

Rebel with a cause

The Framing of Climate Change and Intergenerational Justice in the German press treatment of the Fridays for Future protests

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We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors. We borrow it from our children.”
(Wendell Berry, 1971)

In August 2018, 16-year old Greta Thunberg refused to go to school and started protesting in front of the Swedish Parliament building. With her sign ‘school strike for the climate’ she accused the Swedish government of failing to uphold the goals of the Paris accord and demanded radical action to prevent global warming. The young girl soon caught international media attention and since then, her continuous strikes almost every Friday have inspired a global youth movement.

The global rise in temperature of 1.5° C above pre-industrial level will lead to substantial “impacts on ecosystems, human health and well-being” (IPCC special report 2018) and it is today’s children who will be most vulnerable to these impacts (Guillemot 2019). Children make up over 30% of the world’s population¹ and an estimated number of 175 million of them a year will be affected by climate-related disasters within the next ten years. This problem is summed up under the concept of intergenerational justice according to which children have to bear the costs of environmental pollution caused by older generations (UNICEF UK report 2010). Since children cannot legally take part in political decision making, this adds up to the “age-old political problem, where marginalized citizens and those living in distant places and times are materially and existentially threatened by the decisions and actions of other individuals, companies, or states” (O’Brien et al. 2018: 22). Although the consequences of climate change for children are known, they are still largely absent from the “forefront of climate change policy, advocacy and research” (Guillemot 2019) and political action to effectively limit global warming is scarce. Only 16 out of 197 countries are currently meeting the climate goals of the Paris agreement, amongst them only three industrialized nations of the Global North who are keeping up with their historic responsibility as main energy consumers (Nachmany and Mangan 2018, Santarius 2007). Various studies on the current public and media discourse on climate change and its consequences seem to confirm that the current framing of climate change in the media feeds into the political lack of climate mitigation action (Oels 2015; Methmann and Oels 2015).

It is clear that in recent months *Fridays for Future* -the global youth movement that brings together the issue of intergenerational justice and climate change- has become the focus of media attention. Holding political and economic power elites of the industrialized nations

¹ Children will be defined according to the UN Convention on the Rights of children (CRC) as “a person between the ages of 0-18”, including youth until the age of 25 (Guillemot 2019)

accountable, children worldwide demand a radical change of our political and economic system (Cannon 2019) “to safeguard the future living conditions for human kind” (Thunberg 2019). Mass media coverage of the *Fridays for Future* strikes will consequently have a crucial impact on how the issue of intergenerational climate justice and global warming is framed, understood and securitized as an issue of political importance. By looking at the media coverage of the *Fridays for Future* protests in the German newspapers *Zeit Online*, *FAZ.net* and *Bild.de* from August 2018 until March 2019, this study seeks to understand in what ways the *Friday for Future* protests are framed in the mass media, and to find out what this implicates for the direction of the larger discourse on climate change.

Theoretical Outline

>>> [Fig. 1]<<<

To identify the empirical research and theories related to the *Friday for Future* protest, it is helpful to look at the issues the protests combine and address (Fig. 1). The article begins by presenting the theories informing this study -such as framing theory and intergenerational justice- before approaching the latest research intersecting at the movement’s core: the media representation on climate change discourse, social protest and children. Then, the methodological design, the research questions and the sample are explained and the quantitative and qualitative results of the analysis are discussed. Due to the recent nature of the *Fridays for Future* protest, research exploring the intersection between climate change, intergenerational justice, social protest and political illegitimacy in the media is scarce. Therefore, one of the driving forces behind this study is to fill this gap and bring attention to the urgent issue of intergenerational climate injustice through the influential gaze of the mass media.

Framing Theory, Media and Power

As the “primary source of information on complex political issues for the average citizen” (Merkley and Stecula 2019: 1) the mass media play an important role in shaping public opinion (Hasebrink 2016). By selecting what becomes news and by presenting news in a certain way, mass media not only set the agenda of what we think about but also influence how we think about a certain topic (McCombs and Shaw 1972). Framing theory describes the theoretical concept of making “some aspects of a perceived reality [...] more salient in a communicating text” (Entman 1993, 51). During the framing process, certain aspects of a topic are highlighted and explicitly or implicitly interlinked, offering the recipient an interpretation of the problem, its cause, its moral evaluation and its solution (Kühne 2013, Schenk 2007, Scheufele 2003).

