Becoming Parents at the End of the World: Trauma Narratives, Parenthood, and the Climate Crisis. A Critical Discourse Analysis Approach

by *Aureliana Natale**

Abstract

This article explores the impact of climate trauma on reproductive choices and the imagination of parenthood in the age of environmental crisis. As climate change is increasingly perceived as an existential threat, fear and climate anxiety shape individual and collective decisions, challenging the ethical, emotional, and psychological foundations of becoming – or choosing not to become – parents (Dillarstone *et al.*, 2023). The essay also addresses the phenomenon of pre-traumatic stress disorder (Van Susteren, 2018; Kaplan, 2020), exploring how anticipatory anxiety shapes not only individual emotions but also existential and intergenerational decisions. Through the analysis of newspaper articles, the study investigates how trauma narratives construct a future imaginary dominated by instability, loss, and ecological collapse (Kaplan, 2016; Woodbury, 2019). These narratives often intertwine the fear of extinction with deep dilemmas about reproduction, responsibility, and the transmission of life in a threatened world (Crist, 2020).

Keywords: Climate trauma, Ecolinguistics, Parenthood, Pre-traumatic stress disorder, Critical Discourse analysis.

1
From Global Warming to Climate Trauma: Evolving Language and Psychological Impact

«The danger was real, though sometimes much exaggerated» (Hobsbawm, 1995, p. 552): this is how Hobsbawm, in his *Age of Extremes*, summarizes what he defines as «the uncontrollable warming of the global temperature [...] which began to be seriously discussed around 1970 and became a major preoccupation of both specialists and politicians in the 1980s» (Hobsbawm, 1995, pp. 551-2). Notably, Hobsbawm was writing in the early 1990s, a period when the implications of global warming were predominantly framed within the context of the so-called ozone hole. This particular historical perspective may account for his relative minimization of the danger, as well as his tendency to reference the issue in the past tense. By the mid-1980s, the detrimental effects of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) on the ozone layer were widely acknowledged and the conclusion of the decade saw the beginning of an international

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ISSN 1974-2886

effort to mitigate this threat through the Montreal Protocol (1987), which led to the reduction and eventual cessation of CFC usage. Consequently, as the new millennium approached, that specific danger appeared to have been effectively addressed.

However, reading about global warming today as a past and sometimes exaggerated danger has a disorienting effect. Contemporary discourse presents a stark contrast: the danger posed by global warming is considered anything but exaggerate to the extent that a common critique of governments, institutions, and even individuals is their tendency to underestimate its gravity. Furthermore, the nature of the danger has evolved from a hypothetical threat to a reality that is manifesting in observable consequences. Thus, what has changed is not merely its perception but its fundamental nature: what was once considered a potential risk is now recognized as a source of tangible harm.

This shift is also reflected in language. As is well known, contemporary scientific and institutional discourse increasingly favors the term climate change over global warming. This distinction is significant, as the latter describes a specific phenomenon, whereas the former encompasses a broader and more interconnected set of processes. According to the *Climate Dictionary* of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), these processes «affect the balance of ecosystems that support life and biodiversity» (UNDP, 2023, p. 37) and are responsible for «more extreme weather events, such as more frequent and more intense hurricanes, floods, heatwaves and droughts, and lead to sea level rise and coastal erosion» (UNDP, 2023, p. 37).

In recent years, particularly due to the increasing frequency of these extreme events, the term climate crisis has gained prominence, particularly in media discourse. This shift in terminology is meaningful, as it moves away from the relative neutrality implied by the term change and instead underscores the urgency and severity of the situation. At least in principle, this linguistic shift also aims to prompt responses that differ in terms of timing, intensity, and approach.

The growing interest in the mental health effects of climate change can rightly be considered one of such responses. Indeed, it is only when the concept of climate change takes on the tangible form of a crisis that the issue of its psychological consequences becomes widespread and, therefore, observable. Stef Craps effectively summarizes this phenomenon:

> The growing frequency and severity of extreme weather events around the world have helped make the somewhat abstract concept of climate change tangible in people's minds. After all, one can experience devastating hurricanes, destructive floods, prolonged droughts or intensified wildfires, but not gradually rising global temperatures (Craps, 2023, p. 275).

