

**The temporalisation of global climate change discourse:**

A critical analysis of temporality and climate justice in COP26 and COP27

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“En la escena quinta del acto primero de la pieza más conocida de William Shakespeare, Hamlet habla con el fantasma de su padre y descubre que este ha sido asesinado por su tío. Pero Hamlet no sabe si creerle, si realmente ha hablado con él o si se está volviendo loco. Aterrorizado, Hamlet dice: «*Time is out of joint.*» Esta frase intraducible, ha sido objeto de mil traducciones distintas y disparatadas. Confrontado con la *temporalidad espectral*, decía Jacques Derrida, el propio traductor, *is out of joint*, se le va la olla. [...] El tiempo se ha salido de sus visagras, pero también, en la lectura de Derrida, se ha desajustado, o más aún, se ha vuelto *injusto*. [...] El tiempo ya no es lo que era. El tiempo está *en transición*. Hamlet se siente maldito porque es el heredero de una muerte: aunque él mismo no ha participado en el asesinato, por su silencio, por su inacción, es cómplice de él. En *Espectros de Marx*, Derrida nos recuerda que nosotros somos, como Hamlet, herederos de la historia política del siglo XX. [...] Nuestro tiempo, ese futuro que hemos creído heredar, está ardiendo, está tocado, se ha desvencijado, se ha desplazado, está jodido, va a estallar. *Time is out of joint*. Ahora. Justo *ahora*.”

(Preciado, 2022, pp. 95-97)

## **Declaration of authorship**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this bachelor's thesis. The ideas, arguments, and conclusions presented in this work are entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always duly cited and referenced.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Beyond academics, I would like to acknowledge my mother, Carolina, for her everyday emotional and physical care, and my father, Antonio, for his intellectual advice, as well as my chosen family, Ana, Carlota, Araceli and Alicia, with whom I have shared life's joys and anxieties, especially during the last four years.

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## **Positionality statement**

I believe it is relevant to briefly mention how my positionality may influence, and potentially bias, my understanding of climate justice and temporality in global climate change discourse. I position myself as a White, middle-upper class, queer, Spanish student and novice researcher. The privilege accompanying my social location means that, despite good intentions, my effort to stress climate injustices in postcolonial contexts risks being patronising and even recolonising.

Furthermore, several factors make me an *insider* in relation to the phenomenon under study. First and foremost, I live in one of the most affected places by climate change in Europe (Southern Spain), and in the last few years, I have experienced the worst heat waves in the region to date, as well as the ongoing drought. Moreover, I participated in the Fridays for Future movement during my last year of high school in my home city Granada, and I currently sympathise with the Extinction Rebellion movement. I also remain overtly critical of ecomodernism and have been thoroughly influenced by Jem Bendell's "Deep Adaptation" agenda, which sees a climate-driven societal collapse as inexorable, and thus defends that societies take radical measures to adapt to these inevitable changes and let go of many aspects of the Western industrial ways of life. Lastly, I support the Zöop organisational model, which aims to safeguard the interests of both human and nonhuman life.

## **Abstract**

Global climate change discourse is currently dominated by a linear temporality, reflected in future-oriented climate action, and an eschatological temporality, associated with a discourse of climate urgency. However, climate change is a phenomenon unfolding with uneven severity across the world, which poses the question of which countries are most climate-vulnerable. This thesis investigates how linear and eschatological temporalities influence states' perceptions of and responses to climate change, and how these temporal approaches relate to states' political priorities. Furthermore, I focus on how states' temporal framings of climate change intersect with their position in the distribution of climate impacts. To do this, I adopt a sociological approach to the study of time, examining the concepts of linear and eschatological temporalities, together with climate justice and the most prevalent contemporary discourses on climate change. Moreover, I develop a model of critical discourse analysis to assess 14 speeches from five international actors delivered during the 26th and 27th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties. The findings indicate that states who are less climate-vulnerable (e.g., US, EU) perceive climate change as an imminent threat and put forward future-oriented climate policies reproducing a linear temporality. Second, especially vulnerable states who prioritise socioeconomic development (e.g., African Group, G77 + China), view climate change as an ongoing eschaton and respond through climate finance demands that mobilise a linear temporality. Lastly, the most climate-vulnerable states (e.g., SIDS) perceive climate change as an ongoing apocalypse, thus prioritising adaptation and demanding climate justice through an eschatological temporality.

## **Keywords**

climate action, distributive climate justice, linear temporality, eschatology, climate apocalypse, Conference of the Parties, climate change discourse

## Table of contents

<b>Declaration of authorship.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Positionality statement.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Table of contents.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. Theoretical framework.....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1. The state of knowledge: Climate change and temporality.....	10
2.2. The socio-political character of time and temporality.....	12
2.3. Linear and eschatological temporality in climate change discourse.....	15
2.3.1. Linear temporality.....	15
2.3.2. Eschatological temporality.....	17
2.3.3. The interplay between linear and eschatology in climate change discourse.....	18
2.4. Climate justice.....	19
<b>3. Methodology.....</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1. Research questions.....	20
3.2. Empirical material and context.....	20
3.3. Critical discourse analysis.....	21
3.4. Concept operationalisation and model of analysis.....	22
<b>4. Analysis.....</b>	<b>26</b>
4.1. Alliance of Small Island States.....	26
4.2. African Group.....	28
4.3. Group of 77 and China.....	30
4.4. European Union.....	31
4.5. United States.....	33
4.6. Discussion of key findings.....	35
<b>5. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>6. Bibliography.....</b>	<b>40</b>
6.1 Primary sources: Government speeches from COP26 and COP27 under analysis.....	40
6.2 Secondary sources.....	42
6.2.1 Books and book chapters.....	42
6.2.2 Articles.....	43
6.2.3 Other sources.....	45
<b>7. Appendixes.....</b>	<b>46</b>
Appendix 1: Basic information about statements.....	46
Appendix 2: Code application chart.....	48

## 1. Introduction

In January 2007, the *Bulletin of the atomic scientists* added climate change<sup>1</sup> to the prospect of nuclear annihilation as the greatest threat to humankind. By that time, the Doomsday Clock struck five minutes to midnight. Three years later, we were given an extra minute, but from 2010 to 2023, our time has shrunk significantly:

from 5 minutes

to 3 minutes,

2 1/2 minutes,

2 minutes,

100 seconds,

and 90 seconds on January 24, 2023.

On November 1st, 2021, the then UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson delivered his opening speech for the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow. After comparing our present situation to that of a James Bond trying to defuse a bomb about to explode, he pronounced the following words: "It was here in Glasgow, 250 years ago, [...] where the *doomsday device* began to tick [...] humanity has long since *run down the clock* on climate change. It's

1 minute

to midnight on that *doomsday clock*, and we need to act *now*" (Johnson, 2021).

Time is central to climate change. We currently speak as if it is one minute before midnight, but we have been saying that for the last ten years, each time adding, "but if we act now, we can still do something to stop a catastrophe". Thus, the whole complexity and non-linearity of the Earth system are simplified into the image of a linear movement towards a time threshold that should not be crossed (Rothe, 2020). But the "doomsday clock" symbol is only one among the myriad of temporal references that are present in CC discourse<sup>2</sup>.

In recent years, there has been a growing international recognition of the urgency of addressing CC and the need to take immediate action to mitigate and adapt to its consequences. This has led to a partial shift in the temporal framing of CC, with greater emphasis placed on its near-term impacts, which is reflected in political debates invoking a discourse of urgency, such as those stressing the impending threat of rising sea levels in small

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<sup>1</sup> Herein abbreviated as CC.

<sup>2</sup> One may think of many other instances of temporal references that run through climate change discourses. For instance, the international climate movement *Fridays For Future* produces a temporal discourse linked to intergenerational justice in which adults' climate inaction in the present compromises the survival of future generations.



tropical islands. Despite the rise of such a “climate apocalypse” imaginary (Levy & Spicer, 2013), policy responses have so far proved insufficient as greenhouse gas emissions keep rising—together with temperature and sea levels. Some scholars have suggested that states’ apparent incapacity to tackle CC rapidly and effectively is a matter of conflicting sociopolitical and environmental temporalities (e.g., Fitz-Henry, 2017; Lockie & Wong, 2018; Kolinjivadi et al., 2020). In this sense, it seems necessary to understand the prevalence of the temporalities dominating contemporary CC discourse to potentially assess their adequacy in addressing the urgency and complexity of the climate crisis. This is why I intend to conduct a critical analysis of the temporalisation of CC discourse by looking at statements from the United Nations Climate Change Conferences (COP) of the past two years to examine the various ways in which states navigate the apparent contradiction between the perception of CC as an apocalyptic threat (i.e. eschatological temporality) and the future-oriented policy response to the CC problem<sup>3</sup> (i.e. linear temporality).

While linear temporality assumes that the future can be predicted and colonised by rational human agency (Adam & Groves, 2007)—for instance, in the form of predetermined policy interventions within a given timeframe and with supposedly known effects (Arnall & Kothari, 2015)—, the Earth’s climate is an increasingly unstable system leading to sudden and exponential changes (Ellis, 2018) that are unfolding at an unequal pace and severity across the world, leading to unevenly distributed disasters and suffering (Newell et al., 2021) that cannot be understood through the simple image of a linear, homogeneous movement in time. This linear temporality is perhaps most evident in the focus on long-term projections and future scenarios based on present trends—e.g., IPCC reports—and the emphasis on gradual and incremental changes over time (Lockie, 2014). Furthermore, linear temporality is closely linked to a logic of capitalist productivity (Kolinjivadi et al., 2020) that prioritises economic gains over environmental and climate justice goals. It is thus crucial to review the temporal approaches that inform CC policy, particularly in how they shape states’ perceptions, responses and priorities in relation to CC and climate justice. The critical

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<sup>3</sup> My interest in studying the relationship between temporality and climate change discourse through a climate justice lens builds on my previous undergraduate research on ecological discourses, which I have been able to explore from a multidisciplinary point of view thanks to two of my majors—philosophy and political science, as well as sociology. For instance, last year I undertook an exploratory analysis of COP26 statements, examining the ways in which different states navigated the tensions between urgency and agency. More recently, I have offered a philosophical critique of ecomodernism through Walter Benjamin’s philosophy of history and rethought Norbert Elias’s sociological theory of time through the Anthropocene paradigm shift. Lastly, during the winter term of 2023, I developed a research design for my bachelor thesis as part of my course on Research Methods in Political Science. Bearing this in mind, the present thesis is the fruit of an early interest in and preliminary work on related topics, together with a new specifically climate justice approach—which incorporates my background in ethics in my final project.

approach my research adopts becomes especially important in a time when certain political actors hold power to extensively shape the future of others—human and nonhuman.

