

NEOLIBERALISM, POLITICAL ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE YOUTH OF  
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND: A SPACE FOR RADICAL ACTIVISM?

by

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## ABSTRACT

Climate change exists both as a symptom and as a cause of many social ills. It is as urgent as it is complex. Climate change is being addressed internationally through mechanisms heavily influenced by neoliberal globalisation and based around market mechanisms for the trading of carbon dioxide as a commodity, such as the Kyoto Protocol. This has contributed to increasing de-politicisation of the climate change issue. Contestation of neoliberal solutions to climate change has resulted in the birth of climate justice principles which unite action against the systemic causes of climate change. At the heart of action on climate change are young people-historically active citizens and advocates for radical change. In the context of de-politicisation and a post-political carbon consensus, young activists have been influenced by dominant neoliberal discourse.

This research will explore the repercussions of a post-political carbon consensus in producing youth-led spaces of contestation in Aotearoa New Zealand. The case study for this research, youth-driven organisation Generation Zero, advocates for post-political carbon consensus by running campaigns on changes to the national Emissions Trading Scheme and other policy-based work. In this thesis, I will describe the extent to which young people within Generation Zero are influenced by the neoliberal discourse and the implications this has for the role of climate justice and radical activism. This research will contribute to the literature around the de-politicisation of climate change as it describes the impact that this has on youth activism and thus the opportunity for future spaces of dissent.

Key words: climate change; neoliberalism; radical activism; post-political consensus; youth; New Zealand; climate justice.



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"If you go to one demonstration and then go home, that's something, but the people in power can live with that. What they can't live with is sustained pressure that keeps building, organizations that keep doing things, people that keep learning lessons from the last time and doing it better the next time." -Noam Chomsky

This research is dedicated to the international youth climate movement

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## **Chapter 1: Setting the scene**

*Did You Hear?*

*That is the sound of your world falling apart.*

*It is the sound of our resurgence.*

*The day that was the day, was night.*

*And night will be the day that will be the day.*

*Democracy!*

*Liberty!*

*Justice! (Subcomandante Marcos, Zapatista Army of National Liberation)*

*In late 2010 I found myself in Acteal, a small village in the the municipality of Chenalhó, Chiapas, Mexico. It was the 22<sup>nd</sup> December, the anniversary of the Acteal Massacre of 1997. The massacre was carried by the paramilitary group Mascara Roja and resulted in the loss of 45 villagers who were gathered in a church for prayer. It was thought to be motivated by Mascara Roja's perception of and disdain for Acteal's support for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, a revolutionary group that is committed to putting land into indigenous control, living autonomously out of the reaches of neoliberal globalisation whilst maintaining a non-violent defensive. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation became world-renowned for their part in the anti-globalisation, indigenous rights and anti-neoliberal movements, among others (Starr & Adams, 2003; De Angelis, 2000). The strength, courage and commitment to a new world were apparent that day in 2010 as villagers and visitors discussed the possibilities for a world without neoliberalism, a path that the Zapatistas had begun to carve. Chanting and songs of defiance rang across the valley, tears were shed for the lost and a new world was imagined. In the air was the heady scent of possibility, struggle and resistance. They spoke about how their communities would meet the challenges of climate change. This was my first introduction to what a future without neoliberal globalisation could look like, a world where capitalism was contested in everyday life and people lived in peaceful resistance.*

*In late 2011 I found myself at the United Nations Climate Change Negotiations in Durban, South Africa. It was 10<sup>th</sup> December and the negotiations were almost over. The environmental NGOs present were largely dissatisfied with progress being made (for more on the civil society reaction to the Durban negotiations, see Banerjee, 2012). It became easier and easier to block out the voices of negotiators from my mind, instead focussing on the voices of youth, indigenous peoples and others from civil society who are calling for “No REDD” and decrying the use of market mechanisms and the privatisation of nature in this “failing system.” Members of civil society in the Global South, facing the effects of climate change, expressed great frustration and desperation. The negotiations became embroiled in political game play, no longer about climate change, but who could get away with doing the least. So we, the tired and disillusioned, an eclectic collection of activists, occupied the front hall of the conference centre and disrupted the negotiations process for around half a day. We chanted and sang for the marginalised, for youth, indigenous peoples and the activists working hard to fight climate change in our home countries. It was a true display of global solidarity. After being removed by security, two things dawned on me: I would no longer be a part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change’s system and that my faith in that system was completely gone- the change necessary to solve climate change would have to come from the grassroots, from the ground up.*

## **1.1 What motivated this study?**

After witnessing the down fall of the Durban climate negotiations, and the ones that have gone before them, my trust in the ability of the United Nations process and the solutions that it called for had diminished. Our action at Durban, named Occupy COP17, aimed to contest the negotiations process and connect the injustices of the negotiations with the Occupy Movement, which arose from the injustices of an economic crisis. Occupy movement participants organise occupations or protests in their communities or at places significant to social and economic inequalities and organise using flat hierarchical structures (Guzman-Concha, 2012). It was my personal experiences of Durban and of resistance to neoliberalism in Chiapas that inspired this study. This study was further motivated by the spate of recent social movements using radical action techniques, such as Occupy, springing up all over the world. From the Arab Spring came a variety of movements around the world for anti-austerity, indigenous sovereignty, student rights, anti-corporate greed and other causes. These actions also included the student movements of

Canada, Chile and Mexico, Idle No More in Turtle Island (Canada) and anti-tar sands action in North America. Here in Aotearoa New Zealand, student activism, Occupy and Idle No More have been present but not to the scale of their international counterparts. So what is the potential for these movements of resistance and radical change in current day Aotearoa New Zealand? This research will explore the perceptions of activism of youth here in Aotearoa New Zealand and discuss the potential for young activists to take radical action, like what has been displayed overseas.

Significantly, the current generation of youth are facing one of the biggest global issues of our time- climate change. Climate change issues stem from the very roots of our society, yet according to some theorists including Swyngedouw and Žižek, a post-political carbon consensus is forming which seeks to address climate change as an issue solely of emissions (Swyngedouw, 2007; 2009; 2010). This theory of the post-political carbon consensus refers to the prevalence of solutions to climate change that serve the dual purpose of perpetuating neoliberal growth and capital production whilst using policy and technological approaches to address carbon emissions (Swyngedouw, 2009).

The post-political carbon consensus theory will be contextualised within neoliberal discourse which according to Hayward (2012) has resulted in a neoliberal generation, due to the dominance of neoliberal thought during the lifetime of this generation. In this context, youth of today are considered embedded in the post-political, subject to it and shaped by it.

According to theorists such as Swyngedouw (2009), Mouffe (2005), Rancière (2010) and Žižek (2008), the post-political carbon consensus undermines opportunities for dissent of the social and economic status quo, or what is referred to as the “properly” political. With climate change becoming increasingly urgent, this thesis seeks to understand the connections between entrenched neoliberalism and the possibility of a post-political carbon consensus in Aotearoa New Zealand. In particular, this research will explore how a post-political carbon consensus may affect perceptions of different forms of activism, particularly radical activism that contests the economic and social status quo. As a contribution to the literature, this study ties together the theory of the post-political carbon consensus, ideas around neoliberalism and youth activism. This research explores if the post-political carbon consensus influences how youth think about

and engage in climate change activism in Aotearoa New Zealand and what this may mean for creating spaces for radical activism or “properly” political moments.

## **1.2 Post-political carbon consensus and the role of the “properly” political moment**

The approaches activists take to the climate change issue vary greatly, from those who advocate for technological or policy-based solutions to those who believe that the solutions to climate change will come from the grassroots and communities. As mentioned previously, this study is largely based around the theory of the post-political consensus. Swyngedouw (2007) and Žižek (2008) coined the term to describe their observations of climate change discourse.

According to Swyngedouw (2009), the dominance of neoliberal, policy-based, technocratic mechanisms for dealing with environmental issues has contributed to an overall post-political condition. A post-political carbon consensus is said to result from the acceptance that representative democracy and neoliberal capitalist economic systems can solve overarching systemic problems such as climate change with solutions identified and legitimised by the scientific consensus (Swyngedouw, 2010). The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)<sup>1</sup>'s Kyoto Protocol is a key example of a mechanism that would support a post-political carbon consensus as the Protocol is reliant on accounting and management rules as a global solution to climate change. The Kyoto Protocol sets emissions targets for countries based on their historical contribution to climate change and projected future

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<sup>1</sup> “In 1992, countries joined an international treaty, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to cooperatively consider what they could do to limit average global temperature increases and the resulting climate change, and to cope with whatever impacts were, by then, inevitable. By 1995, countries realized that emission reductions provisions in the Convention were inadequate. They launched negotiations to strengthen the global response to climate change, and, two years later, adopted the Kyoto Protocol. The Kyoto Protocol legally binds developed countries to emission reduction targets. The Protocol’s first commitment period started in 2008 and ended in 2012. The second commitment period began on 1 January 2013 and will end in 2020. There are now 195 Parties to the Convention and 191 Parties to the Kyoto Protocol” (UNFCCC, 2013).

emissions. It also provides frameworks for national and international carbon markets and the privatisation of carbon.

As the UNFCCC (2013) states “at the very heart of the response to climate change, however, lies the need to reduce emissions. In 2010, governments agreed that emissions need to be reduced so that global temperature increases are limited to below 2 degrees Celsius.” The Kyoto Protocol addresses climate change as a technical and scientific issue of emissions and does not address the root causes of climate change, such as those identified by Žižek (2008, 279) as “unevenly distributed power relations, of the networks of control and influence, of rampant injustices and inequalities.” Theorists who maintain that a post-political condition exists, such as Swyngedouw, Rancière and Žižek, claim that the Kyoto Protocol and other consensual solutions to climate change undermine the propensity for radical alternatives (Swyngedouw, 2007). Moreover, the consensual condition may perpetuate the status quo because it privileges solutions that do not disrupt the political, social and economic status quo.

Hence, a post-political carbon consensus is said to undermine what theorists including Swyngedouw, Rancière and Žižek refer to as the “properly” political. Rancière (1998, 11) defines the “properly” political as “when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part.” In other words, a “properly” political moment is an act of dissent to the status quo which does not engage or legitimate these social, political or economic systems. Theorists, including Rancière (2001), Žižek (2008) and Swyngedouw (2009), discuss the role of dissensus in a democracy and suggest an alternative radical democracy that places the political moment or dissensus at the heart of creating the necessary change in a political-ecological process. “Democratic politics is therefore, always disruptive and transformative” (Swyngedouw, 2009, 607). Thus according to Swyngedouw (2010), climate change requires a systemic shift that can only be addressed through “properly” political moments and radical change which disrupt the consensual condition. The Occupy COP17 action is an example of a “properly” political moment, where the United Nations process was disrupted in order to highlight the issues that the process failed to address. As an action, it not only momentarily halted the negotiations process, but provided an opportunity to raise the voices of

the grassroots who are otherwise largely ignored within the negotiations, such as youth, indigenous peoples and those from the Global South.

This study utilises post-political consensus approach to climate change discourse because it has been used to portray the influence of neoliberal ideology on governance and describes conditions where opportunities for the “properly” political have been subverted. As an approach, the post-political carbon consensus recognises the role of power structures in creating consensus and removing or marginalising dissenters. This is a particularly relevant area of literature to refer to because it identifies the power structures inherent within climate change discourse, which is appropriate given this study’s use of a Foucauldian discourse analysis, which looks at the role of power through language.

### **1.3 The urgency of climate change**

It is clear that multiple discourses and contexts influence how climate change is approached as an issue. This has contributed to the inherent complexity faced when addressing climate change. Climate change is often referred to as a “wicked” problem due to its multiple causal factors and the indistinguishable boundaries of cause and effect (Ritchey, 2005). It affects social and environmental contexts differently, and has had multiple solutions posed in different contexts involving diverse actors. Social disagreement and uncertainty around the outcomes and solutions further alter the ability of stakeholders to address the problem (FitzGibbon & Mensah, 2012). “Wicked” problems are “ill-defined, ambiguous and associated with strong moral, political and professional issues” (Ritchey, 2005, 1). In part due to the complexity of the issue, the negotiations have failed to produce a global, legally-binding agreement with scientifically adequate emissions reductions targets<sup>2</sup> (Banjeree, 2012). Many countries are beginning to feel the impacts of climate change through extreme weather in their communities As a result, many

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<sup>2</sup> “It is beyond dispute that there have been no global reductions, and estimates tend towards there having been a 40% increase in emissions since 1990, the year selected as a baseline for reductions under the Protocol. Climate change negotiations have never fixed a global emissions reduction target that would yield a tolerably mitigated rise in global temperatures...Nevertheless, this trajectory of emissions obviously cannot meet any of the targets that bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change or the EU have put forward” (Campbell, 2013, 126).



governments, businesses and non-government organisations are choosing to act through local and national level legislation.

## **1.4 ‘Third way’ politics**

One approach to addressing climate change adopted by many governments involves the application of Giddens’ ‘third way’ politics theory. Anthony Giddens, a sociologist, went on to be influential in putting his theory into practise. ‘Third way’ politics has been a widely adopted approach across the world by governments led by Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Helen Clark. This theory was based around the idea that neoliberal ideals should be incorporated into governance and policy in order to facilitate economic growth and entrench neoliberalism into societal norms (Giddens, 1998). Giddens’ ‘third way’ politics forms a key example of the way neoliberal theory has been put into practise. This is particularly pertinent to this study as it is applicable to the process of neoliberalisation in Aotearoa New Zealand described in Chapter 3.

As a state-led method, ‘third way’ politics actively includes business and civil society in reaching collective solutions on issues such as climate change. Giddens (2009) refers to this as a “political and economic convergence”. Further, the ‘third way’ political approach suggests that “political parties should go beyond the rhetoric of ‘left’ and ‘right’ on the issue of climate change” (Dabhi, 2012, 247). Hence, as an approach, it supports the perpetuation of neoliberal discourse and would contribute to the formation of a post-political carbon consensus. ‘Third way’ politics actively avoids conflict and dissensus.

According to commentator Dhahi (2012, 242-243), ‘third way’ politics is “an attempt to create a political framework that addresses the concerns of social justice and equality embedded in an economic system based on the logic of free market” (Dhahi, 2012, 242-243). Hence, this study focuses on where the theories of ‘third way’ politics and the post-political carbon consensus intersect and the influence this may have on activist engagement with politics.

Unlike ‘third way’ politics, both addressing climate change at the root causes and contesting the use of capitalist and neoliberal inspired solutions is important to advocates of climate justice. The concept of climate justice will provide a key framework in this study because it

demonstrates the active pursuit of the “properly” political and can provide examples of how activists are addressing the root causes of climate change through their actions.

## **1.5 Climate justice**

Climate justice advocates work towards solutions to climate change that are not technocratic or managerial in nature. The movement for climate justice has grown out of dissatisfaction with the solutions being offered by the United Nations and at state level, such as the Kyoto Protocol, described in Chapter 2. Climate justice also came out of conflict between organisations over the support that some ‘mainstream’ non-governmental organisations were giving to these solutions. Climate justice activists identified a need to bring together other justice and climate change related struggles around the world.

Climate justice is described by Bond (2010b) as a bringing together of the ‘global justice movement’ with radical environmentalism. The global justice movement stemmed from the Zapatista solidarity network in the 1990s which was one of the first to make use of the internet to encourage global support for a local struggle. This meant that while at the same time highlighting similar struggles globally, movements could draw attention to the impact of the ideology that underlies the struggles at these localities. Global justice movements embody the principles of social and environmental justice which include “economic equity, cultural liberation, and the political participation of people of colour at all levels of decision making” (Dawson, 2010, 326). The climate justice movement transfers these principles to the climate change issue. Primarily, climate justice highlighted the concept of historical responsibility involves the idea that climate change was caused by industrialised countries but the world’s poor will bear the cost and feel the impacts most severely. As Dawson (2010, 508) notes “Climate justice seeks to transform the relationship between society and the climate crisis...politicising divides between the beneficiaries of ecological degradation and those who bear its costs, merging ecological and social issues.”

Climate justice provides a key example of a movement building around an understanding of what Rancière, Žižek and Swyngedouw refer to as the “properly” political. Climate justice activists contest solutions to climate change that commodify carbon and create “green” business opportunities to perpetuate the economic, political and social status quo. Such solutions support

capitalism through what Harvey (2003) calls “accumulation by dispossession” which implies the accumulation of public resources, wealth and therefore power in the hands of an elite few. Accumulation by dispossession has been sustained by neoliberalism, for instance through the privatisation of air and water. Climate justice presents “a complex challenge to capitalism’s internal logic of commodification and neoliberal policy expansion” as a way of addressing climate change (Bond, 2010a, 22).

According to the climate justice approach, solutions to climate change must address the root causes of climate change: unequal power relations and the economic and social systems that support these. In an attempt to move the climate change conversation away from global and state led solutions, empowerment and solidarity with communities on the frontlines of climate change became the focus for groups and communities around the world (Chatterton et al, 2012). The climate justice approach is particularly important to this study as it describes how “properly” political moments and radical action can be used to address the root causes of climate change.

## **1.6 Aotearoa New Zealand context and the neoliberal generation**

As noted earlier, youth have been central to recent politicised action globally that has sought to disrupt dominant power relations and imagine alternative futures. It was both the observation of these movements emerging around the world, the inspiration of Zapatista solidarity and my first hand experience of the failure of the United Nations processes that has strengthened a personal understanding for the important role that grassroots radical activism plays in social change.

This study will explore how radical political action on climate change is perceived by what Nairn et al (2012) refers to as the neoliberal generation of Aotearoa New Zealand. This is a generation who have grown up under the strong influence of neoliberalism and for the purposes of this study, is what defines “youth”. This research addresses the need to explore the future of youth-led radical activism on climate change, in light of recent increases in youth-led radical activism around the world and the perceived influence of neoliberalism on both the lives of youth and climate change.

This research focuses specifically on youth involved in action on climate change. Notably, youth are acting for climate justice around the world, with movements growing noticeably in Canada

and the United States around opposition to fossil fuel extraction projects, such as the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline (Fossil Free Canada, 2013). In general, youth are active across a variety of climate change action tactics (youthclimate.org, 2012). With vested interest in their future well-being and the tradition of student activism, ever growing numbers of youth are choosing to take action on climate change across the world. This is also evident in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, climate justice organisations, particularly those that are youth driven or with large numbers of youth members, anecdotally appear to be few and far between.

An Aotearoa New Zealand context to this study is very important because it offers an opportunity to explore what the further impacts of neoliberalism might be on youth activists, expanding on research by Hayward (2012) around children and environmental citizenship. Hayward (2012) looks at the impacts of neoliberalism on environmental education and children's perceptions of citizenship in Aotearoa New Zealand. She finds that children are most often educated to be consumer-citizens but there are opportunities for children to explore issues of justice and equality in relation to environmental issues.

## **1.7 Research Objectives and contribution to the literature**

Tactics taken within action on climate change are as diverse as the movement itself. Actions are roughly categorised in this study as institutional or radical. This categorisation has been used despite recognition of the complexity and depth of each action or tactic that is used, what it might represent and what it may aim to achieve. Often what a tactic or action intends to achieve may be represented by both categories. The term institutional is used to describe actions that engage with formal participation pathways, engagement with matters of technical or managerial relevance, such as changes to policy. Radical actions are often in the form of non-violent direct actions such as blockades or occupations and aim to “politicise” climate change, create conflict and address the issue by its root causes by challenging power structures.

This research explores the relevance of both institutional and radical actions to youth activists taking action on climate change, particularly radical action. As this research is based in Aotearoa New Zealand, the influence of neoliberalism will be a particular focus to this research. Aotearoa New Zealand underwent one of the most rapid and severe neoliberalising processes in the world.

Thus, my overall research objective is to:

*Explore how members of Generation Zero perceive the climate change issue and the methods to addressing it, given the neoliberal context of Aotearoa New Zealand.*

To address this research objective the following questions are posed in relation to a case study of a youth action group Generation Zero (discussed further below).

1. How do members of Generation Zero perceive the causes and solutions to climate change?
2. How do members of Generation Zero perceive the roles of radical and institutional political action in solving climate change?
3. Do the perceptions of members of Generation Zero reflect the arguments around the existence of a post-political carbon consensus? If, so what are the implications of these perceptions on future spaces for radical action?

Hence, this research will explore how youth involved in Generation Zero perceive the causes and solutions of climate change and whether these perceptions support the existence of the post-political carbon consensus. This will in turn help to build an understanding of the perceived role of radical activism and how this may affect future spaces for radical activism. This research will contribute to literature around the post-political carbon consensus and offer insight into the role of activism in perpetuating, supporting and dissenting the post-political condition. Further, it will contribute a perspective that is unique to Aotearoa New Zealand, given the rapid and entrenched nature of neoliberalism in this country. By highlighting the particular role of youth activists, this study compliments research conducted by Hayward (2012) around the role of children as environmentally-aware citizens in a neoliberal context. Further, this study contributes to the large body of literature surrounding the influences that neoliberalism has had on wider society.

### **1.7.1 Case study: Generation Zero**

Members of Generation Zero's Wellington group were chosen as the case study for this research. Generation Zero is a group consisting of entirely young people actively working to address climate change in Aotearoa New Zealand. Generation Zero has hundreds of volunteers, members and supporters around the country, based mostly out of universities. Generation Zero aims to

enact political change through inclusive and non-radical means. Members organise speaker events with climate change experts, leadership trainings to upskill fellow members, witty and slightly obscure stunts such as a “Funeral for Business As Usual” and “Operation Exposure.”

Generation Zero’s facebook page describes the organisation as:

A movement of young New Zealanders uniting to ensure our future well-being is not undermined by political decisions made today on climate change and fossil fuel policies. We are the generation that must oversee the transformation to a zero carbon world (Generation Zero, 2012a).

Generation Zero focuses on positive, solutions-based campaigning (Generation, Zero, n.d). A non-partisan organisation, Generation Zero aims for broad based political support for policies that reduce New Zealand’s carbon emissions (Generation Zero, n.d). Generation Zero’s website states that:

The means to solve the climate and energy crises largely already exist. We cannot afford to wait for some magical techno fix, and nor do we need to. The barriers to taking action today are not technical. What is lacking is a clear sense of direction and urgency towards a zero carbon future, and the political will to implement the changes that are desperately needed. The first step towards solving the problem is for our society and our political parties to acknowledge what is required to deliver us hope for a positive future: a credible climate plan with responsible targets, and a carbon pricing scheme that sees today’s bills being paid today. Generation Zero will campaign hard to see that our political parties face up to this reality (Generation Zero, n.d).

Generation Zero may represent how activist groups can play a part in supporting and perpetuating part of the post-political carbon consensus. The solutions to climate change which Generation Zero work on are largely based on policy changes and thus support existing structures of the nation state. Generation Zero’s decision to approach climate change in this way (whether deliberate or subconscious) and the perspectives on climate change that have influenced this form the basis of this research. Generation Zero, as a case study group represents a group

within the wider ecosystem of organisations and communities acting on climate change. It may also shed light on how citizens in general view their role within a democracy.

In total, nine members of Generation Zero were interviewed for this research. Research participants were all based in Wellington in order to minimise the costs of this research. Wellington is also my hometown and I am very familiar with the activist territory here. I also consider many of my research participants as part of my community, thus it provides a logical environment to centre my research. However, it is recognised that there are issues that may arise as a result of these close connections. These issues will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

This research focuses solely on members of Generation Zero in order to gain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of each individual and how this has translated into the work that the group does as a whole. Through conducting semi-structured interviews, this research aims to highlight diversity and complexity in these perspectives. Participants were initially asked to share their perspectives on the climate change issue and what they believed to be the causes and the solutions to the problem. Each participant then discussed their views around the role of different forms of political action on climate change, focusing in particular on radical political action. Overall, the interview process intended to gain an understanding of what young people involved with Generation Zero feel to be the most effective or necessary ways of acting on climate change. A discourse analysis was conducted of the statements made by members of Generation Zero.

## **1.8 Thesis structure**

This thesis will address the three aforementioned research questions through a discourse analysis of statements made by members of Generation Zero during semi-structured interviews. The introductory chapter has provided an outline of the thesis context and the motivations behind the research. Chapter 2 will then provide an overview of the literature surrounding the post-political carbon consensus, ‘third way’ politics and the climate justice approach to climate change. Chapter 3 will present an overview of the context of this research- current and past activism in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas, as well as the impact of neoliberalism on this current generation of youth. Chapter 4 will describe the post-structuralist approach taken for this research and qualitative methods used to collect data and analyse findings. A post-structuralist

approach takes into consideration language choice and how this shapes both knowledge and society.

The subsequent analysis chapters 5 and 6 will address research questions 1,2 and 3 respectively, using Foucauldian discourse analysis to consider meanings and representations constituted through Generation Zero's website, facebook page and press releases. Chapter 5 will discuss how Generation Zero members perceive the causes of climate change and how these translate into the solutions needed given the impact of neoliberal discourse. Chapter 6 explores how perceived causes and solutions influence the action taken on climate change by members of Generation Zero and the propensity for young people to engage in radical forms of political action. Research participants' desire to "mainstream" action on climate change will also be discussed in the context of the post-political carbon consensus. The final chapter will conclude by tying together findings from each chapter and providing recommendations for future study.



## **Chapter 2: A post political carbon consensus?**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Shell plays a more eco-sensitive tune, eco-activists of various political or ideological stripes and colours engage in direct action in the name of saving the planet, New Age post-materialists join the chorus that laments the irreversible decline of ecological amenities, eminent scientists enter the public domain to warn of pending ecological catastrophe, politicians try to outmanoeuvre each other in brandishing the ecological banner, and a wide range of policy initiatives and practices, performed under the motif of ‘sustainability,’ are discussed, conceived and implemented at all geographical scales (Swyngedouw, 2010, 216).

This statement highlights the diversity of actors involved in climate change, from scientists to politicians to a number of sectors of civil society. Swyngedouw (2010) also notes the irony of Shell, a major petroleum corporation, being attentive to “eco” concerns, given the role that they have played in creating climate change and a raft of other environmental issues. When it comes to addressing climate change, a multitude of discourses and opinions exist. For some, addressing climate change provides an opportunity to maintain or enhance the status quo, for others it is an opportunity to create revolutionary change that will shake the existing capitalist system at its foundations. Climate change is both as a symptom and as a cause of many social ills and as such is both urgent and complex. This research brings together a diverse literature situating climate change within some of these wider discourses of political theories and geographies of activism.

Climate change, purportedly the biggest environmental and social justice issue of our time, is inherently political and an ever imminent threat for many, especially in the Global South. It is being addressed nationally and internationally through policy and United Nations governance mechanisms. Such mechanisms are heavily influenced by neoliberal globalisation (Bond & Dorsey, 2010; Bond, 2011e; Chatterton et al, 2012). For instance, the Kyoto Protocol guides international, national and local level climate change policy in a number of countries and is based around market mechanisms for the trading of carbon dioxide as a commodity (Bond,

2011e). The proliferation of the use of market mechanisms and the privatisation of CO<sub>2</sub> has created discontent among dissenters of neoliberal globalisation. From this discontent came the concept of “climate justice” and a set of principles which underpin action on climate change taken by communities and organisations around the world (Bond, 2010; Bond, 2011e; Bond & Dorsey, 2010; Chatterton et al, 2012). Globally young people are adopting the concept of “climate justice” and a diversity of other approaches to climate change. As a consequence of youth taking action there has been a recent flurry of social movements with youth at their core, including the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement and student movements.

