Sustainable Ethics and Delinquent Consumers: Environmentalist Discourse and the
Apparatus of Ecological Crisis

by

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ABSTRACT

This project analyses the dominant environmentalist preoccupation with "sustainable consumption" to account for the failure of this discourse to address the structural causes and genocidal harms of our environmental policies, and the impotence of our efforts to arrest the systemic industrial devastation caused by climate change. I argue that our preoccupation with the surveillance of "delinquent consumers" in environmentalist discourse only makes sense given our post-racial and pre-ecocatastrophe sensibility of the present in which systemic racism is consigned to a problem of the past and ecological catastrophe is perceived as a problem not yet arrived. The complicity of our current efforts to arrest climate change requires strategies that affect our sensibility of the present. As such, I suggest the cultivation of a "political sense of mourning" so that we can devise more effective tactics to arrest the sacrificial politics upon which our capitalist practices of production and consumption depend.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

DP	Displaced Persons
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
OEE	Outdoor and Environmental Education
PSB	Psychology of Sustainable Behaviour
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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CHAPTER 1   INTRODUCTION

There has been no lack of speculation as to what 'lessons learned' from the COVID-19 pandemic are relevant to the global climate catastrophe. It has been noted that while there are many differences between the current global pandemic and climate change, we should recognize the heightened vulnerability of certain populations in a global state of emergency.[1] Others have suggested that the pandemic lays bare our collective inability to address a crisis before we are 'attacked', calling for more urgent action to "flatten the curve" of global warming.[2] The Guardian currently has a donation plea on their website wherein they highlight their responsibility moving forward to investigate how COVID-19 "has delivered unusual environmental benefits: cleaner air, lower carbon emissions, a respite for wildlife."[3] Social media has been rampant with statements celebrating drops in emissions as a result of global lockdowns, uncomfortably suggesting that "we are the virus".[4] How relevant are these comparisons, and what problems can we anticipate arising from drawing parallels between responses to a virus and strategies to address climate change? Perhaps if we shift our focus from comparing types of public health crises to the way in which we talk about and respond to these crises, we can better understand the context in which both our efforts to address climate change and to arrest a global pandemic were bound to fail.

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[1] UNICEF, "Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic for tackling the climate crisis." 21 April, 2020, https://www.unicef.org/stories/lessons-covid-19-pandemic-tackling-climate-crisis
[2] Thomas Gunton, "COVID-19 has laid bare how unprepared we are for crises -- and climate change will test us even more," *CBC,* May 5, 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/covid-19-climate-change-crisis-opinion-1.5554971
[3] See: The Guardian https://www.theguardian.com/uk/environment
[4] Sierra Garcia, "We're the Virus: the pandemic is bringing out environmentalism's dark side," *Grist,* March 30, 2020, https://grist.org/climate/were-the-virus-the-pandemic-is-bringing-out-environmentalisms-dark-side/

In a recent New York Times interview, acclaimed ethicist Peter Singer weighed in on the moral implications of 'reopening America' in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. In conversation with other experts, Singer suggests that trade-offs—specifically in terms of lives lost to COVID-19—must be weighed against other economic and social risks to the well-being of the wider population.

> When people look at the number of deaths from coronavirus and they say, You know, this is comparable to the Vietnam War, well, the Vietnam War killed mostly younger people. This is killing mostly older people. I think that's really relevant. I think we want to take into account the number of life years lost — not just the number of lives lost.[5]

After a suggestion from another participant that a feasible risk to take moving forward might be allowing schools and camps to reopen given the apparent lower risk that the virus poses to children, Singer agrees that "it make a lot of sense [...] it's offering people choices"[6] and fleshes out his contention that the number of *years* lost as a result of COVID-19 is "really relevant", noting that:

> Of course, young people who go to camp or school won't take risks only for themselves. They may infect their parents or their grandparents, say, in my own category—I'm in the 70-plus age group, so I'm at high risk. But you know, by summer or fall, grandparents may be prepared to say, OK, I think it's really important that my kids don't miss out on their education. And that would be a reason for saying the lockdown should not continue for very long in the total state that it's in many places.[7]

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[5] Emily Bazelon, "Restarting America means people will die. So when do we do it?" *The New York Times,* April 10, 2020, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/10/magazine/coronavirus-economy-debate.html?referringSource=articleShare&fbclid=IwAR30uB2nbFU9BLdL3R3UFTBeXXt4UDz7ldp-tpfUSIls_MwA_6aChaKl0Cs

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

Singer's contention that those who have fewer years left to live are worthy of less moral consideration should not be surprising; he has been widely critiqued for suggesting that infants born with mental or physical disabilities should in some cases be euthanized on the grounds that moral status should be afforded to persons in accord with their capacity to experience well-being.[8] As such, Singer's suggestion that "parents and grandparents" risk their lives during the pandemic makes 'sense' given the probabilistic "number of years lost" when compared to younger, healthier individuals who will have the opportunity to experience, on balance, more well-being. The structure of such a trade off as articulated by Singer bears witness to an inability to even *imagine* a scenario wherein addressing COVID-19 does not involve risking the lives of some for the sake of others. Following Singer's comments to their logical conclusion suggests that it is not only the elderly who are rendered expendable in the face of a global pandemic. Rather, the contention that one's worthiness to be saved depends on the number of years lost indicates a willingness to make bio-political decisions about the relative value of different types of life and identify those groups— the elderly, the poor, those with congenital conditions—who must be sacrificed in order to save the rest.

In another recent article, Singer rationalizes what he takes to be the terms of this 'choice' between the relative value of different 'types' of lives:

> Making trade-offs requires converting different outcomes into a single unit of
> value. A problem with the current conversations about whether we should
> strangle the economy to save lives is that we cannot directly compare "lives

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[8] For example, see: Helinde Pauer-Studer, "Peter Singer on Euthenasia." *The Monist* 76, no. 2, (April 1993), 135-157, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27903330; Rachel Tillman, "Ethical Embodiment and Moral Worth: a Challenge to Peter Singer," *Hypatia* 28, no. 1, (WINTER 2013), 18-31, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23352273

saved" against "lost GDP." We need to put them into some common unit [...]

Thinking directly in terms of wellbeing allows us to make this comparison.[9]

Singer's suggestion that we view "wellbeing" as a common unit of value through which one can assess trade-offs between lives and GDP lost is intended to account for the fact that economic devastation *also* results in death. As such, the standard of well-being is presumed to allow us to make a utilitarian assessment as to what sacrifices ought to be made during a global pandemic in order to maximize well-being and minimize harm. Singer's effort to foreground human well-being is undermined by his description of the *economy* as being "strangled" as though *it* is the living thing that one ought to be emotionally invested in saving. Singer's excessive personification of the economy alongside his contention that life expectancy matters when considering who will make it to the other side of the pandemic suggests that those who are younger, but also those who are more economically productive are the lives worth saving. The privileging of younger, more productive lives that are able to save the "strangled" economy over those who are assigned a shorter life expectancy—while not explicitly endorsed by Singer—is ubiquitous in our contemporary neoliberal capitalist paradigm wherein the accumulation of profit takes precedence over human flourishing. This logic also resonates with the way in which we talk about and assess our policies towards the current climate crisis in terms of the scarcity of natural resources that requires individual changes in consumption habits. Here too, we cannot even imagine a possibility of systemic change and redistribution of resources but instead simply assume that the problem can be fixed by reconciling exploitative neoliberal socioeconomic structures with various ecological limits. Not surprisingly, this approach can also lead us to a calculus about which lives must be sacrificed in

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[9] Peter Singer; Michael Plant, "When will the pandemic cure be worse than the disease?" *Project Syndicate,* April 6, 2020, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/when-will-lockdowns-be-worse-than-covid19-by-peter-singer-and-michael-plant-2020-04

order to protect others during our ecological crisis.

Indeed, we can detect such utilitarian and bio-political calculi in statements made by El Paso shooter Patrick Crusius: a self proclaimed eco-fascist who targeted Texas's Hispanic population in a 2019 Wal-Mart shooting. In his alleged manifesto, Crusius justified his attack by citing the environmental crisis, and lamented the inability of Americans to properly address it through changing their habits of consumption:

> The environment is getting worse by the year. Most of y'all are just too stubborn to change your lifestyle. So the next logical step is to decrease the number of people in America using resources. If we can get rid of enough people, then our way of life can become more sustainable.[10]

Although Crusius assumes that we must prioritize the survival of white Americans, the logic that leads him to make a homicidal decision about *which* lives to sacrifice in the immediate present in order to assure the survival of white lives in the future is the same logic that leads Singer to call on the elderly to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the youth. For they both reason that in order to preserve the wellbeing of some groups of people, we must be willing to sacrifice other, less valuable groups; we can't all make it to the other side of a global emergency. As an Ethicist, Singer attempts to persuade those groups he has judged to be less valuable and more expendable that *it is ethical for them* to subordinate their desire to-live under our collective desire to re-open the economy. As an Environmentalist, Crusius recognizes the inability of individuals to make "sustainable" consumption choices as provoking the necessity for *him* to decide which human groups are more expendable in order to *act* to remove

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[10] Alexander Kaufman, "El Paso terrorism suspect's alleged manifesto highlights eco-fascism's revival." *The Huffington Post,* August 4, 2019, https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/el-paso-shooting-manifesto_n_5d470564e4b0aca3411f60e6?ri18n=true

these groups and preserve our natural resources. While Crusius's willingness to act may horrify us more than Singer's expert advice as to how to maximize well-being, the discursive similarities between their statements are significant. The fact that Singer and Crusius are so quick to make bio-political decisions regarding the relative value of different kinds of life as an ethical response to a life-threatening crisis exacerbated by our economic and socio-political systems indicates a certain inability to imagine solutions to the global pandemic and climate change that don't require a sacrificial politics.

Singer is not somehow operating 'above' the dominant sensibility in which economic productivity is privileged over human lives, just as Crusius' `logical next step' does not represent a 'tragic rupture' in environmentalist ethics. Indeed, we can detect both Crusius's eco-fascist logic and Singer's biopolitical decisions on life in right wing political platforms that have recently begun using the environmental crisis to advance their anti-immigration policies. In 2019, Marine Le Pen of France's National Front ran on an anti-immigration platform that anticipated the 'danger' of future climate refugees. Unlike French citizens who "are rooted, [and] want to live on their land and pass it onto their children," 'nomadic' refugees "do not care about the environment; they have no homeland" and thus are hostile to the French and their territory in the face of ecological disaster.[11] Singer and Crusius's bio-political judgments thus do not expose the 'failure' of environmental discourse. Instead, my aim here is to illustrate that when we juxtapose the calls for sacrifice from Singer and Crusius, we can detect how our environmentalist sensibilities have been produced in a neoliberal capitalist

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[11] Aude Mazoue, "Le Pen's National Front goes green in bid for European election votes." *France 24,* April 20, 2019, https://www.france24.com/en/20190420-le-pen-national-rally-front-environment-european-elections-france
See also: Norimitsu Onishi, "France's far right wants to be an environmental party, too." *The New York Times,* October 17, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/17/world/europe/france-far-right-environment.html

paradigm in order to re-produce those relations of power that ensure our public and private responses to environmental threats become atrocities that disproportionately harm non-white as well as economically and physically vulnerable populations. The passages quoted from Singer, Crusius and Le Pen can be understood in Foucauldian terms as a product of our current *episteme:* the unconscious apparatus of a particular epoch or the network of rules and assumptions that allow for the possibility of 'sensible' discourse and inform our methodologies of knowledge-acquisition. The decisions on life articulated and enacted by Singer and Crusius are reinforced by the *episteme* that forecloses upon possibilities that value the lives of *all* over the "wellbeing" of the economy.

My analysis of environmentalist discourse and the central moral, practical and political role that 'sustainable consumption' plays in the current episteme aims to provide a way to explain how Singer and Crusius can advocate such morally abhorrent 'solutions' to public health crises as ethical actions to protect "life." Taking seriously that they share a 'sustainable consumption ethic' that promotes bio-political judgments on the value of different human groups raises the question of how this ethic 'makes sense' to both a renown ethicist and infamous mass murderer: it also raises the question of how our discourse about sustainability sustains a certain sensibility that allows us to make-sense of genocide as an ethical response to a global emergency. In order to address this question, in the second chapter I focus on the ubiquity of sustainable consumption in environmentalist discourse and practice to illustrate how it plays an oversized role in how individuals, corporations, academics, and government bodies engage with and respond to climate change in a way that re-produces the system of neoliberal capitalist exploitation responsible for what some activists and

scholars have termed an 'ecocide' or the willful destruction of the environment.[12]
Further, I explain how Foucault's concept of the *episteme* can help us to better think
through why—in spite of widespread critique and the existence of viable alternative
solutions—neoliberal consumer based approaches to climate change continue to
'make sense'.

Chapter three explores the importance of the figure of the "delinquent consumer"—
those who do not engage in sustainable consumption—to the re-production of a
neoliberal sensibility of the environmental crisis that prioritizes the importance of
changing individual habits of consumption over the importance of changing our
system of production. First I consider the data from Lou Preston's follow-up study of
his Outdoor and Environmental Education students in which he recasts his graduate
students' adherence to a sustainable consumption ethic as educators in a secondary
school setting as a form of "resistance" given pushback from colleagues and students.
Preston's analysis highlights a tendency to treat delinquent consumers as "the
problem" for the environmental movement who must be reformed. Against this, I
draw on insights from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* to argue that the
moral judgement passed onto the delinquent consumer—who does not recycle, forgets
to bring his travel mug, and uses plastic bags instead of canvas ones—is crucial to
sustaining our preoccupation with sustainable consumption as a prudent response to
environmental disaster. Further, I show that the delinquent consumer plays at least
three roles in our current episteme: 1. through the reinscription of the sustainable
consumption ethic as a 'minimum threshold' of acceptable environmentalism; 2. by
discursively presupposing the capacity of neoliberal capitalism to 'solve' our

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[12] For example: Rob White, "Global Warming as Ecocide," *Climate Change Criminology*, 19-40.
Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2018. Accessed July 10, 2020. doi:10.2307/j.ctv5vddmg.7

environmental crises even as it is the problem; and 3. our discipline qua surveillance of the delinquent consumer sustains a sensibility of being in a moment of "pre-ecocatastrophe" wherein ecological disaster is on the horizon but can still be addressed if we all "just change our lifestyles". This analysis helps illuminate the logic of the current paradox in environmental discourse wherein dominant solutions to climate change exacerbate its effects. It is tempting to see the centrality of sustainable consumption in environmental discourse as a "failure" to reckon with the gravity of climate change, or as a benign 'better than nothing' strategy. Applying Foucault's insights shows that sustainable consumption must instead be understood in light of its role in re-producing exploitative neoliberal capitalist relations of power which result in environmental and humanitarian atrocities.

In chapter four, I consider how the post-racial sensibility that scholars have identified as a feature of neoliberal sensibility—such that anti-Black violence in the present is seen as a tragic accident and as a remnant of an historical system of racism that was overcome in the past—works in tandem with what I will call a sensibility of pre-ecocatastrophe through which every incident of environmental disaster is seen and felt as a warning of the *real* climate crisis that is always on the horizon but has yet to have arrived.[13] Drawing on work from Mark Levene who has argued that climate change *may* lead to "pre" or "post" genocidal conditions, I argue that the temporal dislocations operative in post-racial and pre-ecocatastrophic sensibility work in tandem to obfuscate our capacity to see the destruction of the environment in the present as *already* destroying the social vitality of Black and Indigenous communities abandoned by the white supremacist state as sacrificible for the health of the

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[13] Alfred Frankowski provides an excellent exposition of post-racialism. See: Alfred Frankowski. *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Toward a Political Sense of Mourning*, Edited by George Yancy. New York: Lexington Books, 2015

economy. This claim is supported by scholarship on environmental racism, and calls into question the long-standing presupposition in the field of genocide studies that any form of state violence inflicted against a racialized group for the pragmatic ends of profit or power does not indicate a form of genocidal violence against the group "as such".[14]

In the concluding chapter I consider how the cultivation of a political 'sense' of mourning for ecosystems *as such* might be helpful for disrupting and recognizing the impotence of our piecemeal individualistic responses to climate change. Drawing on the work of Alfred Frankowski, Ingrid R. G. Waldron and Claudia Card, I suggest that in order to disrupt the cooperation of our post-racial and pre-ecocatastrophic sensibilities such that we can see and feel the moral horror of our sacrificial politics, environmental activism and education must actively create space for the cultivation of a "political sense of mourning." Frankowski argues that such a sense of mourning is important for thinking through how post-racial sensibilities serve to produce new forms of anti-Black violence in the present, and to disrupt the tendency to de-historicize and de-contextualize the continuation of anti-Black violence through memorialization.[15] Against literature suggesting that ecological grief is "antithetical to hope," or a pathological condition to be arrested such that we can pursue more "pragmatic" environmentalist ends, I suggest that the cultivation of a sense of mourning allows for collective reflection on how our sensibility of pre-ecocatastrophic in tandem with our post-racial sensibility obscures the sacrificial logic of our contemporary approaches to climate change.[16] Given the intersection of racism

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[14] See Lissa Skitolsky's forthcoming chapter: "American Slavery, the New Jim Crow, and Genocide."
[15] Alfred Frankowski. *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Toward a Political Sense of Mourning.* New York: Lexington Books, 2015
[16] For an argument for the impotence of despair in the face of climate change, see: See: Catriona McKinnon, "Climate Change: Against Despair," *Ethics & the Environment* 19, no. 1, (Spring 2014) 31-

and environmental policy laid bare by scholars and activists,[17] as well as the relevance of environmental racism in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, we should apply insights from critical race scholars to better understand how to rethink the present and grasp the limits of our ability to reason about global catastrophes. While such reflection itself does not constitute a solution to the complex problems posed by climate change, I take it to be a crucial step towards considering future paradigms in which climate change might be addressed in ways which foreclose any sacrificial politics or biopolitical judgments about the value of 'different types' of life. For this reason I argue that the importance of mourning and ecological grief should be prioritized in environmentalist discourse and education programs, rather than evoked as a reactionary measure to address the needs of overwhelmed students, activists and citizens.