What sets my thesis apart from existing research is thus that it focuses on temporality—i.e. a political actor’s way of organising the temporal relationship between the past, present-day actions and the imagined future consequences—to understand the intersection between states’ particular ways of making sense of CC through conflicting temporalities and climate justice issues. In doing so, my thesis goes beyond recent theoretical critiques of modern Western temporality (Kolinjivadi et al., 2020; Bensaude-Vincent, 2021) while continuing the path of empirical studies about different actors’ perceptions and responses to CC (Arnall & Kothari, 2015; McMichael & Katonivualiku, 2020; Jackson, 2021; Booth, 2023; Kverndokk et al., 2021; Lennon & Tubridy, 2022), by examining how different temporalities relate to states’ policy responses to climate change in the context of COP26 and COP27.

Ultimately, this research is relevant because the temporal dimensions of CC state action, as reflected in COP statements, remain largely overlooked. Furthermore, no international comparative analysis of states’ perceptions and responses to CC has been conducted to date. Therefore, a critical discourse analysis is crucial to provide insights into how different temporalities shape states’ perceptions of and responses to CC. In addition, mapping out discursive constructions of time in relation to CC will help establish a fuller understanding of what the dominant and marginal temporal framings of CC policy are and how these temporalities relate to states’ priorities and intersect with climate inequalities. Finally, the motivation for my research is ultimately ethical: by exposing the historically conditioned character of Western linear temporality, I expect to not only highlight a feature of political practices that may explain, or be complicit with, the failure to address CC and the suffering we and others experience, but also to uncover alternative possibilities hidden by the currently dominant understandings of CC temporality (Inayatullah & Blaney, 2003).

My contribution is thus both theoretical as well as methodological. First, the intellectual merit of my research stems from the theoretical contribution it makes by developing a conceptual framework, tightly connected to and informed by direct analytical engagement with country representatives’ statements, about the most prevalent temporal approaches present in CC discourses. Second, my thesis makes a methodological contribution by operationalising the abstract concepts of linear and eschatological temporalities to produce a model of analysis to be applied in diverse discursive contexts.

To achieve the latter, my thesis begins by briefly reviewing previous research on CC and temporality to highlight a gap in the literature and situate my research in relation to existing knowledge. To construct a theoretical framework that allows me to study temporality as a product of symbolic language (discourse), I then examine the sociopolitical character of time and define the concepts of linear and eschatological temporalities. This section also explains how temporality connects to the most prevalent CC discourses and ends by conceptualising climate justice. Section three makes some important notes on methodology, including comments about the empirical material and context, the version of CDA I employed, the concept operationalisation and the model of critical discourse analysis. The fourth section of the thesis presents the main results of my critical discourse analysis. In the conclusion, I reflect on the implications of my findings, address my thesis's limitations and suggest paths for future research.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. The state of knowledge: Climate change and temporality**

How do different temporalities shape political actors' perceptions of and responses to CC? Which temporalities in relation to CC are currently at play? What are the sociopolitical and environmental implications of seeing CC through a particular temporal lens? Over the last decade, a growing body of research has emerged examining the relationship between temporality and CC action and perceptions. This section reviews such literature, which can be divided into theoretical critiques of dominant temporal approaches and empirical studies focusing on environmental discourses of specific countries. In doing so, I aim to highlight the centrality of temporality in understanding CC discourses and to point out a gap in the literature—namely, an absence of international comparative studies examining how temporalities relate to states' discourses on CC with a focus on climate justice.

Some scholars have recently proposed theoretical critiques of dominant temporal approaches to the planetary crisis. This is the case of Kolinjivadi et al. (2020), who have criticised the fetishisation of the plural temporalities of socionatural interactions through “clock *Time*”, which fails to achieve systemic changes and contributes to the perpetuation of the climate crisis. French philosopher Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent (2021) shares a similar criticism: she has contested the uniform trajectory of linear temporality enshrined in dominant Anthropocene narratives, advocating, instead, for the adoption of multiple

“timescapes” to better make sense of the ongoing ecological crisis. Taken together, these scholars’ ideas provide a vital normative and theoretical foundation which not only helps to highlight the central role temporality plays in environmental action—for it affects how CC is perceived and what should be done about it—but also serves as inspiration for further empirical research.

Beyond theoretical discussions of temporality and environmental issues, research on how precisely different political actors view CC through a particular temporal lens has become established in the environmental humanities in recent years. For instance, Arnall & Kothari (2015) have studied the differences between elite and non-elite perceptions of CC in the Maldives, showing a stark contrast between the future-oriented approach of the former and the day-to-day and intergenerational lens of the latter. More recently, McMichael & Katonivualiku (2020) have examined how residents of low-lying coastal villages in Fiji perceive relocation plans in response to climate impacts as disruptions to personal and intergenerational histories that affect everyday experiences and extend into the future in unpredictable ways. Meanwhile, Jackson (2021) has explored the perceptions of disaster temporalities within two Indigenous societies in the Southwest Pacific: while the Bedamuni have historically naturalised climate hazards as a cyclical feature of life, Emae islanders, who have been in contact with Western societies for longer, seem to experience climate disasters as abnormal events tied to CC.

Focusing on a different area of the world, Lennon & Tubridy (2022) have studied planning for coastal change in Castlemaine Harbour (Ireland), focusing on the ways in which particular perceptions of time shape different visions of how coastal change occurs and how it should be addressed; their analysis demonstrates the existence of plural temporalities in planning debates, which shows the importance of acknowledging such a plurality to build understanding between contending political actors. Similarly, Booth (2023) has looked at the case of England’s net-zero agriculture policy discourse and analysed the target-oriented approach to reducing emissions as the manifestation of a future-oriented environmental governance that reproduces a modernist, abstract and empty temporality linked to a techno-optimistic vision of the future.

Lastly, Kverndokk et al. (2021) have examined various texts about CC coming from climate activism, popular culture and the scientific community, and analysed the presence of a wide array of temporalities in CC discourse—from immediacy and apocalyptic futures to the tensions between local weather experiences and the long-term process of anthropogenic

CC. All in all, my thesis relies on these recent empirical works to take a first step towards the operationalisation of the highly abstract temporal concepts falling under my analysis.

Despite these recent valuable contributions, both theoretical and empirical, there is still a notable lack of international comparative studies examining how different temporalities relate to states' responses to CC. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to how states, from those who contribute the most to CC to those who suffer the most from its impacts, understand and address CC. Moreover, although temporality has received scholarly attention concerning economic inequalities (e.g., Solinger, 2012), there is currently no literature specifically addressing how temporal perceptions of CC interweave with climate inequalities—and how looking at temporality may help delineate such inequalities.

With this in mind, the purpose of my thesis is to perform a critical discourse analysis of world leaders' statements delivered during COP26 and COP27 to:

1. Shed light on how linear and eschatological temporalities influence states' perceptions of and responses to climate change, and how these temporalities relate to states' political priorities;
2. Understand how climate justice issues intersect with states' temporal approaches to climate change.

## **2.2. The socio-political character of time and temporality**

My point of departure for studying temporality in discourse is to understand the historically contingent and social character of time. My approach is thus in line with the epistemological rupture characteristic of sociological theories that treat “time” not as an evident, natural dimension of reality, but instead as a social symbol used to procure the orientation of human beings in the flow of events (Elias, 1992).

In his *Essay on Time* (1992) [1984], Norbert Elias proposes to investigate “time” through a historical perspective, understanding time as a human means of orientation in social and natural processes which has evolved gradually over the centuries (Elias, 1992). In this sense, Elias (1992) argues that the contemporary concept of “time” is a highly abstract concept which presupposes a developed capacity for synthesis—which allows for the formation of a mental image in which various events appear as successive—and a large body of knowledge about ways of determining time ranging from the observation of natural phenomena to the use of instruments such as the clock or the calendar. In this sense, Elias

distinguishes between two main modes of timing that human societies have historically relied on.

In the earliest stages of history, time was measured by reference to *natural processes*. For example, the low and high tides, the sunrise and sunset, the movements of the moon and the stars or the changes in vegetation served as instruments to coordinate social activities with each other and with extra human phenomena (Elias, 1992). What is fundamental to this stage of human development is the constant coordination of social activities with changes in non-human nature. The transition between such “pre-modern time” to what may be called “modern time” (cf. linear temporality) was driven by a series of complex historical processes: the invention and expansion of the use of temporal instruments; the development of the physical sciences, which were able to “discover” observable regularities in nature; and the evolution towards larger units of social integration, coupled with the development of higher levels of conceptual synthesis (Elias, 1992).

Thanks to such historical processes, technologies like the clock and the calendar not only displaced natural phenomena as the primary frame of temporal reference, but also changed the way time was experienced: the detachment from discontinuous natural processes and the adoption of continuous clocks and annual calendars led to the perception of time as a continuous and uniform flow (Elias, 1992). Moreover, the increased autonomy from natural processes to determine time, coupled with the growing urbanisation and commercialisation, made it essential to create a common temporal frame of reference, which came with the gradual centralisation of the time-measuring function in the hands of the emerging modern States, and ultimately led to the general rise of clock-based time<sup>4</sup>

In short, Elias’s *Essay on Time* exposes the sociological view that time stems from social, socio-natural and socio-technological timing practices, illustrating such an argument by showing the historical evolution of time concepts, which occurred hand in hand with changes in timing modes—from an environment- to a technology-dependent form of timing. Furthermore, Elias’s theory demonstrates that time concepts and timing practices have been *plural* throughout history, which further stresses the *political* character of temporality.

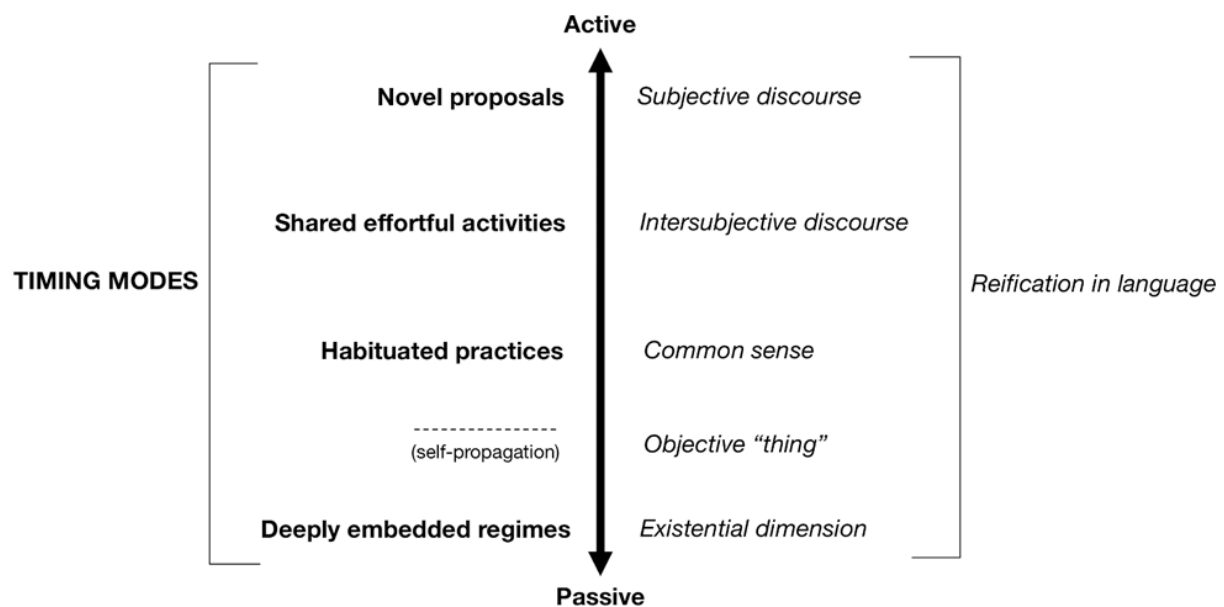
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<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that the transition from “pre-modern” to “modern” time was not absolute. Despite the current prominence of “modern time”, societies still use “premodern” timing modes as their main means of orientation or as a secondary way of measuring time. An illustration of this is the fact that natural phenomena, such as seasonal changes or the movements of the Moon, are still part of our time frame of reference, even though they do so in a less pronounced and direct way than in the past (Elias, 1992). That being said, Elias insists that the development of time concepts in the direction indicated here is not irreversible. In fact, it is even possible that new concepts of time will appear, as Einstein’s correction of the Newtonian concept of time at the beginning of the 20th century demonstrates.

