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Look under the Hood: Green Cars – Red Batteries

*A human rights approach on the expanded demand of Electric Cars in the run
for carbon neutrality and renewable energy transportation*

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“Without radical changes, the batteries which power green vehicles will continue to be tainted by human rights abuses”

– Kumi Naidoo, Amnesty’s Secretary General

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Abstract

The climate crisis is an urgent threat towards people and planet, and rapid changes are needed to decarbonize the planet. The energy sector is in a current transition to renewable-based energy, which also includes a shift to electric cars. Electric cars are motivated to be the future, which will be beneficial for the economy and the environment. The industry has also received criticism, several human rights violations occur in the supply chains of the electric cars and that it is an industry that risk increasing global inequalities.

This study explores the complexity of the car industry's transition to renewable energy, based on case studies of *Volvo*, *Mercedes*, and *Volkswagen*, and their sustainability work related to the supply chains of electric vehicles batteries. The purpose is to show the relation between companies and power structures, as an exemplification of the possibilities for a just energy transition from fossil fuel-based energy to renewable-based energy. The findings shows that the transition is shaped by economical values, which risks broaden the gap between Global South and Global North. It emphasized that it is an issue that needs a collective effort to change the Status Quo, to create sustainable solutions based on the three pillars of sustainable development beneficial for all, not only the Global North.

Keywords

Just Transition; Power Structures; Sustainable Development; Global South & Global North; EV industry

Definitions

Electric vehicles:

Electric vehicles (EV) are a collective name for all vehicles that are powered by electric batteries, in this paper it will synonym to electric cars.

Companies:

When companies, businesses and corporations are used in the text, it refers to either the car companies that the study is based on or companies who are active in the EV industry.

Global South & Global North:

The terms “Global North” and “Global South” are used to make a distinction between the global power structures between dominator and subjugated. It should not be referred to a geographical distinction, rather as a metaphorical distinction between *North* – the path to transnational capital and *South* – the marginalized in relation to economic and political aspects.

Energy transition:

Refers to the structural global energy sector’s change from fossil-based energy to renewable energy sources like wind, solar and batteries. In this thesis it is primarily about the transition from fossil-fueled cars to electric cars.

Just Transition:

A concept built from social justice, the dimension of winners and losers with the energy transition to highlight the social concerns in the debate which is commonly about politics, economic and environmental concerns. It is thusly about an understanding from a perspective of equality and not only about economical growth.

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Power Structures of Electric Cars –A Research Problem

We live in a time when the planet is burning, glaciers are melting, biodiversity is declining and people are suffering, which can be linked to the emissions of greenhouse gases. Carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuel is globally the largest contributor to anthropocentric climate change, it accounts for over 75% of the emissions.¹ Which emphasize the importance to end the global demand of fossil fuel and why we witness a rapid transition to renewable based energy. One important step to reduce carbon emissions is debated to be the shift from cars run on fossil fuel to cars powered by electric batteries. Still, there are issues with this transition, and the situation concerning the electric vehicle (EV) industry is complex. On the one hand, we are in the middle of a crisis, which will lead to devastating outcomes for the planet and people if rapid changes are not made to decarbonize the world. On the other hand, if it is done too fast, without a deeper understanding of the negative outcomes of an energy transition, the risk is high that asymmetric power structures will increase and further the social and economic gap between Global North and Global South. This will also be harmful for people.²

Therefore, the EV industry, is an interesting study object, it represents both sides of the issues, the fossil fuel industry, and the transition to renewable energy with its outcomes. Further on, one of the most concerning areas are the EV batteries, which indicates that the batteries are not as green as they ought to be. Both scholars³ and NGOs like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have been documenting human rights violations related to the extraction of minerals like nickel, lithium, and cobalt that are needed to produce the EV batteries. The extraction of cobalt in The Democratic Republic of Congo can be linked to exploitation of workers and child labor.⁴ The extraction of lithium is taking place in areas that not only pose a threat to ecosystems and water resources. The extraction is also located in areas of indigenous people, which risks undermining and violate indigenous people's rights, their living and preservation of traditions, culture, and customs. The mining related issues are at risk to increase

¹United Nations. Causes and Effects of Climate Change. *United Nation – Climate Action* (n.d.).

<https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change>. (Accessed: 2023.03.10).

²Ankit Kumar, Johanna Höffken and Auke Pols. *Dilemmas of Energy Transitions in the Global South: Balancing Urgency and Justice*. New York: Routledge, 2021. eBook, p. 3-6.

³See *Previous Research*: e.g., Gabriela Quijano's article or Kate R. Finn and Christina A.W. Stanton.

⁴Jim Wormington. If Electric Cars are the Future, Let's Make them Responsible. *Human Rights Watch*. 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/10/if-electric-cars-are-future-lets-make-them-responsibly>. (Accessed: 2023.01.20).

due to the high demand and rapidly expansion of EV cars. One specific type of actor involved in the risks and opportunities are corporations. The abuses can be linked to corporates' supply chains, which it is being undermined when the focus is set on the transition to renewable energy, while still make an economical profit.⁵ To add another dimension about the economic and environmental aspects, the United Nations does also claim that renewable energy is going to power a safer future, that will not only lead to clean energy, also accessible, affordable, sustainable, and reliable energy.⁶ What about just energy?

Justice is not always represented in the international discussions and policy making about the transition to green energy transportation, when the focus is on the urgent need to decarbonize the world.⁷ Although, just transition have gaining representation as a field in the debate about climate justice, it is not as well explored as similar areas like energy justice.⁸ It is an issue, Amnesty International stated, that the environmental crisis have intensified the structural inequalities and human rights are being threatened. Which is one great factor why it is necessary to change the economical and resource-based patterns from fossil fuel to renewable energy sources. However, they mean that the transition to renewable energy will not solve the issues by itself. If justice does not play a central part in this transition, then it is a risk that these structural inequalities follow the energy transition.⁹

This study explores the aspects of global asymmetric power structures in the relationship between Global North & South, how these structures are played out in the run for carbon neutrality and the transition to clean energy transportation. It is based on a critical human rights analysis of the brands *Volvo*, *Mercedes*, and *Volkswagen*, and their sustainability work with a focus on their approach to the supply chains of EV batteries. Within this study, the car companies will be used as a representation of societal structures, with the purpose to show the relation between the companies and power structures, as an exemplification of the possibilities for a just energy transition from fossil fuel-based energy to renewable-based energy.

⁵Amnesty International. Energy Transition. *Amnesty International* (n.d.). <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change/energy-transition/>. (Accessed: 2023.02.27).

⁶United Nations. Renewable energy – powering a safer future. *United Nation – Climate Action* (n.d.). <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/raising-ambition/renewable-energy>. (Accessed: 2023.03.10).

⁷The World Bank. Electric Vehicles: An Economic and Environmental Win for Developing Countries. *The World Bank Group*. 2022. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/11/17/electric-vehicles-an-economic-and-environmental-win-for-developing-countries>. (Accessed: 2023.03.13).

⁸Darren McCauley. Just Transition. in Ohlsson, J & Przybylinski, S. *Theorising Justice: A Primer for Social Scientists* (2023, forthcoming). Bristol: Bristol University Press.

⁹Amnesty International, Energy Transition.

1.1.1 Human Rights relevance of research problem

The global discussions about the transition to clean energy and sustainable development, are commonly from a narrative of the Global North. Who also, both in present- and historical times, are the largest contributors to the anthropocentric climate crisis. Subsequently, as stated in one of the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports, the voices that are being undermined and ignored, are the ones who have contributed the least, while being affected the most.¹⁰ Indigenous people, who have a deeper connection and understanding of the planet and nature, beyond the mainstream population and policy makers' understanding, are being heard the least, even though they are being affected the most, socially, ecologically and economically.¹¹ Therefore, if the energy transition and electric cars are seen as a project for sustainable development, it can raise the question, sustainable development for who? Can the energy transition truly be seen as a good and sustainable climate solution, if its attributes are founded of unequal distributions between Global South and Global North? Hence, if this is the case, it indicates that the idea “*leave no one behind*” is not represented in the current transition from fossil fuel industry to EV industry.

The economic pillar does become relevant because the economic based society and corporate activities should not lead to exploitation of other people. Meaning that the corporate activities of the electric cars should be sustainable for the business, and for the people who works and contributes to the companies' growth and capital. Which also is a fundamental part of The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).¹² It should be a harmony throughout the supply chains that does not lead to exploitation or violations on one end. Therefore, it is relevant to examine if power structures, which historically had a negative influence on the unjust distribution between Global South and Global North, can be a cause for human rights violations today.

¹⁰IPCC, 2023, Synthesis Report of The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report. *Longer Report*, IPCC AR6 SYR, p. 13–15. https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6syrr/pdf/IPCC_AR6_SYR_LongerReport.pdf (Accessed: 2023.04.06)

¹¹See *Previous Research*, e.g., Kate R. Finn and Christina A.W. Stanton. Also, stated by panelists in the panel discussion: *Challenges for Indigenous People – Sápmi to Latin America*, Föreningen för Utvecklingsfrågor (FUF), 2023.04.18.

¹²United Nations, The Corporate Responsibility to Respect Human Rights: An Interpretive Guide, 2012. *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/publications/hr.puB.12.2_en.pdf. (Accessed: 2023.05.10).

1.2 Aim and Research Question

The aim for the thesis is to question the global power structures shaping the EV industry from a human rights approach. To clarify how the three pillars (*economical, environmental and social*) of sustainable development are prioritized in parts of the EV industry, which can contribute to the understanding of the possibilities for a just transition to renewable based transportation. This is done by examining three car companies, to get a hint of the challenges and possibilities that the EV car industry is up against. To see how their view on human rights in their sustainability work can be examined and analyzed by the asymmetric social power structures. To give an indication to what extent the energy transition is based on ensuring energy justice, without leaving no one behind. Or, if their way of prioritizing or diminishing human rights through the supply chains of the EV batteries, shows that the structural inequalities from the fossil fuel-based industry, is at risk of being propagated in the transition to green energy. Which in turn will give a signal of the possibilities of a just transition to cars powered by green energy. The purpose is that the case studies of the car companies is used as a tool and illustration of how power structures affect and take place, thusly, the thesis is a study of societal structures which are studied through the companies.

