

Climate Mythology in News Media:
Exposing the fallacy of people versus the planet

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“For us the snail darter is to be considered side by side with a community’s need for water, the porpoise side by side with appetite for tuna, and the creatures it may fall on with Skylab. We are a woman-identified movement and we believe we have a special work to do in these imperilled times. We see the devastation of the earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, and the threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warriors, as feminist concerns. It is the same masculinist mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and our own sexuality, and which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way.”

- Ynestra King, organizer of 1980 Women and Life on Earth: a Conference on Ecofeminism and the Eighties, as quoted by Vandana Shiva

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent years, the world has been shocked by the Christchurch shooting, the El Paso shooting, and various other attacks against humanity. These murderous rampages have been condoned by the idea that the perpetrators were working to combat climate change. These perpetrators are self-proclaimed ecofascists. Michael E. Zimmerman offers a brief and simplified definition of ecofascism (Zimmerman, 2008). Ecofascism, according to Zimmerman, is “a totalitarian government that requires individuals to sacrifice their interests to the well-being of the 'land', understood as the splendid web of life, or the organic whole of nature, including peoples and their states" (Zimmerman, 2008). Ecofascism, however, does not target all people equally. Notably, ecofascists target those marginalized by racialization, disability, gender, and immigration status.

While ecofascism was widespread in and prior to Nazi Germany, it has seen a resurgence in recent years. This has been attributed to rising concern regarding the climate crisis and the invention of the internet which has made ecofascist communities (by way of internet forums) readily available to almost anyone at any time. Most ecofascists (or even people who do not explicitly call themselves by this name but certainly tout its principles) do not perpetrate mass shootings or bombs. Rather, their violence comes by way of advocating against progressive values, policies, and discourse. Most ecofascists enact their violence through dangerous rhetoric, promoting ideas such as eugenics, race science, and anti-immigration discourse. While this may not be direct violence in the way a mass shooting is, it is nonetheless deadly. Imperialism, extraction, and closed borders do lead to real, tangible harm, human death, and suffering.

While this rhetoric is not explicitly violent in the way that a mass shooting is, it is violent in the hatred it breeds. Ecofascists strive for a future where a ‘clean’ climate is dependent on human suffering- they argue only some are worthy of living on such a planet. Ecofascists believe that there is a scarcity of resources, and that it must thus be determined who “deserves” these resources. Unsurprisingly, this benefits global elites and harms those who are marginalized by systems like capitalism, racism, and misogyny. This is clearly not ethical or the only way forward. Ecofascism exists in stark contrast to

environmental justice, which seeks equitable benefits of a clean and healthy environment for all communities.

Ecofascist discourse can disseminate from grim corners of the internet and enter popular discourse. That being said, there is little to no research regarding how ecofascist rhetoric disseminates into popular discourse surrounding the climate crisis. One way that discourse is introduced and circulated throughout society is through the news media. The news media is a trusted source for information and is strategically framed as an objective, unbiased informant. A feminist analysis of this notion would argue that news is not unbiased, and that individual perceptions of the world are translated through discourse. This is especially true and potentially dangerous when the source is funded by large, multi-billion dollar familial empires, industries, or nations with their own set of values and motives. It is therefore important to be critical of information disseminated in the news media, and question the intent behind stories that are presented as factual.

Research Question

We know that one way popular rhetoric is disseminated throughout society is through the news media. Therefore, for this study, I asked the following question: How does the news media take up and circulate ecofascist rhetoric? It is important to understand how these ideas are circulated by the news media in order to combat these dangerous narratives. Hopefully, if we are able to pin-point the ways in which the news media (inadvertently or advertently) consumes and circulates these ideas, we will be able to cease doing so, or push back against these discourses. In so doing, the general public should be able to receive more accurate, compassionate, helpful, and justice-centred views of the climate crisis and solutions to the climate crisis. It is my hope that this research will offer a critical analysis of how the news media approaches the climate crisis, and provide a justice-centred, anti-fascist analysis of discourse and power.

Methods

For this study, I conducted a discourse analysis of news media. I focused on Canadian and American news media, aiming to cover stories written by well-known, popularly trusted sources. This will include but will not be limited to CNN, CBC, FOX, and Global News. I chose to conduct a discourse analysis of media by Canadian and American sources because these are the most accessible to me in terms of language and cultural understanding (i.e. having a basic understanding of government structure, news funding, and the English language). This discourse analysis took the form of selecting specific pieces published by the news media and analyzing the discourse for ecofascist themes.

In the process of reading these news pieces, I pulled out quotes that promoted ecofascist rhetoric. Through my analysis of these selected articles, three main topics came forth: population, immigration, and Covid-19. Within each of these broader topics, similar repeating themes emerged. Mainly, the discussion of these topics often included themes of othering, racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and reproductive injustice. After coding the various articles, I was able to piece together these reoccurring topics and themes to see a greater, grimmer, picture of the popular news media's coverage of climate change: one that supports ecofascist ideals and disseminates ecofascist rhetoric. The news media that I analyzed supported ideas regarding scarcity, overpopulation, and human/nature dichotomy.

In the follow chapters of this study, I will outline these themes and how they emerge in Canadian and American news media sources. First, I will review the literature regarding ecofascism, both its history and its contemporary form. I will explain the importance of using an ecofeminist and environmental justice framework in analyzing the news articles and videos. Finally, I will expand upon the dangers of ecofascist rhetoric, and make the case against the notions of scarcity, overpopulation, and anti-immigrant sentiments.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

German Environmental Nationalism

Much of the literature on ecofascism is about its roots in fascist Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Twentieth-century German nationalism is cited as birthing ecofascism in the West. It is important to note that I am specifically referring to the roots of western environmentalism. Indigenous Peoples have been invested in environmental preservation since time immemorial, and have centred justice in their relationship to the earth. Western environmentalism, with its roots in fascist Germany, has often been used for colonial projects such as the creation of national parks and the privatization of land. It is important to distinguish western, colonial environmentalism from justice-centred worldviews that place importance on a healthy earth.

Arguably, western environmentalism began in Germany through the work of Ernst Moritz Arndt and his student Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl. This nineteenth-century scholar wrote about the connection between environmental destruction and the Industrial Revolution in his work, *On the Care and Conservation of Forests* (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1996). Arndt was consumed with the idea of romantic anti-capitalism: the notion that capitalism is evil because it separates man from the mysticism of nature, not due to the fact that it exist on the exploitation of humans. Arndt and other early ecofascists blamed Jewish people for the industrial revolution and the onset of capitalism. This was, of course, a false villainization of Jewish people in order to promote an anti-Semitic agenda. Arndt and his student's work was deeply rooted in nationalism. Arndt claimed the preservation of the natural world was to be done by and for German people, a "superior race." He claimed that nature was essential to "produce and feed the people who are the strongest, most healthy and the most beautiful in body and spirit" (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1996). Arndt was specifically hateful toward Slavic, French, and Jewish people- people who were at the time racialized and oppressed throughout Europe.

Historians Biehl and Staudenmaier argue that German ecologism aided the rise in popularity of the Nazis, as the Nazi party was highly concerned with German environmental “preservation”- meaning the preservation of the environment by and for the German nation. The promise of the *Blood and Soil* slogan was appealing to white German nationalists, and gained support among citizens. The Nazi government promoted such practices as “veganism, organic farming, and nature worship” and justified the Holocaust as a way to stifle population growth, something they argued was detrimental to nature (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1996). Notably, of course, the population growth the Nazis were concerned with was that of racialized people, disabled people, and communists. Essentially, those socially constructed as impure and deemed unworthy of life. The Nazis’ ecologism was a nationalistic environmentalism. The Nazis mystified nature and saw a clear distinction between humanity and the natural world. Such being the case, Nazis claimed that human population growth would prove to be detrimental to the environment. Thus, ecologism helped the Nazis to rise to power and elicit support for their fascist government and murderous policies (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1996).

German ecologism (the predecessor of modern-day ecology) was deeply concerned with environmental mysticism. This was especially apparent in the völkisch movement, which was a back-to-the-earth push from German nationalists who opposed urbanization and industrialization. The völkisch movement was connected to the romantic era in Germany- it pushed back against the renaissance, science, and industrialism (Rueda, 2020). Supporters touted this movement as a “spiritual antidote” to industrialization (Rueda, 2020). This movement aimed for Germans to connect with the mysticism of nature- to them, nature was synonymous with purity. This brought with it the opposition of anything that was deemed impure: race mixing, disability, and so on. The popular slogan of the Nazis, *Blood and Soil*, depicted a Germany in which the “pure German race” (depicted by the use of “blood”) could return to the land (soil) and traditional, patriarchal family structures. As aforementioned, the *Blood and Soil* lifestyle was presented as an antidote to urbanization (associated with Jewish people).