Since the *Fridays for Future* protests represent a complex intersection between climate change, intergenerational justice, social protest and political participation, they are very likely to be framed in different ways. What goes into a frame, however, is not only decided by the media, but also by “economic and political elites [...] [who use information] to reinforce ideas and interpretations of events that support existing power structures” (Smith et al. 2001: 1403; McCurdy 2012: 246). Since mass media do not only reflect but also actively “contribute to the creation of public discourse and understanding”, they cannot be “separated from economic and political systems” (Hoeg 2017, 3). Instead, media are prone to culturally reproduce these broader economic and political “power relationships” or, in other words, the “hegemonic ideology” (Curran 1982: 227). An event like the *Fridays for Future* demonstrations, which threatens these existing power relations through their demands, may be framed in a way that “marginalize[s] or otherwise de-politicize[s] their messages” (Smith et al, 2001: 1404). This is often achieved through an episodic rather than a thematic framing of the respective issue. Episodic news frames focus entirely on the event itself without providing the larger context or structural and systematic explanations for a system-critical issue (Iyengar 1991: 14).

Intergenerational Justice

Climate change is a global threat that will affect all of us, but it will not affect everyone equally. Over the last few years, various studies (Hoeg and Tulloch 2018; Methmann 2014, Methmann and Oels 2015) have brought attention to the “geographical injustice of climate change” (UNICEF UK 2010), a concept which addresses the uneven distribution of climate change impacts caused by the global North-South divide. The climate injustice between generations however has remained largely invisible (UNICEF UK 2010; O’Brien et al. 2018; Guillemot 2019; Gossieres and Meyer 2009; Mintzer 2001; Brown Weiss 1992). Scholars differentiate between two types of generational inequality: Synchronic inequality describes the injustice of challenges and opportunities enjoyed “between people of different ages in any given moment of time” (UNICEF UK 2010, 7). The IPCC reports show that in 30 years, the generation of the *Friday for Future* protesters will face severe impacts of climate change in economic, social, environmental and health related terms (O’Brien et al. 2018). Considering the issue of geographical injustice, these impacts will be even greater for children and future generations from the Global South. Diachronic inequality on the other hand refers to the accumulation of CO₂ emissions over time, limiting the life choices for children in high-income countries and threatening the survival of children in low and middle-income countries.

Looking at climate change from a perspective of intergenerational justice, it seems clear that the current lack of climate mitigation action will significantly curtail the rights of children as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of Children (Guillemot 2018). Although ratified by

as many as 193 states and stated in the IPCC report of 2014 as well as in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from 1992 (Davidson 2017), the idea of taking intergenerational responsibility has not yet been reflected in current climate change policies or debate and the focus of climate action policies remains short-termed (UNICEF UK 2010; Guillemot 2018). Since children under 18 cannot legally take part in political decision-making, the mass media play a crucial role in representing their demands within the public and political discourse. A framing of climate change in terms of children's rights could consequently foster the idea of climate change as a longer-term issue, which demands long-term strategies. This would mean addressing the root cause of global warming, rather than concentrating on short-term strategies of adaptation that solely uphold the hegemonic status quo (Kunreuther 2015).

Current climate change discourse in the media

Media and public discourse on climate change has shifted in recent years (Oels and Methmann 2015; Høeg and Tulloch 2018.) Whereas climate change is framed as a “potentially apocalyptic threat” that can “strike anytime, anywhere, hitting almost everyone” (Methmann 2014: 427), those affected by climate change, such as climate refugees, are de-agentalized, framed as passive victims, security threats, abstractions and rarely as activists. Those aspects combined offer a frame that suggests that mitigation action to stop global warming is impossible. Instead, climate resilience or adaptation is fostered.

The strategy of climate mitigation is defined as the “anthropogenic intervention to reduce the sources of greenhouse gases” (IPCC 2014). It offers a long-term solution by addressing the cause of global warming. Climate adaptation on the other hand, refers to the “adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects” (ibid.). As such, it offers a short-term solution that responds to the effects of climate change rather than its causes. This bears the risk of “depoliticizing the issue of global warming [and] makes those affected by it responsible for their own survival” (Methmann 2014, 416). By doing so, the political space for offering solutions and addressing the structural root cause of climate change, is ignored (Methmann and Oels 2015, 51). This in turn “allows powerful, polluting people to avoid taking responsibility for their actions on a global scale” (Høeg 2017, 34).

Xuksa Kramcsak-Muñoz suggests that the *Friday for Future* protests symbolize a change within the current environmental discourse. By demanding alternatives to the hegemonic ideology of the neoliberal capital system, the movement is calling for a change in the current social and economic structures. This “radical new discourse” is not looking for short-term environmental-friendly solutions of adaptation within the current system, but promotes a long-

term mitigation approach to changing the status quo. If the media frames the *Friday for Future* movement in such a way, we may speak of a shift in the media discourse on climate change towards mitigation. Doubts remain however as to whether the mass media will support a movement that threatens consolidated hegemonic power relationships.

