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Master's Thesis

Children and climate change: children's rights in climate-induced displacement governance.

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List of abbreviations

CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

DoD - Department of Defense

GC26 – UN general Comment No.26

IDAC – International Data Alliance for Children on the Move

UNCRC – United Nations Child Rights Convention

UNRC – United Nations Refugee Convention

WPR – What is the Problem Represented to Be

IDCM - Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

IOM – International Organization for Migration

SIDS – Small Islands Developing States

IDP – Internal Displaced People

Abstract

This thesis investigates the discursive constructions currently shaping the global governance of climate-induced child displacement. Drawing on Foucauldian post-structuralism, framing analysis and intersectionality, the thesis analyses the conflict between a dominant “paternalist-security” discourse and an emerging “post paternalist” rights-based counter-discourse. The discursive analysis proposed aims to answer to the research question that asks how the children’s rights challenge the dominant paternalist security focused discourse in the global governance in the face of climate displacement. The dominant approach, prevalent in the state’s security documents, together with a substantial lack in the international legal framework in the protection of climate migrants, set a structural system that systematically violates children’s rights stated in the UNCRC of 1989. Moreover, this discourse constructs displaced populations either as security “threats” or passive “victims” requiring protection. In contrast, the post-paternalist rights-based discourse, consolidated by the youth-led litigation and amplified notably with the publications of the General comment No. 26, reframes, or better said, represents the problem as a children’s rights crisis. In addition, this counterargument and social construction constates children as active “political subjects” and agents of change. A critical intersectional analysis in both discourses will uncover the several inherent silences and gaps. The research argues eventually that the coexistence of these competing paradigms reveals a state of “organized hypocrisy”, where states publicly endorse rights-based norms, while their actions remain guided by security and economic interests. Ultimately, this thesis argues that while the post-paternalist children’s rights approach and constructed discourse offer a significant disruption and pressing arm to the traditional governance, its transformative potential is slowed down by the continuing dominance of state-centric power and security logics that construct policies and legal responses to climate mobility.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The research question.....	2
State of the Art.....	4
The core definitional and legal challenges	4
The security literature.....	5
The children's rights literature.....	5
The constructivism literature.....	6
The thesis contribution and strategy	7
Theory.....	9
The foundation meta-theoretical framework.....	9
Social constructivism as epistemological foundation.....	9
The analytical frameworks for policy discourse: the problematization theory	10
The framing analysis theoretical contribution.....	10
The discourse constitutive theories	11
The paternalist-security theory.....	11
The post paternalist rights-based theory	12
Organized Hypocrisy: the synthesizing theory	14
An Integrated Theoretical Framework.....	14
Methodology.....	16
The research design	16
The analytical methods Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?"	17
The Data Corpus and Selection Criteria	19
The analysis strategy	21
Coding.....	22
Ethical Considerations.....	22
Analysis.....	24
How does the dominant security-based discourse constructs the problem of climate displacement and displaced people?	24

The problem.....	24
The assumptions.....	27
The silences.....	29
How does the rights-based discourse and children practices represent the problem of climate displacement in opposition to the paternalist-security discourse?	31
The problem.....	31
The assumptions.....	33
The effects.....	35
The silences.....	38
How both representations coexist and what does this reveals about the underlying mechanisms of the global governance on climate displaced people?	42
The hypocrisy	42
The fluid subjectivity of children	43
The hypocrisies in practise.....	44
Conclusion	47

Introduction

Over the past two years studying International Relations, specialization in Global Refugee Studies, I have continuously studied to best grasp and understand the ontology and the nuances of international human movements, especially the involuntary one from the native land. During the final year of academic journey, while learning about the raising phenomenon of movement, I acknowledged the dramatic situations that individuals, mainly living in the most affected area of the globe by climate change, suffer. This year, the International Organization for Migration, the IOM, shared a report of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDCM) stating the seriousness of the internal displacement situation in 2024 globally. In a Graphic showing the most affected areas (IDCM, 2025, p.11) it immediately evident that the majority of the internal displacements are due to human-made disasters, precisely causing 45.8 million of internal displaced people (IDPs), despite the 20.1 million of people displaced by conflict and violence. Considering the geographical position of the displacement, the areas highlighted are central Africa, Pacific Islands (or SIDS), South-East Asia and Central America (p.11). However, one point to clarify is that while the most empirical studies on this matter illustrated numbers about internal displacement, which is the most common consequence of climate displacement, there are significant data gaps regarding the number of people who cross international borders due to climate impacts and, most importantly, there is not legal international recognition for them (UNICEF, 2024, p.6).

This first evidences and the complexity of the displacement phenomenon signal the seriousness and the magnitude of the climate crisis in the mobility context. In the last decades, research on the negative impacts of climate change on human life, mainly on population predominantly living in the Global South, expanded in multiple domains: medical, financial, social cultural as well as migratory. Nonetheless, the most important moment of realization to narrow my research occurred during the reading of a specific legal case of a Kiribati citizen, an island in the SIDS (Small Islands Developing States), Iona Teitiota versus the state of New Zealand. I. Teitiota (2016) had applied for refugee status to the government in New Zealand, falling into the category of cross-border displacement, because the current situation in his homeland was no more sustainable for his life, but especially for his children's. Its application resulted in a rejection of it with the reason of substantial lack of the legal persecution ground for the refugee status, according to the UN refugee convention of 1951. The legal case and story of I. Teitiota (2016) enlightened even more my interest in the intersection between climate crisis, displacement and children, aiming to research the reasons why the Refugee Convention of 1951 still has not been amended or complemented with another

convention to protect “climate refugees”. Soon enough, by deepening my study I realised, that this kind of question does not describe the reality of the complex debate going on about climate displacement. Therefore, I changed the starting point of my research: if existing international law cannot adequately protect climate-displaced adults, what protection exists for children who are evidently vulnerable to these same threats? In light of this research necessity, I began to search for legal or policy data intersecting climate change, with displacement and children. What I discovered fundamentally changed the trajectory of my research: a profound discursive debate emerging from the global governance on climate displacement that creates norms and policies that fail in properly addressing impactful and durable solutions to this new migration phenomenon. Moreover, this substantial contradiction and lack of solutions, stated by the 'UN Committee General Comment No. 26 on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change' (GC26) of 2023, is a violation of the rights of millions of children, which are stated and ratified in the UNCRC of 1989 (the most ratified legal binding document in history).

The research question

Therefore, the present thesis, in light of this new data and interest, formulates a central research question:

How do children’s rights challenge the global governance discourses on climate-induced displacement?

This question opens an angle of research in the climate-induced displacement and child’s rights literature, examining not simply what policies exist and are challenged by children’s rights, but how the climate crisis and displacement are constructed problems in different and opposite discourses, and what political and judicial effects these contributions produce.

To answer the research question, the analysis that follows is structured around three key analytical sections that systematically deconstruct the dominant security discourse that is currently dominating the global governance on climate displacement, to then examine the emerging children rights-based counter-discourse, to finally study conjunctively their coexistence within the present-day global governance structures. Through this examination, I aim to build on and to extend on the intersection between climate displacement and children, to build more empirical understanding on the children’s situation and challenges.

Therefore, in the first part of my research, which I term as “paternalist-security” discourse, the documents picture climate change, displacement and individuals (including children) by adopting a security and adult dominant approach and lens, meanwhile on the other side I examine a growing

data corpus that fundamentally frames climate crisis and displacement as a children's rights violation. The first framing will show a common pattern in documents, primarily originating from industrialized and wealthy states such as U.S. as well as from the European Union. These states, together with corporations began, in the latest years of last century to this current moment, to build a framework that constructs climate-displaced persons, either as security threats requiring management and control, or as passive victims requiring humanitarian protection. As an alternative counter-discourse challenging the first one, a child's rights-based framing, consolidated in the UN General Comment No. 26 (in 2023) and amplified through youth-led climate litigation like *Sacchi et al. v. Argentina et al.*, reaffirms the value of the rights of children in the context of climate displacement. The new awareness that this research on the intersection among climate crisis, displacement and children's rights provides to the study, offers the empirical knowledge that will be analysed finally in the current global governance. Better said, I will finally argue that the co-existence is justified by a state of "organized hypocrisy". The interpretation and application of this fundamental concept to this typology of study will allow a comprehensive and critical reflection on the current global governance on climate-induced displacement and children.

State of the Art

The following chapter aims to equip and position the study into a comprehensive review of the existing literature to set a common base of knowledge. The study of this thesis situates at the intersection of the following literature bodies: climate displacement, children's rights, climate global governance and constructivism. Hence, this chapter presents how the existing literature in these areas until today. The intent is to grasp and collect the key contributions, the gaps and the limitations of the current literature into a review, and to consider it as the starting point for my thesis.

The core definitional and legal challenges

A first strand of academic literature that I consider is the one that focuses on the definition of climate displacement and displaced people because of climate crisis. The literature on climate-induced displacement has grown incredibly since the 1990s, which was initially focused on building for the first time the bridge between the environmental degradation and people displacement. The merit for the definition of "environmental refugees" is attributed to N. Myers (2001). Building from this definition, the most reliable sources distinguish several key terms to capture the complexity of human movement in the context of climate change. For instance, UNICEF in the important study of "Climate Mobility and Childhood" define the person displaced in the context of disasters and climate change as: *"a person who is forced or obliged to leave their home or place of habitual residence as a result of disaster or in order to avoid the impact of an immediate, foreseeable natural hazard including the adverse impacts of climate change. Most often, such persons are displaced within their own country, but they may also be displaced across an international border."* (UNICEF, 2024, p.9). Always regarding the definitional problem of this phenomenon other scholars such as McAdam in 2012, suggest not to use the label of "climate refugees" focusing on the natural incompatibility of the 1951 Refugee convention. McAdam's work crucially contributes in establishing a challenge and clarification between definitions. She argues that the term climate refugee is legally imprecise or even counterproductive, favouring the terms "climate mobility" and "disaster displacement" widely used in international organizations like UNHCR (2020) and the IOM (2019). Indeed, she states: the *"[...] purpose is to caution against squeezing all forms of 'forced' movement into a protection paradigm, since this may not best address the patterns or needs of those who move."* (McAdam, 2012, p. 211). This theoretical contribution surely offers relevant aspects that in my research question I take into consideration as start point of my analysis. The fundamental incompatibility explained by McAdam, certainly supports the idea of the thesis to not close and fall into superficial conclusions with the

complex category of climate migrants instead to delve into the several shades of it to discover the reality underlying such multifaceted phenomenon. Still, his debate remains unresolved in the literature to this day, with growing attention to complementary protection mechanisms and human rights-based approaches that will be later presented.

The security literature

Another arm of theoretical works moves from a definition to a causality study. One point of study particularly develops theoretically climate change, displacement and the people moving because of it as a security issue. Better said, this literature body of security studies on the climate migration explains and thus constructs its own security lens on climate displacement and individuals, particularly in two strands of thought. The first points on national and international security, the second on human security. In the first case, documents like the 2007 report of the CNA Military Advisory Board study, the American generals take part into the formation on the national and international security production, coining for the first time the “threat multiplier” term, which will be later widely used in the security discourse to define climate migrants and climate displacement in the European Union and Germany namely. This line of literature focuses on how climate impacts like resource scarcity, extreme weather events, and sea-level rise can exacerbate existing conflict drivers, leading to instability, interstate conflict, geopolitical competition as well global migration. Nonetheless, this literature, despite its relevance has been primarily focused on adult migration and states security concerns, with limited focus on how this policy of securitization affects the most vulnerable such as children. Dalby instead, similarly to G. Bettini ten years earlier, critically argues how this framing shapes external policy responses arguing that the threat multiplier concept represents a "dismal and limited worldmaking project" pointing to manage symptoms rather than addressing root causes (2024, p.42). Indeed, in the thesis, this perspective is implemented and further developed to sustain, together with other tools, the competing discursive paradigms. The Second development in climate security literature operates a shift of focus from the state to the well-being of individuals and communities.