This völkisch movement was also preoccupied with social Darwinism, the idea that humans can be categorized and socially ranked based on race science. One of the leaders of this movement popularized Darwin's theory of evolution in Germany. This understanding of Darwinism led itself nicely to the concept of a "natural social order:" a hierarchy of race based in nature. While the early völkisch movement was very anti-science, it later harnessed race science, social Darwinism, and ideas of natural hierarchies to promote, unsurprisingly, extremely anti-Semitic views (Rueda, 2020). The völkisch promoted the idea that humans, like nature, are organized in a hierarchy based on logic. Rueda, who writes about ecofascist Germany and its connections to today, says "society would logically need to be based on hierarchy, racial division, patriarchy, and the principle of survival of the fittest" (Rueda, 2020). Many of the founders of the völkisch movement were heavily invested in far-right politics and were involved in early Nazi organizing. In many ways, the völkisch movement laid the groundwork for the rise of Nazi ideology in the twentieth century (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1996).

The völkisch movement, which is key to understanding past and present ecofascist ideology, is best summed up in the book *How Green Were the Nazis? Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich*. The authors say the following:

Homeland and nature protectionists saw it as their task not only to protect rare plants, endangered animals, and natural monuments, but also to preserve local customs and national traditions, following the dictum 'keep the German people [*Volkstum*] strong and wholesome.' What kept Germans powerful and pure, in turn, was the strength Germans drew from preserving their traditions, monuments, and land. Volk, homeland, and nature were intertwined (Brüggemeier et al., 2005).

It is important to understand the mystical understanding of nature and nationality that early German fascists promoted in order to understand the complexities of Ecofascism, both in terms of fully understanding history and fully understanding the spiritual components of mysticism in ecofascist circles today.

Human/Nature Dichotomy

The environmental mysticism that preoccupied the early ecofascists from the nineteenth and twentieth century was rooted in and justified by the idea (presented as fact) that humans and “nature” are distinct concepts and things. This idea still permeates mainstream environmentalism today, and much of the language used in mainstream environmentalism reflects this. For example, it is difficult to even find the words to express what I mean by “the environment” or “nature” without seemingly cutting out humans. In western society, there is a clear distinction between humans, nature, the built environment, and the natural environment. The western mindset is also notably anthropocentric and views humans as rightfully dominant over nature.

Scholars such as Jeanne Kay have attributed this western mindset largely to the Old Testament’s portrayal of human-nature relationships (Kay, 1989). The Bible clearly states that humans are separate from nature and are divinely tasked by God to rule over it. The biblical worldview believes that humans were divinely appointed to name all the animals on the earth, and are superior to all other life. Two verses from the Bible are frequently referenced to justify human rule over nature. The first, Genesis 1:26-28, states:

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish in the sea, and over the birds in the air, and over the cattle, and over the world animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

Later, in Genesis 9: 2-3, the Bible reads:

The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they

are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.

Moreover, Kay argues that the biblical viewpoint “can be summarized as a belief in nature as a tool of divine justice: beneficent nature is a reward for religious observance, and a deteriorating environment is God’s punishment for idolatry or immorality.” In this framework, humans and nature are separate, humans preside over nature, and nature is used as a tool to maintain God’s rule over humanity.

This distinctive and hierarchal understanding of humans and nature is dangerous and harmful and plays an essential role in justifying historic and contemporary ecofascism. It is popular to believe the false dichotomy of the built environment and the natural environment. This dichotomy is dangerous and was employed in early German ecofascism, as well as ongoing colonial missions in the West. Wilhelm Heinrich Rielh, a student of Arndt, promoted the idea that modernity- what we might today categorize as the “built environment”- is “nature invented by man.” The notion of humans as separate from nature is also used by contemporary fascists. Richard Spencer, an American Neo-Nazi, notably said: “We are a special part of the natural order, being in it and above it. We have the potential to become nature’s steward or its destroyer... The natural world- and our experience of it- is an end in itself” (Rueda, 2020).

Feminist scholars have pointed out the dangers in distinguishing between the built environment and the natural environment. Ecofeminists specifically critique this binary. Ecofeminist Karen Warren explains that ecofeminists “critique rationalism in the Western philosophical tradition and develop views of the ethical, knowing self that do not maintain and perpetuate harmful value dualisms and hierarchies, particularly human-nature ones” (Warren, 2004).

In her paper *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Alison Kafer writes about how this categorization can be exclusionary and dehumanizing to some bodies (Kafer, 2013). Kafer’s understanding of modernity- the built environment- is fundamentally critical of that that Rielh puts forth. Kafer states that “the natural environment is also a built

environment, one shaped by and experienced through assumptions and expectations about gender, sexuality, class, race, and nations.” Essentially, all environments, those “built” and those “natural” are discursively created to some extent.

It is important to recognize the ways in which the socially-constructed “natural environment” has been and continues to be exclusionary to racialized bodies, and in some instances, outright violent toward them. When considering the dangers of the human/nature, built environment/natural environment binaries, Kafer writes about the expulsion of Indigenous Peoples from national parks during their creation. This was done in an effort to make the regions that were governmentally funded national parks seemingly untouched by humans- the national parks were to be seen as pure, entirely natural (which in this framework excluded humans), and mystical. It is important, also, to note that certain bodies have historically been compared to nature in an effort to demean them. For example, Indigenous Peoples, Black people, disabled people, and women have frequently and are frequently compared to animals.

Contemporary Ecofascism

After World War 2, in the 1960s, mainstream western environmentalism began to surface and gain popularity.¹ Mainstream environmentalism is less outwardly fascist than that of nineteenth-century German, and focuses more on environmental preservation in a seemingly (or perhaps falsely) apolitical way. However, the spectre of ecofascist ideology was not thrown out with the Nazi party. Similar ideologies to those boasted by German ecofascists showed up in the rise of mainstream environmentalism as well. Environmental journalist Trisha Patterson (2016) says the following about mainstream environmentalism:

¹ In this work, when I refer to “mainstream environmentalism” I am referring to western, white, or liberal environmentalism. However, it is important to note that this is not the only type of environmentalism that is active today. Many people who are concerned for the environment today are Indigenous environmentalist, environmentalist in the global South, Black environmentalist, or environmentalist who are otherwise driven by environmental justice.

Within a global context, mainstream environmentalism gives a shallow view of the overarching systems that environmentalism falls into. This system intersects between social constructions, cultural norms, economic valuation of natural resources and political will to protect these resources. Within the stream of popular environmentalism, it is hard to separate the water we see from the water we swim in.

While ecofascist ideas were, and are, certainly present in mainstream environmentalism, one can argue that most mainstream environmentalists are not intentionally being malicious or hateful to marginalized communities. This does not, of course, justify the tangible harm these ideologies impose. All that being said, ecofascist ideas introduced by the Nazis do not only exist subtly in mainstream environmentalism. There is a community of environmentalists who proudly boast their blatant hatred of the “other” and aim to cause harm to marginalized human populations. These ecofascists have been gaining traction through community building on the internet through forums such as 4chan and 8chan. Literature regarding ecofascism mainly revolves around the following themes: migration, race, population, disability, and gender.

Overpopulation

One of the main themes that modern ecofascists are preoccupied with is the racist and sexist concept of overpopulation (Dyett & Thomas, 2019). Ecofascists take a Malthusian view of the world, and blame women for overpopulation. A simple definition of Malthusian thought is the belief that

the rate of increase of the population, being geometrical, will tend to exceed the (arithmetical) increase in its means of subsistence, and should therefore be checked, mainly by sexual restraint. This has often been popularly viewed as a proposal to place controls upon marriage (Oxford Dictionary).

According to ecofascists (and Malthusian thought) overpopulation is one of the leading causes of climate change and environmental destruction. Ecofascists therefore put the onus of climate change and environmental destruction on women; more specifically, poor racialized women in the global south (Dyett & Thomas, 2019). The irony of this, of course, is that poor women of colour in the global south are some of the most affected by climate change (Glazebrook, 2011). Malthusians and ecofascists ignore the fact that the global north punches above its weight in terms of consumption, and instead use racialized women as scapegoats. In 2020 the United Nations found that the planet's top 1% of wealthy people contribute over double the amount carbon emissions than the world's poorest 50% of people combined, disproving any claims that poor, racialized women are to blame at all for climate change (Gore, 2020).

Arguably, ecofascists are not only using racialized women as scapegoats, but using the argument of overpopulation as a justification for at best, capitalistic ventures, and at worst, extreme violence. In *Overpopulation Discourse: Patriarchy, Racism, and the Spectre of Ecofascism*, Dyette and Thomas write about the presence of capitalist superstars at a session regarding climate change at the 2014 World Economic Forum. Bill Gates spoke on behalf of the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation. According to Dyette and Thomas,

This multi billionaire repeatedly emphasized the benefit of reducing certain populations, and alluded to this being one option to assist in alleviating our current climate crisis. He maintains that the populations that should be "suppressed" are those poor, Global South countries, and makes no mention of Western populations.

Promoting the idea that poor racialized women in the global south are responsible for climate change is a way for wealthy people from the global north to defer responsibility and perhaps their guilt. Furthermore, wealthy capitalists like Bill and Melinda Gates are then able to continue to benefit from environmental destruction while hiding behind the guise of philanthropy. *Deep Green Resistance* sheds light on these types of philanthropic ventures, succinctly saying that, "policies that act as an excuse for

‘population control’ constructed around a simmering racist meta-narrative: the problem is really that brown people are too stupid and/or too sexual to control themselves” (McBay et al., 2011). It is clearly important that people have agency over their reproduction. Is it, however, truly an agentic decision to not have children if you are being coerced to use birth control under the argument that having children will lead to climatic destruction and human suffering? What should be a deeply personal decision regarding parenthood has become incredibly politicized topic that governments, religions, and NGOs alike have involved themselves in. It is violent to coerce someone not to have children, whether through policy, or norms and discourse.

