Shifting Burdens, Shared Solutions: Unraveling the Tapestry of Responsibility in Climate Justice

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Shifting Burdens, Shared Solutions:
Unraveling the Tapestry of Responsibility in Climate Justice

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"In the end, we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand and we will understand only what we are taught."

- Baba Dioum

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Personal motivation

As a response to an inescapable sense of urgency, I have taken a great interest in the field of climate change, exploring diverse approaches to mitigating the issue. While I do acknowledge not doing everything I could, I also believe that the burden of mitigating the climate crisis does not solely lay on the shoulders of us individuals. This is a global problem, and it requires determination on a far bigger scale. Some positive steps have already been taken but it still feels like environmentally destructive institutions have too much room to shift responsibilities to individuals as a means to avoid their own. It still feels as though the question around *who* is responsible for *what* is not defined clearly enough which allows for an unjust and ineffective distribution of responsibilities, hindering adequate climate action. Motivated by a personal struggle and determination to engage in appropriate climate action, this thesis aims to analyse other individuals' perceptions of responsibilities in climate justice, as a reflection of current trends and trajectories.

1. Introduction

Climate change is one of the most significant global challenges of our time. Last year has been another painful reality check on the worries around climate change and its consequences. The world has experienced a summer of record-breaking heat waves, fires, and droughts across Europe, global food and energy crisis exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and devastating floods destroying landmarks, cultural heritage, and agriculture spaces in countries like Pakistan (Mikulčić et al. 2022).

These effects are not limited to specific regions or populations, they are affecting people and ecosystems across the world. But the effects vary, exacerbating existing inequalities and injustices. This serves as a reminder that environmental and social (in)justice are intertwined concepts (Holifield, 2001). Small island states and the Global South are those who suffer most acutely at the hands of the climate crisis while cruelly also being those who are least responsible for it. This introduces a great ethical dilemma about burdens and responsibilities in the debate of climate reparations (Burkett, 2009). It is a puzzle that our law and governance are yet to solve.

As the global community grapples with the climate crisis, there is a growing recognition that the issue is not just a matter of science or technology but also a question of justice (Burkett, 2009). Climate justice is an emerging concept that emphasizes the ethical, social, and political dimensions of climate change and seeks to address the unequal distribution of its costs and benefits (Sultana, 2021). It is the recognition that those who are least responsible for causing the problem, are often the most vulnerable to its effects. Climate justice highlights the historical dimension of ongoing patterns of colonialism, imperialism, and inequality, and demands that we not only address the immediate impacts of climate change but also the structural causes that underlie it (Holifield, 2001).

This raises fundamental questions about responsibility and accountability that require uncompromised attention and commitment. Understanding the concept of responsibility in the context of climate justice is crucial for several reasons. First, it is important for developing effective policy and legal frameworks. Without a clear understanding of who is responsible for addressing climate change, it will be difficult to allocate resources, develop strategies, and hold actors accountable for their actions (or inaction). Second, understanding responsibility is important for shaping public opinion and fostering support. If people do not

believe that they have a responsibility to act on climate change, or if they do not trust that others are fulfilling their responsibilities, it will be difficult to assure the social and political commitment necessary to address this global challenge. Third, understanding responsibility is important for promoting global justice and equity. Climate change is a global problem and addressing it will require cooperation and coordination among actors from different countries and regions. However, if responsibility is not distributed fairly, it could exacerbate existing inequalities and injustices, both within and between countries (Sultana, 2021).

The logic of the climate justice argument might seem simple at first: Based on the principles of fairness, equity, and solidarity, the burden of addressing climate change should be shared in a just and equitable way. But the politics of it are complicated as they involve questions of power and privilege. At the center are fundamental questions about how to distribute responsibilities when a small percentage of the world accounts for the vast majority of the pollution that drives climate change while everyone else suffers the consequences disproportionately. It is common in the public debate around climate action, to attribute responsibilities to the individuals even though industries like fossil fuel, are exhausting the planet far beyond any individual's capacity to do so. The expectation is for individuals to separate their trash, travel less, buy sustainable fashion, use green energy, boycott plastic, switch to a plant-based diet, and essentially shift their entire lifestyle (Fragnière, 2016). The shift, however, ought to only happen within the dominant consumerist values of modern (western) societies. The message is always to shift consumption from product A to product B. It is an underlying ideology of framing individuals as primarily consumers and of keeping individuals' agency within a market dependency rather than addressing the root causes of the problem (Panizzut, 2021). This paper aims to contrast this ideology by highlighting individuals beyond consumers and putting them at the center stage of the analysis.

The climate justice framework brings a valuable new lens through which to assess these questions as its fundamental principles inherently shift the focus to bigger polluters (Sultana, 2021). But climate justice is a highly complex topic that combines all fields and demographics. Within this complex pool of opinions and beliefs, there are still significant question marks around the question of responsibilities. It remains rather unclear whether these fundamental principles of climate justice are reflected in the wider public discourse. Motivated by this emerging gap in the literature about the phenomenon of climate justice, this thesis aims to understand (A) what kind of responsibility is distributed, (B) by whom, and (C) to whom. It provides a new angle of using individuals as a reflection of the wider social and

political context of climate justice. This investigative process will be guided by the research question:

How do individuals distribute responsibility within the public climate justice discourse?

This thesis performs critical discourse analysis (CDA) on Twitter to understand the intersection between social media and public policy research. It explores identifiable patters within the interconnected political landscape of an international community. As a first measure, the following section will establish theoretical foundations and guidelines to answer the research question and elaborate on the methodological details. This framework will ultimately also guide the analysis before discussing the insights and their implication for the field and future research. Finally, conclusions will be drawn from the analysis.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Guidelines

The climate justice movement is grappling with the challenge of achieving fair and equitable allocation of resources and responsibilities. While the principles of fairness, equality, and sustainability are being used to guide discussions and actions, there are still significant unclarities around *who* bears *what* responsibilities. It is helpful to follow the research question and break it down into separate components. Starting with the pillars of the research question: what does justice entail and what does this mean in terms of responsibilities?

2.1. Distributive and Procedural Justice

Deconstructing justice is at the heart of the climate justice discourse and therefore essential in the establishment of theoretical foundations for this research. There is now considerable and diverse literature on procedural and distributive justice, but its meaning and scope are still contested (Newell et al., 2021). Distributive justice refers to the fair and equitable allocation of resources, goods, and opportunities among individuals and groups. The philosopher Frankena (1962) describes justice in the following way:

> "Justice, whether social or not, seems to involve at its center the notion of an allotment of something to persons-duties, goods, offices, opportunities, penalties, punishments, privileges, roles, status, and so on. Moreover, at least in the case of distributive justice, it seems centrally to involve the notion of comparative allotment."

In the context of climate justice, scholars are using this definition of distributive justice for the allocation of resources and responsibilities related to addressing climate change (Newell et. al., 2021; Cohen, 1987). Okereke (2010) argues that to achieve distributive justice, resources must be allocated in a fair and equitable manner, considering the differential impact of climate change on different agents. Similarly, Newell et. al., (2021) highlight three main aspects of this process; (1) identifying the goods and disadvantages being distributed (2) determining the entities involved in the distribution; and (3) selecting the most suitable method of distribution. This may involve redistributing resources from developed to developing countries, or from wealthy to poor communities. Moreover, according to a distributive justice framework, comparative allotment of resources must be

judged according to some standard, such as the principles of fairness, equality, or sustainability. The functional rule that determines the allocation of resources should be transparent and accountable so that all stakeholders can participate in the decision-making process and ensure that their interests are represented (Okereke, 2010). This dimension is referred to as procedural justice. According to Forsyth (2014), distributive justice can only truly be archived in combination with procedural justice.

Procedural justice concerns the fairness and transparency of the process by which the decisions around the distribution of responsibilities are made. Newell et. al., (2021) define it as the ability to influence decisions about the impacts of, and responses to, climate change that are fair, accountable, and transparent. York and Yazar (2022) define it as the capability for political power over one's environment, characterized by the ability to influence decision-making processes. Only if all stakeholders have a say in which decisions should be made and only if those processes are transparent, fair and equitable solutions can be reached. Forsyth (2014) also argues that distributive justice alone is not enough, but that procedural justice is imperative in the establishment of legitimacy within these processes. If procedural justice is not respected, there is the danger of hegemony in the decision-making process as well as in the assessment of risk and urgency. This is particularly interesting for this thesis which aims to understand the distribution of responsibilities. Historically big polluters have been able to evade accountability in climate change efforts by controlling decision-making processes and limiting the access of already marginalized groups and vulnerable communities to discussions on issues of risk, urgency, and responsibility (Newell et al., 2021). It emphasizes the link between climate justice and racial justice. This, however, is not an explicit part of these frameworks which creates room to wonder whether racial justice gets sufficient recognition in the (academic realm of the) movement.

