

MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

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A Constellation of Just Transitions. A neo-Gramscian Political Ecology
Perspective on the South African Just Energy Transition Partnership.

verfasst von | submitted by

Veronica Calienno

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master (MA)

Wien | Vienna, 2024

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt |
Degree programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 067 805

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student record
sheet:

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Abstract

Over the past decade, the concept of Just Transition (JT) has gained widespread attention among national, regional, and global actors, influencing climate and energy policies. The establishment in 2021 of the South African Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), an international climate finance agreement between South Africa and five G7 members, marked the globalisation of JT. Despite its proliferation, the definition of JT remains contested, as various socioeconomic and political forces with conflicting interests seek to shape its meaning. However, existing research has largely overlooked JT as a site of political struggle, particularly in Global South countries. This thesis addresses this gap by developing a neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework that interprets JT as a battleground between competing Political Projects (PP) driven by distinct discursive strategies and material interests. The framework is applied to empirically analyse the South African JETP through a Historical-Materialist Policy Analysis (HMPA). By analysing policy documents, interviews, and secondary literature, the thesis situates the JETP within global climate finance regimes, EU-South Africa relations, and South Africa's reliance on the Minerals-Energy Complex and identifies four competing JT Political Projects within the JETP policy conflict: (i) a Core PP of market-driven, technical JT; (ii) a Satellite PP of development-oriented, internationally-funded JT; (iii) an Oppositional PP of slow-paced, fossilist JT; and (iv) an Oppositional PP of socioecological, transformative JT. By developing an interdisciplinary approach that understands the JT as an essentially contested, power-laden, context-dependent concept with global influence, this thesis contributes to the ongoing debate on the global low-carbon transition, while demonstrating the synergy between the fields of Global Studies, neo-Gramscianism, and HMPA.

Abstrakt

In den letzten zehn Jahren hat das Konzept des Just Transition (JT) bei nationalen, regionalen und globalen Akteuren große Aufmerksamkeit erlangt und die Klima- und Energiepolitik beeinflusst. Die Gründung im Jahr 2021 der südafrikanischen Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), ein internationales Klimafinanzierungsabkommen zwischen Südafrika und fünf G7-Mitgliedern, markiert die Globalisierung von JT. Trotz ihrer Verbreitung bleibt die Definition von JT umstritten, da verschiedene sozioökonomische und politische Kräfte mit gegensätzlichen Interessen versuchen, ihre Bedeutung zu gestalten. Die bisherige Forschung hat jedoch JT als Ort des politischen Kampfes, insbesondere in den Ländern des Globalen Südens, weitgehend außer Acht gelassen. Die vorliegende Arbeit schließt diese Lücke durch die Entwicklung eines neogramscianischen Rahmens für politische Ökologie, der JT als ein Schlachtfeld zwischen konkurrierenden politischen Projekten (PP) interpretiert, die durch unterschiedliche diskursive Strategien und materielle Interessen angetrieben werden. Der Rahmen wird angewandt, um das südafrikanische JETP durch eine historisch-materialistische Politikanalyse (HMPA) empirisch zu analysieren. Durch die Analyse von Politikdokumenten, Interviews und Sekundärliteratur verortet die Arbeit das JETP innerhalb globaler Klimafinanzierungsregime, der Beziehungen zwischen der EU und Südafrika und Südafrikas Abhängigkeit vom Mineralien-Energie-Komplex und identifiziert vier konkurrierende JT-Politische Projekte innerhalb des JETP-Politikkonflikts: (i) ein Kern-PP der marktorientierten, technischen JT; (ii) ein Satelliten-PP der entwicklungsorientierten, international finanzierten JT; (iii) ein Oppositions-PP der langsamen, fossilen JT; und (iv) ein Oppositions-PP der sozioökologischen, transformativen JT. Durch die Entwicklung eines interdisziplinären Ansatzes, der die JT als ein im Wesentlichen umstrittenes, machtbeladenes, kontextabhängiges Konzept mit globalem Einfluss versteht, trägt diese Arbeit zur laufenden Debatte über den globalen kohlenstoffarmen Übergang bei und zeigt gleichzeitig die Synergie zwischen den Bereichen Global Studies, Neo-Gramscianismus und HMPA auf.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Prof. Kirsten Rüther for her valuable advice and clear guidance, and for her moral support at times when I could not see the end of this journey. Special thanks also to all my professors in Ghent, Stellenbosch, and Vienna, who, over these two years, taught me to question everything I thought I knew and to accept that truth and justice are a horizon, not a destination.

To my family, thank you for accepting this unquenchable thirst of mine to pack up and leave, and for having always understood that it is not a desire to run away from you, but a drive to go beyond myself.

To all my friends, thank you for always making me feel so free I could be weak. And Jens, thank you (again), because if it wasn't for you I would have never embarked in this beautiful journey.

A special thought goes to the girls of my life. Your intelligence, grit, and passion remind me every day that a future of joy, justice, and respect is possible as long as you are part of it. To Luli, because you don't know it, but it was one of our deep conversations on life that gave me the inspiration for this thesis. To Anita, because your spontaneity has been a guiding light when everything seemed inevitable. To Marghi, because you are my sister-in-arms. To Livia, because you have been home away from home. To Nele, because you showed me how determination can overcome any anxiety. To Malin, because when I look at you, I see the goodness and confidence that make me so hopeful for the world that is to come. And to Bex, because you are the crazy diamond that shined on this wholesome, sometimes absurd, year. I love you all deeply.

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*Meritano rispetto i dubbi e l'irrequietezza
di tutti quelli che – di fronte all'ingiustizia –
cercano il loro modo
di stare dalla parte giusta della storia.*

*Deserving of respect are the doubts and the restlessness
of all those who - in the face of injustice –
seek their way
to be on the right side of history.*

- Zerocalcare

CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1. Climate Change as the latest crisis of Global Capitalism

Climate change is the defining crisis of the 21st century. Rising global temperatures, melting ice caps, and more frequent and severe weather events have been altering the planet's ecosystems, increasingly threatening the stability and well-being of human societies. To this day, over 3 billion people live in regions highly vulnerable to climate change (IPCC, 2023). Communities and countries facing significant developmental challenges are particularly at risk from climate hazards, as the increasing frequency of extreme weather events has left millions struggling with acute food insecurity and reduced access to water. The most severe impacts are seen in parts of Africa, Asia, Central and South America, small island nations, and the Arctic, and globally among Indigenous Peoples, small-scale food producers, and low-income households (IPCC, 2023).

As highlighted by the latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), “it is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land” by emitting disproportionate amounts of greenhouse gases (GHG) since the industrial revolution (IPCC, 2023, p. 5). Driven by the relentless burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, mass livestock farming, and the production of fertilisers, climate change is intrinsically connected with the history and future of capitalist social relations. The extraction of fossil fuel has been instrumental to the ascent of capitalism and the ever-growing expansion of its material and geographical frontiers through processes of industrialisation and colonisation (Schneider et al., 2023). To this day, profit accumulation and maximisation remain crucially fuelled by the burning of oil, coal, and natural gas, which enables the large-scale manufacturing of goods and the global transportation system (Guerrero, 2018).

Although this system is deeply entrenched in global societies and lived experiences, to the point of making it easier for many to imagine the end of the world rather than that of capitalism, its benefits and detriments are unequally distributed among individuals and populations. Ultimately, the winners are the small portion of society owning the material means of production through which resources are extracted, profit maximised, and tons of GHG emissions released in the atmosphere year by year. This unequal distribution is not some contingent product of market or state failures, but the structural condition required by any capitalist system to proliferate, since the systemic pursuit of unlimited growth can only sustain

itself by endlessly extracting and exploiting human (re)productive labour and natural resources. As candidly put by Fraser (2021, p. 1), “capitalism is a cannibal that devours its own vital organs, simultaneously needing and rubbishing nature.”

The inherently contradictory nature of capitalist systems does not go without consequences. The five-hundred-year history of capitalism is punctuated by historical situations in which human and non-human instances entered into friction with the capitalist calculus of accumulation, culminating in systemic crises that were temporarily put under control through the establishment of new frontiers (Beckert et al., 2021). Against this background, climate change has become “one of the most paramount examples of the contradictory character of capitalist social relations and capitalist relations to nature” (Schneider et al., 2023). Climate change is not like any other historical systemic crisis: it is not only a global crisis, it is planetary. The climate crisis is the first capitalism-induced phenomenon that concerns not only the lives of all existing human beings and the ones to come but also the physical and biological reality of our world despite with different degrees of impact. At the same time, calling into doubt capitalism’s historical dependency on fossil fuels as the engine of its growth model, climate change has threatened, arguably more than any previous crisis, one of its most longstanding, fundamental underpinnings.

It is not a surprise then that when the first evidence of climate change started to circulate in academic journals, the capitalist class’s first reaction was one of complete denial (Guerrero, 2018). However, as extreme weather conditions increasingly shaped and impacted socioeconomic relations at global, national, and local scales, the issue of how to tackle climate change has made its way up to the top of the political agenda worldwide. Perceived as unrealistic just a few years ago, the idea of a global energy transition from fossil fuel to renewable energy (RE) sources, in the attempt to decouple global capitalism from fossil-fuel dependency, has gained momentum in Western powerhouses as well as in emerging and developing economies of the Global South. The forming consensus over a “market-centred”, “capital-friendly” global climate regime finds wide support within corporate and financial elites, which has for decades profited from the extraction and commercialisation of fossil fuels and is now eyeing the energy transition as a new opportunity for capital investment and profit maximisation (Fraser, 2022, p. 95). As Satgar (2018, p. 9) observes, this urgency of “greening capitalism” is well reflected in international climate agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, in the flourishing international partnerships for the development of solar, wind, and hydrogen, and in the increasing popularisation of the concept of ‘green’ growth.

Against this background, the concept of Just Transition (JT) has emerged as “one of the most important discursive constructions” in contemporary climate politics (Harry et al., 2024). Concerning the need to find a ‘fair’ balance between the decarbonisation imperatives imposed by climate change and the socio-economic impacts of the global energy transition, that of JT has become a highly contested concept which is prone to be discursively constructed in different terms depending on the interests and objectives of those who use it (Pollock, 2022). In particular, the use of the adjective ‘just’ gives rise to important interrogatives concerning *what* can be considered just, *how* justice must be pursued, and, most crucially, *who* has the power to determine the answers to these questions. Therefore, investigating how the concept of Just Transition is constructed and crystallised into climate policies across the world, which is the aim of this thesis, is fundamental to understanding who will be the “winners and losers” of the global energy transition (Carley & Konisky, 2020, as cited in de Jong, 2023).

1.2. Just Transition: Emergence and Globalisation of a Contested Concept

The concept of JT has its origins in the struggle of US labour unions for better livelihoods and health in the 1970s. In response to increasing environmental regulations for industries, trade unionists from the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW) recognised the need to reconcile environmental and social concerns through *ad hoc* transitional policies (Stewis & Felli, 2020). Aiming at reducing the environmental and health impact of the industries they worked for while securing decent jobs and livelihoods, OCAW unionists mobilised workers, communities, and environmentalists around the conviction that “the real choice is not jobs or environment; it is both or neither” (Kohler, 1997, as cited in Malope, 2022; JT Research Collaborative, 2018). By the early 1990s, this collective effort led to the development of a proposal for a Superfund for Workers, described as “a democratic socialist strategy with a significant environmental component” in response to the rising jobs-versus-environment discourse fuelled by the neoconservative right (Stewis & Felli, 2020, p. 2). In 1995, the term ‘JT’ was first officially introduced by Les Leopold and Brian Kohler to indicate the convergence of the vision and interests of workers and environmentalists (JT Research Collaborative, 2018). However, by the end of the decade, the concept faced decline in the US due to resolute opposition from anti-environmentalists within unions and the government.

Nevertheless, the JT was not consigned to oblivion. By the turn of the millennium, the term had gained international prominence through the efforts of national and international unions (JT Research Collaborative, 2018). As the reality of climate change became increasingly pressing, the meaning of JT shifted to emphasise the imperative of a socially fair

decarbonisation of the global economy. In particular, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), later known as the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), played a pivotal role in shaping the global labour movement's approach to sustainable development and climate change, demanding “an equitable distribution of costs through JT policies” at COP3 in Kyoto (ICFTU, 1997, as cited in JT Research Collaborative, 2018).

After spreading through the Global North, especially in Spain, Australia, and the UK, where it was used to address the social and health dimension of environmental change, in 2010, the concept of JT achieved global significance with its formal inclusion into the UN climate process (Stavis & Felli, 2020). Consequently, the UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties (COPs) became ITUC's primary platform venue for advocating its JT agenda, expressing growing concerns that international climate negotiations were insufficiently addressing the social and employment-related implications of climate change. This emphasis aimed to fill a critical gap in the global climate debate, which, prior to the early 2000s, predominantly viewed equity and justice issues through a North-South perspective, focusing on the historical responsibility of developed countries while neglecting the social effects on employment and labour in both developed and developing countries (JT Research Collaborative, 2018). At COP17 in Durban, ITUC further crystallised its demands for a JT into a complex definition, including

socially responsible and green investment, low-carbon development strategies, and decent work and social protection for those whose livelihoods, incomes and employment are affected by the need to adapt to climate change and by the need to reduce emissions to levels that avert dangerous climate change. (ITUC, 2011, as cited in Malope, 2022)

Since 2015, the concept of JT has gained significant traction and legitimacy in international climate policy. This globalisation is largely due to its inclusion in the Paris Agreement, which marked the concept's first appearance in the global climate change regime. Specifically, the document's preamble urges to consider the “imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities” (UN, 2015, p. 2). The ambition for Just Transition was notably reaffirmed and strengthened through the Silesia Declaration, an initiative led by the Polish COP24 Presidency and adopted by governments at the conference (Jenkins et al., 2020). By endorsing the Silesia Declaration, countries formally acknowledged the challenges faced by sectors and local communities in phasing out fossil fuels. They recognised the crucial role of the “just transition of the workforce” in ensuring the effectiveness of (and public support for)

the low-carbon transition, the importance of “a participatory and representative process of social dialogue” with workers and employers, and the need to support developing countries to promote green decent jobs (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 3-5). At COP26, which also saw the launch of the first Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), countries undersigned the declaration *Supporting the Conditions for a Just Transition Internationally*, which reiterated the need to “support communities and regions that are particularly vulnerable to the economic, employment and social effects of a global transition” (UK Government, 2021, as cited in Pollock, 2022).

This global recognition has led to the adoption of the JT notion by a diverse array of stakeholders, including governments, intragovernmental organisations, the private sector, grassroots movements, and philanthropic entities. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has further promoted the concept through its *Guidelines for a JT towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All*, which advocates for decent work, social protection, and social dialogue among governments, workers, and employers' organisations (ILO, 2015). The private sector has also acknowledged the potential of the idea, as evidenced by the guidelines published by business coalitions such as B Team and We Mean Business in collaboration with ITUC, which were followed by similar statements from other business networks (Stavis & Felli, 2020).

Meanwhile, JT has expanded far beyond labour, gaining support from prominent environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social movements advocating for socioecological, racial, and gender justice, with a definition centred on marginalised frontline communities (Satgar, 2018). Recently, JT policies have also been incorporated into both national and international climate strategies and policies, including Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in line with the Paris Agreement requirements. Initially more prevalent in the Global North, over the last years, the concept has increasingly gained momentum in the Global South, where countries are using it in combination with the notion of Sustainable Development and the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). Notable examples include South Africa, Chile, Argentina, and Indonesia, which have incorporated JT into their NDCs to facilitate the injection of climate finance from developed nations (Pucheta et al., 2021; Hersaputri et al., 2024). The JETPs launched by G7 countries in collaboration with emerging economies from the Global South are one of the most prominent examples of this shift towards an integration of JT into international finance for climate mitigation and adaptation. The first JETP, launched at COP26, saw the participation of South Africa on the receiving end, and the International Partners Group (IPG)

– consisting of France, Germany, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), and the European Union (EU) – on the provider side (Ordonez et al., 2024). The agreement pledged to mobilise US\$8.5 billion to expedite South Africa’s decarbonisation efforts in alignment with the country’s most ambitious NDC targets. The JETP was highly contested from its first moments, particularly due to conflicting views among policy actors and civil society about how the partnership’s allegedly leading concept, the JT, was interpreted and implemented (Baloyi & Krinsky, 2022; Just Transition Research Collaborative, 2018; Lenferna, 2023; McNamara, 2024; Union of Justice, 2023).

Originated as a geographically, socially grounded concept tied to labour’s demands for environmental and health safety and adopted as a banner of a radical alliance between US workers and environmentalists, the JT concept has gradually proliferated through international trade unions and climate justice movements, entering mainstream global climate change discourse and informing contemporary national and international climate policies. Through this process of appropriation and co-optation by diverse public and private actors, the meaning of JT has expanded and changed. While this conceptual flexibility has arguably contributed to its widespread popularity by allowing a vast array of actors to coalesce under a common cause and build consensus around it, the term has also faced criticism for its vagueness, impracticality, and for being employed to support various, often conflicting, interpretations of justice (Kreinin, 2020). As noted by the JT Research Collective (2018, p. 5), “not all stakeholders share the same idea of what a JT should look like, or how, for whom and by whom it should be accomplished.” This ambiguity not only makes it difficult to clarify what the term JT stands for; it also fuels tensions and conflicts between different conceptualisations. As the following section will demonstrate, these tensions are translated into diverse academic approaches that try to make sense of the JT language.

1.3. A Conceptual Review of Academic Approaches to Just Transition

Since the emergence and proliferation of the JT language in real-world settings, academic scholars have been dedicated to reflecting on and enhancing the diverse perspectives and strategies explored by JT stakeholders. Approaching the issue from various disciplines, including but not limited to political science, sociology, geography, and environmental social science, the existing literature within Transition Studies has so far overwhelmingly focused on the JT of the energy system. Smaller streams of research have explored its connection to urban and rural development and circular economy (Otlhogile & Shirley, 2023; Stark et al., 2023). However, given that energy production and consumption are the main source of global carbon

emissions and a main driver of climate change, and that, as a result, most political and academic discourse consider JT in relation to the decarbonisation of the energy system, this literature review will also be concerned with this specific perspective on JTs.

The concept of JT has been primarily analysed either through a labour-centred perspective or in terms of socio-technical transition. From a labour-centred lens, many scholars have adopted a historical approach to underscore how the concept is intrinsically linked to labour and how it can be applied in today's transitional context to ensure that workers, especially in the energy sector, are recognised and compensated for the negative impacts of decarbonisation (Barca, 2014; Stevis & Felli, 2015; Carley & Knisky, 2020). Among socio-technical approaches, the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP), which identifies regimes, niches, and landscapes where energy transformations intersect with social dynamics, stands out as particularly prominent in Transition Studies. This is closely followed by the Transition Management (TM) approach, the aim of which is to encourage collaboration among innovators, non-state actors and social entities (Geels, 2011; Scrase & Smith, 2009). Similarly, governance studies have been proposed as a valuable entry point for researching sustainable transitions, as they capture the growing complexity of institutional structures, political processes, and social relations (Wang & Lo, 2021). The governance approach highlights the necessity of a broad coalition of actors and extensive engagement with local initiatives as fundamental prerequisites for a successful JT (Cha et al., 2020).

However, over the last few years, scholars have begun to acknowledge the limitations of these approaches. On the one hand, governance and socio-technical transition theories have spurred a vibrant debate among critical social scientists. The frameworks, the argument goes, have favoured a technical, depoliticised approach which has ultimately failed to challenge the assumptions at the base of the global capitalist system, by avoiding a thorough reflection on power relations and neglecting post-colonial theories and intersectional perspectives (Kalt, 2024). On the other hand, the labour-centred perspective has been critiqued for paying lip service to the “passive” and “technocratic” JT discourse that is mainstreamed in international arenas, which often focuses on balancing the interests of government, workers, and business through a green-economy-centred discourse (Alarcon et al., 2022, 5). According to these criticisms, the understanding of JT merely as a labour-related strategy overlooks other affected social groups and fails to acknowledge the concept's transformative potential in challenging existing power inequalities.

These critiques have led to the development of an alternative approach that integrates the JT concept within broader frameworks of equity and justice, particularly through the

development of frameworks grounded in environmental, climate, and/or energy justice (McCauley & Heffron, 2018; Smith & Patterson, 2019; Routledge et al., 2018; Monyei et al., 2018). This approach has evolved within a broader “justice turn” in political and academic discourses on climate change and net-zero transformations (Biermann & Kalfagianni, 2020). Recognising that socioeconomic disparities along class, racial, and gender lines are disproportionately exacerbated by environmental degradation, climate change, and unequal energy systems of production and consumption, proponents of this approach seek to enable procedural and substantial justice to ensure that low-carbon transitions reduce inequalities rather than worsening them (Lacey-Bernacle et al., 2020).

The justice-centred approach usually lies on a three-dimensional conceptualisation of justice – distributive, recognition, and procedural justice –each with specific implications for energy and sustainability transitions (Fraser, 2009; Schosberg, 2007). Distributive justice focuses on the equitable distribution of the costs and benefits of the transition and on the social differences that might hinder it. Recognition justice scrutinises the value accorded to social groups and their vision of sustainability transitions, based on their identities, status and cultures. Procedural justice addresses the inclusiveness of decision-making and deliberative processes in transitional policies.

Despite its transformative and emancipatory potential, however, this normative approach is not without limitations. In particular, three interrelated weaknesses can be identified. First, from an epistemological perspective, justice scholars often adopt on a deductive approach to the study of justice, as they extrapolate principles and standards from justice theories to construct JT frameworks. Although it allows for conceptual rigour and clarity, this perspective often falls into the pitfall of universalism and reification, failing to recognise that “justice is not a static ‘thing’” but is instead “a constantly redefined and negotiated idea” (Wijsman & Berbés-Blázquez, 2022, p. 378). Conversely, an inductive perspective can provide a less biased, more nuanced approach suited to investigate how injustices are experienced, and ideas of justice constructed within specific socioeconomic and historical contexts. As argued by Cipler & Harrison (2020, p. 439), “to craft a useful theory of justice, we must develop our ideas not in the abstract but through observing the nonideal, imperfect world in which we live, with all of its tremendous inequalities, relations of oppression, and resource scarcity”.

Second, on a methodological level, scholars of environmental, climate, and energy justice seem more interested in conceptualising what a JT *should* entail and who *should* be included in the process, rather than empirically exploring how JTs are defined and negotiated in actual situations (Wang & Lo, 2021). Acknowledging this limit, some academics within Earth System

Governance have tried to turn the normative debate on justice into an empirical debate on how to conceptualise different justice perceptions and claims (Biermann & Kalfagianni, 2020; Stevis & Felli, 2020). Nonetheless, driven by a deductive bias that imposes to ground these frameworks into philosophical theories of justice, many of these accounts have fallen into the trap of Eurocentrism.

Critically speaking, in fact, the third weakness of the mainstream deductive, normative approach to JTs is its tendency to create an academic path dependency on Western theories of justice and to predominantly focus on Global North's case studies (San Martín & Wood, 2022). For instance, Biermann & Kalfagianni (2020, p. 4), after advocating for a conceptual framework for the analysis of global justice that is not rooted in any particular notion of justice, still end up grounding it in five “mainstream Western philosophical traditions.” In the attempt to generate viable frameworks for empirical research, these theory-grounded approaches recreate epistemic injustices insofar as they insist on a top-down approach to justice, ultimately undermining the emancipatory potential of a justice-centred analysis of JTs. In addition, they fail to acknowledge that, to this day, most justice scholarship on JT has been dominated by Western theorists and theories, despite some efforts to enrich the research agenda on energy transitions with non-Western philosophies and conceptualisations of justice (Sovacool et al., 2017, as cited in Wang & Lo, 2021).

In this regard, some scholars have been vocal about integrating environmental, climate, and energy justice frameworks with epistemic justice – a dimension of justice that recognises the legitimacy and importance of diverse knowledge systems – in order to ensure a truly just planetary transition (Zhou & Brown, 2024). Similarly, academics from the Global South – and particularly Southern Africa, where the concept gained particular popularity – have emphasised the relevance of non-Western value systems and concepts in challenging Eurocentric, narrow approaches to climate adaptation and energy transitions. From a philosophical standpoint, it has been argued that more relational, communitarian values can help shape a transformative transition. For instance, (Terblanché-Greeff, 2019)) made a case for a form of environmental ethics rooted in the Southern African concept of Ubuntu, which can be explained through the maxim ‘I am because we are’. Elevating the relationality between humans, non-humans and the natural environment to ontological importance, Ubuntu can inform an innovative approach to socioecological change that places community, solidarity, caring and sharing before extractivism, profit and economic growth (Terblanché-Greeff, 2019).

From a policy perspective, interestingly, it has been noted that the integration of JT principles into national policies is lagging in the Global South due to a shared perception that

the notion is not relevant for developing countries (Glynn et al., 2021). As a result, some scholars have argued in favour of a more context-dependent approach to the development of JT frameworks, encouraging the incorporation of concepts and issues that are particularly relevant for developing countries, such as the right to socio-economic development, energy accessibility and affordability, state sovereignty, food security, and the threats of neocolonialism (Otlhogile & Shirley, 2023; Swilling et al., 2016). Nonetheless, despite responding to the imperative of giving more space in academia and policymaking to principles, concepts, and worldviews from developing countries, I posit that this kind of deductive approach still falls short of capturing the composite constellations of competing understandings of JT, whose complexity and context-dependency command a bottom-up, inductive, empirical approach to the analysis of justice claims.

Alongside the epistemological, methodological, and critical shortcomings mentioned above, mainstream justice approaches to JT have also been criticised for being excessively “uncritical” and “celebratory” (Ciplet & Harrison, 2020, p. 439). Insofar as they depict JT frameworks as a panacea to the world’s inequalities, these accounts fail to address the potential and existing tensions, trade-offs and conflicts in JT conceptualisations, strategies and practices. A limited number of scholars have so far contributed to bridging this research gap. Newell & Mulvaney (2013) investigated the trade-offs between energy justice and timely climate action; Stevis and Felli (2015) developed a Just Planetary Transition framework to tell apart more or less transformative JT concepts; and Kalt (2024) highlighted the crucial role of transition conflicts in catalysing or hindering transformative socioecological change. Interestingly, Kreinin (2020) developed a JT typology to identify divergent formulations of JT and subsume them under the categories of Neoliberal Political Economy, Ecological Modernisation, and Social-Ecological Transformation. However, although scholars are increasingly theoretically acknowledging that “JTs are not smooth processes” and are instead marked by tensions between conflicting justice claims and interests, there is still a lack of empirical research investigating the contested politics of JT and the strategic mobilisation of justice claims (Kalt, 2021, p. 1136).

1.4. Identifying Research Gaps

Overall, although the burgeoning academic interest in the concept of JT, there is a limited interest in investigating the contested nature of the concept itself, which, I argue, is crucial to understanding how the problem of reconciling decarbonisation with socioeconomic interests and justice claims advanced by competing social groups is addressed in the context of global

capitalism. In particular, three groups of research gaps in mainstream approaches to JTs can be inferred from the literature review above. First, as highlighted by Wang & Lo (2021), critical investigations of power asymmetries and conflicts between JT conceptualisations have been largely absent in the literature, with a few notable exceptions (cfr. Ciplet, 2022; Ciplet & Harrison, 2020; Haas, 2019; Kalt, 2024). Despite having emphasised the pivotal role that multiple actors have in constructing and mobilising diverse transition strategies, scholars have yet to fully explore the significance and potential of a critical discursive analysis of JT ideas. Such an analysis can reveal how JTs are discursively constructed in national contexts and along the Global North/South divide, and how they are used to mobilise alliances and protect the interests of incumbent and emergent players (Wang & Lo, 2021).

Second, justice-centred scholarship's tendency to adopt deductive, normative, theoretical approaches to justice fails to acknowledge the irreducibly contested, context-dependent nature of JT and justice claims. As argued by Alarcon et al. (2022), academic accounts should place greater emphasis on how different JT ideas, along with the actors who utilize them, are embedded in the wider socioeconomic, historical, political, and cultural contexts of national and global capitalism. Third, there is a relative lack of empirical studies on how competing concepts of JTs are dealt with in real-world settings, as most studies concentrate on developing normative or sociotechnical frameworks rather than on applying them. When empirical research on JTs does take place, it overwhelmingly focuses on countries in the Global North, with the result of assuming context-specific characteristics as universally valid (Alarcon et al., 2022). Instead, it is necessary to also examine how JT notions and strategies are developed in developing countries, in order to uncover existing trends, future challenges and opportunities, and alternative perspectives that often go unheard.

Overall, much of political science scholarship has so far overlooked the potential of understanding JT not as a neutral or universally agreed-upon idea, but, rather, as a contested, power-laden, context-dependent site of societal struggle. By making power asymmetries and discursive strategies explicit, this critical angle could reveal how and why certain definitions end up prevailing over others. Moreover, political theory has fallen short in developing a systematic approach to the empirical analysis of conflicts over the definition of JT that allows to appreciate the importance of historical and socioeconomic conditions and to grasp the wide array of forces involved in the process.

1.5. Research Objectives and Research Question

In view of the identified research gaps, I intend to contribute to the literature and debate on JT in Transition Studies and international climate politics both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, this thesis aims to root the understanding of JT as a contested, power-laden, context-dependent concept into a comprehensive theory. To this end, I will adopt an interdisciplinary approach that allows me to draw on relevant contributions from different disciplines and research areas, instead of limiting myself to a single, limited perspective. Through this approach, I aim to elaborate Kalt's (2024) perspective on Gramscian Political Ecology to develop a theoretical framework that can systematically explore, on the one hand, how the notion of JT is formulated at the intersection of nature, conflict, power and justice and, on the other, how its conceptualisation into concrete policies is the product of a hegemony struggle between competing sociopolitical forces holding different interests and power resources. Drawing on Historical Materialist Policy Analysis (HMPA), a Marxian-Gramscian methodology which systematise the analysis of the configurations of sociopolitical forces in hegemony struggles and their crystallisation through policymaking (Brand, 2013; Jessop & Sum, 2023), I condensed these theoretical objectives into the following research question:

How is the Just Transition conceptualised in climate policy conflicts against the background of competing and contradictory interests of different social and political forces?

Empirically, this work seeks to apply the elaborated theoretical framework to the analysis of a concrete societal conflict over the conceptualisation of JT in the context of international climate policy. To specifically address the lack of empirical studies on JT struggles in the Global South, I will examine the case of the South African JETP, an international climate finance agreement between South Africa and various G7 countries. Therefore, this study also contributes to the burgeoning literature about the South African JETP, providing a comprehensive, systematic account of the policy process, the actor constellation involved, and of the historical, material and ideological context in which the JETP has unfolded.

1.6. Relevance of the Study for Global Studies

As a researcher and master's student of Global Studies, I want to spend a few words to emphasise how my research aligns with the field's research agenda. Global Studies is a research field characterised by a multidisciplinary perspective on transnational processes, interactions, and flows (Steger, 2018). By combining insights from political science, sociology,

anthropology, history and philosophy, global studies researchers aim at developing research beyond Eurocentrism and methodological nationalism. In his *Global Studies Reader*, Juergensmeyer (2013) argues that Global Studies is inherently transnational, interdisciplinary, contemporary and historical, critical and multicultural, and globally responsible.

The relevance of this study, in general as well as in relation to Global Studies, lies primarily in its interdisciplinary, critical and emancipatory approach to the analysis of societal struggles through the lens of the JT concept. *Interdisciplinary*, because it dynamically integrates theories, concepts, and methodologies from a broad array of disciplines, including political theory, international relations, political ecology and sociology, with insights from philosophy and history. This interdisciplinary also makes the approach relatively *systematic*, as it combines theoretical and methodological insights that are only partial if used alone. Such a systematic approach enables the study to generate insights that can be applied across different national and global contexts, making it a valuable tool for both scholars and policymakers interested in JTs.

Critical, because this work goes beyond simply describing JT policies, to interrogate the processes through which the idea of JT is reified into distinct definitions that carry concrete political and policy implications. Dismantling the notion that there is a single, ‘correct’ way to understand or implement JT, the study exposes how these definitions are shaped by ideological forces and asymmetric power relations that often privilege and justify capitalist, patriarchal, Eurocentric worldviews. This critical approach is also backed by an intrinsic *transnational* perspective, as it challenges methodological nationalism and emphasises the role of transnational and international actors in shaping the meaning of JT.

Emancipatory, as it seeks to uncover and challenge the power dynamics and ideological forces that shape the formulation and implementation of JT policies. By exposing the interests and discursive strategies behind competing JT definitions, this study aims to counter the naturalisation and universalisation of specific JT concepts while highlighting that alternative visions can exist. In doing so, it opens the possibility for more equitable and transformative transitions, addressing not only environmental goals but also broader societal inequalities tied to class, race, gender, and geography. This emancipatory perspective positions the study as part of a broader effort to democratize climate governance and ensure that the transition to a low-carbon economy benefits all, rather than reinforcing existing hierarchies and disparities.

1.7. Structure of the Research

In order to systematically address the research question exposed above, this thesis is structured as follows. *Chapter II* introduces a neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework of JT to theoretically structure the empirical analysis of JT Conflicts. To this end, it builds on a literature review of academic contributions to the fields of Political Ecology (Section 2.2), neo-Gramscian hegemony theory (Section 2.3) and Historical Materialist Policy Analysis (Section 2.4), with the aim of identifying gaps and potential synergies between their research interests and approaches. Building on a synthesis of the theories and methods investigated and introducing the concepts of Transitional Hegemony Project and Just Transition Political Project, Section 2.5 outlines a systematic theoretical framework, named neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework on Just Transition Conflicts, that reconstructs how JT struggles emerge against the backdrop of the broader socioecological crisis. The framework also conceptualises JT as a terrain of ideological struggle, which can be analysed by identifying how discursive elements, such as frames and narratives, are organised into discursive strategies to s

In *Chapter III*, the methodology followed to adapt the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework for empirical analysis is explained in detail. Section 3.2 presents the research as a qualitative case study focusing on the South African JETP to investigate the complexities and contestations surrounding JT, while Section 3.3 delves into the motivations behind the selection of this specific case study. In section 3.4, I focus on operationalising the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework, by adapting the research question to the case study and outlining the three-step process for HMPA used in the investigation of the JETP policy conflict. For each step, I illustrate the methods adopted to collect and analyse data, which comprises secondary literature, primary sources and semi-structured interviews. Finally, Sections 3.5 and 3.6 respectively address the work's limitations and my own positionality in conducting this research.

Chapter IV constitutes the core empirical analysis of the thesis. Using the theoretical and methodological tools outlined in the previous chapters, this section delves into the case of the South African JETP, examining how the JT concept is formulated in the context of the JETP policy conflict. To this end, the analysis first explains how historical, ideological and material conditions at different spatial, temporal and ontological levels have converged into the investigated conflict (Section 4.1. Context Analysis). Against the background of this multi-layered context, Section 4.2 delves into the Process Analysis, reconstructing the different

phases of the policy conflict and emphasising important events and tuning moments in its unfolding (Section 4.2). Finally, in Section 4.3, the JETP actor constellation is illustrated. Relevant actors are mapped out, and their discursive strategies concerning the JT are unpacked in order to cluster them into Just Transition Political Projects. *Chapter V* summarises and reflects on the results of this thesis and on potential avenues for future research on JT.

CHAPTER II

Theoretical Framework

2.1. Towards a New Approach to the Analysis of JT Discourses and Policies

The concept of JT has evolved significantly over the past few decades, as I explained in Section 1.2. Initially associated with local labour-environmental issues, JT now informs the demands of international unions and climate justice movements, as well as the guidelines of international organizations and businesses, and global climate and finance policies. As a result, the term now encompasses a broad spectrum of interpretations, often reflecting divergent and sometimes contradictory understandings of what constitutes a JT, due to the different degrees of scope, scale, depth, and ambition of the envisioned transitions. For example, a transition that aligns with fossil fuel workers' justice claims may be seen as unjust by climate activists and by future generations (Kalt, 2021). Conversely, rapid transitions necessary for drastic emission reductions may be perceived as inherently unfair by the workers and regions impacted. At an international scale, Global South countries may portray as unjust a global transition that hinders their socioeconomic development and worsens their financial condition; conversely, countries in the Global North could criticise highly polluting emerging for refusing to take action on global warming (Shangrila Joshi, 2015).

These are only a few, non-exhaustive examples of the possible conflicts between JT claims at different scales: the number of combinations is potentially unlimited, as JT discourses are largely dependent on the historical, sociopolitical and economic context in which they develop. Hence, I argue that any analysis that is limited to the *a priori* identification of potential tensions, despite being likely useful for policymaking, fails to grasp the complexity and context-dependency of justice claims. Instead, I propose an approach which, as suggested by Stevis & Felli (2020), is “embedded in and mindful of the historical and social contexts” in which it takes place, in order to, on the one hand, bring analytical clarity to the contested nature of JTs, and, on the other, illustrate how justice claims can be analysed empirically and inductively. This approach, therefore, is not interested in providing any pre-determined meaning to justice. Rather it seeks to empirically assess how justice is discursively constructed in relation to JTs within a specific policy context. Occurring at the discursive level, divergent conceptualisations of JT are understood as intrinsically connected to the material landscape of socioeconomic relations of forces that they inform and by which they are informed. JT discourses are in fact strategically related to the material interests and political stances of the actors that uphold them,

as well as to their power to spread and enforce them. Analysing this process of meaning-making in relation to its material and non-material conditions is paramount to revealing conflicts between divergent JT conceptualisations, to understanding how power asymmetries favour the crystallisation of specific JT discourses into national and international policies, and, ultimately, ensuring that the emancipatory, transformative potential of global decarbonisation is fully realized.

To this end, I introduce a neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework of JT to theoretically structure the empirical analysis of the conflictual process through which specific JT policies are formulated against the background of competing social forces with different justice claims, material interests and power resources. Largely building on Kalt's (2024) Gramscian Political Ecology, this proposal adapts his framework to the analysis of JT conflicts and policies, integrating it with insights from Historical-Materialist Policy Analysis and Stevis and Felli (2020)'s analytical scheme for Planetary JTs.

From a strictly philosophical perspective, my proposal rests on a philosophical grounding in critical realism and epistemological perspectivism. Critical realism combines a realist ontology, i.e. the belief that reality exists independently of our perceptions or beliefs) with a critical approach to knowledge, recognizing that our understanding of this reality is always mediated by social, cultural, and historical contexts (Fairclough, Jessop and Sayer 2004; Sayer 2000). Perspectivism, on the other hand, posits that all knowledge is inevitably shaped by the specific perspectives from which it is perceived and interpreted, rejecting the notion of a single, objective truth. It emphasizes the subjectivity and multiplicity of perspectives, suggesting that each viewpoint offers a partial and context-dependent understanding of reality (Smith, 2022). Together, these approaches endow this work with particular attention to the role of collective perspectives in social reality and a dialectical understanding of the social world as a combination of the material and ideational, providing a solid philosophical backbone to the analysis of the contested nature of JT.

The rest of this chapter is dedicated to conceptualising JT discourse as a transition conflict over climate policies. The first section offers an overview of Political Ecology's strengths and weaknesses in exploring JTs, and delves into Kalt's (2024)'s Gramscian Political Ecology. In the following section, I delve into (neo-)Gramscian hegemony theory to uncover how its theoretical framework can help structure a Political Ecology perspective on JT struggles. The third section explores Historical Materialist Policy Analysis's potential to systematise and operationalise neo-Gramscian Political Ecology through a focus on policymaking. Finally, the last section combines these three approaches to build a neo-Gramscian Political Ecology

Framework for JT to be applied to the empirical analysis of the contested nature of JTs in specific policy processes, through a focus on the discursive dimension of JT conflicts.

2.2. Political Ecology as a Research Approach to Transition Conflicts

Political Ecology is an interdisciplinary field that examines the intricate relationships between political, economic, and social factors and their impact on environmental issues and changes. Political Ecology's research agenda is significantly broad, as it comprises a variety of interests and foci. Generally, it seeks to understand how power dynamics shape environmental policies and practices, often highlighting the struggles of marginalized communities against dominant political and economic systems (Bryant, 2015). Emerging in the 1970s, the discipline integrates insights from various fields such as geography, anthropology, and political science, to investigate, among others, the causes and consequences of resource conflicts and environmental degradation, the socioecological impact of urbanization and agricultural practices, the part played by social movements in advocating for socioecological justice, and the role of power dynamics in influencing climate change policies and adaptation strategies.

Over the last 20 years, the intersection of nature, conflict, power and justice has consistently remained the focal point of Political Ecology (Sovacool, 2021). Therefore, as pointed out by Kalt (2024), Transition Studies – and, I would add, empirical research on transition policies – could significantly benefit from a Political Ecology perspective, particularly due to its explicit reflection on these themes within capitalist, fossil-fuel-dependent, postcolonial societies. However, although several linkages can be drawn between Transition Studies, JT research and Political Ecology's research agenda, this approach has been rarely applied (Boateng et al., 2023). Only over the last few years have some political ecologists started grasping the potential of this synergy. In their analysis of divergent approaches to energy efficiency, Bouzarovski (2022) argues that political ecology can “provide us with the building blocks of a JTs perspective that embraces socio-naturally hybrid and politically disruptive practices [...] in the promotion of socio-environmental equity.” For instance, Boateng et al. (2023), addressing the transition scholarship's gap on JTs in the Global South, advocates for a Political Ecology perspective as a nexus between energy justice and sustainable sociotechnical transition approaches. Through a labor-centered approach, Barca (2015) undertakes a historical political ecology of work to investigate international unions' JT discourses.

Nonetheless, despite providing detailed insights into socioecological transitional tensions, most accounts lack a coherent, rigorous theoretical framework that is able, on the one hand, to

effectively conceptualise societal and political JT struggles between divergent actors, and, on the other, analyse how meanings of JT are discursively and strategically constructed in relation to material and non-material interests. In line with Kalt's (2024) argument, this work argues that a neo-Gramscian perspective, with its focus on hegemony and ideology, can significantly enhance political ecology's critical understanding conflicts over society-nature relations within climate and environmental politics and policies. By emphasising the role of ideological elements in coalescing social forces, Gramsci's theory of hegemony offers a unique, critical lens to understand how specific sets of ideas linked to particular material configurations come to be established and mainstreamed "in particular places at particular times" (Loftus & Lumsden, 2008, p.109). Against this backdrop, I introduce a Gramscian political ecologist theory of JTs that can shed light on the actors and process through which specific conceptualisations of JT become dominant in international climate policy-making.

In recent years (neo-)Gramscian theory has experienced a revival in political science and international relations, informing critical approaches such as Political Ecology, Cultural Political Economy, Historical Materialist Policy Analysis, and Critical Discourse Analysis, arguably because of its analytical strength in untangling complex relations of forces in times of multiple crises, in (Sum & Jessop, 2013; Brand et al., 2022; Kannankulam & Georgi, 2014; Montesano Montessori et al., 2019). For the same reason, hegemony theory has been increasingly applied to the analysis of discourses, policies and practices regarding environmental issues and climate change discourses by states, capital, media and climate justice movements De Lucia, 2009).

Political Ecology, especially in its neo-Marxist form, has also shown a growing interest in Gramscian thought. In *A time for Gramsci*, Loftus (2015) identifies three sites of potential synergy between political ecology and Gramsci's critical social theory: a humanist, historicist approach the focuses on the (re-)production of unequal spatial and natural relations, and, most relevantly for this work, a foundational theory of ecological ideologies. Within this re-discovery of Gramscianism, Kalt (2024, p.5) has developed Gramscian Political Ecology "as a framework that merges the four research foci of political ecology – conflicts, nature, power, and justice – with the insights of (neo-) Gramscian hegemony theory." Kalt (2024)'s valuable contribution lies particularly in the development of the concept of Transition Conflicts, which are described as

struggles for hegemony that emerge on the terrain of society-nature relations in response to the politicization of ecological crises [...] among collective actors with

competing interests, beliefs, and goals who operate within a context of uneven power relations. (p. 1)

Offering a neo-Gramscian angle on the main themes within Political Ecology, this concept enables to take advantage of the synergies between these distinct approaches, as it specifically frames *conflicts* as “analytical entry points to unpack contested transformations of *society-nature relations* taking place in the context of *uneven power relations* where claims about *justice* and *JT* often play a crucial role.” First, a Gramscian Political Ecology perspective reveals that Transition Conflicts are not only the result of divergent broad transition pathways; they also arise from tensions in the design and implementation of concrete climate, energy and environmental policies, which is particularly relevant to this work. Second, by emphasising that humans are a part of (and not apart from) the rest of nature, this approach acknowledges that divergent understandings and narratives of society-nature relations are central to Transition Conflicts. Third, an actor-oriented focus on power relations can reveal the winners and losers of specific transition policies and justice conceptions (Sovacool, 2021). Fourth, Gramscian Political Ecology’s commitment to socioecological emancipation can illuminate the intricate network of different *justice claims*, which is a key driver of JT conflicts. To take full advantage of the potential of this synergy between neo-Gramscianism and Political Ecology, the following section delves deeper into (neo-)Gramscian theory and some of its fundamental concepts, such as hegemony, ideology, historic bloc and organic crisis.

2.3. (Neo-)Gramscian Hegemony Theory

Born in 1891 in Sardinia, Antonio Gramsci was among the leading political and intellectual figures of the Italian Left in the interwar years: after founding Italy’s Communist Party in 1921, and becoming one of the most critical voices of the fascist movement, he was arrested and imprisoned by Mussolini’s regime (Fiori, 1970). It was during the following ten years of forced confinement that Gramsci produced his most penetrating writing, the *Prison Notebook*, originally and autonomously re-interpreting historical-materialist Marxism through an unprecedented emphasis on the role of superstructural elements, such as ideology, cultural worldviews and social struggles, in shaping capitalist societies (Mouffe, 1979).

A key element in the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci’s hegemony theory seeks to explain how dominant social groups establish and maintain control through hegemony. In Gramscian thought, hegemony refers to the predominant influence exerted by a dominant alliance of social forces in shaping and directing the norms, values, and structures of a given socioeconomic, political, and cultural order. This supremacy is achieved not only through direct control or

coercion but also through the ability to secure consent and legitimacy for its dominance, often by framing its own interests and worldviews as universal or natural. To reach this ideological, political and moral leadership, hegemony-aspiring forces seek to construct consensus around particular ideologies or practices and to establish a historic bloc, i.e. a relationship with competing social forces through strategic alliances, material concessions and the partial incorporation of interests (De Lucia, 2009; Haas, 2019). Ensuring a temporary confluence of economic, political and ideological objectives, the historic bloc inhibits social contradictions and tensions from breaking out as manifest conflicts (Kalt, 2024).

