YOUTH ACTIVISM:

CLIMATE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN A TIME OF CRISIS

JANUARY 2020

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Word Count: 9,971

Turn it In ID:

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HOPE FOR THE under-rated youth
-YOUNG BLUD
BLACK HEARTS CLUB
MAKE PEACE NOT POLLUTION
NOW

To the underrated youth, my generation, and the future:

I hope I can look back at this and say we succeeded.

Abstract

Research conducted in Manchester and Stockholm aimed to uncover how frequently marginalised young people have mobilised effectively to push for climate and social justice in a time of crisis. Drawing upon key scholarly contributions to young people's geographies, this dissertation aims to contribute to the growing body of literature which seeks to emphasise and expand definitions of young people’s agency and their political participation. Using our climate crisis as a lens through which young people’s political power can be understood, research seeks to highlight concerns and motivations for striking, and the utilisation of Instagram in mobilising many, pushing for societal change.

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1.0 Introduction

Founded in 2018, the Youth Strike for Climate movement, also known as Fridays for Future, has been revolutionary in mobilising and empowering young people. Through collective aims to achieve climate justice, the movement has seen powerful and quite inspiring acts of determination, seeking to hold governments, corporations, and powerful individuals to account in a time of climate crisis. With this in mind, climate justice is defined as collective and individual determination 'to prepare for, respond to and recover from climate change impacts – and the policies to mitigate or adapt to them – by considering existing vulnerabilities, resources and capabilities' (Preston *et al.*, 2014, p.16).

Through such a prevalent issue, young people are challenging top-down, hierarchical, adultist assumptions of what it means to be a young person in a problematic time. Academia, media, and the political world alike have been typically drawn towards political power and the actors that occupy those spaces, hence there is a call within this dissertation for political geography to redefine young people as political actors now, not simply 'political subjects 'in-waiting'' (Skelton, 2010). The case of the climate crisis acts as a lens through which researchers can follow the changing nature of young people's agency and political being. In doing so, analysis attempts to challenge historic stereotypes of young people as apolitical and 'inert in relation to political activism' (Skelton and Valentine, 2003, p.122). Contributing to the small amount of literature that presents young people as effective political actors, discussion takes inspiration from feminist scholarly contributions that challenge the traditional disciplinary gaze overlooking the agency of marginalised groups (Dowler and Sharp, 2001; Benwell and Hopkins, 2016). Seeking to validate young people's political and social successes with an explicit account of the experimental dynamics of their activism (Juris, 2008), this dissertation acknowledges the following research questions:

1. Considering challenges towards young people's geographies and political participation, what are the defining characteristics of the Youth Strike for Climate movement?
2. In a time of climate crisis, what are the pressing concerns for participants?
3. How has Instagram been successfully utilised to empower, mobilise, and inform young people?

Despite seeking to address activist qualities, activism is, however, a loaded concept. It is restrictive to simply adopt Pattie *et al*'s. (2003) definition of collective activism, whereby strong emphasis is placed on attending offline protests and demonstrations. What the Fridays for Future movement has encouraged, however, is an emphasis on networked protests— seeking to utilise both online and offline forms of activism in hope that they compliment each other to drive social, political, and economic change (Kidd and McIntosh, 2016). With this in mind, there is instead continuous reference to 'political participation' rather than activism, calling for a retheorisation of 'the political'. Benwell and Hopkins (2016), Sloam and Henn (2019), and Kidd and McIntosh (2016) prove invaluable sources of inspiration in an attempt to contribute to the discipline of young people's geographies.

However, it must be made clear that the conclusions this dissertation arrives at are not universal concepts or realities of young people, nor their political lives and agency. If there is not reflexivity with regards to the positioning of this research project in a highly Western-orientated academic environment, then it risks undermining the already marginalised group it seeks to address. Definitions of youth are contested and vary globally, and there must be continuous reinforced acknowledgement that definitions of youth are not globally inclusive in order to avoid imposing Western constructions of youth unilaterally (Evans, 2008).

2.0 Research Context

To understand the youth movement's push for climate and social justice, definitions of 'youth' ought to be challenged by engaging with literature surrounding young people's geographies. Accompanying this, redefining and retheorising political participation is necessary to further analysis.

Benwell and Hopkins (2016) provide crucial insight into this area of academia, acknowledging the agency of young people and prompting revaluation of their position in society as 'active rather than reactive' citizens and social agents (Nayak and Kehily, 2008). Recognising that defining 'youth' and 'young people' is a contested practice across cultures, contexts, spaces, and time, this dissertation seeks to follow Benwell and Hopkins' (2016) example in that it resists adopting narrow definitions for these terms. Instead, for the purpose of ethical considerations, research considered young people to be those aged 16-25 to enable a more simplistic interview sample. However, in reality, 'youth' encompasses wider categories and legal classifications, cultures and transitions (Valentine, 2003). Findings recognise that young people's everyday lived experiences vary in relation to broader global issues, and their voices should not be restricted by imposing a narrow and simplistic definition of their demographic which bears little resemblance to the everyday. Evans (2008) furthers the argument that a redefinition is necessary by acknowledging Holloway and Valentine's (2000) belief that young people are important social actors. Furthermore, Evans' (2008, pp.1662-63) contributions suggest to avoid 'assumed homogeneity of essentialised definitions of childhood and youth' and instead challenge negative stereotypes of youth as 'in-between' and 'being nothing'. By challenging stereotypes, wider literature contributions to this dissertation seek to support the call for a recognition of youth agency and rights, elucidating ways in which young people challenge power hierarchies to bring about climate justice through activism and political participation.

Also proving problematic to discussion was the varying and often quite narrow definitions of 'the political' and political participation. Gaps in the literature were prevalent, frequently discussing how geopolitical processes impacted young people's lives instead of how young people have become geopolitical actors themselves (Brown and Yaffe, 2016). Aiming to fill this gap, this dissertation seeks to partner with notable insights into varying forms of political participation. Sloam and Henn (2019) provide invaluable insight into changing repertoires of engagement through consideration for non-institutionalised and extraparliamentary action. Norris (2003) supports this notion, arguing young people are rewriting the definition of ‘the political’ by engaging in alternative means of participation, particularly protests, boycotts, and signing petitions.

Prompting discussion of young activists’ concerns surrounding climate injustice, Norgaard (2009) supports research findings which evidence how many young people have voiced their desire for global justice within the context of climate change. By considering the threats the most socially and economically vulnerable face, both Brown and Yaffe (2016) and Bosco's (2010) academic insights partner closely to uncover how young people use their already disempowered position to exert political power and raise awareness for inequalities within climate change discourse. To further analysis of concerns and discontent towards 'the system’ and governmental negligence regarding the climate crisis, Aitken's (2001) contributions have encouraged discussion of how young people have responded to the tendency to place power and capital accumulation above mitigation and adaptation. Similarly, Hobbs-Morgan (2017) advances critical input, presenting the habit of institutions and governments to act in line with concerns that are less about justice and more about meeting capitalist demands.

Although dated, Castells (2010) enriches understandings of the Information Age whereby the uprising of social media can be seen as pivotal in increasing the political awareness of young people through networked protest (Ley and Brewer, 2018). Castells (2010) praises the success of online media in mobilising many, democratising information so that Instagram can be understood as a pivotal avenue for youth movement expression. Similarly, Kidd and McIntosh (2016) strengthen analysis of youth movement Instagram accounts by agreeing with Castells (2010) in accrediting the success of movements’ multimodal networking whereby online and offline networks are bridged and facilitate substantive social and political change when intertwined (Tufekci, 2017). However, this section of analysis is not without its critiques; both Gladwell (2010) and Morozov (2009) present strong criticisms towards alternative forms of political activism outlined previously, particularly those through social media practices which make us ‘slacktivists, clicktivists, and passive political participators’ (Newlands and Cook, 2013, p.1395). Despite many valuable contributions from the wider literature, much of it is biased towards analysing Twitter (Pearce *et al.*, 2018). Nevertheless, analysis seeks to facilitate an uncovering of how youth movements have channelled their relatively disempowered and marginalised societal and political positions into Instagram to successfully mobilise and empower young people.

3.0 An Introduction to Methodological Practices:

Methodologies articulate interrelations between epistemologies, research questions, theories, and methods utilised (Baillie and Douglas, 2014). The political geography discipline heavily engaged with ultimately presents itself as a geography of power whereby states, organisations, and adults reinforce social hierarchies (Nogué and Vincente, 2004). Methodological practices evidenced ahead seek to bring this to the fore, calling for an urgent need within the academic community to place young people in a position where their voices are heard and reflected. The emerging political power of young people is addressed, expressing practices and resistance strategies which challenge the definition of 'the political' (Skelton, 2010). I seek to challenge concerns within the literature that demonstrate frequent exclusion of young people and lack of representation as valid social agents with little 'direct influence on political structures or phenomenon… deemed apathetic or apolitical' (Philo and Smith, 2003, p. 103). Presenting detailed accounts of their action, opinions, and mobility in achieving climate justice, this methodology addresses how I seek to accentuate that they are ultimately 'creative agents capable of forming diverse views and actions in response to their experiences' (Pain *et al.*, 2010, pp. 974-975). Attempting to meet demands for the reconceptualisation of young people as important political agents (Skelton and Gough, 2013), their mobilisation in a time of climate crisis will be reflected upon through primary and secondary data sources (see: Table 1). Taking inspiration from Matthews (2016), my ethnographic account is one that is politically-committed, emerging from my own participation in the School Strike for Climate (Fridays for Future) movement from both a researcher's and an 'insider's' perspective too, proving particularly apt for following processes of social movements. In hope of providing a thorough account of data collection, this methodology seeks to not only explicitly address research workings and successes, but failures and critiques to rigorously evaluate data accumulation to address the movement's success in mobilising and empowering many. Reflexivity towards ethics and researcher positioning will thus be of prime importance.

Primary Sources of Data	Secondary Sources of Data
Participant observation	Visual and semiotic analysis of Instagram
Photography: strike action, protests, and marches	
Videos: strike action, protest, marches, and speeches	
Field diaries: autoethnographic approach	
Interviews	

TABLE 1: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES OF DATA

Early research planning accounted for a visit to Stockholm, home of Skolstrejk för Klimatet, whereby I aimed to dedicate much of my research towards Sweden as a progressive nation in terms of climate change policy and adaptation strategies (see: Nilsson *et al.*, 2012; Zannakis, 2013). Not only this, but as the place where Greta Thunberg revolutionised youth climate activism as we witness it currently. It was decided to narrow the focus from policy discourse analysis assessing failing climate agendas and negligence of governments in addressing climate change to instead driving attention towards an uprising: that uprising is the youth movement we see today — a demographic typically characterised within media and scholarly discourse as apathetic and apolitical (Bynner and Ashford, 1994), 'inert in relation to political activism' (Skelton and Valentine, 2003, p.122). Nevertheless, as research became richer and theories began to develop, a natural shift in perspective emerged. It was then decided that dedicating research efforts towards young people would provide sufficient data. Seeking to account for an understanding of the marginalised nature of young people, methods aim to uncover attitudes and concerns surrounding the climate crisis, and the ability of young people to mobilise effectively in hope of driving major social and political change.

3.1 Participant Observation

Data addressed accumulated during Friday climate strikes in Manchester and Stockholm between June and September 2019. As I had previously attended strikes organised by the Youth Strike for Climate Manchester group, transitioning between casual participant and researcher occurred more naturally. In Stockholm, however, as the initial plan no longer fit my aims for this dissertation, time there in early September was instead spent attending two day-long strikes in order to conduct observations and interviews. I was provided with a contrast between the two locations: one being a place I was familiar with, a place I felt accustomed to inner functionings and dynamics, and the other being a location where I was suddenly an 'outsider'. Unlike my role as an ethnographer in Manchester where I engaged in 'indigenous ethnography' (Clifford and Marcus, 1986), striking in Stockholm meant that I did not have prior knowledges of the group I was to observe. In Manchester there was always risk of allowing my 'insider' status, being part of the group I sought to research, to cloud analysis. This called for continuous reflexivity, remaining conscious of my position as a researcher, striker, local, and a young person. Taking inspiration from Maeckelbergh (2009), I allowed this 'interconnectedness' within the movement to drive a natural establishment of theories. Some researchers have fully adopted the social roles they studied (Buroway, 1979) whereas others purposefully take a detached position. Understanding the two extremes, my research, like that of Waddington (2004), seeks to find middle ground, shifting between 'insider' and 'outsider' positions to uncover social meaning and phenomena rather than test pre-defined hypotheses— this allows theory to build progressively over time (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). In Stockholm, my 'outsider' perspective meant that I could build theory without underlying assumptions. Research thus presented constant tensions between scholarly detachment and an entanglement of 'activist, managerial and scholarly interactions' (Berglund, 2001, p. 318). Yet, this added validity to my findings; there was a constant need for making interactions with the youth movement a continuously reflexive practice whereby my developing competence enabled deep understanding (Herbert, 2000). In line with Herbert's (2000) belief, it was pivotal to follow what Katz (1994) deemed a conscious knowledge of my situatedness as an ethnographer.

Schensul *et al.* (1999) consider participant observation to be a fundamental necessity for ethnography — the starting point of the immersion of the researcher into complexities and routines of movement activities. At both Manchester and Stockholm strikes, observation paid careful attention to autoethnography. Beforehand, I created a checklist (see: Figure 1) of aspects to look out for, considering an estimate of the ages of those attending, sensory aspects, and any overarching political messages either heard or seen through chants and slogans, later acknowledged in field diaries. I aimed to fully immerse myself, watching strikes unfold throughout each day as I moved from listening to speeches, to marching city streets, to observing creative acts which drove passionate energy. Before each strike began, I recorded my initial thoughts outlining how I felt as both a researcher and a young person striking to facilitate autoethnography from the outset. Tessier (2012) endorses White (1980) who encourages engaging in two types of note taking: the first being a chronological recording of what unfolded during each strike, and the second being an historical recording shortly after which is more interpretative, containing researcher impressions. As I engaged with this paper before striking, I was able to pre-determine how to most effectively maximise the detail of my accounts. To make observations effective, research involved 'seeing' as much as possible (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2011) in order to avoid what Geertz (1998) labelled 'hit-and-run ethnography' when critiquing Clifford (1997). Data was thus intuitively revealed in situ rather than testing pre-determined hypotheses (Fine, 2015). I was able to comprehend how passionate young people felt about achieving climate justice, determined to make governments act, and it was also possible to walk in the footsteps of other young activists, embodying the political struggles they face as a marginalised demographic. This resonates well with what Back (2017) labels a 'spatial story' whereby a space of resistance is created in an environment typically dominated by those who have power over a particular group. I became a 'go-along' (Kusenbach, 2003), able to experience otherwise unnoticed practices of protest, comprehending how walking became an act of power and resistance (de Certeau, 1984). By engaging in sensorial aspects of observation, I was able to enfold sound, memory, emotion, and movement into field diaries (Bates and Rhys-Taylor, 2017), utilising my own body as an 'instrument for knowing, sensing, feeling and relating to others' (Vannini, 2015). Similarly, as acknowledged by Crang and Cook (2007), this meant an immersion of myself as a researcher into everyday routines of youth activists over several months, involving myself in activities, adding to my lived knowledge of the dynamics and motivations of protest behaviour and action (Fine, 2015).

Observation Checklist:

☐ Sounds: chants and conversations
☐ Sights: estimate age of activists, acknowledge any posters, banners, and placards
☐ Feelings and emotional expression: passion, anger, excitement
☐ Political tension?
☐ Collective identity?

