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Unraveling the production of ignorance in climate policymaking: The imperative of a decolonial feminist intervention for transformation

Seema Arora-Jonsson *, Nora Wahlström

Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala, Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Feminist decolonial scholars have called for disengaging from the current system built on a hierarchical logic of race and gender central to modern, colonial thinking. They have looked to worlds outside the modern system to lead us out of current unjust practices harming both humans and the environment. Although policymaking may be seen as the stronghold of the current political agenda and of the structures that have led to the climate crisis, we argue that climate policies too, are also crucial for rethinking and transforming societies. Our examination of climate adaptation policies in Sweden and the literature from Europe shows how policy documents ignore and unknow the oppressive intersections of gender and power despite the knowledge that exists on these issues in the public domain. Drawing on the tools of agnotology, we examine how this is achieved by strategies of 'denial, dismissal, diversion and displacement.' Building on feminist post and decolonial scholarship, we make explicit the gendered and racial hierarchies and dichotomies underpinning these policy documents. At the same time, we bring attention to the nuances in the policy documents we study and look for the openings that might be used to bring about transformation by making these hierarchies explicit and calling them into question. We argue that a transformation is possible through a feminist post and decolonial intervention, even in policymaking otherwise ignorant of culture, values and the colonial histories that have produced contemporary society.

Adaptation to climate change is a policy objective of rapidly growing importance. While there is a growing critical literature on adaptation, researchers have increasingly pointed out how climate policymaking continues to be dominated by positivist and technological approaches and is steeped in a logic of market instruments shorn of the lived experiences of people on the ground (see Eriksen, 2022; Mikulewicz, 2020; McAfee, 2012; Jasanoff, 2007). Activists, social movements as well as a great deal of feminist research reflected in the IPCC report (2022: 2700) have shown that climate change cannot be addressed without paying heed to climate justice, that is, to questions of gender, class, ethnicity, race and other intersecting dimensions of power. Feminist post and decolonial scholars in particular have brought attention to the centrality of gender and race in structuring our relations- from the geopolitical to the local and personal.

While gender is de jure in a great deal of environmental policy, though mainly in the global South, gender as an analysis of social organization (and of intersecting dimensions such as sexual difference, age, class, race and ethnicity), is far from the ways in which it continues to be used in environmental and climate policy (see Arora-Jonsson, 2011;, 2014). Taking gender seriously entails acknowledging structural and shifting relations of power in societal contexts. Decades of research on gender and power has brought to the fore structural relations that maintain inequalities. It has also made evident that inequalities in ownership or in how individual /collectives are included in decision-making, need to be addressed in environmental policy to enable sustainable change (see Arora-Jonsson, 2014).

Research has also shown how rising incomes in the West and the establishment of welfare provision have depended on colonial extraction in the global South to a very significant extent (Bhambra and Newell, 2022) as well as on the colonization of rural and indigenous areas in the global North (Arora-Jonsson, 2019). Any effective policymaking for change, then, must reckon with 'the histories that have produced it and not just its contemporary manifestations represented in a political economy that effaces its history' (Bhambra and Newell, 2022) and with the cultures and values otherwise invisible in policymaking at present (Arora-Jonsson, 2017).

Yet policymaking on adaptation, and climate change more broadly, continue to remain oblivious to such calls.[1] In this article, we argue that

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: Seema.Arora.Jonsson@slu.se (S. Arora-Jonsson).

[1] These issues have surfaced all the more forcefully at COP 27 in Egypt.

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it is important to question and conceptualize this 'strategic unknowing' (McGoey, 2012) on the part of policymakers. In this unknowing, structures and relations of power in society are ignored in policymaking to uphold an order that is considered knowable and possible to act on, rather than entertaining aspects of uncertainty that the messy world of gender, race, class, the rural and indigeneity entail.

Taking a cue from scholars of 'agnotology' (Proctor and Schiebinger, 2008),[2] we study the 'cultural production of ignorance' on gender and its intersecting dimensions of power in climate policymaking in Sweden and draw on literature more widely in Europe. We argue that unknowing about gender and race is enabled by a colonial understanding or epistememe in climate and environmental policy with adverse effects, not only for the global South, but also for the global North. This has important consequences for aims to transition to a society that is climate resilient and just as called for in E.U and Swedish policymaking alike.

Feminist postcolonial and decolonial scholars would argue that the world we live in today, one that is constitutive of modernity, denies that possibility. For feminist decolonial scholar, Maria Lugones (2010: 749), the current system builds on the categorical, dichotomous (human and non-human, men and women, black and white), hierarchical logic, central to modern, colonial, capitalist thinking about race, gender, and sexuality, where the white male is the human being par excellence. A colonial episteme enables the denial of other worlds (Blaser, 2013), important for conceptualizing new worlds. Lugones looks to non-modern social organizations (not to be equated with pre-modern) from which people have resisted modern, capitalist modernity that are in tension with its logic (2010:749).

The question of whether the modern system itself can be transformed or how we may make use current structures for transformation has perhaps received less attention in post and decolonial scholarship. Policymaking may be seen as the stronghold and the structure that upholds the current political agenda. We argue that beyond the question of the disparities between fine sounding policies and their actual practice, climate policies are in fact crucial for how we can rethink and transform societies. Policymaking is important for how subjects think of themselves, their relationships to one another and the state (Bacchi and Beasley, 2002). As anthropologists have shown, "not only do policies codify social norms and values, and articulate fundamental organizing principles of society, they also contain implicit (and sometimes explicit) models of society" (Shore and Wright, 1997: 7). Rather than merely dictating practice, policy can also work to legitimize existing practice (Wright and Reinhold, 2011). As Mosse writes (2005), good policy is rarely implementable, but it is essential to what goes on in the world. Feminists have shown that policy making can be crucial in pushing forward emancipatory reforms and can have long term effects (Brush, 2003). Greater attention to approaches that may make this possible is vital in work towards climate transformations.

We draw on feminist and decolonial thinking as an important and different approach to address the world of policymaking to reflect on change or transformation that could be brought about through policymaking. Given that 'gender,' in contrast to class, race or indigeneity, has found considerable traction in environmental policymaking, we begin there. We study policymaking on climate adaptation with examples from Sweden and relate them to the (scant) literature on gender and policymaking in Europe more widely.

Through an examination of climate adaptation policies in Sweden, we study how it becomes possible to ignore and 'unknow' the oppressive intersections of gender and power in climate policymaking despite the vast amount that has been written on the subject by feminists, critical race scholars and indigenous scholarship. Adopting a decolonial approach to climate policymaking in the global North, we work not only to reveal the underlying structures or assumptions in climate politics, but also to address the 'strategic unknowing' that comes in the way of addressing climate justice. Like McGoey (2012:3), we seek to explore this 'non-knowledge' and give it 'its full due as a social fact, not as a precursor or an impediment to more knowledge, but as a productive force in itself, as the twin and not the opposite of knowledge.' At the same time, we bring attention to the nuances in the policy documents we study and look for the openings that might be used to bring about transformation.