As a concluding note, I want to clarify that this analysis is not presented as a cynical critique of contemporary responses to climate change, nor am I advocating indifference, despair or a nihilistic refusal to care about the future. Instead this analysis of the relation between the dominant paradigm of environmentalist discourse and the political economy of global capitalism is motivated by my desire to better understand and care about climate change in the midst of the ubiquitous ethic of sustainable consumption that reinforces a structure that produces the very atrocities we are trying to escape. Having had the privilege to work as a teaching assistant to students studying environmental sustainability who are passionate, brilliant and

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49 www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/ethicsenviro; for an argument for the efficacy of "loving" the environment, see: Dale Jamieson & Bonnie Nadzam. *Love in the Anthropocene.* New York; London, OR Books, 2015

[17] See the large body of work by Robert Bullard. For example: Robert Bullard. *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution.* Edited by Robert D. Bullard. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books and University of California Press, 2005; See also work by Ingrid Waldron: *There's Something in the Water: Environmental Racism in Indigenous and Black Communities.* Fernwood Publishing. 2018

devastated by their lack of agency in the face of global disaster, it is my hope that this

research motivates a broader discussion as to how dominant environmentalist

sensibilities can be resisted, and how we might imagine better ways forward.

CHAPTER 2   BE THE CHANGE

In his *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* Slavoj Žižek notes that our contemporary

moment is characterised by "cultural capitalism" wherein one makes purchases not

out of a concern to "keep up with the Joneses'," or to articulate and sustain one's class

or social status, but instead to engage in consumption as a meaningful act-in-itself.[18]

Here consumption is an act which produces meaning in one's life by at once affirming

to the consumer her own values, and signifying to others what those *values are* with

reference to the products that she purchases. The affirmation and signification of

one's values through consumer purchases is a particularly insidious feature of

contemporary environmentalist discourse and practice, wherein "sustainable

consumption" is framed as a plausible and effective means by which to avoid

ecological disaster in spite of widespread scientific consensus regarding the large

scale, global response required to address environmental catastrophe. Articulated this

way, sustainable consumption can be understood as an ethic: a way-of-living or

comporting oneself toward the world that produces moral rules, habits, practices,

commitments and duties.

Although scholars have criticized the sustainable consumption ethic in "green"

marketing as an insufficient form of environmentalism, in this chapter I illustrate that

this obviously absurd approach to the ecological crisis is just one example of how this

ethic is exercised in practices that obfuscate and re-produce genocidal and ecocidal

conditions of the global capitalist economy.[19] Following insights from scholars who

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[18] Žižek, Slajov. *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce.* Verso. 2009. 52
[19] For just a few articles that problematize sustainable consumption and individualizing approaches to climate change, see: Douglas B. Holt, "Constructing Sustainable Consumption: From Ethical Values to the Cultural Transformation of Unsustainable Markets." *The Annals of the American Academy of*

have described contemporary environmentalism as dominated by a neoliberal sensibility preoccupied with profit generation, I show that the sustainable consumption ethic—far from merely a failed corporate approach—is the dominant way in which solutions to climate change are theorized. The ubiquity of the sustainable consumption ethic is well illustrated by considering the failure of global environmental agreements to address climate change and take seriously commitments to distributive justice. The Paris Agreement's abandonment of set global emissions targets in favour of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC's) serves as a particularly good example of the oversized role that market based solutions play in global environmental governance. Further, as Lou Preston demonstrates, individual consumer based forms of environmentalism play an oversized role in how students enrolled in an Australian Outdoor and Environmental Education (OEE) post secondary program understand environmentalist commitments: values that these students then go on to teach students of their own. I will conclude by noting that in spite of: a rich body of literature critiquing our current approaches to climate change; the existence of seemingly promising solutions which take seriously issues of intersectionality, social justice and distribution; strong scientific consensus as regarding the seriousness of global catastrophe and emissions reductions needed to address it; and widespread global activist movements, our approaches continue to reinforce rather than address environmental and humanitarian catastrophe. In order to better think through the impotence of our contemporary approaches to climate change that nonetheless continue to 'make sense' as practical—if imperfect—efforts to stave off ecological disaster, I will draw on Michel Foucault's concept of the *episteme* to

Political and Social Science, 644 (2012) 236–255. www.jstor.org/stable/23316152; Michael D. Doan, "Climate Change and Complacency." *Hypatia*, 29, no. 3 (2014) 634–650. www.jstor.org/stable/24542021; Doyle et. al. "The Cultural Politics of Climate Branding: Project Sunlight, the biopolitics of climate care and the socialisation of the everyday sustainable consumption practices of citizen-consumers," *Climatic Change* (2019) https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-019-02487-6;

explain the role that the discourse of sustainable consumption plays in the reproduction of the social and political conditions of our genocidal and ecocidal economy.

2.1 The Sustainable Consumption Ethic

Climate change is formally defined in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as "a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods."[20] Colloquially, climate change tends to be employed as a catch-all term to describe the driver of various environmental challenges and catastrophes such as drastic temperature change, sea level rise, and droughts that are already occurring, will continue to accelerate and are predicted to cause widespread global humanitarian and ecological distress. In sustainability, planning and policy literature, climate change is often described as a "wicked problem": those problems that are tough to define and cannot be resolved in traditional ways.[21] When solutions to wicked problems such as climate change are pursued, it is often the case that *solutions themselves* result in unintended consequences that exacerbate the problem or fail to address it altogether. While the framing of climate change as a wicked problem seems a reasonably apt description of its complexity, it is significant that the dominant

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[20] *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.* United Nations, 1992. https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf. Accessed 2 July 2020

[21] See Rittle and Webber's pioneering paper which has informed further scholarship on wicked problems: Horst W. J. Rittel & Melvin M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences,* 4, no. 2, (1973) 155-169. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4531523 ; For some helpful insights as to the nature of wicked problems as they apply to climate change specifically, see: Jiazhe Sun & Kaizhong Yang, "The Wicked Problem of Climate Change: A New Approach Based on Social Mess and Fragmentation. *Sustainability,* 8, no. 12 (2016) doi: 10.3390/su8121312; Levin et. al. "Overcoming the Tragedy of Super Wicked Problems: Constraining our Future Selves to Ameliorate Global Climate Change," *Policy Sciences,* 45, no. 2 (2012) 123-152 doi: 10.1007/sl 1077-012-9151-0

discourse surrounding solutions to environmental catastrophe nevertheless center around how *individuals* can change their consumption habits: a curiously simple solution to such a complex problem.

Žižek highlights Starbucks as one corporation that has—like many businesses—capitalized on the climate crisis and has done so in a way that lays bare a sensibility in which performative moral agency takes precedence over concrete action and structural change.[22] A Starbucks newspaper advertisement assures their customers that in choosing Starbucks: "you are buying into something bigger than a cup of coffee. You are buying into a coffee *ethic*."[23] Another recent advertisement from Starbucks reiterates this sentiment: buying their coffee enables customers to be a part of something not only bigger than a cup of coffee but "something bigger than ourselves."[24] The "something bigger" that one is buying into when they purchase a cup of Starbucks coffee is a rhetorical commitment to environmental and humanitarian principles that Starbucks has been exposed as not living up to. It is not surprising that a corporation that sells coffee—a crop that is not only resource intensive but also depends for its production on the exploitation of farmers primarily

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[22] A pertinent contemporary example of this has been Starbucks articulation of support for the Black Lives Matter movement on their social media pages. While many of their recent Instagram posts have articulated their ongoing commitment to "confront racism to create a more inclusive and just world" and "taking action, learning, and supporting our Black partners, customers, and communities", Starbucks was recently exposed as prohibiting their employees from wearing any apparel to work that articulates support for Black Lives Matter. This example lays bear the unwillingness of corporations to endorse social movements which might alienate (in this case racist) customers and ultimately hurt profits. While customers who support the Black Lives Matter movement may look to social media to confirm whether their own moral values will be articulated when they buy from Starbucks, the refusal of Starbucks to forefront their commitment to the Black Lives Matter by displaying any symbols of support in their physical locations allows them to avoid losing profits from racist customers who might find such obvious articulation of support off-putting. See Starbucks Instagram page: https://www.instagram.com/starbucks/?hl=en and this New York post article regarding their privately banning employees from showing support: https://nypost.com/2020/06/11/starbucks-bans-employees-from-wearing-black-lives-matter-attire/
[23] Žižek, *First as Tragedy*, 53
[24] Starbucks, "We're in the People Business, Serving Coffee," Accessed 14 August, 2020. https://www.starbucks.ca/responsibility

located in Latin America, Africa and Asia—is not managing to live up to

humanitarian and environmental commitments.[25]

To take just one recent example of the counterproductive approach taken by Starbucks

in their environmental initiatives, in 2018 Starbucks pledged to ban single use plastic

straws by 2020, having designed a new *plastic* lid. The innovative plastic lid is made

from a heavier plastic, and thus composed of more plastic than disposable straws.

Starbucks does not deny that their new lid contains more plastic than disposable

straws—the heavier plastic is supposedly more easily recycled than the lighter plastic

straws.[26] While the claim that the replacement of plastic with more plastic represents

a sustainability revolution should itself give one pause, Starbucks' innovative lids are

exposed as even more ridiculous against the background of the failure of recycling

infrastructure. A 2018 article in *The Economist* notes that only about 9% of the

world's plastics are recycled, and thus one might assume that Starbucks' lids will

continue to end up in landfills and oceans.[27] The inadequacy of recycling

infrastructure is further highlighted by China's ban on internationally imported

recyclables. The Canadian government is one of many recently criticized for sending

the bulk of its recyclable materials to China, where they were sorted through and

burned. In the summer of 2018, China declared that they would "no longer act as a

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[25] For some analysis of Starbucks' advertising strategies, including some critique of their environmental and social shortfalls see: Constance Ruzich, "For the Love of Joe: The Language of Starbucks. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 41, no. 3 (2008) 428-442, 2008. https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2008.00529.x; Michael Smith, "The Empire Filters Back: Consumption, Production, and the Politics of Starbucks Coffee." *Urban Geography,* 17, no. 6 (2013) 502-525, doi: 10.2747/0272-3638.17.6.502; *Black Gold*. Directed by Nick and Marc Francais. Speakit Films, 2018.

[26] Arwa Mahdawi, "Starbucks is banning straws -- But is it really a big win for the environment?" *The Guardian*, July 23, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/jul/23/starbucks-straws-ban-2020-environment

[27] The Economist, "Daily Chart: Only 9% of the World's Plastic is Recycled," https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/03/06/only-9-of-the-worlds-plastic-is-recycled

dumping ground", ordering other countries to stop sending their recyclables immediately.[28]

The juxtaposition of Starbucks' advertising campaigns against their ethical and environmental shortfalls bears witness to the impotence of corporate sustainable consumption initiatives in the face of ecological disaster. "Green" initiatives such as those championed by Starbucks further highlight the ubiquity of neoliberal capitalism wherein the 'ethic' of sustainable consumption produces moral rules, habits, practices and commitments that reproduce environmentally and socially destructive economic activity. While plastic debris does result in real environmental harm, the contention that one can actually address the amount of plastic output into the environment through a purchase of a beverage in a plastic disposable cup with a plastic lid rather than a plastic straw is absurd. Starbucks and countless other businesses have integrated "sustainability" into their business practices such that their own bottom line is not impacted: what is important is that Starbucks helps the consumer to *feel* like they have done their part by engaging in environmentally meaningful behaviour—whether such initiatives are actually environmentally 'sustainable' is irrelevant.[29]

[28] For a brief overview of these developments, see: Jeff Lewis, "Reduce, reuse, recycle, rejected: Why Canada's recycling industry is in crisis mode." *The Globe and Mail*, May 14, 2019, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-wish-cycling-canadas-recycling-industry-in-crisis-mode/; Carolyn Jarvis & Megan Robinson, "Is Canada's recycling industry broken?" *Global News*, April 29, 2019, https://globalnews.ca/news/5199883/canada-recycling-programs/

[29] It is worth noting that while a price increase (unsurprisingly) is not part of Starbucks' advertising of its new lid, a March 2020 CTV News Article draws attention to recent price spikes in Starbucks beverages, which is partially associated with the use of more expensive plastics. See: Bill Dicks, "Your Starbucks caffeine jolt comes with a spike in prices." *Global News,* March 5, 2020, https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/your-starbucks-caffeine-jolt-comes-with-a-spike-in-prices-1.4841348

2.2 The Sustainable Consumption Ethic in Governance and Education

Consumption based approaches to climate change are often framed as insufficient on their own, but productive if supported by wider governmental and educational infrastructure that seeks to address the larger structural drivers of environmental catastrophe. However, as many scholars have pointed out, we can detect the same neoliberal sensibility that emphasises the importance of individual consumption and responsibility embedded in global environmental governance and sustainability education programs. In his *Natural Catastrophe: Climate Change and Neoliberal Governance*, Brian Elliott argues that the ubiquity of individual consumer based solutions to climate change is an unsurprising consequence of our contemporary western neoliberal paradigm wherein the economy and environmental health are seen to be reconcilable through entrepreneurial ingenuity and technical solutions.[30] As such, Elliott argues that climate change is a *symptom* of neoliberal capitalism that should be understood as a political failure rather than a 'natural' catastrophe.[31] Elliott does not deny the role that heightened industrialization has played in perpetuating environmental catastrophe, nor does he hold a conspiratorial view that climate change is a scientifically unfounded political stunt. Rather, his book illuminates how climate change cannot be addressed within a neoliberal capitalist socio-economic system whose pathological pursuit of endless economic growth and development is at once the main driver of climate change and articulated as the solution. Elliott focuses on both 'sustainable development': those strategies which purport to maintain endless economic growth while accounting for ecological limits, and 'sustainable consumption': lifestyle choices, habit alterations and purchases made by individuals

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[30] Brian Elliott. *Natural Catastrophe: Climate Change and Neoliberal Governance*. Edinburgh UP, 2016.
[31] Elliott, *Natural Catastrophe*, 89

which are supposed to be more environmentally friendly, as impotent neoliberal strategies that perpetuate rather than properly address climate change.

The primacy of economic development over robust climate change policy is evident in contemporary multilateral environmental governance. While global environmental accords include cosmopolitan commitments to principles which recognize the disproportionate effects that both the costs and benefits of climate change hold for different nations, the failure of wealthy nations to meet emissions reduction targets continues to bear most heavily on environmentally and economically vulnerable populations. The principle of "common but differentiated responsibility" has been integrated into climate accords in order to signify the need for nations that have contributed most to ecological disaster to bear more responsibility in efforts of mitigation. In past agreements this principle has been backed by emissions reduction targets which are binding upon wealthier (Annex 1) nations and voluntary for "less developed" parties.[32]

As David Ciplet points out, these cosmopolitan commitments are exposed as merely rhetorical in light of the abandonment of top-down emissions reduction targets that took place during climate change negotiations in Copenhagen, and which have been realized in the Paris Agreement.[33] While the Kyoto Protocol stipulated set emissions reduction targets from wealthy nations (which were not met), the Paris Agreement has

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[32] For example, the Kyoto Protocol bound Annex 1 nations to emissions reductions targets 5% below 1990 levels, while developing nations were expected to contribute in areas of climate change education, research and technological innovation but were not expected to decrease emissions. See: *Kyoto Protocol Reference Manual: On Accounting of Emissions and Assigned Amount.* United Nations, November 2008. Accessed 2 July 2020
https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/08_unfccc_kp_ref_manual.pdf
[33] David Ciplet, "Rethinking Cooperation: Inequality and Consent in International Climate Change Politics," *Global Governance,* 21, no. 2 (2015) 247-274, http://www.jstor.com/stable/24526164

employed a voluntary emissions reduction model which requires all parties to submit and adhere to "Nationally Determined Contributions" (NDC's). As the name suggests, NDC's are drafted by each nation and represent what they think they can reasonably commit to in terms of emissions reductions during the enforcement period of the agreement. Ciplet points out that commitments put forward leading up to the Paris negotiations were grossly inadequate. Even in the unlikely event that each nation adhered to their emissions reduction pledge, warming would amount to 4.5 degrees Celsius warming—a far cry from the 1.5-2 degrees Celsius warming that the United Nations has deemed necessary to seriously curb future catastrophic climate events.[34] The abandonment of infrastructure intended to support principles outlined in the preamble to the Paris Agreement, which emphasize "the intrinsic relationship that climate change actions, responses and impacts have with equitable access to sustainable development and eradication of poverty"[35] lays bare the blatantly neoliberal character of our contemporary global environmental accords, which cannot but perpetuate environmental catastrophe at the expense of the very groups that international agreements promise to protect.

While the shortfalls of global environmental accords are multi-faceted and far from unique to the Paris Agreement, the abandonment of top-down emissions reductions targets in favour of NDC's is discursively and politically significant. The presumption that each nation is capable of setting its own emissions targets that are compatible

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[34] Ciplet. "Rethinking Cooperation," 250; this data was based on Ciplet's research prior to the Paris Agreement negotiations. According to recent UNFCCC data, prospects for limiting warming to 1.5-2C are extremely dire: emissions are still on the rise, and adherence to emissions reduction pledges currently in force under the Paris Agreement will lead to catastrophic warming. UNFCCC advises that NDC's must be drastically strengthened in 2020. See: *Emissions Gap Report 2019:Executive Summary.* United Nations Environment Programme, 2019. Accessed 8 July 2020. https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/30798/EGR19ESEN.pdf?sequence=13
[35] *The Paris Agreement.* United Nations, 2015. Accessed 2 July 2020 https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

with economic development and also ambitious enough to limit warming to 1.5-2 degrees Celsius is frankly absurd when considered against the long history of failed environmental collective action projects. However while it is a patently absurd expectation, it also exposes the neoliberal character of contemporary climate change policy that belies the rhetorical commitment to the ideals of genuine collective action, compliance, and distributive justice. The adoption of NDC's in favour of binding emissions reduction targets further permits each individual nation to un-ironically claim that they have 'succeeded' in meeting their climate commitments even though national emissions reduction commitments—in the unlikely event that they are adhered to by the majority of signature parties—collectively amount to a failure to reduce warming sufficiently or mitigate environmental catastrophe already impacting vulnerable nations and peoples. Here too we can detect the importance of *feeling* like significant political action is taking place that can effectively address environmental disaster: what is important is that nations are *seen* to be "doing their part" in coming together to grapple with climate change. Whether the policies agreed upon are adhered to or sufficient to address global climate change—while critical to attain their own stated purpose—is practically insignificant in a paradigm of neoliberal global environmentalism.

