social life that oppose the rationalisms and intellectualisms of other social and cultural theories" (Reckwitz, 2003, p. 113). Such an analysis manages to read between the lines and thus come a little closer to reality. Melanie Jaeger-Erben (2017, p. 135ff.) also follows this tradition and shows that two completely different motives can be at play in the carrying out of a particular consumption practice (buying organic food) by two agents: for one person, the climate aspect is central, whilst for the other, the consumption decision is made based on other relevant practices (related to parenting) in the same realm. In an analysis that merely looks at individuals' rational decisions, this insight would remain entirely hidden.

Of course, in this study, it is not argued for a reduction of knowledge, but definitely for a more serious and intensive consideration of other types of knowledge, in particular relational, emotional and affective knowledge. Knowledge itself should be thought of as less cerebral or cognitive and instead as more emotional and embodied. Grappling with this alternative form of knowledge rests on the conviction that "individual persons, whether strategic or norm following, are inseparable from the transactional contexts within which they are embedded" (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 287). These contexts include not only the practices the agents perform but also the sometimes subconscious dispositions that spark their execution and that rest on societal regularities. Such relational approaches further stress the role of the historical and the material.

As shown so far, this study's core concepts, responsibility, efficacy and knowing have been extensively contemplated by various scholars. However, traditional perspectives like those that focus on the individual, information deficits and rationality theory approach these issues quite crudely. They have largely ceased to add value, which is not least verified by the fact that with them, meaningful climate action still leaves much to be desired. In some instances, relations between (two of) the core concepts have been discussed and the concatenation between them has been considered. However, a conception that truly integrates these three ideas is missing to this day. There is a clear need for an alternative approach that does justice to the dynamic of social structures and that recognises the importance of societal influences (cf. Rau, 2018, p. 209). Building on Kari Marie Norgaard's ground-breaking work on the connection between climate change, emotions, and everyday life that she developed in her book *Living in denial* (2011) and several other of her texts, this study contributes to closing this research gap.

2.5 The social organisation of denial

Norgaard's culturally sensitive approach reveals the inherently social nature of denial that affects her respondents' reactions to the threat of climate change: "[...] in wealthy nations, the key questions related to climate change have to do with denial"

(2011, p. 216). She defines her concept as follows: "By socially organized denial I mean that ignoring information about global warming takes place in response to social circumstances and is carried out through a process of social interaction" (2006, p. 352). She speaks of different *cultures of denial* (Sutton and Norgaard, 2013; Norgaard, 2019) and in doing so moves beyond prevailing individualistic psychological conceptions of denial. Norgaard takes issue with the fact that many debates about climate change are dominated by insights from the quantitatively oriented disciplines such as economics and psychology, "where only individual action and not social structures are understood as shaping outcomes" (2018, p. 4). Just like information deficit thinking, psychology, that has historically been investigating denial, focuses on the individual without adequately taking into consideration the social dynamics influencing them. Yet, as has been argued and as also Eviatar Zerubavel, amongst others, vehemently underscores, "society organizes patterns of perception, memory, and organizational aspects of thinking" (1997, cited in Norgaard, 2006, p. 352).

Importantly, Norgaard points to people denying not only their responsibility to protect the climate but them also basing this on their own experienced lack of self-efficacy: "We need democratic engagement and response, yet individuals retreat out of a sense of helplessness" (2018, p. 4). She also observes that people collectively turn a blind eye to more news on the threat posed by climate change by falling back on habitual conversation, attention and emotional response that represent specific cultural strategies of dealing with the issue (2011, p. 9). She shows that conventional individualist explanations of denial fail to grasp shared decisions within a community to ignore a particular threat (here: climate change and its wide-ranging impacts on local livelihoods). "Local feeling rules may diminish or magnify the intensity of response, which, combined with available alternatives that are not incompatible with existing worldviews, render some responses to climate change more viable than others" (Ford and Norgaard, 2019, p. 224).

