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Qualifying Cultural and Framing applicabilities within
Sustainability Transition Frameworks

- *From the Paris Conference to the Paris of the Yellow Vests: a laboratory for characterizing transition profiles and cultural repertoires to apprehend social and perceptive conflicts of sustainability –*

by

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Abstract

This paper contributes to sustainability transitions studies in delivering stronger focus and relevance on culture and discursive features to apprehend social resistances towards transition agendas, and the unprecedented emergence of the challenging antagonism of the '*end of the world*' versus '*the end of the month*' revealed by the case study of the Yellow Vests crisis in France since November 2018. Aiming at opening the door to broader "ontologies" to transition frameworks, while supporting narrower profiles for the formulation of transition strategies, the paper initiates a narrative analysis and a tracing process to assess how the universal resolve of the 2015 Paris Conference and its established legitimacy of the sustainability discourse has been further contested by the Yellow Vests, and their fractured framing that would permeate the national public cognitive stage.

From the Paris Conference to the rise of Yellow Vests, from the '*end of the world*' to the '*end of the month*', is to be investigated the rise and fall of the legitimacy of the French sustainability discourse in analysing how both events and their cultural and discursive resonance played out through the five dimensions of salience and plausibility brought by the cultural performative approach. Tip of a broader social crisis, the movement reveals an original conflict of temporalities which embodies the symptom of the inevitable interdependency of socio-economic inequalities to sustainability transitions. Beyond the resistance itself, the Yellow Vests embody an original exemplar for the importance of cultural appropriation within the sustainability discourse' legitimation processes.

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Thank you.

Mathilde Martin

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Yellow Vests: A Transition Malaise?

“Let’s not be naïve, what is possible is linked to a culture, to a people who are the product of their history. These Lutheran people who have experienced transformation in recent years, are not like the Gauls who are resistant to change”

Emmanuel Macron in (Chrisafis, 2018)

While addressing the French expatriated community in Copenhagen in August 2018, President Macron ignited controversy back home in his antagonistic comparison between the Danish “Lutheran” cultural candidness towards transformation and the French Gauls, this ancient tribe who fought against Roman imperialism more than two millennia ago, and their original defiance regarding any instance of change. Although the French President’s words may have triggered national debate over whether his fellow citizens would appear more resistant to change than any other progressive European neighbouring countries, they also bore strong premonitory power regarding the dramatic rise of social protests that would paralyse the country only three months later.

Indeed, the traditional typecast of France’s resistance towards reform would only be reinforced through the late emergence of an extended protest movement that would not only exhibit strong violence and social disarray, but also paralyze the country and government to implement further transition and climate mitigation policy agenda. At the aftermath of the parliamentary vote of the 2019 national budget by the French Assembly and the consequent rise of diesel prices by 6,5 cents per liter (Journal Officiel de la République, 2018), protests rose throughout the country and grew to be a nation-wide demonstration paralyzing the institutions and the economy for weeks onwards (Delrue, 2018). Although France has never been stranger to powerful street rebellion as it is representative of its socio-political history and culture, the emergent rise of the “*Gilets Jaunes*” (The Yellow Vests) revealed a wide series of public demands ranging from social, economic and political stances to territorial and transition challenges. What began as a protest towards a diesel tax increase as part of the domestic climate mitigation agenda, has turned over the weeks into no less than a civic revolt against the established power, social and fiscal inequalities.

From the design of a diesel tax planned as a tool for climate change mitigation and national sustainability transition, to nation-scaled political and social unrests, the Yellow Vests movement is today revealing that acceptability of transition management in a given society is not as axiomatic as the universal and resolute commitments conveyed in the Paris Agreement while the 2015 COP 21 Conference. The French government’s margin of manoeuvre for transition, materialized through the design and implementation of mitigation policies, stands here as compromised, although settled as a key driver for climate action and effective tackle of GHG emissions ratified in the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015a).

Indeed, the recent events in France may be argued to reveal unprecedentedly conceived obstacles towards transition policies and their actual acceptability within the social and civil realms. Throughout the weeks of protests from November 2018, public debates gradually shifted around the emerging conflict of realities between a centralized decision-making core and peripheral populations suffering from fiscal inequalities and contextual dependence to diesel. As the representative share of the population that is mostly affected by this tax and as the one located in territorial and economic fringes of the country, the Yellow Vests underlined a dichotomy of discourse and meaning over the impact and need for sustainability.

Between "*la fin du monde*" (the "end of the world") and "*la fin de mois*" ("making ends meet" or "the end of the month") (in Rérolle, 2018), the protesters argued that the top-down diesel tax policy designed by political elites concentrated in Paris would not only target already struggling populations, but also reveal the overlooking of other socio-economic parts of the population and let only the poor pay for the country's diesel pollutive imprint. Based on the polluter-pays principle of carbon pricing (OECD, 2016a), this diesel tax conveys equity challenges in which a large share of middle and low-income households still heavily rely on diesel, hence translating specific contextual features proper to the French fuel consumption context (Hivert, 2013).

Opposing the abstract and distant need to resolve the '*end of the world*' with the too proximate and immediate necessity of '*making ends meet*' (or the '*end of the month*'), the Yellow Vests movement stands today as one remarkable embodiment of the numerous cultural and framing fractures revealed by the necessity of sustainability transition materialized through tax policy. Originally stated by a protester (in Rérolle, 2018), this dichotomy well displays the framing gaps emerging through differentiated perceptions of sustainability and transition. From one abstract and universal commitment for effective climate mitigation to the undermined acceptability of one diesel tax, an unexpected "Sustainability Fracture" on the framing level has arisen and led to a strong shift of debate from enforcing the country's transition policy agenda to a socio-cultural conflict.

1.2. Research Question: A French Profile of Transition?

The time-sensitive issue of the Yellow Vests calls for an actualization of general understandings as to how sustainability transitions happen and may be formulated and implemented within a given cultural and discursive context. Advanced as one of the first symptomatic occurrences of yet too-universal transition paths, this thesis would analyse the Yellow Vests as a case study (Flyvbjerg, 2006, 2011; Yin, 2017) to convey the importance of cultural and framing features as conditioning factors of acceptability, desirability and feasibility of climate mitigation and sustainability transition journeys (Geels & Verhees, 2011). Although socio-economic inequality features may stand essential in apprehending this issue, the paper would advance cultural and framing outlooks to supplement such mainframe. There is no question here in denying the conditional power of socio-economic factors to grasp the genesis of the Yellow Vests standing against distributional regressive consequences of the implementation of a given diesel tax. Rather, this thesis would aim at supplementing economic and social frameworks by emphasizing culturally-defined framing and discursive struggles to explain the specificity of this opposition within the French context.

Invoking framing struggles (Geels & Verhees, 2011) characterized by a given French perception of sustainability, itself conditioned by specific cultural features, the resistance enacted by the Yellow Vests and the contested cultural legitimacy of mitigation policies would thus need to be apprehended in a context-specific framework, in which multi-dimensional and interdependent instances are in play.

This thesis would thus inquire the following: to what extent the emerging “Sustainability Fracture” between *‘the end of the world’* and *‘the end of the month’* revealed through the Yellow Vests crisis, may account for relevant context-specific and cultural contingencies of sustainability transitions?

In other words, is there a “French repertoire” of transition that might serve as a laboratory to narrow down more effective applicabilities of carbon pricing and broader climate action?

As an overall aim, the research would explore the extent to which a set of cultural and framing characteristics of one given country, society or system may lead to different paths for transition and applicabilities of transition policies, and how this may account for a stronger context-specific stance within the related transition frameworks.

1.3. A new generation for the STRN?

Such research is intended to supplement the current Sustainability Transition Research Network (STRN) venture in understanding how sustainability transitions happen and the emerging conflicts between systematic and context-specific approaches. Indeed, the spark of the Yellow Vests’ dissent towards a sustainability transition agenda constitutes an original challenge for politics and academia as to which degree of specificity transition policies should adopt to stand as feasible and acceptable, while still reaching for universal commitment of climate mitigation. Meanwhile, the extent to which such “desirable” and “applicable” policies would stand as effective regarding the country’s strong pledge in cutting down emissions and fulfil the Paris Agreement’s resolve still remains questionable.

As said, the aim of this paper is to contribute to, further and actualize the STRN agenda through heuristic and analytical concepts based on a contemporary and time-sensitive longitudinal case study that would assist in hampering the complex multidimensionality of sustainability transitions. These supplementary insights would additionally constitute relevant basis for policy makers involved into the formulation of transition policies and efficiently influence the direction and pace of climate mitigation.

1.4. Structure: A Cultural and Framing Odyssey of French Transition

Following the exploration of contextual features to grasp the issue (Section 2), this paper would then account for the different arguments emphasized within the STRN to understand the complex dynamics of sustainability transitions (Section 3). Furthermore, the discussion will introduce the theoretical framework of the cultural performative approach supported by Geels & Verhees (2011) to advance the relevance of culture, collective sense-making and framing struggles within the foundation of cultural legitimacy of sustainability transition journeys (Section 4). After the design of its method

and research strategy (Section 5), this thesis would further the argument through the case study of France and the analysis of the sustainability discourse's salience and plausibility undermined by the Yellow Vests and their revealed "Sustainability Fracture" (Section 6). The thesis ends with a discussion on French-specific cultural contingencies echoing its revolutionary history along with a specific relationship to the tax that may account for such originality emanating from the case study (Section 7), and its conclusion (Section 8).

2. Background: Rise and fall in Paris

These times are ones of transition. Described as the defining challenge of our age, climate change mitigation is nowadays advanced as a primary objective to ensure effective responses to rising greenhouse emissions and their foreseen dramatic impacts on natural and human ecosystems and well-being. With far-reaching and multi-faceted consequences, climate change not only threatens the durability of natural environments but also strongly undermines the capability of economic and social prosperity of human societies. As such, climate change mitigation has now become a transversal issue to be formulated and implemented across various fields of science, technology, finance, policy and trade. Ensuring the sustainability of human development thus originates within the design of mitigation initiatives in order to constrain climate change-related greenhouse emissions emanating from human activities. In this sense, mitigation implies adaptation of production and consumption processes to ensure their "sustainability" not only for ecological preservation but also towards economic and social well-being (Pielke et al., 2007).

Facing the universal necessity for aligned and effective climate action, the global community has been displaying the past decades successive efforts to design and implement commitments to prevent altering human-induced GHG emissions. Following the limited responses offered by the 1992 Kyoto Protocol and the misguided approach of the 2009 Copenhagen Conference, the 2014 Lima Protocol (UNFCCC, 2014) and the following 2015 Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015a) stood as a contrasting success in setting a rather concrete and realistic commitment acclaimed by no less than 195 countries (Falkner, 2016).

2.1. Paris: from universal normative commitment, collective action to domestic implementation of climate mitigation

"The word 'historic' is often a hyperbole. Today it is not. Together, let us make the Paris Climate Conference the historic success the world is waiting for"

Laurent Fabius, *Opening Speech of the COP 21*, (in Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Etrangères, 2015a)

2.1.1. Paris Agreement: a universal commitment for Climate Mitigation and Sustainable Development

On December 12th 2015, the international community witnessed "history" when 195 countries reached a universal agreement during the COP 21 held in Paris. "Historical Breakthrough" for some, "Dismal Failure" for others (Cléménçon, 2016), the

revolutionary character of the Paris Agreement is nonetheless to be found in its universal pledge for international climate action and its focus on domestic politics to implement climate mitigation in order to “*hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C*” above pre-industrial levels, and to further efforts towards under a 1.5°C threshold (UNFCCC, 2015a, article 2(I)a). While translating an encompassing normative and universal commitment for international climate action in cutting down emissions by 40% to 70% by 2050 and reaching a carbon neutral level by 2100, the Paris Agreement envisioned a “bottom-up” framework, in which parties’ inputs would rely on specific formulations of “nationally determined contributions” (NDCs) aligned with each of their transition agendas (Falkner, 2016; UNFCCC, 2015a). As said, while the Paris Agreement’s commitment remains highly normative and universal, formulation and implementation of climate mitigation lies at the domestic level of decision-making, in which parties define their own priorities and goals.

These goals have been formulated in the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable development (United Nations, 2015), a plan of action categorizing 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets aiming at the durability of human activities and social foundations within planetary boundaries. The SDGs work as a toolkit for the states’ transition towards the states’ commitment towards effective climate mitigation and socio-economic sustainable development ratified during the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015a). Amid a historically-universal commitment gathering 195 countries under the unified resolved to tackle climate change in substantially reducing global carbon emissions, its formulation and implementation remains however conditional on the provision of domestic decision-making level and priorities related to specific economic, social, political and cultural contexts.

2.1.2. Climate mitigation in France: a resolute commitment challenged by its love for diesel: “*une exception française*”

Host of the COP 21, France demonstrated from the start strong support of the negotiations and formulation of the resolutions. In line with the country’s “*unremitting commitment*” (République Française, 2016, p.4), official reports such as the “National Strategy of Ecological Transition towards Sustainable Development 2015-2020” (Ministère de l’Ecologie, du Développement Durable et de l’Energie, 2015) and “Report on the Implementation by France of the implementation of Sustainable Goals” (République Française, 2016) well convey France’s voluntary intent to improve its performance both in reducing its carbon imprint while ensuring high standards of living and welfare for its citizens.