The originality and depth of Gramsci's thought lies in acknowledging the irreducible interrelation between discursive, material and political elements in the construction and conservation of hegemony. In opposition to early Marxist epiphenomenalism and class reductionism, the Italian intellectual rejected the reductive conceptualisation of ideology as a mere superstructure mechanically determined by material economic structures and social classes; instead, he appreciated ideology's relative autonomy in shaping societal structures and relations of forces (Levy, 2003). In no moment, however, this appreciation of the role of ideology translates into an ontological and epistemological superiority over the material and the political. Instead, on the one hand, hegemony theory, acknowledges that discursive struggles always occur in the context of material conditions that set opportunities and boundaries for the development of ideas, without necessarily dictating them (Pellizzoni and Ylönen, 2016, as cited in Kalt, 2024). On the other, it emphasises power's "ability to police the boundaries around the categories that knowledge defines" (Gürtler, 2023).

As a more or less coherent set of ideas, discourses and worldviews, ideology plays a fundamental role in the establishment of hegemony through "discursive strategies, ideological frameworks, narrative, and rhetorical devices" (Kalt, 2024, p. 6). From a Gramscian perspective, in fact, a specific ideology's value does not lie in its truthfulness or falseness, but in its efficiency in arranging diverse material and non-material demands in a coherent, integrated system to the advantage of the forces spreading it (Winkler, 2020). A hegemonic historic bloc, therefore, is one in which dominant forces have *temporarily* succeeded in crafting and universalising an "organic ideology" by articulating and integrating the essential elements of subordinate groups' ideological discourses within their own worldviews and interests (Gramsci, 1971, as cited in Mouffe, 1979, p. 181). *Temporarily*, because hegemonies are never a fixed, absolute reality; rather, they are constantly, although more or less explicitly, an object of resistance and contestation by those whose material interests and worldviews are excluded (Kalt, 2024). As a result, hegemonies are inherently dependent on material-discursive

mechanisms, processes, and practices that continually produce and reproduce them within and throughout civil society. In Gramscian theory, in fact, civil society – i.e. social structures and institutions, such as schools, the media, churches, and socioeconomic associations – plays a fundamental role, as it constitutes the site where hegemonic consensus is forged, consolidated, as well as challenged, and contested (Ramos, 1982).

A hegemonic system stays in balance as long as the ruling forces are capable of forging consensus within societal apparatuses. When this capacity experiences a crisis, counter-hegemonic sites of contestation resurface, questioning the legitimate, commonsensical nature of the dominant ideology (Kalt, 2024, p.5). According to Jessop & Sum (2023, p. 43), crises emerge “when established patterns of dealing with structural contradictions, their crisis tendencies, and dilemmas no longer work as expected and, indeed, when continued reliance thereon may even aggravate the situation.” Insofar as these historically contingent moments of instability reveal “incurable, structural contradictions” – i.e. societal conflicts until then kept under control – they are referred to as ‘organic crises’. An organic crisis triggers a new struggle in which aspiring ruling forces attempt to rearrange existing material, discursive, and political elements to construct new organic ideologies that align with their interests (Gramsci, 1971, as cited in Kalt, 2024, p. 6). Through a Gramscian perspective, therefore, politics is primarily understood as a continuous struggle for hegemony between “contending constellations of societal forces” (Caterina, 2017, p. 4). Since the fight for hegemony lies in a relationship of reciprocal dependency with societal conflicts, which in turn are an inherent product of capitalist relations of forces, struggles for hegemony are in fact a chronic, endless feature of capitalism (Kannankulam & Georgi, 2014). Hence, as eloquently put by Poulantzas (2000, as cited in Kannankulam & Georgi, 2014, p.62), capitalist societies permanently “bath in struggles that constantly submerge them.”

In strictly Gramscian terms, hegemony struggles primarily unfold at the scale and frame of the capitalist state, which is understood as a “strategic terrain in which rivalrous and opposite interests of social forces are being organised, articulated and translated into specific policies that contribute to the regulation of contradictions and crisis tendencies” (Schneider et al., 2023). Being developed in a historical period dominated by nationalism and isolationism, this approach seems reductive when applied to the analysis of the 21st century’s hegemony struggles. In a world where economic flows and governance regimes are globalised, threats and challenges spill way beyond national boundaries, and public actors, social movements, NGOs and private corporations are increasingly transnational, clinging to the narrow, static frame of

the capitalist state equates to failing to grasp the complexity and multi-scalarity of today's hegemony struggles (Fraser, 2009).

To avoid this form of methodological nationalism, Neo-Gramscian scholars of international relations and global political economy have highlighted how state actions occur within the context of broader transnational processes influenced by global capital accumulation and class formation (Okereke, 2015). This perspective highlights the role of multinational corporations and international institutions in creating a transnational historic bloc that exerts global influence. Neo-Gramscian theory also recognizes the potential for counter-hegemonic movements to challenge existing power structures through both ideological persuasion and organized resistance, framing these dynamics as ongoing struggles within the global political landscape. Against this background, Sum (2009, as cited in Caterina, 2017, suggests distinguishing among “three mediating sets of arenas” – i.e. international organisations and institutions, single states and supranational entities, and (trans-)civil society – in order to appreciate the scalar dimension of the constellations of forces engaged in the production and conservation of hegemony.

Having outlined the fundamentals of (neo-)Gramscian hegemony theory, in the next subsection, I turn to HMPA, an innovative approach to Critical Policy Studies, to show how it can be used to operationalise neo-Gramscian Political Ecology with a focus on policy conflicts and ‘projects’.

2.4. HMPA as a candidate to operationalise Neo-Gramscian Political Ecology

Over the last decade, HMPA has emerged as a “theoretically informed heuristic” designed to systematise and operationalise the analysis of the configurations of sociopolitical forces in hegemony struggles and their crystallisation through policy-making (Jessop & Sum, 2023). Firstly introduced by Brand (2013), HMPA builds on two theoretical assumptions, also shared by CPE (Jessop & Sum, 2023). On the one hand, it postulates that policies enjoy a relative degree of autonomy from the polity and politics that produce them. In this regard, Brand argues that historical-materialist scholars tend to have a functionalist view of policies as mere tools of hegemony stabilization by dominant groups. Such an approach fails to appreciate the relative autonomy of policies as symbolical and material sites of social reproduction, and, thus, open-ended terrains of (counter-)hegemonic struggles. On the other, HMPA calls attention to the fact that policy analysis needs to look beyond mere policies, to unveil the historically contingent structural conditions, competing social interests, and power asymmetries that determine them.

This argument stems from a critique of conventional approaches to policy analysis, such as the rationalist paradigm and the interpretative turn. On the one hand, HMPA escapes the rationalist, technocratic approach, developed in the 1970s, which understands policy analysis as an instrument of rationalization and problem-solving; on the other, it also takes some distance from Interpretative Policy Analysis (IPA), which aims to unveil the link between policy-making and the contested and power-laden nature of knowledge construction through an analysis of discursive elements (Brand et al., 2022). Considering that both HMPA and IPA fall within critical policy studies, it is forth focusing on how they differ. First, while sharing IPA's perspective on the importance of knowledge and discourse as constitutive aspects of social reality, HMPA emphasizes the independent existence of material structures, mechanisms and social relations of (re)-production (Brand et al., 2022). Second, HMPA deepens IPA's emancipatory interest in exposing power relations and democratising sociopolitical processes, by aiming at a critique that examines "structural conditions and contradictions of social life and societal relations to nature that are reproduced by explicit strategies of actors with divergent power resources and a myriad of everyday actions" (Brand et al., 2022, p. 4). By emphasising policies' relatively autonomous dynamics and explicating their relation to underlying structures and constellations of actors and interests, HMPA adopts a critical realist approach that emphasises the role of material conditions as much as that of discursive elements in the construction of social reality.

Rooted in Marxian social theory, HMPA assumes the existence of social relations of production and reproduction which, under capitalism, are characterised by private ownership of the means of production and imperatives of accumulation, reification, commodification, and exploitation of socioecological reproductive relations (Schneider et al., 2023). Since capitalism, as succinctly put by Fraser (2021, p.1), is a "cannibal that devours its own vital organs, simultaneously needing and rubbishing nature" and (re)productive labour, thus recurrently threatening its own preconditions, capitalist societies are intrinsically contradictory, crisis-prone and fragmented into competing social groups along lines of class, gender, race, ethnicity, etc. Against this background, societal conflicts and policies are the entry point of HMPA. HMPA frames conflicts as "clashing of competing or antagonistic interests of two or more collective actors, and policies as one of the instruments available to institutions to temporarily, and partially accommodate these conflicting interests and stabilise crisis-prone social relations " (Schneider et al., 2023). From this theoretical framework, HMPA scholars have inferred a three-dimensional analytical method to empirically investigate specific conflicts and opolicies. This method will be explained in Chapter III.

This capacity to formulate compromises between different social groups derives from the capitalist state's relative autonomy from the underlying sociopolitical forces whose interests are to be translated into concrete policies (Brand et al., 2022). Therefore, the state has a predominant role as a “mediator between the more abstract social forms and concrete historical struggles” (Kannankulam and Georgi, 2014, p. 61). This does not imply that the state structure is at any moment balanced and equal. As theorised by Poulantzas (2002, as cited in Schneider et al., 2023) asymmetric power relations between different social groups are embedded in the state's physical and institutional structures, such as its laws, institutions, and the political views of its officials as a result of historically contingent hegemonic systems. This means that the state has a legacy of built-in biases, or *selectivities* in CPE, that favour certain strategies, interests, and actions of some societal groups and political actors over others (Brand et al., 2022). As a result, some groups have more influence and easier access to the state and its policy-making processes than others.

Building on materialist state theory, HMPA is particularly interested in the role of the state. However, this overwhelmingly Westphalian frame, despite being useful in analysing national policies, is arguably reductive when it comes to investigating international policies. To be sure, to this day, the state still retains the most power in formulating and implementing policies within its territory and should, therefore, hold analytical primacy. Nonetheless, as emphasised by neo-Gramscian approaches to IR, a growing number of transnational corporations and organisations, slipping out of the borders of nation-states, play an increasingly important role in forging transnational historic blocs that seek to universalise their particular interests through international institutions and policies – especially on global issues such as climate change (Cox, 1983; Okereke, 2015). This phenomenon cannot be simply subsumed under and explained through the mediating role of one single nation-state. Moreover, as asymmetric power relations between different social groups exist and are embedded in the state's structures, power imbalances between states and world regions are also entrenched in the world's economic and political order and must be factored in to provide a comprehensive account of hegemony struggles over international policies.

One of HMPA's most important contributions to Neo-Gramscianism is the introduction of the concept of ‘project’, which refers to broader efforts by dominant social groups or classes to establish and maintain ideological, cultural, and political dominance within a society. These projects seek to secure consent for a particular worldview or social order, making certain ideas or practices appear natural or inevitable (Brand et al., 2022). This concept allows to distinguish among

the myriad of actions, practices, tactics and strategies that are pursued by an often unaccountable number of actors in any given societal conflict, and that are chosen by actors before the background of their vastly different, specific power resources.

(Kannankulam & Georgi, 2014, p. 64)

More in detail, HMPA scholars set apart ‘hegemonic projects’, i.e. projects that have already attained hegemonic status, from ‘hegemony projects, i.e. societal projects that are struggling for hegemony but are “not yet actual” (Caterina, 2017, p.10). This conceptualisation presents two innovative aspects worth mentioning: First, hegemony projects are not attributed to any intentional central organisation; instead, they should be viewed as analytical abstractions representing collections of similar, but not necessarily consciously coordinated, tactics and strategies employed by actors (Kannankulam & Georgi, 2014). Second, the concept of hegemony projects is linked to that of ‘political projects’, namely “aggregation of goals, practices, strategies and policies presented as solutions to specific problems or crises” (Bieling & Steinhilber, 2000, as cited in Kalt et al., 2023). To achieve hegemony, a hegemony project must successfully carry out a series of specific political projects that provide the politico-strategic foundation on which a hegemonic project can solidify, and, in turn, it can only be analysed in relation to its actors’ involvement in tangible political projects.

As public policies constitute the practical instruments through which the strategies and initiatives laid out in a specific political project can be implemented, national and (from a *neo*-Gramscian perspective) international policies play a crucial role in crystallising and actualising political projects. As posited by Brand et al. (2022), public policies can in fact be framed as “unstable compromises” between divergent political projects, which are “formulated against the background of essentially competing and contradictory interests of different social forces” and which can (temporarily) contribute to the regulation of contradictory social relations and conflicts (Brand et al., 2022, p. 1). As a contested terrain where different collective actors try to assert their interests and worldviews, the process of policy-making can give rise to latent or manifest societal conflicts that reflect the “contradictory, dynamic, crisis-prone” nature of socioecological relations in capitalist societies (Schneider et al., 2023).

From a Gramscian historical materialist perspective, therefore, the analysis of specific policies and the conflicts related is crucial for understanding the formulation of political and hegemonic projects. In order to investigate these relationships, Jessop and Sun (2023, p. 61) argue in favour of the development of Critical Policy Studies. Such a discipline should aim to (i) connect empirical and practical deficiencies in policy proposals to deeper inconsistencies in the fundamental theoretical frameworks, policy models, or established bodies of knowledge

that the proposals are based on; (ii) identify ideal and material interests favoured by specific policies and the motives behind such privileging; (iii) analyse how a specific policy proposal or policy paradigm reproduces structures of societal domination and hegemony; (iv) propose alternative policies and strategies with an emancipatory effect in relation to the hegemonic order. In line with Brand et al. (2022) and (Caterina, 2017), I argue that HMPA has the characteristics and the potential to, on the one hand, put into practice this broad research approach to policy analysis, and simultaneously systematise the empirical analysis of Transition Conflicts. The following section shows how HMPA can be integrated with neo-Gramscian Political Ecology to investigate Just Transition discourses and policies.

2.5. A neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework on Just Transition Conflicts

Combining the theoretical approach and conceptual framework of Gramscian Political Ecology and HMPA, this section is fully dedicated to the development of a neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework on JT Conflicts to be applied to the empirical analysis of JT struggles within national and international climate policies. In order to systematically study the contested nature of JT conceptualisations against the background of competing social forces, this framework frames the contestation of JT as a transition conflict unfolding through material conditions, political moments, and discursive struggles. It also provides a systematic theoretical and methodological approach to analyse the relationship between JT and hegemony projects, political projects and policies through a focus on the discursive dimension of JT concepts.

The emergence of JT discourses and policies must be situated in the broad context of the ongoing *socioecological crisis*. By referring to the intertwined present challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, resource depletion and social inequality, this concept highlights the profound interdependence between biophysical systems, human societies, and global capitalist relations of production and reproduction (Moore, 2011). Climate change is arguably one of the most prominent examples of the current hegemonic bloc's failure to establish sustainable patterns to keep its structural contradictions under control. In particular, the climate crisis's environmental and social impact has made apparent some of the tensions that are intrinsic to the transnational capitalist bloc's hegemonic project of neoliberal policies, fossil fuel extraction, economic globalisation, technological optimism, environmental exploitation, and cultural consumerism, i.e. unlimited growth vs. ecological limits, market efficiency vs. environmental degradation, and short-term profitability vs. long-term sustainability. Therefore, the ongoing socioecological crisis can be also read as an 'organic crisis' that has been exposing

“the contradictory character of capitalist social relations and capitalist relations to nature” (Schneider et al., 2023, p. 115).

The relative destabilisation of the fossilist hegemonic project prompted by climate change has triggered worldwide transition conflicts between coalitions of actors aiming to advance their own hegemony project in response to the socioecological crisis. Besides the declining fossilist project, green capitalism, green developmentalism, eco-socialism, degrowth, and technocratic environmentalism can be identified, among many others, as emerging Hegemony projects (Wanner, 2015; Kalt et al., 2023; Wright et al., 2022) I define these specific projects as Transitional Hegemony Projects, as they seek to establish and maintain a consensus over what ideologies, policies, and practices are best suited to guide and shape the transition of societal structures towards a climate-neutral economy. Transitional Hegemony Projects encompass an incredibly wide range of political projects conceived in response to urgent challenges within the broad socioecological crisis while advancing the interests and worldviews of the actors promoting them.

Among this wide range of concrete initiatives, JT Political Projects have emerged as “aggregations of goals, practices, strategies and policies” presented as solutions to address the socioecological and socioeconomic dimension of climate-neutral transitions (Bieling & Steinhilber, 2000, as cited in Kalt et al., 2023). More specifically, different JT Political Projects hold divergent, sometimes opposing, understandings of society-nature relations and justice, and of the linkage between the two. When the ideological, material and political implications of these differences become too pronounced, conflicts erupt when conceptualisations of JT informing specific JT Political Projects become too antithetical in ideological and material terms. Drawing on Kalt’s (2024) notion of ‘transition conflict’ and HMPA’s concept of ‘project’ I derive the concept of JT Conflicts, which I define as struggles between competing political projects that emerge over the construction of JT concepts and strategies and their implementation through policies. Against this background, JT policies can be understood as simultaneously being a part and the outcome of the contextual, power-laden conflicts between political projects of JT carried out at the national and international levels (Schneider et al., 2023).

As argued by Kalt (2024), these conflicts between JT political projects simultaneously unfold through material, political, and discursive moments that are significantly intertwined but have their own relative autonomy. Material conditions concern the economic, technical and technological aspects of global decarbonisation, encompassing the production, financing,

distribution and consumption of energy, critical raw materials, green technologies, carbon sinks, etc (Hafner & Tagliapietra, 2020). For instance, transition conflicts can arise from conditions of poverty, inequalities and environmental degradation linked to incumbent or new energy systems, competition over resources, land and critical raw materials needed for green technologies and RE infrastructures, job losses and supply chain disruptions due to shifting patterns of production and consumption. On a different note, political moments enclose the agency of social forces in forging alliances and securing consent for their own idea and vision of JT through systemic, organisational, discursive, institutional and coalitional resources (Kalt, 2024). Neo-Gramscian theory's appreciation of the transnational scale of political agency is extremely relevant in relation to hegemony struggles over socioecological relations and JTs. In particular, Levy and Newell (2002, as cited in Okereke, 2015), and Ford (2003, as cited in Okereke, 2015) have examined the role of transnational businesses, social movements and NGOs in shaping discourses in global environmental politics and governance.

Despite the importance of these two aspects – the material and the political –, I argue that the discursive dimension deserves special attention when researching JT struggles, as the conceptualisation, negotiation and contestation of JT is primarily a discursive process in which power and material conditions are at the service of the ideological construction of meaning. As a result, JT Conflicts manifest primarily as discursive struggles over the ideological components constituting the notion of JT.

As posited by Winkler (2020), JT can be understood as an ideological element, a terrain of discursive struggle between competing conceptualisations and narratives of socioecological justice and change. From a discourse analysis angle, the term 'JT' can be interpreted as an empty signifier, i.e. a "signifier without a particular 'signified', especially because of the ambiguity, flexibility and irreducibility of the qualifier 'just' (Blissett, 2023). For instance, "whether the "just" in JTs should prioritize the struggles of displaced fossil fuel workers and communities, interstate, interregional or intersectoral inequalities, inter-generation justice, or give priority to colonized people against settler colonial states, or even the ecological debt between the North and the South, is far from settled" (White, 2020). Filling up with meaning the empty signifier 'just' through dedicated JT Projects constitutes, therefore, a fundamental priority of Transitional Hegemony Projects, as it allows them to turn dispersed values into an organic ideology in favour of their hegemonic aspirations. Therefore, within climate politics and JT debates, from the local to the global scale,

justice becomes an ideological tool aimed at winning the consent of a wide social base, necessary for the renegotiation and (re)solidification of consent and hegemony, aimed at the reconfiguration of capitalism under conditions of ecological/climate crisis. (De Lucia, 2009, p. 236)

As argued by radical materialist discourse perspectives, the act itself of filling an empty signifier with meaning is a hegemonic operation (Laclau, 1992, as cited in Montesano Montessori et al., 2019). In the case of JT, this process of meaning-making requires the articulation of imageries and narratives on society-nature relations, concepts and norms of justice, and general views on the role of economic structures, politics and historical legacies in socio-ecological transformations, with material needs, interests and access to power. Hence, the study of JTs cannot be reduced to the acknowledgement of the social dimension of climate change mitigation; instead, it must emphasise that the idea of JT, with its discursive focus on justice, is a “fundamental space of ideological negotiation, where hegemony is nurtured, articulated and universalized” (De Lucia, 2009, p. 237). This means that a range of actors with very different objectives and degrees of material means, social status and political power may strategically align behind the same ideological conceptualisation of JT in order to defend and promote their own interests and worldviews.

To systematically unpack and map different JT Political Projects and investigate how the ‘JT’ empty signifier becomes filled with meaning through contested policy processes, it is necessary to adopt an analytical framework that identifies the different ideological elements of JT definitions. Within Planetary Justice research, scholars are increasingly acknowledging the need for such a framework in order to interpret and differentiate between concepts, principles and mechanisms of justice (Dirth et al., 2020). As mentioned above, I posit that such a framework, however, should not build on *a priori* understandings of justice, especially when intended for informing empirical studies in which context dependency plays a crucial part. A theory-derived approach, in fact, not only risks simplifying complex and nuanced issues, as recognized by Biermann & Kalfagianni (2020). It may also overlook relevant aspects and perspectives that are not taken into account in the theory, besides reproducing Eurocentric views and (in)justice practices (San Martín & Wood, 2022). Rather, as argued by Stevis & Felli (2020), an approach that simply outlines variables in JT definitions can better fit the purpose of differentiating among JT discursive strategies and understanding how and why conceptualisations eventually succeed in becoming policy. To this end, Stevis and Felli (2020, p. 1) introduced an “analytical scheme” that adopts variables of scope, scale, and depth to the analysis of JT definitions.

Scale regards the spatial and temporal dimensions of JT policies: the spatial scale can range from local to planetary, transcending the boundaries of fixed jurisdictional borders; the temporal scale takes into account both the historical legacies and future outcomes of policies. For instance, a narrow scale could envision JT for coal miners in one coal mine through short-term compensative measures. *Scope* concerns the degree of inclusion of stakeholders in both the process and the outcome of the Transition, as well as a focus on the different levels of power held by the actors included. A JT that focuses only on coal has a smaller scope than one focusing on the whole energy system, which in turn has a smaller scope than one envisioning all realms of socioecological relations. *Depth* refers to the level of ambition of justice claims and their intrinsic understanding of society-nature relations. In terms of *justice*, this variable encompasses a continuum from hierarchical to egalitarian approaches; while, in terms of *society-nature relations*, it spans from anthropocentric views holding an instrumental understanding of environmental resources to ecocentric perspectives that assign an absolute value to nature. Recognizing the potential of this framework in guiding an inductive approach to the empirical analysis of JT struggles, I argue that it would benefit from being integrated with a variable that refers to the most material and somehow political aspect of JT visions, i.e. the material means through which specific concepts of Transition should be sustained and financed. This parameter can in fact uncover actors' narratives regarding who should be paying for the transition, thus connecting justice's ideological level with its material (and political) dimension.

This analytical scheme can be used to better analyse how discursive elements in line with material conditions and political agency are arranged to construct JT discursive strategies informing JT Political Projects and how conflicting discourses are negotiated and compromised into policies by the state, civil society and transnational actors.

2.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has laid the groundwork for understanding the contested and multifaceted nature of JT by engaging with key theoretical frameworks systemtise them into a neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework on Just Transition Conflicts.

The chapter first introduced Political Ecology as a critical lens for examining the intersection of environmental conflicts, power dynamics, and justice, identifying its strengths and limitations. To enhance this perspective, a neo-Gramscian perspective was presented, introducing the concept of *hegemony* as a means to understand how certain JT discourses become dominant while others are marginalized. Further, the integration of Historical

Materialist Policy Analysis (HMPA) provided a methodological tool for operationalizing neo-Gramscian Political Ecology. This approach recognized the material autonomy of policies while highlighting their role in the broader configuration of sociopolitical forces and hegemony struggles. Through the concept of 'projects,' HMPA offered insights into how specific JT policies crystallize as unstable compromises between competing political projects.

The chapter culminated in the development of a neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework for JT, aimed at systematically analysing JT conflicts with a special focus on their discursive dimensions, but without overlooking the political and material dimensions. By following Stevis and Felli's (2020) analytical scheme based on an inductive approach to justice, the framework sets the stage for an empirical analysis of how JT discourses are shaped, negotiated, and transformed into policies. This provides a solid theoretical foundation for Chapter IV, which will empirically investigate the contested nature of JT in the South African Just Energy Transition Partnership (SA JETP) policy process. Having established this theoretical framework, the next logical step is to explore how it can be applied to the empirical study of specific Just Transition conflicts. The following Chapter, therefore, outlines the methodological approach (derived from the theoretical framework) that will be employed to investigate the case study of the SA JETP.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The following chapter lays out the research design and methodology used to answer the research question:

How is the Just Transition (JT) conceptualised in climate policy conflicts against the background of competing and contradictory interests of different social and political forces?

The first section briefly reflects on the value of case studies in political and policy research, while the second explains why the South African Just Energy Transition Partnership (SA JETP) was chosen as a case. The third section outlines the methodological approach adopted to operationalise the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework on JT Conflictsdiscusses why it is an appropriate approach for studying the SA JETP. The fourth section describes how primary and secondary sources were selected and collected and why they were considered relevant for analysing the SA JETP, while the fifth section delves into the potential limitations of this research method. Finally, the sixth section discusses some ethical considerations related to the research, with a focus on positionality.

3.1. Research Design: Qualitative Case Study

In order to demonstrate how the theoretical framework developed in Chapter II can be operationalised and applied to the empirical analysis of a specific JT Conflict, this work adopts a qualitative case study research design, investigating the formulation of the JT concept in the context of the SA JETP. A qualitative case study is the detailed, intensive analysis and contextualisation of a small number of phenomena, such as events, actors, processes, and institutions (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Qualitative case studies are crucial in political science and critical policy analysis as they provide deep insights into complex sociopolitical structures and policy processes that quantitative methods may overlook.

This research design is particularly suited for this work due to three specific features. First, case studies play a vital role in testing theoretical frameworks by allowing researchers to examine theories in real-world contexts, thereby assessing their applicability and validity (Chukwudi et al., 2019). Therefore, as the aim of this work is the development and application of a theoretical framework for the analysis of JT discourses, a case study approach is best suited

to illustrate how such a framework can be implemented at the empirical level. Second, Yin (2006, as cited in Malope, 2022) contends that a case study design is well-suited for empirical research that examines a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. As pointed out in Chapter II, the main objective of the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework is to provide a structured framework for the inductive, empirical study of JT discourses in a real-world setting. As a result, the case study design is particularly indicated for developing an in-depth understanding of complex empirical phenomena such as the conflictual formulation of JT policies. Third, as highlighted by Ritchie & Lewis (2003, p. 52), the case study research design is ideal for grasping the “multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context,” as it allows scholars to use multiple data collection methods and to derive multiple accounts from people with different perspectives. This aspect makes the case study design optimal for the analysis of contested concepts and divergent perspectives on JT.

3.2. Case Study Selection: the SA JETP with a focus on EU and South Africa

Against this background, the SA JETP was selected as a case study due to a combination of several theoretical and contextual factors. First, the SA JETP case holds global significance: it has been the first country-led, globally influential initiative to emphasise and fully integrate the JT concept in its framework, and is now being rapidly reproduced across other countries in the Global South, such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and Senegal (Fakir, 2023). Investigating it can, therefore, provide relevant insights into the context-dependency of JT policies and inform future efforts in this direction, while illuminating the shortcomings of current policy approaches.

Second, SA JETP involves a broad spectrum of national and international stakeholders with often conflicting interests, making it an ideal setting to study the dynamics of competing JT discourses (Wang & Lo, 2021). The country’s unique socio-political context, characterized by significant economic inequality, historical injustices, and powerful labour unions, provides a rich environment to explore how different social forces shape and contest the meanings and implementations of JT policy processes. Moreover, given the nature of the JETP as a North-to-South finance agreement between G7 countries and an emerging African economy, this case can shed light on how colonial legacies, asymmetric power dynamics and conflicting ideological-material struggles on historical (in)justices and responsibilities play out in the context of the global energy transition and growing multipolarity.

Third, as emphasised in the literature review (see Section 1.3), Just Transition research has overwhelmingly focused on Global North cases, thus overlooking Global South, and especially

African instances (Wang & Lo, 2021). To be sure, South Africa constitutes an exception in this sense, as the JT has become a mainstream notion in the country's academic and political arenas (Malope, 2022; Union of Justice, 2023). Hence, focusing on the JETP allows this study to take advantage of the relatively dense literature on South African JT, while simultaneously focusing on an area of the globe that is still often overlooked in mainstream scholarship on energy and climate politics.

It is important to underline that, when selecting the JETP as a case study, I decided to focus my empirical analysis exclusively on EU and South African institutional actors and stakeholders in the policy process, overlooking the other signatories within the International Partners Group (IPG). There were two motivations behind this choice. On the organisational level, a selection was necessary due to the scope, time and resource constraints of this Master's Thesis, which did not allow me to examine the entire array of actors and stakeholders who have been active throughout the JETP policy process. Above all, however, this choice was guided by a heuristic reflection. As my primary goal was conducting an in-depth, critical analysis of a specific JT Conflict between contending social and political forces using the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework, rather than exhaustively, mechanically mapping all the existing stakeholders, I deemed it more appropriate to reduce my scope to one or two of the countries involved in the JETP. Although it would have been possible to focus exclusively on South Africa, as the JETP is arguably a country-led initiative, this narrow scope would have prevented me from investigating the dialectical process through which power asymmetries between Global North and South countries become interlinked with JT discourses and justice claims rooted in unequal historical, political and socioeconomic dynamics. Therefore, I resolved to include one of the IPG members in my analysis.

The choice fell on the EU because, besides being the member whose institutional, historical and socioeconomic context I am the most academically familiar with, the EU is the IPG member with the strongest ties with South Africa. These ties will be extensively explored in the next chapter, but it is worth it to touch upon them for the sake of the argument. Historically, the economic and social structures of South Africa were heavily shaped by European colonization, with lasting impacts on its demographic and cultural landscape (Fioramonti & Kotsopoulos, 2015). Economically, the EU is South Africa's largest trading partner and investor, with a growing focus on clean energy and critical material for 'green' technologies (EEAS, 2023). Politically, the relationship is underpinned by a Strategic Partnership, including cooperation in tackling climate change and other environmental concerns (Adelle & Kotsopoulos, 2017a). As these ties have interesting ideological, material and political

implications for how JT discourses and policies are dialectically shaped, the case study focuses on the role of EU and South African actors in the formulation and implementation of JETP.

3.3. Operationalising the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework on Just Transition Conflicts

Drawing on the theoretical reflections advanced in Chapter II, the empirical analysis of the SA JETP has been conducted by operationalising the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework on Just Transition. To this end, the general research question outlined in Chapter I was adapted to the case study, also in view of the developed theoretical framework. Therefore, the case study aims to answer the following interrogative:

How was the notion of Just Transition conceptualised throughout the JT Conflict unfolded in relation to the South African JETP, and against the background of competing and contradictory interests of different social and political forces within the EU and South Africa?

This question was addressed by following HMPA's three-step analysis methodology. HMPA is a heuristic method for operationalising the empirical investigation of sociopolitical struggles and the relationship of forces involved in such struggles (for a comprehensive overview of HMPA's theoretical underpinning, see Section 2.4 and Brand, 2013; Brand et al., 2022; Kannankulam & Georgi, 2014; Schneider et al., 2023; Jessop & Sum, 2023). As a form of critical policy analysis, HMPA adopts a critical realist and epistemological-perspectivist approach to focus on the political and socioeconomic context of particular policies and their contested constitution (Brand et al., 2023). HMPA is particularly well-suited to analysing the JT Conflict in South Africa because it emphasises the role of structural power relations and the influence of ideological and material interests in shaping policy outcomes. In the context of the JETP, where various national and international social forces (such as labour unions, environmental groups, and companies) are competing to define the terms of the JT, HMPA helps to uncover how these power dynamics influence the ideological struggle over the policy process.

3.3.1. HMPA's Three-step Process

To further operationalize HMPA in empirical studies, Buckel et al. (2017) and Kannankulam & Georgi (2014) have developed a three-step process, based on a context analysis, an actor analysis and a process analysis. I argue that the application of this three-step process to the empirical analysis of the SA JETP can significantly deepen our understanding of how specific

JT policies are formulated against the backdrop of contradictory, competing interests and ideologies of different national and international social forces. However, three considerations are paramount before delving into the specific methods I adopted.

First, warning against following the three-step analysis too strictly, Brand et al. (2022) have suggested adopting a retroductive, iterative approach. Retroduction involves a dynamic, iterative process that alternates between abstract theory and concrete empirical data, incorporating both interpretative and causal explanations (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017, as cited in Schneider et al., 2023). This process involves a constant movement between an inductive moment, which can draw on fieldwork, participant observation and interviews, and a deductive moment in which the scholar subsumes the collected data into existing theories and concepts. According to Brand et al. (2022), this analytical method lends itself well to the implementation of HMPA's highly abstract concepts, as it allows the researcher to move freely between the three different levels of analysis instead of being forced into a structured, one-way process. In line with this reflection, I followed an iterative approach in my research. Second, as the three-step method is an extensive process, HMPA scholars recommend focusing on one of its steps (Kannankulam and Georgi, 2014). Following this recommendation, I concentrated my attention on the context and actor analysis, judging them as the best-suited sites for applying the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework due to their focus respectively on historical and ideological conditions, and political projects. Third, as Brand et al. (2022, p. 14) underline, "there is certainly no ready-made template for HMPA": some methodological creativity is required depending on the investigated policy field and the researcher's interest. Therefore, although I mainly followed Kannankulam & Georgi (2014)'s approach, I did not shy away from adapting it to this work's research interests, particularly in what concerns in the focus on discursive strategies.

The remainder of this section is dedicated to summarising HMPA's three-step process, and to explaining how it was operationalised for this specific case. For each step, I describe how data was selected, collected and analysed. Table 1 provides an overview of the three-step process and related subs-steps that guided the analysis.

Table 1. Overview of the structuring of the empirical analysis. Own compilation based on Caterina (2019)

Steps	Sub-steps	Sources
Context analysis	<i>Far-ranging context:</i> neoliberal climate change regime and climate finance	- Secondary literature - Primary sources

	• <i>Intermediate context</i>: Political economy of EU-South Africa relations; JT and EU's Climate Diplomacy • <i>Immediate conflict</i>: South Africa's socioecological crisis in the context of the Minerals-Energy Complex; JT and South Africa's climate action	
Process analysis	• Periodisation • Focus on conflict dynamics, key shifts, and turning points	• Primary sources • Grey literature • Secondary sources
Actor analysis	• Identification of actors' JT discursive strategies through JT analytical framework (see Section 3.5) • Analysis of the constellation of competing JT Political Projects in the JETP policy conflict • (Analysis of the constellation of competing Transition Hegemony Projects)	• Primary sources (see Table 2) • Grey literature

3.3.1.1. Context Analysis: theory, data collection and data analysis

The context analysis reconstructs the chosen conflict “as a specific *historical situation* to which social and political forces reacted differently and in opposition to each other, and which was brought about by a complex set of historical conditions and processes” (Kannankulam & Georgi, 2014, p. 63). This step aims at understanding why and due to which historical, material, and ideological conditions a specific policy conflict emerged “in particular places at particular times” (Loftus & Lumsden, 2008, p.109; Brand et al., 2022). To answer this question, the context analysis examines how a specific policy conflict is connected to the underlying contradictory societal and society-nature relations and crisis tendencies, along with investigating the related struggles to manage these contradictions, not only within the state but also across the broader social formation and international landscape.

As Kannankulam and Georgi (2014, 63) emphasise, the objective of the context analysis is threefold. Firstly, it describes the problem that social and political forces reacted to in various ways. Secondly, this problem is located in a specific historical context, and, thirdly, the most important historical and material conditions that lie at the root of the problem and, thus, of the conflict being analysed are brought to light. One challenge for the context analysis is, therefore, to sort out the contextual conditions on different spatial, temporal and ontological levels and to examine their relevance for the conflict under investigation. In her study of the 2012 Italian

labour market reform, Caterina (2018) addresses this challenge by differentiating between far-ranging, intermediate, and immediate contexts. These three levels of context are organised chronologically and refer to phases, continuities and changes in Italy's national economic and social policy. While this is an appropriate structure for an investigation of primarily nationally mediated labour market policy, in the investigation of the JT Conflict in the SA JETP greater consideration should be given to the various spatially structured levels of policy and political economy in relation to climate change and the low-carbon transition.

The tripartite structure of context analysis is therefore adopted, but the levels in this work are instead oriented towards spatial and historical reference values and their significance for the JETP JT Conflict. Specifically, the context analysis below differentiates between:

- the *far-ranging context*, which here refers to the development of the UNFCCC as the global climate change regime. This level must be explored to situate the JETP policy conflict within the ideological and material structures underpinning the emergence of concrete climate financing models. By analysing the UNFCCC regime, I do not imply or try to demonstrate that the JETP is a direct, necessary product of the global context. As HMPA scholars argue, concrete policies are not a mere instrument of “stabilisation of domination ... and of support for powerful interest and groups” (Brand, 2013). Rather, they have their own relative autonomy, as they represent the compromise between highly specific constellations of actors that are inherently context-dependent.
- the *intermediate context*, which focuses on the relationship between the EU and South Africa before and during the establishment of the JETP, and on the EU's approach to climate diplomacy. Since this work focuses on the role of EU and South African actors in the JETP policy process, as explained in Section 3.2, the context analysis cannot overlook the historical conditions and strategic considerations at the base of EU-South Africa relations. To this end, first, the political economy of this relation is analysed from a historical perspective, focusing on the dynamic nature of its underlying strategic interests. In the second moment, the development of the EU's climate diplomacy is examined, with special attention to the emergence of the Just Transition discourse into its external engagement. Through this level of analysis, I aim to situate the JETP policy conflict within the broader context of the historical and strategic relations between its signatories and within the diplomatic approach of the finance provider country. To be sure, a complete analysis would conduct this research process for each country involved in the agreement; however, as this work chose to concentrate on the EU and South Africa,

the other partners were not specifically analysed. The limitations of this choice will be explored in Section 3.4.

- the *immediate context*, which provides a detailed overview of the historical and socioeconomic context of contemporary South Africa. In particular, this step highlights the problems in response to which the JETP was formulated. In particular, the apartheid legacies of socioeconomic inequalities and the country's energy landscape are investigated, as the competing JT political projects are more or less directly connected to these realities. The unfolding of Just Transition discourses in South Africa is then situated within this context.

All three levels of the context analysis are mainly based on a literature review referring to historical and critical accounts of global climate politics, climate finance, the EU's climate diplomacy, the history of EU-South Africa relations, and South Africa's energy landscape and socioeconomic context. Documentary analysis was also used in the case of important primary sources or whenever relevant information was hard to retrieve from secondary sources.

3.3.1.2. *Process Analysis: theory, data collection and data analysis*

The process analysis aims to reconstruct the dynamic unfolding of the investigated conflict. First, different phases and key moments are identified against the backdrop of the broad sociohistorical context (Kannankulam & Georgi, 2014). Afterwards, this level of analysis should dynamically assess how and why certain actors or groups were able to assert dominance over others and how they mediated conflicting positions and interests (Schneider et al., 2023).

While the actors involved, their convictions, strategies and resources will already be discussed in the course of the process analysis, this discussion will initially remain rather superficial. Instead, the focus is on a chronological retelling of the analysed JT conflict, which will serve as the basis for the subsequent actor analysis. It is important to note, in fact, that due to time and scope constraints, I preferred to focus on the first phase of the process analysis, i.e. the periodisation, in order to present the investigated JT Conflict, and later analyse its protagonists in the actor analysis. However, this was done to the detriment of the second half of the process analysis. Future research should focus more on the dynamic interplay of competing JT Political Projects. In order to still conserve to some extent, the dynamism of the policy process, this section goes beyond policy developments strictly inherent to the JETP process, juxtaposing broader developments in South Africa's energy policy and turning points in the international and domestic political debate about the JETP.

The process analysis is empirically based on publicly accessible primary sources such as policy documents, official and joint declarations by the stakeholders involved, newspaper articles, and party manifestos, supplemented where possible by academic publications on the respective policies and conflicts. The period selected for data collection spans from early 2021, when discussion about a potential JETP agreement started emerging, until May 2024. The decision over the cut date is both practically and theoretically motivated. At the end of May 2024, national elections were held in South Africa, determining a relative change of power balances between political and social forces in the country. Arguably, this reshuffling represented a watershed moment for JETP policy developments, as it brought in and pushed out new and old actors with different ideas over the JT from the political landscape. Given that the analysis of these new configurations of forces would require a much larger scope and time availability, I decided to adopt May 2024 as the end date for my data collection, as it likely marked a turning point in the JETP policy process. Moreover, as I began data collection for this research in January 2024, intending to write results by August, it seemed necessary not to overextend the data collection period any further.

3.3.1.3. Actor Analysis: theory, data collection and data analysis

The actor analysis is devoted to the examination of the relationship of forces involved in the investigated conflict. The aim is therefore to make the actions of the relevant actors comprehensible and to arrive at statements ‘about the specific constellation of social forces’ that “meet, ally, fight and compromise in a specific context” (Buckel et al. 2014, p. 55).

According to Kannankulam & Georgi (2014), this step can be divided into three sub-steps for heuristic clarity. First, relevant actors and their strategies must be identified: these comprise established political actors as well as social movements and institutions and the conflicting strategies they adopt in response to the historical situation they are facing. In the second step, the concept of hegemony project is used to conceptually aggregate the distinguished actors (see Section 2.3 for a deep definition of the concept). To this end, it is necessary to understand which groups of actors share similar positions and overarching objectives, what is the core strategic orientation of these coalitions, and which political initiatives and projects they engage in to achieve their goals. The third step of the actor analysis regards the assessment of the power dynamics within the investigated relationship of forces, which implies the analysis of coalitions’ organisational, systemic, and discursive/ideological/symbolic resources. The latter refers to the actors’ ability to draw on recognised or canonical discourses and symbol-laden

concepts in order to articulate their interests and viewpoints in a manner that is acceptable to other social forces (Kannankulam & Georgi, 2014).

Despite following this general approach, my research draws on some relevant contributions made by Brand et al. (2022). First, they have argued that the formation of actor constellations is highly dependent on the investigated policy conflict and is not necessarily maintained through other conflicts; hence, it cannot be *directly* generalised into a hegemony project. Instead, they propose using the concept of political project, as introduced in Chapter II, in order to highlight “micro-struggles” within the policy process (Brand et al., 2022, p. 12). Therefore, identifying political projects is an essential intermediary step between the strategy analysis and the aggregation into hegemony projects. In addition, Brand et al. (2022) have rightly posited that one of HMPA’s main challenges is connecting political actors to social forces and their material (and ideological) interests. This difficulty stems from the fact that political actors very rarely act exclusively on behalf of the interests of a specific social group; rather, “they usually already articulate and represent specific compromises between various societal interests in a mediated form, involving complex intersections with lines of racism, gender and sexual orientation” (Brand, 2022, p. 12). Based on these considerations, Brand et al. (2022) propose an alternative three-step process. This approach entails, first, identifying the relevant political actors; second, analysing the constellation of actors by grouping them into political projects and, where appropriate, into hegemonic projects; and third, examining the underlying interests of the social forces driving the conflict. In this study, I draw upon the approaches of both Kannankulam and Georgi (2014) and Brand et al. (2022) to develop an actor analysis tailored to my objective of examining competing conceptualisations of JT and discursive strategies within the JETP policy process.

After analysing the context in which the JETP was developed and the process through which its related JT Conflict unfolded, the actor analysis aimed to identify the constellation of actors that emerged within the JETP policy conflict. The analysis was carried out by examining the JT discursive strategies adopted by the actors. In fact, as I extensively argued in Section 2.4, JT Conflicts manifest primarily as discursive struggles over the ideological components constituting the notion of JT. This approach is grounded in the assumption that actors with relatively similar JT discursive strategies pursue similar concrete objectives within a specific policy process and can, therefore, be heuristically aggregated into JT political projects. The remainder of this section outlines the methodology employed in the actor analysis, including the sample selection, data collection, and data analysis.

Selecting the pertinent actors for examination was a pivotal first step in the research process. It was essential to achieve a balance that adequately represents the complexity of the actor constellation while maintaining clarity and avoiding obfuscation from an excessively large sample size. The selection process was conducted in a reiterative manner to ensure that new actors and details uncovered during the entire three-step analysis were integrated. Primary sources examined during the context and process analysis were fundamental in guiding the identification and selection of relevant actors; secondary literature (especially (Fakir, 2023; Tyler & Mgoduso, 2022; von Lüpke, 2023) also played an important part in this step.

As an initial framework for this process, I adopted Sum's (2009, as cited in Caterina, 2017) recommendation to differentiate among "three mediating sets of arenas" – namely, international organisations and institutions, individual states and supranational entities, and (trans-)national civil society. This framework was then applied to the JETP case with the necessary modifications. After careful consideration, the first-level set of arenas was not directly included in the actor analysis, primarily due to scope and time constraints. However, as the context analysis provides an overview of the ideological landscape within which the global climate governance operates, it made it possible to a certain extent, to make some general inferences over the JT discursive strategies adopted by international institutions. Nonetheless, it is imperative that future research rigorously investigate the role of international institutions within the JETP and their influence on shaping conceptualisations of JT.