FIGURE 1: OBSERVATION CHECKLIST FOR CLIMATE STRIKES

However, diaries cannot simply be used alone, thus a triangulation with photographs and videos remained necessary to enable an extensive narrative. There is also potential for incomplete and biased notes as there is a likelihood only the most coherent and relevant accounts to the researcher will be emphasised, leading to potential for underrepresentation of participants' perspectives (Hamo *et al.*, 2004). Participant observation is subjective, relying on one account from one researcher of one group, therefore it is necessary to challenge the legitimacy of conclusions; my account may vary substantially from that of another, yet I remain conscious of this. Participant observation may also make it challenging to distinguish between researcher perspective and bias. However, because of emphasis placed on triangulating data to curb methodological weaknesses, and the ability to engage in ethnographic immersion switching between 'insider' and 'outsider' positions, it was important to lessen potential for completely constructivist and interpretive accounts (Whitehead, 2005). Instead, I sought to maximise potential for accounts that are accepting of 'subtle realism' (Hammersley, 2006) and the potential for partiality, but do not, however, shy away from continuous and reinforced reflexivity; there should be a critical ontology of ourselves (Foucault, 1984).

3.1.2 Photography, Videos, and Speeches

Photography, videos, and speech recordings were utilised to supplement participant observation and visual analysis of the Instagram platform. At each strike, placards, marches, and speeches were captured to document recurring signs and rhetoric that alluded to climate crisis concerns of young people, their growing agency, and their potential to be drivers of social change. Through the cultural turn, the visual has become central in understanding social processes, identities, change, and conflict, conveying meaning through image (Rose, 2001). Photography has thus advanced the possibility to accentuate how the movement has mobilised successfully (see: Figures 2-4); it 'reveal[s] routinised or unconscious responses that are scarcely thought about' (Crang and Cook, 2007, p. 112). Photographs are especially useful in effectively communicating the scale of the General Strike, the messages young people voiced, and, when combined with fieldnotes, provide an explicit picture of the dissatisfaction young people feel towards the political establishment. Photographs were also much less disruptive than asking people to participate in interviews. Recordings of speeches are beneficial, allowing unlimited replay, and account for hesitations and emotional or passionate aspects. This was particularly useful when recording frustrated but also passionate and proud voices. Unknowingly, research involved a 'soundwalk': listening to the environment in order to derive meaning (Gallagher and Prior, 2017). This was particularly apt in enabling me to immerse myself in sensory aspects of each strike, despite being unplanned.

It was important to pair speeches with the transcribing process as emotional content can often be difficult to convey simply by transcribing alone (Poland, 1995). They were then combined with fieldnotes, providing a more comprehensive analysis (Hamo *et al.*, 2004). However, conscious reflexivity was again necessary; what methods present is a very particular positioning and viewpoint — I am a white, university-educated, British young person in the environment of many others in same position. My visual accounts present a very Western-orientated, Global North reflection of what it means to strike as a young person in a wealthy country. I am aware of the privileged position I hold, and despite being unable to change this, I remained conscious and made sure for continuous reflexivity throughout data collection and analysis. Being reflexive meant strict examination of the place from which I observed (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2011).

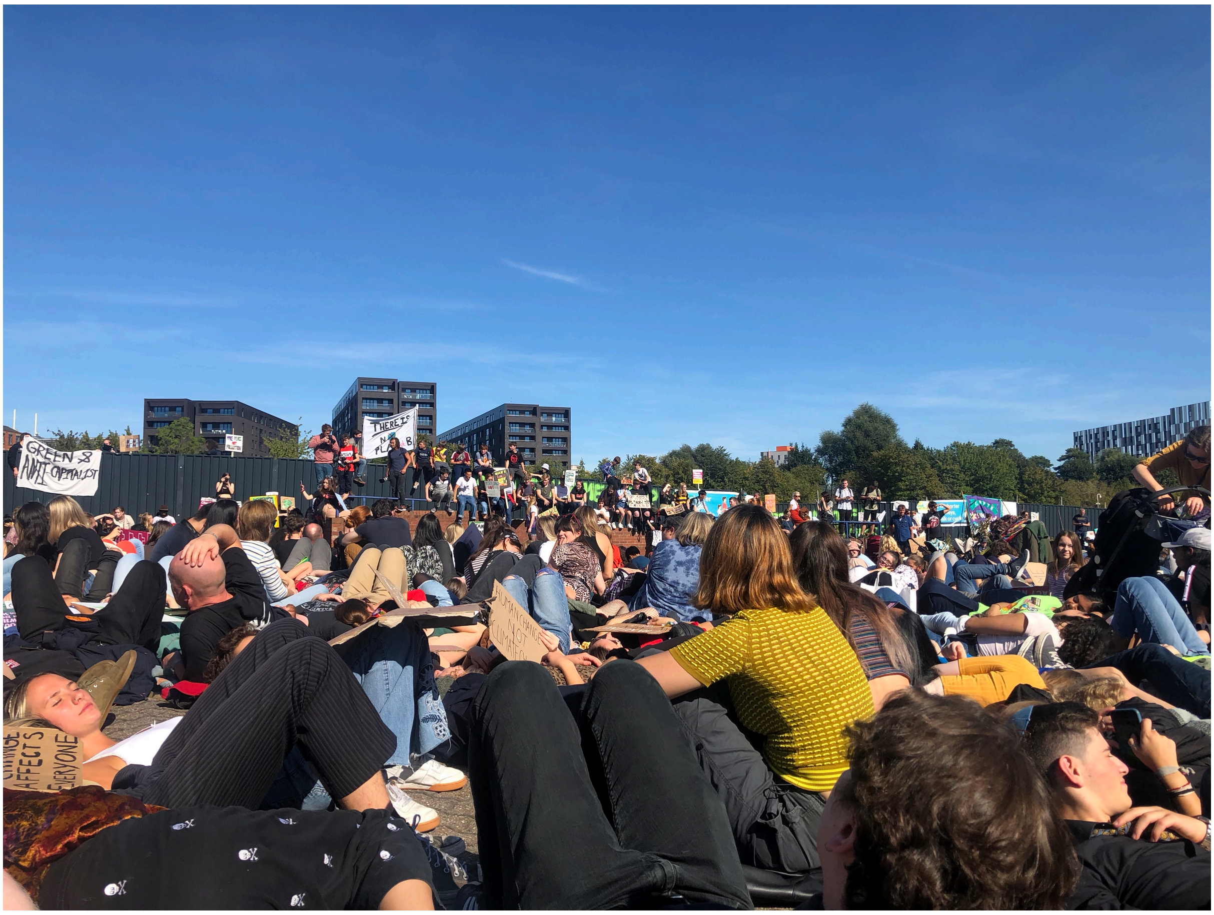


FIGURE 2: A DIE-IN AT A MANCHESTER STRIKE

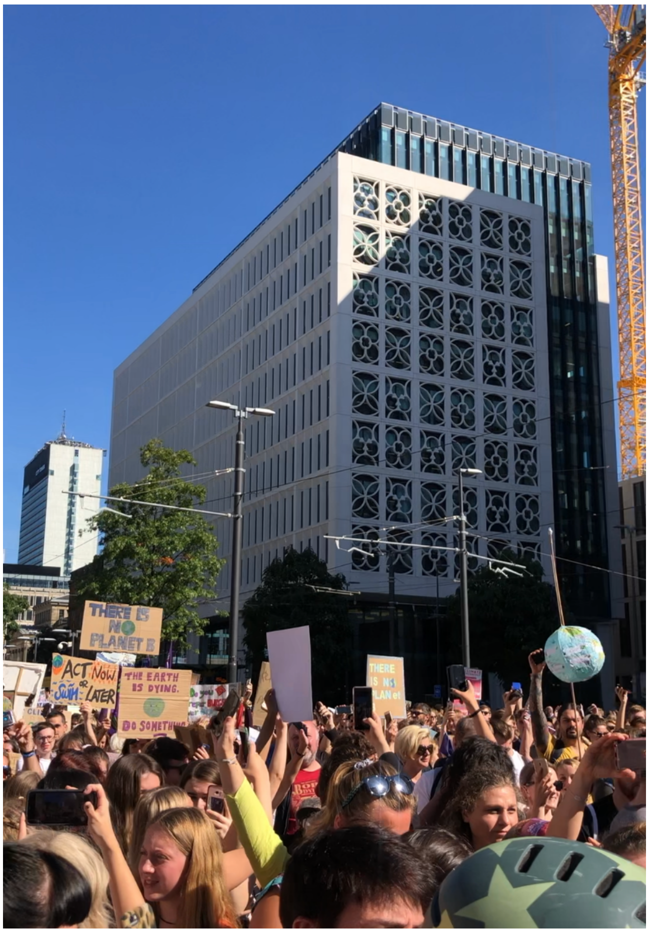

THERE IS NO PLANET B
ACT NOW or SWIM LATER
THE EARTH IS DYING. DO SOMETHING
THERE IS NO PLANET

FIGURE 3: THE SCALE OF THE GENERAL STRIKE, SEPTEMBER 2019

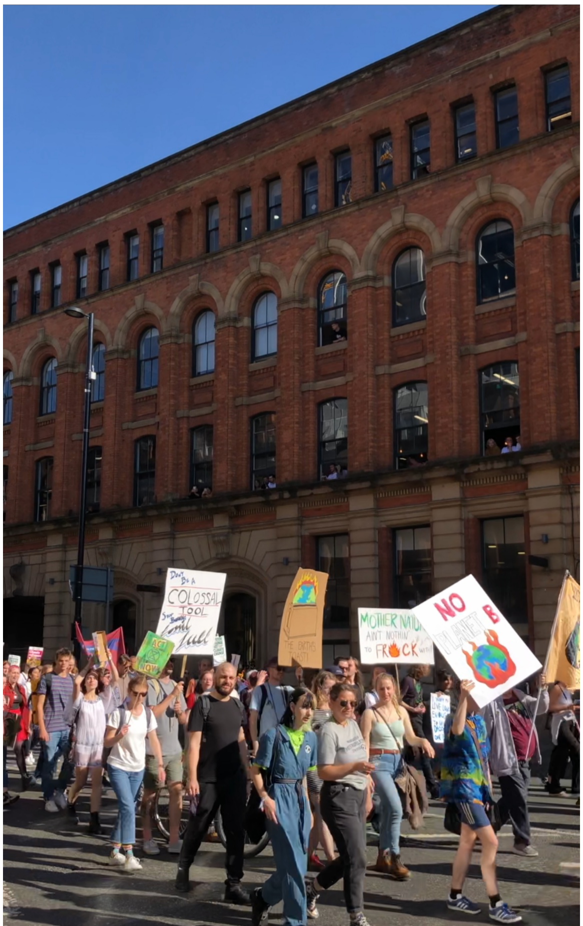

COLOSSAL TOOL
NO PLANET B

FIGURE 4: THE SCALE OF THE GENERAL STRIKE, SEPTEMBER 2019

3.1.3 Interviews

Interviews were conducted through a semi-structured approach (see: Figure 5), aiming to be more conversation-like in nature, lasting between five and twenty minutes each. I first asked whether participants were aged 16-25 and would be comfortable answering questions regarding climate crisis concerns and perspectives. Because of the politically engaged nature of this dissertation and the fact it is focussed on young people, ethical concerns and informed consent were of upmost priority, meaning participants gave 'an informed and free decision on their possible involvement' (ESRC, 2019) through both verbal and written consent, establishing trust between myself and interviewees (Hobbs and May, 1993). Walking and marches were paired with interviews to provide close understanding of interviewee experiences and personal narratives (Hall and Smith, 2017). 'Social and physical aspects of locally situated daily experience' were revealed, elucidating how young people situate themselves during protest action (Clark, 2017, p.87). Coupling interviews with observation, detailed accounts of participants' perspectives and my own involvement in strikes were combined, providing rich understanding of inner workings of the movement. Initially, I remained wary of my position as both a researcher and an 'insider', cautious of asserting subjectivity. However, Herbert's (2000, p.556) scholarly contributions enabled me to understand how interviews 'with no local familiarity' can be purposeless, failing to allow 'a steady unearthing of the layers of meaning'. After interviews were completed, listening to the recordings meant I could tailor and improve the next set of interviews conducted. Unfortunately, I only began this process towards the end of data collection after being prompted by similar methodological practice in the literature. Nevertheless, exit strategies proved successful; I took inspiration from Matthews (2016), emailing interviewees both the recording and the transcription to ensure they were satisfied with the data collected.

Flexible Interview Structure:

1. Establish age and whether they are comfortable to participate in my research.
2. Have you participated in strikes/protests before today?
3. Do you engage in any other forms of politics (for example, voting, writing to your MP, signing or sharing petitions, sharing political or climate emergency posts online)?
4. How did you learn about the School Strike for Climate?
5. Have you communicated about the strikes online of offline? If so, how?
6. How do you engage with the movement online? Do you follow social media accounts or news?

FIGURE 5: INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

Despite interviewing effectiveness whilst marching, there were times when conversation was interrupted by chants, or I was separated from the interviewee, creating difficulty in documenting coherent and undisrupted accounts. When a perspective formed during interviews, I questioned whether I should share it with the interviewee to establish common ground, hoping to lessen power imbalances between a researcher and a participant, or, whether opinions should be held back, saved for the data analysis stage, yet risk asserting too much objectivity. Remaining aware that what interviewees stated during interviews may be different from their thoughts and behaviour was also necessary. Data triangulation aimed to counter this (Fine, 2015).

During data analysis, pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity. Once all data was collected, I engaged with literature of potential relevance 'to build my social-cognitive analysis' (Waddington, 2004) before coding began. As notes were taken immediately after interviews, the reliability of interview data was improved and transcription and analysis processes made easier as impressions remained vivid (Tessier, 2010), emphasising the importance of combing methods. Before the research process began, I had various semi-developed ideas of what I aimed to address, hence my approach was both inductive and deductive. However, as theories developed over time, grounded theory was utilised (Glaser and Strauss, 1967); open coding and categorisation methods were applied to encourage easy comparison between all methods.

3.2 Visual Analysis of Instagram

Pivotal in performing and sustaining climate strikes (Einwohner and Rochford, 2019), Instagram aids collective identity formation online, mobilising and empowering young people. It is a platform that has been utilised effectively to inspire political interest, 'influencing the democratic acumen of young citizens' by challenging traditional narratives that label young people as apathetic towards political engagement (Loader, 2007, p.3). Due to its popularity amongst young people, and the heavy presence of the Youth Strike for Climate accounts (and affiliates), Instagram remains the object of research whereby visual and social semiotic methods, with a multimodal approach, are adopted. This supports an understanding of Instagram's role in mobilising young people, changing the ways in which they learn and communicate about climate justice through networked protest (Ley and Brewer, 2018), redefining definitions of political action. Analysis of posts from the following accounts will be addressed: @UKSCN, @YouthStrike4Climate, @GretaThunberg, @FridaysForFuture. Data was collected between August and December 2019, with a random selection of posts chosen, i.e. every fifth post. To avoid images that do not relate to the movement, individual users who tag the accounts in their photographs have not been analysed; there is tendency for users to tag unrelated posts 'to boost their content's viability' (Einwohner and Rochford, 2019, p.1099).