The increase in environmental sustainability-focused college and university programs seems a promising development in the face of our collective climate crises and the proven impotence of global environmental accords. Many such programs are framed as an opportunity for students to take a more critical and interdisciplinary look at climate change and contemporary approaches to address it through national policies and international accords. Dalhousie University is home to one such program: the

College of Sustainability seeks to inspire a 'generation of change-makers' who can themselves 'be the change'. Acadia University offers a similar interdisciplinary program, claiming that graduates will "be ready to lead change" and "develop a sense of citizenship, especially with respect to environmental and sustainable stewardship".[36] While these slogans place some emphasis on individual responsibility for solving our environmental crisis that also characterizes the neoliberal sensibility of how to approach and solve the problem of climate change, it is perhaps more fruitful to examine the environmental ethics developed by students enrolled in such programs.

Lou Preston, who teaches in an Environmental and Outdoor Education program in Australia, conducted a three year study to explore how his students' environmental ethic evolved over the course of the program. Using insights from Michel Foucault and Eric Darier regarding discipline and normalizing judgement, Preston illustrates how dominant environmentalist discourse and practice with its focus on individual consumption and common-sense lifestyle changes produces obedient "environmental citizens" and obscures the need for regulatory environmental policy.[37] Preston describes his students as relatively uncritically accepting of "normal" environmentalist discourse, preoccupied with individual agency and the "power" of many small changes to make a big difference.[38] He describes his students as constituting "good environmental citizens" who adhere to environmentalism in a way that regulates their own behaviour but is explicitly non-disruptive to the reigning neoliberal socio-political system. His students regularly expressed feeling

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36 Acadia University https://www2.acadiau.ca/prg_ug_esst.html
37 Lou Preston, "Changing green subjectivities in outdoor and environmental education: a qualitative study," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education,* 33, no. 2 (2012) 235-239, doi: 10.1080/01596306.2012.666078; See also Eric Darier, "Environmental Governmentality: The Case of Canada's Green Plan," *Environmental Politics*, 5, no. 4 (1996) 585-606, https://doi.org/10.1080/09644019608414294
38 Preston. "Green Subjectivities," 240-242

blameworthy for not "doing better", and designated themselves as "lazy" for not making more of an effort to—for example—seek out low emissions options for travel.[39] Further, his students displayed great confidence in the capacity for small consumer habit changes to enact positive environmental change: they "like the idea of recycling and actually trying to save the environment".[40]

The normalizing force of contemporary dominant environmentalist discourse is further highlighted by the horror Preston's students expressed at the prospect of being labelled a "greenie": radical, protest-type environmentalists who are viewed as "excessively active, rebels and trouble makers".[41] When asked about this designation in early interviews, Preston's students actively resisted being labelled "greenies", and articulated concern that "greenies" are those who "fight against everything" and "demand change", whereas more appropriate environmentalism consists in sharing knowledge so that people can "make their own decisions".[42] The students' contention that "demanding change" amounts to an infringement upon one's individual right to "make their own decisions" regarding appropriate approaches to environmental challenges is a testament to the strength of the sustainable consumption ethic which presents as a threshold of environmentalism that one cannot surpass without being labelled too radical. For any action that "*demands* change" is incompatible with the narrative of many small individual changes coming together to make a big difference. Even those students who did not resist being labelled a "greenie" embraced it somewhat ironically, noting that other students "see Outdoor Ed. students as greenies and tree huggers….. I don't think they say it as a bad thing". While the resistance to

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[39] Preston. "Green Subjectivities," 241
[40] Preston. "Green Subjectivities," 241
[41] Preston. "Green Subjectivities," 245
[42] Preston. "Green Subjectivities," 245

being associated with 'radical' environmentalism signifies the limits within which Preston's students' environmental sensibilities are evolving, the "humorous" acceptance of the label "greenie" discursively strengthens such limits, and has the double effect of casting his student's mainstream environmentalism as more radical than it is, and "protest type" environmentalism as increasingly radical and unintelligible.

Preston's framing of his students' environmental ethics as the product of disciplinary techniques which produce "normal" environmental citizens who self-regulate their behaviour is helpful, and I will return to some of these insights in the next chapter. Admittedly I found Preston's experience with his OEE students somewhat surprising: having worked as a teaching assistant in the College of Sustainability for several years, my experience has been that students have a strong grasp as to the role climate change plays amongst intersecting structures of oppression and privilege, and are well aware of the systemic barriers to effective climate change action. They are often quite critical of the efficacy of consumption based approaches to climate change, and are quick to point out how privilege often plays into one's ability to engage in such consumption habits. Nevertheless, even the most critical students I have worked with tend to fall back on the sustainable consumption ethic: many of them experience profound guilt for 'not doing their part', and occasionally pass judgement on others who are failing to engage in 'minimal' environmental stewardship such as using a travel mug, a reusable canvas bag, or limiting their meat consumption. I myself have felt awkward walking into the classroom with a paper cup, and have made many self deprecating jokes about being a vehicle owner. While I am *aware* of the structural deficiencies that made car ownership necessary for me at the time, it did not stop me

from—like Preston's students—modifying this recognition by articulating how I could "do better". Considering my experiences in light of Preston's Foucauldian analysis suggests that the disciplinary hold is quite strong: our behaviour is regulated by the sustainable consumption ethic and dominant environmental discourse even as we consciously acknowledge its inadequacy and impotence.

2.3 Sustainability in the *Episteme*

So far this chapter has illustrated the ubiquity of a sustainable consumption ethic that places disproportionate emphasis on ensuring that individuals *feel* that they are "doing their part" and ensuring that nations are *perceived* as taking collective action on climate change even as national and individual strategies fail to address ecological crises. Further, by way of example I have illustrated how the preoccupation with individualistic solutions to climate change—while most obvious in marketing—is present in academia and in environmental policy. Scholars such as Elliott, Ciplet and Žižek have helpfully diagnosed the ubiquity of such approaches to climate change as emerging both from our neoliberal predisposition to believe in the capacity for technological and entrepreneurial ingenuity to reconcile economic interests with environmental ones as well as from the current era of "cultural capitalism" wherein consumption habits are seen as the nexus of moral agency. Neoliberalism and cultural capitalism are excellent frames through which to understand the shortfalls of contemporary environmentalism, and further help to situate our environmentalist 'sensibilities,' or ways of seeing and knowing about the environment and climate change. However, the diagnosis of our current climate crisis and the limitations of our current approaches as emerging from neoliberalism and cultural capitalism does not explain *why*—in spite of widespread critique, the existence of viable alternatives and global movements calling attention to the inadequacy of neoliberal

environmentalism—climate change discourse and practice seems unable to depart from systems that reproduce environmental and social catastrophe. In this section, I argue that when we consider dominant environmentalist discourses and practices with reference to Michel Foucault's concept of the *episteme,* we can better think through how our "failed" approaches continue to 'make sense' even as we are critical of them.

As I have illustrated, the current logics of individual, political and academic discourse and practices surrounding climate change are informed by neoliberal institutions that privilege certain economically sound responses to ecological disaster that serve to exacerbate both environmental and humanitarian crises. The discursive foundations of these practices—based on the presupposition that the solution to the climate crisis lies in the ability of individual persons and nations to engage in sustainable consumption—indicates the operation of what Foucault referred to as the *episteme:* " the 'apparatus' which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterised as scientific."[43] In our contemporary *episteme* the role of individual consumption habits and nationally determined strategies which fail to adequately address environmental crises are "characterised as scientific" and 'make sense' while alternative strategies that take seriously the need for large scale systemic change are cast out as too radical and unintelligible: they "can not be". It is not as though alternative strategies or socio-political paradigms are literally impossible, nor is it the case that solutions to climate change that take seriously the need for massive efforts of redistribution and investment in infrastructure which might not be profitable are doomed to fail. Rather, the reproduction of ecological and humanitarian disaster through our approaches to

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[43] Michel Foucault, "The confession of the flesh" In *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books.

climate change are a result of what is possible, what 'makes sense' in our current episteme. The Paris Agreement's adoption of NDC's, which even if *adhered* to promise bleak consequences, particularly for already vulnerable populations is suggestive of the limits of what responses to ecological disaster are possible in our current episteme. These limits are also expressed in the attitudes of Preston's OEE students; who are confident in the capacity of their individual actions to enact change and recede in horror at the suggestion that "demanding" change might be more appropriate. Further, the students I have encountered in the College of Sustainability illustrate the difficulty of thinking or acting past these limits even when we are critical of dominant environmentalist discourse: their recognition of the insufficiency of the sustainable consumption ethic and the seeming incapacity for large scale systemic change often results in feelings of despair about *their own* inability to enact change. This despair quite often manifests in students falling back on the sustainable consumption ethic in an effort to do more for the environment in their everyday lives or to persuade others to do their part.

As such, our contemporary approaches to climate change—while they neglect to properly address environmental catastrophe—cannot be seen as a failure. Instead, the oversized role that individual consumption based approaches to climate change play in our contemporary *episteme* must be understood as reproducing and maintaining particular relations of power. It is not *sufficient* to view climate change discourse in marketing, policy and academia as mere opportunistic advertising, or as representing ideological or pedagogical shortfalls to be addressed through technological innovation, enforcement mechanisms or curriculum diversification efforts. Nor is it adequate to conceive of the oversized role that environmental responsibilization plays

in our social imaginary as benign environmentalism that is 'tragically' ineffective given a lack of structural mechanisms to mobilize change. Understanding the *episteme* as an unconscious network of rules and assumptions that allow for the possibility of 'sensible' discourse and informs our methodologies of knowledge-acquisition instead prompts us to consider how our environmental discourses across disciplines and social spaces are connected and bound to the same discursive limits of what is possible, and further prompts us to investigate how dominant power relations are reinforced by discourse and practices that appear to be "the best we can do".

In the following chapter, I will investigate just one way in which our contemporary approaches to environmentalism are sustained with reference to Foucault's discussion of disciplinary power in *Discipline and Punish.* While Preston touches on this in his discussion of his student's self-regulatory environmental behaviour, I will argue that a much more insidious feature of our current episteme is the role that our environmental "normalizing judgements" play in condemning those who *do not* engage in sustainable consumption, who I will refer to as "delinquent consumers". While delinquent consumers are often treated in literature and practice as 'problems to be fixed' or inherently hostile to environmentalist motives, I will show that this subject-position plays an important role in our current episteme that is central to the reinscription of the dominant environmental discourse and normative environmentalist practices as a minimum threshold of acceptable environmentalism. I will also illustrate how our sensibility of the environmental crisis that emerges from and reinforces the episteme of sustainable consumption serves to dis-articulate and obfuscate the sacrificial politics on which our capitalist system of boundless

accumulation depends.

CHAPTER 3   THE DELINQUENT CONSUMER

Following his investigation of the ethics embodied by Outdoor and Environmental Education (OEE) students, Lou Preston reconnected with graduates of the program to get a sense of how their environmental ethical commitments had changed since entering the workforce as secondary school educators. Preston was specifically interested in examining how the 'washout effect'—wherein values engendered in university diminish or plateau when graduates enter into teaching roles—had impacted his students. While all of the graduates interviewed agreed that the OEE program was crucial to their developing an environmental ethic, many admit to feeling as though their ethical commitments had stagnated or waned since leaving university. Graduates note that consumer culture and the habits of colleagues who are not environmentally conscious present challenges that make it difficult to continue to adhere to their own ethical commitments—which consist in small scale individual lifestyle changes or practices—outside of the university setting. These comments support Preston's previous research regarding the normalizing force of dominant environmental discourse: the types of environmental ethic that graduates lament finding themselves neglecting are the same small scale, individualised practices associated with dominant environmentalist discourse.

Preston's first reading of graduate interviews focuses on how non-environmentalist norms dominating the secondary school setting have a normalizing impact on the graduate students. However, after reflecting on some ways in which interviewees describe navigating their relationships with eco-skeptical colleagues and students, Preston describes feeling "a sense that these graduates had actually maintained a

strong environmental ethic."[44] One graduate describes asking a Physical Education teacher—described as practicing environmentally problematic behaviour on field trips—to come along with them on a class trip in an effort to demonstrate proper environmental etiquette. Another describes letting their students make fun of him for being a "greenie" while subtly getting them to understand the importance of environmentally conscious behaviour, noting that: "without imposing on them too much [I] do get a message across that they do start to understand".[45] Following Foucault and other scholars who have taken up his theoretical framework, Preston reads these actions as forms of resistance to the dominant anti-environmentalist norms in the school setting. He argues that by engaging in strategies such as the "refusal to speak" explicitly about being a 'greenie,' his graduates are able to maintain their environmental ethic in the school setting without appearing deviant or too radical, which might engender pushback from skeptical colleagues and students. As such, Preston's OEE graduates can maintain their own and encourage others to adopt an environmental ethic by "doing what seems achievable with the limited resources and constraining conditions that surround them".[46]

Preston is certainly right to consider his student's capacity to act in environmentally conscious ways as contingent upon the context in which they are operating: as I discussed in the previous chapter, our contemporary responses to environmental catastrophe are shaped by what it is possible to know and do in the *episteme,* and serve to reproduce particular relations of power that are environmentally destructive. However it seems somewhat hasty to call his former students' moments of

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[44] Lou Preston, "Sustaining an Environmental Ethic: Outdoor and Environmental Education Graduates' Negotiation of School Spaces," *Australian Journal of Environmental Education,* 27, no. 2 (2011) 199-205 (205), https://www.jstor.org/stable/44656543
[45] Preston, "Sustaining an Environmental Ethic," 206
[46] Preston, "Sustaining an Environmental Ethic," 207

environmentalist perseverance forms of resistance given Preston's earlier critique of dominant forms of individualist environmentalism. For Preston's students continue to adhere to an insufficient sustainable consumption ethic that is preoccupied with how each individual can "do their part" for the environment, and seek to have their students and colleagues adopt the same ethic. While I don't think that Preston's former students are *blameworthy* for continuing to adhere to mainstream environmentalism and finding subtle ways to engender support for this ethic, it is problematic to understand such behaviour as a significant form of "resistance" when it does not oppose the system of ecological disaster that is reinforced through neoliberal commitments to environmentalist practices that reform individual habits of consumption. Preston's recasting of the sustainable consumption ethic as a form of resistance is indicative of a more widespread tendency to reinscribe this ethic as more impactful and important than it is warranted when confronted with those who present as indifferent or hostile towards environmentalism. Furthermore, Preston's assessment gestures toward the function of what I have chosen to call the "delinquent consumer"; the skeptical consumer who does not engage in environmentally sustainable behaviour but nonetheless—as a subject-position that is the object of blame—helps to reinforce sustainable consumption as the dominant paradigm for environmentalism. Perhaps if we shift our focus from what forms of environmentalism are possible in a particular context to how these possibilities are sustained, we can better assess both the actions of "good" environmentalists and delinquent consumers in the current *episteme*.

In this chapter I draw on insights from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* to explore the role that our moral judgement of the 'delinquent consumer' plays in the production of docile and useful 'environmental' citizens. In the contemporary

episteme wherein individualizing neoliberal approaches to environmental catastrophe 'make sense' even as they remain impotent against our capitalist system of environmental catastrophe, the preoccupation of Preston's former students and other good environmental consumers with 'reformist' motives only serves to reinforce epistemic positions that leave us subject to and impotent against eco-exploitation. Foucault's analysis of the "delinquent" as the new object of criminal punishment in the 18th century that produced a useful form of criminality for the transition to the modern apparatus of social control through discipline and surveillance of the citizen body, is useful for exploring the "delinquent consumer" as the new object of environmentalist practice that has produced a form of criminality that is useful for sustaining the modern capitalist apparatus of environmental destruction. The 'good' environmentalist's preoccupation with finding and shaming delinquent consumers as the *source* of our environmental crisis plays a crucial role in sustaining the health of the economy over that of the environment, and serves to reinforce the false efficacy of individual efforts of sustainable consumption.

This chapter will proceed in three parts. First, I briefly explore Foucault's insights in *Discipline and Punish* regarding the failure of the popular project of 18th century 'reformers', whose system of punishment as public representation was partially abandoned in favour of a system of mass incarceration that they opposed. I then draw on these insights to help explain why the reformist efforts of environmentalists have failed to provoke meaningful action on climate change, insofar as—like the 18th century reformers—-they champion techniques that actually reinforce the logic of the very system they oppose. For the environmentalist efforts to achieve sustainable consumption depend upon the identification and censure of 'delinquent consumers'

who are morally negligent capitalists rather than on a critique and censure of the global capitalist system that depends upon ecological destruction. Finally, I show how the normalizing moral judgements passed on delinquent consumers by good 'reformist' environmentalists serves to sustain neoliberal logics of eco-exploitation in three ways; 1. through the reinscription of the sustainable consumption ethic as a 'minimum threshold' of acceptable environmentalism; 2. by discursively presupposing the capacity of neoliberal capitalism to 'solve' our environmental crises even as it is the problem; and 3. by sustaining a sensibility of "pre-ecocatastrophe" wherein ecological disaster is on the horizon but can still be addressed if we all "just change our lifestyle."

