“A Battle for the Soul of the Climate Movement”: The Expansion of the Intersectional Climate Justice Frame Among Young Activists in Canada

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Geography and Planning
University of Toronto

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Abstract
In this dissertation, I argue that the climate justice movement in Canada is conceptually aligned with tenets of feminist political ecology and demonstrates intersectional and decolonial approaches to activism and organizing. Such a framework did not emerge spontaneously but was developed through intellectual work and communication of climate justice activists, a contentious process tantamount to what one activist identified as a “battle for the soul of the climate movement”. Climate justice seeks to address the underlying conditions that generate and perpetuate climate change, understood to be caused by inequities, oppressions, and systems of domination inherent in the colonial-capitalist pursuit of endless growth. Intersectional climate justice further understands that groups and individuals experience and contribute to climate change differentially, based on contextual power relations, privilege, and identity, and thus seeks to incorporate recognition, (re)distributive, and participatory justice in climate change mitigation and adaption. My findings suggest that young Canadian activists began articulating climate justice between 2006 and 2015, in response to a Conservative-led federal government that attempted to
(re)create Canada as a global ‘energy superpower’ while simultaneously weakening domestic environmental protection, vilifying activists, and contesting territorial rights of Indigenous peoples.

I suggest that this intersectional climate justice movement inhabits the ‘glocal’ scale (e.g., Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003; Harcourt, 2015), constituted by interrelated, multi-scalar processes as well as actors that contest and co-create global narratives that generate and respond to locally-specific conditions. In this case, activist organizing appears to be structured differently than other environmental and social movements that promote allegiance to a group. Instead, principles of intersectional climate justice are disseminated through youth training networks which connect ‘free agents’ (activists without traditional organizational affiliations) from across the country into new linkages for mobilization.

Many of the activists interviewed have engaged in processes of relational reflexivity, grappling with their own complicity and advantage in a society that continues to contribute to climate change. Their approaches to enacting intersectional analysis and decolonial solidarity are, arguably, empirical demonstrations of how to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016), and provide alternatives to hegemonic climate governance approaches that rely on technological interventions or market mechanisms.
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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................. iv

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................. vii

List of Tables ........................................................................................................................ x

List of Figures ....................................................................................................................... xi

List of Appendices ............................................................................................................... xii

**Chapter 1 A (New) Politics of Climate Change in the Anthropocene** ......................... 1

1.1 Context for the Case Study: Why This Matters Now ..................................................... 5

1.2 Dissertation Outline and Structure ............................................................................. 10

**Chapter 2 Researching Climate Justice: Dissertation Study Design and Methodology** 15

2.1 Situating as Activist-Scholar: Positionality, Ethnography and the Research Process .................................................................................................................. 16

2.2 Setting up the Research: Guiding Questions and Participant Criteria ......................... 22

2.3 Risky Business: Ethics Reviews and Assessing Activism .......................................... 24

2.4 Collecting Data: Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews .......................................... 26

2.5 Codes, Nodes, Categories and Memos: Analyzing Interview Data ............................. 38

2.6 Visiting the Archive: Reading the Movement’s Material ........................................... 45

**Chapter 3 Situating Climate Justice: Feminist Political Ecology as Conceptual Framework** ........................................................................................................................................ 47

3.1 Dualisms and Subordination under (Colonial-)Capitalist Relations: Developing a Feminist Political Ecology Conceptual Framework ........................................................................... 48

3.1.1 The Birth and Death and (re)birth of Ecofeminism .................................................. 51

3.2 The Significance of Climate Justice Activism .............................................................. 56

3.2.1 From Environmental Justice to Climate Justice: The Extension of a Concept ‘Beyond Borders’ .......................................................................................................................... 58

3.2.2 Climate Justice as ‘Trivalent’ and ‘Three-Dimensional’ ........................................ 63
3.2.3 Decolonizing, Solidarities, and ‘Intersectional’ Climate Justice: Setting up the Empirical Research Findings

Chapter 4 Contextualizing Climate Justice in Canada: Environmental Politics and Protest, 1960-2015

4.1 The Production of Nature: Commodities, the Capitalist Market, and Uneven Development in Canada

4.1.2 Constructing a Canadian Identity Connected to Natural Resources

4.2 The First Era of Modern Environmentalism, late 1960s to mid-1980s: Curbing Pollution and Acknowledging Limits

4.3 Second Era of Environmentalism, mid-1980s to mid-2000s: Promoting International Image of Sustainable Development Leader

4.4 Third Era of Environmentalism, 2006-2016: Rollback of Environmental Regulation, Muzzled Scientists and ‘Radical’ Activists

4.4.1 The Controlled Conservative Discipline of Prime Minister Harper

4.4.2 Dismissing Dissent: Attacks on So-Called ‘Foreign-funded Radicals’

4.4.3 Demonstrated Government Support of Oil and Gas Industry

4.4.4 Domestic Environmental Policy Dismantling and Extensive Budget Cuts

4.4.5 Strategic Deployment of Science to Support a ‘Made in Canada’ Approach: Justifying Climate Change (non-)Mitigation

Chapter 5 Thinking Climate Justice: Theorizing and Identifying Organizing Frames and Major Claims of the Climate Justice Movement

5.1 The Roots of Climate Change: Humans Burning Fossil Fuels in a System of Global Capitalism

5.2 Climate Justice Definitions and Concerns: Inequitable Distribution and Systems of Oppression

5.3 Global Hegemonic Climate Framework: The United Nations Climate Negotiations, Historic Responsibility, and the Prevalence of Market-based Responses

Chapter 6 Doing Climate Justice: Scales and Sites of Climate Justice Activism in Canada
6.1 Trajectory of Climate Justice Framing and ‘the Battle for the Soul of the Movement’ .............................................................. 129

6.1.1 The Role of Networks in Facilitating and Promoting a Climate Justice Focus 132

6.2 From Global Narratives to Local Action: Arguing the Multi-scalar Framework of Climate Justice ........................................................................................................... 143

6.2.1 Local Solidarities: Outlining a ‘Just Transition’ from Fossil Fuel Dependence in Canada .................................................................................................................. 149

Chapter 7 Feeling Climate Justice: The Experience of the Embodied Activist ..........157

7.1 “I Don’t Know What I Would Be Doing If I Weren’t Doing This”: Identity-building and Purpose for Young Activists .............................................................. 158

7.2 Precarious Employment, Flexibility, and the Community of ‘Free Agents’ ....... 162

7.3 The Martyr Culture of Activism: Burning Out, Selling Out… and Getting Out ... 167

Chapter 8 Possibilities and Solidarities for Climate Justice: Conclusions and Future Research .......................................................................................................................... 182

8.1 Transformational Climate Justice through Decolonizing Practices: Directions for Future Research ............................................................................................................ 188

References ......................................................................................................................... 193
List of Tables

Table 2.a  Interviewee age and length of involvement in climate activism  31
Table 2.b  Type of leadership position recorded  32
Table 2.c  Home region at time of interview  32
Table 2.d  Highest level of post-secondary education achieved  33
# List of Figures

| Figure 2.a | NVivo Coding Example: Interview Participant Hannah | 40 |
| Figure 2.b | Timeline Example: Interview Participant Hannah  | 44 |
| Figure 3.a | Conceptions of Global Climate Justice: Comparing the Two-dimensional Model with the Three-dimensional Pyramid | 66 |
List of Appendices

Appendix A: Activist Timelines .................................................................................................................. 212

A. 1: Activist Timeline – ADRIAN.......................................................................................................... 212
A. 2: Activist Timeline – ALISON........................................................................................................... 213
A. 3: Activist Timeline – ANNE .............................................................................................................. 214
A. 4: Activist Timeline – BRANDON....................................................................................................... 215
A. 5: Activist Timeline – CAROLINE....................................................................................................... 216
A. 6: Activist Timeline – CHLOE............................................................................................................... 217
A. 7: Activist Timeline – COURTNEY.................................................................................................... 218
A. 8: Activist Timeline – DANIEL .......................................................................................................... 219
A. 9: Activist Timeline – DAVID............................................................................................................ 220
A. 10: Activist Timeline – DAWN.......................................................................................................... 221
A. 11: Activist Timeline – ELIZABETH.................................................................................................. 222
A. 12: Activist Timeline – EMILIE......................................................................................................... 223
A. 13: Activist Timeline – ERIN ........................................................................................................... 224
A. 14: Activist Timeline – HANNAH...................................................................................................... 225
A. 15: Activist Timeline – JAY................................................................................................................ 226
A. 16: Activist Timeline – JEN ................................................................................................................ 227
A. 17: Activist Timeline – JOSHUA........................................................................................................ 228
A. 18: Activist Timeline – JULIE........................................................................................................... 229
A. 19: Activist Timeline – KEIRA.......................................................................................................... 230
A. 20: Activist Timeline – KRISTIN....................................................................................................... 231
A. 21: Activist Timeline – LESLIE......................................................................................................... 232
A. 22: Activist Timeline – LISE.............................................................................................................. 233
A. 23: Activist Timeline – MARIELLE ................................................................. 234
A. 24: Activist Timeline – MARK ......................................................................... 235
A. 25: Activist Timeline – MAYA .......................................................................... 236
A. 26: Activist Timeline – MEGAN ....................................................................... 237
A. 27: Activist Timeline – MELANIE ................................................................... 238
A. 28: Activist Timeline – MIKE ........................................................................... 239
A. 29: Activist Timeline – PETE ........................................................................... 240
A. 30: Activist Timeline – SAMANTHA ................................................................. 241
A. 31: Activist Timeline – SARAH .......................................................................... 242
A. 32: Activist Timeline – SERENA ....................................................................... 243
A. 33: Activist Timeline – SOPHIE ....................................................................... 244
A. 34: Activist Timeline – VICTORIA .................................................................... 245
A. 35: Activist Timeline – ZAC ............................................................................. 246
Appendix B.1: Letter of Invitation to Participants....................................................... 247
Appendix B.2: Informed Consent Form .................................................................... 249
Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide .......................................................... 251
Appendix D: Acronyms of Policies, Government Departments and Agencies, and Environmental Organizations ................................................................. 252
Chapter 1
A (New) Politics of Climate Change in the Anthropocene

There’s so much touched by climate change. It’s probably THE most important issue facing our generation, if not any recent generation. And, so, I see climate change activism as not only including all of my communities, but indeed including all of the other issues that people are concerned about. (Interview, November 24, 2015: Daniel, a climate activist who has lived in Canada and abroad, and has participated in both local youth grassroots campaigns and at the United Nations)

I think I’m very partial to the idea that climate change is perhaps an opportunity in disguise, in that a lot of our economic and social structures are breaking down as a result of environmental issues... this perhaps shows the fact that they were broken to start off with, and this is a good opportunity to rethink them. (Interview, February 8, 2016: Elizabeth, a young professional with leadership experience in a national environmental organization and who participated in an educational trip to the Arctic as a teenager)

It’s not as if we agree on all the different things, but we generally agree that massive change is needed in order to remake our society into the world that we want to live in. (Interview, February 8, 2016: Mike, an organizer who has worked for an international youth network for nearly a decade and has contributed to multiple environmental campaigns)

Climate change, system change: in the quotes above, climate change has been framed as more than warming air and measurable increases in greenhouse gas emissions. In their own

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1 Per confidentiality agreements in the informed consent process, interview participant names have been changed. See Chapter 3 for details.
words, the young Canadian activists interviewed for this dissertation connect climate change to unequal economic, financial, social, and political systems, and “all of the other issues that people are concerned about” (Interview: Daniel, November 24, 2015). Applying a feminist political ecology analysis to the case study of the Canadian youth climate movement between 2006 to 2015, I argue that this period is characterized by an early and ongoing emergence of an analytical framework of *intersectional climate justice* among activists. Such a framework did not emerge spontaneously, but was developed through intellectual work and communication of climate justice activists, a contentious process tantamount to what activist Keira (Interview, April 15, 2016) has identified as a “battle for the soul of the climate movement”.

Climate justice “refers to principles of democratic accountability and participation, ecological sustainability and social justice and their combined ability to provide solutions to climate change” (Chatterton, Featherstone & Routledge, 2013, p. 606). As a social movement and scholarly field of study, it emphasizes that human and non-humans who will be most negatively impacted by climate change are often those who are least responsible for generating the emissions that cause climate change. Analytically, climate justice asserts that climate change is an outcome of colonial-capitalist systems premised on practices of extraction, accumulation, and domination of both humans and more-than-human environment. Specifically *intersectional* climate justice highlights nuanced notions of harm and responsibility, by positing that an individual’s experience of and contribution to climate change is shaped by contextual power relations and “social categorisations” of identity, such as (but not limited to) gender, race or ethnicity, socioeconomic position, class or caste, or sexuality (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014, p. 421). To acknowledge and address such variable lived experiences, intersectional climate justice activists and scholars argue for a deliberative, multi-scaler approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation that includes (re)distribution, recognition, and participation of affected parties (Bulkeley et al, 2014; Malin & Ryder, 2018; Schlosberg, 2004; Sultana, 2014).

By firmly situating analyses of power and privilege in its framing, training, and campaigning, I argue, the intersectional climate justice movement as practiced in the Canadian case study
begins to provide a new way of understanding and addressing climate change. The intersectional climate justice framework politicizes the issue of climate change through its contestation and reimagining of the status quo, as it involves a fundamental critique of the capitalist system, its market apparatus, and managerial approach to environmental ‘externalities’ that continue to enhance the livelihoods of a privileged few while failing to attend to the inequities that generate climate change in the first place (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Chatterton, Featherstone & Routledge, 2013). Climate justice expands the repertoire of responses to climate change by providing an alternative to hegemonic capitalist market-based mechanisms and techno-managerial ‘solutions’; “intersectionality can generate alternative knowledge crucial in the formulation of more effective and legitimate climate strategies… intersectionality also highlights new linkages and positions that can facilitate alliances between voices that are usually marginalised in the dominant climate agenda.” (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014, p. 419) Further, decolonization and intersectionality strive toward increasing the modes and opportunities for participation, to foster context-appropriate mitigation and adaptation opportunities based on situated knowledges (see Haraway, 1991). Throughout the dissertation, I develop my overarching argument that the climate justice movement in Canada is conceptually aligned with tenets of feminist political ecology and empirically (begins to) demonstrate intersectional and decolonial approaches to activism. I analyze the empirical case findings to demonstrate the ways in which activists are beginning to generate and communicate their own conceptual linkages between feminist political ecology, climate justice, and decolonizing principles in the process of developing movement-relevant theory in a ‘battle for the soul’ of the youth climate movement in Canada.

I situate my work within feminist political ecology, which is informed by a broader political ecology tradition of contextually-specific and empirically-grounded research. However, while political ecology identifies processes that result in uneven development, it does not explicitly attend to gender difference. My approach to feminist political ecology is thus influenced by ecofeminism, which asserts that logics of domination and value dualisms that have subordinated nature have similarly oppressed women (Warren, 1990; Gaard, 2011; Kings, 2017). While some ecofeminists have been criticized for being biologically essentialist and/or for not differentiating the variety of women’s lived experiences (and
therefore inappropriately ascribing universal values to what is means to be ‘female’) (MacGregor, 2006), critical ecofeminism can be an emancipatory project when it avoids the tendency to romanticize a homogenous female experience (Elmhirst, 2015). It is this approach that has been woven into feminist political ecology; as contextually-specific and grounded approach to research, it seeks to illuminate social conditions and power relations in a particular context and to empower women and those marked as ‘others’ under patriarchal value dualism to speak for themselves (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015). According to Rocheleau, feminist political ecology is “currently rising to the challenge of decolonial thinking and politics, to the politics of being, differently” (2015, p. 57). Indeed, part of this politics of being, differently, arguably requires an extension beyond the matrix of gender-based analysis. Among other aims, I believe that decolonial thinking encourages us to move beyond gender binary, to consider various facets of identity and socially-constructed difference. I thus engage with an intersectional approach which is increasingly taken up by feminist environmental scholars (MacGregor, 2017).

I argue that the framework of feminist political ecology as informing climate justice is useful not only for academic purposes, but that it becomes discernibly important in guiding activists themselves within the Canadian movement. Therefore, the conceptual linkages are instructive in understanding how activists are already beginning to interpret and communicate an alternative politics of climate change in the Anthropocene – a fascinating methodological and observational overlap which I believe only serves to further demonstrate the possibilities of a strengthened intersectional climate justice activism and academe. I thus align with critical eco-feminist academics and activists who have similarly begun engaging intersectional methodologies of climate change activism and scholarship (e.g., de Onis, 2012, MacGregor, 2014; Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014; Sultana, 2014; Malin & Ryder, 2018).

To support my argument, I combine academic literature on climate justice and feminist political ecology with empirical findings from detailed semi-structured interviews with 35 young Canadian climate activists. Through this approach, I demonstrate that the collective action frame, or “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p.614) of the climate justice movement in
Canada situates climate change as an outcome of colonial-capitalist structures of power and calls for greater democratic participation and recognition in decision-making processes – just as do feminist political ecologists. An objective of mine in undertaking this research is to communicate findings in a way that ‘speak between’ the realms of conceptual advancement in the academy and the lived experiences of activists in the climate justice movement. Throughout the dissertation, I bridge the gap between movement-driven theory and academic theory (e.g., Schlosberg & Collins, 2014)\(^2\) by integrating activist interview data and scholarly literature. To fully appreciate the intellectual contributions of the activists in developing movement-driven theory, I present block quotes of interview transcripts throughout the dissertation alongside my analysis informed by academic journal articles. I believe this process models the iterative conversations between situated knowledges that are so crucial to developing multi-scalar responses to climate justice. I also generated timelines of climate activism for each interviewee, which visually demonstrate the trajectory of activist involvement, training and experiences, and a general chronology of self-reported changes in perspective (see Appendix A, and sections 2.4 and 2.5).

1.1 Context for the Case Study: Why This Matters Now

To illustrate the influence of empirical findings to the argument of the dissertation, consider the selected interview quotes at the start of this chapter: they are from youth (aged 18 to 30) who self-identify as part of the Canadian climate movement. I have included them to demonstrate the variety of ways in which activists are explicitly linking their climate activism with other social issues of what they understand to be “broken” economic and political structures (Interview: Elizabeth, February 8, 2016) that must change in order to create “the world that we want to live in” (Interview: Mike, February 8, 2016). As a qualitative case study with a feminist political ecology conceptual framework, my research was motivated by a set of guiding research questions:

\(^2\) According to Schlosberg and Collins (2014): “theorists rarely cite movements, and movements do not commonly refer to academic journal articles to clarify their positions” (p. 365).
1. Why and how do youth enter into, participate in, and transform the climate movement in Canada?

2. How do the young activists view/understand “nature” and “environment”?

3. (How and why) is this moment different from past environmental movements?

For the purposes of my research, youth³ are identified as between the ages of 18 and 30, which is an age range consistent with youth programs or employment in the field. Youth is sometimes characterized as a life stage in which there are prolonged periods of education or postponement of entrance into the “adult” sphere of work, and greater uncertainty, additional risk-taking, or identity formation (e.g., Arnett, 2000).

Furthermore, the identified time period of 2006-2015 is interesting for two reasons. First, it is a time when the popularization of the term Anthropocene allowed for an (emerging) shared language in geography and planning to refer to the new epoch in which human impact on the ‘natural’ world has required a re-thinking of human-environment interactions. Second, it is also the period in which the government of Canada was led by Prime Minister Harper and his Conservative government, with their tightly controlled messaging and desire to promote Canada as a global ‘energy superpower’ (Lakanen, 2018). This particular time- and space-sensitive set of conditions thus provides an ideal ‘living laboratory’ of conditions to examine the uptake and spread of justice-based climate messaging as resistance to – and despite – an antagonistic federal government.

For additional context, consider that anthropogenic causes of climate change have been substantiated through countless scientific studies since NASA scientist James Hansen first testified in 1988 to a United States congressional committee that he was “99 percent certain that the warming trend was not a natural variation but was caused by a buildup of carbon dioxide and other artificial gases in the atmosphere” and identified that human-caused

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³ “youth” and “young adult” are used interchangeably in the dissertation to represent participants between 18 and 30 years old during the 2006-2015 period of study.
climate change was already occurring (Shabecoff, 24 June 1988, online). The attribution of blame for global climate change and other wide-scale ecological damage as resting on human activity has led to the identification of the current era as the Anthropocene, suggesting that we have entered a new and distinct geological epoch. The term first became popularized in 2002 when atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen claimed that “such is the remarkable power of their combined activities, humans are now taking Earth’s surface away from Holocene norms” (quoted in Castree, 2015a, 67). For example, in a paper published in *Science* in 2016, Waters et al. demonstrate that there are clear stratigraphic signatures – or markers captured in layers of rock or soil – that distinguish the Anthropocene from the Holocene. They identify the significant impact of human activity: “the Anthropocene markers reflect an additional key driver, that of human modification of global environments at unprecedented rates. This driver has produced a wide range of anthropogenic stratigraphic signals, including examples that are novel in Earth history, that are global in extent, and that offer fine temporal resolution” (Waters et al., 2016, aad2622-1). Such findings have resulted in a proliferation of (proposed) geotechnical projects and technologies like carbon capture and storage, as well as new financial instruments to create carbon markets – a novel way to commodify the atmosphere by selling discrete pollution allocations.

Yet the hegemonic approach to leave climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies to be determined by the invisible hand of the market or the supposedly neutral science and technology community:

forecloses (or at least attempts to do so) politicization and evacuates dissent through the formation of a particular regime of environmental governance that revolves around consensus, agreement, participatory negotiation of different interests and technocratic expert management in the context of a non-disputed management of market-based socio-economic organization. (Swyngedouw, 2010, p. 228).

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4 Further, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was founded in 1988 to coordinate global, long-term monitoring efforts of atmospheric scientists and to present findings to policy audiences (Castree, 2015a - Geography).
Here, Swyngedouw points to an evacuation of dissent and political discussion, which he suggests is characteristic of a ‘post-political’ condition, that “reduces political terrain to the sphere of consensual governing and policy-making centered on technical, managerial and consensual administration (policing) of environmental, social, economic or other domains” (Swyngedouw, 2015, p. 138). In many ways, I agree with Swyngedouw that the consolidation of international climate negotiations and ‘solutions’ in complex administrative arrangements overseen by elite international bodies like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has led to ongoing preferential promotion of techno-managerial solutions moderated by capitalist market structures. Further, I believe that such approaches (continue to) mask the inequalities and inequities of a world marked by climate change and attempt to limit the range of possible responses to climate change, in order to produce what Swyngedouw calls “a socio-ecological fix to make sure nothing really changes” (2010, p. 222). In many ways, Swyngedouw’s articulation of the ways in which climate change has been painted as a post-political issue in widespread public discourse rings true. It also provides a jumping-off point for my research, which illuminates an alternative framing of climate change that rejects the political elitism and consensual decision-making that marks the current, hegemonic international climate governance system. This alternative framing – which I maintain is the ideology and practice of intersectional climate justice, aligned with tenets of feminist political ecology – is significant because it challenges the underlying processes that contribute to anthropogenic climate change. Further, by demonstrating how young climate activists within Canada are attempting to engage, empower, and align with different ways of knowing (or, situated knowledges), the practice of intersectional climate justice moves the realm of climate action out of the hands of only elite actors.

In particular, I argue that the emergence of the frame of intersectional climate justice is significant in Canada from 2006-2015, when the natural environment was ‘under attack’ by the federal Conservative government led by Stephen Harper. The Harper government’s rhetoric, including labelling environmental activists (and Indigenous leaders) as anti-Canadian ‘radicals’, was a marked break from the trajectory of more moderate approaches to environmental policy-making by previous federal governments that I discuss in Chapter 4.
As activist Courtney (a labour organizer who first became active in climate justice activism when she participated in an anti-pipeline campaign around 2013) told me in her interview, “it was very, very hard to be an activist while the Conservative government was in power, because there was that constant narrative going against you all the time” (Interview: Courtney, February 9, 2016).

While not all the young activists in this case study explicitly cite academic scholarship (though, it bears noting, some do), I demonstrate that they inherently engage with feminist political ecology analyses in their own movement-generated theory by rejecting a ‘neutral’ technocratic approach to climate change and instead emphasizing the specifically intersectional justice elements of climate change activism. This is demonstrated through the thoughtful analysis articulated by activists like Melanie, a leader in a national youth climate organization who previously worked with the Canadian Federation of Students, who explains,

I specifically and intentionally work in the climate justice movement, which is about driving the movement towards a justice-based transition. So, I think that that necessarily requires me, and hopefully other organizers also working in the climate justice movement, to look at how things are connected and look at how capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, are the foundations of climate change. And if we don’t address those things when we work on climate change, then the world will not change and a justice-based transition will not be possible… There’s a way in which systems and society have been set up so that we have to do the work that we have to do. Like, if we weren’t in a post-industrialized world, climate change wouldn’t be as much of an issue, but other things would still be issues. And if, at the end of the day, we’ve tackled climate change and we haven’t talked about how all the people in the room making decisions are old, white men, then my work is not done [laughs]. (Interview: Melanie, August 21, 2015)

In this dissertation, I demonstrate how the insights of Melanie and other activists are instructive in generating the evolving praxis of intersectional climate justice. I weave together their interpretations of climate justice, illuminated through semi-structured interviews, with academic literature on climate justice and feminist political ecology, to demonstrate the intersectional nature of this moment of climate justice – and to consider the spatial and scalar implications. Specific to the Canadian context, activists refer to their
guiding principles and framework of anti-oppression in recognition of the settler-colonial dynamics that underpin Canadian society. Their approach has opened up new possibilities for activist networks to develop solidarities among varied place-based struggles, “constructed through processes of relatedness, connectivity and commonality” (Chatterton, Featherstone & Routledge, 2013, p. 613).

1.2 Dissertation Outline and Structure

Throughout the dissertation, I develop my central argument about the alignment of the Canadian youth climate justice movement with feminist political ecology and intersectional ways of knowing through a number of assertions. To support my argument, I demonstrate how young climate activists in Canada during the study period: (a) engage in intellectual labour by theorizing and communicating ideas also found in political ecology, critical ecofeminism, and environmental justice; (b) practice relational reflexivity in attempts to become ‘good allies’ and attempt to reckon with their own complicated complicity and privilege in systems that perpetuate climate change; and, (c) construct campaign strategies that trouble hegemonic United Nations’ models of climate governance and resist the Conservative government’s regressive environmental policy regime, by instead presenting the possibilities of multi-scalar just transitions. To connect my findings in a coherent series of claims, I have organized the dissertation in eight chapters, commencing with methodology and literature prior to moving into the empirical analysis. In this subsection, I briefly outline the structure and content of the dissertation chapters.

In Chapter 2, I outline the study design and research methodology. I begin with a consideration of my positionality and the implications of my subjectivity on the research process; as a feminist researcher, I am compelled to make known experiences that have shaped me as a researcher in this field, and to engage in a process of relational reflexivity while undertaking the research (e.g., Whitson, 2017). Picking up from the introductory chapter, I reiterate the guiding questions and clarify the participant criteria, and highlight considerations of ethical research when working with activists as part of my feminist political
ecological commitment to co-producing knowledge with non-academic partners (e.g., Bridge, McCarthy, Perreault, 2015). In the remainder of the chapter, I focus on describing the process of empirical data collection and thematic analysis. I outline my process of conducting semi-structured interviews, which I believe to be the most appropriate method for collecting detailed and nuanced evidence for this research project, before describing my analytical processes, which are supported by coding the data into emerging themes (or ‘nodes’) using NVivo and by constructing activist timelines.

In Chapter 3, I develop the conceptual framework and situate the research within a broader feminist political ecology context. I chose a feminist political ecology framework for its suitability for examining the detailed and contextual specificities of a particular case study, as well as its tradition of highlighting the lived experience and situated knowledges of those involved in the climate justice movement. I first outline how the perpetuation of powerful Western dualisms and hierarchies have led to the domination of nature and women, and how a feminist political ecology perspective provides the analytical tools for parsing through narratives that lead to intersecting oppressions. In particular, I present how critical ecofeminism, incorporating an intersectional approach, does not rely on essentializing a universal female experience, but instead may begin to reveal new possibilities for adaptation and approaches to climate change by highlighting the experiences and voices of those who have been oppressed under systems of domination (e.g., Gaard, 2011; Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014). I then outline my understanding of the evolution of climate justice, which is concerned with questions of the distribution of environmental ‘goods’ and negative ‘externalities,’ but extends beyond environmental justice, as it is premised on unbounded temporal and spatial boundaries. Climate justice foregrounds the need for participatory and recognition, as well as distributive, justice, as “climate change is a global risk being governed globally, but vulnerability and impacts are felt locally” (Burnham et al., 2013b, p. 232). Further, I suggest that a robust, critical theory and practice of climate justice must concern itself with decolonization principles (Haluza-DeLay et al., 2009; Sundberg, 2014). Taken together, this chapter provides the analytical basis for applying a feminist political ecology approach to the intersectional climate justice that I use to analyze the case study – a
framework which I also argue is increasingly practiced among many young Canadian activists.

In Chapter 4, I present an overview of Canadian environmental politics and policies, with the aim of situating a trajectory of environmental attitudes to demonstrate how climate justice activists during the study period resist long-standing environmental imaginaries, challenge neo-colonial injustices, and grapple with the rapid policy dismantling of ‘the Harper years’. I begin by suggesting that historical (re)productions of Canadian identity (as a nation, as a ‘people’) are tied to the (sometimes contradictory) simultaneous celebration of generating economic advantage from the extraction of natural resources and a reverence toward ‘wild’ nature. In this section, I suggest that the same kinds of oppressive hierarchies critiqued by feminist political ecology have been powerfully disseminated through nation-building imagery, providing the (historical) context within which environmentalists have toiled.

Shifting to the mid-twentieth century, I then argue that there are three ‘eras’ of modern environmental politics, each demonstrating a unique focus and distinguished by different government-activist relations, providing context for comparison to the study’s focus period of 2006-2015. I contend that the regulatory environmental regime under Harper was more regressive than in previous modern eras, characterized as it is by widespread budget cuts, strategic use of evidence, and attempts to vilify activists, which arguably generated a ‘chill’ on advocacy groups. I propose that the Harper government attempts to (re)connect with that assertion of ‘Canadian values’ creates an environment in which activists critical of oil and gas infrastructure projects (like pipelines) are labelled as anti-patriotic and threatening. However, it is against this narrow narrative of Harper’s ‘made in Canada’ approach that the intersectional climate justice begins to critique the techno-managerial and economistic rationales that underpin dominant environmental and climate policy.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 comprise the bulk of the empirical analysis. I have specifically structured them to move from the theoretical to the practical; the chapters progress from outlining the overarching principles of climate justice to the physical experience of the individual activist involved in climate justice campaigning.
In Chapter 5, I identify the development of a theoretical climate justice paradigm within Canadian and global environmental movements. First, I explore how activists locate the roots of climate change in the (colonial-)capitalist relations that create uneven development and interlinked oppressions through systems of domination and hierarchies. Then, I assert that young climate activists in Canada are employing a specifically intersectional justice-based orientation, providing examples from the interviews and activist timelines. I also compare and contrast the activists’ own accounts to the circulation of rhetoric emerging from the United Nations-based climate agreements and other global climate justice literature, suggesting that the market-oriented approaches currently favoured by the UN process undermine the radical transformative potential of multilateral cooperation.

In Chapter 6, I examine the role of networks and local sites for proliferating and activating intersectional climate justice in Canada. First, I argue that training networks connect various organizations and ‘free agent’ individual activists, defined as those without formal organizational affiliations. Such networks help to disseminate principles of organizing for justice, including framing of climate issues, anti-oppression practices, and considerations for generating solidarities with organized labour and Indigenous nations. In the chapter, I explicitly demonstrate how these young activists connect ideas of uneven development with their on-the-ground, place-based campaigns while referring to globally-circulating narratives. I do this by making apparent activists’ description of how their work transcends scalar boundaries (see also Larner & Craig, 2005; Tsing, 2005), again demonstrating that climate justice dissolves some of the scalar boundaries that are seen to exist even in other environmental justice movements while also avoiding the “local trap,” in which “the local scale is assumed to be inherently more democratic than other scales” (Purcell, 2006, p. 1921).

In Chapter 7, I focus the empirical consideration on the scale of the individual activists working within the intersectional climate justice movement. I examine activists’ descriptions of their experiences and draw connections between the intensity of identity-formation, the ‘martyr culture’ of justice-based activism, and the difficulties of focusing on collective goals when confronted with precarious work and financial instability. I argue that the impacts of burnout and problems caused by activism are incompatible with a justice perspective,
particularly as female participants seemed to be describing these impacts as more intense and personal than some of their male colleagues. I aim to make apparent inequities and contradictions within the movement itself, primarily by revealing activist accounts of feeling disempowered or ostracized by their peers, as a means to suggest that individuals striving toward climate justice should practice self-care and work toward creating a more welcoming, safe, and truly intersectional, movement.

I conclude the dissertation with a discussion of how my main argument has been woven through the dissertation, and is connected to existing literature on feminist political ecology, climate justice, and youth environmental activism. I also offer an exploration of possible areas for future research that build upon my empirical findings, in particular pointing to the need for additional considerations of how climate justice perspective may be a powerful framework for exploring reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.
Chapter 2
Researching Climate Justice:
Dissertation Study Design and Methodology

The development of this doctoral project was not a straightforward or linear process. It began with a desire to question public participation and processes of engagement in environmental politics, and to advance progressive ideas about how to improve such processes. When asked about research interests in the early stages of the PhD program (and even prior), I would identify public participation in planning, civic life and politics, environmental policy – and, overarching, the role of young people in all this. I thus developed an inductive, qualitative research project focused on activism within the Canadian youth climate movement. I knew that I wanted to hear directly from those involved, as I believed that these activists would have innumerable insights into the way that the movement was developing. I chose an inductive case study research design because it allowed the empirical research gathered in detailed interviews to speak for itself, without my adhering to pre-existing arguments or hypotheses. Further, my feminist research orientation included a desire to allow research participants to provide detailed and descriptive accounts of their work in their own words. Through this process, I discovered literatures of activist scholarship, and have been eager to understand the ways in which theory could be generated by and for communities of activism (see: Bevington & Dixon, 2005).

In this chapter, I outline the research design and methods of this dissertation. I begin by discussing my positionality and the ways in which past experiences and encounters with activist scholarship and feminist geographies have informed my research orientation and situated knowledge, developing my process of relational reflexivity. I then outline the research methodology before considering the ethical implications of working with an activist population. I detail the experience of undertaking semi-structured interviews, which comprised the heart of the data collection and primary research process for their ability to place activist experiences, words, and actions at the forefront of the research process. Finally, I summarize the methods of interview coding through the use of NVivo software and the production of activist timelines, as comprising the process of thematic analysis.
2.1 Situating as Activist-Scholar: Positionality, Ethnography and the Research Process

At the outset of such a large research project, it is useful to provide some details about my biography and how I approach the research both analytically and subjectively. McDowell (1992) urges researchers to include such a practice of writing their reflexivity in their work – a notion that continues to be echoed in feminist political ecology today (e.g., Neely & Nguse, 2015). Extending from Haraway’s (1991) concept of situated knowledges, I do not believe that complete impartiality is possible, or even desirable, in qualitative research. Engaging in a process of reflexivity has been proposed as a “strategy for situating knowledges: that is, as a means of avoiding the false neutrality and universality of so much academic knowledge” (Rose, 1997). I seek to practice reflexivity in my own research process. First, I seek to be mindful and transparent about the factors that influence my frame of analysis, including my positionality, or identity, as a white woman studying geography and planning at a Canadian university. I remind myself that I must make clear my assumptions in my writing, and to acknowledge that there remains much that I don’t know about the world and the lived experiences of others.

To provide to readers some of the context of my positionality, allow me to disclose that I have been an active participant in environmental organizations or committees in one mode or another since 2005. As an undergraduate student at Queen’s University, I was involved in two campus-based organizations aimed at improving literacy – and by extension, we believed, inspiring action – on environmental issues. The first group designed and implemented environmental education workshops for elementary school children and led modest campus-wide campaigns. The second was a student-run resource centre, with a small lending library and a co-operative-style store with ‘eco-friendlier’ personal hygiene and cleaning products and food. While the former group focused on education at various scales, the latter aimed to provide concrete tools for small-scale, individual lifestyle changes to ‘go green’. Inspired by what I was learning in the classroom, coupled with my volunteer work, I attended training and workshops led by the Sierra Youth Coalition. These experiences and networks soon led to a volunteer steering committee position with the Canadian
Environmental Network’s Youth Caucus.

However, the deeper I delved into theory in the classroom, I began to recognize that I did not agree with the approach that overwhelmingly places the onus on the individual to diminish their impacts on issues as large and complex as climate change or ecological degradation. How could individual, small-scale changes really make a difference when the larger capitalist framework within which it was located already predetermined which solutions are available? Worse, it was to buy into – or in the case of the resource centre, I worried, to sell – the notion of the ‘self-perfecting’ neoliberal citizen, defined by a “kind of economic rationality, which sees democracy as the aggregate result of individual choices (or purchases) within the political marketplace” (Kennelly, 2009b, p. 297). This was fundamentally at odds with my conviction that the ecological crisis is systemic and requires larger-scale social change.

Thus, I shifted my volunteer work by moving from an educational stewardship paradigm to a stronger advocacy and activism position. During my Master’s degree, I was a member of the 2010 Canadian Youth Delegation (CYD) to the United Nations climate conference. I joined with the intent of holding the government accountable to its international obligations and lobbying them to be more responsive to the kinds of progressive policies that young Canadians supported. I then parlayed this experience into the (unpaid) position of Policy Development Director of a coalition of Canadian ENGOs undertaking cross-Canada consultations and preparing public comments in the lead-up to the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (“Rio+20”). Finally, from December 2014 to November 2016, I served a two-year term on the Board of Directors of the Sierra Club Canada as it was undertaking a restructuring of its relation to the Sierra Club Canada Foundation (a charitable arm of the Sierra brand). Through these experiences, I was exposed to both ‘mainstream’ environmental organizations – like the Sierra Club – as well as more grassroots community-based coalitions. This matters for my research process because these experiences exposed me to certain ways of communicating, theorizing, and analyzing environmental issues in multiple activist settings.

Throughout these experiences, I sometimes found it challenging to balance my academic work with the pressures of being part of a responsive team and community. I felt committed
to putting into practice what I was learning in the classroom and talking about with friends, colleagues, and professors. In my (volunteer, co-curricular) work in these groups, I met so many passionate and skilled young people. Many were doing this work concurrently with their studies; all but a small handful would receive no financial compensation for their labour, output, or expertise. The time commitment most colleagues put in was substantial, and they exerted a great deal of mental and emotional energy. Why (and how), I wondered, were so many of these young people willing to immerse themselves in these campaigns, sacrificing leisure time and other (potentially, paid) opportunities to work on a problem that was so broad in scope and temporally diffuse? What sustained them and kept them motivated to continue this pattern for many years?

In keeping with my practice of reflexivity as outlined above, I feel it is important to outline, contextualize, and reflect on the experiences which led me to this line of inquiry, in a process of making visible to myself and to readers possible influences and points of reference that inform my analysis. A common criticism of qualitative research is that “the entire qualitative research process is biased by implicit assumptions, interests, worldviews, prejudices, and one-sightedness of the researcher” (Diefenbach, 2009, p. 876). With this in mind, and through discussing and examining my own experiences in a reflexive way, I sought to implicitly and explicitly acknowledge my own personal positioning and limitations as well as the contingent and situated knowledge produced through such a study (Gregory, Johnston, et al., 2009). Ultimately, all qualitative research is interpretative, entangled (Neely & Nguse, 2015), and, as Pratt suggests, “is an inter-subjective, relational process between researcher and researched” (Pratt, 2009, p. 604). I do not intend to present the findings as though they are objectively separate from a specific context, place, and era: the findings of this case study are not meant to be replicable. Still, there are many interesting insights to be found in qualitative case study and site-specific research projects.

I aim to be transparent and open about my own background and experiences, particularly acknowledging that challenges may arise when one is both “insider” and “outsider” in this research (Winchester, 2000). I consider myself as somewhat of an “insider” with some insight into the non-academic world of environmental advocacy. As such, the orientation of
my work may be described as activist scholarship, which Kobayashi (2001) has identified as requiring a commitment on the part of the researcher to become involved in the goal of social change. Such scholarship makes no claim to neutrality or non-intervention. It is by definition normative and undertaken with the hope that the research will result in changed conditions for the subjects – not just the world-in-general, but those particular subjects with whom one works on any specific research project. (Kobayashi, 2001, p. 56)

My activist scholarship is driven by core values related to my academic training at the University of Toronto, and the influence of my emotional responses and relational encounters within political work (see Derickson & Routledge, 2015). I found a connection between the practice and goals of activist scholarship and the academic subfield of feminist political ecology, which I have taken pains to outline in the following chapter. I am motivated by what Bryant (2015) describes among political ecologists as “an almost primordial research instinct to promote a more socially and environmentally just world. Here, engagement in the world of ideas is combined with engagement in the world of material practices to promote positive social and ecological change” (p. 22). In its critical approach to the production of knowledge, political ecology “retains a methodological commitment to in-depth, direct observation involving qualitative research of some sort” and “is characterized by a normative political commitment to social justice and structural political change” (Bridge, McCarthy & Perreault, 2015, p. 7-8)

In relation to the research practice, I consider the value of activist scholarship in contributing to movement-relevant theory, an “approach to theory that puts the needs of social movements at its heart” (Bevington & Dixon, 2005, p. 186). Further, Bevington and Dixon suggest a different approach to traditional academic social movement analyses. They assert that “rather than asking about how to get activists to read this scholarship, we should be asking how to produce useful information that activists will want to read and seek out on their own” (2005, p. 193). This idea serves not only as an appeal to academics to develop research projects that are accessible to activists and community organizers but also to genuinely consider the needs of these communities when developing research programs.
Similarly, Derickson and Routledge (2015) put forward their process of triangulation, or considering three elements, when developing a research project with a social movement or community group. These are: “What are the current theoretical debates or intellectual questions?”; “what publics and institutional projects are served by knowing?”; and, “what do non-academic collaborators want to know?” (Derickson & Routledge, 2015, p.2). I kept in mind these considerations as I developed the research project and began writing up the findings. It is my hope that while I cannot directly “repay” individual activists for the value of their interviews, the outcomes of the research will be useful to the movement and its participants. More broadly is the principle of general reciprocity, that the production of knowledge is useful for society in general (Gillan & Pickerill, 2012). Considering needs, I remain committed to publishing in venues that are accessible to diverse audiences. I believe that the “knowledge produced should at least be physically accessible to those who participated in its creation, though so much [in the form of journal articles]… remain locked up in costly or inaccessible publications” (Gillan & Pickerill, 2012, p. 137). This means publishing in venues and in language that are accessible and understandable to activists, organizers, and community groups.

While I did not strictly adhere to ethnographic research methods, or “the direct observation and documentation of some group or community, their practices and habits, and, primarily, aspects of their culture” (St. Martin & Pavlovskaya, 2009, p.370), I was influenced by the rationale of in-depth familiarization that is part of the ethnographic approach. Bryman, Teevan & Bell (2009) suggest that “the ethnographer’s extensive contact with a social setting allows the context of people’s behaviour to be mapped out fully. The ethnographer interacts with people in a variety of different situations so that links between behaviour and context can be forged” (p. 180). While I did not engage in classical ethnography, I would argue that “aspects of [activist] culture” and “practices and habits” are familiar to me. Indeed, my experience as an activist formerly embedded within the movement allows for nuanced understanding just as well as traditional academic ethnographers.

Indeed, St. Martin and Pavlovskaya suggest that the geographer’s approach to ethnography is “increasingly likely to include a plurality of qualitative methods beyond participant
observation (e.g. in-depth interviewing, focus groups, oral history, archival research or map biographies) and to break from traditional correspondence theories of knowledge that privilege direct and allegedly objective observation” (2009, p. 370-371). I consider my personal experiences to function similarly to a “pre-research” period of immersion providing an analytical foundation. These allow me a lens through which I may understand and apply the findings of the interviews, combined with the critical thinking skills of academic training. In addition to outlining and considering both personal and relational positionality as part of a reflexive research process, I consider the influence of my subjectivity. I believe that my feelings of affiliation and empathy for those I was interviewing enriched my ability to understand or note nuanced elements of their interviews. I understand this to be a process of acknowledging situated knowledges – including my own – and how these may generate insights, ideas, and hypotheses emerging from one’s own relation to-the-world. Part of feminist research, I believe, is “taking seriously” the lived experience and subjectivity of the researcher, “whose cognitive, emotional, bodily and spiritual reactions and positionings are a central research instrument” (Carstensen-Egwuom, 2014, p. 267). Extending beyond auto-ethnography, still I utilize my own experiences as starting point for situating or contextualizing some of what I hear from activists, though it is their experiences that form the material for analysis. To represent activists’ own reflections on their experiences in a transparent manner in addition to my own interpretation, I have incorporated their words through block quotes and by creating individual chronological timelines (e.g., see Appendix A: Activist Timelines) that seek to chart their activist trajectories.

By asking the activists in interviews to describe their activities, motivations, and oral histories in their own words, I received interpretations of the movement from those who experience it – and reflect on it – themselves. Feminist geographers have long acknowledged the importance of integrating the voices of those participating in (or subjected to) the phenomenon of study. Semi-structured interviews seemed the most appropriate way to do so and ensured that I did not rely solely on my own interpretations but engaged in dialogue with other actors. In sum, critically engaging my positionality and subjectivity in a process of reflexivity allowed me to enter into the research with an understanding of the case study context similar to that of an ethnographic researcher; relying on semi-structured interviews as
primary data collection method allowed some distance from being the sole voice of authority in data collection; the two coalesce into a deeper, more meaningful output.

2.2 Setting up the Research: Guiding Questions and Participant Criteria

Developing the qualitative case study research design was an iterative process, starting with a preliminary literature review and the practice of reflexivity explained in the previous section. It was guided by the understanding that qualitative research is about discovery (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009) and that the questions asked in the interviews would be refined as I progressed through the project. While a comparative analysis across regions of Canada may have been another useful research design, I was motivated by an open-ended case study approach for its ability to uncover research observations that are not prescribed to a pre-selected scalar distribution, but rather, emerge from the data itself. While the findings of the interviews are not expected to be generalizable in all jurisdictions or at all scales, I believe the overall insights gained from this detailed case study begin to address the broader research problematic of identifying alternative approaches to defining and addressing climate change.

In developing the research design and questions, I considered both the conceptual work that would inform the research as well as the empirical questions I wanted to ask in the interviews. I wanted to understand the motivations of young activists, combining elements of how young people organize around climate change politics, and the influences they identify with respect to their willingness to work on issues of climate change. I reviewed social movement theory dealing with participatory processes, considering how this applied to a broader framework of feminist political ecology (see Chapter 3). I was interested in knowing what kinds of concrete actions young people participate in, and whether (and how) this differed from other environmental movements. To address this, I researched environmental social movements and environmental politics, particularly within Canada, detailed in Chapter 4.
As identified in Chapter 1, I developed the following guiding research questions, which asked:

1. Why and how do youth enter into, participate in, and transform the climate activism movement in Canada?
2. How do the young activists view/understand “nature” and “environment”?
3. (How and why) is this movement different from past environmental movements?

Prior to commencing the interviews, I identified two criteria for participants:

1. Youth aged 18-30 years during study period of 2006-2016; and,
2. Youth activists engaged in work focused on influencing policy or politics (i.e. of national scope or regarding Canada’s environmental record in international affairs) related to climate change and sustainable development at a more-than-local scale.

As has been discussed in the introductory chapter, while some sources cite youth as between ages 18 and 29, there is no “normal” concept of youth or adulthood, rather, these are both socially and temporally-specific constructs (Maguire, Ball, & MacRae, 2001; Ruddick, 1996). The time period comprising the focus of study (from 2006 to 2015) also coincides with a higher level of youth un(der)employment, rising tuition costs, and a number of other financial concerns for Canadian youth. Youth move in and out of this social movement while undertaking higher education (and shouldering the debt that often accompanies), developing their own identity, and seeking a career in an age of austerity and precarity.

The decade 2006-2016 is a compelling period of study for a few additional reasons. During this era, concern over climate change and large-scale environmental issues became widespread in North America with the popular reception of films such as An Inconvenient Truth in the mid-2000s. Yet, in the Canadian context, the federal government under Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2006-2015) was hostile to environmental interests, attempting to dismiss and disparage organizations and individuals questioning the government’s policies. This was a time of setbacks for activists, muzzling of environmental scientists, fewer “wins” for environmental groups, and increased contentious politics around these issues. I found it
interesting to ponder why some youth opted to participate when the costs of participation, level of frustration, and risk to reputation were high during this period of federal government hostility towards the environment.

With respect to the second condition regarding involvement, it was important that those who participated in the study have an understanding of the youth climate movement, and their own role within it, beyond simply superficial or token participation. I sought to examine activism that connects local organizing with global framings. Much of the work in the climate change field concerns decisions with far-reaching implications (e.g. long timeframes, decisions that affect others beyond certain political or even bioregional borders). I wanted to engage those who understand their own activism as something larger than a small-scale local stewardship project. While those kinds of localized projects are useful and necessary, they arguably take on a different character in the orientation and goals of the participants.