Formulation of climate mitigation policy in France precedes its commitment enacted within the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015a). As the main pillar of its domestic strategy for climate action, the Energy Transition for Green Growth Act (Legifrance, 2015) voted in August 2015 displays the country’s resolve to tackle GHG emissions to 40% by 2020 from 1990 levels. Besides, characterized by a highly emitting transport sector (27% of total domestic GHG emissions) (OECD, 2016a), France integrated an important environmental taxation agenda as one of the main tools for its strategy towards energy transition. Indeed, advanced as a primary device for strong and enabling device, carbon pricing has been relevantly integrated within the “National Strategy of Ecological Transition towards Sustainable Development 2015-2020” (Ministère de l’Ecologie, du

Développement Durable et de l'Energie, 2015). Tackling fuel consumption stands at the core of the country's fulfilment of the SDG of "Climate Action" (République Française, 2016,). It is advanced as one of the main initiatives to "*take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*" (République Française, 2016, p.38), thus conveying strong urgency of climate mitigation being intimately linked with the necessity of taxation devices to efficiently cut down emissions.

Indeed, France remains nowadays highly dependent on diesel with one of the highest rates of gasoline vehicles ownership in Europe (OECD, 2016b). Due to preferential taxation on non-refined fuel, diesel cars represented in 2014 no less than 64% of total private vehicle ownership in France, compared to 35% in 2000 (OECD, 2016b). In contrast with substantial contribution of carbon pricing on freight and company-owned cars, environmental taxation remained light on private diesel use (OECD 2016a, 2016b). In 2014, total diesel consumption reached 55.071 billion liters on a total fuel consumption of 64.472 billion liters (Nerudova et al., 2018) and accounts for 71% of energy use in transportation in the country (OECD, 2016b).

As said, French love for diesel stands as an exception in the European landscape due to specific preferential policy choices enacted in the early 2000s (Hivert, 2013). This dependence further demonstrates strongly-imbedded socio-economic, demographic and geographic specificities, in which diesel use is mainly associated with more driving needs of middle and low-income households mainly located in peripheral regions (Hivert, 2013). Diesel tax in France therefore bears important socio-economic interdependencies and highlights distributional incidences as regressive as it is challenging the government's alternative goal of "tackling fuel poverty" and "socio-spatial" segregation" (République Française, 2016).

2.1.3. Diesel Tax: an unavoidable regressive device in France's transition agenda

Shortly after the resolute enthusiasm at the aftermath of the Paris Agreement, official reports such as the OECD Environmental Performance Review of France (2016b) foresaw the country's failure to meet its targets in cutting down its emissions if still relying heavily on fuel and diesel consumption. Since then, taxing diesel has gradually become a primary focus for successive governments until today. Standing as an international leader for the climate with his notorious motto "Make our Planet Great Again", French President Emmanuel Macron has been elected in May 7th, 2017 on a platform determined in reaching the COP 21 targets and to get over total diesel use by 2040 (Ministère de la Transition Ecologique et Solidaire, 2017). It is in this context that the government planned an increase of the TICPE fuel tax of € 6.5 cents on diesel prices in its 2019 budget (Journal Officiel de la République, 2018).

Such a rise was no surprise as it was part of a broader fuel taxation policy initiated in the 2015 Energy Transition for Green Growth Act (Legifrance, 2015). Although this rise stood as legitimate as it constituted a coherent step in enacting the national energy transition agenda, it got approved by the French Assembly in a context where diesel prices had already rose by 26,8% the previous year while still accounting for 69,75% of the French fleet (Connaissances des énergies, 2019). While diesel represents 80% of fuel sales

in France, the TICPE as a global tax on fuel is the 4th most important state revenue, thresholding at €28,5 billion in 2016 (Connaissances des énergies, 2019).

Generally brought as an efficient cost-effective tool in reducing GHG emissions (OECDa), carbon pricing and more precisely fuel and diesel taxes may however display strong unequal bearings and regressive distributional consequences (Teixidó & Verde, 2017). This conflict between intended efficiency of climate mitigation and just transition highlights the paradox brought by the polluter-pays principles applied at the domestic level. Such discord would dramatically find its materialization throughout the rise of a crisis that would paralyze and divide France onwards: the Yellow Vests.

2.2. Yellow Vests: the Gauls resistant to change?

This thesis will examine the “sustainability fracture” in France by using the ongoing Yellow Vests movement and explore how it has emerged and to what extent it has constituted an original platform to consider discursive and culturally-contingent obstructions of the evolution of sustainability transition journeys. This movement involves a wide variety of demands and originates from successive contextual features encompassing policy design, core-periphery territorial dynamics and socio-economic demographics.

2.2.1. The “France from below”: an unprecedented movement

The Yellow Vests movement catalyses continuous contestations towards the rise of diesel prices which converged in an online petition that cumulated more than 750 000 signatures by early November 2018 (Emanuele, 2018). Preceding the vote of the 2019 Budget (Journal de la République Française, 2018) and orchestrated by social digital networks, demonstrations sparked across the country gathering more than 290 000 protesters on November 17th (Emanuele, 2018). Representative of peripheral fringes of the population, the Yellow Vests initially contested the perceived unjust and regressive character of the diesel tax without any planned compensation on behalf of the government, which additionally stood its ground in maintaining the planned preferential reduction of the ISF wealth tax (*Impôt Sur la Fortune*).

With growing public sentiment of injustice, the movement grew in support while unifying the “Forgotten of the Republic” (BFMTV, 2019), the “France from below” (Gagné, 2018). Wearing with pride a yellow vest, this high visibility jacket legally required for every driver in case of emergency, protesters blocked every Saturday road traffic and occupied the Champs Elysées avenue in Paris to demonstrate their discontent. Along the weeks and the violence of the “Acts” of demonstrations during November and December 2018, claims shifted to an overall dispute over the French President as the persona of French elites and ‘Jupiterian’ (i.e. vertical) decision-making processes (Emanuele, 2018).

From one diesel tax to complete social disarray, the Yellow Vests movement imposed itself as a paralyzing force compelling the government to take drastic responsive measures, among which the withdrawal of the diesel tax nonetheless voted by the French Assembly on December 28th (Emanuele, 2018). The movement was and still is mainly constituted by a specific representative share of the population : according to the Institut Montaigne in its joint study with Elabe, The Barometer of Territories 2019 (Elabe &

Institut Montaigne, 2019), the Yellow Vests are characterized by the following features : 48% are aged over 50 years old, ¾ are using a motor vehicle everyday, 65% are having difficulties making ends meet with a standard of living amounted at €1.486/month, compared to a national average of €1.777.

Facing the shocking images of violence and destructions of historical monuments, institutional buildings and shops during and from December 2018 onwards, the government thus suspended all climate mitigation agenda towards diesel use while planning increases of minimum wages and pension rates to appease civic and social unrest. Despite these measures, discontents as well as violent demonstrations endured giving rise to a political crisis that still withstands today as this paper is being drafted.

2.2.2. An original dichotomy sparked by a transition agenda: the ‘end of the world’ vs ‘making ends meet’

Following the first day of the Yellow Vests demonstrations which assembled close to 300 000 protesters across the country (Emanuele, 2018), the discursive conflict between the ‘end of the world’ and ‘the end of the month’ emerged rapidly on the public stage. Indeed, the now notorious dichotomy translates the apparent discordance between, on one hand, social concerns carried by the Yellow Vests struggling every month in eking out a living; and on the other, the ‘end of the world’ wording emphasized by climate change and the urgent need for concrete mitigation.

Firstly formalized by one of the protesters (in Rérolle, 2018), this dichotomy has thus been appropriated by a diversity of actors within public debates. From politicians to intellectuals, from the President to the Yellow Vests, it bred constructive platforms for debates as well as strong conflicts of discourses between the different parties. Along public discussions and TV shows, the cleavage between the ‘end of the world’ and ‘making ends meet’ progressively embodied a “fracture” upon which each side confronted one another without finding any compromise nor common ground in arguments. As said, this conflict of framings constituted a “Sustainability Fracture” revealing a powerful antagonism that permeates throughout society: ‘end of the world’ vs ‘making ends meet’, Paris vs Province, elites vs low-income margins, climate change vs social justice, etc.

This research would thus focus on this original dichotomy crystallizing a significant challenge for sustainability transitions applied in developed societies, as it confers two different socio-political temporalities revealed via the Yellow Vests. In the name of climate change mitigation and the foreseen ecological and human catastrophe hanging like a menacing Damocles sword over humanity, the Yellow Vests come under the challenge of the use of traditional fiscal tools confronted to the strong normative perception of the future induced by climate hazards. Consequently, it can be argued that this unparalleled “fracture” is on the verge of re-qualifying social struggles henceforth founded on distributional incidence of transition processes.

3. How do transitions happen? A multidimensional review of the literature for a multifaceted transition challenge

“Given the interdisciplinary and multi-level ambitions of transition studies, a potential next step is to conduct a more comparative discussion on politics and power in transition processes across disciplines, frameworks, levels (...) and case studies”

(Köhler et al., 2019, p. 8)

Emphasized in Section 2, the issue of the Yellow Vests movement and its articulation as a transition challenge is as complex as it involves a wide variety of factors across different theoretical arenas. Indeed, apprehending the significance of this unprecedented social resistance towards a given transition agenda appears as remarkable as it involves intricate multidimensionalities such as agency, policy design, the acceptability and feasibility of such transition policies, low carbon society, and even the role of social movements within transition processes.

The surge of the Yellow Vests and the multidimensionality of the movement legitimately sanctions the argued complexity of processes displayed within the different arguments of the STRN (Alkemade et al., 2011; Elzen et al., 2004; Elzen et al., 2011; Geels, 2004; Geels, 2002, 2010, 2011, 2013; Geels, 2014; Geels, 2018; Geels & Schot, 2007; Hess, 2014; Kemp et al., 1998; Kern & Howlett, 2009; Köhler et al., 2019; Rotmans et al., 2001; Rotmans & Loorbach, 2009; Smith, 2003; Smith & Stirling, 2010; Smith et al., 2005; Sovacool, 2016; Sovacool & Geels, 2016; Stirling et al., 2004; Tàbara & Ilhan, 2008; Voß et al., 2009). Transitions are complex processes as they involve multiple variables and interactions. Sustainability transitions are even more challenging as they involve strong normative framing and stand as collective goods and essential devices to embrace contemporary “grand societal challenges” (Geels & Verhees, 2011; Geels, 2010; Köhler et al., 2019).

As said, understanding the complexities of an original and path-breaking occurrence such as the Yellow Vests movement involves a review of different theoretical attempts to grasp transition processes. Sustainability transitions are one issue difficult to fathom as, contra to other frameworks, it reaches factual and empirical borders of human societies and their political, economic, social and finally cultural realities. Apprehending the Yellow Vests movement and its significance may bring substantial actualization to the STRN as it conveys challenging realizations of transition, thus facing interrelated and multifaceted instances of resistance and inertia.

3.1. Transition Frameworks: an evolutive scope of analysis

Prior research on transition testifies of a dynamic evolution of analyses and scopes. As the need for societies to redefine their activities towards more sustainable orientations, research on transition processes has been impressively flourishing the past decade (Köhler et al., 2019). Along the incoming efforts of states and communities to support concrete adaptation and mitigation of climate change, sustainability transition studies nowadays embody a *“collective, productive and highly cumulative endeavour”* (Köhler et al., 2019, p.2). To this extent, the STRN is to be apprehended rather as a

constructive dialogue among different perceptions and mechanisms of transition than a platform of successive theoretical antinomies.

3.1.1. The Contextual Puzzles of Sustainability Transitions

Supplementing one another in a progressive fashion, transition studies may be argued to depart from Geels' (2002, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2018) seminal framing of the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) which understands transition processes as *"outcomes of alignments between developments at multiple levels"* (Geels & Schot, 2007, p.399). In response to the argued too-functionalistic operationality of the MLP, transition management studies rather focus on the role of policy and the relevance of governance, political processes and agency in demonstrating greater sensitivity to contextual dynamics (Rotmans et al., 2001a; Rotmans & Loorbach, 2009; Smith et al., 2005; Stirling et al., 2004; Voß et al., 2009). Along these lines, greater attention has been brought to the social layouts of transitions' visions and objectives, thus conditioning the *"transition management steps"* as *"collective learning processes of development rounds"* (Rotmans et al., p.22). As said, transitions ought to be conceived as stronger 'participatory processes' to design a complete picture of transitional contexts and thus align public support (Burstein, 2003; Rotmans et al., 2001; Rotmans & Loorbach, 2009; Smith et al., 2005; Voß et al., 2009).

The various accounts of agency within transition processes generally emphasize the conditioning power of contextual features as main denominators of the regimes' 'adaptive capacity' towards the effectiveness of change (Smith et al., 2005; Stirling et al., 2004; Voß et al., 2009). The power of context therefore allows different theories to extend the MLP beyond its encountered empirical challenges facing the extreme volatility and diversity of transition journeys (Geels & Schot, 2007; Köhler et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2005; Stirling et al., 2004). As said, beyond static pathways, transitions are to be comprehended within the various contexts in which they take place as they are not all alike (Stirling et al., 2004). Hence, the main challenge of the STRN is to further the analysis beyond the 'abstraction of processes of change' and the extent to which *"each transition displays unique characteristics, dynamics and history"* (Stirling et al., 2004, p. 53).

Along the consecutive assessments of STRN studies that, in effect, transition processes are complex as they are volatile, the updated focus on sustainability transitions appears even more difficult to grasp as it is characterized by strong normative directional instances (Geels, 2010; Köhler et al., 2019; Raven et al., 2017). Indeed, the orientation of sustainability transitions agendas or policies may substantially differ from one context to another given specific socio-economic, cultural and geographic characteristics (Köhler et al., 2019). Besides, emerging from the urgent need for effective climate mitigation and prevention of ecological hazards, sustainability transitions face greater obstacles in the very nature and pace of their own processes (Bento & Wilson, 2016; Sovacool, 2016; Sovacool & Geels, 2016). Any given argument stands *de facto* undermined by the ultimate slow nature of change though facing immediate necessity of action. Even public support of transitions and prevention of resistance towards any implementation of change relies on its gradual and incremental pace (Rotmans & Loorbach, 2009).