3.1 The Project of the Reformers

In his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* Michel Foucault explores the 18th century shift in punishment from the spectacle of torture to mass incarceration. While Foucault notes that this shift is often described as a progressive one towards more 'humane' and less corporeally violent forms of punishment, his analysis exposes how the "gentle way" of punishment through disciplinary techniques enforced through a new apparatus of surveillance served to produce a more thorough and efficient system of social control. Crucial to Foucault's analysis is the fact that the technology of the modern prison developed alongside coercive techniques already operative in schools, the military and factories, wherein disciplinary strategies of normalizing judgment, hierarchical observation and regular examinations worked to produce docile, useful and efficient students, soldiers and workers.[47] For Foucault, the penitentiary system does not represent a new economy of discipline, but rather a system that 'makes sense' and 'makes use' of disciplinary techniques employed in

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[47]Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* translated by Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage Books, 1977,1995 (151-156)

every institution in order to detect and then produce ' delinquents' who are then 'reformed' by this system. Foucault describes delinquency as a type of "useful" criminality that developed alongside the penitentiary system, as it acts as the 'empirical' or scientific-medico support for the new system of 'reform' that takes the soul of the prisoner—rather than the body—as the object of penal intervention.[48] The delinquent is no longer merely a criminal subject to punishment for committing a crime, but instead an abnormal subject whose upbringing, habits and inner life are the object of knowledge required in order to reform his soul.

Central to Foucault's analysis of the development of the penitentiary is the question of how the prison system quickly became accepted as *the one best way* to punish when popular 18th century 'reformist' movements vehemently opposed prison as a general form of punishment: "Because it is incapable of corresponding to the specificity of crimes. Because it has no effect on the public. Because it is useless, even harmful, to society: it is costly, it maintains convicts in idleness, it multiplies their vices."[49] The 18th century 'reformers' discussed by Foucault—consisting of various politicians, jurists, and philosophes—took issue with both the excessive violence of torture as a form of punishment as well as the inefficiency of the 18th century penal system, under which confusions of jurisdiction and the status of particular crimes tended to result in excessive punishment for some, and the evasion of punishment for others.[50] Against these inefficient and excessively violent means of punishment, the reformers sought to implement a system of punishment that respected the 'humanity' of both the criminal and those who were harmed by the commission of crime. Contrary to the

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[48] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 294-95
[49] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 114
[50] As Foucault points out, central to the reformers' concern about the inefficiency of the penal system was the rise of capitalism and property ownership, under which previously 'tolerated' illegalities such as theft became much more threatening. *Discipline and Punish,* 86-89

system of torture that aimed to address and deter crime through excessive displays of violence and sovereign power, the reformers were concerned with identifying the criminal and reforming him through means of punishment that would act as a clear deterring 'sign' to the public and work to instil within the criminal the values that he lacks. As such, the reformers proposed a system of punishment that, through a complex system of symbolic representation of the juridical-moral code, would administer punishment to criminals that were proportionate to the crime they committed, both in duration and in kind.[51] While the reformers granted that the commission of certain crimes still necessitated the use of torture and the death penalty, they insisted that punishment for lesser crimes should focus primarily on public works that represent penalties specific to the crime that was committed: "France has all too many impracticable roads that impede trade; thieves who also obstruct the free circulation of goods could be put to rebuilding the highways."[52] The visual effect of criminals improving public works—contrary to the spectacle of torture in which the criminal is the property of and subject to the violence of the sovereign— casts the criminal as "the property of society, the object of a collective and useful appropriation" and is intended not so much to horrify, but to act as "a school rather than a festival; as an ever open book rather than a ceremony".[53] The importance of correcting the criminal character and deterring potential criminality is central for the reformers:

> For the convict, the penalty is a mechanics of signs, interests and duration. But the guilty person is only one of the targets of punishment. For punishment is directed above all at others, at all the potentially guilty. So these obstacle-signs that are gradually engraved in the representation of the condemned man must

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[51] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 108
[52] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 109
[53] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 111

therefore circulate rapidly and widely; they must be accepted and redistributed by all; they must shape the discourse that each individual has with others and by which crime is forbidden to all by all.[54]

How is it that the reformers' pedagogical strategies for criminal punishment and reform instead manifested in a system of mass incarceration that—and this is still true today—relies on secrecy and an arbitrary system of punishments, fails to reform prisoners, sustains delinquency and encourages recidivism? Foucault illustrates that while the reformers opposed the 'technology' of the prison as an apparatus of punishment, they did not oppose the 'economy' of punishment as the need to reform criminals through discipline enforced through surveillance. For the reformers' punitive apparatus of representation was intended to work more *efficiently* than the prison as a regular function of society: "not to punish less, but to punish better."[55] While the reformers saw imprisonment as an ineffective means of criminal reform, the discursive terms in which the issues of criminality and illegality had already been framed—as concerned with the *character* of the criminal—reinforced the centrality of disciplinary techniques of normalizing judgement, hierarchical observation and constant examination as the remedy to criminality viewed as a pathological condition. For if punishment concerns the reform of the criminal 'soul'—rather than restitution for a crime—then the disciplinary techniques of correction already operative in factories, schools and the military provided a promising model for punitive techniques that produce obedient, docile and useful subjects. While Foucault's analysis highlights the disjunction between the vision of the reformers and the apparatus of the modern prison, it is important to notice that the reformers'

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[54] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 108
[55] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 82

preoccupation with the reform of the criminal *as such* and with strengthening the legal code was shared by those who promoted incarceration as "the one best way" to reform convicts, and this preoccupation still informs efforts in the present both to justify and to reform penal practices.

Foucault's exploration of how mass incarceration came to be *the* system of punishment in spite of the 'good intentions' of 18th century reformers can help us better think through how the projects of contemporary environmentalist reformers—who oppose the efficacy of individual consumer focused strategies on their own—have failed to manifest the systemic changes required to seriously address climate change. While I have already shown how the *episteme* works to articulate a particular field of possible solutions to climate change that are preoccupied with individual agency to enact change, in the following section I explore the importance of the 'delinquent consumer' as the object of discursive practices about the ideal of sustainable consumption. The discourse and associated practices surrounding those who neglect to partake in sustainable consumption promotes a form of normalizing judgment that both shapes our collective response to climate change and leaves us subject to and impotent against ecological disaster.

3.2 Delinquent Consumers

As I argued in the previous chapter, the sustainable consumption ethic constitutes the dominant way in which solutions to climate change are discussed and theorized. While Preston's analysis shows that some individuals take sustainable consumption on its own to be a sufficient strategy, many scholars, activists and concerned citizens are acutely aware of the need for large scale socio-political changes should we hope to seriously address ecological disaster. However, as has been my experience with

students of Dalhousie's College of Sustainability, the seeming immobility of our

neoliberal capitalist economic system—which depends on the destruction of the

environment and exploitation of people for its functioning—incites despair,

frustration and hopelessness which often results in a renewed focus on how to 'do

one's part' to arrest global catastrophe. While such individual strategies are not

seamlessly taken up, the existence of the sustainable consumption ethic as consisting

in principles of how to best do one's part for the environment *right now* necessitates a

whole economy of 'acceptable' versus delinquent consumer choices and behaviour

that undermines any existing environmentalist efforts to derail the capitalist system of

exploitation and eco-destruction. For far from opposing our destructive

socioeconomic paradigm, the sustainable consumption ethic reinforces this paradigm

at the same time that it allows the 'good' consumer to *feel* that they are doing the right

thing as they shame those who fail to 'do their part.'

Efforts to change the hearts and minds of delinquent consumers are ubiquitous, and

I've already mentioned many of these strategies. The advertising of green products is

an obvious example. While Starbucks' environmental advertising campaigns target

those already at least sympathetic to environmental concerns, there is an implication

that if one *merely* buys a cup of coffee rather than, with the help of Starbucks, buys

into "a coffee ethic" there has been a moral failure. Coffee shop culture—in my

experience having worked in a few—is rife with moments of shaming the delinquent

in oneself or in others. I've consoled more than one distraught customer who forgot to

bring a travel mug, and have been on the receiving end of an annoyed scoff upon

mistakenly handing a customer a plastic straw that they didn't request. Another

example of how the delinquent consumer is both the object of sustainability ethics and

the subject of censure who is integrated within capitalist modes of production is the bag policy of many grocery stores. Many grocers in urban areas have stopped supplying plastic bags, and have additionally implemented a disciplinary cost for those who must purchase a paper bag, while those who bring a canvas one are saved this tax on delinquent consumers. The swift reintroduction of plastic bags (and the banning of reusable ones) in many grocery stores due to the COVID 19 pandemic suggests that reusable bags are *not* able to significantly guard us against ecological crises. If limiting plastic grocery bags is essential to staving off environmental apocalypse, surely solutions which protect us from both a pandemic *and* ecological collapse should be pursued.[56]

We can also see the integration of the sustainable consumption ethic as the effort to shame delinquent consumers in public school curriculum. In Canada, for example, the moral imperative to recycle is incorporated into the curriculum in both primary and secondary schools. However proper recycling behaviour is taught to Canadian schoolchildren with the expectation that they then encourage these proper recycling habits at home, as now—armed with knowledge—they are able to identify and correct the possibly delinquent habits of their parents, guardians and siblings. Other sustainable consumption practices are being brought into the curriculum as well: for example, one assignment for a seventh grade class in Halifax, Nova Scotia included a lesson on "The *Not So Secret* Life of Your T-Shirt: A Life-Cycle Analysis" in order to educate children about the toxicity of cotton production and the exploitative labour practices surrounding production of their cotton t-shirts. However, after students watched a video that focused on the global dimension of the problem and explained

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[56] Thanks to Chike Jeffers for pointing this out in conversation

how the capitalist demand for new, affordable clothing was responsible for the industrial production of non-biodegradable t-shirts, they were asked to "provide their thoughts" about how they 'could make positive change.' Despite the important information provided in the video regarding exploitation associated with textile labour, the assignment places the onus on *students* (and so guardians) to buy used clothing or (the often more expensive) clothing made from biodegradable, organic, or sustainably sourced materials in order to be a 'good' and 'responsible.'

The emergence of norms of 'sustainable consumption' framed in relation to the delinquent consumer—the citizen who does not recycle, forgets his canvas bag and travel mug, and wears unsustainably sourced clothing—has inspired an entire academic discourse on the 'psychology of sustainable behaviour' (PSB) that examines psychological barriers to up-take of environmentally conscious habits, and recommends strategies to engender such behaviour amongst deviant consumers.[57] This literature often acknowledges the existence of social, political, and economic barriers to cultivating a sustainable consumption ethic, and concedes that sustainable behaviour change cannot provide all of the answers as to how to arrest ecological catastrophe. However insights as to the importance of change beyond individual habits and behaviour are deferred by an overt focus on environmental problems as 'fundamentally behaviour problems.' If we understand the problem of eco-

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[57] For example, see James A. Swaim, et al. "Influences on Student Intention and Behaviour Toward Environmental Sustainability." *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 124, no. 3, 2014, pp. 465–484., www.jstor.org/stable/24033283 who study barriers to adopting sustainable business ethics amongst business students; Deborah Du Nann Winter, Susan M. Koger; Britain A. Scott; Elise L. Amel; Manning, Christine M. *Psychology for Sustainability: 4th Edition.* Routledge, 2016 in which the authors discuss climate change as a crisis of anthropogenic overconsumption, and draw on psychological theory to describe barriers to sustainable behaviour as well as strategies to incite sustainable behaviour in oneself and others; Susan M. Kroger; Britain A. Scott "Teaching Psychology for Sustainability: the Why and How." *Psychology Learning and Teaching,* vol. 15, no. 3, 2016, pp. 214-225 DOI: 10.1177/1475725716648238 wherein the authors advocate for the integration of psychology into sustainability focused university programs and vice versa, not least because "environmental problems are fundamentally behaviour problems"(215)

exploitation and destruction as *fundamentally* a problem with human behaviour then—as explained in this literature—we can 'solve' this problem through learning techniques to discipline deviant consumers into making more sustainable lifestyle choices.

The strategies recommended in PSB literature are reminiscent of the reformers' system of representation, and operate on the same logic: if the (environmental) moral-juridical code is made obvious through the representation of 'normal' sustainable behaviour, and deviant behaviour is publicly condemned, we will be deterred from violating environmental norms of acceptable behaviour and adopt values associated with sustainable consumption. In her piece on *The Psychology of Sustainable Behaviour*—included in a module on sustainability and psychology at the College of Sustainability at Dalhousie University—Christie Manning argues that giving people "social proof" that sustainable behaviour is normal and desirable by publicly engaging in or discursively expressing support for activities such as using travel mugs, riding a bicycle or recycling is an effective way to encourage others to do the same:

> All of these signals, positive and negative, provide us with important information about how our behaviour compares to what is deemed acceptable and normal in a particular social context. Negative signals compel us to scrutinize what we're doing and adjust it as quickly as possible. Positive cues reassure us that we are on the right course and should continue. Imagine the power of consistently positive social cues for all types of sustainable actions: smiles and nods to people waiting at the bus stop, a thumbs up for bringing your own reusable container to the take-out deli, or the observation "It's great that you walk so many places…" Though it sounds simple (and it is simple), it

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is a powerful behaviour-shaper that is underutilized in our quest for a more sustainable society.[58]

Mere wishful thinking? Perhaps. But this sensibility of environmental activism *as* the power of individuals to make a big difference through their own sustainable behaviour and by their devotion to surveilling the populace for delinquent consumers into the same behaviour has considerable traction in our contemporary neoliberal moment of cultural capitalism. And while individually focused environmental reform is rhetorically opposed to the 'economy' of ecological destruction, the 'technology' of environmentalism-qua-sustainable consumption depends on this very economy for its operation. There is no doubt that any paradigm that seriously addresses ecological disaster will necessitate different ways of life. However our preoccupation with 'converting' delinquent consumers *within* a socio-economic structure that depends upon the destruction of the environment and human exploitation for its very functioning has served to obfuscate what many environmentalists agree to be a more important focus on socio-economic strategies that challenge our destructive political paradigms. In the following section, I will explore the ways in which normalizing judgement exercised against delinquent consumers—far from a benign, 'best we can do' approach—serves to render us subject to and impotent against eco-exploitation.

3.3 The Productive Power of the Delinquent Consumer

While Preston's account of his OEE students illuminates the impact that the sustainable consumption ethic has in terms of our self-regulatory behaviour, PSB literature draws attention to the importance of the surveillance of the environmentally conscious habits—or lack thereof—of *others* for reinforcing the sustainable

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[58] Christie Manning, "The Psychology of Sustainable Behaviour," *Minnesota Pollution Control Agency,* 2009, https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/p-ee1-01.pdf

consumption ethic. Foucault focuses on shifting categories of delinquency throughout *Discipline and Punish,* and is ultimately interested in the delinquent as an object and subject of reform produced through both medico-scientific discourse about 'normal' human behaviour as well as disciplinary techniques enforced through surveillance. The delinquent consumer that is gestured to in PSB literature and judged by 'good' sustainable consumers is akin to the delinquent targeted by the reformers, whose punishment is seen as useful for not only his own moral reform but for guarding against 'potential criminality' lurking in the masses. The delinquent consumer who is to be 'converted' thus plays a central role in reinscribing the sustainable consumption ethic as 'the one best way' to address ecological catastrophe, and rendering the 'good' environmentalists docile and useful in their preoccupation with the sustainable consumption ethic. For if the environmental crisis is 'fundamentally a problem of behaviour,' and there are still those who do *not* practice sustainable consumption, then what is prudent *right now* is ensuring that as many people as possible are engaging in sustainable behaviour. And as long as there are those failing to do the 'bare-minimum,' how can we ever hope to see 'real' change? This logic obfuscates the fact that absent a fundamental shift in our socio-economic paradigms, individual efforts of environmentalism are of little consequence, and certainly have not proven to be effective 'gateways' to integrated and effective environmental policy.

Some might disagree with me and argue that there is nothing inherently problematic about focusing on encouraging individual behaviour change, so long as there remains a commitment to recognizing the inadequacy of the sustainable consumption ethic in isolation of advocacy for systemic change. Indeed some may suggest that cultivating sustainable consumption habits *is* an important first step to engender general concern

for the environment that will eventually transform into efforts to incite more radical socio-political change. These are well-meaning positions that I find unconvincing. As I have already shown, the ubiquity of the sustainable consumption ethic has not engendered a widespread concern with large socio-political barriers and drivers to climate change. In this final section, I will argue that not only has such a shift failed to transpire, but our efforts to arrest the "delinquent consumer" in ourselves and others through disciplinary strategies of shaming and blaming actually serves to sustain neoliberal logics of eco-exploitation in three ways; 1. through the reinscription of the sustainable consumption ethic as a 'minimum threshold' of acceptable environmentalism; 2. by discursively presupposing the capacity of neoliberal capitalism to 'solve' our environmental crises even as it is the problem; and 3. by sustaining a sensibility of "pre-ecocatastrophe" wherein ecological disaster is on the horizon but can still be addressed if we all "just change our lifestyle."

Preston's analysis of his previous student's adherence to environmental ethics in the workplace is an excellent example of how our efforts to convert delinquent consumers serves to reinscribe sustainable consumption as a 'minimum threshold' of environmentally responsible behaviour required to arrest ecological disaster. While Preston's original analysis of his then-students consisted in astute observations as to how the sustainable consumption ethic rendered his students 'docile and useful' in their preoccupation with piecemeal individual environmentalist strategies, his recasting of the now-OEE instructors adherence to the sustainable consumption ethic as *resistance* in the face of delinquent colleagues and students suggests that it *is,* on the contrary, incredibly important to ensure that individuals at a minimum 'do their part' by recycling, riding their bicycle, and remembering their travel mug. While

Preston clearly does not endorse the sustainable consumption ethic as adequate—his first study was critical of individualistic approaches to climate change—his secondary analysis suggests that in the face of the threat of delinquent consumers, the sustainable consumption ethic *is* a meaningful form of resistance against eco-catastrophe that is a necessary pre-condition should we hope someday to achieve "real" change.