Thus, her work presents convincing arguments and evidence for denial operating "as a key mechanism in the reproduction of power" (Sutton and Norgaard, 2013, p. 498). As discussed, conventional economic theory conceals power structures and questions of collective responsibility. Bourdieu writes that this is because elite groups successfully exert power on those who are underprivileged by unknowingly receiving their consent. He goes on to say that this consent is not of the enlightened and conscious kind but emerges instead as a form of submission of their bodies being socialised in the way that they were (cf. Bourdieu, 1997, p. 165). "Often missing from the discourse about climate action is consideration of how our ties to histories of colonialism, racial domination, as well as hetero-patriarchal social systems might influence the adoption of new practices" (Ford and Norgaard, 2019, p. 234). So, we see that obscuring diverging distributions of power is itself a means to exert power on those less powerful as this "manages to impose meanings and to impose

them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1973, p. 12).

Explicit versus implicit denial

Importantly, in this study's conception, different types of denial belong to two broad categories, either explicit or implicit denial. Explicit denial is performed by those sceptical of climate change even occurring whilst implicit denial refers to people that acknowledge the issue but push away the imperative to act accordingly. The latter kind is dealt with in detail by Norgaard and described below. The former kind, explicit denial, refers to climate sceptical views that outright negate the IPCC-consensus. Some people even believe that corporate, scientific and political elites have conspired to further restrict the public's freedoms with the help of climate narratives. The outlook of people who endorse such conspiracy theories[8] is particularly difficult to argue with or alter as "then any additional evidence supporting the consensus will just be seen as *more proof* of the conspiracy" (Hart and Nisbet, 2012, p. 4) – the so-called backfire or boomerang effect: "A boomerang effect occurs when a message is strategically constructed with a specific intent but produces a result that is the opposite of that intent [...]. Furthermore, boomerang effects may be specific to only certain segments of an audience based on individual predispositions or context" (ibid.). This explains why the different forms of denial are observed in some climate cultures and not in others. When new information collides with people's worldviews, their original beliefs can become even more entrenched through this type of backfire effect. By now, a growing body of research has established a strong link between (explicit) denial of climate change and the support of conspiracy theories (Lewandowsky, 2021; Hornsey et al., 2018). What is also distinct about this type of denial is the central role emotional messages play in these discourses:

> The ferocity and grandiloquence of climate denial rhetoric suggests more than a rational, measured disagreement of a scientific nature, but an emotional reaction

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8   Here I rely on Karl Popper (1980) who conceives of conspiracies as follows: "The explanation of a social phenomenon consists in the discovery that individuals or groups have a vested interest in the unfolding of an event and that they conspired to bring it about. (Their interests are sometimes hidden and must still be detected.) This (...) of course stems from the wrong theory that whatever happens in a society is the result of plans made by powerful individuals or groups. (...) In its modern forms this theory is the typical result of the secularisation of a religious superstition" (cited in Eco, 2021, p. 11f.). Such powerful individuals or groups are generally often referred to as 'the elite' by those endorsing such conspiracy theories. This rhetoric also has an antisemitic element to it and must be thoroughly distinguished from what is meant by 'elite climate cultures' in this study (i.e., those endowed with considerable cultural capital in Bourdieu's terms).

grounded in threat, and the fear, anxiety and unease that such a threat might engender.

<div align="right">Ford and Norgaard, 2019, p. 226</div>

Norgaard however mainly deals with the other type, implicit denial: "What I observed in Bygdaby [the small Norwegian community studied] was not a rejection of information per se but the failure to integrate this knowledge into everyday life or transform it into social action" (2006, p. 352). Norgaard's conception is very nuanced. The remainder of this chapter thus elaborates on three aspects in her work and how they serve as point of departure for this study's own conceptual framework (defining climate cultures): the collective denial of responsibility for climate action; the denial of self-efficacy; and the denial of knowing in the form of this distancing from emotion. Now, the next section is concerned with what she has to say on the denial of responsibility.

Norgaard on denial of responsibility

The connection between denial and responsibility in relation to climate change (that lies at the heart of this study) has recently been granted increasing attention. Processes of moral disengagement such as the diffusion and displacement of responsibility are central to the denial of responsibility this study analyses. For example, Stoll-Kleemann und O'Riordan observe a shift from the outright denial of climate change towards the denial of *responsibility* for climate change: although in their study, all respondents claimed to find climate action important, a sort of *moral decoupling* was discernible: "There is still denial by favoring displacing responsibility or even assigning guilt to others (e.g., government, business and industry, lobbies, 'the rich', the 'egoistic people'), refusing to be a first mover and to engage in more than just low-cost behavior" (2020, p. 11). In her study of the people of Bygdaby, Norgaard similarly observes how people use a host of different strategies to practice this denial of responsibility. Here, she (2011, p. 68) refers to Frantz and Mayer who note that "climate change [...] is marked by a diffusion of responsibility" (2009, p. 214).