The concepts of overpopulation and population control have been taken up by self-proclaimed ecofascists to justify extreme acts of violence and murderous rampages over the past decade in more outwardly violent ways as well. The Christchurch New Zealand Mosque shooting in 2019 was done by a self-proclaimed “ethno-nationalist ecofascist” (Forchtner, 2019). The shooter wrote a manifesto titled *The Great Replacement: Towards a New Society We March Ever Forward*. This manifesto talks about overpopulation of “non-Europeans” and his goal to murder people in an effort to address this belief (Forchtner, 2019). Here, we see the ecofascist idea that some people are worthy of life (white people) while others are not (in this case, Muslims). Ecofascism was also the motivator behind the El Paso shootings in 2019 in the United States. The murderer behind this mass shooting also wrote a manifesto outlining his ecofascist beliefs titled *An Inconvenient Truth*, likely referring to Al Gore’s documentary and book on the topic of climate change² (Forchtner, 2019). Present in both manifestos was not only a concern for overpopulation, but a hatred of immigrants, especially racialized migrants. In one case, this hatred was directed toward Muslims while in the other it was directed toward Mexicans.

² I am not implying that Al Gore is an ecofascist, rather I am drawing a connection between the shooter’s racism and his understanding of climate change.

Immigration, migration

Another subject that ecofascists are preoccupied with is migration and immigration, as mentioned above in the previous section regarding the ecofascist shootings. Known-fascist Jared Taylor once spoke to this hatred saying, “how can we [Americans] possibly claim to be fighting for environmental degradation when we import a million or more people every year?” (Rueda, 2020). Ecofascists claim that mass immigration or migration leads to population growth in urban areas, urban sprawl, and environmental destruction (Ross & Bevensee, n.d.). Taylor’s statement also echoes a common phrase in ecofascist discourse surrounding immigration: the idea that immigrants are imported. This is dehumanizing, and will reoccur later in this study when I analyse language used in news articles regarding immigration.

Ecofascists also participate in romantic anti-capitalist hatred of Chinese immigrants, similar to the romantic anti-capitalist hatred of Jewish people by the Nazis and Nazi predecessors. Ecofascists hate capitalism because they associate it with the other, not because of globalization and the evils of environmental destruction and human oppression. Iyko Day explains ecofascist romantic anti-capitalist notions in *The Yellow Plague and Romantic Anticapitalism*,

Romantic anticapitalism is not in fact anticapitalist, but rather its regressive, fetishistic form. It is an ideology that *misunderstands* capitalism as an opposition between the concrete, sensory, natural world on one hand and the abstract, intangible, nonsensory dimension on the other (Day, 2020).

Day also draws comparisons between ecofascist hatred of Chinese immigrants and that of Jewish people. Ecofascists rationalize hatred of immigrants by associating them with the introduction of capitalism and the subsequent environmental destruction. This mirrors the hatred ecofascists had (and continue to have) of Jewish people in early twentieth-century Germany during the *völkisch* era. Ecofascists are morally confused: they claim to hate capitalism when it is associated with Chinese and Jewish people yet

they support the same oppressive structures (racism, ableism, exploitation) that capitalism thrives off of. In order to dismantle capitalism, other oppressive systems must also be dismantled. That being said, it would not serve the ecofascist agenda to dismantle systems of racism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and other such forces.

Gender, Reproduction

The ecofascist movement and its rhetoric are in many ways incredibly patriarchal and misogynistic as well as xenophobic. Aside from its concerning beliefs on population and reproduction, the ecofascist movement is also very concerned with traditional family roles, and traditional masculinity.

There is a long history of misogyny and violence against women within the environmental movement and this is especially apparent in ecofascist circles. It is difficult to enter radical environmental spaces as a woman without experiencing extreme misogyny. Judi Bari, a famous anarchist feminist and leader of *Earth First!* was a long-time recipient of this hatred. Bari worked to combat ecofascist undertones in extreme environmentalism and ecoterrorism, and was met with death and rape threats that targeted the fact that she was a woman. Bari's anti-oppressive work was called "an excrementious piece of eco-femme idiocracy" by angry men in the environmental movement. The following was published in a journal in response to Bari's *Why I am Not a Misanthrope*:

Give us a break, Bari. Behind every aggressive white male stands a pampered female, wheedling, whining, and conniving, clamoring for more comforts and commodities. If you take any group of civilized people and set them down in the jungle with instructions to live like the Guatemalan Quiche, the women will set up such a din of bitching and caterwauling that the men will be forced to pave over the jungle and invent refrigerators and automobiles just to shut them up! (Shantz, 2002).

Exemplified here is an example of the blatant misogyny that permeates deep ecology. It

appears as if radical environmentalism has no place for environmental justice, which is extremely unfortunate. Bari not only worked to find a place for women in deep ecology, but also a place for workers and racialized people. This, in turn, had her essentially kicked out of a movement she had a large hand in starting.

Oddly, food is also a topic area in which ecofascism and misogyny collide. Many ecofascists are vegans or vegetarians and claim that dairy products and eggs are feminized foods (Rueda, 2020). Ecofascists aim to portray the strength of “Aryan men” by eating only plants and being as physically healthy and attractive as possible, and looking down upon those who do eat meat (Rueda, 2020). Meat is seen as feminized, and therefore bad. It is puzzling that something like meat would have to be feminized in order to be criticized in these environmentalist communities, as there are plenty of real problems with the meat industry that do, in fact, warrant criticism. Ironically, there is an entire body of literature connecting feminist thought to that of veganism and vegetarianism.

Going in another direction, it is also interesting to note that ecofascist Ted Kaczynski (the Unabomber) was revered in ecofascist circles (Rueda, 2020). Kaczynski was very open about his hatred for women. Though the term was not used at the time, it is likely that Kaczynski would have been a member of the incel community. He was extremely angry about being a virgin, and he despised feminists and women in the workforce. In his ecofascist manifesto, he stated: “feminists are desperately anxious to prove that women are as strong and as capable as men. Clearly they are nagged by a fear that women may NOT be as strong and as capable as men” (Tron, 2020). Famously, Kaczynski claimed his motivation for the bombing was population control in the name of environmental stewardship.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, ecofascists advocate for population control in the global south. Through population control (code for “control of women’s bodies”) ecofascists want to prevent women, especially racialized women, from having agency over their bodies and reproductive choices. While some conservative environmentalists like Bill Gates might claim they are, in fact, given women more agency over their

reproductive choices through population control initiatives, many ecofascists outright promote sterilization and eugenics (Zimmerman, 2004).

Conclusion

It is important to understand the main tenants of historic ecofascism as well as its current concerns. Contemporary, mainstream western environmentalism in many ways grows from the rotting roots of ecofascism, and it is essential to reckon with these histories. In order to combat ecofascism today, it is necessary to weed out any trace of nationalism, misogyny, racism, imperialism, and xenophobia in contemporary western mainstream environmentalism. Since the news media's coverage of climate change is largely influenced by contemporary western mainstream environmentalism, it is therefore essential to address these problems upstream before this dangerous rhetoric spreads throughout society.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

This thesis is based on an ecofeminist and environmental justice framework. It is important when researching these topics to be critical of aspects of gender, race, class, ability, and other social markers. Ecofeminism and feminist geography take these aspects into consideration. The aim of my work is to create positive social change. In order to create change, it is important to be critical of hegemonic ideas distributed through means like the news media. I believe that an effective method of deconstructing these hegemonic and harmful ideas is through using a feminist lens- both ecofeminist, reproductive justice, and that of environmental justice.

First, I must clarify the position at which I am approaching this research. I am a white woman writing from within the academy, coming from an upper-middle class family. I grew up in Canada, and have had the privilege of citizenship in both Canada and the United States. I have been a reporter and editor for a number of years, and as part of my feminist praxis I think it is necessary to be critical of news media and the discourse it spreads. It is also part of my feminist praxis to care about and work for environmental justice- as the destruction of the earth is fundamentally tied to patriarchy, racism, and other oppressive systems. Broadly, I feel it is my duty as a journalist and as a feminist to help create a more responsible, critical, and just news media. This process begins by deconstructing the problems that currently exist in the news media, specifically in Canada and the United States. Ecofeminism, environmental justice, and reproductive rights frameworks offer tools to deconstruct the problematic ways in which the story of climate change is told in the news.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is an ideology that rose to popularity in the late 1970s into the early 80s. The theoretical framework views the masculinist oppression of women as akin to that of nature. Ecofeminism began as an essentialist idea proposed by Françoise D'Eaubonne that women and nature have something in common: women are essentially

closer to the earth than men. This, of course, was an essentialist notion and later it was criticized and reworked by third wave feminists and intersectional feminists. Ecofeminist Karen Warren explains this, saying

While radical feminists historically have had the most to say about ecofeminism, sometimes claiming that “women are closer to nature than men,” some ecofeminists have worried about the extent to which radical feminism both mystifies women’s experiences by locating women closer to nature than men, and offers ahistorically essentialist accounts of “women’s experiences.” Furthermore, some ecofeminists worry that any view that makes any group of humans closer to nature than any other is conceptually flawed and methodologically suspect: it maintains just the sort of value dualistic and hierarchical thinking that is critiqued by ecofeminism (Warren, 2004).

