

Preface & Acknowledgements

I denied climate change for longer than I care to admit. I knew it was happening, sure. Not like Donald Trump and the Tea Partiers going on about how the continued existence of winter proves it's all a hoax. But I stayed pretty hazy on the details and only skimmed most of the news stories, especially the really scary ones. I told myself the science was too complicated and that the environmentalists were dealing with it. And I continued to behave as if there was nothing wrong with the shiny card in my wallet attesting to my 'elite' frequent flyer status. A great many of us engage in this kind of climate change denial. We look for a split second and then we look away. Or we look but then turn it into a joke ('more signs of the Apocalypse!'). [...] Or [...] we tell ourselves comforting stories about how humans [...] will come up with a technological miracle that will safely suck the carbon out of the skies [...]. Which [...] is yet another way of looking away. Or we look but try to be hyper-rational about it [...]. Or we look but tell ourselves we are too busy to care about something so distant and abstract [...]. Or we look but tell ourselves that all we can do is focus on ourselves. Meditate and shop at farmers' markets and stop driving, but forget trying to actually change the systems that are making the crisis inevitable [...]. Or maybe we do look – really look – but then, inevitably, we seem to forget. [...] We engage in this odd form of on-again-off-again ecological amnesia for perfectly rational reasons. We deny because we fear that letting in the full reality of this crisis will change everything. And we are right.

Naomi Klein – *This changes everything*, 2015, p. 3ff.

Just like Naomi Klein is describing in this paragraph, I too experienced a lingering and increasingly nagging feeling that climate change should be playing a much greater role in the way we go about our lives, given the extent of the threat posed by it. And here I was particularly puzzled by why some people took the issue much more to heart than others. I could not trace the reasons back to education, political stances or socio-economics. I was especially phased by these different leanings also existing in my parents' generation. More baffling still, eco-conscious baby-boomers did not seem to necessarily have raised eco-conscious millennials but some indifferent baby-boomers had. Why was that? Why was it that some people felt compelled

to protect the climate – felt it was their responsibility to do something, while others either blended it out or fatalistically accepted that the planet would eventually just heat like crazy?

Puzzling over philosophical and ethical questions had been a passion of mine at school already, certainly during my masters' course when I wrote my thesis on philosophical issues in development. The prospect of deeply grappling once again with moral concepts got me very excited. And the topic of climate-cultural differences in society gave me a lot of them: responsibility, climate justice, intergenerational justice, global justice, social fairness and so on...

When I started my doctoral research in September 2018 as part of the BAYSICS¹ project, these were the questions that I brought with me. Quickly it became clear to me that it was a very apt time to be researching these issues: what I had not known when I started, of course, was that a mere two weeks before I began my work at the LMU Geography department, on August 20th 2018 in fact, Greta Thunberg had not gone to school for the first time for reasons very much related to my questions. In the rest of that year, *Fridays for Future* was rapidly developing into a large movement and by the time I held my first interviews, climate change had become a much more fiercely debated public issue. So much so that it was one of the key topics in the 2019 European Election, where only a couple of days prior, the German YouTuber Rezo released his infamous video in which he fatefully bashed a number of established parties, and most of all the CDU, Germany's leading governing party at the time. Some of my interviews directly relate to this event. For example, on the Monday after the election results had come in, I spoke to a CDU politician and member of the Bundestag who was also part of the party's environmental committee.

Increasingly, I realised that the debate had a whole series of different layers – there were young YouTubers responsabilising established political actors, yet there were also voices in the public that replied that it was outrageous that immature young protestors were telling hard-working managers what to do. What a time to be researching this topic!

The election results revealed the public's desire for climate action, which political leadership answered with a climate cabinet that was to come up with legislation in the summer of 2019. This 'climate package' became however subject to heaps of criticism that often rendered it no more than a 'climate parcel' in public perception. When 2020 came around, I was finishing up my data collection and I distinctly remember doing my last group interview with the mobility provider on a Tuesday in February as it was Pancake Day (*Faschingsdienstag*). That week was when the Covid

1 BAYSICS (Bayerisches Synthese-Informationen-Citizen Science Portal für Klimaforschung und Wissenschaftskommunikation) is part of the Bavarian climate change research network bayklif, funded by the Bavarian State Ministry of Science and Art (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Wissenschaft und Kunst).

action committee was established by the German federal government. On March 10th, I travelled to Berlin for the first meeting of the scientific advisory board for the environmental awareness study and people were already greeting each other awkwardly by bumping their fists or feet. Only ten more days later, Germany went into full lockdown for the first time.

How lucky was I that I had just finished collecting my data and I could continue to work from home analysing my materials and sorting what they revealed to me? This was of course interspersed with several zoom calls with Henrike, my supervisor, who really did a lot of sorting of my thoughts and gave me the most valuable prompts and inputs of her own. I want to take this opportunity to say the biggest thankyou to you, Henrike! Without your warm guidance and valuable feedback, I would absolutely not have gotten on the way I did. And we always had a good laugh or two as well. Without Henrike, you also would not hold this book in your hands – so thank you so much once again for your initiative also in this vein!

In the course of writing a book chapter with Henrike on the media analysis that is covered by chapter 5 in this thesis, the concept of climate cultures emerged as a very useful conceptual tool for this research. I then applied the concept to the focus group discussions to see what insights it yielded in relation to professional work environments. At that time, in autumn 2020, I also had my second baby, my Ruby. So I often sat there, researching and writing my stuff and nursing her at the same time. My husband Kevin would bring her to me when she was hungry and hold her over the top of the door, so I could only see her head and then he would say things he thought she'd want to say in a high voice. I went back to work in April 2021 and now, a year later, I am finally handing in this thesis. I immensely enjoyed working on it.

Writing it would however not at all have been possible without the enormous and continuous support of my parents, especially my Mum, who so often took Oskar and now also Ruby and entertained them with all sorts of wonderful activities. And my Dad would take Oskar to kindergarten on his way to work or pick him up when I was in meetings. I will forever be grateful for the amount of help I got during these past 3,5 years from the two of them and the big part they played in me being able to finish this work.

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