In the following, we study the role of policymaking in bringing about change at the intersection of two bodies of literature: on 'strategic unknowing' to analyze the absence of gender and power in climate adaptation policymaking in Sweden and Europe; and on feminist post decolonial thinking to help us think through the geopolitics of environmental policy narratives that obstruct transformative change and as a theoretical and methodological tool to overcome this. This is followed by a brief description of our methods. Next is an analysis of the strategic unknowing in climate policy making in Sweden and Europe, based on a review of Sweden's National Strategy and Regional Action Plans for Climate Adaptation and on the literature on the subject in Europe more broadly. We examine how policy narratives construct ignorance about social/climate justice and difference (in valiant attempts to deny other knowledges lurking on the edges of what they write about) but also go on to reflect on policy as sites of potential post/decolonial politics, the openings that exist in these texts for what might well be needed in policymaking to acknowledge the world outside of current rarefied policymaking institutions and to account for different people's lived experience and the dimensions that influence their everyday lives in order to work towards transformation.

1. Policymaking, strategic unknowing and feminist decolonial openings

Climate scholars have criticized the techno-managerial approach in climate policy making and the fallacy of assuming that it is possible to marshal complete knowledge on the subject and then implement change (Jasanoff, 2007). Not acknowledged in policy contexts is that a limited set of expert knowledges dominate problem understandings and related decision-making and that this legitimizes particular actions, actors, and interests (Mikulewicz, 2020). Here, we examine how the absence of difference in relation to gender and intersecting dimensions of power, despite the presence of knowledge on the subject, is the result of 'the will to know less' rather than a willingness for more knowledge on the subject. Peter Galison calls this 'antiepistemology', the study of non-knowledge or the art of how knowledge is deflected, covered and obscured (Galison, 2004:237). While epistemology explores the nature, methodology and limits of the production of knowledge, anti-epistemology asks after its shadow: the nature of nonknowledge, and the political and social practices embedded in the effort to suppress or to kindle endless new forms of ambiguity and ignorance (McGoey, 2007:3).

Along with several others in a book on agnotology, Proctor emphasizes the marked absence of theoretical attention to the value and practical uses of this sort of ignorance in economic and social life; how different forms of strategic ignorance (McGoey, 2007) and social unknowing (Thrift, 1985: 97 cited in McGoey) help both to maintain and to disrupt social and political orders, allowing both governors and the governed to deny awareness of things it is not in their interest to acknowledge. As Rayner shows, societies or institutions actively exclude because they threaten to undermine key organizational arrangements or the ability of institutions to pursue their goals. Knowledge is possible only through the systematic 'social construction of ignorance' (Ravetz, 1986; Rayner, 1986:111), a phrase which draws on Berger and Luckmann's 1966 classic *The social construction of reality*, and which aims to highlight the ways that ignorance is a socially produced and maintained phenomenon. As others show, this is not merely restricted to certain kinds of knowledge but also the uncomfortable outsiders that might accompany this knowledge (c.f Arora-Jonsson, 2013:166–167; Todd,

[2] A corresponding concept is that of "nescience" used increasingly in medical literarure as well as narratology but is outside the scope of this paper.

2016) beyond the limited set of experts (c.f. Mikulewicz, 2020).

Ours is thus an anthropological approach to policy (c.f. Shore and Wright, 1997; Wright and Reinhold, 2011) as we go on to study the 'cultural production of ignorance' (Proctor and Schiebinger, 2008) in Swedish climate policies. Policymaking in the anthropology of policy is seen as a continuous process of contestation rather than a linear hierarchy. Neither is it a linear sequence (c.f. Wright and Reinhold, 2011). We go on to show this further. Drawing on Rayner's (2012) four implicit strategies, we examine how ignorance is maintained by *denial*, persistent refusal to act on information; *dismissal*, where information is acknowledged, even if it is only to justify rejecting it; *diversion*, that is, distracting attention away from the question of gender and power in policy making and lastly through *displacement*, wherein a model or technical solution for climate change becomes the object of management rather than real world phenomenon. We regard policies not only as social and political blueprints but in fact also as productive and performative as they seek to stabilize certain webs of meaning and cultures and draw on the power of the state to legitimize certain policy solutions and work hard to ignore others (c.f. Shore and Wright, 1998). We draw on feminist post and decolonial thinking to reflect on how that might be interrupted and changed and importantly on the openings that we could leverage to bring about change.

1.1. Thinking with feminist and post and decolonial scholars for change

Postcolonial and decolonial thinking have different trajectories and intellectual traditions. For our purposes, we draw on them to highlight the legacies of colonial rule and imperial administration that continues to inform global and national politics (Rutazibwa and Shilliam, 2018) also in Sweden (Molina and Reyes, 2002; Mc Eachrane and Faye, 2001; Mulinari and Neergaard, 2017).

Feminist decolonial scholar, Lugones writes that the colonial civilizing mission of modernity entailed the imposition of the gender framework with its categorical logic of hierarchical dichotomies that justified enormous cruelty (2010:744). Grounded in modern scientific thinking, it promotes a rationalizing, extractive understanding of nature and society, drawing boundaries between functional, experiential relations among people, plants and animals – a separation of nature and culture basic to contemporary Eurocentrism (Pratt, 1992; Lugones, 2010). Gender and sexuality were central to this separation. The human that underpinned such thinking was "(ideally) unitary, rational, autonomous, self-sufficient, masculine and European agent of the history of humanity" (Venn, 2006:9). The understanding that properties of materials are not fixed attributes of matter but are processual and relational is disregarded (Jackson, 2014:77).

Gendered and racialized notions of what is the environment and who it belongs to or who has authority over it are embedded in global North-South environment politics (Mollet and Faria, 2013; Moore et al., 2003; Baldwin, 2009) and also shape environmental relations within Europe, including in the Nordic countries (Kuokkanen, 2019; Arora-Jonsson, 2018). Third world feminists point to how the trope of the oppressed Third-World woman in contrast to that of the Northern (European) woman as modern and developed imbues transnational relations (Mohanty, 2003; Mindry, 2001). In studies with women's groups in villages in Sweden and India, Arora-Jonsson (2009) draws attention to how discourses about oppressed third-world women affect not only women in the global South but by upholding the global North as the progressive norm, limit the possibilities to acknowledge or address inequalities in the North. Similarly, indigenous peoples in the global North are regarded as pre-modern (Loftsdóttir and Jensen, 2012) and rural areas as the backward spaces of an otherwise modern state (Arora-Jonsson, 2013).

There has been a long history of resistance and oppositional responses to this dichotomisation in local histories (c.f. Lugones, 2010:748). Neither is the nature-culture divide universal for all (Todd, 2016). Surprisingly, this can also be seen in the case of policy. Research suggests that when policymakers are distant enough from its practice and target groups, as in global North development policies for the global South, nature-culture entanglements are much more acceptable (Arora-Jonsson, 2017). Lugones (2010) calls for a decolonial feminism built through coalitions among those oppressed by and through colonial logics and structures, to forge a new non-modern ways to counterbalance the force of modernity.

Indigenous leaders and scholars (Cameron, 2012; Laurie et al., 2005: 485) have criticized how environmental and climate research that seeks to integrate indigenous knowledge into Western scientific understanding frames it as 'traditional' and localized and science as universal. It also ignores the importance of colonialization in shaping research objects, subjects, findings and research relations. Todd (2016) draws attention to how the ontological turn apparent in almost all social science disciplines today, by ignoring thinking by scholars outside of the mainstream, perpetuates the exploitation of indigenous people. She writes that today it is not only what is said or accepted about culture /nature as inseparable as important but that those who live this thinking are excluded. Policymaking and the academy are still firmly experiencing the colonial in its lack of acknowledgment of other ways of knowing and its debt to the sciences. This ignorance is a form of epistemic violence (c.f. Todd, 2016:17 citing Hunt, 2014).