1.2.1 Research questions

- In relation to the companies' sustainability work, how are human rights defined and prioritized?
 - To what extent are the companies talking about their responsibility through the supply chain of EV batteries?

- In what ways can power structures be identified and affect the companies' approach of the three pillars of sustainable development?
 - Does that indicate that the work practices of social aspects within supply chains of EV batteries is contributing to a just transition?

1.3 Outline

The thesis includes 8 chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction of the research problem and research questions. The following chapter explains the theoretical framework and how it is implemented. Chapter 3 covers the research design and reflection of material and methodical approaches. Chapter 4 highlights the literature review of previous research relevant for the thesis. In chapter 5, the historical context that have shaped structural dynamics between North and South are brought up. The social role of companies is also discussed. It does also introduce international frameworks for companies' human rights work. Chapter 6 raise the outcomes of the examination of the companies' sustainability work. Chapter 7 discuss the findings in relation to theory and previous research, and relates it to power structures and the possibilities for a just energy transition. The thesis ends with a conclusive and reflective chapter about the studies finding, and ends with the bibliography of used sources.

2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framing is inspired by Cheryl McEwan and her notions of the contemporary development and way of unifying theoretical frameworks to gain new insights and deeper understanding of notions of power and agency, related to economical inequalities and the domination of knowledge and “truth” from the North.¹³ Her notion focus on the instrumental level and the role of the state-actors in a global context, which is why her notion is not implemented, rather used as inspiration of how two theories can be applied, unified, and used in dialogue to keep the dimensions of North and South in relation to agency and power. Thusly, a Marxist theory is used together with a postcolonial theory, which hopefully will lead to fruitful and new insights in the analysis of power structures and modern imperialism within the EV car industry. By applying a Marxist theory, it opens the possibility to critically study and understand how the EV industry is shaped by representation of capitalism and economic values. How it can lead to socioeconomic oppression within the supply chains of the companies’ production of EV cars.¹⁴ The postcolonial theory is used to recognize the connection between past and present between different parts of the world, to highlight how the EV industry relates to power relations in contemporary cultures and economics. How the traces of colonialism can be visible today within the asymmetric power structures.¹⁵ Below follows a more in-depth of the core of the theories and what they are based on for the application in the analysis of this thesis.

2.1 Marxism

In *Marxist Theories of Imperialism – A Critical Survey*, Anthony Brewer highlights the development of the Marxist theory during the 20th century linked to the rise and expansion of global exploitation of natural resources from Global South for the industrialization, which contributed to the world capital system. This have led to an international grown free trading market as part of the society, and a division of the world, between advanced - (strong economy) and underdeveloped (weak economy) countries. Thusly, a structural gap between South and North.¹⁶

¹³Cheryl McEwan. *Postcolonialism, Decoloniality and Development*. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge, 2019. eBook, p. 132–144.

¹⁴Lois Tyson. *Critical theory Today – A user-friendly guide*. 3rd edition. New York: Routledge, 2015. eBook, p. 448.

¹⁵Tyson, *Critical theory Today*, p. 409–412.

¹⁶Anthony Brewer. *Marxist Theories of Imperialism – A Critical Survey*. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge, 1990. eBook, p. 2–8.

Brewer explores the link between classical theory in the contemporary world of globalization, related to the capitalist mode of production and its link to the social relation between the classes of the workers and the capitalist. Which is founded of the idea that the worker is in a position with no wealth and cannot afford to produce own capital and need a wage that can cover their social needs, the same pattern is then reproduce once the workers costs are covered and is back at net zero. Hence, by reducing wages to bare minimum, the capitalist can increase their profit, which becomes needed once the competing aspect of capitalism is added, to make the largest capital growth in relation to other capitalists. This opens of for expansion and technical progress within production.¹⁷ The next aspect that becomes vital is monopoly that comes with the competition and enabled for capitalist to join into one large global block to increase economic power.¹⁸

The global approach of Marxism linked to imperialism and the globally expanded capitalistic system can be characterized by a metropolis-satellite structure, like the worker-capitalist notion, in a global context. Consequently, a geographical hierarchy of classes becomes visible, which highlight that the exploitation on one end leads to economic capital on the other end.¹⁹The features of traditional Marxist in the contemporary world is in the relation between producer and their exploiters.²⁰ The expansion of multinational companies is seen as the contemporary subject of capitalism and imperialism. It centralizes the headquarters in a global context beyond the national borders. It opens up for production in a geographical area where the wage and the cost of production is low, which creates higher economic growth. The monopoly and competing aspect that is part of the structures of multinational companies will keep a gap between Global North and South, even if development is occurring at both ends.²¹

¹⁷Ibid. p. 27–36.

¹⁸Ibid. p. 90–91.

¹⁹Ibid. p. 166–168.

²⁰Ibid. p. 229.

²¹Ibid. p. 261–268 & 275–283.

2.2 Postcolonialism

Postcolonial thinking can, according to Leela Gandhi, be used to gain new meaning by emphasizing the hegemony of the Global North that contributes to a cultural domination, that can be used to challenge the globally dominating western knowledge. It is a concept useful to reflect of the historical encounters from the colonial era and how that have affected the structural inequalities today, based on aspects of knowledge and culture between North and South. The systematic critique that is possible with a postcolonial notion enables for new ways of thinking, which opens for an ethical paradigm for moving out of the structural asymmetric power dynamics shaped from colonial encounters, which can be visible today with the imperial language on local experience.²² Gandhi means that the critics against postcolonialism often claim it to be a theory that works against western modernity to flatten the European historical heterogeneity. Which she contradicts by her claim, that the postcolonial thinking is about implementing elements of *Western self-critique* as reactions against global hegemony, to highlight the synergies between domination and knowledge. Which is similar to the pattern of thoughts of self-critique from the Enlightenment era about asking oneself “if my liberties are harmful to others” or if “others enjoy the same freedoms that I am?”²³

Another aspect in Gandhi’s notion of postcolonial thinking is *Planetarily*, which is about seeing the world as integrated instead of divided in example profit and resources and by that emphasize the importance of equal representation and an intersectional explanation of imperialism, that includes the interconnective relations between people and planet. Aspects regarding anthropocentric actions of domination on the environment and people in relation to power and development becomes essential.²⁴ Postcolonialism should therefore not be understood as a strict theory, it is changing, depending on the social relations of society, new meanings will always occur, hence, the baseline is in the relation of power and imperial. It can thusly be used to study possibilities of non-generic connection with the world and the exit of asymmetric power structures in the transformation from domination. The postcolonial thinking becomes relevant because it can enable for an analysis linked to hierarchy of knowledge within the EV industry and the development and transition to clean energy transportation.

²²Leela Gandhi. *Postcolonial Theory – A Critical Introduction*. 2nd edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019. eBook, p. 176–177.

²³Ibid. p.178–180.

²⁴Ibid. p. 184–185.

2.3 Implementation of Theory in Thesis

The theoretical lenses from these two notions of Marxism and Postcolonialism will be implemented for the analysis and interpretation of power within the context of the companies' sustainability strategies as proxies for the power structures that is the core of this study. In dialogue with the two theories, it will be used to study the dimension of power linked to the relationship between headquarter and local area to investigate if the central ideas from these notion about exploitation and exploiter. How the transition to clean energy can be seen from these perspectives and in favor of highlighting the asymmetric structures. Based on domination from the North and the dimensions of power within the EV industry that contributes to the hierarchal classes of people that is visible in the capitalistic society. The theories will be used to interpret the possibilities for a just transition from the perspectives of the theories notion of power linked to *Geographical Hierarchy*, *Capital Growth*, *Planetarily* and *Western Self-Critique*, and to analyze synergies between unequal structures from the past, in the present fossil-fueled based society and in the transition to a renewable energy-based society.

2.4 Analytical tools for interpretation of text

The theories are applied in the analysis, and are central in the interpretation and understanding of the texts, which have been combination with the analytical tools mentioned below.

2.4.1 *Critical approach*

The analysis is built on a critical approach, which provides a tool for deconstruction of the material of the car companies, to go deeper into the meaning of what they highlight in their sustainability reports and web pages. Which later can be connected to their approach to sustainable development and human rights. It is a tool to dig into social aspects and Status Quo, to find hidden biases and agendas and bringing them up to the surface, to investigate the underlying aspects that are not visible from a first gaze. To highlight the aspects that can be linked to social inequalities and power, and to analyze the text from a deeper meaning of what is written in text. How hidden societal biases can affect and be expressed in the context of the

case studies and how new forms of dominations can occur in the contemporary technological development of the society.²⁵

2.4.2 *A Human Rights perspective*

A human rights perspective is a great tool for explanation issues about causes of poverty, inequality, wealth, and power. It is usually in the context of understanding the law to enable for human rights to be realized and flourish in relation to state-actors as duty bearers and their obligations to fulfill human rights claims for the rights holders.²⁶ However, in this analysis it is used as a perspective of interpretation, in contribution to the critical perspective. Hence an analytical tool for examination of text for a deeper meaning of human rights linked to power and equality within the work of the companies and in relation to a broader societal understanding.