Overall, the definition of distributive justice is being used to guide discussions and actions related to climate justice by highlighting the importance of fairness, equity, and responsibility in addressing climate change threats. To fairly distribute resources and responsibilities according to distributive justice, procedural justice needs to be respected to ensure transparency. These fundamental principles of justice are at the core of the climate justice movement. How these shape its goals and dynamics will be explored in the following review of existing literature.

2.2. Climate Justice Unplugged

As a global problem, climate justice is understood as a matter of determining the appropriate divisions of responsibility and burden of reparations within a global community (Bulkeley et al., 2013). The academic debate is fundamentally about acknowledging how climate change impacts people and communities differently and disproportionately. It involves negotiations and discussions to compensate resulting injustices in appropriate and fair ways (Sultana, 2021). The urgency of this debate we experience currently is a consequence of the denial of climate change science (Bulkeley et al., 2013). Now there is a rapidly growing body of research on the evolving concept of climate justice but more is required regardless. Whilst it is not a new concept, it is rapidly growing in gravity. For some countries, the devastating effects of climate change are not a terrifying vision of the future anymore, but they are already living their very personal dystopia.

The term climate justice was coined in 1989 but has a myriad of influential ancestors (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). The review of current climate justice literature draws attention to various domains of relevant work, including environmental justice. The difference between environmental justice and climate justice partially stems from a disagreement about the very definition of environment. Whilst traditional approaches of environmental organizations mainly focused on the environment as wilderness (where there are no people), the climate justice movement demands that the environment should be seen as where people live, work, and play. It is about focusing on the places and ways in which the climate crisis threatens everyday life (Schlossberg & Collins, 2014).

Although climate justice was already influential in political debates before the term was coined, its debut can arguably be traced back to 2000 when the first Climate Justice Summit (COP 6) took place in The Hague, Netherlands. This summit aimed to “affirm that climate change is a rights issue” and to “build alliances across states and borders” against climate change and in favour of sustainable development (Agostino & Lizarde, 2012). The climate justice debate significantly stems from the idea that environmental and social (in)justices are connected (Holifield, 2001) and that we cannot be historically blind in combating the climate crisis (Porter et. al., 2020).

Many climate crisis theorists have highlighted the importance of the past in how we approach the present (Bulkeley et al., 2013; Porter et. al., 2020; Schlossberg and Collins, 2014). European powers established colonies around the world, often through violence and coercion, and exploited the resources and labour of colonized people to fuel their own

economic growth and development. This exploitation continued after formal decolonization, as many countries in the Global South remained trapped in a cycle of dependence on the Global North for economic and political support while being denied the ability to pursue their own development paths (Sultana, 2021). Today, these patterns of inequality and exploitation persist, as multinational corporations and wealthy countries continue to extract resources and labour from the Global South, often without regard for the environmental and social consequences. The unequal distribution of wealth and power also means that those who are most affected by the impacts of climate change, such as small island states or indigenous communities, often have the least capacity to respond and adapt (Porter et. al., 2020). The legacy of colonialism is a core issue of the climate justice debate because it explains how carbon emissions are deeply connected to political-economic development (Mitchell, 2011). While Europe and North America used coal for economic growth and democratic transitions, the Global South was forced into a systematic disadvantage. Its oil reserves were exploited to inexpensively satisfy the limitless energy demands of the same powers by extracting resources without regard for indigenous control over their energy supply (Sardo, 2023).

At the core of this lies the recognition that powerful states have established a system of ecologically unequal exchange (Sardo, 2023) whereby industrial production, fossil fuel consumption, and their cumulative impacts are increasingly shifted to developing nations, while the profits and benefits go to wealthy power states (Rice, 2007). Consequently, the injustice of climate change stems not from mere chance or geography, but from unjust global political-economic structures. Similarly, Ackerly (2018) argues that addressing such structural injustices requires addressing the power imbalances of the global political-economic order. In this approach, she emphasizes the 'triple inequality' of unequal contribution, vulnerability, and adaptive capacity that must be contextualized within broader structural dynamics. Triple inequality is also often referred to as 'triple injustice' of climate change: The ones least responsible for pollution are cruelly the most vulnerable to its effects, while simultaneously suffering unjust disadvantages from responses to climate change that perpetuate or aggravate current inequalities (Sultana, 2021). Robert and Parks (2006) argue that the root cause of the triple inequality are the unequal legacies of colonialism. The climate justice discourse emphasizes the importance of acknowledging this historical dimension in the process of coining fair policies. In other words, the historical dimension is a core element of climate justice and inseparable from the principles of distributive and procedural justice. This finally creates room to approach the question of what this means in terms of responsibility.

2.3. Responsibility

Firstly, it is important to define responsibility and how it is distinctive from accountability. Responsibility refers to the moral or ethical obligation to act or take responsibility for agents' actions (Newell et. al., 2021). In the context of climate justice, responsibility is often attributed to countries, individuals, and institutions that have contributed significantly to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions or have benefited from unsustainable practices, leading to climate change. Responsibility implies a duty to take corrective action, make amends, and prevent future harm (Schlüssler, 2011). Accountability, on the other hand, refers to the answerability or liability for agents' actions or decisions (Whyte, 2019). In the context of climate justice, accountability means holding those who are responsible for climate change and its impacts accountable for their actions or decisions. Accountability implies that there will be consequences for not fulfilling one's obligations, such as facing legal or financial penalties or losing social or political legitimacy (Casper, 2019). In summary, responsibility is about the moral or ethical obligation to act, while accountability is about the consequences of not fulfilling that obligation. Both concepts are essential. Nevertheless, since covering both concepts is beyond the scope of this thesis, it will focus on understanding responsibility as the first essential step of the climate justice movement.

After previously identifying what kind of interests should be encompassed within a theory of (climate) justice and what goals this entails according to the current academic landscape, this research can now move forward to the question of *who* has *what* responsibilities to meet these goals. Since it is a rather complex questions, it is helpful to break it down into four sub-questions. These will first be explored with regards to existing literature and ultimately also guide the analysis of this research. Together this enables a comprehensive answer to the question of what would be a just distribution of responsibilities.

2.3.1. Climate-Action Question

This question is centered around who should engage in responsibilities to mitigate climate change (Caney, 2021). Two of the most established concepts in climate crisis discussions are mitigation and adaptation. Adaptation refers to the efforts of adjusting to the current and future effects of climate change. Mitigation focuses on preventing impacts of climate change or making them less severe by reducing GHG emissions

(VijayaVenkataRaman et al., 2012; European Environment Agency, 2022). Responsibility in this context has an emphasis on who should take responsibility for climate change impact (Bulkeley, 2001). It is, however, increasingly argued that the debate around mitigation efforts is insufficient and that in the long-term evolution of climate change consequences, we are slowly but surely reaching the limits of adaptation efforts (Sultana, 2021; Bukeley, 2001). There is growing recognized that some destructive impacts of climate change we can no longer avoid or adapt to.

Consequently, this question cannot be answered without the concept of loss and damage. This concept stresses the historical dimension of the climate crisis and colonization as a cause for growing social and economic inequalities that are aggravated by the climate crisis. Loss and damage is about reparation for damage that has already been done (Cao & Cheng, 2016). Climate science is pushing for loss and damage finance to play more of a central role in the debate on climate justice (Wallimann-Helmer, 2015). Boyd et al. (2021) claim, however, that we are still very far from finding solutions to loss and damage and that there is still a substantial gap in policies partially because it is not clear who should engage in responsibilities of loss and damage. In terms of who should engage in this form of climate action, there is no clear consensus in the current debate. A prominent concept, however, is 'common but differentiated responsibility'. This is the idea that we all have a responsibility to fight climate change but to a different extent, typically shifting greater responsibility to the Global North (Schlosberg and Collins, 2014). Bulkeley et al. (2013) refer to this as relative responsibility.

Although these are important considerations, they do not suffice in finding equitable solutions. The ones who have responsibilities to act are not automatically the ones who should also bear the costs of such efforts. Caney (2021) provides the example that one might think developing countries should engage in mitigation efforts by using clean technology instead of fossil fuel, but one might simultaneously think that the cost of this should be shouldered by others based on the principle of distributive justice. In other words, even if actors are clear about their responsibility to take action, it still must be determined who has a duty to bear the costs. This introduces the second question.

2.3.2. Burden-Sharing Question

This question centers around who should bear the costs of combating climate change. A considerable amount of literature has developed around this question which is also often discussed within the concept of distributive responsibilities. Generally, these distributive responsibilities that help answer the burden-sharing question, fall into two basic categories: contribution principles and capability principles (Sardo, 2023). Within the contribution principles, the Polluter Pays Principle (PPP) is the most prominent example (Sardo, 2023; Caney, 2021; Bulkeley et al.,2013). It divides climate responsibilities according to an agent's involvement in the climate issue. According to this principle, an agent's liability for adaptation, mitigation, and compensation costs ought to be proportional to their causal involvement in climate change (Sardo, 2023). In other words, more of the burden should fall on those whose historical and current emissions are higher. Contribution-based ideas have, however, been criticized for a number of reasons. One reason is that GHG emissions do not directly affect the climate, they interact with geophysical systems over time to produce unfavourable weather conditions. As a result, every agent's impact on climate change is limited and moderated by social and geophysical systems. The PPP also has trouble tracking down polluters over time since many are not around anymore. Additionally, the increasing emissions from developing countries originating in their economic and population growth, coupled with the outsourcing of emission-intensive energy and industries from developed nations, intensify the normative stakes of this temporal challenge (Sardo, 2023). It is therefore argued that strict adherence to the PPP would again unfairly burden those who are most vulnerable because they lack the adequate resources to adapt (Bulkeley et al.,2013).