At the intermediate level, as already explained in Section 3.3, South Africa and the EU were selected respectively as the single state and supranational entity to be analysed. Significantly, the two were not analysed as monolithic policy actors led by an univocal grand strategy. Drawing on neo-Gramscian and state materialist theory, this research assumes that different state branches and apparatuses do not necessarily 'think' and act in a unified, coherent manner. Rather, as clearly put by Brand et al. (2022),

since particular structures and power relations exist in different policy fields and conflicts, their material condensations in state apparatuses are specific, and there are tensions among various political institutions. As a result, manifold and often contradictory policies are formulated through different state apparatuses. (p. 7-8)

Therefore, the actor selection and data collection for this work aimed at conserving the complexity and differences between state and governmental apparatuses within South Africa and the EU. Finally, the selection of actors at the last of Sum's levels of categorisation, i.e. the (trans-)national civil society, built mainly on the process analysis, which was essential in

identifying umbrella organisations, social movements, political parties, firms and interest groups that were significantly active and vocal in the investigated JT Conflict. In choosing from the numerous organisations that articulated their specific positions on the JETP, I established four criteria to guide the selection process. Firstly, the organisation must have openly engaged with the concept of JT. Secondly, it must possess either a national or international scope and reach. Given that the JETP is explicitly a countrywide initiative, I prioritised actors who approached it from this perspective, despite the consequent exclusion of valuable insights from local and regional organisations. Thirdly, I prioritized organizations with divergent positions, ensuring a more comprehensive representation of the nuanced dynamics within the actor constellation under investigation. Fourthly, more pragmatically, I prioritised actors whose information and positions were easily accessible online. Table 2 offers an overview of the actors selected and the primary sources observed in the analysis.

Table 2. Actors and primary sources analysed in Actor Analysis

Category	Actors	Primary sources
EU	EU Commission (DG INTPA, DG CLIMA, DG ENER) EEAS EIB	Interviews, joint declarations, press releases, policy documents
South African government	Presidential Cabinet/DFFE PCC DMRE	Press releases, policy documents
Political Parties	ANC DA EFF	Political manifestos, press releases
Trade unions	COSATU	Position papers, interview
(Trans-)national NGOs and Social Movements	Climate Justice Charter Movement	Interview, position papers

Data was collected through two parallel research methods, documentary analysis and interviews, conducted reiteratively until data saturation was reached. I analysed publicly accessible written texts related to the JETP or, more generally, to the South Africa JT, including position papers, statements in consultation processes, press releases, policy documents, official and joint declarations by the stakeholders involved, and party manifestos. Furthermore, I integrated this data with six semi-structured interviews conducted in July 2024 with key stakeholders to gain deeper insights into their discursive strategies and JT conceptualisations.

The decision to conduct interviews was primarily influenced by the limited availability of data relative to the EU's definition of JT. Interviews were, therefore, crucial for developing a thorough understanding of the EU's role within the JETP. Table 3 below offers an overview of the participants.

An interview guide (see Appendix I) was developed to outline the main topics and questions to be addressed while also accommodating the exploration of emerging issues during the interview. The guide featured open-ended, non-leading questions to encourage comprehensive responses concerning their role in the conceptualisation, negotiation and contestation of the JT within the JETP policy process. While the interview guide provided a structured framework, the sequence of questions varied based on the flow of each interview. Additionally, follow-up questions were posed to delve deeper into specific areas. All interviews, except one, were held online and recorded with prior consent from the participant (see Appendix II for the integral anonymised transcriptions of the interviews).

Table 3. Overview of interviews participants.

#Participant - #Interview	Type of stakeholder	Date	Location
P #1 – Interview #1	EU Commission - DG INTPA	4 July 2024	Online
P #2 – Interview #2	EU Commission – DG CLIMA	4 July 2024	Online
P #3 – Interview #3	EEAS	8 July 2024	Brussels
P #4, #5, #6 – Interview #4	EU Delegation to South Africa	8 July 2024	Online
P #7 – Interview #5	COSATU	12 July 2024	Online
P #8 – Interview #6	EU Commission – DG ENER	19 July 2023	Online
P #9– Interview #7	Climate Justice Charter Movement	23 July 2023	Online

The data was examined using a three-sub-step process derived by adapting Kannankulam & Georgi (2014)' s and Brand et al. (2022)'s approach. First, actors were identified and categorised in relation to their socioeconomic and political roles and to their engagement in the JETP. Second, the discursive strategies of some selected actors were critically analysed using the JT analytical framework theorised in Chapter II. Afterwards, actors were aggregated into

JT Political Projects. The fourth potential step, i.e. the aggregation of political projects into hegemony projects, was not carried out due to time and scope constraints.

In order to systematically unpack how different, sometimes competing, actors strategically use different JT discourses to fill the JT empty signifier with meaning, I applied a JT analytical framework that allowed me to identify the different ideological elements of JT conceptualisations in an inductive, bottom-up manner. This analytical framework was developed mostly by operationalising Stevis and Felli's (2020) analytical scheme described in Section 2.5, and by adding one variable concerning the financing of the envisioned JT. Analysing questions concerning the *where*, *when*, *who*, *for whom*, and *how* of divergent JT visions, the frameworks provide a structured yet flexible approach to analysing the contested meanings of Just Transition across different contexts. In this study, the framework was applied to empirical data from the SA JETP to enable a systematic exploration of how JT visions are shaped by historical, geographical, and political forces. Through this inductive and context-sensitive approach, the framework helps to reveal the ideological, social, and material dimensions of JT, offering a comprehensive tool to analyse the dynamics of justice in transition policies. The selected variables were operationalised as follows:

- Spatial scale: addressing the *where* of JT, this variable concerns the geographical extension of JT policies as conceptualised in actors' discursive strategies. It ranges from local, regional, national, transnational and planetary levels.
- Temporal scale: addressing the *when* (and *why*) of JT, this variable regards the temporal extension of JT policies as conceptualised in actors' discursive strategies. It spans historical legacies, impacts on future generations, and long-term visions.
- Scale: this variable concerns *who* should lead the JT and *for whom* the JT is, according to actors' discursive strategies. It encompasses the diversity of actors involved in consultations and/or decision-making processes, for instance: coal workers, workers in general, marginalised communities, women, youth, the private sector, governmental agencies, etc.
- Depth: this variable considers *how* the JT is *ideologically* conceived in actors' discursive strategies, meaning their approaches to social change and society-nature relations. It ranges between reactive, conservative, reformist, and egalitarian approaches on the one hand, and anthropocentric, sustainable-development-based, and intermediate or radical ecocentric perspectives, on the other.

- **Resource Allocation:** this variable concerns *how* the JT is *materially* conceived in actors' discursive strategies, meaning the financial and infrastructural means that are to be mobilised to ensure a JT. It encompasses public funding, community-based approaches, socially-owned means, private sector investment, and different kinds of international finance.

The above analytical framework was used to thematically code documents and interviews. The coding process was performed using MAXQDA, a software for qualitative data analysis that allows which facilitates more efficient organisations and examination of extensive data sets (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). After identifying dominant elements used to construct the concept of JT, I determined how these were organised into discursive strategies in favour of actors' interests. As mentioned above, the analysis of actors' JT discursive strategies was only carried out for a selection of actors (see Table 2). This was done considering the case study's objective, which is first and foremost to show the applicability of the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework, rather than provide an exhaustive account of the entire JETP actor spectrum. Therefore, I prioritized actors whose discursive strategies were more amenable to analysis, given the availability of extensive data and well-substantiated positions. Time and scope constraints also played a role in this decision. In a second phase, building on my analysis of discursive strategies and on secondary literature about secondary identified actors, social and political forces were clustered together into Just Transition Political Projects.

3.4. Limitations

This study encounters several limitations that might influence both the depth and generalizability of its findings. Firstly, the use of a qualitative case study research design is linked to several limitations that must be taken into account. From an epistemological point of view, the interpretive nature of qualitative research introduces potential biases from the researcher, which can affect the objectivity and reliability of the data. On a different note, the time- and resource-intensive process of data collection and analysis in this kind of research design further complicates replication and may strain practical feasibility.

Some limitations are specific to the case study selected. Conducting a case study focusing specifically on the SA JETP, inherently restricts the scope of analysis to this particular context. This means that the study may not fully encompass the broader global dynamics and comparative insights that could be gained from examining other significant actors in the global JT discourse. However, this limitation is in line with my argument that JT conceptualisations and highly context-dependent and must be analysed as such. The deliberate exclusion of key

international players from the analysis is probably a stronger argument in favour of this study's limitedness. Overlooking actors such as the UK, the US, and other relevant IFIs and DMBs, which had a relatively stronger position in negotiations due to higher diplomatic power and financial contributions to the JETP, prevents a thorough assessment of their role in the investigated JT Conflict, as well as of their impact on JT conceptualizations and practices, and therefore constitutes a limit to this work's comprehensiveness. Moreover, the ongoing implementation of the JETP presents a significant limitation. The continuous evolution of the program means that the data available for analysis are incomplete, and the full policy process and conflict related to the initiative cannot yet be examined in its entirety. The dynamic nature of the program affects the ability to provide a comprehensive assessment of the relationship of forces involved and their long-term implications on the policy process.

The study also faced scope and time limitations that constrained the selection of a relatively small sample of actors. This restricted sample size may not adequately represent the full spectrum of perspectives and stakeholders involved in the JETP, potentially leading to a skewed or incomplete understanding of the actor constellation and their strategic actions. Additionally, the methodology employed, which includes documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews, introduces its own set of limitations. The documentary analysis relies on the availability and reliability of existing records, which may not capture all relevant nuances or emerging developments. The interviews, while providing valuable qualitative insights, were limited in number due to time constraints, and notably lacked sufficient representation from South African actors due to difficulties in obtaining access to participants. This limited sample size and the underrepresentation of some perspectives may affect the depth of understanding regarding the specific context of South Africa's engagement with the JETP.

These limitations collectively affect the robustness and generalizability of the study's conclusions. While the insights gained are valuable, they should be considered within the context of these constraints, acknowledging that further research incorporating a broader range of actors and perspectives would be beneficial for a more comprehensive analysis of JT conceptualizations and the JETP.

3.5. Positionality

Throughout this research, it was imperative for me to maintain a critical awareness of my positionality as a researcher and of its influence on the study. In qualitative research, achieving complete neutrality and a value-free stance is inherently unattainable; therefore, it is crucial to identify and explicitly address any biases present in the research (Whittemore et al., 2001, as

cited in de Jong, 2023). As Brand et al. (2022, p. 9) articulate, to mitigate “disciplinary narrow-mindedness,” researchers must recognise themselves as “subjective and socially positioned, yet reflexive,” thereby generating knowledge through a process that is “recorded, analysed, and reflected upon.” Reflexivity is thus a crucial component of the research process, involving the understanding, construction, critique, and articulation of one’s own biases and their potential impact on the research (Cohen et al., 2011). For instance, the decision to adopt a bottom-up, inductive approach to justice at a relatively advanced stage of this research emerged from such a reiterative process of reflection. This process led to the recognition that relying predominantly on Eurocentric theories of justice, as initially intended, would undermine the ethical validity of the study.

Recognising one’s positionality is a central step in this process of self-reflection. Positionality encompasses an individual’s worldview, significantly shaped by their social identity (Bourke, 2014, as cited in de Jong, 2023). This includes both fixed dimensions, such as gender and race, as well as more fluid aspects, such as personal ideologies and experiences. The interaction between these elements influences one’s ontological and epistemological assumptions, determining how one interprets and engages with the world. Hence, researchers must recognise that their worldviews are not given but are products of this constant dialectical process (Holmes, 2020). In this work, I tried to use style and content to make my positionality explicit. Stylistically, I decided not to refrain from writing in the first person, especially when supporting arguments and making relatively subjective claims about theoretical and empirical issues.

In terms of contents, the remaining of this section is an attempt to clarify my own positionality as a person and a researcher. As I understand power relations as a constituent element of identity, my reflection on my own positionality is framed through an intersectional approach, which assumes that individuals can experience multiple forms of oppression and privilege simultaneously and that these cannot be understood separately from one another (Nash 2008). I am a white heterosexual woman, born in a provincial town in Northern Italy. I was raised in a high-middle-class family with catholic, left-oriented values. As a woman born in a rather conservative European country, I have been exposed to the influence of a patriarchal society that silently shaped my perception of my position in the world as a woman. However, being white and high-middle class has given me a huge privilege: I grew up in a mostly white community that never questioned my right to exist within it. I had access to a high-quality life and education which fostered my physical and mental well-being and gave me valuable educational opportunities.

These elements inevitably had some influence over my work, its research design and the questions that were asked. This fact does not inherently pose a problem; however, it is essential to approach it with sensitivity, especially considering that my case study partially relates to a country of which I have limited personal experience and knowledge. Although I was partially exposed to the South African context during my exchange semester at Stellenbosch University, this can in no way provide me with a subjective understanding of South Africans' lived experiences of colonial and apartheid legacies of injustice and poverty. This is not only due to my relatively short stay in a wealthy town that was at the forefront of colonial expansion (with structural and demographic consequences that have survived to this day), but also to my being a white European who has never experienced structural injustice to the degree that many black South African have.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter has meticulously detailed the methodology apply the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework outlined in Chapter II to the investigation of the complex dynamics of the SA JETP. The chapter began by emphasizing the value of qualitative case studies in political and policy research, particularly in providing deep insights into complex sociopolitical phenomena and policy processes that quantitative methods may overlook. The selection of the SA JETP as a case study was justified based on its global significance, involvement of a broad spectrum of actors, and unique socioeconomic and political context linked to historical legacies and power asymmetries.

The chapter also elaborated on the operationalisation of the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework through HMPA. To systematically explore the JT Conflict within the SA JETP, I employed HMPA's three-step analysis, composed of context analysis, process analysis and actor analysis. Building mainly on secondary literature, the context analysis aims to provide a multi-layered examination of the context in which the JT conflict related to the JETP unfolded, while the process analysis offers a chronological retelling of the policy conflict, identifying key phases and turning points that set the stage for the actor analysis. In the actor analysis, I first identified the strategies and discursive positions of various stakeholders, by applying a JT analytical framework that uses variables of spatial and temporal scales, scope, depth and resource allocation to identify dominant ideological elements. In a second phase, I aggregated the investigated actors into JT Political Projects.

Limitations were critically reflected upon. The interpretive nature of qualitative research, the challenges of focusing on a single case study, and the constraints imposed by time and

resource limitations, alongside the evolving nature of the SA JETP, were identified as the work's main limitations. Ethical considerations were also thoroughly discussed, with a focus on positionality and reflexivity. Overall, this chapter laid out the methodological foundation for the subsequent empirical analysis of the SA JETP and its competing JT discourses, to which the next chapter is entirely dedicated.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis and Discussion

In this chapter, I analyse and discuss the results obtained by applying the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework on Just Transition (JT) Conflicts outlined in Chapter II to the case of the South African Just Energy Transition Partnership (SA JETP). This chapter aims to frame the manifest conflict around the establishment and implementation of the JETP as a JT Conflict between divergent JT Political Projects advanced by competing societal forces at the national and international levels. Before delving into the Process Analysis, which reconstructs the unfolding of the JETP policy process, and the parallel manifestation of a JT Conflict on issues of international interference, indebtedness, and (un)fair emission shares, the Context Analysis situates the JETP into the global, international and national policy and political landscape. Finally, the Actor Analysis investigates the actors involved and their discursive strategies in relation to the Just Energy Transition (JET), identifying four JT Political Projects to which they can be attributed: (i) a Core Political Project of market-driven, technical JT; (ii) a Satellite Political Project of development-oriented, internationally-funded JT; (iii) an Oppositional Political Project of slow-paced, fossilist JT; and (iv) an Oppositional Political Project of socioecological, transformative JT.

4.1. Context Analysis

This section reconstructs the JT Conflict that emerged in the context of the SA JETP as a specific historical situation determined by the convergence of ideological and material conditions at different spatial, temporal and ontological levels. It identifies the global climate change regime, the political economy of EU-South Africa relations, and the regime of accumulation at the base of South Africa's social relations of production and reproduction as the structural conditions that gave rise to the JETP and discusses their implications for the investigated JT Conflict.

4.1.1. Far-ranging context: Climate Finance in the Global Climate Change Regime

Like any conflict about the formulation and implementation of a specific policy, the transition conflict within the SA JETP is not occurring in a vacuum. Rather, as the JETP is presented first and foremost as a response to climate change, it is intrinsically connected to the trends and structures of the global climate change regime, specifically in its linkages to the Just Transition

discourse, climate finance and the political economy of the global energy transition. This subsection analyses the broad global context within which the SA JETP has been designed and negotiated, investigating the material, ideological and historical conditions and institutional structures underpinning the development of the current climate change regime and the climate finance model linked to it.

4.1.1.1. The Global Climate Change Regime

Today's global climate change regime is mainly embodied in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Established in 1992 in response to the urgency to "prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system" and ratified by 198 countries, the UNFCCC constitutes the foundational treaty of the international climate regime (UN, 1992, p. 9). The emergence of this climate regime was heavily conditioned by historical development that hindered national climate action and international cooperation. This encompassed the decreasing global hegemony of the United States and its economic insecurity compared to China; the division of economic and environmental stances among countries in the global South, moving beyond the traditional North-South divide; a major global economic recession caused by risky financial practices and the resulting austerity measures in several large emitting countries; changes in global power dynamics due to new energy sources; and an increasing focus by mainstream environmental groups and their funders on market-based and voluntary approaches to governance (Ciplet & Roberts, 2017). As a result, the climate regime saw its light in a context of interconnected path dependency and historical contingencies that embedded it within international neoliberal environmentalism, i.e. a framework that integrates neoliberal economic principles with environmental policies through market-based solutions that prioritise economic growth, efficiency, and individual responsibility over state intervention or collective action.

Importantly, the UNFCCC was the first binding instrument to endorse the Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC) principle, which recognises that, although all countries share a collective responsibility to address the climate crisis, these responsibilities are differentiated based on their historical contribution to GHG emissions and their technological, financial and institutional capacity to mitigate their impact (UN, 1992). The principles of 'equity' and 'polluters pay' were pivotal in the founding treaty, implying that developed countries should act first in reducing their climate impact and bear the greatest responsibility for mitigation and financial obligations (Atapattu, 2008). As a result, international climate finance, in the form of public and private finance and technology

transfers, emerged as an imperative of the global climate regime. Simultaneously, the ideas of cost-effectiveness and economic growth were also at the centre of the UNFCCC, informing an understanding of climate change as a financial stability risk that can be addressed through market-based solutions (Bracking & Leffel, 2021; Ciplet & Roberts, 2017). As Bigger and Carton (2020, as cited in Bracking & Leffel, 2021), succinctly posit, “climate policy was not financialised; it has always been financial.”

One of the first major steps taken within the UNFCCC was the establishment of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty setting legally binding emission reduction targets for 37 industrialised countries and supranational entities, thus partially reflecting the CBDR-RC principle. The Protocol also introduced International Emission Trading and the Clean Development Mechanism, a market mechanism that allowed developed countries to redress their emission reduction targets through investments in low-emissions projects in the Global South. By tying together (re)distributional principles, the right to development and market mechanisms, the Protocol enshrined a capital-driven vision of climate mitigation in which the market exchanges and a renewed paradigm of nature marketisation and exploitation became the solutions to both climate change and underdevelopment (De Lucia, 2009).

COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009 marked two major turning points in the global climate regime. On the one hand, the Kyoto Protocol’s “top-down regulatory-market hybrid approach” was dismantled through the Copenhagen Accord negotiated by the US, China, South Africa, India and Brazil (Ciplet & Roberts, 2017). On the other, developed countries, for the first time, committed to contributing to Global South’s mitigation and adaptation efforts through international climate finance, pledging US\$ 100 billion *per annum*. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) and later the Green Climate Fund (GCF) were established as the primary entities for the operationalisation of this and future pledges (Swarnakar & Shukla, 2023).

The Copenhagen Accord prompted a shift towards a new voluntary, non-binding system that was crystallised in the 2015 Paris Agreement. Based on nationally determined contributions (NDCs) through which countries voluntarily set their own emission reduction targets, the Paris Agreement reinterpreted the CBDR-DR principle by encouraging all countries to share the responsibility of climate action. Significantly, the Paris Agreement also emphasises the role that developed countries must play in mobilising climate finance through “a wide variety of sources, instruments and channels”, opening the way to private climate finance and public-private partnerships (UN, 2015, p. 13). Moreover, international climate finance was put in indissoluble relation with NDCs: on the one hand, NDCs from the Global South became explicitly conditional on climate finance and technology transfers; on the other, the

disbursement of this finance became conditional on the existence of NDCs and on the compliance with the pledge-and-review process. Since the establishment of the Paris Agreement, the overall approach to international climate cooperation has remained unvaried, with the following COPs further consolidating this voluntary, decentralised NDC system.

Ciplet & Roberts (2017) argue that the Paris Agreement can be understood as the culmination of the neoliberal turn in international environmental governance due to its libertarian justice ideals, marketisation mechanisms, focus on transparency and minilateralism. First, the universalising, voluntary NDC system relies on an understanding of justice as a mutual advantage, allowing “states with unequal resources to pursue and maximize their gains under the minimal constraints of an agreed framework” (Ciplet & Roberts, 2017, p. 150). The emergence and consolidation of JT discourses within the climate change regime in the aftermath of the Paris Agreement must be understood in the context of this neoliberal understanding of justice. Second, the Paris Agreement entrenches a market-based financial approach, as it transfers the responsibility of climate finance to national governments’ capacity to create a favourable environment for private investors to develop RE and climate resilience actions. At the same time, formal mechanisms to coordinate international climate finance in fulfilment of the CBDR-RC have not been established, leaving further space for manoeuvre to private finance and market-based solutions. Third, the overwhelming focus on the importance of transparency, with its implication that the lack of transparency is the primary obstacle to sustainable development, hinders stronger reglementary practices and strengthens the failed-state argument used in reference to some developing countries. Fourth, the Paris Agreement legitimised the creation of “minilateral” climate agreements between small groups of states, transferring the decision-making process away from the UNFCCC (Ciplet & Roberts, 2017, p. 154). Whether this kind of agreement has a positive catalysing effect or a negative weakening impact on the UNFCCC regime is out of the scope and interest of this research.

Here, I am only interested in showing that informal clubs, such as the G7 and G20, play an increasingly significant role in the climate change regime complex. In this context, I argue that the JETPs established between G7 members and low-to-middle-income countries are a clear example of these market-based ‘minilateral’ climate agreements, and they largely contribute to building consensus about how to design and finance the global response to climate change. In particular, the emergence of JETPs has reflected a specific neoliberal approach to climate finance that is further investigated in the next subsection.

4.1.1.2. *International Climate Finance*

Today, international public climate finance is “a complex set of mechanisms intended to facilitate the transfer of funds between states” towards the final goal of reducing GHG emissions (Ciplet et al., 2022). While its early emergence within the UNFCCC was narrowly understood only in connection with climate mitigation and adaptation, the scope of climate finance has increasingly broadened, becoming intertwined with the notion of JT, development aid and energy transition strategies, as demonstrated by the emergence of JETPs. In particular, the dominant narrative within the neoliberal climate regime argues that climate finance is essential to put in place the Global South’s “green modernisation” through public-private partnerships in support to RE development (Bergius & Buseth, 2019, p. 1). The \$ 100 billion *per annum* pledged by developed countries at COP15 and extended through 2025 as part of the Paris Agreement is the foundation of international climate finance commitments. In 2022, developed countries provided and mobilised a total of US\$ 115.9 billion in climate finance for developing nations, surpassing their collective annual target of USD 100 billion for the first time (OECD, 2024).

Nonetheless, as underlined by Ciplet et al. (2022, p. 1) “raising and distributing large sums of funding to address injustice does not happen in a historical vacuum” but is instead strictly related to historical legacies, global power asymmetries and ideological and material path dependencies. Therefore, it is important to underline that the \$ 100 billion target was not achieved through UNFCCC funds but mainly through traditional bilateral and multilateral mechanisms and mobilised private finance, which allow provider countries to maintain direct control over funds’ allocation and distribution. By deciding on the nature and requirements of climate projects, provider countries can ultimately exert disproportionate power in setting the climate finance agenda (Ciplet et al., 2022). Furthermore, the lion’s share of the financial resources pooled for climate objectives is still constituted by loans, although developing countries have been advocating in favour of a more grant-based approach (OECD, 2024). The project allocation of these loans also raises important questions in terms of justice-oriented demands. Climate finance overwhelmingly focuses on expensive RE generation projects with potentially high investment returns rather than projects facilitating energy access (Ciplet et al., 2022). Despite the argument that RE projects in the long run increase energy access, it has been demonstrated in several cases that this inference is all but necessary and that energy justice is scarcely taken into account when these projects are designed and implemented (Malope, 2022). This is particularly relevant when considering that several countries in the Global South still

struggle to satisfy their population's basic energy needs: notably, 53% of sub-Saharan Africa's population has to this day no access to electricity ([UNCTAD, 2023](#)). Moreover, financing mechanisms strongly reflect the categories and ideological stances of Global North's countries. On the one hand, they hardly ever challenge neoliberal justice principles and capitalist assumptions of infinite growth and overconsumption; on the other, they rarely make concessions to developing countries' climate narratives, such as the concept of climate and ecological debt (Ciplet & Roberts, 2017).

As a result of these considerations, the current neoliberal climate finance approach has been largely called into doubt for reproducing relationships of dependency between Global North and Global South countries. Postcolonial scholars, in particular, have criticised climate finance in light of the financial subordination argument, which posits that the international financial architecture built after the collapse of the colonial system has perpetuated neocolonial, imperialist practices to economically control former colonies and access their resources through investments, loans and debts (Blissett, 2023). Climate finance, they argue, is yet another instrument to financially subordinate developing countries and to increase the unequal ecological exchange of 'green' resources.

Within the African context, the financialization of climate resilience and energy transitions has been following trends that compel governments to accept non-concessional loans and to secure funding only through state-backed de-risking measures (Blissett, 2023). Consequently, climate finance allegedly ends up further burdening already indebted, ecologically vulnerable African countries, ultimately reproducing debt colonialism and deepening the ecological debt owed by the Global North (and East) to the African continent (Moyo, 2024). In light of this potential (in some cases already actual) threat, members of civil society, developing countries' governments and academia have framed their justice claims in relation to climate finance through the concept of climate debt, which posits that the Global North is debtor to developing countries for the damage caused by its disproportionately large historical contribution to climate change (Ciplet & Roberts, 2017). In the case of Africa, Moyo (2024, p. 1) takes one step further by advancing the concept of ecological debt, i.e. "the result of the operations of the global agents and beneficiaries of Africa's resources who have been involved in ecological destruction of the continent for more than 500 years of slavery, colonialism, apartheidism, neo-imperialism, globalisation, and globalism." Following the climate/ecological debt argument, climate finance should be understood as the restitution of this debt rather than as a new form of development aid, and thus, should substantially favour grants over loans and recipient-led over donor-led fund allocation (Bond, 2024; Browne, 2022).

In conclusion, analysing the Just Transition conflict between competing JT political projects in the context of the SA JETP requires taking into account its embeddedness in the global climate change regime and its approach to climate finance. This regime, shaped by historical developments and material conditions, has entrenched neoliberal ideologies – namely a libertarian justice approach, the marketisation of climate solutions, the emphasis on transparency and good governance, and minilateralism – into the architecture of international climate finance, contributing to partially reproducing unequal power relations between Global North and Global South countries. Hence, it is necessary to take into account that the SA JETP has been developed within the overarching material-ideological context of the neoliberal climate change regime as a North-to-South ‘minilateral’ international climate agreement aimed at financing the South African energy transition. The next subsection will look more closely at the historical, political and economic conditions in which the JETP has been developed, first by providing an overview of South Africa-EU from a historical and strategic point of view and, afterwards, by focusing on the EU’s approach to climate diplomacy and JT discourse.

4.1.2. Intermediate context: EU-South Africa relations and EU Climate Diplomacy

4.1.2.1. *Political Economy of South Africa-EU relations*

In a broad sense, the origin of South Africa-EU relations can be traced back to the 15th century, when Portuguese navigators first set foot on the coasts of the Western Cape. The colonisation of South Africa began in the mid-17th century when the Dutch East India Company established a supply station at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, marking the start of European settlement in the region (Thompson, 2014). This initial foothold led to the expansion of Dutch control over indigenous Khoisan lands, followed by the arrival of British forces who seized the Cape Colony during the Napoleonic Wars. British colonisation intensified in the 19th century, culminating in the annexation of the Zulu Kingdom and the Boer Republics, which triggered the Anglo-Zulu War and the two Anglo-Boer Wars (Thompson, 2014). The resulting British dominance solidified colonial rule, laying the groundwork for the segregationist policies that would later evolve into apartheid. European countries initially remained silent about the institutionalised discrimination enforced by the white-controlled government in South Africa (Fioramonti & Kotsopoulos, 2015). It wasn't until the 1970s that European governments and the European Economic Community began to participate in the UN-led international campaign against apartheid. However, it was only in the mid-1980s that European member states became more outspoken against the South African regime, implementing a broad range of sanctions and launching a special program to support the victims of apartheid (Fioramonti &

Kotsopoulos, 2015). Meanwhile, by promising a surge of foreign investment under the condition of the incoming government adopting the Washington consensus paradigm, the EU, together with other influential Western governments, ensured that post-apartheid South Africa would be entrenched in the new neoliberal order (Landsberg & Hierro, 2017).

In the aftermath of the first democratic elections in 1994, the EU and South Africa signed an Interim Cooperation Agreement to support economic and trade cooperation and democracy promotion, especially through EU investments and financial aid (Margaritis, 2012). Relations between the two were further normalised in the following decade and developed into a comprehensive relationship. At the economic level, today's trade and development aid flows between the two markets are regulated by the 2016 EU-Southern African Development Community Economic Partnership Agreement (EU-SADC ECA), which took the place of the 1999 Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA). At present, the EU, as a bloc of 28 members, is South Africa's largest trading partner, accounting for 22% of total trade: while EU imports are overwhelmingly constituted by mineral products, especially gold, platinum and coal, South Africa imports are focused on machinery and transport equipment and chemicals (EEAS, 2023).

Political relations are driven by the 2007 Strategic Partnership Joint Action Plan (SP JAP), an agreement of bilateral cooperation structured around the two pillars of political dialogue, especially at the regional and continental level, and socioeconomic cooperation (Soko & Qobo, 2017). Rather than as a pragmatic deal, the SP JAP was primarily established as a value-based agreement rooted in a shared commitment to rule-based multilateralism, sustainable development, climate change mitigation, and environmental conservation, alongside "the economic principles of a social market economy, free and fair trade, and an equitable international economic order" (Council of the European Union, 2007, as cited in Landsber & Hierro, 2017; Soko & Qobo (2017, p.138)). Due to this approach, Soko & Qobo (2017, p.138) have argued that the partnership, alongside the TDCA and the ECA agreements, must be understood "as part of the unified logic of socialising South Africa into norms that have strong currency in the EU." As argued by Landsberg & Hierro (2017), the SP JAP was in fact an important step in South Africa's entrenchment into free-market ideology.

Multiple factors have influenced the strategic nature of the partnership over the years. At the time of its establishment, the EU was particularly interested in South Africa's strategic geographical location and its endowment with natural resources, besides its emerging market for value-added goods; on its part, South Africa was driven by the necessity to re-establish international relations and regain access to the European market after years of isolation

imposed by anti-apartheid economic sanctions (Fioramonti & Kotsopoulos, 2015). While, at the beginning of the partnership, the EU held a position of considerable strength compared to South Africa, over the last decade, this relation has shifted with relevant political, ideological and economic implications. Due to tensions between the two sides and the rapidly changing power dynamics that have repositioned South Africa in the international political landscape, the partnership has relatively lost importance, turning into more of a political battleground rather than a forum for mutually beneficial cooperation (Landsberg & Hierro, 2017). This is particularly signalled by the fact that over the last decade, only one high-level EU-South Africa high-level summit has occurred (in 2018), although it should take place annually by agreement.

From the South African perspective, the relationship with the EU still retains a certain degree of relevance, as it guarantees access to development aid and a consistent flow of investments from EU companies, besides strategic cooperation in critical areas such as peace and security, sustainable development and trade. On the one hand, about 70% of total donor aid to South Africa comes from the EU, especially through the work of the European Investment Bank (EIB), which since 2007 has financed priority infrastructure and climate change mitigation projects, as well as the private sector and Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) (Landsberg & Hierro, 2017). On the other, the EU also constitutes South Africa's leading foreign investor, accounting for 48,8% of South Africa's FDI stock, especially in the finance, mining and manufacturing sectors (EEAS, 2023; Soko & Qobo, 2017).

Although the EU remains a strategic partner for South Africa, the importance of this relationship has been downsized as a result of burgeoning South-South economic and political cooperation, on the one hand, and of ideological tensions embedded in the historical legacy of EU-Africa relations. As a result of the EU's declining role in global affairs, over the last decade, South Africa has increasingly gravitated towards emerging powers, becoming a formal member of the BRICS group in 2011 (Soko & Qobo, 2017). This geopolitical realignment is also reflected in ideological terms. In line with the ANC's (i.e. South Africa's governing party) historical connections with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist Third World movements, since the end of apartheid, South Africa has increasingly reinforced its image as a Global South country (Fioramonti & Kotsopoulos, 2015). To this end, it has embraced a typically Pan-African stance in re-orienting away from traditional international partners and occasionally adopting a relatively strong anti-Western rhetoric (Landsberg & Hierro, 2017). To be sure, South Africa has however also strategically leveraged its privileged relation with the EU to gain power in multilateral relations with other African countries and to build its image as a middle power in the global political scene.

Contrarily, the role of South Africa as a strategic partner has essentially increased from the EU perspective, as the bloc seeks to establish itself as a global actor in view of economic globalisation and transnational challenges. Being a potential ally in the pursuit of more norms-based governance structures, a regional leader with global influence and a resource-rich economic partner, South Africa is perceived by the EU as a bridge between the North and South, especially in the context of rapidly transforming geoeconomic and geopolitical dynamics. On the one hand, the EU aims to leverage the role of South Africa as a significant member of North-South groups, such as the G20 and the G7 + 5, to pursue its vision of global governance rooted in multilateralism and legally binding agreements (Fioramonti & Kotsopoulos, 2015). This is particularly true in regard to the EU's aspiration to strengthen its leadership role in climate change governance, as the next subsection will explore. On the other, as a prominent voice in African regionalism, South Africa is viewed by the EU as somewhat of a "legitimising force", a pivotal gateway for inter-regional relations with the continent (Landsberg & Hierro, 2017, p. 15). In particular, South Africa is considered a strategic entry point to regain the historically privileged relation with African countries, which was threatened by the rise of multipolarity, the consolidation of the BRICS group and a rise in anti-Western rhetoric (Soko & Qobo, 2017; Interview #3). However, this process has proven more difficult than expected, as the EU has increasingly struggled to accommodate South Africa's anti-Western rhetoric, arguably due to its bureaucratic, technical stance that rejects any kind of "emotional attachment" and is, therefore, ill-suited to deal with pan-African narratives of historical responsibility and solidarity (Landsberg & Hierro, 2017, p. 17).

Re-establishing an advantageous relationship with South Africa is especially crucial for the EU as it aims to build political and economic leadership in sectors that are strategically relevant in the burgeoning green economy and global energy transition (Pham, 2021). Politically, due to South Africa's image as one of Global South's most vocal actors in international climate governance. Economically, considering Africa's high endowment with mineral reserves and RE sources and South Africa's potential as a profitable export market for European low-carbon technologies and green services, such as solar panels, wind turbines and technical assistance. Moreover, in the aftermath of the ban on Russian energy products after the invasion of Ukraine, South Africa, together with the US, became the primary source to fill the EU energy supply gap, upscaling its role as a strategic partner for the Union (Reuters, 2022). The growing focus on green hydrogen in the two countries' strategic engagement (also reflected in the JETP) has been interpreted by some as a long-term strategy to shift this energy cooperation in a greener direction (Pandarum, 2023).

Due to these manifold interests, over the last four years Von der Leyen's Commission has purposefully attempted to strengthen its relationship with South Africa. As succinctly put by an EEAS member I interviewed, "we want to do everything to keep them on our side" (Interview #3). Against this background, the JETP is a crucial part of this attempt to re-establish a privileged relationship with South Africa, as it allows the EU to create significant opportunities for European investors and companies in the sector of RE and electric vehicles while laying the foundations for a long-term energy and trade cooperation based on green hydrogen and critical raw materials. The launch in 2024 of the Just and Green Recovery Team Europe, Initiative for South Africa, which absorbed the EU's contribution to the JETP, further consolidated this intention. Designed as part of Global Gateway, the EU's global infrastructure investment strategy in response to China's Belt and Road, the initiative aims to invest over \$280 million in grants to "support policy reforms on green recovery, unlock green investments and build a knowledge-based transition" (European Commission, 2023).

4.1.2.2. The JT Discourse in EU's Climate Diplomacy

As the "new space race" of achieving decarbonisation unfolds, with great and middle powers competing for strategic autonomy and global leadership in the green economy, the EU has gradually attempted to step up its ambition as an ideological and political leader in global climate change governance (Adelle & Kotsopoulos, 2017; Rumble et al., 2021, p. 4). Playing a spearheading role in the negotiation and ratification of the Kyoto Protocol represented the first milestone in the EU's roadmap towards global climate leadership. In the following years, the EU increasingly made climate change and environmental conservation a key topic of its strategic partnership. In the case of South Africa, the two parties agreed to join forces to tackle climate change already in the 2007 SP JAP and again in 2008 with the Declaration on Climate Change, strengthening their respective position in UNFCCC negotiations. However, although the EU and South Africa shared some common views, especially on the need for Global North countries to scale up climate finance for adaptation and technology transfers, the formal structures of this cooperation failed to gain traction in the years leading to COP15 (Adelle & Kotsopoulos, 2017, p. 230).

COP15 represented a negative turning point for the EU, as its political weight was drastically reduced when it was strikingly left out of the negotiation of the Copenhagen Accord. The Accord was in fact established in overt opposition to the EU's proposal to further enshrine the approach based on legally binding emission reduction targets into the UNFCCC framework (Adelle & Kotsopoulos, 2017). The fact that 5 out of its 10 strategic partners, including South

Africa, actively worked against the EU to destabilise its multilateral vision turned COP15 into a “diplomatic fiasco” for the European bloc ([Adelle & Kotsopoulos, 2017, p. 230](#)). In the case of South Africa, this explicit disagreement with the EU’s approach directly stemmed from the newly re-established political and ideological allegiance to the Global South (Fioramonti & Kotsopoulos, 2015). As a result, while South Africa and other emerging powers in the Global South took up a more proactive role in global climate governance, the EU’s position was considerably worsened (Fioramonti & Kotsopoulos, 2015).

In response to this setback, the EU resolved to adopt a more pragmatic, assertive approach to Climate Diplomacy in order to regain its ideological and material leadership in climate politics. The concept of Climate Diplomacy refers to the emergence of climate change as a “vector of foreign affairs”, increasingly driving countries’ international priorities and strategic relations ([Rumble et al., 2021, p. 8](#)). Initiated in 2011 through the joint publication of *Towards a Renewed and Strengthened EU Climate Diplomacy*, this new approach emphasised the need to make climate change a strategic priority in diplomatic dialogues and strategic partnerships, in order to use the EU’s significant development assistance as an instrument to promote sustainable development and decarbonisation (Bremberg & Michalski, 2024). This was finally crystallised into the European Green Deal (EGD), the EU’s flagship green-growth strategy launched by the Von der Layen Commission in 2019. Recognising both the EGD’s far-reaching geopolitical and economic implications and its potential as an instrument to execute the EU’s political and economic ambitions, the EGD was created with a clearly defined international dimension, designed to serve as the guiding framework for EU climate (or ‘green’) diplomacy efforts (Bremberg & Michalski, 2024).

With the ultimate strategic objectives of bolstering opportunities for green companies overseas, ensuring access to critical raw materials, and reinforcing its normative leadership in climate governance, the EU has expressed its commitment to leveraging diplomatic and financial tools, and bilateral, multilateral and unilateral initiatives to advance its green diplomacy. Bilaterally and multilaterally, the EU has been designing its international partnerships around the key pillars of climate action and decarbonisation, emphasising its commitment to assisting developing countries, especially African ones, in reaching and upgrading their NDCs (Karkare & Medinilla, 2023). On a different note, unilateral measures comprise instruments such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), proposed in 2021 to impose a ‘carbon tariff’ on certain carbon-intensive import goods, and the Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), mandating that imported products cannot originate from deforested land. These initiatives have generated tensions in the Global South, as they

essentially take the shape of climate sanctions in countries where rapid decarbonisation is not likely, therefore clashing with their industrialisation and socioeconomic growth goals (Karkare & Medinilla, 2023).

The consolidation of the new EU climate diplomacy approach occurred in parallel with the emergence, amplification and diffusion of the JT concept in the EU's external relations. Between 2015 and 2019, JT, which had already become a key principle of its internal energy transition policy, particularly in coal-dependent regions, was promoted internationally by the EU through the Silesia Declaration and the Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, which included South Africa as a partner (Pollock, 2022). The amplification of JT as a policy concept began in 2019, with the EGD adopting a definition of JT, as a process that “leaves no person and no place behind”, that gained immediate traction in the EU and beyond (Pollock, 2022). This principle was reflected in the EGD's external dimension, outlined in the 2021 *Council conclusions on Climate and Energy Diplomacy - Delivering on the external dimension of the European Green Deal*. Recognising that the energy transition “will have a significant impact on societies, economies and geopolitics globally”, the document emphasises the EU's commitment “to developing, and support, international initiatives to accomplish and highlight the economic opportunities of a just transition away from unabated coal towards climate neutrality” (Council of the European Union, 2021, p. 7,8). Moreover, by underlining the need to provide “targeted support to the most affected in order to support the transformation of their economies”, the Council also paved the way for a Just Transition-focused form of climate finance (Council of the European Union, 2021, p. 8). Since 2021, JT has become a central concept in the EU's external engagement, especially in its multilateral relations with the Global South, as demonstrated by the various JETPs stipulated over the last four years.

As emphasised by Pollock (2022), the proliferation of the JT concept in EU external policies was accompanied by a definitional ambiguity and flexibility determined by both endogenous and exogenous factors. Internally, it was the result of sometimes-contrasting perspectives over policy framing and intent among EU institutions and internal apparatuses, of limited efforts to explicitly prioritise a specific understanding of the concept, and of the limited attention given to the geopolitical implications of the term. Externally, this definitional flexibility can be attributed to the willingness to accommodate differing understandings of JT in order to facilitate country-specific JT policies and multilateral efforts. This argument will be particularly useful in the actor analysis, as it will help shed light on how the EU and its apparatuses conceptualised JT within the JETP policy process and how this conceptualisation has contributed to the related JT Conflict.

As this subsection revealed, the consolidation of the EU's strategic approach to Climate Diplomacy coincided with the integration of the JT concept in its foreign relations. These two processes did not occur independently from each other; rather, they are arguably closely intertwined. In seeking to strengthen its position of political and ideological leadership in climate governance, the EU has urged the Global South to scale up its decarbonisation efforts through what Bond (2024) defines as a "carrot-and-stick" form of climate diplomacy. On the one hand, more or less convenient climate financing packages, such as the JETP, are offered to Global South countries to keep fossil fuels in the ground and speed up the energy transition; on the other, the EU has imposed unilateral measures such as the CBAM that are often framed as unfair by developing countries, as they threaten to hinder their economic development. In particular, the Global South receives with scepticism a coercive demand to decarbonise coming from a historical contributor to climate change. In this context, Just Transition policies in EU external relations can be understood not only as a means to discursively accommodate Global South's claims in terms of socioeconomic development and CBDR-RC but also as an attempt to influence the parameters through which the global energy transition is perceived as just through the formulation of concrete JT Political Projects inside and outside of the EU.

Hence, the promotion and participation of the EU in the SA JETP can be read as an integral part of the EU's climate diplomacy effort towards two objectives. First, re-consolidate its relationship with South Africa, a country that holds a strategic position in the political economy of the global energy transition and in the global and regional geopolitical settings, in the aftermath of a decade where the African country has significantly turned away from the EU. Second, build political and ideological leadership in climate change governance by mainstreaming a specific conceptualisation of Just Transition through a neoliberal form of climate financing built on a libertarian approach to justice, market-based solutions, and unilateral governance.

4.1.3. Immediate context: the Political Economy of South Africa's Just Transition

The following subsection explores the historical evolution of South Africa's political economy, revealing how specific historical, material and ideological conditions have determined the development of coalitions of political and economic interests rooted in coal extraction, energy production and energy-intensive industries. It also discusses how South Africa has responded to growing demands of climate action, adopting the JT discourse to balance its internal and external socioeconomic and political interests. By doing so, I aim to uncover the linkages between South Africa's regime of accumulation, its ongoing socioecological crisis, and its

specific response to it, with the ultimate goal of highlighting the socioeconomic problems that the JETP is intended to address.

4.1.3.1. *South Africa's Socioecological Crisis within the MEC*

The material conditions of South Africa's political economy are strictly intertwined with the social, political and economic legacies of apartheid ((Baker, 2015). Scholars have argued that the history of colonialism and apartheid in the country has forged a form of racialised capitalism centred on the so-called Mineral-Energy Complex (MEC). Theorised by Fine and Rusomjee (1996, as cited in Malope, 2022), the MEC provides a theoretical framework to analyse South Africa's political economy and history through the lens of the mineral and energy sector. The MEC is defined as the historically specific regime of capitalist accumulation that gave rise to a wide range of economic, political and social phenomena way beyond the boundaries of the mineral and energy sector, underpinning the “exploitative, class- and race-based development” of the South African economy (Ashman, *The Evolving Structure of South Africa's Economy*, 2023). As argued by Baloyi et al. (2022), the country's development trajectory is in fact indivisible from the historical exploitation of the country's natural coal endowment and black (re)productive labour.

The origin of this system can be traced back to the late 19th century when foreign capital began investing in the coal-based energy sector to meet the energy demands of the gold and diamond mining operations conducted by white settlers. In order to access cheap labour for mining purposes, the early Dutch and British colonies imposed a tax regime in combination with systematic practices of land dispossession to force black men to work in the mines (Baloyi et al., 2022). As Williams (2018) explains, the development of coal and mining became interdependent: the mining industry expanded due to its reliance on coal energy, while the coal sector thrived on mining's increasing demand for energy.

After the Union of South Africa was created in 1910, the colonial state played a pivotal role in reinforcing the MEC by investing in key energy and transport infrastructures to support the energy-intensive industrial sector developing within the MEC (Malope, 2022). The formation of the Electricity Supply Commission (ESCOM), later renamed Eskom, was a direct result of the 1922 Electricity Act passed by the white-led government. In its early years, ESCOM focused on building coal-fired power stations, taking advantage of South Africa's abundant coal reserves. By the 1940s, Eskom had become the main supplier of electricity in the country, playing a key role in supporting South Africa's rapid industrialisation (Malope, 2022).