The Kyoto Protocol and the related carbon market/pricing mechanisms have influenced young people’s perceptions of action. This research will explore the relevance of Swyngedouw’s post-political carbon consensus to youth taking political action on climate change. It is argued that the consensual condition removes opportunities for dissent to the economic and social systems that have created the consensus. Thus it is important to explore not only the nature of the condition, but also what influence such a condition may have on producing future youth-led spaces of dissent.

This chapter will explore the literature and theory that argues that there has been a de-politicisation of climate change and a post-political carbon consensus. Through highlighting the influence of neoliberalism and ‘third way’ politics, this literature review will argue that globally a post-political carbon consensus does exist. Further, this chapter will explore the influence of the consensual condition on spaces for dissent and contestation of current social and economic systems. These spaces of dissent are referred to by Rancière (2001), Mouffe (2005) and others as the “properly” political.

## **2.2 De-politicisation**

Erik Swyngedouw has referred extensively to the “post-political carbon consensus” which applies the ideas of radical democracy to climate change (Swyngedouw, 2007). Rancière, Mouffe, Žižek and other political theorists have contributed to the radical democracy literature which describes the “properly” political as a space of conflict and dissent which most importantly realises the opportunity for alternative imaginaries. It has been recognised that the

post-political consensus undermines these opportunities for dissent by shifting consensus to the forefront of democracy (Swyngedouw, 2010). Swyngedouw (2010)'s post-political carbon consensus stems from the idea that neoliberal, technical and governance approaches to climate change have been combined to create consensus on action on climate change amongst various actors including government, business, the media, scientists and others. How the consensual condition is said to undermine the "properly" political will be explained in the remainder of this chapter.

Swyngedouw's theory of the post-political carbon consensus forms a key framework used throughout this thesis as it provides a context around which to explore the role of radical action on climate change, given Swyngedouw's explicit assumption of the role of consensus in removing opportunities for radical action on climate change. Swyngedouw (2010) and Chatterton et al (2012) suggest that a post-political or de-politicised framing of climate change has been consolidated by the role of policy and democratic politics on addressing climate change. General environmental problems, as noted by McCarthy & Prudham (2004), Castree (2008) and Purcell (2009), are increasingly being solved through market-based mechanisms and technocratic solutions, creating what Swyngedouw refers to as a consensus-based politics. A consensus-based politics is heavily influenced by Giddens' 'third way' approach to politics. 'Third way' politics seeks to create a "centre" (that is, neither left nor right) politics that incorporates neoliberalism as a strong influence on policy making (explored further in Section 2.3).

Purcell (2009) also discussed the role of neoliberalism in democracy and argued that democracy is increasingly being used to support neoliberalism and this is resulting in consensus-based politics. According to Purcell (2009, 141), the influence of neoliberal doctrine has removed opportunities to "challenge existing relations of power." Neoliberalism has become a dominant hegemony that "has increasingly shaped state policy to benefit capital rather than citizens" (Purcell, 2009, 141), which not only produces policies that perpetuate inequalities but entrenches ideology that places capital at the fore. These norms and ideals will be discussed further in Chapter 3. According to Purcell (2009), neoliberalism has contributed to a consensual politics by co-opting "proper" politics into neoliberal ideology and therefore closing out the possibility of fewer moments of dissent. Despite this, Purcell (2009, 144) highlights that even though

neoliberalism is a dominating discourse it “is not invincible... counter-projects are possible; indeed they are inevitable.”

A lack of dissent due to neoliberal hegemony is one contributor to a consensus-based politics. According to Swyngedouw (2010), consensus around the need for action on environmental issues such as climate change also stems from a scientific consensus. For example, climate change is framed by Swyngedouw (2010) as a global issue with the legitimisation of scientific consensus, thus requiring political action. Scientific consensus has formed around the need to address excess greenhouse gas emissions, largely due to the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The scientific consensus is widely accepted as being politically neutral and thus free of the bias of the political left or right. As Swyngedouw (2010, 217) assumes it is generally undisputed that:

the changing atmospheric composition, marked by increasing levels of CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, is largely caused by anthropogenic activity, primarily (although not exclusively) as a result of the burning of fossilized or captured CO<sub>2</sub> (in the form of oil, gas, coal, wood) and the disappearance of CO<sub>2</sub> sinks and their associated capture processes (through deforestation for example).

It is generally accepted that if these reductions are not achieved then disaster is imminent (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). With consensual scientific certainty around the threat to human well-being, the issue becomes one of concern across the political spectrum and “scientific expertise becomes the foundation and guarantee for properly constituted politics/ policies” (Swyngedouw, 2010, 217). In other words, scientific consensus through use of expert knowledge has become the basis and justification for taking consensual political action on environmental issues, such as climate change.

Rancière (1998) suggests consensus-based politics is comprised of “policing”, “policy making” and the reduction of such activities to a particular “mode of governing” (Swyngedouw, 2009, 605). “A mode of governing” implies that issues are addressed through pre-determined governance mechanisms leaving no space for alternative imaginaries. Rancière (2001, 9)

describes policy as being an aspect of “the police”: “The police is not a social function but a symbolic constitution of the social. The essence of the police is neither repression nor even control over the living. Its essence is a certain manner of partitioning the sensible.” The police order described by Rancière is a partitioning of the sensible, or the hierarchical ordering and categorisation of social activities. The role of the “properly” political challenges this hierarchy and disrupts the social order.

As components of the police order, Swyngedouw (2010) notes that the dominant approach to environmental issues appears to be the use of management and accounting tools. Swyngedouw (2010, 225) refers to these as “techno-managerial planning, expert management and administration.” For example, in Aotearoa New Zealand the Resource Management Act 1991 forms the major piece of environmental legislation that is used to manage the environment (Ministry for the Environment, 2013) through land, air and water quality policy. The Resource Management Act relies on local government officers for the main mechanisms to regulate resource use. The use of technological or managerial techniques is seen as politically neutral and thus reduces opportunities for dissent. It is grounded in dominant rational discourses of environmental management, science, planning and economic development. Furthermore, the recognition of the role that these tools play in perpetuating an economic and political status quo and the hierarchical social order may make them tools of the post-political condition.

A further tool of the post political condition is arguably Giddens’ (1998, 2000) ‘third way’ politics. According to Swyngedouw (2007, 30) he has “been a key intellectual interlocutor of this post-political consensus.” Giddens’ ‘third way’ politics has been influential both in theory and practice through the incorporation of neoliberalism into governance and policy. The ‘third way’ political approach thus provides a basis to the argument for a consensual condition. A consensual condition addresses climate change as an issue of excess emissions through co-operation between the nation state, business and civil society. The connections between the ‘third way’ politics and de-politicisation of climate change will be discussed in the following Section 2.3.

## 2.3 ‘Third way’ politics

Anthony Giddens coined the term ‘third way’ politics in order to describe the state of social democracy in the 1990s. As a sociologist, he was highly influential and his theories went on to shape governments globally, including Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Helen Clark’s respective governments (Dabhi, 2012). Through ‘third way’ politics Giddens (1998) endorsed the incorporation of neoliberal ideals into governance and policy. He also theorised that a merging of left and right politics into a progressive centre politics was important to deal with social and environmental issues and to encourage economic growth.

‘Third way’ politics were developed to meet the needs of a globalising world (Giddens, 2008).

‘Third way’ political discourse accepts the inevitability of neoliberalism and aims to fit social or “left-of-centre” goals of inclusion and equality into economic growth models (Dabhi, 2012).

Further, both free market growth logic and government intervention have an equally strong role in ‘third way’ politics and technocratic solutions, though short term and incomplete solutions, are recognised (Dabhi, 2012).

Sustainable development is also an important aspect of third way politics. The role of markets in protecting the environment is prominent (Dabhi, 2012). Giddens’ (1998) suggests that without government regulation and policy, environmental protection cannot happen but in the interests of a globalising world, where national borders are becoming ever blurred, this may be increasingly irrelevant. Thus, under Giddens’ conceptualisation markets and technological developments play an important part in maintaining “sustainable development” (Dabhi, 2012; Giddens, 1998; Swyngedouw, 2010). Dabhi (2012) critiques Giddens’ approach and notes that he does not question modernisation and economic growth in sustainable development, despite known criticisms (Dabhi, 2012).

Giddens (2008) has written a series of recommendations on how governments should proceed on climate change policy, noting the importance of balancing state-led and market- based solutions to climate change. He considers the following four issues:

1. Management of risk: Giddens (2004) highlights the importance of managing of the long term risks of climate change and energy security. He also notes the importance of building consensus around the policies that are used to manage such risks.
2. Long-term planning: Giddens (2008, 4) asks policy makers to consider how:  
     market-orientated approaches [can] be balanced with state-centric ones in coping with vital issues of mitigation and adaptation, such as carbon pricing, the role of regulation, energy efficiency, transport and land use, the promotion of specific technological innovation by government, and lifestyle and behavioural changes
3. The need for a political and public consensus for action on climate change: Giddens (2008, 4) challenges policy makers to create consensus around the need for policy to address climate change in the long term, given the “democratic penchant for partisanship and short-termism”.
4. Social justice: For Giddens (2008) it is important that any climate change policies instigated address equity issues and do so in a way that ensures the costs of climate change are not worn by the world’s poor. He (2008, 4) asks: “What are the prospects of ensuring that western democracies can be persuaded to carry the economic and political burden of climate change instead of countries in the developing world?”

Clearly in his recommendations, Giddens supports the use neoliberal solutions to climate change in a way that would strengthen and perpetuate the post-political carbon consensus. Particularly, through his perception of the need to address climate change as a long term issue, Giddens forecloses the need for conflict in favour of an overall consensus. Giddens advocates for climate change to be addressed not as a “‘left-right’ issue and [but rather] should thus transcend all forms of party politics.” (Dabhi, 2012, 244). He terms this “political transcendence” (Dabhi, 2012).

Further, Giddens had a strong influence in roll out neoliberalisation, or the introduction neoliberalism into policy and governance. Peck & Tickell (2002, 384) describe roll out neoliberalism as “the purposeful *construction and consolidation* of neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations. [Roll out neoliberalism] is this more recent pattern of institutional and regulatory restructuring.” For example, as a part of roll out neoliberalism in Aotearoa New Zealand Roger Douglas realised that “incentives to invest and

earn profits would require a lower tax burden, especially on companies. That would be achieved by cuts to government spending, streamlining of state sector administration, and selling state assets to repay debt” (Kelsey, 1993, 19). Further analysis of neoliberalism in Aotearoa New Zealand will be discussed in Chapter 3.

As a key facilitator of the merging of policy and neoliberalism, Giddens’ theories, when applied to government restructuring, play an active role in the formation of what political theorists such as Žižek, Rancière and Mouffe and critical geographers such as Swyngedouw refer to as the post-political consensus. Hence, the work of Giddens is particularly important to this study. Giddens’ third way politics highlights the role of neoliberalism within a consensual politics. Further, it as supports the case for the existence of the post-political consensus due to the influence that Giddens’ work has had in politics globally, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States. Giddens’ third way politics has been notably influential to social democratic parties. According to Peck & Tickell (2002, 384) this roll out represents “the attainment of a more aggressive/proactive form of contemporary neoliberalization” (Peck & Tickell, 2002, 384).

Further, the role of the state in Giddens’ ‘third way’ politics is to act as a ‘top-down agency’ that ensures all groups in society work together and incorporate both business interests and formal civil society participation such as consultation and voting processes. Giddens’ (2008) assumes that the state will have the means and methods to address climate change through regulating CO<sub>2</sub> and meeting the needs of all its stakeholders including business and civil society equally. However, Giddens (1998) also suggests there is an increased possibility for NGOs, social movements and other members of civil society to play an important role within policy-making beyond voting. He names this role of civil society a ‘sub-politics’ and sees it as relegated to a sphere separate from policy-making. He notes that civil society can perform functions that complement government policy making, but not entirely replace it.

Authors such as Dabhi (2012) have highlighted critiques of Giddens’ third way politics’ approach to addressing climate change. Many of these critiques reflect Swyngedouw’s concerns around consensual politics. According to Dabhi (2012), Giddens’ ‘third’ way politics does not



identify a role for radical action or the “properly” political within democracy, particularly through his advocacy of a centre politics. This fails to recognise the role of the politics of the left on issues of social equality in the current day:

If we consider that the politics of the ‘left’ is a politics of emancipation – one that tries to bring about social equality – then this ideology of ‘left-right’ is even more apt today where we are seeing massive protests around the world against corporate greed in the form of, for example, the Occupy movement (Dabhi, 2012, 245)

Dabhi (2012) also points out the need to address the social, economic and political structural causes of climate change, as the ‘third way’ seems to ignore these structural problems” (Dabhi, 2012, 247). Accordingly, Giddens’ is seen to address climate change as a standalone issue of greenhouse gas emissions in order to avoid political conflict or left-right politics. Further, Dabhi (2012) suggests that Giddens does not recognise the role that power relations may have between “state, businesses and civil society... that will eventually translate into public and economic policies” (Dabhi, 2012, 246).

This section has demonstrated how Giddens’ ‘third way’ politics has been applied to climate change. It is clear that ‘third way’ politics is an approach that plays a significant role in the formation of what Swyngedouw, Žižek, Mouffe and others refer to as a post-political consensus. Giddens’ influential theory and work shall form a key focus of this research as it is a current and widely adopted approach both in theory and practise that highlights how neoliberalism has become a part of policy making. Giddens has also made recommendations for national level climate change policy makers that highlight the role of neoliberal market mechanisms in addressing the issue. Due to the proliferation of Giddens’ theory into practise it is pertinent to this study which aims to explore the impacts that some of Giddens’ ideas may have had on creating a post-political carbon consensus and as a result reducing dissent amongst youth activists of the neoliberal generation. The components of the post-political carbon consensus will be explored in the following section.

## 2.4 Post-political carbon consensus

A post-political condition, as referred to in Section 2.2, is described by Mouffe (2005) and Swyngedouw (2007) as an approach that stifles the “properly” political and restricts opportunities for dissent. Swyngedouw (2007, 24) suggests “postpolitics rejects ideological divisions... the postpolitical condition is one in which consensus has been built around the inevitability of neoliberal capitalism as a moral foundation.” In other words, any social or environmental change that occurs within the post-political condition will be restricted to the confines of the existing social and economic systems. In the case of climate change, Bond (2010a & 2011b) highlights that most political action being taken on climate change maintains a social and economic status quo and maintains the dominance of neoliberal discourse. The Kyoto Protocol provides a key example of this (Chatterton et al, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2010).

The Kyoto Protocol has become a dominant mechanism for addressing climate change under mainstream discourse. Under the Kyoto Protocol countries are obligated to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to below 1990 levels (Sharife, 2009). The Kyoto Protocol relies upon mechanisms such as offsetting schemes and carbon prices to regulate emitter activities. Swyngedouw (2010, 227) refers to the Kyoto Protocol as replacing “political institutions of government” with a “public-private” body, where market mechanisms have been legitimated through policy. As a result carbon dioxide has become a commodity that enters the private sphere of markets. Hence, the Kyoto Protocol neoliberalises governance and the institutions that control and govern the Kyoto Protocol are complex and technomanagerial (Swyngedouw, 2010).

With the role of government within the Kyoto Protocol to manage the relationship between markets and policy, Žižek (2002, 303) argues that government becomes “deprived of its proper political dimension.” To be deprived of a “properly” political function assumes that the Kyoto Protocol acts to perpetuate Swyngedouw’s concept of a consensual condition by privileging and legitimising the commodification of CO<sub>2</sub>. In this view, he argues climate change has become an issue of markets, capital exchange and a:

complex governance regime organized around a set of technologies of governance that revolve around reflexive risk-calculation, self-assessment, interest-negotiation and intermediation, accountancy rules and accountancy-based disciplining, detailed

quantification and benchmarking of performance (Swyngedouw, 2010, 220)

General consensual acceptance of the Kyoto Protocol as the primary means of addressing climate change, coupled with the scientific consensus that has catalysed the need to address climate change as an issue solely of greenhouse gas emissions, has resulted in the reduction of spaces for dissent on contestation of these economic systems. Although it should be acknowledged that a number of countries no longer participate within the Kyoto Protocol, including Aotearoa New Zealand, it is likely that any successor will be entrenched in a similar system.

Swyngedouw (2010) refers to the concept of the “fetishization of CO<sub>2</sub>” and role it has played in the apocalyptic imaginaries that have been shaped around a global warming scenario. Through the fetishization of CO<sub>2</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub> is presented as the “antagonist” that can be managed, manipulated and controlled through neoliberalised policy measures which count CO<sub>2</sub> as a commodity (Chatterton et al, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2010). Fundamentally, commodified CO<sub>2</sub> becomes:

The fetishized stand-in for the totality of climate change fatalities and, therefore, it suffices to reverse atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> build up to a negotiated idealized point in history, to return to climatic status quo ex-ante. An extraordinary techno-managerial apparatus is under way, ranging from new eco-technologies of a variety of kinds to unruly complex managerial and institutional configurations, with a view to producing a socio-ecological fix to make sure nothing really changes (Swyngedouw, 2010, 222).

For political theorists and philosophers such as Rancière, Mouffe, and Žižek, the post-political condition does not address social and environmental issues adequately. This is because the “carbon consensus” suppresses opportunities to shift the social and economic systems which have, according to these theorists, resulted in historical injustices, inequalities, and unequal power distributions (Swyngedouw, 2010; Žižek, 2008).

This research will argue for the existence of a post-political carbon consensus. There is compelling evidence in how neoliberalism solidifies a post-political carbon consensus and influences the solutions to climate change. Further, the urgency and seriousness of climate change has seemingly created an opportunity for innovative new forms of capital accumulation,

with businesses around the world investing in biofuels, biochar and other technological solutions (Swyngedouw, 2010).

McCarthy (2013, 19) disputes the theory of the post-political carbon consensus, by suggesting it is a “potentially analytically flat, totalizing, and inadequate” framing. By referring to climate politics in the United States, McCarthy suggests that a post-political carbon consensus is not as rigid and entrenched as theorists claim. For example, McCarthy (2013, 23) states “they [US politics] do not compartmentalize problems for management, instead seeing virtually every specific issue-e.g., light bulb standards- as a significant front in all-encompassing struggle over the relationship between state and subject.” McCarthy (2013, 12) questions “whether contemporary environmental politics are really so lacking in antagonism, alternative visions, and other elements of “proper” politics as many analysts of the post-political condition claim.” Here, McCarthy argues that theorists such as Swyngedouw undermine the possibilities for activism that contests or opposes neoliberal globalisation and similar economic structures. McCarthy (2013) also notes the difficulties in achieving a “properly” political moment as it is impossible to detach oneself from the economic and social systems of which activism is embedded, stating “we do such political activism a great disservice by contending that it somehow does not count as “proper” politics, or that it is inevitably co-opted or complicit in the reproduction of the status quo” (McCarthy, 2013, 24).

McCarthy (2013) provides examples of moments where activists have challenged economic and social systems such as neoliberal globalisation, for instance the Occupy COP17 protest that was referred to at the beginning of Chapter 1. Evidently, McCarthy (2013) substantiates the idea that a post-political condition is not as steadfast and entrenched as Swyngedouw has theorised. McCarthy cautions against the widespread application of Swyngedouw’s concept of a post-political carbon consensus. He urges for “more modest and consciously situated claims regarding the state of contemporary “politics” writ large” (McCarthy, 2013, 23). McCarthy’s caution is important to this research because it takes into consideration the possibilities for future spaces of dissent and does not assume that the post-political condition is absolute and certain for eternity.

### 2.4.1 Consensus and conflict

The antagonism and fetishization of CO<sub>2</sub> is problematic as it removes conflict that theorists such as Rancière, Žižek and Swyngedouw perceive as necessary for a “proper” democratic politics. Rancière (2001, 11) suggests that “a demonstration is political not because it takes place on a specific locale and bears upon a particular object but rather because its form is that of a clash between two partitions of the sensible.” Thus it is the presence of the conflict that creates the politics and realises opportunities for alternative social and economic futures.

Politicisation is the term used by Swyngedouw (2007) to describe the process of entering politics. He does not mean the politics of governments, but rather refers to politicisation as when an issue, such as climate change, becomes recognised as “inescapably interconnected with a multiplicity of global forces from which it is impossible to escape...” (Swyngedouw, 2007, 30). In other words, to truly address the root causes of climate change one must contest and alter the forces that are creating climate change at its very roots. In contrast, the post-political consensus is defined by Swyngedouw (2007, 26) as a lack of “radical dissent, critique, and fundamental conflict.” Ideally, in the “properly” political, conflict creates an alternative trajectory for the future devoid of systemic injustices (Swyngedouw, 2007).

It is theorised that the consensus systematically and purposefully marginalises opportunities for disruption or dissent (Purcell, 2009; Swyngedouw, 2009). For example, democratic involvement may be used to quell conflict through offering a means of participation (Purcell, 2009; Walters, 2004). But this form of participation is constrained and for non-elites and tends to be reduced to a debate of technicalities within governing institutions, accountancy or technology (Swyngedouw, 2009; 2010). For Swyngedouw (2009, 609), this “announces the end of politics, annuls dissent from the consultative spaces of policy making and evacuates the properly political from the public space.”

Swyngedouw (2009, 615) also considers that under a post-political condition, protests and other expressions of resistance can be co-opted into deliberate forms of participation with institutionalised outcomes or “relegated to a domain outside the consensual postdemocratic arrangement.” In other words, protest can either be replaced with institutionally legitimated participatory measures, such as consultations, or they are considered illegitimate and therefore

ignored. Similarly, Purcell (2009, 141) notes that “neoliberalism seeks actively to co-opt and incorporate democratic resistance. Both liberal and deliberative forms of democracy are being enlisted to support the neoliberal project.” Purcell (2009, 143) suggests that the hegemonic, universal nature of neoliberalism that has resulted in this co-option and that the “ongoing struggle to maintain neoliberalism’s dominance” has meant that resistance is actively discouraged.

Swyngedouw (2009, 615) refers to Cooke and Kothari’s (2001) “tyranny of participation” which means that people:

become either instituted through public–private stakeholder participatory forms of governance, succumbing to the ‘tyranny of participation’... or are radically marginalized and framed as ‘radicals’ or ‘fundamentalist’ and, thereby, relegated to a domain outside the consensual postdemocratic arrangement.

This propensity for relegation is what makes the “properly” political so rare, as opportunities for dissent are actively ignored and discouraged.

## **2.5 The “properly” political and neoliberalism**

McCarthy & Prudham (2004, 278) note the role of environmentalism in resisting neoliberalism, stating that environmental concerns have been “the most passionately articulated and effective political sources of response and resistance to neoliberal projects.” The authors refer to the impact that neoliberalism has had on creating some yet worsening other environmental and resource concerns. Simultaneously, through the proliferation and entrenchment of neoliberalism, McCarthy & Prudham (2004, 279) highlight that:

Many environmentalists have adopted elements of neoliberal ideology and discourse, reflecting and reinforcing neoliberal hegemony. “Free-market” environmentalism, once an oxymoron, has proliferated since the Reagan-Thatcher years, in forms such as tradeable emission permits, transferable fishing quotas, user fees for public goods, and aspects of utility privatization. Meanwhile, neoliberal ventures have increasingly

assimilated environmentalism through key discursive shifts, such as the growing convergence of sustainable development with green capitalism... and a vast tide of corporate green-wash.

Thus, McCarthy & Prudham (2004, 276) also recognise the convergence between environmentalism and neoliberalism, noting the commonalities of environmentalist narratives playing the “game” of neoliberal discourse. In this framing, the post-political consensus stifles choice and opportunity for re-imagination. Swyngedouw (2009) claims that consensus redefines freedom to what is socially and normatively accepted. Further, Purcell (2009) and Žižek (2008) theorise that such freedoms and “alternative trajectories” are limited to being reactionary within existing social constructs of power and privilege. Žižek (2002) argues that the “properly” political is a necessary part of a radical democracy that puts power in the hands of its people and enables people to determine a just future. Within a post-political carbon consensus, the neoliberal solutions handed down from elites in response to an issue such as climate change do nothing more than perpetuate the systems of unequal power, control, injustice and inequalities by failing to address the system at hand (Swyngedouw, 2009; Žižek, 2002).

Under a post-political consensus, debate occurs over technicalities, management of predetermined “legitimate” stakeholders and the “arrangement of policing” (Žižek, 2008, 279). It is, according to Rancière (2010, 6), not a “quarrel over which solutions to apply to a situation but a dispute over the situation itself.” In other words, conflict should lie deeper than simple decisions over. Rather the conflict lies with the ability for the people to defend the commons and thus the power structures that determine the situation (Rancière, 2010). McCarthy (2013) argues that the term “properly” political compartmentalises activism in different localities and presents a narrow definition of the “properly” political. He (2013) argues that, theorists such as Swyngedouw, have created rigid classifications for the “properly” political and created a seemingly consensual condition, free of dissent. The following section will explore Rancière, Žižek, Purcell and Swyngedouw’s notions of the “properly” political in relation to activism. Further, it will suggest the implications that the definitions set out by these theorists may have for the possibility of alternative futures.

## 2.6 The “properly” political and activism

By Rancière’s definition the “properly” political is about reclaiming the freedoms that have been denied through the elitist governance of the police order or the post-political consensus. Further he theorises that “political moments” occur when those individuals and institutions with marginalised or excluded voices transgress or resist the police and the socio-economic order that created them (Swyngedouw, 2007). According to Žižek (as referred to in Swyngedouw, 2007, 23) something becomes:

political when a particular demand (cutting greenhouse gases, stopping the exploitation of a particular resource and so on) starts to function as a metaphoric condensation of the global opposition against Them, those in power, so that the protest is no longer just about that demand, but about the universal dimension that resonates in that particular demand...

In other words, to Žižek (2002), the “properly” political comes about when the dominant hegemony under which an issue came to be is the subject of conflict rather than the issue itself. Under this definition, the “properly” political is not about making demands or requests of the police governance or leaders, but asserting a claim to alternative imaginaries (Swyngedouw, 2007; 2009). According to Purcell (2009) and Swyngedouw (2007) the properly political must oppose the neoliberal discourse/the post-political at its core. As noted above, dissensus and conflict are central to the properly political as they provide mechanisms for radical change and a space for the contestation of the discourses that perpetuate the status quo (Rancière, 2010; Swyngedouw, 2009): “Genuine politics is about the recognition of conflict as constitutive of the social condition, and the naming of the socioecological spaces that can become” (Swngedouw, 2007, 25).

“Properly” political moments are spaces of contestation for those who are marginalised with “no name or no place” whose activities begin to reflect an alternative ideal of equality and liberty on their own terms (Swyngedouw, 2009, 616; Žižek, 2002). Under a consensus situation, equality and liberty are recognised and defined by the dominant hegemony, hence the “properly” political redefines the constraints of these freedoms.



Žižek (2002) suggests that under the post-political condition, radical forms of environmental activism are "unending" and ineffective in their attempts to dislodge power structures and the dominant hegemony as they ultimately end up participating within the very system that they look to disrupt. Rancière (1998) states that only a rupture of the status quo can create the "properly" political. Thus, according to Rancière and Žižek, a "properly" political moment is rare. However, this theory ignores everyday and individualised changes that occur in political subjectivities, particularly through consciousness raising.