The children's rights literature

On the line of what just said, I considered also the children rights study corpus, with the purpose to discover and deeply research the potential use of children's rights and their violations in climate crisis and displacement, witnesses exponential growth since the ratification and consequent adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1989 which provides the legal tools to hold states accountable for climate impacts on children throughout the appeal of several fundamental articles like the best interest of the child, the right to be heard and the right to a safe and clean

environment (UNCRC, 1951). Reading Daly's contribution to this line of literature I discovered that with the term "paternalistic" (2024) he describes the standpoint of how policy and judicial documents are produced by correlating children as vulnerability in need of protection arguing that instead a "post paternalist" perspective on children's rights it should be developed and applied in the solution formulation of climate crisis and displacement. Indeed, by researching the coping mechanisms of children in this complex situation I discovered that in later scholarships about agency, represented by Abebe (2019), children are recognized as active agents with legitimate claims to participation in decisions affecting their lives, drawing the path to the key concept "post-paternalism". This theoretical development provides crucial analytical tools for my thesis and to the understanding how youth climate activism challenges traditional approaches to children's rights. Complementing studies on youth climate activism have documented how young people challenge adult structures and demand for action. The youngest leader representing the global trend is the popular Greta Thunberg, who has challenged traditional assumptions about children's passivity and acceptance, or ignorance, about their future on this planet, by showing capacity, courage and relevant agency, reaching important speaking stages. This interesting intersection of children's rights with the environmental crisis grew to the point where the literature corpus gets significant relevance and the attention of the UN Committee, that in 2023 produces and publishes the "UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 26". Its importance is due to a fundamental definition of climate crisis' governance as "structural violence against children" (p.1). This affirmation, in the literature dedicated to children's rights in climate crisis and displacement is an enormous achievement, calling wealthy and industrialised states and corporations as duty bearers, a big success for children's rights jurisprudence.

The constructivism literature

One more body of literature examined is the social constructivism and the global governance. In order to choose the right tools to answer my research question I considered the social constructivism perspective because the previous two bodies of literatures focus on explaining two different realities of the same problem but fail in addressing how global governance operates through the social construction of problems, identities and proposed solutions. Namely, Finnemore and Sikkink's work on norm entrepreneurship illustrates how new norms become socially accepted through the calculated actions of who produce them (1998), as well as the importance of non-state actors in the influence and production of specific norm designs. However, this literature does not focus on the global governance that constructs and manages the populations of individuals, especially displaced children. Instead, the post-structuralist approach of M. Foucault, or even more

precisely Bacchi's problem representation fit the purpose of my study which wants to discover the several representations of the same problem and the subjectification complementing the representation imposed to individuals involuntarily engaged and victim of such representation. Indeed, Foucault examines how discourse shapes global governance by constructing subjects, objects and solutions, but Bacchi operationalise in a systematic analysis the deconstruction that Foucault theorise. Always concerning political constructions, I have discovered the literature contribution of Rasan-Cooper et al. in 2015 which provides a more comprehensive theorisation than Bettini (2014) on framings and subjectification of individuals displaced. More precisely, Ransa-Cooper et al.'s contribution aligns with the same macro-subject in my thesis: climate-displaced people. The work specifically frames the subjects of study into four framings: the victim, the security threat, the adaptive agentic and political subjects. My contribution will be to contextualise it in a children-centred analysis. Last but not least, in the process of the literature research I found extremely relevant and explicative the organized hypocrisy's concept developed by S. Krasner (1999). Despite the presence of more recent studies of Barnett and Finnemore (2004) on international organization pathologies and of Sending and Neumann (2007) on institutional contradictions, which provide additional theoretical tools to understand how the global governance institutions manage competing difficulties, Krasner's understanding of how states simultaneously endorse new norms and policies, while continuing violating then norms themselves when convenient, builds the perfect theoretical lens to explain the coexistence of both discourses and the reasons lying behind that I will analyse.

The thesis contribution and strategy

This literature review reveals that while each of this literature bodies of scholarship examined provide a significant analytical base, there is no literature that critically contributes with a comprehensive research question that asks: How do children's rights challenge the global governance discourses on climate-induced displacement?

While each of the three bodies of scholarship examined have made significant contributions to understanding aspects of climate crisis, climate displacement and children's rights, limited work exists at their intersection. In the definitional and legal literature body, authors struggle and focus on the how and how to not to name climate displaced people but fail to address the actual casual drivers that creates this new category. Later, in both security and children's rights literature they provide a significant base of literature for my study but present gaps understanding how to co-exist with the dominant paternalist-security discourse, falling in norms and policy developments that lack of efficacies, although representing enormous step forward.

Therefore, with this research question, the thesis aims to build on this literature review to provide a first triangulation of the two discourses, on one hand the paternalist-security, and on the other one the post paternalist and rights-based discourse, critically synthesized in the organised hypocrisies of global governance that reflects on international legal and policy developments.

Theory

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework that supports the documents' analysis of the global governance of children's climate-induced displacement. The central argument is that the governance is characterized by a profound hypocrisy swinging between competing paradigms: a dominant paternalist-security that represents the problem of first climate change, then climate displacement and the individuals involved, as either threats or passive victims. On the other hand, there is a raising, more pro-active and human-based discourse founded on children's rights. The latter, conceptually constructs children as the most impacted individuals in this scenario as well as political subjects, with agency and legitimate claims to justice, which recalls the UNCRC of 1989.

To analyse this complex discursive contestation, this thesis employs a multi-layered theoretical framework organized into four interconnected sections. The first one presents the foundational meta-theoretical framework that is epistemologically oriented to social constructivism and post-structuralism. Secondly, it will be examined the problematization concept and theorisation, together with the framing theoretical concept, both employed to understand the different policies' discourses. The third paragraph will present the supporting concepts of both discourses with an umbrella of specific theories that sustain the different competing representations of climate displacement and children. Finally, the fourth section will introduce the relevant theory as the key to understand the contradictions that characterize the current legal and policy status in regards to children and climate crisis and displacement.

The foundation meta-theoretical framework

The social constructivism as epistemological foundation

The primary lens and theoretical approach to this study rests fundamentally on a social constructivist epistemological base. Social constructivism, developed by P. Berger and T. Luckmann in the 60s, states that what typically is understood as objective social reality is actually the product of ongoing social processes, shared meaning and relational subjectivity practises. In 'The social Construction of Reality' (1966), Berger and Luckmann affirm that human beings do not simply discover pre-existing social facts but they actively build their perspective of social reality through daily interactions, processes and relevant activities. This approach is fundamental to understand that while social organisations and categories appear natural, they are the result of historical structures. Therefore, in this thesis context, the social constructivism treats and challenges categories as "climate migrant", "child", "security threat", "victim" as fixed and natural

classifications, posing a strong start line to investigate the complex process that actively constructs these categories, uncovering who has the power to manage and design the course.

A step forward is operated by the post-structuralism of M. Foucault's. He builds from social constructivism to focus mainly on the relationships between power, knowledge and discourse (M. Foucault, 1972). His relevant contribution and perspective about the construction of knowledge and its production in different historical periods and places (1972), together with his contribution on the study of the relationship between power and knowledge (1977), are crucially relevant for the thesis since the study is not merely about collecting and reading statements, texts or generally documents but goes beyond the structure, aiming to discover the hidden assumptions. Therefore, a post-structural approach to this thesis is the right opportunity to analyse the modalities by which discourses shape and produce specific reality and subjectification.

The analytical frameworks for policy discourse

The problematization concept

The crucial theoretical bridge between the post-structural theoretical framework and the specific analysis of the data is provided by C. Bacchi's (2009, 2012) studies on problematization theory. She builds directly from the Foucauldian idea about the relationship between power and knowledge with her main purpose of criticize the dominant and neutral "problem-solving" approach, generally characterizing the conventional legal and policy documents. Specifically, rather than looking at the problems as given and neutral issues, she adopts with her "What is the problem presented to be?" questions, a critical approach to the problem itself analysing how they are constructed through social and institutionalised processes. *"What one proposes to do about something reveals what one thinks is problematic"* (Bacchi, 2009, p. 6). This shift is particularly useful to analyse the climate displacement governance, where it changes in problematizations: if it is represented as a states' security problem or as a child's rights violation, which consequently produces different outcomes in the legal and policy levels.

The framing analysis theoretical contribution

Complementing Bacchi's problematization theory, this study chooses to include the framing analysis to deepen the study by looking at the reasons why certain individuals are being framed in different ways. The framing theorisation specifically used here is the theory of H. Ransan-Cooper, C. Farbotko, K. McNamara, F. Renaud and T. Vanclay developed in 2015. There have been previous framing theoretical elaborations developed by other sociologists who examined how social and political actors interpret, define and represent complex issues in ways that privilege certain

understandings and marginalize others. Nonetheless, the Ransan-Cooper et al. framing theorisation is a better fit for this thesis for a simple reason: she analyses the environmental migration framing. In their study named 'Being(s) Framed' of 2015, Ransan-Cooper et al. identify not one but four primary frames through which climate migrants have been represented in several international policy discourses in the past decades: 'victims', 'security threats', 'adaptive agents' and 'political subjects'. Regarding these classifications, the authors argue that these frames are not merely analytical categories, rather active political constructions that reflect distinct political, ideological and normative assumptions (Ransan-Cooper, 2015, p. 107). For the purpose of the thesis, this distinction provides essential key concepts to analyse the competing narratives and constructions of different actors and to comprehend how different framings produce different subject positions for climate-displaced children.

The discourse constitutive theories

To understand the different representations this third section provides a presentation of all the theories and perspectives that emerge from each constructed reality and categories on climate crisis, climate displacement and above all the individuals such as children.

The paternalist-security theory

In order to grasp how environmental migration is represented as a security threat, this thesis draws extensively on the securitization theories as developed by the Copenhagen School of security studies. The pivotal work of B. Buzan, O. Wæver and J. de Wilde (1998) provides the base line to understand how the reality is constructed as a security problem for major dominant states and corporations that privilege own interests instead of reducing environmental impacts in their emissions production. An insight of securitization theory is that security is a 'speech act' (Buzan, 1998) throughout actors can construct issues as existential threats requiring emergency measures outside the standards of normal politics. The 2007 CNA, for instance, will be analysed and discussed as one of the documents that conceptually constructs climate change as a “threat multiplier” challenging delicate world order and current difficult problems.

The security theoretical lens is complemented by paternalist approaches that position climate-displaced children as passive victims who need external paternal protection and management. Paternalism, as analysed by scholar such as J. Donnelly (2007), is explained as the power exercised over others by being justified from ideas and assumptions about “others” incapacity for self-determination and need for protection. In a paternalistic perspective, children’s rights are something that adults “give” or donate to children and that they manage on children’s behalf. This perspective,

definitely aligns with the dominant attitude of major wealthy and industrialised states that visualise an agentic individual as an adult that protects, with a paternal attitude, who physically and mentally can not. On this line, the paternalist-security consequent subjectification of other individuals, especially foreigners, is explained in what Ransan-Cooper et al. (2015) identify in their categories as the “victim” and “security threat”. The first recalls a paternalistic perspective, framing the displaced person as passive subject that involuntarily moves and contributes to negative consequences. The second framing, represents the menace that the person can cause, coinciding with the securitization stamp.

The post paternalist rights-based theory

This discourse uses the concept of 'structural violence' elaborated by J. Galtung (1969). Galtung affirms that structural violence is a kind of violence built into social systems, which causes unequal power and therefore unequal life chances across the globe (p. 171). With the structural violence concept, it is possible to understand how the global fossil fuel economy damages immensely children and communities in the Global South, considering that they have contributed the least to carbon emissions, still suffering the most from the climate change. Therefore, this theoretical concept can assist the thesis investigation on climate-induced displacement by looking at the structural systematic conditions that cause displacement and not just to the subjects.

Moreover, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified globally in 1989, particularly represents the basis for the rights-based arguments. The UNCRC creates a universal legal framework for children's rights which can be applied on the climate crisis and consequent displacement, to show that the lack of protection of children in the event of climate change and displacement is a violation of children's basic rights. This creates a corresponding responsibility for states to prevent harm and provide solutions. The angle chosen for this thesis analysis extends and elaborates theoretically more on the rights-based analytical approach.