Throughout the apartheid era, which began in 1948 with the formal institutionalisation of the racist, white-suprematist segregation system, the MEC was further entrenched in the South African development trajectory, engendering a “racialised hegemony of coal” (Kalt, 2024, p. 8). This system was heavily reliant on the role of ESCOM, which had become by then a vertically integrated state monopoly, buying coal directly from Western-owned mining companies and managing the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity (Malope, 2022; Williams, 2018). ESCOM was tasked with supplying cheap electricity to white urban areas, and especially to white farmers who had played a central role in the 1948 elections, systematically excluding non-white communities from basic energy access. With ESCOM providing “cheap electricity from coal mined by ‘cheap’ black workers to white-owned mining and industrial capital”, the state actively promoted the expansion of steel, iron, metal, and chemical industries as part of the MEC (Kalt, 2024, p. 7).

In order to ensure the availability of ‘cheap’ black labour to sustain the MEC, the apartheid regime heavily relied on a racialised labour regime and migration system, which involved black men forcefully moving to urban areas to work in mines while leaving their families behind in the rural areas where they had been confined by the 1913 Native Land Act and the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act (Malope, 2022; Stull et al., 2016). In addition, the apartheid government implemented strict job reservation laws that allocated specific job categories exclusively to white workers, relegating black workers to low-skilled, poorly paid positions in the mining sector. High education opportunities and formal unionisation were also made impossible for black South Africans, ensuring a workforce that was largely unskilled and easily exploitable. Due to this high degree of labour segregation and exploitation, mineworkers, alongside transport and manufacturing workers, were at the forefront of the anti-apartheid struggle (Williams, 2018). Black organised labour played in fact a crucial role in the liberation movement, as explained below.

The 1970s witnessed an extraordinary state-led expansion of energy production, with the construction of power stations and the further development of existing mines (Malope, 2022). These years saw the internationalisation of the MEC: having secured the national market through their privileged relation with ESCOM, private mining companies turned to the global market. Railways and port infrastructures were consequently further developed to allow the mass exports of coal and other mineral resources (Williams, 2018). Meanwhile, due to the high return on investment related to the MEC, industrial strategies to diversify the economy beyond the mining and energy sector were scarcely considered (Mohamed, 2018). The 1970s were somehow the peak of the apartheid-led MEC. Internally, the apartheid government was

confronted with the emergence of a growing militant trade union movement, which began with the Durban Moment in 1973 when over 60,000 black workers went on strike to protest their low wages (Thompson, 2014). Internationally, South Africa began being isolated as a result of increasing condemnations of the apartheid policies (Thompson, 2014).

Throughout the 1980s, the crisis of the apartheid regime erupted. Electricity prices underwent sharp increases as a result of Eskom's high expenditures, raising energy demand and international sanctions. To protect the MEC, at a time when global trends were shifting towards the liberalisation of state-owned power utilities, Eskom and the apartheid government diverged by maintaining state control of the energy sector and refusing to liberalise prices (Malope, 2022). Meanwhile, anti-apartheid sanctions had the unintended consequence of reinforcing the MEC. On the one hand, the embargo on oil imports led to the innovation of coal-to-liquid technologies to circumvent it (Kalt, 2024). On the other, sanctions, together with the internal crisis of the apartheid regime, precluded any serious effort of economic diversification into non-MEC sectors. During this time, Eskom started a massive electrification programme for black communities and spearheaded the reform of industrial relations to guarantee its own survival in case of an ANC takeover (Malope, 2022). In 1991, after the ban on the ANC and the South African Communist Party was lifted, a formal Tripartite Alliance was established between COSATU, the newly formed black labour union, and these two parties (Malope, 2022). COSATU, whose major affiliates were unions strictly connected to the MEC, namely the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), played a crucial role in mobilising workers through its organisational structures to negotiate the transition to democracy (Williams, 2018).

After the end of apartheid in 1994, the now-ruling ANC opted to uphold the MEC and use it to build consensus among a small group of black citizens rather than embark on diversifying the country's economy into employment-creating industries. Overall, the negotiated democracy transition left untouched the basic power structures of the apartheid socio-political regime entrenched in the MEC (Swilling et al., 2016). In turn, white capital contributed to the emergence and inclusion of a new small black elite, made up of former union leaders and political activists, into the existing accumulation regime (Ashman et al., 2011). Leaving behind the Marxist/Leninist discourse that characterised its liberation struggle, in 1996, the ANC adopted the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) Programme, clearly signalling its intention to stimulate socioeconomic development within the limits and rules of the Washington consensus. To be sure, major steps forwards were made in improving non-white South Africans' livelihood and ending racial discrimination in the management of the economy

through the enactment of policies such as the 2003 Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE). However, the dominant approach to these issues was always in line with the neoliberal dogma of market-driven growth rather than with the radical claims of economic redistribution made during the apartheid struggle.

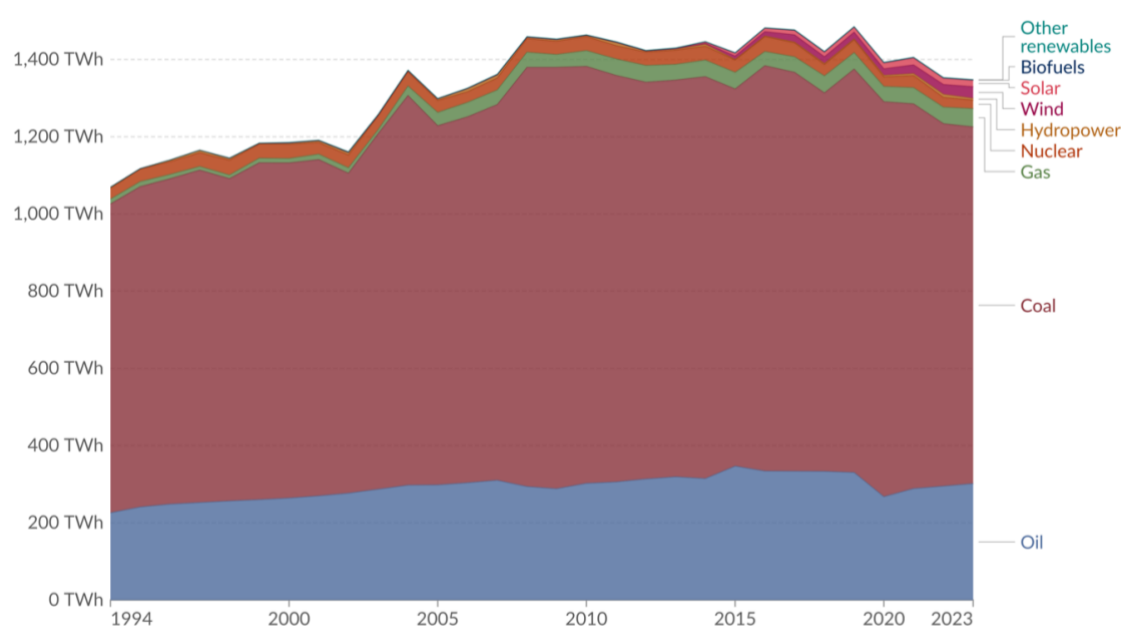
Meanwhile, the consensus of the black majority was maintained via a social compact rooted in non-developmental welfarism: massive welfare grant programmes were implemented to lift people out of poverty and extend consumerism to the emerging black middle class (Swilling et al., 2016). Extremely low electricity tariffs and massive grid expansion in underserved black communities, under the banner of ‘Electricity for All’, were also instrumental in this process of consensus-building (Kalt, 2024). These measures were funded by the rapid financialisation of South Africa's economy which allowed the government to take out international and domestic debt for its macroeconomic policies (Swilling et al., 2016).

Due to its central role in the ANC's development plan, alongside its attractiveness as a borrower of international and domestic capital, Eskom escaped privatisation and unbundling, conserving its position as a state-owned monopoly, in contrast to other formerly state-owned enterprises within the MEC. Throughout the following years, Eskom continued providing cheap coal-based electricity to households and growing mineral sectors despite rising concerns over the enterprise's generation capacity and financial sustainability (Muller, 2023). As explained by Swilling (2024), Eskom urged the government to authorise the construction of new power stations to address these concerns, but the GEAR Programme dictated that these should be built by black-owned businesses. For this to be feasible, electricity prices needed to rise, which would have threatened exports dependent on cheap energy. As a result, new power stations were not built. This, alongside rapidly growing demand, decreasing generation capacity of ageing power plants, mismanagement practices and corruption cases, caused the beginning of South Africa's energy crisis in 2007 (Swilling, 2024). Since then, the country has experienced scheduled power cuts that have increasingly worsened over the last years, despite the \$ 32 million debt taken up by Eskom to tackle the crisis (Price, 2022). Moreover, electricity tariffs quadruplicated, raising new concerns over energy poverty in the country (Swilling et al., 2016). In response to load shedding and to South Africa's commitments to emission reduction (which are explored below), in 2011, the government introduced the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REI4P), an initiative aimed at increasing generation capacity through private sector investments in renewable sources (Malope, 2022). This programme, in combination with the energy crisis and other efforts to

decarbonise the country's energy mix, has represented a first decisive step away from the hegemony of MEC.

To this day, however, the MEC remains pervasive in South Africa's political economy and development trajectory, as it intertwines with energy security, trade balances, employment rates and political power. Coal constitutes 74% of South Africa's total primary energy supply and 90% of the country's electricity is still generated by Eskom's coal-fired power plants (Baker et al., 2019, as cited in Price, 2022) (see Table 4). Overall, 94% of the country's energy comes from fossil fuels, making South Africa the world's 10th largest GHG emitter per capita (Baker, 2015). Furthermore, MEC-related goods constitute the core of the country's exports, with precious stones and metals, mineral fuels, ores, and raw and refined metals representing about 60% of total exports in the trade value (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2024). This number is even larger considering export products related to the capital-intensive industries dependent on the MEC, such as the iron and steel industry and the chemical and plastic industry. In addition, as of 2019, approximately 100,000 workers were employed in the sector of South Africa's coal-fired electricity; this number rises to over two million when considering the overarching mining sector and the coal-value chain (McNamara, 2024). The contemporary MEC also has a sociodemographic aspect that further enshrines coal dependency into South Africa's contemporary system of accumulation: to this day, the coal industry is one of the few economic sectors in which the majority ownership is held by black South Africans, granting it considerable political influence among historically black-dominated political parties such as the ANC and the EFF (van Staden, 2024)

Table 4. Energy consumption by source (1994-2023), South Africa. Source: OurWorldInData.org



As several scholars have noticed, the inability and unwillingness to eradicate the MEC from South Africa's political economy have significantly contributed to the country's multiple (and intertwined) socioecological crises (Baloyi et al., 2022; Swilling et al., 2016). These challenges encompass climate change, environmental degradation, unemployment, inequality and poverty. First, the MEC is overwhelmingly responsible for South Africa's environmental degradation, resource depletion and contribution to climate change. Mining and energy are the largest emitting sectors in the country, with Eskom alone accountable for 40% of the country's emissions (Price, 2022). These sectors's emissions make South Africa the world's 14th-largest emitter and Africa's first-largest emitter (Baker, 2015). Moreover, 60% of the country's land is ecologically degraded, as a result of the MEC's extractive practices and apartheid's forced confinement of high densities of black people in small rural areas (Mani et al., 2021; Stull et al., 2016). In addition, climate change has been causing unusual weather variability, water stress, and catastrophic events, such as the 2023 floods. These conditions, along with air pollution, have considerably worsened the livelihoods of South Africans, causing food insecurity, climate migration and health issues (de Jong, 2023).

Second, the MEC contributes to structural unemployment and poverty, as it mostly comprises capital-intensive industries whose growth does not benefit the population in terms of employment opportunities and decent income earnings (Baloyi et al., 2022). Between 2008 and 2024, South Africa's unemployment has steadily increased, reaching a peak of 35% in 2021, one of the highest rates in the world, as a result of the MEC-related economic sector's inability to absorb new workers. This number rises to 45,5% in relation to youth unemployment (Statistics South Africa, 2024). Third, the MEC is controlled by a few major firms and individuals that either own or have preferential access to key assets and resources, such as minerals, land, water, and energy, often at discounted rates (Baloyi et al., 2022). In particular, the Energy Intensive Users Group (EUIG), a group of 27 companies in the mining and manufacturing sector, is responsible for over 40% of the country's total electricity consumption and has effectively lobbied for favourable energy policies, including shaping pricing and demand forecasts, and against climate policies (Swilling et al., 2016). Meanwhile, households consume only 20% of the country's energy, and 3.2 million households, particularly in informal settlements, utterly lack access to electricity and other basic resources and services (Malope, 2022; Price, 2022). Fourth, MEC-related sectors are highly financialised, meaning that they tend to invest in short-term financial speculation instead of productive activities (Baloyi et al., 2022). These last two points are considerable factors behind South Africa's high income and wealth inequality, with the top 10% owning about 85% of the country's wealth, while millions

of households, overwhelmingly black, struggle to afford energy and other basic services (Chatterjee et al., 2020). Fifth, the MEC is responsible for the country's highly spatially fragmented and unequal economy. Due to the MEC's spatial clustering around mines and power plants, 80% of South Africa's economic output is produced in 20% of its geographical space, namely in the regions of Mpumalanga, where coal mining and power generation are concentrated, Gauteng, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal (Baloyi et al., 2022). This, alongside the legacies of apartheid, has contributed to inefficient and unsustainable land use and to the unequal distribution of public services and infrastructure.

In conclusion, the development of South Africa's political economy is deeply rooted in the historical evolution of the MEC, a system shaped by the country's colonial and apartheid past. The MEC's dominance has not only defined South Africa's energy and industrial sectors but also perpetuated significant socio-economic disparities and environmental challenges. South Africa's socioecological crises are in fact strictly intertwined with the country's historical regime of accumulation and coalition of economic and political interests. South Africa's heavy reliance on the MEC constitutes a considerable challenge to the country's decarbonisation effort, as it threatens deeply rooted socioeconomic and political interests, on the one hand, and on the other, it risks exacerbating the current socioecological crisis. The emergence and consolidation of the JT discourse in the country, together with the establishment of the JETP, must be understood as a response to this complex framework of economic interests, apartheid legacies of inequality, and political influence. Therefore, the analysis of JT Political Projects within the South African context cannot overlook their connection to the MEC and to historically specific relationships of forces. The next section investigates how South Africa has responded to its multiple ecological and socioeconomic crises by increasingly integrating JT discourses into its climate action commitments.

4.1.3.2. Just Transition in South Africa's Climate Action

Acknowledging the contribution of the country's coal-based carbon-intensive economy to global warming, the government of South Africa has pledged in international forums to contribute to global climate change mitigation by reducing emissions. At the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, then-President Jacob Zuma pledged that South Africa would cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 34% by 2020 and 44% by 2025, marking a move towards integrating RE into the nation's energy portfolio (Baker, 2015). A series of documents published by the administration in the following year, notably the National Climate Change Response Green Paper and the New Growth Path (NGP) strategy, emphasised the potential of

the ‘green economy’ in mitigating climate change while driving job creation and infrastructure development (Malope, 2022). Significantly, as noted by Malope (2022), the NGP’s mention of the need for an ‘equitable transition’ foreshadowed the emergence of the JT discourse over the next couple of years.

To enact the country’s climate action commitment and green growth project, in 2011 the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) introduced the REI4P, a programme designed to foster the development of South Africa’s RE sector by allowing private independent power producers (IPPs) to participate in the market by selling electricity to Eskom at a bidding price (Swilling et al., 2016). This first energy diversification project, combined with a strong narrative around green growth and green jobs by the government, generated divergent opinions among stakeholders and scholars. Mainstream NGOs, such as Greenpeace Africa, and RE advocacy and lobbying groups welcomed the initiative as a big step towards sustainable development (Malope, 2022). Nonetheless, Swilling et al. (2016), among several other critics, have expressed concerns over a market-led transition strategy in which innovation is driven by global investors in response to supply shocks, instead of one proactively led by state-linked development bodies. Similarly, organised labour, especially NUMSA, attempted to interdict the initiative, arguing that a privately owned RE sector would not benefit communities and would result in the loss of tens of thousands of jobs within the power sector (Malope, 2022).

2011 was also the year when the JT concept was first introduced in the South African climate change debate. The term made its appearance when COSATU’s Central Executive committee adopted a Policy Framework on Climate Change (Malope, 2022). As a member of ITUC, which, as shown in Section 1.2, was at the forefront of the term’s internationalisation, COSATU arguably saw the potential of JT discourse to articulate South African workers’ interests in the face of the country’s decarbonisation efforts. One year later, at the 9th National Congress, NUMSA supported the resolution by urging the creation of a socially-owned RE sector in opposition to privatisation through the REI4P (Malope, 2022). Over the following years, the JT concept gained currency in South Africa in the context of the REI4P debate, especially due to NUMSA upholding it to advocate for a transition that would protect the interests and needs of black working-class communities who rely on formal and informal jobs within the MEC and who are the most vulnerable to climate change effects.

The South African government first embraced the JT concept under Ramaphosa’s administration in 2019, specifically in the DMRE’s Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), where the importance of a JT for MEC workers is emphasised, and in the Roadmap for Eskom, which put

forwards a broader definition. The latter in fact frames JT as a “vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy” in line with NGOs Climate Justice Alliance’s definition (CJA in DPE, 2019, as cited in Malope, 2022). In addition, at the 2018 jobs summit, the government agreed to establish a Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) mandated to oversee the country’s JT through stakeholder engagement.

Since then, the popularity of the terms has grown rapidly, adopted by scholars, businesses, NGOs, unions, and development institutions, and has been institutionalised into South Africa’s climate response. In 2015, South Africa had submitted its first NDCs under the Paris Agreement, committing to limit annual emissions to 614 million tonnes of CO₂ (MtCO₂). In preparation for the 2021 COP26 in Glasgow, South Africa released an updated NDC, in which it pledged to further reduce its annual greenhouse gas emissions to 398-440 MtCO₂ by 2030t. Significantly, this document does not only acknowledge the importance of a JT; rather, it fully incorporates it into South Africa’s climate action (Republic of South Africa, 2021). Underscoring, on the one hand, South Africa’s challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality, especially in light of climate change’s impact, and, on the other, the potential of “low-carbon development” for the country, the revised NDC argued that “a well-resourced just transition strategy will be needed to shift to low-carbon technologies, to maximise benefits and minimise adverse impacts on communities, workers and the economy” (Republic of South Africa, 2021, p. 4). The document remarkably posits that, to implement such a transition, international cooperation in the form of concessional finance, is required and expected. Drawing a straight line between the JT concept and the UNFCCC’s CBDR-RC principle, the document argues that the extent and pace of South Africa’s decarbonisation would be heavily dependent on the financial support available. Therefore, by officially incorporating JT in its NDCs and requesting developed countries to partially finance its JT, South Africa has intentionally paved the way for the establishment of the JETP, which, in fact, was announced not even two months after the release of the updated NDCs.

An important element emerges from this short overview that is particularly significant for this work because of its terminological and thematic implications. In South Africa, JT discourse has evolved in close relation to the material and ideological conditions of the national energy system, given the MEC’s repercussions over the country’s socioeconomic fabric. Therefore, as revealed by the documentary analysis, the South African government and several (but not all) South African stakeholders prefer to speak about a Just Energy Transition (JET), rather than only a JT. This is perfectly in line with the general trend (as already explained in Section 1.3),

in effect among political and academic circles, of using the concept mainly in relation to the decarbonisation of the energy system. However, in the South African case, this specific conceptualisation has surged to a relatively high degree of institutionalisation since it has directly informed domestic and international policies, including the JETP. There are two implications of this inherent connection between JT and energy policies that are particularly relevant for the remainder of this analysis. First, from this moment on, the terms JT and JET will be used interchangeably, except in those rare cases where it is explicitly stated the opposite. Second, in light of this thematic interrelation, the process analysis will necessarily touch upon significant developments in South Africa's energy policy in order to take into account their connection with and influence on the JETP process.

In conclusion, this subsection has provided an overview of the emergence of the JT concept within South Africa's organised labour, its diffusion through national energy and resource policies and its final consolidation and integration into the country's NDC. Significantly, the section also argued that, in the specific case of South Africa, the concept of JT has become irremediably tied to the field of energy policies, to the point of becoming (almost) interchangeable with that of JET. Considering this analysis, it could be argued that the South African government used the JT concept to articulate its material and ideological interests against the background of the global climate regime and its strategic relation with the Global North. However, this work is not interested in and does not have the necessary scope to assess the process through which this condensation of interests took place in the South African context over the decade of the concept's emergence. Rather, this work intends to analyse the configuration of forces and interests related to the specific case of the JETP.

To this end, the context analysis just conducted was fundamental in providing a detailed account of the multilayered spatial-historical conditions and institutional-economic structures underpinning the SA JETP. First, to provide the far-ranging context, the historical and ideological development of the global climate change regime was investigated, with a special focus on the specific climate finance model it has fostered and its related critiques. It was concluded that JETPs have emerged as a form of 'minilateral' North-to-South financial agreements in line with the dominant neoliberal approach to climate finance. Afterwards, the intermediate context provided a historical and strategic overview of EU-South Africa relations, illuminating the dynamic power relation and transforming material and ideological interests that have underpinned the two country's cooperation in climate mitigation and in the JETP.

First, I argued that this relation has been transformed by the material and ideological competition spurred by the low-carbon transition, and that, in this context, the JETP represents

an effort by the EU (and the other G7 members) to restore the centrality of an existing strategic relation. Second, I posited that, with this goal in mind, the EU has adopted the JT language in its external relations in order to combine Global South countries' justice claims on socioeconomic development and historical responsibilities with its own economic and political leadership ambition. Finally, the immediate context subsection focused on unpacking South Africa's socioecological crisis, its historical structural causes and the discursive-material answer articulated by the country's main actors in response to it. Unemployment, poverty, economic inequality, environmental degradation and resource depletion were identified as the most pressing issues which the JETP aims to address and were causally linked, through a historical perspective, to South Africa's dependency on the Minerals-Energy Complex. Against this background, I traced the emergence and consolidation of the JT concept in the country's political debate, arguing that this development is part of a narrative-building process through which the South African government has articulated conflicting domestic and international interests concerning global climate governance, climate finance, and Global North-South relations. Having explored the context of the SA JETP, the following section delves into the Process Analysis, offering a periodisation of the agreement's JT policy process and of the JT Conflict that unfolded in relation to it.

4.2. Process Analysis

The South African JETP represents a significant milestone in global climate governance and a critical juncture for South Africa's energy policy. This section reconstructs the dynamic process through which the JETP-related JT Conflict unfolded, highlighting its different phases and turning points and its connection to the broader debate on the ideological and material conditions of South Africa's energy system. This periodisation elucidates the shifts in focus, challenges encountered, and the socio-political dynamics that have shaped the JETP. The following subsections outline the key phases of this process, namely its negotiation and establishment, the investment phase, and the ongoing implementation phase.

4.2.1. Negotiation and establishment of the JETP (2021)

The period leading up to the formalization of the JETP was marked by foundational developments in both South Africa's domestic energy policy and the broader international climate framework. The Paris Agreement's emphasis on reducing carbon emissions resonated with South Africa's own growing recognition of the need to transition away from its coal-dominated energy sector. Domestically, this period saw the gradual development of policies

aimed at integrating RE into South Africa's energy mix. The 2019 IRP was a key document during this phase, outlining a vision for an energy transition that balanced economic growth with environmental sustainability. Significantly, in the IRP the DMRE announced its decision to speed up the closure of its 15 coal-fired power plants by 2050 (Vanheukelom, 2023). However, despite these advancements, the country's heavy reliance on coal remained a central challenge, both economically and socially. As highlighted in the Context Analysis, early discussions about a JT emphasised the need to mitigate potential negative impacts on coal-dependent workers and communities, setting the stage for what would later become a core focus of the JETP. In 2021, the establishment of the PCC played a pivotal role in stepping up South Africa's ambitions in terms of emission reduction. As a result of this new ambition, the updated NDC was the final necessary step to bridge South Africa's decarbonisation ambitions and global climate finance through a focus on JT.

From an international perspective, 2021 witnessed the establishment of a broader infrastructure agenda spearheaded by the G7 in the aftermath of the pandemic, arguably in opposition to China's geopolitical rise in climate and energy cooperation (van Staden, 2024). As highlighted in a report by the Union of Justice (2023), this agenda was initially established during the G7 summit in Britain in June 2021, where it was introduced as the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative, later rebranded as the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) during the 2022 G7 meeting. The G7 leaders' communiqué from the 2021 meeting laid out their vision for the JETP framework, emphasising the strategic mobilisation of private capital through DFIs and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs). This vision is based on the principle that "developing the global green finance market will help mobilise private sector finance and reinforce government policy to achieve our net zero commitments" (Union of Justice, 2023, p. 15). In line with the B3W, the EU developed its own global strategy for infrastructure project investments, known as the Global Gateway. Significantly, the JETP was immediately listed in the Global Gateway's project portfolio, although it was actually established before the strategy's announcement. This substantiates the argument that the JETP was designed to play a particularly decisive role in G7's strategy for the global energy transition.

The year 2021, therefore, saw the convergence of South Africa's internal needs and international ambitions with G7's strategic positioning in the race towards climate neutrality. In the same year, negotiations over the establishment of a climate finance partnership between the two parties began, advanced particularly by the UK, as the host of COP26. The EU, eager to jump on the bandwagon due to the reasons explored in Section 4.1.2, promptly joined the

negotiations. During this process, which was carried out in utter secrecy, negotiators mainly clashed about the financial terms of the agreement, with South Africa pushing for a larger share of grant finance over loans (Phillips, 2021)

The JETP was officially launched during the COP26 conference in Glasgow in November 2021. The international partnership saw the participation of South Africa, on the one hand, and, on the other, an International Partners Group (IPG) composed of the EU, the US, the UK, France and Germany. As explained in the Political Declaration jointly released by the signatories, the partnership was designed to support South Africa's transition from coal to cleaner energy sources, through an initial climate finance commitment of \$8.5 billion over the next 3-5 years, made up of multilateral and bilateral grants, concessional loans, guarantees and private investments, and technical support (European Commission, 2021). As outlined in the Political Declaration, the JETP aims at (i) enabling the accelerated decarbonisation of South Africa's electricity system in line with the country's NDC, (ii) ensuring a JT for vulnerable workers, coal miners, women and youth, (iii) privatising and unbundling the electricity sector to service Eskom's debt, (iv) developing local value chains to benefit from the green economy, and (v) drive the creation of green, decent jobs through technological innovation and private investment (European Commission, 2021). South Africa and the IPG also committed to "explore additional sources of financing and mobilise or include additional international partners, to further support South Africa's ambition" (European Commission, 2021).

This first phase was characterised by a mix of optimism and scepticism. The announcement was hailed as a significant step towards a low-carbon economy and a model for international cooperation on climate finance. However, it also sparked immediate concerns regarding the adequacy of the financial package, the conditions attached to the funding, and national sovereignty. Critiques emerged from various stakeholders, including labour unions and environmental justice groups, who were concerned about the potential for job losses in coal-dependent regions and the implications of international conditionalities on South Africa's sovereignty. For instance, in the aftermath of the announcement, Julius Malema, leader of the radical-leftist party Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) suggested that the fact that the deal was initially announced by the government of the UK was a first signal of how the JETP would undermine South Africa's sovereignty (Phillips, 2021). Moreover, the fact that the JETP was mainly negotiated behind closed doors and that conditionalities linked to financial disbursements had not been disclosed sparked controversies among some civil society actors (Interview #5). The lack of widespread consultations with stakeholders in both the host and donor countries before the signing of the agreement was also perceived as evidence of the JETP

being ill-suited to enable a transformative JT (CJCM, 2022; COSATU, 2023). Retrospectively, Joanne Yawith, head of the JETP Secretariat (presented in the next section), described the approach taken in the beginning of the process towards stakeholder engagement as “overcautious”, acknowledging more information should have been shared with the general public (UN Climate Change, 2023).

It was in this first phase of the policy process, that divergent JT Political Projects started forming and gaining momentum among South African and international actors. As explained in the Context Analysis, the JT concept was not new in South Africa, as it had already informed policies over the past decade; however, the announcement of the JETP, with its central discursive focus on JT and its global relevance as a milestone in climate finance, played a pivotal role in catalysing social tensions into a manifest conflict and in bringing together social forces into concrete JT Political Projects.

4.2.2. Investment Phase (2022)

Following the JETP’s announcement, 2022 was marked by intense policy development and strategic planning. Together with its international partners, the South African government engaged in detailed negotiations to define the specific governance structures, projects and priorities under the JETP framework. The two main JETP governance bodies, the Presidential Climate Finance Task Team (PCFTT) and the JETP Secretariat (JETP-Sec) were established in this phase. In February, President Cyril Ramaphosa established the PCFTT with the mandate of assessing the JETP finance package to advise the Presidential Cabinet’s Inter-Ministerial Committee on its structure, affordability, and regulatory alignment (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, 2022b). The PCFTT also served as the formal negotiating counterpart to the IPG, as it was tasked with engaging with partner countries, finance institutions, and the private sector to turn the pledges made in the Political Declaration into a concrete climate finance pathway (Fakir, 2023). Daniel Mminele, the former CEO of a multinational banking and financial services conglomerate, was appointed to lead the task force. The JETP-Sec, funded by the Climate Investments Fund and headed by Joanne Yawitch, former CEO of the National Business Initiative in South Africa, was established in May 2022 and tasked with coordinating the interests of the host country and the IPG into a coherent Investment Plan (IP) (COP26 Presidency, 2022b).

Meanwhile, in early 2022, the government announced a series of policy reforms in the electricity sector in line with the JETP’s aim of unbundling and privatising Eskom. The main action in this direction was the partial removal of licensing requirements for electricity

generation, which allowed Independent Power Producers (IPP) to generate electricity below 100 MW and sell it to Eskom to be injected into the transmission grid (Blissett, 2023).

In June, the Presidential Climate Commission, published *A Framework for a Just Transition in South Africa*, in which the definition of a South African JT, its guiding principles, and key policy areas were formally outlined. The document explicitly refers to the JETP, stating that the Commission is set to assist the PCFTT to make sure that the proposed framework is embedded in the agreement (PCC, 2022). In the same month, the first six-month update on the JETP was released by the COP26 Presidency. Besides establishing a timeline for the release of a JETP Investment Plan (JETP IP), the document welcomed the initiatives already undertaken by the South African government to create an enabling environment for the JETP (COP26 Presidency, 2022b). Significantly, the update provided clarification over the key financial entities involved in the delivery of the JETP. From the EU side, this included the Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB), alongside a dozen of other DFIs and MDBs under the control of the other signatories and the World Bank Group (COP26 Presidency, 2022b).

In November, right before COP27 in Egypt, President Ramaphosa announced the sign-off of the JETP-IP, a 216-page document detailing the investment needs, strategy and timeline for the South Africa JT for the 2023-2027 period. The PCC and the IPG welcomed the JETP-IP, which was also publicly endorsed by the Global Energy Alliance for People and the Planet, an organisation of global philanthropies, and by the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ), a global coalition consisting of financial institutions (PCC, 2022a)

. The JETP-IP outlined South Africa's JET investment needs, amounting to \$98 billion, and divided them into three sectors – electricity, new energy vehicles and hydrogen – and five horizontal priorities – infrastructure, planning and implementation capacity, skills development, economic diversification and innovation, and social investment and inclusion (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, 2022a). Moreover, skills development and municipal capacity were also identified as cross-cutting sites of investment. Significantly, JT is delineated as a horizontal priority encompassing all three sectors. The JETP-IP also clarified the nature of each signatory's contribution, summarised in Table 5, and the allocation of these among the identified priority sectors. In terms of the type of funding, grants amount to less than 4%, while concessional and commercial loans amount to respectively 62% and 17% of the total (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, 2022a). Providing 12% of the total financing, the EU is the third largest contributor after the Climate Investment Fund and the UK. However, only 3% of the EU's climate finance is constituted by grants, while the bulk comes in

concessional loans. Importantly, the financial risk for concessional and commercial loans is carried by the South African state in order to de-risk investments for the private sector (Blissett, 2023). Beyond the \$ 8.5 billion, The European Investment Bank also made a €200 million loan to the South African Standard Bank for on-lending to eligible onshore wind and solar photovoltaic projects in South Africa (European Commission, 2022a).

Table 5.. Sources and financing instruments of the IPG offer (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, 2022a)

US\$ millions	Grants /TA	Concessional Loans	Commercial Loans	Guarantees	Total (source)
CIF/ACT (\$500m to leverage an additional \$2.1bn)	50	2 555	0	0	2 605
European Union – EIB	35	1 000	0	0	1 035
France	2.5	1 000	0	0	1 002.5
Germany	198	770	0	0	968
United Kingdom	24	0	500	1 300	1 824
United States ¹⁴¹	20.15	0	1 000	0	1 020.15
Total (instrument)	329.7	5 325	1 500	1 300	8 455

According to the JETP-IP, the IPG \$8.5 billion offer, which only covers around 10% of South Africa's JT financing needs, is allocated for the most part (98,8%) to the electricity sector and its priority areas. Of this share, 85% goes to infrastructure – i.e. the decommissioning of coal-fired plants, the expansion of the transmission and distribution grid and the development of new generation capacity through RE –, 8% to planning and implementation capacity to create enabling conditions for investments, and the remaining to skill development for workers and communities, economic diversification in coal-dependent Mpumalanga region, and social investment and inclusion (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, 2022a).

According to the twelve-month update published in November 2022, the remaining sum is expected to be reached by catalysing private and blended finance from local and international private sector capital (COP26 Presidency, 2022a). To this end, the PCFTT and the IPG started engagements with philanthropies on the potential and specifics of their support, especially on the 'just' components of the transition. Several international and domestic private sector organisations have also been engaged, including DFIs, MDBs, and NGOs. The document also framed some policy interventions made by the South African government over the last six months as central support to the implementation of the JETP. In particular, it mentions the complete removal of the licensing threshold for private investments in electricity generation

projects, a significant lowering of local content requirements for near-term RE investments, and the privatisation of electricity generation and transmission through the REI4P (COP26 Presidency, 2022a).

In response to widespread criticisms about the lack of significant stakeholder engagement during the JETP negotiation process, 2022 and 2023 were marked by extensive consultations carried out by the PCC, with efforts made to include voices from labour unions, environmental organizations, and communities directly impacted by the transition. In this sense, the JETP twelve-month update emphasised that the JETP-IP was the result of a “country-owned, country-led engagement process, which drew on South Africa’s extensive knowledge base amongst policymakers, academia, civil society, and business” (COP26 Presidency, 2022a). However, doubts were raised about these consultations’ ability to meaningfully influence policies. Instead, labour organisations and some NGOs have argued that consultations were used as a box-ticking exercise to legitimise the JETP process and create consensus around a narrow, technical understanding of JT (McNamara, 2024). According to McNamara (2024), JETP multistakeholder workshops and community engagements were largely impacted by technopolitical, policy-focused, middle-class NGOs, including national economic and social research bodies and national subsets of international organisations, such as WWF SA. Instead, justice-centred contributions of more identitarian organisations, such as labour unions and radical NGOs, were marginalised in final reports, despite being acknowledged by the PCC.

As the specifics of the JETP began to take shape through the IP, public debates intensified, fueled also by the mistrust in the consultation process. Concerns over the balance between grants and loans, the pace of the transition, and the potential for exacerbating existing social inequalities led to calls for policy adjustments of different degrees. First, the sheer prevalence of loans over grants has been interpreted by some as evidence of the nature of the JETP as a form of green structural adjustment, where climate finance is used to impose financial subordination and privatisation reforms (Blissett, 2023; Lenferna, 2023). According to these critics, loans risk undermining South Africa’s sovereignty in two ways. On the one hand, since they rely on de-risking through risk-taking by the state, they can worsen the country’s financial stability and deepen its indebtedness. On the other, as loans are denominated in foreign currency, debt repayment might become an issue in case of a depreciation of the Rand. Shortly after COP27, the South African Climate Justice Coalition, a grassroots movement for social and climate justice, marched to the National Treasury to demand an “end to the prevailing climate agenda of privatisation and austerity” (Climate Justice Coalition, 2022, Lenferna, 2023).

Second, addressing the relevance given in the agreement to private sector investments, some scholars and activists accused the JETP-IP of fostering a “disorderly transition driven entirely by market force” which would end up overwhelmingly benefiting those who already have access to wealth, land and capital – i.e. individuals and corporations tied to the MEC (Swilling, 2022, as cited in cited Lenferna, 2023). Instead, they argue, the IP should allocate more resources to testing social ownership models of RE projects and to tackling energy poverty. For instance, Malope (2022) posits that RE projects are a necessary but not sufficient condition for a JT, as ongoing projects by private (often foreign-owned) RE companies have so far failed to ensure decent job creation, poverty eradication and sustainable economic development.

The case of the decommissioning of the Komati power plant in Mpumalanga also gave rise to criticisms. Although the project was not linked to the JETP, the overt failure to ensure a JT for the plant’s workers and community considerably contributed to the public perception of the government’s and international community’s inability to conduct a country-wide JT, thus indirectly influencing the debate over the JETP (UN Climate Change, 2023).

Significantly, one of the strongest critiques of the JETP came from Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy Gwede Mantashe, who, ahead of COP27, accused the IPG of using South Africa as a ‘guinea pig’ for its energy transition ‘experiments’ and, in general, developed countries of forcing foreign concepts onto African countries (Magubane, 2022). Mantashe also criticised the IPG members for presenting the agreement in better terms than those negotiated and for hypocritically dictating a shift away from coal while increasing their own coal production in the face of Russia’s gas embargo (Magubane, 2022). Similarly, in the same period, Malema called on EFF members to lead communities and workers to reject the JETP, emphasising that South Africa needs a practical energy policy that protects jobs and the environment without being influenced by the West (Economic Freedom Fighters [@EFFSouthAfrica], 2022).

4.2.3. Implementation Phase (2023-2024)

The transition from planning to implementation began in 2023. To facilitate the implementation process, in January The Presidential Cabinet established the Just Energy Transition Project Management Unit (JET PMU).¹ However, the publication of the JETP-Implementation Plan

¹ It is unclear whether the JET PMU has been established in substitution of the PCFTT. The fact that information about the PCFTT is unavailable on the internet and that the last JETP update, unlike the previous

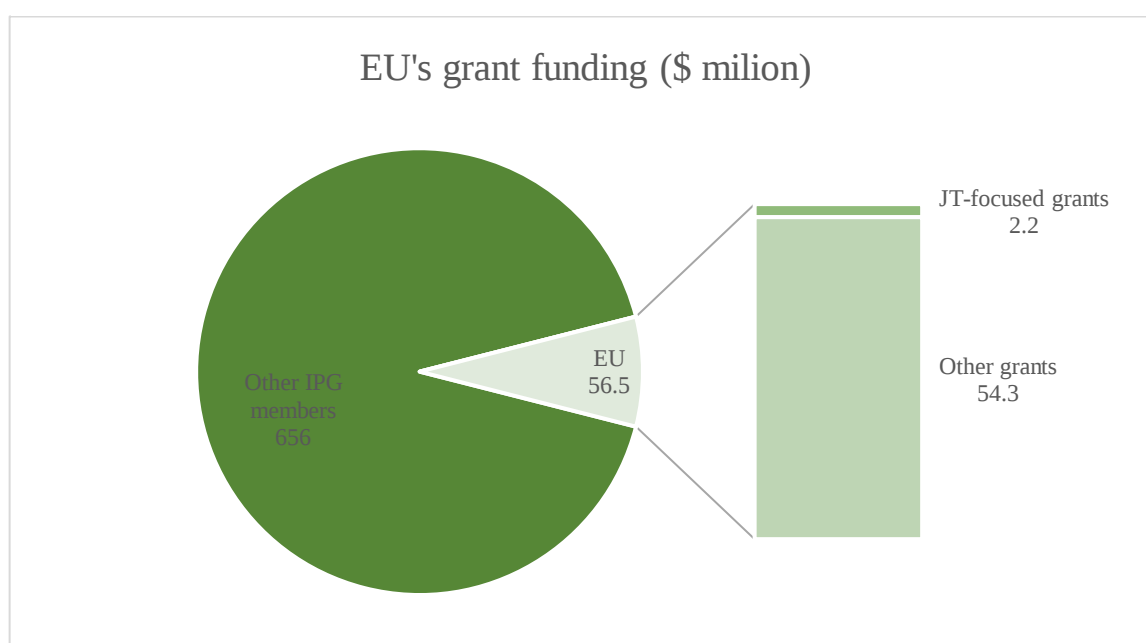
(JETP-IP2), initially scheduled for the beginning of 2023, was delayed due to pressures by labour and civil society organisations to hold serious stakeholder consultations. After consultations were eventually carried out by the PCC in early 2023, the final draft of the JETP-IP2 was put together by the PMU and finally approved in November by the Cabinet. The JETP-IP2 outlines the current state of financing and provides updates on progress for each of the six established JET investment portfolios, i.e. electricity, Mpumalanga JT, new energy vehicles, green hydrogen, skills and municipalities.

In October, the Presidential Cabinet announced that Denmark and the Netherlands had joined the IPG, pledging an additional amount of \$333 million (Sguazzin, 2023a). Ahead of COP28, the IPG reiterated its commitment to the JETP and welcomed South Africa's energy policy reform that allowed for the development of new private renewable projects (European Union Delegation to South Africa, 2023). In the press release, the IPG announced an increase of the total IPG commitment to \$9.3 billion, thanks to scaled-up pledges by both foundational and new members, and a 116% increase of the grant financing from the previous amount committed at COP26, for a total of \$713 million (European Union Delegation to South Africa, 2023). Half of the funds had been committed as of the time the announcement was released, with a consistent portion spent on economic diversification, training and reskilling projects in Mpumalanga Province. The statement clearly emphasised the importance of grant funding for ensuring a JT and reiterated the importance of a JT approach to South Africa's decarbonisation. In this regard, the IPG also underlined the importance of engaging municipalities and communities to deliver timely results on the ground and increase energy access.

ones, is signed by the PMU instead of the PCFTT, is arguably proof that the role of the PCFTT has been considerably reduced, if not completely suspended.

In November, together with the JETP-IP2, the PMU also released a JET Progress Register, containing the record of JETP partners’ grants, with details on the sums, implementing actors and projects’ nature. This document is beneficial for understanding what kind of projects were funded by the EU and what organisations were tasked with implementing them (see Table 6). Out of the seven grants disbursed by the EU as of November 2023, three were specifically focused on the JT of the electricity sector and coal-dependent areas (JETP PMU, 2023). The largest grant, accounting for more than \$ 2 million, was allocated to five large South African civil society organisations, namely WWF SA, Green Cape, Democracy Works Foundation, Association for Rural Advancement, and Social Change Assistance Trust to “increase the

Table 6. EU grants over total grant funding. Elaboration of data from JET Grant Register and JETP Investment Plan



participation of South African CSOs in tackling climate change” (JETP PMU, 2023, p. 1). The other two JT grants were dispensed to the PCC to facilitate stakeholder engagement in coal-dependent areas and improve communication around the JT. The bulk of the remaining EU grant funding, which does not focus specifically on JT, aims at blending finance with loans from DFIs in support of infrastructure projects (\$ 37 million) and at increasing selected municipalities’ capability and capacity in the face of climate change (\$ 16 million). The release of the Grant Register was well received by civil society, which had been vocal about the lack of transparency about the allocation of JETP financial resources (Davies, 2024). However, media and civil society pointed out that 89 over 145 projects had already started by the time the JETP-IP2 was released, with some having begun even before the JETP Political Declaration

was made public. Moreover, the Register failed to bring clarity about the criteria and process of selection of projects and recipients of grants. These constataions further increased mistrust in the worthiness of PCC's consultations and in the transparency of the JETP process as a whole (Davies, 2024).

This phase involved the rollout of the first wave of JETP-funded projects, primarily focused on RE infrastructure, energy efficiency programs, and social initiatives aimed at supporting coal-affected communities. However, the implementation process quickly revealed a range of challenges, from bureaucratic delays to issues of governance and capacity within key South African institutions, such as Eskom. Implementation delays, uncertainties about the leadership of the JETP process, and disagreements within the government about the shift to RE led the centrist liberal Democratic Alliance (DA) to accuse the ANC for not treating the JETP with the "required urgency" (D. Bryant, 2023).

Arguably, the worsening of the energy crisis played a crucial role in this phase. Since the establishment of the JETP, blackouts had skyrocketed, with load-shedding hours increasing by 600% between 2021 and 2023 (Cowling, 2024). Perceptions about the causes of this deterioration are multifaceted. From a technical angle, some have argued that Eskom's overburdened transmission systems hindered the injection on the grid of the new electricity capacity brought along by the REIP4 and the removal of licensing requirements for electricity production (Vanheukelom, 2023). On a different note, South African civil society has also claimed that worsening blackouts are a direct effect, on the one hand, of criminality, corruption and sabotage at Eskom, and, on the other, of the export of high-quality coal overseas (Vazi, 2024). As a result of rising energy insecurity, opposition to coal phase-out and calls for a slowdown of Eskom's coal-plant-shutdown timeline mounted, with several social and political actors attributing the worsening power outages to the JETP. Electricity Minister Kgosisentsho Ramokgopa became the second member of the ANC-led government to criticise the JETP after Mantashe. Ramokgopa attributed the worsening power cuts to the closing of the Komati power plant (even though, as explained above, Komati's decommissioning project does not lie within the JETP scope), claiming that the shutdown was an "injustice" carried out "because someone gave us money and said 'decarbonise'" (Payton, 2023). In light of this, he urged the rest of its government to relook at the decommissioning schedule. Later, ANC Secretary General Kifile Mbalula accused the finance agreement of "decapacitating" South African generation capacity as it enticed the government to haphazardly shoot down plants to access funding (Sguazzin, 2023b).

In May 2023, Ramaphosa eventually confirmed that South Africa would slow down the shutdown plan in an effort to ensure its energy security first (Dludla, 2023). Speaking to the National Assembly, the President ensured that the transition would occur, but at South Africa's own pace and time, in order to take into account the needs of the South African people and the country's energy security. Significantly, the 2023 IRP published in December 2023 by the DMRE reinforced this position, emphasising the importance of ensuring energy security and reducing carbon emissions through a mix of 'clean coal', to be obtained through carbon capture and utilisation storage (CCUS), nuclear, natural gas, and RE. The approval of several offshore gas exploration projects by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE) further signalled the government's intention to diversify away from coal through a mix of (more or less) energy sources, rather than through a sharp transition to RE (Bradstock, 2023; Centre for Environmental Rights, 2024). This strategy has been heatedly contested by climate justice movements. Organisations such as the Climate Justice Charter Movement and the Life After Coal Campaign have vocally emphasised that delaying shutdowns and developing gas fields would prevent South Africa from reaching its climate targets and from reducing the negative health and environmental impacts of non-renewable energy sources (Interview #7).