This accounts for the growing body of research aimed at analyzing the emotional – and, in some cases, pathological – responses associated with the climate crisis, as well as the emergence of new terminologies to describe these experiences (Albrecht, 2019). Broadly speaking, such psychological states are often conceptualized within the framework of trauma, given that the symptoms and emotional responses reported

closely resemble those observed in established traumatic conditions. These include intense fear, helplessness, a perceived loss of control, and threat of annihilation. This association is particularly evident in cases where the climate crisis manifests in concrete and violent forms. Any significant environmental disaster can, in fact, be considered a traumatic event, as it may endanger one's own health and that of loved ones, disrupt everyday life conditions, and destroy cherished places and personal property. Each of these factors has the potential to leave a lasting and deeply distressing impact on the psychological well-being of those affected.

At the same time, however, the experience of the climate crisis exhibits specific and perhaps unique characteristics. Based on this premise, Woodbury suggests considering the climate crisis itself as a novel form of trauma. According to Woodbury, «the climate crisis does not just induce trauma under certain circumstances – it is a new form of trauma that pervades the circumstances of our life» (Woodbury, 2019, p. 1). This recognition would once again require a change in terminology: we should no longer speak of global warming or climate change, nor even of a climate crisis, but rather of climate trauma.

While Woodbury's proposal risks collapsing the distinction – one that does, in fact, exist -between the phenomenon itself and its psychological reception, it nonetheless serves to highlight the uniquely traumatic aspects of the climate crisis. These distinguishing features can be broadly categorized into two primary factors: scale and temporal scope.

Although trauma is well understood as not only an individual condition but also one that can be collectively experienced by entire communities and across generations, the climate crisis, when reframed as climate trauma, represents an unprecedented expansion of this collective dimension: «With Climate Trauma», Woodbury asserts, «we are talking about the entire human race» (Woodbury, 2019, p. 4). A trauma that, at least in potential terms, encompasses the entire global population differs significantly from those that affect individuals or even large groups. While therapeutic interventions may still be directed at individuals, the underlying condition must be understood as endemic at the species level.

However, the most distinctive feature of climate trauma is undoubtedly its temporal scope.

Traditionally, trauma is understood as a condition that follows an event: it is an effect produced by a specific cause. This causal relationship is reflected in the terminology used within trauma studies, where the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been particularly influential. As the prefix *post-* indicates, PTSD is a disabling disorder that emerges after exposure to a particularly distressing event. While it can affect the present and future lives of those who suffer from it, the time of trauma is rooted in the past because its origin lies there. By contrast, the temporal structure of climate trauma is fundamentally different, as it extends across the past, present, and future. Climate trauma does not merely consist of emotional reactions following a

particular extreme event. If that were the case, it would only affect those individuals directly involved in that specific extreme event. However, research indicates that even those who have never personally experienced extreme weather conditions exhibit symptoms of stress, anxiety, and psychological paralysis related to climate change (Innocenti, 2022). This occurs precisely because climate change is a global and ongoing phenomenon capable of threatening anyone at any time: in Woodbury's words, it is «an ever-present existential threat» (Innocenti, 2022, p.5).

Many individuals who have never experienced its most tragic consequences thus feel that they have not yet done so. What can result is a psychologically unique condition in which the mind suffers the negative effects of a cause that has been anticipated, imagined, but not directly experienced. This phenomenon helps explain the recent emergence – following but parallel to that of PTSD – of concepts such as Pre-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Pre-TSD) and Pre-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (Pre-TSS) where the temporal prefix highlights a condition that precedes the traumatic event itself.

Kaplan, who coined the term Pre-TSS, describes it as presenting «symptoms similar to those in PTSD» such as «nightmares, and fear-induced dissociation», which arise «from extreme anxiety about a future when the natural environment, and related human systems, would have failed» (Kaplan, 2020, p. 82). Similarly, Van Susteren, one of the first to use the term Pre-TSD, defines it as «a before-the-fact version of classic PTSD» (Van Susteren, 2018) in which, consequently, individuals experience not sudden flashbacks but rather sudden flash-forwards. While such pre-traumatic states are not exclusively linked to the climate crisis, the latter, due to its global nature and pervasive media coverage, has become one of the most prevalent sources of these conditions.