According to Norgaard, "the crisis of climate change makes clear how badly we need a mode of social organization that promotes organized responsibility rather than organized irresponsibility and denial" (2011, p. 226). However, since "current political economic structure is (still) intimately embedded in our petroleum-based economy" (ibid., 2018, p. 4), she observes a society-wide distancing from responsibility as "individualism and globalisation work together to create a disjunction between our morals and our practices" (Maniates, 2002, p. 51, cited in Norgaard, 2011, p. 226). Only by denying climate change, it is possible for Norwegian society to re-

main on this economic path. People from this community employed a variety of so-
cial narratives, some produced by the national government, to deflect responsibil-
ity for and legitimate Norwegian petroleum policy" (Norgaard, 2011, p. 140). Crush-
ing ambivalences, like those caused by conflicting information, leave people feeling
stalled and thus frustrated: "… climate change poses a new challenge for individuals
to live morally coherent and responsible lives" (ibid., p. 226).

Norgaard then describes how people neutralise these negative feelings of incon-
sistency in various ways: "This dissonance is an unpleasant condition that people
seek to resolve, often by changing one of their cognitions" (ibid., p. 68). Internal-
ising the threat posed by climate change, the urgency there is to act on it and the
totality with which behaviour would have to be adapted would be so disturbing and
in conflict with so much that is taken for granted in modern everyday life that it
is simply avoided. Norgaard here points to cultural "tools of innocence" that pro-
vide a *repertoire* or *toolkit* of solutions to everyday problems (see also Swidler, 1986;
Rau, 2008). She sees these as "ideas, images and activities that are used to create
distance from responsibility and to assert rightness or goodness" (Norgaard, 2011,
p. 146). Here, she describes all sorts of strategies that the people in the community
employ to justify their denying of responsibility. In this, she builds on Zerubavel's
theory on the sociology of denial (2010) and social psychologist Morris Rosenberg's
emphasis of "selective attention in the construction of reality" (Norgaard, 2011, p.
173): as Rosenberg writes, "people may shift their thoughts intentionally from one
topic to another or selectively perceive, remember, attend to, and interpret events in
ways that produce the intended emotional outcomes" (1990, p. 11).

Another mechanism to neutralise cognitive dissonance is seeking reassurance
with those people one identifies with the most that one still acts condonably. "When
we stray from social norms and our prescribed roles, emotions signal to us through
feelings of discomfort that we are out of cultural bounds" (Ford and Norgaard, 2019,
p. 221). We often seek absolution in the relational. "[…] cognitive dissonance is gener-
ated by threats to identity and individuals' desire to preserve a positive sense of self-
esteem" (Norgaard, 2011, p. 217). Admitting to oneself all the ways in which one falls
short in protecting the climate would however not benefit one's sense of self-esteem,
which helps to explain this widespread phenomenon of denying responsibility.

Further strategies applied by the people Norgaard interviewed were, for ex-
ample, that they often stressed they only needed to live a *simple* life as "images of
simplicity connote innocence" (Norgaard, 2011, p. 161). Similarly, she reports that
through emphasising the globality of the climate challenge, the Norwegian state
managed to paint the Norwegian natural gas project in a climate-friendly light
(ibid., p. 172). She also writes that leading politicians have emphasised that Nor-
wegian industry is not the most harmful to the climate when compared globally,
insinuating that Norwegian fossil fuel industries are "good climate policy interna-
tionally" (ibid., p. 173). Such cultural strategies employed to deny one's own climate

responsibility and whether and how they may also feature in the German context thus forms one key interest of this study.