Building on Elias’s sociological theory of time, Hom (2018) has elaborated on the political dimension of time, proposing an account of how timing activities contribute to time’s reification in language. To explain this relationship, he sketches a continuum of timing modes (see Figure 1) ranging from *active* to *passive* timing, each corresponding to a certain degree of hypostatisation of “time” in discourse. *Active* timing involves conscious efforts to synthesise dynamic relations and does not produce a “time” perceived as an “objective” dimension of reality, but rather as one possible timing attempt among others. In contrast, *passive* timing is experienced as a natural “existential dimension” thanks to “habituated practices” and “deeply embedded regimes” which contribute to originally active timing processes becoming reified in language (Hom, 2018).

**Figure 1**

*A spectrum of timing modes and temporal language*



*Note.* From “Timing is Everything: Toward a Better Understanding of Time and International Politics”, by A. R. Hom, 2018, *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(1), p. 73 (<https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx090>). Copyright 2018 by Oxford University Press. Reused with permission.

Even though this spectrum is dynamic and open to change, Hom (2018) points out that some timing modes—e.g., clock-based timing—have become so passive and propagated in societies that they have led to particular species of time, such as linear temporality, becoming the taken-for-granted, perceived as an objective “thing” or an existential dimension. Here, another political aspect of time becomes apparent, namely, the fact that time’s reification *imposes* a specific organisation of life which privileges certain processes

and agents while subordinating others—e.g., productive work vs leisure, economic production vs ecological cycles—. In turn, to perpetuate themselves while appearing as ‘normal’, temporal regimes necessitate their *enforcement* by an authority like the State or the Church<sup>5</sup>. Hence timing activities and the derived symbolic “time” are always *positional* insofar as they work for someone and for some purpose (Cox, 1981).

The theories of Elias (1992) and Hom (2018) provide an adequate theoretical framework to study “time” as a product of symbolic language (discourse) that is crisscrossed by power relations and is thus graspable through CDA. In this sense, I employ the term “temporality” to distance myself from essentialist views of time and to enable a study of temporality in relation to climate change that deals with empirically analysable discourses.

In the following subsection, I discuss the two most prevalent temporalities present in discourse about climate change—i.e. linear and eschatological temporality—, to then examine the most salient ways in which CC discourses address the tension between the dominant linear temporality and the acknowledgement of CC as an apocalyptic phenomenon.

### 2.3. Linear and eschatological temporality in climate change discourse

#### 2.3.1. Linear temporality

It is useful to think of **linear temporality** in terms of what Donna Haraway calls *figuration*, i.e. “the distillation of shared meanings in forms or images” (Weber, 2016, p. 13). In this regard, linear temporality tells the story of time as flowing in a specific direction, which is condensed in the image of a *continuous* and *homogeneous* line of *empty moments* following a specific *telos*. Even though such an account of time is now the dominant temporality, even to the point of having been described as the global “hegemonic metronome” (Hom 2010), particular historical processes were necessary for linear temporality to become internationally established.

Mckay and Stockdale (2016) point to the European Enlightenment as one of the sources from which linear temporality arose, but add religion to the equation. First, Christian historiography contributed to spreading the understanding of history as “a sequence of events unfolding in a linear fashion [...] moving from Creation to Apocalypse” (Mckay & Stockdale,

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<sup>5</sup> A nerdy yet pedagogically useful example of the social institutionalisation of time appears in Marvel’s *Loki* (2021). After a vast multiversal war in which multiple timelines battled each other for supremacy, the so-called ‘Time-Keepers’ emerged and brought peace by reorganising the multiverse into a single ‘Sacred Timeline’. Anyone who veers off the ‘proper’ flow of time is arrested by the Temporal Variation Authority. This can be read as the successful enforcement of linear temporality, which is examined below.



2016, p. 6). Enlightenment thinkers inherited such a *progressive* view of history and gave it a secular twist, replacing divine will with *human reason* as the driving force of historical progress (Mckay & Stockdale, 2016, p. 7). What is common to both accounts of time is thus a universal narrative of *progress* reliant on God's will and human intervention, respectively.

Besides the Enlightenment period, Hom (2010) points to the development and spread use of precise clocks (cf. Elias, 1992) and the rise of territorial sovereignty as two key historical processes in the ascent of linear temporality, or what he calls "Western standard time". Clocks enabled a form of measuring time based on the constant indication of even hours, subdivided into minutes and seconds, producing "a unified, elegant, rational manner of marking daylight" (Hom, 2010, p. 1149). Moreover, linear temporality spread worldwide thanks to its generalised use in "churches, cities, factories, railroads and telegraphs, colonies, the trenches of World War I and post-colonial nation-states" (Hom, 2010, p. 1148).

Adam and Groves (2007) suggest that the aforementioned social processes of modernity generated a particular temporality that sees the future as *open*, *empty*, and *colonisable* by rational human action. By mobilising this linear temporality, liberal democratic institutions, who are usually those responsible for producing the shared futures of societies, remain blind to the long-term environmental impacts of their actions, and are thus not "fully equipped to deal with the futures of their making" (Adam & Grooves, 2007, p. 116).

Translated into CC discourse, linear understandings of CC identify future scenarios we are moving towards and the adaptation and mitigation policies necessary to prevent and prepare for them (Anderson, 2010, p. 783). From this temporal perspective, the future is rendered *predictable* and can thus be mitigated by adopting a specific set of predetermined policies within a short period of time and with supposedly known outcomes (Arnall & Kothari, 2015, p. 201). Examples of such a future-oriented approach to environmental policy include net zero long-term strategies and temporal markers generally employed by governments and enterprises to respond to CC, such as 2030 sustainable development goals (Kolinjivadi et al., 2020; Booth, 2023). Moreover, linear temporality is also present in techno-optimistic discourses that rely on the promise of technological innovation as the ultimate solution for the climate crisis (Peirano, 2022). Several scholars have criticised these linear temporal approaches to climate policy because they prevent the necessary

transformative action in the present by systematically situating it in an abstract future that never arrives<sup>6</sup> (Anderson, 2010; Kolinjivadi et al., 2020; Booth, 2023).

### 2.3.2. Eschatological temporality

To understand eschatological temporality, one must first understand the concept of **eschatology**, or the Christian doctrine of the last things (Phillips, 2015). Just as linear temporality, **eschatological temporality** departs from a linear notion of time that moves from a starting point ( $t_0$ : creation) towards a final event in the divine plan ( $t_1$ : the eschaton). This linear model of eschatology allowed for making sense of change and progress, but also brought with it the questions of how time would end, whether it would be imminent and involve a catastrophe, and what role human agency would play in it. In this respect, **apocalypse** refers to *a particular eschatological species* in Christian eschatology, namely the “belief in an imminent cataclysmic intervention by God in history” (Rothe, 2020, p. 156) which does not necessarily involve a catastrophe, but rather “a promise of radical change” (Rothe, 2020, p. 157).

Given the polysemy inherent to the concept of the apocalypse, it may be pertinent to provide a minimal definition encompassing its main attributes. Departing from Alison McQueen’s (2017) notion of “apocalyptic imaginary”, the **apocalypse** is characterised by: 1) a chronological dualism, namely the division of time in the present age and the promised future; 2) a pessimistic historical determinism in which supernatural agents control the direction of human affairs and against which human agency is limited; and 3) a sense of urgency and imminence.

McQueen’s definition provides useful insights into understanding how contemporary discourses on climate change reproduce a secular version of Christian eschatology, namely by sustaining the belief in the finitude of time due to a climate-driven rupture of an otherwise continual flow of history. Some scholars have identified a policy discourse of climate urgency associated with a **climate apocalypse imaginary** that stages global climate change as a signal of “a great danger, of epic dimensions, that, if unheeded, might radically perturb, if not announce the premature end of civilisation before its sell-by date has passed” (Swyngedouw,

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<sup>6</sup> The idea that linear temporality prevents revolutionary action now is not brand new. Rather, one can find it already in Walter Benjamin’s *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1989) [1940], in which the philosopher put forward a critique of the ideology of progress—present in fascism as well as in German social democracy—, noting that the confidence in a supposedly inevitable, infinite and universal (technological) progress leads to political conformism, which prevents the emergence of the necessary systemic changes in the present.

2010, p. 215). The next subsection examines how the most salient CC discourses rely on a linear temporality and a specific vision of a climate-driven end of the world.

### 2.3.3. The interplay between linear and eschatology in climate change discourse

According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—the most representative international actor configuring the global discourse on CC, together with the IPCC<sup>7</sup>—, the concept of **climate change** expresses the idea that a change of climate is occurring and altering the composition of the global atmosphere beyond natural climate variability, and that such phenomenon is attributable, directly or indirectly, to human activities. Despite the “hyperobject” (Morton, 2013) character of CC—viz. the fact that it is a phenomenon that goes beyond human comprehension given its vast temporal and geographical scope—, CC is often made legible through a **linear-eschatological temporality** that combines the notion of humanity’s progress, represented by the image of a linear forward movement, and the acknowledgement of CC as a temporal rupture.

Drawing from Rothe’s (2020) classification of Anthropocene discourses<sup>8</sup>, one may distinguish between **three main competing discourses about climate change**, each of which mobilises a *linear notion of time* and invokes a particular vision of a *climate-driven end of time*. In turn, each vision of the apocalypse comes with a particular view of when the eschaton arrives, whether it involves a catastrophe and what role human agency has in it.