Given that our contemporary socio-political system is premised on the destruction of the environment and human exploitation, the presumption that individual efforts of sustainable consumption that have been so seamlessly integrated into our politics are *necessary conditions* of addressing ecological and humanitarian disaster further discursively presupposes the ability of our exploitative socio-economic paradigm to somehow act as the solution even as we acknowledge that it is *the* problem. As such, psychological strategies of shaming delinquent consumerism and encouraging sustainable consumption are not benign or merely 'the best we can do,' nor are they gateways to more effective environmentalism. Rather, the policing of the sustainable consumption ethic serves to distract from both the socio-economic changes that are required to arrest global catastrophe, and defers our awareness of the failure of intergovernmental organizations and international summit agreements to advocate any change that significantly alters the capitalist mode of economic production and distribution based on the industrial exploitation of all available resources. The discursive and 'practical' environmentalist preoccupation with the consumerist habits of individuals and with identifying and converting the delinquent consumer thus undermines—when it is present—genuine moral concern with intersecting issues of climate change and social justice. For if Manning is correct, and it really "is simple" to meaningfully address ecological catastrophe with "a thumbs up for bringing your

own reusable container," by bringing your reusable travel mug to Starbucks, remembering your reusable bag, or by adequately disciplining those who do not recycle, then the sustainable consumption ethic *is* all we can do for now, and the good environmentalists then serve as docile and useful subjects for the 'green' consumer market.

Finally, our preoccupation with sustainable behaviour and the conversion of delinquent consumers suggests a temporal dislocation wherein climate change is felt as something always on the horizon but not quite arrived, wherein every unprecedented heat wave, earthquake and flood serves as a mere warning of what is to come rather than indicative of a crisis that is well underway. While of course the impacts of climate change *are* predicted to become more severe and widespread as time goes on, the sustainable consumer takes pride in being part of the solution to the problem before the 'true catastrophe' renders these individualist habits truly ineffective. This sense of pre-ecocatastrophe and their ability to help stave off the impending environmental apocalypse also accounts for the moral urgency with which sustainable consumers admonish and try to convert delinquent consumers; when they convince their parents to start shopping local, or express frustration with colleagues who drive to work when they could walk, they also express the hope that there is *time* to convince everyone to 'do their part' before it is too late for the miniscule environmental benefits that accrue from sustainable consumerist practices to reform our capitalist mode of production *enough* to stave off a severe shortage of all resources. While many of those who are engaged with climate change research, news and activism *believe* that climate change is already having real impacts, the endorsement of piecemeal strategies of sustainable consumption—many of which

take *years* to reap any minimal environmental benefit they might have—logically obscures the very real impacts that climate change is already having in disproportionately poor and ecologically vulnerable nations, as well as on disproportionately Black and Indigenous communities.

As I argued in the previous chapter, the field of possible responses to climate change are overwhelmingly limited in our current *episteme* to those actions which focus on individual agency, consumption and behaviour change. This chapter has shed light on some of the concrete discursive practices that indicate and reinforce certain limits as to what 'makes sense' as environmentalist ethics and activism in our current episteme. I am not claiming to be 'above' or seeing into or past the episteme by engaging in this analysis. Rather following Foucault, we can infer some of the limits to what is possible by exploring why it is that certain socio-political strategies or projects gain traction when others do not.[59] Foucault's focus on the reformers' 'failed' project of 18th century penal reform illustrates how it is possible to speculate as to what falls outside of the field of possibility: for Foucault, the reformers' popular movement failed due to its operation within a system that was already in various ways preoccupied with discipline and efficiency, to which the complex system of representation was opposed. The reformers' acceptance of the 'economy' of punishment as the reform of the delinquent meant that their critique of a particular technology of punishment was easily integrated within the system responsible for the technology of the prisons as "the one best," most efficient and practical way to control

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[59] My thanks to Chike Jeffers for pointing out this critique of Foucault, and so a potential critique of my use of the *episteme* in this project. While this brief mention certainly does not address a potential critique in a robust way, it seems important to at least briefly address any concern that I am situating myself as somehow 'outside' or privy to the 'truth' of certain epistemic limits of understanding and agency. In addition, though ostensibly only an introductory text, Gary Gutting's *Foucault: A Very Brief Introduction* has been helpful for thinking through some of Foucault's theoretical frameworks: Gary Gutting, *Foucault: A Very Brief Introduction.* Oxford UP, 2005

the social body. Foucault points out that calls for the reform of the prison have always been essential to the economy and normalization of the prison as a necessary institution:

> The prison should not be seen as an inert institution, shaken at intervals by reform movements. The 'theory of the prison' was its constant set of operational instructions rather than its incidental criticism - one of its conditions of functioning. The prison has always formed part of an active field in which projects, improvements, experiments, theoretical statements, personal evidence and investigations have proliferated. The prison institution has always been a focus of concern and debate.[60]

Likewise, the environmentalist preoccupation with responsible *habits of capitalist consumption* already accepts the possibility of a 'good consumer" and the ability of a delinquent consumer to "become better" at buying and disposing of waste. As illustrated in the Starbucks 'coffee ethic,' environmentalist critique of specific consumerist habits is easily integrated within the capitalist system of production responsible for the crisis they seek to rectify.

Why has environmentalist reform failed to engender the socio-political changes required to address climate change? I have argued that the field of possible climate change action in the current *episteme* is significantly impacted by our preoccupation with individual sustainable behaviour and the discursive practices that accompany it. Sustainable consumption is imbued with various levels of importance by a variety of environmental activists and scholars, and while the underlying logic of these strategies is rhetorically opposed to the 'economy' of ecological degradation, the

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[60] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 235

technology of sustainable behaviour change is compatible with our contemporary socio-political paradigms, and has been integrated in such a way that it renders our actions impotent against environmental catastrophe. The moral judgements exercised against those who do not engage in sustainable consumption play a particularly insidious role through the discursive obfuscation of the complicity and impotence of individual efforts of sustainability. This suggests that our strict surveillance and judgement of our own consumption habits and those of others as to how well they match up to the 'norm' of the sustainable consumption ethic should be critically questioned rather than accepted as a benign, 'best we can do for now' strategy. Doing so does not provide a clear answer as to how best to approach our ecological crisis, but allows us to better think through the complicity of seemingly harmless strategies in perpetuating ecological crises.

CHAPTER 4   SACRIFICIAL POLITICS

Following Foucault's illustration of how reformist efforts to critique the prisons reinforced the economy of the new system of social control as discipline-qua-surveillance, we can further examine the political role that the reformist efforts to promote sustainability ethics plays in the re-production of cultural capitalism. The discourse of the sustainable consumption ethic prioritizes our environmentalist critiques of social behaviour as 1.distinct from our critiques of systems of oppression and as 2. the most pressing issue to arrest the looming environmental apocalypse. In this chapter I detail how these patterns of critique serve to obfuscate and defer the genocidal and ecocidal harms already inflicted by capitalist modes of production. As I noted in chapter 2, while the impacts of climate change are predicted to become more severe and widespread over time, the sustainable consumer takes pride in being part of the solution to the problem *before* the 'true catastrophe' renders piecemeal individualist habits and approaches ineffective. Their hope and the meaning of the efforts of the sustainable consumer is made possible and reinforced by what I have called our "pre-ecocatastrophe" sensibility of the environmental crisis, in which any ecological crisis in the present is seen and felt as an "impending warning" of the "true" environmental destruction that has yet to come and can still be avoided through reforming our consumerist habits. Often scholars who aim to raise moral concern about the destructive environmental consequences of capitalist modes of production do so through warning us about the possible shape of the future environmental catastrophe in which there is a severe lack of any resources to sustain any part of the body politic. While such exercises of 'future scenario analysis' are valuable in planning and policy, the futurization of our climate change crisis by some scholars

serves to obscure how environmental devastation is *already* destroying communities in the present.

This sensibility is operative in the work of the genocide scholar Mark Levene, and in this chapter I critique his recent scholarship that raises moral concern about the effects of our current environmental policies as 'potential preconditions' of genocidal violence to detail how such positions are made possible by the co-operation of our post-racial and pre-ecocatastrophic sensibility of the current state of affairs. These mutually reinforcing temporal dislocations—in which systemic racism is always a problem overcome in the past and environmental destruction is always a problem that awaits us on the horizon—prevent our ability to see or feel the simultaneously ecocidal and genocidal violence already inflicted by the global capitalist economy.

Following my analysis of the way that the dominant lines of critical inquiry about our environmental crisis by the leading white scholars in the fields of genocide studies and environmental activism are informed and limited by these sensibilities, I argue for the need to draw on the work of the Black Canadian social scientist Ingrid R. G. Waldron on the economy of environmental racism in order to shift our paradigm for thinking through eco-catastrophe. The dependence of our capitalist economy on systemic Black and Indigenous genocide is ignored by Levene and others who offer diagnoses and predictions about our environmental crisis in isolation of the role that the global racial caste system plays in driving the sacrificial politics required for capitalist production and distribution of goods and resources. I argue that Waldron's work is an example of recent scholarship by Black academics in the social sciences and the field of critical race theory that is essential to help white environmentalists—

myself included—'see' what cannot appear in our post-racial analyses of our current environmental crisis; specifically: the systemic and ruthless destruction of life *as such* for the sake of capitalist modes of production and accumulation that require a sacrificial politics based on the relative value of different *types of racialized life* in order to sustain and rationalize the economy of total domination.

4.1 Levene's Dilemma: Will Ecocide Cause Genocide?

Mark Levene's historical analyses of the relation between the rise of European nation-states in a rapidly accelerating global capitalist economy and the proliferation of genocide in the twentieth century initiated a Marxist shift in the field of Holocaust studies from the focus on the ideology of racial anti-Semitism as the determining historical condition of the Nazi Genocide to a focus on those social and geopolitical shifts that created a milieu in which the expulsion, enslavement and destruction of Jews made sense as a European project.[61] Levene draws on Hannah Arendt's (1951) comparative analysis of the logics of colonialism and Nazism in her book on *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to argue that the structure of the capitalist mode of production—based on the exploitation of the working class to produce capital for those who own the means of production—in the historical context of the emerging global capitalist marketplace created a social milieu in which certain historical 'solutions' to the political need for a rapid accumulation of capital gained traction because they had already proven so successful for the American effort to dominate the market.[62]

As Marx pointed out, one of the contradictions of capitalism is that the accumulation of capital is both the means and end of production, and when human labour is

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[61] See: Mark Levene, "Why is the Twentieth Century the Century of Genocide?" *Journal of World History,* 11, no. 2 (2000) 305-336, http://www.jstor.com/stable/20078852
[62] Levene, "The Century of Genocide?" 307-309

removed from its real necessity to provide for and sustain a population, it serves instead to degrade, harm, impoverish and poison the majority of citizens for the sake of sustaining the excessive wealth and power of the minority who profit off of their pain and misery.[63] Levene's groundbreaking analysis assumes the Marxist view that the economic substructure creates the terms for the production of the intellectual superstructure which allows him to analyze how the sensibility of impending catastrophe that fuels the urgency with which genocide gains traction as the 'one best way' to protect national security, is actually shaped by physical and economic needs that arise from a specific social system already in place.[64] Levene's work suggests that capitalism has served to promote genocide insofar as it is an economic system based on competition and the individual accumulation of wealth rather than the common good. So, the perception of extremity is formed in a system in which cooperation and equity are always already supplanted by competition and economic disparity, where one is always beset with the question of either us or them.

In light of mounting evidence that anthropogenic climate change and resource scarcity exacerbated by our capitalist economy is and will continue to be a major driver of global conflict, Levene argues that genocide scholars must take seriously the impending ecological catastrophe. Using a 'future scenario analysis' type of model popular amongst climate scientists, planners and policy makers, Levene endeavours to explore the nexus between "genocidal potentialities" and environmental catastrophe through an assessment of the current conflict over mineral resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the broader issue of climate change induced migration.

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[63] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,* Translated and Edited by Martin Milligan, New York: Dover Publications Inc. 1961, 2007
[64] Levene, "The Century of Genocide?" 308-311

Levene explores the process of extracting valuable minerals in the DRC—

particularly coltan which is crucial to electronics and aircraft manufacturing and 80%

of which is found in the DRC—as an example of 'business as usual' capitalist

exploitation that harbours a new geopolitical threat given the now known limits of the

carrying capacity of the planet. Far from a 'business as usual' conflict, the ongoing

violence in the DRC associated with mineral extraction is a direct consequence of the

Rwandan genocide. After the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) took control of Kigali

on July 4, 1994, two million Hutus fled across the border into what was then Zaire—

including former members of the *Interahamwe* or the mobile killing units composed

of young men trained to act as *génocidaires* for Hutu Power.[65] Thousands of these

men who had been conscripted to murder and rape found safe haven in one of the

refugee camps established by the United Nations to assist those victimized and

displaced by the Rwandan genocide against Tutsis and those Hutus who had assisted

them. In these camps the *Interahamwe* took refuge alongside—and continue to

terrorize—Tutsi victims of the genocide.[66] In this way, and as explained by Philip

Gourevitch in his book *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with

our families*, the Hutu Power *génocidaires* used the resources provided by

international aid groups to rebuild themselves into militarized militia groups.[67] As

explained by Gourevitch:

> It was bewildering enough that the UN border camps should be allowed to
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> constitute a rump genocidal state, with an army that was regularly observed to

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[65] *The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo,* directed by Lisa F. Rankin

[66] See: Phillip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform you that Tomorrow We will be Killed with Our Families,* Strauss and Giroux Farrar, 1998; *The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo,* directed by Lisa F. Rankin

[67] *The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo,* directed by Lisa F. Rankin; Sara Meger "Rape of the Congo: Understanding Sexual Violence in the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies,* 28, no. 2 (2010) 119-135; Phillip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform you that Tomorrow We will be Killed with Our Families,* Strauss and Giroux Farrar, 1998

be receiving large shipments of arms and recruiting young men by the thousands for the next extermination campaign. And it was heartbreaking that the vast majority of the million and a half people in those camps were evidently at no risk of being jailed, much less killed, in Rwanda, but that the propaganda and brute force of the Hutu Power apparatus was effectively holding them hostage, as a human shield. Yet what made the camps almost unbearable to visit was the spectacle of hundreds of international humanitarians being openly exploited as caterers to what was probably the single largest society of fugitive criminals against humanity ever assembled.[68]

Gourevitch published his book about the Rwandan genocide in 1998, and included statements by Rwandan and American politicians who expressed shock at the criminal neglect of these UN camps and their eventual disbandment that led the newly resurgent Hutu Power militias to flee into the DRC and terrorize local communities. Gourevitch was with American Ambassador Bill Richardson when he visited a camp for Rwandan Hutus at Kisangani in 1997, and read a prepared statement which described the "humanitarian crisis in the Congo" as "a tragedy that dates back to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda,"[69] before stating:

> The failure of the international community to respond adequately to both the genocide and the subsequent mixing of genocidal killers with the legitimate refugee population in the former eastern Zaire only served to prolong the crisis. This climate of impunity was further exacerbated by ethnic cleansing and conflict in the [North Kivu] region—and also by former President Mobutu's policies of allowing these genocidal forces to operate, recruit, and resupply on his territory. Tragically, this chapter is not yet closed. Reports of

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[68] Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you*, 266-267
[69] Quoted in Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you*, 335

widespread killings continue. All of us, the new government of the

Democratic Republic of Congo, its neighbours and the international

community, have the responsibility to stop the killing of innocent civilians.[70]

In the decades that have passed, it has become clear that the failure of the

international community to adequately administer the UN camps and prevent the

ability of perpetrators to inflict more violence against the Congolese was not simply a

"tragic" oversight but instead served to sustain and exacerbate the conflict in order to

create the conditions to profit from it in the DRC. For when the Rwandan

génocidaires found refuge in the DRC, they created a climate of social instability and

mass violence that allowed for a variety of national and extra-national militia groups

to gain access to and exploit mineral resources to sell to the international community

in an unregulated market at a time when their value sky-rocketed in the mid-nineties

as demand for technology increased across the globe.[71] Millions of citizens have been

killed since 1994, and hundreds of thousands of women have been raped and

mutilated and, as a result, excluded from and abandoned by their communities.[72]

Given the historical relation between the genocidal violence in Rwanda and the

systemic violence inflicted against Congolese groups, it is strange that Levene

analyses the possible genocidal conditions in the DRC in isolation of the context or

how the patterns of state-sanctioned violence there have been facilitated by western

powers and exploited for the sake of capitalist profit; especially in light of his

groundbreaking work on the relation between genocide and the demands of the global

capitalist economy.