Norgaard finds there to be interpretative and cultural strategies of denial and classes the former narratives into the rubrics of 'selective interpretation', 'perspectival selectivity', and 'claims to virtue', and the latter category into 'norms of attention' and 'emotion/conversation norms'. One example of how the latter produce denial is that information about climate change may be perceived as too uncomfortable and thus people tend to choose to not concern themselves with it, which Norgaard calls "a new psychological predicament for privileged people" (2006, p. 366). Here, she observes how her respondents feel a "profound sense of entrapment" (2011, p. 195). People in western societies experience being "caught between the [...] desire to do the right thing and to be informed (which they felt is a necessary first step toward responsibility and change)" (ibid.), whilst being stuck in a system that in so many ways depends on emitting carbon on a daily basis.

One further strategy used to push responsibility away was for example the application of so-called 'stock stories' in what falls in Norgaard's category of *interpretative denial*. This refers to the employment of a repertoire of ways to speak positively about Norway and thus neutralise potentially negative messages when confronted with evidence about its increasing climate impact.

Norgaard explains that this category of *interpretive denial* also involves the use of Rosenberg's notion of *perspectival selectivity* that refers to the way one approaches a particular situation: "People tend to assign those meanings to events that will produce the desired emotions" (Rosenberg, 1991, p. 135). Such perspectival selectivity was also applied to "deny self-involvement" (Opotow and Weiss, 2000, cited in Norgaard, 2006, p. 359). Here, responsibility is diffused as people "deny personal responsibility for an environmental harm by seeing it as the result of collective rather than individual decisions and actions" (Norgaard, 2011, p. 123). For the purpose of neutralising negative feelings about impending climate change, the members of the community also used humour as a means to "maintain [...] conversational control over topics that were troubling (ibid., p. 125)". Here, Norgaard cites Nina Eliasoph who noted that "teasing let members keep the wider world at arm's length" (1998, p. 107, cited in Norgaard, 2011, p. 125), which is precisely what Norgaard observed was happening in this small Norwegian community. Norwegian people also deflected responsibility away from themselves by pointing to the US as another larger climate culprit and stressing Norway's comparatively small land area and population (ibid., p. 171). Norgaard goes on to say that ex-environmental minister Børge Brende had stated that "Norway is one of the countries in the world that has benefited most from fossil fuels. This gives us a special responsibility in the politics of climate change, especially with respect to poor countries" (Hovden and Lindseth, 2002, p. 143, cited in Norgaard, 2011, p. 71). Yet even in light of this acknowledgement, Norway had still substantially expanded its oil and gas production in recent years.

Norgaard argues that this diffusion of responsibility was also made possible by the strategy of habitually coming back to, focusing on and emphasising the positive sides of Norway. As Benedict Anderson (1991) has pointed out, "part of imagining communities is agreeing upon what people will collectively pay attention to [...] and what they will collectively ignore [...]" (Norgaard, 2011, p. 173). Accordingly, in conversations the members of the community focused on all things typically Norway: "By portraying Norwegians as close to nature, egalitarian, simple, and humble, these narratives of national identity served to counter the criticism and doubt Norwegians face with regards to climate and petroleum policies" (ibid., 2011, p. 142). These processes of national identity formation and protection were vital in maintaining a positive picture of one's country in the light of climate change and Norway's specific involvement in it. Since constant dripping wears away the stone, focusing on the positive and repeating it over and over will eventually make people believe in it, even when the evidence tells a different story. This strategy of *over-communication* (Goffman, 1959, cited in Norgaard, 2011, p. 142) serves to steer attention away from the fact that "Norwegian wealth, political economy, and way of life are intimately connected to the problem of global warming – not only through individual actions of automobile usage but also through the political economic structure that has created Norwegian wealth through the production and marketing of North Sea oil" (Norgaard, 2006, p. 353).

In a much more recent paper, Norgaard, together with her colleague Allison Ford, further develops these ideas about the links between climate change, culture, emotions and everyday life into their concept of *environmental subjectivities* (2020, p. 59) that "situates individual environmental practices in relationship to interlocking power structures" (ibid.). Here, responsibility again plays a central role: "For the Karuk people [US indigenous tribe studied], environmental subjectivity is shaped by a sense of responsibility to the natural world that spurred many creative, politically engaged responses to climate change and related environmental problems" (ibid.).