However, ignorance can be made or unmade and science can be complicit in either process (Proctor, 2008:3). A decolonial feminist perspective affirms that gender hierarchies are made explicit and addressed. We examine how dichotomous constructions are maintained in policymaking through the construction of ignorance about social and natural relations and 'by taking both humans and nature as static' (Arora-Jonsson, 2017; Jackson, 2014). Instead of seeking to 'integrate traditional knowledges,' as in some research and policy, new approaches that 'situate' knowledge production, acknowledge different ways of knowing and power inequalities and work humbly with experimental practice (Arora-Jonsson, 2016) need place in policymaking. It is also important to recognize how culture is intrinsic to nature but is also not static, ever changing and highly political (Ibid). As Allwood writes, there are institutional pockets in the EU where a more nuanced gender analysis emerges" (2021:39). We argue that the existence of such pockets bodes well and there is a need to find and use these leverage points to change the system.

2. Context, material and method

2.1. Context

We explore the non-knowledge of gender and power in Sweden's policy making and relate this to what we know from the literature on gender and climate change in European policymaking. Both policies on adaptation and mitigation deal with climate change. Mitigation policies concern themselves primarily with decarbonization while adaptation policies are about building capacity and protecting marginal groups and ostensibly at least to have people at the centre of their efforts. This has motivated our choice of policies. Calls for transformation have emphasized the involvement of whole societies. While we believe that this needs to be the case in all climate policymaking, both literature and policymaking globally indicate that adaption policies rather than mitigation policies (that tend to be largely technical) have as a point of departure, commitments to help people adapt and to give priority to the most vulnerable.[3] The Regional Action Plans for Climate Adaptation in Sweden, thus potentially provide an excellent ground for carrying out societal transformation and thus worthy of deeper analysis.

While our point of departure in analyzing Sweden's climate policies

[3] https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/climate-adaptation?gclid=Cj0KCQjwyLGjBhDKARIsAFRNgW_WJpSM0CBsQ9SG2y1Dg_djSIyrcjc8-v2YHap4dGQbNtJsIRQbfDbMaAilqEALw_wcB

is the *National Strategy for Climate Change Adaptation* (NSCCA, Prop, 2017/18:163), the focus of our analysis is on Sweden's *Regional Action Plans for Climate Adaptation* (RAPCA) meant to guide all regional and county actors including the municipalities on the concrete and practical work of climate adaptation (see bibliography for list of policy documents). We focus on the RAPCAs, but we also examine documents at the national level including research based governmental inquiries that the RAPCAs drew upon, parts of which they sometimes reproduced verbatim.

Sweden is divided into 21 administrative regions, each represented by a regional political body. The *Region* overlaps geographically with the county and the *County Administrative Boards* (CABs) are responsible for the regions' action plans for climate adaptation. The CAB consists of bureaucrats who are representatives of the central government in the region, responsible for environmental questions and some regional planning. Since 2009, the CABs have been tasked with coordinating climate adaptation in their regions and in supporting municipalities with adaptation work.

There are 290 municipalities or local governments in Sweden responsible for social services and for planning land-use. Municipalities differ in size and population density and the number of municipalities within each region differs markedly. Regions and municipalities in northern Sweden are bigger in size and sparsely populated. The four northernmost regions: Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland and Dalarna overlap with the indigenous Saami cultural region, *Sapmi*.[4] The Saami were recognized by the Swedish government in 1977 as an indigenous people, in line with global discourse and UN agreements on indigenous rights at the time and with the ongoing parallel discourse on minority rights at the UN and the European Council. However, Sweden has been unwilling to acknowledge land rights central to the agreements on indigenous rights and has not ratified the ILO Convention no. 169. Instead, it has chosen to regard the indigenous Saami as a minority and ratified two minority conventions of the European Council and has based its minority politics (which includes the Saami) on these conventions (Johansson, 2008). Contestations around land because of encroachment on Saami reindeer herding land have been some of the most important and unresolved disputes in relation pathways to climate adaptation (Arora-Jonsson, 2019; Lawrence, 2014).

In their work to coordinate regional climate adaptation, the CABs report to the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute (SMHI), a central government agency that produces climate forecasts regionally for the CABs but also evaluates their work on climate adaptation. SMHI is responsible for the 'National Knowledge Center on Climate Adaptation'[5] that serves as both knowledge provider and forum for agencies working with climate adaptation. Affiliated to SMHI is a national board of experts on climate adaption.[6]

2.2. Material

Our material consists of the NSCCA and the 21 RAPCA documents. While the CABs were tasked with producing the RAPCAs in 2009, it is not until 2018 that the first *National Strategy for Climate Change Adaptation* (2017) was launched. We also studied the *Climate- and vulnerability inquiry* (SOU, 2007:60) that is the point of departure for several RAPCAs. This inquiry[7] commissioned by the government, identified six sectors to be prioritized for climate adaptation: communications (e.g., roads, railways, radio, tv), technical systems (e.g., electricity supply, heating, drinking water), the built environment, agricultural industries and tourism, the natural environment, human health and lastly what they call the changing world and its effects on Sweden. A reading of the inquiry indicates that it clearly has an influence on the RAPCAs as the headings from the SOU are a recurring feature of several RAPCAs.

The RAPCAs follow a general structure. With a few exceptions, they have sections that discuss the consequences of climate change and sections listing measures to reduce vulnerability to climate change. There are also some differences. Some RAPCAs are as old as 2014 (Stockholm, Halland, Blekinge, Södermanland) while others have been updated since then and even during our research period in 2021–2022 (Västra Götaland and Dalarna who both updated theirs in 2021). The length of the different documents ranges from the shortest at 14 pages (Värmlands, 2020) to the longest at 161 (Jönköping, 2021). Instead of a separate RAPCA, Västmanlands (2013) chose to include climate adaptation into a strategy on climate change mitigation and energy transition. Norrbotten (2020b) has a separate gender analysis that they commissioned from consultants.

2.3. Methods

For the 21 RAPCAs, we undertook a search for keywords such as gender, sex, gender-equality, women, ethnicity, indigenous, Saami, age, class, and income and carried out a summary reading of the 21 strategies. We found that in an otherwise extremely technical discussions, the RAPCAs of two regions (Norrbotten, 2020a, in northern Sweden and Västra Götaland, 2021:17, in southwestern Sweden) stood out when it came to questions of inclusion and social difference (gender, class, income, indigeneity, age). Since our focus is on understanding where a difference can be made, we chose to focus our in-depth analysis on the action plans of these two regions for a more extensive examination.