Regardless of whether one fully conceptualizes it as a new form of trauma, it would be difficult to deny that climate change presents itself as a concept that is hard for the human mind to manage. The danger it poses, to borrow Hobsbawm's words, was real, is real, and most importantly, will be real. Addressing and responding to a threat that is both ongoing and future-oriented requires adapting cognitive and narrative frameworks to an unusual register, one that accommodates both rational calculation and imaginative projection, the unknown and the foreseeable, fatalism and interventionism.

Furthermore, there exists a fundamental chronological asymmetry: if current projections hold, the severity of the climate crisis will escalate in the coming decades, meaning that its most catastrophic effects will not be experienced by present-day adult generations but by those in the future. Beyond an inevitable degree of self-interest, the climate crisis thus compels individuals to confront, in the present, anxieties about the well-being of future generations, whether they are already known (children, grandchildren) or not yet conceived. From this perspective, the trauma associated with climate change may extend beyond the lifespan of any given individual, shaping not only personal psychological states but also the potential existence of future lives.

2
Parenthood as Existential Dilemma: Personal Testimonies and the Language of Trauma

Few topics intertwine the personal and collective dimensions as profoundly as natality, even when these dimensions may be in tension with one another. Having a child has always been, simultaneously, an individual and a social act. This duality has become even more pronounced since the second half of the Twentieth century, a period marked by significant economic and cultural transformations that have reshaped the role of women and the structure of the family. These changes have increasingly positioned parenthood as a matter of choice rather than obligation: a choice that is considered and not random, and, starting in the 1970s, at least in much of the Western world, a choice to which many individuals have responded negatively.

Given these broader shifts, it is unsurprising that contemporary reproductive decisions – especially when they lead to a choice not to have children – may also be influenced by considerations related to climate change. Having a child today, after all, means bringing a human being into a future world that many current discourses portray as very difficult, if not outright inhospitable. As a result, the decision to have or forgo parenthood is increasingly shaped by the pre-traumatic conditions previously discussed, manifesting through personal reflection, collective discourse, and both private and public narratives.

The following section of this article applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine a series of newspaper and magazine articles that explore the challenges of choosing parenthood in the context of the climate crisis and, in many cases, the subsequent decision to forgo it.

The corpus under examination consists of twelve articles published online between 2019 and 2024. Analyzing a corpus of such articles is particularly significant, as newspapers and magazines serve as primary platforms for shaping public opinion and discourse. This examination, therefore, provides insight into how a topic that is theoretically very private – the decision to have children – becomes a matter of public concern. Moreover, there is a notable quantitative factor: at present, discussions on this topic primarily emerge within journalistic outlets. Drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (Fairclough, 2003) and Baker's corpora analysis (Baker, 2006), this study, therefore, aims to investigate how this issue is narrated within the media and to identify recurring linguistic and narrative patterns that emerge across different texts and authors. Specifically, it seeks to highlight how the recurrence of certain lexical choices shapes discourses (Van Dijk, 2008) that reflect features of traumatic narrativization. In this regard, the analysis also demonstrates how, whether anchored in past experiences or projected into the future, the experience of trauma ultimately finds expression in a language of trauma.

2.1

The largest portion of the selected corpus of articles, eight out of twelve, is drawn from "The Guardian", a British newspaper renowned for its extensive coverage of climate change. This is particularly evident in the newspaper's dedicated section, titled *Climate Crisis*, which aggregates all related news and articles. Beyond its significant coverage, "The Guardian" also engages in what could be described as investigative journalism, having commissioned numerous surveys to explore the scope and impact of actions and emotions related to climate change. For those researching how the phenomenon is narrated, "The Guardian" serves as an important reference point and a rich source of documents.

Among the many articles dedicated to the climate crisis in its various dimensions, eight were selected that explicitly address parenthood. These articles can be broadly categorized into two groups: those presenting the topic in general terms and those reporting individual experiences. On the surface, the distinction between these two categories appears significant, as it generally separates informational articles from opinion pieces. This distinction is reflected in the article titles. In the first category, titles tend to be impersonal, summarizing the issue while presenting data and research: *More People Not Having Children Due to Climate Breakdown Fears, Finds Research*; *Four in 10 Young People Fear Having Children Due to Climate Crisis*; *Climate 'Apocalypse' Fears Stopping People Having Children – Study*. In the second category, titles immediately signal a more personal tone: *Would You Give Up Having Children to Save the Planet? Meet the Couples Who Have*; *Why I Don't Have a Child: My Climate Crisis Anxiety*; *Why a Generation is Choosing to Be Child-Free*; *Should I Have Children? Weighing Parenthood Amid the Climate Crisis*; *'I Am Starting to Panic About My Child's Future': Climate Scientists Wary of Starting Families*.