2.3 Risky Business: Ethics Reviews and Assessing Activism

Submitting a research ethics protocol is a standard procedure of university research. I was surprised when my research protocol submission was returned with a single directive: “would the researcher please describe the protocol to follow if interviewees mentioned illegal activity.” I discussed with my supervisors and crafted a reply, focusing on the need to maintain confidentiality of the participant. I then received a more thorough, multi-step follow-up request for further details from the SSHE REB reviewer.

As a result, I developed very detailed plans as to how I would protect confidentiality as well as data storage plans, using a password-protected encrypted USB key to store the voice recordings and code-identified transcripts with potentially-identifying information. I also described the process by which I would decouple interview transcripts from participant names; this ended up being a multi-step process whereby participants were first assigned a code for their data, and then an alias by which they would be identified in the final write up. I discussed the use of providing coded categories for the types of potentially illegal (or quasi-legal) activities that participants may allude to: for example, “direct action” or “civil disobedience” for acts that might possibly include trespassing or peaceful protest. However, I
repeated that in order to answer the research questions, *examination or discovery of criminal behaviour or activity is not required.* I would not be pressing activists for accounts of quasi-legal or illegal activities; rather, in the remote possibility where they willfully and voluntarily divulged such information, I would protect their identity to the best of my ability and to the extent permitted by law. I subsequently updated my letter of information and informed consent form accordingly to reflect this (see Appendices B.1 and B.2). In preparing my responses to the ethics reviewer, I discussed with colleagues in other fields about how they have handled similar research. I also met with a friend in the field of criminal law who advised on the difference between accidentally uncovering alleged past activities and the duty to report any imminent intent to harm an identifiable third party.

In the end, nearly all the data collected was quite benign from a criminal activity perspective. The vast majority of activists explicitly stated or implicitly suggested that they worked within a policy of non-violence; while a few participants mentioned their participation in non-violent civil disobedience such as sit-ins or peaceful protests along pipelines, this was not the main focus or reflection on their work. Most activities occurred within state-sanctioned and public events. Again, the research questions did not need to uncover or examine illegal activity to be answered, so the few activities of civil disobedience were not discussed in detail.

It was useful, however, to deeply consider my own approach to research ethics. Being the ethical researcher goes beyond simply completing multiple bureaucratic checklists and long forms; it is about thinking through our obligations to participants and the ways in which we respectfully deal with communities and data. Similarly, Gillan and Pickerill (2012) point out that, while proposals and ethics reviews must be undertaken before a project commences, peer approval and ethics review checklists do not capture the ambiguity of the project. Rather, there are complexities to doing any kind of research with social movements, and we need to have more conversations about the approaches and methods to ethical research design.
2.4 Collecting Data: Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this project to “explore a broader range of factors, including the thoughts and feelings of study participants” (Northey, Tepperman, & Albanese, 2012, p. 79). While not always representative or generalizable, interviews help to explain how “individual people experience and make sense of their own lives” (Valentine, 2005, p. 111). This is particularly valuable in asking interviewees about their histories, experiences, and roles in the climate movement, encouraging them to comment on personal and political factors. As I sought to represent the views and agency of activists themselves, interviews were most effective at revealing key details, uncovering nuance, and seeking clarification. For these reasons, semi-structured interviews were more appropriate than a rigid survey instrument. An interview process also provided more opportunity for participants to reflect on whether (and if so, how/why/when) their experience or ideas changed over time, providing me a greater level of detail for analysis. While I undertook interviews for their ability to capture participants’ experiences in their own words, I do acknowledge that there is interpretive work done by the researcher; thus, I take responsibility for interpreting the quotes emerging from interview data.

Collecting data through semi-structured interviews is uniquely suited for thematic, or frame, analysis. Snow et al. identify frames as the “‘schemata of interpretation’ that enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify, and label’ occurrences within their life space and the world at large. By rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective” (1986, p. 464) – frames are particularly important to developing narratives that sustain collective action within social movements. Similarly, semi-structured interviews help collect narrative data by asking certain types of questions; the “interviewees themselves interpret and make sense of issues and events” (Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009, p. 160, emphasis in original).

Thirty-five (35) interviews were held either in-person, over the telephone, or via Skype. While I had originally planned to conduct the majority of interviews by arranging research trips to major cities in Canada, a number of interviews were conducted via Skype or over the phone due to resource constraints. In particular, Skype offered an interesting new use of
technology as it provided some of the benefits of meeting face-to-face. The Skype and phone interviews generally yielded as much data as those conducted in person. It also provided the opportunity to include participants from a number of regions that I would not have been able to visit in-person.

I employed a combination of recruitment techniques, relying primarily on personal networks, listserv outreach, and developing a snowball sampling technique. I began by contacting gatekeepers of relevant listservs of which I was aware: primarily, an environmental research and advocacy list developed and maintained by a professor at the University of Toronto, and various listservs created by the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition (CYCC), including years of alumni networks of Canadian Youth Delegations (CYD). I thought that the former would connect me with other researchers and scholar-activists, and I knew the latter’s organizational listservs would be invaluable for reaching potential interview participants across the country.

To elaborate on the value of the CYCC network listservs: every year the CYCC selects and trains a delegation of youth representatives to participate in the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), known more colloquially as the “UN climate conference.” There is an effort on the part of delegation organizers to recruit representatives from all regions of the country, as well as Indigenous youth. This group is collectively known as the Canadian Youth Delegation (CYD), and they attend the international UN climate conference after months of preparation. Occasionally, an additional “Home Team” has focused on on-the-ground communications and mobilization in Canada during the UN negotiations. Thus, the network of alumni from years of CYD provides an excellent starting point for recruiting climate activists. The CYCC and CYD will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, with a focus on the role networks play in supporting justice movements.

The CYCC is also a lead coordinator in the Canadian Powershift project, which provides

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5 In order to maintain some level of confidentiality of participants, I do not reveal which professor has created this list.
active regional training and capacity-building meetings where youth meet, train, and strategize together in person. Powershift is also an online community which “offers young organizers a platform to share resources, stories, ideas and showcase our diverse movement. The community we create helps us to build political power, harness our collective energy, amplify our message and advance our vision of a clean, just and sustainable future” (Wearepowershift.ca, 2014). Finally, the CYCC is also involved with the Canadian divestment campaign (as are networks like 350.org and, formerly, the Sierra Youth Coalition). In this capacity, members of the CYCC are involved in on-campus efforts to move university endowments and investments away from fossil fuel industries.

Though there is overlap between participants of CYD, Powershift, and divestment campaigns, each network reaches a particular cross-section of activists with slightly different but complementary goals: those participating in processes of state-sanctioned international climate governance, and those involved in more grassroots organizing and local direct action efforts. I thus asked the Director of the CYCC to circulate the letter of invitation to all listservs. In this email outreach, I provided a brief personal introduction, as well as the official Research Ethics Board-approved letter of invitation to inform potential participants about the nature of the study and its goals.

In addition to listserv outreach, I relied on personal networks to gain access to potential participants. Resulting from my past participation in youth climate activism, I know people in leadership positions who oversee small numbers of volunteers or staff. I identified a list of those whom I believed to be appropriate contacts. As it transpired, some of them reached out to me first, having received my letter of invitation via one of the listservs – an unanticipated “finding” of connectedness. I followed up directly with the others, contacting via email, or in a few select cases where this was not possible, through Facebook. I shared the letter of invitation and asked whether they would be interested in participating and, crucially, whether they would be willing to share the letter of invitation with their own networks of colleagues and friends who matched the participant criteria. This was another way in which I connected with potential participants beyond my immediate network.

In this manner, a snowball sampling technique emerged: I asked my contact or the
“gatekeeper” to pass along the letter of invitation directly to potential participants. This procedure was followed primarily to ensure privacy and informed consent. Since the letter of invitation instructed those interested in participating to contact me directly, the person who passed along the invitation need never know whether they followed up. This safeguarded confidentiality for those who did participate and removed social pressure to participate from those who were not interested.

It was remarkable to note that the snowball sampling did not produce a linear pathway to others working in the same city or for the same organization; rather, the activists had networks that crisscrossed the country and did not conform to regional boundaries or associations. To illustrate, a researcher in Ottawa might get in touch with me because her friend on Vancouver Island passed along the letter, while an activist working in Nova Scotia might refer me to someone who manages a listserv in Edmonton. While I was not able to map the pathways of such engagement within the scope and confines of this research project (and, most notably because it would have contravened the agreement signed by participants as part of the informed consent process), it would be a fascinating addition to a future project.

Midway through the data collection, I noticed that I had not spoken with activists from the Prairies and the Territorial North. I decided to undertake a second round of listserv outreach in early winter 2016, supposing that perhaps the CYCC was overly representative of youth in Eastern and Central Canada. These issues raised a question regarding the geographical distribution of environmental activism by youth in Canada. I decided this question was better left for future research in order to maintain my research focus on the narratives of activists themselves and their engagement practices while keeping in mind that there could be relational associations between their engagement practices and their geographical location.

To increase outreach in Canada’s Western provinces, I got in touch with listserv gatekeepers of an organization called Next Up, a training hub and community network for young people involved in progressive projects in social and environmental justice work. Next Up was founded in BC in the mid-2000s, and has since established multiple chapters in cities in Alberta and Saskatchewan, as well as in Winnipeg and Ottawa at the time of writing. As such, the network is well-developed in the West and Prairies. In addition to providing young
leaders with a network, Next Up coordinates seven-month training programs, as well as intensive workshops on climate leadership for Indigenous and Metis youth.

The final sample size of 35 interviews was finalized as the research process unfolded. To ensure that the sample size was sufficient, I sought information on sample size of other doctoral projects; for example, in a database content analysis of 560 PhD studies employing qualitative interviews, Mason (2010) found that the median was 28 and the mean 31 interviews. While I was satisfied to be well within qualitative social science disciplinary norms and expectations, sample size was ultimately determined by *theoretical saturation*, or “when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation” (Mason, 2010, p. 2; see also Bryman, Teevan & Bell, 2009). Saturation may be affected by the nature of the study and the types of questions it seeks to answer – some studies reach saturation faster than others. Still others warn that the inability to answer a question comes not from lack of data but from having too much of it – an excess of data (Mason, 2010). The number of participants can also be influenced by the level of expertise or familiarity with the topic and the respondents (Mason, 2010).

Of greater significance, then, with respect to the level of expertise or familiarity with the topic, the 35 interviewees demonstrated proficiency and great familiarity with the climate justice movement. These key informants were selected through purposive sampling, for their intimate knowledge of the youth climate movement through years of experience. As the timelines in Appendix A demonstrate, the activists interviewed were involved in climate justice (or more broadly, sustainability) work in various capacities. Specifically, ten of the 35 interviewees had participated in the environmental or climate movement for more than ten years, while only four had less than two years’ experience in the movement (see Table 2.a). 21 interview participants had attended an international climate conference, either the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC or Rio +20; many related that experience to their Canadian-based activism for a truly multi-scalar analysis. The deliberate nature of informant selection, combined with the wealth of detail collected in each semi-structured interview, thus provided adequate detail for the doctoral study. I felt I had reached theoretical saturation because I was hearing repetition, and consensus began to emerge around themes that
addressed the research questions I had set out to investigate. I recognize that I had reached saturation of a certain type of activist view, as represented and perpetuated by leaders in the movement, while also acknowledging that I had not reached saturation of the entire Canada-wide climate activist community. The sample of activists I had interviewed was marked by some homogenous indicators, particularly in that all had some level of post-secondary education and lived in relatively urban locations, and thus it is not possible to apply these findings to the entire movement (and indeed, generalizability of findings in qualitative research projects is not always possible or desirable).

Table 2.a  
Interviewee age and length of involvement in climate activism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of involvement in environmental or climate activism (years)</th>
<th>Age at time of interview (years)</th>
<th>18 – 24</th>
<th>25 – 30</th>
<th>&gt; 30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 – 10</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographically, 25 interviewees presented as female and ten presented as male. 26 of the 35 interviewed identified that they had leadership experience in the movement (see Table 2.b), having either held a coordinator or director role in a climate organization at the campus, regional, or national level; the additional nine interviewees did not specify whether they had held leadership positions. In particular, some interviewees mentioned other interviewees by name, identifying them as a leader or an influencer in the movement. For instance, Erin was commonly named, while Keira, Leslie, Mark and Mike were also mentioned as those with
ample experience. Maya and Sarah’s experiences extend further back to more ‘foundational’ elements of youth organizations, such as the SYC sustainable campuses program, a noted training opportunity among young campus organizers. I also interviewed ‘rank-and-file’ movement participants to capture a variety of perspectives within the movement. All but one had been involved for over a year, which allowed them more perspective and experiences to reflect upon. Dawn, a first-year undergraduate student, was the youngest interviewee and had the least direct experience in the movement, but even she had longer-term exposure to the environmental movement, mentioning that it was her environmentalist father who first introduced her to climate issues.

Table 2.b  Type of leadership position recorded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National organization</th>
<th>Regional or campus group</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly half of the interviewees were based in Ontario (see Table 2.c), which is likely a result of two factors: i) Ontario is Canada’s most populous province and has a number of larger cities and educational institutions that attract young people, and; ii) I was living in Toronto at the time of the interviews and scheduling in-person interviews in the Toronto area was easier than scheduling (and sometimes re-scheduling) Skype across the country.

Table 2.c  Home region at time of interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Western Canada &amp; Prairies</th>
<th>Ontario</th>
<th>Quebec</th>
<th>Atlantic Canada</th>
<th>Territorial North</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some activists were living or travelling frequently between provinces – for example, one woman I interviewed was attending university in Ontario at the time of the interviews (and very involved in her campus divestment campaign), yet she was about to return to Vancouver and was looking forward to (re)establishing as an activist there. Similarly, another activist
split her time between her partner’s home in the Prairies, and central Canada, where she lived for short-term work contracts. Thus, the locations of the activists are not meant to be understood as static; in the words of Montreal-based activist Anne, the youth climate movement is “transient” (Interview: May 3, 2016), because so many young activists are students or need to move for employment opportunities. Indeed, all of the interviewees had, or were pursuing, a university education. This brings up notions of privilege – something that the activists themselves grappled with, as discussed in Chapter 7.

Table 2.d  Highest level of post-secondary education achieved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergraduate degree in progress</th>
<th>Undergraduate degree received</th>
<th>Masters or professional degree in progress</th>
<th>Masters or professional degree received</th>
<th>Doctorate in progress</th>
<th>Doctorate received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, a shortcoming of the research is that I was unable to interview any young people working or living in the Territorial North, however, this should not be taken as indication that climate justice activism does not occur there. Rather, there appears to be a disjuncture in the ‘national’ youth network that does not extend as robustly to the North, an interesting area for possible future research.

I began the process of transcribing and coding the early interviews as I continued the second round of interviews in winter 2016. In addition to the impressions recorded in the interview field notes, I could determine with some rigorous certainty through coding that a number of important themes were repeated throughout a subsection of the interviews I was analyzing in detail. Further, as I continued with the remaining scheduled interviews, I was struck by the realization that the later interviews did not reveal to me anything new or innovative with respect to the guiding research questions, suggesting a certain amount of consistency or agreement within the sample. Thus, after having completed 35 interviews, I decided to focus my attention on analysis rather than recruitment.

My commitments to transparency and to incorporating a process of relational positionality in
the research process prompted me to provide a short biographical introduction to participants at the beginning of each interview. I would usually indicate explicitly that my own experiences and subjectivity influenced my desire to undertake this academic research. I then provided a brief, dispassionate description of my credentials – degrees earned and research background – as well as a general but vague overview of my involvement in youth environmental and climate groups, allowing the research participant to have a better sense of my positionality in relation to their own. The level of description I provided varied depending on the participant; in some cases, participants would ask me additional questions about my background or research rationale before beginning the interview. Others asked specifically about the group(s) I (had) participated in and the years of my involvement. Some interview participants were interested in chatting about shared experiences or figuring out whether we had acquaintances in common. I tried to describe my experience in a way that I felt would not influence how participants might respond – that they would tailor their responses to either fit or disrupt a model of activism they perceived me to practice or promote. I felt it important from the perspective of continuous informed consent to provide enough information that the research participant could choose to participate; by participants ‘opting-in’ to share their details, I felt it was only fair to provide details about my own experience relative to theirs. Through this process, I felt that the interviews generally progressed in a conversational tone respectful of difference, in a mutually-beneficial, or reciprocal, process producing relational and situated knowledge (e.g., Kobayashi, 2001). I feel that sharing my own experience yielded more detailed descriptions in the interview, because “the intersubjective nature of social life means that the researcher and the people being researched have shared meanings and we should seek methods that develop this advantage” (England, 1994, p. 82). Still, I am aware that power dynamics between interviewer and interviewee are often present, changing and complex, and that difference and commonality, body language and appearance may all affect the interview – in short, that it is difficult to neutralize the “interview effect” and I will receive certain types of information because I am asking questions and presenting in a certain way (Gregory, Johnston, et. al, 2009).

Yet, I believe letting participants know I had both an academic and pragmatic background –
in that I had experience in both the study of and the doing of activism and advocacy – allowed them to feel comfortable adopting a sort of shorthand with me. Practically, the participants were able to use acronyms when referring to major youth organizations or institutions with which they now knew I had experience: CYCC, SYC, CYD, UNFCCC, COP6 (see detailed list in Appendix D) were among those acronyms frequently employed. There was both reward and risk in this familiarity. For example, participants were eager to discuss events or phenomenon in more detail than they might with an “outsider” researcher. However, there were some instances where they assumed I had too much familiarity. This resulted in situations such as, when describing a major event in 2012, the participant said, “you were there, weren’t you?” (I was not), or in interviews where participants would end with, “oh, but you already know this” (I may not). In these kinds of cases, I would ask participants to provide their own interpretation of the event or topic under discussion. This not only refocused the emphasis on the participants to provide their own perspectives, it also produced more fully detailed descriptions for the transcripts.

In practice, the interviews took on a conversational form, allowing interviewees to describe their experiences in more detail, and with greater nuance, than in a traditional questionnaire (Valentine, 2005). I followed a best practice of interviewing technique by clarifying the meaning and verifying my interpretations of the participant’s answers as the interview progressed (Kvale, in Roulston, 2010). I relied on a combination interview guide and schedule employing “a mix of carefully worded questions and topic areas [which] capitalizes on the strengths of both guides and schedules, [where] a fully worded question can be placed in a guide and yet be used as a topic area” (Dunn, 2000, p. 83) (see Appendix C for interview guide). This interview guide had formally phrased questions, which I would rely on if I got lost or distracted or could not remember how I meant to ask a question. There were also topics that usually came up quite naturally in the course of the interviews, but for which I would sometimes need to probe. For these kinds of topics – for example, highest level of education achieved or in progress, or where they currently reside – I included a prompt. I

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6 Canadian Youth Climate Coalition; Sierra Youth Coalition; Canadian Youth Delegation; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; Conference of the Parties
noted prompt words as a set of bullet points, which I would review toward the end of the interview and seek clarification if enough detail hadn’t organically emerged throughout the conversation. This prompting was particularly useful in ensuring that, in addition to understanding each participant’s broader narrative and personal history arc, I was collecting smaller details.

Even though I did have formally phrased questions on the interview guide, I did not always ask the question in the exact same way – rather, I tried different and sometimes more informal ways of asking the same thing. Throughout the course of the research, I would find preferred ways of asking a question which provided greater clarity to the interview participant. Sometimes this grew out of a pattern: some participants would seek interpretation or clarification on the same question(s), so I realized I should ask it differently. The particularities of re-wording and phrasing were not something that I could have anticipated in advance but allowed me to develop a closer connection to the questions. As I became more comfortable interviewing, I was able to develop numerous entry points to bring up questions organically. This was a valuable development, since conversations progress more unpredictably than a list of pre-determined questions may allow for.

Finally, some prompts were added partway through the interview process, emerging from the flexible process of exploratory qualitative research. They arose when I realized that some participants were mentioning an issue of relevance that I had not originally included in the question list: I would then start to ask other participants about it. I also had to adapt to changing socio-political situations. For example, I decided to probe into perceived or anticipated changes in Canadian politics when, in October 2015 (mid-data collection phase), Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Liberal party won a majority in the federal election, ousting the Conservative government after nearly a decade in power.

I also included some questions that were relevant to specific participants and to be deployed only when applicable. For example, some interview participants were Canadian activists currently working or studying abroad (or had previously worked or studied abroad). In these cases, I began asking whether their experiences outside of the country influenced their perspective or analysis on the Canadian movement. Often, they had experience in the United
States and were able to provide some thoughtful perspectives on whether the youth movement in the US related to certain outcomes or events in the Canadian context.

In terms of the order of the questions deployed, the first few interviews I conducted took on a slightly different order than the later interviews. I initially posed the question “What would you identify are the causes and greatest threats of climate change?” at the very start of the interview, as I thought diving right into it would stimulate conversation and get the interviewees to begin thinking about climate change broadly. However, rather than opening up immediately on the topic, many interviewees seemed overwhelmed or surprised by the scale of the question. While my intention was to glimpse what kind of (political) ecological background or viewpoint they might possess, many participants wanted clarification on what they should talk about. On the advice of my committee, I decided that a more appropriate way to open the interview was to ask them about their own experiences: how did they first get involved in the youth climate movement and what did they do? From there, we covered motivation, activity, and perceptions of climate causes and threats, though generally in a more organic way.

To ensure informed consent beyond simply reading a theoretical description and filling out a form, I wanted to provide participants with additional context and a concrete sense of what to expect from the interview in advance. I also wanted them to reflect a little bit prior to the interview. When sending a confirmation or reminder email of the scheduled interview, I included some sample questions. This usually occurred one to two days in advance, but in some cases, I was only able to email the confirmation and questions a few hours prior to the interview.

Finally, I did experience some attrition at two key points. In the first, potential participants responded positively to an initial call for participation, but would not reply to my follow-up email with the informed consent form. While their non-response precluded me from finding out from these participants why they did not reply, it is possible that upon learning more about the process and time commitment of interviews (or the very minimal possible risks), participants simply opted out. The second key point of attrition was in the scheduling of interviews: some potential participants responded positively to both the initial call and sent
back the consent form, but ultimately did not complete an interview. In most instances, it seems this occurred because they were too busy and we could not easily find a mutually agreeable time. In a small number of cases, they simply did not show up for the interview at the agreed-upon time and date, and never did get in touch again. While I generally followed up once or twice with participants to ensure that my correspondence did not get lost, I did not follow up extensively. Ultimately, all participation is voluntary, and I did not want participants to feel coerced, pressured, or otherwise negatively impacted by the research participation request.

In order to maintain participant anonymity, a two-step identity de-linking processes was employed. First, I assigned each interview an alpha-numeric code. This code was attached to the voice recording of the interview and the transcript I produced afterward. When I began using the transcripts in NVivo for the frame analysis, I then assigned a first name-only pseudonym. None of the pseudonyms include names of actual participants, further keeping confidentiality. Interview participants are thus not referred to by their name in the final dissertation or additional articles. Through the informed consent process, participants were invited to decide whether they want to be quoted by any organizational affiliation or professional position.

2.5 Codes, Nodes, Categories and Memos: Analyzing Interview Data

There are two main elements I considered regarding data analysis. The first is the mechanics of how the data was collected, sorted, and archived. The second is the conceptual framework that informs the analysis. In this case, I employed a common method of frame analysis (see Goffman, 1974) based on identifying dominant, repeating themes, within a feminist political ecology lens.

I audio-recorded all interviews; the recordings provided the basis for detailed transcription records. I jotted down notes throughout the interviews, which I could later consult if the recording quality was poor or I wanted to double check for meaning. In the moment, the notetaking helped me to stay focused and to make notes of follow-up questions as they arose.
It also allowed me to record observations, connections, or syntheses as these were fresh in my mind. Finally, the notetaking helped me set reminders for future research.

I undertook transcription myself; listening to the interviews while transcribing provided me the opportunity to begin identifying emerging themes. It is true for me that “immersion in the data provides a preliminary form of analysis” (Dunn, 2000, p. 97). As I mentioned earlier, I undertook a “second round” of interviews in winter 2016 while I began transcription and preliminary coding. I felt that some of the later interviews were stronger as a result of my ongoing reflection: through this analysis and close listening, I was able to identify some of the areas I would need to delve more deeply into across all interviews.

Having transcribed the interview records, I used NVivo software\(^7\) to code and analyze the data. Coding in NVivo “entails cutting up transcripts into chunks of data (and of course carefully identifying the origins of the chunk with, for example, name, position, date) for later data retrieval” (Bryman, Teevan, & Bell, 2009, p. 258). I primarily used NVivo as a content management system to catalogue the transcripts and archival data – the software did not replace the analytical work I needed to do to catalogue and categorize the data. As the researcher, I was still in the position of privilege of making the making the final call of how to interpret the words of research participants (Rose, 1997).

Assigning an excerpt to a node does not remove it from its original context – it remains in place within that interview transcript. It is identified as such when the node itself is examined. There is no limit on how many nodes to which any one transcript or particular excerpt can be assigned. All potentially appropriate nodes may be applied. See Figure 3.a for an example of how nodes are assigned to a particular transcript.

\(^7\) Specifically, I uploaded completed transcripts and assigned each participant an alias, to further de-link their identity. As I read through the transcripts, I would highlight sections of particular relevance and assign them to a “node” – essentially a folder or a container to hold sections of text relating to a specific theme or category. Once that section of text has been assigned to a “node”, it is retrievable or searchable by that node. Clicking on the node will bring up all instances of that node across the transcripts. This is both rigorous and convenient to organize and review the data – rigorous because it provides additional certainty about how frequently a certain theme is mentioned by participants, and convenient because all such instances of a theme may be retrieved at once for further examination.
Figure 2.a NVivo Coding Example: Interview Participant Hannah

Figure 2.a: This image provides a quick view at Hannah’s transcript in the NVivo Starter software used for the project. In the centre window, we see Hannah’s response to a question posed in the interview. This response is provided in its original context; the interview may be scrolled through to be read in its entirety. The window on the far right shows the “coding stripes” – that is, it indicates which nodes are applied to this particular transcript, and the bars of colour demonstrate where they occur. For example, “mobilization” applies to the first part of this answer, while “comparison_social movements” applies to the entirety of the excerpt we see on the screen. Further, the highlight function has been applied to only one code, “tactic_violence”, to demonstrate another way to visually pull up the nodes within Hannah’s transcript. If instead of viewing Hannah’s transcript, we wanted to view all instances of “mobilization” across all transcripts, we could click on “Nodes” in the far left menu bar and select it from a list. Multiple windows may be open at a given time in NVivo and toggled between, which is particularly useful for comparative purposes.

I developed these nodes based on the data itself: for example, if a participant spoke about the possibilities of a community group developing a program or project, it would be coded with “community solutions”. There developed almost a hierarchy of categories of codes; I decided to link them by general issue, which might be, for example, “motivation to participate.” It would then be further defined within a subfield, identifying the particular type of motivation.
(e.g., an event, an interaction with literature, personal relationships). Building on this, then, if a participant mentioned how their interactions with classmates in a first-year university course eventually led them to attend a rally and join a committee, “motivation_people” might be used as the node. Such examples can also be found in Hannah’s transcript in the right-hand window of Figure 3.a.

In addition to coding the transcripts by node, I also created memos, a tool of grounded theory facilitated by NVivo (Bryman, Teevan, & Bell, 2009). Through memos, I began to link ideas illuminated by the node classification to develop concepts. Such concepts provide the empirical basis for Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Memos were also generated to summarize main themes and key details of each interview; these memos were named by participant. By summarizing the interviews in this way, I was able to see participant details and answers “at-a-glance”. Generating memos about each participant helped organize the interviews as brief descriptive stories, rather than reductive compilations of nodes, and ensured that I could easily retrieve the essence of the participant’s interview.

Detailed attributes of each interview participant were also contained in a case. Cases contained general and anonymized categorical attributes for each interview participant – for example, age range, approximate length of involvement in the climate movement, highest level of education achieved. By compiling each interview participant as a case, it was possible to run queries or show comparisons across the attributes.

Identifying concepts emerging from coding and memos was an exercise in frame analysis. Frame analysis is widely attributed to Goffman (1974), who described framing as “the organization of experience” (p. 11). Frame analysis has been utilized in social movement research (see: Tilly & Wood, 2013; Tilly & Tarrow, 2007). The process of coding and developing categories from the interview data – essentially, revealing frames – helped me to uncover and explain this particular social movement formation. Once frames have been revealed, they can then be analyzed, leading to the development or discovery of concepts. The methodology and analysis meet the compelling need to study the “meaning given by certain actors to their action” in social movements (Touraine, 2004, p. 719).
In keeping with my feminist commitment to present interview participants’ perspectives in an unedited way, I often provide the activist’s description in their own words before analyzing it myself. I believe that this provides respect to the interviewees to speak for themselves, as well as making (more) apparent the assumptions I am making in my theoretical connections. This is an attempt to remove the ultimate and opaque power of the researcher to make the only decisions about how ‘data’ is presented – though I do acknowledge that I make the final analytical conclusion, which may include interpreting quotes or making an assertion that could be disputed by other researchers.

Another manner in which I present the interview data in a way that allows it to ‘speak for itself’ while I analyze emerging themes is through the creation of activist timelines. Through a detailed review of an interviewee’s transcript, as well as NVivo memos and cases, I generated a chronological timeline of climate-related activism for each participant. These timelines (see Appendix A) include information about the interview participant’s described influences on their decision to participate in activism as well as the activities they undertook. Indeed, to differentiate between ‘action’ and ‘idea,’ I used two colours on the timeline (see Hannah, below, as an illustrative sample): the black text represents an action or activity that the activist ‘did’, for example, beginning a new university program, attending a conference, or planning a march. The pink colour represents their self-reported thought process, realization, or changing opinion at a particular time. Of course, as with all qualitative data collection, one cannot be certain that the reported thought processes are ‘accurately’ what the activist experienced at the time. Yet, I assert that it is valuable to collect this information as part of their consciousness-making and personal story-telling which informs their own praxis. It is thus a useful and richly detailed demonstration of how interview participants were not ‘born’ fully formed in their opinion and approach, nor immediately transformed into climate justice activists in only one day, but rather that their activist identity is a process of becoming, through accumulated experiences, exposure to different ways of organizing around justice issues, and personal reflection on social structures and/or political radicalization.

For example, again using activist Hannah as a sample, her timeline (Figure 2.b) demonstrates
the multiple ‘phases’ during which Hannah’s evolution as a climate justice activist may be identified. For instance, she reports having been interested in environmental issues as a child and enrolling in environmental politics courses in university. It was during her university studies that Hannah became directly involved in student and local politics; it is then that she, as identified in pink font, began that environmental issues were all-consuming in their urgency and importance. We can then see how, by extension, she reports feeling the need to perform her environmentalism in a prescribed, appropriate manner (see 2008-2010). 

Alongside her changing consciousness traced by the timeline, one can see the positions Hannah has held in non-profits, and the campaigns she has participated in.

By providing both activists’ acts and changing beliefs, I aim to underscore how much of the movement is shaped by activist reflection and consciousness: an iterative process of (re)thinking about experiences over time. Rather than being solely focused on the action taken by those involved, I seek to demonstrate how their own processes of reflexivity, critical engagement, and a movement ‘from righteousness to empathy,’ connects the movement actors to similar processes of feminist political ecology and intersectional analysis. In this manner, activists (here demonstrated by Hannah) embody and personify the changing nature of the movement at-large. In Chapters 5 and 6, I begin to demonstrate how activists are involved in theory-generation: activists are making sense of their experiences, and by sharing them in networks and training sessions, producing ideas that get taken up and (re)produced in other activist (and, even academic) contexts.
Figure 2.b Timeline Example: Interview Participant Hannah

as a child, cared about environment and enjoyed watching Captain Planet

worked for student union, worked on a local mayoral campaign

2008-2010: had a campaigner job at an environmental organization, felt a lot of self-imposed accountability to perform environmentalism in the “appropriate” way

2010: worked for a non-profit foundation, focusing on environmental issues, noticed a lot of ENGOs framing climate change work as “arctic research” to fly under Harper government’s radar

received direct action training, involved with an anti-Keystone campaign

2013: decided to take a step back from activism - “left the field” is worried about being called a “sellout” but notes that her interests have changed

focusing on “empathy rather than righteousness”, suggests that different framings speak to different people

undergraduate courses focused on international studies and global environmental politics

began feeling a lot of pressure - that environment is THE most important issue

worked with a coalition of academics and civil servants on environment and economic issues, was offended when an older colleague told her that she’d change her mind - she believes there’s a difference between growing older and becoming jaded

worked with an anti-toxics campaign

2011-2012: involved in educational environmental events in the lead-up to Rio +20

received training in non-violent communication, trying to avoid activist burnout
2.6 Visiting the Archive: Reading the Movement’s Material

In keeping with my commitment to develop a project that synthesized activists’ own perspectives with those of academic researchers, I sought to include multiple accounts of social movements and environmental politics. I read materials that ranged from academic analyses (e.g., Snow & Soulé’s 2010 *A Primer on Social Movements*), to popular books (e.g., Naomi Klein’s 2014 *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*), to the personal and autobiographical accounts of activists themselves (e.g., Tzeporah Berman’s 2011 *This Crazy Time: Living our Environmental Challenge*). I also examined the history of environmental politics in Canada from the 1960s to 2015 through a review of scholarly literature and policy documents in order to have a better understanding of the context within which environmental activism has ‘evolved’ in Canada (see Chapter 4).

Bevington and Dixon (2005), for example, suggest that it is useful to know what is being read and discussed by activists to know what will be of use to them when developing a project. This also includes what they are producing and disseminating. They suggest that “in other words, activists read, write, and talk extensively about organizing and other tactical questions, categorizing methods of mobilization with high degrees of specificity and depth” (Bevington & Dixon, 2005, p. 194). These views encouraged me to read what is sometimes called “grey literature” created by and for social movements. Such grey literature was predominantly used to supplement the primary data collection of the interviews, and inform discussions in Chapters 5 and 6. A broader scholarly literature was largely used to develop the conceptual framework and context for the research project that I discuss in Chapter 2. I also reviewed press releases, blogs, websites, event invitations and calls for participation, all with an eye to identifying dominant themes in mobilizing grievances, identity, and the framing of climate and ecological issues. For example, to better understand a participant’s description of a campaign they participated in with 350.org, I read blogs about that campaign which were available via that organization’s website.

Finally, I also looked at direct communications that these groups sent their supporters. As a subscriber/supporter on many listservs – including 350 Canada, Leadnow, Sierra Club, ForestEthics, and Evidence for Democracy – I already had direct access to a robust archive of
direct communication. I was thus able to examine years of email communications and calls to action. Of course, in ‘mining my email inbox’, I used only public campaign emails sent to supporters as a means of situating the individual narratives within a wider context of campaign communications, watershed moments, and emerging shared narratives. I did not examine private in-group conversations, within which sensitive strategizing and conservations took place, because I did not have consent from those participants. I focused on the public communications that were meant to be viewed by the public and shared widely on social media.

In summary, the research project was a qualitative case study of the Canadian youth climate movement between 2005-2016. I was influenced by feminist and activist scholarship in my research design and orientation, and used a process of frame analysis to explore emergent themes and concepts. By reporting on my findings from semi-structured interviews, I made concerted efforts to include the activist voices ‘in their own words’ to try to make apparent the orientation and assumptions of my own analysis. Indeed, I practiced reflexivity throughout the research project, and provided a brief description of my positionality to research participants at the outset of our interviews. All participation was voluntary and I sought informed consent from participants. Through the process, I challenged myself to consider the usefulness of the research findings for both academic and community organizer audiences. In the next chapter, I make apparent why environmental and climate organizers would be interested in this work. I do so by tracing the changing ‘eras’ of environmental politics and governance throughout the late twentieth century to present, to demonstrate what is unique and worthy of study in the time period I have identified, from 2006 to 2015.
Chapter 3
Situating Climate Justice:
Feminist Political Ecology as Conceptual Framework

A feminist political ecology conceptual framework makes visible connections between the domination of nature and of women, Indigenous peoples, and those living in the Global South. Increasingly, feminist political ecology has incorporated the “the matrix approach of ‘intersectionality’, which now seems de rigueur in feminist environmental analysis” (MacGregor, 2017, p. 4), and it is this evolving intersectional approach within feminist political ecology that I focus on incorporating in my own analysis. Intersectional considerations of oppressions are also, coincidentally, chief concerns of climate justice, suggesting a preliminary appropriateness of aligning these two ‘traditions’ or conceptual frameworks within academic study and activist organizing.

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical foundations of my empirical research project. I insist on incorporating a specifically feminist political ecology analysis, influenced as it is by earlier ecofeminist work, which first strongly identified the link between the subordination of women and of nature (e.g., Merchant, 1980; Warren, 1990; Gaard, 2011), and a broader political ecology tradition, which concerns itself with the contextually-specific and place-based political and power dynamics between people and environment. In the second half of the chapter, I elaborate on the extension of environmental justice frameworks into climate justice and decolonial approaches to scholarship and activism. In developing the conceptual framework of the dissertation, I contend that an approach that combines these traditions is appropriate and necessarily for fully analyzing the youth climate justice movement, and I weave them together in my analysis of the empirical data of the case and broader academic and movement literature throughout the dissertation.

In this chapter and throughout the dissertation, I take my lead from scholars like Di Chiro, an academic and community organizer, who focuses on interdisciplinarity, stating that

In Western societies most notably, the world is organized through categorical and binary distinctions (e.g. nature and culture, ecology and politics, humanities
and the natural sciences). One way I have attempted to ‘stay with the trouble’ in my academic and activist work is to think and act across these binaries by engaging with transdisciplinary fields such as environmental justice studies and feminist political ecology. (Di Chiro, 2015, p. 211-212)

Specific to this chapter, I argue that feminist political ecology, related directly to the nascent field of climate justice, is instrumental in crafting the conceptual framework for understanding the youth climate justice movement in Canada. Further, the transformative potential of intersectional climate change supports approaches of solidarity and reconciliation among settler and Indigenous peoples. This is important for multiple reasons. Not only is the integration of feminist political ecology and climate justice literatures crucial for my own analysis, I have found that strong connections are being made that link active feminist and decolonial approaches by activists within the climate justice narrative and climate justice movement itself.

3.1 Dualisms and Subordination under (Colonial-)Capitalist Relations: Developing a Feminist Political Ecology Conceptual Framework

In this section I do two main things to clarify my feminist political ecology research framework. First, I demonstrate how persistent Western dualisms that separate Nature from Society have influenced the ubiquitous idea that humans assert dominance over nature and have contributed to processes of uneven development. Next, I argue that, while political ecology has successfully begun to critically dismantle hierarchical dualisms, such analyses are not always sensitive to gender, intersectional identity, and positionality. The tradition of ecofeminism attends to gender analysis, yet has been criticized for being biologically essentialist, as in the case of women being described as being more closely connected to nature because of their gender (e.g. Vandana Shiva’s invocation of a feminine principle in nature, outlined in Kings, 2017), or for what MacGregor identifies as “ecomaternalist” rhetoric, which suggests “women’s mothering and caregiving work mediates the relationship between people and nature and thereby engenders a caring stance towards nature”
(MacGregor, 2006, p. 4, emphasis in original). While acknowledging the basis of such criticisms of essentialist arguments, I demonstrate in this chapter that a feminist political ecology perspective, influenced by critical ecofeminisms, political ecology, and intersectionality, provides the seeds of an appropriately justice-oriented analytical framework for this project.

The idea of a singular, ‘God-given’, and unalterable Nature has been espoused through various religious and spiritual practices for over 2000 years (MacNaghten & Urry, 1998). In a seminal (and contested) 1967 article, White argues that Judeo-Christian beliefs shifted humans’ understanding of their role from “part of” nature to one who dominates over it: “Christianity… not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends” (White, 1967, p. 1205, emphasis added). The Cartesian division of mind and matter popularized in Enlightenment thinking of the 18th century further supported the society and nature dualism, suggesting that nature was somewhere “out there” and separate from humans (see Dale, 2001; Evernden, 1993; Redclift, 1987).

The Industrial Revolution reinforced this separation through its supposed “triumph of ‘culture’ over ‘nature’”, creating a greater imaginary distance between modern Europe and the rest of the world (Gregory, 2001, p. 87). Modern cultures, able to exert their will on the environment, believed they were no longer constrained by local ecologies as were premodern cultures (Gregory, 2001). Harvey (1996) asserts that the Enlightenment idea(l) of human mastery over nature was revered as a path to emancipation and self-realization. Harvey suggests that this paradigm contributed to notions of environmental determinism and cultural superiority, and ultimately, to uneven development under capitalist conditions:

The genius of eighteenth-century political economy was this: that it mobilized the human imaginary of emancipation, progress, and self-realization into forms of discourse that could alter the application of political power and the construction of institutions in ways that were consistent with the growing prevalence of the material practices of market exchange. It did so, furthermore, while masking social relations and the domination of the laborer that was to follow, while subsuming the cosmic question of the relation to nature into a technical discourse concerning the proper allocation of scarce resources (including those in nature) for the benefit of human welfare. (Harvey, 1996, p. 87).
Harvey (1996) continues, however, by arguing that the Enlightenment project was not extended equally to all of humankind – it excluded and subordinated by class, gender, and race, through the control of resources and production of socially-produced scarcity. Harvey’s analysis has been echoed in political ecology, which, though it draws upon different fields, theoretical and methodological traditions, “was (and is) an epistemological project, which set out to shatter comfortable and simplistic ‘truths’ about the relationship between society and its natural environment” (Bridge, McCarthy & Perreault, 2015, p. 5). Yet, as Harvey begins to imply and other political ecologists reiterate, nature coded as secondary to humans has not been done so neutrally, rather, it has been coded as separate from (mainly Euro-Western, white) men – and it is here that a feminist perspective must be applied. Thus, “to recapitulate, certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, animals – in short, domination of all constituted as others” (Haraway, 1991, p. 177).

Thus, in the Western ‘canon,’ dualisms that subordinate nature place women on the side of the body, and men on the side of the mind. In this way, women are subordinated to man as nature is to culture. In the 1980s and early 1990s, ecofeminism emerged as both activist movement and academic concern claiming that “the liberation of women cannot be achieved without the simultaneous liberation of nature from the clutches of exploitation” (Kings, 2017, p. 70). As Gaard (2011) makes clear in her thoroughly referenced (chronologic and thematic) retrospective, ecological feminisms provide an integrative perspective for justice concerns in the present-day:

In the year 2011 (and beyond, I suspect), there is no lack of eco-justice issues to interrogate, theorize, organize around, and transform using the analyses of an ecological feminism: Global gender justice; climate justice… An intersectional ecological-feminist approach frames these issues in such a way that people can recognize common cause across the boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality, species, age, ability, nation – and affords a basis for engaged theory, education, and activism. What shall we name this approach, so that future generations of feminists can find its history, its conceptual tools and
activist strategies, its critique of economic imperialism, cultural and ecological colonialism, gender and species oppression? (Gaard, 2011, p. 44)

In response to Gaard’s (rhetorical) question, I suggest that a feminist political ecology perspective is best to embrace the intersectionality of the ecological feminist project and to leave behind what MacGregor (2006) calls the “ecomaternalism” of ecofeminist approaches, which I examine in the next subsection. In particular, I align with MacGregor’s call for “feminist ecological citizenship” as “a more promising, and more radical, language for articulating the goals of ecofeminist politics than the language of care” (MacGregor, 2006, p. 4). In the subsections that follow, I first consider the trajectory of a specifically ‘ecofeminist’ approach before developing the feminist political ecology conceptual framework within which my work is situated. Later in the chapter, I also propose that a fuller conception of feminist political ecology must include decolonization practices as a means of critically engaging how inequities resulting from racist and imperialist practices are an important part of intersectional climate justice.

3.1.1 The Birth and Death and (re)birth of Ecofeminism

Ecological feminism, or ecofeminism, is concerned with uncovering and critiquing the dualisms and subordination that have been identified in the first subsection of this chapter. As MacGregor suggests, “ecofeminism is a broad intellectual tradition founded on an analysis of the intersections of gender, class, race, and imperialism and is ‘fundamentally linked to struggles for global justice and ecological flourishing’” (2014, p. 622). According to Warren (1990), “ecological feminism is the position that there are important connections – historical, experiential, symbolic, theoretical – between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding of which is crucial to both feminism and environmental ethics” (Warren, 1990, p. 126). Warren further demonstrates that patriarchal conceptual frameworks are supported by a “logic of domination, coupled with value-hierarchical thinking and value dualisms, which ‘justifies’ subordination. What is explanatorily basic, then, about the nature of oppressive conceptual frameworks is the logic of domination” (Warren, 1990, p. 129, emphasis in original).
Feminist scholars have long demonstrated how ‘feminine’ Nature has been placed in dialectic with ‘masculine’ Society. Nature is commonly referred to in female or feminine terms, with all its (sexualized) imagery of fertility, renewal, and reproduction (e.g., Smith, 2010; Soper, 1995). Feminized Nature is both innocent, nurturing mother and wild, unruly siren (Gregory, 2001). In these narratives, Nature’s curves and ‘virgin’ body are ripe for penetration (Soper, 1995); her lands need to be tended or tamed, dominated or mastered, by masculine society (e.g., MacNaghten & Urry, 1998). The material ‘motherland’ of physical geographical features is to be shaped by the ‘fatherland’ of culture and society (Soper, 1995).

In *The Death of Nature* (1980), Merchant notes how these changing characterizations of Nature over historical timeframes resulted in different interactions between humans and their environments:

Whereas the nurturing earth images can be viewed as a cultural constraint restricting the types of socially and morally sanctioned human actions allowable with respect to the earth, the new images of mastery and domination functioned as cultural sanctions for the denudation of nature. Society needed these new images as it continued the processes of commercialism and industrialization, which depended on activities directly altering the earth. (Merchant, 1980, p. 2)

Merchant continues that,

while the pastoral tradition symbolized nature as a benevolent female, it contained the implication that nature when plowed and cultivated could be used as a commodity and manipulated as a resource. Nature, tamed and subdued, could be transformed into a garden to provide both material and spiritual food… It depended on a masculine perception of nature as a mother and bride whose primary function was to comfort, nurture, and provide for the well-being of the male. In pastoral imagery, both nature and women are subordinate and essentially passive. (Merchant, 1980, p. 9)

Ecological feminist thinkers have also demonstrated how the idea of woman as passive and subordinate to man has been supported by tools of scientific method, employed to naturalize hierarchies: “The political principle of domination has been transformed here into the legitimating scientific principle of dominance as a natural property with a physical-chemical base” (Haraway, 1991, p. 19). Rather than accepting systems of Western science and other structures of Enlightenment thinking that promote and support hierarchies, ecofeminist
approaches espouse a different mode of thinking. In particular, ecofeminism challenges notions that suggest humans must “emancipate” themselves from nature by the creation and control of culture (Mies & Shiva, 2014):

An ecofeminist perspective propounds the need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of co-operation, and mutual care and love. Only in this way can we be enabled to respect and preserve the diversity of all life forms, including their cultural expressions, as true sources of our well-being and happiness. (Mies & Shiva, 2014, p. 6)

However, some ecofeminists, like Shiva, have argued that a ‘feminine principle’ inherently links women to nature, and that the subjugation of this feminist principle is the basis of all environmental degradation and injustices (Kings, 2017). Cultural ecofeminism as practiced by Shiva has been criticized by poststructuralist feminists for the “essentialist equation of women with nature, discrediting ecofeminism’s diversity of arguments and standpoints” (Gaard, 2011, p. 31; Sultana, 2014). Similarly, MacGregor points out that “ecomaternalist arguments that celebrate women’s caring for people and the planet without condemning its implication in oppressive political economic systems risk affirming sexist notions about women’s place in society” (MacGregor, 2006, p. 6-7). Such criticisms of ecofeminism-as-essentializing became so prevalent that in the 1980s and 1990s, students and scholars steered clear of identifying as ecofeminists for “fear of contamination” (Gaard, 2011). According to Gaard, this association has persisted and resulted in the loss of the possibilities from an integrative feminist ecology perspective:

In conjunction with the charges of essentialism were the criticisms of ecofeminism’s allegedly essentialist spirituality that both gendered the earth as female and led to elite, apolitical retreat and individual salvation rather than inspiring engaged struggles for local, community-wide, and global ecojustice. Yet, ecofeminist theory, spirituality, and practice have consistently been rooted in activism that challenges any notions of essentialism. (Gaard, 2011, p. 38)

In her 2011 article, Gaard summarizes decades of ecofeminist work, both considering the critiques of the field and its possibilities, suggesting that ecological feminist work should embrace intersectionality and critical thinking. Indeed, extending Warren’s (1990) logics of
domination, it is important to note that inter-related oppressions occur in time- and place-specific contexts. Intersectional analysis produces a more nuanced and differentiated understanding of individual women’s lived experiences, avoiding the tendency “to romanticize women, women’s knowledge, or women’s participation” into one homogenous category of “woman” (Sultana, 2014, p. 374). Specific to ecofeminism, intersectionality can move the field “beyond the categories which dominated essentialism debates in the 1980s and 1990s… by offering a ‘nodal point’ for disparate approaches to contribute to ecofeminist scholarship and explore the effects of sexism, class, homophobia, caste systems, and racism on women and their relationship with the environment” (Kings, 2017, p. 66).