Overall, according to Swyngedouw, Žižek and others, a post-political consensus revolving around neoliberal globalisation heavily restricts the will for the "properly" political. When CO<sub>2</sub> is the perceived antagonist, rather than the systems of power and privilege that have caused it there is little need to disrupt the current social order. Thus, climate justice advocates suggest that the role of the climate justice movement in creating the "properly" political and contesting the predominant consensus is key to the displacement of our economic and social systems.

Further, in respect to climate change, climate justice principles act to contest the dominating attributes of the post-political condition. A growing global movement consisting of diverse organisations and communities, climate justice looks to the root causes of climate change and intends to catalyse systemic change as a solution to climate change. The following section will describe in more depth the principles of climate justice and how they present a challenge to the post-political carbon consensus. The existence of the climate justice movement supports McCarthy's (2012) argument that the theory of post-political carbon consensus is generalised and does not take into consideration actions that are taken against the consensual condition, such as the climate justice movement.

## **2.7 Climate justice**

Evidently, climate justice is used to frame an alternative form of political action on climate change to the neoliberalised solutions of a post-political carbon consensus. Climate justice, in its many forms, seeks to achieve what political theorists such as Rancière, Žižek and Mouffe refer to as the "political." The climate justice movement is thus important to this study as it presents a challenge to Swyngedouw's supposed post-political condition, provides alternative localised trajectories for the future and supports McCarthy's (2013) more nuanced view. Further, the

climate justice movement in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas is an example of the use of radical action within the post-political condition. This research will explore how relevant climate justice is to the youth of Aotearoa New Zealand assuming the dominance of the post-political condition over the climate justice alternative highlighted by Swyngedouw (2010). Hence, this research will contribute to a gap in the literature that exists around how the post political carbon consensus shapes how youth think about and engage in climate change activism in Aotearoa New Zealand and what this means for creating opportunities or space for “properly” political moments.

According to Bond (2010a, 22) climate justice presents “a complex challenge to capitalism’s internal logic of commodification and neoliberal policy expansion” and a challenge to de-politicisation through deliberate antagonism, solidarity and understanding of the commons (Chatterton et al, 2012). For climate justice activists, emissions reductions must be achieved in recognition of the unequal social impacts of emitting activities such as fossil fuel extraction and also through addressing the systemic “causes” of climate change- institutionally and structurally, including corporate control over governments, neoliberal globalisation, colonisation, imperialism and marginalisation (Bond, 2011b; Bond & Dorsey, 2010; Dawson, 2010; Goodman, 2009).

Climate justice is a relatively recent concept, described by Bond (2010b) as a bringing together of the ‘global justice movement’ with radical environmentalism. The global justice movement stemmed from the Zapatista solidarity network in the 1990s. The Zapatistas resistance catalysed global support for a local struggle and recognised the similarities of struggles around the world (Bond, 2010b; Dawson, 2010; De Angelis, 2000). Movements were able to draw attention to the impact of the ideology that underlies the struggles at these localities. Global justice movements embody the principles of social and environmental justice which include “economic equity, cultural liberation, and the political participation of people of colour at all levels of decision making” (Dawson, 2010, 326). Climate justice movements transfer these principles to the climate change issue. Climate justice is a way of perceiving the climate change issue that recognises that the causes and solutions to climate change have the most direct ramifications for the most vulnerable people in the world (Bond, 2010a; Dawson, 2010).

Climate justice theorists critique many of the solutions being offered to climate change as being “technical-redistributionist, Third Worldist, Keynesian, or global elitist experiences and aspirations” (Bond & Dorsey, 2010). This echoes the ideas of theorists such as Swyngedouw and Žižek, discussed above regarding mechanisms that have created a post-political carbon consensus. Climate justice activists are united around a loose set of principles underpinned by the inadequacies of neoliberal market based approaches to the climate change issues, such as the UNFCCC body and carbon markets (Bond, 2011b; Bond & Dorsey, 2010; Dawson, 2010; Goodman, 2009). Generally, climate justice activists agree that neoliberal solutions to climate change are simply perpetuating the economic and social systems that created climate change. Additionally, the emissions reductions proposed by the UNFCCC body are said to be too minor and incremental to halt or slow the impacts of climate change (Campbell, 2013).

Many climate justice focussed activists and organisations are committed to maintaining solidarity with indigenous communities, many of whom are opposed to the “false solutions” being imposed upon these communities (Bond, 2010a; Goodman, 2009). “False solutions” can refer to solutions that do not address the root causes of climate change but simply pass the burden of emissions to a developing country (Bond, 2011b; Goodman, 2009). One example of a solution that is often referred to as false is the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM):

Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) is a form of carbon trading provided by the Kyoto Protocol. The scheme allows governments and corporations from Annex 1 countries - i.e. rich countries required to reduce emissions below 1990 levels - to reduce greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere if they can do so at a lower cost. The CDM generates financing for projects that are supposed to lower GHG emissions, such as conversion of landfill methane to electricity (such as Bisasar) or planting of timber to serve as a carbon sink (Sharife, 2009, 95).

Clean Development Mechanisms are controversial for a number of reasons. Some argue that CDM projects act to reward polluters and many do not actually reduce emissions. Dabhi (2012, 246) suggests that “tools such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) simply transfer the

ecological crisis to Southern countries so that the Global North does not have to compromise its way of life.” Further, Dawson (2010) critiques:

there are a number of fairly obvious scams associated with the CDM. So-called carbon sinks are... nothing more than a temporary solution, which, by suggesting that emissions have been nullified, actually encourage further emissions. Under CDM... corporations can both emit more greenhouse gases and also profit from the production of these gases. (Dawson, 2012, 329)

According to Bond & Dorsey (2010) another example of a “false solutions” which climate justice advocates campaign on is mega hydro power projects:

Indigenous communities along the Klamath River forced Pacificorp Power company to agree to ‘Undam the Klamath’ by the year 2020, in order to restore the river’s natural ecosystems, salmon runs and traditional land-use capacity. For decades, Indigenous communities have been calling out false solutions - pointing to the fact that energy technologies that compromise traditional land-use, public health and local economies cannot be considered climate solutions.

Hence, the term “false solution” is a generalised term used to describe solutions to climate change that have unjust effects on society’s poor or oppressed. As a form of critique, it is “sensitive to relations of unequal global geometries of power and how these intersect with relations of class, race, gender, generation, indigenous rights and socio-nature” (Chatterton et al, 2012, 5). Climate justice, as it is referred to in this research, is a diverse and spatially dispersed series of movements sharing similar core principles or value systems. Climate justice activists tend to operate within a number of social movements and the tactics and strategies used in defence of climate justice are as diverse as the people involved (Bond, 2010b).

### **2.7.1 Climate justice and activism**

As acts of resistance, climate justice activists often organise protests and direct actions in an attempt to move the climate change conversation away from global and state led solutions, towards empowerment and solidarity with communities on the frontlines of climate change.

Radical actions may not always represent “properly” political moments. However they are usually designed to create conflict and actively contest the post-political consensus.

For many climate justice activists around the world, this has meant taking up the direct action and protest tactics of other resistance, social and environmental justice movements (Dawson, 2010). Direct action tactics have been a key part of climate justice struggles over the last few years including the “Nigerian and Ecuadorian oilfields, Australia’s main coal port, Britain’s coal-fired power stations and main airport, Canada’s tar sands, and US coalfields and corporate headquarters” (Bond, 2011a, 2).

### **2.7.2 The growth of the climate justice movement**

Climate justice as an active concept was established more formally through the formation of a number of coalitions and organisations such as the Durban Group for Climate Justice and Climate Justice Now! (Bond, 2010b; Bond & Dorsey, 2010). At the 2007 United Nations Climate Change negotiations in Bali, Climate Justice Now! was formed as a result of ideological factions within the Climate Action Network (the main NGO umbrella group), which was becoming increasingly sympathetic to the carbon market based solutions being presented at the negotiations (Bond 2010b; Bond & Dorsey, 2010; Chatterton et al, 2012).

Another turning point that saw growth in the climate justice movement was the United Nations Climate Change negotiations in Copenhagen, 2009 (COP 15). COP 15 failed to deliver on the global agreement that would legally bind nations into emissions reductions and also produced an impressive display of the force of corporate interest in the negotiations (Bond, 2010b; Chatterton et al, 2012). While consensus did not exist over the nature of the agreement, there was a consensual condition surrounding the framing of the issue as one of CO<sub>2</sub> and the use of techno-managerial fixes for climate change. According to Chatterton et al (2012, 3):

There was the space of corporate and business interests that turned the summit into an opportunity to present big technology, science and market-based solutions to climate change. These green capitalist accumulation strategies were embodied in the “Hopenhagen” exhibition area in central Copenhagen, opposite the Tivoli Gardens.

In contestation, the negotiations also saw the collective strength of collaboration between social and environmental justice activists from the left under the banner of “Climate Justice Action” (Bond, 2010a). This included anarchists, anti-globalisation activists, youth, NGOs, grassroots groups, social movements such as Via Campesina (small scale farmers and peasants network), socialists, unions and a wide range of civil society actors (Bond, 2010a). Thus the negotiations (and other conference gatherings) provided an opportunity for the articulation of a set of climate justice-based demands. These demands represented solutions to climate change that the movement want to see, beyond the negotiation process outcomes, for example:

Leaving fossil fuels in the ground and investing in appropriate energy efficiency and community-led renewable energy... rights-based resource conservation that enforces Indigenous land rights and promotes peoples’ sovereignty over energy, forests, land and water (Bond, 2010b, 20).

Following the failure of the Copenhagen negotiations, the Cochabamba summit, supported by the Bolivian Government and President Evo Morales, brought together indigenous peoples from all over Latin America to discuss climate justice and to contest the United Nations climate change negotiations process through a series of demands (Russell et al, 2012). The Cochabamba Summit also brought attention to the plight of climate refugees and demanded the costs of adaptation be met by Annex 1 countries (Panayotakis, 2012). Cochabamba was based on the need to address the power relations within climate change politics- give voice to the vulnerable, indigenous peoples and many of the countries of the Global South that are being marginalised (Panayotakis, 2012). As a deliberate act of contestation, the Cochabamba Summit leveraged the voices of those being affected by climate change and their call for change in economic systems that perpetuates their marginalisation (Panayotakis, 2012).

### **2.7.3 Antagonism, commons and solidarity**

As mentioned previously, rather than forming one social movement, climate justice principles are brought to life by diverse networks, communities, organisations and social movements (Chatterton et al, 2012). Chatterton et al (2012) refer to the three main tenets of climate justice as antagonism, commons and solidarity. This is a concise way of differentiating the climate justice

movement from the ‘third way’ and other neoliberal or mainstream approaches to the climate change issue. Further, Chatterton et al (2012)’s three attributes play an important role in this study because they outline the values that one perceives as important in order to consider advocating climate justice principles or radical action on climate change. By providing an outline of three possible motivations for taking radical/climate justice action on climate change, Chatterton et al (2012) offer insight into the perspectives of climate justice advocates. Further, as this research seeks to explore youth perspectives on climate change and how this may influence spaces for radical action, it is relevant to consider these principles that encompass a climate justice perspective.

The first attribute is the recognition of a systemic antagonism such as the unequal global/local power relations or capitalist growth. Different climate justice networks will have recognised varying antagonists. However, unlike more mainstream approaches which place carbon emissions and scientific processes as causes of climate change at the centre of debate, climate justice movements recognise the role of political antagonists underlying the political carbon consensus (Chatterton et al, 2012). To identify systems such as capitalist growth or power relations as the antagonist allows for action to occur in dissent of the post-political carbon consensus which recognises carbon emissions as the sole antagonist (Chatterton et al, 2012). Therefore, to identify a systemic antagonist allows for actions to become “properly” political. Swyngedouw (2007, 32) suggests that “the “enemy” or the target of concern is... continuously externalized. The enemy is always vague, ambiguous, and ultimately vacant, empty, and unnamed” (Swyngedouw, 2007, 32). In other words, it is an important part of climate justice to recognise a systemic antagonist, otherwise actions risk entering the post-political condition. However, the systemic antagonist, such as capitalist growth or neoliberal globalisation is relentlessly difficult to name and measure. Thus it is a relatively difficult target for activists.

The Free Association (2010) refer to a reoccurring lack of recognition of capital and neoliberalism as the antagonist root cause of climate change. They argue that social movements should recognise neoliberalism as an antagonist and act in ways that counteract neoliberal ideas. According to Swyngedouw (2007) and Rancière (1998) social movements are said to enter the

post-political condition when they are supporting neoliberal and technocratic solutions and fail to recognise these mechanisms as a part of the cause.

The second main tenet of climate justice according to Chatterton et al (2012, 10) is the belief that the commons must be defended against resource “dispossession from poor, peasant and indigenous people.” Mechanisms of resource commodification and privatisation are potential antagonists because they disrupt the commons that are sustained by communities in order to allow long term and regenerative support to collective livelihoods (Chatterton et al, 2012).

Finally, solidarity is an important aspect of the climate justice approach. These universal struggles are often brought together through acts of solidarity. “Solidarity means fighting for our own autonomy at the same time as we struggle against corporations and the relationships of capital that exploit people everywhere” (CJA, 2010, 1). Solidarity is the recognition of the need to connect those fighting common battles in spatially and culturally different contexts (Chatterton et al, 2012). It is particularly important in the fight for climate justice as it actively brings together groups and movements in recognition that the systemic causes of climate change are also the causes of many other struggles. Solidarity in practise epitomizes the struggle for power that social movements are built upon– the support of local struggles by others across the world is a display of how solidarity can shift politics (Chatterton et al, 2012). According to Chatterton et al (2012) solidarity is able to counteract assumptions that localisation of struggles is inward facing and isolating. Further, practising solidarity can help to “develop a broader critique of the forces at play shaping localities” (Chatterton et al, 2012, 13). Thus solidarity can help to build broad alternatives for local situations but increase the collective strength of alternatives that contest neoliberalism and a post-political consensus.

## **2. 8 Summary**

This literature review has revealed the increasing portrayal of climate change as a de-politicised issue. Many commentators have recognised the role the Kyoto Protocol and other neoliberalised solutions to climate change have played in forming a post-political carbon consensus. Thus the systemic causes of climate change are being overlooked in favour of policy-based mechanisms. Climate justice principles have provided a space for dissent and active opposition to the root causes of climate change, including neoliberal globalisation. Connecting thousands of



communities and organisations around the world in solidarity, climate justice acts to oppose the solutions proposed by the United Nations and other political elites in favour of the solutions that create conflict and space for radical change.

There is little empirical exploration of the nature of the consensual condition and its effect in removing opportunities for dissent. This research will fill a gap in the literature that exists surrounding the role of youth activists in perpetuating the post-political carbon consensus. Hence the research will provide an analysis into how relevant the post-political condition is to youth climate change activists and the extent to which post-political carbon consensus has or has not altered perceptions of the “properly” political.

The following chapters will explore the relevance of climate justice to the youth of Aotearoa New Zealand given the sheer strength of the neoliberal discourse that is contributing to the depoliticisation of climate change in Aotearoa New Zealand. The following chapter will explore the neoliberal context of this generation as well as the condition of activism both in Aotearoa New Zealand and globally. It will also introduce Generation Zero- an entirely youth-driven organisation taking action on climate change.

## **Chapter 3: Neoliberalism and youth activism**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores the global and local context for this study. Globally, youth around the world are taking action on climate change and other social and environmental issues through a number of social movements. It is pertinent to question: how is this action reflected in Aotearoa New Zealand? In particular, noting the potential influence of the neoliberal ideology within which activists are working. Despite the extensive neoliberal restructuring in the 1980s, Aotearoa New Zealand has a rich history of social justice and environmental activism which provides the historical context for many of today's activists, who are influenced by campaigns such as Nuclear Free New Zealand and Save Manapouri. The extent to which this context has affected climate change action that case study group Generation Zero's members take will be touched on throughout this study.

### **3.2 Global context: recent social movements and young people**

For this research, it is relevant to explore the history of past and current social movements around the world which influence and inspire activists. Some commentators have particularly noted the role of youth in current day movements around the world:

The past 12 months have furnished numerous other examples of young people – even children as young as eight – becoming involved in popular protest around the world. Every newspaper presents a kaleidoscope of rebellion, dissatisfaction and anger prosecuted in large part by young people, and sometimes with reference to the notion of 'youth' and 'generation'. (Jeffrey, 2011, 145)

Similarly, the influence of well-known historical movements is important to consider. The Zapatista resistance in the 1990s spawned global solidarity networks and the anti-globalisation movement around the globe, and resulted in resistance and solidarity becoming two of the key facets of new social movements. The Zapatista movement created an opportunity for local struggles to unite and work towards the creation of an alternative imaginary to neoliberal

globalisation (Routledge, 2009). The consolidation of climate justice networks has occurred around translocal days of action, which provide opportunities for groups and communities facing similar struggles around the world to unite around synchronised acts of solidarity. Similarly the anti-globalisation movement and global justice networks also used days of actions and international conferences, such as the G8 summit in Seattle, as convergence spaces (Chatterton et al, 2012; Halvorsen, 2012; Routledge, 2009). Convergence spaces manifest as points of interaction between groups, individuals, communities and movements for the purpose of collaborating, strategising, planning and the recognition of a common struggle (Routledge, 2009). Convergence spaces may be longer term or fleeting, however they play an important role in growing global movements and highlighting the interconnections of different themes and issues (Routledge, 2009).

In recent years a new wave of social movements has arisen. The Arab Spring represented the beginning of widespread and public unrest and eventually ousted several regimes from power. The Arab Spring inspired the Occupy movement that began on Wall Street as a result of injustices of the economic crisis and slowly spread across the Western world, including the main centres of Aotearoa New Zealand (Constanza-Chock, 2012). Almost simultaneously the Indignados in Spain, #yo soy 132 in Mexico, the tent protests in Israel, anti-austerity protests across Europe and the student movements against fee rises in Ottawa, Canada, Britain and Chile sprang up (McIntyre, 2012). Students also protested the privatisation of education in Europe, South Africa and Sri Lanka (Jeffrey, 2011). Protests, occupations, rallies and demonstrations captured media attention which spurred further waves of action around the world. Social media and the internet played a notable role in not only raising awareness of the unrest but in the organisation of some of the mass mobilisations that took place around the world. A key example of this being #yo soy 132 in Mexico, a protest around the role of media in democracy which began as a twitter hashtag and resulted in some of the biggest street protests in Mexico to date (Constanza-Chock, 2012; McIntyre, 2012).

Students tend to be savvy social media users and are an important factor in these broad social movements (Guzman-Concha, 2012; Jeffrey, 2011). Many student movements, such as those in

Chile and Mexico, resulted in more wide spread movements which looked to address other more systemic issues:

Contesting inequalities in the education system, the movement [student movements] soon evolved into a challenge to the authoritarian character of political institutions, sharing similar goals with protests elsewhere around the world—including radical economical and political democratization (Guzman-Concha, 2012, 1).

According to Jeffrey (2011, 147):

The Tunisian uprising in turn sparked further protests across the Middle East and North Africa, most notably in Egypt, where a partly youth-led movement used social media and direct protests to force the authoritarian leader Hosni Mubarak from power. These uprisings were not straightforwardly ‘youth’ mobilizations. They involved people of different ages... but young people were important in the Arab Spring.

A number of commentators have noted that students are once again the political force they have been historically. Jeffrey (2011, 147) states, “children and youth have been highly visible in recent mobilization around the world...Young people appear to be acting as true ‘alchemists of the revolution’, as they have done in the past.” They have large numbers, existing organisations, access to technology and social networks which enables quick and efficient co-ordination (Guzman-Concha, 2012; Jeffrey, 2011). Another factor that drives these social movements is the recent financial crisis which has meant that austerity measures are being used more widely with detrimental effects on people worldwide (Halvorsen, 2012). The financial crisis has meant changes to student support, fee increases for university education, fewer jobs available for youth, increased student debt and general feelings of unrest as youth face an uncertain future (Halvorsen, 2012). Compounded by environmental issues, including climate change, young people worldwide are recognising the issues resulting from neoliberalism, capitalism and corporate control (Jeffrey, 2011). While many of these movements (other than Occupy) did not actively mention similar struggles around the world, it is clear that there is a pattern of increased political opposition to corporate control and inequalities gaining pace around the world, each struggle “rooted in their local circumstance and politics” (Pickerill & Krinsky, 2012, 6). Some of

these movements present a paradox to the framing of the post-political consensus, as they highlight the desire but difficulty in achieving the “properly” political. In some instances, such as the Arab Spring, it could be argued that the demand for western-constructed forms of democracy does not subvert systems. However, given the localised context of the action it is important to consider that perhaps the “properly” political and henceforth the post-political consensus is different in every locality and therefore the opportunities to contest dominant systems are locally diverse. Thus, this study explores the localised context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Many protests and movements are driven by students who see a need for change in the social and economic power structures of society and out of concern for their futures. It is concern for their future that commonly drives youth activism on climate change (youthclimate.org, 2012). Thus it is important to consider how youth of Aotearoa New Zealand fit into global patterns of youth-driven radical action and mass mobilisation, in particular in relation to climate change.

### **3.2.1 Youth climate change activism around the world**

Aside from involvement in movements addressing social and environmental issues, it is relevant to this research to explore what young people are doing specifically around climate change. Given the lag time of the impact of carbon dioxide emissions, youth and future generations will be feeling the true force of climate change, economically, socially and environmentally. This will provide broader context for youth activism on climate change in Aotearoa New Zealand and provide a basis from which to analyse the diversity in forms of political action on climate change taken by young New Zealanders.

Climate change activism driven by young people is often collectively referred to by youth engaged globally as the “international youth climate movement” (youthclimate.org, 2012). Geographically diverse regions are represented by the international youth climate movement, which includes the newly formed Arab Youth Climate Movement, the African Youth Initiative on Climate Change, the Australian Youth Climate Coalition and many more across the Global North and South. One opportunity that youth organisations, youth representatives of NGOs and many other young people use to converge is the annual United Nations Climate Change Conferences. Hundreds of youth attend the negotiations every year and represent global youth as

the constituency “YOUNGO” (youth NGOs). It is in this setting that this movement has established a broad overarching vision that represents a series of general policy asks:

Youth envision a world with a safe and stable climate. In this world, unmitigated pollution of the shared atmosphere is no longer acceptable. Developed countries have paid the full debt of their historical emissions burden on the climate by facilitating and financing necessary adaptation measures in developing countries. Also financed by developed countries, global innovation has been harnessed, and effective renewable and energy efficient technologies have been developed and equitably distributed throughout the world. Having addressed climate change through a strong global agreement, and free from the added pressure of a more dangerous climate, we are now able to turn our full attention to the world’s other pressing issues including food security, water & sanitation, health care, education and freedom (youthclimate.org, 2012).

Increasingly, young people working on climate change are meeting away from the United Nations Climate Change Conferences and seek to find other solutions to climate change. Dissatisfaction mainly stems from the lack of progress being made at negotiations in creating legally binding emissions targets (Banjeree, 2012). Following COP 17, Banjeree (2012, 1769) noted “green groups claimed that the agreement did not cover binding emissions cuts, a major objective of COP meetings, and hence COP17 was a failure.” Bond (2011c, 3) proclaimed “failure is the only way to summarize sixteen years of talk by United Nations negotiators from national states influenced by fossil-fuel-dependent capital [and] neoliberal multilateral agencies.” Further, some youth believe that the channels for youth involvement, for example interventions made at the end of negotiation sessions, are inadequate. As Banjeree (2012, 1764) highlights “being allowed to participate in negotiations as a legitimate stakeholder does not mean that all participants have similar capabilities in making their voices heard.” One example of an alternative gathering of youth is the Global Power Shift event happening in Istanbul in June 2013. Youth from all over the world will gather to learn, share and mobilise climate movements against fossil fuels in their home countries (Global Power Shift, 2013).

Youth climate activists around the world engage in a number of different forms of activism, from lobbying on policy measures to more radical actions. For example, SustainUS in the United States work on “proactive education and advocacy at the policy-making level and at the grassroots” (SustainUS, n.d.) while the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition works on a campaign called Fossil Free Canada which aims to build a movement for divestment from fossil fuels (Fossil Free Canada, 2013). Youth-based organisations and networks often collaborate with “adult” non-government organisations and take their cues from their campaigns. Some examples of well-known (non-youth based) organisations that specifically support climate justice principles include; Carbon Trade Watch, Friends of the Earth, Global Justice Ecology Project, Indigenous Environmental Network, Rising Tide UK/North America, La Via Campesina peasants’ movement and Durban Group for Climate Justice. Some youth-based organisations are becoming increasingly powerful political lobby groups, for example, the Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC). The AYCC has over 70,000 members and counts one of its major successes as driving a coalition of organisations to lobby successfully for a carbon tax in Australia (AYCC, 2013). AYCC’s uniquely “positive” brand of climate activism has thrust climate change into the public spotlight and provided inspiration for youth movements around the world, including Generation Zero in Aotearoa New Zealand. The following two sections will explore environmental and social movements, as well as climate change focused groups in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **3.3 Environmental and social movements in Aotearoa New Zealand**

It is relevant to discuss the history of environmental and social movements in Aotearoa New Zealand in order to understand the context of current day activism for youth and others. Furthermore, this study will explore if issues are being addressed in new and different ways than they have historically.

Aotearoa New Zealand has a long and proud history of social and environmental movements that have shaped this country. The anti-nuclear, anti-war, women’s suffrage and anti-apartheid movements are demonstrative of Aotearoa New Zealand’s political activism (Curtin & Lacey, 2007). It was these movements that enabled New Zealand to become connected with global

organisations such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, which set up branches in New Zealand (Curtain & Lacey, 2007).

Environmental activism for conservation reached a peak in the 1960s and 70s with the establishment of groups such as Forest and Bird and Ecology Action in Aotearoa New Zealand and campaigns, most notably the Save Lake Manapouri campaign (Downes, 2000; Mills, 2009). Biodiversity conservation is a poignant issue for many New Zealanders due to the unique ecology of Aotearoa New Zealand and the effect that the introduction of foreign species since colonisation and urbanisation has had on native and endemic biodiversity (Downes, 2000). It is still something of an ongoing battle most recently seen through campaigns such as the 'Save Happy Valley' campaign and a campaign to save the Denniston Plateau from proposed coal mining. Mainstream public support was also built around resistance to Government plans to mine Schedule Four conservation land. The announcement of these plans led to thousands of people mobilising through marches in central Auckland and other centres and writing submissions to central Government. According to Mills (2009, 684), "there has been some argument... as to whether contemporary environmental movements derive from such past concerns, or represent reactions to more recent events, such as degradation in the environment, and international activism."