However, upon closer examination, this apparent difference between the two categories diminishes. In fact, even the more neutral and informational articles consistently include individual voices alongside general data and trends, offering insights into the emotional states experienced when making the decision to have or not have children. This prevalence of personal accounts, even in articles not explicitly framed as opinion pieces, suggests a communicative necessity: in order to effectively explain and narrate the choice of whether or not to have children – particularly the decision to forgo parenthood – it is perhaps essential to hear the words of who have made such a decision.

This is perhaps the first characteristic that can be considered a traumatic narrative condition. Especially since the Twentieth century, the narration of trauma has been intrinsically linked to the genre of testimony (Jensen, 2023) and the concept of the witness (Dean, 2023). This is true both for individual traumatic events and for historical ones. In other words, trauma cannot be fully objectified or synthesized in a purely external or detached manner; it always requires a first-person account – whether

singular as an individual or plural as a group – that accepts the task of reconstructing it, despite all the difficulties. As Jensen argues, «Testimony in the aftermath of trauma should be understood not as a mode of statement but a mode of access to painful truths» (Jensen, 2023, p. 75). In the context of the climate crisis, one might argue that this holds true not only in the aftermath of trauma but also in its anticipation.

The use of first-person narratives in the articles under review – whether in the form of entire articles or as individual quotations – represents a way to access the mental processes underlying the decision to have or not have children in the context of the climate crisis. Through personal accounts, it becomes possible to observe and thereby understand how the looming threat of the climate crisis operates at the crossroads of seemingly contradictory yet shared and shareable personal feelings. This intersection is particularly evident from a lexical standpoint. In many instances, a single sentence juxtaposes terms typically associated with traumatic experiences (such as fear, anxiety, and grief) with those that evoke feelings more commonly linked to parenthood (such as love, hope, and dreams). The complexity of the mental processes at work becomes even more apparent in the ways individuals articulate and justify their choices. For example, consider how two different women, citizens of very distant countries (Canada and Australia), explain the reasons behind their decision not to become mothers.

> I wonder, too, about who our child would turn out to be; which qualities they would take from us, and which they would form independently. Would they be kind and introspective, quietly biding their time like my partner is, or impulsive, like me? [...] In 1989, the world still had space for me and my dreams. But now it's 2020 and I think an apocalypse is under way. Since I love my unborn child already, I can't risk their livelihood in a world that neither needs them nor can provide for them. Because I love my child already, the only way I can protect them is by not having them (Wei, 2020).

> When I think that it won't hurt too much, I imagine the children I will not have. Would they be more like me or my partner? Would they have inherited my thatch of hair, our terrible eyesight? [...] Then I remember the numbers. If my baby were to be born today, they would be 10 years old when a quarter of the world's insects could be gone, when 100 million children are expected to be suffering extreme food scarcity. My child would be 23 when 99% of coral reefs are set to experience severe bleaching. They would be 30 – my age now – when 200 million climate refugees will be roaming the world, when half of all species on Earth are predicted to be extinct in the wild. They would be 80 in 2100, when parts of Australia, Africa and the United States could be uninhabitable (Cain, 2020).

The first-person narrative follows a similar trajectory. At first, the imagination attempts to give form to the concept of parenthood: the mind envisions unborn children, speculating on their inherited physical traits and potential character differences. This exercise, though inherently unattainable, powerfully conveys the intensity of the underlying desire and, upon closer examination, subtly reveals the anticipated pain of regret. In the second phase, in fact, the same imagination intervenes to broaden the scope of the current thought, extending it to the world in which those children –

who cannot be imagined – will be forced to live. Despite varying language, the result is consistent: the world envisioned is one unsuitable for a fulfilling or happy life. In both accounts, the shared trajectory of the narrative "I" seeks to articulate, and thus make narratable, a range of complex emotions: love for someone not yet known, fear of something that has not yet happened, and the anguish that the object of that love may experience the object of that fear. The decision that arises is, therefore, to sacrifice the desire for that love in order to protect it, tomorrow, from the suffering that is already manifesting in the present. This same emotional reconstruction can be found, in varying degrees and detail, across other female voices.