In response to these concerns, some scholars allocate responsibilities according to the second category of distributive principles, the capacity-based principles. One of the most popular is the Ability to Pay Principle (APP). The APP looks at an agent's capacity to bear such burdens rather than their casual contribution when distributing the responsibility (Shue 1999). This principle could help avoid unfair burdens since many of the wealthiest states are among the highest historical emitters of GHGs and would, as such, indirectly be held accountable for their causal contribution (Sardo, 2023). While this might seem like an attractive solution, the APP has also been criticized within the scholarly discussion. Sardo (2023) expresses the concern that this might absolve individuals from their moral responsibility to rectify injustice solely based on their relative abilities. Additionally, he highlights the danger of the APP discouraging economic growth to avoid responsibility by

uniformly distributing burdens to high-emitting and low-emitting wealthy agents. Many political theorists have realized these limitations of both categories in isolation and have therefore proposed hybrid theories that combine multiple distributive principles to address the shortcomings of each. For example, Vanderheiden (2011) urges the need to combine an additional principle of historical responsibility with principles such as PPP and APP. This and other hybrid theories seek to balance the competing demands of fairness and effectiveness in addressing the challenge posed by climate justice.

For some the approach of these distributive principles is generally insufficient. Lovett (2009) argues that centering the attention solely around material goods and resources could inadequately restrict the scope of justice as it neglects the examination of social and institutional contexts. According to Lovett (2009), justice is more than simply ensuring everyone gets an equal share of resources. Injustice can also be caused by social structures and institutional contexts that limit people's ability to develop themselves or determine their own path. Lovett believes that justice should focus on addressing these issues of oppression and domination, in addition to distribution of resources. This idea of responsibility to change the social, economic, and political environment introduces the third question.

2.3.3. Political-Action Question

While existing literature largely centers around the question of who should pay, there is another important dimension regarding responsibilities. Caney (2021) makes a useful distinction between first-order and second-order responsibilities to approach this dimension. First-order responsibilities are the ones discussed in the first two questions to either (a) mitigate climate change or (b) bear the costs of those efforts or both. Second-order responsibilities refer to taking the necessary actions that enable others to meet their first-order climate responsibilities. For example, a second-order responsibility of governments would be to incentivize citizens to use clean energy sources by providing subsidies or designing cities in a way that promotes walking, cycling, and public transportation (Caney, 2021). They are responsibilities to change the social, economic, and political environment so that others fulfil their first-order responsibilities. A similar concept is noted by Cripps (2013) who advances the idea of promotional duties. These are duties to bring about necessary collective action. Cripps argues that these include campaigning, running for election, signing petitions, donating to environmental organizations, and protesting. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (2010) supports this claim and suggests that citizens hold the responsibility for the implementation

of climate legislations by their government. Citizens in this case are seen as having a duty to participate in civil disobedience and resist laws that lead to unjustifiable emissions or insufficient levels of climate action. This claim, however, can be evaluated a bit more critically based on the concepts of capacity and accessibility. It can be assumed that for an agent to fulfil their duty as stated by Armstrong, they first need to be aware of the issue of unjustifiable emission or insufficient climate action. This, in turn, requires (easy) access to information and knowledge such as research or reports. A study examining articles of the world's largest database for peer-reviewed journals, SCOPUS, found that 80% of the 21,000 articles from 239 countries were written entirely in English (Huttner-Koros, 2015). Even the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC) Report, which is broadly acknowledged as one of the most influential reports in climate literature globally (Birch, 2014), is only officially available in the six UN languages: English, French, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, and Spanish (IPCC, 2019). These languages, however, account for less than half of the world's speaking population (Kianni, 2022), meaning more than half the world's population is unable to understand those reports and publications. Consequently, it could be argued that the actual second-order responsibility here lies with the ones disseminating the information and knowledge that is essential for citizens to comply with their responsibilities to participate in civil disobedience and resist laws.

Within these responsibilities to change the social, economic, and political environment, two further distinctions should be made. The literature has mostly focused on "positive" second-order responsibilities (Caney, 2021). Positive means that they require an agent to take action like the examples mentioned above. Within this line of argument, however, it is reasonable to posit the existence of "negative" second-order responsibilities. While a positive second-order responsibility entails an obligation of enabling other to fulfil their first-order responsibilities, a negative second-order responsibility would be an obligation not to intervene or undermine efforts aimed at addressing climate change. An example would be fossil fuel companies, electric utility companies, and other labour organizations and institutions, that extensively exert themselves to undermine initiatives focused on mitigating climate change (Stagner, 2021).

The focus of much of this literature has been on political institutions. While these undoubtedly play a central role, they are also arguably insufficient. Caney (2021) argues that in order to establish a comprehensive explanation of agents' second-order responsibilities, it is useful to begin by conducting a political, social, and economic analysis of the reasons why agents fail to comply with their first-order responsibilities. Starting with this enables working

backwards to determine *what* actions need to be taken by *who* in order to archive the necessary changes. Such changes are likely to require shifts in ideologies (such as those that encourage fossil-fuel-based development), cultural customs, and social conventions, as well as institutional structures (Caney, 2021). This introduces the final, and potentially, most contested question about the role of individuals in combating climate change.

2.3.4. Duty-Bearer Question

This question is centered around what kind of agent has an obligation and whether or not individuals have the responsibility to limit their personal emissions (Caney, 2021). Some scholars, such as Sinnott-Armstrong (2010), remain doubtful of the idea that individuals have a duty to limit their own emissions, grounded in the belief that personal emissions do not make a difference. Some, however, dispute that claim. Hiller (2011) asserts that engaging in an action that is anticipated to cause more harm than another easily accessible alternative is morally wrong. He argues that individual emission, while small, violate this principle. It should be noted here, however, that there is no clear definition of what “easily accessible” means. This will likely be a subjective understanding of what lies within someone's capacity, especially in the climate change context where privilege plays a central role and can drastically alter the perception of “easy”. Some also argue that we have a duty not to participate in collective processes which generate unjust outcomes. This idea of complicity by Kutz (2000) centers around the same idea as the concept of promotional duties by Cripps (2013) that was discussed within the second-order responsibilities.

Another contested question around the impact of individual emissions comes from choices of consumption. Especially in Western societies centered around consumer culture, it is a relevant debate of what are the “right” choices of consumption and what responsibilities that entails. Habib et. al., (2021) argue that changing consumer behaviour is a way to improve climate impacts. This consumerist ideology places high value on market solutions and individual choices which reflects core principles of capitalist societies (Sklair, 2012). This perspective often assumes that individuals are primarily motivated by self-interest and that market incentives and consumer demands can drive positive social and environmental outcomes (Habib et. al., 2021). But this ideological standpoint has been subject to critique from some scholars and activists, who argue that it overlooks the broader systemic issues underlying social and environmental problems (Panizzut, 2021). Lovett (2009) argues that a narrow focus on consumption and market solutions can obscure the need for collective action,

policy change, and structural transformation to address the root causes of inequality and environmental harm.

In conclusion, to approach the question of *who* has *what* responsibilities in addressing climate change, it is useful to make a distinction between these four question: First, who should engage in climate action efforts? Second, who should bear the costs involved in such efforts? Third, who has the responsibility to foster an environment in which the relevant duty bearers from questions one and two comply with their responsibilities? And finally, what kind of agent is being assigned responsibilities for each of the above and does that involve individuals?

3. Methodological Approach

3.1. Method

This research took interest in the public debate around climate justice and how its fundamental ideological and historical dimensions can provide a valuable lens for understanding the distribution of responsibilities. To best address the research question, critical discourse analysis (CDA) was deemed the most fitting method, as it enables a thorough exploration of the intricate nuances within the discourse of climate justice.

Discourse refers to the way in which language is used to convey meaning and establish social relations. Being not only socially shaped but also socially constitutive, discourse establishes a reciprocal cause-and-effect relationship wherein it is influenced by society but simultaneously is influencing that society (Wodak, 1999). Discourse is a way of understanding historical and institutional contexts (Carvalho, 2008), making it indispensable to this research. According to Foucault (1980) power and knowledge are interconnected and inseparable. He argues that power operates through knowledge and is omnipresent. The interplay between power and knowledge determines what receives attention, what is perceived as desirable, and how people and objects are understood, related to, and acted upon (Yates & Hiles, 2010). Foucault (1980) states that power is created and communicated through discourse, but that it can also be transformed or modified through discourse. This is precisely what makes CDA pivotal as a method for this topic. It creates room to consider the nuanced intersection and interplay between the historical, ideological, and power dimensions of climate justice.