To understand how civically-active young people's engagement with climate change and associated political tensions are furthered through Instagram use, deductive and inductive approaches were adopted, with codes formed on each post to consider how narratives of community, mobilisation, and empowerment were visually constructed (Adi *et al.*, 2018). By applying codes and themes (see: Figure 6), I was able to emphasise an overall desire for climate justice. Analysis was thus useful in visualising, and rendering significant, political expression. Visual analysis prompts consideration for the narrative of images, the mapping of lived environments onto images, and the production and distribution practices that go into an Instagram post (Aitken and Craine, 2005). To avoid 'analytical incoherence' (Rose, 2001), semiology has been utilised to unpick posts and relate their content to larger systems of meaning (van Leeuwen, 2005), seeking to explicate the ways in which Instagram has been a key tool in expanding the youth climate movement we witness today. The subjectivity and personal involvement that come with subjectively applying codes onto posts are harnessed through autoethnography as a making-meaning tool, deepening understanding (Simpson and Archer, 2016). Combining social semiotics and autoethnography has allowed for a fusion of social context with rudimentary, surface level aspects of images to emphasise the activist group's ability to mobilise youth by using Instagram as a tool for dissemination of pressing environmental concerns.

☐ Emotional expression:
    A. Views and opinions
    B. Concerns and demands
☐ Aspects of political significance and tension
☐ Collective identity: mobilisation and organisation
☐ Dissemination of knowledge and fact, environmental or political
☐ Larger system of meaning

FIGURE 6: INSTAGRAM POST CHECKLIST

However, analysis is limited as data was collected during a brief time between August and December. It does not account for the increase in mobilisation efforts on Instagram from the start of Fridays for Future to the present day, nor is participation recorded for cross-examination in similar networked protests. There is also risk of subjectivity whereby my interpretation may assume or create biases in relation to an image (Zappavigna, 2016), hence continuous reflexivity has been crucial. Instagram posts are approached with caution as there is potential for users to selectively represent photographs in curated manners (Boy and Uitermark, 2016). It should also be reinforced, however, that there is still a significant digital divide (Peters, 2017) — the analysis of movements' Instagram accounts and their ability to mobilise young people does not mean that this is available to every young person interested in achieving climate justice, nor does it suggest that every young person has been empowered or mobilised by online efforts to drive participation.

3.3 Methodology Conclusions

After data collection, I delved into potentially relevant literature to strengthen analysis and theoretical reflection (Matthews, 2016). By engaging with aforementioned approaches ahead, I aim to draw attention to the need to redefine what constitutes the meanings of citizenship, participation, and political engagement. Analysis seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature attempting to explore how young people are engaging in alternative forms of political engagement to drive social change and policy regarding our climate crisis (Wood, 2013).

4.0 Analysis

During the research process, the most pressing findings emphasised growing frustration towards governments, policy inadequacy regarding climate change, and the failure of politicians and the adult demographic alike to take young people seriously and address transformations in political participation. To demand action, young people have abandoned rudimentary, formal, and restrictive practices of participation, particularly voting and party allegiance. Instead, there has been an upsurge in alternative forms of participation, away from fuelling the power of politicians, instead utilising social media to disseminate political debates and concerns, furthering the collective mobilisation and empowerment of a group so marginalised in society (Brünker *et al.*, 2019). Taking into consideration Loader's (2007, p.2) assertion that 'political representatives appear distant and self-absorbed and unable to empathise with young people's experiences of a dramatically changing social and cultural world', analysis seeks characterise the youth movement, challenging traditional assumptions that young people are apathetic towards political participation (Philo and Smith, 2003). Analysis calls for a redefinition of the political, bringing awareness of alternative means of political participation to contribute to the growing field of young people's geographies. Climate justice concerns and motivations for activism will then be addressed. Bringing the previous two research elements together, analysis then seeks to explore the utilisation of Instagram and its role in aiding both online and offline activism (Kidd and McIntosh, 2016), mobilising and empowering young people, contributing to the idea of networked protests (Tufekci, 2017). Efforts will be made to reinforce any ethical or positionality-related implications within the research process that could potentially impact analysis findings, attending to continuous reflexivity.

4.1 Characteristics of the Youth Strike for Climate Movement

To understand the persistence of young people in striving to achieve climate justice, analysis aims to situate them in the social and political context that historically and continuously undermines their agency. The literature surrounding young people's geographies has been successful in aiding the deconstruction of social dynamics of the Youth Strike for Climate movement, reflecting upon traditional dogmas of youth participation in politics. This dissertation calls for a redefinition of the political in light of contemporary social movements frequently characterised by the mobilisation of young people resultant of the Digital Revolution, and argues that young people have not disengaged from the political realm (Vromen *et al.*, 2014), but have voiced their concerns for the climate crisis through alternative means. Interview data, speeches, and autoethnographic approaches to fieldnotes will support these considerations.

To understand how young people are reinventing political participation through climate justice efforts, analysis critically examines predominantly cynical and damaging 'discourses around young people's political participation, or supposed lack of it' (Skelton and Valentine, 2003, p.117). Despite the Lima Ministerial Declaration on Education and Awareness-Raising furthering notions that present youth as major stakeholders, participating in developing and implementing effective climate change policies (Narksompong and Limjirakan, 2015), it is interesting to consider how dominant discourses have historically pigeonholed youth as disengaged from political affairs. There are contradictions in society whereby states deem young people as responsible and competent in some senses, but irresponsible and incompetent in others, presenting inconsistencies between whether they are or are not valid political subjects and agents (Skelton, 2010). They have been historically depicted as the 'weakest of the weak publics' (Aitken, 2001, p.59) — an apolitical generation (Pirie and Worcester, 1998). As political participation and interest is frequently doubted, it is crucial to unpick what the 'political' truly is. Matthews *et al.* (1999, p.136) define political participation as 'processes of involvement, shared responsibility and active engagement in decisions which affect the quality of life', yet what constitutes these facets are typically traditional, equating political participation to formal politics involving voting and party identification (White *et al.*, 2000). Political engagement has historically operated with a very narrow conception of what 'the political' involves (O'Toole, 2003). However, as this section of the dissertation calls for a rethinking of how young people are politically engaged, it should be emphasised that research findings ahead are not representative of all young people. As addressed in section 2.0, the definitions of 'young people' and 'youth' vary and are contested between nations, cultures, and contexts (Benwell and Hopkins, 2016). Instead of encouraging universalist assumptions of what it means for a young person to be 'political', it is essential to note that the findings and definitions addressed are applicable specifically to the participants this dissertation focusses upon in Manchester and Stockholm. Inequalities can, and do, exist between a variety of groups of young people (Wyn and Woodman, 2006).

Much of the literature on children's geographies has labelled young people as 'becomings' instead of agents and individuals in their own right (Skelton, 2002), reinforcing adultist views that consider them less than adults and knowing less than adults. Matthews *et al.* (1999) agree with Skelton's (2002) assertion, arguing that the UK allows very little space for young people to participate politically. During the General Strike for Climate in September 2019, an interviewee contended with this when asked whether they have participated in protests or strikes before. They displayed a passionate sense of dissatisfaction towards both having to rely on politicians to take political action regarding our climate crisis, and also what happens when no political action is taken by those who hold the traditional power to do so:

> "Some say that we should not engage in activism, instead we should leave everything to our politicians and just vote for a change instead. But what do we do when there is no political will? What do we do when the politics needed are no where in sight?"
>
> — Interviewee at the General Strike for Climate. Age 19.

What is particularly ironic is that young people are so typically stereotyped as apolitical and disengaged from politics (Brown and Yaffe, 2016), yet research findings present growing discontent towards politicians who fail to take successful political action towards climate change. Many participants also acknowledged being 'less than' adults, less serious, and with less experience (Waksler, 1986), yet emphasise that this form of political participation they engage in has taught them more than their formal education (see: Figure 7):

> "We know what we're talking about. We are not stupid little children. Yes we skip school, we are skipping a school whose education, publicly, is failing us. There's some things we can't be taught. There's some things we've learnt from here today that have not been taught in classrooms."
>
> — Speech at the General Strike for Climate, Manchester, September 2019. Sixth form student.

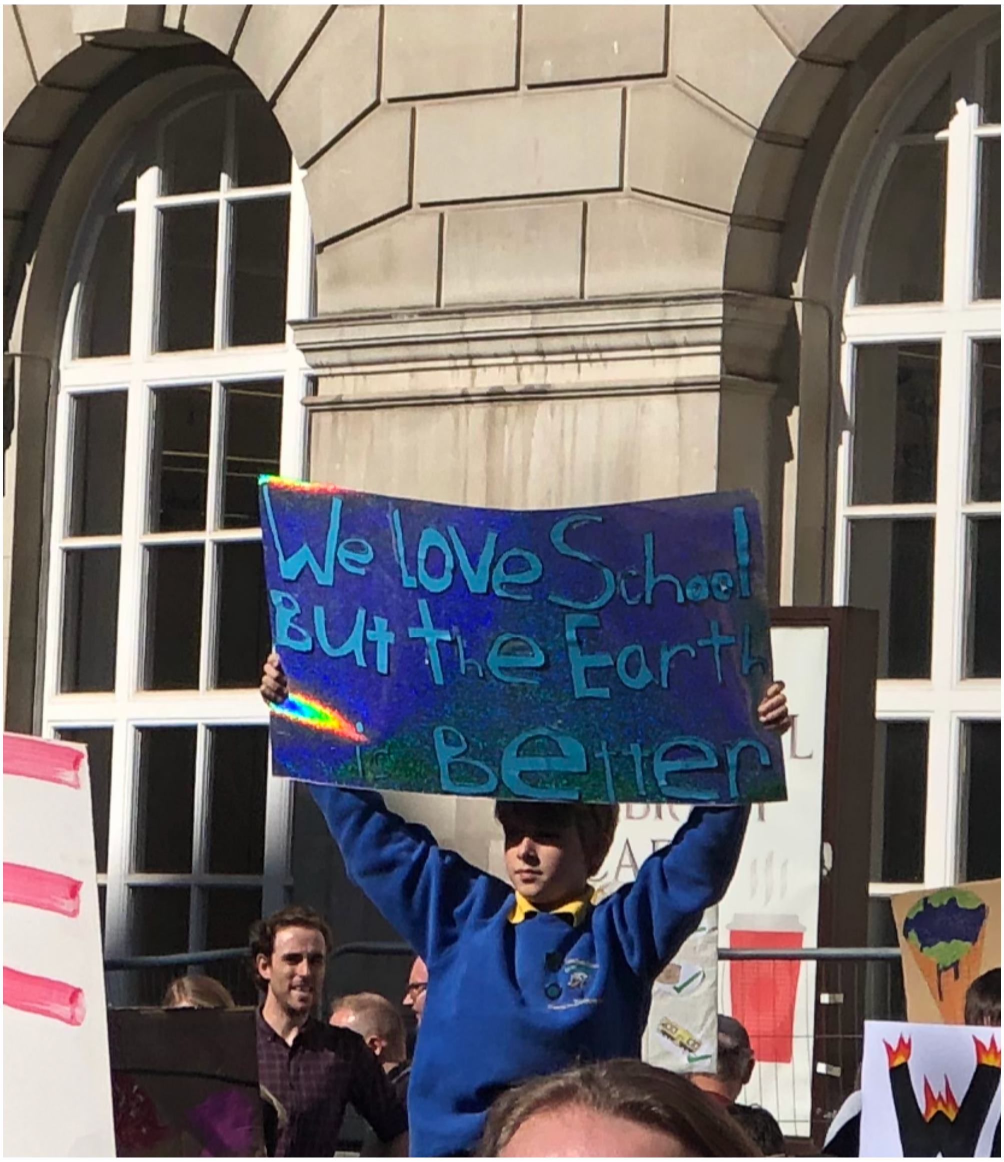

We love School
But the Earth
is Better

FIGURE 7: STRIKE PARTICIPANT

What both of these findings suggest is that young people are increasingly rewriting the rules of 'the political' by engaging in politics despite declining enthusiasm for politicians, giving strong indication that this youth movement is characterised more by a pressing disconnection between the political system and young people than a lack of political engagement (Sloam and Henn, 2019). Young people are also rewriting the rules of what political participation involves; 'research indicates that contemporary youth often take part in many different forms of political action such as demonstrations, boycotts, and direct action' (Sloam and Henn, 2019, p.119). These issue-based forms of participation and lifestyle politics were highlighted during interviews in both Manchester and Stockholm, with 16 out of 20 participants stating they had attended demonstrations, and all stating they had either shared a petition online or signed a petition.

What was evident in field diaries was the strong sense of collective solidarity amongst young protesters during marches and strikes in both Manchester and Stockholm. In Manchester, there was emphasis on passion and power that came from chants, adding further complexity to whether young people are actually apolitical. Their emotion and collective solidarity consolidated a belief held throughout research: the youth movement we see today, characterised typically by children, teenagers, young adults, and students alike, has engaged in a 'geopolitics from below' (Routledge, 1998), taking power into their own hands:

> "I feel empowered as a young person right now. 'Power to the people, people got the power' is being chanted by hundreds of young people as I walk the streets of my home city, even young children. We are being stared at by adults in their office windows, workers in their vans, but we are one — a collective… So many of us have mobilised to raise awareness for an issue that is being dismissed by those in power. People are chanting 'fuck Boris Johnson' and 'we want climate justice', and I have never felt more proud to be a young person."
>
> — Field diary entry, 20th September 2019.

Even if young people have little direct influence over political structures or phenomena (Philo and Smith, 2003), research findings support Bosco's (2010) notion that they have sought to exert power to political advantage even in a disempowered position. This was acknowledged during an interview with a secondary school student in Stockholm who spends his Fridays striking outside the Riksdag:

> "I come here every week with some friends from my school. We want our leaders to listen and we want to raise the consciousness of older people. We stand here each week to make our point… if people ask us about climate change, we voice the facts that scientists have been posing for years."
> — Student, Stockholm Skolstrejk för Klimatet participant. Age 16.

Although findings uncover a politically engaged youth climate movement cohort in Stockholm and Manchester, this does not mean all young people are. There is a gap in this dissertation and the wider literature in that social inequalities of participation are frequently neglected, particularly those from less affluent backgrounds from people who may be 'unengaged' or 'disillusioned' (Amnå and Ekman, 2014). Positionality as a researcher is thus reinforced. Despite obvious power dynamics between young people and adults, what is evident from research outcomes is that many young people, frequently dismissed as apathetic towards anything remotely political, are in fact taking more action towards achieving climate justice than many of their adult counterparts. The power relations they are entangled in make their political roles in a time of climate crisis even more worthy of attention in the political geography discipline (Skelton, 2010). To further analysis of youth activism, understanding climate concerns and motivations for participation is hence central to inquiries.

4.2 Crisis Concerns and Motivations

If it is true that young people are not disengaged from politics, then it must be considered that contemporary political culture is disengaged from young people's aspirations and values (Coleman, 2007). For many years, in the everyday and academia alike, young people's views and understandings of the world have been ignored or overlooked (Waksler, 1986). It is ironic that there has been an historic legacy to discount 'the 'political child' who speaks out against war, injustice, or environmental degradation as naïve or idealistic', confining their activism (Ruddick, 2007, p.516), alongside potent criticisms of declining voter turnout (Fieldhouse *et al.*, 2007). If typical societal tendency leans towards muting voices and limiting their potential (Ennew, 1994), then a consideration for the six million people that took part in the Global Week for Future climate strikes in

September 2019 (Taylor *et al*, 2019) presents a challenge. Looking towards the findings of this dissertation, analysis attempts to confront what was a problematic gap in the critical geopolitics literature for some time — there has been a failure to attend to young people's emotional landscapes, and their voices have been marginal (Pain *et al.*, 2010). To echo feminist scholarly contributions in countering the exclusion of young people (Hopkins *et al.*, 2019), analysis must attend to their beliefs, politics, and emotions to prompt a reevaluation of societal positions. Drawing upon research findings, concerns for the climate crisis and motivations for striking aim to heighten consideration for young people's determination to achieve climate justice. Taking into account the findings in section 4.1, if there is indeed a 'generational rupture', a trend of disillusionment towards political powers (Sloam and Henn, 2019), and a transformation in participation methods, then the gap between failing participation and growing political interest requires attention. This so-called 'perfect storm of discontent' (Sloam and Henn, 2019, p.7) presents a challenge Norgaard's (2009, p.3) claim that 'no nation has a base of public citizens that are sufficiently socially and politically engaged on the problem' of climate change. Analysis of photography, and coding of speeches, interviews, and field diaries revealed three overarching climate crisis concerns amongst young people, however, due to length limitations of this dissertation, only two are accounted for in this analysis:

1. Marginalised groups, inequalities, and social justice.
2. 'The system': capitalism, the economy (including but not limited to corporations), governments, and politicians.
3. Concerns for the physical environment, ecological governance, and sustainability.