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[70] Quoted in Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you,* 335-336
[71] *The Greatest Silence,* Lisa F. Jackson
[72] See: *The Greatest Silence;* Sara Meger, "Rape of the Congo: Understanding Sexual Violence in the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies,* 28, no. 2 (2010) 119-135; Amber Peterman; Tia Palmero; Caryn Bredenkamp; "Estimates and Determinates of Sexual Violence Against Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo, *American Journal of Public Health,* 101, no. 6 (2011) 1060-1067, 10.2105/AJPH.2010.300070;

As mineral resources begin to deplete and African nations such as the DRC face climate change related challenges of food and water scarcity likely to exacerbate existing conflict, Levene points out that foreign interest in mineral procurement will almost certainly take precedence over the heightened human cost of continued extraction. This is made abundantly clear by the language used in a "possible future scenario" report prepared by the British Ministry of Defense that, after acknowledging the increased instability that climate change will bring to African nations, asserts that "outside engagement and intervention would effectively be limited to a small-number of well-defended entry points and corridors, which would provide access to raw materials essential to the global economy."[73] As Levene aptly points out, such language is reminiscent "of the nineteenth-century scramble for Africa, some of the consequences of which *were* genocidal. More to the point, if this can be taken to be the genuine bottom line of ongoing British foreign policy, it casts a disturbing commentary on African conflicts in which resource issues have played a prominent role."[74]

Of course exploitation of mineral resources at the expense of human life *can* be taken as the "bottom line" of not only British foreign policy but that of many nations who depend on the DRC for access to profitable resources. However we need not wait until some cataclysmic event in the future to understand that the procurement of mineral resources, for the global market *right now* depends upon a cheap exchange rate provided by a black market sustained through social unrest, violence and the mass

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[73] Quoted in Mark Levene, "From Past to Future: Prospects for Genocide and its Avoidance in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, edited by Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses, 638-659. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010 (644)
[74] Levene, "From Past to Future," 645

rapes of women and children.[75] While Levene is certainly right that these atrocities will be exacerbated by climate change, the impacts of climate change are *already* contributing to heightened water and food insecurity in the country.[76] Levene nevertheless stops short of referring to the current crisis as genocidal, and rather sees the current crisis as constituting "post-genocidal" violence that, with the added stress of climate change, may also constitute "preconditions" of genocidal violence. Such preconditions may presumably become genocidal in a mad-dash to extract minerals from the country as it is plagued by future totalizing ecological disaster and global demand for minerals that far exceeds supply. Since violence in the DRC "doesn't fall into the rubric of genocide" but rather falls into a strange category that is both pre and post genocidal, according to Levene, Western nations who rely on such conflict for their access to minerals "are all the better positioned to eschew responsibility."[77]

While Levene's assessment of the ongoing conflict in the DRC makes sense in terms of his own definition of genocide as a state effort to kill as many members of a targeted group as possible until the group is destroyed "*in toto*, or until it is no longer perceived to represent a threat" to national security,[78] I do question his use of the term genocide throughout his essay which always refers to a past or future 'event' of violence against a targeted group rather than the state-sanctioned, systemic violence

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[75] Sara Meger, "Rape of the Congo: Understanding Sexual Violence in the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies,* 28, no. 2 (2010) 119-135 https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001003736728
[76] See: Félicien Kengoum, "Adaptation policies and synergies with REDD+ in Democratic Republic of Congo: Context, challenges and perspectives," Center for International Forestry Research (2015) https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep02249.
[77]Levene, "From Past to Future," 647
[78] Mark Levene, "Is the Holocaust simply another example of Genocide?" *Patterns of Prejudice,* 28, no. 2 (1994) 3-26 (10)
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0031322X.1994.9970124?needAccess=true

inflicted against "a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such."[79] Levene's

willingness to admit that the Congolese people as such—specifically those residing in

Ituri and North and South Kivu provinces—*might* be victims of genocidal violence in

a future rush for access to increasingly scarce resources amidst ecological disaster

suggests that his reluctance to charge genocide in the present does not stem from an

obscurity as to what particular group might be victimized.[80] Rather, Levene's focus

on genocide as mass "physical elimination" of a group as such suggests that violence

in the DRC does not presently constitute genocide because the violence—while

devastating—has not resulted in the "physical elimination" of enough Congolese

residents such that they are "no longer perceived as a threat" to the continued

procurement of mineral resources.

Here it is worth noting that Levene's definition of genocide as a type of mass murder

is far more restrictive than either the legal definition provided by the United Nations

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, or the

philosophical conceptions developed by scholars who work in the interdisciplinary

field of genocide studies. For example, Claudia Card argues that both political 'evils'

(such as mass killing, mass rape and sterilization) and systemic harms inflicted by an

institution or practice are *genocidal*—regardless of individual intent to cause

genocidal harm by those who work in the institutions—when we can reasonably

foresee that they will lead to intolerable harm against certain groups as such, or result

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[79] *Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,* United Nations, 1951
https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-
crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Cri
me%20of%20Genocide.pdf
[80] Levene, "From Past to Future," 645

in "social death."[81] Taking seriously Card's assertion that specifically *genocidal* harms affect the social vitality of a community that can be undermined through various political evils suggests that the Congolese people who are not benefiting from the illicit mineral trade are subject to genocidal violence that has rendered them "no longer a threat" to national security or to the national interest in exploiting them. For the mineral trade is cultivated by militia groups, corporations and nation states that economically benefit from this illicit channel for cheap minerals, and while their aim is ostensibly the procurement of valuable resources; mass rape, torture and killing are not only "foreseeable" and ongoing consequences, but *essential* to sustaining the social instability that has allowed for various stakeholders to profit from exploiting land and labour in the DRC. In order to sustain the illicit market to buy minerals that power our devices, western nation states have already sanctioned mass killing, torture and the mass rape of women in the DRC for the sake of keeping this resource available and competitive on the global market.

The crisis of mass rape in the DRC is helpful for thinking through how violence in the country is already arguably genocidal. While Levene only makes passing reference to sexual violence in the DRC in relation to the participation of women and children in the "burgeoning *alternative* economy primarily as prostitutes,"[82] the ongoing crisis of mass rape resulting in death, mutilation and trauma of Congolese women and children—as well as the destruction of families and communities as a result—appears to constitute genocidal violence on Card's definition, and arguably satisfies at least four of the five categories of violence that constitute 'genocide' when inflicted against

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[81] Claudia Card, "The Paradox of Genocidal Rape Aimed at Enforced Pregnancy." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 46 (2008) 160; See also: Claudia Card, "Genocide and Social Death," *Hypatia,* 18, no. 1 (2003) 63-79, http://www.jstor.com/stable/3811037
[82] Levene, "From Past to Future," 646

groups as such, as listed by the United Nations Convention On The Prevention and

Punishment of The Crime of Genocide: "Killing members of the group; Causing

serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; Deliberately inflicting on the

group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or

in part; Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group."[83] While

women and children who are victims of violent rape undoubtedly bear the brunt of the

physical and emotional trauma, the systemic mass rape of Congolese women and

children severely undermines the social vitality of entire communities of Congolese

people, and is crucial to maintaining chaotic conditions in the country such that those

majority of Congolese not profiting from the mining industry remain 'unthreatening'

to those profiting from the mineral trade. This social death suffered by Congolese

people as a result of mass rape is made clear by testimony of both survivors and those

working on the ground in the DRC interviewed in Lisa Rankin's documentary *The

Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo*. A United Nations peace officer interviewed in

the documentary claims that "there is no doubt that rape is a method in this

environment to create continued instability or dominance. It is very prominent, and it

is without question, the worst environment that I have seen."[84] Christine Schuyler

Deschryver, a women's' rights activist in the DRC maintains that "More than coltan,

more than gold, more than diamonds, the women in this country are the greatest

resource [ensuring] that it will stay like this."[85] Levene's side-stepping of the violence

against women and children in the DRC neglects to recognize the myriad ways—

through the infliction of "intolerable harms"—that a community *as such* can be

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[83] *Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,* United Nations, 1951
https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-
crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Cri
me%20of%20Genocide.pdf
[84] Colonel Roddy Winser, quoted in *The Greatest Silence,* Lisa F. Rankin
[85] Christine Schuyler Deschryver, quoted in *The Greatest Silence,* Lisa F. Rankin

rendered "no longer a threat to state directives. Claudia Card's assertion that mass

rape can amount to genocidal violence perpetuated on a group *as such* through the

destruction of the social vitality of communities suggests that ongoing violence in the

DRC is already genocidal, or at the very least calls into question the readiness with

which Levene both historicizes and futurizes genocidal violence in the DRC.[86]

Levene's exclusion of systemic violent rape in the DRC from his analysis of the

potentially genocidal conditions of violence provoked by the exploitation of labor and

resources further hinders his ability to make accurate predictions about how climate

change might engender more genocidal violence. The impacts of climate change are

disproportionately felt by women, especially in conflict ridden area, as women are

often responsible for travelling long distances to find increasingly scarce water and

food sources. Travelling further and to more remote areas to procure food and water

leaves women increasingly vulnerable to the sexual violence which—along with the

already present impacts of climate change in the DRC—is presently undermining the

social vitality of Congolese communities.[87] It appears as though Levene's dilemma

about whether 'Ecocide' will cause 'Genocide' is an open question only when we

exclude systemic violence against women from our field of relevance and moral

concern.

Levene then moves on to discuss the potential impacts of climate change beyond its

genocidal potentialities for mineral-rich nations such as the DRC to consider how

ecological disaster may impact urban and agricultural societies under conditions of

forced migration, taking the case of the Jumma peoples in Bangladesh's Chittagong

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[86] Card, *The Paradox of Genocidal Rape,* 188; Card, *Genocide and Social Death,* 73
[87] For some helpful background on the intersection between climate change and gender-based violence, see: Itzá Castañeda Camey, Laura Sabater, Cate Owren and A. Emmett Boyer, "Gender Based Violence and Environmental Linkages: The Violence of Inequality," edited by Jamie Wen, Gland, Switzerland: IUCN, 2020, https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.CH.2020.03.en

Hill Tracts as an example of a "creeping genocide" that could potentially erupt into genocide "as such." Given the very real possibility of mass displacement due to ecological disaster in not only Bangladesh—parts of which is particularly vulnerable to irreparable flooding—but all over the world, as well as the clear signalling from many governments that they are not willing to take in 'climate refugees,' Levene considers the possibility of genocide exacerbated by forced mass migration more broadly. The climate crisis as it pertains to mass displacement suggests two possibilities for Levene. First:

> States will practise triage against those parts of its citizen or subject population considered least saveable or, more cynically put, most superfluous. The specific conditions of climate catastrophe, however, raise the possibility of exclusion from a universe of obligation being practised across borders, and even applying to whole populations of perhaps, once sovereign states.[88]

Levene here turns his focus towards the potential collapse of entire nations who, now stateless and turned away by the global community, are thrust into a "Hobbesian state of nature" wherein they must fend for themselves. In such a situation of failed nation states, Levene contends that the circumstances would be a truly "*post*-genocidal landscape in which atrocity is not simply the norm as perpetuated by the simple conditions of extreme scarcity but one in which, without the state or even outside agencies to offer a calculus as to the political purposefulness of violence, no one single group of actors can be blamed, let alone held to account, for the resulting carnage."[89]

Levene refers to a situation that might be considered genocide per se—albeit only

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[88] Levene, "From Past to Future," 653
[89] Levene, "From Past to Future," 647

implicitly—in his second imagined scenario, in which he hypothesizes what is to become of "rich tier 1" nations in the midst of a totalizing ecological catastrophe. Since many such nations are largely dependent for food and resources from more environmentally vulnerable nations (who at this point in the thought experiment have largely collapsed), in the midst of an "all embracing crisis" wherein "standard front-line public services find themselves overwhelmed or unable to cope," Levene contends that Western nations might witness "responses which in normal times would be deemed not only unthinkable but unforgivable."[90] Presumably such responses refer to the "triaging"-qua-genocide of "superfluous" segments of the population.

Levene's effort to consider genocidal potentialities against the threat of climate change in tandem with exploitative political paradigms and systems of development is important work: the impacts of climate change are predicted to worsen, raising serious questions about what this means for the world at large, and particularly for those already vulnerable to political violence and environmental degradation. Given Levene's groundbreaking intervention in genocide scholarship regarding the role that socio-economic structures play in creating conditions in the "intellectual super-structure" such that genocide "makes sense" as a political solution, it is surprising that he can only imagine the genocidal potential of a future eco-catastrophic event with reference to a "Hobbesian state of nature" outside all political structures.[91] In Levene's Hobbesian prognosis of the aftermath of environmental and socio-political catastrophe, climate refugees are turned away at the borders of still-habitable nation states and forced into "post-genocidal" violence to compete for a 'real' scarcity of resources outside of a commonwealth where there is no legal or moral structure to

90 Levene, "From Past to Future," 657
91 Levene, "From Past to Future," 655-656

hold people accountable. However, as Levene points out, many nations have *already* explicitly stated that they are unwilling to take in climate refugees, and are rather "shoring up" their own security and access to scarce resources.[92] I suppose in the midst of totalizing global collapse wherein there are virtually no institutions or organizations to either blame for or with whom to file a complaint regarding genocide such charges would be meaningless. However, given that the aim of Levene's essay is to hypothesize "from our genocidal past" to our prospects for genocide in the future in a rapidly accelerating climate crisis that forebodes more widespread devastation and displacement, one would assume that at some point between the genocidal pre-conditions and the post-genocidal Hobbesian state of nature that there might be some room to charge nation states with complicity in genocidal violence against those racial, ethnic, national groups who are targeted as proletariat fodder for industrial capitalist production in order to 1. suffer a disproportionate amount of its environmental harms while 2. excluded from the fruits of their labour. Further, if we take seriously Levene's own contention that capitalism's dependence on the exploitation of people and environmental resources tends to create the conditions for genocide to "make sense" as policy, we can already identify the structure of particular socio-economic paradigms responsible for ecological disasters that inflict genocidal harms against Black and Indigenous communities as such.

Finally, while Levene doesn't explicitly invoke the term genocide to describe the plight of rich Western nations who find themselves without access to often imported essential resources, he implies that in such a circumstance, those segments of the population considered "least saveable or superfluous" might become victims of

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[92] Levene, "From Past to Future," 654

violence "which in normal times would be deemed not only unthinkable but unforgivable."[93] Of course this wouldn't be new, nor do we need to imagine a totalizing collapse of the entire global socio-political system to imagine what it might be like for rich nations to "practice triage" against the "superfluous" groups of citizens in its own territory. The Canadian government has admitted to an active perpetuation of genocide against its Indigenous population as such. Genocide scholar Lissa Skitolsky has argued that both American slavery as well as contemporary anti-Black violence in the United States constitutes genocidal violence in the service of white supremacy.[94] Most relevant to this particular project and Levene's exploration of climate change, Ingrid R.G. Waldron has noted that environmental racism—which refers to the disproportionate numbers of facilities that emit toxic substances in primarily Indigenous and Black communities—in many cases constitutes genocidal violence.[95] Environmental racism leaves Black and Indigenous communities vulnerable not only to disproportionate ecological burdens, but to devastating impacts on physical, mental and cultural health.

How can Levene recognize the history of genocide in the twentieth century as a *political* project that was conceived and "made sense" at "the intersection of capitalism, industrialism, and the nation-state," and yet fail to see the state-sanctioned murder of Congolese residents and the systemic rape of Congolese women and children as genocidal violence emerging from this same intersection in the global capitalist economy that has always served the terms of western nation states organized

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[93] Levene, "From Past to Future," 657
[94] See: Lissa Skitolsky, "The "Criminal and the Crime of Genocide," in *Logics of Genocide: The Structures of Violence and the Contemporary World,* edited by Anne O'Byrne and Martin Schuster, New York: Rutledge, 2020; Skitolsky, Lissa. "American Slavery, the New Jim Crowe, and Genocide," *Forthcoming*
[95] Waldron, *There's Something in the Water,* 10;58

to sustain the white supremacy over capital and power at the expense of developing nations and Black and Indigenous groups?[96] Why is it that there is no moment of genocide *as such* that Levene can gesture to in his imagining of total ecological and nation-state collapse, but only as a potential in barely-hanging-on rich countries who are forced—due to no fault of their own—to sacrifice certain nations and groups as "superfluous?" Some of the reasons for Levene's apparent inability to 'see' such cases of genocidal violence—as I have illustrated—relate to the disciplinary debates surrounding the definition of genocide as such as the state-driven crime of 'people-destruction.' Levene's definition of genocide departs from both the legal definition provided by the United Nations Convention as well as the more expansive definitions provided by other scholars who have followed Claudia Card and sought to define genocide in terms of the distinct harm that it inflicts on victims rather than in terms of the perpetrator's intent, or the amount of people "physically eliminated".[97] However, analytic differences between definitions of genocide alone cannot account for the disappearance of systemic violence against racialized and gendered groups from the historical genealogy and political assessment of genocidal practices in the past and present. Nor can such definitional quandaries fully account for why it is so difficult for scholars to perceive human catastrophe that is inextricably linked to ecological disaster, degradation and noxious industry as *genocidal* violence that afflicts entire communities. In the next section I argue that we must understand this disappearance and cognitive difficulty in terms of how we perceive and talk about the climate crisis

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[96] Mark Levene, "The Century of Genocide?" 309

[97] For example, see Claudia Card, "Genocide and Social Death," *Hypatia,* 18, no. 1 (2003), 63-79, http://www.jstor.com/stable/3811037; Alfred Frankowski and Lissa Skitolsky, "Lang's Defense and the Morbid Sensibility of Genocide Studies," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 20, no. 3, (2018) 423-428, DOI: 10.1080/14623528.2018.1445420; While not a genocide scholar per say, Ingrid R. G. Waldron has argued that environmental racism constitutes genocidal violence in her *There's Something in the Water*, centering the impacts of racial capitalism, white supremacy and racial color-blindness as resulting in the destruction of Indigenous and Black communities.

through our "pre-ecocatastrophe" and post-racial sensibilities; or through the cooperation of two temporal dislocations that prevent our ability to see or care about the genocidal harms that we can reasonably foresee will be inflicted on Black and Indigenous communities as a result of everyday industrial practices essential to the capitalist mode of production.

4.2 Our Pre-Ecocatastrophe Sense of Urgency

In the previous chapter, I described our sensibility of "pre-ecocatastrophe" as a feature of dominant environmentalist discourse that focuses on individual consumption-based solutions to climate change as the "one best way" to arrest ecological catastrophe. While many environmentalists recognize that climate change is well under way, the discursive preoccupation with enforcing sustainable consumption habits that reinforce rather than challenge larger socio-political drivers of climate change rhetorically presupposes the capacity for such piecemeal strategies to save humanity before it is *really* too late. A key feature of this message framing is the emphasis on the importance of bringing your reusable bag, coffee cup, and so on, *right now* so that we can ensure a good life for future generations consisting of our children and grandchildren. The smiling faces of children upon a poster celebrating Sobeys plastic bag ban comes to mind as a particularly good example of our sensibility of pre-ecocatastrophe. The message is that the children are happy because since you 'did your part' by bringing a reusable bag, we have become all the closer to arresting the "real" environmental catastrophe before it arrives and destroys their promising futures. While concern for one's offspring and grandchildren is of course a good thing and ostensibly a good way to motivate concern for climate change, this futurization of the climate crisis yields reformist strategies that, as I have shown, are

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impotent at best and complicit at worst when taken up in our current *episteme*.

Further, this sensibility diverts attention away from ecological disaster that is

occurring in the present, disproportionately devastating the health and social vitality

of Black and Indigenous communities. Indeed, it is precisely those communities who

have already suffered from the industrial destruction and toxic poisoning of their land

who are both excluded from and disregarded by the pursuit of such piecemeal

solutions to climate change to help those who *still* have access to clean water and

plenty of food. For example, the shaming of consumers who still purchase bottled

water falls disproportionately on those—usually Black and Indigenous—communities

who do not have access to clean drinking water. Whereas reducing one's plastic

consumption via a reusable water bottle is framed as a viable way to arrest climate

change before it really arrives (amongst those of us with access to drinkable water), it

also serves to defer the fact that this is *not* a viable option but instead already *too late*

for people in those communities that have already suffered the eco-catastrophe of

toxic waste and the loss of drinkable water.