Meanwhile, in October 2023 the National Assembly passed the Climate Change Bill proposed by the DFFE, which anchors climate change response into South Africa's law by setting mandatory mitigation and adaptation objectives and mainstreaming climate change governance, assessments, and responses at the provincial and local levels (The African Climate Foundation, 2023). While some NGOs, such as the African Climate Foundation, have welcomed the Bill, trusting it would provide a legislative framing and impetus for the implementation of the JETP, doubts remained about the government's level of ambition in tackling climate change.

Financial disbursement became another focal point of contention, particularly concerning the conditionalities attached to the funding and the lack of transparency on the JETP negotiation and implementation. Debates also focused on whether the financial support offered was sufficient and appropriately structured, which led to calls for a mid-term review or for the utter rejection of the agreement. In particular, the overwhelming prevalence of loans over grant finance was criticised by labour unions and radical NGOs as an instrument of new financial subordination (Interview #5). Throughout 2023 Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana raised the point in various multilateral and international fora that the financial support being proposed by JETP should include a significantly larger grant funding component (Fabricius, 2023). Arguably, the grant increase announced in the IPG's press release ahead of COP28, alongside

the reiterated support to a South African JT, was an attempt to contain the grievances surrounding the nature of the financial support and the failure of the Komati repurposing project. However, in October, NUMSA called for the suspension of the agreement, arguing it was threatening 51.000 jobs in the coal and power industries (Vanheukelom, 2023).

Due to heightening levels of contestation around the energy crisis, the speed and nature of coal phase-out, and the financial composition of the JETP, in the months leading to the 2024 national elections, the JT was mentioned less and less by political parties (Vazi, 2024). Even the ANC, which adopted the JT as a central concept and the JETP as a flagship project, only mentioned the JT twice in its 58-page election manifesto, linking it to the prioritisation of industrial growth and job creation for an inclusive, green economy (ANC, 2024). A similar approach was followed by ANC's main opponents, i.e. the DA, the EFF. The DA's manifesto did not mention either JT, decarbonisation or environmental protection; rather, it focused on the energy crisis, blaming the state-led generation and transmission system for load-shedding (Democratic Alliance, 2024). Although the EFF's manifesto also omitted references to the JT and was heavily centred on the load-shedding crisis, its proposed solutions differed drastically: clean coal and nuclear energy stood out as essential technologies to increase power generation and achieve decarbonisation at South Africa's own pace and scale (Economic Freedom Fighters, 2024). Interestingly, the proposed suspension of Eskom's privatisation and of all projects under the REI4P stood in clear contrast with the JETP objectives, alongside the establishment of a state-owned coal mining company to leverage the country's reserves for sustainable economic growth. The manifesto also called for the adoption of a strategy aimed at transitioning from a coal-dependent energy system to a 'fair' energy mix of sources comprising fossil, nuclear, and RE (Economic Freedom Fighters, 2024).

On May 29, 2024, South Africans went to the polls to elect a new National Assembly and provincial legislatures. For the first time since the end of apartheid, the ANC lost its absolute majority in parliament and was forced to form a government with competing forces, namely the liberalist DA and the conservative Inkhata Freedom Party and Patriotic Alliance (Kotze, 2024). In the aftermath of the electoral reshuffle, the establishment of the first coalition government since the end of apartheid brought some significant changes to the institutional landscape that are likely going to impact the JETP process. Under pressure from its new allies, Ramaphosa, who was re-elected for a third mandate, reduced the DMRE's mandate, splitting it into a Department for Mineral Resources and Petroleum Resources, and a Department of Energy, which now detains complete decision-making power over energy policy, and substituted the former head of DFFE with a DA's member (Hedley, 2024).

Overall, the three phases outlined above reveal the complex socio-political dynamics and challenges involved in South Africa's energy transition, as well as the ideological and material conditions shaping its evolution. Considering the centrality of the JT concept in the entire process, it is not surprising that the policy conflict unfolded through a heavily justice-oriented discourse from all actors involved. The negotiation phases highlighted tensions over coal dependency, the need for job protection, and the balance of sovereignty against international conditions. Critics, including local labor unions and political figures like Julius Malema, raised concerns about the lack of transparency in negotiations and the potential threats to South Africa's sovereignty, signaling early fractures in the consensus around the JETP. The investment phase further deepened these concerns, as significant progress was made in policy reforms, such as electricity privatization and renewable energy integration. The overwhelming reliance on loans over grants sparked accusations of green structural adjustment, while public consultations were deemed unfit to effectively influence the policy process. Critics also argued that the JETP might exacerbate social inequalities, benefiting already wealthy elites while marginalizing workers and coal-dependent communities.

The implementation phase has exposed practical challenges such as bureaucratic delays and governance issues, making visible the contradictions between the JETP and the ongoing energy crisis. Criticisms intensified over the pace of coal phase-out and the perceived negative impacts on energy security, with key government officials, including Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe, questioning the fairness and utility of the JETP. These challenges have led to increasing public scepticism, especially as blackouts worsened, and growing calls for slowing down the transition. In the following section, I will re-conduct these disparate arguments to specific actors involved in the JETP process, discussing how their JT discursive claims can be subsumed under and explained through specific JT Political Projects.

4.3. Actor Analysis

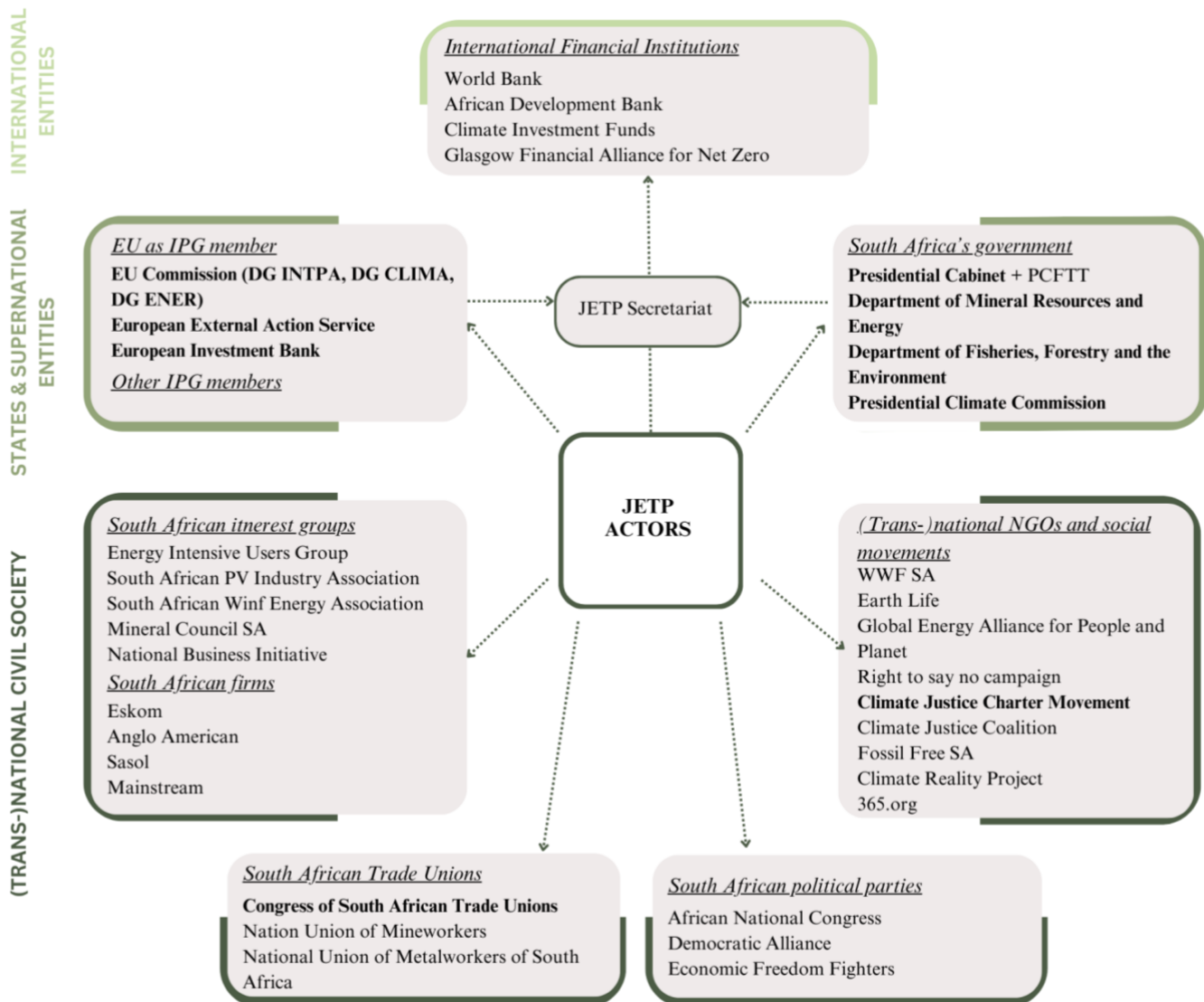
In this final part of the analysis, I outline the constellation of forces that formed within the JETP policy conflict. To this end, the first subsection maps out the relevant actors that got involved more or less directly in the JETP. The second subsection focuses on those among the selected actors that engaged the most with the concept of JT (for more details about the selection process, see Section 3.4.1.3.). I identify their JT discursive strategies by applying the JT Analytical Framework theorised in Chapter II and III, and contextualise them by explaining the ideological and material interests behind these strategies. Finally, the third subsection outlines the Just Transition Political Projects promoted by the investigated JETP

actors, i.e. the aggregations of discursive, material, and political strategies they presented as solutions to South Africa's socioecological crisis and JT needs.

4.3.1. Relevant actors in the JETP policy conflict

Figure 1 provides an overview of the actors involved in the JETP's policy conflict, divided into international institutions and organisations, states and supranational entities, and (trans)national civil society as proposed by Sum (2009, as cited in Caterina, 2017). International entities were showcased to provide a comprehensive picture of the actor constellation, even though they were not included in the analysis as explained in Section 3.3.1.3. The highlighted actors are those whose discursive strategies and JT conceptualisations were analysed using the JT analytical framework outlined in the same section of the Methodology.

Table 7. Map of actors involved in the South African JETP



4.3.2. JETP Actors' Just Transition Discursive Strategies

4.3.2.1. *The EU and its apparatuses*

The EU, as the rest of IPG members, has been a major player in the JETP process. This role is not only limited to coordinating and financing; rather, it widely extends to the dimension of policies. As the decision about which elements of the JETP-IP get funded and implemented ultimately falls on IPG members, the EU can be understood by all means as a policy actor in South Africa's JETP process, especially in relation to the energy sector and the JT, which are the areas it has funded the most (von Lüpke, 2023). Importantly, however, this role is not acknowledged nor legitimised by the South African political system.

The EU Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) have been the protagonists on the EU's side of the negotiation, formulation and implementation of the JETP. The Commission is the executive branch of the European Union, responsible for upholding EU treaties, formulating legislation, and monitoring the implementation of policies both internally and, increasingly over the past years, externally. For a long time after its establishment in 1992 with the Maastricht Treaty, the Commission had a marginal role in decision-making over foreign policy and international relations, which were considered the exclusive domain of EU member states. However, this dynamic has shifted since the installation of the von der Leyen's Commission in 2019. Throughout its five-year mandate, the Commission pursued a stronger role as a global geopolitical actor, especially by leveraging its economic power (Haroche, 2023). Von der Leyen's remarks at the launch of the JETP, in which she called the agreement "a global first" and a "template on how to support JT around the world" are a clear signal of this willingness to frame itself as a global player of the energy transition (European Commission, 2021, p. 2)

The Commission is composed of a high-level political wing, made up of the commissioners and their cabinets, and an administrative branch organised into policy departments, known as Directorates-General (DGs). The DGs work at the operation level to ensure the implementation of the Commission's political decisions and strategic orientation. In the case of the SA JETP, two DGs played a major role in the policy process: the DG for Climate Action (DG CLIMA), which has been the main negotiator and coordinator from the EU's side, and the DG for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), which has managed operations related to grant disbursement. The DG for Energy (DG ENER) also participated in the process with a marginal advisory role (Interview #1, #2, #7).

Since its establishment in 2010, the EEAS has been the EU's diplomatic service, tasked with managing the EU's foreign and security policies and supporting the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, a position held by Josep Borrell between the 2019-2024 mandate. Aiming to ensure the EU speaks with one voice on the global stage, the EEAS works with EU delegations around the world, coordinating diplomacy, crisis response, and defence strategies. Because of its somehow ambiguous position between the Commission and the Council, scholars have extensively debated on whether the EEAS is to be considered an extension of the Commission or an institutional competitor (Nugent & Rhinard, 2011). From the EEAS's side, engagement with the JETP policy process was assigned to the Africa department and the EU Delegation to South Africa. However, P #3 repeatedly highlighted that the EEAS's role in the JETP should not be "overestimated", as most negotiating and resource allocation power lies in the Commission. The Delegation's role was also described as relatively "small": its tasks comprise being the "eyes and ears" of the Union, overlooking the implementation of EU pledges, and managing the communication around the JETP.

Besides the Commission and the EEAS, the European Investment Bank (EIB), the EU's lending institution under the mandate of the EU Council, also represents a relevant actor in the JETP process. The bulk of the EU's JETP pledge, i.e. \$1 billion in investment loans to support the development of RE projects, is in fact provided by the EIB (European Commission, 2022b)

Within the JETP policy process, the EU has developed and supported a conceptualisation of a Just Transition as a fast-paced, market-driven, technical process of reform in which environmental sustainability is coupled with economic growth. To construct this understanding of JT, a series of discursive strategies were recursively adopted. In particular, I identified five strategies: (i) the depoliticization of the JT debate, (ii) the naturalisation of neoliberal, market-based solutions for the JT, (iii) the narrowing of JT's scope and ambition, (iv) the de-historicising of the JT, and (v) the conflation of climate mitigation with economic growth. These strategies are constructed through specific discursive elements that were heuristically reconducted to the variables of the JT analytical framework.

Considering the spatial scale, the JT is conceptualised primarily at the South African national level. On the one hand, participants emphasised that the JT is a "domestically owned process"; on the other, they described the EU as having a merely "supporting" and "non-dictating" role (Interview #2, #4). By rejecting its role as a policy actor in the JETP process, the EU can shift accountability to the South African government and obscure the power asymmetries inherent to a North-to-South climate finance agreement. This framing, which excludes the EU from political responsibility, significantly contributes to the depoliticisation

and de-historisation of the JT debate. At the same time, when the topic is addressed more practically, in terms of where measures are needed, the JT is mostly conceptualised as a sub-national issue relegated to specific coal-dependent regions such as Mpumalanga. In particular, EIB's JT strategy stresses the need to identify those sub-national territories that are "heavily dependent on mining, fossil fuel exports and/or emission-intensive industries" (European Investment Bank, 2023). This regional focus is arguably quite narrow and minimalistic in the South African case, considering that, due to the pervasive nature of the MEC, the EIB's definition is true for the whole economy. This kind of framing portrays the JT as a narrow, technical process in which justice only pertains to the decommissioning of coal mines and power plants and not the economic transformation of a whole national economy. The participant from DG CLIMA, which is directly involved in both the EU's internal and external JT policies, also introduced a more transnational scale by bringing the EU's internal JT framework into the picture (Interview #2). This emphasis strategically frames the EU model as a template for others to follow, suggesting a hierarchical relationship between the EU as a knowledge producer and South Africa as a recipient, thus satisfying the EU's ambition to be an ideological leader in climate action.

From a temporal perspective, the EU has privileged a vision of JT that is detached from the past and focused on the short- to medium-term impact of transition policies. The historical motivations behind South Africa's coal dependency, deeply rooted in the legacies of colonial and apartheid economic interests and social injustices, are mostly ignored. Only the Delegation, arguably due to its presence on the ground and direct engagement with the South African context, has acknowledged the JT as a potential solution to the "historical structures that the country is trying to overcome: apartheid legacies, segregation, discrimination of people" (Interview #4). With an eye to the future, instead, the JT is framed in terms of short-term deliverables, such as reskilling projects, grid extension and job creation (Interview #1, #3). Long-term justice concerns, such as intergenerational impacts and structural changes caused by climate change and the energy transition are not considered part of the picture. Rather, the JT's timeline is conceived exclusively in technical terms as a result of a well-planned sequencing of coal plant decommissioning and in relation to the inevitable, upcoming global energy transition (Interview #2, #3, #4).

The scale of the JT conceptualised by EU apparatuses spans a narrow range of actors. Moreover, the *who and for whom* of the JT are discursively constructed as two separate entities with no point of contact. Although, as explained above, South Africa and the EU are portrayed respectively as the accountable supervisor and a model supporter, it is the private sector that is

framed as the real leader of the transition. As succinctly put by P #2, “it’s the private sector that will create the jobs” in coal-dependent regions, “but you need to help that process with public funding” for vocational training, reskilling projects and support for green-sector SMEs (Interview #1, #2). On the other side, the JT beneficiaries are mainly identified as unskilled coal workers whose jobs are endangered by the decommissioning of coal-fired plants in the Mpumalanga province (Interview #2, #4). Even when this narrow, labour-centred approach is combined with a more inclusive look at affected communities – “from the coal miners to the ladies who are selling food and drink to help the coal miners to those ladies’ children, and so on” – these people are represented as passive recipients of top-down transition reforms and JT measures rather than agents of change (Interview #1, #4). While grassroots movements and CSOs have little to no space in the EU’s narrative, critical voices that label the transition as unjust are described as aiming to “undermine the energy transition to keep their economic interests”, arguably in an attempt to delegitimise political oppositions to the JT process within the JETP (Interview #2). When civil society’s resistance is acknowledged, it is explained as a technical problem of misinformation and miscommunication about the JETP, rather than a political contestation over its structures (Interview #4).

Considering the depth variable, from the analysis emerges a technical and instrumental understanding of justice and social change, spanning between a conservative and reformist approach. In the EU’s vision, a JT aims at avoiding the worsening of affected groups’ socioeconomic conditions, rather than addressing structural conditions of energy poverty, inequality and environmental racism. To reach this goal, incremental policy reforms able to shift the labour market towards the green private sector and to create an enabling environment for this sector are portrayed as necessary and inevitable (Interview #1, #2; EIB, 2023; European Commission, 2021). As explained by P #3, the EU perceives the justice dimension of the JETP “as something very technical, while their [*South Africans*] approach is very political” (Interview #3). At the same time, the ‘just’ element of the transition is shallowly conceived as instrumental to “reinforce the credibility of the plan” rather than as an underpinning objective of the JETP (Interview #2). In terms of society-nature relations, the JT is conceptualised as an integral part of a sustainable growth model in which climate mitigation is considered as an opportunity for and a means towards profit accumulation.

Finally, resource allocation for a JT is understood in a complex, somehow contradictory way. On the one hand, public funding is mainly described as having a necessary yet only supportive role, as a catalyst for market-driven investments, given that ultimately “it’s the private sector that will create the jobs” (Interview #2, 3). On the other, the EU has repeatedly

acknowledged that “the just dimension of the transition can only be realised with public money”, implying that market-based solutions are not fit to address unprofitable issues of (in)justice (European Union Delegation to South Africa, 2023). This tension between two different approaches to JT funding exposes a contradiction in the EU’s discursive strategy of naturalisation of neoliberal, market-based solutions that has not been addressed yet.

The motivations and interests behind these strategies are manifold. First, by depoliticising the JT debate, the EU aims to minimise the political dimensions of the transition, presenting it as a technical or managerial issue rather than a political one. Avoiding engaging with contentious issues which could lead to conflicts, allows the EU to circumvent the formulation of a precise principle-based JT approach, and to maintain a pragmatic, flexible approach led by geopolitical and economic considerations. As succinctly put by P #8,

if you have principles, you have to stick to them, and you don’t want to do that in practical political terms. Once you apply principles, you have to apply them everywhere, which is not a good idea. (Interview #6)

Second, the naturalisation of market-based JT solutions reflects an ideological commitment to neoliberal economic principles, which prioritise market mechanisms as the primary means of addressing social and environmental issues. By framing market solutions as natural and inevitable, the EU seeks to align its conceptualisation of JT with the prevailing economic paradigm, thereby legitimising its economic interests in bolstering the green economy. Third, a narrow JT scope enables the EU to manage expectations and limit the complexity of the transition. This strategy reduces the perceived scale of the challenge and aligns with more easily achievable goals, making it easier to present success. It also protects the EU from the broader implications of systemic change that might require more substantial commitment and resources. Fourth, de-historicising the JT allows the EU to avoid confronting its own role in past and present socioeconomic inequalities. Through this strategy, the EU can frame the transition as a forward-looking initiative, distancing itself from past responsibilities and focusing instead on less contentious issues. Fifth, the discursive conflation of climate mitigation with economic growth allows the EU to promote economic growth as inherently beneficial for socioecological outcomes and avoid confrontation with alternative JT narratives. By framing social and environmental sustainability as a byproduct of economic development, the EU can appeal to growth-oriented stakeholders while potentially sidelining deeper questions about consumption and production patterns, environmental degradation and inequality in the distribution of the impacts of the socioecological crisis along lines of race and

gender. Ultimately, a depoliticised, de-historized and narrowed-down concept of JT contributes to building consensus around the JETP as a profit- and growth-oriented international climate finance agreement, and to obscure alternative JT approaches that challenge an Ecological Modernisation paradigm.

4.3.2.2. *The South African Executive and the PCC*

The South African Executive government in office between 2021 and mid-2024 was the second Cabinet held by Cyril Ramaphosa, former anti-apartheid activist and current ANC president. As the ANC won a majority in the 2019 election, all the Cabinet's members (minus one) were affiliated with the ANC. The Presidential Cabinet has played a central part in the JETP, building political intention towards the agreement and steering its negotiation and implementation through the PCFTT, the JETP Secretariat and the PMU. At the same time, being responsible for ensuring the alignment of domestic policies with the international commitments made in the agreement, the Executive has had the role to strike a balance between South Africa's internal and external interests. However, as pointed out in several reports from the World Bank (2022, as cited in Chilenga-Butao & Holl, 2024), South Africa's JET response has been affected by "fragmentation of strategic and technical responsibilities within government". Since there is no unified plan assigning responsibility to a leading department, nor is there a clear delegation of JET-related tasks to relevant institutions, policy design and planning is spread across several bodies, including the DMRE, the DFFE, and the PCC. Each of these apparatuses has developed its own conceptualisation of JT, embodying different interests that are ultimately attributable to the ANC-led government.

According to a comprehensive report by the Public Affairs Research Institute, the DMRE is the one among all government departments holding the most critical mandate of the JET Chilenga-Butao & Holl, 2024). Nonetheless, the organisation has shown particular hesitation in taking a leading role, failing to clearly articulate its position about the future of the energy mix and to align with broader government policy, especially regarding climate action. This hesitation is due to a lack of external and internal alignment about how the JT is understood and conceptualised. An overview of the DMRE's discursive strategies confirms a misalignment from other departments. Members of the department, including the Minister, conceptualise the JT as a necessarily slow process that must prioritise South Africa's economic interests over international climate objectives. To support this definition, the DMRE's discourse relies on (i) the naturalisation of coal dependence, and (ii) the polarisation of national sovereignty vs Western influence. Mantashe and his department have framed coal as the only economically

sustainable solution to ensure energy security, claiming that a RE-led energy mix “is not going to save us” from load shedding (Leshoro, 2023). In a 2023 speech, the Minister underlined:

coal is going to be with us for a very long time and we have a responsibility to invest in coal technology that makes it cleaner, and we reduce the emissions but use what we’re endowed with in the country, and that is called coal. (Leshoro, 2023)

Against this background, the DMRE portrays itself as a “rebel” that has the courage to stand for the rights of coal workers and communities against the tyranny of developed countries. Indeed, the polarisation of the discourse about developed vs developing countries is also central in Mantashe’s speeches. On the one hand, South Africa is depicted as the protector of Africa’s right and responsibility to determine itself as a continent: “We are the least developed continent. We have a responsibility to develop it, to take leadership. We are rich but poor, and we cannot allow that to continue” (Leshoro, 2023). On the other hand, developed countries are framed as untrustworthy neocolonial powers aiming to “force” and “impose” the energy transition onto South Africa (Magubane, 2022). Emphasising this antagonistic view, Mantashe accuses Western economies of using South Africa as “guinea pig” and calls for Africa to resist becoming “a conduit of the ideas of other” (Magubane, 2022).

The use of these discursive strategies can be explained by the presence of a “huge pro-coal anti-JETP lobby within the organisation” that stands against the more pro-JETP members (Chilenga-Butao & Holl, 2024, p. 15). The presence of such a large pro-coal lobby can be traced back to the close ties between the DMRE and the MEC. According to Chilenga-Butao & Holl (2024, p. 28), the DMRE perceives itself as a “custodian” of the interests of stakeholders imbricated with the MEC. In particular, the department aims at shielding two key sets of vested interests. On the one hand, large mining and energy industries, such as Anglo American, Sasol and industries within the Energy Intensive Users Group. On the other, those black-owned mining companies that emerged over the last decade from the large-scale sale of assets by large industries in view of the energy transition. From an overview of media statements, it appears that the DE’s approach to JT is led by interests and strategies largely aligned with the DMRE’s anti-imperialistic, coal-first narrative (Payton, 2023). However, as the DE was only established in February 2023 and suppressed in mid-2024, its influence in the JETP policy conflict is arguably limited.

The DFFE, led (during the investigated period) by Barbara Creecy, has maintained a very different approach from the DMRE, repeatedly expressing support for the agreement. Tasked with providing policy guidance for “sound environmental management and sustainable

development”, the DFEE also appears to be the designated international face of the South African JET, as demonstrated by Creecy’s exposure in international arenas. In her interventions at COP27, Creecy has conveyed a conceptualisation of JT as a fast-paced country-owned, internationally-funded process in which climate commitments are respected without leaving “anyone behind” (Nyathi, 2023). By (i) taking accountability of South Africa’s JET, she underlined her country’s responsibility to demonstrate it can implement the JET quickly and efficiently, while portraying South Africa as a global JT leader (Creamer, 2022). At the same time, the DFEE frames the JT as “global public good”, through a (ii) strong emphasis on developed countries’ moral responsibility to financially assist the Global South through grant finance, and (iii) a critique of the global financial system (DFEE, 2023b) Reinforcing the linkage between JT as a South Africa-led process and as a transnational issues, Creecy argued:

What happens in Mpumalanga is of international significance, because the world is in dire need of success stories that demonstrate that just transitions are not only possible, but better in every way than climate measures which leave our people and our communities behind. (DFEE, 2023a)

These discursive strategies are rooted in the government’s ideological and material interests in the JETP and the broader climate finance landscape. First, DFEE’s focus on grant-based international climate finance reflects a clear interest in ensuring that South Africa’s transition is heavily subsidised by external actors. This strategy, while ostensibly framed around climate justice, also acts as a buffer for South Africa’s domestic budgetary constraints. By pushing for finance that doesn’t exacerbate the country’s debt burden, the DFEE protects South Africa from the economic risks associated with debt-financed climate initiatives, which could politically destabilize the ANC-led government. Second, by positioning South Africa as a transition leader and a success story for JT implementation, the government seeks to enhance the country’s influence in global climate governance. Being recognized as a leader in JT provides South Africa with greater leverage in international negotiations, access to decision-making platforms, and an ability to shape the direction of global climate policy.

Appointed in 2020 by Ramaphosa, the PCC is a multi-stakeholder independent body composed of the President himself, alongside key Ministers and stakeholders from city and regional administrations, labour unions, social and environmental NGOs, climate justice organisations, community activists, philanthropists, faith organisations, industry interest

groups and national bank representatives.² Reporting directly to the Cabinet, the PCC is mandated to advise on South Africa's climate response and support a common understanding of JT by facilitating dialogue between social partners (PCC, 2022b). However, its capacity to carry out valuable consultations to create an inclusive JT framework has been repeatedly called into question (de Jong, 2023). For instance, McNamara (2024) argues that stakeholder engagement spaces in the context of the JETP did not allow a genuine reshaping of the JETP based on radical justice claims.

In the PCC's *National Just Transition Framework* and declarations by its representatives, JT is conceptualised as a people-centred, financially fair and transparent process aimed at achieving a "quality life for all South Africans" (PCC, 2022, p. 7). To support this framing, the PCC adopts three main discursive strategies: (i) a development-centric approach, (ii) the prioritisation of procedural justice, and (iii) a critique of the global financial architecture. The JT is portrayed as the "key to unlock the deal" for these countries' participation in global decarbonisation, suggesting that justice and climate ambition are intertwined rather than oppositional and rejecting the idea that developing countries' emphasis on JT dilutes climate ambition (UN Climate Change, 2023). Another significant strategy is the prioritisation of procedural justice over other understandings of justice. While the JT is framed as a necessarily technocratic process, procedural justice is framed as a fundamental element of this process, as it allows to build consensus through information sharing, stakeholder engagement, and social dialogue (PCC, 2022; UN Climate Change, 2023). More radical understandings of procedural justice, such as inclusive decision making, and other dimension of justice take up limited space in the PCC's discourse. Moreover, the critique of global climate finance as dominated by an "elite cabal" of developed countries points to structural inequities that hinder the JT in developing nations, suggesting that JT requires rethinking global governance and finance systems (UN Climate Change, 2023).

The interests behind these strategies are directly linked to the PCC's role in mediating between the national priorities of South Africa and the global climate agenda, while maintaining legitimacy among domestic stakeholders. By framing the JT as central to South

² Key Ministers include the Ministers of (i) Finance, (ii) Forestry and Fisheries and Environmental Affairs, (iii) Mineral and Energy Resources, (iv) Minister of Human Settlements, (v) Public Enterprises, (vi) Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, (vii) Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, (viii) Trade and Industry, (vix) Higher Education, Science and Technology, (x) Transport, (xi) Water and Sanitation, (xii) Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, and (xiii) Electricity. NGOs representatives include WWF, Friends of Earth, Earth life Africa, and more.

Africa's national development, the PCC aligns itself with the broader socio-economic priorities of the government, especially in addressing unemployment, inequality, and poverty. This strategy positions JT as a tool for achieving economic development, which appeals to domestic and international actors invested in maintaining growth while transitioning to a low-carbon economy. Moreover, by emphasizing a consensus-building approach centred on procedural justice, the PCC can position itself as a neutral, expert-driven body that is focused on practical outcomes rather than ideological conflicts. By doing so, the PCC gains credibility and trust from both the government and international partners, while mitigating political opposition from labour unions or civil society groups that might view the JT as exclusionary or biased. Finally, by criticising the global financial system, the PCC embodies the government's interest in reshaping the financial architecture in a way that is more beneficial for Global South countries, thus with a stronger focus on grant finance for climate mitigation and development.

4.3.2.3. *South African trade unions: COSATU*

Trade unions in South Africa have a long and influential history, playing a crucial role not only in the labour movement but also in the broader political landscape, and, today, in the country's manifold JT Conflict. In the aftermath of the Durban Moment, black organised labour surged as an important actor within the liberation movement. In particular, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), a union federation created in 1985 forged a Tripartite Alliance with the ANC and the South African Communist Party with the goal of establishing a post-apartheid democratic government that would improve the material conditions of the black working class (McKinley, 2003). Significantly, one of COSATU's founding affiliates was the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), at the time led by Ramaphosa, which reveals the MEC's profound eradication into the South African political landscape.

Due to its leading role in the anti-apartheid struggle and its close ties with the ruling party, COSATU held a significant role in the post-1994 democracy. Its capacity to organise and mobilise over 1.5 million members, mostly black South Africans, gave COSATU considerable bargaining power in pushing for labour-friendly socioeconomic policies. Despite its strong political influence within the ANC-led government, COSATU often found itself in a complex position, needing to balance its alliance with the ruling party with its class-based approach to labour policy. In particular, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), COSATU's largest affiliate up to 2014, was particularly critical of the ANC's support for privatisation. The union vehemently opposed the GEAR strategy (see Section 4.1.3) for prioritising economic growth over workers' rights and social justice (Twala & Kompi, 2012).

COSATU also faced internal challenges due to disagreements over the federation's ideological and political alignment with the ANC, alongside a general decline in subscription numbers (Malope, 2022). Remarkably, in 2014, after calling for a break from the Tripartite Alliance and the establishment of a militant, more radical union federation, NUMSA was expelled from the federation (Malope, 2022). The event, which sparked broad controversies, led to the flight of NUMSA's 350.000 members and to NUM becoming COSATU's new largest affiliate. Since then, a growing number of scholars has argued that COSATU has long lost its progressive approach to social change, preferring to remain aligned with the centre of power to secure limited benefits for its members and advance the personal careers of its leaders (McNamara, 2024).

COSATU's role in the JETP policy process has been rather indirect. On the one hand, the federation has been pivotal in supporting and spreading the JT concept in South Africa's climate change debate, advocating early on for the protection of workers in industries affected by the shift to a low-carbon economy (Malope, 2022). This contribution was acknowledged with its inclusion in the PCC. However, as highlighted by P #7, COSATU members were excluded from early JETP negotiation, learning about the IP only at the moment of its release at COP27 where COSATU participated as part of ITUC (Interview #5). Only after the federation publicly rejected the JETP-IP, the PCC asked it to submit its own comments.

The in-depth analysis of COSATU's submission to the PCC and of my interview with one of its representatives reveal a conceptualisation of JT as a labour-centred, state-led process oriented to job creation and economic growth. This vision is discursively constructed through (i) the reappropriation of the JT notion, (ii) a strong focus on the working class, (iii) the critique of neoliberal policies, and (iv) the naturalisation of the mainstream development paradigm.

In the reappropriation strategy, the temporal scale is instrumental in the meta-conceptualisation of the JT's origin as a "historical labour demand" (COSATU, 2023, p.5). Through this emphasis, COSATU frames itself as the legit owner of the concept, in opposition to private capital which is accused of wanting to "take over" and "co-opt the idea of JT to expedite the liberalisation of key sectors in the economy" (Interview #5; COSATU, 2023, p. 6). In terms of scope, COSATU's ownership of the concept has two implications. On the one hand, it translates into the argument that a transition in which the federation is not involved is *a priori* unjust (Interview #5). Speaking about the JETP, P #7 remarked: "There was no justice because they were not transparent about it." The agreement was in fact mainly rejected due to labour's participation being "specifically excluded from the negotiation process" and to PCC consultations being "used to rubber stamp the untransparent agreements" (COSATU, 2022, p.

8). On the other, it implies that the private sector can only have an ancillary role in the JT, and only if it accepts COSATU's demand for decent work and sustainable livelihoods (Interview #5).

Reappropriating the term, COSATU significantly shifts and narrows down the focus of JT on the working class of developing countries. From a temporal perspective, COSATU proposes a short-to-medium-term JT vision where the need for "immediate" job creation and reskilling and upskilling programs for workers is prioritised over the long-term impacts of climate change and of the transition on future generations (Interview #5). In terms of spatial scale, the federation argues that the "just transition means changes that do not disadvantage the working class worldwide, that do not disadvantage developing countries", therefore adopting a global perspective, in line with ITUC's scope, that frames the JT as a transnational process that particularly regards the Global South. At the same time, a regional scale centred on the Mpumalanga province and on coal-dependent regions is used when addressing the concrete dangers to which workers are exposed. This twofold spatial frame implies a twofold scope. On the one hand, the entire working class is presented as the necessary beneficiary of the JT. "Employment creation and sustainable industrial policy" to ensure "sustainable livelihoods, decent work and a safe environment" for all workers are presented as COSATU's priority. Interestingly, COSATU's definition of the working class is rather broad, including also "those who do unpaid work and anyone who is unemployed or underemployed", in the interest of which the establishment of a universal basic income grant (UBIG) is demanded as part of a JT (Interview #5).

However, on the other hand, the regional focus on Mpumalanga considerably narrows down the scope of the envisioned JT, as coal workers, and indirectly their communities, are framed as the most exposed to the risks of "business closing and power stations being decommissioned" (COSATU, 2023, p. 5). Arguably, this rather exclusionary focus is a result of NUM's prevailing influence on the federation, which also explains an otherwise quite cryptic reference to job losses "changing the political balance in the country" by weakening "the traditionally strong sections of the labour movement" (COSATU, 2023, p. 5). In terms of depth, the JT is framed as the result of an inclusive social dialogue between workers, employers and the government, which reveals a "a benign, non-confrontational approach that poses little or no challenge to the mainstream pro-growth, pro-business transition" (Interview #5; McNamara, 2024). The focus on workers is also reinforced by portraying workers' needs as more important than environmental and health well-being and, therefore, by calling for JT

funds to be primarily invested in pro-workers policies, such as the One million job campaign and the UBIG. Notably, as put by P#7,

You can go talk to a worker and say: “You know, this coal-fired power station is bad, it pollutes. That’s very bad for your health and your lungs”. Then the worker will tell you: “I’d rather die than not have an income. So how So how are you helping with rehabilitating this place and ensuring that I don’t lose my job?”. (Interview #5)

The critique of neoliberal measures represents another of COSATU’s main discursive strategies. In particular, framing austerity measures, privatization and financialization through public-private partnerships as antithetical to a JT, the federation argues that JETP is ill-suited to bring it on (Interview #5). As P #7 explained, “we know that public-private partnerships come with privatization, which is one of the things that we are against. We do not want our electricity and whatever to be privatized.” This critique has a sharp historical and spatial dimension, as it posits that neoliberal policies and market-based solutions can recreate “neo-colonial power dynamics between Africa and the Global South” (COSATU, 2023, p. 9). Hence, on the one hand, the JT should be led by the state, rather than by “the global financial architecture” and developed countries’ development agencies. On the other, the state should prioritise measures – such as socially-owned energy generation capacity, land redistribution, the expansion of public spending for climate-resilient infrastructure and social needs, and wealth tax schemes – that enable “the redistribution of power and resources towards a more just and equitable social order” (Interview #5). In terms of resources to fund these policies for a JT, COSATU calls for the use of domestic funds or international grants, arguing that international lending’s overreliance on de-risking policies is a threat to South Africa’s debt sovereignty (COSATU, 2023).

Finally, COSATU’s JT is conceptualised through the naturalisation of a development model that prioritises economic growth over environmental sustainability. Similar to the critique of neoliberal policies, this strategy also heavily relies on JT’s temporal scope. Emphasising that the Global North developed by burning fossil fuels, COSATU argues that the responsibility to curb emissions should primarily fall on developed countries. Consequently, it frames a too-quick transition as unjust. As succinctly put by P #7, “Why are you not allowing us to develop first before we transition?” Therefore, despite acknowledging the ecological (and economic) importance of transitioning to renewable energy, the union advocates for the continued use of coal to develop South Africa’s economy. At the same time, COSATU openly promotes the development of a domestic green economy, framing it as an opportunity for job

creation and for the local production of RE infrastructures and technologies (COSATU, 2023). Therefore, COSATU's claim that "we can't afford to stop mining" should not be read as a form of coal fundamentalism but as part of a growth-at-any-cost narrative (Interview #5).

A critical examination of COSATU's JT conceptualization reveals that its framing is driven by specific material and ideological interests that reflect not just concern for workers' rights but also the protection of its institutional power and influence in South Africa's socio-economic landscape. First, by rejecting market-based solutions, COSATU ensures that state-owned enterprises such as Eskom, where the union maintains a strong foothold, remain key players in the energy transition, thus protecting its own privileged position within South Africa's sociopolitical context. Second, the naturalisation and prioritisation of a growth-based economic model ensure that existing jobs in coal-dependent regions are preserved as long as possible, in line with NUM's interest. Third, reappropriating the JT concept and focusing it on the working class allows COSATU to monopolise the JT debate, potentially sidelining other voices, such as environmental activists, who may advocate for more radical JT visions.

4.3.2.4. *South African Civil Society: the Climate Justice Charter Movement*

According to McNamara (2024, p. 6), South Africa's civil society is "vibrant, diverse, and has multiple avenues to influence government", comprising both institutionalised, policy-focused NGOs and social movements advocating for social justice and demanding services. However, as also explained by McNamara (2024), these organizations are highly fragmented, reflecting, but not strictly aligning with, race and class divisions. On the one side of the spectrum, there are white, middle-class, often internationally-funded NGOs that engage in the monitoring and technocratic advocacy roles central to the Good Governance agenda, representing what Huber (2022), in his seminal *Climate Change as Class War*, defines the "professional class" – a segment of the labour market whose political focus is less on material struggles and more on leveraging knowledge for policy improvements through non-confrontational means. On the other side, there are "black organizations", many of which emerged from radical opposition to apartheid, either making moral demands for resource redistribution in formal spaces or advancing revolutionary claims through protest (McNamara, 2024).

In the JETP policy process, both sides of the spectrum have had a relevant role, despite having different degrees of influence capacity. Environmental NGOs and social and climate justice movements make up the bulk of these organisations. Some representatives from environmental NGOs, namely Groundwork (Friends of the Earth's chapter in South Africa), Earthlife Africa, WWF South Africa, were invited to sit as Commissioners in the PCC.

Moreover, WWF SA, Green Cape, Democracy Works Foundation, Association for Rural Advancement, Social Change Assistance Trust received a JETP \$2.1 million grant “to tackle climate change while enhancing gender equality and participation of the youth” (JETP PMU, 2023). These NGOs, most of which are internationally funded, share a rather technical conception of JT, rooted in principles of good governance, procedural and recognitional justice, capacity building and green growth. Social movements and organisations from the more radical justice-oriented side of the spectrum have not been directly involved in the policy process but have still played an important role in mobilising and organising critical voices about the JETP. The group includes organisations and grassroots movements such as 350.org, the Climate Justice Charter Movement (CJCM), Fossil Free SA, and the Climate Justice Coalition, which focus on countering power asymmetries and economic and environmental injustices through transformative collective actions. For instance, the Climate Justice Coalition has criticised the JETP as a “disorderly, market-driven transition”, instead proposing a JT funded through climate reparations and aimed at the redistribution of the “renewable means of production” (Lenferna, 2023).

Gravitating around similar principles and objectives, the CJCM is a movement born around the ambition to include Climate Justice in the South African Constitution through the formulation of a Charter to be presented to the National Assembly. As explained by one CJCM member, this was a “strategic tactic to try to bring awareness of the climate crisis [...] and to see how important climate actually is to our political representative” (Interview #7). As explained on its website, the CJCM aims to “unite social justice actors [...] to encourage a realignment of climate justice forces”, “ensure that [...] the working class, the poor, the unemployed and the landless have a voice and lead this process of eco-centric transformation”, and “advance forms of democratic mass power” (CJCM, 2020). The CJCM has been a harsh critic of the JETP: it has accused the ANC-led government of voluntarily undermining developing countries’ historical calls for climate debt and reparations by accepting a country-centred agreement driven by geopolitical power games, and the PCC was called for failing to acknowledge South Africa’s deep economic inequality (CJCM, 2022).

The Charter, which was launched and handed to the parliament in 2020, is entirely built on the vision of JT. From an in-depth analysis of the Charter and of my interview with one of CJCM representatives emerged a transformative, radical concept of Just Transition rooted in transnational socioecological justice, ecocentrism, and decoloniality. To strategically construct this JT vision, the Charter adopts a series of discursive strategies: (i) the rejection of JT essentialisation and depoliticization, (ii) an emphasis on historical and structural factors on

injustice, (iii) the rejection of the naturalisation of growth, progress, and society-nature dualism, and (iv) a negative portrayal of Global North. Significantly, the CJCM rejects mainstream understandings of JT as a “watered-down”, technocratic process focused primarily on energy transitions (Interview #7). P #9 explains the risk that

people then start to attribute the language of transition and ideas of transition to shallow promises and will become increasingly more opposed then to the idea itself of transition (Interview #7).

Instead, the Charter proposes to use the term “Deep Just Transitions”, to emphasize a more transformative and holistic understanding of JT (CJCM, 2020). Moreover, South Africa's reliance on coal and its economic structure is explicitly linked to its colonial and apartheid history through the MEC. This historical framing positions JT not just as a climate policy issue, but as a necessary process for addressing deeply rooted socio-economic inequalities. The CJCM's Just Deep Transitions concept is also built in opposition to the naturalisation of dominant imperatives of growth and progress inherently built on a Manichean approach to society-nature relations. As P #9 explained,

the Charter itself aimed to put forward an awareness that we thrive in coexistence with our planet, and that we all share this planet Earth. It also aims to inspire break with the thinking that caused the crisis, the obsessions on growth and progress that overlooks the damage and the impacts to human life and non-human life. It sorts of reconnects us with an old sense conception of what it means to be human. (Interview #7)

Finally, the CJCM has built its JT concept on a harsh critique of Global North's instrumentalisation of climate finance. G7 interest in South Africa's coal phase-out is portrayed as a strategic move aimed, on the one hand, to delay the phase-out of gas and oil, and, on the other, to be used as a “geopolitical stick” against emerging economies such as China, Russia, and India (CJCM, 2022). This framing contributes to the polarisation of the Global North vs Global South debate, portraying the former as a hypocritical, neocolonial force, and calling for the latter to unite into a Global Climate Justice Bloc of vulnerable governments, peoples, workers and movements (CJCM, 2022).

CJCM's interests in using these discursive strategies are primarily political and ideological but with fundamental material implications. First, CJCM aims at a political reshuffling in South Africa, as also demonstrated by their contestation campaign in the 2024 national elections. The refusal of depoliticisation and essentialisation must be read in the context of open opposition

to the ANC for its response to climate change and its gradual appropriation of the JT concept. The proposal of an alternative Just Deep Transition concept is therefore an attempt to prevent JT from being co-opted by corporate or government interests that might strip it of its radical, justice-oriented potential. CJCM also shows a strong interest in influencing the political landscape of the country, shifting attention to more progressive political forces. Second, through the polarization of North North vs. Global South interests the CJCM pursues two objectives: on the one hand, more urgently, ensure access for South Africa to more favourable climate finance, and, on the other, build a broad transnational alliance with social movements and unions in developing countries. Third, by emphasising the historical conditions at the roots of the MEC, CJCM aims to dismantle the remnants of colonial power structures, asserting the right of Global South nations to define their own paths to development. This is not just about equitable resource distribution, but also about asserting ideological independence from the global capitalist system. Ultimately, the CJCM is driven by a vision of democratic, systemic restructuring of South Africa's capitalist relationship of production and reproduction, through the social ownership of renewable energy, the democratisation of commons, and the decoupling of income from labour exploitation (CJCM, 2020). The movements also seek to advance an alternative paradigm that challenges the anthropocentric and extractivist relationship with nature, promoting coexistence and regeneration instead.