First, **eco-catastrophism** stresses the *imminence* of ecological collapse and calculates the time we have left to prevent it through a policy of *emergency management* that will endlessly *defer* the eschaton (Rothe, 2020). Second, **eco-modernism** puts forward a vision of global CC as less of a warning than a promise of an *optimistic future* where economic development, technological advancement and scientific progress will help humanity *overcome* the planetary crisis while enabling continued economic growth (Rothe, 2020). In this way, the eschaton is made *immanent* through a promise of gradual human improvement that cohabitates with the new climate reality, and, through this process, it is also *banalised* (Rothe, 2020). Lastly, **planetary realism** departs from the assumption that the apocalypse is

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<sup>7</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body for assessing scientific research on CC.

<sup>8</sup> Rothe (2020) has analysed the presence of a linear-eschatological temporality in discourses about the *Anthropocene*—i.e. the current geological era, characterised by human-caused ecological disruption—, rather than discourses on *climate change* specifically. However, given that CC is arguably the most addressed planetary crisis—followed by the other also crucial but less discussed eight planetary boundaries (e.g., biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, alteration of biogeochemical cycles, etc)—, it seems legitimate to extend Rothe’s classification of the main Anthropocene discourses to CC discourses because both of them rely on a linear temporality and a common belief in the end of time.

*already happening*; therefore, it abandons hope of continued progress and, instead, embraces the *uncertainty* and *complexity* of the Earth system that escapes our control (Rothe, 2020). The corresponding political project is a policy of *adaptation* and *resilience* to the new climate regime.

## 2.4. Climate justice

Since the early 1990s<sup>9</sup>, the term **climate justice** has been used to refer to “how climate change is having the most severe effects on those with the least responsibility for causing it” (Newell et al., 2021, p. 2). Thus, there exists a *double inequality* linked to CC because not only are climate impacts unevenly distributed across and within countries, but also because contributions to CC in the form of carbon emissions are attributable to just a few emitters (Chancel et al., 2023, p. 9). Beyond these general remarks, the intension, extension and practical implications of the concept are still under debate (Newell et al., 2021). Given the purposes of my research, I provide a conceptualisation that facilitates the discursive analysis of climate justice within the UNFCCC context<sup>10</sup>.

Discussions about climate justice in the international arena have mainly revolved around **distributive climate justice**, which deals with how economic and non-economic costs and benefits associated with CC are distributed across societies (Sovacool et al., 2019). The recognition of such climate-related social goods and ills has led to the creation of a ‘polluter pays’ principle, together with the adoption of a principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities of individual states in tackling CC. Since COP19, climate justice has come to the fore in UNFCCC following the establishment of the Warsaw Mechanism on Loss and Damage, which aims to “address loss and damage associated with impacts of climate change, including extreme events and slow onset events, in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change” (UNFCCC, n. d., para. 1).

In light of the latter, one may identify a series of attributes of **climate justice**, which facilitates the subsequent operationalisation of the concept, namely: 1) distribution of CC impacts; 2) contribution to CC; 3) capacity to respond to CC; and 4) allocation of responsibility burdens among Parties.

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<sup>9</sup> The term was first coined by Edith Brown Weiss in 1989 (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> As will be seen, the conceptualisation of “climate change” presented here focuses on distributive climate justice, leaving aside other dimensions, such as intergenerational justice—which also has a strong presence in COP debates—, recognition justice, procedural climate justice or interspecies justice (Perkins, 2018; Newell et al., 2021).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research questions

To ground my theoretical insights, I look at statements of heads of governments delivered during COP26 and COP27 and apply critical discourse analysis to elucidate the embedded climate change temporalities in relation to states' perceptions of and responses to CC and state political priorities. Additionally, I pay attention to the intersection between temporal approaches to CC and climate justice issues by examining each actor's position in the global distribution of costs and benefits associated with CC. Based on the latter, the following research questions have been proposed:

1. How do linear and eschatological temporalities affect states' perceptions of and (policy) responses to CC? How do these different temporal approaches to CC relate to states' political priorities?
2. How do different states' temporal approaches to CC intersect with the global distribution of costs and benefits associated with CC?

#### 3.2. Empirical material and context

The empirical material consists of statements delivered during the **Conference of the Parties (COP)**, the United Nations meeting that annually brings together representatives from countries that have signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) since 1995. The main purpose of COP meetings is to review the implementation of the UNFCCC and negotiate new agreements to address CC. During each COP, country representatives and other political actors negotiate and adopt new policies and goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit global warming. Since COP meetings reunite almost every state in the world—more than 190 countries took part in each conference—, COP26 and COP27 constitute an ideal context to study global trends in the temporalisation of CC discourse and climate justice.

However, not all statements were the subject of analysis due to the limited scope of this thesis and the large number of available statements. Studying all of the speeches would be a challenging task that would inevitably hinder the depth and rigour of the subsequent discourse analysis. Thus, I have chosen to focus on speeches from the **high-level segment of the COP**, which includes the interventions of world leaders and excludes other voices, such as journalists or activists. This focus on high-level representatives comes from a deliberate

choice of limiting the scope of the study to the official discourse of *states*. Furthermore, I have decided to examine the discourses of only a limited selection of countries and state coalitions while still trying to include most of the voices of most regions of the world. With this in mind, the collected data includes **14 statements** delivered by the *Alliance of Small Island States*<sup>11</sup>, the *African Group*<sup>12</sup>, the *Group of 77 plus China*<sup>13</sup>, the *European Union*, and the *United States* (see Appendix 1 for further information on the type of statements and speakers). All in all, the choice of context and sample of statements contributes to the results of my inquiry being somewhat representative of the current global CC discourses while ensuring the feasibility of the analysis.

Lastly, regarding the years selected, this thesis has opted to analyse world leaders' statements from the past two years, that is, from **COP26** and **COP27**, in an attempt to assess the contemporary trends in the temporalisation of international CC discourse and climate justice and simultaneously accounting for recent changes in the global political agenda—e.g., the recent global energy crisis that has resulted in the return of energy security as a primary geopolitical concern for most states—. The 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) was held in Glasgow (United Kingdom) in October - November 2021 and mainly revolved around commitments towards CC mitigation (IISD, 2021). Meanwhile, the 27th UN Climate Change Conference (COP27) took place in Sharm el-Sheikh (Egypt) in November 2022 and was declared to be the “Implementation Summit”, but also paid unprecedented attention to the issue of climate-related loss and damage (IISD, 2022).

### 3.3. Critical discourse analysis

**Critical discourse analysis** (CDA) encompasses a wide variety of approaches to the study of language that differ theoretically as well as in their methodology (Johnson & McLean, 2020). Despite such a variety of research orientations, CDA is generally characterised by a shared view of discourse as not only language, spoken or written, but also as a specific way of representing aspects of social life, such as sexuality, inequality or climate change. In Foucaultian terms, **discourse** is defined as a system of representation, namely “a group of

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<sup>11</sup> The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) is an intergovernmental organisation representing the voices of 43 low-lying coastal and small island countries.

<sup>12</sup> The African Group is a United Nations regional group comprising 54 member states from the African continent.

<sup>13</sup> The Group of 77 and China is a coalition of currently 134 developing countries (77 were the founding members) at the United Nations, including most countries in the Global South. China does not consider itself to be a member; thus official statements, like the ones pronounced during COPs, are delivered in the name of Group of 77 plus China.

statements which provide a language for talking about [...] a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (Hall, 1997, p. 44). Second, CDA is overall concerned with investigating the hidden power relations and ideologies embedded in discourse and has the declared aim of intervening in or contesting the relations of domination sustained by the discourses under study (Johnson & McLean, 2020).

The particular version of CDA I adopt in my methodology aligns with the later work of Fairclough (2013), who maintains a realist view of social reality as dialectically constituted by both social structures, such as language, and concrete social events. In addition, the British linguist stresses the critical nature of CDA by focusing on *social wrongs*, i.e. “aspects of social systems, forms or orders that are detrimental to human well-being and could in principle be ameliorated if not eliminated” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 13), such as power inequalities and injustices, that are revealed in discourse. Building on this version of CDA, my thesis departs from the understanding of COP speeches as instances of discursive social practices that influence and inform the climate change policies implemented by governments around the world—which, in turn, affect the distribution of costs and benefits derived from CC, as well as the future of the planetary crisis—, and which are conditioned by each actor’s experience of climate change. Moreover, I explicitly address the social wrong of climate inequality.

On the practical side of my application of CDA, I have performed an **evolutionary coding**, meaning that my conceptual categories evolved from *a priori* theoretical expectations into a complete operational model based on empirical data (Mayring, 2002). Hence, the first coding round was an open and inductive process during which I looked for theoretically-informed themes and patterns in all of the texts in the sample; in turn, coding round two was a deductive process systematically applying the already established critical discourse model of analysis (see Table 1 in section 3.4) to every statement. Finally, in order to study the power asymmetries manifest in COP meetings, I try to delineate each actor’s subject positioning (see section 3.4 for a detailed definition).

### **3.4. Concept operationalisation and model of analysis**

Following Toshkov (2016), a necessary part of my research is to not only *conceptualise* the concepts to ensure analytical rigour and clarity, but also to *operationalise* the former to make them *measurable* in discourse through observable indicators. Such a dual process allows the researcher to bridge the theoretical world of concepts and the empirical world (Toshkov,

2016). Having completed the conceptualisation phase in the theoretical framework, the following step is to operationalise the concepts into indicators that enable the detection of the concepts' defining dimensions in the (discursive) empirical phenomena. In this subsection, I outline the model of analysis and operationalisation<sup>14</sup> (see Table 1) of linear and eschatological temporalities, CC discourse and climate justice, as well as state political priority.

First, I have distinguished four attributes of **linear temporality** based on the literature and their respective indicators: 1) *progress*, reflected in references to economic, scientific and technological development, coupled with metaphors of forward movements along a line; 2) use of *standardised time metrics*, such as years or decades; 3) *empty futurity*, which is graspable in temporal markers and emphasis on gradual change; and lastly 4) *agency*, which refers to the capacity to define the future through projected actions and can be detected when a subject speaks about its future goals and commitments, and climate action (mitigation and adaptation) plans. Second, I have identified a *sense of urgency*, coupled with the *acknowledgement of a climate-driven eschaton*, as the two basic dimensions of **eschatological temporality**.

Beyond temporal categories, I have formerly introduced the concept of **climate change discourse** to refer to each country's specific way of making sense of CC through an eschatological-linear temporality that comes with a particular vision of the threat of a climate-driven end of time and a political project to cope with it (Rothe, 2020). Within this concept, I have distinguished between three CC discourse subtypes whose operationalisation appears in Table 1.