3.2. Tax Policy & Transition: Effectiveness vs Fairness?

Identified as inherently conditioned by political processes (Rotmans et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2005; Voß et al., 2009), effective enactment of transitions thus strongly relies on policy reforms (Kern & Howlett, 2009), from which taxation devices are underlined as primary efficient and cost-effective mechanisms (Goulder, 2013; Kosonen & Nicodème, 2009; Nerudova et al., 2018; OECD, 2016a). In line with the international commitment to resolutely cut down GHG emissions by 40-70% by 2050 ratified in the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015a), mitigation policies epitomize an indispensable tool to effectively impose strong regulation on carbon-emitting production, consumption and trade processes (OECD, 2016a).

While the need for future and concrete sustainability transition stands as widely acknowledged among collective and political consciousness, the formulation and implementation of tools to reach mitigation goals remain highly debated and non-axiomatic. The issue of mitigation policies and taxation devices presents such a dilemma: on one hand, constitute cost-effective legal mechanisms (OECD, 2016a; Jordan & Lenschow, 2010); while on the other hand being subject to potential hampering regarding their social acceptability and feasibility within given contexts (Drews & Bergh, 2016; Gzheli, 2013; Hammar & Jagers, 2007; Teixidó & Verde, 2017)

3.2.1. Carbon pricing: the primary tool of Sustainability Transitions

A growing number of official reports advance carbon pricing as an imperative tool to deliver on the COP 21 promises (UNFCCC, 2015a) (OECD, 2013, 2016a, 2016b). Mostly targeted at Energy use and Transport (23% of global emissions) (IEA, 2018), carbon pricing and taxation are both conceived as economically effective devices as they can be attached onto already existing systems (OECD, 2016a) as well as they internalize the cost of environmental change (OECD, 2013). Besides, taxing energy use stands as a key source of public revenue (OECD, 2016a), 4th most important of state revenue in France (Connaissance des énergies, 2019).

Although effective, environmental taxes such as carbon pricings and specific fuel taxes may however convey important distributional inequalities and regressive incidences (OECD, 2013, 2016a; Teixidó & Verde, 2017). Generally favoured for their corrective reduction of social costs, Pigouvian types of taxation are argued to be rather progressive than regressive, and consequently prevent unequal impacts of middle and low-income households (Poterba, 1991; Sterner, 2012). However, such conceptions overlook contemporary regressive materialization of some mitigation taxes in developed economies such as France, particularly considering fuel and diesel taxes, which convey strong socio-economic, demographic and geographical bearings (Hivert, 2013; Teixidó & Verde, 2017).

As said, the regressive incidences of gasoline taxes may thus constitute platforms for contention and public dissent against perceived distributional unfairness (OECD, 2016b; Brannlund & Persson, 2012). The issue of tax policy as a tool for sustainability transition is therefore crucial as it underlines a discord between its use for efficient emission abatement and its regressive economic imprints, thus hampering the perceived fairness of a given transition agenda. The latter is furthermore of the utmost relevance as

it would substantially condition public support and acceptability of a perceived 'Just Transition' (Brannlund & Persson, 2012; Hammar & Jagers, 2007).

3.2.2. Acceptability and Resistance: enablers and barriers of Transitions

Recent literature has accordingly demonstrated sharper focus on inherent equity concerns related to climate mitigation policies, particularly fuel taxes, and discussed rather regressive impacts within the 'real world' (Hivert, 2013; Teixidó & Verde, 2017). Furthermore, the issue of tax policy as a transition tool is even more relevant as it subsequently involves meaningful behavioural changes in order to be effective (Alló & Loureiro, 2014). Indeed, in order for emissions to be significantly cut down, governments ought to incentivize changes on their citizens' habits, behaviours and expectations. And here lies the whole challenge of sustainability transitions: to what extent is civil society able and willing to change them, and how far? Hence, tax policy as a tool for effective sustainability transitions reveals a key determinant of its success : acceptability (Burstein, 2003; Drews & Bergh, 2016).

Although social acceptability of tax policies may be anticipated with supplementary progressive devices to compensate negativities of such taxes (Brannlund & Persson, 2012), and support public perception of fairness (Teixidó & Verde, 2017); social acceptabilities of sustainability transitions are as volatile as they are normative. As underlined further above, sustainability transitions present strong normative and contextual contingencies (Köhler et al., 2019) which further condition the acceptability and reception of their actual implementation and materialization within a given society, notably by way of environmental taxes (Drews & Bergh, 2016). As said, social acceptability and public support of transition mechanisms are key factors for their applied effectiveness; while expressed dissent or resistance towards them may oppositely constitute major barriers to realization of transitional processes (Geels, 2013). Not only sustainability transition may awake different normative interactions and reactions with regard to their implementation, they more importantly rely on the existing social norms and cultural frameworks of a given context (Alló & Loureiro, 2014).

The multipolarity of acceptability of sustainability transitions has been the subject matter of the most recent stream of literature, which furthers the outlook to the relevance of social and cultural variables to fully grasp emergent divergences and preferences towards climate change mitigation (Adger et al., 2013; Adger et al., 2009; Alló & Loureiro, 2014; Geels & Verhees, 2011; Tàbara & Ilhan, 2008). Not only these factors are emphasized as substantial in understanding dissent or acceptability of climate policies, they are also portrayed as significant apparatuses to orient and assist the debate about climate change (Alló & Loureiro, 2014). Broadening the scope of analysis, such accounts henceforth actualize the idea that transitions are not all alike (Stirling et al., 2004) and that potential obstacles to their effective implementation are thus 'endogenous to society' and contingent on culture and knowledge (Adger et al., 2009). These insights contrast with previous conceptions of transitions which may resultantly stand as too abstract and devaluing cultural and normative limits to adaptation, which in turn are more invisible and difficult to apprehend (Adger et al., 2009).

Beyond the importance of social norms, Adger et al. (2013) finally account for deeper analysis within the very cultural dimensions of societies as key conditional power of their response, acceptability and adaptation to climate change. The relevance of

cultural features thus invites to broaden the analytical scope while being confronted to rather invisible and abstract concepts. Nonetheless vague, cultural features characterize specific frameworks and contexts in which they are enacted through symbols, given habits and perceptions (Adger et al., 2013; Swidler, 1986). Consequently, tensions arise between the universal scale of climate change challenges and their actual resonance within specific values, visions, cultural worldviews and contexts (Adger et al., 2013). They may subsequently activate forceful antagonisms and cognitive discords (Adger et al., 2013), which this paper will testify through the Yellow Vests exemplar.

Ultimately, the analysis and attempt to comprehend sustainability transitions is not as unified and systematic as they embody volatile and context-specific processes. They involve such a multiplicity of variables and mechanisms that obstacles in their implementation may seem difficult to address, as conveyed by the Yellow Vests crisis. However, it is of the utmost urgency to formulate alternative and supplementary devices to decipher contentions and social resistances in order to ensure effective climate mitigation and limit the dramatic foreseen consequences of climate change. To this end, as sustainability transitions are complex and multidimensional processes, it is time for present and future research to adopt echoing multidimensional outlooks in order to sufficiently apprehend convoluted phenomena. As said, this research is aligning with Geels' (2010) call to integrate different 'ontologies' to understand 'substantive transitions', and constitutes a first draft attempting to broaden the scope and narrow down the scale to further comprehend and improve the conceptualization of "Sustainability Transition Journeys".

4. Theoretical Framework: Bringing Culture and Framing into the Transition equation

"Culture is important for understanding both mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, and of course plays its part in framing climate change as a phenomenon of concern to society"
(Adger et al., 2013, p. 112)

This thesis departs from the assessed transition literature's gap on cultural dimensions as relevant outlining powers of transition paths, and their causal bearings on mitigation policies failures if being ignored (Adger et al., 2013). It would introduce the Yellow Vests crisis as an original platform to discuss the overlooked relevance of cultural and discursive magnitudes within the formulation and composition of sustainability transition journeys.

Overall, the previous review of the literature entails a dual appraisal: firstly, sustainability transitions are inherently volatile and normative, and thus ought to be embraced within narrower contextual scales. Secondly, their reliance on diffuse cultural and perceptive features invites a broader and multidimensional analysis, supplementing frameworks focused on technology, socio-economics, governance or even policy.

As said, the thesis would thus rely on the examination of a defined French cultural and framing 'repertoire' of sustainability transition. The latter would be argued as a decisive genesis to apprehend the Yellow Vests' original and adversarial breadth, and a subsequent unprecedented 'Sustainability Fracture' between the antagonistic framings of the 'end of the world' and 'making ends meet'.

4.1. From Cultural Essence to Transition Existence

To articulate cultural dimensions of sustainability transitions is one arduous task as it implies diffuse conceptualizations of abstract concepts highly contingent to specific contexts. Echoing previous accounts from the literature, the discussion advances Swidler's (1986) seminal approach of culture, defined as a "repertoire" of various symbolic vehicles constituting a "toolkit" used to elaborate "strategies of action".

4.1.1. Culture

Culture is conceived as this unifying aggregate of symbols and meanings upon which collective sense making is forged into strategies to respond to encompassing problems (Swidler, 1986). As said, culture constitutes a model of symbols shaping experiences and worldviews in bringing them legitimacy, hence justifying and reinforcing a culture's *ethos* (Swidler, 1986). Through this legitimization process, these symbolic experiences thus emphasize powerful platforms for shaping collective moods and motivations, as well as evaluations of reality (Swidler, 1986).

Furthermore, culture is originally characterized by contention dynamics as it embodies an arena of conflicting symbols, stories and guiding visions (Swidler, 1986). Nonetheless a universal conceptualization of identity, culture stands as a contested process between competing perceptions of reality. As said, culture ought to be invoked while assessing contentions between different groups enacted within a same structural context. This paper in this regard ambitions to evaluate the Yellow Vests crisis as this antagonistic quarrel between different symbolisms embodied in the '*end of the world*' and '*making ends meet*' within the given French cultural arena distinguished by a peculiar "repertoire" of sustainability.

Culture ought to be intimately coupled with climate change-related apprehensions as they bear substantial consequences on human societies and their habits, lifestyles and symbols. Because tackling climate change would rely on tangible shifts in behaviours, habits and expectations (Alló & Loureiro, 2014), it would thus impose itself on culture and communities in ways perceived as undesirable and loss-identified (Adger et al., 2013; Kirsch, 2001). Accordingly, climate change embodies negative bearings upon, not only marginalized and exposed societies, but henceforward on global post materialist developed economies such as France's.

Culture additionally is exclusive to a given time and place. A dynamic process, it constitutes features that are "endogenous to society" which are as mutable as subjective and peculiar to their contextual contingencies (Adger et al., 2009). Moreover, as climate change and sustainability responses imply strong normativities, subsequent responses may not emerge as consistent to 'rationality', thus supporting negative and loss-identified framings. As said, dissent towards the urgent necessity for climate action is intimately rooted within given cultural and cognitive framings which direct their negative proclivities. Thus, cultural dimensions abide strong explanatory power in understanding the acceptability and preferences conveyed within a given society in a transition process (Alló & Loureiro, 2014). Eventually, "*culture, in its analysis, is central to understanding the causes and meaning of, and human responses to climate change*" (Adger et al., 2013, p.112).

4.1.2. Discursive Framing

Contentions within a cultural context between competing visions and guides to action are devised through discourse. Language, discursive symbols and framing are thus tools used to codify collective meaning and sense-making within a cultural “repertoire” (Swidler, 1986). This interpretative approach to culture involves a dynamic agency of actors within their creation of meaning (Swidler, 1986). Moreover, we ought bringing into the equation the sociological account carried by discourse theory which advances social groups as producing collective meanings around unifying issues (Hajer, 1995).

Appendix I - Definition of discourse (Hajer, 1995, p.44)

Discourse is a “*specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorization that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices, and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities*”

According to Hajer (1995) (Appendix I), discourse thus provides structural material for building collective sense making. Though a unifying setting, culture is also an arena of contestations within which competing groups and framings are in dialogue and sometimes discord (Geels & Verhees, 2011).

Applied to sustainability, there has been attempts in the literature to formulate semantic and discourse framing of transition (Rotmans & Loorbach, 2009). What does sustainability mean to societies actually fluctuates in consonance with a given culture, a given discourse, and given framings within a cultural context. Which meaning we apply to objects or ideas is subject to variation in function of language, habits and lifestyles, and collective sense making. Which meaning is given to climate change and sustainability is even more elusive as they both sanction strong normativities and are subject to stronger negativities, later conditioning forceful and antagonistic debates and competing framings. As said, comprehending sustainability transitions and their directionalities relies in the exploration of their ‘language’, and the competing framings enacted within the ‘transition arena’ (Rotmans & Loorbach, 2009). Sustainability transition journeys vary from one another because they imply different cultural, discursive and framing contexts. As said, there is an assessed causality between content and process (Rotmans & Loorbach, 2009), in which the perceived and discursive framing of sustainability, itself conditioned by a given cultural “repertoire”, will have conditional power over a society’s transitional strategy.

4.2. A Cultural Performative Approach

Hereafter, success and efficiency of transition journeys originally relies on a cultural legitimization of its resonance within a given society (Geels & Verhees, 2011). For there are substantial linkages between content and process, the direction of a transition journey relies on the various contentions between the involved actors and the cultural legitimization brought by discourse, and the competition of different guiding visions and actions. This dynamic approach is brought by Geels & Verhees (2011) in their emphasis on “cultural legitimacy” as a primary vehicle for the directionality of innovation journeys

in creating powerful links between struggling framings within the discourse about a given encompassing issue.