Efficacy and denial

To shed more light on such interlocking power structures within and between groups, the following section considers how in society there are different levels of both, actual and perceived efficacy, with respect to climate action. Norgaard also points to the links between responsibility and efficacy: "People with low self-efficacy will be likely to deny responsibility and concern because unless they feel able to do something about the problem, an awareness of concern or sense of responsibility would be a conflicting cognition" (2011, p. 68). She further refers to Jan Krosnick et al. who find that people only take on issues where they feel they can do something

about them: "People stop paying attention to global climate change when they realize that there is no easy solution for it" (2006, p. 34).

With respect to the impact that different societal agents can exert on the outcome of the climate crisis, Norgaard stresses: "An individual can take shorter hot showers but the US military remains the biggest consumer of oil in the world" (Norgaard, 2018, p. 4). Elsewhere she points out that almost any effort from official sides to communicate climate change displays the 'severe limitation' of being addressed to the individual consumer. Here we again see the discrepancy between responsibility attributions and efficacy expectations at its finest.

Norgaard further elaborates on the relationship between privilege and climate change: "Privileged people reproduce existing power relations as they enact denial in everyday life" (2011, p. 218). To make visible such differences in actual power, one must become aware of the choices people have with regard to climate action: a business manager will have different financial means to forego certain mobility options than a single mother who lives in the countryside. Importantly, on top, both will have respectively different social pressures. "[I]t is important [...] to question the power structures that support and benefit from the invisibility of material realities. Both culture and emotions can be co-opted into supporting the status quo; or, channelled into challenging it" (Ford and Norgaard, 2019, p. 238). In many studies it has now been shown that it is precisely those who would theoretically be able to afford more climate action who deny most categorically: "Privileged people are protected from full knowledge of environmental (and many other social) problems by [...] their own fine-tuned yet unconscious practices of not noticing, looking the other way, and normalizing the disturbing information they constantly come across" (Norgaard, 2011, p. 219). All these considerations by Norgaard and others confirm the added value of conceiving of responsibility for climate action in direct connection with the impact an agent can actually have.

In her referring to efficacy, Norgaard widens these originally solely individually and psychologically conceptualised ideas about denial tendencies and self-efficacy (in Bandura's sense) by approaching it social-scientifically and also considering the role of emotions. Here, Ford and Norgaard refer to Kemper who "theorises that power and status are universally linked to the elicitation of emotions; when power and status are threatened, negative emotions motivate attempts to restore them" (1990, cited in Ford and Norgaard, 2019, p. 226). Norgaard also points to the fact that privileged people in industrialised Western societies profit from their denial of climate change in two ways – financially and also by "avoiding the emotional and psychological entanglement and identity conflicts that may arise from knowing that one is doing 'the wrong thing'" (2011, p. 72).

Underscoring the role of emotions, Norgaard also fiercely refutes information deficit thinking by calling for the recognition that "information alone is not enough to produce action" (ibid.). More so, expanding people's information about climate

change can even prove counterproductive, as she and various other scholars (e.g., Kellstedt et al., 2008, see Norgaard, 2011, p. 2) have found that "respondents who are better informed about climate change feel less rather than more responsible for it" (Norgaard, 2011, p. 2). This is because being further inundated with details about the looming catastrophe is not a particularly motivating scenario. People then tend to look the other way or bury their head in the sand like the ostrich. This indicates that the relationship between increasing information and efficacy is anything but straight-forward. Thus, what is taken for granted and what counts as obvious and self-evident or what is seen as valid and legitimate in one section of society simply melts with reality. That this is in fact contingent only becomes visible from the outside of the social group: "[...] information on climate change may be accepted, resisted, navigated and interpreted differently depending on the sense of efficacy, self-esteem, and social support of the individual receiving it" (ibid., p. 72). This brings us to the link between efficacy and knowledge in Norgaard's work. As Goldblatt reminds us: "All knowledge is widely enmeshed in the operations of power" (2004, p. 124f.). Thus, the following third point of this subsection now considers such denying of knowledge that is simultaneously interlinked with denial of both efficacy and responsibility. Here, Norgaard writes: "The notion that people are not acting against global warming because they do not know about it reinforces a sense of their innocence in the face of these activities, thereby maintaining the indivisibility of the power relations that are upheld by so-called apathy regarding global warming" (2011, p. 71). This reiterates the pressing need to uncover these power relations if one is to make any significant progress in protecting the climate.