The term “intersectionality” is often attributed to Crenshaw, who used the metaphor of a traffic intersection to explain the intersection of race and gender experienced by Black women and how their experiences of sexism differ from those of White women and how their experiences of racism are different from Black men (e.g., Malin & Ryder, 2018). As a concept, intersectionality has expanded in scope so as to query “the ways in which power differentials based on gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality, etc. mutually interact” (Lykke, 2009, p. 39; de Onis, 2012). Further, intersectionality begins to uncover how privilege and oppression are “constituted by multiple, converging, or interwoven systems” that intersect with societal “hierarchies of power and privilege” (Carastathis, 2014, p. 304). Intersectional analysis has thus been employed by a wide array of feminist scholars, including critical ecofeminists, to “shed light on how structures of power emerge and interact” (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014, p. 418).

Building on and extending from intersectional ecofeminism, I situate my research within a conceptual framework of feminist political ecology, which Harcourt and Nelson (2015) identify as “a process of doing environmentalism, justice and feminism differently” (2015, p. 9). Rather than a checklist of metrics of how to ‘do’ sustainability, they contend that feminist political ecology is characterized by thoughtful and critical reclaiming of the scholarly territory occupied by ecofeminists:

At the same time, we are trying as feminists and environmentalist advocates not to repeat populist journalism, NGO or activist campaigns that perpetuate harmful and essentialist images of women as victims of climate change or of
defiled landscapes with the people who inhabit them depicted as the primary culprits of ecological damage. We are uncomfortable with how these images erase women’s histories and lives. We feel that while women do experience changes/disasters differently it is not because they are women per se, but rather because of the structural inequalities they endure, and those pictures and broader narratives silence their voices, knowledge, and lived experiences. (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015 p. 5)

In this excerpt, Harcourt and Nelson clarify that feminist political ecology is not intended to essentialize women’s experience, but rather consider the specifics and situations of research and activist contexts (see also Sultana, 2014). Rocheleau (2015) continues, arguing that “FPE as a networked and expanded feminist endeavour to deal with the social relations of power and justice connected to cultures, ecologies and economies is alive and well. It is currently rising to the challenge of decolonial thinking and politics, to the politics of being, differently” (Rocheleau, 2015, p. 57). Although not all feminist political ecologists have demonstrated linkages to intersectional theories or methodologies in their writings (for example, Merchant’s work tends to brush over heterogenous female experiences to make certain strategic arguments about gendered experiences, power, and social conditions), intersectionality has become a more prominent tenet of feminist political ecology in the past decade. According to MacGregor, “an intersectional analysis of capitalism, rationalist science, colonialism, racism, (hereto) sexism, and speciesism has always been central to feminist environmental scholarship. And, contrary to popular opinion in many corners of environmental studies, this work has very little to do with the claim that ‘women are closer to nature than men’.” (MacGregor, 2017, p. 1). Instead, feminist political ecology “informed by theories of embodiment and intersectionality can avoid an unhelpful retreat to simplistic understandings of gender divisions and singular gendered power relations in relation to the environment” (Elmhirst, 2015, p. 524) Thus, Rocheleau’s politics of “being, differently” is possible through acts of feminist ecological citizenship, “because citizenship, defined in feminist terms, offers a way to develop ecofeminist positions that are non-essentialist, democratic, and oppositional” (MacGregor, 2006, p. 6). In this manner, then, ecological feminist thinking does not necessarily connect women to the maternal values of care, nor to the private sphere of the home.
In this subsection, I have demonstrated the possibilities for feminist political ecology, incorporating re-invigorated critical ecofeminist thought and intersectional methodologies as a foundation for studying intersectional climate justice. The next subsection delves more deeply into emerging literatures of climate justice to further demonstrate how a feminist and decolonial perspective are appropriate for informing the conceptual framework for this research project.

3.2 The Significance of Climate Justice Activism

While the previous section considered the impacts and legacies of uneven development through capitalist and colonial relations, this section moves towards a (feminist) conceptual framework of what resistance to these processes of uneven development looks like, in the form of intersectional climate justice. In particular, while so-called “first generation” environmental justice academic work has traditionally focused on distributive justice concerns arising from the uneven socio-spatial distribution of environmental risks and burdens, climate justice as academic field and social movement extends to consider multiple types of justice: distributive, recognition, and procedural, which Schlosberg (2004) identifies as “trivalent” environmental justice (2004). Extending this conception, Bulkeley et al. suggest that climate justice should be conceptualized as a “three dimensional pyramid which… better captures the multidimensional nature of what a just response to climate change might entail” (2014, p. 31), as shown in Figure 3.a. Finally, the climate justice movement makes demands that are “sensitive to relations of unequal global geometries of power and how these intersect with relations of class, race, gender, generation, indigenous rights and socio-nature” (Chatterton, Featherstone & Routledge, 2013, p. 606), demonstrating the influence of intersectionality and feminist political ecology as developed in the previous subsection.

In particular, I situate myself as part of a cohort of scholars who are now beginning to explore “how intersectionality can be employed as an analytical framework for understanding complex dimensions of climate change… to understand how individual and group-based differences are implicated in contexts of climate change, in material and
institutional as well as normative senses’’ (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2018, p. 418). Early writings in the subfield of intersectional climate justice explicitly identify that intersectionality:

> [P]rovides a critique of existing power relations and institutional practices relevant for climate issues and, thus, adds significantly to the framing and understanding of climate change. Moreover, intersectionality can generate alternative knowledge crucial in the formulation of more effective and legitimate climate strategies… intersectionality also highlights new linkages and positions that can facilitate alliances between voices that are usually marginalised in the dominant climate agenda. (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014, p. 419)

Intersectional analysis avoids oversimplification and essentialisms by revealing nuances of how climate change affects individuals and groups based on their complex positionality. For instance: while it may be true on a macro scale that wealthy, Global North countries produce the highest per-capita emissions, actual individual emissions remain contingent on factors such as class, income level, gender, age, race, location, etc. (e.g., Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014). Likewise, while certain countries have more power in international climate negotiations, privilege and benefits are not distributed equally across the population.

As an example, Malin and Ryder point to what they see as a truly “intersectional, innovative” example of a demonstration for climate justice: the Standing Rock Sioux’s anti-pipeline protests in 2016-2017. They suggest these protests highlight how impacts of climate change “do not exist in isolation, but are instead connected to intersecting forms of structural environmental injustice and dominant ideologies that operate as classist, racist, sexist, nativist, ableist, homophobic, and anthropocentric matrices of domination” (p. 1). Likewise, through my interviews with activists and organizers in the Canadian youth climate movement, I found evidence of an intersectional movement which sought to build solidarities among groups and foster multi-scalar solutions based on situated knowledges, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6. An intersectional climate justice is correlated with environmental justice, as discussed in the following subsection.
3.2.1 From Environmental Justice to Climate Justice: The Extension of a Concept ‘Beyond Borders’

Climate justice has been inspired by environmental justice principles, but is more spatially and temporally diffuse, as climate change will affect populations at great physical distance from the sources of fossil fuel emissions that have led to these atmospheric changes, and will continue to do so well into the future. While environmental justice campaigns focus on the burdens of environmental degradation or discrimination that are experienced at the local or neighbourhood level, climate justice is necessarily multi-scalar (Malin & Ryder, 2018; Sultana, 2014) and glocal in its scope, best served by coalitions considering both local and global impacts of climate change (de Onis, 2012). Further, while traditional environmental justice may discuss race, poverty, class, gender, etc., alongside one another, an intersectional climate justice approach “delves more deeply into the complex ways multiple forms of oppression create, shape, and reproduce one another” (Malin & Ryder, 2012, p. 2). In this subsection, I demonstrate how climate justice is distinct from so-called ‘mainstream’ environmentalism, discuss the influence of environmental justice organizing and theory on the development of a climate justice framework, and expand into the main tenets of climate justice as they are explained in academic literature.

The environmental justice movement “can be understood as a popular, community, grassroots, or bottom-up reaction to external threats” (Agyeman, 2005, p. 80). Environmental justice is framed around human and civil rights, fairness, access to resources, self-determination and occupational health and safety concerns (e.g., Agyeman et al., 2016), and has expanded outward from a focus on environmental racism in the United States toward a broader critique of “the structural and spatial inequities of production and reproduction in a neo-liberal political economy” (Rahder, 2009, p. 82).

A major catalyst for the growth of the national environmental justice movement in the United States was a series of direct action protests in 1982 against the disposal of PCB-contaminated soil at a landfill in Warren County, North Carolina, which was understood to be an illustration of the pervasiveness of environmental racism. Such coordinated action brought
together people of colour and environmentalists (traditionally white, middle class – see Gottlieb, 2005) and was publicized as “the beginning of a ‘merger of the environmental and civil rights movements’, and... helped to spur the development of a national movement” (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014, p. 360). Environmental justice action (re)united campaigners and communities who had worked together for civil rights, and the literature often points out the ways in which the modes of organizing were also similar: “environmental justice tactics more closely resembled civil rights actions – such as protests, rallies, sit-ins, and boycotts, often organized out of churches – than mainstream environmental activities – such as membership drives and lobbying campaigns” (Agyeman et al., 2016, p. 325).

Due to its alignment with civil rights frames, tactics and principles, then, environmental justice is distinct from what Gottlieb (2005) terms “mainstream” environmentalism. Mainstream environmental organizations – such as the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council, or the World Wildlife Fund – are largely hierarchical, centralized, and distant from community-level concerns. Such organizations are focused on adopting corporate models and promoting professionalization to gain ‘legitimacy’ from a legal and scientific perspective rather than on broader public campaigns (e.g., Faber & McCarthy, 2001). Further, such mainstream groups tend to frame environment as wilderness or pristine ‘nature’ (e.g., Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Gottlieb, 2005), and as is outlined in the Canadian case in Chapter 4. In addition, many traditional environmentalists working in the field are middle and upper-middle class, white, male, and tend to have post-secondary education (Gottlieb, 2005). Crucially, as Faber & McCarthy (2001) contend, these traditional or mainstream environmental organizations have failed to effectively “protect the environment” of all citizens; even existing laws and regulations are poorly enforced (Faber & McCarthy, 2001).

Rather than focusing on the pursuit of protecting wilderness or non-human species somewhere “out there”, “the environmental justice movement demanded that environment be understood as where people ‘live, work, and play’ – and that environmental movements focus on the way environmental risks threaten everyday life” (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014, p. 360).
Environmental justice is a term and a social movement born out of a desire to politicize and problematize the uneven exposure of people of color to environmental pollutants and locally undesirable land uses... By extension, then, environmental justice activism can be understood as challenging the hegemony of racist, state-supported, industrial capitalism that has produced, sanctioned, and externalized the cost of environmental degradation at a nearly incomprehensible scale. (Derickson & MacKinnon, 2015, p. 308)

Just as environmental justice movements in the United States seek to demonstrate “environmental racism”, other organizations campaigning against toxins sought to draw attention to “environmental classism.” Such phenomena, powerfully exemplified by the toxic leachate found in basements of the Love Canal housing development that was built on a chemical landfill in Niagara Falls, New York, demonstrated the unequal exposure of lower-income populations to environmental hazards and degradation in their homes and workplaces (Gaard, 2011).

Environmental justice as both an activist movement and discursive frame poses a challenge to the nature-society dualism, as it is not concerned with differentiating ‘environment’ as something extraneous to the everyday lived experience of humans: “Far from conceiving of nature as an abstracted disembodied ‘elsewhere’, environmental justice activists show that the health of their communities and the health of the environment are inseparable” (Di Chiro, 2015, p. 213). Further, while mainstream environmental organizations might support market mechanisms for the allocation of environmental goods, as the quote from Derickson and MacKinnon (2015) above implies, environmental justice is skeptical of market-based solutions, identifying capitalism as a system perpetuating power inequities and uneven harm to some populations. This is demonstrated through uneven development that is not produced neutrally, but from asymmetrical power relations that underpin the capitalist production of space, patterns of consumption, and unequal outcomes (e.g., Routledge, 2011). For these reasons, I contend that environmental and climate justice must be understood within traditions of feminist political ecology including an intersectional perspective.
Like environmental justice, the climate justice movement asserts that the impacts of global climate change will most negatively impact poor and marginalized communities, those who have had the least impact on creating the problem and are least likely to be able to adapt to the changes. Yet, climate justice widens the distributive justice concerns focused on “spatial inequities” mentioned by Rahder (2009) to incorporate temporally-diffuse inequities. Whereas the US environmental justice movement has been traditionally concerned with the distribution of environmental burdens – the spatiality of locally-undesirable land uses or toxic wastes, for example – climate change demonstrates that environmental actions taken in one place impact distant ‘others,’ both in space and time. Walker (2009) suggests that the “first generation” of environmental justice literature and activism was particularly effective at identifying the co-location of hazardous sites and environmental risks with poor and/or racialized populations, but that environmental justice “as only a matter of socio-spatial maldistribution” (p. 615) must be expanded for climate justice, which “posits that the benefits and burdens of climate change will be differentially distributed across space and time” (Burnham et al., 2013a, p. 240, emphasis added). Thus, a fuller conceptualization of climate justice recognizes the inequitable distribution of pollution and negative externalities but introduces the concept of porous borders: that locally-experienced negative environmental impacts are not neatly contained within the region that produces them. This suggests a new consideration of the geographies of responsibility (Fisher, 2014) and leads to what has been identified as the adaptation paradox, which “arises from the fact that climate change is a global risk being governed globally, but vulnerability and impacts are felt locally” (Burnham et al., 2013b, p. 232) – more on which will be discussed with reference to my empirical findings in Chapters 5 and 6.

All these factors combine in such a way that Jamieson (2015) asserts that the “responsibility for climate change poses a very different kind of problem than those that we are typically used to treating as matters of individual justice” (Jamieson, 2015, p. 798). In particular, Jamieson (2015) identifies that the technologies that cause climate change affect planetary conditions, not just local environments, and that greenhouse gas emissions reach populations that are spatially and temporally (i.e., future generations) distant. He suggests that the
centrality of fossil fuels to the global economy means that nearly all humans are implicated in climate change, making it “the world’s largest and most complex collective action problem” for which it is difficult to attribute blame for individual causal effects (Jamieson, 2015, p. 799). Finally, Jamieson (2015) also points out that climate change is world-constituting, affecting outcomes that might not otherwise happen in the absence of such climatic upheaval.

Yet this “climatic upheaval” is itself affected by historical patterns of production, consumption, and waste-generation; such patterns identify industrialized Global North countries as “more responsible” for climate change. Liverman (2009) suggests that in attributing responsibility for global greenhouse gas emissions, there should “be a moral difference between those emissions associated with ‘survival’ (e.g. for basic food and warmth) and ‘luxury’ emissions (e.g. for large cars)” (Liverman, 2009, p. 289). Further, emissions currently generated by Global South countries are often being outsourced from Global North countries, who continue to consume with a voracious ecological metabolism:

As many of the products produced in the Global South are exported to feed the lifestyles of the Global North, the environmental burdens associated with the extraction and export of these products are subsequently displaced from the North to the South. The result of this burden displacement is an accumulated ecological debt, owed by countries in the Global North to countries in the Global South. Such a reframing raises important questions over who is responsible for those emissions, and ultimately, who is responsible for cutting them. (Burnham et al., 2013a, p. 241)

The notion of “common but differentiated responsibilities” has been identified in the United Nations Convention on Climate Change and Agenda 21 as means to address such distributive justice concerns and will be taken up in Chapter 6. However, climate justice goes beyond distribution; following the work of Schlosberg (2004), I align with climate justice scholars who point out that recognition and procedural justice are also crucial components of climate justice, as “the production of just climate outcomes at various scales necessitates a comprehensive theory of justice that takes into account all types of justice, distributive, procedural, and recognition” (Burnham et al., 2013b, p. 235; Fisher, 2014). In this way,
emerging scholarship around climate change may borrow from and extend beyond existing environmental justice and development literatures, which “have also engaged with ideas of recognition, distribution and procedure in many different contexts over the past decades and so have significant insights to offer” to the development of the climate justice frame (Fisher, 2014, p. 2).

3.2.2 Climate Justice as ‘Trivalent’ and ‘Three-Dimensional’

Climate justice is both a discourse and an activist movement that has grown in prominence and usage, particularly after the September 2014 “People’s Climate March”, attended by more than 300,000 protesters in New York City (Jamieson, 2015; Chatterton, Featherstone & Routledge, 2013). Routledge (2011) references author and activist Naomi Klein who suggests that since 2009 climate justice has emerged as a ‘movement of movements’, arguing that “we are witnessing a range of overlapping, interacting, competing, and differentially placed and resourced networks concerned with issues of climate change and justice” (Klein in Routledge, 2011, n.p.). Routledge continues, identifying that movements for, ‘climate justice’ emerged from the Global South referring to attempts to conceptualize the interrelationships between, and address the root causes of, the social injustice, ecological destruction, and economic domination perpetrated by the underlying logics of capitalism that has seen industrialized countries reap the benefits of fossil fuel-intensive development… Such conceptualizations acknowledge that capitalism, as a social and ecological relation, is implicated in anthropogenic-induced climate change. (Routledge, 2011, n.p.)

The connection here between political ecology literatures that point to uneven development and accumulation by dispossession (see Smith, 2010; Harvey, 2003) thus serve to underscore how critical geography is contributing to (the nascent) theoretical tradition of climate justice. Later in the dissertation, I demonstrate how a political ecology approach infuses and influences activist analyses of the ‘root causes’ of climate change (see Chapter 5) and attempts at appropriately scaling climate change interventions (see Chapter 6). Further, a specifically feminist and intersectional approach to justice is crucial in tracing how climate change impacts on individuals in personally-differentiated ways (as discussed in Chapter 7).
While a comprehensive theory of climate justice “remains elusive and highly contested” (Black, Milligan & Heynen, 2016, p. 286), a holistic definition from which I borrow and use in more detail throughout the dissertation is:

Briefly defined, climate justice refers to principles of democratic accountability and participation, ecological sustainability and social justice and their combined ability to provide solutions to climate change. Such a notion focuses on the interrelationships between, and addresses the root causes of, the social injustice, ecological destruction and economic domination perpetrated by the underlying logics of pro-growth capitalism. In particular, climate justice articulates a rejection of capitalist solutions to climate change (e.g. carbon markets) and foregrounds the uneven and persistent patterns of eco-imperialism and ‘ecological debt’ as a result of the historical legacy of uneven use of fossil fuels and exploitation of raw materials, offshoring, and export of waste. (Chatterton, Featherstone & Routledge, 2013, p. 606)

Indeed, while climate justice as concept and movement has been mobilized differently by international elite non-governmental organizations, grassroots groups and academics (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Jamieson, 2015),

one discursive tactic that bridges gaps among these diverse strands is the foregrounding of a crucial dialectic: elites who have benefited from anthropogenic alteration of the global climate along with entities that continue to benefit from climate inaction and denial, on one end, and the marginalized, who face the most dire consequences resulting from this alteration and whose consumption is least implicated in producing the problem, on the other. (Black, Milligan & Heynen, 2016, p. 286)

What is made apparent in these quotes is the various ways in which climate justice mobilizes ‘justice.’ These approaches identify unequal power and the logics of domination in ‘who decides’ and ‘who participates’ in world-constituting environmental and political change. This approach is concerned with the distribution of harms and benefits, and firmly situates capitalism as both a perpetrating and perpetuating factor. These quotes also suggest that such an approach is concerned not only with distribution, but also with recognition and participation in defining the agenda of climate justice.
In his influential 2004 article, Schlosberg lays out the argument that “a thorough notion of global environmental justice needs to be locally grounded, theoretically broad, and plural – encompassing issues of recognition, distribution, and participation” (Schlosberg, 2004, p. 518). This has been taken up by Bulkeley et al. (2014) to apply to climate justice, who extend Schlosberg’s idea of trivalent justice by suggesting that “climate justice must be conceptualized in three dimensions, where questions of rights, responsibilities and recognition are essential but necessarily interdependent facets of justice in both its distributive and procedural forms” (2014, p. 32). The various faces are illustrated in Figure 3.a; each facet of climate justice is influencing/influenced by the others.
Figure 3.a Conceptions of Global Climate Justice: Comparing the Two-dimensional Model with the Three-dimensional Pyramid

Fig. 1. The conventional two-dimensional conceptualization of climate justice.

H. Bulkeley et al./Global Environmental Change 25 (2014) 31–40

Fig. 2. The three-dimensional climate justice pyramid as viewed from (a) directly above; and (b) obliquely below.

Figure Source: Bulkeley et al., 2014 (p. 32, p. 34)
An interesting consideration in this figure is the inclusion of both rights and responsibilities, as well as distribution and procedure. Including rights is consistent with the environmental justice literature that suggests all humans have a right to live in a healthy environment, while the invocation of responsibilities calls upon those who have power to exercise it with due consideration of its effects. Bulkeley et al. identify this as the need to move toward “post-distributive notions of justice” (2014, p. 32), which includes recognition and participation, as well as rights and responsibilities. This is a conversation that is influenced by the work of feminist theorists Fraser (2008) and Young (1990), who also explain why recognition and participation are vital components of justice. In particular, Schlosberg (2004) explains why the incorporation of procedural and recognition justice is so critical for a fully developed environmental justice (and which I extend to climate justice).

Schlosberg (2004) challenges liberal traditions of Rawlsian justice, which suppose that justice is equal to specifically distributive justice, and that participation and recognition (or, respect) are subsumed within this paradigm. However, Schlosberg, argues, while distributive justice in theory means that environmental goods and burdens will be distributed equally, distributional justice in the absence of such direct participation of all affected in practice is unlikely to wield very equal or just outcomes: “without recognition… such an ideal distribution will never occur” (2004, p. 520). In other words, says Schlosberg (2004), if a social group is not recognized, and not part of the parties making these decisions, they are unlikely to achieve an outcome in which they benefit. Schlosberg draws in an intersectional approach in identifying,

the direct link between a lack of respect and recognition and a decline in a person’s membership and participation in the greater community, including the political and institutional order. If you are not recognised, you do not participate… Democratic and participatory decision-making procedures are then both an element of, and a condition for, social justice. (Schlosberg, p. 2004, p. 519)

If we are to accept and extend Schlosberg’s reasoning – as I do – then recognition is a crucial pre-condition for participation, and inclusive participation is necessary for achieving just
distribution. Hence, I argue that in addition to distribution, recognition and participation are key elements of the emerging climate justice paradigm.

Burnham et al. (2013a) suggest that recognition justice “argues for the existence rights of different cultural and social groups, with respect given to these differences, in the face of climate change” (p. 240), yet they suggest it is “still largely missing in climate justice scholarship” (Burnham et al., 2013b, p. 235). However, where climate change and other environmental destruction challenge ways of life, and indeed, the very ability to survive in a region, one can see the injustice of misrecognition as “the processes of disrespect, insult and degradation that devalue some people and some place identities in comparison to others” (Walker, 2009, p. 615). Walker (2009) suggests that such degradation and disrespect create “marked people in marked places” who are “blamed for not looking after their own environment” (p. 627). Such perceived outcomes are related to framing of “the causal mechanisms of environmental problems, how we understand who is to blame and who will suffer as a result, and what we see as the appropriate actions that need to be taken” (Burnham et al., 2013a, p. 240). This misrecognition and misplaced blame are truly climate change-related injustices; many people living in these “marked places” or “sacrifice zones” (Klein, 2014) have not created the conditions that lead to continued or accelerating degradation of their environment, but they rely on it for physical and cultural survival. Recognition justice highlights the inherent values of subsistence, culture, and other practices; as Martinez-Alier points out in his environmentalism of the poor thesis, a clean environment should be a right, not a luxury (2014). Similarly, Schlosberg points to Indigenous environmental justice activists who suggest that “the first step towards justice is recognition. The basic argument is that ways of life are being lost, and they are lost simply because they are not recognised and are devalued as ways of life. That is an issue of recognition, not simply equity” (Schlosberg, 2004, p. 526). Coming out of processes of “disenfranchisement, a result of mis- or malrecognition,” is a demand for community-based participation, a “‘place at the table’ and the right to ‘speak for ourselves’” (Schlosberg, 2004, p. 523).

Related to recognition, then, are questions of who has a voice and can participate in decision-making. Participation and procedural justice “assert that those who are most affected by
decisions should have particular rights to be involved and have their voices heard on a fully informed basis” (Walker, 2009, p. 628). Procedural justice is particularly important for ensuring that it is not simply local elites who participate in developing adaptation ‘solutions’ for locally-felt climate change impacts, but that those who are more vulnerable are heard (Burnham et al., 2013b). Climate and environmental justice involves “fairness of treatment and the participatory ability of all marginalized peoples to be able to make substantive qualitative changes to the impositions of the larger society, especially those that adversely affect their rights and freedoms” (Haluza-DeLay et al., 2009, p. 9). Such an ethos has favoured a bottom-up, grassroots approach “to push through the systemic barriers that bar citizens from directly participating in the identification of problems and solutions so that they may speak and act for themselves” (Faber & McCarthy, 2003, p. 59).

However, Burnham et al. (2013a), suggest that competing approaches to social justice mean that “insufficient attention has been paid to questions of procedural climate justice... Numerous procedural concerns exist: who sits at the table, how they are allowed to participate, whose knowledge counts, and who gets to define the problem” (p. 245). Burnham et al. (2013a; 2013b) also mention that where such procedural justice strategies do exist, they place a great emphasis on the level of the state, and go on to point out that impacts are felt differentially within the state based on such factors as race, class, and gender. Rather than tying procedural justice to normative notions of belonging based on citizenship, they instead espouse the “all-affected principle” (Burnham et al., 2013a), suggesting that procedural justice may be a necessary precursor or requirement for true distributive justice: “Without fairness in process, fairness in distribution is unlikely. Conversely, fair outcomes will lead to greater recognition for the people most affected by climate change, drawing them into the conversation about solutions and thereby increasing overall justice” (Burnham et al., 2013a, p. 245).

Extending beyond the exposure to environmental risks and burdens, then, climate justice is about recognizing other ways of living, extending who speaks, and creating a non-oppressive framework within which to expand participation. The first step toward that, I argue, is to begin to decolonize our ways of thinking and customs of inclusion. Practicing decolonizing
scholarship and activism requires an attention to other knowledge traditions and beginning to place them in conversation with one another, illuminating and resisting the kinds of systems that continue to rely on (re)productions of racial inequities (e.g., Radcliffe, 2017). I suggest that it is through adopting a decolonizing approach to climate justice, influenced by feminist political ecology, that we can best approach climate justice in Canada.

3.2.3 Decolonizing, Solidarities, and ‘Intersectional’ Climate Justice: Setting up the Empirical Research Findings

In building upon understandings of climate justice through a study of youth climate activism in the Canadian context, it is important to recognize that the country has different dynamics of racialization and history than the US and other global sites, and also has a different relationship to nature, as I will describe in greater detail in the following chapter. Thus, while it is useful to understand the principles of the American environmental justice movement, it is erroneous to apply those theories and lessons directly to Canada. As Keil et al. argue, “(T)he challenge for Canadian environmental justice researchers is to avoid simply borrowing American theoretical and methodological approaches that may be inappropriate to the Canadian context” (Keil, Ollevier & Tsang, 2009, p. 65). Further, environmental racism and injustices take on a different tenor in Canada’s post-colonial nation through attention to indigenous issues. As Haluza-De Lay et al. argue, an important “theme in Canadian environmental justice research is the recognition of Aboriginal difference, that is, that First Nations and other indigenous peoples have practices and epistemologies and relation with the land that bear little relationship to that of contemporary, Westernized Canadian society” (Haluza-DeLay et al., 2009, p. 16, emphasis in original).

Thus, to conceive of an environmental or climate justice tradition suitable for Canada, non-Western knowledge and customs must be considered and respected in the course of recognition justice. For example, Deborah McGregor (2009) asserts that some Indigenous nations in Canada have communicated concepts similar to environmental justice for generations. These practices are part of traditional teachings, and their extent reaches beyond living human beings. For example, McGregor points out that Anishinaabe culture sees a responsibility to ensuring justice for “all our relations,” including non-human species and
past and future generations. These relationships and responsibilities emerge out of place-sensitive and nation-specific Creation stories. McGregor argues that to confine the environmental justice conversation to consider only impacts on humans is restrictive:

It can be argued that because of their intimate relationship with the land, any injustice to Aboriginal people is an environmental injustice to the extent that it impairs the ability of Aboriginal people to fulfil their responsibilities to Creation. Conversely, any injustices to the environment that impedes the ability of Creation to fulfil its duties to Aboriginal people is an injustice to Aboriginal people. Of course, this is true of all people: we cannot survive without an environment that fulfils our needs for survival. It is simply time for all peoples of the world to recognize this explicitly and to act accordingly. (McGregor, 2009, p. 39)

Indigenous nations’ identification of relations and responsibilities to nonhuman nature is not particular to the Canadian context. Similarly, Schlosberg quotes Indigenous women in the US southwest who argue that insofar as “we construct our identities in place, whenever the biophysical conditions of a place are threatened, undermined, or radically transformed, we also see these changes as attacks on our identity and personal integrity” (in Schlosberg, 2004, p. 525). The right to live in relation to the land and other species has been acknowledged in international agreements, such as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and in international environmental justice movements:

This influence is seen in the very first principle of environmental justice, developed at the 1991 summit, affirming the “sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity, and the interdependence of all species”. The relationship between cultural practices, sovereignty rights, and lives immersed in diverse and threatened ecosystems has been at the heart of indigenous environmental justice organizing – and indigenous movements have been central to the environmental justice movement. (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014, p. 360-361)

Such affirmations of the connections between humans and non-humans denote recognition and procedural justice. As illuminated by Sundberg, “(I)ndigenous authors in the Americas, for instance, outline complex knowledge systems wherein animals, plants, and spirits are understood as beings who participate in the everyday practices that bring world into being. These epistemic traditions are not organized in and through dualist ontologies of
nature/culture” (Sundberg, 2014, p. 35). While, as discussed in section 3.1, nature may be treated as commodity in the Euro-Western tradition, Indigenous traditions may consider nonhuman elements to be persons, relations, kin (as noted in Haluza-DeLay et al., 2009). To truly embrace justice for all, recognition of interdependence is fundamental – and that we must not be caught within the canon of posthumanist geography that “refers to a foundational ontological split between nature and culture as if it is universal” (Sundberg, 2014, p. 35).

Indeed, decolonizing scholarship urges us to recognize that, although the formal end of colonial rule resulted in the formation of postcolonial nation-states (formally sovereign states whose structures and modalities were conditioned by their colonial histories), the forms of knowledge – about economy, democracy, development, education, culture, racial-ethnic difference and so on – through which the world is apprehended and explained and modelled for the future are deeply rooted in post-Enlightenment Euro-American claims to be able to pronounce universal truths and to theorise the world (Mignolo 2000; Slater 2004). Consequently, power relations in the colonial present permeate all forms of knowing about and understanding the world. (Radcliffe, 2017, p. 329)

Sundberg suggests that borrowing from the practice of the Zapatistas of “walking the world into being” can provide inspiration for thinking about, and approaching the decolonizing of research and practice:

I posit walking as key to decolonizing in order to highlight the importance of taking steps – moving, engaging, reflecting – to enact decolonizing practices, understanding that decolonization is something to be aspired to and enacted rather than a state of being that may be claimed. In addition, attention to walking – the embodied and emplaced movements involved in producing worlds – may help to foster recognition of the multiplicity of knowledge systems. (Sundberg, 2014, p. 39)

Combining recognition and procedural justice into a fuller notion of climate justice requires the expansion of one’s own worldview to make space for others’ theological and cultural traditions. In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I demonstrate how the youth activists who I interviewed include such expanded worldviews and approaches in their own contexts and practices; for instance, activist Melanie (see Appendix A.27) asserts that “solidarity is an action” requiring
that one learn, listen, and sit with the discomfort of not always knowing the answer. Thus, throughout the chapter, I have demonstrated the importance of weaving together feminist political ecology and climate justice, two traditions that highlight how intersectionality and power are crucial considerations for the implications of a changing climate. I have established the ways in which feminist political ecology moves beyond essentialist claims through intersectional engagement, and how climate justice has emerged from ‘first generation’ environmental justice narratives into a multi-scalar, trivalent and three-dimensional consideration of justice.

Moving from the broad abstract theoretical contribution of this chapter, I move to the specific context of the Canadian example in the next chapter and highlight how the domination of nature and the shaping of natural resources into nation-building project has led to uneven development and ultimately to Prime Minister Harper’s assertion of Canada as natural resource superpower.
In this chapter, I argue that the rhetoric and action of the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2006-2015) signal a distinct break from the pattern of modern environmental governance ‘as usual’ from the 1960s onward by echoing earlier notions of a masculine Canadian nationhood focused on ‘taming’ or ‘conquering’ nature for (settler) human purposes while denying Indigenous peoples’ rights to land and traditional ways of living. I also suggest that, in response to the hostile position of Prime Minister Harper towards the environment – which omitted both feminist and justice considerations in environmental policy-making – a growing resistance and a narrative of climate justice by youth climate activists has emerged that has sought to challenge the federal government’s position. In this chapter, I contend that the ‘Harper era’ is significant for the impacts it has had on placing an ‘advocacy chill’ on environmental organizations, casting aspersions on the character of activists, and removing funding for fundamental environmental monitoring activities. I outline and connect these factors to illustrate the context for activist resistance to the federal government’s environmental governance from 2006-2015.

In the first section of the chapter, I argue that popular interpretations of national identity in Canada are premised on a legacy of uneven development, masculinist imagery, and a managerial nature-society dualistic paradigm. To begin, I suggest that two dominant and seemingly-competitive narratives on environmental management have contributed to nation-building ideology, political economy, and natural resource policy of Canada since Confederation in 1867. The first is the harvesting of stocks of natural resources for economic gain, and it is this point which is discussed in the first subsection. The second constitutes a desire to preserve wilderness in national parks and protected areas, in part to develop and promote a sense of Canadian identity grounded in landscape. In both cases, however, a strong case can be made that both narratives emphasize nature as providing utility to humans through the market rather than as embedded within a relational understanding of humans and
non-human environment. I claim that this leads to a nationalistic emphasis on (over-)
exploitation, as well as the erasure or dispossession of cultural heritage, leading to the
misrecognition or lack of participation of Indigenous peoples – a large part of the climate
justice paradigm as discussed in the previous chapter. Further, commodification of the
environment has also led to managerial approaches toward crafting environmental policy and
legislation, which I turn more explicitly to in the second section of the chapter.

In the second section, I examine the tensions between state-led environmental policy and the
resistances and relationships from the public that shape it, beginning in the modern
environmental movement of the 1960s. In subsections two and three, I provide brief
descriptive explorations of environmental protest, policy and legislation from the 1960s to
2005, demonstrating the push-pull dynamics of citizen demands and government (re)action in
shaping environmentalism in Canada over the decades. I acknowledge that these two sections
of this chapter are rather descriptive in nature, as I was unable to undertake a detailed
analysis of the political ecology of eras outside the time frame of this dissertation. However,
the context provided in these two sections provide additional context for the modes of protest
and repertoires of contention (see Tilly & Tarrow, 2007) that characterized earlier
environmental movements in Canada. Moreover, I provide this context of earlier
environmental protest and policy direction in Canada to substantiate the claims I make in the
second half of this chapter, focused on my argument that the government of Prime Minister
Stephen Harper marks a distinct change from the environmental governance approach of his
immediate predecessors.

While previous environmental policy may have been ineffective or poorly implemented, the
Harper government’s disdain for environmental actors provides additional barriers faced by
the climate justice movement of my study. I contend that the development of the climate
*justice* narrative, while an extension of earlier environmental movements, is also a strategic
way to frame the issues of climate change as ‘more than’ simply ‘environmental problems.’
While I demonstrate the activists’ connections to feminist political ecology through their
development of solidarities with Indigenous, labour, and other social justice movements in
chapters 5 through 7, in this chapter I focus on detailing the (anti)environmental record and
character of the Harper government. Through careful attention to specifically ‘Harperian’ tactics, I reveal the distinct challenges faced by activists in this time period and strengthen my claim that Harper’s brand of Canadian identity-as-energy-superpower is distinct from previous governments.

4.1 The Production of Nature: Commodities, the Capitalist Market, and Uneven Development in Canada

A view of environmental goods-as-stocks extends from a reductionist neoclassical economics tradition. This interpretation contends that stocks of environmental resources may be identified, parceled out, divided, traded, bought, and/or sold. Like binary nature-society thinking, such economic models do not capture the intricacies of systems-thinking or flows. Rather than considering cumulative or systems impacts, the market concept of ‘externalities’ – both negative and positive – are frequently applied to environmental goods and assessed in crude cost-benefit analyses (when considered at all). In sum:

Neoclassical economics assumes that resources are divisible and can be owned. It does not acknowledge that resources bear a relationship to each other in the natural environment, as part of environmental systems. Market mechanisms fail to allocate environmental goods and services efficiently precisely because environmental systems are not divisible, frequently do not reach equilibrium positions and incur changes which are not reversible… Economics is not adapted to consider total changes. Resting as it does on the concept of the margin, it is epistemologically predisposed towards a reductionist view of resources and their utility. (Redclift, 1987, p. 40-41)

Like neo-classical economics, Marxism has also traditionally viewed natural resources as ‘stocks’ rather than ‘flows’; the tradition is further concerned with how “use values are converted to exchange values” (Redclift, 1987, p. 48). Since, in this understanding, stocks are separate and divisible, they may be bought and sold as commodities subject to market value. Use values are converted to exchange values, explained as the transformation of nature from ‘first nature’ to ‘second nature.’

In this model, first nature is sometimes known as external nature, characterized primarily by bio-physical processes and characteristics separate from social conditions (Smith, 2010;
Redclift, 1987). External nature is “God-given,” that contradictory environment that is both spiritual and material, ordered and disordered, and so on (Smith, 2010). Smith continues by stating that, “(T)he same piece of matter exists simultaneously in both natures; as physical commodity subject to the laws of gravity and physics it exists in the first nature, but as exchange-value subject to the laws of the market, it travels in the second nature. Human labor produces the first nature, human relations produce the second” (Smith, 2010, p. 79). Second nature is considered to be produced space (Heynen, Kaika & Swyngedouw, 2006), where the production of nature becomes “the dominant reality” (Smith, 2010, emphasis added).

Arguably, the production of nature under capitalist conditions has ultimately led to commodification of the environment:

For Smith, quite simply, capitalism makes nature a commodity, not only as the material circulation of all manner of discrete bits of biophysical stuff (oil, minerals, wheat and the like) but also in the guise of images, texts, narratives and ways of knowing that are saturated with the exchange imperative, made legible by reference to economic value, capital and wealth. (Prudham & Heynen, 2011, p. 228)

In the Canadian context, then, nature as economic commodity has multiple dimensions: 1) as natural resources, the material products of nationhood, to be sold for profit, and; 2) environmental beauty as something to be consumed and subsumed in idea(l)s of national identity (see section 3.2.2). It is this context that generates uneven relations among citizens of Canada with respect to ownership of land, labouring in natural resource industries, and resistances to this model of rapacious development – a nexus of contention within which young climate justice activists organize and do their work.

Ownership of land and the division of labour determine who benefits most from the riches of natural resource extractivism. Labour specialization and differentiation develops second nature through the production of commodities, and also leads to the entrenchment of class structures and the notion of social surplus. Social surplus occurs when levels of production of a good are beyond those required for subsistence – the use value of that good is then converted to an exchange value, and the good becomes a commodity to be sold and bought in
a marketplace (e.g., Smith, 2010). This process also becomes the basis of class division, depending on ownership of means of production:

For with the generalization of commodity production and exchange relations, previously isolated, localized groups of people are knitted together in a concrete social whole. They are united as a societal whole no longer through the general unity of social individuals, but through the societal institutions that have necessarily developed to market and the state, money and class, private property and the family. Society as such, clearly distinguishable from nature, emerges. Through human agency, a cleavage is created between nature and society, between a first nature and a second nature. (Smith, 2010, p. 65)

Thus, the structures and class divisions created by capitalism to ensure the conditions for continued social surplus have also led to alienation not only from one’s own means of production, Smith argues, but also an alienation of the human from “nature” or the environment itself (Smith, 2010) – again, arguably supporting the pervasive nature-society dualism examined earlier in this chapter.

Thus, capitalism in the 20th and 21st century is not “natural,” preordained, or inescapable – it is historically contingent, temporary and fragile (Smith, 2010). Its own internal contradictions ensure this is so, including its conditions of produced scarcity: “Uneven development is social inequality blazoned into the geographical landscape, and it is simultaneously the exploitation of that geographical unevenness for certain socially determined ends” (Smith, 2010, p. 106). Uneven development is evident in the distribution of environmental “externalities,” or the negative impacts or waste products of social metabolism, grounded in and reinforcing a process of environmental racism disproportionately affecting poor, racialized, or otherwise marginalized populations in North America – a concept introduced in section 3.2 and discussed throughout the dissertation. Crucially, it is important to note how the process of commodifying the natural world as stocks and parcels of goods for human use have contributed to processes of environmental degradation and accumulation by dispossession. The impacts of capitalism to generate landscapes of uneven exposure to harm are arguably amplified by processes of climate change. Throughout the dissertation, climate justice analysis returns again to the tools of capitalism and colonialism that have perpetuated such systems of uneven development.
In this subsection, I have demonstrated conceptual connections between capitalist relations, uneven development, and the framing of environment as (economic) commodity. Yet, commodifying the environment for human identity and nationbuilding purposes, and not simply utilitarian use, was also arguably a significant colonial project of (what is now known as) Canada. It is to this idea that I turn next.

4.1.2 Constructing a Canadian Identity Connected to Natural Resources

In the Canadian context, hegemonic ideas of wilderness and natural resources have had an impact on what gets coded as the environment. Rugged landscapes incorporating both “bounty” and “harshness” are commonly linked to an ephemeral sense of Canadian identity as portrayed through state-sanctioned ideology, literature, and visual arts (e.g. Turner & Freedman, 2005). The circulation and reinforcement of particular narratives celebrating Canada’s ‘true north’ nature8 in both national folklore and policy shape public understanding of what it is to value the environment. Elements of Canada’s nation-building exercise have centered on appeals both to a traditional conservation ethic to conserve ‘wilderness’ and to exploit natural resources for economic gain; the effects continue to trickle down in economic planning and political life, including contemporary environmental thought. Identifying Canadian identity in messages of codification and commodification of environmental goods and ‘bounty’ demonstrates how environmental injustice continues to deepen through such processes. In this subsection, I identify the kinds of narratives against which activists work, and the ongoing challenges presented by Canada’s settler-colonial reality, which will be elaborated upon in Chapters 5 through 8.

Early European explorers and colonial settlers documented the riches and resources of the so-called New World in a form of ‘exploration writing’, which commonly integrates objective

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8 I take a note from Baldwin (2009), who states, “I recognize that Canada, Canadian, and Canadian identity do not connote any one thing, but are highly unstable categories whose meanings can never be completely fixed. Nonetheless, it remains possible to speak, however, problematically, of an official national imagination in Canada such as might be promulgated by state agencies and state-sanctioned cultural institutions like art galleries, museums, and amateur sport, and hegemonic representations of national history and geography. When I mention an official Canadian imagination, it is to this suite of sanctioned representations that I refer.” (Baldwin, note 1, p. 529).
descriptions of places, people, and events with more fanciful imagery” (Turner & Freedman, 2005, p. 176). While these accounts may have been exaggerated to entice wealthy benefactors into funding further exploration (Turner & Freedman, 2005), the images they conjured of the overwhelming, endless abundance of natural resources arguably persist(ed) in Canadian mythology. In these accounts, there is just so much of ‘it’ – whether “it” is fish, wildlife, trees, minerals or other resources – that even by Confederation in 1867, future scarcity was inconceivable by a majority of colonial settlers (Paehlke, 2014).

In these early accounts, nature seems to take on a life of its own. Unpredictable and disorganized Canadian nature was marked as different from “domesticated” or pastoral nature in Europe, from which such violent eruptions had been “expelled” (Gregory, 2001). The new wilderness was compared to Romantic expectations of European settlers accustomed to a different experience; northern areas, in particular, are sometimes described in unflattering terms (MacDowell, 2012). The rise of imperialism in western Europe marked the “historical co-occurrence of the racist and colonialist ‘voyages of discovery’ that resulted in appropriating indigenous peoples, animals, and land” (Gaard, 2011, p. 28) Nature was outside the scope of humans, but could be brought under (masculine) control of society, as elaborated in previous subsections in this chapter. However, this worldview was at odds with many Indigenous beliefs and practices in the territories now known as Canada (Haluza-DeLay, 2009; McGregor, 2009).

Indeed, imperial practices not only sought ownership over landscapes, but dominated colonial relations with Indigenous peoples. Pre- and post-Confederation, Canada has been a site of conflict and struggle between First Nations and colonial powers. By the early twentieth century, relationships and encounters were not straightforward, but included at times a complicated mixture of historical romanticization of First Nations’ relation to the land, an erasure from terra nullius, and an aggressive program of assimilation and forced relocations. The effects of these factors sadly persist in some manner or other today:

As in most industrialized countries, history as taught in schools as a history of Canada ignores the tens of thousands of years Aboriginal peoples have inhabited this country (Dickason, 2006) and elaborates that history through white, Western, and Eurocentric eyes. Deliberately set-out state-enforced
assimilationist policies and practices, unilateral erasure of treaty guarantees, denial of legal representation, denial or criminalization of spiritual practices, and other legalized and socialized forms of systemic violence amount to government-sanctioned (and often initiated) cultural and biological genocide. (Haluza-DeLay et al., 2009, p. 10)

During the late nineteenth century, state policies focused on moving Indigenous peoples “out” of their traditional territories by coercion and force, while white settler populations were encouraged to move “in” and commune with nature. In practice, this resulted in official messaging focused on celebrating the bounty of landscape through the creation of national parks and conservation efforts that have helped prepare the “Great White North” for settler enjoyment, inhabitation and ownership (Baldwin, 2009). As personal mobility increased by train, and, later, automobiles, thus began a new era of middle-class enjoyment of aesthetic nature in North America.

The American conservation movement’s main ideas were first outlined in the 1865 book of Congressman George Perkins Marsh, who discussed the interrelated relations of humans and nature and challenged unchecked exploitation of natural resources (MacDowell, 2012). The conservation movement was based on “the appreciation of nature and the wise, and scientific, use of resources… and advocated the preservation of nature” (Paehlke, 2009, p. 3). It was also related to fears of the vanishing frontier, population pressures, and a realization that natural resources are exhaustible. The conservation movement was slower to advance in Canada, where a “pioneer mentality of ‘unlimited’ forests, lakes and wildlife persisted longer” (Paehlke, 2009, p. 3; MacDowell, 2012). Though smaller and less supported than in the US or Europe, there were early conservation efforts in Canada (Paehlke, 2009):

Influenced in part by the American conservation movement and changing ideas about nature brought on by the growth of cities, Canadian conservationists – who were largely male middle-class scientists, foresters, farmers, urban planners, and civil servants concerned about the overuse of resources – amended this outlook. They counselled moderation and pressed for the efficient management of forest resources and the establishment of national parks. (MacDowell, 2012, p. 96)

Such economistic rationale is evident in the creation of early national parks in Canada. The
first, Banff National Park, was established in 1885, only 13 years after Yellowstone National Park in the United States (Paehlke, 2009). Banff was originally developed as Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) construction extended to the West Coast, as “stunning destinations along the way were needed to justify the nation-building plans. Banff from its origin provided protection, but the core motivation was the acceleration of economic development [rather than conservation]” (Paehlke, 2014, p. 284). In addition, the exploitation of natural amenities, framed as natural resources, was increasingly based upon scientific management principles. These were promoted by groups like the Commission on Conservation (1909-1921) and institutional forestry programs such as the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Toronto, founded in 1907 (Erickson, 2011; MacDowell, 2012; Paehlke, 2014; Paehlke, 2009).