4.2.1. Cultural Legitimacy

Geels and Verhees' (2011) article envisions an important development within innovation studies as it integrates broadening ontologies in the social and cultural validation of new technologies and their fit within wider frameworks of norms and beliefs. To this extent, Geels and Verhees (2011) emphasize the dynamic notion of "Cultural Legitimacy" as a primary vehicle of societal and cultural embedding of innovations, hence guiding the direction of innovation journeys. Cultural legitimacy is performed throughout contention processes in which competing interests and visions debate on the public stage and attempt to influence public opinion to gain greater support (Geels & Verhees, 2011). Through these processes, agents henceforth frame their perceptions in such ways to influence the general discourse. While discourses embody more encompassing representations of a given technology or issue, frames are characterized by the authors as narrower specifications and meanings attributed to specific themes (Geels & Verhees, 2011). Geels and Verhees (2011) enhance the particularity of "framing struggles" as cognitive contention on the public stage that can influence broader discourses if they display strong enough salience and plausibility.

As said, the concept of cultural legitimacy allows the authors to account for the normative and cognitive factors at play within the perception of innovations and whether they are desirable and acceptable given a cultural repertoire of norms and beliefs (Geels & Verhees, 2011). Their research finds its original relevance in furthering insights on the production of cultural legitimacy of innovations through discourse and framing struggles (Geels & Verhees, 2011). As a primary mediator of public support to innovations, cultural legitimacy is hereafter constituted either as an enabler of innovation journeys, or a barrier if lost in un-legitimization. The orientation of such legitimacy further relies on the established links to the existing cultural framework of norms and beliefs, in which are competing different framings to influence general discourse about the issue at play. The authors' research aims thus at assessing the influence of specific framing struggles within a giving context: the Dutch discourse on nuclear energy and perception of the Chernobyl crisis, and convey their directional power over the nuclear innovation journey (Geels & Verhees, 2011).

In sum, Geels and Verhees (2011) allow for a dynamic analysis of framing and discursive influence upon the cultural legitimation of given innovations, and thus orient their evaluation and insertion within wider public and social realms. Finally, their account is even more relevant considering the multidimensional character of innovation and more broadly transition journeys in discussing crucial social agency within cultural legitimation processes, which themselves are materialized through the emergence of social movements (Geels & Verhees, 2011). Indeed, normative and cognitive framing struggles upon a given issue are often operationalized across social movements and their embodiment of "pro" and "contra" dialogue of discourses within the public stages (Geels & Verhees, 2011). Their appropriation of Social Movement Theory allows the analysis to strengthen the mechanisms in framing struggles enacted between dominant and emerging discourses, between political elites and peripheral interests, whose dialogue and contentions would actualize the public cognitive space of debate.

4.2.2. From Innovation to Sustainability Transition Journeys

Geels & Verhees's (2011) dynamic cultural performative approach constitutes a relevant platform for analysing the original cultural and framing contingencies revealed by the Yellow Vests crisis bewildering French society since November 2018. From innovation journey to sustainability transition odyssey, this paper would constitute an analogy of Geels & Verhees' (2011) emphasized cultural performative approach to the case of the Yellow Vests' framing struggles and contestation of the legitimacy of sustainability discourse, as being contingent of a specific French historical and cultural revolutionary repertoire.

Firstly, Geels & Verhees's (2011) framework induces inherent normativities of culture, from which emanate contentions and framing struggles to influence broader discourse on the public stage. Hence, a culture's discourse is linked to antagonistic struggles between different social groups aiming at gaining greater influence and support for their respective perceptions. Secondly, the innovation journey and its cultural performance rely on legitimacy of discourse, which orientation emerges from the public cognitive space, itself influenced by struggling dialogue between antagonistic frames (Geels & Verhees, 2011). Framing struggles within innovation journeys thus play out as "technological dramas" within the public arena, in which actors compete in their influence towards the audience (Geels & Verhees, 2011).

5. Method: a French Sustainability Transition Journey, a longitudinal case study to apprehend fractured framings of sustainability

"Context is not just a stimulus environment, but a nested arrangement of structures and processes where the subjective interpretations of actors perceiving, comprehending, learning and remembering help shape the processes"
(Pettigrew, 1990, p.270)

5.1. Paris: Green is the new Black, Yellow is the new Red, a case study

The research strategy is constituted as an analogy based on Geels & Verhees's (2011) investigation of the longitudinal process of cultural legitimacy and framing struggles through to the case study of Dutch Nuclear Energy journey between 1945-1986. Applied to the contemporary setting of France and the Yellow Vests crisis, this thesis would thus adopt a case study methodology (Flyvbjerg, 2006, 2011; Yin, 2017) to account for the longitudinal processes of Sustainability Transition Journey, cultural legitimacy and framing struggles. Brought in as a complex and multifaceted issue involving various theoretical, factual and empirical realities, as we outlined in Sections 2 and 3, the Yellow Vests thus reveal an unprecedented and culturally-contingent framing of resistance towards sustainability transition. The issue discloses the longitudinal challenge to link content with process and context to further explain the different asymmetries and change dynamics involved. (Pettigrew, 1990).

As said, we assume a case study strategy (Flyvbjerg, 2006, 2011; Yin, 2017) to account for an exploratory investigation of the French transition context. The latter is

sanctioned by the rise of the Yellow Vests, and invites to further trace the different cultural mechanisms underlined, and to emphasize how given cultural legitimacy and framing struggles may influence the revealed directionality of France Sustainability Transition journey.

In consonance with Geels & Verhees's (2011) outlining, the Yellow Vests crisis is presented as a "sustainability transition drama", in which antagonistic framings of the 'end of the world' and 'making ends meet' are struggling onto the public stage to influence the direction and nature of France's sustainability transition agenda. Such discord is argued to display unexpected and paralyzing barriers towards effective transition devices, leading to inertia if not retrograde dynamics. The framing "Sustainability Fracture" not only incapacitate and polarize the domestic discourse about sustainability and climate action; but further find its genesis within a deeply-rooted loss-identified and revolutionary repertoire of French cultural perception of sustainability, and contingent to a specific socio-political culture and history symbolized by revolution and dissent.

As said, the Yellow Vests crisis would constitute a platform to study the framing struggles in investigating how imbedded cultural perceptions and discourses would be laid out upon the five dimensions of salience and plausibility, defined as followed in Geels & Verhees (2011, p.914) (Appendix II).

Appendix II - The Five Dimensions for Discourse plausibility and salience (Geels & Verhees, 2011, p.914)

- **Actor credibility:** the status or perceived expertise of the social groups advocating particular frames.
- **Empirical fit:** the perceived correspondence between the frame and real-world events (the more 'evidence' a frame/discourse can claim, the higher its empirical fit).
- **Centrality:** the perceived importance of the topic or debate to particular audiences (relative to other topics or debates).
- **Experiential commensurability:** the resonance between the frame and the everyday experiences of audiences (if frames are very abstract have little bearing on people's daily life, experiential commensurability is low).
- **Macro-cultural resonance:** the fit between frames and cultural repertoires (deep structures)

This paper will trace and study the evolution of the French Sustainability Transition Journey across the confrontation of the sustainability discourse and its cultural legitimacy to its salience and plausibility within the French public cognitive space. The investigation would thus consist in two parts involving a narrative and tracing process analyses to deploy an in-depth qualitative exploration of public performances, discourse and framing, as well as images and symbols conveyed in the underlined case. Narrative analysis entails the capture of socially situated knowledge and sense-making configurations in their own texture of experience (Polkinghorne, 1995; Abbott, 1992). The study of narrative plots thus allows to capture equivocal processes and to provide analytical focus while constructing *analytic chronologies* and a tracing process of a given case history turned into a case study (Pettigrew, 1990; Pentland, 1999; Beach, 2017). As said, the analysis would be conducted as follows: first, at the aftermath of the 2015 Paris

Conference (November 2015-January 2016), and secondly at the spark of the Yellow Vests crisis (November 2018-January 2019). This would allow for an exploration of the evolution of the sustainability discourse in France, and account for its shifting legitimacy undermined by the rise of a disruptive framing struggle.

Sustainability discourse in France will henceforth be confronted to these five dimensions of salience and plausibility of discourse to convey the relevant struggle implied since November 2018, and its emerging un-legitimization against its framing dissociation between the '*end of the world*' and '*making ends meet*'. While support and legitimacy of transition is contingent upon positive scores through these five dimensions of salience and plausibility, the fractured polarization of the sustainability discourse by the Yellow Vests is expected to convey negative scores and hence justify negative framing and un-legitimization of the French Sustainability Transition Journey.

From the Paris Agreement's positive reach and abstract formulation of the '*end of the world*', to the Yellow Vests' "sustainability fracture" and negative framing of the antagonistic '*end of the month*'; the paper initiates a narrative analysis and a tracing process to assess how the universal resolve of the COP 21 and its established legitimacy for sustainability and climate mitigation has been further contested by the Yellow Vests, and their fractured framing of sustainability that would permeate the national public cognitive stage. From the Paris Conference to the rise of Yellow Vests, from the Green to the Yellow Paris, from the '*end of the world*' to '*making ends meet*', is to be investigated the rise and fall of the legitimacy of the French sustainability discourse in analysing how both events and their cultural and discursive resonance played out through the five dimensions of salience and plausibility. The analysis would be conducted as followed:

- The creation of cultural legitimacy of sustainability within the French discourse at the aftermath of the Paris Conference (COP 21) in from November 2015 to January 2016.
- The contestation of such legitimacy sparked by the rise of the Yellow Vests, and the revealed framing struggle in dissociating the '*end of the month*' from the '*end of the world*'. Once dissociated from the social realities and temporalities of the '*end of the month*', sustainability discourse loses of its legitimacy being singled out as the too abstract and divisive '*end of the world*'.
- Discredited and polarized once confronted to the Yellow Vests, the French Sustainability Transition journey resultantly suffers from un-legitimization, and would even more be put aside from the public cognitive space for the country to recover around national myths and symbolism of unity and identity.

Ultimately, this research ambitions to contribute to general understandings of sustainability transitions in delivering stronger focus and relevance on culture and discursive features to apprehend social resistances towards transition agendas that are yet to multiply in the near future, and the unprecedented emergence of the challenging antagonism of the '*end of the world*' versus '*making ends meet*'. This paper aims at opening the door to broader "ontologies" to transition frameworks, while supporting narrower profiles for the formulation of transition strategies. For sustainability transition journeys to anticipate and overcome such polarizing and paralyzing "dramas" as embodied by the Yellow Vests crisis, scholars, and eventually decision-makers, ought to consider rather

invisible contingencies revealed by discourse, framings, collective experiences and symbolisms, which reveal a society's culture and history that are *"not just an event in the past but (are) alive in the present and may shape the future"* (Pettigrew, 1990, p.270).

5.2. Sources

The presented longitudinal case study (Pettigrew, 1990) is based on multiples sources of data. As multidimensional this topic is, so are the mediums and types of data to allow for more dynamic triangulation (Flyvbjerg, 2006, 2011; Yin, 2017). As a time-sensitive and recent issue, analysing the Yellow Vests movement and its multifaceted contingencies, diverse mediums are used such as newspapers, brochures, news clips, television debates, presidential speeches, all to assess the variety of framings of the sustainability discourse in France. Through these, are analysed various dialogues, discussions and articulations of different implications of the movement and their resonance towards sustainability transition in France. Besides, will be used results from official reports and polls to account for the general public perception towards sustainability and its resonance. This approach will be useful in assessing the multiple discourses and representations proper to each of interest groups: policy makers, government representatives, scientists and intellectuals, protesters, and civil society as a whole. Will be additionally included material issued from the successive demonstrations: petitions, visual protest mediums (Philipps, 2012), etc.

5.3. Challenges for the sake of novelty?

As a time-sensitive research, this thesis might find strong limitations given the diffuse and still-evolving character of the Yellow Vests movement itself. Indeed, the Yellow Vests are still on the streets as this paper is being drafted, and the movement's direction and influence is still shifting. Besides, few official reports and independent analyses are yet to be published, which doesn't provide any polishing material to further analyse a movement characterized by diffuse structural organisation and identity. Actually, the Yellow Vests stand out in being leaderless and lacking any unifying manifesto nor official platform of revendications. Hence, the media remain a primary vehicle of information and platform for analysis of the Yellow Vests and their contentions discourse, as well as sounding out the general public cognitive space. After all, *"assuming that in today's democracies the mass media constitute by far the most important vehicle for shared attention and political communication, media coverage, then, should best reflect public attention"* (Newig, 2004, p. 159).

While the accuracy of the presented data throughout the research and the relevance of its arguments may be legitimately limited if not challenged, the novelty of such outlook should be taken as an engaging opportunity to further the analysis in future academic works. Finally, this research faces a translation challenge in which the breadth of the French discourse and cultural contingencies would be somehow diminished through their conveyance in English as discursive and cognitive features of such a peculiar transition profile.

A genuine research journey, this paper covers a multidimensional topic and involves extensive and transversal exploration of multiple sources. A movement which is yet to evolve, the Yellow Vests have already displayed interrelated challenges within the political, economic and social realms; supplemented here by performative, cultural and discursive dynamics. Overall, this paper positions itself as a modest but yet angular step

in highlighting an original analysis of unprecedented occurrences, which already prove to challenge the formulation and apprehension of sustainability transition journeys, while reminding the harsh reality gap between theory and practice.