Many of these environmental/conservation movements and social movements such as the anti-apartheid movement had strong support and involvement from students and young people, a pattern which has been emulated around the world (Hirsch, 1993). Nevertheless, Curtain & Lacey (2007) note that fewer and fewer from this current generation of youth are becoming politically active. Although Curtain & Lacey (2007) describe political action through means such as voting and joining political affiliate groups, they also note a general lack of youth interest around politics, including the politics of carbon neutrality in Aotearoa New Zealand. This follows a global trend of youth political apathy but contradicts patterns of rising youth dissent and non-traditional means of political involvement. Perhaps this is indicative of growing understanding and recognition amongst youth for the need to resist and create conflict given the unique set of issues this generation of youth faces and their systemic causes. The aforementioned recent campaigns represent the combination of conservation and traditional



environmentalist messages with the issue of climate change. Hence, it could be argued that these newer campaigns represent Aotearoa New Zealand's past movements against environmental degradation coming together with global issues of concern. Thus this study will explore how this historical context is relevant to youth climate change activism here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **3.4 Climate movement in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Given Aotearoa New Zealand's history of addressing environmental and social justice issues it is pertinent to explore how New Zealanders are addressing climate change. Thus, this section will explore the civil society reaction to climate change in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is Aotearoa New Zealand's primary policy tool for addressing rising carbon emissions. Much controversy has plagued the ETS since its introduction in 2002, particularly surrounding the role of agricultural emissions in the scheme (Donald & Kerr, 2012). Most recently, Aotearoa New Zealand withdrew from the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol (Radio New Zealand, 2012). Essentially, Aotearoa New Zealand's government has an inadequate plan to responsibly reduce emissions in accordance with our per capita emissions<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, emissions in Aotearoa New Zealand are currently growing, most significantly in the transport sector (Ministry for the Environment, n.d.). A number of NGOs, businesses, business lobby groups (such as Pure Advantage), the Labour Party and the Green Party of Aotearoa have expressed concerns with Aotearoa New Zealand's commitment to addressing the climate change issue. The Green Party of Aotearoa stated:

By emaciating our own emissions trading scheme and renouncing any legal obligation to cut emissions in this decade New Zealand now rivals Canada for the worst climate change policy in the world. All other developed countries and many developing countries, including major emerging economies, have more visionary and effective policies (Graham, 2013).

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<sup>3</sup> "New Zealand now appears to be a long way from meeting its Kyoto Protocol targets at least in terms of domestic action... Gross emissions (before accounting for forest sinks) have continued to increase since the late 1990s and in 2006 were about 20% above the 1990 baseline" (Boston, 2007, 16).

A grassroots movement of organisations, communities and individuals taking action on climate change is slowly building but is in its relative infancy. A key point of growth in this activity was prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> annual United Nations Climate Change Negotiations in Copenhagen (Chatterton et al, 2012). Chatterton et al (2012, 2) refer to these as the Copenhagen mobilisations, a “culmination of diverse forms of translocal organising.” Prior to the negotiations, groups around the world organised in anticipation of the negotiations and the deal that they were expected to produce. Chatterton et al (2012, 2) highlights the diverse and widespread organising, “for example, on 24 October 2009, a global day of action organised by the “350 campaign” saw 5200 actions in 181 countries unite in a call for an equitable and meaningful solution to the climate crisis.” Further, the negotiations themselves saw thousands of members of civil society converge, with five spaces for civil society to gather in (Chatterton et al, 2012). This provided an opportunity for civil society to network and work together (Chatterton et al, 2012).

A small number of organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand campaign and work directly with the climate change issue. The last few years have seen the introduction of climate change as a core concern in the campaigns of large organisations such as Greenpeace New Zealand, exemplified by the “Sign On” campaign around the setting of a “40% emission reduction target” for New Zealand at the Copenhagen Climate Change Negotiations (Greenpeace, 2010) and Oxfam New Zealand which focuses on the impacts of climate change on poverty (Oxfam, 2000-2013). Coal Action Network Aotearoa (CANA) “recognises coal as the primary threat to Earth’s climate system. CANA promotes climate justice by advocating and acting for a just transition to an Aotearoa free of coal mining and use” (CANA, n.d.). A multitude of other organisations also run campaigns around climate change, focusing their campaigns around poignant issues such as fossil fuel extraction, transport and the emissions trading scheme. Examples of these organisations include Climate Defence Network, WWF New Zealand, Ora Taiao: New Zealand Climate and Health. 350 Aotearoa, as part of the global movement 350.org, addresses climate change with a globalised perspective and aims to raise awareness of climate change and what can be done about it (350 Aotearoa, n.d.). In general, organisations (both those that are development focused and those that are environment focused) within New Zealand tend to view climate change through a scientific or policy-oriented lens. For example, “WWF advocates for government to do its bit to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to safe levels. We have a vision

for a low carbon New Zealand and to make it happen we are working with government, business and individuals” (WWF New Zealand, n.d.). Much of the mainstream rhetoric surrounds policy measures and New Zealand’s role in International Negotiations. For instance, Oxfam New Zealand focuses on a global solution for climate change: “Oxfam is part of the tck tck tck global campaign, calling for an ambitious, fair and legally binding climate change treaty” (Oxfam, 2000-2013).

There are few organisations that actively use climate justice rhetoric or align with climate justice principles. A number of anti-mining organisations operate under a similar understandings of the need for systemic change and an opposition to market-based solutions. One example of this is Coal Action Network: “Coal Action Network Aotearoa (CANA) is a group of climate justice campaigners committed to fighting the continuation of coal mining in Aotearoa New Zealand” (Coal Action Network Aotearoa, n.d). Other organisations were set up specifically to work on climate justice; for example, Climate Justice Aotearoa, Climate Justice Wellington (largely inactive) and Climate Justice Taranaki: “a community group dedicated to justice, resistance, education and positive action at the front lines of climate change” (Climate Justice Taranaki, n.d.).

Climate justice is just as relevant to Aotearoa New Zealand as it is overseas. While Aotearoa New Zealand may feel relatively few impacts of climate change in comparison, the rising cost of food, oil and other commodities will create justice issues within Aotearoa New Zealand as it is the poorest and most vulnerable that will feel the effects of this the most. Climate change will thus exacerbate existing inequalities and widen the gap between the rich and the poor. The cost of rising sea levels and any natural disasters Aotearoa New Zealand might face will impact the poorest the most (CJA, 2012).

Fossil fuel extraction are particularly pertinent climate justice issue in the Aotearoa New Zealand context as fracking, lignite mining, deep sea oil drilling, coal mining and other forms of extraction are risks for our environment (CJA, 2012). Extraction activities present justice issues because of the unequal environmental effects are unequally felt by the economically and socially marginalised (CJA, 2012). Further, extraction activities are sometimes in breach of land rights or indigenous sovereignty (Bond & Dorsey, 2010). False solutions also have a large role to play and

are expected to be an increasingly important campaign subject for climate justice-concerned organisations. False solutions (as referred to in Section 2.6) are solutions which do not address the root causes of climate change but simply pass the burden of emissions to a developing country (Bond, 2011b; Goodman, 2009).

Another important aspect of climate justice in Aotearoa New Zealand considering how climate change specifically affects Māori:

As with other indigenous peoples, climate change will unfairly affect Māori more than many others in Aotearoa because Māori live close to the environment e.g. fishing, gather kai and are often... lack[ing] the means of protection from economic crises, natural disasters or new disease outbreaks. Climate justice... [is about] acknowledging that Māori have a lot of knowledge about how to live sustainably on this land and for how our communities can re-organise and support each other... stand in solidarity with them by rebuilding your own sustainable communities so that we can resist climate polluters and capitalism together – Tuhi- Ao, climate justice activist (CJA, 2012, 5).

As previously mentioned, climate justice activists often use direct action and aim to address unequal power relations through their actions and how they are organised. Across the spectrum of actions, strategies and tactics groups can engage in, youth are often a part of these actions on climate change. The next section will explore the kinds of actions and strategies youth taking action on climate change in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **3.4.1 Youth climate change activism in Aotearoa New Zealand**

For this study, it is important to discuss the spectrum of climate change action that youth in Aotearoa New Zealand are involved with. This indicates how youth are meeting the challenge of climate change and what kinds of solutions youth see as most effective. Generation Zero, the case study for this research, forms a part of this climate change movement, and thus the overall role that Generation Zero plays in this movement shall be explored.

Youth activism on climate change is as diverse as their “adult” counter-parts and represents a variety of strategies and visions for addressing climate change. Within the Aotearoa New

Zealand context, there are relatively few groups that are entirely youth-focused. A number of the aforementioned organisations that work on climate change do involve youth in their action. However, Generation Zero is the only entirely youth-run climate change organisation. 350 Aotearoa partnered with Generation Zero to hold Power Shift NZ-Pacific (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> December 2012), a conference that brought together 700 young people from around Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific Islands with the intention of catalysing a youth climate change movement by providing skills and inspiration (Power Shift NZ-Pacific, 2013). The conference also saw the launch of two campaigns *100% Possible* and *100% Possible To Be Heard* which intend to enact local scale climate solutions and raise awareness of the impacts of climate change in the Pacific Islands respectively (Power Shift NZ-Pacific, 2013). Generation Zero was heavily involved in marketing and recruiting young people to attend this conference.

Generation Zero's approach to the climate change issue is policy-based. They aim to make change through institutional political means and empowering young people to be an active part of the political process (Generation Zero, n.d.). From this focus it appears that the climate justice approach does not align with Generation Zero's organisational strategy. Generation Zero will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4. Further, the remainder of this thesis will explore Generation Zero's policy-based approach and the influence that Aotearoa New Zealand's neoliberal context may have had on this.

The neoliberal nature of some of the solutions that are endorsed by Generation Zero will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. However, the following section considers the role that neoliberalism has played in shaping aspects of the lives of current day youth. McCarthy & Prudham (2004, 275) refer to the "various parallels and tensions between neoliberalism and environmentalism". Further McCarthy & Prudham (2004) highlight the lack of literature that has explored the interrelations between the two ideologies, something which this study aims to address. The following section also draws out some of the important effects of neoliberalism on the wider social and political landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **3.5 Neoliberalism in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Uniquely, the current generation of youth have grown up completely immersed in neoliberalism. Aside from having political and economic implications, it has created a discourse of social norms

and practises that impact many aspects of our lives (Hayward, 2012; Larner, 2000; Nairn et al, 2012; Peck & Tickell, 2002). Thus, the neoliberal context of this current generation of youth will shape the future of activism that youth engage in, and the ways in which youth perceive the effectiveness of action and its role in the democratic society.

Prior to 1984, Aotearoa New Zealand's economy was in a state of disarray with high levels of government borrowing and a reliance on agriculture and protected foreign markets, including Great Britain (Larner & Craig, 2005). Aotearoa New Zealand was one of the most protected economies in the world under then Prime Minister Muldoon, at a time when the rest of the world began liberalising their economies (Bray & Walsh, 1998; Larner & Craig, 2005). As these international economies began restructuring they became more open to international trade in an attempt to become more profitable (Larner & Craig, 2005). They followed a general pattern that aimed to increase the size and efficiency of the economy by removing some of the Government's responsibility for capital and placing it in the hands of the market (Bray & Walsh, 1998). In this context, Aotearoa New Zealand embarked on a significant programme of reform. The change of Government in 1984 allowed the changes to begin:

Their blueprint for change required less government, the privatisation of state assets and businesses... reduced public expenditure, and rolling back the welfare state. Excess productive capacity would have to be liquidated, the existing labour force entrenched, and new, efficient technology introduced (Kelsey, 1999 16).

Roger Douglas' as finance minister under Lange's Labour Government instigated some of the most radical and rapid reform seen globally, known as Rogernomics (Kelsey, 1999). This was justified by the declining economy and a sense of urgency and fear built by the government and other external actors. To deal with the declining economy, radical changes were made over a short period, with little consultation of affected parties and those outside of Douglas' inner circle (Bray & Walsh, 1998; Larner, 2000). This was known as the 'blitzkrieg' approach (or "lightening strike") due to its "surprise announcement and "rapid implementation" (Kelsey, 1999, 27). This was example of the shift away from social democratic values and a shift to the Centre Left that typifies 'third way' politics, despite being prior to Giddens' influence. Generally, there was little resistance to the discourse that would go on to define a generation. Aotearoa New Zealand's

previously protected economy became one of the most open, internationalised and deregulated economies in the world (Larner, 2000). The economy began to diversify and look beyond its previous agricultural focus (Larner & Walters, 2000). Rogernomics saw the closure of a number of small local businesses unable to compete with international trading partners. Many farmers and rural land owners were unable to compete without the previously high subsidies that were supporting the agricultural industry (Larner & Walters, 2000). Unemployment increased and many small communities were left without their supporting industries as investment went into less labour intensive industries. Furthermore, a large number of government-owned enterprises, such banks and the postal service, were sold to overseas investors (Larner & Walters, 2000).

Overall, the restructuring under Rogernomics had a detrimental social impact. The hardest hit were low income families, rural communities dependent on agricultural subsidies, single mothers, beneficiaries and Māori (Kelsey, 1999; Larner, 2000). The rhetoric of “short term pain for long term gain” (Kelsey, 1999, 11) was irreversibly affecting the vulnerable in society, yet there was very little resistance to neoliberal policy change. The logic of liberal economists was that while tax reductions increased the ability of the wealthy to become wealthier, thus increasing inequalities and eventually the benefits of this wealth would trickle down (Kelsey, 1999). This trickle down is not professed to happen through hand outs or welfare, but rather through motivation and innovation (Larner, 2005), “welfare, they argued, had undermined workers’ motivational commitment to market exchange and the achievement ideology” (Kelsey, 1999, 15). A liberal economy aims to maximise participation and efficiency in the marketplace and thus according to Kelsey (1999) ensure that individuals are rewarded for initiative, innovation and taking risks. As the needs of the market become tantamount within social norms, so too does the promotion of “self-restraint and community sacrifice” (Kelsey, 1999, 15). Therefore inequalities become a fault of not only the individual’s ability and capacity but their propensity to be “lucky”. As a result “inequality is accepted as an inevitable and necessary condition of a free market in which there is no predictability, and of a society where progress is achieved by providing rewards for initiative” (Kelsey, 1999, 16).

Further, Larner (2005) encourages the pursuit of research into neoliberalism that acknowledges “the paradoxes that characterize neoliberalising political formations” (Larner, 2005, 12).

Academics must recognise the complexities inherent within the discourse and its wide-reaching implications and paradoxes (Larner, 2000). In doing this research, the context of neoliberalism is used to highlight the complexities and considerations of youth involved in activism with the intention of re-creating their future. It has fundamentally shaped their vision of what is possible and how it should be achieved.

The changes and reforms that have occurred under neoliberalism were rapid and deep-seated and took place within the context of global shifts towards neoliberalism, they are considered hegemonic by many commentators including McCarthy & Prudham (2004). Commitment to neoliberal ideals and the global market are strongly held by industry, politicians and private players and the entire economy has been reformed to meet the needs of the free market. But for the neoliberal generation, neoliberalism is the only reality they have ever known and thus the ideals have been embedded in their upbringing, through education, work lives and their role as citizens within a neoliberal democracy. Peck & Tickell (2002) refer to the “strength in the transformative and durable nature of neoliberalism both economically and politically. Neoliberalism has demonstrated an ability to absorb or displace crisis tendencies” (Peck & Tickell, 2002, 400). As a result, it has infiltrated and affected all aspects of our society’s operation and “become a commonsense of the times” (Peck & Tickell, 2002, 381). Neoliberalism has created a politics where “the outcome is not homogeneity, but a constantly shifting landscape of experimentation, restructuring, (anti)social learning, technocratic policy transfer, and partial emulation” (Peck & Tickell, 2002, 396). Thus there has been little effective resistance to neoliberalism and the discourse has remained strong (Peck & Tickell, 2002). It is the complexity of the politics created by neoliberal discourse that will be explored in this research. These characteristics facilitate the perpetuation of the broad consensus and a neoliberal political economy (as discussed in Chapter 2). Hence this research will fill a gap in the literature that exists surrounding the role of neoliberalism within activism and how this may be used to support a post-political condition.

Larner (2005) recognised that it was not simply economic and political changes that neoliberalism brought in. Neoliberalism, as a discourse, altered perceptions of what was common sense and shifted social relations. Larner (2005, 12) states “neoliberalism is a social project that



seeks to create a reality that it suggests already exists”. For example, neoliberalism has also allowed the concept of “freedom” as defined as the right of the individual to control the activities they engage in and thus their future through these activities (Kelsey, 1993). This is opposed to notions of freedom that imply “‘freedom to’ enjoy positive outcomes” (Kelsey, 1993, 16) or freedom of expression. Thus neoliberal reforms not only had an economic influence but also an impact on social norms and perceptions of rights and “freedoms” (Kelsey, 1999). An entire generation have grown up under neoliberalism and its associated social norms, often known as the “neoliberal generation,” “children of the market” or “consumer-citizen[s]” (Hayward, 2012; Nairn et al; 2012; Larner, 2000). How has neoliberalism shaped their experiences and perceptions of the role of activism in addressing climate change?

### **3.6 The Neoliberal Generation**

Hayward (2012) and Nairns et al (2012) both refer to the impact of neoliberalism specifically on children and young people. Their respective books cover the role that neoliberalism has played in shaping values, including perceptions of employment, ambition, citizenship and education among other important aspects of the formative years of youth. Both refer specifically to the values associated with neoliberalism beyond the economic and political implications, which forms the focus of this research. Further both texts are set within the unique Aotearoa New Zealand context in which neoliberalism was rolled out rapidly and radically and resulted in little opportunity for critique. Hayward (2012, 12) notes that:

The shift to citizenship as personal responsibility has been exacerbated by the spread of neoliberal economic theory. While differing from country to country, neoliberalism can be conceived as an economic policy and ideological project that seeks to extend market values in public life.

Hayward (2012) discusses in depth the impact that neoliberalism has had on the neoliberal generation and the perception that this generation has of citizenship, particularly political citizenship in relation to environmental issues. Hayward focuses on the role that neoliberal ideology has had on how children are taught to interact with global and moral issues and thus choose to take action. She argues that we are seeing in relation to environmental issues, a shift further away from collective, politicised action towards action that focuses on the role of the

individual, particularly the role of the consumer. Hayward asserts that environmental education that our young generations are being exposed to does not fully equip them to be critical of the neoliberal system or to think holistically about the intersections between sustainability, ecological concerns and other issues such as poverty and domestic violence. Current popular environmental education on waste issues and recycling are suggested to be inadequate as they simplify solutions to problems that require a deeper understanding of the interconnections between social and environmental issues to truly address them. Despite the fact that neoliberal policy has had a hand in creating some of the “largest consumers and polluters per capita on the planet” (Hayward, 2012, 4), there are few opportunities within environmental education to see their role as citizens beyond neoliberal actors. There is a complacency within addressing such issues not as political issues which require a democratic imagination, but as issues that require “more efficient, market-based solutions, more responsibility, not more democracy” (Hayward, 2012, 5).

According to Hayward (2012), the dominating importance of the market and private property rights to society has undoubtedly had an effect on the perceptions of children towards what is valued and what is important. Much literature points to concerns that young people now “equate ‘good citizenship’ with habits of private responsibility and ‘ethical consumption’ in ways that leave the underlying drivers of environmental and social problems unchallenged” (Hayward, 2012, 21). This reflects the privileging of individualism within neoliberalism and the idea that each individual is responsible for “her or his own behaviour and destiny” and thus determine their own influence on the environment (Kelsey, 1993, 16).

For Hayward (2012), the internalising of neoliberal values is of most concern when it involves the compromise of other values such as those based around community and collectivism that have been replaced with these new forms of individualised citizenship. Citizenship that relies upon behaviour change from each individual and does not allow or promote criticism or analysis of the politics of power at systemic level fails to address the reality of “complex, interconnected problems” (Hayward, 2012, 12).

Hayward argues that as neoliberal actors, youth have been conditioned to see themselves as private individual actors, whose power lies in the ability to “adopt pro-environmental

behaviours” (Hayward, 2012, 7). Further, neoliberal discourse has affected how environmental issues are portrayed. Environmental issues tend to be viewed through a psychological lens which has allowed the moulding and shaping of messages to a moral and individualistic framing. A psychological and individualistic framing of environmental issues is said to have compromised the political approach to such issues. By teaching young people to perceive issues as being political, according to Hayward, allows citizens to gain the agency needed to make larger, more widespread systemic change. Hayward suggests that neoliberalism and as a result “consumer-citizenship”:

Inadvertently narrows our vision of citizenship, reducing the potential of political agency to the aggregation of personal values choices, aspirations and psycho-social interactions with the natural world, obscuring the political potential of citizens collaborating and reasoning together to create alternative pathways and forms of public life (Hayward, 2012, 8).

This notion reflects the post-political condition raised in Chapter 2, as it demonstrates the privileging of solutions that do not address the social, political and economic systemic causes of issues (Swyngedouw, 2010). Instead, solutions that do not shift the status quo or create political conflict are the norm. Hayward warns against “the temptation to withdraw from our rapidly-degrading and disappointing world in favour of “do it yourself” independent green living” (Hayward, 2012, 5-6) which essentially fails to address any of the root causes of environmental or social issues, in fact making such inequalities worse by creating a “green privileged elite” (Hayward, 2012, 5-6) and distracts from the solutions which will address the underlying systemic causes.

Furthermore, Hayward recognises a reliance upon market based mechanisms contributing to a lack of political framing of environmental issues. As a result of neoliberalism, market tools are seen as the solutions to our problems “including fiscal incentives, tax deductions for home insulation and carbon trading” (Hayward, 2012, 8). As neoliberal market-oriented actors, one benefit of a financial incentives scheme is that we can be encouraged to act in certain ways by profit. This presents the question: would we act to the benefit of the environment if no financial incentives were offered? Hayward (2012) concedes that market solutions also do not address the

systemic causes of environmental issues as noted by practitioners of the climate justice approach. They not only reduce complex issues down to economic issues but ignore the role that citizens could have in creating community led solutions. With issues becoming increasingly complex, agency, collaboration, imagination and democracy are required to solve them. This is far beyond what Hayward believes we are teaching our young people, which is that “good citizens recycle and vote, are dutiful, obedient, resourceful and resilient” (Hayward, 2012, 12).

Similarly, Nairn et al (2012) explore the implications of neoliberalism on the generations born after 1984, referred to as the neoliberal generation. Rapid and radical neoliberal policy reform has thus influenced this generation’s “identities and futures” (Nairn et al, 2012, 11) and reflect how they make the transition from school to adult lives. Neoliberal discourse has affected how attitudes toward consumption and have made products increasingly important to young people’s identities. Often heralded as materialistic (the ‘Me Generation’), this hides the impact of increasing inequalities on the experiences on some of this generation.

Secondly, Nairn et al (2012) note the measures of success and learner identities within the neoliberal generation. Participants generally characterised successful learners “in terms of hard work and good behaviour that would be rewarded in the acquisition of school and post-school qualification” (Nairn et al, 2012, 111). This is once again the ideal that individuals are responsible for their own futures and therefore this is where the power for change is perceived to be held- at the individual level rather than in the system or the collective. This “complicated version of freedom” (Nairn et al, 2012, 12) involves becoming a risk taker or accepting exploitative or free labour (such as internships) in order to “get a foot in the door” (Nairn et al, 2012, 12).

Overall, in their commentaries of the effects of neoliberalism on this youthful generation, Nairns et al (2012) and Hayward (2012) analyse the impact of neoliberal economic policy on attitudes toward the future and active citizenship. Both Nairn et al (2012) and Hayward (2012) note the prevalence of individualistic behaviour evident in taking responsibility for one’s self. This in turn affects perceptions of how the individual can make change in the world around them as active citizens.

### 3.7 Summary

Historically, Aotearoa New Zealand has a diverse and established history of activism on social and environmental issues. In recent years, movements around the world have sought to address climate change- seen as the ultimate environmental and social issue of this generation of youth. However, our current local and global context has affected youth activism and perceptions of change. Within the “youth climate movement” and amongst climate change organisations and movements in general, diversity has sometimes arisen as a result of fundamentally different ideological viewpoints. According to Nairn et al and Hayward, neoliberalism has affected how today’s youthful generation perceive different aspects of their lives and how they can make change. This research seeks to explore what this means for radical action on climate change such as that which is advocated for by the climate justice movement.

This context presents attributes of what Swyngedouw, Žižek and other theorists refer to as a post-political condition. According to Hayward (2012), as a result of the influence of neoliberalism, young environmentally concerned citizens are more likely to engage with a consensual approach. However, Hayward (2012) expresses concern about not only a lack of engagement with the “properly” political (or close to “properly”) but with forms of engagement with political institutions such as voting.

The following Chapter 4 will cover the methods and approach used in this study to analyse the perceptions of research participants. The remainder of this thesis will explore how participants perceive climate change causes and solutions and how these perceptions may be influenced by the concept of the neoliberal generation. Moreover, this research will explore how the dominant neoliberal discourse may have shaped perceptions of the “properly” political or radical action on climate change through building the post-political condition.

## **Chapter 4: Research approach and methods**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter will introduce the case study group used for this research and outline the methods used to collect and analyse research data. The purpose of this research is to explore and understand the perspectives members of Generation Zero have in relation to addressing climate change. Generation Zero, as a youth-driven climate change organisation, provided the ideal case study example. A post-structural approach to this research was taken, with qualitative research methods employed to gain data. The implications of my positionality as a researcher and an activist in this study will be discussed in relation to the analysis methods chosen. To gather data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten young people and discourse analysis used to recognise themes and dynamics within the interview transcripts. This chapter will explore in more depth the methods and the justifications for these choices.

### **4.2 Research approach: post-structuralism**

This study takes a post-structuralist approach. The justification for this choice was that post-structural approaches use language to understand society and the creation of knowledge (Murdoch, 2006). By taking a post-structural approach allowed for the role of positionality within knowledge construction to be considered (Panelli, 2004). Further, a post-structural approach is appropriate given the relevance of how different systems and socially-constructed knowledge interact with the complexity of the climate change issue. A post-structuralist approach implies that reality is dynamic as a result of changing cultural, economic, social and political conditions and thus immeasurable (Dwyer & Limb, 2001). This idea is appropriate for this study as it assumes that the data gathered is influenced by systemic forces and carries multiple and dynamic meanings.

### **4.3 Positionality as a researcher**

Considering positionality allows for an understanding of “the impact of explicit and implied power structures on the research process, the relationships between the researcher and those researched, and the transfer of knowledge” (Chacko, 2004. 51). My positionality within this

research is that of a middle-class, university-educated female. I am 22 years old and a third generation New Zealander of Chinese descent. My positionality undoubtedly affects my research. In this instance I am peers with my research participants. All research participants are of a similar age, university educated or currently studying at a university, based in Wellington and identify as middle class and able bodied. Four of the participants identify as male and five as female. This contextual make-up mirrors the general make-up of the Wellington Generation Zero group. Further, these attributes allow me to consider the identities of the research participants as similar to my own (though by no means identical, given the large role that gender and ethnicity play in positionality). All of research participants identify as European or Pakeha, something which differentiates my positionality as a researcher from that of the participants. It was unclear to me what implications gender and ethnicity may have on this research, other than perhaps subtle power relations and differences of experience. The majority of research surrounding the impact of positionality on researchers and research participants looks at situations “where the researcher is in a more powerful position than the participant” (Mullings, 1999, 338). Having a number of similar identity attributes may have worked to reduce power imbalances between myself and research participants. However, Mullings (1999) notes the influence of gender in creating an “asymmetrical distribution of institutional power between men and women” which “has implications for the sort of information and insights that interviews produce” (Mullings, 1999, 339). Further, the positionality of my participants has clear implications for this research in terms of discourse and privileging of knowledge, given their educational backgrounds.

As a 22 year old researcher, and a member of the neoliberal generation, neoliberalism has undoubtedly shaped and influenced my positionality in many ways. However, the impact of neoliberalism on my views is not entirely as described by Hayward (2012) and Nairn et al (2012), due to my critical and radical perspective of the climate change issue. This understanding has implications in making me an “insider” and “outsider” to my own research (Mullings, 1999) as participants may share a similar understanding or oppose these perspectives, thus I am inherently conflicted.