Florian Wettstein explains that it exists different approaches of human rights accounts. It can be explained from a philosophical approach, where the ethical aspects are central of how to determine human rights, linked to human dignity, right and good. Hence a well-intentioned cause cannot be justified if it leads to harmful outcomes. Another approach is political, which does not see human dignity as the core of the construction of human rights, simply from the political discourse and practices that have been endorsed for certain political purposes. Hence, it is motivated from more than just the ethical aspects, human rights can also be motivated as a tool for regulation of the political global order. A final view highlighted in Wettstein explanation is as endorsed from social and cultural practices linked to processes and other forms of public and social interactions that shapes human rights beyond the emphasis of formal institutions.²⁷ To relate it to the thesis, this is a second element of the analysis of the human rights perspective to investigate the companies' motivation and definition of human rights. A tool for investigating their motivation and drive to engage in human rights, if it from a moral drive, institutional or external societal pressure.

²⁵Robert C. Bishop, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences – An Introduction*. London: Continuum, 2007. p. 58–61.

²⁶Rhona Smith and Lee McConnell. *Research Methods in Human Rights*. London: Routledge, 2018. eBook, p. 1–5.

²⁷Florian Wettstein. *Business and Human Rights – Ethical, Legal and Managerial Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. p. 28–45.

2.4.3 Sustainable Development

The final tool is investigating the text based of sustainable development, which is proceeded from the definition of Sustainable Development from the Brundtland Report, that states “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need”²⁸, it contains of three pillars, *ecological*, *economical*, and *social*, which all should be considered equally. The report does emphasize that global environmental issues should be seen as the outcome of poverty in the Global South in relation to unsustainable consumption and production in Global North. Sustainable Development could accordingly be a framework which should consider economic development in ways that does not affect people in negative ways and contribute to increased inequalities, nor practices which will lead to further environmental destruction.²⁹ It is a tool to get an indication of how they are prioritizing the three pillars and the companies holistic use and understanding of sustainable development.

²⁸World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, (1987): Report by Gro Harlem Brundtland, Geneva, UN-Document A/42/427. P. 37.

²⁹Brundtland, *Our Common Future*.

3 Methodological Approach

3.1 Research Design

The case studies are based on a qualitative and critical textual analysis of the car brands *Volvo*, *Mercedes*, and *Volkswagen*'s sustainability work, which have been observed and obtained by a content analysis of their websites and sustainability reports for year 2021 and 2022. The analysis and deconstructing are based on a coding scheme of analytical questions (*see below*) to investigate what can be deduced from the content of the webpage and the reports. The result from the case studies have later been examined and interpreted through a perspective of *power* linked to the Postcolonial- and Marxist theory, and in relation to external report and previous research. To understand the relation between the companies and societal power structures.³⁰ Thusly, the companies are a study object to make a “micro illustration” of the societal structures that effects the just transition to renewable energy transportation. The focus is the supply chain of the EV batteries for the electric cars, which aims to capture and study the synergies between headquarter and production as an exemplification of societal power structures and how that can give an indication if the energy transition risk following the same unequal patterns, that are visible today with the fossil fueled based economy and energy. Subsequently it is an abstract and philosophical analysis of asymmetric power structures based on the three car companies work with human rights. How it is being prioritized or limited in their sustainability work. How the companies as a study object can be used as an instrument for how underlying societal structures linked to phenomenon of power can be studied based of Marxist and Postcolonial perspectives.

3.2 Material

By using case studies, the analysis can identify and measure the abstract validity of power and find indicators from different paths and factors related to power structures. It gives explanation of cases which cannot be explained in only statistics and numbers. In addition, case studies have been developed and interconnected with underlying arguments from philosophy, which is

³⁰Göran Bergström & Kristina Boréus, *Textens mening och makt – Metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*. 3rd edition. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2012. eBook, p. 74–76.

suitable for the design of this research.³¹ The material for the case studies is based on a triangulation of perspectives, one is the companies' report, one is the previous research and the final one is documentations from NGO's and UN bodies, which will broaden the perspectives and understanding of the issue, as well as strengthen the research. Firstly, because its shrinkage the risk of biases, which would have arisen if the study was only based on material from the companies and their perspective. Hence, the triangulation of data sources is justified based on the possibility to increase the credibility of the findings by also including the perspective from human rights organizations and academics. Secondly, to study the companies work in relation to power structures and to get a deeper and more fulsome understanding of the just transition and the issues between headquarter and local areas of EV production. It has been necessary to look at other sources, because the case studies by themselves is not enough for an analysis and understanding of the issues.³² It would have led to a very one-dimensional analysis from the perspective of the companies, which would not be in line with the aim and purpose of this thesis. Conclusively, one primary collection of academic data has been made, while material have been added along the process of reviewing material and analyzing material.

³¹Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005) eBook, p. 16–21.

³²Janice D. Aurini, Melanie Heath and Stephanie Howells, *The How To of Qualitative Research*. 2nd edition. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022. p. 96.

3.3 Analytical questions

The analytical questions have been the baseline for the case studies of the companies' sustainability reports and webpages. The questions have been used for the coding of the material, through the perspectives of the analytical tools, and thusly to find patterns in the texts, which later have been used for the constructing of the result and analysis of the thesis. Thusly, to be able to respond to the research questions.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is included in their approach of human rights and on is it clear how far their responsibility through the chains extends?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are their commitments around SDG and UNGP, is it a clear part of their business and how does that impact their approach and thoughts on human rights?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do the companies react to documented human rights violations within supply chains of the EV industry conducted by human rights organization? Hence is it highlighted and discussed in the reports.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the focus of their sustainability work, is it based on the three pillars of sustainable development on equal terms?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Based on the sustainability reports, are there any indications of hidden biases, or are the companies transparent and critical of their own work and ability of social responsibility?

3.4 Methodological discussion

The study's qualitative method allows for a nuanced investigation and understanding of the social interactions and meaning of social phenomenon beyond aspects of fixed variables. Hence, to understand the underlying aspects that will affect a just transition to renewable energy transportation. A qualitative approach is useful to explore and explain the current change in society that is visible in the transition from fossil fuel to renewable based energy, and how it can be explained and broaden the meaning of the issue by placing the phenomenon in the context of power structures.³³

Further on, to structure the research on case studies enables for an in-depth analysis of the context of power structures within the EV industry. It is a relevant tool to use in research that seeks to explain social phenomenon in contemporary situations that can be gained by a range

³³Jens Rennstam and David Wästerfors, *Analyze! Crafting Your Data in Qualitative Research*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2015. p. 11–20.

of perspectives around the context. Which is how the data is captured in this study, both from the companies, the external organizations, and the previous research. It allows for multiply perspectives of the issue and thusly a more deeply understanding of the phenomenon of a just transition to electric cars.³⁴

The analysis could be made in many ways to gain new insights of the issues, a common method for case studies is interviews or field studies or a mixed-methods approach that includes this and document analysis. In consideration of the timeframe and the width of the thesis, it has been limited to a content analysis. A type of textual analysis used in social science to investigate, identify and distinguished text in relation to different phenomenon. In this case, the use of human rights and sustainable development by the car companies in relation to power and social structures. When using a qualitative content analysis it aims to examines the content of a text that primarily cannot be measured in quantified terms, or that can be measured in some regards, in combinations with more complexed readings of text in line with a qualitative approach.³⁵ Which is the baseline for the choice of method, because for the aim and purpose of this thesis, the analysis of material must be decoded in more complexed ways and in relation to other texts and notions. Further on, Bergström and Beréus explains that textual analysis is a great tool in the discipline of social science to study phenomenon's like, power, equality, and economic markets. To understand the meaning of the context of textual writings linked to time periods and way of thinking and act. They claim that in social science, power is one of the most important objects to study. In their explanation, they proceed from Steven Lukes idea of power, based on three dimensions of power, thusly it will be used in this research as well. The first one proceeds from power as something visible, which is commonly expressed in new political decisions. The second dimension proceed from power as more than just the visible, for example that questions that are important for some groups of the society is not subjects of decisions. The third, and final dimension is "power over thought", which is about hidden exercises of power that is linked to the ability to affect people in a certain way, to act in a certain way. Which can be made by looking at how media is portraying societal phenomena based on a certain angle, while ignoring other perspectives. For this study the second dimension will primarily be applied, since the purpose is to study the underlying power structures which is not direct visible,

³⁴Aurini, Heath and Howells, *The How To of Qualitative Research*, p. 60–62.

³⁵Bergström and Boréus, *Textens mening och makt*, p. 49–52.

the third dimension is also relevant to study the companies' ability shape their marketing to attract consumers.³⁶

A central aspect of any kind of textual analysis is the reading and decoding of the text to acquire the meaning. Henceforth, the hermeneutic circle becomes essential, which is rooted in an understanding that a text is decoded from both the greater context and from specific details, which puts the text in a new perspective of understanding. The interpreter will proceed the decoding with a preunderstanding and preconceptions of the world, people and the society, based on the background, knowledge, and social context of the interpreter, which will affect the understanding of the texts. An interpretation of text is not possible without some type of preunderstanding, it rests on the interpreter's contemporary knowledge and experience in interplay with the original text, that leads to deeper understanding. What can be added is that I, the researcher, am both a student in the field of Human Rights & Democracy, along with studies in Business and Economics and have a preunderstanding from both the societal perspective and the corporate perspective. Although, to keep its trustworthiness as a researcher, it is important to be aware of this and use it to generate new point of views of issues, without leaning too much on one owns perceptions. Which is why a necessary step is to use an interpretation strategy to keep it as objective as possible. This study is based on the strategy that material of the case studies has first been interpreted in full, which then have been related to other text, the reports from human rights organizations, these insights have then been interpreted through the lens of *power* based on propositions based of perspectives of power from Postcolonial- and Marxist theories. Hence, the decoding is based on the companies as study objects in relation to my preunderstanding of the matter, which will determine the result of how power structures can be identified.³⁷ This will lead to new understanding of the text and the societal issue, in line with the hermeneutic circle. In this case, how power structures can be captured in the context of the economic market of electric car production within the three companies.