I feel like I can't in good conscience bring a child into this world and force them to try and survive what may be apocalyptic conditions. [...]

Climate change is the sole factor for me in deciding not to have biological children. I don't want to birth children into a dying world though I dearly want to be a mother (a 27-year-old woman and a 31-year-old woman quoted in Carrington, 2020).

I realised that even though I wanted to have a family at that point, I couldn't really bring myself to do it. [...] I had to say to him [her partner]: I don't know if I can do this, considering what we know (Blythe Pepino quoted in Hunt, 2019).

The intensity of the anguish in question is further demonstrated by its ability to manifest ex post, meaning after individuals have already had children. A 40-year-old mother for instance said: «I regret having my kids because I am terrified that they will be facing the end of the world due to climate change» (Carrington, 2020). In such reflections, and similar accounts, the envisioned future is so fraught with terror that it obstructs present decision-making or, in some rarer cases, even induces regret over past choices. This phenomenon, which contributes to a traumatic interpretation of the climate crisis, raises questions about the robustness and consistency of these images.

The language used to depict the future varies significantly across individuals, yet there is a recurring set of terms – such as droughts, floods, hurricanes, famines, diseases, and violence – which, when coupled with adjectives like untold, unprecedented, widespread, and incessant, shift the narrative from a scenario of climate crisis to one of climate catastrophe. An illustrative example of this can be seen in how a 42-year-old father envisions the world of 2050.

A hot-house hell, with wars over limited resources, collapsing civilisation, failing agriculture, rising seas, melting glaciers, starvation, droughts, floods, mudslides and widespread devastation (Carrington, 2020).

It is a description that resembles a condensed summary of a post-apocalyptic film. Perhaps not by accident the term apocalypse frequently appears in these depictions of the world that future generations – whether already born or, in some cases, deliberately not born – will inherit. Kaplan (2016) has dedicated several pages to the potential

impact of dystopian films, finding them to be a possible source of pre-traumatic conditions. The portrayal of a world after catastrophe, even within the confines of fiction, can provoke intense emotions such as fear, helplessness, threat of annihilation. These emotions, in turn, can shape present-day behavior and, as demonstrated, influence future life decisions.

In addition to the potential trauma induced by the fictional depictions of future worlds, there is now an additional layer of trauma: the real-world imagery presented by the media. These real images depict a world that might be distant from one's immediate environment but can further amplify feelings of anxiety and existential threat:

> If I don't turn on the news and just observe from my window the neighborhood kids biking gleefully outside of my apartment, I can imagine a future that exists in a continuum with the past. My child would be able to experience all the same things that I did (Wei, 2020).

In areas where climate change has not yet shown its most concrete effects, one could imagine a future in continuity with the past, and thus a life for one's children that mirrors one's own. Or rather, one could do so if only one could ignore what is already happening elsewhere: extreme weather events, droughts, desertification, migration. Given the omnipresence of media coverage, such ignorance is increasingly difficult. Consequently, although the immediate effects of the climate crisis may be localized to other regions, these images can nonetheless influence one's perception of the future within their own context. However, this does not mean that the choice of whether or not to have children is determined by how potential parents relate to the images of the climate crisis to which they are exposed. It should be emphasized, though, the differing imaginative capacity: their minds are not able – as is natural – to visualize the children they have decided not to have, but they can visualize a world that does not yet exist. For the former, after all, there is no tangible basis to rely on. For the latter, in contrast, there is already a vast archive of news, data, and indeed images that allow one to foresee the worst.

The movement from present images to future projections is, in fact, another hallmark that these articles share with traumatic accounts. As Eaglestone notes such narratives often feature «the movement of the story backwards and forward through narrative time«(Eaglestone, 2023, p. 288). The structure of these articles involves significant temporal deviations and ellipses: narrators oscillate between discussing the present, imagining the future, recalling the past, and comparing their present circumstances with those of their own parents. These continuous shifts are not functional to the construction of a plot but are rather fragments that attempt to reconstruct sensations. Consider the following example:

> One evening last summer, I was running through a damp field on my farm in Vermont with my 10-year-old [...]. Suddenly, my daughter turned to me with a serious look in her eyes. "I didn't realize things were going to get so bad so soon," she said. [...] Lately, when my daughters

begin the sentence "when I have children..." my chest aches. I know they can live fulfilling lives without traditional parenthood, but I wish them a future where they have options – one that I suspect is moving quickly out of reach. Some models predict significant global ecological and environmental collapse by 2040 – within my lifetime, as well as my children's. [...] Last week, my eldest daughter was flipping blueberry pancakes. "Mom," she said. "I just read an article that says anyone under 40 will have a hard life because of climate change. Is that true?" (Bergman, 2021).