The idea that ideologies are embedded in discourse is a central claim of discourse studies (Carvalho, 2008). Ideologies are expressed and generally reproduced in social practices as well as acquired, confirmed, changed, and perpetuated through discourse (Van Dijk, 2007). CDA offers a valuable tool to study structures and functions of underlying ideologies. Additionally, it can help with the processes of studying ideological polarization between ingroups and outgroups. Ideological standpoints are possibly the most fundamental shaping influence of text although they are not always fully revealed in discourse analysis. To facilitate a more comprehensive consideration of the underlying ideologies that shape the climate justice discourse, this study will follow the framework of Carvalho (2008) who suggests that a broader view of the discourse realization of ideology is necessary as well as a special consideration of the historical dimension that shapes discourse. This means that

ideology will be considered an overarching characteristic of the text as and represented in all dimensions of the data. Carvahlo (2008) states that identifying the discursive means of underlying ideologies often requires a good deal of interpretive work due to their non-explicit nature. Appearing natural is at the core of the ideologically shaped work of representing reality. I will hence, by no means, be able to correctly identify all underlying ideologies. Nevertheless, through aiming to be as self-aware of my own positionality that shapes the analysis, this research aims to give relevant ground to understanding how ideologies and history play a role in the climate justice discourse through the framework of Carvalho (2008).

As for my own positionality, there are a couple of relevant aspects to acknowledge concerning my role and ability as a researcher for this topic. First and foremost, the privilege(s) I hold. Since racial justice is an important element of this study, it needs to be acknowledged that my own privileges and life experiences as a white cis-female from Germany, influence my perspective and interpretation of certain issues. I want to emphasize that I do not intend to speak for others but rather want to amplify their voices and perspectives. Additionally, I hold the privilege of coming from and living in, a developed country that is not at the forefront of climate change. This means two things. Firstly, I have access to certain resources, technologies, and information not everyone has. The simple fact that I am able to conduct research on the platform of Twitter is based on the privilege of accessibility. Secondly, this gives me the massive privilege of being able to choose whether I want to engage with the issue or not.

3.2. Data Collection

This study chose to analyse Tweets from the social media platform Twitter. This microblogging social media network platform allows users to share messages, or tweets, in real-time (Sam, 2019) which is particularly valuable in researching very timely phenomena such as the rapidly evolving climate justice movement. In the most recent year of 2022, Twitter was used by 450 million participants (Twitter, 2022) to exchange ideas, coordinate action, and enact change. This vast amount of engaged users makes Twitter a prime venue to find elements that make up the broader discourse around climate justice. Secondly, Twitter's hashtag system makes it easy to track and analyse tweets related to specific topics or events such as climate justice. Thirdly, Twitter's brevity and informal style encourage users to express their views and opinions in concise and often emotive language. This makes it a rich

source of data for analysing the attitudes, values, and beliefs that underlie discourse (Sam, 2019). Finally, this study looks at discourse that is created or reinforced by individuals on an international level. While it must be acknowledged that not everyone that has a say in climate justice discourse also has access to Twitter, it was still deemed a highly prominent platform for this discussion. Individuals generally do not have much space for expressing their uncompromised thoughts in political debates around climate justice. Therefore, Twitter is a great venue for individuals to express themselves and engage in discourse creation.

This study aimed to collect data that would reflect trajectories in the climate justice discourse. Specifically, the aim was to retrieve a sample that provides insights into how responsibilities are being distributed within the discourse. In the data collection process, Twitter's advanced search for research was leveraged to retrieve the relevant data from the vast stream of tweets. In order to minimize algorithmic biases, a dedicated Twitter account was created exclusively for the analysis so a new algorithmic recommendation system would be used to show content according to specific search criteria. Twitter’s advanced search enables going into great detail about the kind of tweets one is looking for. Since this study took an inductive approach, the detailed search was not used to a great extent to avoid the preliminary exclusion of relevant insights.

The criteria in the advanced search were limited to the following. Firstly, tweets had to contain “climate justice” with or without hashtag. Tweets containing “climate injustice” were also included. Secondly, responsibility had to be distributed through the tweet. The requirement was not to include the actual word “responsibility” since it quickly became evident that there are many forms of speech through which one can assign responsibilities without referring to it as such. Thirdly, tweets had to fall into the time frame of 06.10.2022 to 28.03.2023. This timeframe was set around the COP27 which was expected to spark more engagement with the online discourse around climate change. The time frame starts exactly one month before COP27, leaving room to include tweets before the event. It ended just over five months later because that was the time when the analysis started. While five months initially seemed like a long time frame, it was seen as the most effective way to include as many relevant tweets as possible and ultimately ended up generating a manageable amount of data. The fourth criterion was that the tweets had to be in English. This is due to both, the reason that this master's thesis is part of an international program taught in English as well as certain limitations in terms of a manageable scale. Although this poses significant challenges of representation and accessibility, a multilingual approach was simply out of scope. Finally, the tweets had to be uploaded by an individual since individuals are the unit of analysis to

solve the puzzle of this research. Individuals in this case were classified as people who speak for themself. Meaning that individuals such as politicians or activists that speak for a wider institution or party, were not included. This was mainly due to the fact that there would be no way of knowing whether their statements are actually their personal contribution to the discourse or if more people and motivation lie beneath it. After testing all tweets that initially emerged against these criteria, a sample of 39 tweets was left to move into the actual phase of analysis.

3.3. Investigative Process

This analysis is built on the framework for analysis of media discourse developed by Carvalho (2008). This framework is specifically concerned with climate change discourse and highlights a need for three additional dimensions; a historical dimension, an emphasis on social actors, and an ideological dimension. The framework, however, is constructed for journalistic text and was therefore adapted to the context of Twitter. It was further adjusted to serve the specific research question about responsibilities, meaning that the analysis was performed with general regard to the responsibility and justice framework established in earlier stages of this thesis.

The study took an inductive approach, leaving as much room as possible for insights to emerge from the data. Especially in the case of the climate justice discourse, where the question around responsibilities is still somewhat in its infancy, approaching the data with predetermined expectations would have posed the risk of potentially distorting, obscuring, or omitting crucial themes due to inaccurate preconceptions.

The data collection process yielded 39 tweets, which were then analysed in the whiteboard platform Miro. Miro proofed to be an invaluable tool for performing CDA because its visual interface provides a multitude of options to organize and visualize data in unique and creative ways. This facilitated the identification of patterns and connections that were otherwise not immediately apparent in the complex discourse. Subsequently, the data was evaluated through an iterative process, involving a continuous re-engagement with the data based on new insights gained in each round. The initial step involved developing a familiarity with the tweets through a close reading process. Afterwards, the data was subjected to an initial analysis in Miro, employing various ways of visualizing and conceptualizing ideas and thoughts. A table was created, including all tweets and a column

for each discursive element under investigation. Additionally, codes were added to each tweet when flagged. While the codes were all determined in an inductive manner, they were still divided between codes that already appeared in the literature and new codes to allow drawing insights from that. Having acquired a preliminary understanding of relevant observations, subsequent rounds of analysis focused on establishing and reinforcing patterns. Adjustments were made where necessary, such as the inclusion of geographical information for each tweet. Although not originally included the framework, this addition proofed to be a valuable addition to the analysis. It was visualized in a world map for a comprehensive and quick understanding of the distribution of geographic origins. The location that individuals had publicly displayed as part of their profile information was used for this information. Tweets and profiles without this type of information were simply left blank, without geographical consideration. Finally, following Carvalho (2008) emphasis on social actors, a concept map of the relevant social actors was created to visualize the roles they play and how they relate to each other.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Because this study retrieved data from Twitter, obtaining informed consent as typically done in other data collection processes such as surveys, was not feasible. Nonetheless, the collected data contains intimate details about individuals' lives and beliefs, requiring careful ethical considerations. Throughout this study, the status of users' analysed content was taken into consideration, leading to the following determinations: (1) Users who posted content related to climate justice may be classified as "vulnerable individuals" (Tiidenberg, 2018); (2) The range of individuals in the data set spans from largely unknown individuals to potential aspiring activists, making it challenging to ascertain whether they intended their content to have broader visibility beyond Twitter (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022); (3) Particularly the lesser-known users have probably not fully evaluated the implications of publicly displaying their tweets, such as its persistence and potential reach (Boyd, 2010). It is highly probable that the individuals whose tweets are being analysed did not mean for their tweets to be utilized for this specific purpose. Therefore, in line with the recommended ethical practices for ambiguous internet contexts (Markham, 2012), this study aimed to anonymize the identities of users to the greatest extent possible.

This study employs social media user-generated data for non-intrusive research while prioritizing privacy and anonymity. Ethical decisions regarding anonymity are informed by recommendations from critical scholars (Roberst, 2015). The data collected from Twitter originated from users with publicly accessible profiles. Throughout the study, user anonymity was preserved by presenting findings without revealing identifying information such as Twitter handles and specific posting dates. While complete user anonymity cannot be guaranteed, additional safeguards were implemented, including the use of anonymous references like '[individual]' instead of names, both in the text and references. The references were anonymized to ensure individuals cannot be traced through their surnames or usernames.