6. Case study: From Green Revolution to Yellow Insurrection, Rise and Fall of the sustainability discourse in Paris (November 2015 - January 2019)

In this section, will be analysed the evolution of the sustainability discourse and its evolutive legitimacy across the French public cognitive space from the Paris Conference (November 2015-January 2016) to the Yellow Vests crisis (November 2018-January 2019), according to the five dimensions of salience and plausibility suggested by Geels & Verhees (2011).

6.1. The Paris Conference, Sustainability and Revolution: the creation of cultural legitimacy in “making History” (November 2015-January 2016)

“Ce que Paris conseille, l’Europe médite ; ce que Paris commence, l’Europe continue”

“What Paris advises, Europe meditates; what Paris initiates, Europe continues it”
Victor Hugo, 1848 (in ed., 1883, p. 214)

Heart of History, heart of revolutions, Paris has embodied powerful narratives of change throughout the ages. Eternal city, it became anew the centre of the world in 2015 at the occasion of the 21st United Nations Climate Change Conference, which re-actualized its myth as the capital of History formerly celebrated by the iconic 19th century French novelist and poet Victor Hugo (1883). At the dawn of the 21st century, climate change already embodies the challenge of the era and calls for a reshape of human habits, beliefs and lifestyles, on a multiplicity of scales. Succeeding the argued failures of previous international gatherings for the climate, such as the 2009 Copenhagen Accord, and unsuccessful alignment in limiting foreseen environmental and ecological hazards on natural and human ecosystems, the 2015 Paris Conference appeared in collective consciousnesses as the last chance for meaningful unity to “save the planet”. To everyone’s surprise, the COP 21 and the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015a) was assessed both in France and abroad, as a great success as it made “history” in achieving a universal commitment ratified by 195 countries to tackle down human-related emissions and to “hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C” above pre-industrial levels (UNFCCC, 2015a, article 2(I)a).

Irony of History or not, this crucial event advanced as a “Revolution” (Hollande in Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires Etrangères, 2015b) took place in the capital of all revolutions: Paris. The “Paris Conference” and the “Paris Agreement” supported resilient creation of cultural legitimacy of the sustainability discourse within the French society, which was characterized by strongly-embedded “pessimism” and immediate shock at the aftermath of the November 2015 Paris Attacks (Ipsos & Game Changers, 2015; Ipsos & Sopra Storia, 2015). More than elsewhere, surfaces in France a “before and after” COP 21

picture (Ipsos & Game Changers, 2015), in which the Paris Conference and its conveyed “historical success” was domestically translated as a ‘French success’, strong of its diplomacy and applauded resolve towards climate action. Along this acclaimed national triumph, the Paris Conference brought revived legitimacy to the sustainability discourse throughout successive positive and unifying framings. Indeed, the universal and motivational breath of the International COP 21 had been rescaled at the domestic level of French civil society, which found itself consequently reunited in discourse beyond socio-economic frontiers towards national commitment for positive grasp of action against climate change.

6.1.1. Macro-cultural resonance

Climate change, environmental impacts on human societies, biodiversity loss, and sustainable development have increasingly become important repertoires within French society since the early 2000’s (Ipsos & Sopra Storia, 2015). Although, the 2008 economic crisis and its drastic consequences on the French people’s buying power, along with the rise of terrorism and the immense shock of the November 2015 Paris Attacks, have gradually pushed environmental concerns into the background (Ipsos & Sopra Storia, 2015). The 2015 Paris Conference is however acknowledged to constitute an ultimate trigger in reviving French repertoire of sustainability and climate action (Ipsos & Game Changers, 2015). The unifying character of the COP 21 conveyed throughout the twelve days of negotiations reached a climax during the closing speech of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs and President of the Conference, Laurent Fabius (Le Monde, 2015a). The applause and the clamours following Laurent Fabius’ hit of his green hammer reached French households as the success of the Conference was transmitted through all forms of media: news reports, debates, press, social networks, etc., and for weeks onwards. News articles relate an “euphoria of the Paris Conference” (Lewino, 2015) and an “immense success” (Laystary et al., 2015), and celebrate the skills of the French diplomacy able to monitor such a gathering (Marre, 2016). Beyond the success of a government, the Paris Conference embodies in the French discursive landscape an “awakening of consciences” and the related importance of climate action (Ipsos & Game Changers, 2015). For the Ipsos polling institute (Ipsos & Game Changers, 2015), there is in France a “before and after COP 21”, contributing in the update of French people’s concerns and resolve to take a more active part in the global effort for sustainability and climate mitigation.

Sensitive to symbols and national myths, French civil society henceforth welcomed the COP 21 as an opportunity for greater unity nationwide. Echoing the celebrated universality of the Conference and its inclusive message “The planet is in our hands” (COP 21, 2015) (Fig.1) and the enhanced inclusiveness directed towards the population (Fig 2), sustainability discourse shifted into a call for a “green revolution” (Gaboulaud et al., 2015), under which all French will be reassembled. News articles, TV and radio shows successively narrate climate change henceforth as an opportunity to overcome historical frontiers and to unite for a transcendent cause, and ultimately fulfil humanity’s dream for universality. As symbolical and lyrical as it can be, sustainability discourse at the aftermath of the COP 21 adopts unifying traits, which encompass the whole society, and is linked to embedded myths and positive frames of revolution. The closing discourse of the Conference by the French President Hollande well represents such specific French inclination (Appendix III).

"Après les droits de l'homme, grâce à vous aujourd'hui, vous venez de proclamer les droits de l'Humanité. Je suis fier que la France ait accueilli cette conférence, fier que les Nations unies aient été capables de prendre cette responsabilité, fier que les idéaux de justice aient pu prévaloir, fier que notre génération ait pu décider pour un monde que nous ne verrons pas. Le 12 décembre 2015 restera une grande date pour la planète. A Paris, bien des révolutions se sont déroulées, mais aujourd'hui, c'est la plus belle des révolutions, la plus pacifique, la révolution pour le changement climatique."

"After the Human Rights, today you have proclaimed the Rights for Humanity. I am proud France has hosted this conference, proud the United Nations have been able to take their responsibility, proud ideals of justice have prevailed, proud our generation have decided for world we won't know. December 12th, 2015 can be not only a historic day but a great day for the planet. Where many revolutions have occurred, we are living today in Paris the most beautiful of all revolutions, the most pacific, the revolution for climate change"

NB: It is to be noted that the reported translation is self-made as the official one takes substantial liberties from the original meaning and cultural linking to the French Revolution. This bears meaningful insights on the specific character of the President's discourse and the cultural reference and contingencies intended to resonate in regard of a French audience.



Figure 1- COP 21 Official Visual Material, "The Planet is in our hands" (COP 21, 2015)



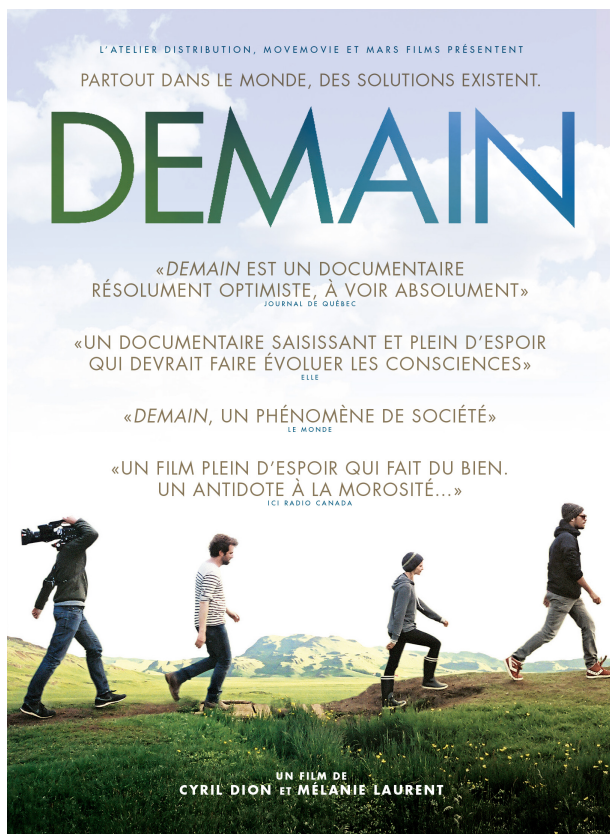
Figure 2 - COP 21 Official Visual Material, (COP 21,2015)
"We're counting on you!"

6.1.2. Experiential Commensurability

The linking of the Paris Conference not only transpired in its resonance within French history and cultural symbols, but also permeated within people's lives and interactions within their immediate environment, and further enhanced the experiential commensurability of the sustainability discourse. In the wake of the COP 21, perceptions about climate change and the need for stronger action infused across French society. 72% of French people were convinced by the success of the Conference in mobilizing an unprecedented realization surrounding sustainability and environmental challenges (Ipsos & Game Changers, 2015). While one in two were confident in the reaching power of the Paris Agreement (Ipsos & Game Changers, 2015), the Paris Conference further succeeded to materialize and give stronger breadth to the abstract threat of climate change (Ministère de la Transition Ecologique et Solidaire, 2018). From a collective euphoria deployed in the media, discourse shifted into more positive and motivational frames towards experienced and concrete projects. At the eve of the COP 21, the "Train for the Climate" met substantial success across the country. Travelling through 19 cities and gathering more than 23 000 visitors, the "messenger of the climate" aimed at enhancing public awareness at the local level framed within positive and interactive dimensions (SNCF, 2015). In direct contact with local populations, such initiative multiplied after the Paris Conference to spread and answer to greater demand for understanding and implication for climate action.

Turning local actors into global facilitators (Dantec, 2015), the profusion of content and discourse after the COP 21 evolved into accessible, simplified and interactive frames such as video tutorials and campaigns (Fondation Nicolas Hulot pour l'Homme et la

Nature, 2015; Le Monde, 2015b). Contents were devoted to explaining climate change within inclusive and proactive framings, which supported the awakening of a general positive discourse towards sustainability and changes of behaviours. A significant example may be found in Cyril Dion and Mélanie Laurent’s movie “Demain” (Tomorrow) (2015), released only three days after the closing of the COP 21. The forward-looking movie recorded a million tickets sold in France and was screened in 27 other countries. It portrayed the impacts of a changing climate by originally focusing on the people who bring about solutions and initiatives (Fig. 3). Sketching a proactive and positive rather than an alarmist picture, this movie played a great influence into general perceptions about climate change and the opportunities for individual awareness and to take concrete initiatives for a sustainable future (Demain le Film, 2015).



Translation:

“All around the world, there are solutions

TOMORROW

‘Tomorrow is a resolutely optimistic documentary, a must-see’

‘A gripping documentary and full of hope, which should shift consciousness’

‘Tomorrow, a social phenomenon’

‘A film full of hope that does the soul good, an antidote against gloominess’

Figure 3 - Official Poster of the movie "Demain" - (Demain Le Film, 2015)

6.1.3. Actor Credibility

The 21st United Nations Climate Change Conference brought strong political credibility to the various attending state representatives. Along the different appointed ambassadors, strong focus converged on the presence of heads of state such as US President Obama, Russian President Putin, the German Chancellor Merkel, etc. Besides, the international and transversal breadth of such a gathering got even more strengthened with the active attendance of UN Secretary Ban Ki-moon. Brought as a diplomatic success for alignment around the universal cause for climate change, as well for the French delegation and more generally for France as the host country, the credibility of the Paris Conference was reinforced by the unprecedented involvement of scientists, experts, NGOs, companies and representatives of the civil society.

Beyond a stage for political negotiations, the COP 21 eventually stood as a platform for discussions among experts and various actors to ideate and formulate innovative solutions to support the reached commitments (UNFCCC, 2015b). Different panels and side events were also devoted to the “French National Cause”, during which a gathering of French scientists and NGOs converged in the “Coalition Climat 21” to discuss sustainability projects at the domestic level. Along the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015a), numerous other accords were formulated and ratified between different categories of actors in close cooperation with the States (UNFCCC, 2015b).

6.1.4. Centrality

The legitimacy of the Paris Conference resolve to tackle climate change, and the positive resonance of the sustainability discourse within French society, was further reinforced by linking it to the unprecedented involvement of companies and economic actors (Ipsos & Game Changers, 2015). The implication of non-state parties at the COP 21 supplemented the political resolve conveyed by the negotiations of the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015a), in opening the discussions and the implementation of stronger sustainability practices to a larger panel of players. Hence, the expressed intent and involvement of companies contributed to enhance the ‘centrality’ of the Conference’s proactive, resolute and positive framing of the sustainability and climate action discourse. Advanced as key actors of the global effort against climate change, multinationals and start-ups were underlined in the media as indispensable participants in the design of initiatives exhibited in an immense “Gallery of Solutions”.

For companies in France, the Paris Conference initiated a “green strategy” posing cheaper future access to green technologies and sustainable practices at a narrower level. The involvement of non-state actors and companies was unprecedented and acclaimed in the media (Ipsos & Game Changers, 2015; D’Abbundo, 2015, UNFCCC, 2015b). It stimulated greater public awareness and through prospective materialization of sustainable practices within production and consumption processes. It showed the public that solutions would be brought in the market for consumers to participate in the effort while adapting their behaviours. This positive and inclusive framing from companies greatly sponsored the centrality and increase of public attention to the resonance of the Paris Conference discourse.