³⁶Bergström and Boréus, *Textens mening och makt*, p. 17–20.

³⁷Bergström and Boréus, *Textens mening och makt*, p. 30–35.

3.5 Preparation and Selection before the analysis

To make it possible to construct the study, a few necessary steps of preparation had to be made, one was how to choose car companies and the second aspect was to conduct an overview of relevant academic data of the research problem, which will be presented in the next chapter, Previous Research. Below follows a thoroughly commentary of the selection of car companies

3.5.1 *The choice of car companies*

To enable an analysis of global asymmetric power structures, the starting point of the selection was multinational companies, with headquarter in the Global North with a strong rootedness of their supply chain, linked to production and extraction of materials for EV batteries in the Global South. To get a foundation for the width of the search of companies, it was limited to multinational companies established in the Swedish market with electric cars as a central part of their range of cars.

After looking at statistics of most common car brands in Sweden during year 2021-2022, 13 car brands were chosen for a look at their Sustainability Reports for year 2021. Each report has been scanned based on keywords like *Human Rights*, *UNGP*, *SDG*, and *Business Ethics*, to see if the keywords are included in the reports and how many times. For a deeper insight, a brief reading of their *Code of Conduct* and *Business Vision* have also been made, to see if human rights, sustainable development, and responsibility for supply chains are central in their businesses. The results from the examining of the brands' reports were summarized in an index of the different brands, which have been part of the choice of car brands. Unfortunately, the scanning of the reports did not give a clear result of three companies that seems to prioritize sustainable development and human rights. Most of the companies did mention UNGP, Global Compact and SDG in similar ways in the reports. Consequentially, new ways to make distinction between the companies had to be made. The companies could be divided into newer brands, established during the present- and last decade who only produce electric cars and older brands established during the late era of the industrialization, during late 19th century and during the 20th century, companies who are now joining the transition to electric cars. The newer electric car brands like Polestar, Tesla and Xpeng have a focus on technological innovations and becoming the brands who leads the way for the rest of companies. They are very competitive to become number one, which could have been a route to analyze the capitalistic

agenda. This path of analysis could become political between China (Xpeng), USA (Tesla) and Sweden (Polestar), and the tension between who will set the stage for the EV industry. Which would have led to a very interesting analysis, thusly, a fear was that the focus would be on the international politics and the state actors in the competition to become number one. That it would be easier to make parallels to the *Space Race* between the Soviet Union and The United States, rather than to the underlying asymmetric power structures. For this reason, the new companies who only produce EV cars were discarded. The remaining brands could be linked to the theme of this thesis, the transition from fossil fuel to EV batteries, these brands are on a path to transition from producing only fossil fueled based cars to produce EV cars.

However, it was not enough to make a choice, the remaining brands still highlights similar aspects in their sustainability reports. From a quick scan of their *Code of Conduct* and *Business Vision* it was hard to point out certain companies being at the forefront in their sustainable work, from all three pillars. One distinction that could be made was that five brands were originally established in European countries, one from USA and three of the brands were originally from Asian countries. From this insight, a decision was made to select from the car brands originated from Europe. The other brands could possibly be useful in this study, the result could still be the same since all of the brands are multinational companies. Nor were these companies behind in addressing the social dimension in their reports in comparison with the European companies. Nevertheless, the decision to select from the European car brands, made it possible to get more of a metaphorical connection to the historical relationship between Global South and Global North from the colonial era, which leads to a clearer connection to the contemporary asymmetric power structures.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are important in research, particular in qualitative and human rights studies that usually includes direct contact with people, in-depth studies, or observations of specific events. It is important to address aspects concerning fairness, trustworthiness, and respect. This study does not include sensitive data, it is about reporting the findings truthfully, without influencing the analysis toward specific bias or misrepresenting the findings of the study.³⁸ Which is why the FAIR Guiding Principles for data management have been used.

³⁸Aurini, Heath and Howells, *The How To of Qualitative Research*, p. 107–110.

Which is about using data that can be find, be accessible, interoperable with other data and that data should described to be able to be reusable in new sceneries.³⁹

One particular concern that have been deliberated before starting the thesis is how to relate and describe the global power relation between the two opposites - who is affecting and who is affected by actions. After consideration Global South and Global North was decided to be used to address the dynamics of global power structures. However, it is important to remember that categorization of countries can be made in many ways, however, it comes with problematics when one includes subjective of countries as more develop and less develop, which undermines the complexities within countries. It puts a generalization of countries which does not always depicts countries and regions in a fair and accurate way. For the purpose of this thesis, it has thusly been necessary in order analyze the societal power structures. Global South and Global North have been chosen instead of similar terms like Third World (South) and First World (North), which implicates more of a hierarchical relation underpinned with eurocentrism and is a less nuance way of distinguishing between regions and countries.⁴⁰

A final consideration is the limitations of this study and what can truly be answered based on the scope and timeframe of the thesis, which means that certain important aspects to give a holistic and comprehensive view, will not be possible. Particularly about the missing aspect of raising the voices from the local areas of Global South. This once again emphasize the importance of truthfulness and transparency to avoid interpretations that can lead to unjustified biases.

³⁹Go Fair. FAIR Principles. *Go Fair* (n.d.). <https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/>. (Accessed 2023.05.10).

⁴⁰Cheryl McEwan, *Postcolonialism, Decoloniality and Development*, p 17–21.

4 Previous Research

4.1 Literature Review

To get a deeper understanding and locate the current state of academic knowledge about issues concerning human rights perspectives on energy justice, sustainable development, and business in the transition to clean energy transportation, a literary review has been collected. The research has been collected through the databases Ebscohost – Political Science Complete, Hein Online International Core and Oxford Scholarly Authorities on International Law, in the range year 2013 to 2023, which all are available at University College Stockholm. Google Scholars have also been used as a tool for the conduction of scholarly literature. 113 sources were downloaded from the databases and briefly examined and divided into files depending on its relevance for the thesis. 44 sources with a clear focus on either *just transition*, *energy justice*, *extraction of minerals*, *business responsibility in supply chains* and *aspects concerning sustainable development's effects on global south and global north* was picked for a deeper analysis. The second review enabled to narrow it down to 20 articles with clear relevance and related aspects for this thesis, to show the complexity, the width, and the depth of the issues from different perspective, whilst still being connected to the aspects of energy justice, just transition, sustainable development and human rights and business. Parts of it will be presented below, which have been divided in themes based of patterns that was found during the process of the literature review.

4.2 Capitalism and Business– the role of corporations in a globalized world

Thomas Clarke argues that the doctrine of Milton Friedman and his famous claim that “*the only social responsibility that business have is to increase its profit*”, is wrong. He explores the idea that this capitalistic doctrine is intensely damaging for corporations. That the lack of social aspects which comes with the focus on maximizing shareholder value, can be the reason of companies' failure to respond to concerns regarding increased pollution and safety. In addition, the outcomes of social responsibility as equal with increased profit, is that innocent lives are at risk, as well as the environment, both externality and internally, with negative effects

concerning the safety and health of the workers.⁴¹ In his notion, corporations must pass the mindset of being purpose-driven when it comes to stakeholder value and develop established strategies for social and environment responsibility. Further on, that this becomes hard, when the gap between the reality of what the corporations are doing, and what is needed to accomplish climate resilient, is increasing.⁴²

The correlation between capitalism and environmental destruction is also something that Ian Angus have researched in his book *Facing the Anthropocene – fossil capitalism and the crisis of the earth system*. He proceeds from the notion that capitalism and fossil fuel is two inseparable items for the global economy, that together have led to the anthropocentric climate change and environmental destruction, based on the never-ending chase of increasing production and capital while ignoring its affects on nature. The automobile industry as one major part of the Fossil Capitalism, that the mass-production which have led to affordable cars for the vast majority, have also led to unsustainable patterns for the earth system. Angus means that a 100% transition to renewable energy is important and possible, although, the question is if it exists a political and economic will to truly proceed when the fossil capitalism is deeply intertwined in the societal system.⁴³

To connect it to the EV industry, A. Katharina Keil have investigated the German car industry to highlight insights of their sustainable work from the three pillars. The study shows indication that the capitalistic values are running the car industry, like electrified SUV's instead of smaller cars with less demands of resources. She claims that capitalistic dynamics of maximizing profit will lead to an (un)sustainable transition which undermines the ecological and social aspects.⁴⁴ Jason Henderson have come to similar conclusions. In his account, it is not a solution that fix the environmental or equality issues, it is a solution that is set for a neoliberal society when the focus is on electrifying the market instead of making more severe changes and adjustments in our society and daily life.⁴⁵

⁴¹Thomas Clarke, The Contest on Corporate Purpose: Why Lynn Stout was Right, and Milton Friedman was Wrong, *Accounting, Economics, and Law: A Convivium* 10, no. 3, 2020: p. 3–10. DOI: 10.1515/acl-2020-0145.

⁴²Clarke, p. 35–39.

⁴³Ian Angus. *Facing the Anthropocene – fossil capitalism and the crisis of the earth system*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016. eBook, p. 153–174.

⁴⁴A. Katharina Keil. *Cars, Capitalism, and Climate: An Inquiry Into Systematic Barriers to a Sustainable Transition in German Car Industry*, 2022. p. 5–6 & 14–16. DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.4075510.

⁴⁵Jason Henderson. *EVs Are Not the Answer: A Mobility Justice Critique of Electric Vehicle Transition*, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 110:6. 2020. DOI: 10.1080/24694452.2020.1744422.