Social Movements in the Media: The Protest Paradigm

Previous literature identified certain patterns in the media coverage of social protests, summed up under the concept of the “protest paradigm” (Lee 2014, McLeod and Hertog 1999). According to the protest paradigm, news frames of protests are more episodic than thematic, thus reducing protests to an event, rather than focusing “on the issues the movement seeks to address” (Smith et al. 2001; Iyengar 1991). This lack of context and meaning in turn delegitimizes, de-emphasizes and marginalizes the protest and fails to provide recipients with a “systematic explanation for social problems...” which is necessary to “mobilize and motivate adherents” (ibid.). Furthermore, coverage often relies on official sources and definitions. By narrating social protest from the perspective of the powerful, perspectives that challenge the latter and existing power-relations are downplayed (McLeod 2007: 187). Coverage further tends to demonize protests, by focusing on the negative consequences the protest might entail. Mainstream media coverage on social protest thus “generally disparages protesters and hinders their role as vital actors on the political stage” (McLeod 2007:185; McCurdy, 2011; Smith et al. 2001: 1403-1415). The more threatening the demands of a social movement are to the “existing socioeconomic order and the more protests apply tactics which ‘violate social norms’” (McLeod 2007, 188), the less favorable news coverage will be and the more it will adhere to the patterns of the protest paradigm. Subsequently, coverage on protests whose goals are not radical and do not involve militant action deviates from the protest paradigm. *Fridays for Future* certainly represents a social protest whose demands to stop global warming are radical (Cannon 2019). This logic would lead us to expect that the protest paradigm must apply to its corresponding media coverage. However, the tactics of the movement are peaceful, do not violate social norms and most importantly, are carried out by actors that are politically deemed to be illegitimate: children.

Children and Youth in the Media: Political Illegitimacy and Activism

Since children have no legal right to political participation, they are considered illegitimate political actors (Kettrey 2018: 349) and their voices are often absent from media coverage (Vlad 2017: 120). International studies conclude that children are often stereotyped and perceived as problems and omit reference to their civic engagement (ibid: 119). A study by Bird and Rahfaldt (2011) on the representation of children in South African news media shows that children's roles are limited and they are often portrayed as victims and mostly featured in

negative stories about crime or disaster (Bird and Rahfaldt 2011, 55). Scholars agree that this may reinforce the idea “that children are not active members of society [...]” (Vlad 2017: 55) and downgrades them to being “mere objects with little to say”.

When these illegitimate political actors engage in political action through social protest, how does this affect media coverage? Kettrey (2018) argues that the legitimacy accorded to protesters changes the way in which the news media displays variations of the protest paradigm. While previous research on the media coverage of youth activism is limited, it does show that the perceived illegitimacy of youth activists both guarantees them a voice in the news media, but at the same time is used to undermine their political agency (ibid. 361). Youth voices are limited to “apolitical personal testimonies” and youth activists are indirectly delegitimized by disparaging a sub-group of legitimate actors instead. This makes it possible to “discredit an activist group as a whole, without targeting those who may be viewed as vulnerable by the general public” (ibid.). By doing so news media portray youth activists as being exploited by the political agenda of adults, thus further undermining their political agency and thus the movement itself.

Research Questions

The question that emerges from the academic literature surrounding this issue is whether the framing of the *Friday’s for Future* movement (A) as a social protest (2.1) acted out by illegitimate actors (3.1) most vulnerable to climate change (B) and who demand radical alternatives by openly addressing economic and political power elites, will feed into the current climate change discourse of de-politicization and adaptation (1.1), or run against it (B) (Fig.2).

>>>> [Fig. 2] <<<<<

Based on the theoretical framework outlined previously and in the specific case of the German press the research questions are as follows:

RQ1. *How are the protesters represented?*

RQ2. *How are the demands and accusations of the protesters represented and evaluated?*

RQ3. *How is the Fridays for Future movement represented in the wider media discourse on climate change?*

RQ4. *Does the overall media framing of the Friday for Future movement differ from newspaper to newspaper? If so, how?*

RQ5. *Does the overall framing of the Friday for Future movement change over time?*

Methodology

This study considers the media coverage of the *Fridays for Future* protests in all news articles and editorials of the online content of the German newspapers *Zeit Online* and *FAZ.net* along with the tabloid newspaper *Bild.de* from the emergence of the movement in August 20, 2018 to March 30, 2019 shortly after the first Global Strike for Future. All chosen newspapers are national dailies, available to readers throughout Germany.

Germany is amongst the countries with the largest *Fridays for Future* protests (Tagesschau 2019). The heightened media attention of the German media thus provides a solid base for analysis. To avoid description bias, three news publications have been chosen to provide “multiple accounts of collective action groups/events” (Kettrey 2016, 353-354) that guarantee “veracity of coverage” (ibid., 353). Consequently, *Zeit Online*, *FAZ.net* and *Bild.de* have been identified as subjects of analysis. According to the *Informationsgesellschaft zur Verbreitung von Werbeträgern*, they do not only represent the three German newspapers with the widest online circulation range (FAZ 2018, Springer 2012), but also, as quality and tabloid newspapers, they adopt different editorial approaches (Kettrey 2018, 354) and show varying political leanings. *Zeit Online* leans towards the liberal left, *FAZ.net* is regarded to be center right and *Bild.de* is conservative (Eurotopics 2019). Additionally, all newspapers are published in different major German cities, which avoids capital centric coverage. Both the different editorial approaches and the chosen time period will allow the analysis to identify a possible heterogeneous number of frames, as well as to take into account if and how frames changed over time.