4.3.3. Conflicting Political Projects in the Debate over the SA JETP

Building on the previous in-depth analysis of the JETP actors' discursive strategies and against the background of the context and phases through which the policy conflict has unfolded, it is now possible to reconstruct the Just Transition Political Projects advanced by the various observed actors. The analysis points at the existence of four different political projects of JT: (i) a Core Political Project of market-driven, technical, country-led JT, (ii) Satellite Political Project of development-oriented, internationally-funded JT, (iii) an Oppositional Political Project of slow-paced, fossilist JT, and (iv) an Oppositional PP of socioecological, transformative JT.

4.3.3.1. *Core Political Project of market-driven, technical JT*

Within the context of the SA JETP, a political project focused on a market-driven, technical, and country-owned JT emerges as the core framework shaping the discourse. This project, primarily advanced by the EU institutional apparatuses and certain elements within the South African executive, promotes a vision of JT as the technical byproduct of a market-led

process. In this framework, international climate commitments are intertwined with economic and geopolitical interests, rather than being purely about environmental or social justice. Specifically, key actors such as the EU Commission, the EEAS, the South African Presidential Cabinet, and the DFFE focus on making the energy transition commercially viable by enhancing opportunities for both domestic and international businesses involved in RE and ‘green’ technologies. This political project assigns a supportive role to the South African state, which is tasked with implementing a series of technical, neoliberal reforms, such as the unbundling and privatization of the energy system. While South Africa facilitates these structural reforms, the EU and other IPG members provide rapid access to finance, and private RE companies drive the actual transition. This model hinges on privatization and market-led solutions, promoting a future where energy transition is largely shaped by private-sector initiatives, particularly in RE and technology industries.

The justice dimension of the JETP, while rhetorically significant, is largely a legitimizing factor and is treated as the sole responsibility of the South African government. By framing JT in this way, both the EU and South Africa are able to sidestep contentious issues such as global climate justice, historical responsibilities, and the principle of climate reparations. The EU, by presenting itself merely as a technical partner, avoids accountability for ensuring a JT in South Africa. Meanwhile, the South African government positions itself as a leader of Global South transitions without confronting the long-standing debates around climate debt nor protecting the interests of less powerful developing countries. Moreover, by narrowing the definition of JT to focus predominantly on the needs of coal workers in Mpumalanga, both the South African government and the EU reduce the scope of the justice dimension, which allows them to allocate only limited financing to address it. This restricted approach allows the two JETP signatories to treat justice as a secondary objective, tangential to the primary focus on economic green growth and energy reform.

This political project finds strong support from multinational corporations and South African industries engaged in RE and green technology production, as well as from local interest groups that advocate for energy privatisation and state subsidies for large-scale RE projects. Notable supporters include organisations like the South African Wind Energy Association and the South African PV Industry Association, which lobby for policy frameworks favorable to RE expansion and private-sector involvement. In addition, international financial institutions and philanthropic organisations, such as the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ) and the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, openly back this private-finance-led approach to energy transition, aligning their

investment priorities with this political project. Therefore, this political project enjoys a relatively strong position of power in the JETP-related relationship of forces, as it is supported by actors with high levels of institutional and financial capacities, besides being entrenched into the neoliberal climate change regime due to historical and political path dependencies.

Politically, the interests behind this market-driven JT are most effectively mediated by the DA on the South African political landscape. Although the DA's election manifesto does not explicitly reference JT, decarbonization, or environmental protection, its policy positions align closely with the objectives of the JETP. The DA advocates for the unbundling and restructuring of Eskom as a solution to the country's power crisis, proposing privately-owned RE projects and a diversified energy mix as the path forward (Democratic Alliance, 2024). This alignment with the JETP's neoliberal framework highlights the party's focus on market solutions and its opposition to the state-centric approach historically associated with Eskom, positioning the DA as a political supporter of the private-sector-led transition. The ANC, as the ruling party at the time of the JETP establishment, also partially embodies this specific political project, particularly for what concerns its most neoliberal, business-friendly wing. However, considering the little attention given to the JT concept in the 2024 manifesto and critiques to the JETP coming from the ANC's secretary-general, the prevalence of this core political project has teetered inside the party, arguably as a result of the worsening energy crisis, ultimately determining a realignment with the satellite political project of development-oriented, internationally-funded JT.

In summary, the political project of market-driven, technical, country-owned JT, as advanced by the EU and part of the South Africa's executive, is shaped by a vision that prioritizes commercial viability, economic opportunities, and privatization, with the justice component relegated to a secondary concern. This project is driven by powerful multinational corporations, financial institutions, and interest groups advocating for energy sector liberalization, while being politically supported by the DA's neoliberal agenda, and partially, by the ANC. The JETP, under this framework, serves more as an economic and geopolitical tool than as a means of advancing comprehensive climate or energy justice.

4.3.3.2. Satellite Political Project of development-oriented, internationally-funded JT

The political project of development-oriented, internationally-funded JT operates as a 'satellite' to the core JETP project, reflecting a dynamic of both critique and support. This project, driven by key actors such as COSATU, the PCC and, to some extent, the DFFE, serves

as an aggregation of domestic interests in response to the international pressures exerted by the JETP. While this satellite project acknowledges the economic opportunities presented by international investment, it simultaneously pushes for a JT framework that prioritizes South Africa's socio-economic development, particularly job creation and energy security. This dual stance reflects a strategic attempt to position South Africa not just as a participant but as a moral and geopolitical leader advocating for the needs of developing countries.

The PCC plays a crucial role in maintaining this balance between support for and critique of the JETP. As the institutional body responsible for building consensus around the JETP, the PCC must navigate the tension between accepting international financial assistance and ensuring that this assistance aligns with domestic priorities. The PCC's role involves advancing the narrative that socio-economic development is inseparable from a successful JT, a position that seeks to shape the terms of the JETP in a way that benefits South Africa's broader development goals. COSATU, as a key member of the Tripartite Alliance, occupies a pivotal position within this project, despite not being directly involved in the JETP policy process. Its primary interest lies in protecting the socio-economic welfare of South Africa's predominantly black working class, while also maintaining political stability for the ANC-led government. To this end, COSATU employs discursive strategies that frame JT as an engine for socio-economic development while critiquing the neoliberal tendencies in climate finance and highlighting the moral responsibility of developed countries. The aim here is clear: to secure more favorable financial terms within the JETP, ensuring that international funds support the creation of jobs and infrastructure that directly benefit South African workers. The DFFE, although more closely aligned with the core JETP project, has demonstrated some sympathy toward this satellite political project, especially when it comes to concerns over the effectiveness and equity of the international financial architecture. This suggests a broader coalition of institutional actors pushing for a JT that is not only about energy transition but about achieving sustainable development on South Africa's terms.

This political project envisions the JT as a tool to further South Africa's development objectives, combining international financial assistance with state-led measures to support a wide range of stakeholders, from the working class to private-sector actors. The discourse surrounding this project promotes JT as the outcome of procedural justice—an inclusive, consensus-driven process that emphasizes social dialogue and stakeholder engagement. More radical interpretations of justice, such as climate or energy justice, are downplayed in favor of a broader, less confrontational conceptualization that claims to accommodate all potential beneficiaries of economic development.

This satellite project finds support among NGOs with a predominantly white, middle-class base, as well as business associations like the National Business Initiative, which lobbies for economic support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Politically, it aligns with the liberal-developmental wing of the ANC, which has increasingly adopted JT as a central plank in its policy platform. Over the past decade, this faction of the ANC has framed JT as a means to merge development goals with green economy opportunities. In view of the worsening load-shedding, this political project has increasingly gained traction in opposition to the core political project of neoliberal JT, openly prioritising development objectives over decarbonisation. For instance, the ANC's election manifesto links JT to industrial growth and job creation, positioning renewable energy as only one of the several pathways to achieving energy security and mitigating the country's ongoing energy crisis (ANC, 2024).

Ultimately, the development-oriented JT project is marked by its pragmatic approach, seeking to integrate international finance with South Africa's domestic development agenda. It envisions JT not as a radical transformation but as a mechanism to deliver inclusive economic growth while navigating the complexities of international and domestic pressures.

4.3.3.3. Oppositional Political Project of slow-paced, fossilist JT

In direct opposition to the JETP has emerged a political project advocating for a slow-paced, fossil fuel-centered Just Transition (JT), primarily championed at the institutional level by the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE). This project is heavily supported by key industrial players such as large mining and energy corporations, including Anglo American and Sasol, as well as industries within the Energy Intensive Users Group. These major corporations, together with their affiliated interest groups like the Minerals Council South Africa, form the core of a coalition determined to preserve South Africa's reliance on fossil fuels. Their strategy combines delaying meaningful climate action with promoting so-called "clean coal" technologies to sustain the use of fossil fuels for as long as possible through a conceptualisation of JT rooted in coal naturalisation and political polarisation.

This coalition extends beyond the corporate sector, drawing support from black-owned mining SMEs and influential coal workers' unions, particularly the NUM and NUMSA, which have repeatedly called for the suspension of the JETP. Politically, the coalition's interests are represented by the most conservative, nationalist wing of the ANC and the EFF. The EFF, in particular, has emerged on the one hand, as a vocal proponent of clean coal and nuclear energy, and, on the other an harsh critic of the ANC's definition of JT. The party's 2024 manifesto

positions clean coal and nuclear energy as essential tools for economic growth, reinforcing the political legitimacy of the fossil fuel-based transition, and argues in favor of a slow-paced transition dictated by South Africa's development needs (Economic Freedom Fighters, 2024). Due to this broad coalition that brings together strong unions with large corporations, this political project can count on the one hand on a solid system of mobilisation and organisation, and, on the other, on a high degree of political influence through highly-funded lobbying campaigns.

This coalition of interests, largely aligned with the structure and priorities of the MEC, presents a conceptualization of JT that positions coal as indispensable to South Africa's industrial growth and energy security. The project asserts that coal dependency is a natural component of the country's economic trajectory, advocating for its continued use as the backbone of South Africa's energy strategy. To bolster this position, the coalition actively demonises foreign influence, particularly that of the Global North, portraying international climate agreements and foreign investments as neocolonial tactics aimed at undermining South Africa's sovereignty and economic autonomy. By framing foreign-driven decarbonisation initiatives as politically subversive and economically dangerous, this political project appeals to nationalist sentiments and constructs a narrative of resistance against the accelerated decarbonization agenda promoted by the JETP. This political project also reflects the attempt by MEC-related powerful industries to universalise their material interests by appealing to anti-imperialist justice claims popular among South African trade unions and working class.

However, despite the unified opposition to the JETP, this political project is not without internal tensions, due to the diverse and sometimes contradictory composition of its supporters. On one hand, it is backed by private capital and large corporations with vested interests in the MEC, which also favour pro-market and business-friendly policies. On the other hand, it receives support from anti-capitalist organizations such as NUMSA and the EFF, which advocate for radically different economic models. NUMSA, for example, has repeatedly called for the social ownership of all renewable energy resources and the decommodification of the electricity system (McNamara, 2024). Similarly, the EFF has proposed the establishment of a state-owned mining company to exploit South Africa's mineral wealth for the benefit of the public, underscoring its anti-capitalist stance (Economic Freedom Fighters, 2024)

This contradiction between pro-capitalist and anti-capitalist forces within the coalition reveals underlying friction, particularly in how the transition should be managed and who should control key sectors of the economy. While the corporate sector pushes for privatization and market-driven solutions, unions like NUMSA and political actors such as the EFF

champion state-led, publicly-owned models that directly challenge the economic structures underpinning the MEC. These differences highlight the competing visions within the fossil fuel-aligned project, which could potentially lead to further fragmentation in the future.

Ultimately, this slow-paced, fossil-fuel-aligned political project reflects deep-rooted economic and political interests that are intertwined with South Africa's historical reliance on coal, industrial mining, and energy-intensive industries. The project frames international climate policies, particularly those driven by foreign actors, as threats to national development, workers' livelihoods, and South Africa's economic autonomy. While this project enjoys strong support among key industrial and political players, its internal contradictions and reliance on nationalist rhetoric suggest it may struggle to sustain unity as the JT Conflict unfolds.

4.3.3.4. *Oppositional Political Project of socioecological, transformative JT*

Social movements and grassroots organisations, such as the Climate Justice Charter Movement (CJCM) and the Climate Justice Coalition, occupy a distinctive position within the broader constellation of political projects surrounding the JT debate. These actors promote a radically transformative conceptualization of JT, grounded in socioecological justice, which stands in stark opposition to the mainstream framework of the JETP. Unlike the JETP's country-focused approach, this political project advocates for a transnational perspective that foregrounds the historical conditions and power asymmetries responsible for climate change, as well as the inequities embedded in dominant responses to it. By rejecting the technocratic and neoliberal JT models, these movements position themselves as the vanguard of a more comprehensive, justice-oriented transition.

Central to this political project is a an *Ideologiekritik* of the prevailing development paradigms rooted in extractivism, the exploitation of labor and nature, and the pursuit of unlimited growth. These grassroots organizations argue that the current JT model perpetuates the same capitalist logic that caused the climate crisis, failing to address the deeper systemic injustices in the socio-economic order. Instead, they call for a reimagining of societal relations of production and reproduction, where the power dynamics between the Global North and Global South are recalibrated to reflect a more equitable and just global order. By focusing on the historical and structural roots of inequality and ecological destruction, this project critiques the extractive relations underpinning the global capitalist system and highlights the urgent need to dismantle these oppressive structures.

This radical reconfiguration of JT seeks to dismantle the exploitative logic that governs capitalist relations between humans, labor, and nature. It emphasizes that any meaningful

transition must address not only climate change but also the broader socio-economic injustices inherent in South Africa's energy system and societal structure. The focus is not just on phasing out fossil fuels, but on fundamentally transforming the relations of power that have historically marginalized both human communities and ecosystems. This project thus reframes JT as a tool for global socioecological transformation, rather than merely a technical or economic fix.

By advancing this radical understanding of JT, these social movements and radical NGOs position their agenda as an ideological and political counterforce to the JETP, pushing for a justice-centred transition that prioritises ecological sustainability, social equity, and economic democratisation. They argue that the JETP, by failing to challenge the underlying power structures that maintain socio-economic inequality and ecological exploitation, is incapable of delivering true justice for marginalised communities and the environment. However, this project is the least strong politically, as it does not align with any major political force in the country and it cannot count either on a capillar system of organisation and mobilisation, nor on institutional and political capacity.

In sum, the socioecological, transformative JT project advanced by these grassroots movements calls for a radical overhaul of the current socio-economic order. It demands a global perspective that addresses the historical causes of climate change and the unequal power relations between the Global North and Global South. By challenging the capitalist logic of extraction and growth, this project seeks to create a just, equitable, and sustainable world where both human and non-human life can thrive. This vision not only critiques the mainstream JT models but also offers a bold and comprehensive alternative that redefines the meaning of justice in the context of climate action.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter applied the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework on JT Conflicts on the case of the South African JETP, adopting Brand et al. (2022)'s three-step process of context analysis, process analysis and actor analysis. Through the context analysis, I demonstrated that the South African JETP is shaped by a complex set of historical, geopolitical, and socio-economic conditions: globally, by the neoliberal climate regime, characterized by an approach to climate finance rooted in the marketisation of climate action, unilateralism and libertarian justice claims. I argued that the JETP reflects the strategic interests of the EU and G7 members to consolidate geopolitical influence and ideological leadership while addressing climate change. Against this background, the EU's adoption of the JT language, as I showed, serves to align Global South countries' justice claims with its own political and economic leadership

ambitions. At the national level, I illustrated how South Africa's socioecological crisis – rooted in the historical dependency on the MEC – sets the stage for the JETP. Key structural issues, including unemployment, poverty, economic inequality, and environmental degradation, are central to understanding the urgency of South Africa's energy transition. I argued that these conditions have, on the one hand, fostered the institutionalisation of JT language into the country's climate response, and, on the other, inflamed conflicting domestic interests regarding how the JT should address these pressing socio-economic and environmental challenges.

In the process analysis, I described the various phases and characteristics of the JETP policy process, highlighting the key milestones and tensions that have emerged. I demonstrated that the JETP unfolded through a series of distinct phases: from its negotiation to the investment phase, and the ongoing implementation phase. Each phase has been marked by shifting priorities and escalating tensions between international and domestic actors. Initially, the process was driven by the IPG's market-led, technical approach, which emphasized privatization and economic growth. However, as the JETP progressed, domestic contestation intensified. These tensions have shaped the policy conflict, reflecting the broader challenge of balancing decarbonization, energy security, climate and energy justice claims within South Africa's energy transition.

In the actor analysis, I identified and analysed the JT Political Projects advanced by key stakeholders in the JETP debate. I demonstrated that four distinct political projects have emerged, each reflecting different visions of how JT should be implemented. First, the Core Political Project of market-driven, technical JT, led by the EU and parts of the South African government, promotes a market-led, privatised transition focused on economic growth and investment, with minimal attention to justice. Second, the Satellite Political Project of development-oriented, internationally-funded JT, supported by domestic actors like COSATU, the PCC, and elements of the ANC, seeks to align international climate finance with South Africa's socio-economic goals, particularly job creation, while balancing international and domestic pressures. Third, the Oppositional Political Project of slow-paced, fossilist JT, advocated by the DMRE, coal industries, and industrial labour unions, calls for a continued reliance on coal, framing foreign climate policies as threats to South Africa's sovereignty and economic autonomy. Finally, the Oppositional Political Project of socioecological, transformative JT, advanced by grassroots movements like the Climate Justice Charter Movement (CJCM), calls for a radical reimagining of JT, emphasizing socioecological justice, decoloniality, and the dismantling of capitalist, extractive systems.

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrated that the JETP is not only a complex policy process but also a contested political space, where competing visions of JT have resulted in a manifest JT conflict reflecting broader tensions between Global North and Global South interests, as well as internal divisions within South Africa. By identifying the four distinct Just Transition Political Projects, I showed how these competing frameworks—ranging from market-driven approaches to transformative socioecological visions—highlight fundamental disagreements over how to navigate South Africa’s energy transition. Ultimately, this chapter illustrated that while the JETP has been positioned as a solution to the country’s socio-ecological crises, it has also reflected and intensified debates over how justice is conceptualised in the global transition to a low-carbon economy.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions

This thesis set out to explore the concept of Just Transition (JT) within the context of the capitalist climate crisis. Initially emerged as a geographically and socially grounded concept linked to labour's demands for environmental and health protections, and later embraced by a radical coalition of U.S. workers and environmentalists, the JT concept has gradually spread through international trade unions and climate justice movements. Over time, it has become an integral part of the mainstream global climate change discourse, shaping both national and international climate policies. The establishment of the South African Just Energy Transition Partnership (SA JETP) as the first international climate finance agreement centred around the notion of JT represented a watershed event in the globalisation of the term and its coronation as a key concept on the global climate agenda. As a consequence of this popularity, which incentivised a vast range of actors to appropriate the term for diverse purposes, the meaning of JT has evolved and expanded.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that this process of proliferation and co-optation was made possible by the fact that JT is *per se* an empty signifier, a “fundamental space of ideological negotiation” where conflicting social forces with different, power-laden understandings of justice compete for hegemony (De Lucia, 2009, p. 237). As most literature had so far overlooked the contested nature of the JT concept – on the one hand lacking a critical investigation into its linkages to power asymmetries and hegemonic projects, and on the other prioritising normative, top-down approaches over empirical research into specific policy formulations of the term – I sought to elaborate a theoretical framework to advance the understanding of JT as an essentially contested, power-laden, context-depedent concept. By doing so, I aimed at developing a structured approach to answer the research question guinding this thesis, namely

How is the Just Transition conceptualised in climate policy conflicts against the background of competing and contradictory interests of different social and political forces?

The result was the formulation, in Chapter II, of a neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework on JT Conflicts, which applied Kalt's (2024) Gramscian Political Ecology to the study of societal struggles over the discursive construction of the JT within climate policies. By

conflating Political Ecology's research focus on conflicts, justice, nature and power, on the one hand, and Gramsci's hegemony theory, with its emphasis on the role of ideology in coalescing social forces around hegemonic blocs, Gramscian Political Ecology was identified as an ideal approach to investigate how different actors mobilise competing justice claims, discourses, and ideologies to advance their own interests within the global energy transition. Integrating crucial insights on hegemony and political projects from Historical Materialist Policy Analysis (HMPA), the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework introduced the concept of JT Conflicts, defined as struggles between competing JT Political Projects that emerge over the conceptualisation of JT strategies and their implementation through policies. Understood as simultaneously being a part and the outcome of the contextual, power-laden struggle between political projects of JT carried out at the national and international levels, conflicts over concrete climate policies can be studied to reveal how and why specific discursive constructions of JT end up prevailing over others. I posited that this can be done by investigating each JT Conflict as a context-dependent struggle, therefore tracing back the ideological and material conditions behind its historical development, and exploring how different actors participate to it by advancing dialectically divergent JT discourses. In order to facilitate the analysis of competing discursive strategies without falling into the trap of deductive, top-down understandings of justice, I introduced an analytical framework largely inspired by Stevis and Felli's (2020) scheme for the study of Planetary Just Transitions.

After outlining and grounding into political theory the neo-Gramscian Political Ecology Framework on JT Conflicts, I sought to demonstrate how it can be applied to the empirical analysis of a specific policy conflict. The SA JETP was selected as a case study for its emblematic role in the globalisation of the JT concept, and for its ability to generate a vibrant justice-centred debate between conflicting views on the past and future of the climate finance regime, the Global North/South divide, and South Africa's coal dependency. Chapter III provided an extensive description of the methodology adopted towards the JETP case study, operationalising the theoretical framework through HMPA's three-step process of context analysis, process analysis and actor analysis (Kannankulam and Georgi, 2014; Brand et al., 2022).

Finally, Chapter IV delved into the core of this thesis. Drawing on an in-depth analysis of policy documents, interviews with key stakeholders and secondary literature, I dissected the complex layers shaping the JT Conflict related to the JETP, revealing how it unfolded against the background of specific historical conditions and conflicting interests. First, I demonstrated that the JETP is not an isolated policy initiative but is profoundly influenced by a broader set

of historical, geopolitical, and socio-economic factors. Globally, the JETP reflects the neoliberal climate regime, which has anchored climate finance in market-based solutions, characterized by the marketization of climate action, minilateralism, and justice claims rooted in libertarian ideologies. I argued that the strategic involvement of the EU and G7 in the JETP goes beyond mere climate action; it serves to consolidate their geopolitical influence and secure ideological leadership in the global transition. In this context, the EU's adoption of the JT language is not purely altruistic but a calculated move to co-opt the justice claims of Global South nations, aligning them with its own political and economic ambitions. At the national level, I illustrated how South Africa's deep socioecological crisis, rooted in its historical reliance on the Minerals-Energy Complex (MEC), sets the stage for the JETP. The country's pressing structural issues – unemployment, poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation – have driven the institutionalization of JT language into its climate response. Yet, these very conditions have also sparked conflicting domestic interests, leading to fierce debates on how the JT should address the nation's socio-economic and environmental crises.

The process analysis delved into the unfolding phases of the JETP policy process, tracing its evolution from negotiation to investment and its ongoing implementation. I highlighted how each phase of this process has been shaped by shifting priorities and escalating tensions between international stakeholders and domestic actors. As the process advanced, domestic actors began to challenge this externally-driven framework, reflecting the broader struggle to reconcile decarbonization with energy security, social justice, and economic transformation within the context of South Africa's energy transition.

In the actor analysis, I identified the key stakeholders shaping the JETP debate and examined how they discursively formulated the concept of JT in order to strategically advance a specific political project. In particular, I uncovered four distinct JT Political Projects, each embodying different visions of how the transition should unfold. The first is the Core Political Project of a market-driven, technical transition led by the EU and segments of the South African government. This project advocates for a privatised, market-led approach that emphasises economic growth and investment, with little focus on broader justice concerns. The second is the Satellite Political Project, a development-oriented, internationally-funded JT, supported by domestic actors like COSATU, the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC), and parts of the ANC. This project seeks to align international climate finance with South Africa's socio-economic goals, particularly job creation, while navigating the pressures exerted by both international partners and domestic constituencies. The third is the Oppositional Political Project of slow-paced, fossilist JT, championed by the Department of Mineral Resources and

Energy (DMRE), coal industries, and certain labour unions. This project frames foreign climate policies as threats to South Africa's sovereignty and economic autonomy, advocating for continued reliance on coal. Finally, there is the Oppositional Political Project of socioecological, transformative JT, advanced by grassroots movements like the Climate Justice Charter Movement (CJCM). This project calls for a radical rethinking of the Just Transition, emphasizing socioecological justice, decoloniality, and the dismantling of capitalist, extractive systems.

This thesis has contributed to the ongoing debate surrounding the present and future of the global energy transition by demonstrating that JT is not merely a neutral concept but a politically charged and ideologically contested terrain of struggle over competing visions of justice, power, and ecological transformation. Because of its interdisciplinary approach, this work constitutes a relevant input to the fields of Global Studies, HMPA, and neo-Gramscianism. First, the relevance of this research for Global Studies lies in its contribution to understanding how global, transnational phenomena like climate finance and energy transitions are negotiated through the interplay of competing political and economic forces at the discursive as well as material level. By examining the global, yet context-dependent dynamics of JT through a critical, emancipatory lens, this thesis highlights the uneven power relations that shape the global energy transition, emphasizing how powerful actors seek to align the justice claims of marginalised, weaker stakeholders with their own political and economic agendas. In doing so, the research underscores the importance of critically engaging with global climate policies not as neutral solutions, but as contested political arenas where questions of justice and power are at stake.

Second, for Historical Materialist Policy Analysis (HMPA), this thesis offers a valuable case study on how to operationalize the approach within the specific context of JT. By applying HMPA's three-step process of context, process, and actor analysis, research provided a structured method for applying HMPA to the analysis of JT conflicts, demonstrating its utility for investigating how policies are shaped by underlying power struggles. Third, this thesis also makes a significant contribution to neo-Gramscian theory by demonstrating that, with the right adjustments, Gramsci's theory of hegemony remains extremely relevant in explaining today's global political conflicts, climate crisis *in primis*. Through the concept of JT Conflicts, the research has shown how different actors engage in ideological and material struggles over the meaning of JT, seeking to establish hegemony by aligning their justice claims with broader political and economic goals. By integrating Gramscian insights into the analysis of climate

policy, the thesis reveals how contemporary environmental and energy struggles can be understood as ongoing battles for hegemony within the global capitalist system.

Looking forward, future research could further explore how JT is conceptualised in other contexts by applying the proposed theoretical framework, especially in Global South countries where similar conflicts over justice, sovereignty, right to development, and ecological transformation are unfolding. Comparative studies of different JETPs could deepen our understanding of how global climate finance regimes interact with local justice claims across various countries and continents, shedding light on how different actors mobilise JT discourses to shape national and international policies. Additionally, future works could focus on the long-term impacts of JT policies like the JETP, investigating whether these initiatives genuinely address the socio-economic needs of vulnerable communities or merely perpetuate existing power inequalities.

In conclusion, this thesis underscored the importance of viewing Just Transition not as a settled concept but as a battleground for competing visions of justice, power, and ecological futures. By critically examining how JT is contested in the global and local contexts, this research invites scholars and policymakers alike to rethink the assumptions behind climate policy. Too often, we convince ourselves that there is only one given way to address an issue and understand a concept. Instead, progressive political theorists and activists should reject naturalised and universalised ideas regarding climate action, and explore alternative, cotextual paths to socioecological change. Only if we understand the global low-carbon transition as a continuous political struggle can we strive for a transformative reconfiguration of society-nature relations in a less exploitative, more inclusive and equitable way. Only if we understand justice as a horizon, rather than a fixed concept set in stone, can we foster indispensable discussions over the future of our planet and our place on it.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Below, one can find the interview guide that has been used for the interviews. Please note: the interview guide was slightly adjusted for the participant's background and for follow-up questions.

1. Can you shortly describe your role within the institution/organisation you are part of and your experience with the JETP with South Africa?
2. How does your institution/organisation define and frame the concept of Just Transition? What are the key principles or elements that are prioritized when it comes to implementing this concept in international policies? How was this definition formulated?
3. Can you please describe your institution/organisation's role in the formulation of the justice dimension of the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) emerged and developed from the early beginning until today?
4. What main points of similarity and differences emerged between the approach of your institution/organisation to the Just Transition and the one formulated in the JETP?
5. How were conflicting perspectives negotiated during the formulation of the justice dimension of the JETP?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add about the JETP, the EU's approach to Just Transition, or anything else?
7. Can recommend any other stakeholders or expert I should speak with to further understand these issues?

Appendix II

Interviews were edited to avoid disclosing sensitive information about the participants.

Interview #1

Interviewer: Could you, please let shortly describe your role within, your directorate? And what is your experience with, just energy transition partnership with South Africa?

P#1: So my role in this..... I mean, in this context, I mean, South Africa is, is a big partner. So we have a unique strategic partnership with South Africa. So it means it is not only cooperation, as it is with other countries in Africa, for example, Malawi or Chad or I mean, this is this is not only the traditional cooperation. So it's more it's broader because it also encompasses, other topics like, trade, for example, research, science, education, Erasmus, for example, we have a lot of exchanges, with between, researchers and also academics serving South Africa. So my role is only, focusing on the cooperation. So the traditional cooperation. So in the other DGs, for example, DG trade, they have also a desk which is dealing with the trade of course between the EU and South Africa and for example in DG CLIMA. So they have also a desk I don't know if you have already spoke with him. So he is responsible for example, the DG CLIMA is the leader in in the coordination of the JETP in South Africa.

Interviewer: Yeah. And so did your, directorate have like, direct engagement in the establishment of the Just Energy Transition Partnership?

P#1: Direct engagement? I mean, direct engagement no because the agreement, the partnership has been signed in 2021. So this is between the EU of course, at higher level and the South Africa. So then of course under, under this, this agreement as I explained, also other directory generals are also concerned so we are working together and we are focusing on only the projects in favor of for the ETP.

Interviewer: Okay. Right. So and in your, in your relations with South Africa, does the concept of just transition appear a lot? And if yes, could you please like, describe to me how, your own department and more in general, the, the, the commission, how, how you define this concept of just transition.

P#1: It's. I mean, in South Africa, it's a very important, concept and in our relations with South Africa. So, just, I mean, we call it a flagship. So, it means that this is a kind of umbrella for our cooperation. And under the umbrella of the Just Energy Transition Partnership now, we define, more more, I mean, a few, sectors that we are focusing on, for example, that are also in the

implementation plan of JETP, of course. So this is, for example, renewable energies, and particularly, green hydrogen. The second one is the critical raw materials. And the third one is the automotive sector and particularly, the batteries. So we have also started working on the transmission grid because this is one of the most important pillar of the just the energy transition partnership and the government, I mean, in the, in the negotiations, the discussions with the governments and local governments, they clearly want the partners to focus on the transmission grid because, I mean, you may know that there are huge problems in load shedding in South Africa. So now we are also, trying to work on the, on this topic and then, but, I mean, of course with the financial institutions and also with our grants. So this is the grants are not very it's not very important. I mean, the the amount of grant is not very high, but it is leveraged by the loans, by the financial institutions.

Interviewer: Okay. Right. Very interesting. And but what about, like. The justice dimension of this partnership. So, what I mean is, because there is a strong component in, in the partnership, from what I read. There's a big focus on this idea of justice so that it has to be a just, transition for South Africa. So how does, how how did this justice, dimension come up in the formulation of the partnership? So, did it come both, first from South Africa and the you picked up on it, or, does the EU have, precise, understanding of what this just transition should be? Yeah. If you could clarify this a bit.

P#1: Yes. So this this is this is a horizontal topic in the justice Energy Transition Partnership and in the implementation plan. So, we are, of course fully aware from the beginning, and this is exactly what we do with our grants. So we focus on the just part. So just to give you the example: so far we have committed, more than €100 million. So these are all grants. So this is not, I mean, these are grants are so not, not reimbursable. And, so we have, few projects that we have already committed. Some of them already started. The, the others did not yet, but it is in the making. So the financing agreements with the government should be signed first before we signed the contract with the implementing partners. So, for example, we have already started the green service delivery in the municipalities. So this is a 50 million project. And, so it will focus on, I mean, the first phase, it is the title. So, to, to strengthen and to improve the service delivery in the municipalities and the greening, the service delivery. It can be, for example, a waste management, it can be, transport, within, within the cities or this kind of thing. So, and the second one that the committed, so the big one. So this is the big project to the just dimension of the partnership. We committed last year. So in, in November. So the financing agreement is not yet signed by the government, but it will be, in a few months, I think. And they can start in

January next year. So this is a 63 million project with the three components. One component is for whole kind of technical assistance that the government, would need in key institutions to help them to define this just transition and also to, for example, to improve the regulatory framework in different institutions. And, so this is an, a kind of, demand based, this is a demand based approach. So the government, will tell us where they need this technical assistance so we can then mobilize, this is a long term technical assistance so we can mobilize, for example, if they they have already asked us, to, to help in the Ministry of Electricity. So in the Department of Energy and Electricity. So again, this is a 10 million. So that overall, envelope is 10 million from the 63. And beside this we have the second component, which is 20 million, which will be for, technical and vocational training. And this is exactly, for example, to allow that the people who work there in the, in for example, in the, in the, in the mines or in the, in the power plant that will be closed to reconvert them to other jobs, to help them to find jobs, for example, in the green sectors, in renewable energies and this, this kind of things. And the third one is, is the biggest one. So this is a €43 million. So this will be in support of the SMEs in the new green energy sectors. So this is exactly what they did. I mean we, we have already implemented a project, in support of SMEs. So we will continue to do so, but, we will focus on the green sectors and for example on renewables because it's very demanding and they need a lot of new of course, new, SMEs who will provide, for example, for the households, the solar panels, so to help them to, to to set up the SMEs and to help them to reconvert to work in these new green sectors. And then beside this, we have other project or these these are the blending projects. We provide the ground for for example, we provide 7 million AFD (Agence française de développement) who signed a contract of 200 million loan with the government in the, in the development of the green hydrogen network. Yeah. And there are others. So we have also another, with the EIB. The EIB will provide 350 million, loan to, to Transnet. And, we provided a 21 million grant to help them to identify the infrastructure investments needed in the transport sector. STransnet is the state owned enterprise who has transport, railways, the ports and so on.

Interviewer: Right. And focusing on this, 63 million package, it's you mentioned so like, I was just wondering, these projects, that are part of it, how were they? Decided, like, was, was there, a request from the South African government to, to make grants on these, with these objectives? Or it was more it was a dialog between the two parties, or the it was a decision of the of the you.

P#1: No, it's. It's always a dialogue between the two parties. So in this case, I think that was. But that is also the dialog, in the context, I mean, it is not between the two parties because the, the text piece. So there is an international partner group. And so there is not only the EU, but there are also the other, participants of France, the UK, Germany and so on. So in this context. So the government, of course, they, they, they, they suggested tha with the grants we support this kind of things for example. So we have also the geographical localization. So, because, in, the province, such an open anger. So there are many, coal power plants that I'm mean, that are now schedule to be closed. Maybe not in two years, but, I hope in the medium term, and, so, yes. And this is also in the implementation plan.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Right. And so and in this dialog, as you said, with, the South African government and the other partners, would you say that there where at any point, tensions, and like conflicting perspectives about how to, understand the justice dimension of the GTP.

P#1: I don't think. No. Not really about the just component, but basically, I mean, about the whole JETP because South Africa always told us that we are too slow. And I mean, we, not only need the European Union, but also with the other partners. And on the other side, of course, they also they have procedures. So they, for example, for the financing agreements as I mentioned. So they need at least nine months to sign a financing agreement. So, but not not about I didn't hear anything about their any, conflicting opinion about the just part.. So it's it's very well, I mean, it's it's very well included in this transition. So it is, a core part of the transition.

Interviewer: Right. And I was also wondering, was any was this the formulation of the policy and the implementation? Was it a very, like institutional diplomatic process or where, where there was there also the involvement at some level of like civil society or academia or business, in the, in the, the policy process.

P#1: Yes. Yes, I think yes. But I mean, this is this I mean, of course, that in, in Brussels we are not involved in these discussions. So it is at local level. We also met to civil society, of course, or the I mean we discussed those subject so and so they, they are very relevant and they, they were involved in the, in the, the process of developing the just the transition.

Interviewer: Okay. Right. So yeah, I don't know if, if is there anything else you would like to add? I don't know, some. Yeah. Comments, questions, opinions about, this, this policy, about the EU approach, like some observations you have. From our side.

P#1: I think now what we have to do is to deliver, of course, on the projects. So as soon as possible. So as soon as all the contracts, and all the finance agreements are signed we have to start working on the project and deliver something on the ground. Of course. And this is also, for the, for the loans, of course, for, for EIB and for AFD, which is not under our control, of course. But at least I mean, we are in close contact with the EIB. Of course. And then also maybe the second, because the EIB, I don't know if you know that the, the EIB pledged €1 billion for the JETP. So this, this what I mentioned, the 350 million loan is only the first part of this pledge. So now they have to urgently, start preparing the second half because now I mean we are in 2024, so. And the partnership was signed in 21. So it's time to deliver something on the ground. So that's, that's the point I think.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. yeah I think I asked you everything. I needed to I don't know maybe you have any. Can you recommend any like other expert that I could talk to or like some relevant documents that, I could delve into to get to know to understand this better.

P#1: I think that the documents you can find on the internet maybe on the, on the, on the website of the department of energy and also the presidential climate commission, who are in charge of the whole coordination of the JETP. If you have contacts in digitally masks or, you know, the person.

Interview #2

Interviewer: Could you please just shortly describe your role, within your directorate? And what is your experience with the GDPR, with South Africa?

P#2: Okay. So I am... One of the concrete projects on which I focus is the JETP with Africa, which I've been following since its inception in 2021. And I prepared participation of the EU in the what is called the International Partners Group, which brings together the, the partner countries that are supporting the JETP. So France, Germany, US, UK, Denmark and, and and then of course, the EU.

Interviewer: Okay. Right. And so this concept of just transition is very central in the, GTP. So I was wondering if you could talk a bit about how, your institution, how do you define the concept of just transition? And in particular, if you could focus on what are the key principles, that are prioritized, when it comes to implementing this concept in an international policy such as the GTP.

P#2: Okay. Well, the I think that was important to emphasize the JETP is a domestically owned, sort of, partnership. So it means that the, the, the policies are coming from within South Africa. And and we are we are there to support them in achieving their policy goals. The underlying sort of objective, for the partnerships are set out in the, in the political declaration for the JETP. And, I mean, we can, of course, work with South Africa on the different concepts and the different reforms that are needed to to make them reach their goals. But it's not so that, you know, we would be sort of, dictating how they need to pursue their just energy transition or the other goals that are included in the partnership. Right. So I think that's that's important. We have within the EU are our own sort of, frameworks, to work on, just energy transition within the EU. And there are some programs, that, that exist for that, for regions that are affected by this type of economic transitions. We can share the best practices and there are some projects, in fact, that do that. There are some projects where we put regions from the EU that have gone through the energy transition, in contact with regions from third countries that are going through that and including from South Africa. But this is sort of an exchange of, of practices. And, and, the framework for which that is being used, for South Africa, it's just an energy transition. It's a framework that has been, established within the South African context, for which there has been extensive consultations. And that was adopted by the Cabinet of South Africa. So there is, I think it was in 2022 that they adopted this just transition framework which was prepared by the Presidential Council Commission, and, for which we have provided some support to help the P.C.C to conduct a number of consultations ahead of finalizing this framework.

Interviewer: So you would, would you say that like, this consultation element was like an important part on the side of the EU, like making sure that there were consultations with the South African society.

P#2: I wouldn't express it like that, as a condition. It's it's something that came from, you know, there is this PCC that is an organization that does a lot of this consultation type of work around kind of policies. And we were more than happy to support them in doing that, because we believe it's important and it's, it's part of the things that, that help to make climate policies more acceptable for the general public. That's very important for a context like South Africa, where, you know, you need to build the consensus around their just energy transition. It's a very painful, sort of exercise where you have, community, people losing their jobs and you need to give them the perspective of what comes after this.

Interviewer: Right. So if I understand. Well, there isn't like, from the side of you, like, normative definition of just transition. It's more like, see, case by case, like in this case, like with South Africa, like what South Africa needs and what is like what? Yeah. What they conceive as a just transition for themselves.

P#2: There's a framework for how we deal with this within the EU. I don't deal with that myself specifically. So that's colleagues within DG energy that deal with that. And there are some programs I know that support this kind of work, but we don't necessarily replicate that or impose that on countries with which we work on a, on a JETP. We're happy to share our experience. And, and it can be useful that they learn from it. That's very good but, every transition is it will be specific to the context in which it is happening. We can all learn from each other. That's always good to learn from each other. But we are not coming there with sort of a number of criteria that, we have imposed as conditions for South Africa to complete in order for us to support their JETP.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. And, could you please, like, describe to me how the the process of the formulation of the justice dimension of the GDP emerged and, and developed like, from the beginning. So, like, was it from the beginning? Was there from the beginning such a strong focus on the justice dimension? What who from what side it came from? If there were also some tensions in how to define this, dimension.

P#2: The primary sort of objective of the JETP from an international perspective is to work with South Africa to reduce its emissions. I mean, that's the, you know, that's the driver of this partnership. South Africa is one of the most polluting countries in the world and, it's one of the countries where you can do quite rapidly, all things considered, progress in lowering these emissions. And, we saw that there was a strong commitment of the government to do so. Because they proposed a nationally determined determined contributions under the Paris Agreement that included a high level of ambition. We also saw that there was a, reform policy effort ongoing that could sustain that ambition. So that's sort of that's at the basis of the partnership. The just element is an important part of this policy reforms that are needed to sustain the transition. So it's, it's something that, that definitely we want to look at and we want to support thorough the EU funding that we're mobilizing for the partnership. We will be supporting the just energy transition, because we will do a number of actions. This will help for the reskilling of workers as well. That will create jobs and businesses in the coalmining regions. And, yeah, I mean, I think that's how we that's in terms of sequencing how I'd present it. First, the underlying, the basis for the partnership is South Africa's NDC. And from there

we developed a number of priorities that need to be addressed, including the just dimension, how to ensure that there are the right policies and sufficient funds for that. And and doing our part of that work by mobilizing grants that will help South Africa reach those objectives.

Interviewer: Right. But so this, element of just, transition, would you say it's, it came first from South Africa? Like, if South Africa didn't want to include it, would have would have it still be there or not.

P#2: No, I say, I think it's part of I mean, you cannot do, this energy transition you cannot do it without these just elements. Yeah. It's it's part of the credibility of the offer that was presented to international partners is that, you know. They came with a plan to do their missions that also included a big emphasis on the trust element, which reinforces the credibility of the plan. Because, without that, you know that the plan is doomed to fail.

Interviewer: [Right? Okay. And, would you say that in during this process of, and. Yeah, the establishment of the partnership, was there any tension, with, the, especially with the South African partner, but also with the other partners about the main, underpinnings of the, of the of this justice dimension.

P#2: No, I don't think so. I think in the general public in South Africa the JETP is quite contested. It's, it's considered is presented as being unjust and so that the narrative around the JETP in South Africa is not very positive. But we need to explain more, that that in fact from the side of the international partners, for us, it's very important that we prioritize this for the support that we are mobilizing for the JETP. So in that sense, there has been tension.

Interviewer: But why, in your opinion? It's considered unjust by the by the African like public opinion.

P#2: You're touching on something with a lot of economic interests that are at stake. So I think there's, potentially, an interest from those that are to lose from that ecosystem and to steer the debate in that direction because, it's a way to, in a way undermine the energy transition to keep their, their economic interests. Right. So that that's one aspect. And I think there's also the difficulty to, to have a good alignment or a sort of a good sequencing, between, plans to close a coal mine and making sure that before, that happens, sufficient activities are already ongoing to help the communities. There's a case of Komati's coal mine, which you might have heard about, where there has been fierce critics that there was not sufficient things in place, before the plans were activated to close this coal plant. So there's a report of the PCC about that be interesting for you to read. So this is very useful report to read, I think, because it shows you

the difficulty of having support for for the closure of a coal plant, but then not sufficient programs in place to to help the communities affected by the closure. So I think it's really a useful report to read from the, from the PCC. So I think that that's, that's a factual sort of problem. So I think there's a problem which is about the politics. And there are people in South Africa that make money out of coal that get elected. On the on the basis of the coal constituency, the people who make a living from coal. They stand to lose from the just energy transition. And they will always steer this debate about whether it's, that it's unfair, that it's not realistic etc., etc.. And then there is also I think we need to look at the facts, and accept the need to improv the sequencing of the action because, it's, you know, just closing a coal plant is not enough. You you need to make sure that there's a plan to support the community, and that is effective.

Interviewer: Right? But so these tensions, as you just told me, like, yeah, there are tensions within the African society. But when it came to your relation with, with the South African government in establishing the partnership, would you say that there was, alignment of visions of interests or there were like some strong moments of, like some strong, conflicting perspectives about how, I don't know, yeah. About the process through which the, the policy was formulated, about how the money would be distributed, like these kind of things.

P#2: That the tension is around the money. Tensions is around the money. Is there enough money, you know, are international partners putting enough money on the table to ensure that this is a just transition. That's, that's where the tension comes from and that's where South Africa has pushed back by asking to have a bigger amount of money mobilized, to have more grants as part of the money that is being mobilized, making sure that the loans that are mobilized are really concessional loans. So that's where the tension, I would say, arises. Because, yeah, that, especially for this just dimension, of course, you know, this can only be realized with public money to realize the just dimension of the transition, you cannot say that this is going to be covered by private funds. It's, it's a private sector that will create the jobs, but you need to help that process with public funding.

Interviewer: Okay. And and so. And how is the, you're answering to this.

P#2: I think in general the international partners have increased the grant funding that that have been made available for the JETP. So we addressed that concern from South Africa to have more grants and less loans in the, in the financial offer. And then from our side, we are going

to mobilize high amount of funds for the just elements, and so programs of reskilling, programs of SMEs creation, with a big with the focus on the coal mining, the, coal mining regions.