Adding on this rights-based perspective of children's rights, in the research process it becomes evident that the type of advocacy work and the perspective brought from children, scholars and partners is more sophisticated and critical towards the UNCRC. The theoretical concept that sustains a new perspective on children's rights is the 'post paternalism'. Developed by Daly et al. in (2024), this concept has emerged in current children's rights debate which tries to contextualise the new events of climate and rights advocacy. It represents a change in how it is possible to understand and apply children's rights, since post-paternalism concept questions the outdated and paternalistic approaches by seeing children as active political people who can demand, use, and expand their rights through their actions. Indeed, the rise of global youth climate activism is a good example of

using rights in a post paternalist way. The post paternalism therefore involves *"grassroots action from children (for the first time, on a global scale), rather than well-meaning adults 'giving' children their rights"* (Daly et al., 2024, p.1).

A key feature of the post paternalist approach is a detailed understanding of agency that goes beyond typical ideas of individual action. Instead of seeing agency as the ability to act alone, this view recognizes that all human action is relational and interdependent (Abebe, 2019). Abebe is a scholar that I discovered in my research and supports well the post paternalist representation of children's position in the climate and displacement context. The scholar's concept is relevant because agency is intended as a "continuum" approach. This approach recognizes that agency is not binary in individuals: either you are agentic or the opposite. Instead, agency is considered as a capacity, just as the post paternalism, that can be exercised differently across several situations and interactions. And even more, this conceptualisation aligns again with post-paternalism because both are relational, they can be exercised alone. Lastly, Abebe's agency finds similarity with the framing theory of Ransan-Cooper in the "variation" factor or, in other words, with the "hybrid" feature of agency and frames (Ransan-Cooper et al., 2015). Hence, both agency and frames can vary, depending on relationships and structural contexts. Linking to the framing of Ransan-Cooper et al., the rights-based argument is mainly shown through the political subject frame (50). Within this frame, environmental migrants are constructed as political subjects with real claims to rights, justice, and involvement in decisions that affect their lives. This frame emphasizes the rights of children to participation, voice and self-determination while challenging the structural violence perpetrated by states and corporations and produce environmental displacement.

To assure a comprehensive critical analysis, this framework includes also an interpretation of intersectionality, as developed by the legal scholar K. Crenshaw (1989, 1991). Crenshaw's core study focuses on traditional legal American processes to understand discrimination mechanisms and how different identity are considered as separate and not intersecting with each other. Race, gender, class, disability... they are all identities marginalizing individuals, especially in judicial processes. This several identities are singularly considered, avoiding their intersectionality. Important to highlight is Crenshaw's focus of study which points to the live experiences of Black women in legal processes. Hence, her theoretical contribution is in the sphere of feminism, injustice and violence in the context of legal processes. Despite this difference of focus and contribution, I do believe that an interpretation of intersectionality is a relevant theoretical contribution to climate displacement and the study of children positionality in the context analysed in this thesis, and I will demonstrate it in the analysis by applying the same mechanisms of logic. With Crenshaw's intersectionality logic, it

is possible to detect how children are systematically marginalised in the global governance of climate crisis and displacement. Moreover, through an intersectional lens is possible to identify the dominant policy and legal frameworks on climate induced displacement that often obscure the complex realities and experiences of children, characterised by different and unique compounded identities. While policy discourses often treat "climate-displaced children" as a homogeneous category, an intersectional lens reveals that the experiences of displacement vary dramatically based on factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, disability status, and geographic location.

Organized Hypocrisy: the synthesizing theory

At this point, what is established is the foundational theoretical frameworks and the discourse-specific theories. The next paragraph now presents the comprehensive analysis of S. Krasner (1999) that equips the analysis of the right theoretical concept to understand and synthesize the co-existence of competing discourses about climate-induced child displacement within global governance structures. In theorising the approach of states to new global scenarios he introduces a "logic of appropriateness" meaning that political actors act based on rules, norms, and values that define what is acceptable in certain social situations. The "logic of consequences", on the other hand, suggests that political actors act based on what benefits them most, so their true material interests. But when the organized hypocrisies happen? When these two ideas clash (Krasner, 1999, p. 9). Krasner elaborates that organized hypocrisy is not just an act of manipulation but a result of how the international system is mainly set up. Better said, the political actors who shape the global governance, may publicly endorse norms, principles and commitments, pretending to permit a partial loss of their sovereignty for an fair cause or reason, meanwhile pursuing hidden policies that directly violate those very principle.

The current management, or majorly lack of, in climate-induced displacement children's rights violations in the event of climate crisis and displacement, clearly shows organized hypocrisy in practice. Krasner points out that states have often approved international human rights agreements and made promises under international climate agreements. But then again, even with these agreements, states' behaviour often drives against these principles. Therefore, organized hypocrisy theory helps us understand why the different discourse in this paper, the paternalist-security and the rights-based arguments, can exist together.

An Integrated Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents a comprehensive and detailed theoretical framework that combines concepts from social constructivism, post-structuralism, problematization theory, framing analysis,

securitization theory, structural violence theory, rights-based approaches, post-paternalism, intersectionality, and organized hypocrisy theories. While each of these notions are useful on its own, combining them provides the analysis a better tool kit to analyse the complex issues of climate displacement governance. Bacchi's theoretical concept of problematization sets the scene with a theoretical notion that enable the researcher to look at the problem representations with a critical constructive eye. The framings of Ransan-Cooper contribute to understand the different subjectification applied on the study subject of analysis: the climate displaced people. By applying this lens on this thesis, it will be possible to decodify how individuals are pictured and considered. Thirdly, the umbrella of theoretical concept listed above that supports both discourses will be used to analyse the data taken in consideration. And ultimately, the intersectionality and organized theoretical concepts will be applied in the analysis as critical analytical means to reflect on the findings.

Methodology

This chapter clarifies the methodology employed to investigate the global governance of climate induced child displacement from the perspective of competing discursive paradigms. The research design reflected the key research question: How do children's rights challenge the global governance discourses on climate-induced displacement?

To meet this research question, a creative, compounded and interpretive approach is employed incorporating a critical discourse analysis, rooted in post-structuralist epistemology and inspired by Carol Bacchi's WPR approach ("What's the Problem Represented to be?"). This methodological framework will allow an analysis of how competing discourses (a dominant paternalist-securitization discourse and the opposite emerging post paternalist children rights-based discourse) generate different constructions of climate mobility and relative subjectification. This chapter will present the research design, analytical techniques, data selection criteria, analytical strategy and ethical considerations, which will guide the investigation.

The research design

The study follows to a qualitative research compatible with its post-structuralist theoretical perspective and social constructivist epistemology. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) point out, qualitative research is especially well suited for a study on how social reality is constructed, contested, and changed through discursive practices: the qualitative research is *"a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, the phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them"* (p. 3). The choice of qualitative methodology hence aligns with a study emphasizing the understanding of how climate displacement is problematized, framed, and governed through contending discourses rather than a measurement of how often and how effectively particular policy interventions might be instituted.

In this perspective, the study is methodologically inspired to the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), drawing particularly on the work of N. Fairclough (1992). The reasons behind this choice of inspiration lies on the tools that the CDA offers to both reflect on the constitutes of social reality and subject positions. As Fairclough argues (2003, 23), the CDA concerns: *"the relationship between what is structurally possible and what actually happens, between structures and events, is a very complex*

one". This focus aligns with the purpose of the study that tries to uncover the competing discourses rounding on climate displacement, children's rights and the shaping operated by the global governance practices. In the analysis, it will be examined the proper text looking at the linguistic features and rhetorical strategies which correspond to the first dimensional point of the model adopted by Fairclough (1992). Moreover, an additional division of the model is elaborated which considers not only a textual analysis but also the discursive practices of how documents are produced and distributed and consumed, added to the social practice analysis of how discourse relate to the broader power structures and social developments. This multi-dimensional approach to discourse designs the pathway for an analysis not only on climate-displaced children but also on how different representations of them are constructed, legitimized and contested across different institutional texts.

The analytical methods Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?"

Writing about representations, the thesis primary analytical method is the one of C. Bacchi's (2009) "What is the Problem representation to be" (WPR) which provides not only a strong theoretical problematization approach (as previously seen) but also a systematic method applicable to the to analysis. Bacchi's purpose is to "*challenge the presentation of policies as rational responses to objective problems by demonstrating that they are instead the contingent products of prevailing policy/political discourses, and can therefore be thought "otherwise"*" (Clarke, 2019, p.190) in Riemann, 2023, p.152). Therefore, her use of the WPR method, applied in international relations not only questions policies formations and constructions but also their "problem-solving" rationality and efficiency (Riemann, 2023). Hence, the entry point of the analysis for Bacchi, as well as in this study, is the policy documents themselves. Starting from them, Bacchi suggests a division of the analysis in six questions (Bacchi, 2009) that systematically deconstructs the policy and unveils the discourse and narrative at the core of the document:

<i>Q1: What is the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy or policies?</i>	The first question guides the researcher to detect implied problems and policies proposed by simply reading the text (Bacchi, 2009, p.48). This is a important step because in this phase the researcher's goal is to understand the problematization, what the authors of the documents consider as a problem, by identifying both strategically declared assumptions as well as the non-declared ones. Indeed, Bacchi states " <i>what one proposes to do about something reveals what one thinks is problematic</i> " (Bacchi, 2012, p. 21).
<i>Q2: What deep-seated presuppositions or</i>	This question engages with the presuppositions underlying the problem representation. What is to identify in this step is the conceptual logics, the

<i>assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?</i>	rational thought behind ideas and use of terminology. In this step the categories, the key terms are identified and brought to the centre of discussion. The problem representation, to be logical and rational has to be constructed through association of specific definitions to specific objects and subjects.
<i>Q3: How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?</i>	This question identifies the historical and political processes through which particular problem representations have emerged and have been legitimated. Here what is noticeable is a recollection of the Foucault genealogy where the implied problems are examined by focusing on the journey to arrive at this representation (Riemann, 2023, p. 156). Therefore, the historical, cultural and political circumstances are taken in consideration at this point because they influence inevitably with the policy making processes.
<i>Q4: What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?</i>	This question is particularly important because the researcher, if using this question, chooses as scope to highlight the silences deriving from the problem representation and not only. Here Bacchi pushes the researcher to carefully examine the “possible gaps or limitations in this representation of the “problem” (Riemann, 2023, p.156). Hence, with this question what results is excluded, marginalized, or “invisible” alternative realities of individuals, different approaches and policy productions on the problem representation (Bacchi, 2012, p.23). Interesting, is the comparative approach, that Bacchi includes in this 'passage' drawing from Foucault. With this suggestion she signals the comparative feature of the question, where the researcher has to question and explore other alternative representations placed possibly also in another time and place (Riemann, 2023, p. 156).
<i>Q5: What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?</i>	This question examines the concrete and rhetorical effects of different problem representations, including also how they create specific subject positions, policy responses, and lived experiences (Bacchi, 2009). She proposes a set of sub-questions to design a line of procedure for the examination: ‘What is likely to change with this representation of the “problem”?’ What is likely to stay the same? Who is likely to benefit from this representation of the “problem”?’ Who is likely to be harmed? How does the attribution of responsibility for the “problem” affect those so targeted and the perceptions of the rest of the community about who is to “blame”?’ (p. 48).
<i>Q6: How and where has this representation</i>	This question analyses the institutional and political processes through which the problem representations are preserved and challenged. Precisely, she

<i>of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?</i>	wants to bring to light the elements that support a problematization. Therefore, the goal of this step is to interrogate how a certain view has been constructed, legitimized and shared” (Riemann, 2023, p. 157).
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To conclude, Bacchi’s problematization systematic method can definitely contribute to the thesis analysis of climate crisis and consequent displacement. The WPR method shifts analytical attention from evaluating policy solutions to interrogating how problems themselves are represented and contested by offering a versatile methodological pathway to systematically operationalise a structuralist approach, drawing from a Foucauldian foundational print to a discourse analysis, inspired by the Critical Discourse Analysis. By focusing on problematizations: “*WPR unpacks policy problems by asking what the problem is represented to be, what assumptions and silences are necessary to this representation, and what effects it has on subjectivities.*” (Riemann, 2023, p.157).

The Data Corpus and Selection Criteria

In the analysis, the data presented is carefully selected from the broader corpus of policy documents, legal instruments, and institutional communications that represent crucial moments and places in the policy production regarding climate-induced displacement and children positionality. The data selection strategy follows the requirements of relevance to the research questions and to the theoretical and methodological tools.