Through a keyword search on the respective online pages, all publicly available news articles posted under the keywords: ‘Fridays for Future’, ‘Schulstreik’, ‘Klimastreik’, or ‘Greta Thunberg’ from August 20, 2018 until March 30, 2019, were chosen as the corpus of analysis. The sample includes articles only available through archive, or premium access. Apart from straight news pieces, editorials were added. As “the news of ideas” (Rivera 2018), editorials represent the newspapers’ opinion, aim to convince the reader “of a different argument or even persuade you to take action” (ibid.). Hence, they provide an ideal subject for identifying underlying frames. Since the focus of the analysis lies on the textual framing and not on the visual discourse, videos have been excluded. Lead images are included in the analysis as part of the respective articles’ wider text. Opinion articles have also been eliminated from the sample, hence they “are contributed by people from outside the paper and represent their own views” (New York Times 2005). Guest contributions, giving voice to *Fridays for Future* protestors, or politicians, listed as news pieces outside the opinion section were also included, since it can be assumed that these possibly reflect the broader views of the respective

newspaper. All articles and editorials that do not directly refer to the strikes itself as main topic of the article have been excluded. This was done to narrow down the focus of the framing analysis to the *Fridays for Future* movement and lead to the following sample of news articles (Fig. 3):

>>>> [Fig. 3] <<<<

The research technique applied to collect data from the chosen sample is a structured qualitative content analysis, based on Kuckartz (2016) and Altheide (2000). Through the “discovery [...] description [...] [and] search for underlying meanings, patterns, and processes” of a document” (ibid.), qualitative content analysis helps to identify “how events and issues are packaged and presented to audience members” (Altheide, 192). Since the purpose of this study is to analyze how the *Fridays for Future* protests are framed in German news media, applying a qualitative content analysis to look at the way this issue is placed in context, and what themes, frames, and discourses are being presented is useful. In line with Kuckartz (2016), the study did not only build categories inductively from within the analyzed news articles but also reduced and structured the material through thematic main categories. Whereas quantitative categories collected formal data such as date, length, section, format or sources, qualitative categories aimed to answer the question of *how* the *Fridays for Future* movement is represented in the selected media outlets. Qualitative categories were organized into main and sub-categories. Main categories were based deductively on the findings drawn from prior research and research questions RQ1 - RQ5. They encompassed the representation of the protesters (MC I), their demands and accusation (MC II) and the representation of climate change (MC III). Each main category is followed by several sub-categories (Fig .4).

>>>> [Fig. 4] <<<<

Results

Quantitative findings were presented and evaluated to provide a more general overview over the representation of *Fridays for Future* in the three different media outlets. Qualitative findings are structured following the five research questions and present the eight major frames used to represent the *Fridays for Future* protests within media coverage. The identified frames were the result of the combinations of how protesters, their demands and accusations, climate change and the protests itself, have been highlighted, downplayed and interlinked within each article. Besides the evaluation of the occurrence of these frames in *Zeit Online*, *Bild.de* and *FAZ.net*, the individual components within the eight frames are evaluated separately, to

ensure a more detailed response to the research question. To consider if and how the overall media framing of the Friday for Future movement differs from newspaper to newspaper, the results of each media outlet are always compared to each other. Examples illustrating the findings will be referred to by their respective case number, for instance B1 (*Bild.de*, article 1), F1 (*FAZ.net*, article1), Z1 (*Zeit Online*, article 1).

Evaluation of quantitative findings

Length of coverage

Looking at the editorial approach and the political position of each newspaper, it becomes clear that *Zeit Online*, as a liberal-left outlet, provides in-depth coverage of the system-challenging protest (20 articles, average word count per article: 858 words). *FAZ.net*, as a conservative broadsheet, provides a large amount of articles (31), although many articles are short in word count and remain superficial (average 656 words). *Bild.de* follows tabloid length parameters and offers short stories (34 articles: average word count 367 words).