6.1.5. Empirical Fit

The legitimacy of the COP 21 discourse got even more armoured with regard to the French audience through various evidence of existing successful applications of sustainable practices and mitigation policies, both in France and abroad. At the aftermath of the Conference, the Californian exemplar was advanced as a pioneering model for ambitious sustainability strategy. To convey such initiatives are achievable to the French public, the “Californian green success “ was delivered through various news articles and reports as a rewarding example of toughened mitigation policies in a developed economy followed by positive socio-economic impacts, such as employment and well-being (Novethic, 2015; BFM Business, 2015). Even after the abrupt US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015a) enacted by President Trump in June 2017, California pursued its effort in fulfilling its commitment in enacting different independent partnerships with multiple towns, regions and countries (Lesnes, 2017). The Golden State

was also one of the first regions to integrate the UNDER 2 MOU, which became the Under 2 Coalition in 2017, a global partnership to further climate mitigation efforts, in which California pledge to a 40% decrease of its emissions by 2030 (Under 2 Coalition, 2019).

Similar validation of the empirical fit of the Paris Conference resolve with real-world applications are to be found likewise in France at the local scale. Featured as dynamic contributors to tackle down national emissions, French ‘territorial collectivities’ (French administrative territorial subdivisions) are underlined as local players with global facilitator power (Dantec, 2015). Along the stronger focus on the “Made in France” orientation within local production processes and consumers’ choice, the relevance of the municipal level of implementation for mitigation was strengthened in the discourse (Dantec, 2015). The 2008 European “Covenant of Mayors” was actualized as a primary example of French local commitment to fulfil the 2020 Horizon European objectives (Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, 2008). Promoting a more effective margin of manoeuvre exercised at narrower scales of decision-making and implementation, French municipalities and regions enjoyed renewed national focus upon their abilities to commendably influence their citizens’ daily habits, lifestyles, lodging, transport and nutrition. From local actors to global facilitators, these ‘territorial collectivities’, and their successful assessment of their sustainability initiatives, further covered the empirical fit of the Paris Conference resolve and its translation in real-world and experienced settings.

6.1.6. *‘A Revolution for Climate Change’: the high cultural legitimacy of the Paris Conference discourse*

The depicted resonance of the positive frames deployed by the COP 21, along with the emerging cultural activities on various levels, all converge to solid salience and plausibility of the committed discourse initiated by the Paris Conference. Celebrated for its historical achievement in uniting 195 countries around one ultimate cause for sustainability, the motivational and universal character of the event further reached the French public cognitive space in a rather inspiring and positive fashion. The Paris Conference was not only optimistically welcomed by the French audience for its universality, but also as an inclusive opportunity to radiate through the diplomatic success it entailed for the country. Enjoying the political spotlight, strong links were established throughout French society with its idolized historical legacy, hence supporting stronger public appropriation of the fight against climate change.

As the Paris Conference and following Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015a) embodied a “Revolution for climate change”, even so the “most beautiful of all” (François Hollande, in Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires Etrangères, 2015b), the salience and plausibility of the sustainability discourse found even stronger grounds within the French cognitive space as it echoed deeply-embedded symbolisms, political culture and historical resonance. As the host of History and the stage for unparalleled universal resolve for the planet’s future, France and its people were subject to favoured positive exposure and ascendance over change. And it strongly incentivized motivation and support towards concrete climate mitigation and substantial change of habits.

Despite a general euphoria, apprehensions and doubts started to emerge after the COP 21 as to its ambitious objectives could actually be reached. From 2016, the applause gave way to uncertainties and inconsistencies once the processes of national policy design and implementation had been initiated. As cultural legitimacy of the Paris Conference

discourse became established, attention shifted towards concrete and domestic applicabilities of such resolve. To what extent the universality and global commitment to tackle carbon emissions could actually be translated within domestic and context-specific settings, characterized by multiple political, socio-economic and even cultural contingencies? Here come the Yellow Vests as the symptom of such inexorable challenge. From a national supportive and hopeful momentum that unified the French people around a positive revolution, nothing predicted the rise of such dissent and resistance towards a single mitigation tax policy only three years later. Confronted to the rise of the Yellow Vests and their original polarization, sustainability discourse would face trial by social uprisings in November 2018, and by the emerging antagonistic framing struggle of *'making ends meet'*. Henceforth framed as the *'end of the world'*, the legitimacy of the sustainability discourse would thus become strongly contested, if not paralyzed. From this point forward defined by its inequality-identified incidences across social layers, it would suffer strong dissociation from the *'end of the month'* framing, as it would reveal implicit inabilities for struggling shares of the population to assume the burden of national sustainability efforts.

6.2. The *'end of the world'* confronted to the *'end of the month'*: the contestation of legitimacy and original framing fracture of the sustainability discourse by the Yellow Vests (November 2018-January 2019)

"Paris est peut-être la ville du monde la plus sensuelle et où l'on raffine le plus sur les plaisirs ; mais c'est peut-être celle où l'on mène une vie plus dure. Pour qu'un homme vive délicieusement, il faut que cent autres travaillent sans relâche"

"Paris is perhaps the most luxurious city in the world, in it pleasure is carried to the highest pitch of refinement; yet life there is perhaps harder than in an other city. That one man may live delicately a hundred must labour without intermission"

Montesquieu, 1721 (in ed 1875, p.227).

France is no stranger to revolution nor to dramatic public discontent. These are both part of its historical and cultural fibres, and they constitute a unifying platform for the French people to articulate its will and aspirations for a better and just future. Although they are part of its political culture and historical symbolisms, the public demonstrations initiated by the Yellow Vests movement embrace an unmatched character as it encompasses diverse social categories, while not being as structured as previous instances of social resistance towards a given policy. Leaderless and without any specific agenda, the Yellow Vests although found rapid support among socio-economic fringes of the country and sparked a wave of demonstrations across France since November 2018 (Duhamel, 2018a). Originally, the movement emerged as an insurgency against planned increases on fuel prices as being part of the national transition agenda. Representative of these low to middle-income households located within enclaved territorial peripheries, the Yellow Vests found strong resonance in those who felt *"un ras-le-bol general"* (a general exasperation) in view of difficulties to eke a living and to work only to survive. Employed and unemployed, active and retired, single mothers and assisted, a wide range of people were resolved to wear a yellow vest on November 17th to demonstrate not only their discontent towards yet another tax and reduction of their

already limited power purchase; but most importantly to display an unjustly required inability to support the rather abstract and less proximate effort for climate mitigation. Here lies ultimately the original challenge with the air of an impasse that constituted the genesis of the presented research and argument.

At the tip of this unprecedented French crisis, which strongly echoes the Revolution era, its processes, and convergence to its Parisian birthplace, lies however an almost caricatural contrast between climate change and social challenges, which today nonetheless reveals new meaning and actual fractures: fracture between realities, fracture between socio-economic experiences, fracture between Paris and the Rest, fractures in discourse and different framings towards sustainability. These fractures have been formulated through this unprecedented discord between the '*end of the world*' and the '*end of the month*', which eventually conveys sustainability challenges dissociated from and in conflict with people's already struggling daily lives in a developed economy. As said, sparked by the implementation of a diesel tax as part of the country's transition and promised fulfilment of the COP 21 resolve, the Yellow Vests translate a socio-cultural polarisation inevitably embedded within sustainability challenges, and the unequal character of transition policies, which may have been set aside and overlooked by the euphoric, universal, political and cultural successes of the Paris Conference. Henceforth dissociated from the '*end of the month*', the '*end of the world*' discourse, successfully legitimated since the Paris Conference, would face high contestation within not even a framing 'struggle' by rather a framing 'fracture', which would strongly undermine its salience and plausibility. Contested, the fractured sustainability discourse, facing a Yellow Wave, would ultimately be overcome by more pressing social disarray, and further set aside in favour of national unity and universality of its cultural and political symbolisms.

6.2.1. Experiential Commensurability

The movement introduced itself onto the public stage on November 17th when more than 280 000 protesters flooded the streets of major cities and blocked toll booths throughout the country. "*Gilets jaunes, colère noire*" (Yellow Vests, Black Anger), "*Macron, demission*" is read on signs. The duality and opposition expressed throughout the protests sanctioned a specific orientation of the discourse for weeks onwards. At the aftermath of the first weeks of protests, the fracture emerges:

*Appendix IV - The framing fracture between the "end of the world" and "making ends meet" -
A Yellow Vest's words quoted in Rérolle, 2018*

"Les élites parlent de fin du monde, quand nous, on parle de fin de mois"

"The elites are talking about the end of the world when we are talking about making ends meet"

The fracture is launched, and it would successively orient the following debates, and further define the emerging framing discord within the public cognitive space. From November 17th, sustainability discourse stands as much fractured as it is torn apart in an inexorable dilemma: the less purchase power, the further climate change and its urgency are distant and out of step from daily realities. Ability to afford a daily living becomes a true barometer of the proximity assigned to sustainability and environmental concerns.

More than ever, the *'end of the world'* is associated to centralized political and intellectual elites who can afford to worry about it, and whose scale of experience outruns the limited contexts specific to struggling economic fringes of society. On the other side of the spectrum, stand the Yellow Vests who embody the "France from below", the unhappy "forgotten of globalization", and confront the "Parisian bobos" and their uprooting from reality (Duhamel, 2018b). Condemning the "obscure forces from above" (Huyghe & Liccia, 2019), the *'end of the month'* players extend the fracture to broader social and cultural realities, while underlying unjust centralization of power which vertically imposes constraints to an already struggling population. As the ultimate embodiment of this political verticality, Macron became the target of all converging clamours which demand his resignation for being the "President of the rich" (Fig.4).



Figure 4 - A Yellow Vest holds a sign calling for Macron's resignation (Christophe Petit Tesson / MAXPP)

The once inclusive universality enhanced during the Paris Conference would lose from this point forward its former resonance within French society as its materialization would be argued at odds with the actual reality of the audience's daily lives. Henceforth polarized, sustainability discourse embodies the straw breaking the camel's back, in actualizing traditional cleavages of inequality. "Once you belong to the low classes, you are entitled to nothing and you endure everything" (BFMTV, 2019) declares one of the numerous pensioners attending the demonstrations. Gathering those who struggle at the end of the month and can't afford any 'other pleasures' such as weekend night outs, the Yellow Vests embody these citizens pushed aside of the social consumer existence that governs a developed economy such as France's. From the urgency induced by climate mitigation, thus emerged a deep fracture within the French social framing and embodied a desperate call from struggling populations who struggle within a highly globalised society. As said, the framing fracture between the *'end of the world'* and *'making ends meet'* deprives the urgency of climate change and sustainability of any experiential commensurability in a consequent polarized discourse, in which the environmental alert is only audible by those who socially exist through substantial comfort of resources. In contrast, for those deprived of a social future, these Yellow Vests, the daily material anxiety precedes all when "each end of the month is the end of the world" (Foessel, 2018).

This fracture, it embodies the irreconcilability between two different temporalities (Ledoux, 2018). Once the *'end of the world'* evoked, a rise to abstraction and universality inevitably occurs, hence setting aside secondary concerns. The threatened future of humanity stands for a universal awakening and resolve for action, while purchase power

is only circumscribed to one share of the population's concerns, even though it represents a majority in numbers. United in division, the Yellow Vests embrace a simple, if not caricatural, framing struggle throughout the 'end of the world' vs *making ends meet* discord. The movement conveys a strong communion of a large share of the people against the rest of the French society. Embracing a simple framing oriented towards straightforward concepts of power, people and democracy, the Yellow Vests embody a unifying struggle based on an individually experience of inequality. In contrast with the inclusive discourse enhanced while the Paris Conference, the Yellow "we" conveys an aggregate of "I" which are opposed to the rest of the society, and are united in their fight against injustice. This rising collective individualism and original framing transpire within the recent cultural productions that followed the movement: the movie "J'veux du soleil!" (I want some sun!) by François Ruffin and Gilles Perret (2019) (Fig.5), and the song "Fin de mois fin du monde" by the band I Muvrini (2019) well translate the original translation of this fracture within experienced daily lives of the audience.



Figure 5 - Official Poster of the movie "J'veux du soleil" (I want some sun!) (2019)

Dissociated from any empirical social reality, the sustainability discourse would henceforward be supplanted by social and political framings, and further engaged in a powerful hiatus within a polarized and torn apart public cognitive space between the 'end of the world' and *making ends meet*. Two framings, two realities, clashed in a dialogue of the deaf, with at its convergence the presidential figure of Emmanuel Macron that would crystallize all the passions.

6.2.2. Empirical Fit

The disruptive character of this antagonistic framing fracture would not only have an impact on the experiential commensurability of the sustainability discourse after the rise of the Yellow Vests, but also on its empirical fit within the public cognitive space.

While reinforced after the Paris Conference by real-world applications, foreign and domestic, the henceforth dissociated ‘*end of the world*’ from the ‘*end of the month*’ was further deprived of its empiricity as we argued above. Moreover, President Macron’s speech on November 27th in response to the movement conveyed his resolve to stick to the diesel tax increase and to further France’s commitment towards climate mitigation (Élysée, 2018a). Even though he promises in his speech to reconcile both, the president acknowledges the need to provide stronger focus on the “environmental alarm” while not forgetting about the social unease conveyed by the Yellow Vests (Élysée, 2018a). In light of the framing antagonism, President Macron thus attempts a reconciliation between the two dimensions in reminding the empiricity of the sustainability discourse while enumerating the different policies to be enacted for the country’s energy transition and support the creation of innovation and jobs (Élysée, 2018a). To revive the relevance and universal character of the urgency of climate mitigation, Macron recalls in numbers the incidences of pollution on human health (48 000 deaths a year), and its superiority compared to all road accidents, suicides, homicides, drownings and domestic accidents (Élysée, 2018a). In this attempt to reintegrate environmental themes within an experienced reality, the President intends to revitalise the legitimacy of the sustainability discourse and overcome the difficult dissociation from real-world experience. Furthermore, to appease the Yellow uprisings he promises a resolute compromise:

*Appendix V - President Emmanuel Macron's speech (excerpt) on November 27th, 2018
(in Elysée, 2018a)*

“Je refuse que la transition écologique accentue les inégalités entre territoires et rendent plus difficile encore la situation de nos concitoyens qui habitent en zone rurale ou périurbaine”

“I refuse for the ecological transition to exacerbate inequalities between territories, and aggravate our fellow citizens’ situation who live in rural or peripheric areas”

Sticking to the plan while trying to reconcile the sustainability discourse with the Yellow Vests’ demands, there was the aim of the President’s responding speech on November 27th. Reconcile a dialogue of the deaf? not such an easy task... President Macron indeed faced unplanned incomprehension and frustration the following days from his Yellow counterparts, to whom this revival of climate urgency as linked to social anxiety appeared in no way sustainable. The following ‘Acts’ of protests demonstrated a failed attempt to reinforce the empirical fit as much as the Yellow Vests weren’t receptive towards the President’s words. Not only the movement grew in support and in force, it also furthered a growing mistrust of the Presidential figure and the political elites seen as not only deaf but henceforth blind towards the people’s hardship.