The analysis of the NSCCA and the two RAPCAS was conducted between 2020 and 2021. During this time, Västra Götaland (VG) updated theirs and we discuss the changes in approach to gender between the 2017 and 2021 version. To understand the shift better, we followed up with a telephone interview with the desk-officer responsible for the Västra Götaland RAPCA. We also undertook a review of the literature on gender and intersecting dimensions of power in climate policies in Europe to understand how climate policies deal with social difference. There was relatively little on the subject and given that policymaking tends to ignore these issues, it probably makes it comparatively difficult for researchers to analyze something that does not exist. As we embark on such a task, we also draw on a larger literature on the environment /climate change and questions of gender, indigeneity, race/ethnicity in Sweden and in Europe to examine the knowledge on the subject that exists in the public domain. The literature brings to attention certain central themes and recurring critiques that we discuss in the following section.

3. Social justice in climate relations: a missing dimension in policymaking

Our review of the literature indicates that climate change policies in Europe and in Sweden are largely ignorant about gender and intersecting dimensions of power. It is clear from critical literature on climate change that this is not because these questions are not relevant in European contexts. Questions of social justice such as of gender, class, indigeneity, urban/rural residence, ethnicity are integral to and shape resource use, environmental impacts as well as risk-perception and need to be addressed in climate decision and policy making in Europe (e.gs. Arora-Jonsson, 2013; Cohen, 2017; Hultman and Pulé, 2018; Reid, 2018) for safe environments and social justice.

The question of risk and vulnerability has occasioned much discussion in climate change scholarship. Contesting past understanding of climate change as an external event, social scientific research on climate change made it abundantly clear that rather than being produced by external forces such as natural disasters, vulnerability is in fact produced

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%A1pmi

[5] https://www.smhi.se/tema/nationellt-kunskapscentrum-for-klimatanpassning

[6] https://klimatanpassningsradet.se/

[7] https://www.riksdagen.se/en/documents-and-laws/docs–laws/commissions-of-inquiry/

through societal relations, that is socially produced rather than biologically determined (Bradshaw, 2010) as is also clear in the IPCC reports. Blaikie et al. (2004)/(2014) question the myth about 'natural' disasters and argue that extreme natural events are not disasters until a vulnerable group of people is exposed. They regard disasters thus, as a signal failure of development and societal planning where vulnerability is a result of the power inequalities in society.

A recent report shows that racialized communities across Europe, such as the Saami, the Roma or migrant workers, have been disproportionately impacted by climate change.[8] Conflicts over land and the lack of recognition of Saami peoples' rights as indigenous people in Sweden is an increasing concern for climate justice (Arora-Jonsson, 2019; Cambou, 2020). The intersection of race, gender and indigeneity are specially challenging in climate change policy in relation to climate interventions such as wind parks (Vasstrøma and Lysgård, 2021; Bjärstig et al., 2022). Within an already discriminatory system, indigenous women can face further systemic violations at the nexus of gender and indigeneity (Prior and Heinämäki, 2017; Kuokkanen, 2019). In fact, Prior and Heinämäki :210) (2017) argue that Arctic states need to develop participatory quotas for indigenous women and a push for a permanent seat (represented by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues), with a quota for indigenous women, in UNFCCC processes.

Yet, EU institutions as well as European nations, when they do acknowledge power relations, continue to frame it as (gender) equality between men and women, ignoring the heterogeneity of these two categories, the power relations within, as well as between, them (Allwood, 2021) as well as other structural inequalities such as class, race, ethnicity, urban/rural residence. Activist networks have called for racial justice in climate policies and in the European green deal.[9]

The literature also brings attention to inequities in environmental decision-making that can lead to unsustainable practices and conflicts (see Cambou, 2020; Reid, 2018; O'Brien and Leichenko, 2000). There has been increasing focus on the ever-present and indispensable, though largely invisible work of care, performed mainly by women that sustains lives and upholds local communities and rural environments (Svendsen et al., 2022; MacGregor et al., 2022; Arora-Jonsson et al., 2019; Vinz, 2009). A recent report commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers points to how investments in 'green jobs' have tended to target male dominated industries, while effects of climate change on women's employment as well as the increased burden of unpaid work performed by them has gone unnoticed (Svendsen et al., 2022). What Vinz (2009) writes on Germany's Sustainability Strategy is telling for much climate policy, 'the resource of women's reproductive labor is assumed to be infinite.' We go on to examine how these issues might or might not be addressed in Swedish adaptation policies.

4. Constructing ignorance to manage uncomfortable knowledge

Addressing questions of gender, class, ethnicity and indigeneity are crucial when planning for climate action. The importance of gender has been acknowledged in several overarching policies in Sweden. Gender-equality is an overarching policy prescription, and all government agencies are meant to address it in their work. An overarching policy on gender-equality builds on an acknowledgement of people's different abilities and power to be able to act (SOU, 2005:66). The Bill on Nature Conservation (Skr, 2001/02:173), too states that it is important that gender-equality is taken into consideration in nature conservation and that women and men are given the opportunity to take part on equal terms in these processes. Commitment to inequalities and social justice in the *Agenda 2030* to which Sweden is a signatory as well as the IPCC report bring attention to knowledge on questions of gender and social justice in climate settings also in Sweden and Europe.

Given this attention to questions of gender and difference in overarching policy literature as well as the presence of the literature, that is, the knowledge that exists on these issues in the public sphere, it makes the ignorance of these aspects in climate policymaking paradoxical. In the rest of the paper, we go on to examine the ways in which policymaking in Sweden and in Europe more generally has managed this uncomfortable knowledge on social and political power in climate change, evident in the public domain. Through an analysis of Sweden's *National Strategy for Climate Adaptation* as well as of the *Regional Adaptation Plans for Climate Adaptation* (in particular of two) and following Rayner (2010), we find that there appears to be four ways in which ignorance of gender and power is created and maintained in policy documents: through denial, dismissal, diversion and displacement.

4.1. Denial: the persistent refusal to act on information or even accept its existence

A ubiquitous form of ignorance is achieved through denial – a lack of action on information in the public sphere. Denial in the climate documents is first and foremost, that of social difference and a denial of the gendered work of care, vital to address the interrelationship of the 'climate and care crisis' today (Morrissey et al., 2022). Second, when differences are acknowledged, they are ascribed to people's biology and power, politics and inequities in societal organization responsible for climate harms are denied.

4.1.1. A denial of difference and care

A search for the keywords (sex, gender, gender-equality, women, ethnicity, indigenous, age, class, and income) in the NSCCA did not give any results for these words. The NSCCA does mention the indigenous people in Sweden, the Saami when referring to the Saami Parliament and their work with adapting reindeer husbandry to a changed climate. In a lone section on the 'Guiding principles for climate change adaptation work', the document refers in abstract language to the need for 'balancing and combining economic, social and environmental development' and that climate measures need to consider the "positive effects on social cohesion, contribute to sustainable economic growth and employment, good living environments and health and that they do not disadvantage any social group" (Prop, 2017/18:163:65–66).

Of the 21 RAPCAs, 4 (Hallands, 2014; Kronobergs, 2016; Stockholm, 2014; and Uppsala, 2014a,b) made no reference to any type of social difference or social aspects of climate change whatsoever. Of the rest (17) that did, 10 made no mention of gender or gender-equality in climate change or adaptation and the closest they come to talking about people are brief references in relation to health. Among the 7 RAPCAs that do mention gender or gender-equality Gotland, 2018b; Västmanlands, 2013; Norrbottens, 2020a; Västra Götalands, 2017; Kalmar, 2020; Skåne, 2020; and Västerbotten, 2021), 3 (Gotland, 2018b; Skåne, 2020; and Kalmar, 2020) mention it in passing as one of several perspectives to be integrated in the work of climate adaptation. The following quote from RAPCA Gotland (2018b:9) epitomizes this approach,

> "According to §§ 5 and 6 of the CAB's instructions, all the CAB's operational areas must integrate cross-cutting perspectives in their work.…(these include) gender equality, children's perspectives, ensure accessibility and participation for the disabled, human rights, public health, simplify processes for companies, consider environmental goals and in their activities, ensure that housing needs are met. This integrative work must proceed continuously."