In the 1920s and 1930s, political economist Harold Innis noted the reliance on natural resources when he famously linked Canada’s culture and political traditions to its economic reliance on natural resource “staples”, such as fur, timber, minerals, and fish (cf., Evenden, 1999): his well-known identification of Canadians as “hewers of wood and drawers of water” was related to both commerce and science (Turner, 2013). However, a reliance on primary industries is sometimes identified as a “staples trap,” for precluding other kinds of development pathways: “the initial role of Canada as a white settler colony was to supply cheap food and primary resources to Britain, and as such, the major focus of investments was on staples extraction and not industrial manufacturing” (Ali, 2009, p. 98). These instances demonstrate that the framing of environment – whether to protect, use, or abuse – can have tangible impacts on public policy and quotidian life through the production of nature and uneven development. Canada’s state-led decision to either pursue a staples identity or to focus on environmental celebration – or some troubled combination of both – thus informed the creation of environmental policy into the twentieth century, which I discuss in the following two subsections. These subsequent sections outline the production and implementation of federal environmental policy and legislation, and identify public support, resistance, and tensions in relation to policy and legislation from the 1960s to the present time.
4.2 The First Era of Modern Environmentalism, late 1960s to mid-1980s: Curbing Pollution and Acknowledging Limits

This section discusses the scope and impact of the ‘first’ era of modern environmentalism in Canada, ranging from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s. I argue that this era succeeded in politicizing processes of environmental degradation, exploitation, and pollution. This was achieved through the rise of protest, the creation of public interest organizations, and increased media coverage of environmental issues. During this era, the government of Canada created domestic policy and regulation on matters of environmental protection and amplified bilateral cooperation with the United States on cross-border environmental issues. I suggest that this first ‘era’ is useful for demonstrating the impact of early environmental lobbying as mode to accelerate policy development. It was also a time when organizations in Canada developed new repertoires of contention (see Tilly and Tarrow, 2007) of civil disobedience – for example, public demonstrations by the nascent group Greenpeace – that would influence activists in the contemporary period of study of this dissertation.

The modern North American environmental movement is widely cited as having begun as a response to the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962. Carson raised public scrutiny of the chemical-heavy military-industrial complex of the post-Second World War boom by demonstrating the effects of persistent organic pollutants on human and ecological health. The Club of Rome’s 1972 report, *The Limits to Growth*, raised alarm about the finite limits of the biophysical world. The report examined the interactions of growth-constraining factors and modelled resource trends and systems behaviour (Meadows et al., 1972). The Club of Rome was comprised of members from 25 countries who all agreed on one major conclusion: should current rates of resource exploitation and waste production continue, the earth would reach its capacity to provide for humans in the next 100 years (Meadows et al., 1972). Such severe warnings echoed the main assertion made in American biologist Paul Ehrlich’s 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*, and other neo-Malthusian predictions of the same period.

Limits to growth and the effects of industrial pollution were demonstrated through a series of
events that impacted average North Americans: for example, OPEC oil price increases of 1973 and 1979 proved oil was not an inexhaustible (or, cheap) resource (Paehlke, 2009). Environmental catastrophes in the United States, such as the Cuyahoga river fire in 1969, the discovery of toxic waste contamination in the Love Canal neighbourhood in the late 1970s, and the 1979 Three Mile Island partial reactor meltdown made evident the effects of poor industrial management, pollution, and accidents (Forkey, 2012).

There were also inconvertible signs of the environmental and health impacts of industrial projects in Canada. Excess phosphates from detergents and agricultural processes accumulated in the Great Lakes, resulting in poor water quality and algae blooms. In particular, Lake Erie was polluted and deemed to have several “dead zones” (MacDowell, 2012). The St. Lawrence seaway and large-scale hydroelectric projects negatively impacted water quality, local wildlife species, and destroyed human and non-human habitat (Forkey, 2012). Citizens thus became wary of the impacts of proposed large-scale mega-projects, such as the James Bay hydroelectric project and Mackenzie Valley pipeline (MacDowell, 2012).

In the Canadian context then, a first “wave” of public interest in environmental issues crested between 1968 and 1975, marked by increased media coverage and citizen polling (Winfield, 2009; Paehlke, 2014). In 1960, the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) had premiered their program *The Nature of Things*. The program sought to present scientific evidence on the impacts of anthropogenic environmental change and frame environmental debates (MacDowell, 2012). Increased interest in environmental affairs generated advocacy groups that pushed for greater government regulation on pollution. Taking their lead from scientific reports like the *Limits to Growth*, some environmentalists thus questioned the underlying ideology of post-war capitalism that privileged accumulation and economic growth above all else (Paehlke, 2011). The first Earth Day was held in April 1970, and in 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm incorporated environmental issues into a framework of international governance. The Canadian Environmental Law Association was founded in 1970 and environmental law was introduced at Canadian law schools shortly thereafter (MacDowell, 2012). From the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, a great number of Canadian environmental organizations were created to focus on local
environmental quality, resource use, and pollution abatement. Prominent examples include Pollution Probe at the University of Toronto (1969), the BC chapter of the Sierra Club (1969), and Halifax’s Ecology Action Centre (1971), as well as countless smaller grassroots organizations (MacDowell, 2012; Paehlke, 2014). Another well-known example is the 1971 founding of Greenpeace on Canada’s west coast, which would grow over the coming decades to become one of the largest international environmental non-governmental organizations. These factors all coalesced in such a way that, by the 1970s, “environmentalism [had] reached the broader public in ways that conservation had not, and alarm replaced passing concern. Governments, especially in North America at this time, felt compelled to at least appear to be taking action to protect the environment” (Paehlke, 2009, p. 4). In response to the outrage over pesticides documented in Silent Spring, for example, Canada banned DDT in 1969; soon after, affected wildlife populations began to recover (MacDowell, 2012).

The 1970s in Canada was an important decade for the development of environmental governance and action at the federal and provincial level. In 1971, then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau created the Department of the Environment – the predecessor to Environment Canada – with a mandate to create national environmental policy. The Department was tasked with overseeing “parks, the weather service, endangered species, the regulation of air and water pollution, and eventually environmental assessment” (Paehlke, 2014, p. 290). The creation of the Department was followed quickly by the passage of the Clean Air Act in 1971 and the Canada Water Act in 1972. In both cases, similar policy was created in the United States, which also passed its own Clean Water Act in 1972, two years after its National Environmental Policy Act of 1970; both countries signed the International Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement in 1972 (Forkey, 2012). Other prominent legislative examples include the Canadian Wildlife Act (1973) and the Environmental Contaminants Act (1976). Provinces, with jurisdiction over natural resources, introduced their own environmental legislation, such as Ontario’s Environmental Protection Act in 1971 (MacDowell, 2012). The two levels of government would occasionally coordinate efforts: in 1968, the Experimental Lakes Area (ELA) in Northwestern Ontario opened with support from both the federal and provincial governments. The unique, self-contained ELA would be the site of major large-scale freshwater ecology studies, illuminating, for example, the impact of phosphorus in generating
algal blooms and the effects of acid rain. Knowledge from the ELA was crucial in informing environmental policy and stewardship for decades and positioned Canada at the global forefront of this kind of applied research (Turner, 2013).

In addition to scientific studies, the federal government of Canada at the time relied on various mechanisms for environmental decision-making. Public inquiries, including Royal Commissions, were launched to address environmental concerns and allow various opinions to be heard. One remarkably comprehensive Royal Commission was the Berger Inquiry on the proposed Mackenzie Valley Pipeline. The inquiry was remarkable not just for the quantity of evidence gathered, but for its process of direct consultation with Indigenous peoples and public interest groups, who were eligible to receive subsidies to support their presentations (MacDowell, 2012). In his 1977 report, Justice Berger challenged industrial development by concluding that the risks were too great to approve a pipeline through the Yukon, and advocated a ten-year moratorium on development of a pipeline through the Mackenzie Valley (MacDowell, 2012; Paehlke, 2014).

Industrial development had demonstrated negative impacts on southern parts of the country, as well. Acidified precipitation – acid rain – was increasingly a concern in the late 1970s and 1980s. Lakes, rivers, and forests in Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritimes were suffering the effects of acid rain, mostly traced to sulfur dioxide emissions from coal-burning power plants in the US Midwest. The Canadian Coalition on Acid Rain was founded in 1981 to lobby Washington for better legislation to abate such emissions. At the same time, the Canadian government realized that it had to reduce its own emissions from nickel smelting and hydro activities if it expected similar action from the United States (Forkey, 2012; Paehlke, 2009; Paehlke, 2014). Such began closer partnerships and coalitions between civil society and government agencies, which may be seen in the trend toward the professionalization of environmentalists in the ‘second’ era. Indeed, tensions persist with respect to professionalization of advocates vs. grassroots organizers within the environmental and climate movements in the period of study of the dissertation. While the previous section has demonstrated early governmental policy and legislation for environmental protection, the following section will describe how the advent of sustainable development ushered in a new
era in Canadian environmental governance. Supported by evidence from previous studies, I argue that this era was characterized by an increasing number of voluntary measures, advisory boards, and pronouncements and performances on the global stage about the need to move toward sustainable pathways.

4.3 Second Era of Environmentalism, mid-1980s to mid-2000s: Promoting International Image of Sustainable Development Leader

The consideration of long-range and cross-border environmental impacts marked the concerns of the ‘second’ phase of environmentalism in Canada. From a governmental perspective, this era is heavily characterized by the shift toward sustainable development discourse and advisory functions that relied on non-binding policies like information programs and encouraging voluntary actions by making available small subsidies (Jaccard, 2007; H. A. Smith, 2008). In the late 1980s and 1990s, sustainable development became a ubiquitous idea presenting an elusive win-win-win balancing economic, social, and environmental factors. A benevolent ‘bridging’ concept, sustainable development, or sustainability, has often been conceptualized as an integrative, holistic approach to reconciling the three “pillars” of environment, economy and society (e.g., Agyeman, 2005; MacDonald & VanNijnatten, 2005).

In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) released their report, Our Common Future, and its conclusions and recommendations were embraced by civil society, governments, and international agencies alike. The report coined the oft-cited contemporary definition of sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 8). The report recognized that economic, environmental, social, cultural, energy, and security problems are interconnected. Finally, it argued that multilateral (and relatively urgent) political action was required to solve global environmental, social, and

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9 While the terms sustainable development and sustainability can and do mean different things, to increase ease of readership, they will be used interchangeably in this discussion.
economic problems (WCED, 1987). Canada’s favourable attitude toward sustainable development discourse was suggested in its active support of intergovernmental activity. The government of Canada hosted the World Commission on Environment and Development for a series of cross-country meetings and consultations in 1986 – prior to the publication of Our Common Future in 1987 (Runnalls, 2009; Tarasofsky, 2007). Canada was host country of both the 1987 conference that led to the signing of the 1989 UN Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (Casey, 2011), and the 1988 International Conference on the Changing Atmosphere in Toronto, at which then-Prime Minister Brian Mulroney delivered a keynote address (Harrison, 2007; Paehlke, 2014). The 1988 conference was particularly timely, proceeding mere days after Dr. James Hansen provided testimony in the US that “he was ‘99 percent certain’ that global warming was occurring as a result of human activity” (Harrison, 2007, p. 98). As the international sustainable development and climate change conversation warmed up, Canada actively fostered its image as a leading country in international environmental discussions (Runnalls, 2009; Toner & Bregha, 2009; Tarasofsky, 2007; Casey, 2011; H.A. Smith, 2008).

The capacity of Environment Canada was strengthened by Mulroney’s government. At that time it was considered to be a junior ministry with little regulatory authority and a small budget. Mulroney appointed a senior minister to the portfolio (Toner & Bregha, 2009). Also under the Mulroney government, the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE) was founded in 1988 to focus on the interdisciplinary tasks of explaining, implementing, and promoting sustainable development in all sectors and regions of Canada (Dale, Spencer, & Ling, 2006; Toner & Bregha, 2009; Boutros, 2009). Its intent was to encourage communication, foster new partnerships and bring forward policy solutions for sustainable development; the mandate was based on a belief that broad membership would represent Canadian interests (Toner & Bregha, 2009; Boutros, 2009; Dale, Spencer, & Ling, 2006). Internationally, the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (colloquially known as the Rio Earth Summit) was an unprecedented meeting of heads of state and national delegations to discuss global environmental and development issues (Dobson, 2007; Runnalls, 2009). During the conference, Canada’s Environment Minister Jean Charest took an integrated approach to including government delegates and
civil society observers in daily “Team Canada” briefings, an attempt at fostering integrated communication among government and civil society (Toner & Bregha, 2009).

Following the pattern set, prior to the 1993 election, the federal Liberal party proposed measures for sustainable development as part of their Red Book campaign promises (Toner & Bregha, 2009). Once in office, Prime Minister Chretien and the Liberal government continued to project Canada’s image as a “green boy scout” (H.A. Smith, 2008).

Domestically, the Liberals quickly created several parliamentary reporting roles, such as the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development (SCESD) in 1994 and the office of the Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development (CESD) in 1995 (Parliament of Canada, 2011; Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2010). In particular, the creation of the Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development (CESD) was driven by the recognition of the “pervasive gap between rhetoric and action” in the decade following Our Common Future (Smallwood, 2009, p. 203). The CESD was tasked with holding the federal government accountable on issues of sustainable development and receiving official environmental petitions from the public (Tarasofsky, 2007).

In the late 1990s, Prime Minister Chretien negotiated emissions reductions targets as part of the United Nations’ Kyoto Protocol; in 2002, the government of Canada ratified the protocol despite opposition (Jaccard, 2007; Paehlke, 2009; MacDonald & VanNijnatten, 2005). The government has since been criticized for not having developed a concrete plan that would successfully reach their emissions reductions targets (see H.A. Smith, 2008), which were perhaps purposefully “aspirational” or “ambitious” (see Young & Coutinho, 2013; Jaccard et al., 2008). Politically-unfavourable policy tools, such as carbon taxation or an emissions cap, were not implemented (Jaccard, 2007), rather, the focus was instead on “ineffective voluntary measures… and investments in research and development” (Winfield, 2013, p. 23).

Concurrently, widespread adoption of curbside recycling collection in municipalities, production of energy efficient appliances, and consumer demand for “greener” products and organic food increased (Paehlke, 2011; Paehlke, 2014). Mainstream environmental organizations began to professionalize as new consultation and research organizations took
shape, such as the Pembina Institute, founded in 1985. Legal representation was also crucial in an emerging phenomenon: Sierra Legal Defense Fund (founded in 1990, became Ecojustice Canada in 2007) defended citizen groups sued by corporations in “SLAPP” cases, or Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (MacDowell, 2012). Throughout the era, grassroots groups continued to proliferate and protest environmental destruction and injustice at local and global scales. The road blockades to protest clear-cut logging in Clayoquot Sound in the mid-1990s, for example, remain some of the largest environmental protests in Canada (MacDowell, 2012) and an important reference for climate, Indigenous, and feminist organizers today for having demonstrated the possibility of direct action tactics (Moore, 2011).

Thus, the second environmental era was shaped by Canada’s adoption of sustainable development discourse and its active portrayal as a green internationalist. I contend that environmental policy was not effectively operationalized in the 1990s, rather, the federal government relied on reporting mechanisms, informational programs, voluntary measures, and small subsidies to achieve environmental objectives. However, more specifically to this dissertation project, the overall image of the federal government during the period was generally positively inclined toward environmental initiatives. I argue that it is this image and attitude that shifts most precipitously in the ‘third’ era, when the government of Prime Minister Harper demonstrates overt hostility to environmentalists and climate justice organizers.

4.4 Third Era of Environmentalism, 2006-2016: Rollback of Environmental Regulation, Muzzled Scientists and ‘Radical’ Activists

The transition between what I have identified as the second and third eras of modern environmentalism in Canada can be traced to the election of Prime Minister Harper in 2006. In particular, I suggest that the approach of the newly-amalgamated Conservative party-led government to environmental governance demonstrates a distinct break from the direction of previous eras. The Harper government appeared determined to control a new kind of environmental narrative by suppressing government scientists and selectively employing
evidence to support their ideological predisposition toward increased levels of natural resource extraction. Such right-wing market-based ideology departed from “the big-tent appeal of the old Tory parties” (Martin, 2010, p. 267) in decades past: “Unlike the Mulroney-era Progressive Conservatives, the Harper Conservatives have engaged in regime dismantling as opposed to regime creation” (H.A. Smith, 2008, p. 63). The specific details of cutbacks to environmental monitoring and the disassembling of existing legislation will be discussed in subsection 4.4.4, however, the most significant change for the purposes of this research is with respect to the government’s tendency to diminish the credibility of activists who questioned their pro-resource extraction policy direction. For my interviewees working in environmental activism within this period (2006-2015), the government was inaccessible and closed off, with few opportunities for consultation or collaboration on environmental or climate issues. In an attempt to reduce credibility of the climate movement, Minister of Natural Resources Joe Oliver suggested that all environmentalists who are opposed to pipeline development are also opposed to creating new employment opportunities. Rather than succumbing to this potentially divisive rhetoric, however, I argue that the climate justice movement was able to skillfully demonstrate why an intersectional approach to climate change is about more than just opposing development projects, but about demonstrating the unequal impacts on populations within and beyond Canadian borders who are differentially impacted by the negative impacts of climate change (more about this and the ‘just transition’ will follow in Chapters 5 and 6).

4.4.1 The Controlled Conservative Discipline of Prime Minister Harper

Stephen Harper was first elected as Prime Minister in January 2006 with a minority Conservative government. At the time, the rise of climate change awareness was facilitated by the popular reception of productions like An Inconvenient Truth (2006), a documentary that sparked widespread public concern about the state of the global environment. In January 2007, polls showed between 26 to 35 % of Canadians identified the environment as the most important public issue, considered as the “highest ever levels of public concern for the environment in Canadian public opinion polling” (Winfield, 2009, p. 77; Harrison, 2007).
Yet, despite having been elected during a wave of intense public interest in environmental issues and increasing international pressure to act on climate change, the Harper government’s policies proved to be consistently regressive and hostile towards environmental and social welfare issues. Further, Harper’s government sought to tightly control the national narrative on energy policy, particularly as they related to the oil and gas sector, as any public opposition was viewed to undermine the government’s aspiration of becoming a global energy superpower (Peyton & Franks, 2016; VanNijnatten, 2016).

While Harper’s campaign platform had promised greater government accountability (Adams, 2012), the following near-decade in power demonstrated a lack of transparency, and at times, deep derision and contempt for foundations of parliamentary democracy. Over the years, Harper would prorogue parliament multiple times for his own benefit (Adams, 2012), relying on divide-and-conquer techniques, stifling dissent, and evading customary democratic procedures (Martin, 2010). Harper has been characterized as single-minded, vindictive, and “methodical, deliberate, and puritanically disciplined” – better at bringing others down than building up his own base of support (Martin, 2010, p. 5). It has been suggested that Harper was attempting to “change Canadians’ underlying system of values and beliefs to something more like that of Republican America” with a “current of bitterness” (Adams, 2012, p. 11; Martin, 2010; Nadeau, 2010).

Harper revealed a notable preference for control, censorship, and top-down messaging, with the Prime Minister’s Office or Privy Council directing policy issues traditionally seen as beyond its scope (Martin, 2010; Peyton & Franks, 2016; Young & Coutinho, 2013). Such management extended to Environment Canada, where a media protocol instituted in 2007 required scientists to respond to journalist and public requests with approved lines (Amend & Barney, 2016; Young & Coutinho, 2013). This media clearance vetting process involved as many as seven people and could take as long as four or five days (O’Hara, 2010). Indeed, Environment Canada “researchers were prevented from sharing their work at conferences, giving interviews to journalists, and even talking about research that had already been published. Carefully researched reports intended for the public… appeared on government websites only after long delays” (O’Hara, 2010, p. 501). When scientists did attend
conferences, they had media handlers to monitor what they were saying and direct follow up questions (Turner, 2013).

The impacts of these new approaches to access to information were frequently raised by my interviewees. For instance, Brandon, involved in environmental activism for over a decade (and most recently dedicated to a campus divestment campaign), recalls a time when he had to specifically request a copy of a federal report on the health consequences of climate change:

Health Canada had a big report, *Human Health in a Changing Climate*, which I think cost several million dollars to make. The original plan was to have coast-to-coast press conferences about it. But as it happened, it was released Friday before a long weekend in the middle of the summer, and they didn’t even make it available online. You had to specially request it and they would send you a CD. (Interview: Brandon, June 15, 2015)

Thus, the (generally) disciplined and controlled messaging of the government of Prime Minister Harper extended to environmental matters, demonstrated through increased levels of secrecy and bureaucratic gate-keeping.

4.4.2 Dismissing Dissent: Attacks on So-Called ‘Foreign-funded Radicals’

As another component of their campaign to control the narrative around environmental issues and climate change, the Harper government remade its relationship to civil society interest groups and social movements in negative ways. Discursively, Cabinet ministers characterized environmental groups as ‘anti-Canadian radicals’ (Oliver, 9 Jan 2012). Materially, they reduced public funding to the sector and made work more precarious and ineffective as non-profits and charities focused more of their capacity and energy on grant applications and fundraising. Further, environmental charities were increasingly tied up in costly and time-consuming audits performed by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) when the Conservative government “targeted dozens of charities it deems too ‘political’ for its tastes – meaning that they have been vocal in their opposition to policies that put people, nature and rights at risk” (Voices-Voix, 2015, p. 4).
Harper’s government intensified their campaign against campaigners after the 2011 election. They portrayed environmentalists as out of sync with Canadian values and progress, trying to dismiss demands for regulation and policy on climate change as fringe interests not held by ‘mainstream’ Canadians, despite evidence that the Canadian public largely supported climate change mitigation (Young & Coutinho, 2013). The characterization of climate change concern as peripheral was demonstrated powerfully and clearly in a January 2012 open letter penned by Joe Oliver, then Minister of Natural Resources, in national newspaper *The Globe and Mail*. In the open letter, Minister Oliver repeatedly invoked the “Canadian national interest” as irrevocably linked to expanded trade in oil and gas, drawing an overly simplistic binary distinction between those who support Canadian economic interests and those “radicals” who do not. He stated that, “(U)nfortunately, there are environmental and other radical groups that would seek to block this opportunity to diversify our trade. Their goal is to stop any major project *no matter what the cost to Canadian families* in lost jobs and economic growth” (Oliver, 2012, online, emphasis mine). While this kind of approach is not new – activists protesting logging in Clayoquot Sound, for example, were positioned as anti-jobs (Moore, 2015) – the extension of such a previously place-based characterization of local activists to now be applied to the broad community of environmental and climate activists across the country seems to be a new tactic.

Through his repetition of the label “radical” – and assertion that these interest groups are receiving “funding from foreign special interest groups” that use legal means to delay a project in a “quintessential American approach” – Minister Oliver attempts to bolster a unitary Canadian identity interlinked with the extraction of Canada’s (dirtier) natural resources and identifies activists as a “threat” to such values (Peyton & Franks, 2016). As Peyton and Franks (2016) argue, the Harper government tries to thus (re)make the environmental subject through a number of appeals: that “rescuing stranded or ‘tough’ resources is good stewardship”; that seeking “utility, growth, progress and accumulation” is common sense, and should be viewed as the “‘natural’ order of things”; and, that the “environment is positioned as a central agent through which such “growth, prosperity and improvement” may be achieved (Peyton & Franks, 2016, p. 457).
Oliver’s letter focused not only on diminishing the public opinion of activists, it also sowed the seeds for a change in the environmental review process. He claimed that the National Energy Board review process – which accepted public submissions and interventions from groups that oppose development projects – was “broken” (Oliver, 9 Jan 2012). Kinney (2015) maintains that Oliver’s letter outlining “how ‘environmental and other radical groups… threaten to hijack our regulatory system to achieve their radical ideological agenda,’ explicitly recognizes the government’s own ideological justifications for pushing back against what it sees as overly strenuous government intervention in the energy sector” (p. 344). Thus, this remarkable letter from Oliver serves two major purposes. First, it characterizes opposition to oil and gas development as anti-patriotic and thus, problematic to the ongoing production of the nation-state. Next, it opened the possibility for public acceptance of leaner regulatory standards by suggesting the current rules stop good Canadians from receiving the well-paying jobs to which they are entitled.

Organizers and activists across the country resisted this characterization. For instance, BC-based anti-pipeline organizer Adrian comments on the effect the Minister’s letter had on him, as he worked to encourage public engagement in National Energy Board review panel processes:

We put a real big focus on getting people to sign up to participate in the review hearings, to speak at the public hearings or to submit official letters of comments… really focusing on public engagement in these processes. Knowing that the process was flawed, but that the public engagement was probably a really good [position]… [In] 2012, I came back from being away for the holidays, and got called into the office and basically told that, like, the government of Canada considered our organization enemies of the state, and were going to take away our charitable status. That was the same time that Joe Oliver went on that media rampage you might remember, calling all the people opposed to Enbridge ‘foreign funded radical puppets’ or whatever… that’s when I got really radicalized. I was just like, ‘fuck this. You can’t do this. I’ve met these people, I’ve signed them up. There’re, like, scared little old ladies who’ve never spoken at a public hearing before. They are not our puppets. This is ridiculous!’ (Interview: Adrian, April 21, 2016)

In addition to calling into question the so-called allegiance of environmental activists, the government attempted to slow the sector through “the targeted auditing of environmental
groups who voice concern over tar sands development” (Peyton & Franks, 2016, p. 456).
This was achieved through one of the few environment-related investments in the 2012 budget Bill C-38, specifically, “an $8-million line item to permit Revenue Canada to perform a higher volume of audits on environmental NGOs” (Turner, 2013, p. 28). The auditing process was focused on registered charities, which must remain strictly non-partisan and expend no more than 10 per cent of their budget or time on ‘political activities’. Ironically, as the CEO of the David Suzuki Foundation pointed out in an interview with the Toronto Star, expenses incurred by the charities being audited meant that “donor money earmarked for other purposes like education or conservation ‘was diverted from the donor’s intent and put into the audit’” (Aulakh, 2014, n.p.). Audits were undertaken on well-known or high-profile environmental charities from across the country, among them Environmental Defence, The David Suzuki Foundation, Tides Canada, the Pembina Foundation, Equiterre, and Halifax-based Ecology Action Centre (Aulakh, 2014).

In addition to stretching small resource-poor charities, the audit program created a general advocacy ‘chill’: groups were increasingly worried about speaking on these issues for fear they might lose their charitable status. With fewer resources at their disposal and the feeling of being watched, many groups cut down their activities, redirected their efforts away from campaigns at the federal level, or closed up completely. In 2015, the steering committee of the “Voices-Voix” coalition, which included human rights lawyers and members of large NGOs like Greenpeace Canada and Amnesty International Canada, stated, “we have borne witness to hundreds of cases in which individuals, organizations and institutions have been intimidated, defunded, shut down or vilified by the federal government” (Voices-Voix, 2015, p.4). Similarly, interviewee Pete, a longtime Liberal campaign volunteer who has presented on climate change to a committee of Parliament, remembers that the Harper government would “crack down” on “charities that they considered to be hostile to their policies… So there was this real fear on the part of environmental charities to appear partisan, to appear to be taking any kind of side. And just to wade into politics at all” (Interview: Pete, January 6, 2016).

The feeling of being watched did not end with the charitable audits program, however. In
2015, Bill C-51 proposed unprecedented levels of state monitoring and sanctioned “spying” on those believed to be organizing against the state. Publicized as a tougher anti-terrorism bill, it specifically proposed language that outlined terrorism as acts against the (vague) Canadian interest and “critical” infrastructure. After years of being portrayed as anti-Canadian radicals aiming to slow or stop construction of infrastructure like pipelines, environmental and Indigenous activists worried they might be targeted or surveilled under this proposed legislation. An editorial in *The Globe and Mail* from February 5, 2015, discussed the potential implications of the bill: “Why does the bill do so much more than fight terrorism? One part of Bill C-51 creates a new definition of an ‘activity that undermines the sovereignty, security or territorial integrity of Canada’ that includes ‘terrorism,’ ‘interference with critical infrastructure’ and ‘interference with the capability of the Government in relation to… the economic or financial stability of Canada.’” (*The Globe and Mail*, 2015, n.p.). It goes on to ask, “So what is this other class of security-underminer the bill refers to?... Indian activists who disrupt a train line? Environmental activists denounced as radicals by a cabinet minister? These things are on a par with terrorism now?” (*The Globe and Mail*, 2015, n.p). Indeed, interview participants noted their concern over the implications of Bill C-51; for instance, researcher and community grassroots volunteer Kristin, active in environmental politics for nearly a decade (see Appendix A.20), mentions that she has “been worried recently about [the bill] that labels anyone working on climate change as terrorists, basically” (Interview, May 20, 2015).

The editorial is not part of a conspiracy theory: a leaked RCMP internal intelligence report “characterized pipeline opponents and First Nations as ‘violent anti-petroleum extremists’” (Linnitt, 2015, n.p.). Opposition MPs, academics, lawyers, and others all pointed out how the vague language could be employed against environmental or Indigenous activists who take peaceful action without all necessary approvals or permits and could therefore be considered as participating in “unlawful” civil disobedience. The overall effect, as was pointed out by prominent activists in the field, is that the bill essentially has had the impact of “criminalizing dissent” (Linnitt, 2015).
4.4.3 Demonstrated Government Support of Oil and Gas Industry

As alluded to in the previous subsection, another defining feature of the 2006-2015 Conservative government was its steadfast support of extractive natural resource-based industries, in particular the oil and gas industry of Prime Minister Harper’s Western Canada electoral base (Adams, 2012). This put the government immediately in an antagonistic position to climate justice activists who opposed the expansion of the tar sands and other unconventional sources of fossil fuels, and provoked different kinds of responses. For example, some activists changed their approach to organizing as a result, moving from cooperative stances to more adversarial or direct action tactics. For example, activist, researcher, and teacher Megan describes how her interactions with the Canadian delegation over numerous United Nations climate meetings shifted, influencing a change in her approach to engaging the federal government:

"It feels so naïve now, but I mean, I think it was at the first conference [I attended], and I just remember I had this view, like, “yes, I know the Conservatives are not progressive on climate, I know that!” But I was like, “but, you know, Jim Prentice has been given this role as Environment Minister, it’s almost like they’ve put him there to be this devil’s advocate, you know? His JOB is to fight for the environment.” And then we got there, and I mean, that was a time when [the Canadian Youth Delegation] were having meetings with the Canadian delegation, we had one or two with them, and it was just so hard to hear him just being an apologist for the oil industry in those meetings! And I was like, oh no! It was awful [laughing], and yeah, definitely really changed my perspective on the government in a way that I wish I didn’t feel because it’s sad. (Interview: Megan, November 10, 2015)

Likewise, activist Leslie, who also has attended multiple United Nations conferences over her (approximately) seven years of involvement in environmental activism, pointed out how she noticed other young people “have lost faith in the UN climate negotiations process because they are so corrupted by private interest, specifically in the fossil fuel industry, and that Canada also was, like, in the pocket of the fossil fuel industry” (Interview: Leslie, September 21, 2015). The position of the government as a staunch supporter of the fossil fuel industry made itself publicly apparent on a number of occasions. For example, after the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion in the Gulf of Mexico in spring 2010 – during which time
crude oil spewed, uncapped, from an offshore oil well for 87 days – ecologists and opposition parties in Canada called for a moratorium on offshore oil projects. Harper’s response to such pressure was to reiterate that planned offshore drilling “should proceed without interruption” (Nadeau, 2010, p. 113). Similarly, it may be inferred that the much-vaunted 2014 public-private Victoria Strait Expedition to the Arctic\(^{10}\) was less about recovering the remains of the 1845 Franklin Expedition and scientific discovery and, instead, more about mapping the ocean floor for potential future resource exploitation, including the discovery of offshore oil (Turner, 2013).

The international image of the country, so carefully crafted by Mulroney and Chretien as “green boy scouts,” changed under Harper’s leadership as well. Canada habitually won “Fossil of the Year” awards at UN climate change conferences for its obstructionist stance in international negotiations process – making “their mark with their skepticism and ‘cowboy diplomacy’ on the international stage” (H.A. Smith, 2008, p. 58). Increasingly, Canada became a vocal proponent of demanding greater emissions reductions from rapidly developing countries in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, a request “seemingly incompatible with COP-1’s call for leadership in the first round from industrialized countries” (Harrison, 2007, p. 100), and which is related to the concept of Common but Differentiated Responsibility that will be discussed in section 5.3. While notions like historic responsibility and cooperative internationalism were consistent with messaging the previous Progressive Conservative or Liberal governments wanted to project, such was not the case with the Conservative government: “The Canada I see, under the Harper government, functions from explicit positions of national interest and acts more like an international environmental maverick than a model international environmental citizen” (H.A. Smith, 2011, p. 365). A clear demonstration of this was the announcement by the government in 2011 that it would formally withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol. After the

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\(^{10}\) The partners involved are mentioned on a Parks Canada website; in addition to government agencies, these include a private shipping operator, the Royal Canadian Geographical Society (RCGS), and Shell Canada, who was supporting the RCGS “in its development of educational tools and products that will help bring the learnings from the Victoria Strait Expedition to students and educators across the country.”

government withdrew from Kyoto, it began abandoning or terminating domestic environmental policy and programs, as well.

4.4.4 Domestic Environmental Policy Dismantling and Extensive Budget Cuts

Domestically, the 2006-2015 era (and particularly, the final four years) was marked by budget cuts to monitoring agencies, weakened environmental regulation, and dismantling of key environmental and sustainable development policy bodies. While the Harper government was certainly not the first to engage in environmental cutbacks, a key difference here was the scale and speed at which these took place: on several occasions, the government proposed a large number of changes in a short time, overwhelming the opposition, Parliamentary committees, and public sector organizations’ review processes (Nadeau, 2010; Kirchhoff & Tsuji, 2014). The Conservatives relied on party discipline and majority status to pass legislation in the House of Commons, even when substantial concerns were raised or amendments proposed.

A noteworthy example of the changing policy direction under Harper was the passing of Bill C-38 in 2012, a whopping 400-plus page “omnibus” budget of the Conservative majority government. Bill C-38 was approved despite widespread opposition and over 22 hours of voting where, for instance, the Green Party tabled more than 300 amendments (Turner, 2013). The rushed nature and overwhelming number of policy initiatives “precluded ‘substantive policy reviews by the appropriate Parliamentary Committee and by Parliament itself’” (Kirchhoff & Tsuji, 2014, p. 108). The length of the document is indicative of how much material is included in one bill: an “omnibus bill is a single document that is accepted or rejected through a single vote by a legislature. Omnibus bills package together several measures into one, covering a number of diverse and often unrelated topics… voting on individual issues in the bill is not possible” (ibid.). Under the neoliberal rationale of streamlining, reducing red tape, and cost-saving mechanisms, Bill C-38 reads like a laundry list of cutbacks to environmental legislation, monitoring, and policy. Specifically, Bill C-38: overhauled the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act; amended the Species at Risk Act; rewrote the Canadian Fisheries Act to protect only “valuable” fish habitat; amended the
Navigable Waters Protection Act; proposed the closure of the Experimental Lakes Area (ELA), which was later rescued by the Winnipeg-based International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD); closed the Polar Environment Atmospheric Research Laboratory (PEARL); repealed the Kyoto Implementation Act; strongly diminished the capacity of the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences (CFCAS); terminated the National Round Table on the Environment and Economy; and abandoned several hundred Environmental Impact Assessments in progress (Gibson, 2012; Kirchhoff & Tsuji, 2014; Turner, 2013). In response (among other resistances), there was a “Death of Evidence” rally and march in Ottawa where scientists, wearing white lab coats, marched to Parliament Hill in opposition to cuts to evidence-based decision making and science funding (Turner, 2013).

While young people had often rallied in creative ways in front of the Parliament Building, scientists generally represent a new demographic of protestor at Parliament. For instance, interview participant Maya, who has experience in campus sustainability and multiple climate coalitions (see Appendix A.25), recalls taking part in a demonstration in which young protestors arrived in pajamas with sleeping bags to attend an all-night filibuster.

Bill C-45, another omnibus bill in the same year, continued a similar trend, limiting the number of lakes and rivers protected under the Navigable Waters Protection Act (NWPA), and changing regulations regarding consent over lease and use of Indigenous lands under the Indian Act. Indigenous nations, directly affected by changes to the Indian Act, were not consulted prior to the changes (Kirchhoff & Tsuji, 2014). In particular, changes to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA) were widespread and demonstrated the government’s commitment to greenlighting extractive industrial projects as quickly as possible. The CEAA had been in effect since 1995, yet this new 2012 version further narrowed the definition of environment (focusing primarily on biophysical aspects), and effectively changed how and when an Environmental Assessment (EA) process would be initiated (Gibson, 2012). Under the 1995 CEAA, all projects were to undergo an EA process unless they were specifically identified on the Exclusion List. By comparison, in the CEAA of 2012, “this ‘triggering’ process has basically been reversed; no undertaking requires an EA unless explicitly included in a list of designated projects”, meaning that more than 95 per cent of projects that would have required an EA under the old regulations would now be
excused (Kirchhoff & Tsuji, 2014, p. 110, emphasis added). It also limits the opportunities for meaningful public engagement and input in the project planning stages, including Indigenous consultation, and – significantly – reduces financial support to enable such stakeholder participation. In sum, the changes to the 2012 CEAA were incompatible with international best practices, as “requirements under CEAA 2012 are to be few, uncertain, late and typically too narrowly scoped to qualify as environmental assessment” (Gibson, 2012, p. 179). This maneuvering was justified through claims that it would reduce duplication, create clearer expectations for industry regarding timelines of assessment, and of course – a favourite mantra in times of austerity – save taxpayer dollars.

To put some of these supposed cost-saving figures of C-38 into perspective, the Experimental Lakes Area (ELA) research program was given a budget of a total of $2 million CAD annually, while the federal government spent more than $28 million CAD to commemorate the bicentennial of the War of 1812 (Turner, 2013). Further, it is estimated that since 2009, over $100 million has been spent on promoting and advertising the federal government’s Economic Action Plan, “with $8.2 million allocated to the ‘Responsible Resources Development’ program developed by Natural Resources Canada” (Peyton & Franks, 2016, p. 463) – effectively selling the narrative of ethical extraction to the Canadian public. This supports additional evidence that the government opted to cut such programming not out of dire financial restrictions, but for ideological reasons that support the “development and export of petroleum and natural gas resources, and the removal of perceived environmental constraints on that path” (Winfield, 2013, p. 38). The government sought to shrink the capacity of organizations that collect and disseminate environmental data, particularly where the findings might jeopardize extractive resource development (e.g., Turner, 2013).

4.4.5 Strategic Deployment of Science to Support a ‘Made in Canada’ Approach: Justifying Climate Change (non-)Mitigation

Following the work of Young and Coutinho (2013), and Peyton and Franks (2016), I argue that the Conservative government strategically determined when and how it would apply evidence in its environmental decision-making, choosing evidence that best fit its pre-existing ideological dispositions. This kind of strategic use of science served to ‘muddy the
waters,’ so to speak, when activists made public claims about the shortcomings in policy, as the government asserted that it was simply creating plans that were most suitable to the Canadian context. Certainly, the Harper government demonstrated that it sought to control the type and quality of evidence that could be used to inform decisions, by limiting both the collection and dissemination of data, as I have taken pains to establish throughout this chapter. A further illustrative case is the closure of seven (out of eleven) Department of Fisheries and Oceans libraries in 2013, during which the library collections were, astonishingly, allegedly disposed of in dumpsters (Dudley, 2014). The Minister suggested that the libraries were not easily accessible to the public, an explanation that conceals the fact that these libraries were primarily intended for research and academic use. Further attempts to fit the closures within the rationale of costs-savings does not equate with reality: “(T)he amount of money saved in the closures – $440,000 – is insignificant on a national budgetary scale, and, considering that many of the discarded documents represented publicly-funded research, the closures themselves can actually be seen as a waste of taxpayers’ dollars” (Dudley, 2014, p. 2).

In the American context, McCright and Dunlap (2010) have pointed to the anti-reflexivity prominent during President George W. Bush’s administration that sought to cast doubt on the science of climate change in order to “protect the industrial capitalist order of simple modernization” (2010, p. 101). While a significant part of the Bush administration’s narrative strategy focused on calling into question the scientific consensus of anthropogenic climate change, Harper’s government arguably undertook an anti-reflexivity approach in another direction. Not only did the Conservative government pick and choose which science initiatives (and thus, outcomes) would be funded, they simultaneously asserted that they were taking action on the problems of climate change. Young and Coutinho (2013) demonstrate how, in its early years, the Harper government employed “language and metaphors borrowed from the environmentalist movement” (p. 96) in an attempt to demonstrate that they understand the severity of the problem and to claim compliance with some level of climate stewardship. This was achieved, in part, by the Harper government referring to their adherence to (ever-shifting) emissions reductions targets. Emissions reductions targets – like those proposed in the Kyoto Protocol, the Copenhagen Accord, or the Paris Agreement – are
rather complex, and thus challenging to understand, monitor and assess, particularly by non-experts. Young and Coutinho (2013) identify this process of the government referencing fluctuating targets a type of “policy noise” for the strategic production of ignorance. In their analysis of government documents, they found “evidence of ‘affirmation techniques’ that involve explicit acceptance of the consensus position, followed by concerted attempts to control what precisely acceptance means. This is about more than giving lip service to the issue, but manipulating how climate change and climate change policy are presented to the public” (Young & Coutinho, 2013, p. 102, emphasis mine). Likewise, Amend and Barney (2016) suggest that the Harper government did not assume a wholesale rejection of science and evidence, but rather, used it sparingly and strategically to fit their purposes. Rather than funding ‘basic’ or exploratory science, the government instead promoted applied sciences for commercial and market-ready purposes: “In May 2013, the Conservative government revealed its rebranding plan for the National Research Council (NRC), which would see the agency’s focus shifted away from so-called basic research – research for the purpose of knowledge gathering and discovery – and aimed toward applied research that could bolster Canadian industry” (Amend & Barney, 2016, p. 15). Thus, while simultaneously taking away funding for environmental monitoring, the government supported science as an increasingly entrepreneurial venture, to be harnessed for ‘innovative’ market-driven purposes – rhetoric that has been, incidentally, heartily adopted by major universities and colleges in Canada over the same period.

Part of controlling the narrative of climate change policy involved the Harper government’s early assertion of the need for a ‘made-in-Canada’ approach to emissions reductions (e.g., Young & Coutinho, 2013). This approach was particularly evident in reports such as the Turning the Corner Plan (2007) in which the government would insist that they were taking an incremental, “sensible”, and “balanced” approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation (Young & Coutinho, 2013). Interviewee Pete points out how he perceived the Turning the Corner Plan, revealed at the United Nations climate conference, to be fraught with industry intervention:

There was an event where [Environment Minister Baird] was supposed to explain what was then the government of Canada’s Turning the Corner Plan. That was the pretext that the government had set about pulling out of Kyoto,
which they did immediately after they got elected. They said that they were going to create a made-in-Canada plan… And there was a major event where he was finally going to explain it and unveil it, and of course we were there with bells on, with the whole delegation. But it ended up being basically an infomercial for carbon capture and storage technology and other kind of Albertan-based businesses, because the Minister was spotted at the back of the room. Showed up very casually in flip flops or whatever, saw that we were there, thought, “no this won’t be a friendly crowd,” and just left. Decided not to – just to cancel – and the excuse he gave was something really vague, like “something came up.” So it was, in cancelling, embarrassing because media were there, and everything had been built up to learn about Canada’s new climate change plan. And there wasn’t one. (Interview: Pete, February 6, 2016)

Drawing on his experience with the federal political party system, Pete suggests that the kind of climate change mitigation and adaptation that was promoted as ‘suitable’ for Canada centered around industry- and expert-led processes requiring advanced technology and large inputs of capital investment (and potential reward for the private sector). In doing so, he points out that the line between this government’s policy and industry interest was increasingly blurred. Discursive techniques in these ‘made in Canada’ plans made subtle references to the particularities of a Canadian identity related to the government’s broader aim of rationalizing extractive resource development (Peyton & Franks, 2016). Following Peyton and Franks’ analysis, I argue that this narrative of connecting ‘Canadian values’ to the exploitation of natural resources hearkens back to and doubles down on political economist Harold Innis’s staples thesis. It echoes nationalist rhetoric that has been employed to great effect since exploration writings and parks-building projects in the nineteenth century. This perspective espouses that the very essence and character of being Canadian is inherently and intimately linked to the active use and manipulation of the environment. Those who opposed such unfettered economic growth, and thus (the produced) Canadian values, were to be regarded with suspicion, or identified as ‘anti-Canadian,’ as I demonstrated in section 4.4.2. This kind of messaging was employed by the federal government of Prime Minister Harper to promote an antagonistic relationship between ‘mainstream’ Canadians and the climate justice movement.

In this chapter, I have provided a context for situating the contemporary youth climate justice movement within a longer environmental governance context. First, I analyzed how
commodification of the environment has influenced natural resource-based development, and that these have arguably affected the development of Canadian nation-building narratives around Confederation and into the early twentieth century. I suggested that, since the 1960s, three distinct eras in modern environmental governance can be identified. The first ‘era’ demonstrated what was possible from a protest and policy perspective, setting up models of engagement in which that later generations of activists may find inspiration. The second ‘era’ demonstrated the careful cultivation by the federal government of its reputation as a global leader promoting sustainable development. The third era is marked by the government of Stephen Harper and is the temporal focus of study for this dissertation. In the last five subsections, I demonstrated traits of the Harper government ‘era’ that provide opportunities or barriers to those organizing around climate justice. In particular, I have revealed how Harper’s control over messaging extended to Environment Canada, and how the government cut funding to science monitoring and protection programs while simultaneously strategically using only some climate science and communication in promoting its pro-resource industry stance. Most importantly, I have argued that these factors, taken together, produced a sort of advocacy ‘chill.’ This was characterized by targeted auditing of environmental charities and, arguably, attempts at intimidating activists. Yet, activists persisted in bringing forward concerns about climate change, and began presenting them in a climate justice framework, which I will examine in the following three chapters.
Chapter 5
Thinking Climate Justice:
Theorizing and Identifying Organizing Frames and Major Claims of the Climate Justice Movement

I mean, when you’re talking about climate justice, you’re not talking about greenhouse gas emissions, you’re talking about the social systems that enable the massive extraction of fossil fuels at the expense of the communities, or communities around the world, period. (Interview: Leslie, September 21, 2015)

This chapter defines climate justice and examines the parameters of a specifically climate justice-oriented social movement in Canada. In this chapter, I argue that the development of intersectional climate justice as uniting narrative is closely aligned with academic understandings of feminist political ecology. I do so by identifying similarities between the activists’ definitions of climate justice and those in the academic literature. To make this link clear, I provide detailed quotes of the activists’ own words alongside my analysis. In particular, I contend that young adults defining climate justice in a Canadian context have been influenced by the potentially transformative language around ‘common but differentiated responsibility’ (as articulated in the United Nations’ Agenda 21) as a way of articulating why wealthy nations have an obligation to lead climate change mitigation efforts and make reparations for historic emissions. Finally, I consider how more recent international climate justice organizing efforts critique the primarily market-based mechanisms that increasingly characterize the United Nations’ hegemonic approach for their tendency to entrench modes of intersectional injustices.

Guided by my research questions and a feminist political ecology conceptual framework I was interested in identifying how research participants understand “environment”. To begin interpreting this, I asked interview participants to identify in their own words the cause(s) of climate change. The question was not asked to quiz interviewees about the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report or to have them rattle off a Wikipedia-
style definition. Rather, it was to query how the activists delineated the origins of climate change, and whether (and how) this was communicated through their organizing efforts. My findings suggest that, rather than neutrally encasing climate change in a scientific-technical jurisdiction (i.e., identifying it solely as rising temperatures caused by increased greenhouse gas emissions), the vast majority of activists identify uneven development and fossil-fuel reliant infrastructure as drivers of such greenhouse gas emissions. I argue that this is significant because it demonstrates that activists situate human agency – and particularly systems of capitalism, (neo)colonialism, racism, and other oppressions – at the centre of contemporary climate change. Through my analysis, I demonstrate that even though not all activists are citing academic literature, the majority of activists interviewed have adopted a critical political ecology perspective which understands the domination of nature through capitalism to be the primary cause of environmental degradation (e.g., Forsyth, 2003). To provide some context of the empirical research findings, consider that a full 28 of the 35 interviewees touched upon the interrelation of climate change and justice concerns. Many of the activists provided an astute critique of the roots of climate change, which they identified as unjust economic systems of advanced capitalism, gender-based domination, and (neo)colonial relations. These analyses have prompted the English-speaking Canadian youth climate movement to develop a coherent climate justice narrative, which I detail in this chapter. First, I outline how these activists identified climate change as an outcome of fossil fuel-intensive capitalism, and then demonstrate how the activists connect climate change to other systems of historical marginalization and oppression. The analysis in the following section comprises the preliminary connection between the movement for climate justice in Canada and the feminist political ecology framework as developed in Chapter 3.

5.1 The Roots of Climate Change: Humans Burning Fossil Fuels in a System of Global Capitalism

The identification of human-generated fossil fuel emissions as the major cause of climate change was prevalent throughout the interviews. While the activists interviewed rarely reference specific geoscientific findings of Anthropogenic markers, they do connect climate change to human activity and reliance on fossil fuels. For example, interview participant Pete
identifies that “the causes [of climate change] are our consumption, the way that we are consuming natural resources, particularly oil and coal. We’re using technologies including – I’m visualizing cars and industries – that are emitting massive amounts of greenhouse gases, and those are affecting the climate systems of the planet” (Interview: Pete, January 6, 2016). Similarly, activist Elizabeth echoes that “the greatest causes of climate change, I guess, well, obviously fossil fuels, but maybe more specifically, giant industry and industrialization and cars” (Interview: Elizabeth, February 8, 2016).