The data corpus can be categorised like this:

Document title	Discursive contribution	Geographic position	Authors	Year of publishing	Type of document
National security and the threat of climate change	Security-based	Global North (U.S.)	CNA Military Advisory Board	2007	Report
U. s. Department of Defense (DoD) "climate change adaptation roadmap"	Security-based	Global North (U.S.)	U.S. Department of Defense (DoD	2014	Policy Document / Roadmap

Frontex strategic reports	Security-based	Global North (EU)	European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex)	2022	Strategic Report
Australia-tuvalu falepili union Treaty	Hybrid (it provides a rights-based migration pathway in exchange for security guarantees)	Bilateral (Global North-South)	Governments of Australia and Tuvalu	2023	Bilateral Treaty
UN refugee convention	Hybrid (it protects refugees under persecution but fails to protect “climate refugees”)	International	United Nations (UN)	1951	International Convention
Fund for responding to loss and damage	Hybrid (rooted in climate justice; aims to provide remedy for harm to vulnerable nations but fails in providing concrete financial aid)	International (Global South focus)	Parties to the UNFCCC / Paris Agreement	2023	International Agreement / Fund Guidelines
UNCRC General Comment No. 26	Rights-based / Hybrid (it frames climate change as a "children's rights crisis" but fails in its non-binding nature)	International	UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)	2023	General Comment (Authoritative Legal Interpretation)
The Sacchi et al. v. Argentina et al. legal complaint	Rights-based	International	16 child petitioners; Decision by UNCRC	2019 (Complaint) / 2021 (Decision)	Legal Complaint & Committee Decision
Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis	Rights-based	International	UNICEF	2021	Report
International Data Alliance for Children on the Move (IDAC)	Rights-based	International	IDAC (UNICEF, IOM, UNHCR, OECD, Eurostat)	2024 (Primary report cited)	Report / Data Brief
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	Rights-based / Hybrid (it is a fundamental document for children’s rights but shows paternalist perspectives)	International	UN Committee on the Rights of the Child	1989	International Convention

The data corpus treated in this thesis provides sufficient data set for a discourse analysis with the available time and capacity. The final dataset has been obtained by firstly identifying the institutional, legal databases, academic sources and reports. During a second reading round I verified the relevance and engagement with the following topics: climate change, childhood, Children's Rights, climate-induced displacement, climate migration, climate disasters and related policy and legal issues. Considering the time at disposition, I consider feasible the selected number of documents presented.

The analysis strategy

In this paragraph what is explained is the strategy applied to structure the analysis. The latter follows a systematic and clear structure which is composed by three chapters. These three sections are created with the main purpose to answer the main research question which is "How do the children's rights-based discourse challenge the global governance discourses on climate-induced displacement?".

The first analytical sub-question aims to investigate the paternalist-security discourse analysis by posing the question: *"How does the dominant security-focused discourse constructs the problem of climate displacement?"* In this phase Bacchi's WPR method, specifically questions (Q) 1 ("What is the 'problem' represented to be?"), 2 ("What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the 'problem?'") and 4 ("What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?"). Together with the use of the security concepts, the paternalist and intersectional theories the framework is ready to analyse the majority of the security-based data presented in the data corpus presentation. This first question aims to examine how the dominant discourse constructs climate displacement and migrants as a security problem and children as passive victims or threats by identifying the problem representations, underlying assumptions and intersectional gaps.

The second one sub-question asks: *"How does the rights-based discourse and children practices represent the problem of climate displacement in opposition to the paternalist-securitization frame?"* To answer this question the analysis, employ Bacchi's Q1 ("What is the 'problem' represented to be?"), no. 5 ("What effects are produced?"), and no. 4 ("Where are the silences?"). Ransan-Cooper's categories will serve also in this analysis section, particularly, the adaptive agent and the political subject framings. Complementing the theoretical concepts of structural violence, children's rights, agency and intersectionality, this question will examine the documents present in the second category of the data corpus section. This phase emphasises the counter-discourse and how it constructs climate displacement as a rights violation and children as political subjects. Additionally,

it emphasizes the effects of alternative problem representations and their challenge to the dominant one.

The third and last analytical sub-question aims to conglomerate the contradictions and paradoxical co-existence of both discourses answering to this question: *“How both representations coexist and what does this reveal about the underlying structure of global governance of climate-induced displaced people?”*. By applying the theoretical concept of organized hypocrisies and Bacchi’s Q5 (“What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?”) it will be possible to detect the contradictions between normative commitments and policy practices, analysing principally documents hybrid documents presented in the data section.

Coding

In order to obtain a valuable analysis, both deductive and inductive coding strategies will be implemented. Deductive codes are derived from the theoretical framework, including concepts such as "securitization," "paternalism," "structural violence," and "post-paternalism" namely. Inductive codes emerge from close reading of the data texts and if needed interpretation of it, allowing for theoretical refinement and the identification of unexpected patterns.

The first cycle of coding of data focuses on descriptive and in vivo coding to capture basic content and authors’ language. The second cycle tries to identify patterns and theoretical coding to identify themes and connections to theoretical concepts. The last and final coding cycle aims to analytically develop interpretations and theoretical insights and critical points.

Ethical Considerations

On the same line of thought of critical and post-structuralist approaches in this research it is essential to acknowledge the researcher positionality and the potential influences that the researcher could be subject at. As Haraway (1988) affirms, all knowledge is “situated knowledge” which shows particular perspectives, positionalities and interests rather than neutral, objective observations. In this thesis therefore, I choose to position the study as a Global-North academic investigation of the global governance, legislations and discursive strategies. In addition to this, in examining the second counter-discourse of the post paternalist and rights-based approach I aim to partially bring to light the bottom-up advocacy work of children and organizations (given to space and time at disposition) from the Global-South by positioning them in comparison with the Global-North discourse and policy, legal production. I am aware that that this specific standpoint can limit my understanding on the widest spectrum of lived experiences, alternative representations, particularly from the Global-South. Nonetheless, the analysis attempts to discover how children and

communities from the Global South are represented in Global North policy discourse while avoiding the reproduction of paternalistic or colonizing perspectives.

This study aims for a logic and clear examination about its approach, data sources, and analysis methods while noting some key limitations. By focusing on official policy documents, it might overlook important alternative viewpoints and important voices. This study is produced in Copenhagen (Denmark); therefore, the researcher's positionality may show important and practical limitations, which may reinforce certain forms of knowledge privilege. The study notes that discourse analysis cannot fully represent the material conditions and lived experiences related to the complex topic of climate displacement, neither all the nuances of the international discourses in act currently which would require additional research. Still, analysing policy discourse is crucial for grasping how governance practices shape the conditions of displacement and inform responses. The researcher aims to use the findings to help create fairer and more effective governance responses while acknowledging that academic research has limitations when it comes to making immediate material changes for affected communities.

Analysis

As previously anticipated, the analysis will be structured in three big sections that will answer to three sub-analytical question with the final purpose of building and obtaining the empirical results for the research question posed and the beginning.

How does the dominant security-based discourse construct the problem of climate displacement and displaced people?

To deconstruct the different discourses in the global governance, this first analytical section of the analysis chapter begins with the analysis of the security-based narrative to identify its problem representation and proposed solutions. This section takes the first steps by deconstructing the dominant discourse, by posing following analytical sub-question: *how does the dominant security-focused discourse constructs the problem of climate displacement and displaced people?*

As stated in the methodological chapter, the analysis employs Carol Bacchi's (2009) "What's the Problem Represented to be?" approach, by interrogating foundational security documents through Bacchi's initial: "What is the 'problem' represented to be?" and "What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation?", the investigation states the conceptual construction that positions climate-displaced persons not as rights-holders, but as threats to be managed. The corpus for this analysis consists of three categories of texts that design, produce and legitimize this frame; initially, with military and security strategy documents from the United States, where the "threat multiplier" concept was born. Secondly, international and regional border security policies, particularly from the European Union, which operationalize the abstract threat into concrete surveillance and control mechanisms. Finally, high-level political speeches and strategies that communicate this frame as official state policy, thereby legitimizing a state-centric response to an actual human-centric crisis.

The problem

As already written, Bacchi's first start point is to detect what is the problem appearing to be. This question in this specific security documents picture climate change as a security issue, solidified in the global discourse through the strategic introduction of a single, powerful concept: the "threat multiplier." Coined in the 2007 Report 'National Security and the Threat of Climate Change by the Center for Naval Analyses' (CNA), a group of honourable retired U.S. generals and admirals introduce the term "threat multiplier": *"Climate change can act as a threat multiplier for instability in*

some of the most volatile regions of the world, and it presents significant national security challenges for the United States." (CNA, 2007, 1). The term is a deliberate rhetorical intervention because they design and explain it to translate environmental concerns into the familiar military lexicon of a "force multiplier," ensuring it would resonate within defence communities (Britchenko 2025, p.2).

This document poses specific questions aimed to define the problem type, magnitude, present / future impacts, and strategy against it. After the first reading what appears immediate is the constant use of the 'security' term (precisely 183 times), 'defense' (69 times) and above all 'nation' (229 times), in 68 pages. Moreover, a second finding is the careful prediction of the effects of climate change over the coming decades which include weather events, drought, flooding, sea level rise, retreating glaciers, habitat shifts, illegal mass migration and increase in spread of life-threatening diseases, by stating that *"projected climate change poses serious threat to America's national security"*, it *"[...] will add to tensions even in stable regions of the world"* and that they recognize themselves as threatened by it because *"climate change, national security, and energy dependence are related set of global challenges"* (CNA, 2007, p.43-44). What the generals recommend as solutions is namely that numerous bodies of the American government should focus on constantly report on the climate change impacts situations and to fully integrate national security responses in the national defence strategies (p. 48). Indeed, an analysis of another foundational document and subsequent strategies, like the U.S. Department of Defense's 'Climate Change Adaptation Roadmap' reveals the strict consequent connection, additionally clarifying the precise nature of the problem representation (The White House, 2014): the "problem" is not the climate change per se, but its cascading political effects. The chosen language focuses on how phenomena like sea-level rise and changing precipitation patterns exacerbate a *"wide array of pre-existing vulnerabilities and drivers of instability, including poverty, infectious disease, terrorism, and weak governance"* (Britchenko, 2025, p. 2). Therefore, the core threat identified is geopolitical instability, particularly in the Global South, which could ultimately jeopardize the national security interests of the Global North. The analysis is stuffed with terms like 'resource competition', 'failed states', and 'humanitarian disasters', framed as precursors to conflict that the U.S. military may be called upon to manage.

This framing proved remarkably effectiveness, rapidly becoming the "primary lens" for the U.S. security community (Dalby, 2024), crossing oversea to be adopted by institutions like the European Union (Brown and McLeman 2009; European Union, 2008). However, this success creates a profound paradox: the "threat multiplier" framework, whereas effective for the agenda-setting, represents a "dismal and limited worldmaking project" (Dalby 2024). It is *"dismal"* because it raises a fatalistic vision of inevitable climate-intensified conflict located in fragile states, and *"limited"*

because it channels responses toward managing symptoms, such as hardening military infrastructure, rather than addressing the root cause through transformative decarbonization (Britchenko 2025, p.3). The framework externalizes the problem, portraying vulnerable regions as sources of future threats to be contained, rather than as the victims of a crisis disproportionately caused by the historical emissions of industrialized nations (Dalby 2024; Koubi 2019).

This representation is powerfully operationalized in the risk analyses of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency: Frontex. In its strategic report, the abstract "threat" caused by the instability is translated into the concrete problem of border management. Frontex states that "climate change will possibly have the greatest effects on border security in the future" and will cause a "continuous flow of irregular migration" toward the EU (Frontex 2022, p. 9). Here, the WPR analysis shows that the problem is explicitly represented as the challenge of controlling human "flows," which are constructed as a direct threat to the integrity of the EU's borders. This framing moves climate-related migration "outside" the standard politics and into the area of security, justifying "extraordinary measures" over standard practices (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998).