We can see this sensibility of pre-ecocatastrophe operative in Levene's future

scenario analysis of the potential for climate change to induce genocidal violence.

While Levene is not denying that climate change is already happening and resulting in

devastating impacts on specific, racialized and gendered groups, his excessive

futurization of climate change thrusts human kind into a post-apocalyptic scenario

wherein genocide cannot be identified a*s such* due to the total collapse of any socio-

political order. This is not to discount the value of future scenario analyses or

projections about the impacts of climate change. Such analysis is important for

exploring options for mitigation of ecological disaster and for identifying particularly

vulnerable nations and groups. However Levene's preoccupation with an 'event' of "*omnicide*" rather than genocidal violence already exacerbated by adverse environmental conditions—which mirrors his contention that genocide as such must include a relatively swift event of mass death—amounts to a complete deferral of any discussion regarding how environmental catastrophe and degradation is *already* central to genocidal violence in the present, or how such scenarios might play out beyond genocidal "pre-conditions" but before a "post-genocidal" Hobbesian state of nature. Further, Levene's inability to see cases of arguably genocidal violence exacerbated by climate change in the present impairs the ability of his analysis to provide meaningful insight as to how genocidal violence exacerbated by ecological disaster—in the present *and* the future—might be arrested.

It is not as though there is a lack of examples of arguably genocidal violence exacerbated by climate change and environmental exploitation. As I mentioned in the previous section, food and water insecurity in the DRC already poses a heightened threat of rape and murder to women responsible for travelling to procure these resources, and the rape of these women is crucial to maintaining instability in the area and so illegal access to valuable mineral resources whose extraction has environmental costs alongside the human devastation.[98] Martin Crook and Damien Short point out that crude oil extraction taking place at the environmentally destructive and noxious tar sands in Alberta, Canada has resulted in ecological destruction not only impacting traditional lands of Indigenous populations, but has also been devastating for their cultural and physical health. "Indeed, environmental pollution from the tar sands has been linked to high levels of deadly diseases such as

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[98] Meger, "Rape of the Congo," 130-131; Jackson, *The Greatest Silence*

leukaemia, lymphoma and colon cancer in indigenous communities."[99] Following

Card's assertion that genocide—violence against a group as such—should be

understood with reference to the distinct harm of social death that it inflicts on its

victims, or the loss of social vitality and intergenerational bonds, Crook and Short

contend that the Mikisew Cree First Nation members suffered genocidal harms in Fort

Chipewyan Alberta, though nothing new for Indigenous communities. In response to

those who might argue against their conclusion given the lack of a clear intent to

destroy the social vitality of the Mikisew Cree First Nation, Crook and Short argue

that while we cannot identify an individual's intent to infect the community with

deadly diseases, there is certainly intent to destroy sacred lands and displace those

living upon it.[100] We can draw on Card's amendment of the "intent clause" of the

genocide convention to further stipulate that given the toxicity of the extraction

process, the destruction of people of the Mikisew Cree First Nation is genocidal

because we could have reasonably foreseen that it would negatively affect their

cultural and physical health. In her work Card has argued that since we can identify

genocidal violence in terms of the harms that it inflicts on victims rather than simply

in terms of a perpetrator's stated intent, we can amend the UN Convention to

stipulate that genocide is a crime when committed with the intent <u>or</u> with the

reasonably foreseeable consequence of destroying a group, as such. She argues: "If

the destruction of a group is a clearly foreseeable consequence of measures taken in

order to disable and expel members of that group, then it will not quite do to say that

destruction of the group was unintended even if destruction was not an ultimate

[99] Martin Crook and Damian Short, "Marx, Lemkin and the Genocide-Ecocide Nexus," *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 18, no. 3 (2014) 298-319 (310), https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2014.914703

[100] Crook and Short, "Genocide-Ecocide Nexus," 311-312

aim."[101]

Just as Card's formulation can help us make sense of the use of mass rape (like that executed in the DRC) as a form of genocide where we can reasonably foresee that this violence will destroy the lives of women and the social vitality of their communities, Crook and Short argue that the construction and operation of toxic extraction industry on Indigenous lands for the sake of profit required the sacrifice not only of Indigenous lands, but of their culture and their lives, all of which was foreseeable to some extent.

While I agree with Crook and Short that the case of the Mikisew Cree First Nation amounts to genocidal violence due to the foreseeable consequences of the destruction of people and lands, culture and health, their analysis of what other scholars term 'environmental racism' stops at the impact on *Indigenous* communities, thus obscuring the genocidal consequences that our global capitalist economy has on other non-white groups. In this sense it is significant that Crook and Short describe the genocidal violence experienced by the Mikisew Cree First Nation as "far from a recent development for many Indigenous peoples around the world," but futurize the impact that climate change and ecological destruction *will* have on "many non-Indigenous minorities and discrete cultural groups" who are "often the most vulnerable within vulnerable states."[102] Of course, there exist non-Indigenous "discrete cultural groups" in comparatively non-vulnerable nations such as Canada and the United States who are subject to the type of genocidal violence described by Crook and Short in the *present*. In the case of my home province of Nova Scotia, Canada, it is not only Indigenous Mi'kmaw communities that are disproportionately

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[101] Card, "The Paradox of Genocidal Rape," 180
[102] Crook and Short, "*Genocide-Ecocide Nexus,"* 310

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impacted by environmentally noxious industry, but also African Nova Scotian

communities such as those in North Preston, East Lake, Lincolnville, Shelburne and

Truro. In the United States, the water crisis in Flint, Michigan—where in 2014 local

officials pursued cost-cutting measures that led to tainted drinking water in largely

Black communities with dangerous levels of lead—is another example of

environmental racism from which the residents still suffer.[103] Further, the extensive

body of work by Robert J. Bullard shows that Flint is far from an isolated incident in

the history of the United States.[104] While environmental racism is undeniably an issue

in Indigenous communities—as argued by Crook and Short—their lack of concern

about the genocidal harms of environmental racism against Black communities is

indicative of the post-racial sensibility that leads us to defer awareness of the lethal,

systemic, environmental harms inflicted on Black people as such as a problem in the

distant past, overcome in the liberal order of our democratic present.

4.3 "We're All In This Together:" Our Post-Racial Sense of our Vulnerability

What Crook and Short describe as happening to the Mikisew Cree First Nation in

Alberta has been described by authors such as Bullard and Waldron as environmental

racism: "environmental policies, practices or directives that disproportionately

disadvantage individuals, groups or communities (intentionally or unintentionally)

based on race or colour."[105] Alfred Frankowski has described this tendency to see

violence against non-white groups as something other than racialized violence in

terms of our "post-racial sensibility" wherein anti-Black violence in the present is

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[103] For background, see: Paul Mohai, "Environmental Justice and the Flint Water Crisis," *Michigan Sociological Review,* 32 (2018) 1-41, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26528594

[104] For example: Robert J. Bullard, "Solid Waste Sites and the Black Houston Community," *Sociological Inquiry,* 53, no. 3 (1983) 273-288; *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality,* Boulder, CO: Westview Press (1990); "Confronting Environmental Racism in the 21st Century," *Global Dialogue: The Dialogue of Civilization,* 4 (2002) 34-48

[105] Quoted in Waldron, 12

seen as an occasional, tragic accident and/or caused by racist individuals. Our post-racial sensibility is framed by the dominant narrative of American history that depicts the racial caste system as a problem of the American past overcome with the abolition of chattel slavery, which supports our ability to see and feel anti-Black violence in the American present as an exception to the norm of a 'truly' democratic society. In this way, our post-racial sensibility also supports the neoliberal approach to redressing the persistent problem of state-sanctioned anti-Black violence through piecemeal legal reforms. Post-racial sensibility also encompasses what Waldron describes as an inability amongst white people to perceive racism as anything other than "individual hostile acts" such that, for example, the harms inflicted on Black people through structural and institutional avenues that protect and benefit white people are not seen as racist or as inflicted on Black people *as such,* but instead tend to be "naturalized" as simply 'the way things are,' subsumed into issues of class or ignored.[106] One important way in which systemic, anti-Black violence has always been naturalized in the US and rationalized as an inevitable part of the Justice system is through the criminalization of Black people in the media and dominant discourse which has conditioned white Americans to see Black people as a potential threat to white wellbeing and public safety; this default, perceptual criminalization of Black people is operative every time a white police officer kills an unarmed Black citizen because he felt 'threatened,' and every time the state agrees with his assessment and fails to file charges. We can also detect the operation of post-racial sensibility in Mark Levene's assessment of the genocidal dangers of climate change. For his assertion that an environmental apocalypse in "rich tier 1" nations will result in actions (exercised against 'superfluous' segments of the population) that "in normal times would be

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[106] Waldron, *There's Something in the Water,* 11

deemed not only unthinkable but unforgivable" entirely obscures the fact that capitalist exploitation has always been facilitated and organized in accord with the global racial caste system such that we can reasonably foresee that the health and wellbeing of certain racialized communities will always be sacrificed for the sake of the white supremacist economy. Put differently, it appears as though in our present "normal times," Black and Indigenous communities are already subject to "unthinkable" and "unforgiveable" systemic violence.

The notion of a "post-racial" sensibility of the present has been taken up by scholars in multiple fields to try to account for a particular feature of white sensibility that became more prominent in the immediate aftermath of the election of Barack Obama to the US presidency, and it does not simply refer to our tendency to defer the reality of systemic anti-Black violence.[107] While Indigenous genocide is a concept that has gained traction among genocide scholars in the past decade, Waldron points out that in Nova Scotia Canada—where she conducted research for her book—there is huge resistance to talking about the placement of environmentally noxious industry in Black and Indigenous communities as an issue of race at all. Instead, it is often assumed that such industry is placed in poor communities, effectively making the issue one of class rather than race. While Waldron emphasises the importance of considering how issues of class, race, gender and ability might intersect and leave individuals and communities particularly vulnerable to environmental devastation, she argues that centering issues of race is crucial in the pursuit of environmental

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[107] For example, in his *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization* Alfred Frankowski frames his discussion of post-racial sensibility "as that point at which society cannot turn its back on how anti-black racism shapes its present" by juxtaposing the election of Barack Obama as a symbol that we were "now in a *post-racial* society" and the murder of Trayvon Martin which appeared in "this apparently post racial moment" and "shed light on the ways that our public discourse had not changed." (xi)

justice.[108] She illustrates this point with reference to the provincial placement of environmentally noxious industry and the popular view that these decisions are not influenced by racism since such facilities are sometimes placed in poor white communities, by pointing out that in Nova Scotia, such communities are often much more thoroughly consulted and compensated for environmental and physical harms suffered from industry than are African Nova Scotian and Indigenous communities. For example, while residents of the low-income, primarily white community of Lower Sackville as well as the African Nova Scotian community of Lincolnville both had first-generation landfills placed in close proximity to their communities, the provincial management of toxic leakage or 'leachate' was very different.[109] When it became clear that toxins that did not belong in a first generation landfill were being dumped into the Lincolnville site and leaching out, the dump was closed and buried, after which a second-generation landfill was built in the community. When similar concerns regarding leachate were raised in Lower Sackville, the dump was retroactively lined to prevent leachate. Further, in spite of the landfill in Lower Sackville being located further from the community, residents received monetary compensation for the environmental harm that the dumping site caused, and some residents were even bought out of their homes: "the community was paid $5 million under the *Community of Sackville Landfill Compensation Act"* which has been "ratified to protect the health and welfare of residents and prevent the placement of the landfill in the community in the future."[110] The Lower Sackville landfill did indeed close in 1996 and was not rebuilt in the community, and a multi-million dollar leachate collection system has been installed to clean up groundwater in the

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[108] Waldron, *There's Something in the Water,* 3-5;15
[109] Waldron, *There's Something in the Water,* 85-86
[110] Waldron, *There's Something in the Water,* 85-86

community.[111] Lincolnville residents continue to await the replacement of a faulty liner in the landfill poisoning their community, and have not received any compensation for harms suffered.[112] Here it is clear that our capitalist practices of eco-exploitation are organized in accord with a racial caste system that provides the biopolitical principle by which to measure which types of racialized life can be sacrificed for the accumulation of white capital.

Similarly, in Shelburne—which was settled by the Loyalists in the 1700's and whose South End remains a prominent African Nova Scotian community today—residents believe that their alarming rates of cancer are caused by a poorly regulated dump in the community bounds that closed in 2016 (and had been operative since the late 1940's).[113] In spite of the fact that the community is the only district without access to the town drinking water, Shelburne government officials refused to respond to the efforts of African Nova Scotian residents to advocate for clean water by addressing and fixing the environmental contamination in their community. Instead, activist Louise Delisle notes that government officials "find it not feasible to put in pipes so that we can have clean water."[114] Indeed, while installing a well in the community to provide residents with clean drinking water would cost about ten thousand dollars, the community of Shelburne had budgeted thirty-five thousand dollars for their annual founders memorial celebration.[115] The only way we can understand the apparent discrepancy in priorities is to understand that in our capitalist mode of production, racism is not a problem for the structure of law enforcement but instead the law is

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[111] Waldron, *There's Something in the Water,* 86
[112] Ibid
[113] Waldron, *There's Something in the Water,* 125-126
[114] Quoted in: *There's Something in the Water,* directed by Ellen Paige and Ian Daniel, *There's Something in the Water,* (Canada; 2 Weeks Notice Productions, 2019)
[115] ibid

enforced in a way to privilege the health and material well-being of white people through the devaluation and exploitation of Black and Indigenous communities *as such*. When Delisle spoke about the issues of environmental racism in her community at a Halifax event in 2017, local councillor Rick Davis lashed out at her in a Facebook post that he later deleted: "I think it's time to stop trying to find fault, and push blame, I think it's time to stop playing the racism card. It's old."[116] The sentiment that Louise is "playing the racism card" in her advocacy for her community's right to clean drinking water is a clear expression of post-racial sensibility, as Davis cannot see or think about the ecological violence inflicted on this community as a product of systemic racism that was overcome in the Canadian past, but instead sees a tragic accident or policy oversight despite the fact that this 'accidental policy' has served — for decades—to benefit white communities in Shelburne at the expense of Black lives. While it is not possible to locate the intent of our white supremacist system of capitalist production in the intent of any particular judge or government official who helps to administer this system, we can reasonably foresee that the way in which we regulate the exploitation of natural resources and enforce environmental protections will undermine the social vitality of Black and Indigenous communities as such as well as poison and kill residents in these communities. The only way it is possible to evade this obvious conclusion is if we cannot see the genocidal harms of environmental devastation in the present because we see systemic racism as a problem of the past and ecological catastrophe as a problem in the future.

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[116] Quoted in: Zak Markan, "Stop playing the racism card, Shelburne councillor tells Black resident," *CBC News,* 26 April, 2017 https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/shelburne-councillor-environmental-racism-african-nova-scotian-1.4086369

4.4 The Cooperation of Temporal Dislocations Produced by Post-Racial and Pre-Ecocatastrophe Sensibilities

As I have shown, a post-racial sensibility of the political present presupposes that systemic racism was a problem of the distant past, while our sensibility of being "pre-ecocatastrophe" at this stage of the climate crisis presupposes that we have not yet suffered from environmental devastation, global warming and the scarcity of natural resources from our industrial practices of capitalist production. However the cooperation of these two temporal dislocations does not simply lead white people to defer or deny the reality of environmental racism but instead to adopt habits and values that play a role in the economy of its repetition and normalization. For if racism was overcome in the past, and we are still waiting for the *real* impacts of climate change to rear their apocalyptic head, we literally cannot make sense of environmental racism or think to oppose—rather than reform though piecemeal individual efforts—our capitalist economy organized to sustain white supremacy through the exploitation and destruction of Black and Indigenous communities.

The cooperation of these two temporal dislocations lays bare the inadequacy of Levene's analysis of climate change as a "possible pre-condition" of genocidal violence in the future. For his inability to see or feel the genocidal harms of environmental racism and environmental devastation in the present causes him to make assessments about a "possible future" in which "superfluous" communities *might* be subject to genocidal violence—even though this is precisely the socio-political position that is already a reality for many Black and Indigenous communities in "rich tier 1" nations. While Crook and Short are right to gesture towards environmental racism as a leading cause of genocidal violence inflicted against

Indigenous peoples, their own inability to see this as an issue *already* plaguing Black communities and other "discrete minorities" in the present also suggests the operation of a post-racial and pre-ecocatastrophic sensibility. Further, the cooperation of these two temporal dislocations sheds light on the inadequacy of environmentalist projects that take the development of a sustainable consumption ethic—and the shaming of delinquent consumerism—to be crucial to staving off *future* environmental catastrophe. This goal only makes sense to white scholars and activists who cannot see or feel the moral horror of the genocidal harms inflicted through the administrative practices that organize our capitalist mode of production to exploit the environment and human labour for the accumulation of white capital. For the piecemeal individualist efforts to arrest our "future" climate crisis reinforces and lends legitimacy to those institutions, policies and socio-political systems that create the conditions for eco-catastrophe and humanitarian disaster. As the present crisis of environmental racism described by Waldron lays bare, such reformist efforts result in our continued complicity in a sacrificial politics that legitimizes the genocide of Black and Indigenous communities for the protection of white lives until the "real" crisis arrives.

In order to disrupt the cooperation of these two sensibilities, white environmentalists must take seriously Waldron's claim that the experiences of Black and Indigenous communities must be centered in the environmental movement.[117] As Waldron points out, while issues of conservation and sustainable development are important to consider, the constant deferral of the crisis of environmental racism and its subsumption into the broader issue of environmental justice renders environmentalists

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[117] Waldron, *There's Something in the Water,* 16

who fail to center issues of racism in their activism complicit in "state-sanctioned racial and gendered violence within various institutions [that have] manifested both historically and in the present day to inform environmental policymaking and practices."[118] While both Levene's Marxist intervention in genocide scholarship and the efforts of some environmentalists to center the danger of ecological catastrophe for 'future generations' is valuable for gesturing towards a "nexus" between capitalist resource exploitation, climate change and genocidal violence, the post-racial and pre-ecocatastrophic sensibilities that are operative in such analyses and activism serve to obscure the decisions on the relative value of different "types of" life that are being made *in the present* in order to sustain relations of power that privilege the health and material well-being of white people. While it is true that climate change will have much wider impacts in the future, Waldron's analysis of environmental racism as genocidal violence lays bare how the systemic and ruthless destruction of life *as such* for the sake of capitalist modes of production and accumulation requires a sacrificial politics based on the relative value of different *types of non-white life* in order to sustain and rationalize the economy of total domination.