The Västmanland RAPCA (2013:27) briefly mentions that science has shown that transport is affected by parameters such as gender, income and household size, but leave it at that. The Västerbotten RAPCA (2021:69) in its prescriptions recommends that health care personnel are educated in different cultures and norms to understand people from

[8] https://www.enar-eu.org/racialised-communities-in-europe-hit-hardest-by-the-climate-crisis-new-enar-report/

[9] Towards Climate Justice - equinox-eu.com

different ethnicities. The two exceptions are Västra Götaland (2017: 34, 36) and Norrbotten (2020a:47) that discuss how women may be differently affected than men and how gender might intersect with other social dimensions such as income and power to cause differential outcomes of climate change. A discussion on the relation of the (largely gendered) work of care and reproduction is denied in the NSCCA and all but two (Norrbotten, 2020b and Västra Götalands, 2017) RAPCAs that we go on to discuss ahead. Apart from the mention above in relation to healthcare, there is scant mention of immigrants, especially those living in the suburbs of large Swedish cities where low-socio economic status can intersect with low education and racism to produce and exacerbate negative effects such as was clear during the covid pandemic.

4.1.2. A denial of power

As is the case in a great deal of policymaking (c.f. Arora-Jonsson, 2011; 2014), 'gender' is either equated with women or used to refer to general differences between imagined homogenous groups of men and women, rather than addressing the socio-economic and political contexts in which that men and women find themselves. In other words, there is a denial of power relations inherent in societies that determines outcomes for people in their everyday lives in times of climate change. Vulnerability to climate change is seen as a function of biology.

For example, the Kronoberg RAPCA (2016:22) mentions gender and age as aspects of vulnerability, but this is ascribed to biology: older people are more susceptible to heat and have a higher mortality and small children to cancer.

An exception is the Västra Götaland RAPCA (2017),

"The view of risks varies between different groups and individuals. Women are generally more likely to take risks seriously and act to a greater extent than men to avoid or reduce the risks. Women are also generally less positive to technical solutions perceived as risky. …. When choosing climate adaptation measures, an analysis should be made of how it can affect various particularly vulnerable groups" (p.35).

However, here too, difference is accounted for by biology and how women or men are inherently assumed to be and not by the relations of power that structure society or that these positions might change in different situations and at different times. As a result, this approach leads to technical solutions and the RAPCA continues,

"This could, for example, be about how functional requirements for buildings in flood-prone areas must be designed so that the function is also maintained for e.g. children, the elderly or people with disabilities" (p.36).

These references to risk and differential impacts and any mention to ethnicity were however missing from the later version of the Västra Götaland RAPCA (2021).

Only two RAPCAs that of Västerbotten, (2021 :69, 70) and Västra Götaland, (2017:34) mention ethnicity. In the case of VG, it is in relation to climate vulnerability that state that vulnerability is socially produced and is a result of intersecting dimensions of gender, income, age or ethnicity. These mentions however are absent in the following updated plan. The Norrbotten RAPCA does mention commercial interests in the area that would need to adjust to reindeer herding's need for land and shifting reindeer paths (2020a:23) but in keeping with government practice, none of the RAPCAs use the words 'indigenous' for the Saami. Norrbotten however, refers to the term in relation to potential refugees who might be indigenous (2020a:30).

Power relations concerning the majority society or the state and the Saami are not mentioned, nor the colonial history or ongoing conflicts related to the many climate initiatives such as wind-power or mining where the state is involved. The refusal to acknowledge indigeneity or culture in Sweden itself corresponds to research (Arora-Jonsson, 2017) that shows how culture, values and identities are relegated to other supposedly less developed states and peoples in the global South where nature has been more difficult to separate from its cultural mooring. In Swedish environmental policymaking, on the other hand, the pre-eminence of the natural sciences has implied denying social relations imbricated in environments (Ibid, 2018).

The overwhelming denial of gender and intersecting dimensions of power in most RAPCAs is echoed in work by Singleton and Rask's (2022) study of three governmental agencies in Sweden. They argue that while each agency articulated an awareness of social difference in their climate policymaking, their references to it in broad and vague terms had the effect instead of obscuring differential climate impacts and effects of climate action. This approach is also evident in EU's climate policy. In fact, in her analysis of policies at the EU level, [10] Allwood, (2020:342) rues that, most remain resolutely gender-blind.

Svendsen et al. (2022:35) write that all Nordic countries formally acknowledge that climate policies impact gender through their commitment to the 2019 Lima Work Programme and the Gender Action Plan. However, only Finland explicitly addresses gender in their climate action plan and is the only country to conduct a gender impact assessment. Climate policies in Norway and Denmark appear to be gender-blind.

A consequence of the denial of difference and care as well as of power was a complete denial of people and knowledge production outside the rarefied sphere of policymaking. Thus, the knowledge and values of local and /or indigenous groups, considered vital to be able to deal with our current crisis (c.f. Jasanoff, 2007), were denied.

4.2. Dismissal: note it and move on or we don't really know enough

Dismissal acknowledges the existence of the information and involves some minimal engagement up to the point of rebutting it. This appears to be one of the most common approaches to the question of dealing with the politics of climate change in the documents.

Questions of difference are mentioned and then the text moves on. Dismissal is justified by a lack of information on the subject, as being peripheral to the main concerns, as the remit of others or at best it is acknowledged and then leased out to consultants to write.

4.2.1. Naming and moving on

The Västra Götaland RAPCA (2017:34) takes up the important issue of how income /class, ethnicity, political influence, age and gender impact people's health and vulnerability to climate effects and their possibilities to recover from crisis. They also note the importance of social security for vulnerable groups, giving an example of how the shutdown of social services during a crisis might affect women *in particular* and that "Access to publicly funded measures is thus an advantage for people with poor financial resources" (2017:36). The RAPCA (2017:35) calls for the need for participation of different social groups in decision-making.

Eight RAPCAs mention sustainability in some way in their action plans, either as a part of criteria for measures where it is stated that they should be economically, ecologically and socially sustainable (e.g., Västmanland, 2013:55) or it is mentioned in relation to *Agenda 2030* (e.g. Jämtland, 2020:10). Västra Götaland that we cite above has a section (2017:34–36) dedicated to issues of social sustainability and human rights. Unfortunately, all reference to these issues is dismissed when it comes to the section on taking action (2017:44–66).[11]

This is also the case when it comes to the work of care and reproduction. The CAB in Norrbotten commissioned a gender analysis to be used as a basis for their work on climate adaptation (Norrbotten 2020b).