Some ethical considerations are also necessary in terms of diversity and representation. Climate justice is inherently about inequality in representation. Therefore, this study seeks to shed light on this inequality and mitigate it to the best of its ability. The sample is designed to ensure equal representation. However, it is important to acknowledge that achieving true representativeness is challenging, and the study may inadvertently include and perpetuate certain biases. Thus, it is vital to clarify that this research does not seek to speak on behalf of others, but rather aims to amplify the voices of those included.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis will follow the structural guidelines of the responsibility framework that was established in earlier stages of the study. To answer the question of how individual actors perceive the question of *who* has *what* responsibilities, it is helpful to break this question down into several parts of analysis. These four questions will be explored in the following section and ultimately help answer the research question.

4.1. Climate-Action Question

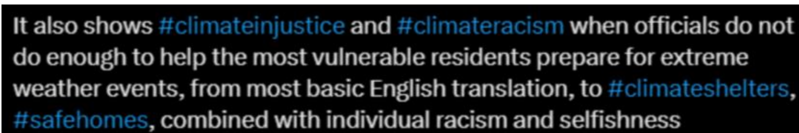
The first question of the analysis is centered around who should engage in responsibilities and to what extent. While individuals in the sample distributed responsibilities between a relatively broad array of actors, they mainly addressed governments and their officials, the Global North, retailers, and youth. Youth, however, will be discussed in the political-action question.

4.1.1. Governments and Officials

One of the most prominent actors that individuals distributed responsibilities to, were governments or "officials". Interestingly enough individuals that did so, only addressed their own governments. Also interesting was that these tweets did not communicate the principle of common but differentiated responsibility as suggested by the literature review (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). In these tweets, individuals solely communicated responsibilities to their governments without (explicit) regards to the idea that everyone else also still bears a duty to act. Moreover, individuals generally chose a critical tone towards their governments and each tweet included suggestions and pleas for changes in action, decisions, or policies. The highest dissatisfaction, in terms of quantity of tweets, came from African accounts and were addressing African governments. In this context, the criticism towards African governments for not doing enough, reflects a broader discourse of frustration with the inability of governments to address the complex and interconnected challenges facing the continent. This discourse could be a result of what Ackerly (2018) calls the triple injustice of climate change. Unequal contribution, vulnerability, and adaptive capacity are likely to generate frustrations. African countries are among the most vulnerable to climate change and in this case, the frustration is materialized in the form of criticisms towards the lack of adaptive capacity of their own government.

This creates room for addressing the historical dimension as emphasized by Carvalho (2008). Tweets that distributed responsibilities guided by this question lacked explicit mention of historical events. Nevertheless, an inherent historical dimension can be identified when considering that a significant part of the struggle to build stable and effective governments in many African countries is a legacy of colonial rule and a systematic disadvantage (Sardo, 2023).

Also interestingly, the only two tweets that contained an explicit link to climate racism as part of climate justice discourse were addressing governments. Tweet nr. 5 criticized the inappropriate preparation for extreme weather events of the most vulnerable residents by the government, showing again frustration about a lack of adaptive capacity in vulnerable situations.


It also shows #climateinjustice and #climateracism when officials do not do enough to help the most vulnerable residents prepare for extreme weather events, from most basic English translation, to #climateshelters, #safehomes, combined with individual racism and selfishness

(Individual 5, 2022)

The individual highlights language as a factor for climate racism, reflecting the concerns about accessibility of climate change knowledge that was raised previously. In the literature review, the concern was about the accessibility of academic research and political reports (Huttner-Koros, 2015). The data illustrates that the same challenge goes beyond those issued documents and also affects communities at the grassroot level when it comes to the dissemination of practical knowledge and support. While English might often simply be accepted as an international language, it overlooks the fact that many of the most vulnerable communities do not speak it. It violates the principle of distributive justice when resources (including knowledge) cannot be distributed fairly due to language barriers, preventing certain individuals from accessing it. This poses relevant questions about the accessibility of the movement and its discourse. A general question to ask would be how global a global movement can truly be? More concretely it needs to be critically evaluated who determines the accessibility of climate justice discourse when it involves different levels of privilege, technology, and language prioritization. There will always be individuals and communities that have less access than others and typically this will be the same marginalized groups.

4.1.2. Retailers

Although retailers were only specifically mentioned in one tweet, the general topic of consumer culture and its role in climate justice was a recurring pattern in the sample and deserves some exploration within the analysis. Tweet nr.18 attributes political power to retailers and consequently also responsibilities.

Jon Molyneux: climate justice is not the job or concern of people living in food insecurity, it's the responsibility of retailers #CashFirst miro

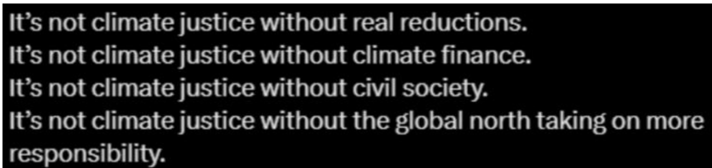
(Individual 18, 2023)

The statement suggests a belief that retailers should primarily carry the responsibilities, since they are seen as having more resources and power to address the issue in contrast to people in food insecurity who may be struggling to meet their basic needs. While in a different context, this reflects the same logic as the APP. While still indirectly framing the individual as a consumer in a market dependency, this tweet simultaneously alleviates some burdens from the individual by emphasizing the need to recognize individuals' unique (and potentially limited) capacity to act. It contrasts Hiller's (2011) belief that one should not partake in harmful (consumer) choices when other alternatives are easily available by emphasizing that the alternative is not necessarily easy but that it depends on an agent's unique capacity and ability.

Overall, the statement highlights the intersection of climate justice with other social and economic issues, such as food insecurity and economic inequality. This is in line with literature suggesting that climate injustice originates in unjust global political-economic structures (Rice, 2007; Mitchell, 2011). By emphasizing the importance of financial considerations and placing responsibility on retailers, the individual is reflecting a broader critique of the global economic system and the role of multinational institutions in perpetuating environmental and social harm. Especially with the choice of #CashFirst the individual highlights the critique of choosing economic growth over the protection of people and the environment.

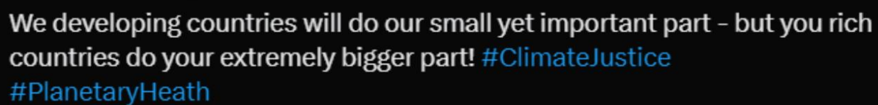
4.1.3. Global North

The divide into Global North and Global South was the most prominent terminology in the sample and will therefore also be used throughout this analysis. Some, however, also referred to it in terms of developing and developed countries, rich nations, or mentioned specific countries such as Australia and Germany. Most of the tweets distributed financial responsibility to the Global North and will hence be discussed in the burden-sharing question. Nevertheless, the two questions do overlap and there have been calls for the Global North to take more than simply financial responsibilities. It was, however, not clear from the tweets which additional responsibilities the individuals are actually distributing to the Global North other than financial. Tweet nr.23 simply states that "It's not climate justice without the Global North taking on more responsibility".



(Individual 23, 2022)

Similarly tweet nr. 7 states "we developing countries will do our small yet important part, but you rich countries do your extremely bigger part!" without actually making specific claims on what this request entails.

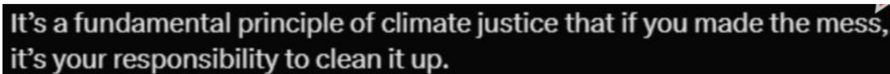


(Individual 7, 2023)

This highlights again the need for greater clarity within the distribution of responsibilities in the public climate justice discourse. Without a comprehensive understanding about who is responsible for what and a clear distribution of those responsibilities, it will be difficult to advance in climate action. An imperative value could therefore lie in the division of responsibilities that is suggested by this framework.

4.2. Burden-Sharing Question

The second important question to clarify is who should bear the responsibility of financing climate justice efforts. The answer to this question seems fairly mutual across the data, distributing the responsibilities almost solely to the Global North or developed countries. Tweet nr.33 states, “it’s a fundamental principle of climate justice that if you made the mess, it’s your responsibility to clean it up”.