4.2.1 Marginalisation and Climate Injustice

Young people's already 'marginal and precarious position' resultant of 'widespread social discourses' (Pain *et al.*, 2010, p.974) has put them in a unique position to use their voices to address inequalities, social injustice, and other marginalised groups in society through the lens of climate change. Norgaard (2009, p.4) presents notable dimensions of justice, particularly the consideration that not only do wealthy, industrialised countries contribute disproportionally to global pollution, but that the consequences of climate change will be worse in poorer, Southern Hemisphere nations. Data analysis brings attention to this problem, highlighting young people's concerns towards the fact that climate change-induced impacts are unevenly inflicted upon those who are already most marginalised in society and routinely face inequalities. A defining aspect of this social movement is an inherent ability to engage in identity politics to highlight the need for social justice amongst marginalised groups (Lin, 2013). Research found that groups frequently mentioned were those already most economically and socially vulnerable, particularly young people, climate refugees, and the working class. These groups, termed as 'counterpublics composed of subaltern peoples… defined by their position of exclusion' (Varnelis, 2008, p.155), are engaged with in photographs of placards taken at climate strikes (see: Figure 8).

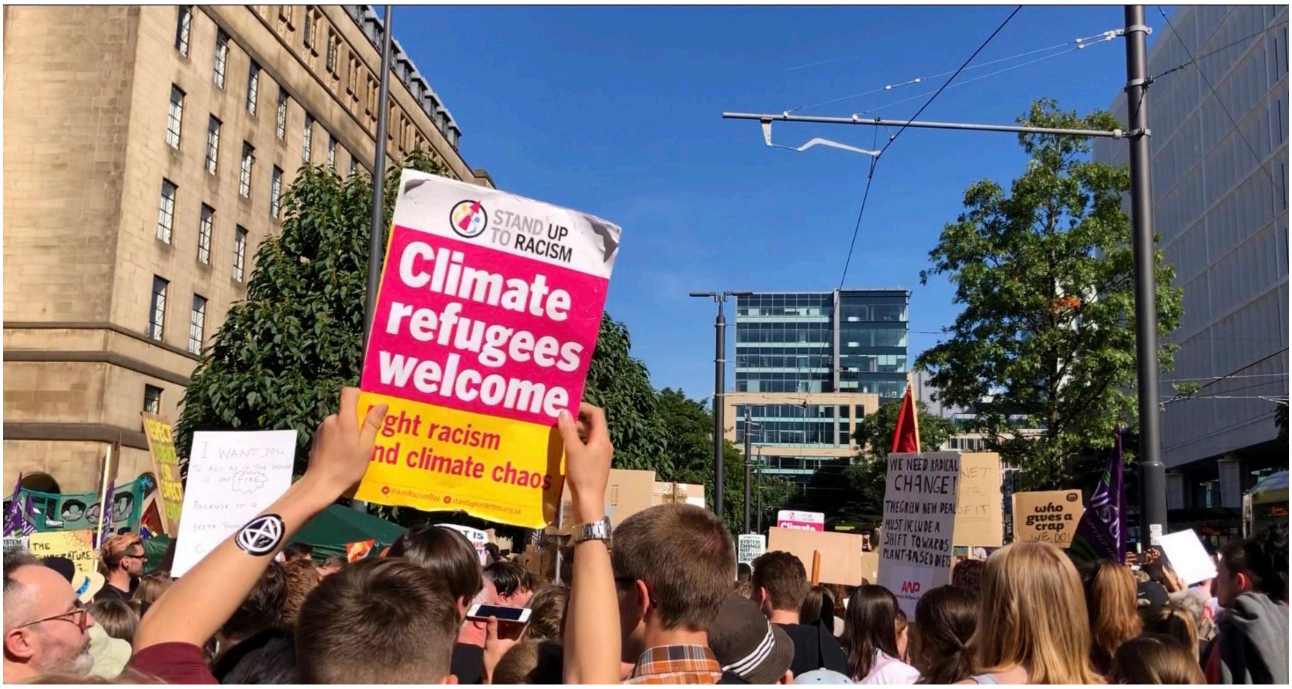

STAND UP TO RACISM
Climate refugees welcome
ght racism
nd climate chaos
WE NEED RADICAL CHANGE! THE GREEN NEW DEAL MUST INCLUDE A SHIFT TOWARDS PLANT-BASED DIETS
who gives a crap WE DO!
I WANT YOU

FIGURE 8: ACTIVISTS ACKNOWLEDGING INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The visual culture here is successful in visualising social difference (Rose, 2001) resultant of the climate justice issue, yet reflexivity encourages a consideration for power relations involved; representations of climate refugees are not through themselves but through the researcher (Crang and Cook, 2007). Nevertheless, a concern for vulnerable people by young people in hope of influencing government opinion has enabled them to use their disempowered position successfully to wield political power (Brown and Yaffe, 2016). Reengaging with Matthews *et al.* (1999, p.136) is crucial, challenging the very definition of political participation; from research experiences, it became clear that the young people observed did, in fact, participate in active engagement with issues that affect life quality, determined to emphasise a need for social justice in a time of anthropogenic induced climate change. Evident within analysis of speeches and interviews, there was recognition that climate change will impact vulnerable communities disproportionally, particularly those which are socioeconomically vulnerable (Jayawardhan, 2017):

> "When will we stop being so bloody selfish? We will not feel the direct effect of climate change, not for a long time, but it is the people of the Bahamas, of the Sahara regions, the people of Ethiopia, that will be feeling those effects and relying on us to save them when we're just packing our bags and have got no bloody idea what we're doing next."
>
> — Speech at 19th July 2019 Youth Strike, Manchester.

Findings reinforced the fact that climate change is more than avoiding the physical damage of a global catastrophe; it represents injustices threatening the most vulnerable and should prompt action in 'pursuit of global justice within the context of a global scientific consensus' (Brooks, 2013, p.10). Young people's concerns not only emphasised issues of vulnerable communities and displacement, but also the vulnerability of their own demographic. Climate change is very much a problem of inequalities, exacerbating young people's existing vulnerabilities, and will remain a defining issue not only of their present, but also their future (Narksompong and Limjirakan, 2015) (see: Figure 9). When asked about their concerns, many interviewees turned their attention towards feeling excluded from the formal political system because of their age, despite being of legal age to vote:

"We do not feel our voices are heard. We can vote, but we do not see change… Voting isn't doing much for us anymore; we are never heard, but when we strike we raise awareness and our voices are louder… we feel we are a novelty to the politicians but I think our strikes show we are more committed to the cause than our leaders."

— Stockholm Skolstrejk för Klimatet participant. Age 22.

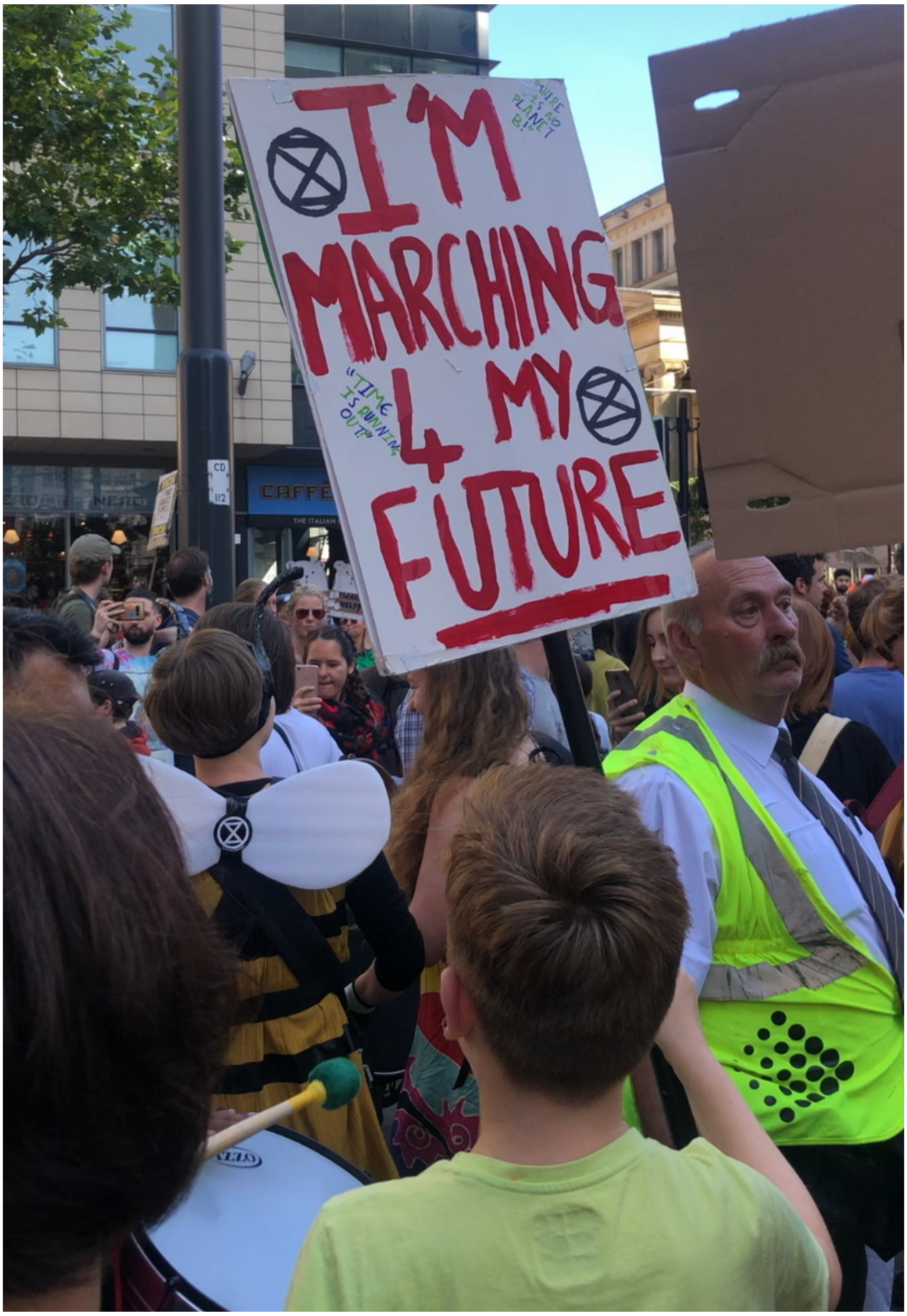

I'M MARCHING 4 MY FUTURE
"THERE IS NO PLANET B!"
"TIME IS RUNNING OUT!"
CAFFE
THE ITALIAN

FIGURE 9: YOUNG PEOPLE PRESENTING THEIR CONCERNS DURING CLIMATE STRIKES

The process of marginalisation, frequently resultant of adultist assumptions and views towards young people, emphasises unequal power relations and hierarchies that young people are subject to (Punch, 2002). The climate crisis has thus highlighted not only concerns from young people for the planet, but growing discontent and anger towards policy makers. There was common belief that government inadequacy has left an already marginalised demographic to fend for themselves, inheriting the weight of a problem they did not create (see: Figure 10). Their political efficacy was particularly apparent:

> "It's up to a bunch of kids to care about our planet, and if they try to stop us, if they try to lock us into classrooms and make us study things that we don't need to know, then I promise you we won't follow. Because these days if you sit down you've lost your opportunity, and we've lost our opportunity to stand up to dickheads like Boris Johnson and Donald Trump… We are not snowflakes… and if you look at everyone here you will see that we are fighters and you will see that we are willing to fight for our planet… It's not just youth it's other people too, but it's mostly us now because in the end it's gonna be us that has to deal with it when it's absolutely 100% destroyed… Youth has this."
>
> — Speech at the General Strike for Climate, Manchester, September 2019.

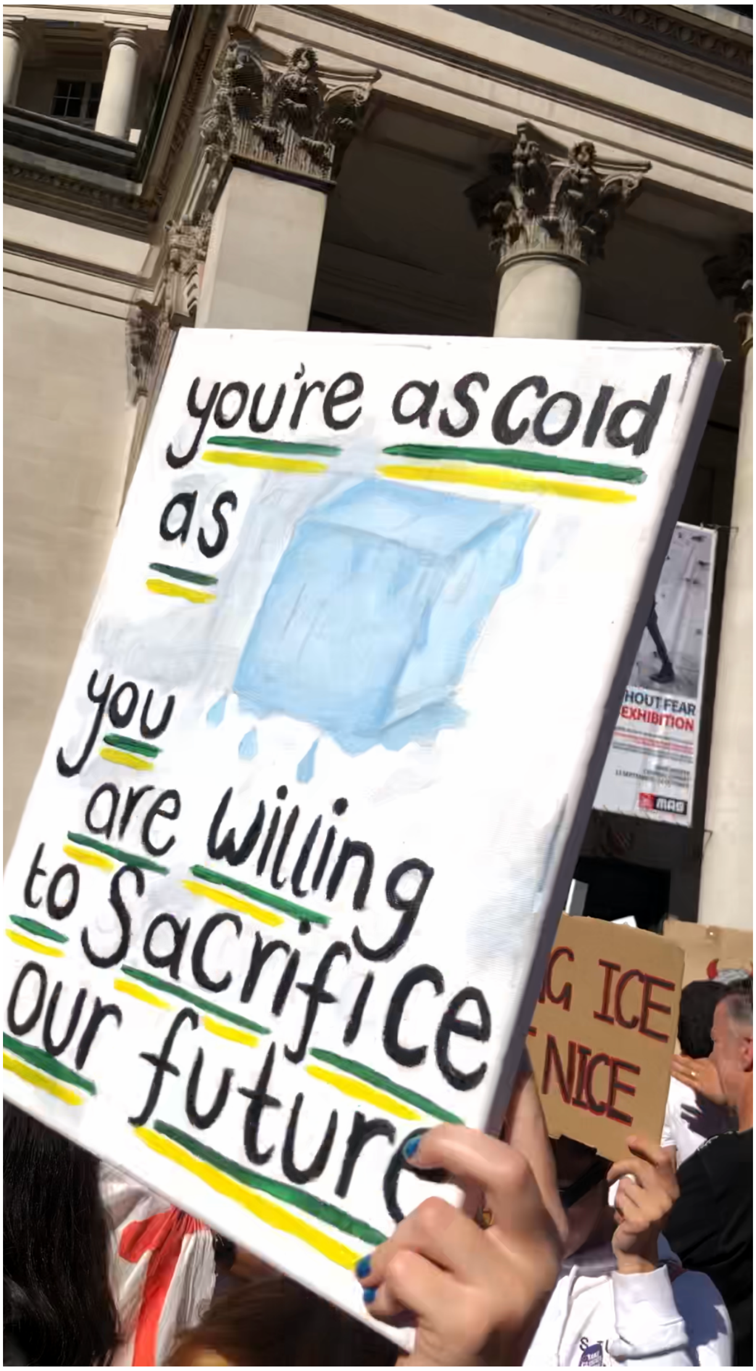

you're as cold
as
you
are willing
to Sacrifice
our future
G ICE
NICE
HOUT FEAR
EXHIBITION
MAS

FIGURE 10: YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCERN FOR THE FUTURE

4.2.2 'The System'

> "Can I just say — that sign: "governments fucking up the world for future generations", that's amazing… They say that 71% of emissions are just from under 100 huge companies. Us reducing our carbon footprints, that's not gonna fix that. We need change from those companies. And if there's any politicians in the crowd today, I need to tell you: listen to us. Our planet is dying."
>
> — Speech at 21st June 2019 Youth Strike, Manchester.