The core of ecofeminist ideology is not that women are intrinsically connected to nature in a way that men aren’t. Rather, ecofeminism suggests that the powers at be view women and the earth both as submissive, something to be dominated and exploited. This is not to say that women and nature share some common essence, but that the forces of patriarchy aim to demean both. Ecofeminism rejects binaries, including those of sex and gender.

That being said, ecofeminism recognizes and values the many ways in which women have been socially placed closer to the earth- whether that be through working the land, keeping seeds, or practicing traditional medicines. “Human beings, and particularly women, are not ‘embodied’ to nature. We are not living symbols of this esoteric ‘nature,’ rather we are ‘embedded’ in it” (Williams, 2018). The ideology is at its core anti-imperial and anti-military. Famed ecofeminist Vandana Shiva speaks to this in her book *Ecofeminism*, saying

wherever women acted against ecological destruction or/and the threat of atomic annihilation, they immediately became aware of the connection between patriarchal violence against women, other people and nature, and that: in denying this patriarchy we are loyal to future generations and to life and this planet itself. We have a deep and particular understanding of this both through our natures and our experiences as women... (Shiva & Mies, 2014)

Ecofeminism is an accessible theory, and often emerges in culture through the work of speculative fiction writers like Ursula K. Le Guin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler who, according to ecofeminist Cara Williams,

use science fiction and ecofeminism as a thought experiment to explore how we grapple with our relationship with nature. These authors turn to utopia to hypothesize about the quintessentially symbiotic relationship we might have with our environment. They ask their readers to ponder what an environment would look like to demand respect from its inhabitants (Williams, 2018).

In this way, ecofeminism can be used as a tool to reimagine a just world: a world where humans, non-human animals, and the earth are all healthy and harmonious.

I am working under an ecofeminist framework for this study since I aim to take into account the exploitation of the earth and I aim to do this in a feminist way that focuses on how women and other marginalized peoples are impacted. It is important to centre the voices of women in the field of environmentalism. I am drawn to the anti-military, anti-imperialist nature of ecofeminism, as this lends itself well to my thesis. Ecofeminism has led me to develop my thinking on colonial and patriarchal military violence, the violence of borders, corporate violence, and the violence of land

privatization. These topics are all present in the news media's coverage of climate change, and will be analyzed through an ecofeminist lens.

Environmental Justice

Another theoretical lens I employed in my research is that of environmental justice. Environmental justice rose to popularity as a movement alongside ecofeminism in the early 1980s. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), environmental justice is

the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work. (EPA, 2020)

The environmental justice movement was largely established by its "father" Robert E. Bullard. Bullard conceptualized the notion of environmental racism, the systemic connection between racialized communities and environmental destruction. Environmental racism often leads to premature death, due to poor air quality, water contamination, and chemical fumes. Environmental justice rejects mainstream, western environmentalism. Rather the "grassroots groups challenge the 'business-as-usual' environmentalism that is generally practiced by the more privileged wildlife-and conservation-oriented groups. The focus of activists of color and their constituents reflects their life experiences of social, economic, and political disenfranchisement"(Bullard, 1993).

According to environmental activist and scholar David Schlosberg, there are three main tenets of the environmental justice movement. Environmental justice focuses on fair distribution of resources: be that water, food, space, or clean air. The movement/ideology also calls for the “recognition of the diversity of the participants and experiences in affected communities, and participation in the political processes which create and manage environmental policy”(Schlosberg, 2004).

Environmental justice promotes the involvement of diverse communities through its fostering of grassroots movements. The environmental justice movement is headed by racialized communities, often communities living through environmental racism. Bullard spoke to this, saying:

An environmental revolution is taking shape in the United States. This revolution has touched communities of color from New York to California and from Florida to Alaska - anywhere where African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans live and comprise a majority of the population. Collectively, these Americans represent the fastest growing segment of the population in the United States. They are also the groups most at risk from environmental problems (Bullard, 1993).

I have employed an environmental justice framework in this research in an effort to consider the dangerous, tangible effects of climate change. Writing from the safety of the academy and my relative privilege, it is important to keep the real-life threats of climate change for racialized communities at front of mind. Environmental justice aims to centre the experiences and voices of those who experience the harshest effects of climate change, and is therefore an essential framework for discourse analysis regarding the environment.

Reproductive Justice

The third and final body of theory that my research is influenced by is that of reproductive justice. The field of reproductive justice was established by Black women, namely Loretta J. Ross in 1994. Reproductive justice circulates around one's choice to have a child, not have a child, and one's ability to raise a child. According to Ross and historian Rickie Solinger:

At the heart of reproductive justice is this claim: all fertile persons and persons who reproduce and become parents require a safe and dignified context for these most fundamental human experiences. Achieving this goal depends on access to specific, community based resources including high-quality health care, housing and education, a living wage, a healthy environment, and a safety net for when those things fail (Ross & Solinger, 2017).

Specifically stated in this definition of reproductive justice is access to a healthy environment. In this way, reproductive justice has a direct connection to environmental justice. Furthermore, Ross explains that reproductive justice is "linked directly to the conditions in her community – and these conditions are not just a matter of individual choice and access" (L. Ross, 2007). Reproductive justice moves beyond a rights framework, and examines other social factors, such as social coercion to not reproduce. Ross and Solinger say:

Many politicians and ordinary people still disapprove of young people, poor people, people of colour, single women, immigrants, and disabled people, among others, engaging in sexually pleasurable activities, especially if these activities lead to procreation (L. J. Ross & Solinger, 2017).

This understanding of reproduction is essential when deconstructing ecofascist rhetoric. Ecofascists attack people for having children, especially poor and racialized people. This would lead to eugenics, and the forced sterilization of women. In today's news media coverage of the climate crisis, there is a large push for women (largely in the global south) to use contraceptives in order to "prevent climate change". While it is important that everyone have access to contraceptives, it is also important to analyse the potential social pressures to not have children that these narratives are producing. People should have access to contraceptives because it is just, not because it will serve the climate. The blame the media puts on women in the global south for having children is misplaced and dangerous.

Conclusion

I have used the theoretical frameworks of reproductive justice, environmental justice, and ecofeminism to inform my analyses of the news media's coverage of climate change because these ideologies understand interlocking systems. Each of these theories offers important and unique insight into racialization, gender, class, discourse, and environment. When analyzing the news media's coverage of climate change, it is important to identify harmful hegemonic ideas regarding these topics. Ecofeminism, environmental justice, and reproductive justice allow me the tools to deconstruct these harmful ideas, and offer news, more just insights and visions of the world.

Chapter 5: Findings: Ecofascist rhetoric in the news

In my analysis of news articles that contain ecofascist rhetoric, some common themes emerge. Namely, news media and adjacent media that cover climate change in problematic ways tend to focus on population, immigration, and Covid-19. Within these three categories, themes of gender, race, disease, and nationalism emerge frequently. Throughout the selected stories, journalists frequently perpetuate the myth of overpopulation and its supposed contribution to climate change and scarcity. Population concerns also tend to be associated with immigration. Another theme that has been very popular in 2020-21 is the impacts of Covid-19 on the environment. The “we are the virus” sentiment has been reflected in the news media’s coverage of the pandemic as a sort of (unnecessary) “silver lining” angle to the deadly virus. In the following chapter, I have broken down my findings into three categories: population, Covid-19, and immigration. It is important to note that while I have divided these into three categories, the rhetoric used in covering these stories is all influenced by ecofascist ideology. Furthermore, many of the discursive themes within these categories work with and through each other. It is impossible to completely isolate the themes of gender, immigration, population, and disease- and it is important to consider the complex relationship these themes have with one another. Nevertheless, Table 1 depicts the frequency of the following themes in the climate change news stories I analyzed.