This rhetorical move is an example of what H. Ransan-Cooper and her colleagues (2015) call "framing", the process by which actors interpret and represent an issue to generate specific policy directions (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, p. 1). The securitization discourse, in fact, uses two distinct frames they identify the environmental migrant, either as a "security threat" or as a "victim" (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, p. 1). Firstly, the securitization aspect of the discourse aligns perfectly with the security-based discourse (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, p. 5). In this representation, environmental migrants are illustrated as a danger to global and national security, with the potential to exacerbate resource conflicts and destabilize regions (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, p. 5). This framing justifies military solutions, border protection, and a focus on sovereignty rather than human rights (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, p. 5), as analysed in the previous data, where the "threat multiplier" concept is the pillar of the frame, structuring the issue as an international instability that demands action and control by the military and security bodies of the Global North (Britchenko, 2025, p. 7; Dalby 2024).

Simultaneously, there is a "paternalist" aspect of the discourse that engages on the "victims" frame (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, p. 4). The state-centric logic of industrialised countries and actors is fused with a deeply paternalistic worldview, embodying the "victim" frame and perspective to address the climate migrants and displaced people. Paternalism, in this context, links to a logic in which the state is constructed as the protector or, better said, the "father" of people. It is illustrated as an agentic player, legitimated to "recognise" and act on threats. Within this hierarchical structure,

state's own citizens are considered as passive objects to be managed or controlled, not as subjects with inherent rights or agency (Deng, 2021). Following this construction, migrants are portrayed as helpless, passive, and in need of salvation from environmental breakdown (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, p. 109). This frame positions the Global North as the benevolent "saviour" who must provide humanitarian assistance and protection: *"[...] these victims are subjects in need of protection against environmental change effects: the North is imagined as a space of salvation for victims on the move, as the provider of compassion and protection for helpless 'Others'"* (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, p. 109).

Later in the discussion, Ransan-Cooper et al. state that the two frames, while appearing contradictory - one of fear, the other of pity - are two sides of the same paternalistic coin (2015, p. 113). Both are driven largely by a Global North perspective and share a foundational silence: the denial of the migrant's agency (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, p. 113). Whether as a threat to be contained or a victim to be saved, the climate-displaced person is constructed as an object of policy, not a subject of rights (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, p. 113-114). This dual framing creates a powerful, self-reinforcing logic: when in lack of compassion or seen as too "expensive", the "victim" can easily be altered as a "threat," justifying a shift from humanitarianism to securitization.

The assumptions

Secondly, Bacchi's second step suggests to uncover what presuppositions and assumptions underpin this representation. The paternalist-securitization frame lies on a set of deep-rooted, often unspoken, assumptions about how the world functions. The most fundamental presupposition is that the international system is an arena of sovereign states whose primary duty is the protection of the national interest (Krasner, 1999). In this international perspective, power and interests, rather than norms like universal human rights, are the primary drivers of state policy. Sovereignty is the protection against external threats hence, any phenomenon that can alert the state control or territorial integrity is automatically understood as a security problem.

This logic is not merely a feature of policy discourse; it is codified in the very international legal framework. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees stands as a primary example. The core issue of the incompatibility of the Convention lays on its specific text, which was established in the aftershock of the World War II, to build a legal framework aimed for the protection of people victims of persecution, violence and oppression. That historical context currently shapes the definition of "refugee" that is based on the well-founded fears and persecution based on specific grounds:

"...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country"

(Art. 1A (2), UNCR, 1951)

The definition of refugee generates an insuperable obstacle for the climate-induced displaced people. Firstly, because the category of climate refugee does not meet the requirement of persecution: as stated, a "*well-founded fear of being persecuted*" (Art. 1A (2)) has to exist and direct on the individual. Around the concept of persecution, the agents inflicting the harm has to be human, such as a state or a non-state actor, combined with the state's lack of action to protect the victim. Differently, climate change and disasters' agents are environmental calamities such sea-level rise, drought, or floods. Moreover, the group of people affected by natural calamities are complex to identify and quantify. Secondly, the persecution has to be based on "*reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership*" (Art. 1A(2)). Differently, the climate displaced people are affected by environmental disasters because of their geographical location, not because of their identity or beliefs. Later on, it will be discussed that the people suffer disproportionately the effects of climate change. Nevertheless, the complexity and the intersection of multiple factors in climate-induced-displacements remains very hard to link to one of the five persecution grounds as Kanodia affirms (2017). Thirdly, the convention text strictly refers to cross-border displacement: "*...is outside the country of his nationality*" (Art. 1A(2)). Available and quantitative data of population displaced by climate-related disasters is one of the biggest challenges nowadays. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) though estimates that internal displacement is far more common than cross-border movement. The European Parliamentary Research Service in 2023 also stated that since 2008, over 376 million people have been displaced as a result of climate disasters, comparing the number to the entire population of Australia as if forced to leave their native land every year (EPRS, 2023). In 2022 alone, 36.2 million people were displaced because of natural disasters brought about by climate change, and while many found refuge within their own country, some were forced to go abroad. (Daoust, and Selby, 2024).

Certainly, the UN Refugee Convention remains the most comprehensive statement the international legal framework has nowadays on the rights and obligations of refugees, supported by the Human Rights Law. The Convention managed in the past to open doors to new refugee necessities, that is how refugees now can also have international protection if victims of gender-related persecution, but the core and primary purpose were not designed to protect every displaced person in the World, rather a specific target group subject of cross-border displacement with a persecution grounds. Therefore, despite the increased recognition in the global arena of climate forcibly displaced people

because of climate crisis, the protection gap still persists and new binding treaty, with the same legal power and recognition as the Refugee Convention, seems improbable in the short-future (McAdam, 2017). The reasons are: lack of political will, accountability from state actors, the intersectional nature of climate change, data collection barriers and the general preference for alternative non-binding measures (McAdam, 2017). All of this is topped by the paternalist-securitization conceptual discourse around climate displacement and the subject metaphorical framing of people who flee. These factors highlight the urgent need for a more adaptable legal framework, such as one centred on children's rights, to address the specific vulnerabilities of those displaced by climate change.

As just said, this legal void creates a "legal limbo" which persists nowadays for climate-displaced persons, allowing them to be framed not as rights-holders demanding protection, but as a "flow" of irregular migrants to be managed and controlled (Frontex, 2022); a security problem rather than a legal responsibility, which perfectly coincide with the discourse favoured by the U.S. generals and admirals (CNA, 2007), the U.S. Department of Defense's with the "Climate Change Adaptation Roadmap," (2014) and the Frontex (2022). The paternalistic legal approach of the Refugee Convention to forced migration is that the states will "grant" protection under very narrow circumstances of their own choosing; it does not recognize a universal right to safety in the event of humanitarian crisis, and states have all the interests (Krasner, 1999) in keeping clear this legal incompatibility.

The silences

Applying the fourth question of Bacchi's WPR framework, "What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?" and "Where are the silences?", the analysis gets the right analytical tool to deeply understand what this discourse strategically omits and so where it fails to address the comprehensive reality nuances (Bacchi, 2009).

There thesis argues that the relevant theorisation of K. Crenshaw about intersectionality plays a pivotal role in presenting the silences hiding behind the narrative discourse analysed until now. Bacchi explains that a WPR analysis allows to analyse not just what is said and the underlying assumptions derivable from the data, but also and most importantly what is systematically omitted (Bacchi, 2009). Operating a rapid step backwards, the analysis of the previous data reveals a paternalist-securitization discourse which speaks in monolithic, distant and security-oriented terms: 'illegal migration', 'uncontrolled migrants', 'mass migration' namely. This language constructs a homogenous, undifferentiated mass of individuals, erasing the vastly different experiences and nuances of climate displaced people. On the opposite narrative and conceptual side, an

intersectional analysis recognises and uncovers the profound silences on the compounded harms faced by individuals at the intersection of multiple axes of identity and vulnerability (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw positions the subject affected by climate change and disasters at the centre of the intersection of multiple identities and social vulnerabilities, visually showing the several challenges that a single human being has to overcome in order to survive certain situations. Crenshaw, with her intersectional approach and perspective of analysing injustice, also if belonging to the feminist and injustice scholarship, contributes significantly to the identification process of the most vulnerable subjects in the contexts, this time applying it on the climate crisis and displacement, among different and overlapping discriminations and challenges (Crenshaw, 1989). For example, the generals and admirals and, the Dod and Frontex and corporations that perpetrate business economies deregulated from high-impact policies on climate and a paternalist-securitization approach to the matter, do not take into consideration how a drought might force a young girl into an early marriage in another town or country as a family's coping strategy, or how a flood might be uniquely deadly for a person with a disability unable to flee. They do not consider the profound loss of indigenous groups and communities when losing not only their ancestral lands but their cultural and spiritual identity strictly tied to that specific land when forced to relocate because of climate-induced inhabitability or, how women often face heightened risks of gender-based violence and trafficking in asylum camps (Government of Fiji, 2017). As A. Guterres, UN Special Rapporteur noted after a visit to Vanuatu, the human rights impact of climate change fall disproportionately on children, women and girls, older persons, and persons with disabilities (Morgera 2025, p. 1). This is not a mere oversight; it is a structural consequence of the frame itself: a discourse centred on the security of the state as its primary referent object, inherently incapable of perceiving the nuanced, intersecting vulnerabilities of individuals. Its unit of analysis is the geopolitical "risk," not the human being. By failing to differentiate the "threat" under a different humanitarian lens, the frame renders the specific experiences of women, children, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized groups invisible (Crenshaw, 1989), leaving them unproblematicized (Bacchi, 2009).

Concluding, the dominant paternalist-securitization discourse represents climate mobility and displaced individuals as a undermining object that threatens state sovereignty and international balance. This problem representation, raised from the "threat multiplier" definition, is reinforced by powerful, unspoken state-centrism and paternalism, which are legally codified in the incompatibility of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Through a WPR analysis, this chapter demonstrates that the frame's most significant failure is its profound legal lack of protection that systematically erases the compounded vulnerabilities faced by the most marginalized individuals. By having established the hidden logic mechanisms and the boundaries of this dominant paternalist-

securitization frame, the next chapter will analyse its direct antithesis: the emergent "political subject" frame, which offers a radical, rights-based, and post paternalist alternative narrative and discourse.

How does the rights-based discourse and children practices represent the problem of climate displacement in opposition to the paternalist-security discourse?

In clear contrast to the state-centric and paternalistic logic of the securitization frame analysed in the previous section, an alternative and increasingly influential discourse elaborates against it. This opposite point of view represents climate displacement not as a threat to be managed or a security crisis, rather as a human and rights crisis to be redressed. This chapter deconstructs this emergent and opposite framing by providing the evidence showing the rise of a "post paternalist" and its inherent correlation with children's agency and activism. Therefore, the analytical sub-question in this section is *How does the rights-based discourse and children practices represent the problem of the problem of climate displacement in opposition to the paternalist-security discourse?*

This analysis again uses Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?" (WPR) systematic method, focusing on Questions no.1 ("What is the 'problem' represented to be?"), no. 5 ("What effects are produced?"), and no. 4 ("Where are the silences?"). The corpus for this analysis is drawn from the key texts that have both formed and codified this new discourse: the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 26 (GC26), the landmark legal complaint in *Sacchi et al. v. Argentina et al.*, communications from youth movements like Fridays for Future, and reports from major international organizations and partners such as UNICEF and the International Data Alliance for Children on the Move (IDAC).

The problem

Focusing firstly on the representations, in the post paternalist frame, the "problem" of climate crisis and displacement is not presented as a geopolitical instability caused by displaced populations, but as a fundamental violation of human rights, especially children's, specifically caused by the inaction of global actors. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 26 (GC26) stands as the most authoritative and recent legal production of this problem representation, creating a fundamental legal (but not binding) contribution to the construction of the intersection between climate crisis and children's rights crisis (2023). The Committee chooses to start with the 'triple planetary crisis' terms combination: 'triple' to include climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution; 'planetary' to take into account the transboundary and total scale of the climate crisis; and

'crisis' to state clearly the need of action. The Committee explains the triple planetary crisis as an *"urgent and systemic threat to children's rights globally"* (GC26, 2023, p. 1). The careful choice of the words strategically locates the conceptual discourse on a different level, shifting the focus. The problem is not about the effects of climate change and the climate migration menacing states' sovereignty, security and interests, but about the failure of states and corporations to guarantee a liveable planet, by not truly facing the problem. Adding to this, the UN Committee writes about the child's rights violations in the context of climate change, referring to the extremely relevant binding legal Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989.