As addressed in the speech, anger towards governments, politicians, and corporations was in abundance during the research process. The majority of participants voiced concern with the political establishment (see: Figure 11), with many acknowledging the wilful ignorance and cognitive dissonance of those who should facilitate change (Vidal, 2018). This fury towards governments is representative of concerns within the literature that lack of political will and commitment alongside 'entrenched and selfish interests' (Ndungu, 2017, p.266) are fuelling our climate crisis. Research findings echo such assertions:

> "I don't want to be negative here, but the people aren't being listened to, and the power is still in the hands of the few. One thing about the community that we have created, is that it cannot be broken. We are fighting for our planet and our community, and what we have created will only grow. And if I wanted to send a message to 10 Downing Street, it would be that you work for us. You work for our goals, our community, and our planet — not the other way around. Justice, justice for the climate."
>
> — Speech at the General Strike for Climate, Manchester, September 2019.

Anger towards consumerism, capitalism, and corporations also dominated discussion (see: Figure 12). The economics-orientated prioritisation of climate change, concerned with the cost effectiveness of preventing and minimising climate change impacts, is, arguably like the UNFCCC, dominated by neoliberal logics, concerned less about justice and more meeting demands of capitalism (Hobbs-Morgan, 2017, see: Figure 13). Hobbs-Morgan (2017, pp.4-5) also stresses the dominant climate imaginary's obsessive faith in ‘managerial, neoliberal, and capitalist institutions’ to ‘respond to climate change adequately’, believing existing institutions can solve problems. Research reinforced concerns for this:

> “The real problem is the profit system, and I don’t want any of you to be guilt-tripped into thinking you’re the guilty parties. Who are the guilty parties in this? The hundred big companies who give out 70% of the emissions. As the young person before me just said, the real problem is the system of profit that prevails throughout our world, and what are we going to do about it? Now, the trade unions are beginning to take action on your behalf and in solidarity with you… Workers and young people together need to take the power out of the hands of the billionaires who are wrecking the planet and we need a socialist world.”
>
> — Speech at the General Strike for Climate, Manchester, September 2019. Former Head of a Sixth Form.

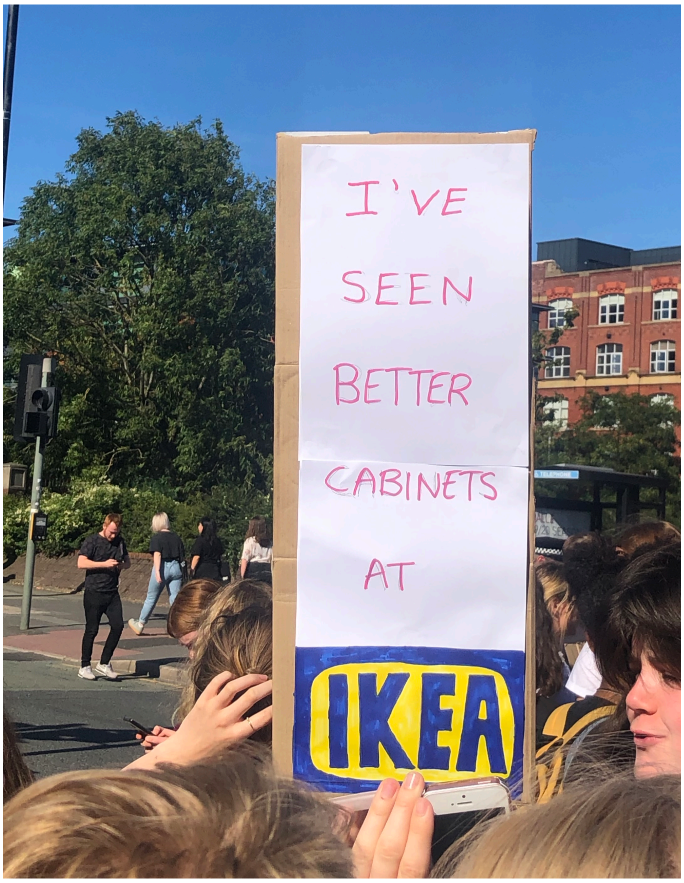


FIGURE 11: CONCERNS TOWARDS THE POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT

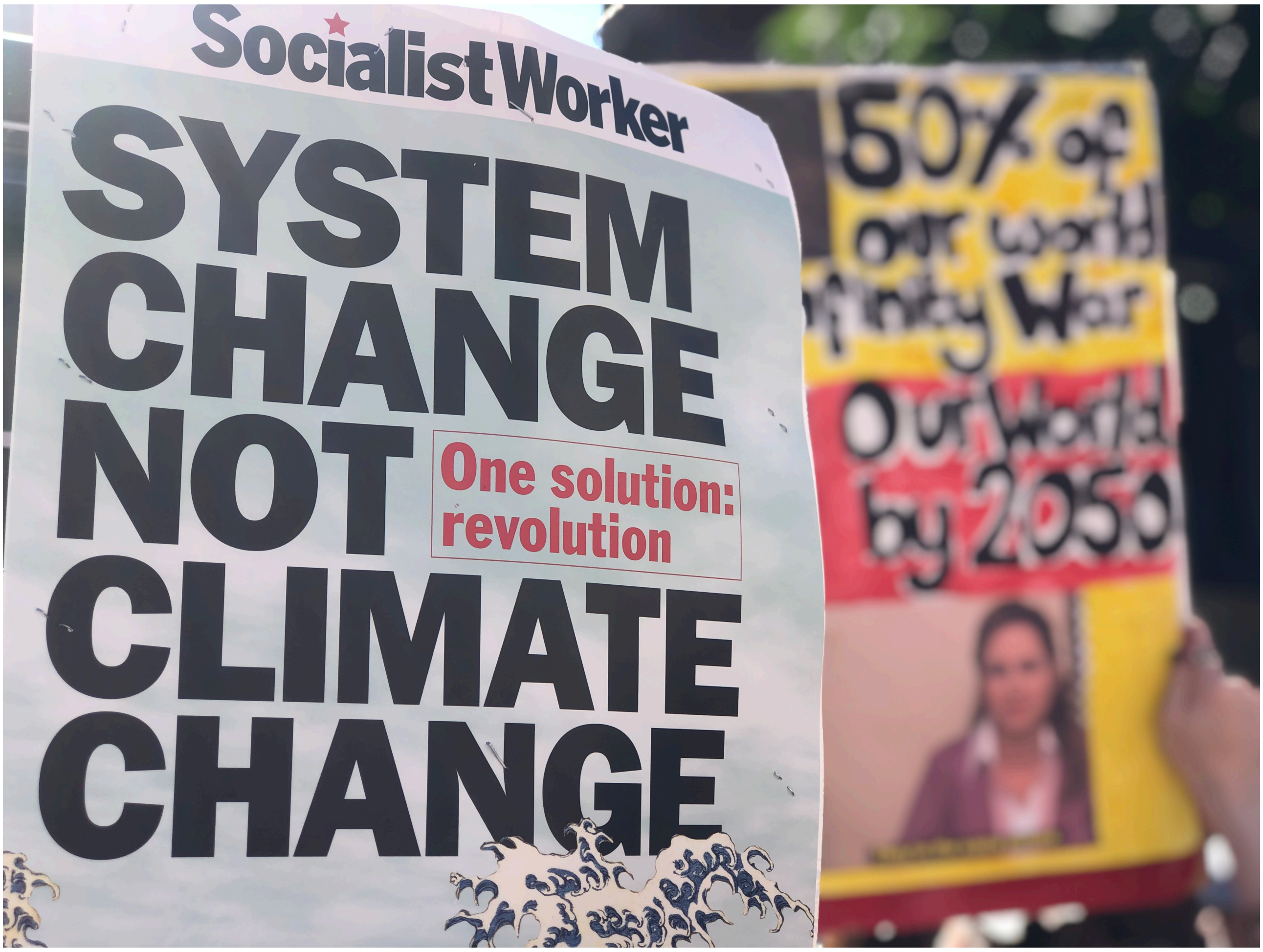

Socialist Worker
SYSTEM CHANGE NOT CLIMATE CHANGE
One solution: revolution
50% of our world ... War
Our World by 2050

FIGURE 12: CONCERNS TOWARDS THE SYSTEM

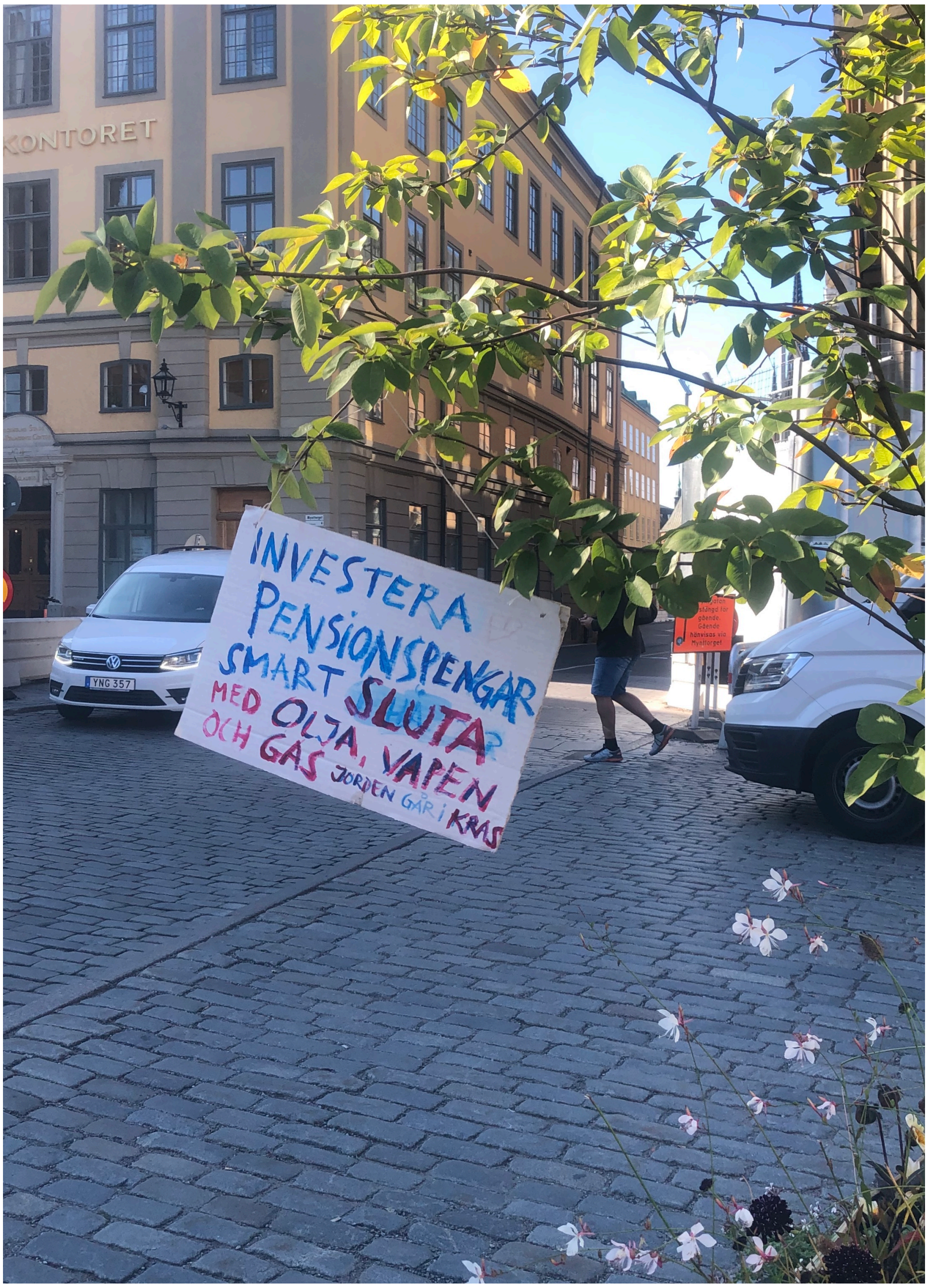

KONTORET
INVESTERA
PENSIONSPENGAR
SMART SLUTA
MED OLJA, VAPEN
OCH GAS
JORDEN GÅR i KRAS
YNG 357

FIGURE 13: STOCKHOLM STRIKES: ‘INVEST PENSION FUNDS SMARTLY. STOP WITH OIL, WEAPONS, AND GAS. EARTH IS FALLING APART’.

Marginalised groups, inequalities, and anger towards governments and 'the system' seemed to dominate findings. Aitken (2001) bridges these facets of concern, calling for an understanding of how young people have been excluded, their identities eroded, and material transformations of society furthered at a cost. These 'geographies of exclusion that permeate the lives of young people' are understood through a consideration that governments and corporations, while putting power and profit ahead of climate justice, mitigation, and adaptation, have 'their heads stuck in the rarified air of power and capital accumulation' (Aitken, 2001, p.22). Hence, not only is there discontent towards these systems of capital and governance (see: Figure 14), but concern for how these systems further the marginalisation of those who are already most vulnerable in a time of crisis:

> "There is a real danger if we only talk about climate change and we don't talk about justice and we don't talk about racism that we could end up in a dictator state where they make decisions about doing things about climate change that are not good for people… Thinking about justice, so what does justice really mean right?… We've gotta remember our history. It's really fitting that we're in Manchester… because Manchester was the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution… if we think about what… [it] lead to and the capitalism that we're facing today… We think about Britain and its empire going outwards and what that's done to the world, then we think about climate refugees and the people that are gonna have to be displaced… The state that we're in today and the way that we treat refugees today is horrendous. We need to turn that around right now, because in the future the amount of refugees that are gonna be coming here looking for safety because of what we have done is gonna be huge. We need accountability and we need responsibility."
>
> — Youth Strike, Manchester.