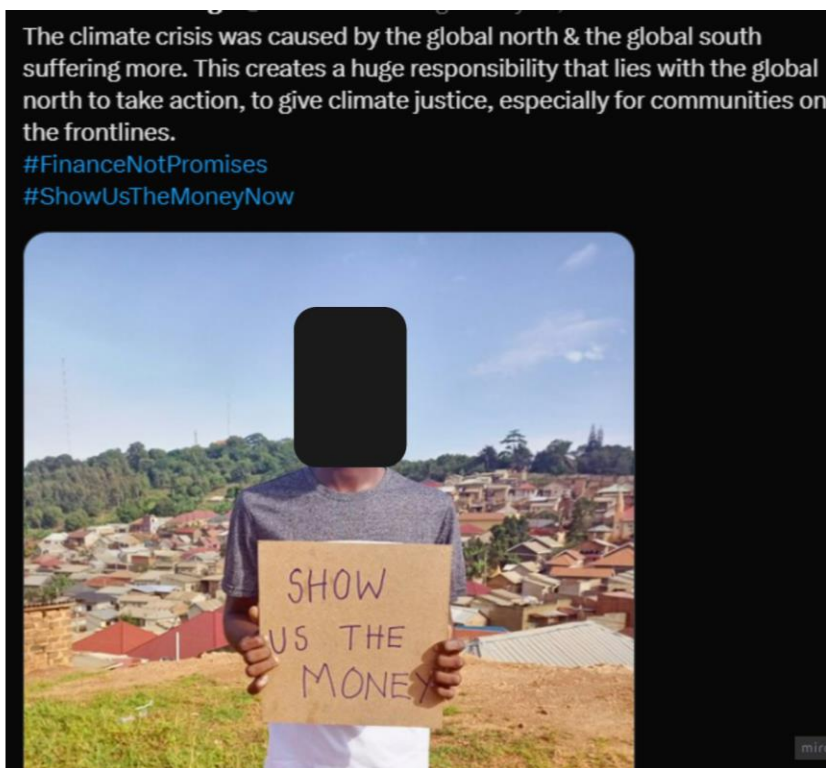


(Individual 33, 2023)

This principle is reflected as the foundation of all tweets centered around the burden-sharing question. This standpoint was referred to as the polluters pay principle in the literature (Sardo, 2023; Varderheiden, 2011). It emphasizes the responsibility, particularly of those who have historically been most responsible for causing climate change and its impacts. At the core of this is distributive justice and its underlying ideological belief in the redistribution of wealth and resources as a means to challenge legacies of colonial rule and domination.

The literature review highlighted how distributive justice can only truly be archived in combination with procedural justice (Newell et. al., 2021, Forsyth, 2014). This consideration or emphasis on procedural justice, however, is almost entirely lacking in the data. While the idea of procedural justice might be inherently included in individuals' demand for distributive justice, it remains questionable whether this is sufficient consideration within the public discourse to shape decision-making processes. This highlights the importance of including individual voices and perspectives through channels such as social media. These individuals, and other voices that should have a say in the distribution of resources, are commonly excluded from those decision-making processes. While it might be impossible to include every single individual, studies like this can provide insights into discourses of the wider public that can subsequently be considered in transparent decision-making processes. It is precisely those nuances, reflecting the wider political and social context that must be understood to coin appropriate policies. Climate justice is based on the principles of distributive and procedural justice, and this study suggests that individuals can provide a valuable pathway for archiving these principles.

Generally, the distribution of responsibilities towards the Global North is reinforcing the narrative that those who cause pollution or environmental damage should be responsible for bearing the costs of mitigating its impacts. While this fundamental principle includes an inherent historical dimension of colonial rule and imperialism, this was rarely explicitly mentioned in the data. Only one tweet explicitly mentioned colonialism as an important factor in climate justice discourse and one other mentioned racial injustice. This suggests that while the history of imperialism and colonialism is undeniably a fundamental part of climate justice it is not as obviously reflected in the data as one might assume from the literature. Nevertheless, this is based on the textual element of the analysis. Following Carvalho's framework for discourse analysis (2008), some insights can be gained when looking at the wider historical context and the underlying ideologies. While tweets such as nr. 21 might not specifically mention a history of colonialism, there is a clear ‘us vs. them’ mentality.



(Individual 21, 2023)

The individual in the tweet states “#ShowUsTheMoneyNow” positioning themself in the in-group (“us”) and addressing the Global North as the other. Similarly, tweet nr.7 engages in this discourse formation by using “we” and “you”, also positioning themselves in the in-group of Global South countries and addressing the Global North as the out-group.

We developing countries will do our small yet important part - but you rich countries do your extremely bigger part! #ClimateJustice #PlanetaryHeath

(Individual 7, 2023)

This polarization reflects a meaningful insight from the CDA. In this case the form of speech reinforces the divide between the Global North and the Global South, not just in geographical terms but emotional, cultural, and ideological ones too. Understanding the century-long history of colonization and exploitation that has formed this dynamic offers an explanation as to why this does not need to be mentioned explicitly. While my own positionality might not allow for immediate identification of this underlying historical dimension, it sure can be fuelling these statements for individuals whose lived experiences are significantly shaped by this discourse. It is the creation of an empowering narrative that claims long overdue reparations from the Global North. In the literature, the loss and damage concept would come the closest in covering this ideology. Loss and damage is about reparations for damage that has already been done (Boyd et. al., 2021).

The other side of the coin from this narrative, however, is one of desperation and urgency. Many of the demands for more financial support come from vulnerable regions or communities that depend on the support of wealthier nations in mitigating climate change. It is a problematic narrative in terms of the power relations it perpetuates. The us vs. them discourse, again, puts the Global South into a submissive position in which it depends on the financial support of the Global North. While this is the logical consequence of the underlying principle, it becomes problematic when considering the historical dimension. After colonial rule and exploitation, Global South countries have continued to struggle with the legacies of their oppression and are still trapped in a dependency on their former colonizers (Sardo, 2023). According to Foucault (1980), power is produced and transmitted but also shifted and changed through discourse. In this case, this means that the climate justice discourse does hold the potential to shift the power imbalances in terms of the dependence of the Global South on the Global North but might not do it in the most effective way. There is an inherent responsibility to construct a new discourse that challenges how we see the world today in terms of its systems of power and knowledge.

This responsibility of freeing Global South countries from this discursive dependence, however, was not mentioned in either the literature or the data. Holiefiel (2001), states that climate justice demands not only addressing the immediate impacts of climate change, but

also the structural causes that underlie it. Following this approach, climate justice discourse should center more around this responsibility.

4.3. Political-Action Question

This dimension of second-order responsibility was not a very prominent part of the literature review, which made it a particularly valuable addition to the framework, adding a new dimension to the puzzle. Overall, individuals did not seem to consciously discuss second-order responsibilities in the climate justice discourse but nevertheless, made some implicit references to it that provide relevant insights to this study. The main themes that emerged are news outlets and youth.

4.3.1. News Outlets

The distribution of responsibilities to news outlets stood out in the data because it was not evident in the literature review. Tweet nr.6 highlights the devastating effects of Cyclone Freddy in Malawi and how this has barely been covered by the news in the Global North.

(Individual 6, 2023)

The lack of adequate news coverage means that the news outlets did not fulfil their second-order responsibility. News outlets have the duty to provide accurate information that enables others to make sense of the world, especially the parts of the world that one otherwise cannot see. If the news outlets gate-keep the information, they also have the power over the

sense of urgency that is communicated to the wider public. Foucault (1980) emphasizes that power is created and communicated through discourse. In this case, news outlets have the power to control and frame knowledge that ultimately fuels action or inaction of agents.

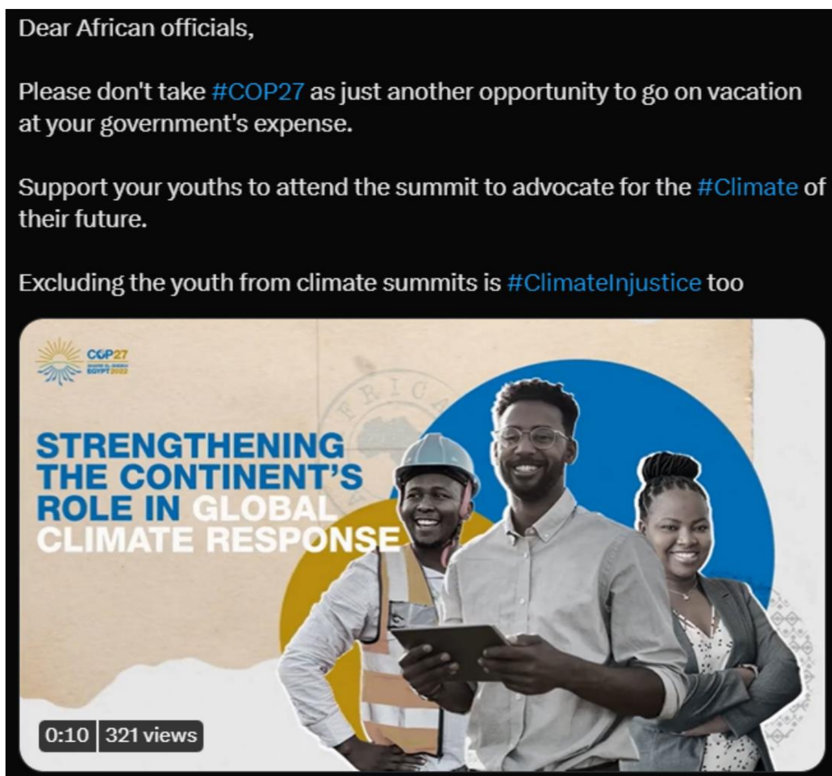
This links back to a need for a stronger commitment to procedural justice in climate justice (Forsyth, 2014; Newell et. al., 2021). With institutions' power to control the discourse and hence, the public's assessment of urgency and risk, there is the danger of hegemony and inadequacy in decision-making processes (Newell et. al., 2021). Additionally, it highlights the challenge of distributive justice since it centers around the dissemination of knowledge, a resource that is not distributed fairly and equally. Diaz Bone et. al., (2008) state that various interpretations of reality exist, and all are created in a unique manner. Our understanding of societal reality and the way we comprehend the world is shaped through discourse. News outlets barely devoting coverage to devastating climate change issues, illustrates how institutions can privilege some discourses over others and shape how we see the world.