6.2.3. Actor Credibility

If already protesters conveyed their dissent and exasperation towards the Presidential figure, the November 27th speech from the President crystallized even more strongly the Yellow Vests’ despise for Emmanuel Macron. “President of the rich” and “corrupted by the banks”, the French President has been since portrayed with the

definitive traits of arrogance and insensitivity towards the daily anxious struggle towards the “Forgotten of the Republic” (BFMTV, 2019). Awakening traditional mistrust feelings towards the people’s representatives, the Yellow Vests powerfully echoed the revolutionary framing inherited by the French Revolution conveyed by the “sans-culottes” against the king Louis XVI. Accusing the French President’s “Jupiterian” conception of his office, the Yellow Vests attacked Macron’s credibility in the blame of his authoritarian rule, his arrogance and class contempt (Lazar, 2018).

The time of the applauds and public ovation for the government at the aftermath of the Paris Conference seemed undeniably over. Through his argued moralizing language and his technocratic origins as a former senior civil servant, the presidential figure found itself toughly discredited in regard of the Yellow Vests as he further crystallized society’s polarization : the privileged and enlightened elites on one hand, and the “people of little” on the other (Lazar, 2018). Portrayed as a true monarch reminiscing from the Old Regime and privileges (Fig.6, 7), President Macron not only saw his credibility undermined as a political leader, but even more so stood as the scapegoat which popular dissents converged upon. As the ultimate symbol of the discord between ‘*end of the world*’ and ‘*making ends meet*’, the President’s loss of credit only strengthened the high contestation of the sustainability discourse’s legitimacy in France.



Figure 6 - Tag "Macron = Louis 16" on the Opera Garnier

Retrieved from: <https://www.lautrequotidien.fr/articles/2018/12/3/sur-le-mouvement-des-gilets-jaunes-par-temps-critiques>



Figure 7 - Protest sign: "The Yellow Vests are talking to you, Mr. Macron you have to resign, otherwise there will be a Revolution!" (JEFF PACHOUD/AFP)

6.2.4. Centrality

Only four days after the President's speech, the 'Act III' of the Yellow Vests protests embodied a turning point in the emerging polarization of the sustainability discourse and the irreversible loss of its centrality in France. December 1st, 2018 became the day when "everything changed" (Chapuis, 2019), not only in regard to the demonstrations' violence, but also regarding the fracture of temporalities within the French social fabric. Strangely reminiscent of the Bastille Day (July 14th, 1789), December 1st 2018 sanctified strong rise of violence between protesters and police authorities on the Champs Elysées, symbol of the Parisian luxury and wealth. Images of burning cars, assailed shop windows, historical monuments and companies headquarters on the famous avenue bore witness of the confrontations. From December 1st, "France is in fear" as it faces the violence of protesters henceforth portrayed as "troublemakers" (les 'casseurs', those who break) (Darnault et al., 2018). Not only the Yellow Vests lashed out the corporate actors by symbolically degrading their building facades, but more importantly damaged some of the sculptures of the Arc of Triumph (Fig.8), which resonated as a grave insult for those attached to the Republic's symbolism and its unity. From this day onwards, the polarization between 'end of the world' and 'making ends meet' was to be deepened as the events of the day materialized a true fracture between now-portrayed violent Yellow Vests, and the Parisian elites of politicians, companies and intellectuals.



Figure 8 - Damaged Sculpture of the 'Allegory of Liberty' from the Arc of Triumph, symbol of the French Republic, following the December 1st protests

Retrieved from : <https://www.independent.ie/opinion/comment/miry-fitzgerald-broken-marianne-is-symbol-of-a-movement-that-is-plotting-to-bring-president-macron-to-his-knees-37606299.html>

Once key players in the formulation of the country's resolve for climate action in 2015, the central actors of the Paris Conference found themselves targeted by the Yellow Vests. Polarized, the sustainability discourse has more than ever lost of its centrality in the symbolic fracture between a France of the Parisian elites and the revolutionary Yellow Vests. Moreover, the protesters' claims strongly concentrated on the implemented

preferential reduction of the ISF wealth tax, which favoured companies rather than the middle- and low-income households left to their daily struggle (Fig.9) (Cori, 2018). From a dissociation in the discourse to a materialized polarization of society, the framing fracture between *'end of the world'* and *'making ends meet'* irreversibly shifted the legitimacy of the French sustainability discourse into a violent stage awakening socio-economic inequalities. More than a loss of centrality, the events December 1st onwards would sanction a conflict of temporalities between an immediate and daily *'end of the month'* against an abstract and future *'end of the world'*, which would transfer from polarized framings into socially materialized division of the French social fabric (Ledoux, 2018). From December 1st, players would be divided into two "sides": the ones who can afford a tomorrow, reflect on it and sound the alarm for the *'end of the world'*; against the ones who can only make their daily struggle heard on the streets in burning the elites' cars, damage shops and even monumental symbols.



Figure 9 - Protest sign, "We also want to pay the Wealth Tax, give back the money. There is no up without the bottom" (Radio France / Vanessa Descouraux)

6.2.5. Macro-cultural resonance

In light of such brutality, which culminated on December 7th when some protesters attempted to trespass the Prime Minister's residence (Emanuele, 2018), President Macron finally responded to the Yellow Vests' call during a speech he addressed the nation on the 10th (Elysée, 2018b). Not only would he sanction a freeze of the diesel tax that awoken such disarray, the President announced several measures aimed at the increase of purchasing power of the middle- and low-income shares of the population (Elysée, 2018b). Making amends, he agreed that *"the expected effort was too high"* and subsequently prioritized the *"economic and social state of emergency"* over climate change mitigation (Elysée, 2018b). Facing such disturbing violence expressed during the previous weeks of protests, President Macron favoured national unity over the sustainability fracture that reached the point of no return in its irreversible framing and social dissociation that so intensely polarized French society. For the sake of the country's unity and to prevent a revolutionary reminiscence of History, the President took the side of social reconciliation over the discord for the future.

“Mon seul souci, c’est vous ; mon seul combat, c’est pour vous. Notre seule bataille, c’est pour la France”

“My only concern, it is you; my only fight, it is for you. Our only fight, it is for France”

In his speech, words activate a unifying myth of the “we”, the “us”, gathered around a vision of a nation in agreement with its identity, common roots and values. For France’s sake, the fracturing sustainability discourse is laid aside in favour of a revived collective project which would offer an *“opportunity for all”* (Elysée, 2018b). Unexpected mother of the Yellow Vests revolution, French sustainability transition stands paralyzed if not overlooked as it engendered such discord, not only throughout conflicting framings, but more strongly across clashing social temporalities and realities. In order for unity to permeate once again within the French social fabric, and for the unifying values of the Republic to prevail and resonate to all the citizens, sustainability discourse finds itself not only diminished but entirely put out of the picture. Henceforth, beyond a non-resonance, it is suppressed in favour of a regained cultural echo of unity symbols around common myths of French history and identity. Additionally, past the paralysis of any fuel tax increase until 2022 voted by the Senate (Legifrance, 2018), French transition agenda would be supplanted by policies rather focused on democratic processes of representation through the launch of a “Grand National Debate” (Elysée, 2018b), conceived as an horizontal platform for civic debates and feedback onto governmental action.

6.2.6. A Revolution for the “end of the month”: the contestation and abdication of the sustainability discourse’s legitimacy.

From December 10th, the hour of the universal and resonating resolve for climate action initiated in 2015 would henceforth be over; for the nation to appease the protests and to heal the discord between the *‘end of the world’* and *‘making ends meet’*. To *“turn the anger into an opportunity”* for national unity (Elysée, 2018b), the legitimacy of the sustainability discourse had to be disengaged. The Yellow Vests’ expressed violence and resistance against a tax increase as part of the country’s transition agenda is not to be taken as a contestation of the sustainability discourse’s legitimacy per se. Rather, its undermined, if not defeated, salience and plausibility during this crisis is to be analysed as the unprecedented symptom of its so-far unexamined fracturing power and lagging unfit upon concrete socio-cultural contingent realities and temporalities.

The presented exploration hence reveals that, despite a primary universal and motivational resolve, a country’s cultural and social acceptability of mitigation may be overwhelmed by the awakening of traditional cleavages crystallized by the paralyzing discord *‘end of the world’* vs *‘making ends meet’*. Beyond the feasibility of a given policy, the Yellow Vests’ framing struggle reveals a conflict of temporalities in which the less-proximate and expensive sustainability discourse would not prevail in face of the more palpable daily struggle of the *‘end of the month’*. More than contested, this implied sustainability fracture imposed a torn dilemma in which the *‘end of the world’* did not

prevail, but rather got overlooked in favour of social unity and the French myths' recovered universality.

7. Discussion

*"You say you want a revolution / Well, you know / We all want to change the world / (...) /
You say you got a real solution / Well, you know / We'd all love to see the plan /
You ask me for a contribution / Well, you know / We're doing what we can (...) /*

The Beatles, *Revolution*, 1968

7.1. Fracture of temporalities: Just and Unjust Sustainability Transition in the Global North

At the aftermath of the Paris conference, sustainability discourse met strong legitimacy once it permeated the French public cognitive space as its revolutionary character constituted a platform for cultural appropriation that echoed the country's history and symbolic legacy towards change. As the birthplace of all revolutions, France and its people were subject to positive exposure and resolve over the incumbent need of structural change supplemented by a national effort towards sustainability and climate mitigation. Only three years later, once the Green Revolution was to become concrete reality for the citizens as it materialized through a diesel tax, the euphoria would turn bitter as the Yellow Vests polarized the sustainability discourse and contested its legitimacy. From one ideal of universality emerged a "fracture" of framings and realities over what sustainability meant and implied in the daily lives of French citizens. Tip of a broader social crisis, the movement nonetheless reveal an original conflict of temporalities which embodies the symptom of the inevitable interdependency of socio-economic inequalities to sustainability transitions. The emerging fracture between the 'end of the world' vs the 'end of the month' in the discourse hence convey such correlation has been overlooked and inevitably hidden by the COP 21 positive resolve, too far from everyday experiences of these inequalities, upon which are thus added sustainability transitions distributional incidences.

As said, the case study of the Yellow Vests crisis and the tracing process of the sustainability discourse disclose the unavoidable power of sustainability transitions to stir in a developed economy already existing cleavages, as well as a geography of the just and unjust. Once the 'end of the world' is put forward, other issues are laid aside as humanity's survival universally prevails over the exclusive purchase power decrease that is the concern of one share of the population, even though this one stands as majoritarian in numbers. The Yellow Vests' strong resistance thus reveals the so-far overlooked impact of transition injustices in a developed country, but more importantly the difficulty to appease this dissent. Even though struggling, these categories remain at a global scale far well off compared to other populations and convey greater dissent to adapt to climate-related impediments as they have far more less to lose. In a way, the Yellow Vests crisis may work as a flag for decision-makers to further apprehend different scales of acceptability and ability of societies towards climate policies, which would not only rely on socio-economic variables, but more deeply upon cultural and context-specific contingencies. Indeed, beyond the resistance itself, the Yellow Vests embody an original

exemplar for the importance of cultural appropriation within the sustainability discourse' legitimation processes.

7.2. When the Revolution outshines the Transition

The advanced "Sustainability Fracture" reached beyond the polarization between the 'end of the world' vs the 'end of the month' in the conflict of two revolutions. From a universal and inclusive revolution of the Paris Conference, the movement hence translates a revolution of the "Forgotten of the Republic" (BFMTV, 2019) who, in turn, appropriated themselves with the country's historic legacy and symbols. If the Paris Conference fit the contours of universal and positive revolution, the Yellow Vests reminisced powerful symbols and narratives inherited from the 1789 revolution of the "sans-culottes" against the absolute monarchy and the privileged other orders, the nobility and the monarchy (Appendix VII). Angular stone of the country's history, the Revolution still reigns over the country's contemporary political culture and upon the basic precepts of its institutions and democratic structure.

Appendix VII - The French Revolution in 80 seconds (Encyclopédie Larousse, 2019)

In a context of agricultural paucity and economic crisis, the French Revolution (1789-1799) sparked in 1789 as the uprising of the tax-burdened and majoritarian "Third Estate" (*Tiers Etat*) against the privileged, prosperous and tax exempted Nobility and Clergy. Heir of the Enlightenment and the American Revolution (1765-1783), what started as a localized rural revolt shifted into national uprisings, in which peasants and bourgeois united against the authoritarian and deemed unjust social order crystallised by the absolute monarch Louis XVI and the Old Regime. Converging in Paris, the "sans-culottes" displayed such disrupting dissent throughout their demonstrations that it led the King to call for the reunion of the Estates General (*Etats Généraux*) to appease and consider the people's revendications surveyed in the registers of grievances (*cahiers de doléances*). Unsatisfied and feeling unheard, the Third Estate as a result autonomously proclaimed on June 17th, 1789, the National Assembly and institute seminal principles of democratic representation and fair taxation processes. Along with the storming of La Bastille on July 14th, the year 1789 initiated the angular process of regime change, with its success and terrors, that sanctioned the country's modern History, democratic ideals, myths and institutions.