The activists interviewed gesture toward a more nuanced understanding of how fossil fuels contribute to climate change. Obviously, fossil fuels, in the ground, are not emitting large quantities of greenhouse gases – emissions are generated from fossil fuel extraction and combustion. Nor are the processes that consume fossil fuels neutral or “natural”, rather, they are the outcomes of political systems of human action. I argue that what the interviewees identify is a recognition of human agency – that climate change is anthropogenic. To reiterate in one interviewee’s own words: “the causes of climate change, yeah, I mean, humans [laughing], human activity, our technologies, the current state of our technologies as we develop them and as we’re using them so far” (Interview: Pete, January 6, 2016).

This subtle discursive shift then moves climate change from a global condition to an active and ongoing process driven by human activity – a feminist political ecology perspective that recognizes the interrelations between the “natural” physical environment and the production of environmental conditions through social relations. As process, climate change is more than just the fetishized object of CO₂ (see: Swyngedouw, 2010), it is the reproduction of systems that oppress and suppress certain ways of living while promoting and supporting privileged Western systems of power. Long-time environmental activist Sarah, who has an extensive history in the Sierra Youth Coalition, elaborates on this distinction when she differentiates between what she calls the “technical causes” and “social engineering causes” of climate change:

I mean, there’s the very technical causes, and there’s the social engineering causes. So, you know, technically, the causes are increased levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere combined with decreased ability at ground level to process those gases out of the system. So we are simultaneously, you know, killing forests and decreasing our capacity to manage CO₂ levels and increasing
our release of CO₂ into the atmosphere, in large part due to humanity’s relatively recent use of fossil fuels… So, I mean, that’s the technical stuff. If you want to get into the, you know, we as a society build – as a developed society, obviously, not everywhere in the world has done this… We’ve decided to engineer our culture around cars. And around fossil fuels. And it’s just not a sustainable use of energy. (Interview: Sarah, July 7, 2015)

Here, Sarah asserts that society (specifically, “developed” society of the Global North) has decided to develop infrastructure that relies on fossil fuel. She identifies that carbon dioxide-producing infrastructure increases the load of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere while simultaneously decreasing the capacity of the earth to (re)absorb greenhouse gases – a positive feedback loop enhancing the effects of climate change.

These perspectives seem to suggest that society’s choice of fossil fuel-intensive infrastructure seems increasingly “locked in.” Activist and researcher Kristin admits that while she used to focus her explanation of climate change on what Sarah deems the technical causes, her perspective “changed a bit over time and now I think more of causes of climate change in terms of fossil fuels locked in to all aspects of society and economy and trying to think about pathways to try to stabilize that, overcome that” (Interview: Kristin, May 20, 2015).

Likewise, Jay, who has a technical background and was involved in alternative energy campaigns as an undergraduate student, suggests that “you end up seeing that many of the small-scale changes you can make are extremely constrained by the fact that we live in an environment where fossil fuel infrastructure exists, where most of the choices that we could make are pre-determined for us” (Interview: Jay, May 19, 2015). While these descriptions by activists acknowledge that Western society revolves around the use of fossil fuels, the question of why this is so remains unanswered in their explanations: consideration of who drives this system and who is merely complicit in it is not yet addressed. Extending beyond a simplistic explanation, one activist provides a useful metaphor for how he understands the “layers” of climate change causes:

For me, it’s a bit of an onion. Like, the outer layer is carbon dioxide, right? And methane and all those things. And then, if you peel that off, it’s like, okay, so the fossil fuel industry. But then underneath that, I think that there’s something where it’s like, “well, why do we have the fossil fuel industry?” And why do we, why aren’t we able to move away from it? Science is telling us that we
should. And I think that’s where everybody kind of agrees… I think that layer of, like, “okay, so why are we still stuck in this system if it’s killing our planet?” Because where peoples’ analysis differs the most, my analysis is that it basically comes at you, our economic model of, kind of, neoliberal capitalism… I feel like if we’re actually going to deal with this problem, part of that needs to be seriously looking at the economic model. (Interview: Adrian, April 21, 2016)

Some activists identify the reliance on environmentally-damaging fossil fuels as entrenched in an economic model that relies on the Western human-environment dualism that I discuss in Chapter 3. For example, activist Courtney thinks that humans are, “just consuming too much, burning too much, we continue to want to keep taking it out of the ground, mostly thinking economically and not thinking environmentally” (Interview: Courtney, February 9, 2016). Also noted in Chapter 2, while the interlinkages of human activity and natural processes become increasingly visible – thus transgressing “the ontological border long thought to separate the world of nature from the world of people” (Castree, 2015a, p. 72) – in the Anthropocene, such holistic consideration has arguably not caught on among actors who have much to gain from thinking solely “economically.” Likewise, another activist points out that “corporate greed is a big cause and motivator. Our whole economic system is kind of based on ‘do everything you can to make the most profit and don’t care about the environmental impacts or social impacts’” (Interview: June 2, 2015: Dawn, currently enrolled in an environmental science degree program and volunteering with a local 350 chapter).

The issue of fossil fuel subsidies in Canada was commonly raised in my interviews to underline the powerful, entrenched economic interests that derive great financial benefit from fossil fuel-intensive activity\(^\text{11}\). For instance, francophone environmental advocate and youth trainer Marielle mentions that the continued practice of providing subsidies to fossil fuel-generating companies in Canada “is certainly something that refrains us from investing in greener solutions” (Interview: October 26, 2015). Such subsidies contribute to what

\(^{11}\) According to some reports, nearly $3.3 billion in government subsidies and other assistance has been provided to the Canadian fossil fuel industry annually during the time period of this study (Milman, 15 November 2016).
environmental and electoral politics activist Zac – who has a business background – identifies as major market flaw: the lack of appropriate pricing signals in the fossil fuel industry, which leads to negative environmental outcomes being labelled as “externalities.” In his interview, Zac draws upon economistic language from his experience in the private sector, stating that the market-based advanced capitalist system does not create an:

Incentive structure for companies and individuals to make the right decisions. And the fact that [climate change] is a global problem means it’s really easy to have free riders, and penalizes people or countries from moving first, because they’re afraid they’re going to lose their competitiveness. And the fact that it’s so long-term, the problem. And so you’re not going to see immediate returns, the long term. So just everything – and the fact that [burning fossil fuels] is so central to the economy. (Interview: Zac, April 13, 2016)

Just as Western society’s reliance on “locked-in” fossil fuel infrastructure is not neutral, so too is such a “market failure” political and socially-determined. While the roots of the capitalist system extend for centuries, many of the activists identify economic policies in the last few decades – which some even explicitly identify as neoliberal capitalism – champion limitless growth with little attention to the consequences. As activist Serena states,

I see corporatization and globalization in the way that they manifest in the 21st century as really key drivers of climate change. Everything from the way that trade agreements are structured and executed, to how, you know, industries are subsidized and funded. I think that we’ve stopped – well, we’ve just externalized all the costs, right? If we’re going to use a cost-benefit analysis to make our decisions, we’d better have the costs right. You know? And the benefits, for that matter. And so I see, you know, neoliberal ideology and a lot of the ideas that have come out of, what, in the last thousand years, as pretty major hindrances to seeing the world as something that we have a responsibility to. (Interview: Serena, February 29, 2016)

In this quote, Serena, who is relatively new to climate activism but firmly committed to a justice perspective from her previous health and poverty advocacy, considers both immediate and longer-term perspectives. She identifies the root causes of climate change in a worldview or ideology that has emerged alongside the market economy over hundreds of years. She notes that market-based economic cost-benefit analyses fail to adequately consider the
impacts of industrial activity. Yet Serena, like a number of activists interviewed, understands negative behaviours that lead to climate change to have accelerated due to neoliberal ideology and free trade agreements. Similarly, her colleague and fellow new climate justice activist David narrows down these ideological and political drivers to the last three or four decades:

We’ve got, especially since the 1980s with the advent of neoliberalism, we’ve got, you know, these completely unregulated and globalized economies that prioritize economic growth above any possible outcome, and I think that’s very much been to the detriment of the climate or the environment, and of people around the world. So, I think people are, hopefully, finally starting to get that we can’t have infinite growth in a finite planet, and that that’s actually not the most desirable outcome, either. (Interview: David, February 12, 2016)

Here, David notes the incompatibility of unrestricted growth in a limited biosphere – the contradictions as the global sustainability paradigm comes of age alongside neoliberal deregulation. In his comment that the market seeks “economic growth above any possible outcome”, David gestures to the possibility that such goals may lead to uneven development and environmental injustices.

Other activists reflect on how they see these macro-policies and market paradigms influencing individuals over the same period. They suggest that the ideology of constant growth has permeated Western lifestyles, which become unthinking and motivated by instant gratification. One interview participant elaborates:

I think a lot of it is to do with people just not thinking about the consequences of, you know, our desires and the way we feel about it, so we want this and that, and we’re a little too busy to think about how that’s affecting other people in the world. So, a lot of these needs are very legitimate, you know, we need a warm house to live in, and lights and stuff, and that’s great. But, you know, there are side effects that we can be doing a better job of addressing. (Interview, June 15, 2015: Mark, who has worked for an environmental non-governmental organization and attended multiple United Nations climate conferences)

While Mark, quoted above, identifies that some of these needs are “legitimate”, Mike, who was quoted on the first page of the dissertation, suggests that desires in an advanced capitalist society are related to the accumulation of stuff as meaning-making:
The overall cause I would say comes down to two things. One of them is, like, the way that we think about ourselves in relation to the collective. So the tension between our needs as individuals and our needs as the collective… there’s also kind of just an overall focus on greed and material wealth and consumption as a source of happiness, as a source of meaning. As a way of defining ourselves. And of defining ourselves in relation to other people, where there’s this kind of ongoing competition for stuff. Which actually isolates us even more than we need it to. (Interview: Mike, February 8, 2016)

Thus, the activists involved in the youth climate movement recognize that the causes of climate change are multiple: at a technical level, climate change is caused by the burning of fossil fuels. But the extraction and burning of fossil fuels is done by humans to power a capitalist economic system that externalizes environmental damage, is marked by unequal social benefits and costs, and is perpetuated by Westerners who want more and more “stuff”. What these activists personally advocate as ‘solution’ to climate change varies along a spectrum, reflected in the degree to which they reflect or reject liberal environmental attitudes. Like the multidisciplinary field of political ecology itself, which is characterized by its practitioners’ calls for action along a spectrum from incremental policy changes to radical revolution (e.g., Bryant, 2015; Bridge, McCarthy, Perreault, 2015), what binds these activists’ accounts is their adamant conviction of exploring and promoting more socially-just opportunities. Building from these causes of climate change as identified by activists, the next section focuses on the development of a climate justice frame around which a movement has coalesced.

5.2 Climate Justice Definitions and Concerns: Inequitable Distribution and Systems of Oppression

While traditional environmental movements are criticized for being narrowly focused on wilderness and nature conservation issues (e.g., Gottlieb, 2005), the young people interviewed emphasize that “climate change sort of cuts through everything” (Interview, June 24, 2015: Alison, who has studied United Nations climate policy and works for an organization that communicates climate change to various audiences). The activists
interviewed assert that the impacts of climate change, some of which I have outlined in the previous section, are intricately connected to social justice issues. In this chapter, I identify two components emerging from both my interviews and related policy literature review that relate to the conceptual framework of feminist political ecology in Chapter 3 to elaborate on what climate justice means for the activists involved in my research. The first is an analysis and acknowledgement of the unequal socio-spatial distribution of the impacts of climate change. Secondly, and building upon the first, is the recognition that these unequal impacts are entangled with, and/or reinforce, other systems of marginalization and oppression (e.g., Young, 1990), such as poverty, racism, and sexism. For the activists that I interviewed, working toward climate justice means trying to empower communities who are impacted by these multiply-reinforcing injustices.

From a climate justice perspective, then, it would be disingenuous to embrace unnuanced messaging of ‘we’re all in this together’ because it lacks clear attribution of responsibility and critical analysis of harm. Though climate change can (and will) affect everyone, some societies and actors have contributed more to creating this problem, and/or are better-positioned to adapt to the most extreme consequences. Briefly, then, those who (have) benefit(ed) from the wealth generated by fossil fuel-led industrialization are not those who (will) experience the worst impacts of climate change. This notion is echoed by activists like Dawn, who states that “all the people who are going to be impacted from climate change, unfortunately, it’s a lot of the people who didn’t contribute that much. It’s the Indigenous community, it’s frontline communities, it’s people in Third World countries, it’s anyone who lives on the coast” (Interview: Dawn, June 2, 2015). Activist Zac, who outlines market failures and disincentives in the last section, identifies consequences of uneven development in the face of changing climates:

For me, it’s also a real justice issue, because the people, the countries that have been most responsible for climate change, they’re the only ones that have the ability to fix it in time, and they’re the ones who can best handle the effects of climate change. So they’re the least incentivized to actually do something about it. Whereas the Ethiopias of the world, the Bangladeshes of the world, they didn’t create climate change, they have no ability to solve it, and they’re going to be totally decimated by this issue. So you’re talking about hundreds of millions, or billions, of people who had no part of creating this problem, no
ability to solve it, and they’re not going to be able to live a decent life. So once you really internalize that, you’re like, holy shit, this is kind of the, you know, social justice issue of the 21st century. (Interview: Zac, April 13, 2016)

Zac, like many other activists interviewed, noted a disconnect between those contributing most to, and suffering most from, issues wrought by climate change. The vast majority of activists interviewed assert that “the primary responsibility for climate change lies in the developed world” (Interview: Sarah, July 7, 2015). They identify that they live in these countries that have caused climate change – and many admit to grappling with feelings of guilt regarding the privilege they have been afforded as a result (see Chapter 7 for more detailed analysis). As part of working within a framework of climate justice, activists are attempting to decolonize their thinking and take leadership from frontline communities, particularly Indigenous nations in Canada. Instead of focusing on politically ‘neutral’ scientific and technical models for explanations and solutions to climate change, activists like David suggests listening to those most affected:

To me, climate justice is very much about reframing climate change, you know, away from this purely scientific, technical problem with scientific and technical solutions, reframing it as a social justice issue… it’s acknowledging how unjust climate change is; that globally, nationally, and locally, the people that contribute the least to the problem are the ones that are most affected by it. And then, following the leadership of those affected people in finding solutions that work for everyone, and foster cooperation and care. So I think, finally, climate justice is very much about seeing climate change as an opportunity to build a better world, to address a lot of problems, our underlying problems that are contributing to this, and build a much more just and equitable situation. (Interview: David, February 12, 2016)

In his interview, David refers to climate change as a social justice issue rather than a “purely scientific, technical problem” and asserts that it is not enough to only acknowledge that some people are more harmed than others by climate change. Instead, David identifies that climate justice compels him to act toward building a better world by seeking guidance from those affected by climate change in place-based contexts. Extending from this and suggesting a way in which feminist and decolonizing practices based on relationality may contribute to building this better world, activist Chloe (a recent graduate who held a leadership position in her local
350 chapter) suggests that a climate justice movement might orient itself around other ways of knowing and being-in-the-world:

I mean, climate justice is related to everything, that’s why I included the word ‘justice.’ And so it’s not just about climate activism anymore, it’s about justice in the way that’s incredibly far-reaching and so, like, justice for frontline communities, people whose island homes are going to be underwater, or – and it involves gender justice as well, because so much knowledge that’s carried by females in many communities around the world is a way of being in the world that actually could combat climate change, and so these things are incredibly far-reaching and intricate. And it’s so much about justice for First Nation communities as well, because that’s also a tradition of being in relation to the world that is so much healthier than the way that Western society teaches us to be with the world. (Interview: Chloe, June 23, 2015)

Chloe begins to identify how climate justice is related to “everything”, specifically noting the unequal material impacts of climate change on women and Indigenous communities. Chloe expresses that climate change is related to, and potentially exacerbates, inequities perpetuated by other systems of oppression that have historically marginalized different communities. We might infer from her comment the kinds of critical analyses and processes of ‘unlearning’ required for decolonizing activist practices and academic scholarship (e.g., Radcliffe, 2017; Sundberg, 2014). She is suggesting that there may be place-based traditions of being “in relation” to the world that are less extractive – and potentially more just.

Earlier in the chapter, I outline how activists identify capitalist worldviews as contributing to climate change and, by extension, creating uneven development and injustice. In the quote that is placed at the beginning of this chapter, activist Leslie indicates that a climate justice perspective is critical of “social systems that enable to massive extraction of fossil fuels at the expense of the communities.” But what are these systems that disenfranchise communities? Leslie continues:

Those systems, as far as I understand them, are: capitalism, the idea that things should be commodified and sold for money. The idea of private property, and individual wealth, and individualism – I suppose you could call it ‘radical individualism.’ All the systems, you know, colonization of land, or the extraction of resources; I mean, I see a deep connection between sexism and extraction, like extractive industries, the idea that you can dominate nature and work beyond the limits of ecology. Kind of the same idea that you can dominate
humans, specifically women and femininity... And if you’ve got money, you’re probably a CEO of something, like an oil company, and then you just get to write laws, like you do in Canada. Like all of those things seem really, really connected to me, and then they play out on a really local level, in different ways. (Interview: Leslie, September, 21, 2015)

In her detailed explanation, Leslie identifies multiple “-isms” that inform the climate justice movement. Capitalism figures heavily, particularly as it relates to what she identifies as “radical individualism” – linked to the neoliberal rationale of placing burdens and responsibilities (and possible benefits to be gained) at the scale and site of the individual rather than the collective. Sexism and gender-based domination enter into her analysis, echoing feminist ecologies. Leslie draws in socio-economic classism, noting that those in positions of corporate or economic power exert influence on political processes in Canada, sometimes to the detriment of local communities. In sum, Leslie’s analysis touches on intersecting oppressions, echoing Young’s (1990) scholarly categories of oppression. Leslie is demonstrating how processes of capitalism, colonization, classism and sexism are systems in which domination and oppression exclude – or at least minimize the abilities of – certain actors from participating in decisions that ultimately result in climate change. Links between capitalism, extractivism, racism, gender-based domination, colonialism, and climate change emerged in other interviews, for example, as demonstrated in my conversation with activist Jen, who has volunteered with OPIRG and a campus divestment campaign, and received anti-oppression training with other climate justice organizers:

If I could sum up the causes [of climate change] in a nutshell, I would… link it all together, and talk about the white supremacist, capitalist, hetero-normative patriarchy [laughing], I think it’s bell hooks’ term. So capitalism, I think I am very suspicious of the term “green capitalism.” And I think that’s another thing that I would add too – I think a lot of youth are starting to become more suspicious of that, as well. A system, an economic system, that is predicated on continuous growth is not sustainable in a limited biosphere. And I don’t know if everybody recognizes that. So, yeah, a system of capitalism that must always grow more racialized labour, that basically allows people to kind of be turned into things and, like, discarded. A capitalist system that also doesn’t have to pay for its externalities – like, pollution is considered an externality. And colonialism, I would add to that as well, because I see it as very – even though colonialism kind of started before the grand heyday of capitalism, I think it was kind of the precursor, because it was that drive for more, you know? (Interview:
Jen, February 9, 2016)

When Jen suggests “a system of capitalism that must always grow more racialized labour”, her point can be connected to Harvey’s notion of the spatial fix: that capitalism must always find new labours, new markets, to keep reproducing itself in uneven relations. Organizer Joshua picks up on this structural issue of capitalism’s unsustainable drive for more, suggesting that inequality and exploitative relationships are really at the heart of the climate crisis:

Climate change, yes, is physically caused, but is more importantly a byproduct of colonialism and capitalism relations that have left most people with no power. So, I mean, like, what causes it? Yes, there are physical reasons, but there’s a social-political thing that while solutions or ways forward might seem logical and easy, there are social systems trapping people in not acting. Socially, I think inequality and exploitative relationships – which in practice mean global structural racism, settler colonialism in Canada, sexism on a global scale, and just capitalist drives of needing profit or needing to expand economies – are things that are causing climate change, and that have to be addressed to actually address climate change. (Interview: Joshua, May 19, 2015)

In this quote, Joshua clearly identifies that he sees climate change as “a byproduct” of colonialism and capitalist relationships. In order to “actually” address climate change, Joshua suggests, it is not enough to reduce CO₂, which has been commodified as one physical manifestation of the larger system. In this way, I argue that Joshua – while he is not identifying it explicitly as such in the interview – has connected to a feminist justice ‘turn’ in climate change activists’ understanding of what is necessary in combatting climate change. Rather than focusing on one component or environmental element, such as atmospheric gases, the movement has begun to develop holistic, relational, and system-based considerations.

Still, not all activists broadly situate “capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy” as central to climate change, which demonstrates that there is not full consensus among all actors in the movement. Yet, those I interviewed generally situate themselves along a spectrum that resists or rejects market ideology and liberal environmentalism to varying degrees. Thus, the climate justice framework has been in contention in global and local organizing circles for many
years, in part emerging from disagreement at the international level about how to best address climate change. The next section considers the emergence of climate justice narratives as potential framework for disrupting the market-based legalistic solutions promoted at the level of United Nations negotiations.

5.3 Global Hegemonic Climate Framework: The United Nations Climate Negotiations, Historic Responsibility, and the Prevalence of Market-based Responses

In this section I highlight what I identify as tensions within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process from a climate justice perspective: on the one hand, the acceptance of notions of historic responsibility for climate change provides a basis for a connection to climate justice, but on the other, the framework’s reliance on market-based tools to achieve the techno-rational goal of reduced global greenhouse gas emissions fails to fully address the transformational potential and economic re-imaginings possible within a justice-based transition of the global economic system. While foundational principles of the UNFCCC agreement gesture to climate justice, I contend that the mode through which climate change mitigation and adaptation are promoted through market mechanisms actually heightens the possibility for inequitable outcomes that lead to injustices in the first place.

Some background information to contextualize this conversation: The annual Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – or, the UN climate negotiation, as it is colloquially known – draws the attention and participation of academics, interest groups, lobbyists, industry, and the “general public” alike. The UNFCCC was first signed in 1992, one of the agreements to emerge from the UN Rio Earth Summit. The 1992 Rio Earth Summit marked the start of,

[W]hat is now referred to as ‘global environmental governance’ and ‘global sustainability’ (as opposed to the earlier language of ‘environmentalism’ during the 1970s). The proliferation of institutions, organizations, principles, norms and decision-making procedures – what are conventionally seen as an ‘international environmental regime’ – is reflected in the explosive growth of
inter-state treaties, on average sixteen a year since the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, and nineteen a year since Rio. (Peet, Robbins & Watts, 2011, p. 6)

The parties to the UNFCCC gather at inter-sessional meetings throughout the year, culminating in the larger (more well-known) annual Conference of the Parties (COP) in November of each calendar year. The parties to the Framework include nation states whose official government delegations negotiate on their behalf, and other stakeholders may attend the COP as accredited civil society observers. While they cannot directly participate in the negotiation of the outcome text, many civil society observers take an active role attempting to persuade or influence official delegates in adopting changes. They may attend plenaries and open negotiating sessions (some higher-level sessions are closed to delegates without specific clearance).

Civil society observers may choose to work together, in interest or identity groups to stake their collective position. The incorporation of identity groups into the process came from demands to address procedural and participatory justice within international institutions. Participatory justice suggests that those who have historically not been heard in these negotiations or other decision-making bodies will have a role to play. These groups may have their own caucus meetings, coordinate actions within the conference, or hold ‘side events’ – officially sanctioned events on the premises of the conference, with an educational, lobbying, or network building purpose (Harcourt, 2015). Members of these groups may also communicate and strategize beyond the conference. For example, Harcourt speaks of her own experience with the women’s caucus, suggesting that she observed that the “process around the UN meetings facilitated movement-building and transnational solidarity” (2015, p. 247). The women’s caucus provides a venue for organizers to strategize and share best practices that informed the group’s interventions and position statements at the conference, and that also then influenced their praxis outside the conference.

Yet, while they may provide excellent networking and knowledge-exchange opportunities, these groups remain largely outside of decision-making bodies. Bond (2011) points out that there remain injustices within the actual UNFCCC negotiation process: ultimately, those who
control the official outcome of the conference are the nation state delegations, not observers. This is related to another question of power and to procedural justice discussed in Chapter 3 – whose voices are loudest in these official negotiations? The tension continues to exist within COPs between a more justice-oriented approach and the [carbon] market approach commonly favoured by the Washington elite (see: Bond & Dorsey, 2010).

Theoretically, justice considerations should be at the forefront of any agreement emerging out of this United Nations process. Agenda 21, the outcome document of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, provides a set of agreed-upon ‘principles’ to guide normative sustainable development goal-setting at the local level, and Principle 7, “Common but Differentiated Responsibility” (CBDR), is an excellent example of a justice-based principle. At the core of the principle of CBDR is the notion that all countries are complicit in processes of global environmental degradation, but that some bear greater responsibility than others. Acceptance of this principle provides a basis upon which to speak of climate debt, which submits that wealthy, industrialized countries have achieved their status by polluting common areas (referring to waste products as environmental “externalities”) or more generally taking (inequitable) advantage of common resources. Climate debt, as concept utilized by climate justice organizers, is not always meant to be translated literally into terms of repayment or financial transactions, however, but rather seeks to demonstrate the uneven histories and continuing inequities of the (post)colonial-capitalist market system.

For example, speaking of a particular demonstration in Copenhagen in 2009 (COP 15), Chatterton et al. note that the notion of climate debt was:

[N]ot reducible to simple financial transactions that place a monetary value on the damage done to people’s lives after centuries of human and resource exploitation. Rather, it was used to dislocate the dominant agenda, reminding people of who is responsible for industrialised capitalism and the current bio-crisis. (2013, p. 610)

The notion of climate debt draws attention to the pervasive and sometimes hidden ways in which capitalist, colonial, and extractivist regimes have benefited at the expense of others. With respect to climate agreements, climate debt founded in
historic responsibility theoretically identifies who must make greater cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, faster. Countries that have historically benefitted from the burning of carbon and have accumulated wealth in part due to emissions they generated in the development process, essentially must go ‘first and fastest.’ Brandon explains how an acceptance of historic responsibility is meant to influence climate change emissions reductions globally:

Certainly, one of the reasons why it’s so important to push governments like that of Canada to change course is that other countries can quite reasonably say, “you became rich through this very fossil-fuel intensive form of development, you currently emit 23,000 kilograms of CO₂ per person per year and it’s increasing. So why should we, who have 500 kilograms per person per year, restrain ourselves?” I think, in terms of plausible global pathways, it has to involve this contraction and convergence that people talk about, where the countries that have the highest per capita emissions need to cut fastest and deepest. (Interview: Brandon, June 15, 2015)

According to Schlosberg & Collins (2014), the term “climate justice” was introduced to the United Nations sphere during COP 6 in 2000 and then reiterated in the 2002 Bali Principles of Climate Justice. Climate justice as rallying point was taken up more broadly by the 2009 COP 15 in Copenhagen, at which time it became an increasingly visible global discourse (e.g., Routledge, 2011). Global climate justice organizers thus developed solidarities among groups experiencing similar injustices, and some began calling for a rejection of capitalist and market-based solutions to global environmental but to engage instead with the underlying causes (e.g., Black, Milligan & Heynen, 2016). The next chapter will elucidate how the narrative of climate justice likewise emerged and was strengthened post-2009 in the Canadian youth context.

During COP 15, a number of convergences, demonstrations, and gatherings occurred among civil society participants that further developed global ideals of climate justice. A major meeting space was the Klimaforum, where civil society members congregated and worked together on achieving goals or proposing content for final conference outcome text12. The

12 which they can sometimes present in plenary “on behalf of” civil society identity groups (see above discussion).
‘Declaration of the Klimaforum’ articulated a set of Climate Justice Principles focused on: leaving fossil fuels in the ground; ensuring land sovereignty and localized food production for vulnerable communities; reducing overconsumption; respecting Indigenous peoples’ rights; financial reparations for climate debt; and a “critique of purely market-based policies to address climate change” (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014, p. 367; Chatterton, Featherstone & Routledge, 2013, p. 606). As discussed earlier, reparations for “climate debt” are supported by the United Nations’ own notion of CBDR, but the Klimaforum Climate Justice Principles contain another caveat for the operationalization of such debt reparations. In particular, the Klimaforum Climate Justice Principles include a “critique of purely market-based policies to address climate change” (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014, p. 367, emphasis mine), as, climate justice articulates a rejection of capitalist solutions to climate change (e.g. carbon markets)” (Chatterton, Featherstone and Routledge, 2013, p. 606). Climate justice organizers thus seek not to re-orient how the market works in small incremental changes, but to fundamentally revolutionize it. In Schlosberg and Collins (2014, p. 364),

One activist explains the differing positions: “Traditional climate activists espouse ‘our economy works, except for the carbon thing. How do we simply make our economy less carbon-intensive?’ But [environmental justice] folks see climate as a symptom of a whole system, so we need to rethink our economics.” In any climate policy debate, environmental justice activists are suspicious of corporate or consumerist responses to climate change; they see such approaches as catering to those with wealth, rather than the already vulnerable.

It can be argued that environmental and climate justice activists are distrustful of market mechanisms because, as Schlosberg and Collins (2014) suggest, the UN process accommodates the demands of wealthy and powerful actors while further dispossessing vulnerable peoples from their lands and livelihoods through the promotion of market-based schemes. The noticeable preference for market mechanisms, privatization, or commodification of CO₂ within the UNFCCC process functions at cross-purposes with the principles of climate justice movements.

In particular, a number of activists interviewed highlighted how private interests and market solutions are entrenched in the UNFCCC process and approach, and how this condition can
thus affect the range of possible outcomes. For example, interviewee Mike connects process and outcomes, worrying that relying on schemes based in economistic rationales will not lead to just outcomes, but rather an intensification of business-as-usual:

> The biggest threat is that we invest in a process that actually isn’t going to get us to the solution that we want. I’ve been following a bunch of conversations around, what’s it called, carbon pricing… [the risk is] that we invest in a system that monetizes the sky… [and what if] we turn that into the ability to pollute for lots of money? (Interview: Mike, February 8, 2016)

While climate justice activists like Mike point out the shortcomings of “monetizing the sky” through the popular “polluter pays” model, it is arguably a more palatable solution for governments and corporations than a change requiring fundamental system restructuring. In explaining why he believes that a more radical or justice-oriented view has not been implemented by the UNFCCC, interviewee Brandon points to the power and vested interests of the fossil fuel industry and their influence over climate agreements:

> If the message of climate change is, “there’s a direct relationship between the proportion of all the world’s fossil fuels we dig up and burn, and how much we change the climate, and the only way to keep the amount of climate change within tolerable bounds is to not burn the majority of the world’s remaining fossil fuels,” that sets up some powerful people to be big losers. You tell [fossil fuel companies] that most of their reserves are unusable, and they are very actively fighting against any restriction on their ability to keep using the atmosphere as a dumping ground for pollution, and as our democracies function, they’re very politically influential. (Interview: Brandon, June 15, 2015)

Indeed, a number of the activists I spoke with believed that the UNFCCC process is threatened by attempts to generate corporate-friendly market-based solutions rather than develop policy in the best interests of its citizenry writ large. In particular, many activists highlighted their dismay and disenchantment with what they perceived as the Canadian government negotiating “on behalf of” fossil fuel companies at the UNFCCC. As mentioned briefly in Chapter 4, activist Leslie expands on this view, explaining how

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13 See also Chapter 4 for analysis on the Harper government’s approach, in particular
experiences like hers were consciousness-shaping for other youth activists, with the outcome that:

People have lost faith in the UN climate negotiations process because they are so corrupted by private interest, specifically in the fossil fuel industry. That Canada also was, like, in the pocket of the fossil fuel industry, I think that was [the CYD’s] main message [one year], that Canada wasn’t negotiating on behalf of its citizens, it was negotiating on behalf of fossil fuel companies that operate in Canada. (Interview: Leslie, September 21, 2015)

Regardless of whether governments’ positions are influenced by private corporate interests, activist Kristin questions the efficacy of the entire UNFCCC process in which states’ interests are so deeply entrenched as to appear unmovable. She identifies that her trust in the UNFCCC as arena for change was eroded after COP 15 in Copenhagen:

Trying to think through solutions, for me, was in a very global, international development, UNFCCC kind of framework, in the beginning. You know, I didn’t think we’d get a treaty and it’d all be solved, but I still thought that that scope of discussion or whatever would be the place that we would find solutions… and we could deal with it country-to-country, and if they could sort out some of the incentives and that kind of thing between different countries to act, then it could be solved there… And then, after working through a couple of UN conferences, especially Copenhagen – which I’m sure you’ll hear about a lot, Copenhagen – it just didn’t seem like anything was ever going to change there. It seemed like the interests of national government were locked in so strongly, in the arena that they had set up in the UNFCCC was so static, it was just kind of reproducing the same discussion over and over again. (Interview: Kristin, May 20, 2015)

Encountering this seemingly unmovable process, which may profess to support justice-based efforts but does not implement them well, Kristin articulates that she turned away from a focus on international policy and put her efforts instead into campaigns and research at the local level. Kristin’s realization of the ‘static’ nature of the UNFCCC and subsequent switch to working at the local level was not unique: many young activists noted in their interviews that they felt as though the level at which they could best address climate justice concerns was not the international level. In determining how to intervene in climate justice, they are actively shaping and (re)producing the scale of intervention of the climate justice movement in Canada.
In this chapter, I have demonstrated a connection between what the activists define and describe as intersectional climate justice and the concerns of feminist political ecologists. Alignment can be seen in how both the social movement framing and academic theory make the connection between the domination and subordination of nature to that of women, people of colour, and Indigenous populations under current colonial-capitalist systems. There is an emphasis in these traditions that the production of uneven development is not natural, but outcomes of processes of capitalist relations that consume at the expense of other livelihoods. In this chapter, I have argued that climate justice in the Canadian context has been developed in conversation with internationally-circulating ideas. In the next chapter, I take up this argument and refine it further, clearly demonstrating how the activists position themselves in relation to global conversations of climate justice to locate their own place-based campaigns. In particular, in Chapter 6 I contend that young activists in Canada organize through networks that provide training, frame alignment, and strategic coordination among young organizers across the county.
Chapter 6
Doing Climate Justice:
Scales and Sites of Climate Justice Activism in Canada

I think in some ways, there’s a bit of a battle for the soul of the climate movement in Canada… I think there was a time when you could have seen the climate movement and sustainability movement, particularly on campuses, become very, like, institutionalized, and really focused a lot on bringing down emissions through facilities and that kind of stuff. But I think there were enough activists and enough, either activists who had a deep history of working in allyship with Indigenous communities or Indigenous activists who were part of the movement, or who were at least willing to talk to the movement, that were painting the bigger context and the bigger picture, and saying, ‘no, this is not just about composting. This is not just about bringing down ghg emissions and having targets. This is fundamentally about justice, because let’s look at who bears the brunt of these big impacts.’ (Interview, April 15, 2016: Keira, who has advocated for environmental issues since childhood and been involved in campaigns and training sessions since 2005)

Building on definitions and origins of climate justice explored in the previous chapter, this chapter considers how the young activists engage in and organize the climate justice movement within the particularities of place-specific Canadian contexts. In this chapter, I map both tensions and interlinkages between the universalizing normative global climate regime of the United Nations process and the particularities of place-based just transitions in the Canadian climate justice movement. I argue that the young activists I interviewed operate between different levels (international, national, regional) in scaling the climate justice narrative for their particular organizing focus in what Harcourt (2015) describes as “glocal” contexts, but which I understand to be multi-scalar and relational. Taking inspiration from Tsing’s idea of friction, that the messy circulation of universalisms leads to transformation of/through local engagements, I seek to uncover in this case study whether and how “the
knowledge that makes a difference in changing the world is knowledge that travels and mobilizes, shifting and creating new forces and agents of history in its path” (Tsing, 2005, p. 8). This is useful for contextualizing the activist experiences attending United Nations conferences or participating in educational trips to the Arctic; as actors, they transmit and transfer knowledge between different levels, scales, and situations.

To that end, I identify that it was not a guarantee that the Canadian youth climate movement would move toward a justice orientation but that youth networks helped cultivate a justice-oriented narrative for organizing local campaigns; there was, as Keira reveals in the above quote, a sort of “battle for the soul” of the youth climate movement transmitted and played out through the facilitative role of youth trainings, networks, and ongoing conversations and reflections of the activists themselves. In addition to these youth-led training and networks, exposure to United Nations (UN) climate negotiations provide an additional point of analysis for activists concerned with global climate justice. Ultimately, many activists critique the UN process for being top-down, impersonal, and overly reliant on market-based schemes, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. I now turn my attention to examining how young Canadian activists generate locally-articulated campaigns centered, in part, around the concept of a just transition. This includes a relational approach to organizing which recognizes the need to support resource industry workers interested in developing skills better suited to a post-carbon economy. Activists also strive to make “solidarity an action” (see Appendix A.27 – Melanie), through their attempts to incorporate anti-oppression principles in developing right relations with Indigenous communities. I thus argue that the multi-scalar, relational, and anti-oppressive work that activists enact and work toward achieving (and not just speaking about) is a defining characteristic of the intersectional climate justice framework in the Canadian youth movement.

6.1 Trajectory of Climate Justice Framing and ‘the Battle for the Soul of the Movement”

In reaction to the perceived failure of the 2009 United Nations climate conference in Copenhagen to achieve a legitimate global agreement for greenhouse gas emissions
reductions (e.g., Routledge, 2011), former National Director of the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, Cameron Fenton, argues that the Canadian youth climate movement experienced a watershed moment of change. Fenton (2013) contends that this experience generated a fundamental re-thinking among youth about how they should organize around issues of climate change, taking as inspiration some of the other predominantly youth-led movements such as Occupy, the Arab Spring, and Idle No More. In particular, Fenton noted that the time for call-ins, flashmobs, and “polite” petitions had come to an end, declaring instead that the “new surge of energy and organizing on campuses, in high schools, in communities and on the frontline of destruction is inspiring, and a sign that the youth climate movement may finally be ready to take on the task at hand” (Fenton, 2013, p. 15).

Fenton’s identification of the post-Copenhagen period of change and rebuilding in the movement was echoed in the interviews I conducted, as activists similarly identified a noticeable shift toward a climate justice orientation after 2009. For instance, Samantha (whose background in visual communications has prompted her to use creative ways to demonstrate human impacts on the environment) observes that when she first became involved in 2008, the youth environmental movement had a greater focus on encouraging individual behavioural changes: the dominant “solutions that were being offered to us were very consumer-based, so like, oh if you care about the environment, you should turn off your lights. You should buy an electric car. You should, I don’t know, buy this soap that biodegrades…you had to be very, I guess, immediate solutions-focused, with a consumer lens” (Interview: Samantha, October 7, 2015). She then contrasts that consumer-based approach to what she is experiences now, which includes a “ politicization of the issues” and explicit attempts at building solidarities:

I also find that the movement right now is incredibly, beautifully intersectional... recognizing, sort of, the intersections of race and, I guess, feminism and other oppressions within the climate-slash-environmental movement. Whereas before, perhaps, there was a lot of focus on nature and, you know, saving the animals and saving the natural world. Which is still super important, but making the connections to those human elements of oppression and destruction has been a theme, I think. (Interview: Samantha, October 7, 2015)
Samantha reiterates what other activists were saying: that the climate justice paradigm departs from other environmental or climate action movements that focus on preserving the natural world or wilderness-as-separate-from humans. Rather, as I have begun to demonstrate in Chapter 3, the climate justice movement views connections and overlap with other social justice issues and movements.

Among Canadian youth activists specifically, the intersectional nature of the movement has been communicated, activated, and built through networks and training sessions. In particular, the Sierra Youth Coalition, the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, and Next Up are all credited in the interviews as organizations that provide(d) training opportunities and foster(ed) collegiality. While these are by no means the only organizations that young activists identify they have worked with (notably, 350 and Leadnow were also mentioned as important organizing platforms and networks), what is unique about these three organizations is that they host trainings and events that facilitate the consolidation and dissemination of specifically justice-based organizing principles, aims, and approaches within the movement. At least in part, all three are capacity-building associations: providing productive spaces for activists to engage more deeply in climate issues; cultivate better understandings of the intersectional nature of their work; and deepen their praxis through anti-oppression and/or direct action training. In contrast to interest groups that may focus on one-time protest events, Diani (2012) suggests that a network model of protest and social movement organizing is better suited to envisioning how organizations and groups are interrelated, “implying some degree of ideological and emotional proximity, rather than on the sheer amount of protest events attended (an activity which may more easily reflect pure tactical considerations)” (Diani, 2012, p. 45). Similarly, in tracing the impacts of participatory approaches to policy making in Australia and New Zealand, Panelli and Larner (2010) identify how networks create an:

> Emergence of new spaces in which diverse actors come together to discuss issues of shared concern and/or develop collaborative work plans. These collaborative initiatives often explicitly draw on the resources and skills of networked, grass-roots activists in order to solve short-term immediate problems as well as contribute to longer-term transformations of governance structures. (2010, p. 1347)
The next subsection considers how these networks of smaller, locally-based activist groups and campaigners come together for regional or national training sessions and summits, and how, I argue, this positively allows the transmission of climate justice ideology and promotes concrete planning of how to apply climate justice in a Canadian context.

6.1.1 The Role of Networks in Facilitating and Promoting a Climate Justice Focus

In this subsection, I specifically consider the development and influence of three major youth networks in shaping the Canadian youth climate movement: The Sierra Youth Coalition, the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, and Next Up. These organizations are cited by numerous interviewees as having provided foundational training and capacity-building opportunities, as well as providing a sense of community to burgeoning activist circles.

The Sierra Youth Coalition (SYC) is cited in interviews as being foundational in developing and supporting sustainability-oriented campaigns – arguably pre-curors to climate campaigns – largely before 2009. Founded in 1996, SYC is the youth chapter of the Sierra Club Canada, and as part of its core mission has provided capacity-building training for young environmentalists. In the 2000s, SYC coordinated a number of campaigns with secondary schools and on university campuses, held annual national and regional Sustainable Campuses conferences and youth action gatherings, helped initiate the movement for campus sustainability offices, and developed and employed a campus sustainability assessment framework (which later had a similar framework for secondary schools). By “roping in together student leaders”, according to activist Keira (Interview: April 15, 2016), SYC provided a sense of community for burgeoning climate organizers like Caroline, who recalls:

One of the hugest things that I identified with throughout those years and still to this day think so fondly about the community was the Sierra Youth Coalition.

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14 At the time of writing the dissertation, the SYC – like the Sierra Club Canada and Sierra Club Canada Foundation – was less active than it had been a decade earlier.
And in fact, the Sierra Youth Coalition, oh man, it kind of primes my involvement with all of this. I was living in Ottawa, and I was 16 years old… it wasn’t climate change, per se, it was more sustainability when I learned about it in high school. So when I was 16, they had these youth action gatherings… it was this kind of, like, “youth involvement, get engaged, you’re empowered,” and it totally motivated me and gave me a community to belong to. (Interview, July 15, 2015: Caroline, who then went on to analyze and write about policy negotiations at the United Nations climate conferences)

Like Caroline, activist Keira also participated in youth gatherings and discusses how such trainings brought her into the movement. She notes that during the mid-2000s, these gatherings focused on measuring sustainability indicators:

But what I think really brought me, certainly on the path towards movement-based climate activism and climate justice work, was when I was in grade 10, I went to a sustainable high schools symposium that was hosted by some combination of the Sierra Youth Coalition and the Sierra Club BC… At the time, there was still a lot of focus on, like, “we have to measure things.” Like, we have to measure sustainability. So that we can prove that it is or is not very sustainable, so we can measure the impact of any actions that we would take to improve it, and that is how we will get people onside. Like, this is pre-IPCC 415, so there hadn’t been this, like, watershed moment of like, oh my God, climate – like, An Inconvenient Truth hadn’t come out yet, there was no, like, “oh my god, climate change is real and urgent and everybody knows that!” (Interview: Keira, April 15, 2016)

In her interview, Keira suggests that an earlier tactic of the youth movement was to influence and persuade stakeholders by demonstrating (with quantifiable evidence) the impacts of decisions and changes to be “more sustainable”. One tool that the SYC developed was the Campus Sustainability Assessment Framework (CSAF). Interview participant Maya, who worked with the SYC, reflects on measuring both environmental and social factors through the framework:

The thing that appealed to me about the CSAF, was that it had a big

15 “IPCC” = the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, established by the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization in 1988. The fourth synthesis report of the global working groups studying the impacts of climate change was published in 2007; the findings of this historic and detailed report are significant for their assertion that climate change is definitively occurring, and that rising temperatures are the result of human action. See reporting online: https://www.ipcc.ch
environmental component and a big social component, and the environmental questions were actually a lot easier to answer. Because the answer existed somewhere, you know, if you could just get the information from people, most of the data was being collected. The social stuff actually required lots of surveys, and was quite a different measure, but having the two together was what, I think, drew me in and a lot of other people, too, because it equally prioritized people and rights, in the organizational framework, as the energy efficiency kind of thing. (Interview: Maya, June 17, 2015)

Here, Maya differentiates between the quantitative environmental data collected by campus physical plant or maintenance services, and qualitative social sustainability indicators. Though capturing social sustainability elements by attempting to measure attitudes and behaviours was challenging to coordinate, these are what helped draw Maya and “a lot of other people, too” in to the process of organizing around sustainability and climate issues.

Other activists relayed that their attraction to sustainability, and later, climate issues and organizing, emerged through the identification of explicit links to social justice issues. For example, advocate Victoria speaks of her experience as an undergraduate attending an SYC Sustainable Campuses conference, which introduced her to “the idea that this was a movement, and that there was higher-level organizational work to be done.” Victoria explains that she was “blown away” by the conference:

The reason why the Sustainable Campuses conference was such a turning point for me was because it was the first time I learned about anti-oppression work. So, it was the first time I saw the interface of climate justice, social justice, you know, environmentalism, conservation, human rights. Like, it was the first time it ever occurred to me that these things were connected? And that was a game-changer moment, for sure. And also understanding that the challenges are systemic, I mean, I’d kind of bought the line that we get fed that environmental destruction is your fault. Take shorter showers, drive your car less. And that’s sort of the interface that I was working on before, like, recycling and compost, and trying to get those programs started, and let’s go LEED-certified buildings, and then I kind of had a change in my head a bit like, oh yeah, even if we all do that, industrial emissions of the neoliberal capitalist system, the outcomes of that, like, drastically overweigh what we as individuals can affect, even if we restrict ourselves. So that was a big turning point for me, too. (Interview: Victoria, September 21, 2015)
In this passage, Victoria points to a transformative moment in her own orientation and understanding of the causes and connections of climate change – something that occurred as a result of her participation in the Sustainable Campuses conference. The trainings and sessions she attended helped her to more fully recognize the interconnections of “environmentalism, conservation, human rights.” Victoria then explicitly compares this new, broader systemic perspective to her previous theory of change, which centered on encouraging personal responsibility and placing the blame on the individual.

Evidence from the interviews suggests that Victoria’s shift in perspective – from managing the efficiency of the individual through quantitative measurement, to critiquing the systems that underpin (un)sustainable practices and lead to climate change – is a microcosm of what was happening widely within the Canadian youth environmental movement. In our conversation, activist Sarah suggests that by the early 2010s, members of SYC had become more focused on climate change as “a real human issue”:

So, really, it comes down to the fact that climate change isn’t an environmental issue for a lot of people, anymore; it’s a moral issue. And it has huge environmental consequences, but the reason that, deep down, most environmentalists care about climate change is the human impacts. You know, we care about climate refugees, we care about the fact that human beings are losing their homes, they’re losing their livelihood, they’re being directly affected. Indigenous communities are suffering at the hands of extractive industries and are on the frontlines of the impacts of climate change. So climate change has evolved from something that was, you know, this abstract scientific environmental issue into a real human issue, so building connections to create a just transition has really been SYC’s motive in, you know, making these connections and being involved. (Interview: Sarah, July 7, 2015)

Sarah’s invocation here of a “just transition” away from extractive industries will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Like her colleagues’ descriptions of climate justice, Sarah also notes that frontline and Indigenous communities are most affected by climate change; here, Sarah has connected this to a moral imperative for young people to act.

The Canadian Youth Climate Coalition (CYCC) is an organization that also encourages youth action across the country and attempts to build solidarities with Indigenous and other
communities who view climate change as a moral issue\textsuperscript{16}. The CYCC was founded in 2006, which more or less coincides with my empirical evidence of the time period in which many activists realized that, again to quote activist Keira, “climate change is a big deal” (Interview: April 15, 2016). A number of activists interviewed demonstrated enthusiasm for the core mission of coalition-building at the formation of the CYCC. For example, activist Mark recounts feeling inspired when he attended an early meeting of the CYCC in Toronto. Mark had a lot of friends who were working in the environmental field and says that “to see them all come together in this attempt to make a crazy coalition of all these young people working on this issue from all different sectors and approaches was really cool, and I got really excited about that” (Interview: Mark, June 15, 2015).