Temporal distribution of coverage

>>>> Fig. 5 <<<<<

Thunberg started her 'school strike for the future' on Monday, August 20, 2018 in Stockholm, Sweden. The first school climate strikes take place in Germany in September. Whereas Thunberg continues her strikes regularly every Friday, *Fridays for Future* branches in Germany strike sporadically on December 14, 2018 until they begin striking every Friday from January 18th, 2019 onwards (Tagesschau 2019; Fridays for Future 2019; Hendrischke 2019). Although German pupils strike weekly in several cities with 30,000 participants in January and over 60,000 participants in February, media coverage remains largely absent. Whereas the lack of media coverage in August and September may be explained due to the holiday season (Orzessek 2018) and the sporadic nature of the strikes in Germany, the lack of media coverage during January and February hints towards the fact, that *Fridays for Future* is downplayed and ignored by the media during these months (Fig.5). In March 2019, coverage begins to rise significantly for the first time and reaches a peak on March 15, 2019, when over 300,000 pupils in Germany participate on the first global *Fridays for Future* strike.

News sections and Format

>>>> Fig. 6 <<<<<

Most articles within all three media outlets belong to the 'domestic politics' or 'foreign affairs' sections thus placing the *Fridays for Future* protests in the context of a political issue (Fig. 6). Articles from *Bild.de* are found in the section 'regional news' focusing on the atomised protests of the various federal states. What is striking here, is the categorization of the FFF stories in *Zeit Online*. Most news articles from *Zeit Online* fall under the category 'society' (7) and 'other' (6) which mainly encompass articles from the section 'opportunities'. Both, 'society' and 'opportunities' are sections that focus on issues within society, including school and education, current events and news from universities and the scientific community. On the one hand, regarding the protests as a topic of education, science or society acknowledges the fact that climate change is an issue that affects society while on the other it eliminates the political sphere necessary to discuss the issue of *Fridays for Future* and intergenerational justice as one with potential policy-making implications.

Focus and iconic representation

Bild.de (21 to 13) and *Zeit Online* (14 to 6) are mainly "protest-centric", meaning the individual article focuses on the protests, rather than on Greta Thunberg ("Greta-centric"). *FAZ.net* on the other hand focuses equally on both Thunberg and the protests with a slight tendency towards Greta-centric coverage (14 to 17). The focus of the article and the accompanying lead picture are identical in most cases. Articles that mainly deal with Thunberg are usually accompanied by her picture. Articles that focus on the protests are mostly accompanied by images of the protests. However, there are two ways in which the protests are visually represented. Images either show a smaller group of protesters, where faces can be clearly identified (17 images), or an anonymous mass of people, displaying aggressive behavior and often photographed from a bird's eye perspective (21 images). *Bild.de* often uses the image of the anonymous protesting mass. *FAZ* on the other hand, prefers images of smaller groups or portraits of Thunberg. *Zeit* remains mostly balanced. The distribution of the different visual categories is strongly connected to the frames applied by the respective news media. Amongst all the images on a topic related to global warming, only one image shows the consequences of climate change (B1). Climate change, the very issue the movement aims to raise awareness for, consequently remains literally invisible.

Sources: Who gets to speak?

>>>> Fig. 7 <<<<

The distribution of sources clearly repeats what previous research found. As Kettrey (2018) shows in her study on media coverage on youth activism, the perceived illegitimacy of young activists guarantees them a voice in the news media (ibid., 361). In all three news media the

sources who, directly or indirectly, get to speak the most, are the *Friday for Future* protesters (58 out of 147 sources). The second largest group that gets to voice an opinion however, are politicians, followed by experts, education officials and police statements. Grouped together, these sources are almost cited as many times as the protesters (54 vs. 58), which indicates that the overall media coverage of the climate demonstration still adheres to the protest paradigm by strongly focusing on official sources (Smith et al. 2001, 1404). Quantitative results have thus given a first indication on how the *Fridays for Future* movement is framed in the German media. The evaluation of the qualitative results will now show, whether the perceived illegitimacy of the protesters is used to undermine their political agency and whether the movements agenda is marginalized or not.

Qualitative findings: Introduction of Frames

Eight distinct frames, containing combinations of protester, agenda, movement and climate change representation on a visual and textual level have been identified.

>>>> [Fig. 8] <<<<

David vs. Goliath Frame

The David vs. Goliath Frame visually and textually focuses on Greta Thunberg. Thunberg, is represented as the little girl “dressed in a simple blouse, with messy hair that are braided into two long pigtailed over her shoulder” (B2). She is often compared to childhood hero Pippi Longstocking (B5) as an innocent but fierce role model that fights against big business and lying politicians (B8). Coverage often refers to her background story of getting depressed by climate change, being diagnosed with Asperger and overcoming this depression by initiating the school strike against global warming. By doing so, the strike is reduced to a personal testimony, rather than a political movement. Whereas the definition of the *FFF* movement itself remains largely neutral on a textual level (“strike”, “demo”), her demands and accusations are systemic and strongly refer to intergenerational justice and strategies of climate change mitigation. The “lying and power hungry” (B2) global elite with their “utopia of green economic growth” (B2) are made responsible for global warming and are accused of “stealing children’s future and ignoring children’s rights” (ibid.). In line with that, climate change is also framed in terms of intergenerational justice/mitigation policies and introduced as a systemic issue of children’s rights, stressing the responsibility of the Global North. “Some people say we have caused the climate crisis altogether, but that’s just a comfortable lie. Because when we are all responsible, nobody is. But there are culprits [...]” (Z1). Although climate change is framed as intergenerational justice, solutions both systemic and individual are either deemed hopeless, too difficult to achieve, or involve too much personal sacrifice. By portraying the small childlike

protester against the big bad global elite, the political space for taking concrete climate mitigation action is eliminated.