Moreover, I have previously identified four dimensions of **climate justice** that help operationalise the concept (see Table 1). These dimensions are analysed together with states' **subject positioning**, which refers to the power relations between states, distinguishing between those who are considered powerful and weak, both in terms of dominance in shaping negotiations and in relation to coping with CC (Magnusson, 2022). Lastly, **state political priority**<sup>15</sup> refers to what the country representatives declare are the issues of highest importance for the nation in question, and the degree to which each state pays attention to and

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<sup>14</sup> As Toshkov (2016) notes, the proposed operationalisation and its quality, rather than absolute or universally valid, will necessarily be context-specific for it depends on the particular set of research goals and theoretical approach of my research, as well as on the nature of the empirical data under analysis.

<sup>15</sup> The academic literature defines "state political priority" as (1) the level of attention by political leaders towards a particular issue, (2) the extent to which the political system creates policies and programs that address the issue and (3) the provision of financial, technical, and human resources to support these programs (Shiffman & Smith, 2007). However, given the purposes of my investigation, I have focused on the *discursive* aspect of the concept, that is, on what the country representatives *say* about their state's priorities.



announces political action and resources devoted to the furtherance of environmental goals, relative to other state priorities, mainly economic development and energy security.

**Table 1***Model of critical discourse analysis*

<b>Concepts</b>	<b>Dimensions (coding categories)</b>	<b>Indicators (patterns)</b>
Linear temporality	Progress	References to economic/scientific/technological development; metaphors of forward movements along a line; References to universal/uniform trajectories of progress/development
	Standardised time metrics	Standardised metrics of modern clocks and calendars like hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades, etc.
	Empty futurity	Temporal markers (targets, goals, etc) to forecast and respond to catastrophic changes; Plans, long-term projections; Emphasis on gradual and incremental changes over time
	Agency	Capacity to define the future through human rational action
Eschatological temporality	Sense of urgency	Allusion to urgency/emergency, references of temporal thresholds, metaphors of time running out
	Climate-driven eschaton	Mention of adverse CC impacts; allusion to loss and damage associated with impacts of CC
Climate change discourse	Eco-catastrophism	Imminence of climate apocalypse, deferral of eschaton, emergency management
	Eco-modernism	Immanence of climate apocalypse, banalisation of eschaton, economic/technological/scientific progress
	Planetary realism	Climate apocalypse now, acceptance of eschaton, adaptation and resilience
State political priorities	the level of attention by political leaders towards climate action relative to other issues (e.g., economic growth, energy security)	
Climate justice	1) distribution of CC impacts; 2) contribution to CC; 3) capacity to respond to CC; and 4) allocation of responsibility burdens among Parties	
Subject positioning	Construction of powerful/weak actors, both in terms of coping with CC and determining the outcomes of COP negotiations	

## 4. Analysis

This section presents the findings from the critical discourse analysis. First, the analytical results of each actor's statements are presented separately. Second, the last subsection discusses the main findings of the analysis.

### 4.1. Alliance of Small Island States

AOSIS's speeches in COP26 and COP27, delivered by Antigua and Barbuda, were characterised by a strong presence of **eschatological temporality** in its two dimensions. References to temporal thresholds and metaphors of time running out that convey an acute *sense of urgency* are abundant. For instance, "the world is teetering dangerously on the precipice of a climate catastrophe" (Browne, 2021, para. 4). Coupled with the latter is the insistence on the fact that *frequent catastrophic climate events* now constitute the ongoing reality of SIDS<sup>16</sup>: "[t]his [climate disasters] is now the perennial experience that small island developing states suffer" (Browne, 2021, para. 8).

The marked presence of eschatology in both speeches is linked to **climate justice remarks**, such as AOSIS's self-positioning as a group of countries especially vulnerable to CC impacts and with limited capacity to respond to their detrimental effects: "[i]t takes a single storm, a few hours to destroy the economy and infrastructure of an entire small island state, which lacks the necessary financial and other resources to rebound and rebuild" (Browne, 2021, para. 7). On the basis of these remarks about SIDS's *vulnerability* and scarce capacity to respond to CC, the statements introduce demands of *urgent* climate action and compensation for loss and damage on the part of "industrialised nations" because not only do they have the capacity to respond, but also are the most responsible for the current climate crisis situation. In addition, SIDS explicitly denounce the *unequal global distribution* of and *contribution* to CC impacts while acknowledging their lack of power in holding polluting states accountable: "[w]e recognize that [...] the advocacy of small island states can be easily brushed aside and ignored" (Browne, 2022, para. 29). In COP27, complaints about developed countries' inaction become especially manifest, with a shift from abundant references to climate disasters and marked vulnerability followed by demands of international urgent action (COP26), to a firmer denunciation of climate injustices and demands for responsibility from big polluters and developed countries who keep breaking their climate commitments.

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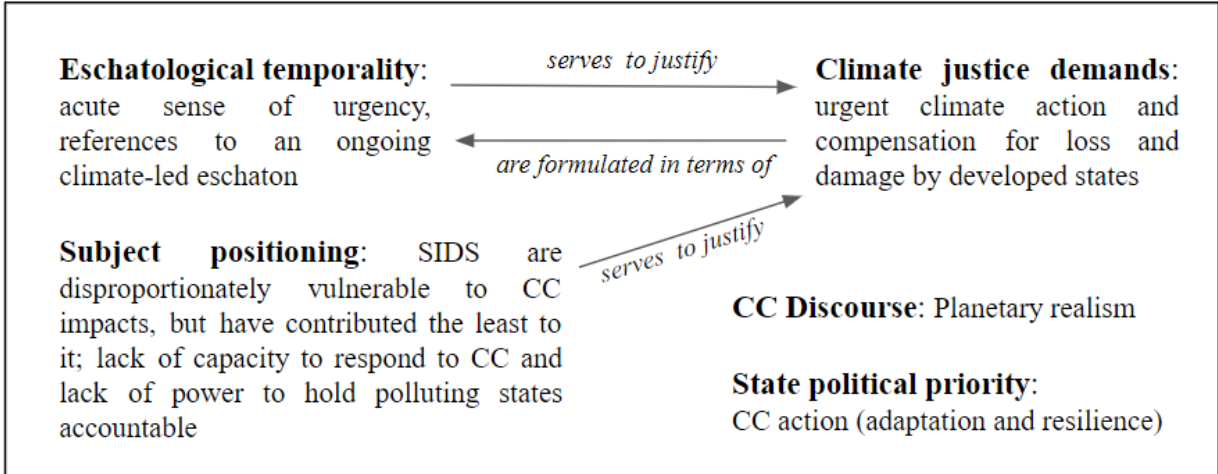
<sup>16</sup> Small Island Developing States.

It is interesting to examine the limited presence of **linear temporality** in AOSIS’s speeches, which only appears in two instances: first, when SIDS declare that “[t]his is *the last decade* the world has to avoid the worst impacts of global warming” (Browne, 2021, para. 27), which conveys the idea that humanity, as a whole, still has time to prevent the climate eschaton from fully revealing, whereas SIDS would already be feeling the full effects of CC; second, when SIDS denounce developed nations’ breaches of their climate commitments, which are formulated in linear temporality terms<sup>17</sup>, and explicitly criticise those nations’ broken promises of future climate actions when quoting Macbeth’s “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow” soliloquy<sup>18</sup>. In both cases, when addressing “the world” as well as when asking for climate justice to those most responsible, linear temporality appears as the dominant “temporal language” the AOSIS has to mobilise in order to speak up and be heard on the international stage.

SIDS’s **political priority** is *climate action* (adaptation and resilience), as reflected in the abundant demands for international financial support and reduction of carbon emissions, because the new climate regime these countries live under imperils every other state priority: “[t]his situation has weakened our ability to plan our economic and social development with predictability” (Browne, 2021, para. 9). In this sense, tackling CC is constructed as the main priority, for it is, as it were, the condition of possibility for the other state priorities.

**Figure 2**

*Findings of the analysis of AOSIS’ statements at COP26 and COP27*



<sup>17</sup> “The promise made 12 years ago by the developed countries, to provide \$100 billion annually in climate finance to help deal with the effects of climate change, has not been fulfilled” (Browne, 2021, para. 19).

<sup>18</sup> “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow/ Creeps in this petty pace from day to day/ To the last syllable of recorded time/ And all our yesterdays have lighted fools/ The way to dusty death” (Browne, 2022, para. 9).

Lastly, in terms of **climate change discourse**, AOSIS seem to primarily reproduce a *planetary realism* discourse insofar as SIDS recognise that they are already navigating a climate apocalypse. Although marginal, SIDS's statements also contain some elements of *eco-catastrophism*, such as noting that the world has a limited period of time to avoid the worst effects of CC.

#### 4.2. African Group

The Republic of Gabon and Zambia, speaking on behalf of the African Group (AG) in COP26 and COP27, respectively, delivered statements stressing the urgent need for climate action<sup>19</sup> and highlighting the asymmetrical vulnerability and contribution of African states to climate impacts and derived loss and damage<sup>20</sup>. AG's statements are thus crossed by an **eschatological temporality** undertone, where the *sense of urgency* and *acknowledgement of a climate-led eschaton* are less explicit than in other actors' speeches, insofar as there is no mention of specific climate disasters or metaphors of time running out, but remain present through constant references to the more general term of "adverse climate impacts" that are said to be ravishing the continent. In turn, the mobilisation of such eschatological temporality, coupled with remarks about the unequal contribution to and distribution of CC effects, serves to justify demands that developed states increase their climate commitments.

However, **climate justice** remarks are not exclusively constructed around an eschatological temporality. Rather, demands for financial support for mitigation and adaptation employ temporal targets for climate finance goals that reproduce the empty futurity characteristic of **linear temporality**. Similarly, one finds an explicit approval of a "single common time frame" for tracking each country's implementation of NDCs<sup>21</sup> in a transparent, standardised way. Moreover, in COP27, the AG expresses the intention to keep taking action regardless of whether developed countries provide financial help; in doing so, it employs a linear temporality where the future is charted through long-term projections of an energy-based green growth trajectory that would lead the continent to prosperity through gradual changes over time. These mobilisations of linear temporality suggest a certain

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<sup>19</sup> "The recently released scientific reports underscores the need to drastically *accelerate* climate action" (Gahouma-Bekale, 2021, para. 7).

<sup>20</sup> "54 countries of the African continent contribute only 4% of the total global emissions" (Gahouma-Bekale, 2021, para. 13) or "We expect this conference to recognize Africa's and other LDCs' special needs and special circumstances, given the disproportionate impact of climate change on our continent and our people, measured against Africa's low contribution of 4% towards the global emissions problem, yet we are impacted negatively the most" (Hichilema, 2022, para. 10).