In less than a page, the narrative unfolds across three distinct temporal settings – the previous summer, the present moment, and the prior week – in which the notion of a «global ecological and environmental collapse by 2040» suddenly appears. What we encounter is a series of flashbacks, an often-employed device in traumatic writing and a characteristic symptom of PTSD, as well as a flashforward, a typical feature and symptom of Pre-TSD. The resulting text is not a coherent account of how a mother deals with the fear of the climate crisis in relation to her daughters; rather it consists of a series of situations in which that fear has been experienced and confronted. If we turn again to studies on trauma, this narrative structure is not unexpected. As Luckhurst notes «trauma cannot be integrated into diachrony [...] and the traumatic memory persists in a half-life, rather like a ghost, a haunting absent presence of another time in time» (Luckhurst, 2008, pp. 80-1). However, the idea that this «haunting absent presence of another time in time» could refer to children never had and a time not yet arrived is, as has been pointed out, a novel and distinctive aspect of the climate crisis.

2.2

The articles selected from "The Guardian" represent only a small segment of a much broader discourse, which, not coincidentally, is beginning to attract the attention of quantitative research. One of the most comprehensive studies in this area is by Dillarstone *et al*. (2023), who, in their systematic review, actually highlight that «over the last decade, a novel connection has been formed between these psychological effects of climate change and human reproductive decision-making. Anecdotal evidence from news outlets, surfacing largely from countries in the Global North, has revealed a growing number of individuals reconsidering their reproductive decisions in light of their concerns about climate change» (Dillarstone *et al*., 2023, p. 2). The data collected «support anecdotal evidence that climate change is factoring into people's reproductive decision-making, with the majority of studies suggesting that many people are choosing to forego childbearing or reduce the number of children they have as a result» (Dillarstone *et al*., 2023, p. 20). The motivations behind these decisions align closely with those described in the articles analyzed in the previous section: anxiety about the future, apocalyptic visions, and fear of the suffering their children may face. However, the study also highlights that the relationship between parenthood and the climate crisis is likely more complex than it first appears. The issue is dynamic

and constantly evolving. Moreover, most of the data collected belongs to the «Global North» and is burdened by a «relative absence of gender-diverse participants' voices» (Dillarstone *et al*., 2023, p. 20). This concern is similarly present in the corpus of articles analyzed, where the majority of testimonies come from women. While this might be understandable, it raises the additional issue of the relationship between potential fatherhood and the climate crisis.

From this perspective, it is important to acknowledge the existence of articles that document a particular type of male testimony regarding the issue. These accounts feature men who, in response to the climate crisis, not only decided to forgo having children but, in a sense, formalized this decision by undergoing a vasectomy. This is, as evident, a radical choice that may also serve as a public act of protest but is primarily a personal action made on one's own body. While testimonies of this nature are not particularly numerous, it remains insightful to examine how such a decision is articulated and shared with others.

> When I got engaged, my fiancée, Virginia, and I started planning for the future .[...] All of a sudden, I started thinking ten to twenty or more years ahead. We got engaged in June 2018, a couple months before a wildfire destroyed an entire town in California and another one wiped out sections of Malibu. Shortly after that, most of the Mississippi River basin flooded, something that might be the new normal. [...] Is this a world we want to bring kids into? Is this a world it's responsible to bring kids into? (Siller, 2019).

> I find it very frightening thinking about the way that the world is right now and what scientists are predicting the world will look like in 20 and 30 years... I didn't think that was a great place to bring up a child (Lauder, 2021).

> How can we bring a child into a world we know doesn't want it, will have trouble feeding it, and will lose more plant and animal life because we added yet another needy human? (Whetter, 2023).