Beyond the social temporality embraced by the Yellow Vests' framing dissociation of the 'end of the world' from the 'end of the month', the movement further displayed strong symbolic embrace of the country's revolutionary legacy. With the novelty of its structure and claims, it also drew from historic references to refine an identity audible to all. Indeed, the reference to the 1789 "sans-culottes" has been strongly palpable and consciously revendicated by the Yellow Vests. Throughout the weeks of demonstrations, numerous were the signs and symbols resonating the revolutionary vocabulary and symbolism (Figs. 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13). Like the "sans-culottes" who proudly wore the freedom-identified Phrygian cap and loosen pants, the protesters proudly wore in 2018 their yellow vests as a symbol of unity over their struggling condition catalysed by the rise of diesel prices. Even in the media, the comparison genuinely appears (France culture, 2019; Fig. 14).



Figure 11 - Protests Inscriptions tagged on barricaded shop windows "The People wants the Fall of the Regime" (France Montagne)



Figure 10 - Protests Inscriptions tagged on barricaded shop windows, "Yellow Vests, Sans Culottes" (François Guillot AFP)

Besides, above the symbols, the tracing of the Yellow Vests movement strangely embraces the contours of the 1789 processes sparked by a deemed unjust feudal fiscal system: today's carbon tax may be paralleled with the Old Regime's Salt Tax (Fourquet & Manternach, 2018). As said, the Yellow Vests revived a narrative of the Revolution extracted from History to express and construct collective meaning over the revealed framing fracture between the 'end of the world' and the 'end of the month'. Comparing themselves to the "sans-culottes", these founding fathers of the French Republic and its democratic principles, the Yellow Vests thus allowed their movement to be inserted within French historical great narrative. Beyond their own revolution, their appropriation of such symbolism conferred strong will for unity and breadth of social justice within a contemporary setting. Above the immediate consequences of political and social disruption, the Yellow Vests' revolutionary embrace is one of the first instances of civic uprising that demonstrate such resilience and transversal unifying power since the 1970's (Girard, 2018).



Figure 12 - Protesters disguised as "Marianne", female allegory of the Revolution and Liberty, during the December 15th, 2018 Protests in Paris Retrieved from: https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/des-marianne-seins-nus-face-aux-forces-de-l-ordre_2053548.html



Figure 13 - Fresco in the 19th Arrondissement in Paris, reinterpreting the "Liberty Guiding the People" (1830) by Eugène Delacroix (LP/Julien Duffé)

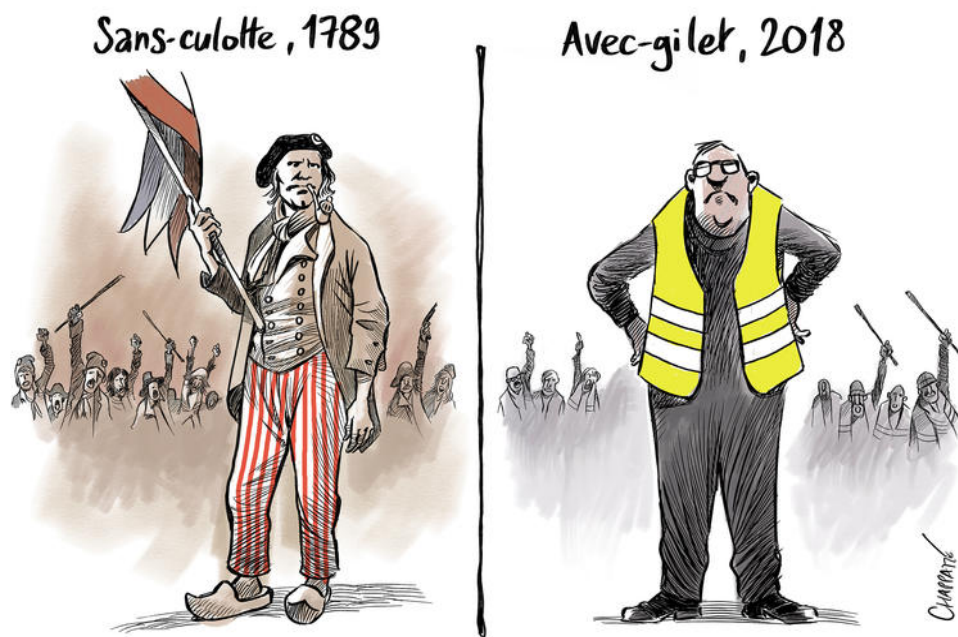


Figure 14 - Drawing from Chappatte (in *Courrier International*, 2018)

Finally, the unifying power of France's revolutionary legacy would once again be appropriated by President Macron himself to convey his own acknowledgment of the protesters' claims and thus attempt to recover social appeasement and unity during his Press Conference on April 25th, 2019 (Elysée, 2019). Like Louis XVI in 1789, the French President launched at the aftermath of the crisis several weeks of "Grand National Debate" during which the people could express their grievances to their representatives in official gatherings. At the end of the process held between December 2018 and March 2019th, the President responded to the conveyed grievances in attempting to re-activate collective myths and symbols of the Revolution. To forge a bond anew between his citizens and the confidence in their representatives, the President advanced "*L'art d'être Français*" ("The Art of being French") (Elysée, 2019) as this peculiar identity that ought to overcome any social divergence. "*Above all, he declares, we are the children of the Enlightenment*" (Elysée, 2019). As it has been revealed across this case study and narrative analysis, president Macron attempts a re-unification of the discourse over the fracture '*end of the world*' vs '*end of the month*' in his echo of French universal myths of past achievements and collective projects. For unity's sake, the French Revolution is resuscitated to heal the fracture implied by the Green Revolution and its urgent and foreseen challenges. A revolution surpasses another to recover the disruptive polarization of society and resistance towards needed adaptation of contemporary habits and consumption behaviours implied by sustainability transitions.

7.3. Tax: the spark of revolutions, the crystallization of transition as "injustice"

Torn between revolutions, sustainability transition emerges as the crystallisation point of perceived injustices, even though these cleavages precede the very formulation and implementation of the French transition agenda. While tax policy is generally advanced as the most effective tool for concrete and cost efficient climate mitigation (Goulder, 2013; Kosonen & Nicodème, 2009; Nerudova et al., 2018; OECD, 2016a), it is this very device that awoken older social sorrows and unexpected revolutionary passions; which, in turn, would suspend if not paralyze national transition journey. However, such contemporary resistance displayed by the Yellow Vests may further find resonance within deeper cultural and historical experiences that would contingently condition the given acceptability context. Indeed, as argued by the historian Gérard Noiriel (2018), the role of taxation finds a powerful as much as specific breadth within the French political and cultural context. There lies undeniably a particular relationship to taxation that is experienced throughout the country's history as it crystallised most of its social uprisings, revolutions and structural changes since the Middle Ages (Noiriel, 2018). As a Modern State, France has been constructed since the 15th century on a given distributional framework proper to the Old Regime's feudalism, and subsequently laid ground for the ultimate awakening of the French Revolution (Noiriel, 2018). The relevance of taxation within the French perceptive context is to be considered even more substantially as it enjoys independent articles in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (articles 13 & 14, 1789 in Legifrance, 2019) (Appendix VIII). As said, taxation concentrates strong historical sensitivity within the French cultural and political contexts. In a way, fuel taxation and its planned increase for climate mitigation's sake may be nowadays argued as much sensitive and socially-permeating as salt and wheat prices formerly were under the Old Regime.

Art. 13. Pour l'entretien de la force publique, et pour les dépenses d'administration, une contribution commune est indispensable : elle doit être également répartie entre tous les citoyens, en raison de leurs facultés.

Art. 14. Tous les Citoyens ont le droit de constater, par eux-mêmes ou par leurs représentants, la nécessité de la contribution publique, de la consentir librement, d'en suivre l'emploi, et d'en déterminer la quotité, l'assiette, le recouvrement et la durée.

Article 13. For the maintenance of the public force and for the expenditures of administration, a common contribution is indispensable; it must be equally distributed to all the citizens, according to their ability to pay.

Article 14. Each citizen has the right to ascertain, by himself or through his representatives, the need for a public tax, to consent to it freely, to know the uses to which it is put, and of determining the proportion, basis, collection, and duration.

In analogy, the Yellow Vests may be portrayed as these post-modern “sans-culottes” who emerged from a non-structured movement of contestation against the tax increase over a product upon which emanate strong socio-economic, territorial and demographic dependencies. Feeling unheard and left out of the prosperous picture a developed economy engaged on the path of environmental resolve such as France’s may display, the “Forgotten of the Republic” (BFMTV, 2019) in turn engaged in a conflict against its symbols and re-appropriated themselves with revolutionary legacy. While the “sans-culottes” questioned the fair legitimacy of the Old Regime’s fiscal system, the Yellow Vests on the other hand reveal the overlooked exclusiveness and regressive character of taxation policy advanced as a tool for sustainability transition, *a priori* deemed universal and part of global resolve for the future. In their resistance towards this tax, and along with the upholding of the ISF wealth tax, the Yellow Vests movement convey substantial embodiment of French inherited perception towards taxation as the catalyst of social inequalities and basis for revolutionary endeavour. True impetus for social divergence and conflict, taxation reveals strong cultural contingencies of the French public acceptability of fiscal policy. Adding the urgency and normativity induced by the need for concrete climate mitigation and sustainability shifts of society, the tax device stands in France as the crystallisation point where sustainability transition turns in the discourse into injustice, which is intimately related to the fight against privileges and revolutionary awakening.

8. Conclusion

These times are ones of transition. Although it is an anticipatory process enacted in the present in which unfolds the future, the pictured “Sustainability Fracture” in the discourse between the ‘*end of the world*’ and the ‘*end of the month*’ remarkably recalls the powerful ascendance of contingencies emanating from culture and historical experiences, thus playing as orienting factors of the French Sustainability Transition Journey. Beyond the acknowledged multidisciplinary character and normativities implied by sustainability transitions, the presented analysis of the sustainability discourse in this case study reveals the so-far overlooked leverage of cultural contingencies onto the creation and contestation, if not abdication, of the sustainability discourse’s legitimacy within a given public cognitive space, in this case France’s. Torn apart between revolutions, from the universal resolve of the Paris Conference to the Yellow Vests’ disruptive framing fracture, this analysis and presented insights from the performative approach display a significant exploration to account for the unexpected spark of resistance towards a transition agenda, while revealing unprecedented hindrances a Sustainability Transition Journey may face once applied in the setting of a developed economy. In the end, sustainability discourse is found to be highly legitimated in a universal fashion as long as it is remotely portrayed within motivational and inclusive features. Once materialized and applied into a given context, tensions may arise and find in extreme cases a complete fracture of temporalities; in which the reality of the ‘*end of the world*’ no longer relates to the daily experienced struggle of the ‘*end of the month*’. As said, once translated into tax policy, sustainability transition is shown to crystallize specific framing in perceptions proper to its setting of application. As revealed by the Yellow Vests crisis and the tracing of the sustainability discourse across the French public cognitive space, sustainability transition in spite embraces here the contours of a deemed ‘unjust’ process; that is intimately linked to regressive distributional incidences and finally becomes the trigger of revolutionary afflictions.

Awoken by a historically-defined culture of the tax, the French context stands almost as naturally hostile to any forms of sustainability transition policy based on taxation devices. The spark of the Yellow Vests is yet to be apprehended as a “sustainability transition drama” that reveals the need for stronger attention to deeper and less palpable “repertoires” proper to each context of application. Beyond economic development, demographics and socio-economic variables, culture and past experiences of one society may constitute refining factors while attempting the design of transition policies. Complex processes, sustainability transitions’ contexts ought not to be systematically defined as cultural contingencies and performative dynamics are shown in this thesis to have greater incidence than expected. Even framing fractures within the discourse can alter if not paralyze the direction of Sustainability Transition Journey if some less ‘palpable’ features are overlooked, as shown in the case of the Yellow Vests in France.

While the universal and motivational breadth of international resolve may sustain public support and legitimation of the sustainability discourse, greater time and resilience ought to be devoted to its actual translation into domestic formulation accounting for specific contextual contingencies, for the implementation to be perceived as rather “acceptable” across various layers of society. Beyond the non-palpable power of context, sustainability transitions studies would face the coming challenge to conceive and further apprehend the potential fracturing power of the process as it can strongly be dissociated

from one framing to another in the discourse, and resultantly suffer from irreconcilable paralysis. Deprived of its essential role of taxation as efficient tool for climate mitigation, the French Sustainability Transition Journey is today facing both inertia and obstructed direction. With the emerging fracture '*end of the world*' vs '*end of the month*', it is rather attributed with polarizing incidence which would ultimately undermine its active evolution and expected reach. Normative and complex, Sustainability Transition Journeys extend beyond empirical rationalities. The rise of the disruptive forces and social resistance such as the Yellow Vests' in France stands as evidence of the strong influence of normativities at play once the resolve is to be translated into concrete policies and directives of change. Studies are to consequently further the scope towards other ontologies and heuristics, while narrowing down the scale to contextual contingencies, for efficiently supplementing economic, social, political, technical and demographic rationalities of Sustainability Transition Journeys and the challenges they are to be faced up to.

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