As noted by some activists with intimate knowledge of the establishment of the CYCC, the coalition was loosely modeled on the United States climate network Energy Action Coalition\textsuperscript{17}: From its inception, the CYCC attempted to bring together more diverse voices than simply the “usual suspects” of mainstream environmental groups – though environmental groups, like SYC, were members of the coalition as well. To elaborate in the words of one interview participant, the CYCC,

\begin{quote}
from the beginning, wanted to engage a much broader segment of the population than “enviros.” So at the first meeting, if you look at the list of people, of organizations represented… it’s like, 30 organizations. It’s faith groups, it’s indigenous groups, it’s youth organizations that aren’t “environment.” There’s a whole spectrum. (Interview: Maya, June 17, 2015)
\end{quote}

The CYCC was founded after the 2005 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

\textsuperscript{16} For example, faith-based communities. In my planning work outside the dissertation research, I have encountered a number of church congregations (particularly the United Church of Canada) who understand the need to combat climate change as a moral and justice issue, and lead action as part of their faith mission.

\textsuperscript{17} Energy Action Coalition was founded in the United States in 2005 and is defined online as: “a coalition of youth-led environmental and social justice groups working together to build the youth clean energy and climate movement. Working with hundreds of campus and youth groups, dozens of youth networks, and hundreds of thousands of young people, Energy Action Coalition and its partners have united a burgeoning movement behind winning local victories and coordinating on state, regional, and national levels in the United States and Canada” From: http://powershift.org/about/energy-action-coalition
Conference of the Parties (COP 11), which was hosted in Montreal; local youth who had participated in the conference as civil society observers recognized an opportunity for increased Canadian youth presence and influence at future UN COP events. The incorporation of students and young graduates with science and policy backgrounds helped the coalition perform analyses of the negotiations themselves; the CYCC would go on to coordinate a decade worth of cohorts of the Canadian Youth Delegation (CYD) to future UN COPs. The delegation prepares and strategizes ahead of the conference, during which they then participate intensively for the two-week period. Individual delegates fundraise to attend the conference, which is held in a different international locale each year.

To represent an organized, yet diverse, Canadian youth presence at the UN negotiations, the coordinators of the CYD intentionally select representatives from across the country (meant to be representative of different regions, language and culture groups, and genders) who have experience organizing on issues of environment, climate or social justice in their community or campus. Like SYC, the CYD connects young people, encouraging them to learn from each other and work together after the conferences. Activist and researcher Megan says that having been selected to join the CYD was “such an amazing experience” and that she “learned more, at a faster rate than I ever had in my life…. just being exposed to this whole world and finally so close to this thing that I cared so much about, and was really important, that was so exciting” (Interview: Megan, November 10, 2015). Francophone climate campaigner Emilie reflects that the CYD “connected me with a lot of other youth, from all across the country… that are also as motivated and care about climate change. And it created a network for me to be involved… so that made a big difference, those connections” (Interview: Emilie, October 21, 2015). As part of the CYD, Emilie connected with activists beyond her geographic- and language-specific group in Quebec, extending the scope and reach of campaigns she felt confident leading. As the CYD grew in size and notoriety over the years, activist Keira points out that participation in the CYD was seen as a kind of milestone or formative experience within the movement:

for a long time [the CYD] had been a thing that was kind of “the next step.” A really common path for some of the activists that I knew, was, like, you’re involved in your grassroots thing, and then you get networked into this Sierra
Youth Coalition, or Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, or Powershift kind of network, and then some of you go to the UN, and that’s part of this whole, like, ‘how change happens’ idea. (Interview: Keira, April 15, 2016)

In a practice aligned with its justice principles, the CYD attends to correcting inequities in participation, making efforts to ensure that the delegation includes members from groups who have been historically underrepresented in decision-making processes (see also discussion about “Major Group” participation, section 5.3). In describing the delegation in advance of the 2015 COP 21 in Paris, interviewee Melanie notes:

we have 18 people from all across the country. We have two Indigenous-identified folks, we have one person who’s not a Canadian citizen but has been residing here and doing great work and trying to get citizenship. We have a couple folks that don’t identify as White... we have a pretty good gender mix. We also have some self-identified members of LGBTQ communities, so I feel really good about the big cross-sections of identities that are in our group this year, and how many different perspectives they can come from. With 18 people there’s also just so much experience. (Interview: Melanie, August 21, 2015)

The “whiteness” of the environmental movement has been noted in conversations about environmentalism generally (Gottlieb, 2005). In this dissertation, the politics of positionality and privilege as they are experienced by those participating in the movement will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. What is notable about Melanie’s invocation of diversity in her interview is both a self-conscious awareness of the (historic or perceived) lack of diversity in the movement, and the real attempts at making space for different participants to feel welcome, secure, heard, and supported in these organizing circles and training networks. This is an example of how the increased uptake of intersectionality as approach to organizing may be understood as deliberate practice rather than limited to lived experience: “intersectionality both notices and contends with the realities of multiple inequalities as it thinks about ‘the interaction of’ those inequalities in a way that captures the distinctive dynamics at their multidimensional interface” (MacKinnon, 2013, p. 1019). Intersectionality is thus not ‘only’ the concern of those whose complex, overlapping facets of identity lead to greater experiences of oppression, it is theory and method, “the concept that reminds us of the necessity of considering multiple inequalities for the analysis” of spatial and contextual qualitative research (Rodo-de-Zarate & Baylina, 2018, p. 551). Like
decolonial approaches to research and activism, intersectional approaches to climate justice hold space for those who have been traditionally excluded from decision-making processes, and whose situated knowledges, personal experiences and perspectives should be sought out, heard and incorporated. It is thus the responsibility of all of us – not only (especially not only) those who are oppressed – to ensure that this is our societal goal.

In addition to the CYD, the CYCC runs other campaigns and training sessions. Twelve interviewees highlighted the valuable role of the CYCC’s Powershift summits, which are, climate justice training conferences or gatherings where we try to bring people together either nationally or regionally to build skills in the movement, to build capacities in the movement, and to build analysis, so that folks who are going back to their communities doing really important work are understanding the larger role their work plays into, and have more skills and tools and support with which to do that work. (Interview: Melanie, August 21, 2015)

These training sessions go beyond training for specific actions or organizing “how-tos”: central to these Powershift summits is the communication and advancement of principles of anti-oppression and the development of respectful relationships. Participant Leslie explains further:

Generally at Powershift, there are a lot of concurrent sessions, and some of them are about direct action, but most of them are really about developing a good understanding of justice and trying to develop relationships between people in different communities, specifically bridging the gap between, like, rich, white university students who tend to work on climate action, and Indigenous communities and communities of colour and communities on the frontlines in their community. So we did a lot of work to bring in speakers, big keynote speakers as well as workshop leaders, who worked in different justice movements, so that we could sort of bridge gaps between movements, instead of being very insular, as often happens. (Interview: Leslie, September 21, 2015)

Powershift is a potent illustration of the organizing shift from a more general climate action dominant frame to a climate justice dominant frame within the movement. Powershift brings together young people to confront challenges and build relationships; it is an opportunity to build allies within social justice movements who do not always work directly with one another. In her description of the attempts to bring in keynote speakers who could “bridge
gaps between movements”, Leslie is specifically referring to her experience of Powershift 2012, where the planning committee applied lessons learned from previous iterations of the conference and their own evolving experiences within the movement.

Leslie and her colleagues noted that the climate justice frame was stronger and more visible in 2012 than it had been at the first Canadian Powershift conference in 2009. Elaborating on this trend, activist Erin, who has been identified by her peers as a leader in the Canadian youth climate movement, says that Powershift 2012 had “a pretty different political analysis from Powershift in 2009 and really centered justice and the voices of Indigenous women. And lots of room to improve, for sure, but it was a very different conference” (Interview: Erin, May 4, 2016). By contrast, Erin says that Powershift 2009 had been focused on renewable energy and reducing individual carbon footprints. Similarly, activist Keira also points out that “Powershift in 2012, I think did a much better job of really anchoring, like, ‘what does climate justice mean?’ and really presenting strong Indigenous voices. So I’d say that, in ’09 we did some of that, but that continued to deepen and grow” (Interview: Keira, April 15, 2016).

In her interview, Keira traces this change in the youth climate movement in detail, as indicated by her quote I have placed at the beginning of the chapter. In particular, she notes how conversations and analysis transmitted through organizing and training networks helped to ferment this type of transformation toward explicit framings of climate justice. While quite lengthy, it is instructive to read this interview excerpt in its entirety for its clear illustration of how she perceives the development of the climate justice frame to have “taken over” from a vague sustainability-focused frame:

I think 2009 was a really – everything was really nascent, like, it was in this build-up to Copenhagen, we were talking about climate justice but also we just wanted a freaking climate deal! But as part of that climate deal, we wanted – it needed to recognize Indigenous rights. You know, you had the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples being passed in 2007, but Canada didn’t ratify it. And so, all of those things that are all swimming in the soup at the same time, and there was a time – I think in some ways, there’s a bit of a battle for the soul of the climate movement in Canada. There was a time when some of that was very technocratic, right? Like, you’re measuring things, you’re talking about, like, efficiencies in HVAC systems and heating, and, I don’t know,
whatever else we talked about – composting. Lots of things that in and of themselves could be quite technocratic, and really not values-based. Like, you’re talking about numbers and measurement and ghg, and all of those things. And they’re not necessarily talking about, like, who has the rights to the land, or who gets to say whether a pipeline can happen. Or, any of those elements that are more political. So I think there was a time when you could have seen the climate movement and sustainability movement, particularly on campuses, become very, like, institutionalized, and really focused a lot on bringing down emissions through facilities and that kind of stuff. But I think there were enough activists who had a deep history of working in allyship with Indigenous communities, or Indigenous activists who were part of the movement or who were at least willing to talk to the movement, that were painting the bigger context and the bigger picture, and saying, “no, this is not just about composting. This is not just about bringing down ghg emissions and having targets. This is fundamentally about justice, because let’s look at who bears the brunt of these big impacts.” (Interview: Keira, April 15, 2016)

In her detailed explanation, Keira identifies how activist networks have facilitated conversations around climate change that are more political than technocratic in nature. She directly links these political and values-based considerations with the shift from the technical and institutionalized sustainability movements that were gaining momentum in the mid-2000s toward the still-emerging climate justice paradigm. Notably, Keira’s suggestion that there has been a shift since the 2009 COP in Copenhagen aligns with timing noted by a number of interviewees as a “turning point” for the movement. It also echoes former National Director of CYCC Cameron Fenton’s call to action earlier in this chapter.

Another network that places justice within its analysis of climate change is Next Up, defined as “a social and environmental training program” by member Samantha (Interview, October 7, 2015) and based primarily in Western Canada and the Prairies. Next Up provides a training program and network for young people, aged 18-32, working in social and environmental fields. Participant Serena points out that although not all youth who are recruited into the program have a background in climate change activism, there was consensus among her regional chapter’s advisory group to “really focus on climate change as sort of a lens for all of the skills-based training and issues-based training that was offered in the coming year” since climate change “was going to completely impact all of the other issues that we were talking about” (Interview: Serena, February 29, 2016).
In describing the content and structure of such skills- and issues-based training, one participant identifies that the seven-month program (or the five-day summer intensive for Mètis and Indigenous youth) focuses on three things:

One is, enhancing knowledge and understanding of social and environmental justice issues, so we have presenters come in and talk about the work they are doing, and these issues. Two is skills building around activism, so we do workshops and training and everything from like group facilitation to storytelling, to fundraising. And thirdly, I think it’s very much about building that network of young activists. (Interview: identity withheld)

Both CYCC and Next Up focus on locally-based interventions and campaigns (aside from the internationally-focused CYD, the program of CYCC that sends youth delegates to UN meetings). Speaking with the activists, I found that the training and networking helped build capacity within regional networks by providing activists the opportunity to develop skills, knowledge, and support (personal and otherwise) to lead successful climate justice campaigns in their own communities. Generally, most activists interviewed signaled that they felt most effective and satisfied in their engagement efforts at the local or regional level (from the scale of the neighbourhood up to provincial level), as most felt that their efforts were obstructed or insignificant at national or international levels. For example, Daniel points out how he realized he could have the greatest impact by slowly building connections within communities rather than by attending international events. Daniel describes his work in one instructive summer:

So, that summer I was [involved in a grassroots campaign]. And I was also working with this group in Brazil and in Canada to lobby for sustainable development… One of them was intensely personal: we were [travelling] and then leading small workshops with small groups of youth, having one-on-one conversations a lot of the time… The other one was very, very non-personal. Very global. At Rio, our one-on-one conversations were with diplomats and negotiators, mostly. And we were trying to reach a very large audience of “the public.” Tens of thousands of people around the world, but in a very superficial, short way… And I went away from the United Nations conference feeling like we had not achieved very much, and it had come at a fairly large carbon price… for me, it felt like trying hard to do – maybe what we were describing is sort of the more non-personal, large-scale connection, hadn’t achieved very much. Whereas, in the same summer, I was experiencing a lot of personal, small-scale, local-scale connections that I felt were having a very strong impact. So that was
a pretty seminal case study for me in thinking about my activism. (Interview: Daniel, November 24, 2015)

Daniel’s experience is not uncommon among activists who may have viewed interaction at the international level as part of the “next step” (per Keira’s quote, April 15, 2016) of their activism, but have since come to feel they can be more effective working at the local level. However, like Daniel, many young activists are still very much aware of how narratives at the international level affect local conversations.

In this subsection, I have maintained that the sharing of information across networks can help build understanding and solidarity that traverse territorial boundaries. The next section looks specifically at the interplay between the international dialogue around climate justice and local activism approaches. I demonstrate that activists are engaging in what feminist political ecologists like Harcourt (2015) identify as the “glocal” scale, but what may also be more accurately understood as adoption of a relational multi-scalar approach, which I discuss further in the next section.

### 6.2 From Global Narratives to Local Action: Arguing the Multi-scalar Framework of Climate Justice

In this section, I argue that the climate justice frame used by Canadian activists is simultaneously global in rhetoric and scope and locally place-specific in interpretation and implementation. This mélange of influences results in processes that are “glocal”\(^\text{18}\) and multi-scalar, underpinned by a recognition of climate justice activists and feminist political ecologists of the interrelated scales of the embodied individual, the local community, and the global commons. In this section, I contend that, in the case of the Canadian youth climate justice movement, scale is politically (re)made as activists move between, and use the language of, multiple levels (e.g. international, national, regional) of governance in a relational, multi-scalar approach. In this way, I argue, young activists are dissolving firm scalar boundaries, choosing instead to recognize how political scales and levels of

\(^{18}\text{Glocal = fusion of global & local. See, for example, Harcourt, 2015; Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003.}\)
governmental intervention are related to, interconnected with, and co-produced by, one another. I demonstrate this through an analysis of interview quotes, in which activists have indicated that, even while working at a local or grassroots level, they are aware of and engaging with the globally-circulating ideas of climate justice. Put another way, while the activists interviewed have indicated that they have chosen to work at the local level for reasons of strategy or personal preference, I have found that they are not opting out of or ignoring global discourses of climate justice as discussed in Chapter 3. I argue that, rather than conceptualizing of “scale” as the metaphor of discrete, nested hierarchies\(^\text{19}\), actors creating climate justice movements place these levels in conversation with one another as they produce multi-scalar realities and relations. Activists become akin to local “strategic brokers” (Larner & Craig, 2005) between the global and local level, using their skills and process to work across boundaries and engage multiple groups. Through the continued “grounded joining up” (ibid., 2005) of multiple scales and their awareness of challenges and opportunities of decision-making elsewhere, I suggest that this multi-scalar approach avoids the idea of the ‘local trap’ in which “the local scale is assumed to be inherently more democratic than other scales” (Purcell, 2006, p. 1921), and hence that “decentralisation is necessary for democratisation” (ibid., p. 1925).

A number of social movement organizations facilitate the circulation of climate justice narratives globally. One of these is the non-governmental organization 350.org, founded by activist and author Bill McKibben. Rather than promoting narrowly-focused environmentalisms, 350.org attempts to connect climate justice social movements around the world. The significance of this messaging is that it fosters an understanding of climate change as a global problem with locally-based inputs and possibilities. In interviews, activists highlight the value of connecting to international networks, while still being grounded in their own local context. Some activists found this messaging to be empowering and

\(^{19}\) Scale, as defined by Ruddick (1996, p. 139-140): “Scale itself is not predetermined, but produced in the act of creating and contesting social identity… The tendency has been to think of scales as interacting in discrete nested hierarchies, packing in the way that one would contain a set of Russian wooden dolls – each doll containing a smaller version of itself that patrols the boundaries of its contents. This approach tends to avoid relating scales to one another, but rather treats one scale as ‘dominant’ and the others as ‘residual or emergent.’”
energizing. For example, activist Adrian explains the significance of 350.org’s Global Days of Action:

I mean, there is a bunch of climate campaigns in different geographical and political contexts, for sure. But there is, I think, a sense of solidarity and connection between all of them. And you see it at things like, you know, the global youth climate thing that happened in Turkey, and international days of action, and the COP stuff, and a lot of different places where it feels like more than any of the forest campaigns or anti-nuclear campaigns. Like, a really, truly, international, kind of global movement. (Interview: Adrian, April 21, 2016)

In this quote, Adrian suggests that by gathering together in diverse pockets around the world, the climate justice feels like “more than” any individual “forest campaigns or anti-nuclear campaigns” – the issues around which other or past environmental movements may have rallied. Thus, I suggest that by demonstrating that coordinated climate action can take place simultaneously within different regional and political contexts, the climate justice idea as articulated by 350.org draws attention to universalizing elements of solidarity and connection. 350.org also promotes events that unite people in the same place for a show of strength and unity, such as the Peoples’ Climate March, held in New York City on September 21, 2014 (Jamieson, 2015). Interviewee Daniel participated in the 2014 People’s Climate March and tells of how he was struck by how organizers of the big event, among them 350.org, “cast a wide tent” in framing the interconnected nature of global climate justice:

I remember sitting in the plenary training before [the march], and it seemed like the organizers were being very, very deliberate in casting that wide tent. So the speakers that came onstage, I don’t think any of them were climate activists in the traditional sense, if we’re old enough to have a tradition. But they were instead First Nations groups, or illegal immigrants in America, or representatives of industry who were concerned by the effects of climate change. So I think people like Bill McKibben and the 350.org movement have been deliberate in drawing in more people than would traditionally have identified with the environmental movement… that came across, I think much more powerfully both to me and to the rest of the world, that, “wow, this is a united front that’s not just including hippies and students, but a lot of the different elements of our society.” Which is, I mean, so obvious if you take a moment to think about. I mean, the Occupy movement was chanting “We’re
the 99 per cent”. The climate march was chanting, “We are the 100 per cent”.

(Interview: Daniel, November 24, 2015)

Like Adrian’s comment that the climate justice movement is “more than” the sum of individual actions or demonstrations, so is Daniel highlighting what is different from – or “greater than” – other environmental movements. I suggest that when Daniel speaks of the “wide tent”, he is identifying how organizers make deliberate attempts to demonstrate alignment of priorities among people who would not “traditionally have identified with the environmental movement.” Indeed, I agree that strategic deployment of intersecting goals generates “climate justice solidarities” which “refer to how shared ‘maps of grievance’ are constructed which link different activists involved in struggles over climate change” (Chatterton, Featherstone & Routledge, 2013, p. 614).

Likewise, the Canadian Youth Delegation (CYD) presents another example of the multi-scalar climate justice movement as both local and global. As a network of members simultaneously situated within place-specific Canadian contexts and working within the institutional framework of the UN, I see the CYD playing an important “translating” role by identifying and interpreting how international policy affects/is affected by local activity. Activist Melanie explains these challenges:

The CYD is interesting because it’s the only thing we do that’s not in Canada, right? And we’re the “Canadian” Youth Climate Coalition. So, I think, for us, a big piece of the messaging around the campaign has been grounding how things that happen at big UN conferences like that actually do shape the kind of domestic energy policy that we see in Canada. So, like, if [the parties] weren’t so good at stalling the negotiations, we might be more held to global standards for emissions reductions, and so far we haven’t been. So it’s not that I necessarily see those negotiations as being of the utmost importance, and I don’t actually really see them as being effective… But it’s a last, really important point of intervention, to go and speak our truth as youth in Canada to the issues

20 Of course, it is also worth noting the problematic underpinnings when we begin to more closely deconstruct the “We are the 100 per cent” from a justice perspective. As this dissertation has gone to pains to establish, an important part of climate justice is the recognition that some people are more responsible for creating the problems of climate change, yet others will bear the greater brunt of the burden. Chanting “we are the 100 per cent” obscures these power and privilege differences, while possibly leading credence to notions of a post-political risk society in which all people are (equally) harmed by climate change.
of our generation. (Interview: Melanie, August 21, 2015)

Here, Melanie speaks of the kind of translation work the delegation does “grounding how things that happen at big UN conferences like that actually do shape the kind of domestic energy policy that we see in Canada.” I suggest that Melanie is identifying the role of CYD members as brokers of climate conference knowledge, as a major part of their work is effectively communicating to Canadians how decisions made in these multilateral negotiations impact their livelihoods (see also Larner & Craig, 2005). Insights of Melanie and other activists inherently align with Harcourt’s scholarly feminist political ecology identification of the glocal processes of coordinated environmental efforts, which she defines as “the combination of local/global whereby global realities are played out in place and where actors bring the concerns and experience of places to events/places that claim global importance, such as the UN, and in so doing transform and shape globalization processes” (Harcourt, 2015, p. 252).

Yet, in her quote, Melanie also suggests that she does not see “those [UN] negotiations as being of the utmost importance” except as a last point of intervention. Likewise, I accumulated evidence from other activists who identified their disillusionment with the UN process. Often, activists who indicated in interviews their frustration with international processes suggested their preference had shifted toward working at the local or regional level. For instance, interviewee Mark describes how his “point of intervention” has changed over time:

when I first started out, it was like, “yeah, we need to change things at a global scale, man! And it’s so important to have a global deal.” Which it totally is. But I think back then we were thinking it would be another Kyoto, and kind of top-down, binding… but it’s become increasingly apparent that it’s kind of like, “well, countries are just going to do what people make them do domestically, so it’s kind of about national policies.” And then, you know, just with the [federal] government we’ve had for the past while, that’s not been very productive, then it was like, “ok, maybe we can get some provinces to lead, and support that”… I haven’t yet gone down to the municipal level, but maybe that’s next! (Interview: Mark, June 15, 2015)
Mark notes how perception of his own personal efficacy has influenced how he approached attempting to influence climate policy. He suggests that effective global climate action hinges on effective policy and action at national and local levels, and vice versa, again highlighting the relational and multi-scalar aspects of this type of organizing.

In a slight departure from Mark’s implied preference, other activists underline a strong need to organize at the local level as a matter of passionate urgency, rather than convenience or for politically opportunistic reasons. To illustrate, one activist describes her own emotional process of recognizing where she wanted to concentrate her organizing efforts:

[At the United Nations climate conference] I remember sobbing and ranting about the fact that the US was focused on, like, comma placement while striking out human rights from the negotiating text, and just being like, “nothing is going to happen here! We’re not going to solve the climate crisis through an international negotiation. Things are probably going to get pretty bad, but the important thing is that we go down fighting.” I have a very vivid memory of just being totally distraught, and then kind of accepting that there would be chaos… And now, it’s less like, “it will be ok if we go down fighting,” it’s more like, I want to focus on building, like, strength and resilience locally, to weather the storm, but also to build something better out of the crisis… I don’t really want to plant things in soil that isn’t going to let them grow anymore.

(Interview: Erin, May 4, 2016)

In addition to Erin’s perceived futility of the US focusing on “comma placement while striking out human rights,” she also notes her own emotional response; she speaks of sobbing and of feeling “totally distraught.” Through Erin’s words, we are reminded that activism itself is far from a technical process, and Chapter 7 will examine the embodied experience of climate justice activism. In the meantime, however, I consider Erin’s vivid imagery of chaos and storm: her description of how she wanted to “build something better out of the crisis” that she saw as imminent due to climate change is instructive. While Erin suggests (elsewhere in the interview as well as in this quote) that her activism at the international level was at times toxic for her personal health, by invoking the idea of “soil that isn’t going to let [her actions] grow anymore,” Erin extends a powerful metaphor about the survival of the climate justice movement. She identifies the need to build strength locally because, as she sees it, things might get worse before they get better.
In the Canadian youth climate movement, then, I assert that there is a fine balance between adaptation of “wide tent” and universalizing global climate justice solidarities and attending to specific place-based analyses contributing to building of “strength and resilience locally” (Interview: Erin, May 4, 2016). I argue that the focus on place-based strategies within the climate justice movement are demonstrated through local campaigns in Canada that are focused on creating an environmentally just transition away from fossil fuel dependence. In the interviews I conducted, I observed an emerging trend among activists advocating for an approach that is sensitive to the differential material impacts expected to be felt by resource-dependent populations across the country. In the next subsection, I explore activists’ claims for such a just transition. I consider activists’ own claims in tandem with analytical attention to the impacts of uneven development in a country with a history of economic reliance on primary industries and resource extraction (see Chapter 4).

6.2.1 Local Solidarities: Outlining a ‘Just Transition’ from Fossil Fuel Dependence in Canada

An increasing area of possibility for cultivating climate justice solidarities coalesces around the idea of a “‘just transition’ to a post-carbon economy and providing assistance to vulnerable communities” (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014, p. 366). As a post-carbon economy would have little to no use for fossil fuels, a vulnerable community is one whose economic stability depends on fossil fuel extraction, processing, and related industry. This brief subsection considers the opportunities of a ‘just transition’ identified by interviewees as a movement to re-train resource-sector employees with other vocational skills better suited to a post-carbon economy.

To elaborate on the widespread impact divestment from fossil fuel infrastructure may have, consider the potential for community-wide harm if a region were suddenly to lose its primary income-generating activity:

Community vulnerability does not mean only the susceptibility of particular social groups to technological and environmental disasters such as chemical contamination that have traditionally been the types of struggles with which environmental justice groups have been involved. It also includes the social and
economic vulnerabilities tied to a community’s dependence on natural resource extraction and primary industries – after all, natural resource issues are obviously environmental issues as well. (Ali, 2009, p. 106)

The risks associated with the collapse of the fossil fuel industry will affect entire regions of Canada differently. In interviews I conducted, the concept of a just transition was most often brought up with reference to Western Canada. As interviewees took pains to highlight, compared to the rest of Canada, a higher percentage of workers in Saskatchewan and Alberta depend on the oil and gas sector for their livelihoods. Activists pointed out that such widespread economic reliance on the sector that is contributing to climate change was used to stoke rhetoric highlighting the perceived tension between jobs and environmental protection. Activist David suggests that bringing up climate change in Western Canada is a fraught topic because the public “very much see it as a jobs issue, and so, I think there’s a need to address that, and to decide, you know, how we can transition off of fossil fuels [in an] economically just way (interview: David, February 12, 2016). Likewise, organizer Serena echoes that the difficulty of discussing a post-carbon economy arises from widespread dependence on the fossil fuel industry for local livelihoods. Serena suggests that the common conversation of pitting jobs against the environment is narrow and short-sighted:

It’s really frustrating to see the economy be separated from the conversation about climate change and sustainable decision-making. This idea that short-term gains are going to be the way to long-term stability is just without basis, like – there’s just not any evidence that [governments] understand what the stakes are! So I think we’re up against a really big challenge there, because people are – soon and already – feeling the impacts of climate change. Environmentally, you know, we’ve got forest fires, people being displaced, and all of that. But we’ve also got the very real implications of our economy being addicted and totally hooked on a non-renewable resource that the world’s not super into right now. So we’ve got angry people who are losing their jobs, and a government who’s saying that it’s the planet’s “fault” instead of really taking responsibility for the last ten years of exploitative booming growth in our province and having absolutely nothing to show for it the second that the oil prices have dropped. (Interview: Serena, February 29, 2016)

Such a short-sighted approach is in contrast to activists’ invocation of the type of thoughtful or strategic long-term planning that is possible should the community transition away from fossil fuels. While Serena points out that the government has “nothing to show” for the last
decade of booming oil prices, other activists explicitly identify that times of economic downturn could provide the opportunity and impetus to deal with society’s reliance on fossil fuels. In contrast to doubling down on the tired ‘jobs vs. environment’ narrative, activists like Elizabeth suggest there might be creative solutions to deal with this (increasingly obvious) overreliance on fossil fuels:

The fact that so many people are getting laid off in Alberta right now, is kind of scaring the NDP government in charge here from doing anything radically environmentally because they’re already getting blamed for all of the layoffs… I’m not an economist, but I would think that this is a good time to think about diversifying your economy. Like, people aren’t in their practical, high-paying oil jobs and, like, this would be a good time to think about, “ok, what other industry are we going to create here?” Because, you know, maybe the prices will go up in the short term, but we know this is a losing battle, and this is what it looks like. (Interview: Elizabeth, February 8, 2016)

Grassroots organizers working for climate justice must consider a number of facets when designing and implementing campaigns locally. Rather than subscribing to a set of disembodied principles, engaged organizers will recognize power dynamics, pay attention to interactions among actors, and have a sense of the history of the region. Thus, successful campaigning requires strategic planning:

As a general model, grassroots movement organizers choose and enact tactics that align with broader strategic methods or avenues, underwritten by a (presumably) shared theory of change, all for the purpose of accomplishing selected goals. Goals and strategies are place-specific and exhibit dynamic scalar characteristics, both in the theories and knowledges that inform organizers and in the potential implications for their success or failure. (Black, Milligan & Heynen, 2016, p. 294)

Connecting Black, Milligan and Heynen’s assertion to the goals outlined by those in the climate justice movement, one potential implication for success or failure is contingent on whether labour organizations are in alignment or in opposition to the climate justice campaign’s theory of change, including its critique of the structure and influence of capitalist markets. This provides an opportunity to consider whether climate justice solidarities may be developed. Even though the core missions of the environmental movement and organized labour are too easily dismissed as being at odds with one another, some of the interviewees
identified the necessity of coalition-building across sectors for long-term sustainability. For example, campaigner Jay reflects on the experience of bringing together climate and union organizers for a symbolic public event like the Toronto 350 “March for Jobs, Justice and the Climate” in July 2015:

I know that there are, even now, significant tensions between the labour movement and the climate movement, both pieces of the “progressive” umbrella. But the tar sands mean jobs, and it’s difficult to say no to jobs when we are in an era of still fairly high unemployment, especially amongst youth, and a bunch of crappy jobs, austerity, increasing inequality, what have you. But fundamentally, again, I believe that you have to take on climate; beyond that you can’t make decisions even temporarily around other things, because the fossil fuel infrastructure, the engine around that, is so deeply embedded. In essence, its very existence, the very business-as-usual pathway – dismantling that will do so much for other progressive causes as well, including inequality, including dismantling a lot of existing power that exists – it’s worth heavily going after. But that’s not necessarily seen. That’s not necessarily commonly observed. (Interview: Jay, May 19, 2015)

While Jay outlines that he believes that fossil fuel divestment and the concomitant dismantling of unequal structures of power is “worth going after,” he says that these linkages are not commonly observed. Further, Jay points out that the appearance of saying “no to jobs” generates trepidation among unions. Yet like Jay, many activists assert in their interviews that this moment of austerity can provide an opportunity for collectively reimagining what kinds of jobs are worth pursuing. Interviewees who communicated the need to build solidarities with labour interests identify the just transition as one that is supportive of training opportunities for individual workers and promotes a sector-wide shift in energy production. For instance, activist Brandon outlines his view of what a just transition in Canada would look like:

There’s going to have to be various kinds of financial assistance, whether that’s in terms of international flows or even domestically. Like, I think one of the more prudent and appropriate things that could be done is to create significant retraining programs for, you know, skilled people in the oil and gas industry to shift into other lines of work. (Interview: Brandon, June 15, 2015)

Likewise, activist Julie’s comments echo and expand upon the aforementioned explanation
by Brandon, by suggesting how she envisions this approach would function in Canada’s west:

What would make sense, in my eyes, is to freeze the expansion of the tar sands and then figure out a way to contract, and actually help transition the people that work there, and whose livelihoods depend on the tar sands, to actually be able to help them. They have very technical skills and training that might be relevant to help them get retrained and to work in, like, the green economy, and try to move to renewable energies, right?… In order for us to go 100 percent renewable in Canada, which is entirely possible, we need to harness multiple different forms of renewable energies, and we need people that are versed in those areas that can help fuel that transition. (interview: Julie, December 9, 2015)

Thus, the emphasis on a just transition brings together actors who, without the overarching justice framework and goal of harm minimization, might not otherwise work together, a demonstration of the possibilities of climate justice solidarity-building. Further, Julie also encourages fellow climate justice campaigners to have empathy for communities likely to be negatively impacted by economic depreciation due to fossil fuel divestment:

[Many people are] stuck in this place where they need to be able to make a living and protect their families, and so though it might not be their ideal situation [to work in extractive industries] it’s the best option for them. And so, I think, having that empathy for people that are in those situations and figuring out how to transition in a way that’s just and equitable, so that the people that are most marginalized are ready, are not continuing to be marginalized and going to be left behind in this transition, is really important. (Interview: December 9, 2015)

Through her invocation of empathy, I interpret Julie to be suggesting that an embrace of intersectional climate justice is not about holding tight to righteousness, but rather about looking for opportunities for coalition-building. A number of activists presented this situation in a similar manner to Julie, suggesting community organizers have a role to play in “meeting people where they are.” Through empathetic communication, I suggest, activists can make explicit the connections inherent in this “broad tent” of climate justice solidarities. A focus on the local level demonstrates a sensitivity on the part of activists to the lived realities of those negatively impacted by the effects of climate change. Notably, these activists are not
identifying these groups as ‘distant Others’ in the Global South but their own neighbours, community members, and First Nations whose lands we share. Indeed, many activists interviewed spoke of the need to begin intentionally building respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples. For example, activist Melanie identifies that part of her activism,

has been just understanding how to live and work in right relations with Indigenous folk – not to, like, bombard them with questions or expect them to play a certain role. To not have, like, stereotypical expectations or ideas, to treat them like people who have a different life experience than I do, and to be sensitive to that in the ways that I can. So, I think, most of my active allyship or solidarity work right now looks like responding when communities reach out for support, which does happen. Going to the places that I’m invited to be, and making sure that I go when I’m invited… To not ask questions or have a sense of entitlement that it’s my right to know all the things that I want to know. To respect the teachings that they’re able to offer and not ask for more than I’m being given. To give gifts and show respect. And to not be there when I’m not wanted. (Interview: Melanie, August 21, 2015)

Further, Melanie speaks of how she has learned to sit with the discomfort of not knowing the answers:

So, it was really amazing to start building those relationships and to also just be uncomfortable with some of those relationships at first, where, like the relations between settlers and first nations in the Atlantic region are very strained. So it was really good for me to feel uncomfortable sometimes, because I think that I am so privileged in this society… so then it was great to, like, be uncomfortable and know that that was okay, and learn how to still work with people and build relationships when you’re not the one who has all of the “things” (Interview: Melanie, August 21, 2015)

What is valuable to consider in this excerpt is the sense of humility demonstrated by Melanie when she says that she has learned to accept that she does not always have the answer or the appropriate ways of knowing in a new situation. Rather, Melanie suggests that her role as an active ally has been marked by developing new knowledges and understanding through the building and nurturing of relationships. I argue that it is these kinds of practices that differentiate the frame of intersectional climate justice from other ‘climate action’ practices. Melanie is not alone in her perspective; other interviewees similarly described their learning process as they follow the leadership of those most affected and to wait to be told to do what
is most helpful. For example, activist Chloe explains:

We had a few trainings of how to be allies to Indigenous communities…We had a lot of conversations about what a good ally looks like. And, really, how to – asking what’s needed, instead of doing things that you think are in solidarity. It’s really about being, like, “how can I help you, what do you need me to do?” And so we had that conversation a lot… it feels humbling, I think, to me, just to be like, “well, not everyone does it my way, or the way that I was taught and I need to make space for the way that they do their thing.” (Interview: Chloe, June 23, 2015)

Like Melanie, Chloe is demonstrating that her approach of being a good ally is characterized by her openness and humility, demonstrated in her acceptance that she does not always know the ‘answer’ or the ‘right way’ to do things. I argue that these activists are practicing principles of anti-oppression through their open, non-domination-based approaches to recognizing difference without hierarchy, principles outlined in decolonization literature that I address in Chapter 3. The activists I spoke with are thoughtfully and intentionally approaching situations of relationship-building in a context of solidarity, with an analysis of, and sensitivity to, historic and ongoing power relations in a (post)colonial-capitalist system.

In this vein, activist Serena discusses her understanding of how processes of decolonization and de-carbonization are interconnected:

Yeah, I mean, the way that we’re trying to position ourselves with [climate justice group] right now is to be sort of that connecting point between the environmental movement and all social justice movements. So the biggest one for me is certainly around reconciliation, with First Nations people. And you know, creating a right relationship with the land and the people who depend on it. So decolonization and de-carbonization I think, are sort of hand-in-hand… for all the leadership that someone like me, as a settler, could offer to the climate justice movement, I think that I’m trying to figure out my responsibility and just directing that energy back to people on the frontlines who are experiencing the impacts most readily and most quickly (Interview: Serena, February 29, 2016).

In her interview, Serena noted how de-carbonization is not just the technical process of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but a move away from socio-political and economic systems of domination, as well as locked-in fossil fuel intensive infrastructure (see also
Chapter 5). Decolonization and de-carbonization, then, are not some ‘final destination’ to be reached, but arguably, anti-oppressive pathways for action. Through Serena’s words, we can see a potent articulation of the need for both cultural recognition and enhanced procedural justice for Indigenous peoples of Canada.

Throughout this chapter I have argued that the climate justice movement in Canada is articulated through multi-scalar glocal processes. This is illustrated through the development of locally-situated campaigns that both attend to place-based concerns and power dynamics, and yet remain in conversation with international narratives of climate justice. Movement-building is supported by networks like the Sierra Youth Coalition, the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, and Next Up, through training opportunities and the dissemination of climate justice messaging. Further, I argue that an emphasis on developing right relations with Indigenous communities, decolonization, and other principles of anti-oppression differentiate the specifically intersectional climate justice framework from other climate ‘action’ campaigns that focus solely on technocratic solutions of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

However, while young activists are critical of hegemonic technocratic and market-based ‘solutions’ to climate change, I suggest that they are not immune to the impacts and philosophies of neoliberalization in their own lives. In the next chapter, I examine the embodied experience of the activist, suggesting that increased precarity and flexibilization in the workforce has impacted community organizing possibilities and practices, whereby activists have begun to internalize some of the expectations of professionalization and competition in the neoliberal order (e.g., Larner & Craig, 2005; Panelli & Larner, 2010). I argue that the tensions and heavy burdens inherent in supporting the intersectional climate justice frame – and in simultaneously living through and contesting the intrusion of neoliberal policies in most aspects of everyday life – has had negative impacts on activists’ mental health. I trace how activists’ processes of reflexivity, including unpacking their own privilege, are important for the movement’s framework as a whole, but leads to instances of burnout and of activists being driven by negative emotions like guilt.
Chapter 7
Feeling Climate Justice:
The Experience of the Embodied Activist

I remember [our program director] basically being like, “you kids are going to lose your minds! You carry the weight of the world on your shoulders.” Like, people were crying all the time, and she’s like, “it’s not on you to save the planet by yourself. Why do you feel so much pressure?” And everybody was pushing back: “because this matters! And things are getting worse, and your generation has screwed us over – why aren’t you seeing this?” (Interview: Erin, May 2016)

When asked about their ongoing involvement in climate justice activism, many young organizers point to the intersectional nature of their work and suggest that their work in the field is attached to their sense of identity and purpose. They identify origins of climate change in processes of uneven development and overlapping systems of domination and oppression, which I have elsewhere connected to feminist political ecology scholarship. Throughout my interviews, many activists acknowledged the discomfort they had in recognizing their own complicity and privilege in such systems that create climate change. They also described other negative feelings or experiences of ill health, such as instances of burnout or depression that resulted from prolonged engagement or leadership in the movement; health outcomes similar to those attributed by other scholars to the demands of a neoliberal ideology in which ‘caring citizens’ take it upon themselves to fill gaps in social services left by the roll-back of the state (e.g., Baines et al., 2017). I argue that, while the framework of intersectional climate justice relies on critiquing the power imbalances of everyday life in a (post)colonial-capitalist country like Canada, the impacts on the individual activist engaging in such critiques are sometimes quite negative and, indeed, harmful. Further, while my results are not large enough to be generalizable, I noted an interesting trend in the different gendered ways that mental health was broached among the interviewees; women discussed their experiences with depression, burnout, and self-care as
embodied and personal, while men described such processes in a more theoretical or dispassionate manner. I suggest that this may be viewed as another instance of intersectional injustice within the movement itself: individuals reported the harmful impacts of their activism to be experienced to greater or lesser extents in ways that were connected to their presented identity. Specifically, the women I spoke to seem to be shouldering more of the burden of care in climate justice movements and are being ‘burned out’ as a result.

7.1 “I Don’t Know What I Would Be Doing If I Weren’t Doing This”: Identity-building and Purpose for Young Activists

Throughout the interviews, participants identified how central to their lives their activism and organizing on climate change issues and climate justice had become; in this first subsection, I thus consider the notions of identity and identification that are part of activist experience within the climate justice movement. For instance, activist Caroline points out that through her political lobbying and frequent participation in direct actions at the peak of her involvement, “I really identified as being politically active, a part of the youth community, the youth movement” (Interview: Caroline, July 15, 2015). Similarly, another activist reflects on being involved in a campaign and then participating in a youth delegation and realizing, “this is clearly very central to my identity” (Interview: Alison, June 24, 2015), while interviewee Kristin mentions that she “can’t imagine working on anything else. I think that everything comes back to, ‘it’s the central question of our time.’ I think I would be – I guess, what I do is I imagine trying to explain myself in the future, having not worked on this issue, and think, I can’t have that conversation, that’s just going to be awful” (Interview: Kristin, May 20, 2015). Here, by identifying climate change as the “central question of our time,” Kristin identifies both how important the issue is and that she feels a sense of personal accountability. Indeed, sense of responsibility and feeling compelled to act were cited as reasons by many activists when asked in the interviews why they continue to participate in the movement. For instance, activist Jen says:

I also just couldn’t live with myself if I wasn’t doing something about [climate change], because I’m not super hopeful about the future, and it’s so easy to just give up and not do anything, and just kind of while away the time you have left,
waiting for the end to come. But I think it’s better [laughing] for my health, and for movements in general, if I keep trying to help in ways that I can, because you know, it gives you purpose and stuff like that. (Interview: Jen, February 9, 2016)

In the interview, Jen mentions that keeping busy provides her a sense of purpose. When faced with the overwhelming scale of climate change, activists like Jen report feeling the need to keep working in some small way, even when they are “not super hopeful” that their interventions will have the sufficient far-reaching impacts of climate change mitigation or market-system restructuring. Purpose was a theme echoed by many other interview participants, such as activist Mark, who connects his drive specifically to working within a social justice field. While performing poorly in any “job” can be frustrating or challenging, Mark suggests that the high stakes of climate justice organizing distinguish it from quotidian concerns: “Like, if your job was working for some supermarket, you probably wouldn’t care. But if your job is, like, saving the world and you’re not doing a good job of it, it’s like, oooh! You’re letting people down!” (Interview: Mark, June 15, 2015). Yet, even when admitting that the pressures to perform well in the role of activist can be stressful, Mark echoes the sentiment of many others interviewed that he “could never imagine doing something else. So, I guess that’s what kept me doing it. Just, I can’t do some other job if I know all this stuff’s going on, so I might as well be happy about it [laughs]” (ibid.).

The sense of purpose was also linked to another emerging theme from the interviews. Activists identified that part of what motivates them is their desire to serve a common goal. For example, activist Melanie describes feeling “drawn” to service and public life; further, she believes that working in climate justice is the way in which she can make the greatest societal impact:

I believe I will probably be doing this work my whole life. And I’m okay with that. I think it will look different – it has, even in the relatively short time that I’ve been doing it – looked very different. And so I don’t expect to be doing exactly the work I’m doing now forever, but I think I’ve always wanted to live a life in a path of service, and I see that service as being the service of my generation and the generation that’s going to come after me: to leave the world in a better condition than I found it. (Interview: Melanie, August 21, 2015)
Overall, the quotes from these activists identify climate justice work as *vocation* – almost as a calling or inner voice guiding them into a life of service, as Melanie puts it – beyond a regular, commonplace occupation. Similarly, Nair (2004) suggests that the combination of identity, purpose, and service is at the core of what it is to be/become an activist: “Activism implies acting upon, acting against, acting for causes and issues of social concern, and not only personal concern. There is an implied sense that it is for the social good, working towards social change, a move towards something better – at least in the eyes of the activist committed to bringing about desired change” (Nair, 2004, p. 30). Nair suggests that activism is *a process of becoming*, leading to a way of life, rather than simply a decision to ‘do.’ Thus, the lived experience of the individual activist who seeks meaning and fulfillment from their work is full of emotional ups-and-downs. While social movement theory suggests rational reasons for mobilization around shared grievances, I argue that my empirical findings demonstrate there is an emotional and embodied side of *living activism* within a social movement that can lead to success or failure in a movement. Many activists spoke of the positive influence of the friendships they developed within the climate justice movement, suggesting they found meaning and joy in being part of a community. For example, campaigner Anne, who has been involved with climate campaigns and the Quebec student movement for half a decade, reflects on the benefits she experiences when working with others in building this community:

I think I’ve found a lot of meaning, and I learn a lot, and it just makes me feel good. I remember having a conversation with someone, and they were like, “why [do you do it]?” Knowing that the stuff that we do could lead to nothing – which I don’t think is true, I don’t think there’s any way it could lead to nothing – but let’s say it didn’t lead to the revolution. Why do we do it? And I said, “even if it leads to nothing, this is the funnest way of living life.” This is just what I enjoy doing! And I know that’s not the case for everyone, and it’s hard to remember that when you’re, like, making arguments about why you should join activism. There’s definitely a specific kind of person. Yeah. People who stick around are people who are funny, and smart, and creative and driven. And it’s a great community, and I feel really awed… Like, the people around me are fucking incredible! And I love them! (Interview: Anne, May 3, 2016)

Like Anne, Mike attributes his drive to continue in the movement in part to “social ties. I have developed incredible friendships and relationships and working activist relationships
with people all over the world. And to know that I have, like, badass friends who are doing really, really cool things on the frontlines of this movement” (Interview: Mike, February 8, 2016). In much the same way, Mark feels inspired by his peers: “working with young people doing all these workshops and stuff, you see how engaged and smart and inspiring all these people are, and it gives you hope, like, ‘ahh, we might screw it up, but they’ll fix it, they’re so good at this stuff’” (Interview: Mark, June 15, 2015). Adrian echoes this notion that young people working together will be able to ‘fix it’ when he experiences “moments when I feel like even though it might be irrational, I feel like we’re going to win every time I’m with my people, you know? There’s so many good people, and that sense of, like, being in it together, right?” (Interview: Adrian, April 21, 2016). Emilie suggests that “it’s much more interesting to get involved when we’re doing it with other people. So we’re relying on each other, and we’re able to have ideas together and make something bigger than when it was just one person thinking about it” (Interview: Emilie, October 21, 2015). She goes on to say that “at first I really got involved because I felt strongly about climate change and about environmental issues… but now I think it’s even – I wouldn’t say stronger, but it’s playing a big role – this feeling of taking part of a community that we count for others, that we’re in this together, and then building kind of a network.” (Interview: Emilie, October 21, 2015)

Movement-building that supports and celebrates friendships see retention of its membership. For example, according to Plyler,

> sustainable movements are ones that foster community through the collective creation of culture and social space. Activists are much more likely to stay within a movement when their relationships and communities are entrenched within it. The Raging Grannies attribute much of their sustainability to the friendships and collective identity that has come out of their creative song writing, costume making, and convention-going activities. (Plyler, 2006, n.p.).

Throughout my interviews, personal relationships, friendships, and community-building were generally cited as positive factors in activists’ experiences in the climate justice movement – though examples where relationships were not always considered beneficial will be discussed in section 7.3. However, there are other factors that influence individuals’ ability to participate, as well as their approach to collective organizing. The daily reality many young
activists in Canada confront is one of precarious, flexible work and eroded institutional ties. The ability of activists to earn money while dedicating so much time and effort to the climate justice movement was cited as a challenge. Indeed, some activists noted that a constraint on the growth of the movement is that it is underfunded and young people often must drop out to make money or to care for their health. I will discuss these two considerations in the next two sections.

7.2 Precarious Employment, Flexibility, and the Community of ‘Free Agents’

In this section, I suggest that the trends of flexibilization and uncertainty that have occurred among paid employment positions has extended into activism, and that these developments are seen by activists as both negative and positive. I argue that, rather than identifying with one particular organization, young activists increasingly identify with a ‘cause’ – in the case of those interviewed in this dissertation, climate justice – and follow their focus into various campaigns and networks. Many interviewees confidently identified themselves as flexible ‘free agents’ able to bounce to the next campaign that needs them, something they regarded as positive. This is different than in other organizing traditions, where a strong stable community is expected; in the model I observed, trust is built through networks rather than static, hierarchical organizations. However, the means through which trust is achieved can be negative and taxing when activists feel compelled to demonstrate dedication to the movement through the process of ‘martyring’ oneself following the ‘superstar’ archetype of activist, as will be discussed in the next subsection.