In my next and final chapter I draw on the work of the African American philosopher Alfred Frankowski on the political economy of white sensibility in order to provide a more thorough explanation of how white sensibility—or the way we 'read' and feel what we see *as white people*—plays a central role in why the dominant models for environmentalist ethics and activism always view *systemic* oppression as what was already overcome in the past or that which is "yet to come." Then I take up Frankowski's suggestion that in order to create strategies of resistance that affect our

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[118] Waldron, 16

sensibility of the present, we should cultivate a political sense of mourning that can disrupt the totalizing hold of post-racial sensibility, in relation to the potential for a sense of mourning to also disrupt our "pre-ecocatastrophic" sensibility of our environmental present. In this effort I also draw on the potential of other forms of collective activism mentioned by Waldron that could help redirect our focus away from blaming delinquent consumers for our impending doom and toward collective opposition toward our mode of economic production based on our moral horror of the sacrificial politics on which it depends—even if we cannot 'see' or 'understand' the centrality of systemic racism to our global capitalist economy.

CHAPTER 5   CONCLUSION

In light of my analysis of the epistemic and moral failure of dominant environmentalist discourse to address and oppose the socio-political causes of and genocidal harms inflicted by our environmental practices, it is not surprising that so many students in academic programs of environmental studies experience an emotional dialectic similar to Preston's students, or a cycle of despair, shame and resignation towards the status quo and the impotence of their efforts to halt the apparatus of ecological devastation. In my time working as a teaching assistant in the College of Sustainability, I witnessed this turmoil often amongst my students. Whether their emotional unrest came from frustration with others who they perceived as not sufficiently "doing their part" for the planet, shame for their own sustainability slip-ups, or resignation and despair in the face of a seemingly unmovable socially and environmentally destructive socio-economic paradigm, I often found myself obliged to take time out of tutorial sessions to attend to students emotional needs. As such, I can sympathize with Preston's motivation cast his former students hard-fought attempts to adhere to a piecemeal sustainable consumption ethic in their less "greenie-friendly" workplaces as forms of resistance: for when faced with students feeling shame, despair and resignation about the insufficiency of their efforts, of course as an educator one wants to assure them that they are "doing their best." And in spite of Preston's critique of the impotence of individual consumption based approaches to climate change, when he reconnected with his students who are now themselves environmentalist educators facing barriers to maintaining their "environmental ethic," he too felt compelled to commend their small victories as resistant forms of "working from within" to change the system. I've already articulated what I find unconvincing about Preston's reformist turn; however his response does speak to a need to attend to

the emotional needs and moral quandaries of students like Preston's and like my own who, when faced with the "wicked problem" of climate change, seem to be at a loss.

Upon recognizing that my tutorial sections were turning into more of a gathering for students to air their various grievances than a space to discuss class content and assignments, I decided to start an extra-tutorial support group for students experiencing what has been referred to in academic discourse as "ecological grief." I knew little about literature surrounding eco-grief, and my motivation for volunteering my time came from 1. the need that I saw amongst my own students for a space that was not a classroom to talk about their feelings, and 2. my own pragmatic concerns about getting through lesson plans more smoothly. The success of the group was limited in the amount of students that have attended (so far) but quite significant in terms of those few who consistently attended and looked forward to the meetings each week. Our meetings were casual, unstructured, and oscillated between sharing our frustrations and despair, discussing current events, and chatting about plans for the fall reading week. Having no experience facilitating a support group, I had little expectation as to what would be achieved beyond simply holding a space for sad sustainability students. What I learned—both through facilitating the "eco-grief" group and conducting research for my project this summer—is that collective "grieving" or mourning is a powerful tool for building community, and attends to our sensibility of the climate crisis in a way that "pragmatic" reformist efforts of sustainable consumption cannot.

Drawing on work by Alfred Frankowski and Claudia Card, I suggest that cultivating a "political sense of mourning" towards ecosystems and their diverse parts harmed due

to anthropogenic environmental disaster might help us to better think-through, see, and feel the inadequacy of our contemporary responses to climate change that serve to sustain devastating environmental policies and a sacrificial politics. Against scholars who have framed grief and despair in the face of climate change as irrational, antithetical to hope, or as a condition to be remedied in order to cultivate more positive, hopeful responses to climate change, I argue that a specifically political sense of mourning is fundamental not only to disrupting our post-racial and pre-ecocatastrophe sensibilities, but also critical to building stronger movements of resistance that are not reformist but paradigm-shifting.[119]

5.1 Towards a "Political Sense of Mourning"

In his *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Toward a Political Sense of Mourning* Alfred Frankowski explores the memorialization of anti-Black violence in the United States such as slavery, lynching and Jim Crow policies, as well as the memorialization of civil rights era heroes such as Martin Luther King, Jr. to explain how acts of remembering anti-Black violence and those who fought against it also act as a form of forgetting that obfuscates the violence suffered by Black communities in the present.[120] For the representation of both the horror of anti-Black violence in the past and the success of the civil rights movement are seen and felt by white people who have the privilege to un-ironically claim that we are living in a "post-racial" era as a sign of how far we have come. Memory as a form of forgetting in this way obfuscates the character of our contemporary socio-political systems which are

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[119] For example, see Catriona McKinnon, "Climate Change: Against Despair," *Ethics & the Environment* 19, no. 1, (Spring 2014) 31-49; Ashlee Cusolo et. al "Ecological Grief and Anxiety: the Start of a Healthy Response to Climate Change?" *The Lancet. Planetary health,* 4, no. 7 (2020) pp. 261-263
[120] Alfred Frankowski, *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Toward a Political Sense of Mourning*

grounded in and perpetuate a racist distribution of power and capital, and reinforce a *post-racial* sensibility such that anti-Black violence in the present is seen and felt as already overcome and as a tragic accident in an otherwise "just and equal" world.

Frankowski argues for the cultivation of a political sense of mourning as "a practice of responding" to our post-racial sensibility of anti-Black violence that:

> "is not an outcome, a development, or an attunement, but a position one can take up relative to the shifting frameworks of violence we live out. It is one that is not for the sake of any outcome, but intervenes in our productive activities to take up lines of questioning anew."[121]

While such a political sense of mourning is "not for the sake of any outcome" Frankowski here highlights the importance of a political sense of mourning for acting upon the *sensibility* as opposed to pragmatic efforts of reform: for such reformist efforts presuppose the efficacy of those institutions that continue to perpetuate anti-Black violence in the present, and also of our ability to enact such reforms without properly coming to terms with our post-racial sensibility of the present. In "taking up lines of questioning anew" in relation to our post-racial sensibility of the present, Frankowski argues that the cultivation of a political sense of mourning, while ostensibly not teleological or pragmatic "does more than make room for a reflective stance in which we rethink our lives. It requires that our passivity be turned into an activity, and our philosophical questioning leads to a reformulation of our political agency."[122] For Frankowski the cultivation of a political sense of mourning does not amount to reconciling ones-self to loss, or a private act of grief. Rather, the political sense of mourning described by Frankowski is communal, and a position taken up that

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[121] Frankowski, *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization,* 98
[122] Frankowski, *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization,* 98

fundamentally disrupts our post-racial sensibility such that the strangeness of the

memorialization of past anti-Black violence in the context of present anti-Black

violence that is pervasive yet silenced as already overcome is better seen and felt,

even if not understood by white people.

While Frankowski does not specifically refer to environmental racism in the United

States as a form of anti-Black violence suffered in the present, the strangeness of

environmental racism in our cultural moment wherein racism is seen and felt by many

white people as an issue overcome in the past is well articulated by his discussion of

memorialization as a form of forgetting. For if racism is no longer an issue (since the

residential schools have closed, since slavery has been abolished) and the prevalence

of toxic industry in primarily Black and Indigenous communities is mere coincidence,

a tragic accident or actually a issue of class—which Waldron describes as a very

common stance taken by white Canadians in her book—then the poisoning of Black

and Indigenous communities *as such* is unintelligible, even as those impacted

communities are subject to such ecological violence every day. In remembering racist

practices that have been overcome in the past, we forget the racist violence still

suffered by these communities. As I argued in the previous chapter, our post-racial

sensibility of environmental racism is inseparable from our pre-ecocatastrophe

sensibility of the climate crisis, wherein climate change is seen and felt as a threat

always on the horizon but not yet arrived. For if the environmental harms suffered by

the communities of Lincolnville, Flint, Shelburne, Sipekne'katik First Nation, Pictou

Landing First Nation, and so on are *not* reasonably foreseeable consequences of

ecologically devastating capitalist modes of production, then they are "merely"

unfortunate ecological accidents that are a warning of but not an *actual* environmental

crisis. As such, Frankowski's formulation of memorialization-as-forgetting is helpful

for thinking through our pre-ecocatastrophe sensibility too: our *futurization* of the

climate crisis also acts as a form of forgetting about those disproportionately Black

and Indigenous communities subject to ecological disaster in the present.

Understanding the co-operation of these two temporal dislocations which serve to

render environmental racism in the present unintelligible in terms of Frankowski's

work raises the following question: towards what are we to take up a political sense of

mourning such that our pre-ecocatastrophe and post-racial sensibilities are disrupted?

The inseparability of these sensibilities in the context of environmental racism

suggests that neither the cultivation of a sense of mourning towards those human

communities harmed by ecological disaster in the present, nor of those environmental

bodies harmed by climate change in isolation will be sufficient. As such, I will

suggest that Claudia Card's work regarding the capacity for ecosystems to suffer harm

(and so their worthiness of moral respect) will be helpful for thinking through what it

means to take up a political sense of mourning towards ecosystems *as such* that

include both humans and non-human living things whose respective values are not

exhausted by their respective "use-value" to one another.

5.2 Mourning Ecosystems As Such

In her chapter *to whom (or what) can evils be done?* Claudia Card juxtaposes our

moral horror at the crime of genocide as the infliction of social death upon a

community against the Western philosophical tradition of indifference to harms done

to non-sentient environmental life and ecosystems in an effort to think-through our

apparent moral callousness towards ecosystems. Card cannot understand our apparent

inability to feel that living things other than humans can be harmed in "inexcusable" ways, suggesting that our lack of concern for other living things who—while incapable of *feeling* harm are capable of being degraded and rendered such that they cannot flourish or do well—is morally obscene. While Card does not take-up a bio-centric stance such that ecosystems and their living, non-sentient parts would have "rights" that could potentially "trump" basic human rights to a decent life, she does suggest that a moral harm is done onto ecosystems when we destroy them as a "mere means" to our own superficial ends.

While ostensibly an exploration of what it might mean to do an intolerable harm and so an "evil" onto ecosystems as such, and why Western philosophical traditions— unlike many North American Indigenous traditions—seem not to feel any moral respect for non-sentient ecological life, it is significant that Card explores the moral value of ecosystems in the same terms that she explains the moral harm of genocide. As I have already shown, Mark Levene's inability to see how "ecocide" causes genocide in the present is indicative of our inability to see or feel climate change as a present concern or racism as a presently lived experience for non-white groups perpetuated through socio-political structures and institutions. Card's contention that ecosystems are deserving of some moral respect and can be subject to harm—taken together with Frankowski's suggestion that in order to disrupt our post-racial sensibility we must take up a political sense of mourning in relation to anti-Black violence and post-racial discourse—suggests that the cultivation of a political sense of mourning towards ecosystems *as such* may allow us to better see and feel the moral horror of our sacrificial politics which depends upon the sacrifice of communities who are already disproportionately vulnerable *as well as* other non sentient beings that

comprise an ecosystem capable of "doing well or flourishing." While this may be interpreted to suggest that we must mourn the harm done to ecological life *first* in order to see environmental racism in the present, I do not endorse such an interpretation, nor is such an ordering of that which is 'worthy' of being mourned necessary. Rather, the cultivation of a political sense of mourning towards ecosystems as such should be understood as a stance of mourning taken up towards *both and at once* those human and non-sentient forms of life lost or subject to irreparable harm as a result of our devastating capitalist modes of production. Expanding our sense of what is "worth" mourning or what constitutes a moral harm thus does not amount to diminishing the genocidal violence done onto disproportionately Black and Indigenous communities, but rather has the potential to render intelligible environmental racism which at present is rendered invisible by the co-operation of our post-racial and pre-ecocatastrophe sensibilities, such that we can better see and feel the moral horror of our sacrificial politics, and the complicity of dominant "pragmatic" approaches to climate change which serve to perpetuate rather than arrest the crisis.

The cultivation of a political sense of mourning towards ecosystems as such will further serve to support what Waldron argues must be an environmental movement that centers issues of racial justice. While discussions of environmental racism have recently become more prominent in environmental education and activism—and this is a great thing—creating intentional space for the cultivation of a political sense of mourning in our activism and education will help to guard against 1. Waldron's concern that issues of racial justice tend to be subsumed into broader issues of environmental justice in white activism, and 2. ensure that our protests and learning

spaces do not themselves become what Frankowski refers to as a "mere representation" of our agency rather than an actual practice which can disrupt the discursive limits of our pre-ecocatastrophe and post racial sensibility. Activism such as environmentalist protests are important for enacting social change and cultivating a sense of community, however such movements will be strengthened by the cultivation of a political sense of mourning, such that we are not merely representing our disdain for racism or ecological destruction, but doing so from a place of better seeing and feeling the impotence of contemporary approaches, and the moral horror of our sacrificial politics which enacts ecocide that is *already* genocidal violence.

5.3 Against Hope?

As I articulated at the outset of this project, my analysis is not presented as a cynical critique of contemporary responses to climate change, nor am I advocating indifference, despair or a nihilistic refusal to care about the future. Literature on "ecological grief", when not providing exposition of what that state of mind actually is, often focuses on the need to cultivate hope about the future, pointing out that grieving about one's lack of agency in the face of climate change is irrational and antithetical to our efforts to arrest ecological disaster.[123] Since beginning this project, more literature on ecological grief has been published, some of which expresses "hope" that ecological grief might be a necessary step to reckoning with the climate crisis, though the focus remains on how to arrest feelings of grief such that pragmatic responses can be pursued.[124] While I am glad to see a growing literature on ecological grief and mourning, I think that it is crucial that our mourning in the time of climate

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[123] For example, see Catriona McKinnon, "Climate Change: Against Despair," *Ethics & the Environment* 19, no. 1, (Spring 2014) 31-49

[124] See: Ashlee Cusolo et. al "Ecological Grief and Anxiety: the Start of a Healthy Response to Climate Change?" *The Lancet. Planetary health,* 4, no. 7 (2020) pp. 261-263

change takes the form of Frankowski's political sense of mourning, which is not mourning for an individual, nor a solitary act but a stance that one takes up—in this case in relation to ecosystems as such—that allows for our post racial and pre-ecocatastrophe sensibilities to be disrupted.

When I first pitched the "eco-grief" support group to the College of Sustainability, I did not want "grief" in the name. The feelings that students have expressed to me regarding climate change are complex, and I wanted to hold a space that did not pre-emptively assert to students what it is that they should be feeling. Nevertheless, I was told that the group must have eco-grief in the name, and was promptly emailed articles by two professors about "hope" in the face of climate change that they suggested I read and share with attendees. While I found these responses somewhat frustrating in principle at the time, reading Frankowski and Waldron for this project has helped me to identify what is deeply unhelpful about the "hope" narrative prevalent in dominant environmentalist discourse: attending to the real felt grief, despair, and resignation of students studying environmentalism by suggesting that they adopt more positive responses in the face of the climate crisis forecloses upon an opportunity to investigate where their "negative" feelings are coming from in a deeper way. For while these students may express frustration at their own shortfalls in terms of "doing their part," or frustration at family members who simply "don't care" about recycling; a deeper investigation into the inadequacy of such piecemeal approaches to climate change in our contemporary political paradigm does not alleviate ones shame or guilt, but rather redirects it such that the real sources of such feelings are revealed to be our complicity in a system which perpetuates rather than arrests the very injustices we oppose.

While this brief chapter cannot adequately parse out a robust account of what the cultivation of a political sense of mourning in the face of the climate crisis will look like, nor do I have space to wrestle with important objections regarding the implication that non-human life has moral worth, I do want to briefly address one potential concern. Given my account of climate change as a present and pressing issue, specifically for already vulnerable groups, is taking the time and space to cultivate a political sense of mourning in the service of "disrupting our sensibility" really the best way forward? Doing so is certainly not very pragmatic, and how we should go about cultivating such a political sense of mourning *en masse* is unclear. While these concerns are understandable, my project has shown that our pragmatic approaches to climate change in the present have been far from merely insufficient, and rather continue to work through structurally racist and ecologically devastating socio-political systems to arrest an "impending" ecological collapse. Such pragmatic efforts not only assume the legitimacy of these racist and exploitative institutions, but perpetuate the very harms that they purport to address. I see no value in continuing to pursue such complicit, piecemeal approaches to ecological disaster, and while mourning seems a "strange" response, it is exactly this peculiarity that has the potential to arrest our post-racial and pre-ecocatastrophe sensibilites. To quote Zizek's reversal of the Marxist formulation: "In the twentieth century, we maybe tried to change the world too quickly. The time is to interpret it again, to start thinking." So while of course I see the cultivation of a political sense of mourning as a way to affect our sensibility such that we can take up our approaches to climate change anew, we need to "start thinking" and feeling and seeing the climate crisis differently first. For until we can better see and feel and think our present climate crisis in a way that does

not obscure the complicity of dominant strategies to arrest it, our "best we can do" pragmatism will continue to reinforce a sacrificial politics.

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