[10] The European Green Deal (COM(**2019**)640 final). The climate and energy framework (COM(**2014**)15 final)A Clean Planet for All (COM(**2018**)773 final) "the Environmental Action Programme (1386/**2014**/EU) makes one mention of pregnant women as a vulnerable group." (p.179)

[11] Skåne's CAB has set up a regional working group to ensure that questions of gender-equality, work with gender-equality, human rights and public health are reflected in work with climate adaptation. However, since this is so far a desk study, it is not clear what the group has worked with.

This separate document mentions the gendered dimensions of unpaid care work when referring to Sweden's overarching policy on gender-equality (2020b:20). Västra Götaland on the other hand, in a section called *'Climate change affects human rights and social sustainability*,' write about women's greater care burden and responsibility for care work within the home as well as outside in hospitals, schools and childcare, makes them more susceptible to climate events that disrupt daily life (2017:36). Given the denial of this issue in all other RAPCAS, these mentions are heartening. Sadly, they too fall into dismissal after their first mention.

All RAPCAs include measures for providing relevant knowledge base and guidance, creating guidelines, gathering relevant knowledge, information, communication and training and for integrating issues of climate adaptation in various fora for municipalities and other regional actors. Nowhere is it stated that there is a need to consider or address the politics that arise and the differentiated effects of climate change and action. The actions could have included questions of social justice, effects as well as the measures to deal with conflicting relations around them. This constitutes an opening for change in these documents, that as yet, remains largely unrealized.

4.2.2. *A lack of knowledge?*

The section on social sustainability and human rights in the Västra Götaland plan (2017) disappeared in the updated version from 2021. When we asked the desk officer responsible for the RAPCAs, why that was the case, the officer pointed out that this was something the officer had thought important to put in and had consulted the unit on justice, health and integration on how to write it. However, the next RAPCA needed to be written in a hurry due to the pandemic and things not considered central to the document fell away.

The officer also pointed to the problem of the lack of knowledge or rather to the lack of 'usable' knowledge. The major problem, according to the officer, was the lack of information on how climate change impacted low-income groups in Sweden. When we pointed out that there was literature on this in the public domain, the officer acknowledged that there was indeed, but that it wasn't tailored for their work at the municipalities. This lack of knowledge is a recurring feature. The Skåne RAPCA (2020:26) for instance, regretted the lack of knowledge, especially of climate change on health (also Gotland, 2018b:56).

This problem of the science – policy interface was one reason that the knowledge that does exist in the public domain is dismissed. Thus, in the VG strategy, references to gender, power and social justice shifted from dismissal to denial in the updated version. Even acknowledgement could open a potential pandora's box of having to deal with complex knowledge of the subject, difficult to handle in policymaking. This back and forth in policy highlights its non-linear sequence as well as its non-hierarchical nature (c.f. Wright and Reinhold, 2011). The officer, who was fairly junior, felt that this was something that was possible to change but was not entirely able to carry it through in future versions.

Thus, the RAPCAs that do acknowledge challenges of social differentiation and politics to some extent, either do so and move on, claiming the lack of clear information or in some cases just drop it and go back to denial. None really rebut it, making the resistance to taking it up more amorphous and harder to contest. Though this does not foreclose future attempts at change.

The first assessment report from the national board of experts on climate adaptation (Nationella Expertrådet för Klimatanpassning, 2022:591) has a section on the need for gender-and justice in climate adaptation. They call for better knowledge on the social dimensions of climate adaptation on national, regional as well as local level and suggest that government agencies support municipalities and other actors working with climate adaptation with knowledge-raising activities on these dimensions. At the moment however, the felt lack of knowledge and following inaction constitutes a dismissal of these issues.

Studies at the Swedish environmental protection agency also shows that the perceived inability to deal with the human dimensions of environmental policy and with gender in particular is often explained as a lack of competence on the subject of gender and power within the organization. This is voiced at the same time as is the assumption that the presence of a large number of women desk-officers meant that they had somehow dealt with the question (Arora-Jonsson, 2018).

This has often meant that questions such as these are dismissed to groups outside of the institution (c.f. Allwood, 2020), as the consultants hired to write the gender analysis for Norrbotten. Writing on the EU Commission, Allwood shows that those appointed as gender/climate experts often referred to individuals outside of the DG-CLIMA working with gender mainstreaming. In her research on the EU, Allwood finds that such sub-groups rarely have much influence on the actual climate policies, indicating perhaps the success of construction of ignorance on these subjects.

Yet, such instances of dismissal also reveal the potentiality of change. For instance, the fact that the VG RAPCA did in fact take up the possibility of addressing gendered and power imbalances shows the agency, albeit in the face of constraints, that individual officials can exercise to bring about change in what climate adaptation can mean. Similarly, Norrbotten's commissioning of the report on gender was also an opening. While these openings can be ignored in the wider cultures of policymaking, they also provide spaces from which change may be leveraged.

4.3. *Diversion: attributed to biology, technology and business rather than rights and relations of power*

As we saw above in the VG RAPCA, when acknowledgement becomes difficult, the tendency is to revert to denial. An equally common strategy is to manage expectations by establishing a decoy activity. For instance, in the case of the RAPCAs, the focus on technologies or economic instruments or what are seen as the inevitable consequences of people's biology are used to distracts attention from uncomfortable social relations and change that policy must address for transformation. Instead, technical and economic problems become the focus of interventions.

4.3.1. *Economics and technology, not culture*

Most RAPCAs are clearly inspired by the government's *Climate- and vulnerability inquiry* (SOU, 2007:60) and follow the sectoral division of that document. The focus is on technical systems and economic activities. The lack of attention to politics and culture is epitomized in relation to the Saami indigenous peoples. The Saami are mentioned primarily in relation to reindeer herding as a business activity. An exception, Norrbotten writes about the cultural aspects of reindeer herding and the threat of climate change to reindeer herding as impacting Saami culture (2020a:22) and in fact the entire cultural landscape of Norrbotten (2020a:27). The other three northern regions where reindeer husbandry takes place mention that climate change will affect reindeer husbandry as an economic activity. None are explicit about what that entails for the CAB in terms of future work or responsibility.

Västernorrland's RAPCA (2018) refers to the Saami Parliament's[12] and state that they support the Parliament's suggestion that each Reindeer Herding Community[13] make an adaptation plan and that the CAB would assist them in doing so. The Jämtland RAPCA (2020) merely

[12] The Saami Parliament is both a publicly elected parliament and a state agency working towards increased self-determination of the Saami people. https://www.sametinget.se/english

[13] Sweden has 51 Reindeer Herding Communities. These are geographical regions where reindeer herding takes place. A Reindeer Herding Community is an economic and administrative association with its own board, with the task of leading the reindeer husbandry according to the members' interest. https://www.sametinget.se/samebyar

mentions reindeer herding as one of several industries in the region that will be affected by climate change. The RAPCA from Dalarna (2021:29) states,

> "The consequences for the reindeer industry will be serious. The insect plague and snow conditions in winter become more difficult. Access to land in mountain areas is expected to diminish for reindeer herding leading to increasing land use conflicts with other businesses due to climate impacts. The more positive consequences would be shorter winters and longer periods with vegetation good for reindeer. Reindeer herding can be protected from climate change through a range of relatively inexpensive measures. Increased clearing of forests, re-planting of pine as well as considering areas with reindeer lichen while logging are examples of that. It is however inevitable that mountain areas will shrink and that reindeer husbandry will have to cooperate with tourism on continually shrinking land areas."