Table 1. News media depiction of climate change

Population
<i>Saving the planet by not having any kids (BBC, 2018)</i>
<i>Billboards in Vancouver raise awareness of overpopulation (Newswire, 2020)</i>
<i>Birth control and books can slow down climate change (Vox, 2020)</i>
Immigration

<i>Immigration may make net-zero harder (Financial Times, 2021)</i>
<i>Climate refugees? Biden executive order wants study on resettling those 'displaced' by climate change (Fox, 2021)</i>
Covid-19
<i>Dolphins return[ing] to Italy's coast amid coronavirus lockdown: 'Nature just hit the reset button' (Global News, 2020)</i>
<i>People in India can see the Himalayas for the first time in 'decades,' as the lockdown eases air pollution (CNN, 2020)</i>
<i>Pollution in China falls during coronavirus outbreak (CNN, 2020)</i>

Population

In 2018, the BBC published an article accompanying a video featured in their *BBC Stories* department (Devlin, 2018). In the video, titled *Saving the planet by not having any kids*, a woman speaks about how she feels she is being “selfless” by choosing to not have children for the greater good of the environment. In fact, the woman claims that she realized “the best thing I can do for the environment is not to have any children” (Devlin, 2018). It is important to recognize that the woman in this interview has the right to do what she wants with her body and to choose to not have kids. There is nothing, of course, morally wrong with choosing to not have children, and it is absolutely not the *role* of women to have children. I do not wish to imply any essentialist notions in my critique of this woman’s refusal to bear children. That being said, the implication of her reasoning for not having children - that it is selfish and environmentally destructive - is rooted in ecofascist ideas. The video goes on to say that “having kids in the first place creates a resource consuming person. That’s not me saying that no one should have kids but...it’s kind of a fact”(Devlin, 2018). She describes people who choose to have children as “broody” and claims she would stifle her own “broodiness” to avoid “contributing to a

global population” (Devlin, 2018). The woman’s depiction of women as “broody” is an example of women being compared to animals, in this case poultry. The woman featured in this video is promoting the scarcity myth in her stating the “fact” (it is not a fact) that the world is overpopulated. While the woman speaks in a voiceover about scarcity, a video plays of apples being eaten- implying there is not enough food to sustain the world’s human population. This interview promotes Malthusian beliefs regarding reproduction, global population, and food supply.

The fact that the BBC, a news source, published this video is very dangerous. Look no further than the comment section and blatant ecofascist rhetoric will be apparent. The top comment, posted by someone accompanied with a “Pepe the frog” profile picture (a well-known white supremacist symbol) writes “we should start this campaign for people to stop having children in the countries with the highest birth rates in them not the UK.” Another person sarcastically commented “Saving the planet for the Afghans and the sub-Saharan Africans, because their level of environmental stewardship is so patently superior to the developed West- you go girl!” Here, extreme, blatant racism is intermingled with misogyny. The commenter is both spewing racist rhetoric about the global south and mocking the subject of the video’s right to choose not to bear children. The “You go girl” portion of the comment is mocking the concept of women’s empowerment while the beginning of the comment is atrociously racist.

Obviously, the rhetoric surrounding population growth is inextricably linked to rhetoric around women’s bodies.³ Namely, the bodies of racialized women in the global south. The idea of overpopulation contributing to climate change was the focus of a recent ad campaign in downtown Vancouver and the subject of an article written by Newswire (Cision, 2020) titled *Billboards in Vancouver raise awareness of overpopulation*. The very title of this news article validates the myth of overpopulation by saying the billboards are “raising awareness”- one does not raise awareness for a myth. According

³ It is important to note that not only women are child bearers. That being said, when ecofascists talk about population control, they almost exclusively talk about women. One can assume that ecofascists are not aware, or do not care, that it is exclusionary to refer to birth givers as “women” exclusively.

to this article, the campaign boasts billboards that read: “What’s growth doing for you?” “Overpopulation: we’re all solving it,” “Traffic congestion starts at conception” and “Thank you for shrinking your carbon footprint” (Cision, 2020). These phrases accompany images of people engaging in protected sex.

These ads work under the assumption that individual human lives are nothing more than traffic congesters, and the billboards unquestionably assert that overpopulation is, in fact, causing climate change. The article does not challenge this notion, and instead praises it saying, “conversations fostered by *One Planet, One Child* campaign will bring better information to light- addressing the belief that more people are needed for the sake of economic growth” (Cision, 2020). The article follows this statement up with an anti-immigrant quote by an organizer, Erika Arias, who says, “We don't need to make or import more people to stoke economic growth; an economy's size needs only to match the population, just big enough to meet our needs” (Cision, 2020). This language of “importing people” appears in this article, harkening back to Richard Spencer’s quote on environmentalism and immigration. This depiction of immigrants is dehumanizing and demeaning, and views migrants as surplus commodities rather than humans deserving of good lives and safe travel. Here, we can see how the discourse around overpopulation is frequently tied not only to adding more humans to the world, but moving people around. It is unclear what exactly Arias and others who believe in overpopulation are concerned with when it comes to immigration or population. If they are truly concerned with the idea that people should have fewer children, then how does the physical movement of pre-existing humans impact this?

A less-insidious but nonetheless problematic article regarding birth rate reduction can be found on Vox’s technology news-oriented website, the Verge. In March of 2020, the Verge posted an article titled *Birth control and books can slow down climate change* (Calma, 2020). The article claims that increasing girls’ access to education can be as effective at mitigating climate change as solar panels (there is no mention as to how many solar panels) (Calma, 2020). The Verge article is reporting on a report done by the nonprofit Project Drawdown, which is run by wealthy ecocapitalist Paul Hawken. The

article mentions and condemns the racist history of population control, and quotes a spokesperson for Project Drawdown who clearly states these findings should not be used to suppress populations of people (Calma, 2020). That being said, the article mentions this point of view as a side note, and nonetheless promotes the dangerous idea that women having children is a climate problem that must be solved (Calma, 2020).

Interestingly, in all of these articles addressing climate, there is some air of sheepishness and defensiveness that comes through to the reader. Often, the people being quoted will say things like “a surprising number of journalists, elected officials, and the public are unaware the world is overpopulated or uncomfortable talking about it” (Cision, 2020). Anna, the woman in the BBC interview, says not having children is “selfless. Although that makes me sound like a real prick so don’t put that [in]. Cut!” (Devlin, 2018). It seems that people know to some extent that these ideas are harmful, but choose to air their thoughts nonetheless. This degree of self-awareness is troubling. If the journalists covering these stories and the people they interview are aware enough of the dangers of overpopulation rhetoric to the point that they say it in an interview and then choose to include it in the final copy of the article, why do they include it at all?

Immigration

The topic of immigration seems to find its way into many of the news articles regarding birth rates and population control. This makes sense due to the fact that both “issues” tend to revolve around the bodies and lives of racialized people. Some news articles and op-eds seem to focus solely on the relationship between immigration and climate change.

An op-ed in the Financial Times from early 2021 titled *Immigration may make net-zero harder* is a glaring example of ecofascist rhetoric in news media when it comes to stances on immigration (Grubel & Grady, 2021). The article comes as a response to Canadian prime Minister Justin Trudeau announcing new carbon taxes implemented to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to keep Canada on track with its agreements in the Paris Accord. The writer claims that immigration and a thus increasing Canadian

population will make the Paris Accord goals harder to reach by the set date. Rather than focusing on implementing taxes to curb emissions, the writer turns the focus of the conversation to immigration (and population increase). The article's claims are essentially summarized in one paragraph, where it is stated that:

The size of this effect created by all of Canada's immigrants is determined by the average emissions in their country of origin as well as the numbers of immigrants from each of these countries. Using CO2 emissions data for 2016 from the World Bank, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship data on the sources of immigrants, we estimate that in 2017 the increase in global emissions was 11.33 metric tons per immigrant and that the 286,000 immigrants admitted in that year added a total of 3.25 million metric tons to global emissions and will add 97.4 million more metric tons over the remaining 30 years of their assumed lifespan. These figures are just for the arrived in 2017, but they also are relevant for immigrants arriving in future years in numbers that according to the latest government plans will increase substantially (Grubel & Grady, 2021).

In the article's summation, the writer makes his final claim that the burden of paying higher taxes for said increased emissions will fall on non-immigrant Canadians due to the fact that immigrants tend to have lower incomes than non-immigrant Canadians. Grubel argues that this may result in politicians eliminating the carbon tax and there no longer being an incentive for individuals to reduce their emissions, thus leading to greater emissions and environmental destruction. He claims the:

problem can be avoided, however, if the government sets much lower target numbers for immigration and focuses more on admitting

workers with needed skills rather than dependents and family members (Grubel & Grady, 2021).

This line dangerously implies that power and safety are finite resources, which only non-immigrant Canadians deserve. This quote also vilifies “dependents and families”- immigrant women and children.

In recent years, there has been an increase in attention in the media to topics of climate refugees: people who are and will be forcefully displaced due to natural disasters, drought, famine, and war brought about by climate change. Unsurprisingly, climate refugees are and will be coming from underserved countries that have not contributed to climate change to the same extent that Western, wealthy countries have. Climate refugees are frequently racialized- due to colonial exploitation of countries in the global south. In the beginning months of the Biden presidency, Fox News published a news report surrounding the topic of climate refugees, and how Biden’s immigration policies will interact with this relatively new phenomenon in the coming years (Shaw, 2021). In covering this story, Fox News includes a number of ideas influenced by ecofascist rhetoric, mainly a hatred and othering of immigrants. When highlighting the benefits of Biden’s executive order to allow more refugees, the article points to the report’s inclusion of a “discussion of the international security implications of climate-related migration” in addition to the “options for protection and resettlement of individuals displaced directly or indirectly from climate change” (Shaw, 2021).

When discussing the ‘negative’ implications of Biden’s executive order, the article focuses on Republican critiques of allowing a greater number of migrants into the country. The article amplifies such critiques as put forth by a group of over two dozen Republican senators, who wrote a letter first obtained by Fox News. The Fox article concludes by quoting two passages from said letter. First:

We remind you that so-called ‘climate refugees’ are not included in the definition of ‘refugee’ at Section 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and

Nationality Act, a definition which is consistent with U.S. obligations under relevant international instruments (Shaw, 2021).