In this case, this means that news outlets have a major responsibility to provide adequate coverage of climate change issues so that others can grasp a realistic sense of urgency and risk which ultimately allows them to fulfil their first-order responsibilities of mitigating. This highlights another value in individuals and social media as units of analysis since these power relations are most likely less prominent and a more diverse set of discourse contributions can be identified.

4.3.2. Youth

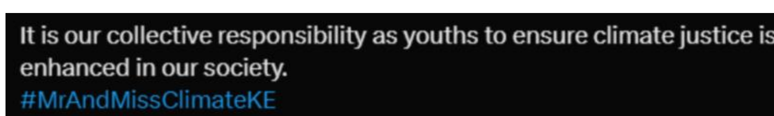
Youth was one of the most prominent themes throughout the whole data set. Youth is also the only actor that got distributed responsibilities, to some extent, in all of the four questions. While they could be part of the analysis in each question, they will be discussed most in-depth here since the responsibility distributed to youth generally centered around changing the social and political environment which is a second-order responsibility.

Overall youth responsibility was included in two ways. Firstly, they were involved in a passive responsibility. This refers to tweets such as nr.2 in which officials are given the main responsibility to change the environment of COP27 and including youth in the discussions.



(Individual 2, 2022)

This, however, inherently involves an active responsibility for youth to take action and fulfil their first and second-order responsibilities once they are included. This is the second way in which youth responsibility was included; actively. Tweet nr.20 directly states that it is indeed youth's responsibility to change the social and political environment.



(Individual 20, 2023)

This connects to what Cripps (2013) calls promotional duties. These responsibilities are forms of activism and have exclusively been given to youth, suggesting a generational divide in perception of agency and responsibility. It suggests a belief that older generations are not as effective or willing agents of change, and that youth are seen as having a greater capacity to drive progress towards climate justice. This discourse formation represents the underlying ideology of procedural justice through intergenerational equity. A focus on intergenerational equity is the commitment to ensuring that young people have a say in decisions that will affect their future and that they are not unfairly burdened by the

consequences of climate change (Okereke, 2010). Hence, this distribution of promotional duties to youth could be an indicator for positive development in the discourse, as it suggests a commitment to inclusive decision-making processes.

It could, however, also reflect a lack of faith in established institutions or actors to take meaningful action on climate change. In other words, if governments, institutions, or other actors are seen as unwilling or unable to take action on climate change, then the burden of responsibility may fall on the youth in promoting change. This is particularly interesting when considering that all the tweets, except for one, that are addressing youth come from accounts located in Africa. It connects to the broader discourse of distrust and dissatisfaction with African governments that was part of the analysis around the climate-action question.

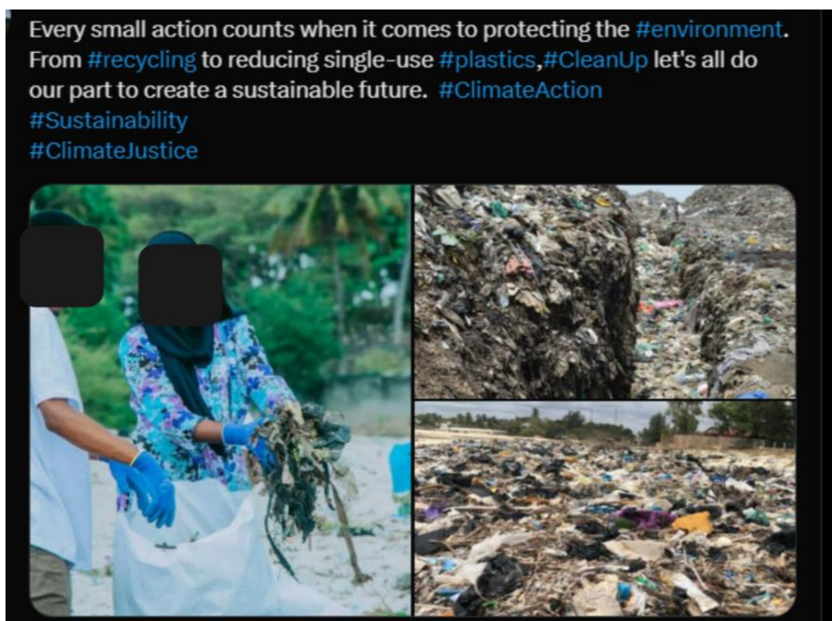
Finally, the following insights can be drawn from youths' appearance in the data; Youth is the only demographic group that represents a common ground across the entire data set. They have been attributed the same responsibilities while sharing the same systematic disadvantage of being excluded from decision making processes about their future, regardless of their nationality or background. Youth is arguably the most vulnerable group to climate change while simultaneously holding the least political power in combating it. Many do not have the right to vote or are not adequately equipped to do so through lack of education and encouragement. Decision making processes are currently dominated by northern and corporate interests and the political landscape does not foster sufficient youth engagement in politics. This suggests a greater need not just for procedural justice but for adults to comply with their second-order responsibilities and change the political and social environment to accommodate more youth voices. Afterall, believing in the capacity of youth to drive progress towards climate justice, but simultaneously believing that there is enough time for them to wait their turn in congress rooms, is inherently privileged. It neglects the sense of urgency and time pressure to act promptly, while at the same time using youth as a means to avoid one's own immediate responsibilities.

4.4. Duty-Bearer Question

This last question centers around the question of whether individuals have the responsibility to limit their own emissions or take individual action to mitigate climate change. The answer that emerged from the data set seems quite simple at first; individuals engaging in climate justice discourse hardly distribute responsibilities to each other. This is a

significant difference to previous climate change movements in which individuals are often seen as responsible to mitigate climate change through everyday (consumption) behaviour (Habib et. al., 2021). This illustrates the benefits of the climate justice movement for more effective and fair distributions of responsibilities. It supports the previous claim that seeing individuals primarily as consumers is too simplistic and that individual consumer choices are ultimately not that meaningful within the bigger picture. Individuals should be acknowledged as inherently political and ideological agents, reflecting intricate nuances of the political and social context for policy making. Climate justice discourse makes significant steps away from the individuals as consumer ideology and towards a more accurate representation of individual agency.

Nevertheless, some tweets did distribute some responsibilities to individuals. Two significantly different underlying ideologies and motivations can be identified in these distributions. The first example is tweet nr. 9 which suggests that every little action counts and hence, each individual should take initiative and engage in climate action.

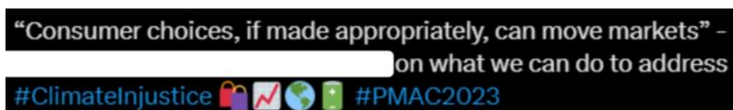


(Individual 9, 2023)

This would be in line with Hiller (2011) who argues that individuals have indeed a moral responsibility to mitigate climate change and that individual emission, while small, still matter. The account of this tweet is from Tanzania and included imagery that suggests a sense of urgency and a call to take action. It communicates a need to claim agency in this overwhelming battle, which would be consistent with the general discourse of dissatisfaction

with (African) governments and institutions that has been constant throughout the data set. The narrative created in this tweet has an empowering tone towards individual action which suggests an ideological commitment to decentralization and local control. The call for individuals to take action, in this scenario, reads as a rejection of top-down approaches to solving climate change problems.

This is in contrast with for example tweet nr. 4 which also distributes responsibility to individuals but with different meanings attached.



(Individual 4, 2023)

This account is from Portland, USA, and attributes the political power to consumer choices. This is in line with some literature suggesting that consumer behaviour is a way to improve climate impacts (Habib et. al., 2021). The individual also reflects the ideas raised by Hiller (2011) who argued that it is morally wrong for an individual to engage in actions that have an anticipated amount of harm greater than another easily available alternative. The individual essentially follows this reasoning by suggesting that one should not engage in harmful consumerism when other alternatives are (easily) available. As also stated before, however, there should be a reflection on whether these alternatives are indeed easily available. Depending on someone's access to resources, privileges, etc., the perception of how easy it is to switch to an alternative can drastically vary. In other words, the reasoning of this tweet lacks a consideration of agents' unique ability to take action. This lack of consideration for the APP was noticeable throughout the entire data set even though it is arguably one of the most important principles in determining fair distribution of responsibilities (Shue, 1999). Further, the idea of not engaging in harmful consumption behaviour relates to Kutz's concept of complicity (2000). It is the idea that individuals have a duty not to participate in collective processes which generate unjust outcomes. Although this raises the question of whether it is fair (and effective) to give this responsibility to individuals rather than to the ones who actually drive the harmful processes, such as (fast-) fashion industries.