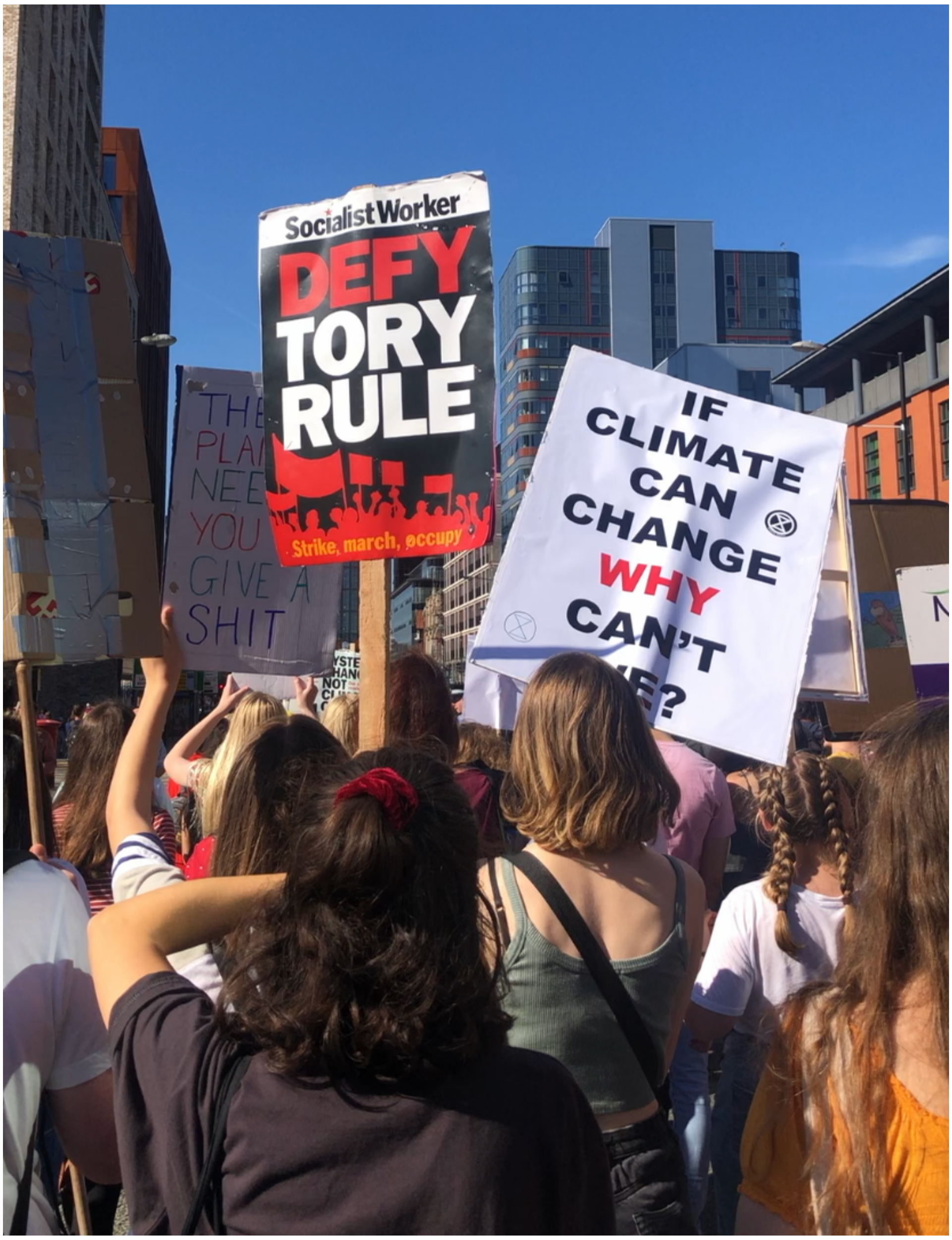

Socialist Worker
DEFY
TORY
RULE
Strike, march, occupy
IF
CLIMATE
CAN
CHANGE
WHY
CAN'T
WE?
THE
PLA
NEE
YOU
GIVE A
SHIT

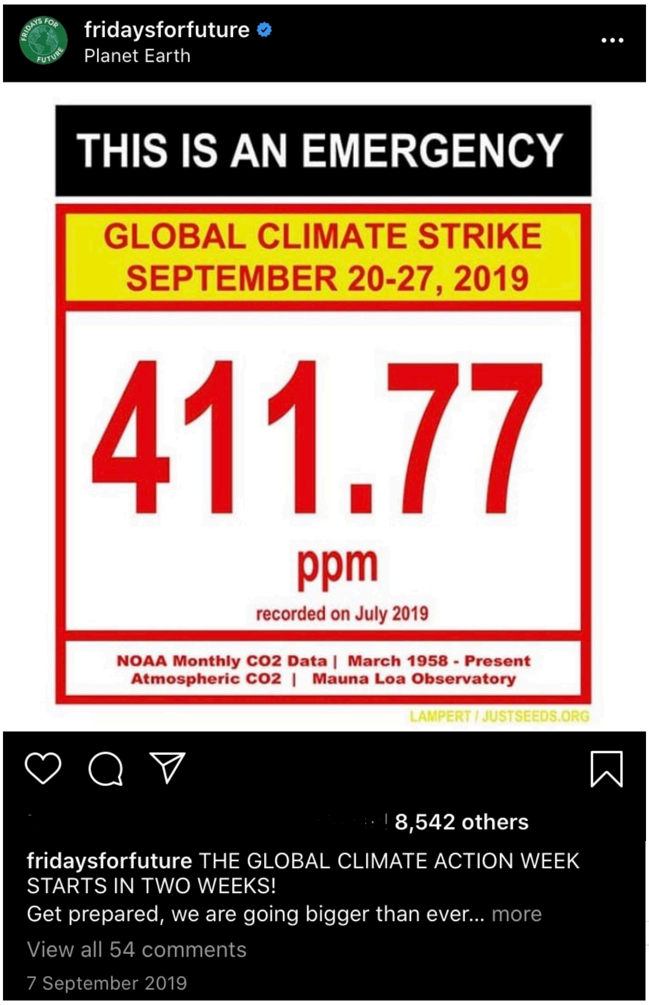
FIGURE 14: DISCONTENT WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

4.3 Digitally Enabled Social Change: the Role of Instagram in the Empowerment and Mobilisation of Youth

Central to this dissertation is the ability to combine young people's concerns, the contested nature of their political participation, and the success of Instagram in mobilising and empowering many, generating wider networks of participation. Expansion of the digital into our everyday lives has coincided with shifts in the way our identities are constructed and communities created (Ley and Brewer, 2018). Furthering this, utilising what Kidd and McIntosh (2016, p.792) define as 'techno-ambivalence', discussion seeks to recognise that despite emphasising Instagram's potential to drive social change, without the presumption of it being an automatic outcome, the posts analysed are bound up in both 'the power of existing hegemonies and the agency of individual actors', encouraging discovery of whether Instagram has been useful in creating the tipping point that has led to the movement's success. Similarly, taking inspiration from Dahlgren and Olsson (2007), research seeks to address whether Instagram has not in fact contributed to the formation of new political identities, but instead, how already established political identities of young people are continuously constructed, rendering Instagram a useful platform to aid political dynamism. The way in which young people participate in social movements has changed due to social media development whereby the boundaries of physical participation are broken and encouraged through virtual means (Tye *et al.*, 2018). It is interesting to prompt consideration for how posts are utilised to catalyse popularity of the movement (Brünker *et al.*, 2019). The decentralised and participatory nature of this platform enables opportunities for further discussion in the literature about new forms of political participation through the lens of the climate crisis (Williams *et al.*, 2015). Comparably, Recuero *et al.* (2015) present Instagram as pivotal in organising movements, allowing new forms of protesting activity and decentralised movements (Castells, 2012). The re-examination of young people's political engagement and forms of participation, away from formal politics, is hence facilitated by a consideration for the 'emergence of digital and networked forms of participation' (Vromen *et al.*, 2014, p.81).

Emotional expression is heavily prevalent in all the Instagram accounts analysed. Both Figure 15 and 16 rely on the presentation of visualisations of pressing environmental concerns to ignite connective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). These visual narratives prompt solidarity amongst users, stimulating engagement (Adi *et al.*, 2018) by presenting urgent environmental concerns. Urgency is conveyed in Figure 15 by presenting the text in yellow and red to symbolise a warning sign, whilst the presentation of scientific fact seeks to disseminate knowledge to the viewer. Similarly, Figure 16 presents flooding in an urban area, placing human and environmental impact hand in hand. The presentation of climate change concern here enables engagement with a larger system of meaning — by presenting a vulnerable person experiencing the direct impact of climate change, it is thus possible to visualise social difference through visual culture (Rose, 2001). Both plates use negative and alarming language, such as 'emergency' and 'shocking', to create emotional response. By presenting emotionally charged statements, semiotic analysis presents Instagram as a useful platform for the verbal expression of emotional response to the climate crisis (Lineman *et al.*, 2015). An interview conducted also emphasised the significance of social media in amplifying urgency:

> "Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram… I see so many scary things about climate change on social media. It's helpful because I am more aware, and the movement accounts teach me more than in school… But really it [climate change] is horrifying… We are more awake and aware now we have social media. I think it makes more of us want to achieve change."
>
> — Activist, Stockholm Skolstrejk för Klimatet participant. Aged 17.



fridaysforfuture
Planet Earth

THIS IS AN EMERGENCY

GLOBAL CLIMATE STRIKE
SEPTEMBER 20-27, 2019

411.77
ppm
recorded on July 2019

NOAA Monthly CO2 Data | March 1958 - Present
Atmospheric CO2 | Mauna Loa Observatory

LAMPERT / JUSTSEEDS.ORG

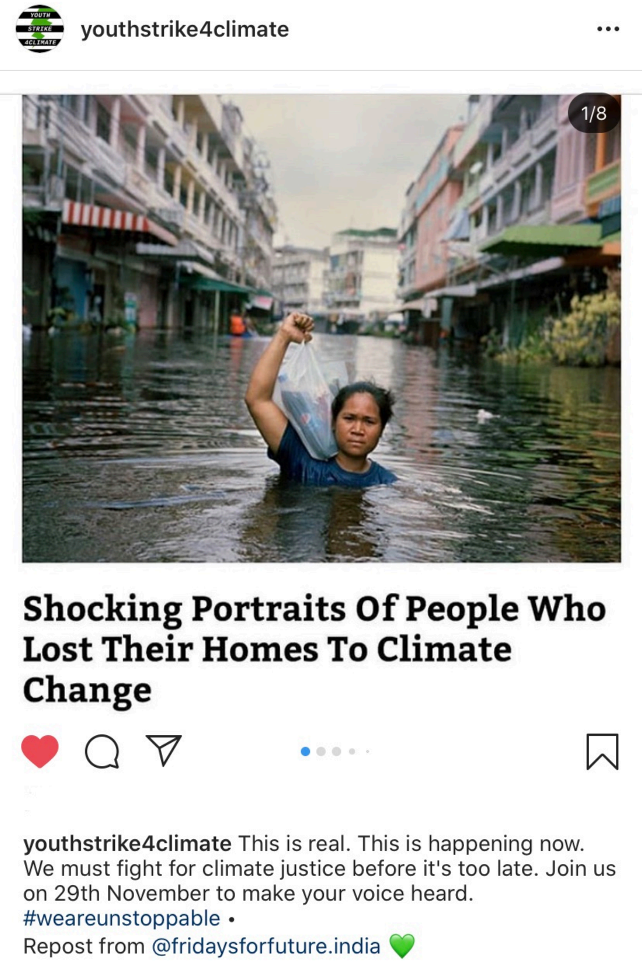
[redacted] 8,542 others

fridaysforfuture THE GLOBAL CLIMATE ACTION WEEK STARTS IN TWO WEEKS!
Get prepared, we are going bigger than ever... more

View all 54 comments

7 September 2019

FIGURE 15: FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE INSTAGRAM POST PRESENTING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY



youthstrike4climate

1/8

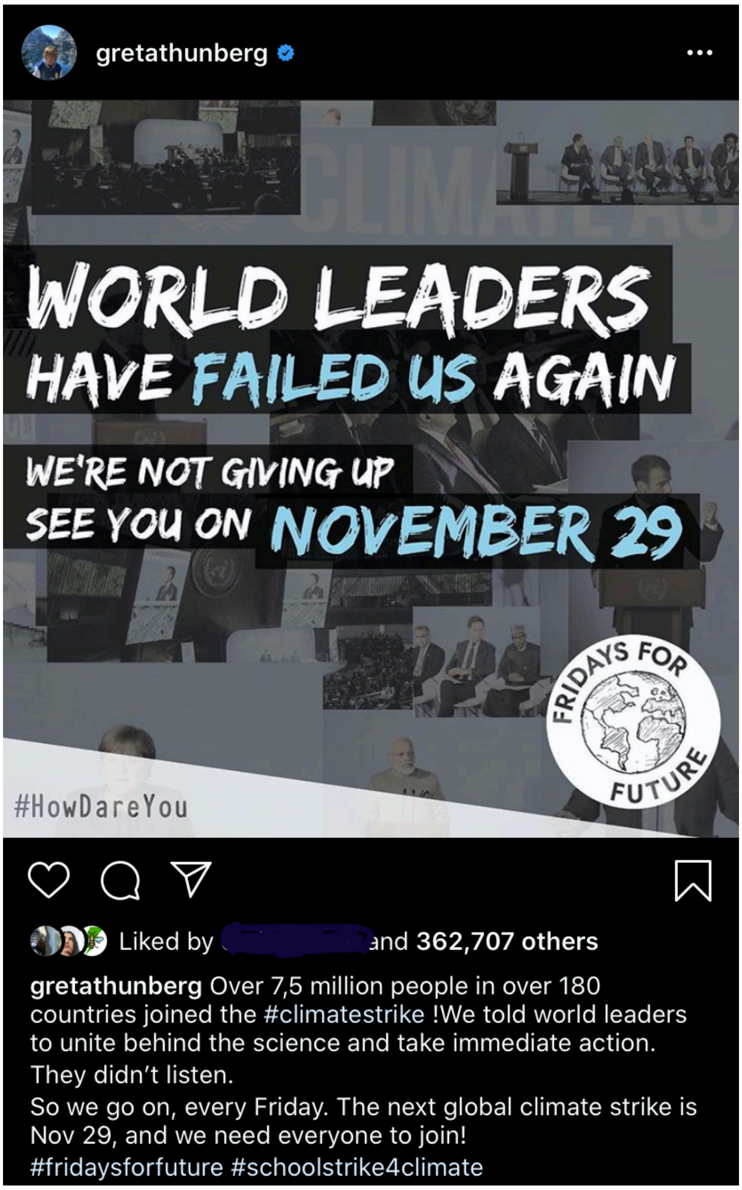
Shocking Portraits Of People Who Lost Their Homes To Climate Change

youthstrike4climate This is real. This is happening now. We must fight for climate justice before it's too late. Join us on 29th November to make your voice heard.
#weareunstoppable •
Repost from @fridaysforfuture.india 💚

FIGURE 16: YOUTH STRIKE FOR CLIMATE INSTAGRAM POST PRESENTING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Instagram has thus become an important source for climate change information exchanges (Veltri and Atanasova, 2017). Shirky (2008) supports such view, emphasising the power of social media technology in furthering the potential for quick assembly around concerns related to our climate emergency. In this sense, the youth climate movement utilisation of Instagram has been successful in educating and engaging publics through connective action (Pearce *et al.*, 2018) in hope that networked activism online complements offline activism (Kidd and McIntosh, 2016).

Aspects of political significance and tensions are expressed through images which emphasise discontent with political leaders and parties' current climate policies. In Figure 17, language such as 'failed us', 'not giving up', and '#HowDareYou' seek to expose the inadequacy of the current political establishment in tackling the climate emergency, multiplying 'the chances for the distribution of damaging political information, thus contributing to the exposure of corruption and immorality, and ultimately to the crisis of political legitimacy' (Castells, 2010, p.xxxiii). In doing so, Instagram is successfully utilised to inform young people of lack of political will and commitment. In this sense, young people are not passively accepting their marginalisation, but rather being mobilised and empowered through Instagram to become drivers of change (Ndungu, 2017). Without coordinated climate change education in formal education systems, social media has been fundamental in the dissemination of climate change discourse amongst young people (Narksompong and Limjirakan, 2015).