4.3 Societal aspects regarding Energy and Corporations

Benjamin K. Sovacool, studies the social aspects linked to the production of EV cars. In one study, he highlights the injustices in a Nordic context linked to elitism and freedom of movement. That prohibition of driving fossil fueled cars and the high cost for owning electric cars, will lead to increased gap between elites and socio-economic vulnerable groups.⁴⁶ Another article stresses the importance of energy justice in the transition to energy-based power, which is claimed to be missing in research and the debate about energy transition. It is seen as ironic since the energy transition often is motivated from sustainable development. A central part within the framework is equality and justice. To dismiss aspects of energy justice can lead to negative outcomes like intensified poverty and rooted gender-bias. The article stresses that the missing aspect of energy justice does indicate that the energy transition has a possibility to deliver the costs and benefits as unequal as the fossil-fueled based energy production.⁴⁷

4.4 Energy Transition - Synergies between Global South & North

Dilemmas of Energy Transitions in the Global South: Balancing Urgency and Justice is comprehensive research, from different perspective about challenges that comes with the transition to renewable based energy. The foundation is about the fast and important climate actions that are needed to face the climate changes. How aspects regarding justice are forgotten in the debates and processes of energy transition, when climate change is defined as a crisis. The book explores the impacts when rapid solutions are made, without consideration of the ethical outcomes it has on people. The importance to consider the tension between Global South and Global North in the discussions of energy transition. Hence, in their examination, the inclusion of knowledge from the Global South is vital to create an urgent, yet well deliberated energy transition which will lead to more just outcomes.⁴⁸

Similar accounts are stated by Jewellord Nem Singh, who examined the green energy transition and the supply chains of raw material from a social justice perspective, to highlight how the

⁴⁶Benjamin K. Sovacool (et al.). *Energy Injustice and Nordic Electric Mobility: Inequality, Elitism and Externalities in the Electrification of Vehicle-to- Grid (V2G) Transport*. Ecological Economics, Elsevier, vol. 157, 2019. DOI: 10.1016/j.ecolecon.2018.11.013

⁴⁷Kirsten Jenkins, Benjamin K. Sovacool and Darren McCauley, *Humanizing sociotechnical transitions through energy justice: An ethical framework for global transformative change*. Energy Policy, Elsevier, vol 117, 2018, p. 66–67. DOI: 10.1016/j.enpol.2018.02.036.

⁴⁸Kumar, Höffken and Pols, *Dilemmas of Energy Transitions in the Global South*.

transition is based on uneven distribution between Global South and Global North. He explores two paths which the transition might lead, one is that the increasing demands on raw material will also increase the inequalities and lead to an uneven development. The other path is that new policy ideas could occur, if the social justice perspective becomes central, which could lead to more of a balance between North and South.⁴⁹ Clark A. Miller has a similar approach, that it is possible with a just transition if the social dimensions become a central aspect globally. Similar to the other scholars, they claim that it is not an easy task to build a new baseline for the energy sector. Henceforth the risk is high that it will continue to be built of clear winners and losers.⁵⁰

4.5 Outcomes from extraction of raw materials for electric batteries

Gabriela Quijano has investigated the increased global demand of lithium along the rising demand of EV cars. In her claim the clean energy transition does open up for economic development in Global South. Nonetheless, the risks are also high for environmental degradation and violations of human rights of local people. It exists a lack of scientific certainty concerning long-term environmental impacts, particularly the effects on the fragile ecosystems on the areas of lithium mining, which henceforth can be devastating for indigenous communities. The shortage of scientific information does make it hard for states and companies to truly understand the outcomes of mining of raw materials, which undermines the efforts of monitoring due diligence practices.⁵¹ Similar accounts are emphasized by Kate R. Finn and Christina A.W. Stanton, that there is a gap in knowledge about how extraction affects indigenous people who have a unique relationship to the land, beyond use for economic aspects. The article emphasizes that it exists a well-documented link between extractive industries and human rights violations, without consequences for the industry. In their statement, the energy

⁴⁹Jewellord Nem Singh, *Mining Our Way Out of the Climate Change Conundrum? The Power of Social Justice Perspective*. 2021. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/mining-our-way-out-climate-change-conundrum-power-social-justice-perspective>.

⁵⁰Clark A. Miller, Alastair Iles and Christopher F. Jones, *The Social Dimensions of Energy Transitions*, *Science as Culture*, 22:2, 2013. DOI: 10.1080/09505431.2013.786989.

⁵¹Gabriela Quijano. *Lithium Might Hold the Key to our Clean Energy Future, but Will this Star Metal Fully Deliver on its Green Potential?*, *Business and Human Rights Journal*, vol. 5:2. 2020, p. 276–281. DOI: 10.1017/bhj.2020.6.

transition will face the same issues as the fossil fuel industry if the global actors continue to ignore the knowledge and voices from indigenous and other people affected by the industry.⁵²

Datu Buyung Agusdinata, have made an analysis of trends in previous research about EV technology based on lithium batteries. One findings is that the socio-economic concerns of the lithium batteries have decreased in research and been replaced by environmental concerns, which can pose a threat towards the victims who suffer from the extraction, if it continues to spiral down in research trends.⁵³ He has also written about the winners and losers in the expanded demand of electric cars, which question if it truly can be motivated as sustainable development when the extraction leads to negative impacts and violations towards local people.⁵⁴

4.6 Contributions to the field of studies

Previous research shows different perspectives related to the issue of this thesis, with the same conclusion. The risk of EV industry being a copy of the current automobile market is high, and research emphasizes that inequalities from the fossil fueled based energy and economy is at risk to follow into the green energy transition. However, there is a shortage of studying it interconnected, through analysis of power structures and the effects from both the postcolonial- and capitalistic society. How the underlying societal aspects affects both the abilities of the companies and possibilities for a just energy transition. Scholars are pointing at the risks, the negative ecological outcomes, the inequalities and the harmful actions against workers, local people, and indigenous people. Thus, what is often missing, is how it have occurred from a deeper-rooted cause linked to the structures of the society. This is what this thesis will contribute with the most. The analysis of the asymmetric power structures will hopefully give an (even if small) explanation to how the structures does affect the possibilities for a just transition, and give an indication that this is needed to be addressed more before construction new laws and obligations for companies and society.

⁵²Kate R. Finn and Christina A.W. Stanton. *The (Un)Just Use of Transition Minerals: How Efforts to Achieve a Low-Carbon Economy Continue to Violate Indigenous Rights*, Colorado Environmental Law Journal, vol 33:2, 2022, p. 342–346.

⁵³Datu Buyung Agusdinata et al. *Socio-environmental impacts of lithium mineral extraction: towards a research agenda*. Environmental Research Letter, 13, 123001. 2018. DOI: 10.1088/1748-9326/aae9b1.

⁵⁴Datu Buyung Agusdinata et al. *Critical mineral for electric vehicles: a telescoping review*. Environmental Research Letter, 17, 013005, 2022. DOI 10.1088/1748-9326/ac4763.

5 Society, Business and Power: Past to the Present

5.1 Historical Context of South & North

Historically the world has been divided in a hierarchal order and a distinction between ruler and dominated of people and places, which takes new forms depending on time and era. The societal structures visible today is an effect of what happened in the past. This does not mean that the exploitation today is practice the same way as during the colonial era. The pattern of power and control linked to economy and territory is still part of the societal structures. In the time of colonialism, it was about the European elitism who claimed to achieve the common good by exploiting the natives land, captured, and enslave the population, motivated from economical aspects. Which did not only exploit and kill people, it did also undermine the native people's connection to nature and environment. During the Enlightenment era, colonialism was justified based on ideas from thinkers like John Locke about sovereignty and property across the globe to promote the European hegemony and promote economic development. Hence, the colonial era created a global order of imperialism based on a division of people and its territory. The aftermath of colonialism has created deep-rooted structures, which have taken new forms in the contemporary world. Multinational companies are one way to highlight the patterns of structures. Another aspect is concerning sustainable development from a policy level, regarding what perspective they are constructed from. On this basis, the dichotomy of Global South and North, is a way of describing the movement to highlight the international subjective interest of power in policy and structures based of the legacies from the colonial era. How an understanding of how the past have affected the relationship between North and South today, can open for new ways of thinking and acting about power, responsibility, and ethics in the international sphere.⁵⁵

⁵⁵Siba Grovogui. A Revolution Nonetheless: The Global South in International Relations, *The Global South*, Vol 5, No. 1, Special Issue, Spring 2011, p. 176–183. DOI: 10.2979/globalsouth.5.1.175.

5.2 Business as Social Actor

The discussion about the social responsibility have been a widely debated topic since the society become more and more global. In step with the geographic expansion of corporation from the 1970s and onwards, which have led to the possibilities to have production in one country and headquarters in another, to increase the economical profit. The social responsibility was commonly motivated from Milton Friedman's claim that "business is business" whose contribution to the society is to create economic development. That it will be beneficial both for corporations and social progress. Subsequently, because more attention has been directed towards multinational companies having power over local areas of production while making economic profit, questions have occurred about companies' role as a social actor. This can be seen as founded in the complex global society, that makes it nearly impossible for state-actors to ensure the fulfillment of human rights by themselves. Thusly, companies should not be able to take advantage of the situation. External medial pressure has also changed the mindset of many companies. Today it exists a will and motivation among companies to do good, be part of changemaking and provide social goods. Companies are voluntary incorporating corporate social responsibilities in their business and adopt international regulations. However, the issue is that, as of right now, the frameworks for businesses are soft laws, it does not exist any legally binding treaties at the UN level for corporates responsibility or other initiatives which would make companies to more of a social actor with obligations. In this sense, it becomes an issue about what is manageable for the companies when they need to have a balance, since they are not non-profit organizations or state actors, it cannot cost more than it generates in economic value, because they must make the ends meet economically to run their business forward. Hence, them as a social actor is affected by how the society want to perceive them, if it should stay in the Status Quo, or see them as an integrated, complex, and nuanced social actor with more commitments beyond economical values.⁵⁶

⁵⁶Tommy Borglund, Hans De Geer, Susanne Sweet et al., *CSR och Hållbart Företagande*, 3rd edition. Stockholm: Sanoma Utbildning, 2021. p. 59–80.