A similar “insider/outsider” tension exists around my personal involvement with activism and political issues. My participation in a number of climate change groups such as Climate Justice

Wellington, 350 Aotearoa and Generation Zero was a huge influence on my selection of this particular research topic and meant that I had a strong pre-existing awareness and knowledge of the issues surrounding climate change activism. Further, my involvement with the case study group, Generation Zero, and its members span a number of years beyond this research. Thus as both a researcher and an activist within my own “community,” my positionality has implications for the process of knowledge creation. It creates an intricate set of circumstances, which highlights what Chacko (2004) suggests is the inability to separate personal interests and experiences from research. Mullings (1999) also refers to the complexities inherent in being considered an insider, yet also an outsider to research participants’ social groupings. Mullings (1999, 340) notes that “researchers can never be fully located on one side or the other of the insider/outsider boundary.” It is thus important to recognise the advantages and disadvantages being partially both an insider and outsider.

One advantage of my involvement is that there mutual understanding and open-mindedness between myself and my research participants, given that we discuss climate change issues on a regular basis. Conversely, some differences in opinion existed between myself and my research participants. However, I aimed to minimise the impact of this on my participants’ responses by allowing the interview space to be for participants to express their opinions, rather than my own. Ideally, one should strive to create an impartial research environment in recognition of the complexities and assumptions created by the insider/outsider positionality and “create a space during interviews that allows interviewees to share information freely” (Mullings, 1999, 340). This is opposed to disregarding the researcher’s partial insider status in favour of perceived objectivity or neutrality which is very difficult to accomplish.

However, I believe my role within the organisation and with the people involved in my research meant that there was an added degree of honesty and “authenticity” due to my previous immersion in the field/research environment (Chacko, 2004). This meant my experiences can be considered more “authentic” and thus further legitimated by dominant western scientific discourse. In recognising my role also as an “outsider,” I encouraged a degree of critical reflexivity about my position as a critical neoliberal subject and how this might affect research relationships.



#### **4.3.1 Scholar activist**

In addition to being a part of the community or “field environment” that I was researching, being a researcher and activist presents another set of issues and identities to consider. As previously acknowledged one must be sensitive to differing views and experiences as well as changing roles and identities from peers to researcher and researched and the implications that this may have on the tone of the research. I believe my experience as a researcher balanced nicely with my personal relationships with my research participants as it meant interviews maintained a conversational tone and helped to break down some of the barriers between activists and scholars (Chatterton, 2008). However, interviewees respected my need to ask particular questions as a researcher, perhaps in part due an understanding built through their own academic activities.

The key issue faced by scholar activists is the attempt to bring activism and academic discourse together meaningfully despite the barriers that exist between the “rigid” academic institution and the “organic” process of social change (Chatterton, 2008, 424). This was largely inapplicable to this research as the research participants are or were a part of the academic institution; they never questioned why I would study activism and rather saw it as a way to legitimise their views and theories of change. In many ways, my research instead highlights many of the complications of activism and perceived dichotomies created by an academic lens.

I used academic framing and discourse theory to deconstruct dominating discourses within climate change issues and at the same time offer the activist community some insights to consider. In a sense, as an activist scholar, one feels a sense of responsibility to use their research to assist or offer critique to fellow activists, to make space for activists to analyse their own discourse. Similar to my own research, Chatterton (2008, 426) aimed to bring radical ideas to audiences that may not ordinarily consider them:

I want to galvanize dissent, normalize critique, and make radical alternatives seem like real possibilities for our times. There are always possibilities for radicalising public debates, be they in our workplaces (disputes with management, supporting junior members of staff, challenging corporate restructuring and management diktats, introducing radical ideas into our teaching) or outside (helping groups with campaign

strategies, showing solidarity to those in resistance, attending events and demonstrations, lobbying and defending for particular causes).

Within Foucauldian discourse analysis, the positionality of the researcher and the research subjects is given important consideration as the power relations between each party will influence the knowledge created through the research. Though Rose (1997 in Waitts, 2010, 225) warns “that it may impossible to ever fully locate oneself in a research project” it is an important consideration when conducting discourse analysis. Thus this research utilised qualitative methods to gather data that describe the perceptions of youth and related discourses.

#### **4.4 Qualitative Methods**

This study was conducted using qualitative methods, as these are founded on the assumption that knowledge is constructed, in keeping with the post-structuralist approach (Dawyer & Limb, 2001). Qualitative research methods were utilised to understand the perceptions and opinions of Generation Zero members. Qualitative research methods were most appropriate to this research as they allow each participant to present a contextualised story of their perceptions. Such methods produce an in-depth and complex understanding of each research participant’s point of view (Creswell, 2009). The focus on depth of understandings, as opposed to breadth of data, allowed for a more thorough analysis of the factors influencing participants’ perceptions. Methods comprised of exploring the case study of Generation Zero through conducting semi-structured interviews and a discourse analysis of the interview transcripts.

#### **4.5 Case study: Generation Zero**

The case study for this research is the youth climate change organisation Generation Zero. Generation Zero is self-described as “a movement of young New Zealanders uniting to ensure our future well-being is not undermined by political decisions made today on climate change and fossil fuel policies. We are the generation that must oversee the transformation to a zero carbon world” (Generation Zero, n.d.). Generation Zero was formed in 2011 in a process which I was involved in. Following its formation, I volunteered for the organisation for approximately a year before withdrawing my involvement significantly. Comprised mainly of university students from Auckland, Dunedin and Wellington, Generation Zero has dozens of active volunteers and hundreds of cyber supporters around the country. Generation Zero aims to encourage concern for

climate change through climate change solutions based campaigns and awareness-raising. Members organise speaker events with climate change experts, leadership trainings and workshops, write press releases, discuss issues with local politicians and hold stunts such as a “Funeral for Business As Usual” and “Operation Exposure.” Operation Exposure saw dozens of members in Wellington board trains in their underwear to “expose” an unequal transport spending between roads and public transport. A non-partisan organisation, Generation Zero aims for broad based political support for policies that reduce New Zealand’s carbon emissions.

The current generation in charge is passing the buck to the future... If we allow this to continue, young New Zealanders will not only inherit massive ecological debt and a country further reliant on fossil fuels, we will also be lumbered with a hidden financial debt because of our country’s failure to meet its international commitments. The Government’s main response to addressing climate change – the Emissions Trading Scheme – is actually a mechanism to shift most of the costs to a future generation... Yep, that’s us. As Generation Zero, not only do we have the most to lose from bad decisions today, we have the most to gain from taking action to protect our future (Generation Zero, n.d.).

Generation Zero primarily frames climate change as an issue of intergenerational justice and refers to the injustice as being the financial burden that will be placed on future generations should current leaders continue to ignore the issue of climate change. However, the issue is framed locally and made relevant to the members’ demographic. Thus the focus of campaigns tends to be decision makers at local and central government.

Generation Zero was selected as a case study for this research as they are entirely youth operated and thus members are from the neoliberal generation. Neoliberalism is both inherent and observable within Generation Zero’s campaigning and critique and thus they make an ideal case study that highlights the complexities of activism that shuns many aspects of neoliberalism but embraces others. The following section will discuss the methods used within this research and how the data collected for this research was collected from members of Generation Zero and analysed.

## **4.6 Interview process**

Data for this research was collected using qualitative methods: open ended semi structured interviews and analysis of various documents produced by Generation Zero. Interviews allowed me to explore complex and conflicting ideas organically and how they might be related to a diversity of experiences (Dunn, 2010). Interviews also allow research participants to explore and reflect on their own world views (Dunn, 2010). Accordingly, the questions asked during the interview process referred directly to the research questions this thesis is based upon. Research questions one, two and three were all addressed through separate sections of interview questions concerning the causes and solutions of climate change and political action on climate change respectively. For the interview schedule, see Appendix Three.

Overall, nine young people were interviewed for approximately an hour each. All interview participants were existing contacts established through prior involvement in Generation Zero. Fortunately, general interest in this research meant there was no difficulty in sourcing interview participants. Participants had varying degrees of involvement in respect to level of engagement and time committed to Generation Zero in Wellington. For instance, some members were involved with the overall strategy of Generation Zero and the National Steering Committee that oversees campaigns and actions. Other members only attended the Generation Zero weekly meetings and/or events organised.

Ethics approval for the interviews was granted on 16 July 2012 by Victoria University of Wellington Ethics Committee (see Appendix Four). Interviews were conducted after each participant received an information sheet outlining the intentions of this research (Appendix One) and signed a consent form that gave permission to use information gained through the interviews for this thesis (Appendix Two). Participants also gave permission to have their interviews audio-recorded. Accordingly, participants remain anonymous throughout this study and are referred to as Participants A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H and I.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face, as the lack of ability to read expression and facilitate open conversation during computer-mediated or telephone interviews would be detrimental to this research (Dunn, 2010). This research required participants to share their opinions and

perceptions which they may be uncertain and unclear on or may be controversial. Thus it was necessary to be able to meet face-to-face.

Each interview began with a number of orientation questions, to get a sense of each participant's background and knowledge. Further, these questions allowed participants to place themselves into the context of my research, relax and also helped create rapport between myself and the participant as the following questions would require a lot of theoretical or "big picture thinking" (George & Stratford, 2010). During each interview I explained what I meant by terms such as "radical action" or "political action." I was open to and received questions and critique of these definitions which I was able to incorporate within analysis. It was also important given the subject matter to use mainstream and "easily understood language" (Dunn, 2010, 105).

Other considerations made when planning my research was to ensure that I did not create defensiveness around the forms of action that the individual or the organisation was taking. I aimed to minimise this by wording my questions neutrally, not implying that one method of political action was superior to another or suggesting that Generation Zero ought to conduct their campaigns differently. This is particularly important given my initial role as a member of Generation Zero as well as my known involvement in different climate justice groups since then. I was able to use my knowledge of the issue of climate change activism to create meaningful conversation and articulate my own openness to their opinions.

Questions were open-ended and designed to provide insight into participants' opinions and experiences. Participants did not receive the questions first and interviews were semi-structured as opposed to unstructured or structured. A topic guide (see Appendix Three) was used to focus the interviews but the conversation was allowed to diverge if interesting, relevant threads emerged. This minimised the chances of participants trying to predict the response required and allowed for thoughts and insights to naturally progress. In other words, semi-structured interviews allowed for discovery of "what is relevant to the informant" (Dunn, 2010, 103). Further, this method of interviewing allows interviewees to frame issues in their own ways, which was important for conducting a discourse analysis (Dunn, 2010).

## 4.7 Discourse analysis

Foucauldian discourse analysis of the interview transcripts help to gauge the themes and issues presented by participants. This technique was also used to analyse Generation Zero press releases, website content and facebook page content. Discourse analysis using the guidelines set out by Foucault, recognises the importance of power within relationships both between the researcher and the researched and within the researched (Waitt, 2010). A discourse analysis explores what has created and influenced particular realities and how we have come to understand through knowledge systems (Waitt, 2010). This is particularly pertinent to this study which deals with the way neoliberal discourse has created knowledge and norms through power relations.

Foucauldian discourse analysis uses the ideas of Michel Foucault as a lens through which to examine how discourse is created through perceived ‘truths’ or “how particular knowledge becomes common sense and dominant, which simultaneously silences different interpretations of the world” (Waitt, 2010, 217). Namely, forms of knowledge become privileged as “‘truthful’ or ‘factual’ knowledge” whilst others are “excluded or silenced” (Waitt, 2010, 225). Foucault explored the influence of social contexts, control and power relations on creating such perceived ‘truths’ and knowledges. This in turn affects what people believe to exist “and determine what they say (attitudes) and do (practices)” (Waitt, 2010, 218).

Essentially, Foucault argued that to have actual “truth” is impossible and it is the power relations between social groups that influence what is “accepted and repeated” as “valid, legitimate, trustworthy, or authoritative” (Waitt, 2010, 234) and what is ignored. However, Foucauldian discourse analysis is widely acknowledged, including by Foucault himself, to be epitomised by complexity and have no one set definition.

Foucauldian discourse analysis requires approaching materials with “‘fresh’ eyes and ears” (Waitt, 2010, 223). This sentiment was particularly pertinent to this study given my own role within the community studied and the number of discussions around the ideas presented in the study that pre-dated the research period. In order to do justice to the discourse analysis, all preconceptions “must be held in suspense...we must show that they do not come about by themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known and the

justifications of which must be scrutinized” (Foucault, 1972, 25 in Waitt, 2010, 224).

The intention of this study is to explore the social contexts which have formed knowledge and “truths” as a result of the influence of neoliberalism within climate change issues. Therefore, one must consider what Foucault refers to as “discursive structures” that create “normative meanings, attitudes, and practices” (Waitt, 2010, 233) that limit what we know to be possible. Western scientific knowledge and the creation of binaries and hierarchies such as “rationality/irrationality, man/woman, mind/body, straight/gay, masculine/feminine, and humanity/nature” (Waitt, 2010, 233) are examples of knowledge that has become accepted as “truth”. Knowledge privileging is relevant to this research because it reflects different discourses and framings of the climate change issue. This research aims to uncover different perceptions and discourses around climate change and activism and thus it is important to consider the implications of knowledge binaries and hierarchies.

Waitt (2010) highlights that discursive structures seem to appear as fixed norms and common sense:

[However] they are fragile and continually ruptured. Hence, there are always possibilities for meanings, attitudes, and practices to change or be challenged. Therefore, an essential part of doing discourse analysis is to be alert to possible contradictions and ambiguities in text (Waitt, 2010, 235).

This sentiment is highly relevant given the inherent complexities of climate change discourse.

## **4.8 Coding**

Coding was done in order to conduct the discourse analysis. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded both for organisation and interpretation (Waitt, 2010). This was done using both descriptive and analytical codes (Cope, 2010; Waitt, 2010). Transcripts were coded descriptively (called manifest codes) based on elements of key research objectives. For example, participants’ perspectives on the causes or solutions to climate change were descriptive codes as were references to specific forms of political action (Cope, 2010), such as “radical activism” and “institutional political action.” When coding specifically for discourse analysis (called analytic

codes), codes were based around discourses, and used to represent personal or formative experiences (Cope, 2010). Key terms that emerged from the data included “neoliberal generation”, “individualism”, “mainstreaming” and “climate justice”. Contradictions or contestations to these discourses were also coded.

## **4.9 Summary**

Overall, this study takes a post-structuralist approach to qualitative research. My positionality as the researcher, as an activist and a scholar placed both opportunities and limitations on my research. As a member of the studied community, I spoke to participants with ease and openness and was able to draw on my experiences to question theirs. Further, the academic privilege of my research participants meant there was little questioning of the academic framing of the “organic” process of activism. The full implications of my positionality will never be truly known but are considered throughout analysis in chapters 5 and 6. Semi-structured interviews allowed for participants to frame their thoughts in their own language and to discuss opinions openly and within context. Finally, through the coding process and subsequent discourse analysis, this study reveals the complexities, ambiguities and paradoxes in the discursive structures inherent in perceptions of both activism and neoliberalism discourse. The following chapter will provide a discourse analysis of data gathered around the first research objective which explores perceptions of the causes and solutions of climate change held by members of Generation Zero.



# **Chapter 5: Neoliberal discourse and perceptions of climate change**

## **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to answer the research objective: *how do members of Generation Zero perceive the causes and solutions to climate change?* The purpose of this objective is to gain an understanding of the role of neoliberal discourse in forming perceptions of climate change and thus how these young activists may choose to address the issue of climate change. It will explore the implications of these perceptions on what members of Generation Zero deem possible and how their visions for the future are shaped through their actions.

Participants were asked several basic questions around the causes and solutions to climate change. These were broad, open-ended questions and as a result each participant interpreted it slightly differently. Subsequently, I conducted Foucauldian discourse analysis on interview transcripts and have used quotes and references from these interviews to provide the evidence found within this chapter and Chapter 6. Given the complex and multi-faceted nature of issues, the results described in the following chapter are equally complex and often paradoxical.

Participants were asked to describe what they saw as the causes of climate change. Many participants perceived the causes to manifest across differing scales, citing differences between the scientific causes of environmental changes and the human and emissions-producing activities and the “deeper” or “root” causes. As outlined in Chapter 3, the climate justice movement looks to the root causes of climate change and asks what systemically drives greenhouse gas emitting activities (Bond, 2010a; Dawson, 2010). These root causes include capitalism, neoliberal globalisation and associated consumerism, individualism and commodification:

To be fair, the first thing came into my head was CO<sub>2</sub> but I know that although it might look like in New Zealand that it's CO<sub>2</sub>, it's a lot easier in other places, from casing other places, to be reminded that it's more fundamental things like corruption and power and access to resources (Participant D).

Several participants suggested that a lack of understanding amongst others of the connections between anthropogenic emissions causing activities and the underlying systems resulted from little knowledge about climate change, as Participant A highlights “the entry level one [cause of climate change] obviously is... emissions.”

Moreover, through their activism, participants were found to be contributing to this discourse that makes climate change about carbon emissions. In particular, the need to reduce climate change to a simplified issue of emissions in order to gain widespread public support resonated with many participants: “the people [in Generation Zero] who want it to be accessible to a large number of people want it to be about CO<sub>2</sub>” (Participant D). The following section will discuss both the perspectives of research participants in relation to the causes of climate change, in particular when it is not reduced to an issue of emissions only.

## **5.2 Systemic causes of climate change**

Initially, most participants discussed emissions producing activities such as deforestation, transport and agriculture as the primary causes of climate change. Participant H simply referred to “humans” and Participant E to “unnecessary human behaviour.” Nevertheless, many participants acknowledge further “systemic” “root” or “deeper” causes of climate change that underlie these activities. As Participant G noted, “I would rather talk on a deeper level.” Several participants identified economic and social systems as the cause of climate change, some of which take root in neoliberal discourse. This was directly identified by some participants and indirectly referred to by others. As shown in Table 1, the systemic causes of climate change referred to are diverse. Some participants recognise attributes of neoliberalism as a notable cause and there is resounding recognition of the underlying influence of broader political, economic and social systems on emissions.

**Table 1: Systemic causes of climate change**

Neoliberal growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- “It [climate change] has been perpetuated by neoliberalism and these economic theories of growth and profit” (Participant C).</li></ul>
Consumption and lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- “Consumerist and consumption driven modern economies” (Participant F).</li><li>- “Our value of ‘your own,’ fulfilment of your own desires is the most important thing you can do in your lifestyle” (Participant A).</li></ul>
Industrialisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- “Sudden advance in technology” (Participant G).</li><li>- “It’s a product of the industrial revolution” (Participant G).</li><li>- “There’s a disconnect between the way we think about growth and how we can grow into the world which I think is an idea from the time of the industrial revolution” (Participant G).</li><li>- “Industrialisation” (Participant C).</li></ul>
Broader economic and social systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- “There are a whole lot of interlinked problems in the world that are tied into the structure of our economies” (Participant F).</li><li>- “An urbanised society” (Participant C).</li><li>- “The root cause [is] the way in which our society runs” (Participant C).</li><li>- “How humans interact and their conceptualisations of their environment and whether they are part of the natural world or not” (Participant D).</li><li>- “There is a disconnect between the way our entire society is organised and the reality of the world that we live in” (Participant G).</li><li>- “A European Westernised background and from all the ideas that boomed during like modernity to where we are right now” (Participant A).</li></ul>

Larner (2000) refers to the interconnectedness of political and economic neoliberalism and wider social consequences. Evidently, this has been recognised by some participants, “there are a whole lot of interlinked problems in the world that are tied into the structure of our economies” (Participant F). Many of the statements made by members of Generation Zero also echo a climate justice narrative, which recognises the interconnectedness of economic systems and social behaviours. For example:

That mindset change is not even enough in itself because there is a feedback loop between the structures, the economic systems that we have in place that make people, in fact force people, to act the way that they do, in terms of the way businesses work, in terms of the way competition drives people to strive for more wealth and if they don’t strive for more wealth than they get pushed out of the market (Participant G).

Through recognising the connections between social behaviours and economic systems, participants highlighted the “system” causes of climate change. As shown in Table 1, many participants, when referring to the system responsible for climate change, spoke on a number of different scales. Some participants referred to the system as external and somewhat monolithic (“it’s absolutely entrenched” (Participant G)), whilst others equated the system to ingrained human behaviours (“a culture of striving for more” (Participant I)). Participants also refer indirectly and directly to neoliberalism, capitalism and broader economic system as well, for example, modernity, urbanisation and consumerism. They recognise the complexity of the systems that are causing climate change and the interconnectedness of their developments, through a lack of differentiation between direct and indirect causes and effects.

Some described their own personal inability and the inability of society to escape from the ideals and norms brought about by these systems. These were recognised to have negative social and environmental implications, including the perpetuation of climate change and our inability to act on the problem. As Participant I stated:

The reason for me, the reason why it [climate change] has just continued to grow is that people are more comfortable with the lifestyles that we have now and there is a culture of

striving for more and more and more and pulling more out of the ground to satisfy that need for a supposedly better lifestyle.

However, not all participants considered individualism, consumerism and other “undesirable” social characteristics to be directly correlated with our economic systems or neoliberal globalisation:

If you blame the economic system you say that but also it's individualistic values, it's community values, it's a whole string of values that got lumped onto us from the enlightenment period and from a European Westernised background.. not all of these are market values, they're from the period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to now.. emerged our values of 'your own', fulfilment of your own desires is the most important thing you can do” (Participant A).

The deep-seated and irreversible nature of neoliberalism in Aotearoa New Zealand (Larner, 2000; Kelsey, 1999) means it has become difficult to distinguish where each set of ideas begins and ends. As referred to in Chapter 3, despite the entrenched nature of neoliberalism, it is also complex and paradoxical in its manifestations (Larner, 2000; Peck & Tickell, 2002). Section 5.2 has shown a strong recognition of systemic causes of climate change, including neoliberalism, economic systems and values. However, the nature of these causes is complex. In the following sections, I will analyse the similarities and discrepancies in how members of Generation Zero envisage and seek to realise their goals given these perspectives.

### **5.3 Solutions to climate change**

As discussed in Chapter 2, mainstream discourse around what should be done about climate change can be understood as centred on a post-political carbon consensus and the formation of international climate change policy through a number of prevalent neoliberal mechanisms such as carbon markets and a price on carbon. As might be expected, the majority of participants identified with characteristics of 'third way' politics although they did not name it as such. Conversely, some participants also referred to the need to make radical shifts in society. However, as will be explored in the following sections, they also recognised the reality of our neoliberalised society and the limitations this presented for radical change.

The variety of solutions to climate change offered by participants was considerably wider than the causes of climate change. This highlights further, the complexity and paradox inherent in the climate change issue. Many participants saw the relatively easy and tangible mechanisms for addressing climate change as important, however preferred to talk at length about the deeper societal changes that needed to occur.

**Table 2: Solutions to climate change referred to by members of Generation Zero**

Changing personal behaviours	<p>“Self-responsibility is the solution... being self-responsible and able to stand on their own two feet and to work purposefully towards something and being accountable” (Participant A).</p> <p>“Getting people to drive less and take public transport more, getting people to eat more locally these are all very [...] lifestyle changes come with a political manifestation as well” (Participant I).</p> <p>“Changing attitudes and stuff” (Participant C).</p>
Institutional politics	<p>“I think in the midterm it’s about... politically voting for a party in New Zealand which appreciated guardianship but in the long term it’s about every political party representing a widely held cultural view that humans are guardians if that makes sense” (Participant D).</p> <p>“Climate change is such an international problem so it needs to be binding at the legal political level, international agreements. Yeah, and blanket rules of everyone because we are all it together” (Participant H).</p> <p>“Transport, energy production and I guess those are the easiest to lobby on... working towards decentralisation of food production and stuff. And food miles” (Participant C).</p>

<p>Shifting energy systems and reducing fossil fuel dependency</p>	<p>“From a straight, scientific or technological point of view I’d say fossil fuels largely. I mean If we had develop[ment] based on energy sources that didn’t emit CO2 we would still have a lot of other problems but we wouldn’t have the climate change problem” (Participant F).</p> <p>“Fundamentally, transforming the energy systems, yeah so there are other parts of it too, with fossil fuels as the big kahuna, but yeah halting deforestation and sorting agricultural emissions needs to be part of it too” (Participant F).</p> <p>“Working on our deforestation and our plantation cycles of timber and working on... reducing the coal industry and beyond reducing general fossil fuel dependency” (Participant H).</p>
<p>Economy based change</p>	<p>“As far as addressing climate change on its own I can envisage a similar kind of economy that was at least in the short term... that wasn’t based on fossil fuels and therefore wouldn’t contribute to climate change” (Participant F).</p> <p>“You can have a monetary based economy with an entirely different radical mindset and that could provide the solution hypothetically” (Participant A).</p> <p>“When you think about actually applying to create solutions to climate change the current political climate... is not the necessary urgency or action to do that. The current global political climate isn’t going to do that. The current economic system as it has been unanimously criticised isn’t going to do that” (Participant A).</p>
<p>Changing perceptions</p>	<p>“It involves changing from the pursuit of wealth to other wealth, the pursuit of traditionally defined wealth to a human wealth, a</p>

	<p>community wealth, a personal wealth, a friendship wealth” (Participant G).</p> <p>“I’m saying that the whole frame in which we see the world is a frame which perpetuates the problem and... the solution is essentially getting out of the frame but how can you motivate people to get out of that frame, how can you change the political sphere to get outside of the frame, how can you change the consumer sphere to get outside of that frame” (Participant A).</p>
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The following subsections break the comments shown in Table 2 into themes and discusses them in relation to some of the key points made in Chapters 2 and 3.

### **5.3.1 Neoliberalism and individual/consumer responsibility**

Hayward (2012) suggests that the emphasis on individualistic action within environmental education is the result of neoliberal influences. Hayward uses market-based approaches and consumer choice as two key examples, “over the past thirty years we have grown accustomed to hearing that difficult, challenging problems require more efficient, market-based solutions, more personal responsibility, not more democracy” (Hayward, 2012, 5). Hayward (2012) advocates a shift towards fostering a sense of social justice and understanding of the importance of collective action within children and young people:

Citizenship and environmental education too often fails to meet the needs of a new generation. We teach our children and our students to recycle and reduce waste while ignoring the way domestic violence and poverty are also pressing ecological concerns (Hayward, 2012, 4).

In other words, Hayward (2012) suggests that ecological issues cannot be met without also addressing social issues, as the causes are interlinked. According to Hayward (2012), meeting these challenges requires collective action, not individualised action. Similarly, when asked what



solutions exist to the climate change issue, several participants discussed the role of the individual citizen as a part of the solution. However, according to Participant E:

Individual action is a great place to start but it's a really shitty place to end... I remember being really focussed on individual action before I joined any groups and I found it really really, really disempowering. It feels like everything you are doing for the planet is cutting two minutes off your shower and you're like, this isn't doing fuck all.

Participant E sheds light on the idea that individualised action for environmental change has fallen out of favour with this particular group of young people. This is through recognition that individualised action does not encourage collective action, but rather discourages it. Political action to encourage policy change is seen as a way to make broad scale behaviour change more efficiently. Interestingly, Participant E also refers to the role of the citizen within politics:

So like politics is, if you work really hard at it [citizen involvement in politics], you can, well you might be able to, have a massive impact as opposed to even if I biked every single day, you're not going to be have a massive impact.