Activist/ Intergenerational Justice Frame

The Activist or Intergenerational Justice frame is mostly protest centric and represents climate activists as possessing self-agency. Articles are often accompanied by images showing groups of protesters, where faces are clearly identifiable. The definition of the movement remains neutral (“protests”, “demonstrations”, “global movement”), or adds to the activist frame by describing it as a “courageous fight” (B23). Other articles directly bring in the intergenerational justice component: “pupils have a right to take part in the discussion of what kind of earth they want, because they inherit the earth” (F21). Demands and accusations are both framed in terms of intergenerational justice or climate mitigation action.

In contrast to the *David vs. Goliath* frame, systemic solutions are evaluated as achievable. Thus, climate change and *Fridays for Future* are given a political dimension in which climate mitigation action is possible.

Truancy Frame

This frame directly disparages the protesters by referring to them as truants with dubious motives. In some cases, they are represented as followers of Thunberg who are forced to play truant or are portrayed as apolitical or unprofessional, thus further undermining their self-agency (B10, B11, B16, F12, F19). Articles are often accompanied by images of an anonymous mass and protesters are further referred to in numbers, e.g. “10.000 play truant” (B16), thus de-individualizing the protester and limiting the transference of sympathy. The protests refer to the negative consequences of truancy. “Every time students miss school, this will be mentioned in their school certificate which makes it hard for them to find a job or go to university” (B25). The political agenda of the protesters is completely marginalized while their demands and accusations are either missing or presented as vague and apolitical. The same pattern can be found for climate change. Instead of climate action *FFF* is fully reframed as a controversial debate about truancy with various politicians and official sources arguing about compulsory education. The *Truancy Frame* is an excellent example of a kind of coverage that strongly adheres to the protest paradigm.

Threat Frame

The *Threat frame* represents the protest as a threat to the existing political and socio-economic order and reacts accordingly. Protesters are mostly disparaged as truants exploited by an adult agenda and the movement itself is classified as the “protest generation”, a “protest wave”, or a suddenly “politicized youth” that will “interfere in politics on all levels” (B20, B22).

Consequently, they are regarded as a potential threat. The demands and accusations are addressed in most cases, but at the same time undermined, criticized or reinterpreted in a way that maintains the status quo:

Greta's strategy to demand radical change will lead to more defense about climate change because it is obtrusive and leads to aversion [...] The market of possibilities has to rule. [...] politics is the freedom of society to find the right path (F15).

Activist without Activism Frame

This frame is closely linked to the findings of Kettrey (2018). While protesters are guaranteed a voice in coverage, this remains largely apolitical and is limited to personal testimonies. However, in contrast to her conclusions, protesters are not always undermined or presented without self-agency, but mostly neutral. Demands and accusations are either completely absent or remain empty and vague: "It's Yuri's first time on a demonstration. I am a little excited about what songs they will chant" (Z3), "which socks are the warmest to wear on a cold demonstration day?" (ibid.) A good example is the coverage of Thunberg's nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. While *Fridays for Future* is praised as an important contribution to peace all the reader gets to know about the movement's agenda is that it advocates for "more climate protection through politics" (F20) and that climate change will lead to "war and conflicts worldwide" (ibis.). Solutions, specific demands and political accusations are absent, marginalizing the political agenda.

Activism without Activists

This frame is the mirror version of the *Activist without Activism Frame* above where the representation of protesters and the representation of the political agenda are reversed. The protesters are disparaged and their self-agency is undermined by framing them as truants or as being exploited by an adult agenda. The content of the protests is framed in terms of Intergenerational justice. Compared to the agenda that can be found in an Activist frame content is vaguer and solutions for climate change are in most cases completely absent (F8).

Hamelin Frame

The focus of this frame often lies on the relationship between Thunberg and her "followers" (F13). Thunberg is labeled a 'popstar', a 'phenomenon' or an 'eco-celebrity' (ibid.) and is admired by her fans, "primary school kids who call Thunberg's name, push through the crowd to sneak a peek at their idol" (F20). The protests itself are often represented as performances (F13) rather than demonstrations. Accusations and demands remain apolitical and vague or, as *Zeit Online* puts it: "What she says drowns in the frantic cheers of the crowd" (Z20). Climate change is vague referred to as "climate protection measures" (ibid.). The *Hamelin Frame* is

often accompanied by images of Thunberg. The frame reduces the political movement to an event-centric coverage about a climate celebrity and her apolitical, truant fans.