5.3 Frameworks for Business

5.3.1 *Agenda 2030 – The Sustainable Development Goals*

Agenda 2030 can be described as a plan of action based on 17 goals to eliminate global poverty in all forms and should consider the three pillars of sustainable development to face the challenges linked to people and planet to achieve equality and end poverty and hunger. It is built on our responsibility and actions together to transform our world to be sustainable for all. It is needed that all states, stakeholders, and other actors act together to achieve the common goal of Agenda 2030. A major part within the global plan of Agenda 2030 is the idea “*leave no one behind*”, which is based on the core from human right about recognizing that the dignity of each human is fundamental and activities and solutions to achieve the goals should meet the needs of all countries and people of all levels of society as well as protecting the planet. Agenda 2030 does also stress the importance of empowering vulnerable groups like indigenous people, as well as the importance of peaceful, inclusive, and just societies which provide equal access to justice and enjoyment of human rights for all. It is a framework which recognize that both social and economic development must be within the frame of sustainable management of the earth’s natural resources, which means that the ecological pillar should accordingly be central in all activities to reach the goals.⁵⁷

5.3.2 *UNGP*

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP) is the normative document on the international level that covers the responsibility to protect human rights for businesses. The principles are not legally binding, just a globally agreed standard which conceptualized their responsibility in regards of mitigation, identification, and remediation of corporate human rights impacts, both negative and positive impacts. It includes a responsibility for companies to conduct human rights due diligence to identify their corporate activities which may be harmful or violate people’s rights. Especially the impacts it has on vulnerable and marginalized groups and populations. Hence, corporations should according to UNGP, pay attention to the rights and needs as well as challenges for people and individuals who risks being affected by corporate activities. UNGP contains of several principles purposed to guide companies and state-actors about the responsibilities and obligations regarding

⁵⁷United Nations. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. *UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs*. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>. (accessed: 2023.04.10).

corporate activities which is in line with the International Bill of Human Rights. However, since these are non-binding principles, (which as most could be considered as soft law), means that businesses *should* respect, not what they *must*, as a duty bearer. Within the UNGP it is still stated that the states are the ones who have a duty to protect human rights, even if the actions are done by third parties like companies.⁵⁸

5.3.3 EU Law – Responsible Batteries

In December of 2022 an agreement was made between the European Parliament and the Council to update the European Union (EU) battery legislation to meet the current environmental, ethical, and social issues. The regulation is set to safeguard and strengthen the regulation of the production of EV batteries, and all other types of batteries, by target risks associated with the whole supply chain of batteries, from extraction to final product, to ensure more responsible production to limit batteries footprint, strengthen human rights and promote sustainable competitive in the European market. The new law needs to formally be adopted by the European Parliament and the Council before it enters into force.⁵⁹ However, concerns have occurred, Amnesty International means that it fails so protect the victims - the people being harmed by the production of EV cars.⁶⁰

⁵⁸United Nations: Human Rights Office of The High Commissioner. *Guiding Principle on Business and Human Rights*, 2011. <https://www.ohchr.org/>.

⁵⁹European Commission. *Green Deal: EU agrees new law on more sustainable and circular batteries to support EU's energy transition and competitive industry*. Press release, 9 December 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_7588. (Accessed: 2023.04.07).

⁶⁰Amnesty International. *EU: New rules for electric battery producers toughen safeguards, yet fails to sufficiently protect victims*. Amnesty International – News. 2022. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/eu-new-rules-for-electric-battery-producers-toughen-safeguards-yet-fail-to-sufficiently-protect-victims/>. (Accessed: 2023.03.10).

6 Mercedes, Volvo & Volkswagen – Sustainable and Rightful?

6.1 The outcomes of the case studies

Based on the information from the websites of the three companies, it can be stated that they have a focus on the technologically innovative aspects concerning the electric cars and the benefits from an environmental perspective to drive electric. The outcomes indicate that the environmental aspects are used as a marketing focus, that the information it is primarily about attracting customers. The brands have a focus on either SUV or luxurious sportscars with high performance and are emphasizing that their electric cars come with no compromises when it comes to design, safety and driving pleasure. Moreover, it is centralized on technological innovation and the benefits of driving electric, both for the consumer and the environment. Hence, that electric cars are the future and a choice to buy an electric car is a choice to be part of the sustainable change. Other concluding findings are that their vision is to electrify Sweden and that they are a key contributor to the rapid drive of development towards carbon neutrality in the car industry.⁶¹Henceforth, it could be argued that a strategy is to focus on a branding of luxurious and innovative larger cars and that they are following trends of the society linked to sustainable development and making a better future. That it can be understood as an attempt to attract costumers, linked to the demand from people to buy sustainable products.

6.1.1 Sustainability reports

In contrast to the webpages, the reports have a broader perspective with the purpose of showcase their work, instead of marketing their products. The reports include human rights and social responsibility, compared the websites. All companies' reports emphasize that climate change is the greatest challenge the world is up against. It is realized that they have a responsibility to shape the car industry based on sustainable patterns, for a better future. *Volvo* claims that the automotive industry is part of the issue regarding climate change and must make solid efforts

⁶¹Mercedes-Benz. Mercedes-Benz EQ. Välkommen till Mercedes-Benz värld av emobilitet. (n.d.). <https://www.mercedes-benz.se/passengercars/mercedes-benz-cars/electromobility/e-mobility/e-mobility-teaser.module.html>. (Accessed: 2023.02.25); Volkswagen. Framtiden är elektrisk. Upptäck våra elbilar. (n.d.). <https://www.volkswagen.se/sv/elbilar.html>. (Accessed: 2023.02.25); Volvo Cars. Hållbarhet. (n.d.). <https://www.volvocars.com/se/v/sustainability>. (Accessed: 2023.02.25).

to become part of the solution.⁶² Similar statements exist in the other reports. The coding shows patterns that they include all three pillars of sustainable development and that respecting human rights is included in their view of social responsibility. All of them claim to be committed to international agreements linked to both human rights and sustainability and are participants of the UN Global Compact. They have made internal principles based on the International Bill of Human Rights and states that both the SDG's and UNGP are part of their guide to be a responsible company. *Volkswagen* has constructed their own declaration on Social Rights, Industrial Relations, and Business & Human Rights, binding for employees and business partners.⁶³ Similar initiatives have been made by *Mercedes* and *Volvo*, thusly, the aspect that is missing is how far down the supply chain the obligations covers and consequences if someone violates the agreements. In contrast to climate protection in supply chains, *Mercedes* states that they have an *Ambition Letter* linked to climate protection, direct suppliers who do not sign it will not be considered for new contracts.⁶⁴ The reports do not mention similar aspects regarding human rights protection in supply chains.

One interesting finding from the examining of the three companies' sustainability reports is that all of them starts with describing themselves as responsible companies. That sustainability has become a central part in their new strategies for reduction of carbon emissions and contributions to the protection of the planet. That social aspects, thusly human rights, are a central dimension of the basis on sustainability for global companies. Below follows one quote from each company to describe their view on responsibility for the companies.

Volvo:

“We see respecting human rights as vital to demonstrating leadership in ethical and responsible business. We seek to respect the rights of people throughout our value chain by continuously improving our human rights risk-based due diligence to identify, cease, prevent, and remedy any human rights violation”.⁶⁵

⁶²Volvo Car Group. *Annual and Sustainability Report 2021*. 2022. p. 20. <https://www.media.volvocars.com/global/en-gb/media/documentfile/298347/annual-and-sustainability-report-2021>. (Accessed: 2023:01.23).

⁶³Volkswagen. *Sustainability Report 2021*. 2022. p. 95. https://www.volkswagenag.com/presence/nachhaltigkeit/documents/sustainability-report/2021/Nonfinancial_Report_2021_e.pdf. (Accessed: 2023.01.23).

⁶⁴Mercedes-Benz Group. *Sustainability Report 2022*. 2023. p. 110. https://sustainabilityreport.mercedes-benz.com/2022/_assets/downloads/entire-mercedes-benz-sr22.pdf. (Accessed: 2023.03.29).

⁶⁵Volvo Car Group, *Annual and Sustainability Report 2022*. 2023 p. 44. <https://vp272.alertir.com/afw/files/press/volvocar/202303076447-1.pdf>. (Accessed: 2023.03.29).

Volkswagen:

“Sustainability is not a fad. It’s firmly embedded at *Volkswagen* as one of five principles of corporate governance. We think of sustainability holistically: it’s about the environment – including climate protection – and about our social responsibility, the transformation of the workforce and the way we run our company”.⁶⁶

Mercedes:

“There are a number of key actions that business can take to tackle inequality. First of all, corporate respect for human rights should sit at the center of everything. It helps to ensure that human dignity moves to the center of how business gets done. It reinforces a company’s capacity to lift people out of poverty, improving the lives of the world’s most vulnerable people”.⁶⁷

The interesting by the quotes is the patterns that later can be found, which in some cases contradicts these descriptions. Thusly, it is hard to draw a concrete assumption about how they define human rights and their responsibility to respect it throughout their supply chains. The outcomes do on the on-hand shows patterns of the companies as responsible to respect human rights and committed to ensure that human rights are respected in their productions and by their suppliers and business partners. That they want to achieve responsible supply chains, based on the idea that human rights should be respected both in headquarter for their employees, and through the chain on local levels.⁶⁸ Linked to the patterns described, it can thusly appear like they formally include human rights as a central aspect of their work, which should shape their business, based on their commitments to human rights initiatives like UNGP. That the social dimension as important in their commitment to sustainable development and the achieving of the SDG’s.