Interviewer: One last question then and then I'm using your time, because in the, in the political declaration, I read that there was, specific focus on women and youth, and how the just transition could help them. Could you just, elaborate a bit on this? Like, is there some specific, project in, already, going on this?

P#2: I'm not aware. I mean, first of all, our funding is at the advanced stage of programing, but, the project themselves still need to be sort of contracted out. But what I would recommend is that you look at the grant register that is available on the website of the JETP. You will see the grant register. I don't know if it goes into that level of detail that you can recognize the beneficiaries of. For example, if there's a gender and youth dimension. So I don't know how easily you can retrieve that information, but, otherwise, maybe the PMU, the project management unit of South Africa, it may give you an overview of that information.

Interview #3

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah. Please. If you can introduce yourself and your role in the department and also a bit about the role of the department in, in the GTP.

P#3: Okay. So, my name is...In my department, well, so as as you, as you know, we have we have the Africa Department, which is like a big department, which consists of several, divisions and, apart from from one division, which covers horizontal matters, other divisions cover different parts of Africa, of sub-Saharan Africa. Because, we don't cover Northern Africa. So, my my division is covering southern Africa and Indian Ocean. I mean, the African, the West Indian Ocean and and so basically and to, to, you know, to understand the you, you, you need to to look at the EEAS as a whole what the EEAS is and what is not. So, so basically in theory, we should have , we should give this political dimension to, to do anything that other directorate Generals do, including those who implement the JETP; In reality, it's, it's far more complex than that. And sometimes it's really working as, it's as it's probably as it was in, in the idea of, of of those who created the EEAS. We should theoretically, we should give this political guidance. We should say, yeah, we are those who give general political lines to do whatever the EU does

Interviewer: And why aren't you in practice?

P#3: Well, because in, in in reality, the commission is, is is very strong. I mean, it's it's very independent. I mean, we we have not, you know, we we are like, I mean, we would have here like a long conversation about what the EEAS is, how it works and what, the issues. But but I would say that, we just don't have we are not really we are not strong enough as as the institutions. It's a young institution which was created by the member states. But sometimes these member states are not that much, you know, protecting it, not giving enough strength, and it's not done because it's mostly about money, because we don't have, you know, it's the commission that has the money, including the JETP although there's also the European Investment Bank there. But but yeah we don't have any money. We and yeah and we so so yeah. But I mean you know it's not I understand that it's your, your your thesis. But I'm just telling well the main reason why I'm telling you this is that you, you should not overestimate our role. Especially in such so such, such a project as the JETP.

Interviewer: But so what what was like your role in the JETP process?

P#3: Frankly speaking, our role in this is very, very limited. We we, you know, we basically what we, what we well, first of all, we need to know what's going on. What what what what what what what is like. Because basically one of our roles is to somehow to, to coordinate different different, different DGs or even not coordinate, but at least to monitor what's going on so that we have like a full picture of, of, of, of, bilateral relations between the EU and a given country. So, so we, we need to know what we're doing and then, when it's necessary, we, for example, when, when there are some high level meetings, we, we, we use these elements to, to brief the leaders to, you know, to discuss it. For example, there's been several, several meetings, recently, different levels, like, for example, between HRP Borrell and, and Foreign Minister Pandor and and doing this, this meeting, these meetings, the JETP project was discussed. And it's the same when, Charles Michelle, spoke with President Ramaphosa. Yeah. So, so it's it's like there's always some messages to, to be passed, but very general messages in the sense that we can we, we support you regarding the, the just transition. We have to be and we we are keen to progress in this field. So so this is again this is basically it comes to us this this, this kind of political messaging.

Interviewer: And does the the EEAS, or your department specifically, do you have like, working definition of just transition? Like when you, worked under, under the, under policy during the policy process, what was the what what definition was given to this, just transition?

P#3: No, I wouldn't say that we have a definition here. It's if you if you are looking for a definition you should talk with the commission.

Interviewer: Yeah. Like, I, I, I'm interested about this. Like, if there's. If this concept is clarified in some way, like in in the JETP.

P#3: well, according to what what I have in my different materials and what I would have been going to my desk, I have never seen any, any concrete definition. And, okay. I mean, everybody somehow feels for what it means and, okay, we don't assume that that, that South Africa is that that the energy mix in South Africa is based on coal and, and, of course, everybody is aware and also in South Africa, maybe not everybody there are some ministers for are still very pro-coal. But but overall there is this conviction in South Africa that they should move from it. And at the same time, they know that there are many people who who you know, who who live from, from from coal from, from the he production of electricity from coal. So basically this is about, you know, having this transition but not leaving this people behind. You have some, some new opportunities. Well, that's what we what we do. We finish this project. But, but yeah, if you ask me whether there is, like, a very clear, precise definition and I, I haven't seen it. Okay, maybe there it is somewhere, but not in this house.

Interviewer: And. So like, could you describe to me, like how the, the policy, that like the policy process of the GTP, and in particular, the focus on the justice dimension, so this just transition idea, how it was, formulated in, in the, in the relations with South Africa. So, was South Africa that was, first very interested in, in pushing for for this justice dimension or did it come from other actors?

P#3: So as you know, that, the EU is not the only actor who is involved in the JETP. There is also the U.S., the UK and, some of our members. There are four, actually, right now it's Germany and France and, the Netherlands and Denmark and, I would say, I mean, I again, I don't know the, the, the, you know, how it's how it all started because I wasn't, I wasn't even here. But the way how I see it is, it's, it's, there's been for, for years a dialog with, with South Africa. So, so it's not that it's not one, one way communications and that the, you know, there's there's also this reflection on, on, on, on, on the energy transition in South Africa. There were, there was a commission attached to the two presidents, Ramaphosa. And they also, you know, they come to a realization that, that this transition was necessary. And then we, I can, you know, I can imagine that the you and other partners is somehow, you know, entering this dialog and eventually we we came to this, to this idea that we, we, we, we work together. And also South

Africa has its own strategy on just transition and basically what what is important to understand that as far as remember, their budget, as they've managed to establish for much more or less, it would cost up to €90 billion. I think, while our contribution of all the partners would be like maybe 10% of it. So it's also important to understand that the, the vast majority of, of, you know, of, of funds is not coming from, from this group. So. Yeah. And then okay out of this 9 billion, which I think 1.3 billion that the group has committed is to be 1 billion from the European Investment Bank and the rest from other partners.

Interviewer: And I mean, I read that like but the international partner groups also like, like aims also at mobilizing other investments like the channel more investments through this starting investment. And that would happen like with like private invest like investments from the private sector. Right. Like, so it would or.

P#3: Well so yes. So so this is, something more general. I would say it's the whole, the whole idea of, of global gateway because basically the JETP is included as a one of the global gateway projects. And, the general idea of, of, of the global gateway is to attract private investments in a way that we, that our funding serve us a certain leverage. So let's say you put ten let's say 10 billion, but you are hoping to get another 10 billion from from private companies, investors coming coming into the project. So definitely there is this, this, this, this desire to, to have this, this kind of effect.

Interviewer: Okay. And when and so like during the formulation of the JETP, like on the side of the you was there was just some was there some talking also some inclusion in the process, of non- institutional actors, like, for example, business or civil society.

P#3: Again, I, you know, I don't, I don't know, I don't know the, the and I don't have any details about these discussions. I would have to check it whether. Have you tried to speak with somebody from the delegation?

Interviewer: I'm speaking to them, this afternoon.

P#3: Okay, great. Because I'm sure that they will have some, some tissue because, you know, it was mostly done to, coordinating and discussing with South Africa, but, but again, I can just tell you that in general, there is this, this, this, this. This thinking within the EU about attracting, you know, about attracting businesses, investors from, so that they would, you know, enhance our. Our our action. And this is also an (?) because when we, we talk about the, green transition and. Just transition. In South Africa, we we since since since the two months, we've been discussing a lot with them about some, some possibilities of cooperating in, in the field of green

hydrogen and critical raw materials and electric vehicles. So this is also, you know, we see this as a as a, you know, it's not only about about the energy; it's also about other sectors where which are linked to to green transition and just transition. So, you know, for example, the idea is that those who before working on coal mines now could work on green hydrogen. So, so there's this, this thinking also included.

Interviewer: And are you aware of any, tension that might have arisen, in South Africa about the JETP and is the EEAS or the Commission doing something to address these concerns and tensions or there's more will to let it let South Africa deal with that.

P#3: Know, frankly speaking, I'm not really aware of any particular tensions, related to to the JETP. So I would I would even say that it's actually the opposite. It's, it's the J in the JEPT hat is an answer to different tensions that are rising. Regarding the transition. Because if you have for some poor people losing jobs, then the idea of, of JETP is to help them, you know, to, to, to give them some for example, information so that it could serve with something else. So, so, so yeah I would say that this is. This. This is, this is. This, this aspect here. But then, if we are talking about. So I don't know if you are aware of of of the CBAM.

P#3: So so basically carbon border adjustment mechanism. The idea of it is that. The EU would like to avoid a situation when polluting businesses are moving from the EU somewhere else because, you know, we wouldn't solve the problem, but we'll just move it somewhere else. Or for example, we are not. We don't want to allow. You know, in a nutshell, we don't want to let some business, some polluting businesses somewhere else to be competitive with our businesses, which will become, more expensive because of difference and different norms. So, we, the EU has invented this this mechanism. And, this is actually a tension, this creates tensions between between the EU and South Africa because they believe that this is, and like that, that, you know, they have this, this. Quite often. Strong. Strong rhetoric. Very, very. Sometimes, like Ideological, you know that that the global North is trying to impose something on the global South, you know, because the idea is that the companies would have to pay this, this, this tax. Yeah, yeah. Carbon carbon tax. So, so so. Okay. It's not directly linked to JETP but it's the same. You know it's also about energy about transmission and the cost of it. In this in this in this case it's about industrial production. So so yeah. So here you could and actually it's, it's something quite, quite important for them . They are voicing it on different occasions. And then they also. You know, somehow always trying to to to to tell us, let's say I really against it.

Interviewer: And what's what is your, like your response is there like, also something to address this concern done within the GDP or like they're two very different.

P#3: No, no. We. Yeah. So so no, it's not really in because the answer is that it's and this is like a long process that, that the, the system will start to work gradually. So they will have time to adjust that. We are trying to, you know, to and, and that, you know, we want to discuss it with them and that way it's, it's not not I wouldn't say that it's going to be.

Interviewer: Okay. And. So later, like, this is about the sebum. Like, it's seen as a very technical issue, where there's not much space for, like, a more justice dimension like that is left more to things like the GTP.

P#3: You know, it's interesting because it is technical issue for the EU because we perceive it as something very technical. While their approach is very political. So we are talking you know from two different, let's say, positions. And I must say that this is what I, what I see sometimes in these bilateral relations that the US is, has this tendency to, to, to have this very technical, even technocratic approach to things, while for them it is very political because they believe that this is, you know, they don't even I don't think that that many of the South African politicians, for example, the foreign minister that they are really deep into this subject, they just had this general idea of what the EU is trying to do. And for them, it's neocolonialism. And yeah, this is this is the perception. Of course, you could always argue that, oh, listen, we have this cbam but then we are we are helping you with you just transition, which is somehow complimentary.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah. I think. Yeah, it's it's interesting to see how this is that Africa perceives like the, this kind of, actions of the EU, like, so, for example, was was there any accusation of. Yeah, of neocolonialism, also concern to the JETP? Or like the fact that it's so focused on justice made that. Go away a bit.

P#3: No. With this one, you know we have some irritants in our bilateral relations and, and basically you know what, what is important to understand that that the JETP and whatever we do is, is in a certain context, and the context is that, that in the South African foreign policy and its perception of, of, of the world, there was still a strong ideological dimension. And, you know, they perceived themselves as this representative of a nonaligned movement of G77 and a representative of, of, of, of the global South. And so in, in their, in their foreign policy, you can you can often see this, this messianistich approach. And actually this is somehow, you

know, visible when we have these different irritants. Like for example, I mentioned this CBAM, but we also have, for example, some trade irritants like, we, we, we introduced some special measures on, on citrus fruits coming from South Africa. And, and they also perceive it as a, as a protectionist measure. But it's hard to, hard to have some issues with JETP because it's, you know, it's basically we are helping them to, to implement their own strategy. So here, you know, it's rather an uncontroversial, project. However, in, as, as, as, as the background to have this difference, these different issues that we have with and different irritants, some kind of challenges, some colleagues prefer to call them challenges, irritants. .

Interviewer: And but so, yeah, as I said, like and the EU is basically helping South Africa to implement their own strategies, the transition. But what is like the final, like why is the you doing this? Like it's because of, like South Africa is an important partner or like what is the the goal.

P#3: Well, I would say that there are several goals like. I mean, okay, if, if, if you want to look at it from this very political angle, you could say that South Africa is, is is is an important partner of the EU; the only the only African country, I mean, including North Africa, with which the EU has a strategic partnership. We we established this partnership in 2007. And we have, you know, we we have different engagements on. On on different levels. The EU is the main, the biggest and, the biggest source of foreign direct investments in South Africa. We are their biggest, biggest, export market. There are many contacts, you know, on human to human level. And then what? Okay. We are not. I mean, South Africa is is is positioning itself as an, nonaligned country including on the war in Ukraine. However, we see that we have on many subjects we are very like minded. For example, just, you know, a random example, the LGBT in question, South Africa is one of a very, very like only a few countries in Africa where this question is, you know, important where where the there are many provisions in, in the legal system about LGBTQ, even same sex marriages are allowed. So, so so this is something which which you don't find in many other African countries where actually quite often it's the opposite. So so it shows that we are, you know, quite often on the same page also regarding our our will to, to enforce multilateralism and to protect it from, from, you know, different, different pressures from. Different sides. And so so this is how we perceive South Africa. On one hand there are some differences, but on the other we believe that this is this is in many fields a like minded partner. So yeah so definitely we we are trying to do a lot to to to keep them in a way on our side. You know it's if you want you can even look at this more globally. I mean if you think that that that we live in this multipolar world where there is some kind of

competition between, you know, the EU, the U.S., China, Russia, then obviously South Africa being a BRIC member, having good relations with Russia and China, it's our, you know, we want to do everything to keep them on our side because we know it's a bit like, you know, they're a bit balancing, although we believe that they are still more because the for them. Okay. For example, take Russia I mean they always say "we don't say we we have good relations with them. We, we, you know, we have to get in BRIC". Historically they had very good relations (the ANC in the 80s). But on the other hand their trade with Russia is maybe like 0.5% of all the trade. You know it's insignificant. So obviously the EU is a much more important partner for them. They are a bit ideological, but not to the extent to, you know, to, to to follow their ideologies and not to look at their interests. And so yeah. So so basically that's you could say that this is this one of one reason why we are having the JETP and other projects with them. On the other hand there is this obvious continuation of our internal green policies. I mean, because the EU the way how it works, is that very often the internal policies of the EU are also reflected in what we do abroad. So in this case, since we are trying to to, to to green our economy, then we are also helping them to do the same, knowing that on the one hand it's a it's a big. Very industrialized country in southern Africa. On the other, it's using mostly fossil fuels to get their energy source. So it's obvious that we we we we believe that it makes sense to, to help them to to change it because it will, you know, to be beneficial for everybody in the whole world. And then, you may look for some more and more pragmatic reasons. So this would be what, what we what we said we have this, this, this hope to work with them on, on, on green hydrogen, on critical raw materials, on, on, on on electric vehicles. And it's also linked to it. So, so here you could say that we do the JETP because we also want to have some some anchors in, you know in this in these fields which are related to it and which could, you know, the vision is that many European companies will also benefit from it. So so, you know, maybe they would have some, you know, joint ventures with certain African companies. So that's that's the thinking behind it.

Interviewer: Okay. And. Like, as I said, like there is this. If I understood where, like, the internal, idea, like of, the internal, like, green policies are somehow reflected also in the external action. But is there a reflection, happening, in general or specifically in the case of South Africa, of what is good, like the challenges that such an approach could create, like considering that South Africa are like global South countries with which, like deep agreements are made, like, such a different socioeconomic context or this is not a focus of the reflection.

P#3: Well, You know, even with with CBAM. What, what what you can see is that that maybe sometimes the EU is underestimating certain effects that our policy may and may, may have abroad. Like, okay, we have this we also have this kind of idealistic approach and that, okay, we we want, you know, we we are fighting against climate change. We, we want those other countries to transform their and, their, their energy mix. But then sometimes you're right that maybe we underestimate certain, certain, issues that that are arising like, for example, maybe sometimes the fact that we are pushing for this transition, that maybe we maybe we are expecting it to happen too quickly, you know, maybe, maybe it should be more gradual, but. And then, okay, in South Africa it's moving very slowly. I don't think that the that we are somehow, you know that that our influence is big to the point that we we may cause something, you know, some kind of harm. Because even if you think that, again, we are only contributing maybe 10% of the whole transition, it's their will, it's their political decision. And and it's also they have this internal, internal discussion that there is one, one minister who is I don't remember his portfolio, but he's, he's a, a strong supporter of, of coal energy and, and you know, and they have different visions within the government. I mean we'll see how it will be with the new government. And actually, we do hope that that's actually one of our hopes related to the new government is that the seats will somehow gain pace with the trend of the just transition, because the de the Democratic Alliance will we will get some, some, some economic, ministries. And we do believe that's a. As they may want to to. To to speed up the into transition. And of course the president is this is supporting it has been always a supporter of this. So yeah so so so so just to to so for example, the difference I see between CBAM and just transition is that CBAM is something we invented that we are really, you know imposing on them. Well it just transition is something that that they decided to to do. And we are just helping them, although it's of course it is aligned with also our how we perceive our, our interests.

Interviewer: And in this is just a more technical question would just like this, I don't know that much about how it works, but like when you like in this negotiation of the GDP, like when you, talk with Africa about it, like, do you talk with, like specific ministries or with, like, with just like the, one representative, the government or like the PCC? Would.

P#3: Yeah. So, so, we, I mean, we have different interlocutors that this is mostly, well, PCC tool, but but mostly the Ministry of Energy. . Now there are things that they're going to be to, to do some changes like switch some portfolios and, but this is mostly the energy.

Interviewer: And, and do you have any more comments or observation you would like to make on this? Where do you think it's if it's going well, if it's something could be improved.

P#3: Well the, the issue that we would what would we see. The, the main problem is that it's, it's, you know, it's it's moving slowly. But then again you could maybe think that's okay. Maybe it's just our perception. Maybe this is how it should be. Maybe, you know, maybe they are not able for political reasons to, to to do everything faster. But then again with this new government there is some kind of hope that that it will be higher on, on the list of priorities and maybe they'll see a sense in accelerating everything. So I'd be, apart from this, I don't. I wouldn't say that. We, of course, you know, the the whole, when you take Eskom and when you think how, how badly managed this company is and, you know, there was there was corruption. There was. And then there is like, waste of resources. So, I mean, this is also like, you know, and so this is like a big issue, but it's not, you know, I mean, this is what this is what it is. It's it's, you know, they have to clean up. It's on their own. This is their, their, their country and their companies.

Interviewer: But when you say that it's moving slow. You mean like compared. Do you have like a timeline. or like agreed on about how let the movement of the of the GTP or like, you mean just, just compare it to the national Nationally Determined contributions?

P#3: Yeah, I would say rather to the NDC. As to the timeline, I, I just know that that that is, 1 billion from the European Investment Bank. It somehow, for example, this one is moving slow because when, when you have such a, such a credit from, from the European Investment Bank, it's a complex administrative procedure. And on their side there are some, you know, some hindrances. So, so for example, this one is not moving, you know, because we, we, we will only be able to disburse to start disbursing next year. The idea was to have this year. What else? No. Again I, you know, I my, my knowledge about it should be general. I mean, I mean, I'm sure that you know much more than I mean, because just because we. Yeah. It's not I mean, again, we as as the years we we need to know what's going on with different guys are doing with the delegation is doing. But this this I think it's mostly in, in, in the remit of DG INTPA. So the DG and the delegation are two main sources I guess information on this one. And. Yeah. And maybe, well, maybe one and one thing, which is also. Are worth saying, that that we had this in the partner group. It's not only EU but also the US, the UK. It shows you that. It's not the very first time nor the last one where we we cooperate on something with with the U.S and the UK. It is. It's also show certain, you know, that the EU is not alone, that there are other

other partners who are like minded and who are also ready to, to work with us. And I think that that's also something quite valuable in terms of, you know, like even politically.

Interview #4

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah, that's that would be great. So, yes, first of all, just if you can describe like shortly, like your position within the delegation and like also especially the role of the delegation into the whole, GTP process, like the formulation, process.

P#4: Okay, so my name is Katiana, I'm a policy officer at the EU delegation in the cooperation section. My main focus areas are water, energy and climate. But the just energy transition forms part of my portfolio. A big chunk of it. So, yeah. So I am also managing a few programs around the just energy transition here, as well as other stuff, related to water and, now. Critical raw materials. Junior mining in the future. .

P#5: I'm Don Smith, also program manager here in the cooperation section. My two sectors is communication and culture. So dealing with communication with regards to the JETP IPG group then policy formulation in itself.

P#6: My name is.... I don't really have a file myself, more coordinating the different actions that, we roll out under the JETP: relations with the partners, with the government, and then, operational implementation when it comes to the main building blocks of the implementation plan of the JETP. Transition, hydrogen, new energy vehicles and the just transition.

Interviewer: Okay. And and so what was the, could you describe the role of the delegation in this in, in the establishment of the GTP?

P#6: The role of the delegation is small. I mean, it's a complicated architecture, that we have that goes from capitals, to the government. And let's say the dialog takes place in a different fora, at multilateral level in defined fora for all such as the conference of the parties, at the level of coordination between JETP members. So the international partners of the governments that takes place at the capital level, mostly. And then you have the bilateral engagement of each JETP partners with, with the government of South Africa. So it's, it's like, multilayered web of connections that, interface and, intertwine between them in different fora at different levels: capitals, and here in Pretoria, on the ground. The role of delegation is precisely to be, on the one hand, the eyes and ears of the European Union and to try this process that is very much, headquarters oriented on an international forum. And then we are tasked and this is, where we play, a second main role is on the actual implementation of our pledges operationally- speaking to the JETP. So basically what we do here is to roll out our supporting tools and mechanisms

that will help the, the just energy transition in South Africa. And then the third leg is what Daniel is doing is the, the actual communication around the JETP. That is hugely important because, you may see in the media, you may see, the civil society that this is, the dominant field of conversation when it comes to today. This is, you know, the fatness of aid (?), the just element compared to other more economic aspects of it, the transparency of the accountability when it comes to that intention. So communicating, to the different stakeholders, what our role is and how we are implementing our pledges becomes very important. So those three aspects, in a way, we, we try to be policy-wise the eyes and ears of, of the European Union on the ground, an advocate. Operational second level : support the implementation plan. And third: communication, raise awareness about what we do and, and reach an understanding, a common understanding with the different stakeholders and learn from them slowly, they can tell us what works and what doesn't.

P#4: Just to add on to what Pancho was saying, these, these kind of meetings and these, get together that he was referring to also has a very coordinating role. So information sharing is one thing, but coordinating is another, because we're all in this space of the just energy transition. And the idea about supplantation and not duplication of efforts, because then we just dilute the impact that we have around the just energy transition. So so it's got a a big coordinating role in there as well.

Interviewer: Okay. Clear. And so when when we talk about just, energy transition, what does the delegation have, a clear like, working definition of what is, just transition is and what it implies also, for example, in the, when it comes to communicating it.

P#5: I think. I think it's different from country to country. What is happening in Indonesia we can't copy and paste in South Africa. I think within the South African context you have the "?", it cannot be underestimated. I feel like a lot of, communication efforts now is also to make it clear that, you know, we support South Africa, and South Africa is implementing the funds. They are implementing the things. We are in support of. And I think that is missed. So, you know, we are being blamed for a lot of things like transparency in grant registers etc. but it's not our responsibility, it's the government's responsibility. So and were they in South Africa, if you talk about, you know decarbonising coal mines, it's not our decision on that, but it looks like it. So I think, you know, the role we need to play within the just part is, is very crucial. Well, the high unemployment in South Africa with, you know, youth unemployment being more than 40 to 45%. You know, this new way of doing things need to take everybody with. So I think that's quite important to to take note of when you also read all these articles. And the

reading that you're doing is, is that the just what is important, for South Africans and for South Africa.

P#4: So in terms in terms of definition, we are led also by the implementation plan of the just energy transition that the government has, has, has issued and finalized. And it really is very narrow in the sense that it talks about the just that Daniel is referring to. There's no universal, definition about what just is what's just to me may not necessarily be just to Daniel, but it kind of means that with this transition that those who will be negatively affected do not get left behind. However, we we, we will, define that. And then it looks at decarbonizing, or reducing carbon emissions. So it's a very narrow definition. And, and if I may be able to say, because this is a government led initiative and we are here to support, this initiative, by default, that also becomes our definition. So, so our programs would really touch on these two aspects, to be broadened or to be narrowed. But yes, it's about reducing carbon emissions. How how does that happen? And to make sure whatever we do has got that just element infused across the board.

Interviewer: And this just element could you like describe to me like how how are we developed in the policy process, how it emerged. You called for it first. Okay. What. Yeah.

P#4: So this just element actually dates back to 2009, when the unions here, Cosatu realized that climate change is a real big issues. And the people who, below the poverty line will be affected adversely. So this is where that kind of thinking came out. They took out a several, several policy papers, saying, look, listen, climate change is going to affect people, but these are the kind of people who will be affected the most. We really need to do something. So there must be a just element to dealing with climate change and dealing with how these people will be affected. So it stems from that. I don't know if that answered your question. And so it's very that so every policy related to the just energy transition has got that component. Now of course it evolves. But that's why I said to you there is no proper definition of what this looks like. I'll give you an example. For us if a coal mine is to be decommissioned, that whole community that is dependent on that coal mine will be affected. From the coal miners to the ladies who are who are, selling food and drink to help the coal miners to those ladies' children because, you know, it's it's a whole, series of events and a whole bunch of people down the line would be affected. The just element would say, you need to deal with that external environment, get in there, do your interventions so that when that coal power plant gets decommissioned, these people are not adversely affected. Maybe it looks at reskilling, upskilling SMEs, whatever it looks like, but we should tackle that. However, coal miners would say, actually, this is unjust

to us because when you close down these power, power plants, at least 150,000 jobs would be lost. What happens? So that's why I'm saying there's no universal definition of what just looks like. It's very tricky. It's a very gray area. There's no black and white area. So we tread carefully and we know and we do what we know will work best for those communities. Yeah.

Interviewer: But so yeah, like my next question is exactly on this lake. So how do you navigate this ambiguity of definition?

P#6: And, I'll go back one moment. I mean, in in any way, when you look at JETP of other nations, Senegal, Vietnman, Indonesia, here, all are about decarbonising the economy right? I mean, this is the this is the main thing. That's why, it's, high polluting countries that are part of it. But then you have to go to a local context, and this is where you build the narrative. And in this country, the, the, the economic and social structure, of it is, very much dominated, not only but is dominated by the mining industry. It's a great contributor to jobs and to GDP. And coal mining is a big part of it. At the same time, South Africa is trying to transition out of, that inequality. The levels of inequality in this country if we look at the World Bank index is is very big. So you have those two elements, which is, a coal-based economy. Not all, but, it's, there's a big element of it and then inequality and then it becomes a very, domestic, sensitive question politically and as if we have an unequal society because of, historical structures that the country is trying to overcome: post-apartheid, segregation, discrimination of people has led to that situation. If, now, the country has to transition out of coal that means that all of a sudden the political discourse, the political mind has to focus on how we can make sure that these people will not lose out, not not just the jobs, but the incomes, the basic services, access to health, access to education, etcetera. So it's intrinsically is, is an internal political question is : I want to phase out of coal, I want to go to other sectors. But how can we be sure that I can sequence it in a way that I don't leave anybody behind? And that means if I create jobs, I first need to create the economic sectors that, replace coal mining. So how do I create economic sector, the sectors of the economy which then can produce the jobs into which, mining communities could, jump into can, could facing? And this is the, the conundrum here. And it's something that the government always said is that, the transition we want it at the pace, the rhythm that is required in this country. And this is, a prerogative of the South African development. We we cannot impose that, we cannot suggest it, because we don't know the country as well as the stakeholders here in South Africa. So the just element becomes essentially an internal question of, how you sequence the phase out of the coal and the phase in of new economic sectors. And this is extremely complicated. It's something that becomes almost, an internal priority of the

country, not because of the JETP. It simply is how they gonna adapt to a new social and economic model for the future so that they can still, continue to, to advance towards a developed economy.

Interviewer: But so if I understand. Right, and it's you're saying that this, justice element is, he's seen also by the U. As, as, I say like as, policy field of South Africa in which the EU doesn't want to, impose or we don't say impose, but, put their hands too much in.

P#6: I mean, maybe, maybe we can give you an example. Of, how, things could of an example of that. We need to draw lessons. Yeah, maybe Komati?

P#4: Well, I am not too, too knowledgeable, on the Komati issue, but it is a coal power plant that was decommissioned. But it was done in a manner that the external environment outside that decommissioning of the power plant, that means the miners and everyone around it that was dependent on it, then are left in the dark because the idea was to decommission and repurpose the coal mine. And there's a small window of which you can do that before the then you know, you've lost your opportunity and it didn't happen. So we so that is a lesson learned to say. In decommissioning these mines, other interventions should already be underway. In my perspective, so that when the coal power plant is, is finally now not operational and will be repurposed. Everyone who was involved with that particular coal power plant, at the communities around, they have different avenues in terms of jobs, in terms of skills, in terms of employment, in terms of SMEs, in terms of education and all of that stuff. It is a big, massive ecosystem. That if one thing goes wrong, in my view, in one part of it, it has a very disastrous effect for everything around it. So so that is why I say that we tread carefully and we use such lessons as well, and learn from them to say, okay, maybe this is not what should be done, but let's explore other avenues and see what's better in that circumstance. We are not in the business of decommissioning power plants, by the way.

P#6: Again, what on your question there? Of course, we we are in no position to impose you or, to put, conditionality on that process. I mean, we know that, the use of coal in the energy mix will continue to exist for decades to come. I mean, it's impossible to think that in the next two years, the the use of coal will disappear from, from that energy mix. So fossil fuels will continue to be part of it. What we see is that the pledges that we do to the it, our engagement is going to be crucial to increase the uptake of renewable energy. And in that way we help South Africa, to make sure that that energy mix is more balanced. And that in time you could see that?... the phase out of coal and the phase in of more and more renewable energies. But,

it's an important point to realize that, what we are not, say, coal mines or coal fired power plants need to be decommissioned: that would be a catastrophic outcome for South Africa's economy. And that's what, the sequencing is so important. We need to understand the, the structure of the economy. And then, understand, what is that phase of phase out and phase in. Because if you get that wrong you cause a lot of damage, which is what happened in Komati's coal fired power plant, where just because of rushing to decommission the coal plant, we left behind, thousands of workers and many communities that now are paying the price. And those are the kind of lessons that we need to learn.

P#4: May I just go back to a statement that I made earlier about that we are led by the implementation plan of this country and we really are. They have a whole schedule there of the decommissioning of power plants. Most of them are like 14 or 15 of them in the Mmabatho region. By 2030 15 of them have to be decommissioned; by 2040, another 23 or so. But, you know, recently in the news, they made the decision to keep five of those power plants, extend the life of those power plants. And that is a decision that they've taken. And we respect that decision. We don't understand it. It's not our role to understand or question, but, this is a government led initiative. They have a schedule to decommission. And how they do it at their place is up to them. We do not tell them what to do in that area and we won't either.

Interviewer: So, what you do is offer support to, to the decisions they make within the framework.

P#4: Exactly.

Interviewer: Okay. Clear.

P#6: And to promote the use of renewables. Because, you know, we believe that worldwide if we are going to contribute all of us to climate objectives, we need to promote the use of renewables. So, what we do here with our pledges, with our expertise, with our know how is to try to mobilize support for the government, because the government is also a part of it. The government wants to transition out of coal. What we do is to say, well, where we can help you is precisely, on how you can generate that, renewable energy, how you can, secure, energy security for everybody. How you can make it more affordable, how you can distribute income more evenly, throughout the population. So these are the kind of conversations that, that we have with them on the coal that we are prevented from engaging by our own legislation. So that, the, you know, when we say and we fully understand that you still need to use coal and,

and go ahead with it, it's not our vision...?.... but, here we can't mobilize expertise or financial support to help you. You will have to it on your own.

Interviewer: Clear. And was there at any point during the, the policy process? Was there any, main, sides of tension with, the South African government or with, I don't know, civil society, about the about the definition, about the justice, dimension of the GTP.

P#4: Yeah, I will let, Dennis, take this question. Maybe I, I thought of that if you would jump in, but civil society has been very vocal about the policies of, one which, I'm not an expert on and, the process, but it's about the green hydrogen. It takes an enormous amount of water in order for you to get green hydrogen. I don't know what the science is behind it but South Africa is a water scarce country, for instance, so they've been very vocal about that. And once again, you know, with Numsa, which is the, Mine Workers Union union, they've been very vocal about "guys, you are talking about just energy transition, just energy transition. But, you know, this country is still 78% reliable on coal. And that is our bread and butter. And we don't agree with this just energy transition. And there's several reasons. One is because we don't know what the future holds for us mineworkers and two we don't actually understand what this just energy transition is about". You know, we bandy all these big terms around. But, you know, to explain in easy terms, this is what we're looking at. And this is what it would it would look like. And this is what it involves. You know, there's been a gap in communication or rather miscommunication. So civil society has been very vocal about the things that they feel do not work and about the things that they do not understand. Yes, we understand you want to go to renewable, you want to change that from 70% of, coal and whatever percent, 7% to renewable and change that figure around. But, you know, if you want to go to green hydrogen, it takes water. We are water scarce country. What is your intervention in that space? What are you going to do when when people don't have jobs and your interventions are not working fast enough? Or the implementation plan, for these things are slow or, you know, that kind of stuff. Civil society is very vocal.

Interviewer: What is the response of you as the EU delegation to this, what is your action to comcounter or to negotiate this vision?

P#4: And this is where the importance of communication comes in.

P#5: I think to also take into account the amount of unskilled labor we have in South Africa. There's a massive amount of unskilled labor, which is also why the unions, I think, is kicking so hard the gates, because number one they don't exactly know how tomorrow will look, but

also to lose all those people contributing to the unions. You know, so that's number one. Number two, to also take into account the the sensitivity around all of what is going on here. Example Namibia has also green hydrogen corridor where civil society, is very vocal on the fact that it looks like it is, parachuting in, making this, you know, basically railway up to ... Bay and then shipping out green hydrogen to, to Europe and not actually contributing to Namibia. That, you know, at some point can spill over to South Africa and then the same narrative will happen. Yeah. Okay. Like I say, what do we do? It is not our decision. CSOs did come after us but we are not doing. We are yet in support of the policy of South Africa with regards to this. Unfortunately, that is not heavily known. So we are working with, the presidency, with South African government in doing more activities by visiting Mpumalanga, where the sites, where the coal mines, where the communities are, you know, engaging with, the private sector, engaging with civil society, engaging with journalists, saying, listen, we, it's the whole we, it's the EU, well all the IPG member, but also very much the government. And they are in, in the lead for all of these activities because we want to get away from the narrative that we are the ones, you know, holding all the wires and saying jump. And, you know, because that is the narrative at this stage, because I think the knowledge on what JETP actually is is very limited, which is extremely dangerous. Because number one, we we also don't want to look like we are the people that says, you know, this is what you need to do otherwise we take away the money. On the website of ? the other day, I again saw that they say, yeah, the JETP is decarbonisation of coal mines but yeah, it's not our decision. So I had to take it off. But that you know, that continues the narrative of "we are telling some other people what to do", which is not. We are there in support of offering facilities, offering resources to be able to engage this process, which will take a long time. But yeah. So at the end of the day, it's about informing informing people on what this is, you know, back to basics because that is where your issues of civil society comes in. That is where your issues with private will come in. That is even where some issues with some government departments that's not as informed as others will come in. It is this perception that we are saying to you what to do with the money that we not even gave you, but, you know, put on the table for use. You know, if you don't use that money, that money's going back. So like, it's, it's some kind of a slush fund with where everybody could just take and, and, there needs to be accountability. That is why the registers are there as well, to show CSOs that, because this interaction we had with CSOs and they said, well, the transparency is not there. So we said, okay, cool. We hear what you're saying. Let's, you know, update the grant registers with government. Of course it's on government's website. It's not even like on our websites. It's all of the government's, you know, platforms. So, that interaction

with the different stakeholders is very important, to, you know, to just highlight the fact that who's doing what, you know, who, who's writing the policy, who's supporting the policy.

P#4: So and so when you ask what are we doing. It's through communications we really set the record straight, one. And we are very open about and transparent about what we are doing in the just energy transition. That is, that is, that is The main role. And we do speak to civil society through dialogs, especially, umbrella organizations of society. So that dialog is continuous and that updating is continuous and, and yeah, that's, that's, that's the best we can do for now. It is the, the, it's just making sure that we debunk myths and we always get the message across clearly and concisely. To, to not only civil society but other stakeholders as well.

Interviewer: And have you seen like, changing in this relation with other stakeholders in civil society, like, have, you would you say that in the past three years, like it's been getting better, like to get the communication straight or there are new tensions that arise?

P#4: It's a difficult one to answer, because, you know, there's always mixed reviews. There are people who now understand what the just energies transition about, and especially the EU, their role in this, in this, in this transition, and then people who just don't understand. And so they always have questions. And even if you explain there will always have doubts. So in terms of perceptions it's very hard to change. It's very hard to change. And it's more difficult if you have senior officials, at a higher level, in government who actually say one thing because they have a lot of influence and you're, you're trying to implement another thing and say another thing. So, look, I always say that if you change the perception of one person, you won. And, the just energy transition is a South African journey, you know, led by the South African government. So I don't think the biggest role is to change perceptions, but to change, to decarbonize and make sure that, you know, people who are, who will be affected don't get left behind. I think that is the main, the main purpose here.

P#6: You could see, that that's. How I tried to to see it. But how do you tell if it is off the mark but I think it's different depending on which stakeholder you talk to. If I see over one year, what I have noticed is, for instance, if I take one specific stakeholder: the government. Where did the government was taking on the on the transition. But when I take September, October, November, and where they are now, I see, a gradual shift in the way the government, communicate about that transition. At the very beginning, if remember, it was very, very negative, saying that, we are coal fundamentalist, we are not going to abandon coal even though they are going to tell us to close our mines. It was very politicized in a negative way. Whereas

the shift that I have seen over the months is that perhaps with the government and now the dialogue is more nuanced, in the sense that we see more engagement with, the private sector, there is more generation through renewables, there is more procurement to, to to give private licenses to, to generate energy through, through renewable energy. So it's it's a different conversation with the government. I think it has a little bit also in the public sphere. With the civil society I think it's the other way around. Perhaps because at the very beginning, over 12 months ago, the government was negative, they were not raising their voice, but now, I think, they are more and more vocal about it, especially when it comes to the accountability of the different stakeholders. And that includes the international community in the process. They say: 9.3 billion U.S. dollars in pledges, where are they? Are you implementing you said you are implementing but everything seems very opaque, very obscure? What are the processes that you follow? What is the transparency that enables monitor of the implementation of those pledges. If you look at the private sector, they will always be silent (?), but, what I see some more and more engagement of the private sector, on on the process of, engagement on renewables, building infrastructure, etc.. So, I think you can look at it from, each and every stakeholder perspective. What is the pathway that they are following? Because it's not a monolithic entity. All of them, there is where you see that they are from different pathways. But my, my key message perhaps is that we see a gradual shift towards more understanding of the transition and the need for everybody to work in it. And a healthy sign of it is that the government seems to be shifting positively. And another positive sign is that civil society is vocal, because at the end of the day they put the government and the international partners to account. And to me, that criticism, that public engagement of the civil society is crucial. It's good that they are negative. It's good that they held us to account because, that's the only way where we can help, create, a trusted environment.

Interviewer: Okay. Very interesting. But, how can I put this? Like, have you ever had the, the feeling that the fact that the the you, like, as you said, like, there's no real definition of just transition and it's more about, South Africans own framework, just transition framework. But have you ever felt that this situation of, like, lack of a precise definition has, created problems for you, for the delegation to work properly like and to engage with the stakeholders?

P#6: The problem if if you try. I think the just transition is perfectly understood. It's, it's a process where you don't leave anybody behind. It's a process that is sustainable, that is going to, lead to, to more, resilient societies and create more sustainable growth. Leaving no one behind. So I think, within these broad parameters, there's no, there's no misunderstanding and

no confusion. Everybody knows that, that's the way to go. And then within that broad concept, then you have to go in each and every country where you are implementing the just transition. You need to understand what is the local context, what are the elements that are very important within that just transition. Because of the, the reality of South Africa, of course, the aspects of coal transition, of, inequalities, of, high unemployment, are very important. So, the danger we have in a very prescriptive definition of the just transition is that the more you try to prescribe it, the more narrow it becomes, the more difficult is to apply to local context. So I think it's important to have this, elasticity in the way you define it and then adapting to the reality of the on the ground. There is a different aspect. that is the accounting aspect of it. But that is, that is about what the government consider is a just measure. This year, the government established a list of criteria that may end up meaning that, something that we consider a just measure is not registered as such by the government. But that is a different issue I see. This is somewhat of a minor issue. And this speaks to the registers that Daniel was discussing before. That is how do you catalog our just interventions. Whether the government, for instance, when we implement a service delivery program, is going to consider it just or not according to the criteria that they set up. That is an ongoing conversation that we have with the government so that we can capture that as much as possible as, as just but I those as two different things. But, it's important to realize, for me, I have to say, I feel comfortable with, with a flexible definition of the just transition precisely because it allows us to adapt to a local reality, as opposed to a very prescriptive definition.

Interview #5

Interviewer: Could you maybe please describe me your role. Inside Cosatu?

P#7: I do work mainly, mostly on climate change and just transition, but then I work in the policy department, so I do other policy related work. I'm also responsible for some pension funds and labor market, social dialogue and just influencing African policy. And so our job so whenever government or like yeah, the presidency has some legislation like bills or whatever, our department is responsible for ensuring that the workers voice is always included. So, yeah. So for instance, if, with, with regards to maybe climate change and the just transition, if the government says this is what we have, they will ask us to make a submission. So we will comment, make written submission, be part of social dialogue and engage on whatever, policies and legislation. So yeah, that's nutshell of what I do like.

Interviewer: Okay. And so, from what I understand, like just transition is an important concept for, Cosatu. So could you please, like, delve into it for me? Like what is just transition for Cosatu and, what are the main principles, the objectives, of a just transition. Also, why is a just transition needed? And, I'm particularly interested in this, yeah, idea of justice. So if you also could say something about. Yeah, what is, the, the justice vision of, Cosatu.

P#7: The concept of a just transition came with the labor movement, right? So we were part of the the group, like, we also, affiliated to the ITUC, which is the International Trade Union Confederation. So we are part of that group that came up with, the just transition. So we are actually the ones who brought it in South Africa. So it is what it is now because of the role that we played. So just like ILO, we also say that the just transition is greening the economy in a way that is fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind. Our, definition at COSATU is: just transition means changes that do not disadvantage the working class worldwide. That do not disadvantage the developing countries. And where the industrialized countries pay for the damage their development has done to the Earth's, atmosphere. So for us, a just transition provides the opportunity for data transformation that includes the redistribution of power and resources towards a more just and equitable social order. So we also, always, indicates or highlights that an unjust transition to us, holds a significant risk for workers, for the economy, regions, jobs and livelihood losses due to businesses closing and power stations being decommissioned. So you have, like, job losses could weaken the traditionally strong sections of the labor movement and change the political balance in the country. So, our transition and in our case, it's nothing if it's not just. So just to emphasize that we are not against just transition as a concept, as long as it does not leave anyone behind and does not risk people losing their jobs and it does not sustain livelihoods. It's not just for us. So yeah, that's the yeah, that's our definition. And then when it comes to like objectives. Yeah, the benefits for us. So we have like a few demands like we have, we have like 18 demands, but then there's like top five of what a just transition is for us as COSATU. So the first one would be employment creating and sustainable industrial policy. We say that job creation is an immediate priority which can be addressed in many ways. There's this one government's master plan which should prioritize environmentally beneficial job creation sectors. Right. Secondly, there should be massive investment in the public sector climate jobs, as laid out in the 1 million jobs campaign, which should be reviewed as the foundation of a jobs plan. But like, on top of everything, the just transition must bring more jobs as opposed to people losing jobs, right? Thirdly, we say that the government should expand

social services that prioritize the well-being of all people and the environment and reduce the burden, which is now largely carried by black women in South Africa. And then, fourthly, we say there should be a job guarantee in the Mpumalanga region, which is the region that has more coal mines, a long term guarantees to address wealth inequality and change how we value work. So second demand is universal basic income grant, right? So we see UBIG as a vital social safety net for all. A just transition aims for more jobs. But those who do unpaid work and anyone who is unemployed or underemployed still need support. Hence, we say we need the Universal Basic Income grant. Cash transfers can alleviate hunger and poverty, stimulate the local economy and increase resilience to climate and transition impacts such as natural disasters, droughts and job loss. So I don't know if you know this. We still are fighting historical issues like inequality, unemployment and poverty. So we see the universal basic income grant as a way to close that gap or to help us eradicate poverty. We also say that within the the grant, social protection changes how work is valued and provides more space for people to choose how to spend their time. The demand is kindly on the Department of Social Development at national government level. So we're still engaging them. So I don't know if you know this, but then in South Africa during Covid there were a lot of people that lost their jobs rights. And then the government came up with an initiative to provide a social relief grant, right, which is not much and cannot sustain people. It's not enough to buy like basic, needs or essentials, right? So we proposed the Ubig as a substitute so that people can be able to have some social, some sort of social protection in a way that would be like efficient and will sustain people's livelihoods. So the third demand is reskilling and upskilling. So we say workers, who are vulnerable to job losses, can demand training programs to equip them for jobs that are created through a just transition. The first step is to audit workers in vulnerable sectors, to identify skills, interests and areas of development. Then training programs should be developed for alternative industries identified to support economic diversification. Training should be coordinated at the level of the bargaining council for these sectors and should be, certified and funded through. So we know how. So like most of the people that work in coal mines power stations are people that I can say they are not really educated. Right? Most of them, like, they've been miners for the rest of their lives. They don't know any other thing. So if you decide to close a coal power station, and chances are they might not be absorbed by a different sector. Hence, we are calling for reskilling and upskilling, right? So the transition when it comes, it needs to equip them to be able to participate in the new sector or whatever. Our fourth demand would be land redistribution. Yeah. We say like lack of access to land undermines people's ability to adapt and to use the opportunities of a just transition. And is also one of the big issues

in South Africa, we are still trying to find ways where people can participate in land ownership and whatnot. We say it affects how transport systems are designed and developed, where jobs are, who's able to capitalize on new opportunities and who profits. So ensuring secure access to and ownership of land is essential to provide the security and flexibility to adapt to the effects of climate change, improve resilience of individuals and communities, and also implement climate friendly solutions and address underlying inequality. So like South Africa, just like any other African country, we also have issues of like food security. So like if you give people land, maybe land to farm, they can be able to grow their own food and that might, reduce hunger and malnutrition amongst other things. So hence we say in land area distribution is one of our biggest demands. The fifth demand and last. Right, top demand is ending austerity for climate just macroeconomic framework. So here we say, significant investment is needed to ensure a just transition. That has a revised macroeconomic framework which rejects, austerity. The reduction of social spending must stop. In the long term the macroeconomic framework must shift further to raise spending on climate resilient infrastructure and social needs. So, we say it needs progressive taxation, such as a wealth scheme, expansion of public services and social protection. So, yeah, resource rent, tax and even a global wealth tax to generate revenue. So currently we say that the South African Reserve Bank should replace inflation targeting, with monetary policies which supports employment and environmental sustainability, reduce cost of borrowing so that the state can support the just transition through public investment and increasing direct financing of green investments, increased control on capital for stability. So as COSAY we've criticized the the JET IP when it came because it had like more loans as opposed to grants. Right. So with our demands we've had we would have preferred like the government to tap into our domestic funds as opposed to borrowing because already like we are indebted like our debt is very huge. So yeah, one of our demand is that one to end austerity.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay. Thank you. That was very comprehensive. And like this last part brings me directly to my next question, which is exactly about. Yeah, the. Just energy transition partnership. So I was like, if you could describe, the the role of Cosatu in this partnership was there was Cosatu engaged in the negotiations, from the early beginning or, you just got in, later. So, yeah, if you just give me, overview of the process.