Distribution of frames in Bild.de, Zeit Online and FAZ.net

Bild.de

>>>> (Fig.9) <<<<

The coverage of the conservative tabloid *Bild.de* shows a strong tendency towards the *Truancy Frame* (Fig. 9). Every third *Bild* article frames the *Fridays for Future* movements in terms of school absences (11/34). Disparaged as truants with questionable motives, protesters lack self-agency and are demonized. Furthermore, the *Truancy Frame* enables *Bild* to undermine protests by focusing on the negative consequences of the strikes. Demands and accusation are consequently marginalized over the question “Is truancy allowed when it’s for the climate?” (B6, Headline). This shifts the focus away from the root cause of the movement as an issue of intergenerational justice and towards educational politics. Debating about compulsory education, rather than dealing with climate mitigation action, successfully eliminates the political potential of the movement to threaten hegemonic power relations.

The second frame most used by *Bild* is the *David vs. Goliath Frame* (6 out of 34 articles). These articles are some of the few which represent the protest’s political agenda in terms of intergenerational climate justice. On the one hand, this framing provides structural and systematic explanations for a system-critical issue (Iyengar 1991) while on the other, the indirect disparagement of Thunberg as the innocent little girl fighting against an undefeatable opponent is something that is repeated by evaluating climate mitigation action to be unachievable. This once again contradicts the political agenda. Most articles undermine the protests and the protesters self-agency and depoliticizes demands and accusations.

Zeit Online

>>> (Fig. 10) <<<<

In contrast to the coverage of *Bild*, *Zeit Online* primarily applies the *Activist/ Intergenerational Justice Frame* (Fig. 10). In 8 out of 20 articles, *Fridays for Future* is framed in a way that fosters intergenerational justice. 40% of the total number of articles depict protesters with self-agency and the movement itself is often described with neutral labels such as “strike”, “demonstration”, or “protest” (Z11, Z14). More than half of the demands and accusations made are of a strictly political nature meaning that the economic elites of the Global North are held accountable for

depriving children of their future through the lack of climate mitigation action. Global warming is understood as an issue of children's rights and in contrast to *Bild.de* and *FAZ.net* system change is considered achievable (35%).

Linking the choice of news sections to the qualitative distribution of frames leads to an interesting finding. Six of the 8 articles matching the *Activist Frame* are placed under 'Society' or 'Opportunities'. While this may represent the idea of intergenerational justice as an issue that will affect society, it simultaneously leads to the elimination of the context to a frame which precisely aims to politicize the issue of *Fridays for Future*. In addition to that, 7 out of 20 articles still apply framing techniques which undermine and marginalize protesters and their agenda.

FAZ.net

>>>> (Fig. 11) <<<<

The *FAZ* seems to display every frame in almost equal fashion. A broader look at the frames however reveals that the vast majority of them undermine the self-agency of the protester and/or marginalize the political agenda (23 out of 31). Only 5 articles out of 31 frame *Fridays for Future* in such a way that fosters intergenerational justice (4 *Activist*, 1 *David vs. Goliath*). Whereas the disparagement shown by *Bild* is stronger, especially regarding the *Truancy Frame*, *FAZ* actually shows the same level of protester criticism (76% vs. 73%). The difference is that the conservative broadsheet is subtler in the way it undermines the protesters' self-agency. Instead of direct disparagement, every second article adheres to indirect patterns of disparagement, such as displaced disparagement or by representing the protesters as being exploited by an adult agenda (19,4%). Whereas *Bild.de* often depicts an anonymous mass of protesters, *FAZ*'s indirect disparagement is often accompanied by images of individual protesters. *FAZ* is the newspaper which most marginalizes the political agenda of the protest. 86% of its coverage represents demands and accusation of protesters in an apolitical and vague fashion or does not represent them at all. Thus, it fails to provide recipients with a systematic explanation for the social problem behind the *Fridays for Future* movement.

A final look at the use of the *Threat Frame* reveals that, compared to *Zeit Online* and *Bild.de*, *FAZ.net* is much more aggressive in the way it reframes and criticizes demands of intergenerational climate justice and system critical accusations. Children's call for more climate mitigation is evaluated as scaremongering (F15). This opinion about climate mitigation also shows in the depiction of climate change: In 80% of the articles global warming is not mentioned or remains apolitical.