Young people are coming of age and entering the workforce in a time of increasingly flexible, contract-based, and precarious work (e.g., Vosko, et al., 2003). Baines et al. (2017) identify how, starting in the 1980s, the downsizing of the welfare state encouraged “doing more with less”, as “(F)lexibility and the pursuit of ongoing ‘efficiencies’ resulted in the spread of precarious work with part-time, contract, casual, on-call and zero hours contracts replacing full-time, permanent employees with pensions, benefits and stable career paths” (Baines et al., 2017, p. 627). The Law Commission of Ontario concurs, stating that “Over the
past several decades, the standard employment relationship – based on full-time, secure work, where employees have access to good wages and benefits – has ceased being the predominant employment structure. In its place, part-time, temporary and casual forms of work have become increasingly common” (Law Commission of Ontario, 2012, online). The overall trend has resulted in a situation where, whether or not young workers’ employment status meet the criteria of precarious work as defined above, more young people report feeling precarious and identify with or ‘borrow’ experiences of precarity from their peers (Worth, 2016).

Indeed, precarious, contract-based, or unpaid work is prevalent in the environmental sector, impacting activists’ abilities to dedicate time and effort, and, it bears noting, determining who is able to participate in unpaid work for long periods of time because they receive financial support from family, friends, or partners. For example, interview participant Jen puts it in simple terms, essentially asking, how do you sustain yourself when you don’t have money? In her interview, Jen reminds of the material needs of the body, pointing out bluntly that “you can’t have effective social movements if you’re burnt out or you’re sick or you can’t afford to eat” (Interview: Jen, February 9, 2016). Thus, self-care, food security, and access to health care are important factors to sustaining individuals and the movement. One of the barriers keeping the climate justice movement from growing, and which emerged in the interviews, is the lack of paid employment opportunities. For example, Sophie (who spent more than a year in a full-time unpaid position) outlines her strategy as she attempted to balance her activism and the need to make money:

While my main motivator to go work for [a political party] was to change the government that’s in place, thinking that that would help the climate movement, on the other hand I really, really wanted financial stability! And I was working as a consultant, very well-paid, but part-time. And I would say, I kind of lost a bit of my motivation because I was working on my own. I think it’s funny because the motivation with [previous campaign] was really the people and the energy. And just that huge community of people working toward one goal! And I think that’s what kept me going, even if it was a volunteer initiative. And when that was over, all that energy was gone and I needed to work and survive, so finances took their way. And I think if the movement was better funded, you know, it would obviously be stronger. (Interview: Sophie, June 15, 2015)
In her interview, Sophie elaborates on the fine balance between being motivated by values, relationships and the draw of the movement, and the need to make money to survive. It is one thing to be fulfilled by the campaign, argues Sophie, and another to be compensated appropriately. In Sophie’s case, these two priorities did not align, and her health and motivation suffered. Similarly, Keira expands on the theme of material scarcity and the widespread impacts of precarity on her generation:

In a world where so many people my age are struggling with employment, we have so much precarious work, like, the economy is shitty and unpredictable… And the idea of being able to buy a house and live that typical boomer-style pathway, where you get married, and then you buy a house and then you have a kid and then you have a white picket fence and whatever, like, that’s not really a thing that’s possible. And we haven’t figured out, like, ‘what is that path?’ And so I have so many people in my life who are struggling with that, both in the day-to-day realities with that, and also the emotional toll of that. Where they’re like, ‘I feel like a failure. I did the things I was supposed to do. I went to university, I got good grades. I volunteered. I care about things, and now, like, what can society offer me? I’m trying to show up with my part of the puzzle, and there’s no puzzle for me to fit into.’ And so part of that is about a belief in a system that isn’t really a system that actually exists. (Interview: Keira, April 15, 2016)

By stating that this ‘white picket fence’ baby boomer ideal is not “really a system that actually exists,” Keira points out that for her generation, the social contract has changed. Under current market conditions there are no guarantees that precarious or contract-based employment provide a path to stable, permanent employment, as was the expectation for previous generations. Standing (2012) identifies the precariat as a “class-in-the-making”, situated around “unstable labour and chronic economic insecurity… [facing] chronic uncertainty, which is stressful and bad for health” (Standing & Jandric, 2015, p. 990). With respect to cohorts now entering the workforce, Standing suggests,

when younger, they are encouraged to pursue more and more schooling, and then various forms of training, all in order to participate in what is little more than a lottery for jobs, many of which do not require or reward the education they have received or think they have received. Instead, they leave schooling with the prospect of having to adapt to a lifetime of flexibility. To compound the resultant sense of status frustration, many see themselves as entering a lower ‘class’ position than their parents possessed. (Standing, 2012, p. 595-596)
The rise of this so-called precariat has been attributed to processes of neoliberal globalization, wherein the dominant economic rationale celebrates competitive individualism and commodification, and where collective organization is seen to be threatening to the deregulated economic order (Standing, 2012). Furthermore, temporary, casual, or seasonal jobs are perceived as deficient in community ties and therefore believed to lack a sense of collective identity and relational responsibility (Standing, 2012, p. 590). Kennelly (2011) points out that within neoliberal governance norms, young adults are taught to take an individualized and entrepreneurial approach to environmental or social issues. Kennelly (2011) also distinguishes between what she terms the “good citizen” and the “bad activist” – social archetypes deployed to (self-)police and judge modes and methods of political participation (see also Hart, 2009). Under conditions of global neoliberalism, Kennelly argues, the ‘good citizen’ contributes by making ethical consumption choices and focusing on the incremental benefits of discrete, individual actions. In this model, civic engagement is re-framed as a one-on-one experience, fitting within the general trends of individualistic policies of the last few decades (Delli Carpini, 2000). As young people come of age in a vulnerable and precarious economic situation, they are part of broader neoliberal processes that increasingly normalize the culture of entrepreneurialism, unpaid internships, lack of government intervention in social and environmental issues. Arguably, young people are encouraged to internalize this idea of “making a difference” through their consumer habits, rather than radically remaking society.

In contrast to the behaviour of the good citizen, Kennelly (2011) contends, the ‘bad activist’ assembles with others to protest state-sanctioned forms of oppression and privatized institutions of capital accumulation. It is in this so-called bad activist category that the young organizers I interviewed are ostensibly placed. As I demonstrated in the last subsection, young activists report that their identity is wrapped up in their activism, that they “can’t imagine doing anything else,” and that they feel a sense of responsibility to their community. While Standing (2012) and others contend that temporary, casual, or seasonal jobs lack a sense of collective identity and relational responsibility, in Chapter 6 I demonstrated that activists involved in casual or temporary campaigns in the climate justice movement have
forged collective identity through extended national networks of organizations and training sessions with shared principles and ideas, suggesting that demonstrations or practices of collectivity and solidarity are shifting in the 21st century.

Still, the activists interviewed admit that the movement is marked by a high turnover rate. While most interviewees had been involved for many years or held leadership positions in their local climate organizing community, they also noted the informal ways in which reputation and personal relationships keep the movement going. In particular, they identified that they felt they could call upon friends and colleagues from past campaigns in order to mobilize quickly when required. To illustrate, consider how interview participant Courtney describes that she and many of her peers do not belong or subscribe to any one organization. Rather, Courtney explains that they seem themselves as “free agents” available to participate in multiple campaigns in a sort of choose-your-own-adventure mode of activism. She describes her experience in the climate justice community in Ottawa “like a coalition of a bunch of different groups… I don’t know, we’ve referred to ourselves as ‘free agents,’ I guess. We’re just kind of – people know that you’re a climate activist or an environmental activist, and [when something happens] you kind of connect and organize an action, and then go from there” (Interview: Courtney, February 9, 2016). Perhaps ironically, it is the neoliberal system with its rationale of increased flexibility and mobility that has encouraged this kind of responsive ‘free agent’ model that some activists – while simultaneously critiquing other tenets of neoliberalism – seem to appreciate.

Interview participants also noted high turnover rates in campus organizing. All the interview participants had some level of post-secondary education and were thus familiar with dynamics of student turnover from semester to semester. Some of them noted that they had to adapt to situations of membership flux and develop strategies for sustaining campaigns beyond the academic year. Some of the interviewees identified that while the high turnover of the student population posed a challenge, there were also benefits gleaned from the constant renewal of energy from new people getting involved in the form of infusions of energy and hope. For example, campaigner Anne describes her experience of organizing the “transient” students that make up youth-led Anglophone climate justice organizations in
Montreal. With respect to youth mobility, she asks, “how do you make a grassroots-national coordinating effort? How do you make people stay in one place?... the Anglo students self-identified-activist population of Montreal, is like, one of the most transient populations you’ll ever find in your entire life” (Interview: Anne, May 3, 2016). Anne then explains that because she was a member of this “transient” activist population in Montreal that she has “ended up without any affiliations” (Interview: Anne, May 3, 2016). Here, Anne’s identification that students and young people are mobile and “without any affiliations” is complicated. This set-up offers flexibility for activists to concentrate efforts where they are most needed at any one time as ‘free agents,’ but it may also pose strategic challenges for sustained, coordinated action. Another strategic challenge for sustained action is presented by the stresses of financial and employment insecurity. While the previous section examined macro-scale trends in the movement, in the next section I examine the micro-scale of the individual activist. I suggest that the stress of financial precarity, compounded by a sense of responsibility and urgency noted by climate justice activists throughout this dissertation, contribute to the prevalence of burnout among activists. In the following section, I reveal the activists’ own descriptions of what it is like to experience burnout within the climate justice movement in Canada. I also identify nuanced gendered differences that emerged through the interviews regarding how activists present their own reflexivity, privilege, and motivating factors.

7.3 The Martyr Culture of Activism: Burning Out, Selling Out… and Getting Out

Burnout is not simply a term to describe passing tiredness at the end of a long day, but signifies a deeper and persistent feeling of disconnection, hopelessness, depression, or withdrawal. Gorski & Chen (2015) clarify that “forty years ago Freudenberger (1974) introduced the notion of vocational burnout to describe, not just a state of temporary fatigue or exasperation, but an ongoing and debilitating condition that threatens its victims’ vocational persistence” (p. 385). Arguably, with increased precarious employment, as discussed in the previous section, related negative health outcomes are on the rise. For example, in their 2007 study, Clarke et al. identified that many precarious workers “were
working extremely hard – even compromising their health – to try to ensure their precarious employment situation led to more permanent employment” (Clarke et al., 2007, p. 325).

With respect to the environmental sector, Kovan and Dirkx (2003) identify that many of the environmental activists they interviewed in their own study cited burnout as a time of intense anxiety and deep depression, when they felt tired and unable to get anything done. One of Kovan and Dirkx’s interview participants “suggested that the reason burnout among environmental activists is so pervasive is due to the inability to both say no and to really take care of one’s self” and that many activists would leave the field entirely as a result (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p. 111-112). Toronto-based organizer Plyler suggests that a sense of urgency and purpose of social justice encourages activists to commit to their cause but warns that this is not sustainable long-term. Rather, this results in “organizers paying for their activism with their emotional, mental, and physical health. Instead of figuring out ways to take care of ourselves and each other, social justice groups lose brilliant and committed activists to burnout, disillusionment and poor health” (Plyler, 2006, n.p.). Likewise, Pines (1994, p. 381) highlights that “burnout tends to afflict people who enter their professions highly motivated and idealistic and [that] it represents a particular hazard for people who relate to their work as a ‘calling’”. This also relates to Harcourt’s feminist political ecological analysis of her own harrowing accounts of what she calls the “nasty business” of burnout, admitting that “I experienced it in waves of despair and crying fits, the inability to eat, a total nervous exhaustion and inability to reach out to others or acknowledge that I was no longer coping until blackouts forced me to see I had to move on” (Harcourt, 2015, p. 245).

Many of the interviewees I spoke with provided intimate accounts of personal experience or closely observed burnout in similar ways to Harcourt’s illustration of her own experience. In my research, 16 of the 35 interviewees specifically mention burnout as something they or someone close to them have experienced, and is reflected in timelines in Appendix A. Many of the activists who identify as having experienced burnout report feeling overwhelmed or upset by the scale of climate change and the solutions required to effectively address it. For instance, activist Lise, whose introduction to climate campaigning two years ago came through her previous multi-year engagement with international human rights and labour law,
admits that as a self-identified “very sensitive” person, she has had to make a “compromise” with herself to not think about climate change too much. While she used to stay on top of climate science reports, she has had to stop because reading them because she “just felt so scared, and a lot of anguish and anxiety and loneliness and powerlessness and emptiness” (Interview: Lise, June 23, 2015). Another activist shared that her ongoing struggles with depression were intensified as a result of her engagement with the United Nations climate negotiations process. She reports that as a result she had to take time off from work and school “to deal with that… so I didn’t do anything for a long time” (Interview: Victoria, September 21, 2015). Another activist explains that her experience of depression and self-reported “nihilism” was heightened on a student educational trip to the Arctic with the group Students on Ice. Though she describes her experience as a rich educational opportunity and “one of the coolest, best life experiences” of her life, activist Elizabeth also experienced negative thoughts:

A lot of my climate activism experience has also had some darker moments or negative sides. Like, when I was on that trip, I had this really weird experience where we were hiking one day, and everything was so beautiful and I felt, like, almost struck by nihilism, like, ‘what does it even matter that this iceberg is beautiful? Why should we protect it? I don’t even know anymore!’ I felt so disconnected from the immediate emotional connection of being in nature and protecting nature, and I didn’t know how to talk about that with other people… similarly, when I was in high school and started to really become aware of the scale of environmental issues, I got extremely depressed, and didn’t know how to talk about that with other people, because school started to feel useless to me. Like, why would we spend time talking about math when we don’t know if the earth will continue? And I would tell that to people, and they would kind of laugh, but not realize that I was serious in those extreme feelings. So yeah, those were just two moments where I was really confronted as an environmentalist. (Interview: Elizabeth, February 8, 2016)

Elizabeth’s story shows how powerful and dueling emotions can coexist. Elizabeth talks about experiencing both awe and disconnection on the Students on Ice Trip, and both passion and depression in high school. Grappling with these extreme emotional states can be exhausting, and some activists identify that the day-to-day demands of activism take a toll on their health. For example, interview participant Maya describes how she experienced burnout after working for years in an environment characterized by urgency, where she felt she was
never able take time “off”. She explains that in her organization at the time, “there was this perspective like, you know, this issue is so pressing, and it is time-constrained, and you know, we’re already too late” (Interview: Maya, June 17, 2015). Maya continues, saying “it’s too much. And you don’t get paid enough. And you can’t have a normal life, have relationships, meet people – it’s not possible. I travelled all the time. It’s crazy.” Finally, Maya points out that in order to “not feel like a hypocrite when you’re working for climate, or even as sustainability stuff, it requires you to work ALL the time [laughs]. Which is NOT great [laughs]” (Interview: Maya, June 17, 2015).

Like Maya, a number of activists reflect on the self-consciousness they experience in trying to prove they are not a hypocrite. Organizer Hannah, who has worked as a campaigner for several environmental non-governmental organizations, illustrates this sense of hyper-vigilance and self-policing of everyday behaviours through her own experiences: “I felt a lot of pressure… I told my Mom like, ‘if we’re walking together, don’t you dare be holding a [plastic] bottle of water. Because if a reporter sees us, I’m in shit.’ You know what I mean?” (Interview: Hannah, August 7, 2015). She suggests that such disciplined behaviour breeds a sense of righteousness and practice of shaming among activists, stating:

That’s my big frustration, especially within the environmental movement: we want to beat people over the head with things. I tease [my friend] about this too, because he’ll tease me about, oh, if I took a cab somewhere or whatever. And it’s like, ‘yo, I don’t need to be shamed!’ Like, I care about the environment, but I also need to be able to do what’s good for me. (Interview: Hannah, August 7, 2015).

Through these kinds of encounters, Hannah has recognized “that I need to soften my approach. And I think a lot of activists could do the same. Because we’re so righteous and so excited and so passionate, it can come across as aggressive. And that is off-putting [laughs].” She also suggests that, in her experience, such passion and feelings of righteousness can lead to a greater level of self-imposed accountability, with the result that many activists “go so hardcore and so intensely that we, like, martyr ourselves. A lot of activists become complete martyrs and they don’t take care of themselves” (Interview: Hannah, August 7, 2015).

Indeed, this notion of activists “martyring” themselves came across in a number of interviews
and is also cited in the literature. For instance, Chen and Gorski (2015) state that social justice and human rights activists are at greater risk of burnout or disengagement than other kinds of activists because of the high emotional toll and the expectation of selflessness. Chen and Gorski (2015) identify this phenomenon as a culture of martyrdom. In part, this culture emerges in response to recognition of systemic injustice and guilt experienced by (self-identified relatively privileged) activists who feel they should be working incessantly to help those on the ‘frontlines’ of activism against climate change. It also contributes to posturing related to demonstrating ‘commitment to the cause’ through every action, with the result that expectations of over-work are normalized, and even come to be expected, in activist circles. One activist specifically recalls her own experience of burnout resulting from disregarding her own health needs while planning a conference. She remembers:

Just completely crashing after [the conference]. And, like, my health has not been the same since. And it’s been kind of a long struggle to build back up that health that I had. Because I think I was running on adrenaline and caffeine for like, a year. And that model was very encouraged, too… there’s kind of this, I don’t want to say ‘superstar activist’ model, but it’s seen as a good thing if you can, you know, go on five hours of sleep and just do coffee and stuff. And so, I’ve been, since that happened, very intentional about stepping back and kind of, ‘what can I long-term commit to?’ And for a while, it wasn’t anything, because I was really sick for a while. So that’s another thing that links into being paid, because you know, if you have these other health issues to deal with that are sometimes caused by the intensity you pursue your activism, it helps to… [find] something you can maintain and focusing on your health” (Interview: Jen, February 9, 2016).

Here, Jen asserts that the “superstar activist” is rewarded and revered in the movement, which results in young people overextending themselves and dealing with the health consequences. Throughout the interviews, other activists alluded to being seduced by a similar kind of model of superstar activism. For example, organizer Leslie discloses that she “burned out really hard” after helping coordinate a training meeting one summer. In Leslie’s case, she identified in her burnout what she sees as an unhealthy link between her dedication to the work, her identity, and the relationships developed through her community organizing. Just as I have demonstrated the link to vocation and identity in social movements earlier in the chapter, Leslie identifies that being involved in climate justice activism is “this coming of
age time, where we’ve spent so much energy and done so much to learn about how to be
good parts of this movement. And then, like, something happens and you can’t be part of the
movement the way that you used to… I really don’t know who I would be or what I would be
doing if I didn’t do this” (Interview: Leslie, September 21, 2015). Leslie provides additional
detail, saying that:

   My identity had become so attached to being a leader in climate justice work in
my little crew that once I wasn’t a leader anymore because I needed to leave
and do all that stuff like self-care, it was like so much of myself was gone that
I didn’t even know how to be whole for a long time. And I had to do a ton of
work to, “oh right, I’m not just a workaholic, I’m also a human, I like to do
stuff. And I can also contribute to this movement in a way that’s not damaging
to me.” Yeah, I don’t know the moment that it switched, but the earlier times
of my involvement I found that even though it was a lot of work, I got a lot of
fulfilment and it gave me energy. Like, I was putting energy in, but I was getting
energy out, and at some point that switched, and it was just sucking my energy
as opposed to fulfilling me and, you know, making me feel good. (Interview:
Leslie, September 21, 2015)

The role of relationships is complicated when it comes to the activists’ self-identified
motivations for maintaining involvement or leaving the movement after experiencing
burnout. On the one hand are those participants who reported that they are sustained by their
relationships and the sense of community they experience in the movement. Yet, on the other
side are those who suggest that actors within the movement can be too critical of one another,
and that this leads to feelings of alienation. I contend that much of this negativity may be
traced back to the martyr culture and the fear of being seen as a hypocrite, as described by
Hannah and other interview participants earlier in the chapter. Like Hannah, advocate Sophie
has observed behaviours of shaming and passing judgment among her peer group, saying
that, “we’re kind of judging people, reprimanding them, there’s all that negativity around
environmental issues. Especially if people aren’t taking action. And then there’s also
negativity within the movement itself where people or organizations judge each other, so it’s
kind of two-fold. It’s kind of a barrier to wanting to participate when it’s that kind of
messaging” (Interview: Sophie, June 15, 2015). Sophie then elaborates on what she sees as a
trend of activists judging one another within the movement, relaying her experience:
Well, I’ve definitely come across an organization which, you know, they saw [our campaign] as working ‘within the system,’ like, with the government… approaching the government and trying to collaborate with them as much as possible, so that the government could change and be more sustainable. But then there was this other organization, you know, who was thinking that we should be more radical, and not work with the government at all, because it’s a waste of time. So, it’s kind of judging other organizations that aren’t going ‘deep enough,’ whereas for the moment it might just be what’s needed… [instead] it’s like we’re taking everything on our shoulders, we think everything needs to change right away. And that just makes it unattainable and disempowering. (Interview: Sophie, June 15, 2015).

Sophie identifies that she felt disempowered when other activists regarded the campaign she was involved in with disdain. Activist Adrian also speaks of his encounter with activists who thought the campaign he was working on was not radical enough; however, unlike Sophie’s feelings of being judged, Adrian reports feeling curious about the source of this criticism, and decided to reflect on and reconsider his own approach to activism. He recalls that the group he was first involved with in the climate community,

was an organization that definitely was associated with some of the more ‘Big Green’ elements in the environmental community. And so I had the experience of kind of, like, being this naïve intern showing up at events and thinking that we’re on the same team, and getting called out by people from more radical grassroots backgrounds. And just part of my personality is that I don’t like it when I’m not liked, I really want people to like me [laughs], so instead of getting angry and fighting back and being like, ‘no, we’re not like that,’ I was like, ‘I actually just want to understand what you mean.’ And so, kind of was open to hearing some of the, yeah, some of the analysis about, um, bigger picture root cause systems-thinking stuff. (Interview: Adrian, April 21, 2016)

In this quote, Adrian identifies that “being called out by people from more radical grassroots backgrounds” had an encouraging transformational impact on him, while Sophie (above) felt depleted by such critiques. Campaigner Brandon explains how these kinds of arguments about tactics and what Adrian calls the “bigger picture root cause systems-thinking stuff” abound within the climate movement:

It illustrates how there are deep disagreements about the appropriate way of going forward. In some ways, the biggest deep disagreement is about, sort of,
the liberal environmentalism versus critiques thereof. Like, is it just a matter of an economic externality, that if we internalize [it] people will deal with the problem? Or is there something more radical that has to happen? Is it possible to deal with climate change without abandoning economic growth as a principle objective of government policy making? Is it possible to deal with climate change within a basically capitalist system? (Interview: Brandon, June 15, 2015)

When activists build campaigns working within the “basically capitalist system,” some of them may feel vulnerable to attacks from more radical campaigns or organizers. This results in experiences of activists being “called out” for “selling out,” such as Sophie’s experience. Specifically, some activists admitted to me that they worry about being accused by their peers for “selling out” when they take on paid work in more mainstream environmental organizations. Similarly, Hannah notes that she hesitates to widely share how much she has consciously taken a step back from activism, “because if I come out and say, ‘hey guys, I’m not an activist anymore,’” I’m opening myself up to criticism… and then the activists are going to be like, ‘you sellout’” (Interview: Hannah, August 7, 2015). While Adrian’s encounter, above, with criticism from more radical activists helped him expand his own analysis of the roots of climate change, Victoria’s experience left her feeling isolated. After her period of burnout and time away from school and work (as mentioned earlier in the chapter), Victoria realized that she no longer felt an affinity to the climate justice movement, and began working with other causes:

[The climate justice movement] just didn’t fit with the way that I saw things, or the way that I felt things could be accomplished most effectively. I found it really catty and kind of incestuous. Definitely a lot of drama, and it just wasn’t – I had no desire to be involved with the climate movement every again… I find that with the climate movement, it’s all centered around these very lofty goals, or these big ideals that are unreachable on the short term, probably unreachable in the long term. And so it was just really nice to be doing something where, I don’t know, the response was a bit more immediate, you could actually see more of the impact that we were having. (Interview: Victoria, September 21, 2015).

By moving into another environment-related campaign, Victoria reports feeling as though her contributions were appreciated rather than scrutinized. She noted it was a “much more
positive working environment” (Interview: Victoria, September 21, 2015).

Indeed, stressful and conflict-laden interpersonal relationships are cited in the literature as contributing factors to burnout or eventual withdrawal from the movement (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Plyler, 2006). Nair (2004) identifies that the activist terrain becomes the playground to enact and externalize inner polarities and unprocessed tensions, which emerge in the complicated or emotionally-fraught relationships that can either sustain or hamper engagement in activist activities. Ironically, some of the injustices and power struggles that draw activists and organizers into a movement end up being reproduced within the movement itself: “Over and over, the prevailing reason cited for why activists leave movements has to do with how we treat each other. At the end of the day, internal conflict and judgmentalism seem to hold our movements back more than state repression and/or ‘selling out’” (Plyler, 2006, n.p.) This may be rooted in unequal power within the organizing community, or because people see different ways of moving forward. Increasingly, I have also seen personal comments on social media and blog sites posted by activists who are beginning to question the culture of “call-outs” and shaming that give the impression (correctly or incorrectly) that activists circles are not welcoming spaces.

Further, in my interviews, I noted subtle gender differences around the reporting of these experiences of negative feelings, burnout, and the complex role of interpersonal relationships in either sustaining or obstructing activist involvement. In my sample of interviewees, women were more likely to describe internalized and embodied processes when discussing the impact of their activism – and spoke more often about their own lived experiences of burnout or negative emotions affiliated with their activism. Men, on the other hand, seemed to speak more abstractly about burnout, and reflected on the impacts of their activism as judgment of its effectiveness. While this study is not large enough to be statistically significant, nor is it intended to be generalizable to the wider activist community in Canada, it does provide some thought-provoking trends on how women and men may differently experience (or report their experience of) burnout and understand the effect/affect of their activism. This provides some insight into how pervasive narratives of expectations of female “caring” is, to some degree, still internalized by young female activists I interviewed,
particularly those who identify their (relative) privilege with respect to climate/social (in)justice.

Interestingly, such a connection to female expectations of care hearkens back to MacGregor’s (2006) identification of maternalistic undercurrents in ecofeminist literatures that rely heavily on women’s propensity for (socially-produced or biologically-rooted) ‘care’ – but this extends beyond the ecological literatures into broader feminist critiques of increasing neoliberalization over the past four decades. Baines et al. (2017) demonstrate that as the welfare state is eroded through conditions of neoliberalism, nonprofit social services and care organizations increasingly rely on volunteer or unpaid labour to fulfill core elements of their mandates, positions that are held more often by women than men. Such a structure increases burdens on volunteers and employees alike to take on more unpaid care work, which is internalized and accepted by employees as part of a pervasive expectation to adhere to an unspoken code of care and altruism. Workers in a study identified that they “expect this unpaid labour of themselves for reasons of faith, personal values and/or political convictions. It is a form of social responsibility, and combines resistance to injustices inside and outside the workplace” (Baines et al., 2017, p. 633). Further, Baines et al. suggest that this ethic of open-ended care for others is associated with gendered notions of traditional femininity: “the demand for unpaid work is a well-accepted norm in this sector in which notions of women’s caring nature and perceived willingness to self-exploit interweave with long-term under-funding and high demand for services, culminating in the institutionalisation of unpaid care work” (2017, p. 639). Similarly, in her study of feminist organizers in Australia, Gleeson found that a lot of women were undertaking unpaid emotional “digital labour” (2016) creating online campaign content and moderating online message boards on profit-based social networking sites like Facebook (to ensure that hateful or triggering comments were removed from their pages). This results in a situation “in which campaigners willingly donate their time but are also subject to troll attacks, harassment and are at risk of burnout” (Gleeson, 2016, p. 79). This kind of (digital) care work and responsibility, common in activist circles, thus also takes an emotional toll on its participants. Taken together, the work of Baines et al. (2017) and Gleeson (2016) suggest that the contemporary neoliberal system exploits ethics of care and relationality that have been associated with “women’s caring
nature and perceived willingness to self-exploit” (Baines et al., 2017). This compromising of one’s own health and well-being in caring for others returns to the on a culture of selflessness among activists, mentioned earlier in the chapter, which portrays self-care as self-indulgent (Chen & Gorski, 2015).

Care, responsibility, and privilege were sometimes interwoven in the activist accounts in my interviews. For example, Jen talks about privilege as the ability to choose to stop doing this kind of work, contrasting her own positionality to those of “Indigenous communities, like Unist’ot’en in northern BC stopping Northern Gateway. They don’t have the option to quit. So, like, I kind of feel like this obligation to keep going, as much as I can, just because, yeah, being able to quit is a privilege that not everybody has” (Interview: Jen, February 9, 2016, emphasis added). Jen’s understanding of privilege and solidarity makes her feel compelled to “do more” – even at the expense of her own health, as her interview quotes describing her burnout (earlier in the chapter) suggest.

Though men spoke of their privilege and responsibility to others, their discussions of burnout in the interviews were less embodied and more impersonal than were the female respondents’ descriptions. They talked about burnout as an abstract idea of a condition that was to be avoided. In the interview, women spoke more candidly about how they are personally and mentally affected by their experience of activism, whereas men were more likely to reflect on the effectiveness of their activism, and connected lack of efficacy as a possible reason for burnout. As an example, Zac talks about how he was focused on measuring the impact and effect he had in the movement, and chose to deprioritize his own “happiness and joy” to focus on output:

I think one overarching effect [climate activism] has had on me is it’s made me deprioritize my own happiness and joy, and things that I was doing for myself. Because, like, what did it really matter? In the grand scheme of things, thinking about the trajectory that the world’s on, it seems – petty isn’t the right word. But it didn’t seem important to focus on myself, and doing things that just made me happy, even if I wasn’t being, you know, quote unquote ‘impactful’ on this enormous problem that is going to, you know, potentially bring down human civilization. And I’m still, like, figuring out how to handle that, but, you know, for a few years, I definitely wasn’t as happy as a person. I wouldn’t say I was depressed, but like, I was just really focused on impact. On external impact,
rather than internal happiness. And, I think it’s taken me a little while to realize that I need, like, a mix of the two, and it’s not sustainable to do this long-term unless you have a mix of the two. (Interview: Zac, April 13, 2016)

While Zac did feel some negative impacts from participating in the climate movement, he is careful to say that he was not depressed. Zac’s language is in contrast to some of the female respondents whose quotes have already been discussed in this section, and who specifically identified that their exposure to climate (in)justice and/or organizing contributed to their lived experiences of burnout, depression, and poor health. While Zac may not have intentionally separated happiness and wellness, discursively his quote suggests a difference between functioning and flourishing: those who describe burnout and depression and speak of their difficulty in carrying out everyday tasks is in contrast to Zac’s decision to, as he puts it, “deprioritize my own happiness and joy” (ibid.).

Similarly, interviewee Mark speaks about his exposure to burnout and emotional distress in an impersonal or detached way. Mark identifies these conditions as something that others experience, saying, “I think some people really definitely did burn out” and going on to say that “they take on these roles which require a lot of stuff and just, like, becomes overwhelming. And now they do something completely different. Because they’re just like, ‘no. I’ve done all I can do’” (emphases added). Mark then clarifies that “I don’t think that [burnout] officially happened to me, but yeah, definitely came close at some times. And yeah, there are other points where you’re like, ‘well, I’ve been doing this for years and like, things are really only getting worse. Have I been effective at all at this?’ Maybe things would be even worse, if we weren’t doing this stuff?” (Interview: Mark, June 15, 2015). I argue that both interviewees Zac and Mark seem to be connecting their experiences of (non-/close) burnout with a weighing of efficacy and accomplishment.

While men adopted a more impassive approach to staying involved and being effective in their activism, the women I interviewed seemed to internalize negative feelings associated with their privilege, and this related to them feeling like they were “part of the problem.” Likewise, in her study of young global justice activists in Canadian cities, Kennelly (2014) identifies that the culture of selflessness was not experienced or lived in the same way by
men and women. In particular, Kennelly notes how women felt more responsibility and were motivated by negative emotions more frequently than were men; she “witnessed their tense negotiation between ‘caring for self’ and ‘caring for others’” (Kennelly, 2014, p. 243)

Kennelly (2014) speaks to this in her research:

Rather than expressing their commitment to social change in an abstract language of justice or ethics, [women] posited their decision to engage in social movements as a personal choice drawn from a deeply felt sense of responsibility, inflected with powerful emotions including guilt, despair, and suffering… In grappling with these deeply felt and often painful emotions, these young women are exhibiting the hallmarks of both reflexive neoliberal modernity and retraditionalised gender norms. Both aspects are captured by the expressions of guilt, of ‘feeling like a horrible person’, of being bound by the suffering of the world; through such feelings, these individual subjects are reflexively placing themselves at the centre of efforts to create social change – yet also feeling that their efforts can never be enough. (Kennelly, 2014, p. 246)

Like Kennelly’s participants, female interviewees I spoke with admitted they felt motivated by negative feelings such as guilt. For example, Leslie talks about how her experiences have highlighted some tendencies in herself of which she is not so fond and which require “so much emotional energy” to contend with. Through recognition of structural and systemic injustices, Leslie’s practice of reflexivity has resulted in her internalizing a sense of complicity with systems perpetuating injustice:

I mean, this movement can be really depressing because it’s about climate change, and we’re fucked. It’s easy from that one simple perspective, like, we have totally screwed up the earth, and that’s really depressing. And then, when you start to think about the systems of power like I was mentioning that kind of cause that destruction – not physically but socially – those systems of power play out in our communities, like, every single day, all the time. I’ve found that as I’ve learned more about sexism and patriarchy and colonization and racism through the lens of climate change, I’ve also noticed those things in my community a lot more, and also in myself. And so there’s a lot – like, I find a ton of emotional energy goes into, like, reckoning with the ways that I play into those systems of power that have caused the climate crisis in the first place. Like, that emotional energy is totally incredible… I mean, how can we address those issues on a global scale if we can’t even address them on an individual or local scale? So it’s a huge amount of work that has to happen, and it’s really easy for it to be really sad. Because, I mean, like, noticing that I have tendencies that are sexist or racist is such a bummer. It’s just like, you do something
terrible, and you feel terrible about it, and it’s really easy to just like, spiral into, like, ‘oh, I’m shit, I’m a bad person.’ (Interview: Leslie, September 21, 2015).

Leslie goes on to suggest that she has noticed a shift over time, such that “the communities I’m part of are really willing to help people deal with that shit that they come up with. Like, ‘oh I did something bad, and I don’t want to do it again, help me figure it out.’ Like, I think that is getting a lot easier for me to do. Which is really good and making me feel a lot better” (Interview: Leslie, September 21, 2015).

In this chapter, I demonstrated that activists within the climate justice movement practice processes of reflexivity that are similar to those of feminist political ecologists. While interview participants (and especially women) have described material and emotional challenges brought on by precarious employment and interpersonal relationships, and the feelings of depression or burnout enhanced by working within a social justice field, many have remained in the movement because they “can’t imagine doing anything else”. Though activists do not cite feminist academic sources, organizers like Leslie comment on their positionality and how that helps or hinders their ability to do their work. Earlier in the chapter, I also make links to how precarious work patterns are on the rise, and the demand for increased work with no pay have led to burnout among some activists. It is worth noting that the positionality of the climate justice activists is in itself an interesting question of intersectionality: in particular, questions arise as to who is able to participate in these (mostly unpaid) activities? Similarly, activists encounter different levels of (perceived or actual) risk based on factors of personal identity, social or immigration status, or health and (dis)ability, to name only a few. Thus, the intersectionality concerns that animate climate justice as a concept are also important in thinking through the movement as a lived experience. The complexities of participation, (perceived) efficacy, and privilege in the movement serve to remind us that embodied activism is a much more complicated process than just simply reiterating theoretical or intellectualized principles. In the final chapter, I will return to climate justice principles in exploring how the findings from this dissertation may provide perspective for new climate justice solidarities in Canada.
Chapter 8
Possibilities and Solidarities for Climate Justice: Conclusions and Future Research

Throughout the dissertation, I have argued that young activists in the Canadian climate movement since 2009 are increasingly organizing around a frame of intersectional climate justice which seeks to address the inequities and systems of domination that generate and perpetuate climate change. This perspective aligns with feminist political ecology and is marked by a multi-scalar approach to defining and dealing with climate change. To this end, the movement is becoming concerned with “trivalent” justice (Schlosberg, 2004), which submits that recognition and participation are as important as distributio

nal justice for addressing climate change. This is significant at a time when hegemonic approaches to defining and engaging with climate change are focused on technological interventions or market-based programs that continue to entrench the kinds of systems that led to climate change in the first place. These dominant approaches do not incorporate the perspectives and participation of those who are most negatively impacted by climate change, and who may have diverse needs and ideas for addressing foundational oppressions that lead to climate change. I suggest that this detailed case study research provides an alternative approach to understanding and addressing climate change through an intersectional climate justice framework. I reveal how this framework is made apparent through the intellectual labour and organizing done by young activist leaders and how it is intimately connected with intersectional feminist political ecology.

Conceptually, I have demonstrated a convergence of feminist political ecology and climate justice literatures and revealed how this is borne out empirically through activists’ understanding of the causes of climate change situated in the uneven and inequitable development emerging from colonial and capitalist systems. In particular, these young activists note that domination over nature (and people) in the pursuit of endless growth is an unsustainable, undesirable precondition of an unjust system. Market-based commodification and systems of externalities fail to capture all the interconnected and complex systems of
human-environment relations. In their justice orientation, I suggest, the activists’ movement-based theorizing is closely aligned with academic feminist political ecology, an interesting finding of what I see to be an emerging trend of centering justice concerns within the movement: many of those who participated in interviews for a study that was conceptually informed by a feminist political ecology perspective were themselves also employing feminist political ecology frames in their activism. Not all activists foregrounded intersectional feminist analysis, though the majority of the activists interviewed did speak directly about climate justice in their interviews. This is primarily apparent in the ways in which the majority of activists identify the need to overturn systemic modes of domination that lead to the subordination of both nature and women (or, as demonstrated by intersectional analysis, those marked as ‘other’) and which also produce the conditions for global climate change. As researcher, it is of course my own contention that the activists are beginning to incorporate feminist political ecology; this is a claim I have made from comparing the language, concepts, and analyses apparent in the interviews against the academic literature of feminist political ecology, and finding many similar goals. This is not to say that all the activists are explicitly identifying this connection themselves, though some of them do mention feminist scholars by name in their interviews or are deliberately clear about the theoretical and academic connections they are making in their activism. Rather, the interviewees present along a spectrum, where some are fully articulating the connections they see and others are only beginning to communicate the linkages they see. Still, these young activists are making intellectual contributions by synthesizing their own analysis of the roots of climate change and, increasingly, by aligning with decolonial and anti-oppressive intersectional methodologies of organizing. In this manner, they are addressing not only the outcomes of anthropogenic climate change, but the underlying causes that perpetuate it, which I suggest is a departure from other mainstream environmental movements (e.g., Gottlieb, 2005). While not all activists across the movement identify explicitly with intersectional feminist political ecology I argue that the majority of activists I have interviewed are beginning to demonstrate a feminist climate justice ‘turn’ by focusing on the uneven and unequal power dynamics that fuel climate change, and that they are becoming more effective in communicating their perspective to their peers through training events and
summits. It is thus through change in the system, and not merely its outputs or pricing schemes, both the literature and the activists suggest, that justice is to be achieved.

Climate justice is sensitive to the ways in which climate change impacts individuals and groups differentially, based in part on intersectional identity, “the concept that reminds us of the necessity of considering multiple inequalities for the analysis” of spatial and contextual conditions (Rodo-de-Zarate & Baylina, 2018, p. 551). This argument is significant because the hegemonic approaches to deliberating climate change at the international level are often run by elites with entrenched interests and “with a view to producing a socio-ecological fix to make sure nothing really changes” (Swyngedouw, 2010, p. 222). This research provides an alternative approach to climate change governance that seeks to dismantle dominant approaches based on ‘neutral’ technological and market control of climate ‘solutions’.

I have demonstrated that intersectional climate justice has emerged as framing narrative in the youth climate movement in Canada, at the same time that a nascent academic focus on climate justice has emerged within academic (feminist) political ecology. In Canada, principles of climate justice are disseminated through youth training networks which connect ‘free agents’ from across the country into new linkages for mobilization and communication. In particular, interview participants attend(ed) events, conferences, trainings and summits coordinated by organizations like the Sierra Youth Coalition, the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, and Next Up, while possibly also campaigning with groups like 350 or Leadnow. These training events are particularly effective at communicating the tenets of intersectional climate justice, which is then taken up intellectually and discursively by most participants, though there remains some lagging in the adoption and practice of justice-based approaches across the entire movement. Some ‘slippage’ into old habits and power structures was observed that is not perfectly aligned with intersectional climate justice principles, but my overall evidence does suggest that intersectional climate justice is a path that most activists are starting to pursue. Nevertheless, this approach to organizing suggests that the youth climate justice is structured differently than other environmental and social movements that promote allegiance to a particular organization. Instead, young activists in this movement demonstrate their commitment to the movement by increasingly attempting to enact its
principles, communicating the climate justice frame, and by staying in touch between summits and protest events via advanced telecommunications and social media. This flexibility appears to provide more opportunity for individual activists to act as ‘free agents’, like organizer Courtney (Appendix A.7) and her friends who “call each other up” when they need support for a particular campaign or action. One could assume that this is related to other changes in the world of work, where temporary and contract work is becoming the new normal for this generation. This type of flexibility, while generating precarity and instability for young people trying to earn a living, may also be helpful in allowing leaner, more responsive action. However, activists do report experiencing feelings of burnout when they devote too much time and emotional energy to their activism at the expense of other activities. Some activists reported feeling pressured to demonstrate their dedication to the cause in a culture of ‘martyring oneself’, which led to some activists leaving the movement, and/or to experience negative mental health outcomes as a result of burnout. Such outcomes demonstrated the paramount importance of self-care and the need to rethink the culture of selflessness that sometimes proliferates alongside social justice activism.

I have demonstrated that conversations and campaigns inhabit the ‘glocal’ scale, demonstrated by an interrelated, multi-scalar process whereby young activists contest and co-create global climate justice narratives while generating, and in response to, locally-specific climate campaigns and conditions. In part, this was communicated by activists as the potential for local campaigns that focus on a ‘just transition’ strengthened through greater connection to labour movements and First Nations communities. The idea of a just transition was brought up with greater frequency when discussing the economies of Western Canada, which are more reliant on fossil fuel extraction than the rest of the country. This is especially important in the current political climate in Canada in 2018, where debates around carbon taxation, cap-and-trade, and other regulatory mechanisms continue to be framed in ways that reiterate debates pitting environment against economy. My research begins to uncover the ways in which practices of climate justice may be enacted in so-called frontline or otherwise vulnerable communities impacted by climate change and decarbonization, to avoid further marginalizing certain groups of people.
With respect to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts, I assert that the possibilities of intersectional climate justice emerging out of interviews and academic theorizations may offer an alternative framing to “the widely accepted environmentalist discourses (for example, of ‘behavior change’ and ‘resilience’) that sustain elite neoliberal interests” (MacGregor, 2014, p. 629). Rather than relying on technocratic solutions, activists point to the need to remake political and economic institutions so that they more fairly and justly represent a variety of interests. While noting constraints inherent within the existing political and economic systems in Canada, the interviewees I spoke with place human agency – as in, the ability to influence political decisions or political acts – as central to climate change and climate justice. Specific to the context of this case study, I have suggested that a paradigm of climate justice proliferated as a form of resistance to the federal government’s framing of the country as an energy superpower. Activists continued to organize and mobilize despite the context of budget cuts, legislative rollback, and a “chill” on advocacy organizations. While the empirical work contained within this dissertation is not meant to be generalizable and replicable everywhere, I believe that the insights herein are valuable in guiding similar academic-activist work in other jurisdictions. In an era of continued (and worsened, in some cases) environmental destruction and legislative dismantling across North America, it is important to highlight localized, justice-based efforts that continue to inspire multi-scalar action. Such interventions by activists have a chance to remake climate change politics from one that is characterized by post-political techno-managerial rationalism enacted by elites, to one that is oriented toward achieving more just processes and outcomes in a non-oppressive framework.

Throughout the dissertation, I have connected empirical research with academic literature to demonstrate the central role of human agency in climate change. This begins with a recognition of causes of climate change emerging from capitalist and (post-)colonial relations, which privilege the few above the many, and encourage the pursuit of commodity and wealth above justice, well-being and equity. While the climate justice movement identifies the uneven impacts of climate change on individuals and populations based on identity, power structures, and positionality (and thus demonstrating a need for (re)distributive justice), the movement also identifies greater recognition and participation as
parts of a trivalent (Schlosberg, 2004) and three-dimensional (Bulkeley et al., 2014) understanding of justice. In particular, my research suggests that cultivating relationships of respect and solidarity with Indigenous peoples may be one way of enacting greater climate justice by acknowledging the contemporary and historic unequal balance of power that exists in addressing and adapting to the uneven impacts of climate change. In Canada, perhaps one means of cultivating ‘trivalent justice in action’ is through collaborative efforts of settlers and Indigenous peoples addressing climate change in a spirit of self-determination, incorporating participatory, recognition and distributive justice functions. Generating solidarities of this nature requires activists to incorporate principles of anti-oppression and to reflect on their own positionality and privilege. I suggest that many of the activists I interviewed are beginning to practice an intersectional, relational reflexive process, in which they attempt to grapple with their own complicity and advantage in the systems that perpetuate climate change. While many of the activists acknowledge their own privilege, they also understood that their experience was not universal, and thus did not feel that they had all the ‘answers’ to climate change. Their processes of intersectionality, then, are not only centered in their own lived experience, but about their deliberate approach and method of organizing – arguably, about learning to live with difference and “staying with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016). Many activists mention that this process includes listening, being respectful to other ways of knowing, and sensitive to context: as Melanie says with respect to working with Indigenous allies, it is not having “a sense of entitlement that it’s my right to know all the things that I want to know. To respect the teachings that they’re able to offer and not ask for more than I’m being given… And to not be there when I’m not wanted” (Interview: Melanie, August 21, 2015).

Building on the significance of this alternative framing of climate change justice and action, in the next section, I briefly outline how future research may build on the young activists’ accounts of their attempts at be(com)ing good allies and working in solidarity with Indigenous nations in an attempt at developing right relations. I suggest this may provide insight into how the climate justice frame aligns with wider calls for decolonizing practices and processes of reconciliation. I argue that this is an area for urgent future research, particularly the consideration of climate justice as a framework and direction for moving
toward right relations and reconciliation in Canada. Beyond this, however, decolonizing practices that are focused on sharing knowledges that are different from Western hegemonic market-based ‘solutions’ for climate change, will more broadly provide a challenge to the post-political frame of technocratic climate change solutions.

8.1 Transformational Climate Justice through Decolonizing Practices: Directions for Future Research

In Chapters 3 and 4, I suggest that the dynamics of environmental justice are different in Canada than in the United States, and it is to this point I return. Environmental justice movements in the US context have primarily focused on the inequitable exposure of African Americans and other peoples of colour to environmental toxins and locally-unwanted land uses. Yet, as I have noted, there is increasing awareness in Canada to address how patterns of colonialism and uneven development from imperialist and capitalist relations have dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their lands and livelihoods. In particular, the concept of “postcolonial intersectionality” is instructive, as it:

[A]cknowledges the way patriarchy and racialized processes are consistently bound in a postcolonial genealogy that embeds race and gender ideologies within nation-building and international development processes. This concept reflects the way women and men are always marked by difference whether or not they fit nicely in colonial racial categorizations, as cultural difference is also racialized. (Mollett & Faria, 2013, p. 120)

Thus, keeping in mind the historic and contemporary situation of Indigenous nations, I suggest that climate justice activism in the Canadian context must foreground the experiences and knowledge of Indigenous communities, on their own terms. In the Canadian context, for the climate justice movement to have greater legitimacy and alignment with its stated goals, it must concern itself with these uneven and troubled relations between settler populations and Indigenous nations.

One way to develop this legitimacy is, as activist David identified, through “following the leadership of those affected people in finding solutions that work for everyone, and foster cooperation and care” (Interview: David, February 12, 2016). I return to an earlier contention I make in the dissertation, which is that an embrace of intersectional climate justice is not
about righteousness or identity, but rather about looking for opportunities for coalition-building within an anti-oppressive framework. In future studies, I am interested in determining whether (and how) this coalition-building potential exists at the local scale. While the notion of the just transition was identified by activists at the time of writing this dissertation, the possibilities for climate justice solidarities and alliances for moving toward a post-carbon economy are fruitful areas for future research engagement. This research direction may also provide a way to move beyond criticisms of maternalism that have plagued ecofeminist rhetoric. While simplistic essentialisms provide us no ‘actionable’ way forward, I argue that the market-based ‘solutions’ of the climate post-political are not the way forward either. Instead, future research may consider what possibilities emerge from working closer with non-Euro-centric political traditions and knowledges – traditions that may not have a central concern with production for surplus, nor premised on hierarchies or dualisms as ordering principles.