Norgaard and knowing

Norgaard then goes on to say: "'Information', like caring, cannot be thought of in generic and isolated blocs of facts with universal meaning and significance across all communities. Instead information is socially structured, is given social meanings and must be understood in social context" (2011, p. 72). This is because knowing is ambiguous and also serves political purposes: "Attention to the specifics of how people turn a blind eye [...] shines a light into more theoretical questions concerning the cultural reproduction of power" (Sutton and Norgaard, 2013, p. 498). In this, Norgaard shows that the social organisation of denial occurs first on the political, secondly on the emotional and thirdly on the social level: "[...] whether people notice information about climate change is related to socially shaped systems of perception and attention, whether they remember what they hear is a function of social systems of memory, whether it is considered morally offensive or not is a function of whether it is inside or outside socially defined limits of concern; [...] how we think is part of culture and marks our participation in community" (Norgaard, 2011, p. 5f.).

An examination of individual points of view that drift in a vacuum decoupled from social connections must therefore remain inadequate. As Stanley Cohen finds:

> The psychology of 'turning a blind eye' or 'looking the other way' is a tricky matter. These phrases imply that we have access to reality, but choose to ignore it because it is convenient to do so. This might be a simple fraud: the information is available and registered, but leads to a conclusion which is knowingly evaded. 'Knowing' though can be far more ambiguous. We are vaguely aware of choosing not to look at the facts, but not quite conscious of what it is we are evading. We know, but at the same time we don't know.

> Cohen, 2001, p. 5, cited in Norgaard, 2011, p. 72

People thus collectively "distance themselves from information because of norms of emotion, conversation, and attention, [...*using*...] an existing cultural repertoire of strategies in the process" (Norgaard, 2011, p. 9). Whilst it shall be emphasised that knowledge and information are certainly vital in sparking engagement, this relationship is far from linear and straightforward.

In this way, Norgaard's account of *socially organised denial* finally helps to explain the infamous *value-action gap*. All these examples point to the fact that emotions play a far greater role in climate action than has hitherto been recognised, maybe even more so than information provision:

> We contend that emotions – the affective interpretations attached to sensations – are central to the interpretation of cultural cues, signalling which frames are compatible with deeply held, often embodied beliefs and habits, and which ones would require the undertaking of what Swidler calls 'a drastic and costly cultural retooling' (1986, p. 277).

> Ford and Norgaard, 2019, p. 222

People refusing to contribute to climate action do not generally do this out of spite. In most cases, this flows from a (subconscious) fear of having to go through such uncomfortable cultural retooling.

There is, however, a certain reluctance in politics, society and most notably in science to give more attention to emotions in general, which is precisely why such insights remain masked from our understanding. Emphasising emotions is unpopular, probably for fear of sounding weak, unprofessional, unscientific or even polemical. This is also underlined by the fact that accusing women of behaving or negotiating 'too emotionally' has a history of being used to delegitimise their messages: "Emotion has typically been associated with femininity and irrational, disorganized

behavior" (MacArthur & Shields, 2015, p. 40). However, if the role of emotions in the diffusion of responsibility continues being brushed under the carpet, climate action will remain inadequate.

In this context, Norgaard speaks of an observed "public apathy" (2011, p. 348) that stems from overwhelming feelings of helplessness in relation to climate change. As she points out, this collective apathy is increasingly puzzling scholars from different disciplines in the form of the apparent paradox that in Western industrialised countries there exists what Robert Lifton (1982, cited in Norgaard, 2006, p. 357) calls a double reality in relation to climate change: highly educated people simultaneously are well aware of the threats posed by rising temperatures, yet lead their lives as if they had never heard of it. Here, she follows Jennifer Kent: "Because climate change requires so much more than individual action, discourses of individual responsibility, rather than enhancing agency, merely 'alert individuals to their essential ineffectiveness in tackling complex global environmental issues'" (2009, p. 145, cited in Norgaard, 2011, p. 192).