In the attempt of understanding the meaning of this approach, the concept of "structural violence" definitely assists and supports it theoretically. In a 1969 seminal article, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research', J. Galtung introduces the term structural violence with the purpose to denounce a form of violence where social structures or institutions (economic, political, or cultural) harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs, stated in the UNCRC of 1989. The key characteristics of structural violence are that it is indirect, with no single identifiable perpetrator, and appears as an unequal power and an unequal life chance (Galtung 1969, p. 170). More precisely, the harm could be avoided, because it is caused by the human hand (Galtung 1969, p. 171) and this conceptualization of violence is correlated as asocial injustice on marginalised groups (Galtung 1969, p. 177). Stated this, the decision by the UN Committee to represent the climate change impacts on children as "structural violence" is a powerful analytical move because it identifies as "structure" the global fossil fuel-based economy and the political systems that sustain it, which have historically benefited wealthy and industrialised nations at others' expenses. Secondly, it defines the "violence" not as a direct attack to the person but as the foreseeable consequences of climate change such as displacement, malnutrition, disease, and death.

All of these impacts fall disproportionately on children, who are the most vulnerable and marginalised, as Crenshaw's intersectional concept about marginalization states. The intersectional concept, in this regard, usefully serves as distinguisher of the extremely vulnerable position of children in the event of climate crisis and displacement. As explained better later on, children sit at the intersection of multiples lines of vulnerability that the structural violence multiplies and intensifies (UNICEF, 2021). But to conclude the analysis of the structural violence, the use of this in the present discourse removes the need for a single "villain," allowing for a call to accountability states and corporations for perpetrating a harmful system.

This shift of perspective is so profound in the opposite discourse that scholars A. Daly and her colleagues have named it a "post paternalist" era for children's rights (Daly et al. 2024). This new

lens fundamentally alters the identities of both children and states by framing the young as main character and political subject and the states as duty bearers, building in direct opposition to the "victim" and "threat" frames. This discourse constitutes children as empowered political actors. Indeed, in the GC26 children are framed as "agents of change" and "*child human rights defenders*" (GC26 2023, p. 1). Similarly, states are seen not anymore as probable protectors but as primary "*duty-bearers*" with specific obligations, including extraterritorial ones (GC26 2023, p. 14; UNICEF 2021, p. 114).

The assumptions

To fully grasp the significance of this post paternalist and rights-based discourse, it is crucial to analyse the specific theory of agency that lies as assumptions in this discourse.

Agency is broadly defined as the capacity of individuals to "*make sense of the environment, initiate change, and make choices*" (Kuczynski 2003, p. 9). The youth climate movement regarding climate crisis though, does not embody a simplistic, Western-centric model of agency that focuses on individual autonomy, willpower, and resistance against social structures (Abebe 2019, p. 5; Durham 2011, p. 152). The "political subject" frame, and by extension post-paternalism, is built on a far more comprehensive understanding of children's agency. Drawing on the work of T. Abebe, the agency presented by youth climate activists, as also regular coping children in remote islands, is elaborated as interdependent and continuative (Abebe, 2019). Explaining better, children's agency is organically interdependent and relational because it is developed and exercised not in alone, but throughout social practices and interactions. The same act of climate litigation, for example, is a proof of its interdependent nature, where child and youth activists have to relate to others such as be in collaboration with lawyers, experts, and NGOs or partners to claim for their rights. This model directly threatens the paternalist conception of the child as a passive, helpless victim in need of someone to come as a saviour, instead, it fights for a mechanism of intergenerational cooperation where rights and competencies are "*developed through participation in social practices... and in social interactions*" (Kjørholt 2005, in Abebe 2019, p. 5). Second, as stated before, children's agency exists on a continuum since children are "*both dependent and independent at the same time*". This means that their agency is negotiated and varies by context (Abebe 2019, p. 12). Youth climate leaders may act as powerful, independent political subjects on the world stage, while remaining dependent on parents and responsible for their daily needs. This perspective avoids the "romanticisation" of child activists as entirely autonomous and independent "mini-adults" and acknowledges their complex reality, instead it recognizes their vulnerability completed with agency. By considering this doble nature of agency, some similarities with the explained fluid nature of the

frames by Cooper emerge: *“Desired or not, frames are non-static and interactive, thereby altering the ways in which environmental migrants are understood or sought to be governed. [...] For instance, environmental migrants also exist as hybrids; victims of environmental degradation in one place re-emerge as agents of their own good fortune in distant labour markets”* (Ransan-Cooper, 2015, p. 112-113). This “hybrid” perspective about agency and frames contribute to the post paternalist contribution because it refuses the previous monolithic assumptions of agency and advances a realistic vision of children as competent, rights-holders and political actors.

To grasp better the original nature of the post paternalist and rights-based discourse, this section also proposes a systematic analysis of the normative landscape the discourse challenges. At the beginning of it, there is the paternalist approach evidenced in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In order to analyse with a post-paternalistic approach the Convention, as Fairclough suggests in his first dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, a close reading of the law “as it is”, focusing on legal text, looking at the terminology used and at the principles defined is operated. By systematically examining the legal text of the UNCRC together with a second critical reflection on the underlying perspective on children, what emerges is a hidden contradiction within the text itself, where a paternalist discourse of protection often contradicts principles of emancipation and participation. The paternalism encoded in the very architecture of the convention is not accidental as Daly et al. (2024) argue. While the UNCRC contains groundbreaking “freedom” articles, *“it is still arguable that the CRC is a paternalistic instrument, or that at least it is regularly interpreted in a paternalistic way”* (Daly et al. 2024, p. 4).

The preamble to the CRC explicitly frames the child as a individuals characterized by deficiency, affirming so: *“the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care”* (UNCRC, 1989, p. 1). Connecting the framing perspective to this statement, this choice of language is not neutral since it relies on and reinforces a set of assumptions about childhood that order vulnerability before capacity (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, p. 4). This ideological starting point frames the child primarily as a person to worry for, to take care of and to legally protect rather than an active agent. This overemphasis on protection, even though well-intentioned, constructs an ideological bias leading to what Daly et al. call as a *“tension between paternalistic and anti-paternalistic features”* (2024, p.4), where the participatory rights of children (e.g., Article 12: the right to be heard, and Article 15: the right to freedom of assembly) are subordinated to the adult paternal representation.

Adding on this, the creation process is relevant a more complete understanding. The fact that children were not involved in the drafting process of the CRC represents a critical evidence element

which can be translated as the children's lack of involvement in the process. This only confirms the paternalist approach by acknowledging that adults are the unique ones to be legitimate authors of children's rights (Daly et al. 2024, p. 5). This stands in great contrast to later conventions, such as the General Comment No. 26, as previously written. This analysis therefore reveals a legal instrument (the UNCRC of 1989) that, despite its absolute importance, frames children as subordinate to adults.

The effects

Moving beyond the investigation of the UNCRC, at this point it is necessary a focus on the real-world impact of the policies and how the inherent principles and norms work in practice. This paragraph relies on Bacchi's consideration of real effects of certain problematization in Q5 (Bacchi, 2009). Since 2016, the growth of the youth climate movement provides an interesting proof of the post paternalist approach to children's rights, interconnecting the post paternalist discourse, present in the UNGC26 with the lived political realities of children nowadays. The activism is the real-world evidence of post-paternalism, by being composed by children who refuse to be confined by the paternalistic frame encoded within the UNCRC of 1989. There are some key aspects to discuss in order to interpret the UNGC26 in reality.

Firstly, the global climate strikes, strategic litigation, and youth politicisation actions directly contradicts the doctrinal-paternalist approach of the child as a passive individual (Daly et al. 2024, p. 1). The youth climate movement is the living effect of this representation since it demonstrates how children can actively interpret and expand the UNCRC's participatory articles on their own terms.

Regarding the Article 12 of the UNCRC, it is stated: *"States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."* (Art. 12 (1), UNCRC, 1989). The interpretation of the article by the youth climate activism highlights the practical limitations of the right to be heard because the article 12, while theoretically representing a step forward, in practice until the UNGC26 is still weak, where adults *"ultimately ignore children's views"* (Lundy 2007 in Daly et al. 2024, 5). The transformative effect of the activism, sees a change from the participatory level at the year of the production of the UNCRC to the participatory levels at the time of the GC26 production (incredibly higher and deepened later). This represents the living proof of children's frustration with legal frameworks that are not applied in the face of new global challenges.

As the following documents illustrate, the youth climate movement is more than just activism; it fights for a structural shift in the adult-child power mechanisms. Daly et al. (2024) describe this as the dawn of a "post paternalist" era, where the traditional, reversing the paternalist hierarchy (Daly et al. 2024, p.1). Indeed, in the first lines of the GC26 it is immediately clarified that the *"efforts of children to draw attention to these environmental crises created the motivation and were the momentum behind the present general comment"* (GC26, 2023, p.1), confirming the transformative effect of the advocacy work. It is furtherly specified in the Comment that the process involved over 16,000 contributions from children worldwide, situating them as global political actors from all around the globe. This activism and engagement level though move its first important steps not before the first global movement: the Friday for Future by Greta Thunberg in 2016. *"Although children and youth have been engaged in climate action long before this, it sparked a global movement which mobilized a generation in an unprecedented effort of international solidarity for the planet and its future."* (Daly, et al., 2024). Thunberg effect had an incredible impact on millions of young people who inspired by her *"[...] have voiced the urgency of the issue, highlighting that as a younger generation, they will suffer the consequences of the crisis most."* (IDAC, 2024, p.29).

The name of Greta Thunberg and her actions are not limited to global strikes for youth's future but points further. She appears among other 15 child petitioners in the landmark legal complaint of Sacchi et al. v. Argentina et al. (2019), submitted to the UNCRC. The complaint denounces that the petitioners' states fail to control emissions constituted a violation of their rights under the CRC (Sacchi et al., 2021). Although the legal complaint has been later dismissed on procedural grounds, the Committee's subsequent elaboration (The realisation of the UNGC26 in 2023) posed a first pressing force on the debate about states' jurisdiction and foreseeable harm. The petition has been produced by sixteen minors who filed a pioneering legal complaint, together with lawyers (recall to the hybrid agency of Abebe), addressed to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The uniqueness of the comment is that petitioners are children (8 to 17) who complain by exposing intine and personal experience of rights violations in the face of climate change. The following nationalities are: Argentina (Chiara Sacchi), Brazil (Catarina Lorenzo), France, Germany, India, Nigeria, South Africa, Sweden (Greta Thunberg), Tunisia, The United States and from the SIDS area, the Marshall Islands and Palau. The variety of petitioners' nationalities confirms the dislocated and extraterritorial natural characteristic of climate change impacts harming children everywhere. The goal of the petition is simple and direct: to denounce states violations of petitioner's rights as children, by referring to direct article in the UNCRC of 1989, and they explicitly quote the following violations:

- Article 6 - Right to life, survival and development through the exposure to foreseeable, existential harms: *“the authors claim that the State party’s acts and omissions perpetuating the climate crisis have already exposed them throughout their childhood to the foreseeable, life-threatening risks of human-caused climate change, be it heat, floods, storms, droughts, disease, or polluted air. A scientific consensus shows that the life-threatening risks The authors have submitted the same complaint against Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany and Turkey, the five complaints are registered as communication confronting them will increase throughout their lives as the world heats up to 1.5°C and beyond.”* (UNCR, 1989, p.2).
- Article 24 - Right to health, because of the lack of physical and mental assistance: *“the authors claim that the State party’s acts and omissions perpetuating the climate crisis have already caused injuries to their mental and physical health, from asthma to emotional trauma. These injuries violate their right to health under article 24 of the Convention and the injuries will worsen as the world continues to warm.”* (UNCR, 1989, p. 3).
- Article 30 - Right to culture by endangering the survival of certain cultural identities of indigenous petitioners : *“the authors claim that the State party’s contributions to the climate crisis have already jeopardized millennia-old subsistence practices of the indigenous authors from Alaska the Marshall Islands, and Saomi, which are not just the main source of their livelihoods, but directly relate to a specific way of being, seeing, and acting in the world, that are essential to their cultural identity”* (UNCR, 1989, p. 3)
- And Article 3 - The best interests of the child, by perpetrating, together with corporations, policies which are not oriented to reduce gas emission so avoiding fundamental rights: *“By supporting climate policies that delay decarbonization, the State party is shifting the enormous burden and costs of climate change onto children and future generations. In doing so, it has breached its duty to ensure the enjoyment of children’s rights for posterity, and failed to act in accordance with the principle of intergenerational equity.”* (UNCR, 1989, p. 3)

Moreover, petitioners argue and defend that states have extra territorial accountability. *“A state’s jurisdiction also follows when its acts or omissions within its territory cause foreseeable cross-border effects.”* (Sacchi et al., 2021, p.3). The choice to involve in the petition specific nations such as Argentina, France, Germany, Turkey and Brazil is not casual. The countries mentioned, not only are the among the biggest gas emitters globally-wise but they also ratified the UNCRC in 1989, permitting the petitioners to hold these states accountable for their actions. Despite the Committee’s declaration of inadmissibility for *“failure to exhaust domestic remedies”* (13), petitioners have established a first fundamental jurisdiction with extraterritorial character:

"The Committee concludes that the authors have sufficiently justified, for the purposes of establishing jurisdiction, that the impairment of their Convention rights as a result of the State party's acts or omissions regarding the carbon emissions originating within its territory was reasonably foreseeable." (p. 13).