These lines, a paraphrasing or rather an interpretation of the original text from a Governmental Inquiry on the *Threats and Opportunities of Climate Change* (SOU, 2007, chapter 4:398–399) omits to mention that the Inquiry emphasizes that the Saami as indigenous peoples contribute to cultural and environmental values difficult to translate in economic terms (Ibid: 398) or that the Saami people need to be given increased opportunities and voice in influencing how tourism is shaped in their areas (Ibid:393). Further, the ways in which this is phrased appears to speak for production forestry, an industry long in conflict with reindeer herding and assumes that more vegetation would be good enough for the reindeer which is not a foregone conclusion.

The Västerbotten RAPCA (2021:64) mentions the CAB's responsibility for protecting the future of reindeer husbandry, however the formulation is vague. They write that they should 'consider' the needs of reindeer husbandry and how trials of environmentally hazardous activities, land exploitation or alternative migration routes needed due to climate change will affect reindeer husbandry. The diversion of the focus only on reindeer herding (to the exclusion of Saami who do not herd reindeer) and as a business activity and not integral to the identity of the Saami implies a detachment of Saami reindeer herding from Saami culture, indicating a separation of nature - culture logic in what Lugones (2010) terms our colonial thought system.

While on the one hand, all relations are diverted or phrased in economic terms, even the economics of reindeer herding, a customary practice by the Saami that has maintained the environment and cultural landscape from time immemorial is as in the Dalarnas (2021) RAPCA, deemed as having to make way for tourists. Thus, culture, that is always political (Arora-Jonsson, 2016), becomes not only a blind spot in policymaking (Arora-Jonsson, 2017) but also becomes 'uncomfortable knowledge' (c.f. Rayner, 2012) that is expediently diverted.

4.3.2. Diversion to the elderly and frail

The other major area of diversion is the focus on biology rather than uncomfortable and hard to manage social relations, essential to address for transformation. This diversion (and depoliticization) occurs through focusing on the elderly or children. 11 RAPCAs mention elderly people as especially vulnerable to heat waves, a point also taken up in the *Climate and vulnerability inquiry* (SOU, 2007:60). Further, the RAPCAs, when writing about the elderly take them as a homogenous group. One exception is Västra Götalands (2017) that singles out older women as especially vulnerable (taking sex as intersecting with age), but none mention that the economic status (class), gender, ethnicity or place of residence (rural or urban where medical facilities differ vastly) and living conditions may be significant for how people experience a heat wave.

The vulnerability of the elderly to heat waves recurs under the heading of Public Health and Climate Adaptation in several RAPCAs (Örebro, 2016; Jönköpings, 2021; Blekinge, 2014; Gävleborgs, 2020; Kronobergs, 2016; Södermanlands, 2014). This is one of the few headings in the *Climate and vulnerability inquiry* (SOU, 2007:60) that refers to people, the other being the section on *Changes in the world and their impacts on Sweden*. In these six RAPCAs, the only mention of vulnerability is in terms of people's biology: being physically disabled, elderly or children and no social aspects of how people's vulnerability may be affected is mentioned. It is seen as being externally produced, by heatwaves, in most instances, thus externalizing to climate change something that is highly societal and political.

In a similar vein, in the conversation with the VG officer, when asked about climate adaptation, the focus on the 'social' was on public health and children and how they might deal with heat.

This diversion to problems of health because of biology rather than their social positions only effects attention away from the social and political vital to address to transform current systems.

4.4. Displacement: vulnerable systems in the North and vulnerable people in the South

Displacement underpins climate adaptation policy in Sweden and more generally in Europe. Displacement, according to Rayner (2010:120) does not merely distract attention away from an area that might otherwise generate uncomfortable knowledge by pointing in another direction as diversionary strategies do, but in fact substitutes a more manageable and abstract surrogate. We show how in the adaptation plans, this recurs in two ways – first, through a displacement from the need to changing norms and relations to a focus on technological systems and second, through a geographic displacement to the global South.

4.4.1. Vulnerable systems

Vulnerability to climate change has been a major issue internationally in relation to climate adaptation. An examination of the RAPCAs, the NSCCA as well as the *Climate and vulnerability inquiry* (SOU, 2007:60) indicates that that the term is used repeatedly but except for Västra Götaland, it refers consistently to the vulnerability of technical systems, not of people.

One example is the NSCCA (2018:27)'s discussion of expected heavy rainfall,

> "all municipalities in Sweden regardless of geography are likely to be at a higher risk of rainfall. The actual consequences of this rainfall depend on the city's density, topography, the proportion of green areas, where the important services are situated, the capacity of stormwater systems and so on."

That people living far from service provision or factors that make it mobility difficult for some and not others or any such factors are beyond the discussion or mentioned in measures. Another example of this technical understanding of risk and vulnerability is Norrbotten RAPCA's (2020a:10) definition of risks relating to roads and railroads. They write that 'the level of risk is dependent on the specific environment, the road and railroad design and the climate effects (direct and indirect).' When assessing risk, factors considered pertinent are technical issues such as infrastructural design, the physical environment and unpredictable natural events. Health too is attributed to primarily to biology - to the effects of new viruses or heatwaves. The organization of society, social/power relations and people's capacity to cope with crisis or changes are not included.

Nor are forest fires that have caused such havoc in Sweden over successive summers necessarily seen as a people's issue. Even in the Norrbotten RAPCA (2020a), forest fires are discussed in the relation to the consequences for forestry (2020a:17) or the cultural landscape and historical remains (2020a:27). Flooding is mentioned in tandem with consequences for roads and railroads (in the section on communications: 10), the consequences for dams and sewer systems (in the section on technical systems:13;15), for buildings (in a section on the built environment, p.16) as well as for the cultural landscape (2020a:27). Potential consequences for different people and how those might be dealt

with are not discussed. The overriding focus is on maintaining the functionality of technical systems or the viability of economic activities.

Thus, vulnerability in Sweden is the vulnerability of technical systems - of drinking water, energy supply systems with corresponding technical solutions designed to inform management of a real-world phenomenon. People or culture and politics are displaced elsewhere.

4.4.2. *Displacing to the global South*

While the focus is on vulnerability of technical systems at home, people in from the global South are in fact seen as vulnerable to climate change. People affected by climate change are "others" from far away who are forced to flee to Sweden for refuge.

For example, in the Östergötland RAPCA (2021), the specter of future migrants is one of very few instances when a specific group of people are mentioned. This is also the case for the *Climate- and vulnerability inquiry* (SOU, 2007:60) where vulnerability in relation to people is taken up only in relation to migration (2007:468) or when it comes to health linked to people's physical being (438−460). Six RAPCAs write about global migration and the need for a readiness for the coming waves of refugees. For example, the Norrbotten RAPCA (2020a:30) states,

> "The effects of climate change increase the risk for flight for already vulnerable people and affect first and foremost low-income countries, women, children, and indigenous populations."

While the action plan from Norrbotten is the one most inclusive of Saami perspectives, there is no mention of their traditional knowledge either and as we write above, the only indigenous people that are mentioned are those who are likely to come as refugees to Sweden.