On the other hand, the findings from the coding does also show patterns of other outcomes. The companies are aware of human rights risks within their supply chain of EV batteries, particularly with extraction of the raw material like lithium and cobalt, and states that they are working on achieving responsible sourcing of material to produce the batteries. One crucial aspect to achieve this is to implement transparency and trackability throughout the supply

⁶⁶Volkswagen. *Sustainability Report 2022*. 2023. p. 5. https://www.volkswagenag.com/presence/nachhaltigkeit/documents/sustainability-report/2022/Nonfinancial_Report_2022_e.pdf. (Accessed: 2023.03.29).

⁶⁷Mercedes, 2022, p. 9.

⁶⁸Volkswagen, 2021, p. 95; Mercedes. *Sustainability Report 2021*. 2022. p. 241–242. <https://group.mercedes-benz.com/documents/sustainability/other/mercedes-benz-sustainability-report-2021.pdf>. (Accessed: 2023.01.23).

chains.⁶⁹ Which is why *Volvo* have developed a blockchain technology to have a better chance to track minerals, which will be further established in their production of electric cars.⁷⁰ Further on, the companies do mention that supply chains are complex, it is not always clear regarding what is responsible and what is not. The human rights risks happen further down the chain, beyond their own control. Which might be the case, however it does also illustrate how they want to use their social power. When they are mentioning their social responsibility, the focus is on philanthropic activities, particularly today with the ongoing invasion of Ukraine. Both *Volvo* and *Volkswagen* mentioned that they use their social power to provide help by donations of goods to humanitarian organizations, both financial support and use of their vehicles.⁷¹ *Mercedes* did a collaboration with art called *A Space for Conversation*, as an attempt to connect and engage in Nature, Responsibility, and the silence of the pandemic.⁷² The social responsibility is also linked to voluntarily commitments like projects to empower youth in areas of headquarter or the possibility for employees to engage in volunteer projects. One aspect that should be added from the findings, is that they do mention that a significant stakeholder for the companies is NGOs who they are in dialogue with to improve their attempts to identify human rights risks within supply chains. Although, this is not well developed in the report compared to the other aspects of what they include in their social responsibility. Further on, the human rights commitments are focused on the companies' employees, which is within their control. The coding shows the same focus for all the companies, actions related to inclusion, diversity, and well-being, particularly about gender equality and a non-discriminatory workplace.

The case studies do also indicate that the three pillars of sustainable development are not prioritized equally, which does not mean that they are ignoring certain pillars, although, the analysis shows a pattern that economic and environmental aspects are more developed than the social aspects. That both sustainability and human rights are commonly discussed as a demand or interest from stakeholders like costumers, NGOs, and investors. The rhetoric in the reports is commonly about that climate change is the largest threat for humanity, which they want to be part to solve, and become the leading brand within the EV industry. It exists a focus on achieving circular economy to achieve a sustainable, yet profitable market, based on green growth. It supposedly exists an economical bias, the sustainable and responsible effort could be

⁶⁹Volkswagen, 2022, p. 110.

⁷⁰Volvo, 2022, p. 24.

⁷¹Volkswagen, 2022, p. 6; Volvo, 2022, p. 172.

⁷²Mercedes, 2021, p. 37–41.

motivated to stay as a profitable company. Additionally, they are emphasizing that they want to achieve a competitive market. It should be sustainable and ethical, nonetheless competitive, in order to enable economic growth.

The patterns show that when economy and sustainability aspects are highlighted, words like “*we are taking actions*” “*we are part of the solution*” “*we are committed to adopt circular economy*” are used. These ambitions can also be measured in numbers. Contrary to the social aspects, words like “*we strive to act ethical and responsible*” or “*we support international standards*” are used and their ambitions are vague, it is commonly phrased like: “*tackle corruption and unethical business practices*” or “*take the lead in setting a new global people standard for the industry*”. Subsequently, economical and ecological aspects are described more in numbers with clear and measurable goals and strategies. The social aspects are described in more abstract terms. Regardless that they have made their own inhouse social principal, it is not as measurable in comparison to the other two dimensions.

One final finding is related to how the companies do refer to the SDGs and how they want to be an actor for a better future, for the planet and its people, holistically. However, one goal that none of the companies refer to and aiming to achieve, is goal number 10, which is reduced inequalities.

A concluding remark from the case studies is that all three companies are committed to achieve a sustainable automobile industry, which include a social responsibility. They see themselves as actors for a better future, thus, to what scope they are committed, is beyond the ability to answer from these case studies. To truly analyze their motivation, much more investigations is needed. What can be stated is that the analysis of the sustainability reports shows contradictions between how they want to be portrayed and what they truly are prioritizing. On the one hand, they are committed to international sustainability and human rights frameworks, and want to achieve responsible supply chains and are positive to further initiatives from the global institutions, to achieve responsible sourcing. On the other hand, the companies have a focus on being the leading EV company, the benefits of becoming sustainable and responsible for the planet. Typically to be profitable and achieve economic growth in the new industry. The next chapter will discuss these findings from a broader perspective, linked to societal asymmetric power structures.

7 Corporation and the link to Societal Power Structures – Indications of a Just Transition?

The case studies indicates that the companies do see themselves as an actor with responsibilities. Who want to act for a better, more sustainable, and ethical car industry, without losing the values of competition and capital growth. Which in a sense illustrates the climate debate from a societal perspective. The urgent need to transition to renewable sourced energy as beneficial for the planet, people, and the economy. This chapter focus on the key finding linked to the lack of SDG 10, responsible supply chains and the prioritizing of the three pillars of sustainable development. It will be related to a broader perspective of society and discussed to explain the energy transition related to what terms is it sustainable and what terms can the structural inequalities tend to be visible today.

The result shows that the companies are aware of risks within the supply chains, which is in line with a study from *Business & Human Rights Resource Center*, who have investigated the negative and positive outcomes from the automobile industry. The study indicates similar aspects, it exists human rights risks and abuses does occur, over 90% does take place regions of extraction of material. The study does also stress that it exist a pattern among car companies to voluntary comply to initiatives to achieve responsible sourcing and identify human rights risks.⁷³ Another study of the car companies states that *Volvo Cars*, *Mercedes*, and *Volkswagen* are in the top when it comes to positive human rights impact, that they have made significant improvements linked to responsible sourcing in supply chains. However, one aspect that is missing is comprehensive protecting of indigenous people. Similar to the aspects brought up in the chapter about previous research. The investigation does stress the issue of not prioritizing indigenous rights risk in the current transition, because currently 54% of global mineral extraction are located in or near indigenous people's territories. Thusly, the EV industry and the energy transition is a current and urgent threat towards indigenous people.⁷⁴ Which the case studies also confirm, *Mercedes* does mention that indigenous people are in a vulnerable situation due to actions in supply chains, hence like this study imply, this is not interconnected in their human rights approach and their strategies for due diligence. Human Rights Watch have

⁷³Business & Human Rights Resource Center. *Business & Human Rights snapshot: Automotive Sector*. 2018. https://media.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/files/BHRRRC_AutomotiveSector_OCT2018.pdf. (Accessed: 2023.03.15).

⁷⁴Lead the Charge. *Scoring The World's Automakers On Their EV Supply Chains*. 2023. <https://leadthecharge.org/scorecards-summary/methodology/#humanrights>. (Accessed: 2023.04.20).

stressed another issue regarding responsible sourcing, which is abuses in aluminum supply chains. This is not directly related to the supply chains of EV batteries, as stated in the report, the prioritizing of companies is due diligence for materials needed for EV batteries, not aluminum and its risks on environment and local communities. Hence, it is a blind spot for responsible supply chains.⁷⁵ The case studies do confirm this, when addressing responsible sourcing it is commonly about batteries, aluminum is mentioned, however, the human rights risks are linked to supply chains of EV batteries. One assumption that can be made is firstly that it can be linked to the lack of mentioning SDG 10, which is also a confirmation of the missing aspects in the global discussions of including justice in debates about energy transition. Secondly, about trends in society to gain profit, which can be related to the findings from the previous research about companies being purpose-driven when it comes to stakeholders' value and development of strategies for social responsibility.

7.1 The economical society

The companies are a great illustration of the economical society. The analysis confirms that economical values are the dominated aspects in developing processes and thusly have power over society. This becomes clear in their way of expressing the importance of creating green- and competitive economic growth. Which is similar to the global rhetoric about the energy transition as both being good from an environmental and economical perspective. That green energy will both be affordable and lead to economical growth. It is thusly a correlation both from the companies and the global rhetoric linked to economical motivation to support the renewable sourced energy sector. This have also been emphasized when looking at information from different UN organs, that the positive aspects are more discussed than the social risks. Which once again indicates how intertwined the economical patterns are in the societal structures and the values that are being prioritized in development. However, other aspects are still brought up, simply not to the same extent as the benefits from an economical perspective. For example, in an IPCC report, it is both stressed that the energy transition is good from an economical perspective and also that the decarbonization puts a demand on car companies to adjust their businesses to be part of the transition, as a reaction towards the divestment in fossil-fuel sector. Further on, it is brought up that car companies have become an essential actor to

⁷⁵Human Rights Watch. *Abuses in Aluminum Supply Chains a Blind Spot for Car Industry*, 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/22/abuses-aluminum-supply-chains-blind-spot-car-industry>. (Accessed: 2023.01.17).

achieve new sustainable patterns. Although, it is stated that it still exists both sustainable and unsustainable patterns, especially the trend of EV SUVs.⁷⁶ The trend of EV SUVs became visible in the case studies, it is something that all three companies stresses that they are producing more of. It can be linked to the research of both A Katharina Keil and Jason Henderson, that the patterns that are visible today in the EV industry is not enough when it comes to sustainability, since it is focused on large car which demands more resources. The aspects of SUVs, together with the rhetoric of creating sustainable and green capital growth, does align with the notion from the previous research about the EV industry being shaped capitalistic dynamics of maximizing capital, which undermines its ability to truly lead to holistic sustainable development.