The belief that our consumption behaviour is a key factor in combating climate change, reflects an ideological standpoint of viewing individuals primarily as consumers. Sklair (2012) argues that this holds true specifically for capitalist societies which would be

supported by the fact that the only tweet reflecting this ideological standpoint comes from the USA. This is part of a larger discourse that emphasizes the role of consumption and the market in addressing social and environmental issues, as opposed to collective action and systematic change. This discourse is commonly perpetuated by institutions that profit from climate exploitation such as fossil fuel companies (Caney, 2021) and has become a deeply engrained ideology in individuals' perspectives such as this one.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was the contribution to a better understanding of the climate justice movement and to how it can reach its full potential. Existing literature suggested that there are still significant uncertainties around the question of responsibilities, slowing down the capacity for climate action. And while this study can by no means provide an exhaustive understanding of this intricate issue, it aims to contribute one more piece to the complex puzzle. To better understand what is impacting the movement's momentum, this study focused on individuals as the smallest yet critical unit of analysis. By examining individuals this study gained insights into the larger social and political environment in which the movement exists. This process now serves to answer the research question:

How do individuals distribute responsibilities within the public climate justice discourse?

In conclusion, the study reveals the intricate nature of individual’s distribution of responsibilities within the climate justice discourse. It is a complex movement involving a range of actors who are both assigning and being assigned responsibilities. The findings suggest that individuals vary in their distribution of responsibilities depending on the specific responsibility involved. This is important because it proves the value of distinguishing between different types of responsibility as demonstrated in this study. It emphasizes the pressing need for a comprehensive understanding of the different responsibility dimensions within climate justice. The framework employed in this study can offer valuable groundwork for future research and enhance public understanding of how to dissect this complex topic into more digestible and tangible climate action efforts.

This thesis has a unique contribution to the field by pointing out the following blindspots of the climate justice movement that became evident from individuals’ distribution of responsibilities. Firstly, there often seems to be an overall assumption that all climate action contributes to climate justice. Some types of climate responses, however, do indeed produce new climate injustices. This was illustrated with the burden-sharing question. The concept of loss and damage finance for example, produces a unique dilemma in which the demand for financial support from the Global North to the Global South is undoubtedly necessary but simultaneously perpetuates neo colonial power dynamics. It is a climate response that is widely advocated for but that also creates new injustices by keeping vulnerable countries in the (financial) dependencies of richer nations. The analysis

highlighted the crucial role of discourse in curating and perpetuating a perception of a still divided world. This discursive divide was a new finding and represents a valuable contribution of this study. It suggests that while the political and economic implications of climate justice are central to the movement, there is also a need to take a step back and determine how solutions can be established in a social and cultural environment that is still shaped by deeply rooted wounds of our past. Similarly, responsibilities that frame individuals primarily as consumers in a market dependency, inevitably create new injustices. They are a climate response aiming to limit emissions or to reduce environmental harm, but they fail to acknowledge agents' unique (in)capacities to act and hence, tend to distribute burdens unfairly. They are a response to climate change that ultimately perpetuates unjust power dynamics, allowing the ones historically most responsible for climate change to deflect their own responsibility to act.

Secondly, the misconception that English as the dominant language makes climate justice a global movement, overlooks the fact that English actually poses significant challenges to the accessibility and equitable distribution of knowledge. A vast majority of the academic knowledge around climate change as well as the public and political discourse is in English even though the majority of people on our planet are unable to understand and read the documents issued. This is a major blindspot because the ones who are equipped to understand and work with English are prone to be blind to the challenges it poses to the others. And those 'others' are likely unaware of it because they cannot be aware of what they do not understand. A lack of easily accessible information leads to misinformation and a lack of interest in the topic. This blindspot cruelly hurts those who need access the most, perpetuating the very same power structures climate justice aims to challenge. Ultimately, a large amount of the distributed responsibilities come down to the responsibility of creating a more inclusive movement. The lack of procedural justice, the call for greater youth inclusion, the lack of racial justice as a link to climate justice, the complete lack of some voices such as indigenous people, and the language barrier, all point towards challenges of accessibility. These are challenges that will be far from easy to overcome. It will require substantial dedication across different demographics and fields in the future. According to this study, prioritizing second-order responsibilities becomes imperative in tackling these obstacles effectively.

Second-order responsibilities are the third and final blindspot of the movement that became evident in this study. Individuals in the sample did almost exclusively distribute first-order responsibilities although they often had an implicit dimension of second-order

responsibilities. Nevertheless, there was a lack of conscious recognition of this dimension, evident through the complete absence of the label ‘second-order responsibility’ or any similar terminology. Second-order responsibilities did not seem to be on the radar of individuals in the data or scholars in the academic literature. This research, however, indicates that agents can hardly comply with their first-order responsibilities if others do not fulfil their second-order responsibilities first. The analysis illustrated this with the themes of language and education, tying it back to the other blindspots as well. There is a lack of distributive justice regarding the dissemination of information and education. In other words, crucial resources are not distributed fairly and equally which is often overlooked because they are non-material resources (such as knowledge) that fall into the second-order responsibilities of agents such as news outlets, researchers, institutions, etc. They are a useful tool in identifying *why* agents do not comply with their first-order responsibilities and consequently, *what* needs to be done, by *who*, to change that. This insight represents a significant contribution of the study. Currently, much of the discourse around climate action emphasizes the first-order responsibilities of agents. Especially profit-driven institutions tend to emphasize the first-order responsibilities of others (particularly individual consumers) to deflect the blame. This narrative, however, lacks the acknowledgment of them not fulfilling their second-order responsibilities of creating a political, social, and economic environment in which others can take action in the first place. This convenient tactic shifts responsibilities and diverts attention from major polluters, a critical aspect that deserves more attention.

5.1. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

First and foremost, the scope of the topic was initially underestimated but inevitably generated considerable limitations for this study. Climate justice is a hugely complex topic that encompasses some of the greatest challenges of injustices and inequalities. This thesis merely constructs a pilot for future research that can devote greater attention to the insights pointed out in this study, each potentially posing sufficient complexity to be a topic of investigation on its own. Since climate justice is inherently an interdisciplinary topic, future research would benefit from such an approach as well. Valuable new perspectives and insights would originate from additional views of anthropology, religion, indigenous studies, and others. Much of the challenges of climate justice originate in deeply rooted ideological beliefs and differences. Future studies that investigate how religion, ideologies, and cultures

impact climate action would be essential for effectively overcoming many existing challenges. This research was interested in the “how” around the question of responsibilities. Future research investigating the “why” would complement the understanding of ways to move forward.

Another important limitation to acknowledge is the challenge of representation. Firstly, the study retrieved data from the social media platform Twitter to draw more general conclusions. However, not everyone has access to the climate justice discourse generally, especially the one materialized on Twitter. Additionally, the study exclusively focused on literature and public discourse in English, meaning it merely analysed a fraction of the discourse and movement. Since the analysis has highlighted the English language aspect as a major blindspot of the movement it is important to acknowledge the limitations it also poses for this research. The insights are likely not representative for other demographics that do not have the same access to the discourse as the individuals in this data set. Future research would benefit from a better understanding of how these issues of representation and accessibility influence our understanding of climate justice and our capacity to take climate action. This could potentially be materialized in the form of a study looking into how underrepresented groups engage with social media platforms. For example, it would be valuable to understand how indigenous people use (or do not use) Twitter and what this reveals about the general discourse and the one we perceive online. Another option to optimize the representation in future research is a more diverse range of different participants or different modes of research. Interviews could potentially allow for better representation of some demographics. Not everyone has access to social media platforms and not everyone has a personal desire to engage in public discussion about potentially sensitive topics. Interviews would curate a more intimate environment, potentially leading other participants to be more open to sharing their perspectives. Retrieving the data from Twitter, limits this study to insights from online discourse which potentially varies from observations that would be retrieved from a different sample. While the discourse does reflect broader societal insights, it is likely to be unique to its environment, in this case social media. Collecting data elsewhere would be interesting to see how this influences the observations.

Finally, a word on positionally and limitations. Climate justice combines a variety of different backgrounds, cultures, languages, belief systems, etc. Inevitably the researcher's own positionality includes them into some discourses, while excluding them from others. In the public discourses around climate justice, which inherently is centered around vulnerable communities, it can lead to overlooking certain ideological or historical nuances. In future

research it could be valuable to have a more diverse team of researchers for the same study. This might be beneficial to identify considerably more nuances as well as highlighting who is overlooking what and why.

6. References

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7. Appendix

Link for Analysis in Miro:
https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVMNpIRtM=/?share_link_id=13598137517