Thus, according to Participant E the responsibility of action still lies within the individual to work hard and be effective within politics. The “working hard” attitude has had a noticeable impact on development of the neoliberal generation as they move through education and into employment (Nairn et al, 2012).

Conversely, for Participant A consumers are perceived to have power to make change, however lack the knowledge and incentive to shift their choices or consume less:

Consumers change the mindset you know but consumers aren't changing the mindset because they are completely dislocated from the problems, you go buy a fizzy drink, you are completely disconnected from the massive spider web that was involved with the manufacturing and also there's a lack of consumer incentive to make proper sacrifices (Participant A).

So rather than opposing the perpetuation of neoliberalism through “consumer citizenship” as Hayward (2012) refers to, participants appear to oppose the lack of efficiency of acting as

conscious individuals. Lifestyle change is seen as something that can be encouraged through both political change and being part of collective action for market or incentive based behaviour change. The disempowering nature of lifestyle change that Participant E noted is made more empowering through the collective:

People doing... political stuff will encourage them to make changes in their own lifestyle without us, without Generation Zero, forcing them to do it, and it will inspire others observing to make sacrifices and changes in their own lifestyle because they'll start to see it as important and they'll see others making sacrifices. We work in groups, we think in groups, we're just a bunch of sheep essentially and the political engagement will encourage the lifestyle engagement (Participant A).

Similarly, Participant B sees political action through shifting policy as important in creating large scale changes which will shift social norms and thus lifestyles:

I think it's ultimately a policy issue. And it's a change of the social norms. So the solutions will be big dramatic changes in the way that you know, economies are run in terms of changing ideas of consumption and the reliance on economic growth (Participant B).

However, Participant B hypothesises that it is the policy change itself that will make the change rather than collective action and a resulting shift in mindset. In other words, the role of political action in changing behaviour is through enforcing new norms which are greater in sum than any individual policy change. Further, Participant F suggests that citizens are essentially powerless to alter systems through personal behaviour. Citizens can only make the changes necessary through forcing or demanding that political elites make the changes needed, whatever they may be, to address climate change:

I think ultimately citizens as individuals have very little ability to alter the trajectory we're on... I don't buy into that we can solve the problem by changing our own personal behaviour and changing the things that we buy and all that sort of thing. That plays a role... But ultimately I think citizens need to be exerting pressure on the power structures that exist in the world to force them to deal with the problem... (Participant F).

According to all the aforementioned participants, citizens have an important role in influencing government and business driven solutions. In order to address the material and tangible causes of climate change, such as emissions from agriculture and transport, the majority of participants privileged solutions such as the Emissions Trading Scheme, public and more efficient transport systems and improvements to food distribution systems. Firmly imbedded in their discourse was the role of “winning over” the political left and right as well as the central government. The role of citizens was thus presented as to engage with these politics. These ideas support the rhetoric and provide evidence for the relevance of ‘third way’ politics within mainstream climate change discourse. ‘Third way’ politics dictates that the role of citizens is within a “sub-politics.” Citizens can use pre-determined channels to influence a politics which uses globalised markets, economic development and growth to address climate change and the associated inequalities (Giddens, 1998).

Some participants were more actively involved in Generation Zero than others, who described themselves as “supporters”. Those more actively involved gave slightly different responses, for example the importance of engaging with ‘third way’ politics was felt more strongly by participants who were heavily involved in Generation Zero. Evidently, Generation Zero as an organisation focuses on political action through policy change. According to Generation Zero’s website what is required to solve climate change is “to show that they are committed to delivering hope for a positive future for today’s young people, political parties must commit to developing a Zero Carbon Action Plan for New Zealand” (Generation Zero, n.d.). Thus this support for ‘third way’ politics highlights the role that post-political consensus can have on constructing activist climate change discourse.

The research presented in this sub-section suggests that the solution to climate change will essentially come from the individual changing their behaviour through a shifting “mindset,” starting with collective action for various policy changes. This is not in fitting with Hayward (2012)’s notion that the neoliberal generation view consumer choice and market-based solutions as most important to environmental citizenship. Nor is it completely in fitting with theories of a post-political carbon consensus that uphold that change must occur at the consensus of business and politics through mutually agreeable policy. Rather, research participants note that change

begins and ends with citizens and “mindset and values” change. Participants recognised the perils of individualised behaviour change and simply relying on technology or markets to solve their problems. They did not identify direct issues with market-based solutions or changes in behaviour. Rather they believe they are catalysts in the solution brought about by a change in “mindset and values.”

### **5.3.2 Neoliberal ideology and mindset/values**

The general mindset of contemporary people is still stuck on the new, like I know climate activists who you know, talk about ‘let’s stop our emissions, let’s stop this’, but yet the moment smart phones start coming up you know young climate activists will all start buying smart phones because it’s like drilled into our mindset.. the new exciting things excite us (Participant A).

Participant A further recognises the complexities and contradictions being faced by the neoliberal generation of activists. Neoliberalism and its ideals, so ingrained into our way of living, has its benefits. Literature in Chapter 3 presents the idea that neoliberalism, particularly in Aotearoa New Zealand, due to its rapid implementation, is ingrained and perceived as irreversible. This is particularly relevant to the neoliberal generation who may have grown to define their goals, aspirations and definitions of freedoms according to neoliberal discourse. Thus this presents a challenge for neoliberal generation of climate activists who, as this chapter suggests, are recognising the role that neoliberalism has played in creating climate change. They also recognise its role in the solutions that seem most “realistic” given our current circumstances. Participant A brings up an important dichotomy for the neoliberal generation, when neoliberalism is perceived to have brought about many lifestyle advantages which as educated, middle-class Pakeha, they have undoubtedly benefited from, to the detriment of others. Participant D suggests that benefiting from the “system” stifles critique or questioning of it: “Especially in New Zealand, being beneficiaries of the system you don’t criticize it as much. But also being inside it means you lose perspective” (Participant D). The Free Association (2010) also highlights this complexity:

Because an antagonistic relationship with capital is still a relationship with capital, it still involves defining ourselves in relation to capital. But we don't want any relation with capital (or the state), antagonistic or otherwise. We want to destroy these relationships, just as we want to refuse definition. We want exodus, autonomy. And this is the paradox (The Free Association, 2010, 1028).

Personal responsibility for behaviour is still perceived by participants as being important in addressing climate change. Thus citizens have the agency to shift their own behaviours and mindset away from individualistic values. However, mindset is perceived as something that can be changed by the individual and also something greater than the individual. It is suggested by Participant A that climate activists with all the knowledge available to them, should make the right personal choices but instead can be seen as hypocritical and unable to separate themselves from the values/systems that are both beneficial and causing environmental harm. For Participant A these values include, "being accountable, being self-responsible means being ethically and morally responsible for what you do in relationship to the world" (Participant A). This evidence represents the complexity in Participant G, A, Ds' responses as they discuss the embedded systemic nature of neoliberalism/capitalism within the problem of climate change and the solutions, despite the risk of shifting critique onto their own behaviours.

Similarly, Participant D suggests that the emissions reductions component of addressing climate change is secondary to creating incremental cultural change:

In knowing that it's [climate change causes] a psychological thing my work in Generation Zero is cultural, it's not about emissions... they're [other members of Generation Zero] like why aren't you focussing on the emissions? Why are you never measuring success and emissions? And it's because I believe in that psychological and a shared psyche... the stronger the collective, the stronger it is a culturally held assumption of how the world works and that culture is shared then that psychological belief becomes truer and truer for more people (Participant D).

For Participant D this transcends the need to reduce emissions quantitatively, in recognition of the need for a strong collective and systemic understanding of the interconnectedness of life. Participant D suggests that emissions reduction could be seen as a means to help people believe that it is possible to address climate change:

It's really symbiotic to be honest because the people who want it to be accessible to a large number of people want it to be about CO<sub>2</sub> and I want to take people... to invite people to question the way their belief systems leads them into actual things and it's really great that the people who I work with want to make it widely accessible (Participant D).

Similarly, Participant I suggests that the solution is beyond the technical or measurable, "[The solution is] broadening the mindset to a collective consciousness that we are all just screwing each other over". Participant G also echoes this sentiment, connecting systemic issues with values and mindset:

But the kind of transition that we actually need to make is a much, much deeper one than that, and it involves a change in mindset and a change in what we value... that mindset change is not even enough in itself because there is a feedback loop between the structures, the economic systems that we have in place that... force people to act the way that they do... if they don't strive for more wealth than they get pushed out of the market. Those are the kinds of systematic changes that need to happen as a result of changes in the way we value.

It is clear there was diversity amongst all participants' perspectives. Although it was recognised that a restructure of the economy and society was recognised as needed, it was variable as to how and what should take place. This highlights the complexity that the neoliberal generation faces coming into the future, at a crossroads where the old system is failing people and the environment, yet many of the "feasible" and "realistic" solutions presented are simply differing manifestations of the same system. How these complexities manifest within Generation Zero's work will be discussed further in the following section.

## 5.4 Pragmatism

The solution is not to abolish the transport system, it's not to abolish the economy, it is just to reinvent and re-imagine what an economy has to represent well if we are going to use it as an instrument... But that's not necessarily a very pragmatic thing to say... So I guess in many ways what I'm saying is the solution is psychological and about conceptualisation because from there people understand the world differently and it changes (Participant D).

This extract from an interview with Participant D again highlights complexity and paradox in the simultaneous intermingling of neoliberal ideology (psychological nature of change) with a desire for change and a shift away from current systemic processes. The need for pragmatism was a strong current felt throughout this interview and a number of others. For example, Participant A states "I don't call myself an anti-capitalist because I like to think about things in the most pragmatic way where I can create like the incremental change that is necessary..."

Those who suggested in their interviews that pragmatism provided the solution to climate change still acknowledged that the climate change issue has "deep" roots and thus requires a systemic and ideological shift from individualistic behaviours. Day (2004, 717) refers to "hegemony of hegemony" or the idea that reform tactics within the constraints of the nation-state has become the assumption. He also refers to direct action as a challenge to this assumption. Evidence analysed in this chapter has highlighted the interconnections of the reality of both assumptions and participants' recognition for the need for both reform and revolution. However, for many interview participants the need for immediate change to occur was a large factor in their decisions on what solutions should be enacted. Thus, the immediate solutions needed were not to catalyse an ideological or systemic shift but market/incentive-based solutions. These market/incentive-based solutions being advocated are deemed to be pragmatic response that will be acceptable to the general public. Generation Zero bases their work on these solutions, the implications of which will be explored in Section 5.4.1. Meanwhile this section will explore how pragmatism can be effective political action.

The solutions labelled “realistic” “achievable” and those that underlie the work that these participants, as members of Generation Zero, work towards are grounded in scientific measurability, tangibility and rational change:

There is the angle of let's get into green business, green growth, green investment and green infrastructure, you know do carbon neutralising things, you know offset, all of that kind of stuff, so there's like that kind of side to it but then there is like that kind of, and I think those things are really good and are really important and Generation Zero is really pro that kind of solution because it is very accessible to the mainstream... I'm not entirely sure that it is something that can be solved through that alone and part of me thinks that we actually need a greater shift of paradigm and like our consciousness in the way society runs like you know... but I guess that's a far scarier kind of goal or project and it's the kind of thing that needs to be really incremental (Participant C).

For some participants, culture change is expected to be complementary to working as a collective or on political change:

Like people saying the core of the problem is an individualistic culture or a lack of community... that's highly abstract I mean climate change is hardly abstract at all, it's pretty tangible and deliberate. You can't get mass public support on 'can we change our community dynamics across society in order to produce a culture of active citizenship'. It's like how can you campaign on that? How can you mobilise people around that? You can't but you can achieve that kind of culture by mobilising them around something tangible like climate change (Participant A).

Evidently, to many of the participants it is important to garner popular public support for action on climate change. This pragmatism also impacts the way the climate change issue is framed. When the antagonist (as referred to in Chapter 3) is portrayed as “capital” or the related “mindset” the issue of ambiguity arises as it can only really be identified by its effects. However, it is also argued that an antagonistic framing of capitalism or neoliberalism is necessary to truly address climate change, despite the difficulties inherent in creating a tangible form and space for



capital (The Free Association, 2010). To place “capital” or the related “mindset” as the antagonist, will create spaces for greater creativity, innovation and possibility:

Simplifications have an excess to them, which we might think of as their impossibilities. This is the cramping that we produce around a problematic. And it is in these cramped spaces that we can create new problematics, tracing a path between impossibilities . . . and so open up new possibilities (The Free Association, 2010, 1029).

However, at the same time, solutions can become “saturated and diluted” by seeming impossible (The Free Association, 2010, 1023). Thus evidence produced in this chapter has demonstrated how participants recognise the intangibility of systemic change and so seek more ‘tangible’ solutions. Often neoliberal discourse is used to provide tangible and rational solutions. In order to address climate change it is not perceived as necessary to overhaul the wider neoliberal capitalist system. Participant responses indicate a belief that change in mindset and values can occur while maintaining most of the economic components of neoliberalism. How this manifests within the work Generation Zero does will be discussed in the following Section 5.5.1 and in Chapter 6.

#### **5.4.1 Pragmatism and Generation Zero**

Despite some of the previously mentioned views of participants that leans towards the recognition of the need for systemic change, concern for building public support, political feasibility and a focus on addressing quantitative emissions has resulted in the intentional use of neoliberal discourse within the vision and focus of Generation Zero. Participant C recognises the pragmatism of Generation Zero as being a deliberate part of the strategy to grow a widespread movement: “I kind of was a bit attracted to its pragmatism” (Participant C). In doing so they are “trying to essentially sell the vision to the rest of the country of a better way forward, a better path for the future which will make it something people can buy into and aren’t afraid of” (Participant D).

Generation Zero, through their marketing and public outreach, do not claim to be radical or revolutionary in their approach. Their approach is to find “workable solutions” (Generation Zero,

2011-2013). Solutions that are “workable” and achievable are seen as more accessible as they do not require a whole new imagination for the world. Thus these solutions are more likely to gain popular public backing:

Generation Zero, for example, deliberately cuts out part [of the solutions needed for climate change], the particularly polarising parts of this, [from] its organisational purpose so that it can spread the net broader and get a wider range of people in and include more people [in Generation Zero’s activities]” (Participant G).

As The Free Association recognises of social movements: “It’s difficult to start swimming in open water: it’s much easier to push off against something” (The Free Association, 2010, 1028). In other words, The Free Association (2010) highlights that it is easier to gain support for a movement that asks for change within existing paradigms when the alternative system is not widely understood. This supports Generation Zero’s use of neoliberal discourse within their work, as it is a framing of an issue that is easily relatable. On their website, Generation Zero used language that deliberately highlights the financial costs of climate change and thus the related injustices for youth and future generations as reasons for taking action. Further, the solutions offered to remedy these costs reflect pragmatism (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Excerpts from Generation Zero’s website describing their vision and goals.**

The consequences of failing to meet a target aren’t just bad for the climate – they’re bad for our wallets. At the moment, the Government is passing the buck for the failure to meet targets to the future (Generation Zero, n.d.).
We cannot afford to wait for some magical techno fix, and nor do we need to. The barriers to taking action today are not technical. What is lacking is a clear sense of direction and urgency towards a zero carbon future, and the political will to implement the changes that are desperately needed (Generation Zero, n.d.).
The first step towards solving the problem is for our society and our political parties to acknowledge what is required to deliver us hope for a positive future: a credible

climate plan with responsible targets, and a carbon pricing scheme that sees today's bills being paid today (Generation Zero, n.d.).
We are the generation to oversee the profound transformation to a zero carbon world. Generation Zero is committed to finding workable solutions to the problems we face (Generation Zero, n.d.).

Generation Zero's website often refers to intergenerational injustices and passing the buck- this is the idea that it is future generations that will have to pay the financial costs associated with climate change in the years to come. By working on this premise, Generation Zero actively uses the dominance of neoliberal discourse to leverage the issue of climate change. Building "political will" for a carbon price and other technical solutions is included as one of their intentions. The implications of this will be explored further in Chapter 6.

## 5.5 Summary

Overall, Chapter 5 highlights the complexities and paradoxes that arise when faced with the intersecting discourses of climate change and neoliberalism. Neoliberal discourse has contributed to the de-politicisation of the climate change issue. Generation Zero as an organisation has adopted this discourse as being key to their messaging and approach to climate change. Underlying this, members of Generation Zero expressed concern with our current economic system and a number of the values and societal norms that have evolved out of neoliberal discourse. However, many participants recognised that climate change could be addressed both on an emissions scale and at a greater scale- citing "deeper" or "core" issues that would need to be addressed. These core and deeper issues ranged across a spectrum from our neoliberal economic system, the industrial revolution to the values instilled by neoliberal discourse, to consumerism and the individualistic mindset we have become accustomed to.

When asked to describe what would be the solutions to their self-identified climate change problems the responses sat along a similarly diverse spectrum. However, it is poignant to recognise the difficulties of being an advocate for future change in discourse whilst living within the prevalent neoliberal discourse. Thus many participants identified a need to make the causes

and solutions to climate change accessible and “mainstream” for reasons which shall be expanded on in Chapter 6. Keeping climate change “mainstream” involves maintaining the use of neoliberal discourse and therefore a post-political carbon consensus. Some characteristics of neoliberalism are desired in the solution, whilst others are recognised as being part of the problem. Hence, the question remains: Can the problem be solved with the same mindset or framework that created it?

# **Chapter 6: Climate change mainstreaming versus politicisation**

## **6.1 Introduction**

As referred to in Chapter 1 and 2, radical political action can be defined within the context of the post-political carbon consensus as action that subverts or interrupts the consensus through providing “properly” political moments. Usually in the context of climate change, radical action is taken in recognition of an antagonist such as a fossil fuel extraction company or intends to undermine capitalist globalised economic systems as a root cause of the issue (Bond & Dorsey, 2010; Chatterton et al, 2012). Conversely, institutional political action is engaged with channels set up by current institutions of the dominant hegemony, such as the nation state (Swyngedouw, 2009). Institutional action includes campaigning for legislative change, voting, consultations or submissions and other formal participation means. This action forms a part of the consensual condition (Swyngedouw, 2009). Institutional political action does not intend to subvert systems but create momentum around managerial or technical alterations of the status quo (Swyngedouw, 2009).

However, actions of the institutional or radical nature both sit along a spectrum of action, as the reality of political action is complex and murky. Both terms are inadequate in describing the diverse contexts of political action on climate change and the different forms of actions that may be taken. As shown in the previous chapter, climate change can be framed in a number of different ways and thus a number of different tactics can be perceived to be effective action on climate change, depending on the perspective taken. Typically, climate justice advocates and those who aim to “politicise” climate change tend to engage with protest and non-violent direct action as means to achieve action on climate change. As Heynen (2010, 1235) suggests “direct action, like civil disobedience, like radical democracy, is a direct threat to the forces of order.” Those who advocate or partake in ‘third way’ politics as part of consensus-building may engage with demonstration on matters of technical or managerial significance or consultation processes. However, as McCarthy (2013, 24) states, “many forms of politics, categories and distinctions,

such as public versus private, economic versus cultural, or formal versus informal, are irrelevant at best and misleading at worst” and thus throughout this chapter it should be recognised that such labels undermine the diversity of actions that exist and the contribution that all forms of political action make to politics in general.

This chapter will answer the research objectives: *How do members of Generation Zero perceive the roles of radical and institutional political action in solving climate change? And do the perceptions of members of Generation Zero reflect the arguments around the existence of a post-political carbon consensus? If, so what are the implications of these perceptions on future spaces for radical action?*

The research objective outlined here will be answered through exploring the perspectives of Generation Zero members on different forms of political action and the implications that this has on the types of action participants felt comfortable engaging in. Given the neoliberal context outlined in the previous chapter, I will use discourse analysis to explore the consequences that this has on political action on climate change both in the present and in the future. I will provide evidence through quotes and excerpts from interview transcripts.

## **6.2 Generation Zero: A path for action on climate change**

The solutions advocated by Generation Zero were described in Chapter 5. From this analysis it became clear that the organisation’s intention is to present a pragmatic set of solutions that are either based on neoliberal discourse or do not contest it (see Section 5.4). The issue is framed through the injustices of financial loss. By gaining large scale public support, Generation Zero seeks to harness momentum to shift voting patterns around climate change and “shift collective mindset” through policy change. This section will outline what members of Generation Zero that participated in this research felt the overall objectives of all the activities that Generation Zero engages in were. In other words, how they aim to achieve pragmatic outcomes as a part of the climate movement in Aotearoa New Zealand.

When asked to describe what Generation Zero did, participants gave a variety of responses, however the majority of participants alluded to upholding the pragmatism of solutions offered through deliberately avoiding any activities that could be associated with “radicalism.” Clearly

members of Generation Zero carefully consider the image that the organisation is projecting within the wider public. Thus responses could be divided into the activities that Generation Zero engages in and how they spread their image into the media and general public shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: What does Generation Zero do and how do they create their own image/brand?**

What Generation Zero does.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “focusing on parts of the [climate change] picture” (Participant F).</li> <li>- “bring climate change into the public discourse” (Participant F).</li> <li>- “public awareness and movement building” (Participant F).</li> <li>- “We don’t challenge social structure” (Participant D).</li> <li>- “[We’re] trying to internally create a culture which... would alleviate injustices socially” (Participant D).</li> <li>- “[We want people to understand] you’re powerful in your local government, look you’re powerful in a national elections... before I think they have a sort of more holistic sense of agency if that makes sense” (Participant D).</li> <li>- “[Our work is] targeted at government to make political change in favour of long term cultural change which is sort of our theory of change” (Participant I).</li> <li>- “Non-partisan” (Participant H).</li> <li>- “Generation Zero likes to focus on the local effects of climate change... it doesn’t matter if we’re doing it to look out for our own skin” (Participant G).</li> <li>- “[Generation Zero has] closer to a reformer kind of role” (Participant G).</li> <li>- “[We do things] in a playful way” (Participant F).</li> </ul>
How Generation Zero aim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “I think we try very hard to not be as seen as the latest</li> </ul>

to be perceived.	<p>wave of uni student anarchists” (Participant C).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “We tend to have a more creative image” (Participant C).</li> <li>- “Rallying people around identity so we chose a New Zealand identity rather than a global identity” (Participant D).</li> <li>- “[We’re] really trying to legitimise ourselves and yeah like a legitimate stakeholder and someone we should be listening to” (Participant H).</li> </ul>
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According to participants, Generation Zero works within hegemonic and institutional politics to create consensus (non-partisan) and engage young people with these politics. Three key points can be drawn out from the information presented in Table 4.

Firstly, Generation Zero aim to attract young people to the organisation through presenting an identity which is creative, locally relevant and actively avoids conflict or contestation. Creative and playful actions were seen as more socially acceptable and less ideologically polarising: “So doing things in a more playful way can even make people laugh as a means to get around that guilt defence mechanism and just get them thinking about it [climate change issues]” (Participant F). Radical action was seen by Participant F as being polarising and creating defensiveness. This response to radical action on climate change and others from participants will be discussed further in the remainder of the chapter. A number of participants also referred to Generation Zero’s focus on local climate change issues as a key part of gaining this support, as Participant G stated “we’re doing it to look out for our own skin.” Participant D suggested that Generation Zero are “rallying people around identity so we chose a New Zealand identity rather than a global identity.” This is an important aspect to the organisation’s focus as it highlights that climate change is perceived as an issue that is relevant to or could threaten their current lifestyles. Evidently, the identity that Generation Zero chose to portray is an important aspect to their goals of raising “public awareness and movement building” (Participant F). The implications of this overall goal will be explored further in the following sections of this chapter.



Second, there was widespread understanding amongst participants that Generation Zero approaches action on climate change pragmatically, as highlighted in Chapter 5. In this context, pragmatism was considered necessary in order to create legitimacy for Generation Zero. As Participant H highlighted:

People will shove a stereotype on us... [we're] really trying to legitimise ourselves... like a legitimate stakeholder and someone we should be listening to... in general there might not be a push to do radical action because that would sit in an extremist basket and take away some of that legitimacy.

The responses in Table 4 reveal that there is a common focus on creating legitimacy in order to gain widespread public support. Many participants wanted to ensure that they were perceived as well-researched and were concerned about losing legitimacy through their youth or associations with student anarchists. Further, it appeared that to some participants “reformist type work” (F) effectively maintains legitimacy and creates incremental change. Action should not be ideologically polarising as “people get defensive and it’s like it is can be a challenge to people’s lifestyle and world view, and if it induces feelings of sort of guilt in you know normal people then that can be a bit of a knife edge” (Participant F). For Participants F and H actions that are polarising and create conflict undermine legitimacy. By avoiding defensiveness or conflict within responses from people, Participant F has highlighted the role of the post-political carbon consensus within Generation Zero’s group politics. As Participant D notes “We don’t challenge social structure.” The suggestion that some forms of action gain legitimacy and others do not is an important one and will be discussed further in the next section.

Third, the internal culture and intentions of the group are highlighted by some participants. Participant D describes the role of internal politics and group culture in addressing the culture and mindset shift which many participants recognised as important to solving climate change. A large part of this is empowering youth who may have not been involved with environmental or political issues to understand their power within politics. Some participants spoke about the organisation as being a part of a “journey” that youth involved will go through, including learning the power of collectivism and charity, their power within politics and will explore the

issues of climate change with depth. In recognising that Generation Zero is just “one part [of the journey]” (Participant G), many participants referred to a further journey that members go through in understanding the role of politics beyond voting or being part of institutionalised process. The role of this journey within a politics of consensus and creating spaces for “properly” political moments will be described further in Section 6.3.

Overall, Generation Zero as an organisation aims to create widespread support for pragmatic action on climate change, through creative and playful actions and intentionally avoiding conflict and polarity. According to Rancière, Swyngedouw, Žižek and others the definition of the “properly” political indicates that political action on climate change must incorporate conflict and polarity. The following section will explore the role of the “properly” political within the perspectives of members of Generation Zero given the context of pragmatic action on climate change.

### **6.3 The political moment and Generation Zero**

During the interview process it was revealed that the majority of participants had an understanding of the role of the “properly” political in causing real shifts in society. This is the role of radical democratic politics in exposing and challenging the root systemic causes of climate change. There are “elements that are essential for true politics: antagonism, deep dissent, the space for the imagination of genuine alternatives, and so on” (McCarthy, 2013, 22). Thus throughout this research I have defined the “properly” political for participants as taking radical or direct action. Actions that directly confront or oppose climate change causing activities are referred to here as direct action. Forms of action that enable activists to work in a way that opposes the system and the activity that cause climate change, are seen by most participants as “radical” or revolutionary” (Participants G and A). Traditional means of political action that don’t engage with institutionally dictated political channels such as rallies, protests, occupations and blockades are categorised in this way. They may be directed at the State, corporations or other representations of a systemic antagonist. Heynen (2010, 1234-1235) recognises that direct action comes from:

an impatience with the normal political processes, and a conviction of rightness which justifies the methods used... Indeed, for over 150 years, non-violent civil-disobedient

direct action has been at the heart of revolutionary struggles to facilitate emancipatory societal change... One historically obvious way we can subvert the status quo is by reasserting our project into the spaces of non-violent civil-disobedient direct action.

Thus direct action is defined by an underlying desire to shift the status quo and rejection of traditional methods of institutional political engagement. It manifests as any action that reflects these desires.