This is immediately followed by a passage from this letter, saying:

The Biden administration must not seek to expand this definition through administrative action, nor should it participate in the attempts by certain activist groups to expand the traditional and legal understanding of 'refugee' (Shaw, 2021).

The article finishes with these back-to-back quotations, and offers no further analysis. Comments are displayed directly underneath this article, which also boast anti-immigration sentiments. Few of these comments, however, seem to be influenced by ecofascist rhetoric. Rather, the commenters seem to deny the existence of climate change altogether and view it as a hoax to justify increased immigration.

Interestingly, anti-immigration hate speech is also present in the top comments of the BBC's video *Saving the planet by not having any kids* (Devlin, 2018). "Don't have children to save the planet. We need immigrants to fill the vacant jobs! It's all so tiresome," writes one. Another says, "If this is about saving the planet, why are we importing people who have large families to replace us?" One clearly white-supremacist comment, reads "if blue eyes still exist in 500 years from now, I'll be amazed."

In publishing this video without any critical analysis to accompany it, the BBC is spreading ecofascist rhetoric. Furthermore, in letting the comment section go unchecked, they are allowing hateful messages to disseminate to the public who view their content. Again, the comments under the BBC video as well as the Fox article demonstrate how xenophobia, racism, and misogyny interact with each other.

Covid-19

The news media's coverage of Covid-19 cannot be ignored when discussing ecofascist rhetoric in the North American news media. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic presented itself as the perfect storm for ecofascists to spread their corrupted ideas about climate change and humanity. With mass, widespread death, cities shutting down, air travel halting, and increasing wealth disparity, the social sphere created by the pandemic is the ideal circumstances for circulating ecofascist discourse.

Perhaps the most obvious place that ecofascist rhetoric shines through was the news media's coverage of wildlife seemingly taking over, or taking back, land (largely urban landscapes) previously occupied by humans. One example is Global News' coverage of *Dolphins return[ing] to Italy's coast amid coronavirus lockdown: 'Nature just hit the reset button'* (Wray, 2020). This article, published on March 18th 2020 (when Italy was taking a hard hit from the virus and large numbers of people were dying daily) tells about numerous reports of animals returning to nature where they had previously been seemingly pushed out by human activity. Global's article included snippets of social media posts:

"Ducks in the fountains in Rome, Venice canals have now clean water full of fishes. Air pollution dropped," they wrote. "Nature is reclaiming its spaces during quarantine in Italy" (Wray, 2020).

CNN also covered stories about 'nature healing' in the wake of human suffering and death. One CNN news headline in April read *People in India can see the Himalayas for the first time in 'decades,' as the lockdown eases air pollution* (Picheta, 2020). The CNN article explains that since the lockdown took effect in India, air quality has improved immensely. Alongside a picture of a view of the mountain range from an Indian urban view reads a selected tweet saying "what nature really is and how we screwed it up" (Picheta, 2020). A single sentence, the second to last in the article, informs the reader of the 6 000 cases and 178 deaths that had occurred at that time. This is shortly followed by

a line explaining that Mount Everest has closed its hiking paths due to the pandemic shutdowns (Picheta, 2020). The placement of information in this news story is a stark reminder of the value of human life in the media compared to other, more stimulating stories like mountain ranges and wealthy adventurers changing their Everest expedition plans to accommodate a global tragedy.

CNN covered a similar story in March on the news, with a story about air pollution decreasing in China (CNN, 2020). The story focused largely on Wuhan, and showed satellite imagery of air quality improving over the course of the shutdown. The reporter spoke about how this was a positive change, saying, "There's nothing business as usual about a global epidemic that has claimed thousands of lives. But in the short term, this public health crisis for humans may actually be helping the environment" (CNN, 2020).

It should be noted that many of the claims in these types of stories were debunked and proven to be fake news (Allison, 2020). Humans are not, in fact, the virus that was preventing dolphins from returning to Italy's coast (Allison, 2020). There has also been some disagreement as to whether the short-term greenhouse gas emissions will impact the climate long-term or not. Most of the stories that mention this, however, point to China's role in global GHG emissions, and claim that this nation in particular will need to continue to curb emissions after the pandemic. Many articles claim that this is unlikely, and China will increase emissions in the post-pandemic world (CNN, 2020). There is no mention in any of these articles as to how the United States, another mass polluter, plans to curbs its greenhouse gas emissions in the post-pandemic world.

That being said, even if these stories were true (and some likely are), their depiction would nonetheless still be problematic. Motive is important in life and in news. The notion that humans are not only separate from nature, by the enemy of nature, is rooted in ideas of ecofascism. Ecofascism views urbanization and industrialization as evil things that are associated with environmental destruction and ethnic minorities.

Adding insult to the injury is that much of the rhetoric surrounding Covid-19 and environmental resurgence is the fact that so many people died (and are dying at the time this is being written) due to this virus. It is also key to understand that the virus *does*

discriminate- or it *does* affect some people more than others. Coronavirus is not the great equalizer it is portrayed to be by the news media. Namely, Covid-19 is deadly for disabled people, racialized people, and older adults.

This can be seen in CBC's animated short film *King Covid* (Keating, 2020). This short film is narrated by King Covid, the sentient, principled, and purposeful virus. King Covid claims he is not so evil after all, and that humans are, in fact, the deadliest animal- seemingly implying we deserved this pandemic (Keating, 2020). Throughout the film, the narrator explains how pandemics throughout history have, in fact, had a net positive effect for humanity. He claims that the Black plague (and also somehow ties in the AIDS crisis) actually brought about the Renaissance, and made humanity more just and egalitarian (Keating, 2020). Because of previous pandemics such as the Black plague, imperialism was able to happen- in this way the film is implying that imperialism was a good and honorable thing that had a net positive effect on the world. The virus also claims that he and his kind benefit humanity because they make us 'stronger' as a species. This has a strange "survival of the fittest" eugenicist undertone to it which seems especially distasteful considering disabled people are most likely to die from the current pandemic we are undergoing.

The film also covers the topic of climate change. King Covid explains that for the first time since industrialization, humans are slowing down and the world is becoming more quiet (Keating, 2020). There is less pollution, and nature is having a comeback. The collage style of animation depicts the Earth healing and smog dissipating. King Covid tells the viewer that we have a choice as to how we proceed after this pandemic, positioning this global health disaster as an environmental 'reset button'. His final line is "if we survive all this" (meaning climate change) "just remember who gets all the credit" (Keating, 2020).

Chapter 6: Discussion

Population

The articles regarding population demonstrate a concerning trend in public thought regarding climate change. The BBC news story exemplifies many problematic notions regarding population, reproduction, scarcity, and race. The short video lacks nuance, and is dangerous in its current form. First of all, it is essential to understand that I am not accusing the woman featured in the video to be an ecofascist. She is likely just absorbing the messages the media and wealthy elites are spreading about population and the scarcity myth. It is also essential to understand that this woman should, of course, be able to make any decision about her body and her womb that she finds fit. I am in no way implying that in order to resist the spectre of ecofascism, one must have children.

All that being said, the virtuous nature in which the woman in question describes her decision to obtain from having children is problematic and echoes ecofascist talking points. She claims it is 'just a fact' that the world is overpopulated, and claims that people who do have children are, in fact, selfish for doing so. This shows a degree of internalized misogyny: it is women's fault for the climate crisis, women are selfish for wanting to reproduce. There is also racism intermingled in the statement that having children is selfish. For many racialized women throughout history and today, the option of having children was taken away. This option may be taken away through forced sterilization efforts, forced labour, unfair living conditions, or social pressure to 'not be selfish.' For some people, having children is a radical act: when one's reproductive choices have been removed for so long, making the choice to have children is not selfish. In some cases, having children is the opposite of selfish. It is a radical act of resistance against an oppressive, white-supremacist world.

Similar racist and misogynist tones are present in the story revolving around the billboard campaign in Vancouver. This story, similar to the BBC story, presents people

simply as carbon emitters. Furthermore, the article presents human lives simply as venues for economic growth, and refers to immigrants as things that are “imported” for economic growth. The article dehumanizes people, largely racialized people, in doing so. Once again, this article puts the onus of mitigating climate change on women, rather than on major polluters and industries.

The same can be said about the Vox article regarding how “birth control and books” can curb the climate crisis. Of course, women should be given the tools to make decisions about their reproduction. This is without question. It is problematic, however, when this agency is framed as a way to combat climate change. Empowering women has been proven to combat climate change in a myriad of ways: when women are empowered to take care of their land they tend to do so more sustainably than corporations, and when women are in leadership positions they tend to take a more holistic approach to policy-making. It is unfortunate that the conversation about empowering women and its relationship to climate change ends at reproduction. This only acts to further establish the notion that women exist only to bear children, or to not bear children. Articles like this are sending the message that women should have agency over their bodies not because it is their inherent right, but because it is important for the climate. This takes the blame of climate change off of wealthy elites who produce the most emissions, and puts on racialized, impoverished women. This message promotes that idea that the worst thing a racialized woman can do is have babies. Ross and Solinger speak to the problematic notion of overpopulation, saying:

the number of people on the earth is far less problematic than the irresponsible consumption patterns of people, corporations and the military industrial complex- a question of quality, not quantity (Ross & Solinger, 2017).