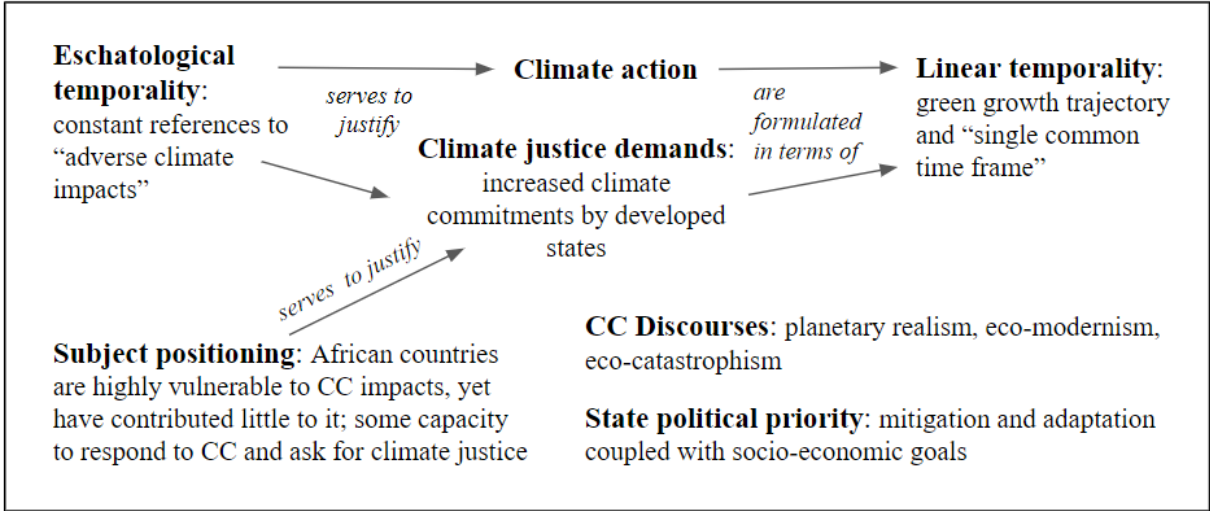
<sup>21</sup> Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) refer to a country's outline of its national plans for reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

alignment of the AG with the trajectory of green progress formulated by developed countries, but also a strategic framing of the linear time as a way of keeping all countries accountable for their climate commitments.

Regarding Africa’s **political priorities**, the Group views *mitigation* and *adaptation* as top priorities that serve as a means for simultaneously ameliorating the general *resilience* of countries<sup>22</sup> and addressing pressing *socioeconomic concerns*<sup>23</sup>. This is in line with the African Group’s mobilisation of an eschatological temporality that highlights the dire need for climate action together with a linear temporality connected to the wish to ensure socioeconomic development.

**Figure 3**

*Findings of the analysis of the African Group’s statements at COP26 and COP27*



Lastly, the **climate change discourse** produced by the African Group remains unclear based on Rothe’s (2020) triad. On the one hand, AG’s speeches acknowledge the existence of an ongoing climate apocalypse reflected in the abundant references to climate impacts and the need to adapt to them, which suggests a certain alignment with *planetary realism*. On the other hand, the AG subscribes to the idea that climate actions can and should go hand in hand with economic development, which matches with the *eco-modernist* discourse. Finally, AG’s calls for urgent climate action show a moderate presence of *eco-catastrophism*.

<sup>22</sup> “Climate change adaptation remains a top priority for Zambia and we place significant importance on actions that address the effects of climate change in order to enhance the resilience of our population, ecosystems, infrastructure, productive and health systems” (Hichilema, 2022, para. 16).

<sup>23</sup> “We have identified mitigation actions as a means of attainment of our aspirations, while advancing investment with the purpose of creating alternative source of livelihoods, jobs and reducing poverty” (Hichilema, 2022, para. 20).

### 4.3. Group of 77 and China

The Republic of Guinea and Pakistan delivered the statements on behalf of G77 plus China in COP26 and COP27, respectively. The general tone of the discourses is one of frustration and worry about developed countries' unfulfilled promises to take climate action nationally and implement their climate finance commitments towards developing states. Throughout the speeches, the mobilisation of an **eschatological temporality** is evident in the Group speakers' insistence on the frequent climate catastrophes ravaging their countries and the derived detrimental impacts on their socio-economic systems. For instance, in COP27, Pakistan's UN Ambassador reports a series of catastrophic floods occurred in his country, which have left "33 million lives in tatters" and "losses and damages amounting to a tenth of the GDP" (Akram, 2022, para. 11). In the COP26 statement, eschatological temporality is also mobilised by invoking a "deep sense of urgency" arising from the "increasing impacts of climate change on [their] socio-economic circumstances and development priorities and trajectories" (Touré, 2021, para. 4).

This eschatological temporality is articulated in liaison with **climate justice remarks** about the Group's disproportional vulnerability and little contribution to CC<sup>24</sup>. Together, the latter serve to justify demands for prompt implementation of developed nations' unfulfilled climate commitments and of increased provision of climate assistance to developing countries. Interestingly, at the same time that developed states' future-oriented approach to climate finance is criticised for constantly postponing climate action, **linear temporality** is also strategically rearticulated by the Group in their proposal of a common "timeline", including a new collective climate finance goal of 100 billion dollars per year, that will keep the implementation of developed nations' commitments transparent, make climate finance predictable, and help climate finance flows coordinate with developing states' needs<sup>25</sup>.

Regarding G77 and China's **states' political priorities**, *adaptation*—as opposed to mitigation—is presented as key for building developing countries' resilience and always in connection with *economic development* and *poverty eradication goals*. Thus, it would seem that adaptation as a priority is conditional on the furtherance of socio-economic interests.

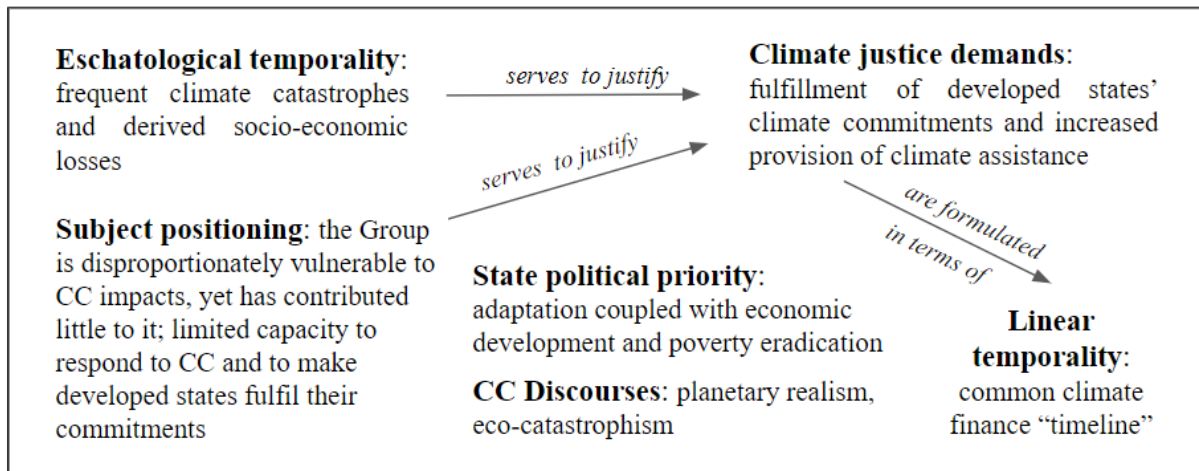
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<sup>24</sup> "We are living in an era where many developing countries are already witnessing unprecedented devastating impacts of climate change, though they have contributed little to it." (Akram, 2022, para. 10).

<sup>25</sup> "We expect that COP26 will decide on the continuation of the LTF [Long Term Finance] Work Programme to contribute to scaling-up post-2020 climate financing and monitor the accomplishment of the USD 100 billion goal up to 2020 and to 2025 [...] The provision and mobilization of finance, technology and capacity building must be done in a transparent manner, must be new, additional, predictable, and consider the actual needs and priorities of developing countries" (Touré, 2021, para. 10).

**Figure 4**

*Findings of the analysis of G77 + China's statements at COP26 and COP27*



Lastly, in terms of **climate change discourse**, the G77 plus China group seems to reproduce a discourse of *planetary realism* insofar as they acknowledge that they are already suffering the most adverse impacts of CC to date. That said, the Group also constructs an *eco-catastrophist discourse* by adopting a future-oriented approach to climate finance and adaptation which assumes that there is still time to address the CC challenge.

#### 4.4. European Union

EU's COP26 and COP27 statements were delivered by Ursula von der Leyen (president of the European Commission), Charles Michel (president of the European Council), and Frans Timmermans (executive vice president of the European Commission). All of the speeches begin by noting the existence of an *imminent climate-induced eschaton* that may still be avoided, but not for long<sup>26</sup>. Discourses also stress the severity of the planetary crisis by alluding to climate disasters happening around the world<sup>27</sup> and by employing strong metaphors of the climate threat: "We have a climatic gun to our head. We are living on borrowed time" (Michel, 2022, para. 2). This mobilisation of an **eschatological temporality** serves the EU to encourage other Parties to take urgent action<sup>28</sup>. In COP27 speeches, the

<sup>26</sup> "Climate change threatens our survival. [...] The recent IPCC report lays out the stark facts. Our time to act is short. But it is not too late" (Michel, 2021, para. 3).

<sup>27</sup> "Just listen to our friends from Pakistan, just now, how the country was ravaged by floods. It breaks your heart to listen to it. Or Eastern Africa, where a drought rages that has no parallel. Or to those in the line of monster storms in the Pacific or the Caribbean" (Timmermans, 2022, para. 26).

<sup>28</sup> "We have lost a lot of speed since Glasgow. We wasted a lot of time already. And our people and planet have no more time to lose. We pledge to pick up speed again, starting now and here. And regain the momentum we had in Glasgow" (Timmermans, 2022, paras. 41-44).



global energy crisis, aggravated by the Russian-Ukrainian war, is presented as a further reason to accelerate climate action.

Another recurring theme in speeches is the prevalence of **linear temporality**. This is made evident, for instance, in EU's insistence on humanity's capacity to circumvent the climate eschaton and "earn the clean ticket to heaven" (Von der Leyen, 2022, para. 1) thanks to humans' "infinite spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship" (Michel, 2021, para. 15). Such discourse of agency presupposes an empty futurity that can be colonised through planned human action. Similarly, one finds the construction of the EU as a global leader in climate issues<sup>29</sup> setting the example for other states. This is achieved through the listing of EU's climate commitments and accomplishments that employ temporal markers and metaphors of forward movements, as well as by mentioning specific climate action plans for a gradual green transition—e.g., REPowerEU, Fit for 55 Package—. These climate action plans are designed to tackle both the climate and the energy crisis and rely on renewable energies whose development represents an industrial opportunity; this points to EU's **prioritisation** of environmental goals insofar as the latter contribute to EU's industry and energy security.