Radical action and direct action were terms widely recognised across the group. However, I do recognise that the terms are not exhaustively transferable, for instance many actions may not be considered radical but can be direct. Swyngedouw (2009) and Žižek (2002) refer to the co-option of environmental activism and other expressions of resistance, noting that it is difficult to separate these activities from the demands of the system entirely. Thus radical actions and “properly” political moments are extremely difficult to achieve, particularly given the entrenchment of neoliberal discourse. McCarthy (2013) highlights this difficulty as one of the primary critiques of Swyngedouw’s post-political carbon consensus. He suggests that by viewing actions that engage with existing economic or political systems as not “properly” political denies the value of these opportunities. In recognition of McCarthy (2013)’s critique, contesting neoliberal or capitalist solutions is closer to the “properly” political than advocating technocratic, policy-based and neoliberal solutions to climate change, such as carbon market based mechanisms.

For the purposes of this research, radical and/or direct action appeared to be the most appropriate terms. Initially to ensure that participants identified similar actions as direct or radical, they were asked to describe examples of radical or direct action. Participants named past and present actions both here in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas, including some of the actions being organised in the United States around tar sands proposals and Greenpeace and Lucy Lawless’ occupation of an oil tanker were two examples: “Lucy Lawless she’s like quite into that [direct action] at the moment” (Participant H). “The tar sands protests in Washington DC in the US is an example where they had both they had a sort of a political focal point that had a sort of a time frame attached to it and they also went and got a lot of people” (Participant F).

“There is a place for it [radical activism] at the moment. The work that Greenpeace has done on oil drilling and the work that I think that CANA [Coal Action Network Aotearoa] is gearing up to do is some sort of direct action and it feels like those compliment more mainstream actions quite well” (Participant I).

These actions and many of the other actions and movements were identified by participants, such as the anti-nuclear and anti-apartheid movements: “I know that we have that history of social movements when there is that incredibly broad level of support... like nuclear or whatever” (Participant E). These movements also represent the difficulty in achieving true political moments. Askanius and Uldam (2011, 75) highlighted: “Resistance is possible but only by breaking with the regulatory confinements appointed by the establishment can protesters avoid being co-opted by the neoliberal system and unwillingly end up contributing to these mechanisms of ‘greenwashing.’” Many of these movements engage with political institutions and institutionalised methods of participation, such as consultation. As Participant I notes, “I’m interested with we often talk about the background, the history New Zealand [social movements] has, nuclear free, giving women the vote, the Springbok tour and things like that... really those boil down to very simple issues... they were only a piece of legislation that had to be changed.” In other words, some participants recognise that it is difficult for a movement to completely contest a system, given our inherent participation in the system. As McCarthy (2013) highlights, by stating that society is in a truly post-political condition undermines the propensity of these movements in creating systemic change.

Participants were asked to consider the role of different forms of political action in addressing climate change. They were asked to describe how relevant or effective they felt radical action was to climate change and the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Participants also considered what they felt were the opportunities and barriers for such forms of action on climate change in the future. Many felt that radical and direct actions had the potential to be an effective part of climate change action:

- It provides a strong moral or values based goal for climate change action: “I feel really grateful for the radicals being there, so that will stop me from being swept up in

reforming so much that I lose track of actually what it is that we are trying to rearrange here” (Participant G).

- Gaining media coverage and encouraging discussion on the issues: “It is one of the most effective means I think for getting things into the news” (Participant F).
- Getting the government to recognise your opposition: “When they [government] don’t listen to your voice, they have to listen to your action” (Participant E).

Conversely, others saw radical action as necessary and effective as the final step to take in order to prevent something from occurring:

- When institutionalised/government mechanisms have failed. For example, one participant said:

I am becoming more and more of the belief that massive, massive mandate creation for government action on climate change won’t come any other way than being a little bit radical in the classical terms of being visibly disruptive and unaccepting of what’s currently happening” (Participant D).
- The climate change situation becomes urgent enough for people to be desperate for solutions to be enacted: “Direct action makes things move faster because it is right at the source. This is what needs to change, and changes it” (Participant H).
- As a catalyst for further action: “It can inspire others to get involved” (Participant A), “[it can help create] a movement towards more people being active in the political community. When someone sees a group of people protesting they are more likely to think that they can do it as well” (Participant B), “the hard core radical stuff is really good to make a stand, to be visible, to be seen and in a cool way it can harness energy and really rally people” (Participant C).

Some interview participants demonstrated understanding of the value of conflict and contestation of the wider economic system in action on climate change: “it propels the issues into the spotlight and that provides a platform for the debate to take place and the other voices put the case in different ways” (Participant F). They also spoke about the context in which this would be relevant “it kind of needs to be pursued opportunistically... I can see it fitting into an ecosystem of forms of action and different organisations” (Participant F). Generally, it was felt that

Aotearoa New Zealand was not in a place for widespread radical action currently, in part due to our neoliberal context:

New Zealand society would get its back up quite a lot if you tried to start shutting down coal mines or something. Because there is that whole focus on the economy for a lot of people and the “not wanting to make a fuss” culture, it’s that whole chill out kind of thing (Participant E).

Participant A felt that direct action was just generally an ineffective technique given the institutional political context: “direct action can stop it happening temporarily, like if you are stopping the drilling, good, how long can you do it for? Until what, the next Government comes into power, I don’t know.” Further Participant A noted that if direct action were to catalyse lifestyle change, then it would be an effective part of the solution: “Did it make people who are willing to accept radical action as a legitimate thing to do concerned about climate change and more willing to make their own contributions? Like did it [radical action] encourage them even just minor-ly to make minor lifestyle changes?” (Participant A). Participant A identifies a lack of relevance of the “properly” political as direct/radical action was not seen as conducive towards lifestyle change or institutionalised political change.

Thus this section highlights a paradoxical approach to direct or radical action. Some participants, such as Participant D, see it as a necessary part of addressing climate change. However, other participants suggest that its place is on the fringes of the climate change movement unless it was to gain popular momentum or the right opportunity arose. Participant C states what the most common response from participants was: “there is a role for both types of protest.” However, in recognition of the role of radical or direct action, it is not seen as something that members of Generation Zero will engage in, for reasons which will be stated in the following section. Despite this paradox, members of Generation Zero are politically motivated and see climate change as a political issue, regardless of the role of the “properly” political. The next section will explore the place of the “properly” political within Generation Zero’s work and how this might be incorporated into a journey of understanding climate change that its members may take.

### **6.3.1 The politicisation journey and Generation Zero**

Many participants spoke about engaging in a personal “journey” towards understanding the role of radical or direct action in relation to climate change. Participant D highlights a shift from a rational to an emotional understanding as part of a journey of understanding and taking effective action on climate change: “emotion is like lighting a torch and people will follow that emotional torch and the longer that we stay rational and we say that rational is the only way to be heard, the longer we delay a climate movement.” For Participant D, radical and direct action is deemed emotional, whereas an institutionalised response is rational, thus it is a necessary journey for activists to make. However, as seen in the previous section, more participants see the role of direct action as being opportunistic (the last attempt) or only effective if it can be adopted across a widespread audience, rather than a necessary component of action on climate change.

A number of participants that recognised that there were benefits to partaking in radical action also referred to a shift in attitude or perspective that needed to occur in order to gain widespread engagement with radical action. This shift to advocating and understanding radical action and thus the “properly” political can be termed “politicisation.” According to Swyngedouw (2009, 609):

Postpolitics refuses politicization in the classical Greek sense; that is, politics as the metaphorical universalization of particular demands, which aims at ‘more’ than the negotiation of interests. The consensual times we are currently living in have thus eliminated a genuine political space of disagreement.

According to some research participants, politicisation was seen to occur for a number of reasons:

- Frustration and anger that institutionally accepted methods of achieving political change are not effective: “[If I were going from being] a reformer to a radical it would look like trying to be a reformer for a while, it not working, getting really frustrated and becoming a radical” (Participant G).
- Exposure to injustice that triggers an “emotional” response to the issue of climate change:

If they're sheltered to real injustice, then they [members of Generation Zero] will be rattled by it, because most of them are sheltered from injustice in many ways and only entertain it academically, basically. And I think they would feel very emotionally rattled by seeing being exposed to injustice and that might lead them to feel called to take radical action... I would take radical action when my heart was breaking... and my heart would be broken by being exposed to someone else whose heart was breaking (Participant D).

- There is such unrest in general that it becomes socially acceptable to engage in radical change: "I think we can see from the collision of economic and political crisis in the US that the more dire economic and political situation there is, the more appropriate it [radical action] is" (Participant I)
- A deeper understanding of the issue of climate change and the issues connected with it: "I think enough people understand the seriousness of the problem already but more people need to understand the root causes of the problem" (Participant G). "I think direct action is a really important part of the climate movement but like lots of different people are kind of like [at] different points on their journey along that movement" (Participant E).

Members of Generation Zero felt the organisation had a part to play in the journey of the young people involved: "Generation Zero really doesn't offer the whole journey from the society we have today to a really really great society. It's just one part of that" (Participant G). According to Participant D, the role of Generation Zero is "to activate the inactivated." Similarly Participant E states "Generation Zero is [about] bringing people in... getting people interested and seeing ways that they can act politically on climate change."

However, participants discussed the external forces of "society" as being bigger factors that influenced whether radical or direct action would be appropriate:

I don't think we are ready for a wide scale radical action as like what you would see in Canada or the US, partly because of the political culture at the moment and also because we have a diverse culture that often a lot of people don't have time to think about climate



change as an issue and I don't think that its mainstream enough to drag people down that sort of path willingly (Participant I).

Interestingly, it is the understanding of climate injustices that is said to be one of the biggest triggers, coupled with a deeper understanding of the issues connected to climate change. Thus the importance of climate justice (or similar) principles and the direct action that may be taken by advocates of these principles was understood by some participants. However, these individual subjectivities are diverse and complex across the organisation, it is difficult to ascertain the role that this identified politicisation journey has on what Generation Zero does and whether this is a consideration in the organisation's strategy.

It is pertinent that much of Generation Zero's focus is on local issues of intergenerational injustice, framed by financial constraints. Yet many of its members felt that change needed to come from a shift in systems or mindset. Generation Zero's focus does not, in my observation, highlight the same injustices or root causes referred to by some participants as necessary to shift activists towards an understanding of the role of radical or direct action. To act in dissent of the post-political carbon consensus often requires direct action that creates conflict or polarity. However, as referred to in Section 6.2, members of Generation Zero aim to actively reduce polarity and conflict around the climate change issue. Thus the consensual condition has created complexities and conflict between the need to deepen members of Generation Zero's understanding of climate change in order to get widespread support for radical action and the entrenched commonsense nature of neoliberalism. This will be explored further in Section 6.5. For instance, Participant B states: "that's one of those things that Greenpeace always gets labelled with, a group that is always resisting and not actually offering different benefits." Radical action and dissent is seen as un-productive and those advocating such action have not yet provided the spaces for alternative imaginaries that are needed to counteract the economic and social benefits offered by the economic and political status quo.

The process of politicisation, as defined by some participants, is about recognising and addressing the power imbalances inherent in the climate change issue. Yet as Chapter 2 discusses, de-politicisation of climate change has been occurring as a result of neoliberal and policy based solutions used to legitimate and perpetuate neoliberal growth. Evidence from this

research shows that de-politicisation of climate change has occurred and has been advocated for by activists. This is notable through the role of citizen participation over technical and managerial matters. When asked what some of the top priorities should be for working on climate change in Aotearoa New Zealand, Participant H highlighted “working on the ETS to make it something that it is actually going to make a difference.” Similarly, other participants when asked what issues they would be working on stated “transport emissions in terms of private car usage... coal mining” (Participant B), “transport and energy production... I guess those are the easiest to lobby on” (Participant C). This also highlights the identification of carbon emissions as the ultimate and easiest antagonist. However, it should be noted that climate justice advocates often use issues of fossil fuel extraction to highlight social and environmental injustices and systemic causes of climate change (such as neoliberal globalisation). Although these issues still address carbon emissions, the antagonist that is recognised is broader and more systemic. This suggests that politicisation is about *how* the issue is addressed, as opposed to the actual emissions that are targeted. Thus politicisation occurs through the framing of issues. By reducing the issue to one of emissions, climate change is framed as an easier issue to lobby on and a generally more accessible issue. For the majority of participants, Generation Zero plays a role in the overall movement for climate action that was about introducing people to climate change issues and giving them accessible things to do: “We developed Generation Zero as a collective identity for a generation that would otherwise be marginalised by inaction and therefore gave them [the] impetus to reclaim their agency” (Participant D).

However, framing climate change as an accessible issue may undermine the pursuit for systemic change in order to address justice issues and thus work to depoliticise the issue, counter to the broad intentions of many research participants. Section 6.3.2 will explore the role of Day’s concepts of a politics of action and a politics of demand and their relevance to the shift in perceptions that members of Generation Zero see as a part of a politicisation process.

### **6.3.2 Politics of the act and Generation Zero**

As referred to in Chapter 2, Day (2004) refers to a “politics of demand” and a “politics of action,” terms which describe different approaches to social change through politics. Politics of demand reflects a post-political carbon consensus:

Every demand, in anticipating a response, *perpetuates* these structures, which exist precisely in anticipation of demands. This leads to a positive feedback loop, in which the ever- increasing depth and breadth of apparatuses of discipline and control create ever- new sites of antagonism, which produce new demands, thereby increasing the quantity and intensity of discipline and control (Day, 2004, 734).

Primarily, a politics of demand aims to solve a social or political issue in a way that perpetuates and maintains “the conditions of its own emergence” (Day, 2004, 724). A politics of demand is “limited in scope: it can change the content of structures of domination and exploitation, but it cannot change their form” (Day, 2004, 733). The current politics of Generation Zero reflects a politics of demand. Despite research participant’s recognition for the need to shift economic and social systems, their chosen paths of action are a restructure or management of current systems (see Chapter 5). As neoliberalism becomes increasingly entrenched (as referred to in Chapter 2) it is perceived to be more difficult or ineffective to engage with a politics of action or to create space for “properly” political moments. Members of Generation Zero suggest that it has become increasingly difficult to engage with the “properly” political on climate change because the solutions to climate change require widespread support from business and those across the political spectrum. Day (2004, 723) in observing new social movements argues, “that the dominant stream of the new social movements remains within a hegemonic conception of the political, and is only marginally and nascently aware of the possibilities inherent in actions oriented neither to achieving state power nor to ameliorating its effect” (Day, 2004, 723).

A politics of action provides what a political moment might contribute to the “ongoing effort to destabilize the hegemony of hegemony, by exploring the possibilities of non-hegemonic forms of radical social change” (Day, 2004, 717). This involves shifting responsibility for revolution or change away from the State and reliance on laws and bureaucracy to solve problems (Day, 2004). Furthermore, Day (2004, 719) refers to “constructive direct action tactics that are being used in contemporary radical social movements, and link these to a shift from a counter-hegemonic politics of demand to a non-hegemonic politics of the act.” Similarly, some members of Generation Zero see radical action as having a role in the shift or “journey” from a politics of demand to a politics of action. However, as shown in Chapter 5, the need for a non-hegemonic

politics to create radical social change to address climate change is not seen as necessary as climate change can be addressed using the existing social and economic structures. Thus far it has been established that members of Generation Zero may perpetuate a politics of demand. Yet a paradox exists that highlights the role of a politics of action within a politics of demand. Despite Day's clearly defined concepts, members of Generation Zero do not fit neatly into one category or the other. Members instead represent a complex, interconnected politics influenced in part by the neoliberal context. Section 6.4 will further explore the role of radical action and non-hegemonic politics in a neoliberal context.

#### **6.4 Radical action in a neoliberal context**

As mentioned in the previously, most (although not all) participants recognised a space for radical action. However, most participants were quick to point out the limitations and ineffectiveness of radical action in relation to the goal of creating a widespread climate change movement. When asked to describe the role of radical action on climate change in Aotearoa New Zealand, Participant A stated, "it's not effective in one way because it is politically polarising and that we've already seen plenty of it before." Further, Participant G also saw radical action as polarising, "it often doesn't offer very concrete ways of making change in the here and now and it often polarises and puts a lot of people off being involved." Similarly, some participants noted that radical action was ineffective as it was written off by the public as being "the radical left that has always been there and they just do radical left stuff so their arguments and their assumptions aren't really politically legitimate" (Participant A). Thus radical/direct action is seen as being counter-productive to the intentions of Generation Zero which are to create a pragmatic mainstream climate change organisation. Radical and direct action was not seen to be a part of a mainstream climate change organisation because of arguments outlined previously- it is seen as illegitimate and polarising, which in turn alienates the public from action on climate change. When some participants suggested that radical/direct action was alienating there were two possible explanations offered:

- The neoliberal generation's experience of dominant neoliberal discourse and influences perceptions of what is considered legitimate action on climate change.

- Radical action creates an “activist” and an “other” perception and thus differentiates the ideas of the activist as being unrealistic or fringe.

Generation Zero members who participated in this research suggested that climate change should be “everyone’s issue,” not just those who understood the injustices or systemic causes of the issue. Thus actions that are seen as “radical” or “fringe” may drive the “political middle” or the general public away from seeing the issue as relevant to them: “It can polarise others against the solutions necessary” (Participant A). The injustices of neoliberalism and other systemic causes of climate change are not seen as relevant to a widespread audience. Participant B states “I think that it is a lot more accessible when you don’t know that it’s a giant restructure that needs to occur.”

Kelsey (1998) notes the relatively strong opposition to neoliberal policy changes in the early 1990s, however there is little current day opposition to neoliberalism. For the neoliberal generation, neoliberalism as a dominant paradigm is somewhat inevitable and has resulted in a number of benefits (Nairn et al, 2012). Thus the connections between neoliberalism and economic injustices are not necessarily connected or contestable. As Participant C believes:

I think in some ways it’s nice to know we’re not fighting against oppression, we are fighting against something that is everyone’s issue and so I think it’s very different, we don’t need to bring down patriarchy, we aren’t trying to bring down the ruling class...

Similarly participant (G) sees the disruption of neoliberal or capital systems as itself resulting in injustice, with the loss of the status quo. It is unclear whether Participant G sees the injustices of the current system as being greater than those that will arise with radical change.

I guess what I’m saying is that I associate the idea of radicalism with the idea of revolution and a revolution is a messy thing and in a revolution people go hungry and in a revolution people lose a lot of stuff you know their livelihoods and their clothes and things (Participant G).

Thus without connecting the injustices of climate change and the injustices of neoliberalism, systemic causes remain invisible, giving little reason to take radical action on systemic causes.

Further, as noted in Chapter 2, the consensus systematically and purposefully marginalises opportunities for disruption or dissent against the system (Purcell, 2009; Swyngedouw, 2009). A post-political carbon consensus would actively work to discourage conflict by offering neoliberal, technological or governmental solutions that come from the top down, with limited technical involvement from the ground. Within the consensual condition, governance has actively discouraged the radical activities that are now seen by many participants as un-productive or ineffective. For example, recently the Anadarko Amendment came before Parliament in an attempt to make protesting within the EEZ illegal and resulting in harsh penalties (Supplementary Order Paper 2013). This presents the idea that the current government in Aotearoa New Zealand no longer considers protest a legitimate act of civil society or a part of the right to free speech and democracy. Moreover, the responses from participants that suggest that society's views of protest may have changed with the advent of different forms of participation. Participant I and Participant B felt that direct or radical action has *lost* its effectiveness, with Participant B citing recent movements:

My views of this has actually changed quite a wee bit recently like with the assets sale protest, one of the biggest protests in absolutely years and the government not being responsive to it... I'm just kind of questioning how effective I think it is to protest, it is effective definitely from like a historical viewpoint (Participant B).

Both politically and socially, dissent is being undermined. The role of Government in de-legitimising protest and other forms of radical action provides support for the existence and perpetuation of a post-political carbon consensus. This, in turn, has influenced how some participants view radical action and its role in solving climate change. Section 6.4.1 will further explore these perspectives on radical action on climate change. In particular it will focus on participant perceptions that radical action alienates the general public.

#### **6.4.1 Radical action and the general public**

A number of participants, when asked to consider the impact of radical or direct action on climate change and the movement against climate change stated that they thought that radical or direct action was “alienating.”

Several participants stated that they would consider engaging with radical or direct action either now or in the future. However, the same participants also expressed concern for Generation Zero’s legitimacy. Similarly, one Participant C believed it was important for members of Generation Zero to engage with a protest that occurred outside of a mining company’s offices in Wellington however, it was in the organisation’s best interests to not attend as representatives of Generation Zero. As mentioned previously, the need to be perceived as “legitimate” stakeholders within a post-political carbon consensus remains paramount to members participating in this research. Participant E states:

I don’t know where it fits in terms of Generation Zero because I can imagine myself wanting to take direct action and then not for the good of the organisational brand or whatever because it’s going to limit more people getting involved because they see you as radical activists.

A number of participants felt that radical or direct action created distinctive groupings of radical activists and environmentalists as opposed to “people” or the general public which undermines this legitimacy (see Table 5).

**Table 5: The creation of the “activist” and the “other”**

<p>Alienation of the “other” by radical actions.</p>	<p>I think the alienation from radicalism comes when the radical is attacking a system which a mainstream person sees as a part of their support network. I mean with the example of coal you know very simple... in engineering school people I knew had worked in coal mines and things [they’d say] ‘ah you dumb greenies a coal mines a good thing, I mean look at the clothes you are wearing, look at the bike you have, that was all made from energy from coal. I mean what are you talking about? It doesn’t make any sense...’ so yeah and that can be a very confronting thing (Participant G).</p> <p>From experience that I’ve had where radical action has been proposed it’s been met with blank faces, part of that is the stigma still involved with it but also part of it is that people don’t yet see the connection</p>
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	<p>about how effective it can be. It's a long road to making that big and I don't want to... lose the opportunity alienating a whole lot of people really early on (Participant I).</p> <p>One problem with direct action is that it will just get lumped in that box, in the far political left that the general public that oppose will just regard as that box that has always existed there and that they're just doing political direct action because they just want to jump on the green bandwagon... they are just a bunch of greenies and that's it you know and it's easy to lump them away (Participant A).</p> <p>Generation Zero does not do or support direct action because Generation Zero is focussing on trying to get as much of the centre involved in action on climate change and therefore they can't alienate the centre (Participant A).</p> <p>I think that would be quite alienating for a lot of young people if we started taking direct action, I think at the moment it needs to be around like making more people feel like, connect with the issue (Participant E).</p> <p>Saying radical puts a group into a box... you know can seem a little scary for people to be involved in something seen as radical action, so maybe it is just about what the labelling is (Participant B).</p>
Differences in perspectives between activists and "others."	<p>I think those people [radicals] align closer to the philosophical than to the real as such and the people who vote are living in the real I think if that makes sense (Participant D).</p> <p>There is still the radical environmentalist box... I don't really want to be seen as a Greenpeace protestor. That is immediately the flick that switches in peoples' brains if you do anything, protest about the environment in New Zealand (Participant E).</p>



	<p>Yeah they [radical/direct activists] are so removed from what is considered normal they are hard to accept (Participant H).</p> <p>Actions like that that are more extreme, more radical can polarise... people get defensive and it's like it is can be a challenge to people's lifestyle and world view, and if it induces feelings of guilt in normal people (Participant F).</p> <p>A lot of people would just see the usual suspects who are kind of using every opportunity to march or whatever (Participant F).</p>
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Some participants felt that the perceptions and values of the radical environmentalist or activist would be viewed as illegitimate by others and thus any engagement would be ineffective: "One problem with direct action is that it will just get lumped in that box... they are just a bunch of greenies and... you know... it's easy to lump them away" (Participant A). Participant D refers to "people who vote" as "living in the real" and radical activists as "living in the philosophical," making the grounds on which they engage too fundamentally different to be productive: "Yeah they [radical/direct activists] are so removed from what is considered normal they are hard to accept" (Participant H).

Chatterton (2006) discusses the "activist" and "other" dichotomy often presented as problematic for movements:

It is not as simple, as in this case, as activist versus lorry driver. We all display multiple, hybrid identities-being radical and conformist, activist and worker, purist and hypocrite, left and right. We also maintain different identities in different contexts... The key is to acknowledge and understand points of commonality and overlap (Chatterton, 2006, 269).

Evidently, Chatterton (2006)'s discussion of the "activist" and the "other" highlights a dichotomy displayed within the attitudes of some research participants. The majority of research participants may represent hybrid identities and have shown complex understandings of the role

of different forms of political action, ranging from radical to institutional or reformist. Chatterton (2006)'s concept of hybrid identities highlights the paradox displayed within participants attitudes towards the "properly" political and the need to create momentum behind politically motivated action on climate change.

Further, Chatterton (2006) recognises that there is no outside and no inside the system. As Participant A noted previously, activists can never be separate from the systems that they aim to change. This is somewhat contrary to the concept of the "properly" political moment which claims that to be "political" an act must be conducted without institutionalised motive or intervention. According to Chatterton (2006) this would be impossible given the inherent connection to our system. Chatterton (2006) highlights the need to create alternatives to capitalism within the system to "unpick" it.

Chatterton (2006, 273) also refers to protests and "social confrontations" as "entry points for critical engagement." However, given the role that assumptions play within these "contained, transient and heavily policed" (Chatterton, 2006, 273) confrontations they can result in unexplained differences. Routledge (1996) calls for the creation of a "third space for critical engagement" where people can engage with ideas of activism:

The third space of critical engagement acts in a fluid, oscillatory fashion - operationalizing within and between resistance and research the traces, relays, trajectories, and interactions that interweave our personal and collective experiences. Relays may effect [sic] various communicative processes between individuals, research groups, etc. within and between the realms of academia and activism. Interactions may be effected [sic] through affinities and alliances, providing a feedback network of ideas, theories, empirical information, and research for mutual benefit (Routledge, 1996, 411-412).

Beyond the academic/activist context that Routledge (1996) referred to, for Chatterton (2006) third spaces within wider society can provide opportunities where "encounters can be extended, where activism and non-activism can blur, where commonality can develop and mature, where

experiences and critique can be shared, outside the pressures of policing and assumed social roles” (Chatterton, 2006, 273). Thus Chatterton (2006) supports the notion that spaces of confrontation can often lead to increased differences and misunderstandings. However, Chatterton (2006) states that these differences in values and assumptions need to be discussed, rather than avoided. This is particularly given the suggestion by some participants that Aotearoa New Zealand/society is not ready for widespread radical action on climate change. This may also be related to the idea that some participants don’t perceive those that engage in radical or direct action as being legitimate, and thus any potential interactions with people who are “living in the real”(Participant D) are jeopardised. Participant G suggests that:

More friendly-to-the-establishment organizations which are more co-operative and offer more specific ways forward, those organisations get the conversations happening amongst a wider group of people and actually allow pathways for people to understand the perspective of radicals without having to be a radical themselves necessarily.

Participant G contradicts Chatterton (2006)’s expanded notion of third spaces by highlighting that by taking reformist action and having an understanding of the need for radical action, the third space can encompass the ideas of both reformer and radical thought and engage people in the politicisation journey referred to in Section 6.3.1.

This section has discussed how participants perceive the potential for radical action to be alienating for members of the public. Members of Generation Zero have overwhelmingly suggested that radical action can create barriers between the activist and the “other” and also limits space for discussion around action on climate change. Yet Participant G has highlighted that politicisation and alienation from action on climate change need not be mutually exclusive.