They also speak to the importance of considering race when discussing climate change, population, and reproduction:

...reproductive justice activists insist that mainstream environmental and reproductive rights movements incorporate a racial analysis because without a consideration of the racialized geographies of environmental degradation and the lack of resources in communities of colour to resist and combat the impacts of environmental toxicities on health, both movements are limiting their goals and missing their mark (Ross & Solinger, 2017).

There is a strongly-held belief amongst the public, disseminated in the media, that the world is over-populated and overconsuming. This is simply a myth. While there is undoubtedly people who are left without adequate resources for life, it is due to unjust distribution of resources, not a lack of resources to begin with. Most of the world is able to produce more resources than necessary to feed the current world's population (Rosenthal, 2010). For example, between 1950 and 2000, the "production of wealth" in the USA grew 38 times faster than the population (Rosenthal, 2010). As the climate crisis worsens and the population grows, it is likely people will continue to link the two events and begin to turn to Malthusian beliefs. As mentioned before, "Malthus argued that population always grows faster than the ability of the land to produce food, so that hunger and poverty can never be eliminated. Moreover, the poor should not be helped because that only causes them to multiply and increase the 'financial burden' on the middle and upper classes" (Rosenthal, 2010). The west has a very long and destructive history with Malthusian beliefs- including forced sterilization practices borrowed by Nazis- and these practices should not continue to be justified in the name of climate change prevention.

In the early twentieth century, the idea of overpopulation was used to justify population control of impoverished, racialized Americans living in the south who suffered from a disease called pellagra. Wealthy elites in America, including the Rockefellers, hired a Malthusian biologist named Charles Davenport to use bunk science to justify essentially letting people die. Davenport made the case that pellagra was a hereditary

disease, rather than a B6 deficiency. This led to inaction on treating people afflicted with pellagra, “on the basis that treating ‘pellagrins’ would only allow them to survive to breed more ‘pellagrins’” (Rosenthal, 2010).

Racialized Americans have also been subjected to population control through sterilization initiatives. Sterilization took place in underserved and racialized communities to prevent “crime, idiocracy, and imbecility” (Rosenthal, 2010). Davenport’s sterilization law was used by the Nazis in 1933 to develop the *Nazi Act for Averting Descendants Afflicted with Hereditary Diseases*. This led to horrendous murders in death camps, which many ecofascists have since openly praised for its role in population control. Rosenthal explains that “when the full horror of the Nazi genocide was exposed after the war, talk of racial purity was discredited. Undeterred, the American eugenics movement reinvented itself as a campaign against ‘overpopulation’” (Rosenthal, 2010). This mythological discourse of “overpopulation” is still circulating today.

In the mid-twentieth century, Puerto Rican women underwent sterilization initiatives by the American government. This was supposedly meant to alleviate poverty as the myth of scarcity was promoted by American elites. However, “Puerto Rico’s lower birth rate did not reduce poverty, but it did protect the profits flowing to US corporations. In 1997, Richard T. Ravenholt, a population officer for the US Agency for International Development, stated that if US goals were met, one-fourth of the world’s women would be sterilized to prevent revolutions that would interfere with multinational corporations’ financial success” (Rosenthal, 2010).

Population control has been used throughout American history to control what is seemingly a threat. What was once justified as a way to control “crime, idiocracy, and imbecility” is now seen as a way to control climate change. The American empire has, throughout history, consistently promoted its problematic morality through sterilization and population control. It is important to be wary of this today in the more palatable form it takes. We must remember that the world is not overpopulated- people are underserved. This can be remedied through a just distribution of resources, not by

reducing populations of marginalized peoples and controlling the bodies of marginalized women.

It is also important to note, as Jane Kirby argues in her book *Fired up about Reproductive Rights*, that reproductive justice and environmental justice should be allies, not enemies. Kirby states:

Environmental mega-projects leave behind toxic contaminants with reproductive health impacts... environmental violence must be addressed as a reproductive justice issue. For example, in Indigenous communities near mining, drilling, or logging sites, the [Native Youth Sexual Health] network cites evidence of increased breast milk contamination, disproportionate rates of cancer in reproductive organs, an increase in developmental delays and learning disabilities in children, and an increase in miscarriages and stillbirths (Kirby, 2017).

Instead of creating a discourse that attacks reproductive justice, the news media should be focusing its coverage on environmental injustices that are harmful to reproductive health.

Immigration

Discussions of immigration, like population, are intrinsically tied to discussions of racialized peoples' bodies and agency over their own bodies: how and when they reproduce and how and when they move throughout the world. Ecofascists oppose racialized people having agency over such matters, and so they construct connections between agency of racialized people and climate change. This occurs even in instances when racialized people likely do not have much agency in their lives- instances such as forced migration. Several of the articles I analyzed regarding immigration and climate change contained ecofascist undertones.

The Financial Times article, for example, boasted the idea that immigrants being in a “developed” country will increase GHG emissions of said country. Thus, argues the article, countries like Canada and the United States will have a more difficult time reaching their carbon emissions goals agreed upon during the Paris Accord. Firstly, this seems to be more about nationalism than it does environmentalism. Proponents of this belief are essentially arguing that people should stay put in whatever nation they are born in, and that each nation should pay the same for GHG emissions. This is a falsity, since some nations are more responsible for GHG emissions than others. If it is difficult for Canada to reach its emission goals, it should invest in a green economy, rather than keeping out immigrants.

Secondly, this argument also exists under the false pretence that climate change mitigation begins and ends at the nation state level. If Canada is able to hit its target GHG emissions level but, say, China (somewhere that a lot of immigrants come from) is not, that does not change the overall amount of GHG in the atmosphere, and does not then, actually prevent climate change. This is simple logic, and is likely not lost on people who oppose immigration. It begs the question, then, if these people actually care about GHG emissions, or if they only truly care about nationalism, competition between nations, and racism/xenophobia toward the ‘other.’

In the Fox News article, the reporter alludes to the safety implications of allowing climate refugees into the United States. Fox does this by strategically mentioning how Biden’s executive order will include a “discussion of the international security implications of climate-related migration.” The very presence of this line in the article indicates that there are valid national security implications of allowing climate refugees into the country. This is the only point in the article in which this executive order is praised: when it is considering potential risks of allowing climate refugees. The rest of the article questions whether or not climate refugees should, in fact be considered valid refugees at all. This article is dangerous. It validates the fact that climate change is real while simultaneously denying protection to those most affected by it. While it is not said in the article, it is important to note that climate refugees are by and large racialized

people from underserved nations. Validating the existence of the climate crisis while denying help to those most affected (and least responsible) is ecofascism, and must be critiqued.

Much of the ecofascist rhetoric in the media surrounding immigration is based on problematic ideas reflecting lifeboat ethics and again, myths surrounding scarcity. Professor of human ecology Garrett Hardin coined the term 'lifeboat ethics' in 1974 to justify *The Case Against Helping the Poor* (Hardin, 1974). Hardin asks the question "does everyone on earth have an equal right to an equal share of its resources?" His answer is no. He states that "if we divide the world crudely into rich nations and poor nations, two thirds of them are desperately poor, and only one third comparatively, with the United States the wealthiest of all" (Hardin, 1974). Hardin uses the metaphor of a lifeboat to justify this unjust distribution of resources, claiming that fair distribution is impossible. He argues against the environmentalist metaphor of a spaceship, saying:

Since we all share life on this planet, they argue, no single person or institution has the right to destroy, waste, or use more than a fair share of its resources. But does everyone on earth have an equal right to an equal share of its resources? The spaceship metaphor can be dangerous when used by misguided idealists to justify suicidal policies for sharing our resources through uncontrolled immigration and foreign aid. In their enthusiastic but unrealistic generosity, they confuse the ethics of a spaceship with those of a lifeboat (Hardin, 1974).

Working with Hardin's metaphor, lifeboats are wealthy nations filled with wealthy people, while the water surrounding the boat is full of poor people from poor nations. Hardin claims that the wealthy people in the boat do not have an inherent responsibility to help the people drowning in the water (Hardin, 1974). He justifies this using the myth of scarcity (Hardin, 1974). Hardin claims that there is not enough space in

the boat for everyone to survive, and that in trying to save the people from the water, everyone will die due to the boat sinking (Hardin, 1974).

This is how the media portrays immigration in relation to climate change. The world is thankfully, however, not a life boat with finite space that is quickly filling up. Rather, there is a wealth of resources (and literal space) to provide for everyone- just an unjust distribution of said resources. When looking at this from an immigration lens, many claim that immigrants will “use up” the resources from nations they immigrate to. Often, this is used in terms of jobs: the fear that jobs will be taken away from “deserving” and given to the “undeserving.” In terms of climate change, people claim that immigrants will use up the country’s allocated GHG emissions, all while putting the burden of paying carbon taxes on those who were born in the country. This is racist and based on the false premise of scarcity. If the wealthiest people (also those who most contribute to climate change) were to cut their carbon emissions, there would be no need for normal people to do so. Furthermore, if we transitioned to a just, clean economy there would be jobs for all, and lower national emissions.