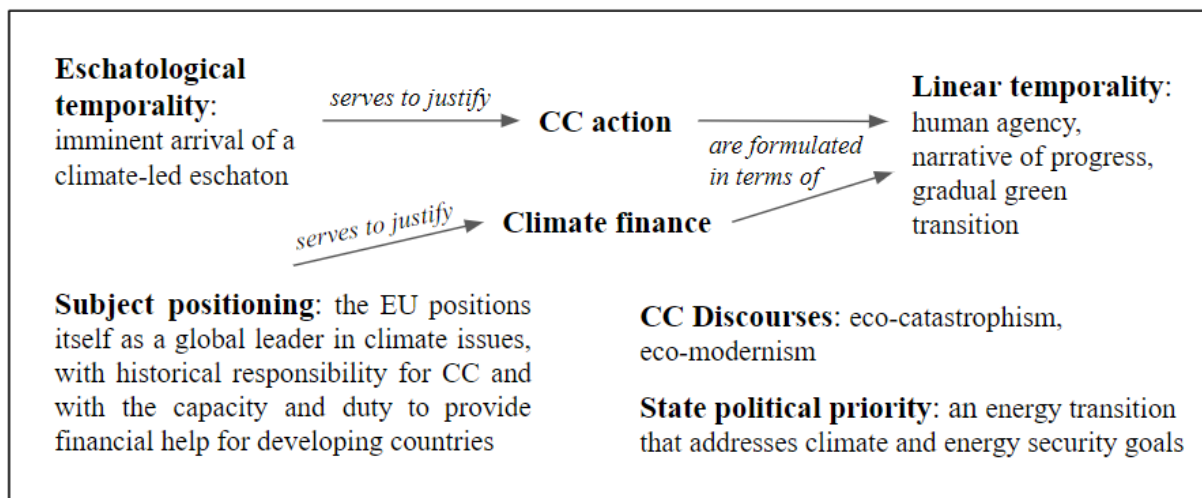
**Climate justice** occupies a central role in EU's self-positioning as an influential international actor in CC matters, for it acknowledges the existence of especially vulnerable countries, which in turn serves the EU to justify financial help for adaptation and mitigation, as well as compensation for loss and damage. Furthermore, the EU presents itself as a project based on cooperation and solidarity that, by its very nature, has "an obligation towards people in developing countries" (Michel, 2022, para. 9). This duty is further stressed by a brief allusion to Europe's colonial past and historical contribution to CC: "We built our prosperity partly by overusing fossil fuel resources and by mistreating the natural world. We must therefore shoulder our share of the burden, and we are doing so" (Michel, 2022, para. 9). When addressing developing countries, however, the EU reproduces a discourse of universal trajectories of progress towards carbon neutrality that results in different states being situated along a uniform line of (green) development, with the EU leading the way.

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<sup>29</sup> "We are, and will remain, champions of climate action, and we are determined to step up the pace of change" (Michel, 2022, para. 6).

**Figure 5**

*Findings of the analysis of EU's statements at COP26 and COP27*



Lastly, the EU seems to maintain an ambivalent **climate change discourse** oscillating between *eco-catastrophism*, manifest in references to an imminent climate-led eschaton that can be postponed through urgent action, and some aspects of *eco-modernism*, such as sustaining the belief in technological development as the way out of the climate and energy crisis.

#### 4.5. United States

US President Biden's speeches at COP26 and COP27 were overall geared towards imparting a sense of urgency to boost decisive global action and framing the climate crisis as an opportunity to build a prosperous future. This was achieved by mobilising an **eschatological temporality** through the acknowledgement that countries have an ever more limited temporal margin left to act and avert a major climate catastrophe<sup>30</sup>, and by alluding to instances of climate disasters having recently affected the US and Africa<sup>31</sup>. In COP27, the global energy crisis was presented as a further reason for speeding up climate action, namely in the form of a clean-energy transition.

<sup>30</sup> "The science is clear: we only have a brief window left before us to raise our ambitions and to meet the task that's rapidly narrowing" (Biden, 2021, para. 2).

<sup>31</sup> "In the United States, we're seeing historic drought and wildfires in the West, devastating hurricanes and storms in the East [...] Here in Africa, home to many nations considered most vulnerable to climate change, food insecurity [and] hunger follows four years of intense drought in the Horn of Africa. Meanwhile, the Niger River in West Africa, swollen because of more intense rainfall, is wreaking havoc on fishing and farming communities. In Nigeria, flooding has recently killed 6000 people; 1.3 million more are displaced" (Biden, 2022, paras. 10-13).

However, unlike other actors, US's recognition of the impending climate eschaton and concomitant urgency are not met with resignation or hopelessness, but rather with confidence: "the challenges we face are great, but our capacity is greater than the challenges. We must never doubt that" (Biden, 2022, para. 85). Such confidence comes with an optimistic view of CC as an opportunity to inaugurate a new era of sustainable economic development that will help humanity surmount the climate crisis<sup>32</sup>. The US thus seems to mobilise an ambivalent **climate change discourse** oscillating between *eco-catastrophism* and *eco-modernism*, given that the acknowledgement of an imminent climate eschaton and promotion of urgent climate action is accompanied by a perception of CC as a promise of a bright future unleashed by technological progress.

US's confidence in their capacity to tackle CC reproduces a **linear temporality**, as evidenced in Biden's constant references to "progress" made on climate issues, announcements of the numerous climate actions the Government is putting in place, and metaphors of forward motions in time<sup>33</sup>. This mobilisation of an empty futurity and of agency linked to a faith in technological progress allows the US to define a predictable future where climate goals are successfully met<sup>34</sup>.

Compared to the focus on the urgency of global action and sustainable economic development, **climate justice** concerns only occupy a marginal place in Biden's statements, with only a few acknowledgements of developing countries' greater exposure to CC effects and developed states' responsibilities for their historical contribution to the planetary crisis. Hence, rather than based on its responsibility for CC, the US defends developed nations duty to provide climate finance for vulnerable countries on the basis of its self-positioning as a benevolent hegemon with a leading role in global climate policy and thus obliged to help "the rest of the world", particularly developing states, to save them from CC by extending the

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<sup>32</sup> "[W]ithin the growing catastrophe, I believe there's an incredible opportunity, not just for the United States but for all of us. We're standing at an inflection point in world history. We have the ability to invest in ourselves and build an equitable clean-energy future and in the process create millions of good-paying jobs and opportunities around the world—cleaner air for our children, bountiful oceans, healthier forests and ecosystems for our planet" (Biden, 2021, para. 8).

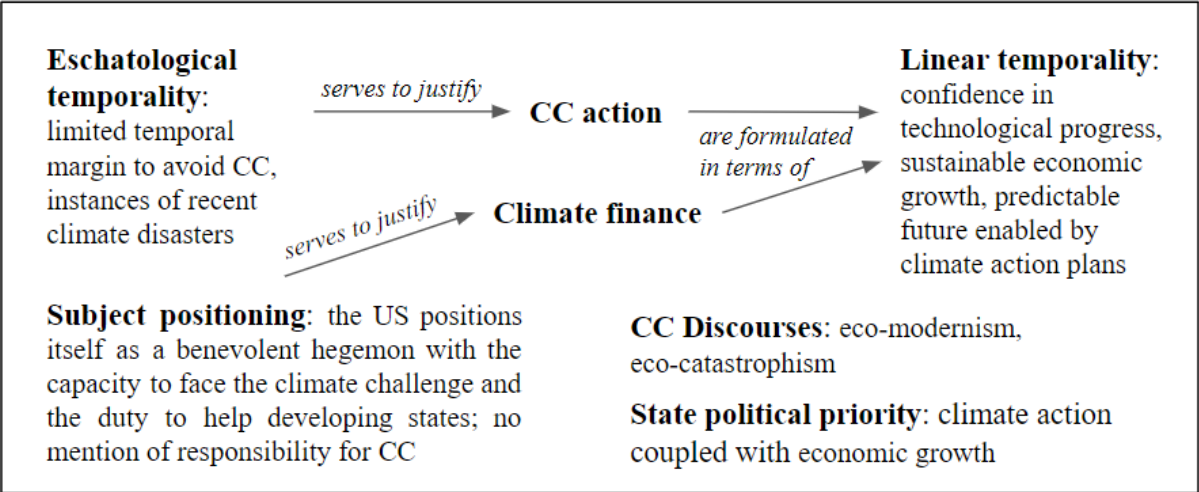
<sup>33</sup> "We're planning for both short-term sprint to 2030 that will keep 1.5 degrees Celsius in reach and for a marathon that will take us to the finish line and transform the largest economy in the world into a thriving, innovative, equitable, and just clean-energy engine for a net-zero world" (Biden, 2021, para. 22).

<sup>34</sup> "And because we are taking all these actions, the United States will be able to meet the ambitious target I set in the Leaders' Summit on Climate back in April, reducing the U.S. emissions by 50 to 52 percent below 2005 levels by 2030" (Biden, 2021, para. 17) ; "And today, finally, thanks to the actions we've taken, I can stand here as President of the United States of America and say with confidence: The United States of America will meet our emissions targets by 2030" (Biden, 2022, para 37).

American model of climate policy<sup>35</sup>. Once again, the US’s approach to international climate help reproduces a *linear temporality* of universal trajectories towards a low-carbon future based on technological progress.

**Figure 6**

*Findings of the analysis of US’s statements at COP26 and COP27*



Lastly, it is interesting to note that a key characteristic of US’s approach to climate policy is the explicit promotion of the economic advantages that are considered to be intrinsic to a sustainable transition. In this way, the US achieves to produce a discourse where economic and environmental **state political priorities**—as well as other major interests such as energy security—appear to be harmonised thanks to a technological progress that automatically fosters economic growth while attaining climate goals.

**4.6. Discussion of key findings**

After breaking down the results of the analysis of each actor individually, I now proceed to spell out the main findings of my analysis in a comprehensive manner, and do so by returning to my research questions, namely: (1) how linear and eschatological temporalities relate to states’ perceptions of and responses to climate change, as well as their priorities; and (2) how these temporal approaches intersect with each actor’s position in the global distribution of CC’s costs and benefits. When comparing the research findings of the five actors under analysis, I have discerned three main groups of states.

<sup>35</sup> “Countries that are in a position to help should be supporting developing countries so they can make decisive climate decisions, facilitating their energy transitions, building a path to prosperity and compatible with our climate imperative” (Biden, 2022, para. 72).

First, I have found that states who *perceive* climate change as an ongoing apocalypse and are *highly vulnerable* to climate impacts *respond* to climate change with a discourse of urgency. This is the case of the **Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)**, a coalition of countries for whom climate disasters have become an integral part of their daily existence. Due to their lack of resources to be able to effectively address such climate impacts on their own, the AOSIS insists that developed nations must take *immediate* climate action and provide climate finance for adaptation and compensation for loss and damage to developing countries. In line with this climate emergency discourse, climate action, namely adaptation and resilience, appears as AOSIS's only and most pressing priority.