Participant G was the only participant to suggest a role for “reformer” organisations such as Generation Zero in the politicisation journey referred to in Section 6.3.1. For the remainder of participants, the concept of alienation from action on climate change takes precedence over the need for a politicisation journey. Hence, the role of activists in creating the post-political consensus could be seen as advocating for neoliberal and policy-based solutions to climate change and through the active avoidance of situations of contestation. It appears the paradox

inherent between the process of politicisation and the threat of alienation exists as a result of the scale of the climate change issue and the complex contexts and perspectives that come into play. However, McCarthy (2013, 24) questions “whether contemporary environmental politics are really so lacking in antagonism, alternative visions, and other elements of “proper” politics as many analysts of the post-political condition claim.” Based on evidence presented in this chapter it can be argued that agency and understanding of “politicisation” towards radical action exists and by describing the consensual condition as entrenched undermines the politicisation journey and the role that the “reformer” may play in this. In other words, McCarthy’s recognition of the complex reality of climate change politics reflects the perspectives of participants towards radical action. However, in the case of Generation Zero, the privileged objective is to make climate change an issue that can be related to by those that benefit from the system’s status quo. Some participants in this research labelled this “mainstreaming” of the climate change issue.

## **6.5 Mainstreaming climate change**

Climate change is going to be an issue despite all of that [attempts to change social and economic structures] and therefore we have to act regardless of what of the social structures are and move people’s conceptualisations of climate change beyond a green issue and many other values including maximising our credibility as a movement because otherwise it will be an effort that has merely been polarised into a radical action (Participant D).

The polarising nature of radical/direct action was seen as being the biggest reason to “mainstream” climate change: “One central problem with direct action is that it can be polarising and polarising politics is not the solution to climate change, it’s part of the solution” (Participant A). The majority of participants discussed making climate change a mainstream and accessible issue to people across society, including those that have a stake in or benefit hugely from the systems at the root of climate change. Most spoke in the context of the work that they do with Generation Zero: “Do you get there [to solving climate change] through direct action or do you get there through a much more wider appeal/focus and I think that the assumption is that Generation Zero has wider focus and appeal...” (Participant A). More specifically they spoke about the organisation’s intention to attract those that wouldn’t traditionally be involved with

environmental issues: “It [action on climate change] has to involve everybody” (Participant G). As Participant C highlights, ‘it’s [about] approachability, you don’t have to be really radical. And you know you look at the demographics of our meetings... there is a lot of nicely dressed law students.” For many of the members of Generation Zero, maintaining this overall goal is paramount to the actions and campaigns organised:

The activities that we do, they’re all about building action and building positive action so when we run these campaigns we run these campaigns effectively to get people involved. We give people an opportunity to get involved and think about the issues. And if we don’t win it’s not actually the end of the world, the really important thing is that we have got people involved, they’re thinking about the issues, they’re being active and they’re learning those skills and that is building a general momentum and a general level of ambition and understanding (Participant G).

Thus some participants demonstrated high levels of concern for how Generation Zero’s brand is used. As Participant D explains, “we are... careful with reputation because that is the tool of reaching a large amount of people” and the organisation’s ability to attract a variety of sectors of society. Participant C believes there are benefits to being a youth-focused, pragmatic organisation, “using the fact that we are young, maybe more accessible and you know trying not to be too anarchistic...it [climate change] needs to be able to be accessible to the mainstream” (Participant C).

However, Participant E questions the effectiveness of simply being an organisation that aims to grow its member base of atypical activists. Given that Participant E recognised the role of radical or direct action in meeting the challenges of climate change, this raises the question of how important this is in comparison to growing a large scale movement for institutional political change:

I’ve got some friends who have been in and out of Generation Zero a little but they don’t want to be activists and they don’t like coming to protests... [can you] have an organisation that still caters to them fully or [do you] change how they see the issue so that it’s [action on climate change is seen as] more necessary? (Participant E).

In order to cater to youth who do not identify with activism or justice issues, Generation Zero has placed focus on making actions palatable and non-radical, what Participant I describes as “happy and cute stuff,” optimistic, playful and solutions-focussed. For example, Generation Zero held a satirical bake sale, aiming to sell 6 billion cupcakes to raise money for public transport spending. Generation Zero Wellington members also organised a dancing “flash mob” to raise awareness around sea level rise. Flash mobs have become an increasingly popular alternative amongst youth climate change organisations globally to highlight public support for a cause. These are often used as an alternative to protests and rallies which, according to Participant A, are losing their “acceptability” amongst the audiences Generation Zero hope to engage:

So Generation Zero does flash mobs and large public displays in order to encourage... people [to get] involved to make them feel inspired and motivated and to try and facilitate them into a culture of actually contributing but also to boast discourse in society make people like ‘wow that is really interesting’, you know. Waving placards isn’t working anymore, weird public stunts does... it’s no-where near as acceptable behaviour and therefore they have less motivation to do it (Participant A).

### **6.5.1 Mainstreaming climate change and a post-political carbon consensus**

Mainstreaming climate change amongst the “general public”, as mentioned previously in this chapter, plays a role in creating a post-political carbon consensus. Participants often refer to reaching people across the political spectrum in order to gain a consensual politics. Generation Zero as an organisation “try and mobilise large numbers of young people across the spectrum for action on climate change” (Participant A). Participant A goes on to suggest:

If a Labour voter daughter of two National Party voting farmers starts getting involved with Generation Zero and starts doing stuff and they’re doing stuff in a very politically acceptable way that’s not alienating or confrontational their parents will get impacted from it no matter what.

By purposefully avoiding polarising or controversial matters and endorsing solutions that maintain a systemic status quo, activism can contribute to a post-political carbon consensus by avoiding addressing the issues at the root of climate change. Consensus is built through

“mainstreaming climate change” and portraying climate change issues as concerns of management of the commons, such as the details of the ETS or spending of the transport budget. Through their marketing and approach to climate change causes, Generation Zero members do not address the ideological differences involved in the politics of climate change that can create conflict or contestation in favour of consensus. This can also be seen through the choice of political action members chose to organise, as protests and forms of radical action are seen as “polarising” or “alienating.”

Further, Giddens (2008)’s ‘third way’ politics push government and business leadership to meet challenges that may arise from climate change. Yet ‘third way’ politics also reflects a deliberate “centre” politics and aims to achieve a form of “progress” that ensures that some level of status quo can be maintained, in spite of climate change. This is reflected in Generation Zero’s non-partisan position and use of neoliberal narrative, such as the highlights of the financial costs of climate change on future generations. A statement from one participant clearly demonstrates the creation of the post-political carbon consensus and ‘third way’ politics that Generation Zero is entangled in:

If all we do on climate change [are] things that alienate the centre and things don’t fit within their frame of what they see as acceptable then we won’t affect them. We’ll just polarise or we’ll keep it as an issue of the left when the solution to climate change is this being an issue of the whole political spectrum... it’s like why aren’t we jumping back and being like ‘ok guys how do we get to zero carbon in a business friendly way’, instead of ‘how do we prove that they’re wrong and we’re right’... one central problem with direct action is that it can be polarising and polarising politics is not the solution to climate change. It’s part of the solution... (Participant A).

Further, Generation Zero have in the past shown support for Pure Advantage, a business lobby group “formed in the belief that the private sector has an important role to play in creating a greener, wealthier New Zealand” (Pure Advantage, 2013). In 2012, Generation Zero publically announced their endorsement of Pure Advantage’s major report, *Green Growth: Opportunities for New Zealand* which highlights the business opportunities that can be found whilst addressing climate change. The following statement from a press release from Generation Zero announces

this endorsement and highlights the perspectives on the climate change issue of Mr Chambers as spokesperson for Generation Zero:

Generation Zero shares Pure Advantage's desire for bipartisan agreement on an economic direction for New Zealand that creates sustainable wealth by genuinely addressing climate change and other challenges. "The old 'environment versus economy' argument is a false choice and out of touch with the realities of the 21st century," said Mr Chambers [as a spokesperson for Generation Zero]. "For our generation future prosperity and wellbeing is locked in with how we deal with issues like climate change" (Generation Zero, 2012).

Support for business lobby group Pure Advantage demonstrates a legitimisation of the post-political carbon consensus, as these solutions also avoid ideological contestation and maintain a neoliberal status quo. According to Rancière (2010, 7), "the consensual state props itself up on global economic necessity presented as an intangible given." Further, this demonstrates Day (2004)'s politics of demand, as it is perceived that the issue of climate change can be addressed if enough support can be gained, then institutional politics will address the issue of climate change and catalyse widespread lifestyle change: "Clearly, the fundamental fantasy of the politics of demand is that the currently hegemonic formation will recognize the validity of the claim presented to it, and respond in a way that produces an event of emancipation" (Day, 2004, 734). However, 'emancipation' is a constrained freedom given by dominant order, in the context of a politics of demand which does not challenge dominant hegemony. As mentioned earlier, Day (2004, 734) highlights that the overall intention of a politics of demand is to "reproduce the conditions of its own emergence." Evidence provided in Chapter 5 shows that while Generation Zero recognises the need for a shift in "conditions," their current political discourse suggests a perpetuation of the same conditions. Henceforth, for Generation Zero, and its members that participated in this research, mainstreaming climate change involves advocating solutions that are inherently non-radical and maintain a strong connection with 'third way' politics, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of a post-political carbon consensus.



## 6.6 Summary

The ideas of politicisation of climate change and mainstreaming climate change can be seen as being paradoxical and in tension. Politicisation asks people to recognise the role of neoliberalism in causing climate change and the need for a systemic shift. Mainstreaming occurs when action on climate change appeals to a widespread audience, assumed to be benefiting from the systemic status quo. This chapter has shown that members of Generation Zero recognise the role of actions closer to the “properly” political, though it was acknowledged that it is highly difficult to produce a “properly” political moment. In addition, for members of Generation Zero participating in this research, the need to make climate change a mainstream issue was seen as an important part of the solution to climate change. This meant advocating for a post-political consensus and simultaneously removing opportunities for dissent and the “properly” political within the organisation.

The theoretical framing presented by theorists such as Rancière, Swyngedouw and Mouffe privileges dissent as an element of proper democracy and implies that other forms of politicisation are of lesser value. Thus the question remains, what is the value in activities that are not considered “properly” political? This research suggests that an awareness of the need to understand the role of radical action exists amongst research participants, however many (though not all) consider it counter-productive to making climate change a widespread political issue. In some respects this highlights that the post-political carbon consensus undermines opportunities for dissent. However, by simply disregarding the inherent understanding of the root causes of climate change held by many research participants undermines the value of their individual subjectivities and the opportunities that these may present for developing future alternative imaginaries. Further, in recognition of the spectrum of types of political action, it is necessary to consider the role of actions that are political in nature but not “properly” political and how they may contribute to shifting perspectives of or solving climate change. The value of political actions in relation to addressing climate change is accounted for within Swyngedouw’s post-political carbon consensus. As previous chapters have also demonstrated, research participants have highlighted the complexities of working within the existing neoliberal framework and the recognition for change within the neoliberal systems as well as of greater systemic change.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

This thesis has offered insight into how youth involved with Generation Zero view the issue of climate change and action on climate change. The overall objective of this research was to:

*Explore how members of Generation Zero perceive the climate change issue and the methods to addressing it, given the neoliberal context of Aotearoa New Zealand.*

To address this research objective the following questions were posed in relation to a case study of a youth action group Generation Zero.

1. How do members of Generation Zero perceive the causes and solutions to climate change?
2. How do members of Generation Zero perceive the roles of radical and institutional political action in solving climate change?
3. Do the perceptions of members of Generation Zero reflect the arguments around the existence of a post-political carbon consensus? If, so what are the implications of these perceptions on future spaces for radical action?

This research aimed to address the problem that anecdotal evidence suggests that radical action is becoming less relevant to activists as a result of the complexities of climate change and the dominance of neoliberal discourse. Through conducting semi-structured interviews with nine members of Generation Zero's Wellington group, data obtained has allowed an understanding of how research participants perceive the issue of climate change and how this shapes their perspectives of what makes effective action on climate change. This research has explored what effects neoliberalism may have had on perspectives of climate change activism amongst the neoliberal generation particularly in regard to how they see radical action. Thus arguments around the existence of the post-political carbon consensus were explored in respect to the perspectives of these youth activists.

Chapter 2 and 3 describe the theories and context upon which this research was based. Using Swyngedouw's (2007; 2010) theory of the post-political carbon consensus, and the role that neoliberalism is said to have within this, I have argued that activism now has a role in strengthening the post-political carbon consensus, as the consensual condition removes opportunities for dissent. Hayward (2012) and Nairn et al (2012) refer to the role of neoliberalism in also shaping the norms and values of this supposed neoliberal generation. In the context of climate change, advocates of the climate justice approach describe a growing movement around the work that recognises the importance of addressing the root systemic causes of climate change. The climate justice movement aims to approach climate change as an issue that requires the "properly" political. Žižek, Swyngedouw and Rancière's concept of the "properly" political forms the basis for this research which sought to understand the relevance of the "properly" political within a neoliberal context for youth climate activists.

Overall, these chapters drew together the impact that neoliberalism has had on both the neoliberal generation of youth and in perpetuating what some theorists refer to as the post-political carbon consensus. Chapters 2 and 3 also highlight the global context of radical activism both on climate change and other issues, and questions the relevance that this has for Aotearoa New Zealand activism.

Chapter 4 outlined the methods and approach used to collect and analyse data for this research. Through using Foucauldian discourse analysis, dominant discourses and how they impact "truths" could be ascertained.

Chapter 5 suggested the perceived role of neoliberalism in climate change for members of Generation Zero. Research participants felt that neoliberalism and the associated values were a component of the causes of climate change. Moreover, it was strongly recognised by many participants that the causes of climate change were largely "systemic" and referred to economic systems, Western thought systems and industrialisation among others. Many of these sentiments echoed a climate justice approach to climate change and indicated that participants thought that systemic and societal shifts must occur to address climate change. Hence, when participants were asked to portray the solutions to climate change, many talked at length about changes in mindset and values (some associated with neoliberalism) as being important. However, I argue that the

complexities and dichotomies inherent in addressing climate change meant that many participants' responses highlight the difficulties of addressing climate change in a neoliberal reality and some participants are managing their conflicting ideas and imaginaries. However, it was also noted by many participants that these solutions could be perceived as "inaccessible" by the general public. As members of Generation Zero, and as individuals, research participants also discussed "tangible" solutions to climate change. Such solutions were either neoliberal in nature or did not aim to shift the root causes of climate change. Participants also referred to aspects of 'third way' politics, for instance campaigning for policy change, as relevant to causing greater mindset and value change in the long term. Overall, I have demonstrated that the active involvement in the post-political carbon consensus for members of Generation Zero was the result of a need to make solving the complex and systemic problem of climate change appear possible under the current paradigm. Yet, this simultaneously highlights that the post-political condition should not be considered absolute given the understanding of the need for systemic change identified by some participants.

According to some theorists including Swyngedouw, Žižek, Rancière and Mouffe, the post-political carbon consensus has disrupted opportunities for the "properly" political moment or dissent and as a result these moments are considered rare. In Chapter 6 I have explained the extent to which working within the post-political carbon consensus may have prevented or discouraged activities which may be considered "properly" political or radical for members of Generation Zero. Climate justice actions, while not always considered entirely "properly" political, represent an approach to climate change which aims to address the systemic causes and provide dissensus. As a relatively small movement in Aotearoa New Zealand, it was pertinent to analyse the relevance of climate justice to those taking political action on climate change through Generation Zero. Evidence showed that a number of research participants felt that radical action, such as that taken by advocates of climate justice, was an important part of addressing climate change. However, the entrenched and commonsense nature of the neoliberal condition meant that for many participants radical action was seen as alienating to others wanting to take action on climate change. Many participants felt that alienation of the "general public" would occur if action on climate change was seen to create a shift in the economic/social status quo, which many benefit from or accept as the only reality. In a similar vein to the 'third way' political

approach to climate change, some participants felt it was important to create large, wide-scale support for action on climate change in order to shift voting patterns or spur policy changes as an effective way of taking action on climate change. This further demonstrates that attributes of the post-political condition can suppress opportunities for the “properly” political through creating divides between the “people” and the “activist”. A number of participants felt that in order to “politicise” young people into taking radical action on climate change, they must truly understand the injustices of climate change and related systems, however for some this would be detrimental to a widespread mainstream climate movement. Overall, this research shows a general acceptance of dominant neoliberal discourse and a number of similarities to the post-political condition meaning that action on climate change is perceived by many to be more effective if building widespread support around the solutions presented by the post-political carbon consensus.

Through advocating for these solutions and deliberately being non-radical and palatable, I argue that Generation Zero aims to build widespread support for institutionally-led action on climate change. However despite this, many members of Generation Zero felt that change needed to come from a shift in economic or social systems and associated values. Once again this highlights the complexities and dichotomies of working within a neoliberal context, with conflicting imaginaries and realities.

Overall, the research presented in this thesis acknowledges the impact that the entrenched nature of neoliberalism has had on this generation of youth climate change activists. While research participants recognised the role of neoliberalism and related values in creating the climate change issue, it is also forms a part of effective solutions, partially to the detriment of spaces for radical action. Through offering support to a post-political consensus and displaying aspects of ‘third way’ political theory, research participants have identified the contextual difficulties of a politics for a new imagination beyond the current neoliberal hegemony with some participants recognising the need for this alternative trajectory.

This research has contributed to the literature supporting the existence of a post-political carbon consensus by outlining the effect of neoliberalism on youth perspectives of the “properly” political. Moreover, it draws together crucial political theories and literature on the post political

consensus, activism and neoliberalism and makes a significant contribution to the literature overall. However, unlike the body of literature that supports the post-political condition, this research highlights a much more complex and paradoxical set of circumstances and potential spaces for contestation of social and economic systems. Further, this research highlights the paradoxical ideas around perceptions of the role of radical action to climate change, thus this does not suggest that radical action has become completely irrelevant but rather recognises the complexities of the neoliberal reality.

## **7.1 Limitations of this research**

Throughout the process of this research, it became evident there were several limitations. These limitations exist primarily because of the limited resources and budget available whilst completing the thesis. Given these limitations, participants in this research were based only in Wellington and interviews were limited to nine members of the group. However, this also had benefits as it reduced the geographical factors that may have also influenced perspectives on activism, such as the political context that Wellington activists find themselves in. Future research could involve interviewing more members of Generation Zero and selecting participants in different areas of the country would have widened the breadth of responses. This may provide further insights and either diversified the assumptions that this research made or strengthened existing arguments.

Further, this geographical homogeneity, coupled with age and ethnic homogeneity amongst research participants further limited the diversity of responses gained. All research participants were Pakeha New Zealanders and it can be assumed that this may have affected the data collected due to similar cultural norms and backgrounds. However, from what I have observed, Generation Zero both as a national level group and the group of participants in this research is made up of mostly Pakeha members, thus this make-up of participants mimics the general make-up of the organisation. The lack of tikanga Māori or Māori world view within this research is also a limitation. This research neglects the voices of Māori or people of colour and the different perspectives that they may have offered as members of Generation Zero. However, in saying this it should not be assumed that different ethnic backgrounds would give way to different perspectives on these issues. This limitation could be addressed by conducting further research

that incorporates activists of different ethnic backgrounds and trace the effect that this has on perspectives.

Finally, choosing one case study group has meant that this research has provided an in-depth analysis of the perspectives of some of Generation Zero's members and highlighted the paradox and complexity inherent within each individual's perspectives. While this research set out to explore and analyse the role of activists within the post-political carbon consensus, which Generation Zero as an organisation clearly demonstrates, this raises further questions that should be asked more widely around youth, activism and the post-political carbon consensus. Further, perspectives on climate change are complex and ever-changing. In recognising this, it may have been beneficial to do follow up interviews in order to allow participants to expand on complicated points. Similarly, had there been more time and resources available, interviewing members of different groups would have broadened the usefulness of this research. Given the spectrum of other views existing within Aotearoa New Zealand, this research offers an insight into a few perspectives that raises important questions for future research.

## **7.2 Recommendations for future study**

This research has shown that members of Generation Zero that participated in this research recognise the role of neoliberalism in causing climate change as well as the challenges of addressing climate change given entrenchment of neoliberal discourse. To enable future study in this area to occur the following recommendations are made:

1. Ask further questions of participants that expand on the experiences and influences to their perspectives. Further research could explore the implications of past current events (such as the Urewera Terror Raids), social movements and personal influences (such as family and place of upbringing) have on shaping perspectives of climate change and political action.
2. Use the position of activist-scholar to do participatory research. By discussing the research and forming questions and methods around the specific needs of research participants, research could provide practical and useful knowledge for conducting on the

ground activism and/or address the questions participants have surrounding their own work.

3. Future research is needed that explores how neoliberalism has affected youth subjectivities and their understandings of activism, for example, career and other future ambitions. This would complement the work of Nairn et al (2012) and Hayward (2012) as it would contextualise neoliberalism within the lives of the activists, not just within the context of climate change.
4. Future research on how activism has changed with the advent of neoliberalism in Aotearoa New Zealand is necessary. Comparing older activists views with those of young activists would enable an exploration of how neoliberalism and other factors have shifted views of political action.
5. Future research that involves more diverse groups and a geographically larger selection of youth participants, potentially even involving young activists from other countries, is necessary to gain an understanding of the nature of activism and the post-political carbon consensus in a national or international context. This would put the context of Aotearoa New Zealand into perspective with the rest of the world and highlight the potential other impacts of our culture on climate change action. Diversity in groups with differing approaches, as well as geographically diverse groups, including youth working on climate justice issues, is also necessary to create a broad picture of perspectives on climate change. This may offer insight into the perspectives of youth that are acting to counter the post-political carbon consensus.

### **7.3 Closing statement**

This research presents an overview of the perspectives of members of Generation Zero on the causes and solutions of climate change, as well as the role of different forms of political action in combating climate change. Research participants have presented a complex picture which does not entirely support the existence of a post-political carbon consensus. However, this study also acknowledges that the prominence of neoliberal policy in mainstream discourse around climate change has had some influence on perspectives of radical action, with some participants



suggesting that radical action on climate change was not as integral to climate change as with other movements and causes. Overall, I would like to acknowledge the need for diversity in action on climate change and the contribution that members of Generation Zero have made in bringing climate change to the attention of many. However, this research has highlighted a need for a wider understanding of the benefits of addressing the systemic causes of climate change through radical action.

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# Appendices

## **Appendix One: Information Sheet for semi-structured interviews**



**Title of project:** Climate change and political action: youth perspectives in Aotearoa New Zealand

**Researcher:** Emma Moon: School of Geography, Environment and Earth Science, Victoria University Wellington, New Zealand.

I am a Masters of Environmental Studies student at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of my Masters degree I am undertaking research which will form the basis for my thesis to be completed in February 2013.

The aim of this research is to gain an understanding of youth perspectives on political action as part of active citizenship in relation to climate change. I hope to gain an understanding of what young people in Generation Zero feel needs to be done in New Zealand (and globally) to address the causes of climate change, and the action they choose to take with Generation Zero both at present and in the future.

No names will be used at all during the course of this research or within any of the publications released following this research. Participants may be distinguished by the extent of their commitment and involvement. This will be mitigated as far as possible by avoiding using material that may suggest any particular identity. Participants will be attributed with a pseudonym such as Participant 1, 2 or 3.

This research will form the basis for my Masters thesis which will be submitted to the SGEES for marking. Following this it will be available for download at the Victoria University of Wellington library website and a hard copy will be kept in the library thesis depositary. It is hoped this research will be used in academic journal publications and academic conference presentations in the future. In order to disseminate this research to a wider audience, in particular the climate change action community at large, this research may form the basis of a number of articles, presentations and blog posts to be written for a lay audience

Victoria University of Wellington has granted me ethics approval to conduct this research.

**What is involved?**

Interviews will be conducted by myself at a mutually agreed location. They have been designed to be 50-60 minutes long. Should you choose to participate in this study, your written consent will be requested prior to it commencing.

Participation is entirely voluntary and you can decline to answer any questions, and/or withdraw from the interview at any time. You can also withdraw your opinions from the research up until the date of 1/11/2012.

You will be asked a list of questions relating to your experiences as a member of Generation Zero and your perspectives on the climate change issue. You do not have to answer all questions.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed. These documents will be stored electronically in a password protected folder for five years after the completion of the project. After this time, files will be destroyed.

Please contact myself or my supervisor, Dr Sophie Bond, if you have any questions or would like to know further information regarding this research.

**Principal Investigator:**

Emma Moon

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**Research Supervisor:**

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Ph: 04 463 5217

## Appendix Two: Consent Form



**Title of project:** Climate change and political action: youth perspectives in Aotearoa New Zealand

- I have read and understood the attached 'Information sheet for interviews.' I have had an opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the study and about participating in the interview and have had them answered to my satisfaction.
- I agree to participate in the interview and understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project by 01/11/2012 without having to give reasons.
- I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed, and that only the researcher and their supervisor will have access to this material. Any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisor. Statements I make may be used in the thesis or resulting publications, but a pseudonym will be used so I am not identified.
- I understand that all written material and audio recordings of interviews will be stored in a locked filing cabinet or as password protected electronic documents and then destroyed after 5 years.
- I understand that the data I provide will only be used for the purposes of a thesis and any articles published from the thesis. No information will be released to others without my written consent.

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full name) hereby consent to

take part in this study by being interviewed.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I would like to receive a summary of the research findings:      Yes / No (Please circle)

If yes, please provide email address:

### **Appendix Three: Interview Guide**

1. What is your role in Generation Zero and how long have you been involved?
2. Can you describe for me the activities that Generation Zero are involved in? And how would you describe this as action on climate change?
3. Have you been involved with any other environmental groups? If so, which ones?
4. Why did you choose to become involved in these environmental groups and climate/environmental action?
5. What do you think are the causes of climate change?

*(Prompt: economic system, politics, human activity, psychology, scientific)*

6. What do you think are some of the solutions to climate change?

*(Prompt: policy based, international law, systemic, individual, community, business)*

7. Name what you believe to be the top three priorities for addressing climate change
8. What do you believe to be the role of citizens within political action on climate change in general?
9. What do you believe to be the role of citizens within political action in a country like New Zealand on climate change?

*(Explain what radical action is in the context of this research)*

10. What do you believe to be the effectiveness of radical action as a role for citizens within political action in a country like New Zealand?

*(Prompt: Legality, public perception of the issue, policy based solutions and the impact that this can have)*

11. What do you believe to be the role of radical action in relation to climate change as a young person and a member of Generation Zero?

*(Prompt: How comfortable would you be with engaging in radical action? identify constraints and potential future opportunities, the aims and ambitions of the organisation)*

12. What barriers exist for radical action on climate change in New Zealand?

*(Prompt: Are there reasons that people would not engage, use or advocate action?)*

13. Are there any other comments you would like to add?

## Appendix Four: Ethics Approval



Phone 0-4-463 5676  
Fax 0-4-463 5209  
Email [Allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz)

### MEMORANDUM

TO	Emma Moon
COPY TO	Sophie Bond
FROM	Dr Allison Kirkman, Convener, Human Ethics Committee
DATE	16 July 2012
PAGES	1
SUBJECT	<b>Ethics Approval: 19406</b> Political action and climate change: what do New Zealand youth say?

Thank you for your application for ethical approval, which has now been considered by the Standing Committee of the Human Ethics Committee.

Your application has been approved from the above date and this approval continues until 28 February 2013. If your data collection is not completed by this date you should apply to the Human Ethics Committee for an extension to this approval.

Best wishes with the research.

Allison Kirkman  
Human Ethics Committee