For example, in her interview, Erin pointed out how this kind of shift in direction is apparent in the youth climate movement, which has begun to boost Indigenous sovereignty and leadership within its organizing efforts during the period of study:

[At Powershift 2012] we sought to make it very clear that, like, people on the frontlines of extractive industries and Indigenous communities were most impacted by what was happening in the country. And that part of the solution is not just to like, give them aid or, like, build policies that create more renewable energy in the country, but that democratizing energy production and democratizing the economy, and local control and engagement in the economy, is an important part of the solution because it changes the way power flows and the way resources flow, and that’s different from just substituting one extractive and profitable system with another one. Right? Like, there’s a difference between Suncor becoming a leader in renewables and First Nations installing solar, and surviving off of that and profiting from that... as long as wealth continues to be concentrated in small pockets of very few people, I don’t think we’ll have changed the fundamental system dynamics that create problems like climate change and economic inequality. (Interview: Erin, May 4, 2016)

In her interview, activist Erin suggests that foregrounding the interests of Indigenous nations should be a primary concern of any just transition in order to “fundamentally” change “system dynamics that create problems like climate change and economic inequality.” Seeing
the shift to a low-carbon way of life means not only shifting the modes of production of energy in a just transition, but also the types and models of ownership, and the values that get (re)produced. In particular, climate and environmental justice involve “fairness of treatment and the participatory ability of all marginalized peoples to be able to make substantive qualitative changes to the impositions of the larger society, especially those that adversely affect their rights and freedoms” (Haluza-DeLay et al., 2009, p. 9). For example, activist Julie says that climate change is transformational, requiring adaptation, not to physical environmental changes, but through the development of new social arrangements and political decision-making:

It allows us this window of opportunity to actually adapt in a way that better us as a society, and moves us away from systems that have created not just climate change, but also oppression, also inequity. And it’s an incredible opportunity to look at solutions that have those multi-dimensions that aren’t just looking at solving, you know – I think if we just reduce CO₂ emissions and we just adapt, but we don’t look beyond that, we would have missed an incredible opportunity in this space (Interview: Julie, December 9, 2015).

Here, Julie is suggesting that there is a brief window to address oppression and inequity alongside climate change. Thus, these perspectives espoused by activists like Erin and Julie align with the more theoretical conceptions of climate justice as discussed throughout the dissertation: young activists want to change the system fundamentally rather than (further) fetishizing the object of CO₂ through markets or cap and trade system managed by experts.

Throughout the dissertation, I have demonstrated the ways in which young climate justice activists ‘stay with the trouble’ (Haraway, 2016), examine their own positionalities within processes of ‘friction’ (Tsing, 2005), and sit with discomfort when navigating relationships of solidarity. I argue that considering processes that attend to relations of place while maintaining a glocal perspective (so as not to fall into the “local trap”) may be a way to stay with the troubles in Canada. Such attempts at solidarity without sameness – or unity without uniformity (Schlosberg, 2004) – may find a way forward by demonstrating greater sensitivity to, and following the leadership of, Indigenous persons in Canada. Climate justice solidarities have the potential to destabilize dominant Western ideas and decolonize our research practice.
(Radcliffe, 2017) by demonstrating that there are ways of being-in-relation to the world that are not entrenched in practices of domination. In the Canadian activist context, such climate solidarities can be helpful in advancing the causes of Indigenous-led social movements like Idle No More, and instituting recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission through the building of respectful relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians (Lakanen, 2018). In my research, interview participant Chloe says:

> The biggest [priority] for me is certainly around reconciliation, with First Nations people. And you know, creating a right relationship with the land and the people who depend on it. So, decolonization and de-carbonization I think, are sort of hand-in-hand… for all the leadership that someone like me, as a settler, could offer to the climate justice movement, I think that I’m trying to figure out my responsibility and just directing that energy back to people on the frontlines who are experiencing the impacts most readily and most quickly. (Interview: Chloe, June 23, 2015)

As part of my own attempts to “figure out my responsibility” and stay with the trouble in an era of climate justice, I have come to realize that the research and my larger project of being-in-solidarity for intersectional climate justice is ongoing. While this doctoral project has demonstrated conceptual linkages between feminist political ecology and climate justice, it has only just begun to embrace decolonization and emancipatory potentials. An engagement with intersectional understandings of oppression, dispossession, and power dynamics may strengthen the climate justice movement, while a focus on the situatedness of multi-scalar ‘glocal’ climate justice interventions identifies how these narratives converge within the empirical case study of the Canadian youth climate movement. Perhaps the Canadian youth climate justice movement demonstrates to us, in some small way, the possibilities of the kinds of “abundant futures” that are possible through a justice-based approach to existing and pervasive patterns of uneven development: “If anything, the Anthropocene is a spark that will light a fire in our imaginaries. This is a time to think big, to dream” (Collard, Dempsey & Sundberg, 2015, p. 326). Indeed, such a project of thinking-and-dreaming big for the Anthropocene requires that we pay attention to post-colonial intersectionality (Mollett & Faria, 2013) and to ensure that intersectional climate justice remains strictly in the realm of the political, for it is not just ‘nature’ that seeks to benefit from a more just approach to a
changing climate. To return to a quote from earlier in the dissertation by activist Melanie, which I think neatly summarizes the core principles of an intersectional climate justice perspective and indeed, my own reflections on it: “I specifically and intentionally work in the climate justice movement, which is about driving the movement towards a justice-based transition… if, at the end of the day, we’ve tackled climate change and we haven’t talked about how all the people in the room making decisions are old, white men, then my work is not done [laughs]. (Interview: Melanie, August 21, 2015).
References


Klein, N. (2014). *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*


Appendix A: Activist Timelines

A. 1: Activist Timeline – ADRIAN

felt personally affected by visible environmental degradation in hometown

first internship at an environmental non-governmental organization in Western Canada. Worked on an anti-pipeline campaign

2010-2012: building volunteer base for anti-pipeline protests; encouraging volunteers to sign up for NEB hearings

2012: coordinated a big rally in partnership with two First Nations

participated in organizer training; learned how to delegate, how to speak to media, campaign strategy

has realized, over time, that capitalism and exploitation at the root of climate change: "My politics have changed a lot... when I started this stuff, it was pretty narrowly about climate... the goal to change CO2 in the atmosphere... [now] it's about Indigenous sovereignty"

studied social sciences and architecture in university

graduated university and helped a friend organize a rally. Realized that individual consumer-based solutions are not enough to combat climate change.

continued organizing rallies. Learned from colleagues how to be a community organizer

2012: Harper government implies the ENGO he is working for is an “enemy of the state”. Reports that this made him feel “really radicalized”

2013: Began feeling a disconnect between personal theory of change and the work of the ENGO; moved to a new organization working on voter campaigns

2015: working for an organization that is focused on member-driven campaigns; see interconnection of issues and worries about exacerbation of injustice under conditions of climate change
A. 2: Activist Timeline – ALISON

spent a semester studying abroad: saw the impact of water scarcity and climate change on peoples' lives

growing awareness that "climate change cuts through everything": identifies a justice orientation - poverty, racial justice, climate change are interrelated

attends a UN COP as a member of a youth delegation volunteered and worked as a consultant on other environmental campaigns

2012: attended Rio+20: shifted perspective, felt that international level moves too slowly. Felt need to demonstrate action in her own life rather than working with "policy wonks"

2015: on the board of a national organization focused on developing leadership. Sees a shift in the environmental movement from "hippy dippy" to credible professionals

as an undergraduate student, worked on development projects that led into environmental politics. Describes this as an "organic shift" between issues

volunteered with Greenpeace

did the Climate Project training - delivered talks and worked on a sustainability tour

2009: begins graduate studies: wanted to study science to have "authority" to speak about climate change issues

worked with a United Nations association

2013-2015: working for an organization focused on shaping environmental communication to reach "beyond the base" by meeting people "where they are" feels driven by a sense of purpose - thinks this is the most effective way to connect with young people
A. 3: Activist Timeline – ANNE

grew up in an urban area without much exposure to "environmental issues"

2012: participated in student strike in Quebec - felt she was part of a social movement, reports having learned a lot and became "very radicalized as a result"

involved in a divestment campaign - felt she needed to learn more about the tar sands

observed differences between Anglophone and francophone styles of organizing in her experience engaging with both

began making connections with Indigenous activists and practicing what she calls "action-oriented allyship" through volunteering at a frisnship centre

sees connections between anti-austerity, labour, and feminist movements in Quebec

started university and was exposed to student organizing

2012: attended Powershift 2012, met a lot of people, helped re-energize a local climate justice network

sees connections between tar sands, Indigenous rights, decolonization, capitalism

worked for campus sustainability office, enjoys the feeling of being part of a group of people who can call upon one another with help for campaigns

2014/2015: began experiencing feelings of burnout and disengagement: felt as though expectations of some leaders in the movement were too great to live up to

began working with a coalition of francophone environmental organizations

feels most energized by working with others in-person rather than at a distance; believes that training programs are important in preparing young people
studied humanities and social sciences in university, including environmental studies
began recognizing the inadequacy of market responses to climate change

worked for federal government
identifies a feeling of being stuck in a "holding pattern of doing anything about climate change" in his department

helped to establish a local 350.org chapter

involved in a campus-based divestment campaign
concerned about the emphasis on technological solutions and certain narratives around renewables

2015: remains involved with 350, including planning a rally.
notes the "strategic value" of aligning with Indigenous groups and organized labour

as a child, attended first environmental conference
began graduate studies and identified that climate change became THE issue of concern for him.
notes he is increasingly worried about feedback loops and "runaway" climate change

participated in a civil disobedience action with 350.org in Washington, DC

2010s: research, teaching, and activism continues

2014: participated in New York City Peoples' Climate March
believes this event "demonstrates the usefulness of dramatic life-changing events for fixing people to the movement"

mentions importance of "fairness" and common but differentiated responsibility for developing climate policy
A. 5: Activist Timeline – CAROLINE

2005: attended UN COP events in Montreal; participated in youth gathering and began following negotiations

attended a UN COP as a member of a youth delegation

mid-2010s: enrolled in a graduate program; focused more on professional goals but maintains some peripheral participation and collaboration with climate movement

has noticed a drop in personal motivation since leaving the “youth” movement; feels that the youth demographic is more engaged than the general population

in high school: attended Sierra Youth Coalition events
felt these were empowering, motivating - began to develop a feeling of community

mid-2000s: involved in a formal capacity with the Sierra Youth Coalition

as a university undergraduate student, participated in a lot of "direct action-type things" and campaigns
"I really identified as... a part of the youth community, the youth movement." Felt she had developed a strong network of friends and colleagues who collaborate. Maintains some of these friendships to present day
A. 6: Activist Timeline – CHLOE

became involved in a campus climate campaign, originally joined the group because of a romantic relationship, and stayed because of new friendships. Notes she has been profoundly influenced by some environmental writings.

took a leadership role in a local climate campaign – led creative, performative actions

feels it is really fulfilling for her and others to take small, concrete actions and see impact of work – need to meet in person to build relationships and be most effective.

sees strong connections – “climate justice is related to everything” – yet highlights the need to avoid doom-and-gloom messaging and instead empower people.

2010s: undergraduate student enrolled in arts & humanities program

felt a disconnect between what she was doing and what she felt she could contribute to her community

joined a divestment campaign and received organizer training

2015: helped organize a large rally, developing outreach strategies.

has begun recognizing the need to “pass the torch” to the next generation of youth and younger students.

recognizes that diversity in the climate movement is important, as not everything thinks the same way she does and that’s ok. "And I really think that’s why community building and building connections between people is absolutely the most important thing, because that’s where you can see direct results of the work that you’re doing, or actions that you’re taking.”
A. 7: Activist Timeline – COURTNEY

2013: first became involved in environmental activism - influenced by extreme heat wave and an invitation from a friend to participate in an anti-pipeline protest

became involved in federal lobbying and politics - connecting local impacts to the national scale

involved in climate campaigns in the lead-up to 2015 federal election

observes a lot of (intentional) cross-over and connection between the climate movement and electoral politics during this campaign

2015/2016: increasingly encouraging faith communities to participate in climate change mitigation and political lobbying

thinks that everyone can participate in ways they are most comfortable

2015-onward: continues organizing with friends and network: considers activists in her network to be “free agents” who collaborate as required

involved in labour union and social justice campaigns, but wanted to do more: “you get tired of feeling helpless, and I think getting involved in activism, you feel like you're doing something, even though you learn very quickly that change happens very slowly”

involved in a local anti-pipeline campaign

through increased organizing experience (and distributed leadership training)

recognized that you need to make a directed ask of participants

2015: involved in “Climate Welcome” events for new Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

participated in “100% renewable is possible” march

continues to monitor the Liberal government but feels it is less stressful than prior work: “It was very, very hard to be an activist when the Conservative government was in power”
A. 8: Activist Timeline – DANIEL

started following international climate negotiations and became involved with an international campaign

undergraduate research thesis focused on environmental issues

identifies that a large part of continued involvement in climate movement is "not altruism", but relationships

while the international scale is not his preferred focus, he does see value in having all local groups come together to discuss. Sees many intersections between climate change and other justice issues

asked parents how they stay motivated: strong connection to nature and to supporting one another

says: "I think it's important to note the intersectionality... so [climate change] impacts will influence the human world in all sorts of ways"

participated in an educational delegation to study the arctic
felt inspired by the experience - has always had a self-described love for nature

early 2010s: university student involved in campus environmental groups

involved in a biking educational tour, leading workshops

2012: attended Rio +20 compared to local campaigns, felt it was not as empowering or effective. Decided to take a step back from international negotiations to focus on the local scale

2014: participated in the New York City Peoples' Climate March. sees this event as "deliberate in casting that wide tent", notes chanting "we are the 100 percent"

pursuing graduate studies and working with a large grassroots environmental group
A. 9: Activist Timeline – DAVID

2013: moved away for graduate school, learned a lot about environmental issues and notes that perspective changed: climate change not simply a "technical, scientific thing"

moved again: continued interest in divestment campaigns

received social justice and grassroots organizing training

identifies Indigenous solidarity and a just transition for workers to be the most important climate justice concerns

2016: continuing to communicate alternative voices and ideas for Canada's energy sector

grew up in Canadian prairies which has influenced environmental outlook

involved in a divestment campaign

2014/2015: influenced by the Leap Manifesto as a way of conceptualizing broader social platform and how climate change is related to other issues

involved in a local grassroots Climate Justice group

acknowledges his shifting perception re: climate change and solidarity: "I had a very typical [Prairie] understanding of it, if you will, where climate change is a very scientific and technical issue, and my response as a concerned citizen was to try and, you know, do what I could to reduce my own emissions"
A. 10: Activist Timeline – DAWN

in high school, was involved in her school's environmental club. Focus primarily on recycling

focus of studies is a combination of creative humanities and environmental science. concerned with the justice implications of climate change - says that those who will be most impacted are not those who created climate change

identifies "corporate greed" as motivator, and people as causes, of climate change

felt very connected to the environment as a child. notes her Dad was an environmentalist

2014: began undergraduate studies and joined school's environmental group. found the group's reach and capacity extended far beyond her high school club

2015: began volunteering with a local 350-related group. Involved in divestment campaign, other campus actions solidifying friendships, still learning about the movement. Identifies the need for self-care
A. 11: Activist Timeline – ELIZABETH

helped create an environmental club in her high school, and assisted in hosting a conference
felt the need to do something, but also felt "paralysis and fear"
travelled to the arctic for an educational experience
reported feeling "nihilism" and overwhelmed by the scale of climate change, while still feeling awe of the natural beauty and a need to protect the region

as learning more about national and international climate policy, felt Western Canada was underrepresented in "national" youth climate movement
relies on spiritual practice - "trying to do the best you can to make the world a better place"

focused more on teaching and legal issues feels like a "retired" activist
sees climate change as an "opportunity in disguise" to fix "broken" systems. Highlights the importance of a "just transition" away from fossil fuels

in first grade, teacher introduced the concept of the ozone hole - made a lasting impact

joined a leadership team of a national youth organization - organized in strategic decisions making. Felt a lot of responsibility

involved in a Canadian-based team reporting back to citizens during the UN COP

2012: attended Rao -20 with other young people

volunteered and made presentations with a climate education campaign

participated in a cycling & environmental education tour in Canada.
learned more about climate change, seeing impacts of environmental issues on local populations

2016: is hopeful that the growth of campaigning and training opportunities (e.g., Powershift Alberta) in Western Canada will engage more youth and highlight regional initiatives
A. 12: Activist Timeline – EMILIE

attended workshops hosted by a regional youth environmental engagement and training organization

participated in an international development volunteer program. Saw impacts of climate change on affected individuals

attended a UN COP as a youth delegate connected with a lot of other youth who cared about climate change; began developing a network for future involvement

2012: participated in Rao+20 like earlier COP, felt it was “too big” to make much of a difference, but began to realize own personal growth and development as a leader

received training on communications, media, administration, organizing in social movements

trying to incorporate anti-oppression principles, collaborate with frontline communities, focus on how root causes of local environmental issues are all related to the political system

in high school: involved in school’s environmental club. Focus primarily on local-level awareness, composting, reusing

2005: attended UN COP events in Montreal was impressed by so many stakeholders coming together to discuss climate change - says it felt “empowering”

throughout undergraduate education, sought out studies for environmental solutions

shifted focus toward local and regional campaigning in Quebec, organizing against pipelines, shale gas drilling. Aimed to build more personal capacity and networks within the province

2015: continued local actions and education efforts to communities about the impacts of oil and gas exploration

believes it is important to avoid negative messaging - focuses instead on empowerment and building strong local communities
A. 13: Activist Timeline – ERIN

2009: attended Powershift in Washington, DC
recognized the intersectional nature of climate change, and believed she could contribute skills to the movement

became involved in a local Climate Justice group

attended second UN COP as a youth delegate, emphasized a different focus, which helped improve her outlook on what could be accomplished

2012: involved in organizing Powershift 2012
identified a different collective political analysis than Powershift 2009, which was centred on justice and voices of Indigenous women. Attempting to practice good solidarity and take leadership from frontline communities

describes intersections of climate change as massive inequality, result is “all the systems are screwing over the same people”

sees a distinct difference between mobilizing (large groups of people) and organizing (for sustained action) - wants to build culture of community strength and resilience to "weather the storm"

was involved in Powershift 2009 (Canada)

attended a UN COP as a youth delegate
felt unsure as to whether it was the best fit opportunity for her

participated in direct action training, and helped organize other youth training camps, was involved in a lot of creative actions and ongoing campaigns

notes that 2011/2012 is when she perceives the tar sands divestment movement really “takes off” in Canada

involved in a national-level campaign related to the 2015 federal election
feels as though the fast pace of mass mobilizations means there isn’t always time to be strategic or critical

her perspective on leadership; give organizers capacity and responsibility
undergraduate courses focused on international studies and global environmental politics

began feeling a lot of pressure - that environment is THE most important issue

worked with a coalition of academics and civil servants on environment and economic issues.

was offended when an older colleague told her that she'd change her mind - she believes there's a difference between growing older and becoming jaded

worked with an anti-toxics campaign

2011-2012: involved in educational events in the lead-up to Rio +20

received training in non-violent communication trying to avoid activist burnout

as a child, cared about environment and enjoyed watching Captain Planet

worked for student union. Worked on a local mayoral campaign

2008-2010: had a campaigner job at an environmental organization. felt a lot of self-imposed accountability to perform environmentalism in the "appropriate" way

2010: worked for a non-profit foundation, focusing on environmental issues. Noticed a lot of ENGOs framing climate change work as "arctic research" to fly under Harper government's radar

received direct action training involved with an anti-Keystone campaign

2013: decided to take a step back from activism - "left the field" is worried about being called a "sellout" but notes that her interests have changed focusing on "empathy rather than righteousness"; suggests that different framings speak to different people
A. 15: Activist Timeline – JAY

mid-2000s: began undergraduate studies.
Became involved in environmental campaigns; volunteered with Engineers Without Borders

moved to a new school in a new city for graduate studies

worked with transit and cycling advocacy groups - sees active transportation primarily as an environmental issue

2015: helping coordinate a rally with other groups
thinks people stay involved in the movement for relationships and connections more than "effectiveness"

as a child, was interested in the natural world, environmental sciences

worked with campus sustainability office
began feeling as though climate change was THE most important issue

became involved with a local 350.org group
concerned about growth of the tar sands;
sees challenges between reconciling labour concerns and environmental issues

wonders: how do you keep people engaged? Is also worried that some mainstream organizations rely on tokenistic or "fake" participation
A. 16: Activist Timeline – JEN

2009: moved to a new city for university
participated in a training camp for climate justice organizers
volunteer with OPiRG

2012: participated in Powershift 2012; continued with divestment campaign
notes that she experienced burnout after "running on adrenaline and caffeine" for a year
identifies cause of climate change: colonialism, capitalism, the drive for "more"

2015: involved in an anti-pipeline campaign. Helped organize a march
in high school, became involved in sustainability initiatives
attended non-violent direct action & anti-oppression training
sees connections with climate justice and intersectionality
volunteered with a local divestment campaign

worked for student union and campus sustainability centre. Focuses on food security of students
considers environmental issues to be most "foundational"

2014: worked on contract for a mainstream environmental organization
notes difference in organizing styles and values among colleagues of different generations
focuses on decolonization by working with Indigenous groups; interested in working together and meeting people where they are
A. 17: Activist Timeline – JOSHUA

became involved in a "mainstream" campus environmental advocacy group
started questioning the effectiveness of this method of organizing and pushing for change

engaged in tar sands divestment campaign
thinks this is a more tangible way for people to understand their own impact, more immediate than influencing (inter)national policy

stays involved because of the people and relationships developed

in high school, a project on climate change inspired him to lobby for climate change legislation

involved in LGBT activism and campaigns in university

participated in a distributed leadership training: learning more about community organizing

began working with a local 350 group - felt like it was a better fit ideologically explains he sees climate change as a "byproduct" or result of colonialism/capitalism. Thinks this messaging can be a strength of the divestment campaign

2015: continuing leadership role in 350 group: organizing events, attending protests, canvassing, posterering, developing workshops and presentations
A. 18: Activist Timeline – JULIE

worked with other high school students in her school board to create a campaign to ban bottled water

helped organize a conference for students, teachers, parents
appreciated how her high school teacher encouraged her and treated her with respect. Notes that this experience was very empowering

worked for student union and campus sustainability group

2013: registered for NEB process to speak against proposed pipeline that would go through her community because of the local nature of this pipeline proposal, it felt more immediate

sees climate change as "window of opportunity to actually adapt in a way that better us as a society, and moves us away from systems that... [create] oppression and inequity"

in high school, participated in an outdoor education program, helped organize a conference for young people to engage with urban sustainability

identifies a "strong connection" to the environment. Travelled throughout Canada with family; feeling frustrated that more people aren't protecting the environment

early 2010s: undergraduate program in environmental science and education

helped launch a community garden

wants people to have a chance to discuss these issues in their communities and to hear different perspectives. Identifies "just transition" from fossil fuels an important goal

involved in divestment and direct action campaigns

2015: wants to continue working in the environmental field
sees connections between community and environmental resilience
A. 19: Activist Timeline – KEIRA

- became a member of a local environmental campaign
- worked for an environmental organization, helping to organize events for youth
- 2008ish: continued work toward training and building the capacity of young people and students
  - believes these networks are beneficial for creating a sense of community - sees the environmental groups growing
- takes on a leadership role in campus environmental group
- involved in Powershift 2009 (Canada), a mass gathering of people who "care about climate change and the environment"
- was seeking opportunities to be mentored by others in the movement, but began realizing that she was becoming one of the more senior members of the movement
- involved in Powershift 2012: thanks this round better at highlighting diversity & Indigenous voices, explaining "what is climate justice?"
- involved in a national-level organization focused on developing democratic participation
- as a teenager, was concerned with social justice. Grew up in a beautiful part of the country, spent time outdoors, inspired by nature
- participated in a Sierra Youth Coalition training session for young people, with a focus on sustainability
- mid-2000s starts university: began working for student union and campus sustainability
  - saw an "explosion" of interest in environmental issues at this time (notes film "An Inconvenient Truth")
  - involved with on-campus waste audits and efforts to improve compost
- 2009: attended Powershift in Washington, DC
  - sees this event as generating the community and the desire to do this in Canada
- attended a UN COP as a member of a youth delegation
  - notes a "collective burnout" felt across the movement after Copenhagen
- very involved in student union
  - began recognizing own "workaholic" tendencies and the need to prioritize self care
  - relies on spiritual practice for guidance: considering how to develop respectful relations and continue building community
A. 20: Activist Timeline – KRISTIN

began conceiving of climate change as a global problem that could only be solved through international cooperation

as an undergraduate student, attended a UN COP with other young delegates

worked for an environmental NGO as a researcher for a few years, with a focus on provincial policy and legislation

trying to recapture some energy and enthusiasm from younger days: "grassroots action gets people involved in climate change in a way that’s really tactile, they feel like they’re doing something"

continues thinking about justice connections: "the deeper I’ve gone into it, the more I’ve started to think about how wrapped up fossil fuels are in all sorts of social and political aspects of economy and society"

as a high school student, participated in an educational trip to the arctic

helped organize a youth conference on "how to be involved" in environmental and climate work

2009: attended the UN COP in Copenhagen as part of a delegation - coordinated with other youth delegations
felt as though the movement put a lot of pressure and expectation on Copenhagen, which resulted in much disappointment and people leaving the movement afterward

2012: on the board of a grassroots environmental charity
began engaging at the national and sub-national level of policy: began feeling that the international level was "burning me out personally"

continued being involved in climate change politics and research: "I can’t imagine working on anything else"

feels part of a community of people involved in climate change policy and politics through different specialization and professionalization
A. 21: Activist Timeline – LESLIE

started undergraduate program in environmental science
felt "bummed out about climate change" - became increasingly aware of the seriousness of the issues

involved in campus sustainability initiative and small projects

started a discussion group in own community about climate justice. Aimed to better understand the UN process

participated in another UN COP found it very tiring. Noticed many young people were losing faith in the UN process, seem to be "corrupted by private interest, specifically in the fossil fuel industry." Found that the increased exposure/learning opportunity about global environmental issues was a "good privilege check"

started to intentionally focus more on engaging with the local level and community

involved in a local divestment campaign

"burned out really hard"

sees intersections: "every movement is the climate movement"

as a child, "grew up in nature"

2009: attended Powershift in Ottawa with a friend
appreciated the format - set up sustained actions to take in communities in the lead-up to Copenhagen COP

participated in a UN COP as a member of a youth delegation

was involved with an organizer training camp to gain skills for non-violent direct action, community organizing, media, and event outreach

compared to "all the other youth delegations, I felt like we had a really well-developed justice perspective"

learning more about respectful engagement with Indigenous peoples in her region

2012: involved in Powershift, which was different than 2009: "when you're talking about climate justice, you're not talking about ghg emissions, you're talking about the social systems that enable the massive extraction of fossil fuels at the expense of communities"

2014: helped with Powershift Atlantic: took "so much emotional energy" and connected to her sense of sense. The event focused on developing a robust movement-wide understanding of justice and to build links with Indigenous communities

began working with "mainstream" environmental organization - is finally getting paid to be an organizer. Notes the differences in this organization compared to her earlier activism
A. 22: Activist Timeline – LISE

began long-time volunteer involvement with Amnesty International

worked for a labour organization: became interested in the link between law and the environment

became involved with a nationally-networked climate campaign. Began lobbying elected officials

notes a difference between francophone tactics and (English-speaking) organizer strategies across Canada

as a teenager: concerned about environmental issues, which felt scary and overwhelming. Understood environmental problems to affect all segments of society

read an article that encouraged her to "make the link" between social issues and the environment

2013: started an environmentally-focused graduate program

feels that negative framing and messaging in popular environmental discourse is disempowering and demotivating
A. 23: Activist Timeline – MARIELLE

2005: attended UN COP in Montreal
reports feeling inspired and mentored by other youth
attended another UN COP as a member of a youth delegation
involved with UN process
switched from a focus on engaging Canadian government officials to delegates from other countries - felt it was too difficult to effect change with PM Harper in power
attended UN COP events and networked with other civil society organizations
identifies need for more equity and transparency in the UN negotiations process
Reflecting before the Paris COP in 2015: sees a shift in how youth delegations have been organizing over the past ten years

involved in high school environmental club - focus primarily on compost and gardening
after 2005: became involved in Quebec-based youth organizations and received training
2009: attended UN COP in Copenhagen
felt very disappointed by the lack of outcomes from conference and decided to re-focus on capacity-building and training for youth instead. Developed interest in peer-to-peer learning and resource-sharing
continued focus on teaching young people how to become involved in environmental solutions in practical ways

"I'm always impressed with this new generation of young people who are not waiting for the government to take action, but they are really creating positive solutions"
A. 24: Activist Timeline – MARK

as an undergraduate student, studied environmental policy and became involved in campus activism

held short contracts working with organizations focused on environmental and youth empowerment issues

attended several UN COP events over the years, including going to Copenhagen in 2009

in 2010s: focused on environmental policy and coordination/collaboration: observed a lot of burnout among his peers. Still, says “I could never imagine doing anything else”

"the thing that really drew me to the climate issue was just the whole injustice, inequality aspect to it"

2005: attended early meetings of the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition

attended a UN COP and helped coordinate a youth delegation; networked with other delegations

began working for a Canadian environmental organization dealt with same issues, but felt it was a different approach than that taken by youth organizations

when he first started, felt focused on the need to effect change at the international scale; now perspective has changed to focus on national and subnational scale "as things become more hopeless at each level"

continues working and researching in the environmental policy field
A. 25: Activist Timeline – MAYA

began undergraduate program in a technical scientific program

became a volunteer with a local PIRG chapter and a campus environmental group

founded a campus environmental group; attempted to apply the Campus Sustainability Assessment Framework measurement, which she liked because it had both environmental and social components

began working for an environmental organization with other youth. Noted low pay and high turnover rate of staff, began seeing an influence from US organizing on how Canadian activists were working

late 2000s: worked on an environmental campaign where she really started to see the integration of justice considerations – something she noted she felt was increasingly common in North America

really needed time to “step away” from activism due to severe burnout. Says news of climate science “makes me miserable.” Hopes activists can start being kinder to themselves and to others, even while acknowledging the “urgency” and dedication that characterizes the movement

as a child, considered herself an environmentalist, but thought it was all about “oil spills and animal rights”

eyear 2000s, attended an SYC Sustainable Campuses conference joined a group and felt “connected”, Helped organize a similar conference and got involved in different ways

mid-2000s: worked in student union and helped create campus sustainability office; was increasingly interested in social issues than a limited view of “environmental” issues - felt there were bigger justice issues at stake

2006: attended early meetings of the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition understood it to be “broader than just enviros” involved. Suggests the group was originally conceived as an avenue for creative protest actions and media stunts

worked for an environmental organization in another country on cross-border organizing; observed a disconnect between theory and activists working within the movement at that time

“most of my activism was totally ‘behind the desk’ activism. I was always the manager, I was always writing grants... I never had an organizer position”
mid-2000s: began university and joined a campus environmental group that seemed “less political”
focus was on personal choice and (limiting) consumption

worked in campus sustainability office. Tried to provide a coordinating role to encourage various environmental groups and campaigns on campus to speak to one another

late 2000s: began a graduate program interested in the influence of ecological systems on increasing or slowing climate change impacts

2009: attended Powershift in Ottawa was reminded that climate change was not just about biological or atmospheric processes, but “about people!”

participated in a UN COP began realizing that while it was “powerful” to come together with others at these events, it was time for her to “move on” and not attend these meetings any longer

2015: teaching and research continues “how do you teach climate change along the ‘hope to despair’ continuum”? Realizing it’s less about the science and sharing expertise, but is rooted in how society operates in high school, tried to reduce personal waste from food preparation and packaging

took on a leadership position in the campus environmental group

interested in environmental studies as a way to practice science, and for its possibility to unite social and policy concerns with science, so she didn’t have to “choose”

attended first UN COP as a member of a youth delegation
says she “learned more at a faster rate than I ever had in my life”

2009: attended UN COP in Copenhagen. Participated in a side event and shared news updates with friends back home
perspective began changing on what was possible at these meetings, observed that the Canadian delegation was quite obstructionist

2012: after taking some time away from environmental activism, began to get involved with local community. Focused on research and career development
A. 27: Activist Timeline – MELANIE

in high school: involved in social justice-related volunteer work

started university: began working with undergraduate student union

experienced burnout from being involved in so much campus and student organizing - needed to take time "off" from activism

began seeing how this community-based work was related to the student movement: understood it to fit within a larger system. Began considering how to be an "active ally" in ways that were personally healthier for her

supported a divestment campaign, but maintained some distance from organizing

started working with a local group on an anti-pipeline campaign

saw how the local campaign connected with a network of similarly oriented local campaigns speaking to one another across Canada

began building respectful relationships - trying to take leadership from First Nations communities - says "solidarity is an action"

2016: involved in planning PowerShift Alberta, which aims to follow Indigenous leadership thinks an important part of a justice-based transition is building (and following) new leadership

worked on global humanitarian campaigns was drawn to the social justice orientation; began realizing there were a lot of local issues to work on

held a leadership position in student union and worked on a large tuition reduction campaign felt it was unfair to saddle young people with so much debt - that it reinforced systems of privilege in access to post-secondary education

began working with a local group concerned with re-purposing waste, building local populations' skills for renewable energy, active transportation and sustainable living, etc.

2014: attended PowerShift Atlantic, which had a "strong focus on decolonization" says "my brain exploded" as she moved from the theoretical to being exposed to lived experience of climate (in)justice

received non-violent direct action training

took on a leadership position in a national youth climate organization conversations about allyship, justice, anti-oppression are deliberate: "decolonization has become a central pillar in the work that I do"

2015: helping to coordinate a youth delegation to the UN COP in Paris: important from a justice and participatory perspective to ensure diversity of participants to address the constraints of "capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy... if we don't address those things when we work on climate change, then the world will not change"
A. 28: Activist Timeline – MIKE

attended social justice-oriented marches and protests with parents; saw parents as modelling behaviour of good citizenship

began participating in Greenpeace demonstrations; saw it as a way to practice non-violent direct action and civil disobedience

started an undergraduate university program. Volunteered with various public spaces campaigns in the city where he attended school

2009: began working for a youth-focused environmental network organization. Became involved in international UN-level and other "bureaucratic stuff"

sees personal role as a connector of people; aims to empower others to recognize their agency for change. Working to unpack own male privilege in international activist space.

as a child, spent time outdoors with his family - considers it an early influence on his environmental career: "I've learned throughout my organizing, as well, people often go back to a seminal moment in nature as something that motivates them"

2005ish: participated in a youth internship experience program that exposed him to other young activists across Canada was positively influenced by one of the group leaders to become more involved in social justice activism

2007: continued involvement with Greenpeace. Also part of a local anti-tarsands campaign group

2009: attended first UN COP in Copenhagen. Began learning how to communicate and work with other groups in solidarity for climate change action - e.g., seeing gender issues and Indigenous sovereignty as interconnected with environment
A. 29: Activist Timeline – PETE

as part of a school project, had to follow a federal election campaign, which led to a life-long interest in party politics

early 2000s: started undergraduate program and became involved with a campus political party

2005: attended the UN COP in Montreal wanted to be involved with bringing an environmental perspective to other party politics

attended UN COP as a member of a youth delegation
Felt “so much energy” from other youth delegations

received training on how to deliver climate change presentations

2015: feeling optimistic and hopeful about the Liberal government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to introduce stronger environmental and climate change policy

participated in Boy Scouts and camping as a child; developed an environmental stewardship ethic

worked as an intern in a local MP office

organized campus political events and debates, and always tried to infuse them with environmental content

felt “defeated” when Prime Minister Harper was elected

worked in political field; was involved in a federal election campaign was supportive of Stephane Dion’s “Green Shift” platform – was hopeful it would resonate with Canadians. Felt “disillusioned” when Dion lost the 2008 election

continued being involved in other environmental and political campaigns felt like he “aged out” of the youth bracket

2015: attended the “100% renewable is possible” march believes young environmentalists should run for office to ensure better representation of climate change issues
A. 30: Activist Timeline – SAMANTHA

Trip to the Galapagos Island: made a big impact on how she reconceived of humans' impact on the environment.

Increasingly considering how to visually communicate environmental issues: focus on a way that doesn't make people feel lectured/guilty, instead foregrounding her own complicity in systems causing climate change, environmental degradation.

Participant in a youth social justice training program.

Started working for a Canadian-based non-profit advocacy and research organization.

Undergraduate: studied design and communication - started doing work related to socio-environmental issues and sustainability.

Got involved with campus sustainability office.

2010s: started MA degree in Environmental Management. Involved in campus sustainability office at new school.

Living in different regions of Canada: exposure to different forms of organizing and histories of activism.

Post-graduation: working for an NGO on international development work. Felt disillusioned and disempowered by the focus on market/capital “solutions”.

2015: preparing to attend the UN COP with a youth delegation.

It is important to build community: "I find that the moment right now is incredibly, beautifully intersectional."
A. 31: Activist Timeline – SARAH

grew up spending time in a large park near her home "exploring nature"

involved in a network of secondary school environmental clubs and campaigns

attended a Sea Shepherd protest felt they were "too radical" and did not go to another event

worked with Sierra Youth Coalition's push to help create a wave of campus sustainability offices across the country

took on a leadership role in an environmental organization "climate change has evolved from something that was, you know, this abstract, scientific environmental issue into a real human issue"

focused on building solidarities, getting unions interested in green jobs, working with First Nations; considers climate justice to be different than other environmental movements because it's a combination of evidence-based decision-making and a moral, emotional argument

get involved with high school environmental and social issues club felt drawn to social justice issues

participated in Sierra Youth Coalition events appreciated the training available through SYC, as well as what she perceived as its "coalition" focus

undergraduate in a technical program took a short break from environmental campaigning to focus on student issues and groups on campus

helped develop youth-focused sustainability training workshops. Involved with education-related organizations

suggests organizing young adults has its challenges - funding isn't always available to support training and capacity-building

remains involved in an environmental organization in an advisory capacity
living in Western Canada, was not sure how to best campaign around social justice and environmental issues

worked on a campaign looking at the social determinants of health and the impacts of poverty

was influenced by reading Naomi Klein's "This Changes Everything" - sees how capitalism is affecting climate change

began graduate studies
interested in studying climate justice: what can we do as a community to empower and support one another and "take power back"

still struggles with framing climate change in a part of the country that is reliant on the fossil fuel industry for jobs: focuses on the need for a just transition

as an undergraduate, studied international development and political studies
looked critically at Western ideas of development; how deep change in communities happens from the bottom up

worked for a progressive candidate in an election campaign

 gained new perspective and appreciation for community organizing and local political strategy

participated in a youth training program with exposure to non-profits, social movements, and environmental campaigns
uses climate change as a "lens" for understanding other social justice issues

received training in the Marshall Ganz style: storytelling and framing in organizing
wants the climate movement to shift away from scary and disempowering narratives

personal focus shifting a lot toward reconciliation: notes connection to civil rights, women's rights, minority rights

says of the responsibility to address climate change: it "can feel like it's your job and yours alone" which puts pressure on young people to act quickly and make decisions
A. 33: Activist Timeline – SOPHIE

began facilitating workshops for youth as part of a national environmental organization
dedicated to working full-time in environmental education and mobilization field

2011: felt she was fuelled by anger when Prime Minister Harper was re-elected
post-Rio +20, experienced burnout and needed to step away from environmental activism

worked in an elected politician's office, experienced burnout again from long hours and recognized the need to take a break
understands the causes of climate change to be related to the unrelenting search for profit. Believes people do not act because of fear of change, not lack of information. Also feels that the climate movement can be judgemental and should reframe messaging away from focus on shame and guilt
undergraduate studies in international development; travelled abroad for exchange
felt a lot of personal guilt and stress because she was unable to recycle while travelling

began volunteering with a grassroots coalition preparing for Rio +20
felt very energized by the youth momentum and leadership

2012: had put in a lot of unpaid labour into a campaign, and another organization was critical of campaign's approach, suggesting they were not "radical" enough. Said this was very discouraging and disempowering

worked as a consultant for educational sustainability organization

2014: returned to school and working part-time with educational organizations in schools
feels that seeing the results of school engagement is a better balance for her
high school: involved in recycling, social justice, environmental committees. Attended wilderness camps
says all these experiences shaped her interest in environmental and scientific research
2009: attended a SYC sustainable campuses conference, which covered social justice and
anti-oppression training
   The climate justice narrative she was exposed to "blew my mind... opened me up to the idea that this was a movement, and that there was higher-level organizational work to be done"
2012: attended Powershift in Ottawa - participated in content delivery
   saw the event as positively reinforcing connections between different justice-based movement communities
2013/2014: began volunteering with a scientific advocacy organization. Started with local outreach and coordination efforts
   realized this organization was a better "fit" than the climate justice movement:
   "there was this perception that, like, you need to give yourself to [climate activism] fully... and that was not an atmosphere I wanted to be in"
childhood: went on canoe and camping trips with family
studied biology and ecology in undergrad. 
   Joined environmental group on campus and lobbied for a sustainability office
continued attending "informative" events and training
   perspective on environmental movement shifted away from expectation of individual personal responsibility for consumer changes
started graduate studies at a new school
attended a UN COP as a member of a youth delegation
   found the experience to be exhausting and disempowering. Experienced burnout and depression - needed to take time off
continues with personal research focused on ecosystem science, as well as advocacy work
sees capitalism as root cause of climate change:
   "I've definitely learned a lot over the years about the connection between climate change and environmental racism, climate change and social justice, and that marginalized communities tend to be disproportionately affected"
A. 35: Activist Timeline – ZAC

attended a climate change workshop hosted by 350.org says "I thought I was well informed" but was floored by the depth and urgency of the climate crisis: "once you really internalize that, it's hard to just ignore it and kind of go about your day-to-day life"

began noting a difference between young people who think "liking" something on Facebook or sharing on social media is the extent of their political action, and those active organizers who see this as only one minimal part of it

spent time researching social movements, political organizing methods, to find best strategy for organizing an online community for action

understands the cause of climate change as the result of "market failure" and a great injustice, as those who feel the worst effects are least responsible for creating problems

feels the movement is "engaging young people in ways that give them the type of training experience they need to become successful activists, people in the NGO world, and politicians"

after graduating from university, began working as a consultant

2009: volunteered with Powershift in Ottawa, using consulting skills was surprised that so few people get paid for activism - it was all done "on the side of the desk" and very much "learn as you go"

helped organize a demonstration to draw attention to the UN process before the COP in Copenhagen discussed with friends their collective "Copenhagen disappointment" generated "motivation to create an organization which was able to build enough political power to actually hold politicians accountable"

helped launch an online community for campaign organizing and mobilizing as organization grew, they were able to pay staff - trying to avoid the model of "rich kids" activism

2015: sees self-care becoming an important conversation in activist circles - recognition of need for rest, care, understanding
Appendix B.1: Letter of Invitation to Participants

Letter of Invitation: Participate in Research Interviews
Project on Youth Climate Activism in Canada

February 2016

Hello,

This letter provides information to potential participants regarding a research project studying youth climate activism in Canada. You are receiving this information because you work/volunteer in the climate movement, or have worked and/or volunteered in the climate movement at any time since 2006. Interviewees will also be, or have been, between the ages of 18 and 30 (defined in the study as “youth”) at the time of their involvement in the climate movement.

The research project seeks to engage with questions of participation, politics, and representation in the youth climate movement in Canada. By incorporating information from in-depth interviews, a literature review, and media articles, the research will provide new insight into the way that this social movement politicizes young participants and (re)generates streams of environmental politics to encourage particular actions and repertoires of participation.

The interview would take approximately 40 to 75 minutes and may be held in person, by telephone, or over Skype. The interview questions will ask about the factors that led to your participation in climate-related activities and the types of tactics or actions you have undertaken with these projects. The semi-structured format will also allow you to provide additional insights as you deem appropriate. If you may be interested in participating, or if you have any questions, please email Raili at raili.lakanen@mail.utoronto.ca to set up a time to discuss.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study, but you may request an executive summary of the findings at the end of the project.
There are no known risks to participation in this study. All information obtained during the research will be kept confidential to the extent that is permitted by law. You will not be identified by name in the dissertation or related published journal articles; a code will be assigned to your data. You will decide whether you would like to be quoted by any organizational affiliation or professional position you hold or have held.

Your participation in this project is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to agree to participate. You may choose not to answer any questions or to withdraw at any time during the interview process and until a draft is prepared in December 2015, without any negative consequences.

You may raise questions or concerns about the project with the primary investigator, Raili Lakanen, or the research supervisors Sue Ruddick and Susannah Bunce. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca.

**Contact Information**

Raili Lakanen, principal investigator: raili.lakanen@mail.utoronto.ca
Dr. Susan Ruddick, co-supervisor: ruddick@geog.utoronto.ca
Dr. Susannah Bunce, co-supervisor: scbunce@utsc.utoronto.ca
University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics: 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca
Appendix B.2: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form: Participate in Research Interviews
Project on Youth Climate Activism in Canada

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research project “Youth Climate Activism in Canada.” Please retain a copy of the Letter of Invitation for your records.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study, but you may request an executive summary of the findings at the end of the project.

There are no known risks to participation in this study. You will not be identified by name in the dissertation or related published journal articles; a code will be assigned to your data. You will decide whether you would like to be quoted by any organizational affiliation or professional position you hold or have held.

Your participation in this project is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to agree to participate. You may choose not to answer any questions or to withdraw at any time during the interview process and until the draft dissertation is prepared in April 2016, without any negative consequences. If you withdraw from the study, your information will be discarded and destroyed.

All information obtained during the research will be kept confidential to the extent that is permitted by law. Interview transcript data will be de-linked from your name, and stored in a locked cabinet and on an encrypted USB key for the duration of the study. The data will be deleted and destroyed upon completion of the doctoral project.

You may choose whether or not the interview is audio-recorded. Interview transcripts will undergo qualitative analysis with the support of a coding software program, NVivo.

You may raise questions or concerns about the project with the principal investigator, Raili Lakanen, or the research supervisors Susan Ruddick and Susannah Bunce.
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca.

Contact Information:
Raili Lakanen, principle investigator: raili.lakanen@mail.utoronto.ca
Susan Ruddick, co-supervisor: ruddick@geog.utoronto.ca
Susannah Bunce, co-supervisor: scbunce@utsc.utoronto.ca
University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics: 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca

__Yes__ __ No  I agree to be interviewed for the project
__ Yes __ No  I agree to be quoted by organizational affiliation
__ Yes __ No  I agree to be identified by professional position (e.g. chair, director, analyst)
__ Yes __ No  I agree to be voice recorded during the interview
__ Yes __ No  I would like to receive a copy of the executive summary

Name (print): ____________________________________

Date: ___________________________________________

Signature: _______________________________________
Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

What are the causes and greatest threats of climate change?

How would you describe your work in the climate field?
- what are the most common activities you undertake?
- With whom do you interact?
- What are the main goals?
- WHY do you work in this way/get involved in this mode and not others?

a) What moved/motivated you to participate in the movement?

b) What keeps you motivated to continue participating?
- consider a formative influence, personal interaction, or life event that you think may have encouraged you to become involved in the climate movement. Why do think it/they affected your course of action? (e.g. family members, friends, teachers, spiritual or other cultural communities, local events, extreme weather events, political changes, etc.)
- How do you keep energy to move beyond setbacks or disappointments?

a) How often do you work with others?

b) (how) do you use social media to communicate?
- Do you feel you have a network on which you can rely for support in your activities? How does this work?
- Do you blog/tweet/post on sites?
- What kind of audience do you intend to reach, and what do you hope to accomplish?

(Ask: how do you understand the position of humans in the world?)

- Prompts and subquestions: How should humans engage with the environment; do you think we should control the environment, are we part of a larger system?

Do you see connections between your work on climate and other social or political movements?
Appendix D: Acronyms of Policies, Government Departments and Agencies, and Environmental Organizations

CBRD: Common but Differentiated Responsibility
CEAA: Canadian Environmental Assessment Act
CESD: Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development
CFCAS: Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences
COP: Conference of the Parties
CRA: Canada Revenue Agency
CYCC: Canadian Youth Climate Coalition
CYD: Canadian Youth Delegation
EA: Environmental Assessment
ELA: Experimental Lakes Area
ENGO: Environmental Non-Governmental Organization
IISD: International Institute for Sustainable Development
NRTEE: National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy
NWPA: Navigable Waters Protection Act
PEARL: Polar Environment Atmospheric Research Laboratory
SCESD: Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development
SYC: Sierra Youth Coalition
UN: United Nations
UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WCED: World Commission on Environment and Development