If society were to move beyond concrete ideas of nation states, borders, and citizenship, it would be easier to both migrate and cut carbon emissions. This, however, would not serve to benefit the wealthy elite who profit off of war, exploitation, and extraction. Therefore, these ideas are not promoted as a valid path forward in the media. Rather, we are consistently fed the lie that scarcity is real, racialized people are to blame for a lack of resources, and some people (people already facing oppression) should be required to ‘pay’ for climate change while others should not by virtue of their social location. All of these ideas are rooted in racism, xenophobia, white supremacy, and lend themselves well to ecofascism.

Covid-19

Much of the news media’s coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic contained ecofascist *romantic anti-capitalist* undertones (Day, 2020). One CNN story covered earlier in this study begins by depicting a pre-pandemic Chinese city with “thick smog blanketing

the skyline” as oppose to a Chinese city undergoing a pandemic, which has “blue skies.” Satellite images show a drop in February after a quarter million people were quarantined. This news story does not shy away from frequently mentioning how China is a huge polluter, and how the pandemic has led to a 200 million tonne drop in CO2 in the atmosphere, which would otherwise be released by Chinese citizens. The story quotes Greenpeace saying this is probably temporary, as China will inevitably “ramp up production to boost their economy.” “This brief period of clean air should be a wakeup call” for China. As aforementioned, this news piece finishes by saying “this public health crisis for humans may actually be helping the environment.” The implication here is that the suffering of Chinese people is to the benefit of the environment, as China is the enemy of nature. There is notably no mention in this news piece about the United States’ impact on the environment, their economy, or their annual CO2 emissions.

CNN’s news piece strategically positions China as dangerous, and promotes romantic anti-capitalist ideas regarding the Chinese economy. Romantic anti-capitalism, especially directed toward the Chinese government, is something to be critical of as the climate crisis worsens. The United States has been creating an increasing amount of anti-Chinese news stories in recent years, as the two countries battle it out as economic giants. The United States frequently positions China as over-industrialized and may perhaps be using the climate crisis as an excuse to create fear and hatred toward China. Similar tactics have been used when the American news media frequently covers stories regarding the Uighur Muslim concentration camps while avoiding covering concentration camps along the American border, or anti-Muslim hatred within the United States. While it is clearly important to care about industry-driven climate change and concentration camps for any person, it is also important to consider the political motivation behind covering these stories.

These news stories often came attached with the tagline of (or something along the lines of) “nature is healing. We are the virus.” This is problematic on numerous counts. Firstly, the sentiment that “we” (humans) and nature are in opposition to each other reinforces the human/nature dichotomy that is so problematic. Humans are

positioned as inherently dangerous to animals. While the impact of human activity may have real harmful consequences on non-*human* animal life, it is hard to lessen these harms if we are taught that humans inevitably hurt other non-human animals. Secondly, it is dangerous to view humans as a homogenous group of evil-doers who all have equal blame for climate change, or in this case habitat loss or harm to non-human animals. When humans are clumped into a homogenous group, it erases relationships that are crucial in understanding climatic destruction. This is a common critique of the move to title this time in human history as the “Anthropocene.” It is important to say what is true, not what is easy. It is not *humans* who are causing destruction. It is white, northern hemisphere, wealthy, (largely) men who are causing death and destruction to the Earth. Grouping humans as a whole unfairly directs blame to marginalized folks while softening the blow to the biggest contributors of climate change, habitat destruction, and human suffering.

The Covid-19 articles, like those regarding population and immigration, also subtly promote scarcity myths and lifeboat ethics. One article by the New York Times praises the Bill and Melinda Gates⁴ foundation for their role in getting the vaccine to so-called developing countries. The article positions the Gates’ as the rightful arbiters of who is allowed to receive vaccinations, who is worthy of survival in the rough waters of the coronavirus pandemic. The article even praises Gates as bringing “a technocratic expertise and power rather than a discourse on human rights and activism” to global public health initiatives.

The article fails to mention how the Gates’ foundation has, in fact, subjected so-called underdeveloped nations to being last in line to receive Covid-19 vaccines. In 2020, Oxford University announced they would give the rights to their vaccine to anyone who could produce one, so long as it would be free to anyone who wanted to become vaccinated. Essentially, an open-source vaccine. Two weeks later, however, Oxford signed with AstraZeneca, a company the Gates’ are heavily invested in, and the rights to the vaccine were no longer free (Hancock, 2020). This business deal was likely made based

⁴ Whose wealth has increased by 10 billion dollars throughout the pandemic alone.

on the fact that the Gates' had made hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of donations to Oxford (Schwab, 2020). Essentially, the Gates foundation is being praised for 'generously' providing vaccines to developing nations while at the same time making billions of dollars in profit from their investment with AstraZeneca after blocking an open-source vaccine that could have been provided to citizens from their governments.

Conclusion

It is incredibly important to notice, name, and challenge the ecofascist rhetoric that can be found in the popular news media's coverage of climate change. The threat of climate change is not going anywhere, and if we do not address racism and how it is implicated in climate change when solving the climate crisis, we will simply have a green version of the current world order. As the current system is based in white supremacy, this would be, simply put, green white supremacy: ecofascism. Naomi Klein explained this danger in an interview with Democracy Now! She said:

The only thing scarier than a far-right, racist movement that denies the reality of climate change is a far-right, racist movement that doesn't deny the reality of climate change, that actually says this is happening, there are going to be many millions of people on the move, and we are going to use this abhorrent ideology that ranks the relative value of human life, that puts white Christians at the top of the hierarchy, that animalizes and otherizes everyone else, as the justification for allowing those people to die (Klein et al., 2019).

Ecofascism, in its inception, promoted ideas of white German nationalism and the mystical connection white Germans had with German soil. This dangerous ideology led to atrocious crimes against humanity. In North America, racialized people were forcibly sterilized for many years to prevent "overpopulation" and Indigenous Peoples were forcibly removed from their homes to create national parks. Today, the narrative that the

world is overpopulated still permeates the media, humans are seen as a virus, and lifeboat ethics are commonly held beliefs. Ecofascist rhetoric is dangerous in the hatred it promotes.

This is not only a theoretical threat. There have been too many instances of ecofascists murdering people in the name of environmentalism. Namely, the 2019 Christchurch massacre, in which 51 people were murdered in a mosque. The motives for the massacre were cited in the perpetrator's manifesto, titled *The Great Replacement*. In this manifesto, the shooter self-identified as an ecofascist, saying "there is no nationalism without environmentalism," echoing the *Blood and Soil* ideals. The murderer's ecofascist beliefs justified his Islamophobia, and led to the death of 51 worshiping people.

Later that same year, another ecofascist massacre took place in El Paso. The perpetrator also identified as an ecofascist, and claimed he was inspired by the Christchurch massacre. In his manifesto, he stated "Everything I have seen and heard in my short life has led me to believe that the average American isn't willing to change their lifestyle, even if the changes only cause a slight inconvenience. ... So the next logical step is to decrease the number of people in America using resources."

Ecofascism can also be seen rearing its ugly head in the past year. The Washington capital riots saw ecofascist undertones, spearheaded by the "Q Shaman," or Jake Angeli. Angeli was dressed in clothing inspired by Norse mythology, a common symbol in ecofascism. While the media mocked the "silliness" of his attire, they failed to recognize the seriousness of the danger his ecofascist attire represented. Angeli has been a frequent participant in climate protests, leading many to believe he was undercover infiltrating the Capitol riots. In reality, he was at the Capitol riots to show support for the racist, misogynist beliefs presented at the event. While he was detained after the riots, he refused to eat food that was not organic. Eventually, his lawyers were able to provide him with his demands and he was provided with fully organic food in prison. This is especially problematic considering the hardships that many incarcerated people go through to be provided appropriate food for their religious beliefs.

These ecofascist-motivated events in the previous few years prove that ecofascism is a real, tangible threat. It is vital to the survival of our planet to fight the ecofascist notion that people are a problem. It is not people versus the planet, it is systems versus the planet (Loach & Chayne, 2020). Corporations, colonialism, imperialism, misogyny, capitalism... Any environmental activism that attacks marginalized people and not oppressive systems is not ethical and is not effective. Any environmental activism that denies the harm and complicity of these systems is ecofascist.

It is absolutely possible and mandatory to reject ecofascist ideas and centre global environmental efforts on environmental justice. Scarcity is a myth. People are entirely capable of providing enough resources to sustain ourselves if enough caring people so choose to. In order to do this, we must move beyond our current system of global capitalism, extractive economies, unnecessary wars, and extreme hoarding of wealth. People consistently say that it is unreasonable to imagine a future free of these systems. In my view of the world, which has been influenced largely by this research, I believe it is foolish and unreasonable to demand anything less than a just world for all. It is entirely foolish to believe that the vast majority of humans (save for a few extremely wealthy) and the earth can continue to exist in the current state of the world given the fact that people are currently suffering every day. The way forward is rejecting fascist ideas and embracing a worldview that upholds justice and care. It is essential to include migrant rights, Indigenous sovereignty, anti-racism, reproductive justice, and true respect for all genders in the effort to combat climate change. This is entirely possible if the people will it.

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