There is another group of countries who are *significantly vulnerable* to climate impacts and who *perceive* climate change as an already-unfolding eschaton that is negatively affecting their socioeconomic systems; unlike the AOSIS, their *response* to climate change follows a linear temporal logic, and they *prioritise* climate action together with socio-economic goals. In this sense, the **African Group** and the **Group of 77 plus China** both share an eschatological perception of CC as already taking place. However, while both state coalitions position themselves as significantly vulnerable to CC, the African Group claims to have some capacity to address the detrimental effects of climate change on their own, as is apparent from their climate policy plans based on green growth, which mobilise a linear temporality. Meanwhile, G77 + China stresses their dire need for climate finance to fund adaptation, but also frame poverty eradication and economic development as pressing concerns. Thus, both actors show a similar prioritisation of needs, namely the combination of climate action (adaptation and mitigation) with socio-economic goals, which suggests an interconnectedness between socioeconomic and environmental vulnerabilities.

In regards to climate justice, the two actors mobilise an eschatological temporality to justify their demands, but formulate those demands in linear temporal terms—e.g., “single common time frame”, USD 100 billion per year goal—. This suggests a certain temporal double consciousness by which these developing nations see themselves and their needs for climate adaptation and mitigation through the eyes of the developed states, which are less vulnerable and more capable of responding to climate change and who put into place long-term climate policies. That said, linear temporality is also articulated in an attempt to ensure the transparency and predictability of climate finance provided by developed states.

Lastly, states who are, for the time being, *less vulnerable* to the effects of climate change and highly capable of addressing them, such as the **European Union** and the **United States**, *perceive* climate change as an imminent threat. However, given their belief that “there

is still some time left to prevent a major climate catastrophe”, these actors’ *response* to CC is a set of climate policy plans and commitments that situate climate action in the future, deferring climate action. This linear temporality is also embodied in their climate finance promises and aligns with the prioritisation of climate action together with energy security and continued economic growth, which necessarily follows a linear logic. The case of the US is quite particular, because not only does it perceive CC as an impending eschaton, but also as an opportunity to bring about a new era of green economic development. Accordingly, this actor responds to CC with long-term climate policies that reproduce a linear temporality and promise the harmonisation of environmental and economic priorities, rendered possible by US’s firm confidence in an omnipotent technological progress.

## **5. Conclusion**

Global climate change discourse is currently dominated by two main temporalities: on the one hand, an eschatological temporality, illustrated by a climate apocalypse imaginary that portrays climate change as an urgent threat to human societies, and a linear temporality linked to a future-oriented approach to climate change that delays necessary action now, on the other. Since temporality is a crucial dimension of climate policy, the purpose of my thesis has been to analyse how linear and eschatological temporalities are associated with states’ responses to and perceptions of climate change and linked to states’ priorities. However, given that climate change is an unequally adverse phenomenon unfolding at uneven pace and severity across the world, I have also aimed to address climate justice by examining how temporal framings are interwoven with different positions in the global distribution of climate change impacts.

To achieve these research goals, I have begun by stressing the sociopolitical nature of time, to then examine the linear and eschatological temporalities, climate change discourses and climate justice theoretically. Next, looking at temporality in discourse has required me to generate a model of critical discourse analysis to gather and organise information about the presence of linear and eschatological temporalities in connection to states’ responses, perceptions, priorities and positioning in the unequal distribution of climate change costs and benefits. After applying such a model of analysis to a selection of 14 states’ speeches delivered at COPs 26 and 27, I have concluded that:

1. states who are less vulnerable to climate impacts and who have the resources to address such effects (e.g., EU, US) perceive climate change as an imminent eschaton and respond to it with future-oriented policies reproducing a linear temporality and which tend to privilege climate ends as a means to economic goals;
2. states who are highly vulnerable to CC but who also view development as a top priority (e.g., African Group, G77 + China) understand climate change as an ongoing apocalypse and respond to it through climate finance demands that reproduce a linear temporality;
3. the most climate-vulnerable states (e.g., SIDS) perceive climate change as an unfolding climate eschaton affecting their very survival, thus prioritise adaptation and mitigation, and respond to climate disasters by putting forward climate justice demands characterised by an eschatological temporality.

These results build on existing empirical research on political actors' temporal perceptions of and responses to climate change by focusing on international actors, showing that while states tend to perceive climate change through an eschatological lens—either as an imminent or an ongoing phenomenon—, most of them propose future-oriented climate action and finance—with the exception of SIDS—that do not match the need for urgent action now posed by the climate crisis. Thus, despite constituting a vital tool for guaranteeing transparency and predictability of climate finance—as noted by the African Group and G77 + China—, linear temporality is associated with the postponement of climate action in the future and obscures matters of climate justice. In this sense, looking at the dominant temporalities that are currently at play in climate change discourses helps to denaturalise linear-eschatological temporalities as the only possible way of making sense of climate change, thus opening up the way for alternative and potentially more desirable climate change temporalities to arise. Moreover, my analysis has contributed to extending Rothe's (2020) Anthropocene discourses triad into climate change discourses of states within the UNFCCC context, pointing to a global prevalence of eco-catastrophism and a significant alignment of developing countries with planetary realism, with a minor presence of ecomodernism, adopted by the United States.

From a practical point of view, looking at the plural temporalities of climate change may ultimately be useful in detecting climate inequalities and allow policy-makers to design better climate action policies that take into account the distinct needs and voices of the multiple affected actors. This would be particularly necessary in the case of climate finance, where the recipients are usually developing countries whose worlds are ending the fastest, but

whose urgent needs are often approached by developed states through a linear temporality that fails to address their climate emergency realities. In this respect, paying attention to the multiple eschatological temporalities of states living under a climate apocalypse now would help build momentum for ambitious international action targeted at the most affected communities. Nevertheless, it is also important to look out for conflicting temporalities of developing states who prioritise climate action together with socioeconomic needs, which tend to follow a linear temporal logic that often clashes with the urgent need for mitigation and adaptation.

Despite the contributions of my thesis, my analysis is not free of the most common criticism against CDA, namely observer bias, viz. a researcher's tendency of uncovering the findings they expect to find. Whereas such bias is vital in guiding an inevitably reduced research focus, it also prevents the researcher from considering emergent evidence. To counteract this threat to the internal validity of my research, I have elaborated both my conceptual framework and model of analysis while reading COP statements, which has allowed me to incorporate early findings into my framework. Another limitation is the narrow generalisability of my results, because the findings of my discourse analysis are necessarily specific to the particular context under study—namely COPs 26 and 27—and the particular selection of groups of countries. Therefore, future research should assess the way in which other political actors, such as social movements, lobbies or local communities, make sense of climate change through particular temporal lenses.

Beyond this thesis, the model of analysis developed here may be used to address further research questions in International Politics, Sociology and Planetary Wellbeing. To what extent are climate change policies guided by a linear temporal frame adequate to address the urgency of the climate crisis? How can the need for urgent and coordinated climate action be reconciled with the existence of different temporal framings of climate change? How can we address the need for urgent climate action in developing countries together with the furtherance of sustainable development goals? I bet that by answering these questions, which take temporality and climate justice seriously, our academic understanding of climate action will advance, along with knowledge about the most effective policy responses to climate change.



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## 7. Appendixes

### Appendix 1

#### Basic information about statements

**Table 2**

*Statements of COP26 included in the analysis*

Country/ Group of countries	State Representative(s)	Type of statement
Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)	Gaston Browne (Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States)	First part of the high-level segment statement
African Group	Tanguy Gahouma-Bekale (Chairman of the African Group in 2021)	Joint Opening Plenary
Group of 77 and China	Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development of Guinea Ahmadou Seborny Touré (Chairman of the G77 plus China in 2021)	Resumed high-level segment statement
European Union	President of the European Council Charles Michel	First part of the high-level segment statement
	President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen	First part of the high-level segment statement
	Executive vice president of the European Commission Frans Timmermans	Resumed high-level segment statement
United States	US President Joseph Biden	First part of the high-level segment statement

**Table 3***Statements of COP27 included in the analysis*

Country/ Group of countries	Speaker(s)	Type of intervention
Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)	Gaston Browne (Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States)	First part of the high-level segment statement
African Group	President of the Republic of Zambia Hakainde Hichilema (chairman of the African Group in 2022)	First part of the high-level segment statement
Group of 77 and China	Pakistan's UN Ambassador Munir Akram (Chairman of the G77 plus China in 2022)	Resumed high-level segment statement
European Union	Ursula von der Leyen (President of the European Commission)	First part of the high-level segment statement
	Charles Michel (President of the European Council)	First part of the high-level segment statement
	Frans Timmermans (Executive vice president of the European Commission)	Resumed high-level segment statement
United States	US President Joseph Biden	First part of the high-level segment statement



## Appendix 2

### Code application chart<sup>36</sup>

	Climate change political project	Eco-catastrophism	Eco-modernism	Planetary realism	Climate justice/Subject positioning	Allocation of responsibility burdens	Capacity to respond to climate change	Contribution to climate change	Distribution of climate change impacts	Eschatological temporality	Climate-driven eschaton	Sense of urgency	Linear temporality	Agency	Empty futurity	Progress	Standardised time metrics	State political priorities
Alliance of Small Island States (COP26)	2	0	0	2	15	9	1	1	4	9	5	4	3	1	1	0	1	0
Alliance of Small Island States (COP27)	1	0	0	1	17	12	1	1	3	12	5	7	4	0	1	1	2	0
African Group (COP26)	0	0	0	0	10	4	1	1	4	4	3	1	4	0	3	0	1	1
African Group (COP27)	1	0	0	1	5	2	0	1	2	2	1	1	5	3	0	2	0	5
Group of 77 and China (COP26)	1	1	0	0	12	7	2	0	3	2	1	1	8	0	6	0	2	5
Group of 77 + China (COP27)	2	1	0	1	6	3	0	1	2	7	3	4	9	2	3	1	3	1
EU's von der Leyen (COP26)	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	11	2	4	2	3	0
EU's Charles Mitchell (COP26)	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	2	2	0	12	4	1	5	2	0
EU's Frans Timmermans (COP26)	2	2	0	0	7	3	4	0	0	4	3	1	24	5	3	12	4	1
EU's von der Leyen (COP27)	0	0	0	0	6	3	3	0	0	3	1	2	12	5	2	4	1	1
EU's Charles Mitchell (COP27)	0	0	0	0	5	2	2	1	0	3	1	2	7	3	0	3	1	2
EU's Frans Timmermans (COP27)	4	3	0	1	3	1	1	1	0	4	2	2	9	4	0	4	1	0
US President Biden (COP26)	9	2	7	0	9	3	3	1	2	7	4	3	38	13	10	10	5	4
US President Biden (COP27)	3	0	3	0	10	2	6	0	2	7	5	2	44	12	7	17	8	7

<sup>36</sup> The table displays the frequency of code application (columns) by each actors' statement (rows). Yellow and green cells correspond, respectively, to a medium (1-9) and a high ( $\geq 10$ ) presence of a concept, and blue cells indicate the most frequent dimensions within each concept.