Discussion

The three German media outlets under analysis differ in their representation of climate change protesters and their demands and accusations. *Bild.de* directly disparages demonstrators and their movement. By reframing *Fridays for Future* as a debate about truancy, the top-selling tabloid successfully eliminates the political implication of climate change by discussing the protest as a politico-educational issue. *FAZ* remains subtler in its disparagement. Nevertheless, its episodic coverage reveals a variety of frames that undermines either the protesters, their political agenda, or both. In this sense, *FAZ.net* shows itself to be the newspaper most interested in preserving existing economic and political power relations. *Zeit Online* differs from the other two media outlets. Here, frames prevail that represent protesters with self-agency and depicts their agenda and climate change in general in terms of intergenerational justice. However, categorizing these articles under labels such as “Society”, or “Opportunities” eliminates the political capacity for addressing these grievances. Looking at the overall distribution of frames across the different media outlets leads to the following conclusions:

>>>> [Fig 12] <<<<

The *Truancy Frame* and the *Activist Frame* are the ones used most widely across the three media outlets. At first glance, this may suggest that overall media coverage of *Fridays for Future* in the German press oscillates between an intergenerational justice frame and one that strongly adheres to the protest paradigm. When reorganizing these frames in terms of those which foster intergenerational justice versus those who undermine protesters and/or their political agenda, a different picture emerges. Frames that foster intergenerational climate justice and adequately represent the protesters’ political agenda are only visible in 21 out of 85 articles. Excluding the *David vs. Goliath Frame*, which can be seen as indirectly disparaging the protesters, the number of articles goes even further down, to 13 out of 85. This means that although being guaranteed a voice in media coverage, two out of every three articles (58/85) undermine the protesters self-agency through direct or indirect disparagement, or by portraying the protester as exploited by adult agenda and marginalize or de-politicize the protesters’ demands and accusations.

What the quantitative findings on the use of official sources (56 vs. 58) hint at can be confirmed through the evaluation of frames. By narrating social protest from the perspective of the powerful, perspectives that challenge the latter and existing power-relations are downplayed (McLeod 2007, 187). The perceived illegitimacy, as well as the peaceful nature of protesters, certainly influenced coverage. Nevertheless, most articles still adhere to the protest paradigm. As framing theory suggests, a protest like *Fridays for Future*, whose demands to stop global

warming by changing the existing political and economic system of capitalism are considered radical, is therefore not supported within media framing. This trend can also be found regarding the representation of climate change:

>>>> [Fig 13]<<<<

The pie chart shows that although the *Friday for Future* protests symbolize a change within the current environmental discourse (Kramcsak-Muñoz 2018), this may not be true for media discourse. 60% of the articles analyzed represent climate change neutrally, frame it in terms of adaptation, or do not mention climate change at all. Only 20.6% of articles frame climate change in terms of intergenerational justice. These reflect the “radical new discourse” that *Fridays for Future* introduces to the wider discourse on climate change. In these cases, climate change is defined in terms of intergenerational equity and children’s rights. Intergenerational climate responsibility is clearly assigned to the industrial nations and power elites of the Global North. A look at the solutions however reveals, that even though short-term environmental-friendly solutions of adaptation are rejected and a long-term mitigation approach to change the status quo are demanded, almost half of the sample considers these solutions to be unachievable. This once again eliminates the political dimension to introducing climate mitigation action as a successful strategy to limit global warming. Based on the clear distribution of frames adhering to the protest paradigm and due to most frames ignoring the intergenerational implications for climate change, one can conclude that the representation of *Fridays for Future* within the German media feeds into the wider climate change discourse towards de-politicization and adaptation.

However, two necessary observations about these results should be made. First, the present study only encompasses the first eight months of news coverage after the emergence of the movement. As such, this study is an introductory review of the initial media framing of Fridays for Futures. Since quantitative data available shows that news coverage took off in the second half of 2019, there is a great possibility that the distribution of the identified frames might have changed over time. A second point derives from reviewing the distribution of individual frame components. As explained before, every frame consists of a pattern put together by the answers each coding sheet gave to the individual research questions. A summary of these answers shows that even though the idea of climate change as an issue of intergenerational injustice is often undermined, it is still introduced into the climate debate. While intergenerational climate justice may not yet lead to a discursive shift within the climate debate towards mitigation, it does make climate change an issue of children’s rights part of the media’s agenda.

Throughout 2019 demonstrations have continued and continue to be covered in the German press. This implies that the current distribution of frames might still change. Sheila M. Cannon, a social researcher on system change, explains it like this: The space between the status quo and a more sustainable system is “occupied by people focused on social change” (Cannon 2018). Within the status quo, their beliefs are usually rejected as “illegitimate or too radical”. But like “pockets for future embedded in the present” (Curry and Hodgsons 2008) movements such as *Fridays for Future* have the power to introduce an idea into the media agenda that slowly changes our beliefs. As historical protest movements such as the civil rights or the LGBTI community show, it is our beliefs that ultimately create, reinforce or challenge the legitimacy of the system we live in. While the mass media may continue to represent climate mitigation policies and intergenerational responsibilities in a way that supports the existing power structure for a while, historical precedents show that the system will inevitably evolve with time. For it is challenged by the very thing that constructs it: an idea. And herein lies the chance to make the idea of borrowing the earth from our children, political reality.

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