At the beginning of these accounts, the thought of an inhospitable world once again emerges, inevitably followed by the consideration of who, in that world, will have to live. This process is strikingly similar to the patterns observed previously. Moreover, in the structure of these texts, there is the same recurring alternation between different temporal planes: present, past, and future. However, what distinguishes these narratives is the tone and lexical register, which tend to be more oriented toward public communication rather than personal testimony.

For example, in the rhetorical questions suggesting the impossibility of having children in such a damaged world, the use of "we" instead of "I" stands out: Is this a world *we* want to bring kids into? How can *we* bring a child into a world we know doesn't want it? In this way, even in the account of such a personal event as a vasectomy, the decision not to have children seems more like a logical and collective consequence than a painful and individual choice.

In terms of language, emotionally charged words such as anxiety, anguish, fear, pain, and love are noticeably less frequent. Particularly absent is the attempt to personify

unborn children and imagine them as physically and psychologically one's own. The children relinquished through vasectomy are generally referred to as kids or a generic child. These are, one might say, children to whom we have renounced not I.

The discourse within these testimonies takes on a more subjective and emotional tone when recounting the experience of undergoing a vasectomy. For example, one man acknowledges that the choice to undergo the procedure only came after he had frozen his sperm in a sort of «cryogenic backup plan»: «What I had thought would be my "hard no" became a "not yet"» (Siller, 2019). Only after many years, together with his wife, did he arrive at the decision to eliminate the stored sample, as «the world, our world, was never going to be more welcoming to yet another child» (Siller, 2019). One can thus perceive a more complex and personal decision-making process than what seemed to be a quick and rational cost-benefit analysis: «Many couples learn that grief can be for the unborn, not just the dead. My climate grief is sewn inside my body» (Siller, 2019).

In light of this, one might hypothesize that the relatively less traumatic narrative tone in these male testimonies reflects a difficulty or reluctance to thematize the emotional aspect of the decision, rather than a complete absence of traumatic experience. However, given the small sample size analyzed, it is premature to draw definitive conclusions or to assert the existence of gender differences in how the issue of parenthood in relation to the climate crisis is addressed in writing. Nevertheless, this question seems to have some foundation and therefore deserves further exploration.

Conclusion

From a historical perspective, human population growth has paralleled increases in temperature. At the onset of the Holocene, approximately 10,000 years ago, the global average annual temperature rose by 7°C within a few decades, prompting a series of changes that made conditions more conducive to the development of agriculture and animal husbandry, activities that subsequently laid the foundation for the emergence of the first organized societies. As Behringer effectively summarizes: «It was the global warming of the Holocene that made climates favorable to civilization possible» (Behringer, 2009, p. 12).

The prevailing belief today is the exact opposite: global warming will make civilization impossible. This idea is continually reinforced in public discourse, media coverage, and fictional narratives presented in books, films, and television shows. If, as Caruth states, «the repetition of the traumatic experience in the flashbacks can be itself re-traumatizing» (Caruth, 1996, p. 63) what happens with the climate crisis is a continuous re-traumatization through flashforwards. Such projections inevitably involve one of the most significant individual – yet, in the long term, also social – decisions regarding the future: whether or not to become a parent, whether or not to have children. This will become increasingly true in the coming years as the effects of the climate crisis become more evident and widespread. The mental condition resulting

from this reality exhibits complex, and somewhat unique, traits, as it is deeply tied to the temporal and spatial specifics of the climate crisis. As previously noted, this condition is reflected in the language used to describe it, wherein individuals experience suffering in the present due to a self-imposed absence of a future, a consequence of a catastrophe that has yet to occur. It is beyond the scope of this article to argue whether a new category or terminology within the broad field of trauma studies is required to describe this phenomenon. What matters here is to emphasize that the phenomenon exists and that the resulting stories exhibit lexical and structural characteristics in common with well-known attempts at traumatic narration.

In one of the most thoughtful articles on the topic – soon to be published in book form – Meehan Crist aptly captures the difficulty of addressing the prospect of having children in the age of climate change: «We lack the language to talk to one another about the fact that a child born today will live on a planet hotter than it has ever been since human civilization developed. The mind baulks. Language fails» (Crist, 2020). This mental block, this inadequacy of language, represents another hallmark of traumatic communication. Yet, as the analyzed texts demonstrate, even when words appear insufficient to express certain experiences and sensations, storytelling persists.

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