P#7: Just to like, highlights that we were not part of the development of the, the JETP like from the beginning. So what the president did, like, firstly, he developed a presidential climate commission, right? Which we believed was supposed to take this work like forward. Right. So when the commission was, developed, we had a representative from Cosatu. Right. But then

what the government did on top of that, they developed a Committee to be responsible for the financing part or for, for the JETP. So the commission was not part of this. So that means that we as Cosatu were not part of it. So we actually learned about it at Cop27 at Egypt when it was launched like for the first time. So like just to reiterate that Cosatu had taken a decision to reject the government's proposal of the the JET-IP in its current form. Right. Because in our view, the plan fails to consider the concerns of affected workers in communities. Right. And we have been, very instrumental in introducing the concept of a just transition here in South Africa. And we had always emphasized that it needs to aim to address historical inequalities and identify new pathways to transform the South African economy. But that's how it was developed. It was very hastily, with critical participation from us being explicitly excluded from the formulation processes. So it's not just as trade unions were excluded, but even other civil society organizations. And that's one thing that we agreed upon that we didn't like the process of, developing the plan. Another thing is that, I mean. When we went to Glasgow the whole purpose of, of, like, developing countries receiving funds from the north was like the JETP was supposed to support developing countries, right? But then, like now, when the plan comes, there's more loans as opposed to grants. So how are you helping us if you are adding more debts unto us? So in a nutshell, the principles of social dialog have been ignored on the substance of the investment plan, which resulted in a pathway that heavily favors private capital and multinational corporations, while neglecting the needs of the workers and communities that are most vulnerable in the energy transition and the broader climate change, crisis. So, yeah. So yeah, I just needed to emphasize that the the first steps of introducing the plan, we were explicitly excluded. But then like what happened after we saw the plan, after it was launched at Egypt, so we decided to do our own scrutiny. Right. So we went like page by page, and then we found that there's so many things we're not happy about on the plan. So obviously we had reservations that like, firstly, you excluded us in this plan. And maybe if we went into that, it would have been like very, mutually beneficial to everyone. So there's a submission document that we have to explain why we are rejecting and making some proposals. So that was the only time we were included. But also it wasn't the government that came back to us and asked for submissions. This was the presidential climate commission. So they were like, yeah, please give us your views on the plan as it is. And then that that's what we did. So yeah, that's the way we've been engaging so far. So since we've been asking to be consulted in everything that came after that, because we're not happy with the initial process they've been reaching out and asking us to participate in social dialog and also submit like written submissions on everything.

Interviewer: And this dialog with PCC started, in like 2022 or something around there or later.

P#7: Yeah, they, they start they started after after Egypt.

Interviewer: Okay. And so and how is it going right now. Like, do you feel like your voice is being heard inside the, yeah. In this dialog about the GTP. Yeah. Or like okay.

P#7: Okay. So, so obviously the PCC is under the government, they report to the Ministry of Climate Change and whatnot. So since our concerns or our submission on the JETP, our, our points have been incorporated to, we actually have a just transition financial mechanism by the PCC. So our submission and comments, we included. But then also you'd want to see like if you are calling for submissions, you'd also like to see maybe an updated plan which includes everyone's consensus. It's not just us as workers who are concerned about the plan, even civil society at large. Right. But then we haven't seen an updated plan, but I'm sure like they can't go back and updated because it's already been signed. Right. But then you'd also want to see like a written document in black and white that says, okay, we heard your concerns and this is what we have because the financing mechanism, even though it covers most of our concerns, there's also things that that lack which is like what I'm happy about is that the Presidential Climate Commission always creates a platform for us to voice out our concerns, which is yeah, great. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Right. And, like during during these years of the GTP and since you've been more involved into it, did you have any dialog at all with, with, actors or with stakeholders from, Europe or from the global North in general? Did like as someone like the EU Commission ever reach out to you to hear from, your perspective or, they kind of left that to, the, like a national level.

P#7: Yep. No. So like what they did, they engaged the presidency. So they did not include everyone. So the only time for us to show up is via the ITUC and COP. Because that's where we are able to say we don't like this, but then, like, there has never been a point where, the EU invites us, but then like there's one country actually that reached out to us at Cop27, that was the, the U.S., the Senate secretary, like, I can't remember her name is so she called us to hear from us. So those we can say that the only ones that reached out to us out of the top five that invested in Africa. Yeah.

Interviewer: [Okay. And what about, more, civil society like you mentioned that you have, you, you have these relations with the international, trade union. And is there any other, civil society from, Europe that you are engaged with to make your requests? Heard?

P#7: Not not necessarily because like, most of the time, the only time we are asked to come and engage, it's like trade union stuff, right? So maybe you come to give a trade union perspective. So we've never been in a situation where we are being called maybe different stakeholders to like engage. Right. But then like I can just say like the place to come to engaging with other stakeholders on the just transition and the JETP is at COP because that's where most, civil society organizations are represented. And then but then us as a South African labor organization, we've had our own, national engagements with civil society. And then we also have there's a national platform which is called Nedlac, where the national social dialog happens. And so we've had conversations as South Africa.

Interviewer: Okay. And looking going deeper into the justice dimension of the GDP. So could you tell me, what do you think are the main points of civil like similarity and difference, tension between how you understand it and how, the and how other, actors involved understand it, especially, I'm interested about how, about yet points of similarities and differences, both with, members of the international partner groups but also with the South African government.

P#7: We have reservations, especially firstly on the definition of the just transition. There's one definition, the one that I mentioned by the ILO, right that was endorsed when they went to the conference I think in 20.. something.. Even this year, like, I know the last time we went to COP, because when we go there, we go under the ITUC, every time we get an engagement, we, we need to remind them what the definition says. So the private sector wants to take over the definition. They want to own it. And we've always emphasized that you can't have a definition without including decent work and sustainable livelihoods in it, like, and leaving no one behind. That's one of the issue. I think it's one of the disagreements maybe we can say we have. And then, what similarities? I know like most people talk about like job creation, right. Which is like one of our objectives that like, it leads to green work. But now the issue is that we hear that just transition will come with job creation. Right? But we don't know the type of jobs that are coming. Right? So when we do our own workshops and learning exchanges with our workers or people that work at mines, and we tell them that, okay, they are saying this just transition will come with work, but then the worker who is a miner who does not know anything else besides mining will ask you "what kind of a jobs are coming". If you're going to close this mine where can I go work besides this? Hence we emphasize the issues of reskilling and upskilling. So I guess maybe if we were given like a clear plan that also says, you know what, if it happens that we're going to close this power station, these are the jobs that are coming, this is the training or skills that will come with this. Right? So that's the that's one of the issues that

makes workers very uneasy and uncomfortable with the transition. Not that they're against it. But then like they just we just thinking of how it's going to impact them. Because also in South Africa since we have very high unemployment, you also have informal workers who sell food outside the coal power mines. So if you close a mine, not it's not only the formal workers who are going to lose their job. It's even the ladies who sells them food outside is going to lose their jobs. So that's going to like, worsen our unemployment rate. So yeah, I'm happy that, like we all agree that, just transition comes with job creation. So another maybe our another common ground we can have. All we have would like, it's that we support pro-worker policies within the JETP. I mean, job creation must also come with social protection, right? So even though it's not like in the initial GDP it does not say really much on social protection, but then it was touched a bit. So in our submission we are highlighting that it's an important factor. So if you're saying there's going to be social protection, it needs to be bold and people need to be aware of that. So like obviously there's like a tension with business associations and sectors advocating for the deregulation or reduced labor protections for economic growth. Right. So this for us is a threat because we always need to to protect labor rights. So just transition cannot come with the deregulation or reduced labor practices. So we also see opportunities. We know that it provides a transition into a cleaner economy with new jobs and in renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure. We support these initiatives, right? As long as it does not affect the jobs. And also, we know that there's some countries that are forcing us to stop mining coal, right? We, we are proposing a mixed approach, right. Most of our electricity comes from coal. And like our coal in South Africa can sustain us for, I think, 800 years to come. So we can't afford to, like, stop mining it. Right. So we propose as much as they propose renewable energy, we also say that they should not do away with coal. Also, most of workers in South Africa, they work as miners. Right. So it means when you close or you stop mining coal, maybe close to 100,000 people are going to lose their jobs. A point of agreement most is on the job creation. But then there's so many things that we are against as COSATU. For instance, under the South African JETIP, on the infrastructure. The paradigm used to address the infrastructure financing requirements for the JETP, has become commonly used internationally for public private partnerships and relies heavily on state de-risking policies. So we know that public private partnerships come with privatization, which is one of the things that we are against that like we don't want our electricity and whatever to be privatized.

Interviewer: Another. And what? So. And, I read that, you are, you are in favor of, like. Yeah. Public ownership. Also like community ownership.

P#7: Yes, social ownership. So we so we are proposing it as an alternative to the financing of a just transition, right? We are saying that, the funding allocation for social ownership in the JETP is vastly inadequate for a meaningful just transition. Right? The building of new energy generation capacity should lead to a change in ownership structures in the country with preferential opportunities for the working class. So the working class should also be able to, to own the transition. The new energy generation capacity should be socialized so that the benefits and incomes are true to working class communities rather than to wealthy institutional investors. Social ownership could be achieved through several models, right? We say, the first one is centralized utility plants, which is at a national level through Eskom, maybe, or under municipal ownership and operation. The second one is decentralized community energy owned by community or workers' trusts with support from state subsidies. So the ongoing model of community ownership in the renewable provides an example of the dangers of delaying benefits. Under these projects community do not receive payments for as much as 15 years to the duration of their (?) period. So that is something that communities participate in. But then it's not fully socially owned by the community. So in the interim, communities, next to large renewable plants, they suffer. Communities must receive ownership benefits from the start of future projects. So we say more grant funding and low cost debt will need to be provisioned in order for this to be realized.

Interviewer: What? How do you think the just transition is happening? Like, is. I mean, what do you think? That there are still many challenges to be addressed in how the just transition is unfolding or South Africa is on the right way?

P#7: Okay. So I can say that I wouldn't say like, necessarily. . But then, I'm just happy that the government, there's been an atmosphere created for us to voice our concerns, right. Because like, there's a mix like the 50% of people are saying that the implementation is slow, right? And then there's 50% that saying, what is the rush? Right. Cause also if you look at like emitters like in the world. Right. We are not really emitting that much. But we are the biggest emitter in Africa but not in the world. But then like, why, is the trouble not putting pressure on us to transition quicker, right. So there's so many things to consider. So if you go to a gathering of maybe mineworkers, right. They will tell you something like: "why are you not allowing us to develop first before we can transition". Because you can come with your international, international examples or experiences and say this worked in this country. But then also this just transition is not a one size fits all because countries are different and they should transition differently, right? So yeah, that's, that's the thing. But then also it's a thing of we are aware of

what climate change does to livelihoods. We have so many issues and we want to transition. But then how are we going to transition in a way that is fair and just? Because you don't want to rush for example, there's a few power stations that were closed, in in South Africa right now, we are learning that the government is saying they were closed prematurely. So how do you address things like that? We are saying, okay, we want you to transition, but then we don't want you to take away our coal. Are you coming with ways to clean our coal? Because you get a mine worker who says, "I don't understand why is Germany telling me to stop mining coal? But then they are buying our coal. Why are we exporting if coal is such a bad thing, right?" So yeah it's a 50-50 thing. We just need more engagement because I love how, you know, workers understand they are wreaking (?) environments more compared to researchers and lawmakers. Right. So if the government needs to just find time to go and engage with people that will be affected by these things because you can come, you can go talk to a worker and say, "you know, this, coal fired power station emits it's bad, it pollutes. That's that's very bad for your health and your lungs". Then the worker would tell you "I rather die than not have an income. Right. So, like, how are you helping with rehabilitating this place and ensuring that I don't lose my job?" right. We're not against this transition and we want it to happen. Like if we could have it sooner we could. But that has jumped the gun. We need proper steps and we need to ensure that people are not going to be affected in the long run. People are not going to lose their jobs. If you lose your job, there must be guaranteed social protection. People should still be able to live and, livelihoods should be sustained with the transition. So yeah, we are playing our part like we educate people whenever there's something new. We go to our unions and educate them, make sure that they have enough information. But then like we also support and we hear the concerns that, yeah, we hear that we want to fix and we want to reduce our emission, we want to move to net zero. But then at what cost?

Interviewer: But so what what is what do you think. What this that to think about. Yeah. The, the fact that, the countries like the EU and US decided to get involved with this just transition partnership with South Africa, like, yeah. What is your opinion about their involvement? Why do they want to get involved? And are they doing everything they can or there's like there are some major structural problems in this involvement.

P#7: Yeah. Like obviously we have our reservations about receiving grants from these countries. Why would we I mean, I don't know if I can say that. Maybe we can say a pilot project for these JETPs. Like, why is so much pressure in us reducing emissions? And then why did we have to go to, to multinational corporations and whatnot to, to, to get the funds.

And also it's also concerning how the government goes so quick to sign without our knowledge. Like I mean you have these loans, we don't know what the conditionalities are. Even now we don't know what the conditionalities have been placed on the offered finance. We don't know, what forms of security guarantees and collateral have been offered in exchange for the finance. We don't know what the legal consequences if the terms of the loan agreement are breached. We don't know the timeline. Like if we don't implement on a certain date, what's going to happen to us? Is there any punishment like, I don't know how cross currency fluctuations are being contended with? Is there any terms of debt forgiveness been included in the agreement? Because that's one of the issues. I mean, if you're if you go to a bank and ask for a loan, you want to know the terms, right? What specific risk sharing concessions have been taken on by the lenders and investors? So like, we don't know, like what are specific anti-corruption mechanisms are being considered to prevent misappropriation of transition funds? I don't know if you know this, but then South Africa has a huge problem of corruption, right? So like what's going to happen if the funds are not used as intended? I mean, we received money during Covid, but then money disappeared and was not accounted for. So how we make sure that that is not going to happen. Also with the loan with the loans also, if we were included, what if we were going to warn the lenders saying that actually we have this problem in South African, proposing that we should do this in this way so that we don't have to pay the bigger price in the end, you understand? So it is clear that like, the accountability is going to become even more challenging in the proposed financial landscape where the multilateral and bilateral DFI, the lenders and other private finances are involved in a fragmented way, undermining the rights of workers in the communities. Right. So yeah, we want to know and we don't know why those were the ones that jumped to say we want to support South Africa, because also out of the countries that they choose, they chosen to finance we're not the poorest. Right. Why were we the first ones? Why not Indonesia? Why not Senegal? Why were we the first ones? And even the way this thing was developed, it's shady. It's for lack of a better word, you know, why were people not included? Why did you have to develop a task team to handle this thing? And those people, like between the two of us, like we were made to sign, non-disclosure agreements, you see, so like, it's, it's very troublesome that, like, even today, we still don't know what went on. You understand? Yeah. So we believe that we also like we are saying that, you know, the government should have tapped in into our domestic funds to fund this transition because also when these countries propose that they going to support us developing countries. They said they'll give us grants. Right. But now the ratio between grants and loans does not make sense. Why do you have more loans than grants? Are they helping us or like what? What's the end

goal? What are they going to benefit in the end. And those are things we are not aware of. So yeah, it's not really it's like I'm not comfortable with the with the fact that these countries decided to just jump and provide us with financial assistance because like, why what's what's in it for them? Because as they, they actually emit more than we do, they are more industrialized than we do. But then like, why are we the ones being pushed to, to to reduce or to transition? Why are they not doing first?

Interviewer: Yeah yeah. Yeah. right I and it's definitely very very interesting to look into it in this way. also for me the fact that I mean there's such a big focus on these, on the justice part. So yeah, but when you talk to the, to people from, the EU or other international, international, partner group, like, they don't really say that much about this justice dimension. Yeah. So yeah. Yeah, yeah.

P#7: Yeah. It's like some of the issues that we are saying, like there's no transition if it's not just because you cannot leave the justice element out of it. Right. But then hence we are saying even the development of this JETP, right? There was no justice because they were not transparent about it. what does justice entails? Because it also entails that we should all participate and everyone's voice needs to be heard. But then, like, why were you secretive about the whole thing? So that's the first thing, like developing a plan. There was no justice the thing. So what makes us sure that the implementation or transition in fully would be just?

Interviewer: Right. Okay. So yeah, I think I ask you everything. I wanted to thank you so much for your answers. I was very comprehensive. I don't know if you want to if you have some last comment or observation you would like, you would like to say about about these, about, just transition in general, the GTP.

P#7: I think everyone knows that we have issues of electricity in South Africa. Right? We have like a serious loadshedding. Right. So the plan, it it frames energy poverty, right as a grid access issue. But energy poverty is also an affordability issue. Right. So like currently South African electricity is very expensive. Right. So we know that like transitioning that's going to make the electricity more expensive because of the technologies and whatnot. The the JETIP focuses on cost reflective tariffs to supports the privatized energy system envisioned. The full cost reflective tariffs are difficult to achieve in developing and developed countries. that was according to a World Bank's study. So our issue is that the JETIP as it stands does not make investment commitments to substantively supports the free basic electricity subsidy for poor

households. Right. So like what are we saying? Why is it neglecting that. And like in our engagements we've been asking that like, there are already people that don't have electricity. Besides the issues of loadshedding, affordability and whatnot, people that don't have electricity are the poor of the poorest. Obviously they don't afford the electricity that we have now. What about when we have transitioned? Because that's going to make electricity more expensive. Are you going to support free basic electricity subsidy or not? Right. So we need that to be in the plan because these households will need it as embedded generation comes onstream at greater scale, which will impact cross subsidization. Right. The JETP as it stands, it undermines localization and decent work. Because it speaks about the Industrial Development Corporation Central breakdown of industrial financing in which minerals-energy finance complex, especially the REIPPPP, dominates. So that causes the exclusion of jobs in the renewable energy and manufacturing. So we need localization, like most of the things need to be manufactured locally because it doesn't make sense that we are transitioning, but we still need to import services from maybe China or countries that are more into renewables. And then another thing. So the pathway options to the JETP. Obviously we need transparency on the triple piece contracts for regulatory. But then there's also risks, right. So how do you eradicate those risk because you have your global financial architecture which prioritize minimizing private sector risk exposure, which might weaken the state governance. So how do we also, address those things? So yeah, our like. I was never like, we we fully supports that. And we agree that we need to transition. But then, the North needs to always keep it in mind that countries are not the same and we should not be pressured to, to transition as soon as possible because there's things that we lack. For instance, if you are saying South Africa needs to move to electrical vehicles so that we can reduce our emissions. We don't have the infrastructure. The, the public transport has issues like as it stands. Why wouldn't you want to start by fixing that before introducing a new system? You understand. So there's so many things to consider that like obviously you want to transition, but then how do you plan or what are the initiatives to fix what is not working currently before you can add new things with your transition?

Interview #6

The content of Interview #6 had to be heavily edited upon request of the participant.

Interviewer: How does your institution/organisation define and frame the concept of Just Transition? What are the key principles or elements that are prioritized when it comes to implementing this concept in international policies?

P #8: We never defined Just Transition; we don't have abstract definitions for any of the points. What is a JT, what is a transition, even? For every country we deal with, we have a different outcome, and that has a huge impact on how you approach a problem. For some countries, you will want to support how the country sees it. The result of that is that we have certain policies we would apply in some countries, and others we don't want to apply in any country. We want to be entirely flexible depending on what policies you have and what you want to do with the country. If you have principles, you have to stick to them, and you don't want to do that in practical political terms. Maybe there are countries you don't like, and once you apply principles, you have to apply them everywhere, which is not a good idea. Frameworks are different.

Interview #7

Interviewer: So, could you please, briefly introduce yourself and your role, within, the organization.

P#9: So my name is I've been involved with the CJCM since it began. I was a master's student at the University of the Witwatersrand, or Wits University in 2019, when the Climate Justice Charter was first being drafted or put together, where there were a number of different constituent groups or, focus groups, such as water stressed communities, climate conscious media, environmental justice, organizations, social justice organizations and youth and labor amongst others, and faith based organizations. So I was a student, so I would have been probably, you could say a youth, representative or someone from that background. My master's, thesis was focused on the Green New Deal. So that also led me to, get involved in a climate justice focused process, like the drafting of the climate justice charter. Since then, as the charter, was formed and then it became a movement, so we formalized the movement last year, officially in October. I am now currently on the, National Coordinating Committee of the Climate Justice Charter. So, part of the national leadership of the Climate Justice Charter movement. And I currently serve as the international secretary, of the Climate Justice Charter movement. So that's currently my portfolio.

Interviewer: What are the main activities of the climate justice movement?

P#9: So the two to get into the main kind of activities of the movement, just need to give a brief background of the, the charter itself. Which I'm sure you may have seen online, but I think

it just for the purposes of our conversation, just to touch on certain things because it would, I think, help also expand the conversation. So the charter itself, coming from all these different groups, was a, a tactic of not only coming together to create a clear vision of an alternative, world that, we would like our society to, go towards. So you see a lot of people speaking about a just transition, but a transition to what? So that ranges from, low carbon society, to some saying net zero by 2050, whatever that means, in whatever society will look like at that point. But this was to provide a more concrete, vision of the different forms of alternatives that are currently existing. So there are already people who are trying to vision and work on things that are constituent towards, transitioning away from the current mode of which our society is, structured according to. So you'll see, for example, and I'm not sure if this happens as much in other countries, but our just transition or the concept of a just transition is often watered down to that of a just energy transition. So people understand the just transition in very narrow terms. And so it's transitioning away from our current energy system. For the purposes of climate mitigation. So more simply put, what the climate justice charter movement is doing is expanding on that in that it's a should a transition of society totally away from its current carbon based, unequal structure. And we use the term deep just transition to differentiate between the kind of mainstream, watered down version of a trans just transition as it's currently understood. Given that the concept of the just transition came out of, labor. And we feel that it's been so removed from its actual roots that it's, in some instances rendered meaningless, in the way that it's used. So the charter itself, is aimed to, you know, put forward, an awareness that we thrive in coexistence with our planet, that we all share this, this planet Earth. It also aims to inspire break with the thinking that caused the crisis, you know, the obsessions on growth and progress that, overlooks the damage and the impacts, to to human life and non-human life. It's sort to reconnect us with an old sense conception of what it means to be human. So to put forward, a means of deeper, quote, deepening cooperation, overcoming the crisis of corporate captured leadership. And also to strengthen our democracy and the principles then that came about in terms of what we understood as this deep trust transition. World climate justice, social justice. Eco centric living, participatory democracy, socialized ownership, international solidarity, decoloniality and intergenerational justice. So these are the principles upon which we think the concept of a deep transition, should be based on. And out of that, the kind of needs of the charter or these 14 systemic alternatives which all these different groups and people had put forward and thought of. Some are examples of work that was really happening at grassroots level. Others were more aspirational in terms of things we thought could be and should be implemented, in policy form to help us transition. So right now, we are currently to answer

your question directly in terms of what's the climate justice charter movement is, we fundamentally busy with a number of things. And one of those is the translation of those 14 systemic alternatives into policy form. So. Is currently, a lot of research and policy work that's been done by members of the movements, for example. Also, I've been busy with research on a number of, those alternatives, translating into policy form. So I've, I've been busy with the zero waste and simple living tackling consumption and waste. Others have contributed to policies on the rights of nature and natural climate solution, eco mobility and transportation, enjoying life to working less so looking at things such as the four day work week and, universal basic income grants. Also another one we've done policy. Food sovereignty, water amongst others that is still being developed. So that's been the next phase. And then taking what we had in the charter and translating into policy. But let's go back a little bit. The initial strategy also of this creation of the charter, before we formalize it fully into this movement now, was to take the charter, to the South African parliaments, because in our Constitution, there's a provision, I think, under section two, three, four of the Constitution, that people can take charters to the governments. And those charters would then be considered by Parliament, our highest legislative body, and then Parliament would have to deliberate on whether they would choose to, implement those choices into legislation. So it was a strategic tactic of trying to bring awareness of the climate crisis, but beyond the fact that we needed government to act, but to also institute that there is a perspective on how the government should act in a means that is, in line with climate justice. And that was the strategy to bring this issue to that level. So in 2020, in October, we had an event where we took the charter to Parliament as an online event because of the pandemic at the time, but the deputy Speaker of Parliament attended, we reached out to all the political parties in our parliaments to debates, to, host a debate on what their perspectives were around the climate crisis. We reached out to all of them, but only three got back to us, and then the rest got back to us after the events to say that they, you know, didn't know how they were missing this. But in and of itself, that was also an indication. And part of the the strategy to see how important is climate, to our political representatives. So that's kind of where we came from in the initial strategy with the charter. But then now it has grown to, as a movement where we've got our policy focused. But amongst that, we also have a number of other, focus areas, and those are divided according to the different portfolios that, each of the secretaries of the national, Coordinating Committee members are under. So, for example, mine would be international secretary. So it's to create international, connections and to extend the aspect of international solidarity, to connect with other movements, and like minded groupings, individuals from around the world, who share perspectives to work together around, you know,

a global, perspective to this crisis because, obviously, the climate crisis, is all but a localized one. So, that's also another important dimension then amongst that, currently our big project, I would say is, following our country's, elections this year, we have, drafted a framework. So there's two things. One, one of my other research, focuses has been drafting what we call a climate justice deal, which is a macroeconomic, framework built on the climate justice charter movement's perspectives and policies. And in line with that, also, we drafted a framework for what we call a climate emergency social contract. Following our election this year, the leading party, the ANC, has for the first time dropped below 50% in its vote share total. So they form what they call a government in national unity. But, can we also describe the grand coalition of, of parties? And part of that, also the formation of that was a call from, some of the larger political foundations, but also from the presidency themselves that they would host a national dialog. But we've launched this framework and petition, calling for, that government of national unity or grand coalition, to implement a climate emergency social contract, and to make that part of the focus in this national dialog where they would be inviting, civil society organizations, communities and other political actors to sit and discuss the country's, issues and some of the prescriptions and how we should move forward as a country. So that's kind of the, the two big things that we're also focused with right now is that petition, calling for this social contract and also in line with the climate justice deal. Speaking about that is also the kind of framing of what we think that climate emergency, social contract should look like.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you. And, can we go back a moment to so, so this definition of a deep just transition that U.S. where you were mentioning before, so I guess, let me know if, I got it wrong. Like, so this just transition concept is a bit of a horizontal, deep, deep, just transition concept is a bit of a horizontal concept that kind of informs all the other, alternative systemic alternative policies that you are developing.

P#9: Yes. So, it is in a sense, the foundation of what, those other 14, there are 14 are systemic alternatives, are built on. Because so the basic perspective understanding of the Climate Justice Charter and the movement is one which is similar, but more prescriptive than most other to say, climate justice, movements. And, you know, the the basic kind of slogan that a lot of climate justice movements around the world, have has been systems change not climate change. But what the Climate Justice Charter and the Climate Justice Movement was seeking to do was go beyond that and not to say, you know, systems change not climate change, but what is that system that we want to see is changed to, to avoid the worst of the climate crisis with climate

catastrophe. So and also just to expand on that concept of the, deep just transition. I said earlier that, you know, the concept of a just transition has gets watered down often in this country, especially to just the idea of a just energy transition. And that's because I think a lot of the focus in the fights around climate justice and climate justice activism is mainly it mainly gets boiled down to mitigation. We, you know, we we struggle and we protest against, emissions as they are and also what's contested is also the scale at which we're trying to reduce emissions and mitigate, our current contribution, globally to the climate crisis and emissions. So that's where the conversations are. For example, you know, we see people saying net zero by 2050, obviously outside of main corporate and multilateral spaces of government that is heavily contested, as that needs also being balanced around the climate science of that we need a rapid reduction in emissions by 2030. According to the United Nations IPCC reports. So that's where you'll see that kind of contestation and the way in which most of that focus on systems change is. And a lot of, energy around climate justice struggles is in terms of reducing those emissions and stopping new projects and new investments into fossil fuel, extraction, such as oil pipelines, like in East, the East African oil pipelines. A lot of work there on that right now. And as Africa, we had a lot of protest, from coastal communities against, offshore oil and gas extraction in new, new kind of exploration of, potential offshore oil and gas sites. But what the deep just transition concept is trying to put forward and what us as a climate justice charter movement is trying to put forward is a more expanded perception, or idea of what's, you know, climate justice struggle should focus on beyond just, the fight for mitigation. And to put it simply, is to expand that to three things. Not just mitigation, but what we prefer to term as transformative decarbonization is the first one. So it's not necessarily to say that these efforts at combating mitigation are wrong or misguided, but that we need to ask for more than just mitigation. We need to ask for transformative decarbonization. Second is beyond, to go beyond that binary of mitigation adaptation. We're not just talking about adaptation, but transformative adaptation, meaning that, the adaptive capacities that we want to see instituted in a transition, what the state must put in place, what communities need not only should prepare them and increase their resilience for, you know, coming increasing climate impacts. What they have to do is to be transformative, which means that not just providing people where they are the means of adaptation, but they also need to look at the historical context in which, you know, these communities and people find themselves and, and prepare them in line with also, you know, being restorative and transformative of that context that they already existed prior to these increasing, climate shocks. So, for example, South Africa as a country is a deeply unequal country. And, it means that the majority of people are still suffering from the effects of,

colonialism and apartheid. Inequality is one of the worst in the world, one of the worst in the world, in terms of being recorded. Our Gini coefficient, for example, is the highest. And that's obviously the physical existing scars of our past. So it wouldn't help just to, you know, apply adaptation programs and policy to society that's already cracked at that level of inequality and to be truly adaptive and to be truly resilient, that means you have to grapple with that legacy of colonialism and apartheid, because it's what's responsible for people being living in the conditions that they currently live in. So that means, rural communities and communities in townships, which were previously for nonwhite citizens of the country, have, poor infrastructure, amongst other things. You have to be transformative in how we approach adaptation for those kind of communities. And then finally, the third thing in that three that go beyond that mitigation adaptation, binary, that we see as being essential for deep transition in terms of its focus is transformative, and transformative regeneration. So it's not just looking at mitigation, adaptation and being focused in the human world and how we're dealing with this climate crisis. And the great environmental crisis, but transformative regeneration. Sorry, is that we also need to regenerate ecosystems and the natural world. We have to stop biodiversity loss and combat that with the same level of energy and vigor that we're trying to combat the climate crisis, because the two are connected in that, they're both primarily caused by human activity. So that's, in essence, what's the idea of, climate activism. And within the concept of the calling for a deep, just transition looks like and that it's about transformative decarbonization, transformative adaptation and transformative regeneration. So more broadly, those principles and all the alternatives that are built on those principles and in essence, are trying to achieve those three things.

Interviewer: Right. Thank you. And so when you, when you, presented the, climate justice charter to the, to the. So. African parliament. How was it? What was the reaction? How was it welcomed, from the different, political forces within the parliament?

P#9: So it was well received by the the deputy speaker of Parliament (cf. Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula). And when we handed that over, we handed it with a, a memorandum document and a, short term climate science document that we put together in collaboration with some of the leading climate scientists in the country who contributed to the southern Africa African portion of the UN's IPCC report. So they took that and that's the we we gave them a year to deliberate and then come back to us of, what their response would be. A year came and we did not hear back from the parliament's. What's their thoughts or actions had been once they received the

charter? So we went back to Parliament in November of that, following year, to protest, regarding a response to the charter that we've had it over. We were then met with a representative from Parliament, tell us that they had received it, but because this, had been part of the, you know, a process that is constitutionally mandated but had not yet been acted out on, they had no processes in terms of how they were going to, grapple with this charter, given that, you know, its societal wide implications and focus. So they didn't know which committee to place it because it's not necessarily just an environmental issue as it speaks to a whole host of other focuses and portfolio committees. So what they said is that it would need some processes on how Parliament should respond or deal with these kind of, you know, interactions with society when they bring forth these, these, charters. But as of now, since then, we have not had any kind of substantive response, from Parliament sets.

Interviewer: From you didn't have, any response like from any other political party, like within the Parliament, like, was there any political party that was, that seemed more interested in, working with you on this? Like, I don't know.

P#9: And in fact, in fact, what we did get a response from the parties was just those who I mean, we invited all of the ones in Parliament, but the ones that didn't attend the initial, the initial event that we hosted with Parliament, they only responded to say that they were sorry for not attending and they don't know how they had missed it. So those were the responses went, that were received from, you know, the established political parties, and from Parliament. But to a degree, it was also something which we had anticipated. And this strategy of taking a charter was an experiment in seeing what was the responsiveness of our, you know, political, political landscape in the mainstream to something like this that was focusing on the climate in this way. So it was it was, in essence, you know part of the process of what we're trying to test out. And the responses we got were an indication of what we were trying to see. And to say something else, the, the way in which the government has spoken and seen time and outside of our response, has also kind of changed in line since that time that we introduced the charter. We're now in the mainstream. The president will mention climate often amongst other focus areas, and has since created his presidential climate Commission also. But that's within the realm of the presidency and the president himself. So that's not necessarily translated to, the broader kind of parliamentary politics of our country. It's not something that political parties debate amongst themselves or in Parliament. It's just one of the focus areas that the president has created with for himself as part of his, executive and policy agenda. So this has happened

around the same time, but it's just, something that I felt necessary to mention because it's there's not parallel despite if someone is looking at this timeline to say, well, you know, at least now they're becoming a bit more, responsive to climate issues, but it's not as democratic or, representative of what we were trying to pursue in making it a fundamental topic of contestation within the political mainstream as other issues such as economic growth and unemployment.

Interviewer: Yeah. And this brings me to the, the, the the Just Energy Transition Partnership. So, what what is the perspective of your organization on, on this partnership with, the Global North?

P#9: So firstly, you know, we're we're we're critical of it as are a number of, of climate justice forces in South Africa. But our critique of it begins with a critique on the Presidential Time Commission, which was constituted by the president. It's made up of a number of different actors from, his dominant political party. Some members of civil society who were invited, but not a broad representation from civil society, but selected members who were selected and also. We had I think from. Earth life, organizations which were I think were related to Earth life. And a representative from groundwork. I think the I'm not familiar with them personally because they precede my entry into the climate justice space. And so I was a student. But I think the two individuals were and bobby Peak. But they're representative of, two big organizations, Earth life and groundwork, within the climate justice space as Africa or the environmental space or specifically, but in addition to that, there's also representatives from Sasol, largest petroleum companies, Africa. It's gone, primary energy producer, and largest emitter. So yeah, it's a it's been some people find it a problematic mix in the sense that it's a climate commission that also includes, you know, fossil fuel interests within it. And then there'll be broader kind of business and, labor interests that are aligned to the main party, the ANC. So our critiques stem from that in that it was not necessarily a democratic space in how it was constituted, and not democratic in terms of inclusion of grassroots, and communities, amongst other civil society organizations. And then, I mean, this little critique of that partnership is that the draft document framework that they drafted on the partnership had a number of glaring omissions. It omitted, context of decarbonization as an imperative or as a need. And it omitted a focus or appreciation of, inequality as one of the primary concerns that the country is facing, and its inability to have fully crossed and dealt with, the legacy of our past. So that's something that also has to be taken into consideration, deeply with any kind of, partnership or transition. But also in terms of the narrowness of its focus into what the just

transition required or what it had to Touch on. The critique then extended from that to when the partnership was then drafted. After, I think it was Cop26 in Glasgow, and the final document that came out of that, then our critique obviously, that both parts critique to that of the partnership itself. And part of it is, is the, the geopolitical context of that partnership, I would say is one of the main critiques. Meaning that South Africa, in its position within the African continent, such as the highest emitter on, the continent and one of the highest emitters in the world historically. And it is understood that, yes, these are missions, in the greater sense, linked to our colonial history, coal and coal extraction, amongst other. Mining activities were deeply connected to the colonial legacy of this country, particularly when was colonized by the British, in the colonial economy of South Africa. And the extraction of its resources within that structure was fundamentally, focused on mining. And coal in particular, is rooted so deeply, what you speak about the minerals energy complex in South Africa, in terms of how it's rooted so deeply in the construction of this country, but also in the creation and construction of, the wealth and also the power structures of our country and our economy. The if you compare the South African example to other nations, such as the European nations and other developed countries, they particularly are primarily reliant on oil, and natural gas extraction. Since the 21st century, those are the primary fossil fuels that they, reliant on. Obviously, everyone having started from coal but graduated to these ones, but they're still heavily connected to coal because we have not been able to shake this mineral energies complex, because the mining of coal, the extraction of coal still so deeply tied to our economy. And part of that speaks to the inequality and the undemocratic, legacies that have persisted post-apartheid in South Africa. Part of the reasons why we still were so heavily reliant on coal is because unlike some of these countries in the global north, which had moved, to oil, for example, due to kind of avoids, some of the powers of organized labor who began to challenge, and protest to strike for, working rights and increased pay, from the mining sector. South Africa was still relying heavily on cheap black labor during the colonial period. So it didn't have any of those shortcomings that, Global countries would have to deal with with regards to workers rights and organized labor. Because they were dealing with colonialised labor of the black majority of South Africans. And then that extended into the apartheid regime, but has continued into today, in the sense of why coal is still so fundamentally important and still relied on because, following the apartheid regime, once we transition to democracy, there were a number of, politically connected, black businessmen who within, enriched by new, new opportunities of being able to be granted mining rights and. Access to, minds from this new government, such as our president, for example, Cyril Ramaphosa, who became a billionaire through some of these Black

Empowerment deals. So. Within that context of South Africa's role in connection to coal, we found it problematic that this, just Energy partnership was formed, not only because South Africa has a responsibility, despite being a global developing country in the global South. We do have a responsibility in terms of our commitments to decarbonizing to other countries of the African continent. But also we believe that, this focus on coal that came out of that cop, was also a geopolitical move, a strategy to delay a focus on oil and gas. And it's also been primarily targeting, developing, countries of the global South and developing nations in particular, because they're the ones who are still more reliant on coal as a fuel. So China and India, for example, also, big players within coal, Russia also, even though they do have considerable oil reserves in Russia. So we thought that South Africa was also playing into this geopolitical strategy at the expense of other countries in the global south by becoming part of this partnership. It was a short term financial, gain that we sought that did not look to deal with the deeper issues and, problems of the responsibilities of these countries, who could really get over their responsibilities by saying that they help the South African transition from a coal economy. And it could be used as a geopolitical stick against countries like China and India who are still reliant on, coal. But also following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, they are increasingly hypocritical because Europe and countries like Germany in particular have become more and more reliant on coal, to power their economies. Since the, ending of the deal with the Nord Stream, pipelines and the, bombing of more steam also, and this increased cost of living crisis that you see in Europe because of its inability to access, Russian fuel, has turned them increasingly into coal. Germany in particular, who for political reasons, had also shut down their nuclear power stations, has them also heavily turned to coal to subsidize that energy that they've lost. So there's hypocrisy also on that level. Those countries are the largest historical emitters globally, in that they would then enter into this partnership with South Africa, whilst they're still heavily reliant on coal and also heavily reliant on our coal exports also, amongst those of other countries that they would pay this, this, this, to form this partnership. But on top of that, beyond all of that, this partnership in and of itself is still heavily loan dependent. These are not grants. These are not reparations for these countries historical emission. They're still loans. So on a number of all of these levels, it is problematic in the historical sense. It is problematic in relation to Global North's responsibility with other developing countries, particularly African countries, in our emissions. It's problematic in how this was centered, as a means of attacking countries that are heavily coal reliance whilst refusing to deal with oil and gas, as also important sources of fossil fuel, energy currently. But finally also in the financial makeup of the deal, highly problematic in its loan structure and

these not being grants, or a form of climate reparations. And then in addition to that, I would add that it's highly problematic in the sense that, these countries have failed to meet their obligations under the, Paris climate agreement for contributions to the Global Fund, for, transition that the developed countries said they would pay. I think it was something of like 100 billion for developing countries to, transition. They've already failed to meet that commitment also. So there's a number of. Interests that are at play which do not align with it being a fair partnership, but even a partnership that is truly transparent and honest in what is trying to achieve.

Interviewer: Okay. And. So how can I formulate this? Because this, GTP also, I mean, it's it's in the name, like the fact that they decided also to call it a just energy transition partnership. There's, important, just as they mention, at least there should be. And also in the implementation part, implementation plan. There's a focus on a justice dimension. So I was wondering if you have any, opinion in the way the progressive dimension is being, implemented and carried out? If, because, like, for example, I talked with some, labor unions and they're also been very vocal about the way that these just transition dimension is carried out. So, yeah, if you could give, your perspective of that also maybe in relation to what, the main, labor unions say, like, do you feel like you're aligned with them? Or there are major points of tension.

P#9: We we stand in, in line with a lot of what is coming from from labor. With regards to how this just energy, transition partnership is already failing or has failed to meet some of the criteria of, of fairness, around what its proposed or purported to be doing. In particular in that there's currently what we say is an unjust transition is is currently taking place in South Africa already. And one of the biggest examples of this case is the Komati power station. Yeah. Which was said to be kind of the crown jewel centerpiece of this new just energy transition partnership, a new, just transition process that would be taking place. So it was lauded and used as an example of where that was happening. But, it's also now since become one of the most, famous and widely known, particularly in climate justice circles example of that unjust transition in that sense. Komati was closed. A lot of those workers, still without jobs or the majority of them were still without jobs. The community itself also has still been, attended to with regards to some of the promises of, new industry, of, renewable energy production that would be beginning with them to include them in employment opportunities, skills and training to facilitate that transition away from their reliance on this power station, which had, provided

work for a lot of people in those communities. But in addition to that, also, they'd never been met with regards to their medical needs. And some of the impact that they suffered from the proximity to that power station, and where they lived and the historical kind of impact and effects that they suffered for that. So that's, I think, a key centerpiece of example where I'd say, 100% we are with labor in that regard. But we also have a greater concern as not being part of labor that because of how that is unfolding, this unjust transition and examples like Komati that they position us and create an atmosphere of mistrust or, skepticism. In the greater sense when it comes to things like just transition and transitioning in that any promises of a transition, and plans for a transition, even when you speak about transition from a civil society perspective, we'll increasingly and rightfully so, acquire more skepticism from labor and communities because of how the government is already starting to unfold these processes. So people then start to attribute the language of transition and ideas of transition to shallow promises, and will become increasingly more opposed then to the ideal transition. Because despite the fact that the concept may have come from labor, not all of labor is 100%, 100% or necessarily behind a need to transition because, and understandably, they are more anxious about, protecting their livelihoods and job security, particularly in a country such as Africa with such high unemployment, such high structural unemployment. So that is another concern that comes out of this, is that it will increasingly make it more difficult for government at scale, but even outside of government, to facilitate those kind of relationships necessary, to fast, and to push forward a transition. So that is another critique, to add to the way in which is currently unfolding, but just another dimension to, how we agree with what labor is saying. But also just some of the fears that will also come out of that.

Interviewer: And you were telling me before that, within the, the kind of justice charter movement, you work as a, internal international secretary, you said, yes. So you, you take care of like, international like outreach with international civil society, I guess.

P#9: It and also just, formulating, movement position on, international engagements from, governments. It's it's it's, climate diplomacy or foreign policy, but also building those relationships internationally. Yes.

Interviewer: And like what, what are some, international, civil society organization? IT organizations, maybe specifically as in Europe, with which you have a comment, you feel like

you have a common understanding, on these issues, on the, on how to carry on, global just transition or also more specifically about South Africa.

P#9: I would say, unfortunately, some of the better, examples, particularly in Europe, in the developed world, are ones of proposals rather than existing structures which had, come out of, for example, I think one of the biggest ones which we were in alignment with was, Jeremy Corbyn's campaign when he was still head of the Labor Party, of their, green Industrial revolution policy framework that, that they proposed for Britain. As an example. It had a lot of great ideas about democracy and ownership, in line with the need for transition, which also had an international dimension in increasing, countries like Britain and other developed countries contribution to helping developing countries combat with the climate crisis. But also there are other, organizations which may not necessarily be, structured within one country, such as the Progressive International, for example. A lot of that having come out of, Europe and, the Americas that have also created beyond that which we find have, a lot of, key kind of approaches of connecting and trying to create a global south global north perspective around sharing responsibility, on dealing with the climate crisis. So not one where the global North talks down to us on how we should be working towards, achieving these challenges.