The close collaboration between the children and the lawyers in resuming the articles of the UNCRC of 1989 is a significant development from the earliest attempts to seek protection, such as the emblematic case of *I. Teitiota vs. New Zealand* (2016). As written in the introduction, *Teitiota*' case aimed for the refugee status based on the impacts of sea-level rise in Kiribati for then being refused and deported back home. The UN Human Rights Committee ultimately found that New Zealand had not violated its obligations because a sufficient risk to life had not been established at that time (UNHRC, 2020). The *Sacchi* case strategy instead, shifted the legal ground from individual harm to a systemic violation of the collective rights of a specific group, children, hence creating a more powerful claim for state accountability.

The silences

The section concludes with Bacchi's and her forth question implementation which methodologically allows to highlight the strengths and silences of the problem representation by posing the question: where and what are the silences?

As already introduced; by applying K. Crenshaw's (1991) intersectional concept to the subject children in the context of climate displacement it is possible to understand compounded vulnerabilities positioning individuals, in this case children, in marginalised and difficult situations. Reports like UNICEF's, *The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis* and the IDAC's *Climate Mobility and Childhood* constantly highpoint that climate impacts fall disproportionately on the most marginalized children (UNICEF 2021, p.2). On this base, the GC26 is explicit in its demands oriented to states, asking to pay special attention to the multiple barriers faced by children in disadvantaged situations, including indigenous children, children with disabilities, and female children. However, a critical and intersectional analysis can still question whether the frame goes far enough including the disaggregated and different situations that children face. While the GC26 acknowledges different groups, the named "child" or "youth" tends to obscure the unique and specific intersections of vulnerabilities. For instance, the reality of a displaced disabled young female differs from the one of an indigenous people in a Small Island Developing State. Alternatively, a young activist child from a European city in the Global North is different from the previous two and all three suffer differently the impacts of climate change. While the rights-based discourse is more inclusive than the paternalist-security counterpart discourse, the challenges remain also in the first

one. By employing intersectionality, Crenshaw posits that identities such as age, gender, race and socioeconomic status are not separate, instead they overlap and intersect to create unique and compounded experiences of discrimination and privilege and positioning the individual in a specific marginalised position (1991). What an intersectional analysis operates is step beyond the "one size fits all" in order to abandon generic responses and instead collect disaggregated data (by age, gender, disability namely; Crenshaw, 1991) to design more targeted interventions, which is where the specifically GC26 lacks. But what does it mean in practise? It means creating safe spaces specifically for adolescent girls in case of displacement, ensuring shelters are accessible for children with disabilities, and providing culturally appropriate support for indigenous children for instance. While all children are vulnerable because of their natural developmental stage, as well as for the Committee, the intersectional concept calls for a further investigation on marginalised people experiences. For example, the vulnerability faced by a 12-year-old girl from a poor, rural family during a drought is different from the experience of a 12-year-old girl from a wealthy urban family displaced by a flood. The girl may face a heightened risk of being pulled from school to help with household chores, being forced into an early marriage due to economic desperation, and experiencing gender-based violence in a resource-scarce environment. These are not separate risks rather a unique group of vulnerabilities accumulated by the intersection of her age, gender, location, and economic status. (IDAC, 2024).

The international Data Alliance for Children on the Move (IDAC, 2024), last year published a relevant quantitative and qualitative analysis showing how climate crisis and consequent displacement does not operate itself alone rather as a threat multiplier, not to states security and corporate businesses, but to children's well-being which intersects with pre-existing vulnerabilities such as poverty, conflict, gender violence, food scarcity and weak infrastructures (IDAC, 2024). This indicates a will from the international partners, especially NGOs and Data Monitoring Centres such as IDAC, IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF namely, to align with the youth-led initiative, to advocate and to denounce the current realities faced by children and the states / corporations' lack of consideration. Therefore, the next paragraph shows and analyse along with an intersectional perspective how these partners and organisations contribute and suggest on how to address intersectionality better in the rights-based discourse and to bring up the voices of the most marginalized people that are currently not taken in consideration in the present global governance. The IDAC, by publishing the report above mentioned, shows a genuine interest and will to address the whole spectrum of realities that children face in the event of climate displacement, by going against a paternalistic, monolithic and security discourse and by trying to trace a concrete pathway to address a better child-sensitive and intersectional action pathway. The IDAC dedicates a section

applying an intersectional lens on children's vulnerabilities and discuss the several key identities of children: gender, poverty, disabilities, ethnicity and age. These categories will be used here to analyse the silences of the GC26 with the purpose of understanding to what extent the GC26 (which represents the current most important legal development on children's rights in the context of climate crisis) incorporate an intersectional consideration.

Referring to the right of education (28 and 29), the Committee, designer of the GC26 addresses the gender aspect: *"States should recognize and address the disproportionate indirect and knock-on effects of environmental degradation on children's education, paying special attention to gender-specific situations, such as children leaving school due to additional domestic and economic burdens in households facing environment-related shocks and stress."* (GC26, 2023, p. 10) Firstly, the terms such as 'should' and 'address' are not requiring recognition, and the statement itself does not adequately indicate the process or the so called "how to do so". The IDAC (2024) elaborates on how climate change amplifies gender inequality and exposes girls to further rights violations showing that an analysis led by UNICEF confirmed that 10% change in rainfall directly linked to climate change has led to a 1% increase in child marriage statistics (IDAC, 2024, p.50). In some cases, families describe child marriage as a strategy to move their daughters away from disaster-prone areas. In another case, such as drought event, girls are the first to renounce school attendance in order to help with family chores like collecting water (p. 50), or if in temporary camps for displaced people, the chance to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) increase drastically because of the poor space availability, privacy and facilities (p. 20). As last countering measures, families in financial difficulty or displaced by climate events may not see any other solution than the one of choosing for extreme coping mechanisms. In this sense, states lack of action so violates the following article of the UNCRC: the Right of an Adequate Life (Art. 27) in the first case, the Right to Education (Art. 28 and 29) in the second and the Right to Protection (Art. 19) in the third.

Moreover, the IDAC also considers the poverty aspect, an element that disproportionately menace the resilience of children in the event of climate disasters and displacement. Poverty is considered as a decisive playing factor in a child's vulnerability assessment facing climate change. (UNICEF, 2021). Children, in contexts of high-poverty and weak essential services and facilities face higher risks to suffer for climate shocks, and the Children's Climate risk Index confirms it. (UNICEF, 2021, p.101). The climate disasters destroy or worsen inevitably the precarious economic conditions of poor families who are the first to struggle in the recovery. This explains the adjectivisation of climate change as "poverty multiplier" (IDAC, 2024, p.19).

The GC26 UN Committee writes the following statement regarding poverty: *“Poverty, economic and social inequalities, food insecurity and forced displacement aggravate the risk that children will experience violence, abuse and exploitation. For example, poorer households are less resilient to environment-related shocks, including those caused or exacerbated by climate change, such as rising sea levels, floods, cyclones, air pollution, extreme weather events, desertification, deforestation, droughts, fires, storms and biodiversity loss.”* (p. 6).

Furthermore, regarding indigenous children, the IDAC also builds on how climate change accelerates existential threats on individuals who is member of indigenous communities with identity, traditions and culture. Individuals belonging and identity is as important as preserving and protecting individuals’ lives and climate change in this regard, impacts negatively the strict connection that especially indigenous people have ancestral lands (IDAC, 2024, p. 10). The natural environment and indigenous communities are deeply related, and this connection is constantly threatened by climate disasters and land degradation. In this case the identity and cultural loss are considered violations of their cultural rights (UNCRC, p.30). The Committee, in this regard express itself with this: *“Indigenous children are disproportionately affected by biodiversity loss, pollution and climate change. States should closely consider the impact of environmental harm, such as deforestation, on traditional land and culture and the quality of the natural environment, while ensuring the rights to life, survival and development of Indigenous children. States must undertake measures to meaningfully engage with Indigenous children and their families in responding to environmental harm, including harm caused by climate change, taking due account of and integrating concepts from Indigenous cultures and traditional knowledge in mitigation and adaptation measures.”* (GC26, 2023, p. 3).

Despite these positive steps, Crenshaw's intersectional critical approach allows to argue that the Comment does not fully apply the three dimensions of intersectionality: structural, political, and representational, that Crenshaw outlines in "Mapping the Margins" (1991). By considering these factors, the General Comment identifies who is vulnerable but fails addressing the rights violation with verbs sentences like “states should”.

Concluding this section which has been driven by a comprehensive analysis of the post paternalist rights-based discourse throughout the examination of the structural violence, the children’s agency, the "political subject" frame and the intersectional approach to marginalisations. This section explains how this discourse represents the problem as a crisis of rights and structural violence, constituting children as empowered agents of change and states as legally accountable duty-bearers. This logic explicitly incorporates an intersectional lens, supported by the advocative work and empirical research of partners and NGOs, rendering visible the compounded vulnerabilities that the securitization and so the global dominant governance continues to ignore. Having deconstructed the problem, the logic behind, the effects and the silences of this powerful counter-narrative discourse,

the following analysis will explore the ongoing contention between this rights-based approach and the paternalist-security discourse in the broader landscape of global governance.

How both representations coexist and what does this reveals about the underlying mechanisms of the global governance on climate displaced people?

The previous analytical sections have deconstructed two fundamentally opposed representations of climate-induced displacement. The first section of the analysis examined the dominant, state-centric paternalist-security discourse, which conceptually constructs the climate migrant as either a "threat" to be managed or a "victim" to be saved. In contrast, the second section of the analysis explored the emergent, youth-led, post paternalist discourse, which reshapes the issue as a crisis of children's rights and structural violence, positioning children as empowered political subjects.

This final analytical chapter brings these two discourses into direct confrontation to answer the final analytical sub-question: *How both representations co-exist and what does this reveals about the underlying mechanisms of the global governance on climate displaced people?*

The hypocrisy

The interaction between these discourses exposes a deep and functional contradiction within the international system itself that reflects on the standing lack of legal protection of climate-induced displacement. This debate is best understood through the theoretical lens of Stephen Krasner's (1999) 'organized hypocrisy'. By analysing key international responses, namely the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage and the UN General Comment No. 26, this section argues that the principal result of this discursive battle is a state of conflict that jeopardize and plays against efficient and genuine legal and policy developments on climate displacement and children's rights in the context of climate crisis.

The most critical point of conflict, as identified through Bacchi's (2009) WPR method, lies in the definition of the "problem" itself. The two frames stand as incompatible representations of the crisis. Within the paternalist-securitization frame, the problem is represented to be as the impacts of climate change and the subsequent migrant threatening borders, because firstly, the multiplied effects of climate disasters spoil the environment and secondly, because the displaced person is the either a potential security problem that could threaten and overwhelm borders, or a helpless victim whose situation calls for paternal management. The original cause: climate change, is often treated

as an external neutral and inevitable shock that needs a response. Under this logic, the policies implemented are therefore reactive and threats-focused such as securing borders, climate impacts monitoring, and financial aid to who needs (Britchenko, 2025).