WORLD LEADERS
HAVE FAILED US AGAIN
WE'RE NOT GIVING UP
SEE YOU ON NOVEMBER 29
FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE
#HowDareYou

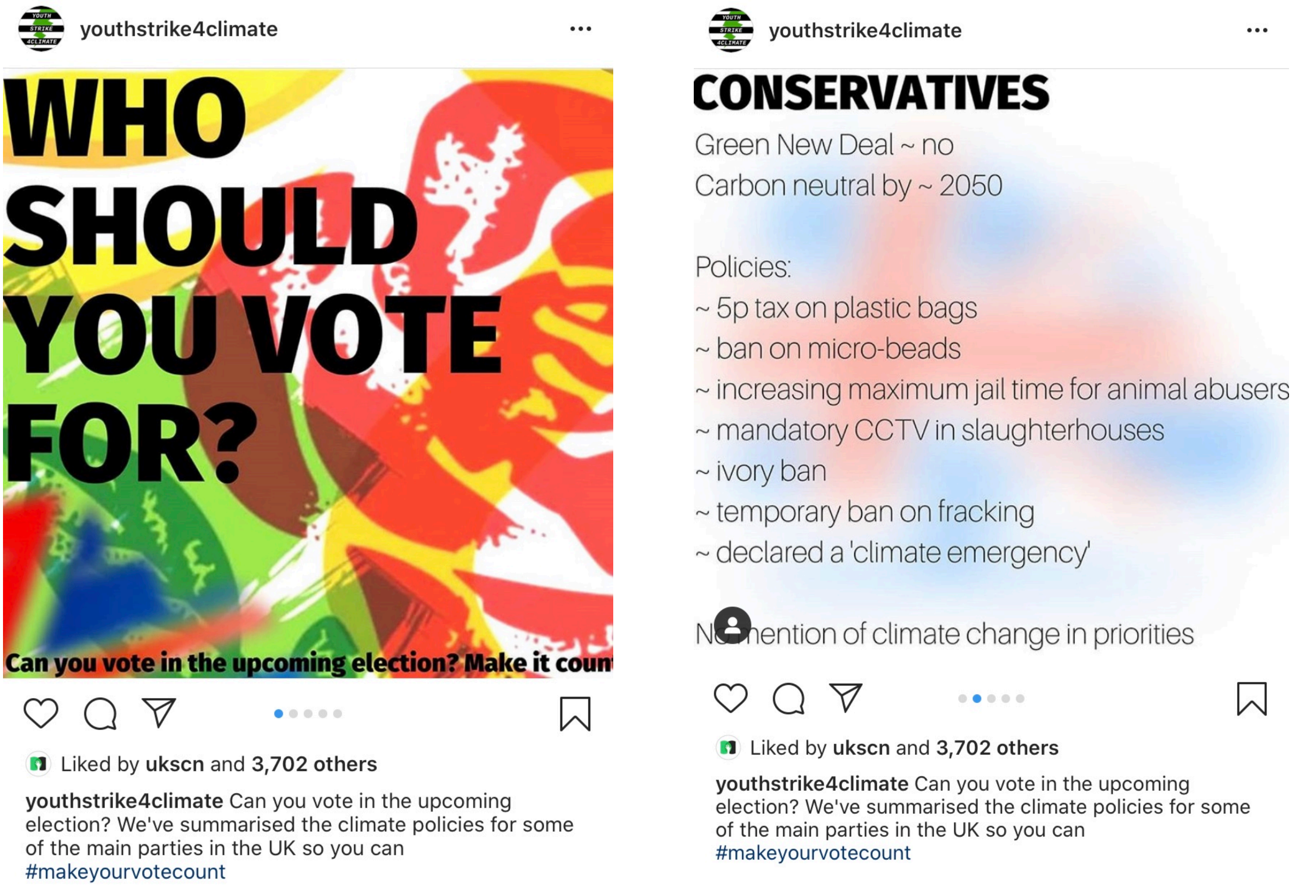
gretathunberg

Liked by [redacted] and **362,707 others**

gretathunberg Over 7,5 million people in over 180 countries joined the #climatestrike !We told world leaders to unite behind the science and take immediate action.
They didn't listen.
So we go on, every Friday. The next global climate strike is Nov 29, and we need everyone to join!
#fridaysforfuture #schoolstrike4climate

FIGURE 17: GRETA THUNBERG'S INSTAGRAM POST ACKNOWLEDGING THE FAILURE OF POLITICAL LEADERS

In Figures 18-22, the presentation of party climate policy breakdown and the 2019 General Election contribute to wider systems of meaning whereby unity of formal political participation, through voting, with alternative participation (Schuster, 2013) (utilising social media) seek to emphasise the climate crisis' political significance. Language, such as "make it count", and the explicit presentation of party environmental policies are useful in informing young people, challenging and flattening organisational hierarchies by distributing and democratising political facts in line with climate change (Kidd and McIntosh, 2016). This form of political information circulation has succeeded in organising and maintaining collective identity (Gerbaudo, 2012) within the movement, integrating social media with contemporary political engagement (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013).



youthstrike4climate

WHO SHOULD YOU VOTE FOR?

Can you vote in the upcoming election? Make it coun

Liked by **ukscn** and **3,702 others**

youthstrike4climate Can you vote in the upcoming election? We've summarised the climate policies for some of the main parties in the UK so you can #makeyourvotecount

youthstrike4climate

CONSERVATIVES

Green New Deal ~ no
Carbon neutral by ~ 2050

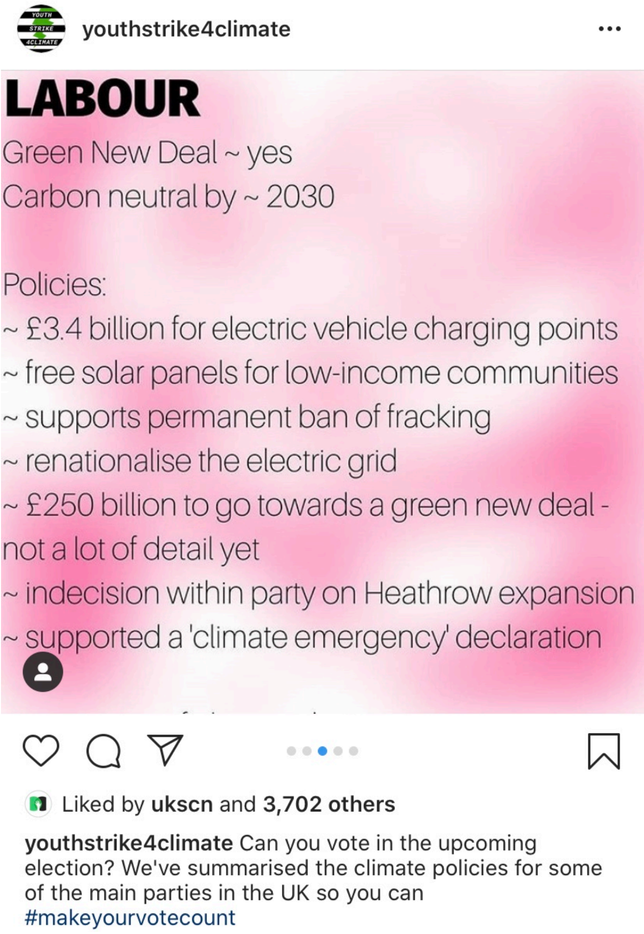
Policies:
~ 5p tax on plastic bags
~ ban on micro-beads
~ increasing maximum jail time for animal abusers
~ mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses
~ ivory ban
~ temporary ban on fracking
~ declared a 'climate emergency'

No mention of climate change in priorities

Liked by **ukscn** and **3,702 others**

youthstrike4climate Can you vote in the upcoming election? We've summarised the climate policies for some of the main parties in the UK so you can #makeyourvotecount

FIGURES 18 AND 19: YOUTH STRIKE FOR CLIMATE INSTAGRAM POST HIGHLIGHTING CLIMATE POLICIES


youthstrike4climate

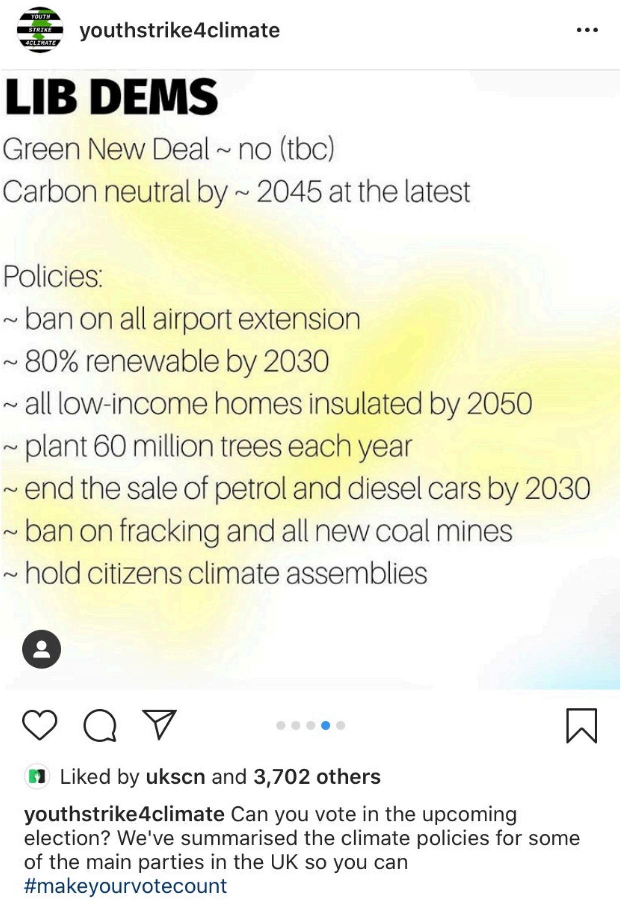
LABOUR

Green New Deal ~ yes
Carbon neutral by ~ 2030

Policies:
~ £3.4 billion for electric vehicle charging points
~ free solar panels for low-income communities
~ supports permanent ban of fracking
~ renationalise the electric grid
~ £250 billion to go towards a green new deal - not a lot of detail yet
~ indecision within party on Heathrow expansion
~ supported a 'climate emergency' declaration

Liked by **ukscn** and **3,702 others**

youthstrike4climate Can you vote in the upcoming election? We've summarised the climate policies for some of the main parties in the UK so you can #makeyourvotecount


youthstrike4climate

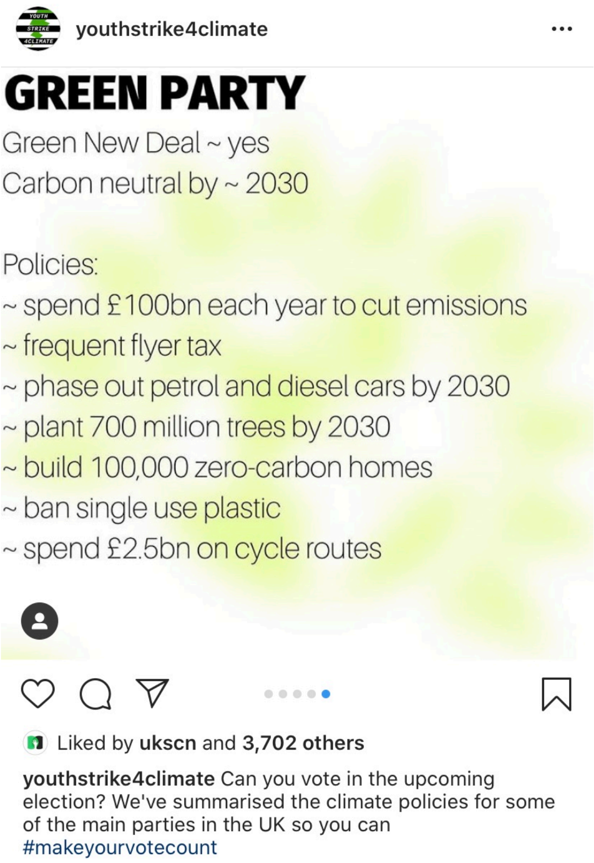
LIB DEMS

Green New Deal ~ no (tbc)
Carbon neutral by ~ 2045 at the latest

Policies:
~ ban on all airport extension
~ 80% renewable by 2030
~ all low-income homes insulated by 2050
~ plant 60 million trees each year
~ end the sale of petrol and diesel cars by 2030
~ ban on fracking and all new coal mines
~ hold citizens climate assemblies

Liked by **ukscn** and **3,702 others**

youthstrike4climate Can you vote in the upcoming election? We've summarised the climate policies for some of the main parties in the UK so you can #makeyourvotecount


youthstrike4climate

GREEN PARTY

Green New Deal ~ yes
Carbon neutral by ~ 2030

Policies:
~ spend £100bn each year to cut emissions
~ frequent flyer tax
~ phase out petrol and diesel cars by 2030
~ plant 700 million trees by 2030
~ build 100,000 zero-carbon homes
~ ban single use plastic
~ spend £2.5bn on cycle routes

Liked by **ukscn** and **3,702 others**

youthstrike4climate Can you vote in the upcoming election? We've summarised the climate policies for some of the main parties in the UK so you can #makeyourvotecount

FIGURES 20-22: YOUTH STRIKE FOR CLIMATE INSTAGRAM POST HIGHLIGHTING CLIMATE POLICIES

The rapid and successful mobilisation of the Youth Strike for Climate movement makes it possible to question the legitimacy of what some researchers term ‘slacktivism’ (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009) whereby online activism is denied purpose, with ‘zero political or social impact’ (Morozov, 2009, headline). Similarly, it is also possible to question Lovink’s (2011) assertion that social media makes individuals passive in their political participation. Cantijoch’s (2012) belief that internet use does not positively impact formal political participation, like voting, can be challenged; it fails to acknowledge that social media has successfully enhanced participation through enabling online protest, widening the definition of the political (O’Toole, 2003). However, there is also debate surrounding the legitimacy of social media; Williams *et al.* (2015) acknowledged high levels of polarisation and segregation in their study, prompting an investigation of whether there is space on Instagram for subjective and alternative climate change viewpoints (Pearce *et al.*, 2018). Tufekci (2017) highlights how social media may not be successful in sustaining long-term activism, questioning the longevity of the youth climate movements, yet Instagram has presented a challenge to perceived notions; the Fridays for Future movement has been sustained beyond the September 2019 General Strike for Climate through continued social percolation of facts and discontent with the political establishment to the general population (Williams *et al.*, 2015).

Instagram is hence integral to mobilising and organising the youth climate movement. This is not to say that it is ‘the dominant communication channel in all networked protests’ (Ley and Brewer, 2018, p.8), rather it has contributed to a redefinition of political participation. Social media is therefore successful in challenging traditional conceptions of citizenship, respecting both formal and informal discursive circulation, appealing to young people by not being confined to traditional spaces of conventional politics (Coleman, 2007, p.185).

5.0 Conclusions

Achieving climate and social justice in a time of environmental crisis has perhaps never been more crucial. In a time where youth are increasingly seen as integral to driving societal change, young people are challenging the very definition of their own demographic. In the contested spaces between adults and young people's worlds, there is fresh political possibility (Wood, 2012) for achieving climate justice. Having acknowledged historic tendency for society to undermine their agency, definitions of youth have been contested and debated. Similarly, there has been a reconceptualisation of the ways in which they are sufficiently politically engaged to raise awareness for climate justice. Addressing research findings through acknowledgement of interviews and speeches has elucidated how young people are increasingly aware of and vocal about the fact they are continuously and unfairly undermined. Hence, there has been encouragement of the belief that young people need to be recognised as actors crucial in the future of the political geography discipline as they are inevitable and permanent parts (Skelton and Gough, 2013) of what will likely be a turbulent and problematic future. Although this dissertation sought to enable a youth-orientated investigation, research only scratches the surface of the tensions within young people's geographies and climate justice activism.