Due to intensified liberalisation of global markets since Reagan and Thatcher, politics has successively shed more and more of its responsibility so that today "we have no politics of climate change" (Giddens, 2009, p. 4, cited in Norgaard, 2011, p. 224). Norgaard thus further criticises existing studies for overlooking the significance of political economy because it provides the background against which cultural norms emerge, thereby also influencing them. Choosing to (not) act upon one's knowledge should instead be deemed a political act, which illustrates once more the inadequacy of such conventional economic approaches like nudging theory. "The barriers to action on climate change are based in the distribution of social power in the economic, political, and cultural spheres. Introducing new messages or information into an otherwise unchanged socio-economic system will accomplish little" (Luke, 2005, cited in Brulle et al., 2012, p. 185). Norgaard similarly concludes that "unless we can also refashion our political and economic systems, we are trapped" (2011, p. 224f.).

Building on these insights, it is vital to also examine 'official' discourses in society and analyse which power structures operate, even if this is often diffuse and difficult to grasp. Antonio Gramsci's (1971) hegemony concept also rests upon the recognition that power is inextricably linked to culture, as Sutton and Norgaard write (cited in Sutton and Norgaard, 2013, p. 498). Privileged social groups in society uphold and secure their dominant status quo by means of subtly generating compliance instead of exerting outright control. They then refer to Eliasoph (1998, p. 233) who defines hegemony as an "ongoing cultural process that gerrymanders the boundary of perception; [...] the way people make sense of everyday experience usually discourages them from thinking thoughts that might challenge the status quo" (ibid., p. 232). Ford and Norgaard also make the following point in relation to this:

> Research that preselects environmental practices takes for granted that all en-
> vironmentally concerned individuals share the political goals of elite-envisioned
> sustainability, such as green development that serves the continuation of modern
> nation-states. But some groups and individuals that are committed to addressing
> climate change are not uniformly aligned to support the continuity and extension
> of the current political economic system.

Ford and Norgaard, 2020, p. 47

Recognising these variations and shedding the assumption that citizens can un-
equivocally be nudged into climate-friendly behaviour (cf. Nerlich et al., 2010;
Suldovsky, 2017) would significantly advance climate action efforts: "One missing
puzzle piece is the acknowledgment that the way people know about climate change
is not uniform but filtered through cultural systems accessed from lived experience
within hierarchical social institutions that sort people by status" (Ford and Nor-
gaard, 2020, p. 44). This is so important because if these differences in the cultural
operation of knowing remain unrecognised, progress remains unlikely: "Power is
contentious and disputed, but has to be included in ways in which knowledge is
produced within the social sciences" (Goldblatt, 2004, p. 125). It must urgently be ac-
knowledged that "changes in knowledge systems and social changes are inextricably
linked" (Foucault, 1977, cited in Goldblatt, 2004, p. 25).

Norgaard goes on to say that in situations where there is no trust in political
structures, the individual's refusal to take responsibility is understandable: "Indi-
vidual apathy is a rational response if there is nowhere to turn" (2011, p. 225). Citing
one of her interviewees, she writes: I feel helpless because I know "I can do these
things on my own every day, like walking, making those choices, but the big envi-
ronmental problems are coming from industry, and I feel like I can't do anything
about that" (ibid., p. 194). Elsewhere she elaborates on the strategy the members of
the Norwegian community employed to make themselves small: "Not every usage of
the phrase 'Norway is a little land' is meant to exempt Norwegians from responsibil-
ity. [...] It implies as well a sense of vulnerability and powerlessness" (ibid., 2011, p.
171).

Consequently, this study integrates these ideas about socially organised denial
of responsibility, efficacy and knowing related to climate change into its own cul-
tural conception and then examines how this varies within German society along
different climate cultures that each share how particular actions are carried out. Ac-
cording to Erhardt-Martinez et al. (2015, cited in Norgaard, 2018, p. 3), "social or-
ganization and culture produce variation in values among stakeholders and deci-
sion makers, variation in the perception of risks and uncertainties, differences in
costs and benefits, and variation in the capacity of decision makers to implement
mitigation policies" (see also Beck, 1992; Fisher, 2006; Roberts and Parks, 2006). A

principal recognition of the true diversity that characterises climate-related think-ing and practice in different social spheres allows, it is argued, the development of more nuanced exchange and more effective (and, certainly and importantly, dual) communication between decision-makers and civil society. In relation to climate change, there often seems to exist some form of 'unwritten law' that functions as absolution not to put one's knowledge into practice. Therefore, Norgaard suggests: "Even talking about climate change with family and friends is an important way to break cultural norms of silence" (2018, p. 4). How this 'unwritten law' is sometimes ratified in one group whilst action is taken in another embodies the central focus of this analysis. Accordingly, knowledge about climate change is in fact processed in the majority of the cultural segments of society, yet consequential actions are often not taken.