Inversely, within the post paternalist children rights-based discourse, the problem is represented as a state and corporate lack of action. The "problem" represented to be in this circumstance instead is one of structural violence embedded and rooted in the global fossil fuel economy and the lack of will from powerful states to answer for their legal and moral (GC26, 2023; Krasner, 1999). The solutions are therefore proactive with the goal to hold states and corporations accountable for their action and to pressure them towards a rapid decarbonization and towards legal measures to protect children's rights of the UNCRC of 1989.

The fluid subjectivity of children

Flowing from the contested problem definition to the battle over subjectivity, the "subjectification effects" (Bacchi 2009) of each frame produce different political identities, particularly for children. The paternalist-security discourse represents the climate-displaced person, including the child, as an object of policy. The authors of this discourse whether consider them as a "threat", hence as an menace to be contained; or as a "victim", hence, as something to be managed. In both metaphorical constructions, individuals have their agency denied, as well as their voice, and political power (Ransan-Cooper et al., 2015). The post paternalist discourse, in contrast, subjectifies the children as a people of rights by framing them as "agents of change," "rights-holders," and "human rights defenders". This opposite representation, recognizes as well, their "fluid" or "hybrid" agency and their right to participate in and actively engage in the decisions that directly determines and protects their future (Daly et al., 2024). This view tests the dominant, paternalist conceptualization of children by demanding a reframing of the subjects, states' power, geographically, but between present and future generations.

Following in the section, Krasner explains that the states, when facing the growing legitimacy of the post paternalist discourse, they resist to change and without abandoning dominant security representations instead engage in a political strategy that Krasner (1999) name "organized hypocrisy". He argues that in external relations, policy-makers show an open-minded attitude towards norms based on a "logic of appropriateness" (the right thing to do) while their actual behaviour is dictated by a "logic of consequences" guided by the same material interests as before and power asymmetries (Krasner 1999, p. 43). The Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) and the UN's General Comment No.26 serve as examples of this phenomenon.

The hypocrisies in practise

The recent production of the FRLD shows the gap between language appropriateness and practise based on interests.

By creating the fund like the FRLD, states publicly show commitment and certainly awareness about the disproportionate burden that the Global South faces and seem open to financially support what is required to address: the impacts that go beyond adaptation capacity (FRLD, 2025). The fund's existence is already a powerful symbolic signal from states' trying to align with a logic of appropriateness. But, while the states are endorsing the norm, their actions are governed by a logic of consequences which keeps prioritizing national economic interests and by strategically avoiding any kind of legal liability written on paper. The final agreement explicitly states that contributions "do not involve" liability and are framed as voluntary acts of "cooperation and facilitation," not legally enforceable "compensation" or "reparations" (FRLD, 2025, 9).

The engagement to the FRLD, totalling just USD 788.80 million in mid-2025, are incredibly distant from the estimated needed hundreds of billions annually to address the problem (FRLD, 2025, p.8). That number corresponds to the 0.2% of the annual losses faced by the developing countries (FRLD, 2025, p.9). Therefore, states in this case operate just a symbolic gesture of contribution but substantially refuse to provide resources at an appropriate scale.

This is a classic example of dissociation of language from action, confirming the appearance of an endorsement of climate justice, but with legal and financial consequences strategically neutralized.

If the FRLD signifies financial hypocrisy, the General Comment No. 26 signifies normative hypocrisy. The GC26 is a revolutionary normative document as already stated, because it officially frames the climate crisis as a "children's rights crisis" and a form of "structural violence" (GC26, 2023, 1, p. 6). Crucially, it calls for states' extraterritorial obligations to protect children from the transboundary harms of gas emissions and finds that procrastination "reasonably foreseeable" harm is a rights violation (UNCRC 2023, p. 12, 14). By developing on the GC26 as authoritative guidance, states appear to support a radical expansion of their responsibilities on human rights, by showing a looking like logic of appropriateness that aims for the child's best interests (Art. 3, UNCRC, 1989). State behaviour, again though, stands firmly and comfortably sit in a logic of consequences. The first reason is that as a General Comment, the GC26 positively results authoritative but non-binding. This important detail let states free agree on its progressive principles without being binding and forced by a legal binding document. They can adopt rhetorically the discourse of the GC26 without being legally required to develop further action upon it.

Still nowadays, too many states and corporations continue to sustain fossil fuel projects that directly contribute to the "foreseeable harm" that the GC26 judges. On this line, Krasner states ultimately, looking back at history, that the core principle of Westphalian sovereignty (the exclusion of external authority from domestic affairs) still characterizes the nations' idea of the international system (Krasner 1999, p. 20). States can publicly accept the idea of the transboundary and intergenerational harm but at closed doors they resist any attempt to derogate the smallest piece of their sovereignty for international cooperation.

However, the concept or state of organized hypocrisy often is noticeable emerging under hybrid narrative discourses, where states' actors carefully blend the language with their actions. The Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union treaty is a perfect example because rhetorically, the agreement is framed as a displacement solution-oriented initiative based on rights and appropriateness by ratifying for the opening of a migration humanitarian pathway for citizens fleeing from highly vulnerable nations, while hiddenly assuring Australia important managing powers on Tuvalu (Australian Government, 2025).

A final critical effort in light of this evidence allows to state that this contestation results in several collision points at the centre of the global system. Drawing on Anna Holzscheiter's (2018) work, the empowerment of youth climate movements, as "affected persons' organizations", has not produced new norms but has instead raised hidden, already previously present several key points of hypocrisy (Holzscheiter, 2018). Three critical points of collision I present as:

- Child protection vs. child participation and emancipation: the traditional legal international frameworks on child protection locate children as vulnerable subjects to be safeguarded from harms. The youth climate actions, though, have leveraged the CRC's own participatory articles, precisely Art. 12 (UNCRC, 1989) to declare the forgotten right to political engagement and the freedom of participation and advocacy, creating so a direct critical encounter and collision between paternalism and post-paternalism.
- Westphalian sovereignty vs. extraterritorial responsibility: the basic principle in the current global governance on climate displacement is the state of sovereignty (Krasner 1999, p. 20). Nonetheless, the climate crisis, an environmental phenomenon that completely ignores states' sovereignty because of its transboundary features, challenges this principle forcing states to react. The legal claims of Sacchi et al. and the production of the GC26 directly collide with the so dear Westphalian Sovereignty of states.
- National interest vs. intergenerational equity: the logic of consequences of Krasner dominant in state practices, prioritizes the temporary national interests (1999), but with the youth-led,

opposite discourses based on children's rights, the concept of intergenerational equality is pressuring states, demanding that current states and corporations' policies to pass through judgments for their harmful impacts on the rights of future generations.

Summing up, the discursive scenario of climate mobility has been presented and analysed and it is composed by the struggle between a profoundly rooted paternalist-securitization discourse and a pressing post paternalist, rights-based discourse. The rise of children's agency and non-governmental partners had positively built a counter-narrative that is already producing legal and policy changes and developments. But silently and harmfully, the logic of security and control stands present and dominates. The result of this competition is a state of organized hypocrisy, which is experiencing increasingly pressure by the urgency of the climate crisis and children's rights crisis. This situation still permits the international system to be managed by these profound contradictions confirming that states can still recognize the climate crisis as a threat to their borders but not as a violation of children's rights. This hypocrisy, while frustrating, also creates new political openings, providing a premise against which state actions can be judged and a demonstrated influential post paternalist rights-based discourse can fight.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored how alternative discourses of post paternalist children's rights-based can challenge the global dominant discourse on climate-induced displacement through a critical structural analysis of both competing discursive paradigms that shape the contemporary legal and policy responses to the mobility phenomena. By using C. Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?" theories and methods, along with the framing theoretical concepts of Ransan-Cooper and the intersectional theory of Crenshaw, 2009, this research breaks down the most relevant contradictions between two opposite representations about climate-induced displacement.

Collecting the key findings of the analysis under a critical lens, leads to the conclusion that the global management of the international responses to climate-induced child displacement is dictated by a significant discursive competition which emerges as a dominant security-focused discourse challenged by a rising rights-based alternative representation. The paternalist-security approach and discourse, which includes the "threat multiplier" idea from the 2007 CNA Military Advisory Board Report, represents climate-displaced people as either "victims" or "security threats". This perspective reduces children to either passive recipients of aid or as elements that disturb migration streams and its management, jeopardising national / international security and control. The legal concept that supports this view is the persecution-based definition of the refugee status in the 1951 Refugee Convention. This creates major obstacles for climate-displaced people, forcing for bottom-up legal actions (petitions and legal processes against states) while states maintain control over what can be protected and what not.

In great contrast, the post paternalist children's rights counter-discourse, highlighted in UN General Comment No.26 (2023) and augmented by youth-led climate lawsuit like *Sacchi et al. v. Argentina et Al.*, sees climate displacement as a structural violence against children, so denouncing their rights' violations. This representation of the problem positions children and young people no more under a passive light but pictures them as "agents of change", as "rights-holders", and as "defenders of their own rights", who own, thanks to articles ratified in the UNCRC of 1989, valid institutionalised claims to engage in political processes, seeking for intergenerational justice. Additionally, the application of an intersectional lens reveals firstly that the dominant security discourse overlooks the unique vulnerabilities different groups of individuals, even more children, face. Moreover, applied intersectionality shows that while texts often treat climate-displaced children as a single category, the experiences of displacement differ greatly based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, disability status, and location. Relevant NGO like UNICEF, IOM and IDAC show

how girls often face increased risks of forced marriage and sexual violence, and how indigenous children suffer cultural loss joint with physical reallocation. Even more, children with disabilities are forced to face extra challenges in evacuation processes, fighting against non-accessible services.

Lastly, to explain the coexistence of these conflicting narratives, S. Krasner idea of “organized hypocrisy”, contextualised in the climate-induced displacement governance really offers the analytical tools to obtain significative understanding. The results deriving from the application of this concept picture states as two-faced players, resulting in a behaviour that externally shows commitment and engagement with rights-based principles even ratifying norms (following the logic of appropriateness), meanwhile, domestically or even internationally contemporarily states and corporations pursue policies based the logic of interests. The analysis indeed chose as example the 'Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage', that recognises climate urgent needs and child-sensitive needed and urgent initiatives, but providing insufficient funding, not coherent with the amount agreed initially. This continues withdrawal and violations from and of norms confirming the incoherence of states policies which results in global governance in three main points of conflicts. The first is the element of child protection versus child participation and empowerment; the second point notes the so defended state sovereignty versus the pressing and increasingly demanded international accountability; and lastly, the third collision point highlights the dear national interests versus the fairness towards the next living generations. These tensions show the current deep dysfunctionalities and conflict mechanisms within the international system that tries to balance state sovereignty with human and children rights and the temporal economic businesses with long-term sustainability.

At this point, the research question that I posed at the beginning of my research and that I analysed all along the study: “How do children’s rights challenge the global governance discourses on climate-induced displacement?” can be answered. With the empirical evidence gained and in hand, it is possible to state that children's rights do challenge the global governance dominant paternalist-security discourse on climate-related displacement. Firstly because, thanks to a post paternalist approach to children’s rights, the problem representation operates a shift from a security issue to the one of rights violations, dislocating the focus from migration management to the structural violence perpetuate by the global systematic structure. Then, the youth-led climate activism and lawsuit presentations, rooted in the Art. 12 of the UNCRC of 1989, have opened up international legal processes, allowing children to access courts and complaint systems that were previously dominated by adults. Additionally, the empirical evidence gained from the GC26’s (2023) analysis, shows that the rights-based discourse enables new accountability measures, calling out states lack of

fulfilments to protect children's rights, hence intimating them to consider the extraterritorial obligations and the foreseeable harm caused. Therefore, children and youth have not waited for adults to grant them rights; they have actively claimed and expanded their rights through bottom-up efforts, legal actions, and new ideas. This upside-down strategy has led to institutional responses, including a comprehensive General Comment from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and greater legal recognition of climate crisis as children's rights crisis (GC26, 1989, 1). Nonetheless, the organized hypocrisy of states, which squeeze in the global governance about climate-induced displacement limits and slows down positive and efficient outcomes, often resulting in the misuse of rights-based norms and policies by promoting appropriate language while upholding harmful actions. The non-binding nature of General Comment No. 26 and the persistent insufficiencies in climate finance together with the persistent lack of legal protection exactly represents the current laboriously efforts obtained by the pressing children rights-based discourse that in the current mechanisms do not align with the material support from states and corporations and institutional reforms.

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