Addressing the youth movement's utilisation of Instagram in mobilising young climate activists and encouraging political engagement, there has been opportunity to uncover how citizenship norms are changing (Vromen *et al.*, 2014). However, engaging in a longitudinal study of cross-platform analysis of social media to fully encapsulate facets of online activism would have proved beneficial, but was simply too big of an aim for this dissertation.

Nevertheless, by acknowledging climate crisis concerns, young people have accentuated understandings of an increasingly unequal world in a time of environmental disaster. Their concerns prompt recognition that climate change is not simply about avoiding a global crisis, nor is it simply a debate about its scientific basis. What it epitomises is, however, a global injustice threatening the most vulnerable populations — it ought to be a debate about the pursuit of social justice in the context of global scientific agreement (Brooks, 2013). Future contributions to youth geographies must respond to inequalities young people will face in coming decades, particularly with regards to climate change, displacement, economic crises, and conflict (van Blerk, 2019). Climate change may offer new opportunity for unity and solidarity, but it is one of the few issues that will affect everyone on the planet. That said, future research should seek to bridge understandings of young people in the Global South and the Global North by forming new conceptualisations of their efforts to achieve climate justice in a time of crisis (Norgaard, 2009).

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7.0 Appendices

🟩 Crisis concerns / motivations.

🟨 Youth movement characteristics / political engagement and participation.

🟪 General: Social media / internet.

🟥 = Themes / categories.

🟦 = Codes.

Speech Analysis:

Speech 7:

- Injustice
- Inequality.
- Standing up to inequalities in society.

“And then I remembered where I’m from [emphasis on from].”

“I’m from Southall. Southall is this place in West London where there is a massive Asian population and in the 70s when my parents arrived in the UK from India, they faced a lot of racism — my uncles got beat up leaving school almost on a daily basis. Um, and in 1976 they was a young guy who was 18… who got killed by racists with racist motivation. People in Southall were angry, people across… Asians across… black people across the country were angry because the judges denied it was a racist attack and general the media and society decided it was a racist attack and the older generations of Indians were very much like… oh well, you know, we should just be polite, let’s not do anything, and what came out of that was the Southall Youth Movement, and the Southall Youth Movement were like no [emphasis on no], this is wrong [emphasis on wrong], we have to stand up to this. We have to stand up to this racism.” [crowd cheers]

“So they were incredible, and my parents were a part of the Southall Youth Movement, and there was this huge riot in 1979 where they stood up to the National Front who were like the equivalent of the BNP or whatever they’re called these days. And the whole of Southall went on strike — the whole town went on strike [emphasis of this sentence], like we’re striking today. And they changed things and that meant that when I was born in 1985, I felt safe [emphasis]. I grew up feeling safe in London.”

- Safe.

- Racism
- Anger
- Attacks.
- Beat up
- Stood up.
- Riot.
- Changed things

Speech 8:

- Government failure.
- Not sustainable.
- Environmental concern.
- Marginalised group.

“Can I just say — that sign: “governments fucking up the world for future generations” [crowd cheers], that’s amazing [crowd cheers and claps].”

“When I first mentioned that I was going to do this strike, that I was going to come, you know, fight for my planet, make sure I live another 50 years [almost sarcastic in tone, quite comical], um, I was told “don’t tell anybody.” I was told “don’t influence people to come”. I say that’s bullshit [emphasis].”

“So, it took me a lot of courage to stand up here today, my knees are shaking as you can all see because I do get anxious at times [people cheer, and one woman shouts: “you’re doing great sweetie”]. Thank you.”

“But I read, on the Greenpeace website, that the Earth is 4.6 billion years old. Scaling that to 46 years, humans have been here for four hours [slow on “four hours” for emphasis]. The industrial revolution started a minute ago [slow on “a minute” for emphasis]. In that time, we have destroyed more than half [emphasis on “half”] of the world’s forests. That is not sustainable [crowd cheers].”

“Something must [emphasis] be done. Change happens when people are uncomfortable. Change happens when people rise. And you know what? I’m uncomfortable. Aren’t you? [crowd cheers]”

“100s and 1000s of people here today, across the world, all striking on the same day at the same time. They’re uncomfortable [emphasis, almost yells, crowd also cheers]. We [emphasis] are uncomfortable and we [emphasis] need to change. And you know what? We are changing. I reckon every single person standing here today has done something personally to reduce their carbon footprints [crowd cheers]. But that’s not enough. They say that 71% of emissions are just from under 100 huge [emphasis] companies. Us reducing our carbon footprints, that’s not gonna fix that. We need change from those companies [emphasis].”

“And if there’s any politicians in the crowd today, I need to tell you — listen [emphasis] to us. Our planet is dying. We know what we’re talking about. We are not stupid little children [crowd cheers]. Yes we skip school, we are skipping a school whose education system, publicly, is failing us. There’s somethings we can’t be taught. There’s somethings we’ve learnt from here today that have not been taught in classrooms. Winter is not coming [crowd cheers]. And I don’t know about you, but, people say climate change is coming slowly and that by the time we realise these effects it’s too late. Well, this summer, multiple records in several [emphasis] countries across Europe, their records, the highest temperatures in the world were broken.”

- Governments.
- Future.
- Destroyed
- Not sustainable.
- Uncomfortable.
- Change.
- Rise.
- Carbon footprints.
- Emissions

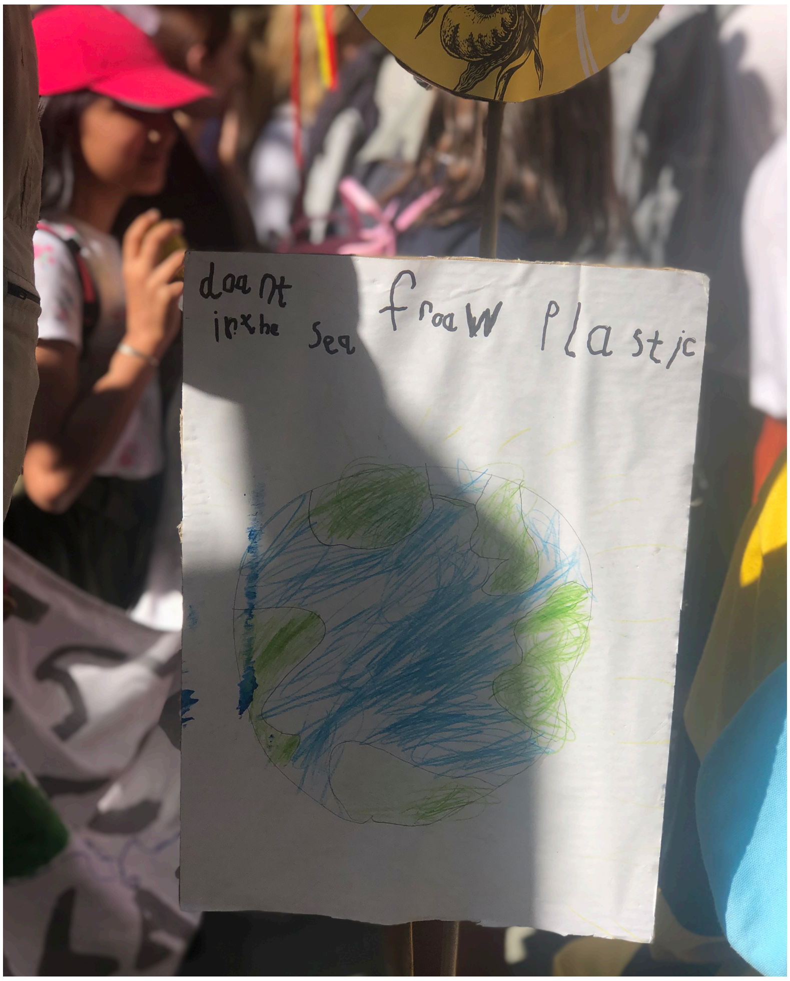
- ‘The system’
- Corporations.
- Failing.
- Huge companies.

UTH STRIKE 4 CLIMATE
@YOUTHSTRIKEMCR
IT'S GETTING HOT IN HERE
OCEANS
RISING!
CAN'T
WE
SYSTEM CHANGE NOT CLIMATE CHANGE

DON'T POISON MY SWAMP
gullón
GALLETAS
STRI
THSTRIKEMC

NOT OUR FUTURE
YOUT
Socialist Wo
SYSTE CHANG NOT CLIMA CHANG

IMAGINE BEING
NEIGHBOURS
WITH A
FISH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in the Sea
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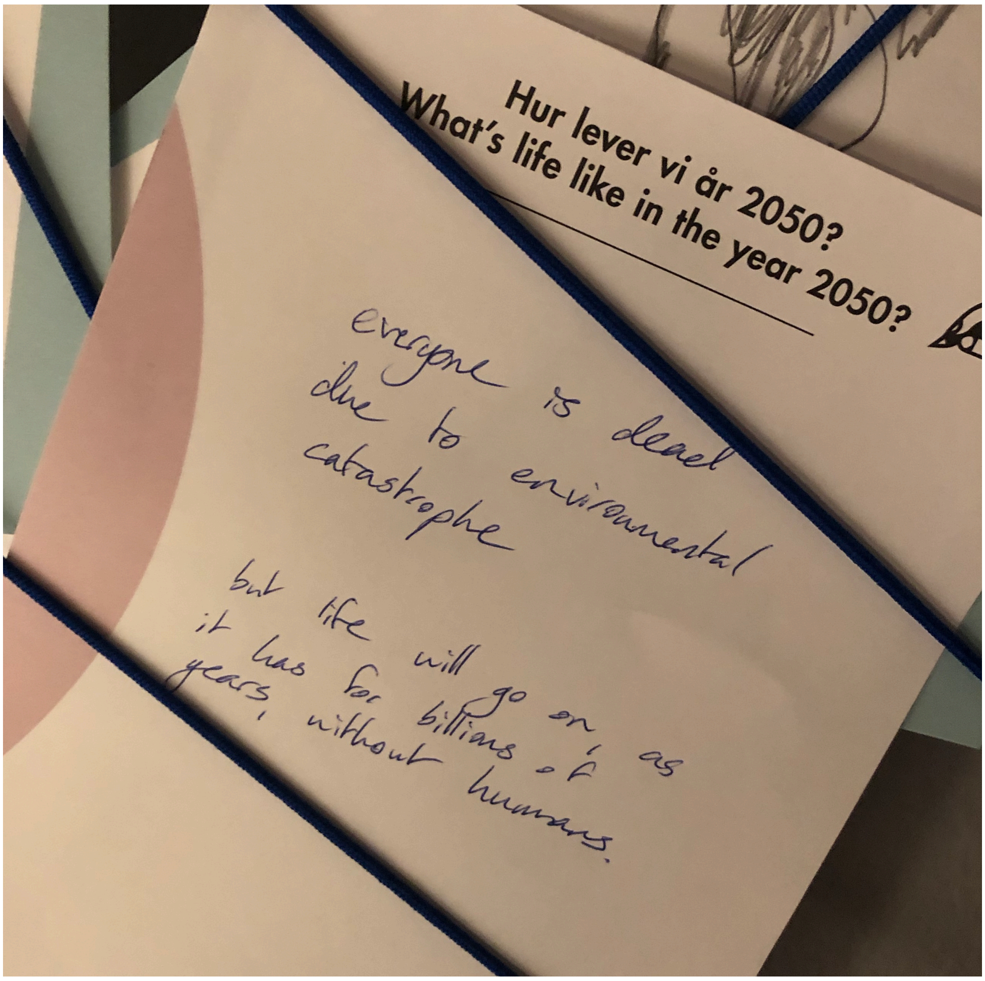
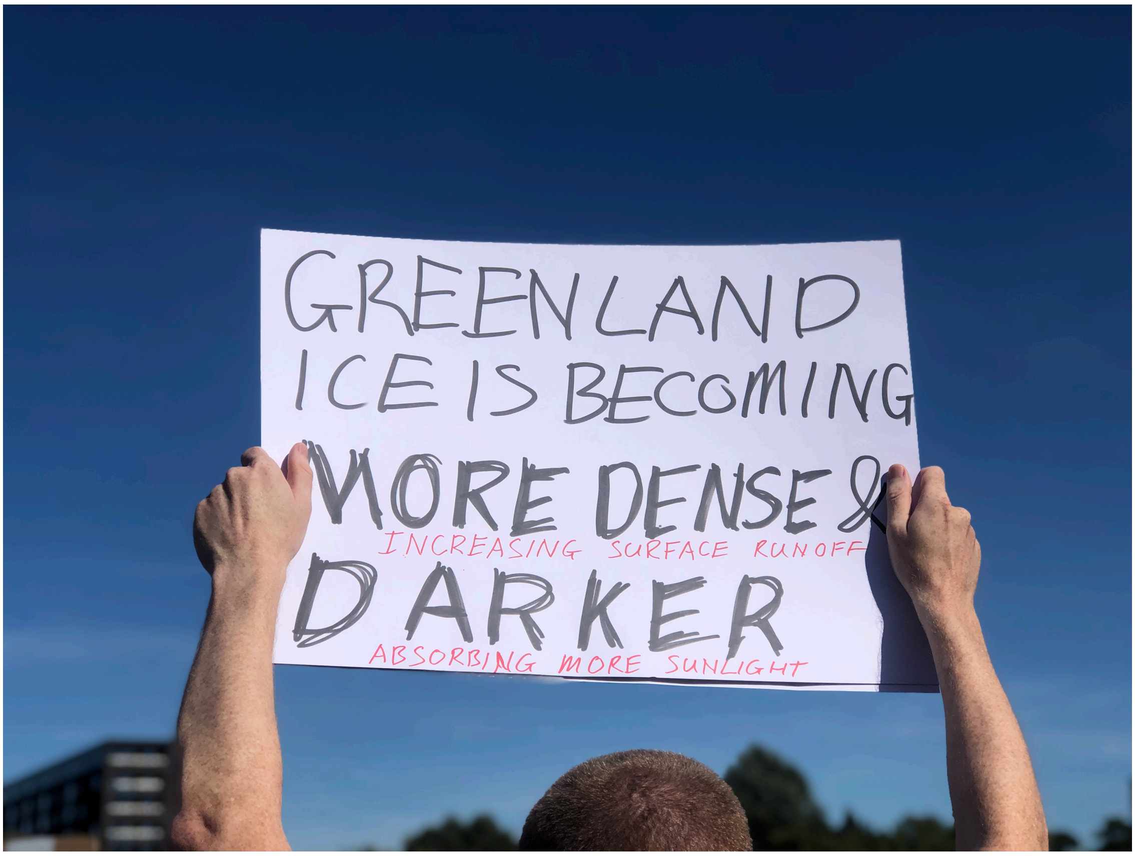


Hur lever vi år 2050?
What's life like in the year 2050?

everyone is dead
due to environmental
catastrophe

but life will go on, as
it has for billions of
years, without humans.


GREENLAND
ICE IS BECOMING
MORE DENSE &
INCREASING SURFACE RUNOFF
DARKER
ABSORBING MORE SUNLIGHT

IT'S TIME FOR RESPONSIBILITY
we only have one

4 CLIM
GOVERNMENTS FUCKING UP THE WORLD FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS
I am inevitable.
2920