Acknowledging the denial that is implicit in such looking the other way allows for the following consideration: perhaps, factual knowledge is rather secondary, and it may prove more conducive to focus on what is being valued as *legitimate knowledge* in certain circles and what does not gain such recognition, by contrast.

According to Nerlich et al., risks to humanity presented by climate change are still being interpreted as 'virtual' by some segments of society which "turns climate change from a purely scientific phenomenon into a cultural one" (2010, p. 2). This helps explain why climate action still remains inadequate even though it has been such a topical issue in recent years:

> Culture shapes how individuals see the world, and how they feel about what they see. And culture is anything but rational! Emotional relationships to culture can help us understand why some people outright deny climate change, while others live in fear of it, but do nothing to change its trajectory, and still others challenge the social systems that cause climate change, fighting passionately against injustices to overturn inequality.

> Ford and Norgaard, 2019, p. 220f.

The idea that there are different types of culturally contingent denial also reiterates what Bieling has found: "In contrast to the relatively coherent world view of the con-ceptual and opinion forming intellectuals, the everyday awareness of the general population presents itself in many ways as incoherent and fragmented as it con-sists both of conservative-conformist and resistant-rebellious, innovative aspects and those that push beyond the status quo" (2014, p. 195f.). Ultimately, a certain way to behave remains acceptable as long the social circles that carry the most impor-tance in the eyes of the practitioner do not openly sanction it. Therefore, it must be recognised that "climate impacts are varied not only along dimensions of inequality

and vulnerability, but are also a function of interaction between material impacts and their cultural interpretations" (Norgaard, 2018, p. 3).

Therefore, this type of socially organised denial manifests differently in different societal circles. Using the concept of *climate cultures*, this study thus captures varying constellations of how responsibility, efficacy and knowing are handled, which is outlined next.

2.6 Divergent cultures of climate action and denial

Although fundamental to public opinion and political (in)action regarding climate change, culture remains a marginal concept in climate change research. Each climate culture will transport its own idiosyncratic norms regarding attributed or experienced responsibility, its individual or collective expressions, its efficacy expectations and its actual contribution to climate action. This occurs in the carrying-out of particular practices.

This overall ignorance of cultural phenomena partly relates to their ubiquity, as well as the relative resistance of culture to conventional scientific definition and measurement. As Mike Hulme (2016) puts it, "culture, just like climate, is hard to see and harder to measure" (p. 6). Thus, most media coverage and public debates concerning climate change tend to be 'culturally blind', too, in addition to ignoring pressing social problems arising from a changing climate such as resource scarcity, poverty and forced migration. Culture is thus conceptualised as an inherently social phenomenon that shapes and reflects social interaction within groups and communities: "Rather than being idiosyncratic, cultures of emotion are structured by social norms and expectations" (Ford and Norgaard, 2019, p. 221).

Given this inherent difficulty in investigating culture, continued cultural blindness in research on climate action coincides with profound neglect of people's everyday experiences and daily practices that characterises debates on environmental challenges more generally, and climate change in particular. This reluctance to 'mind the mundane' (Rau, 2018) means that much climate change communication actually serves to disengage citizens (Fox and Rau, 2017). This includes fear-inducing catastrophic and apocalyptic messages that incorporate a rather limited view of human agency and that may thus prevent public climate action (cf. Kundzewicz et al., 2020 for a recent discussion of this particular issue). Importantly for the present argument, such a perspective completely ignores lived experiences of climate responsibility and of individual and collective efficacy.

In the tradition of Bourdieu and leaning heavily on Norgaard, conventional linear concepts of knowing are replaced with a conception that explicitly recognises the multi-directionality of knowledge creation and –transfer that manifests through culture. "Cultural frames, selective interpretative schema that simplify and