As is evident from research (including the IPCC reports), low-income counties in the global South are most likely to be hit hardest by climate change impacts.[14] Yet, this does not mean that class, gender, indigeneity, ethnicity and other dimensions of power have no role in relation to climate change in countries in the global North. That these questions are ignored in policymaking in Sweden echoes work both in the EU on gender (Allwood, 2020) as well as in Sweden (Arora-Jonsson, 2018, 2019) that gender or indigeneity are regarded as issues only when it comes to the global South. In this 'colonial' episteme built on gendered hierarchical dichotomies (Lugones, 2010), Swedish policymaking based on science and technology has no cause to consider the presence of messy and unpredictable relations of people, power and their cultures. These belong elsewhere – to those less scientific and not quite developed (c.f. Arora-Jonsson, 2018, 2019).

5. Discussion: countering strategic unknowing in policy making

Policymaking has an important role to play in making space for the possibility of different groups to be seen and be involved in climate action, for it to succeed and for it to be just. Drawing on our analysis above, we find however that despite knowledge in the public domain, policymaking appears to be characterized by the production of stereotypes and 'non-knowledge' on the embeddedness of the environment in societal organization and its messy relations (c.f. Arora-Jonsson, 2011). However, our analysis also shows that openings do exist, that ignorance can be unmade, and we turn to feminist and decolonial thinking for suggestions on how it may be possible to do so.

Decolonial scholars (Lugones, 2010; Blaser, 2013) write that a colonial episteme, built on gendered hierarchical dichotomies, enables the denial of other worlds. Both in the RAPCAs as well as what we know from literature on gender and policymaking in Europe more widely, we have shown how policymaking goes about ignoring and 'unknowing' the oppressive intersections of gender and power that 50 years of research on gender and power has made so patently clear (c.f. Arora-Jonsson, 2014).

This ignorance, maintained through strategies of denial, dismissal, diversion and displacement in climate policies, is 'not just the opposite of knowledge but a productive force in itself '(McGoey, 2012). It is constructed through a careful holding outside of the discussion the presence of human actors (both human and non-human) and through constructing changing and shifting environments and societies as static. In rare instances when people are mentioned, their relationship to climate change is circumscribed by their biology (the elderly, children) and has little to do with the intersections of gender, class, or ethnicity that also determine their health and place in society. Where dimensions of power are not denied, they are referred to in the abstract and overarching terms such as references to gender or human rights in some RAPCAs. Almost without exception (the previous VG document being an exception) the embeddedness of human and their relationships and/or actions in determining what the environment looks like are dismissed in the measures needed to deal with climate change, thus not only ignoring questions of justice in climate change measures but also undoing the possibility of concrete climate action where everyone is involved. Dismissal appears to be the most prevalent approach when it comes to gender and power.

The 'ethic of care' both in the home and that also sustains environments and communities (Arora-Jonsson, 2013) and essential to dealing with climate change (McGregor et al., 2022) is denied. Equally invisible are the worlds of indigenous peoples, that in the action plans, are reduced to an industry, that of reindeer herding. The critique of how traditional knowledge is sometimes sought to be integrated into policy or research as local and idiosyncratic while scientific knowledge is regarded as universal (e.g. Cameron, 2012) is not an issue in these documents. Local and traditional knowledges are neither mentioned nor acknowledged. That world simply does not exist. Thus, paraphrasing Todd (2016), policymaking is still firmly experiencing the colonial in its lack of acknowledgment of other ways of knowing and its debt to the sciences. It ignores how the current political economy is rooted in the histories of colonial extraction that sustains the current system (Bhambra and Newell, 2022). The unwillingness to 'situate' and acknowledge different ways of knowing (Arora-Jonsson, 2016; Todd, 2016) can be seen as the continuing manifestation of such relations.

This ignorance is made possible, we argue, by an acceptance of the racial underpinnings of current geopolitical structures. Feminist postcolonial scholarship in Sweden has shown how the focus on other 'less developed and gender-unequal countries' both in policy and practice affirms positive images and a superiority, paving the ground for displacing these as questions for the global South and ignoring them at home (Arora-Jonsson, 2009). Much the same appears to be the case in relation to indigeneity. Where indigeneity is in fact acknowledged, as it is in the Norrbotten (2020a) document, it is done so in relation to other countries, not one's own. The assumption then is that citizens in Sweden are abstract entities devoid of ethnicity, gender or race and that environments or technical systems can be managed as areas separate from the people living in them.

Given that these are adaptation strategies, it is not clear who exactly needs to adapt or change or what that would entail for different people in society, in other words, the actors themselves are missing. They are spoken about in veiled terms: industries, tourism, reindeer herding or technical systems such as communications or water. People, their lives, values and cultures and how these are inseparable from experiences of climate change as well as how climate change can be addressed is ignored. Aspects of 'real life' and uncertainty – of the messy world of gender, race, class are actively ignored to uphold an order that is considered knowable and possible to act on. The 'will to know less' (McGoey, 2012:3) thus is meant for themselves rather than the lay public as was the case in the famous case of agnotology, the tobacco

[14] Although a great deal of research has also made it clear that women or children are not just vulnerable but that vulnerability is created through intersecting dimensions of power in different contexts and policy needs to address those different conditions (c.f. Arora-Jonsson, 2011).

industry's role in covering up the harmful effects of tobacco. Here, instead of creating ignorance for the public it is a case of affirming a not knowing for oneself and relegating uncomfortable knowledge to the need for more competence and tailored knowledge. This was clear in the VG RAPCA, where these aspects were present in the first version but were then considered too difficult given the limited time and the 'lack of knowledge' and dropped. That became the easier solution. This highlights how agency can be exercised by individual officers, but that they would need much more systematic support to address questions of social justice in their everyday work.

However, it is also these instances that show that change is possible. Ignorance can be made or unmade and science can be complicit in either process (Proctor, 2008:3). That a new approach is possible is evident in some of the RAPCAs that at some points attempted to acknowledge these relations. That aspects of gender and power were present in the first version of the VG document shows how individual officer-bearers can in fact influence policy and redefine how policy is done. Although, there are several northern regions, Norrbotten was the only one stated that commercial interests needed to recognize and respect Saami lifestyles as having shaped and shaping Norrbotten's landscape. The importance of research based national documents (the SOUs) cannot be overstated. It was clear that the regional documents were inspired by these and in fact copy-pasted sentences from these directly, even if they interpreted them differently. The increasing presence of critical social science research in governmental inquiries as well as in the IPCC internationally can be important points of leverage.

A decolonial feminist perspective affirms that gendered and racial hierarchies and dichotomies are made explicit and called into question. Admitting that neither nature or culture is static (Arora-Jonsson, 2016) and that shifting and changing differences between groups of people are central to environmental relations would help to confront the uncertainties that the policies try so hard to nail down with ideas of rationality and technology. Importantly, acknowledging relationships of care that underpin all productive work would effectively help to change the technocratic and economic approach that denies the entanglements of the nature and culture. It is also important to let in 'uncomfortable outsiders' (Todd, 2016) involved in dialogues with policymaking. There are enough examples, both globally (such as the processes around the SDGs) and in Sweden (the case of collaborative indigenous governance of Laponia national park as well as the involvement of women's movements in different periods in policymaking on gender-equality) to show that such an approach is possible and generative.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data Availability

The data consists mainly of policy and project documents.

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