In addition, the competitive focus puts a demand on the companies to adjust their businesses according to the request of stakeholders, which in the current state of the climate crisis is about achieving sustainable and responsible companies. The chase to adopt and be part of the energy transition to continue to be profitable, opens up for a question of what it says about their motivation to respect human rights. Because if they do not comply with the interests of the stakeholders like customers, investors, and pressure from society, then they will not be part of the new competitive green market and thusly lose in profit. Although, what truly is the companies drive to engage with human rights is not something that this thesis can answer, it is possible that it is partly from a moral drive that they want to contribute to a positive change. However, the case studies do imply that their motivation is in line with Wettstein explanation of a social approach of human rights. That it is external societal pressure that is the biggest drive to engage in human rights work. Further on, from a dimension of power, it can be related to the third dimension of the ability to affect people in a certain way. Hence, the companies' ability to portrait themselves as responsible and sustainable and an actor for a better future to attract stakeholders. Hereinafter, from the second dimension, the invisible exercised of power exercise, is the relationship between local area and headquarter and how the "look good" approach consequently leads to them to not truly prioritizing the vulnerable people in local areas in the end of their supply chains. It could therefore be assumed that the companies are a great illustration of Brewer's notion of the global metropolis-satellite structure which then makes the

⁷⁶IPCC, 2022: *Climate Change 2022 Mitigation of Climate Change*. Working Group III Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. p. 557–558. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_FullReport.pdf. (Accessed: 2023.03.13).

geographical hierarchy of classes visible and highlights the dynamics of human rights risks on one end and competitive and capital growth on the other end. Subsequently it becomes one way to explain the structural division between Global South and Global North, which leads to injustice.⁷⁷ This will be further explored in the next part.

7.2 The (un)Just society

In the last part, the companies' awareness of human rights risk in supply chains was discussed and linked to their human rights motivation. That the companies' attention is their social responsibility linked to employee's well-being and diversity, and that responsibility throughout the supply chains to local areas, is partly their focus. Additionally, the results show a pattern of two types of responds, the first one is about the companies' action in local areas. The most commonly respond is that they are aiming for responsible sourcing and trying to track human rights risks. However, there are indications that it is not a current solution to discard the local areas. *Mercedes* does not want to leave the risk areas, they want to make the areas better and solve the issues, thusly be an actor for positive development in local areas. Which might sound good and probably motivated from good intentions, it can also be seen as problematic related to the hegemonic knowledge of the Global North. The rhetoric of "solving the issues" can thusly be linked to the western knowledge, which is built from a hierarchical division between the capabilities of the North versus the South. It tends to lean on a form of imperialism over Global South, which undermines them as autonomously agents for development. Therefore, even if the intentions are to protect universal human rights, the risk is that it will contribute to the normative of Global South as helpless victims instead of targeting to structural asymmetric structures.⁷⁸ Subsequently, it comes an illustration of Gandhi's elements of *Western Self-Critique* and synergies of how knowledge and domination can occur in the EV industry, and thusly on a societal level.⁷⁹

The second pattern of respond is the companies' implication towards human rights risks being beyond their control, it is the responsibility of international state-actors. Which could be linked to the mainstream view of companies' main function of responsibility being economical values, other social responsibilities belong to the state-actors. However, the case studies did also show

⁷⁷Brewer. *Marxist Theories of Imperialism*, p. 166–168.

⁷⁸Wettstein. *Business and Human Rights*, p. 292–293.

⁷⁹Gandhi. *Postcolonial Theory*, p.178–180.

patterns of the companies seeing themselves as actors for social responsibility, only that it exist an obstacle when the international sphere have not made changes to increase the companies' ability to achieve responsible sourcing. For example, the need for new and more purposeful legislative reforms and frameworks to achieve trackability and transparency within companies supply chains, end to end. Which could be the reason why the reports do not include SDG 10. It is beyond the abilities of the companies to achieve the goal. Subsequently, it stresses to accountability of the state to make the changes needed to make it ethical and responsible. Another approach linked to Gandhi's postcolonial thinking is seeing it as a collective responsibility to reduce inequalities, it is not only a responsibility for companies nor state-actors, it is an integrated responsibility for all. The integrated approach is also in line with the purpose of Agenda 2030, which states that it is a collective action to face the contemporary challenges against people and the planet. Thusly, other values more than the economic, needs to be central, as well as local representation to face the human rights risks, without it leaning on hegemony of knowledge from the North.⁸⁰

Finally, it is clear to state that economical values are prioritized factors in the transition to renewable energy. The case studies do indicate that social aspects are the least prioritized of the three pillars of sustainable development. From the sections above, it could also be stated that it exists a division between North and South in relation to whose values are being prioritized and between people who have the abilities to make positive changes. It does not mean that the intentions from the companies are to create a gap, although, the invisible structures can be linked to the power of knowledge from the past, related the common good based on economical aspects and the division between "elitist" and "primitives". That it exists a link between past and present, which have contributed to a structural division today. Which confirms the previous research that stressed to importance of prioritizing the social pillar, without it, the risk is high that the global gap between North and South will increase with the growing demands of materials for the electric cars.⁸¹ Darren McCauley stresses that to achieve a just transition, the economic aspects must be sustainable, hence include fair and just concerns linked to the economical outcomes and distribution. Which thusly means that the Status Quo from the fossil fuel industry must be challenged, and marginalized groups need to be prioritized, since they are the ones who are being affected the most from an environment, social and economic

⁸⁰Gandhi. *Postcolonial Theory*, p. 184–185.

⁸¹See *Previous Research*, e.g., Sovacool, Nem Singh and Miller.

perspective. In his account, the electric car industry is not based on a just transition, since it focuses on technological trends to adopt the current transport behaviors in green solutions.⁸²

In closing, the asymmetric power structures can thusly be seen as an obstacle to achieve a just transition, not enough has been made to face the structural inequalities. This indicates that the transition is built on economic structures, which both in past and present time have contributed to a global gap between Global South and North, which is an urgent threat towards vulnerable groups. Hence, if this is not being more prioritized and actors from the South are continued to be undermined. The risk is high that the gap- and human rights risk will rapidly increase following the growth of EV cars. Most certainly because the extraction of raw minerals is estimated to increase with almost 500% until year 2050 to meet the rising demands of EV car productions.⁸³ Thusly, the EV industry has open for a new market, which will lead to positive outcomes for economies globally, a race to lead the new green economy. Nevertheless, the energy transition, as a sustainable development project beneficial for the environment, economy and powerful actors, risk undermining the social dimension and people who are affected the most.

⁸²Darren McCauley, *Just Transition*. (2023, forthcoming).

⁸³Finn and Stanton. *The (Un)Just Use of Transition Minerals*, p. 343.

Concluding reflection – Society, Power, and Further Studies

The thesis has presented aspects of the complexity with the transition to renewable energy, and emphasized that it is an issue that includes different variables that is not going to be fixed by themselves. Actions are needed to change the Status Quo of the economical society. Furthermore, the analysis has not come up with new revolutionist findings, it confirms the previous research, and has contributed with an explanation of the issues linked to asymmetric power structures. It implies that the transition to green energy can arguably be based on the economical values that powers inequalities and division between people and places. The findings show indications of further responsibility among corporations, even though it tends to be a strategical economical drive, it is not truly clear what the companies' motivation is. They claim that they want to respect human rights and track risks in their supply chains to achieve responsible sourcing and production. However, it exists other variables which is beyond the companies' control. The global institutions must also make changes. Subsequently, truly committed attempts are needed, based on a holistic view of sustainable development, that does not prioritize economical values over social harm.

Therefore, the likelihood of a just transition is not high, if the societal structures that contribute to inequalities are not being more prioritized. To achieve an energy transition that is not only beneficial for the North, it must be seen as a collective responsibility to find sustainable solutions, based on justice, dignity, with equal representations, globally. Because, if the hegemony of knowledge that prioritizes the voices and experience from the Global North continues to exist, the chances for a just transition will continue to be low. In the end, it is about us as a society, what actions and solutions we are willing to make to face the urgent threat of climate crisis. What societal changes we want to make and what we prioritize, the dignity of all people or a transition profitable for the Global North. If this approach is not challenged and changed, then it can be questioned if climate solutions like electric cars lead to sustainable development for everyone, or if it fails to achieve the core idea of Agenda 2030 – *leave no one behind*.

Additionally, the study is small and limited and aims to cover a very complex issue. Which means that it does not give a wholesome answer. It is a study that scratches the surface, thusly, there are many missing pieces which are needed to give a holistic view of the issue. Especially

the lack of perspective and representatives from local areas, like indigenous people who have the most knowledge and understanding of the nature and still are listen to the least, while being affected the most. Further on, during the process of the study it has been hard to find profound and reliable reports from organizations, other than the reports from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, about electric vehicles related to human rights. Which in a sense confirms the need for further investigations in the EV industry and its human rights risks. It could also be seen as a confirmation of the complexity of the industry, that it is hard to examine and truly find the human rights issues, when it exists a lack of trackability and transparency in the supply chains. Nonetheless, it came as a surprise that it would be a struggle to find human rights report about the issue.

Although, despite the limitations of reports and well-grounded aspects from local representatives about dynamics of power of knowledge in this thesis. I believe that the thesis findings are a good starting point for further studies. The energy transition and its effects- and representation of people, corporations, and society is an issue that have gained attention lately, not sufficiently to gain a complete understanding of the issues. Thusly, further studies in the field are needed, which I am sure will happen in near future. Most importantly, from an intersectional perspective of vulnerable groups to raise attention of the current lack of knowledge in the mainstream debates. Thank you for reading this thesis, and I hope it has open up for some new thoughts on the complexity of climate actions linked to people, planet, and justice.

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