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ARTICLE

School Strike 4 Climate in Aotearoa New Zealand: youth, relationships and climate justice

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Abstract
The School Strike 4 Climate New Zealand (SS4CNZ) movement have organised and led four strikes between 2019 and 2021. With each successive strike, adult support for students' demands increased. Their most notable achievement was garnering sufficient support to pass Aotearoa New Zealand's Zero Carbon Bill into legislation. However, tensions with SS4CNZ led to the Auckland Chapter announcing its disbandment in 2021. There were mixed responses to their decision. In this reflective essay I argue that this disbandment was a positive move forward because these youth were showing their willingness to re-build relationships with their Māori and Pacific Island activist peers. By disbanding, not only were these young leaders enabling their Māori and Pacific Island peers to lead future actions, they were acknowledging the connections between racism, colonialism and climate justice; responding to our relational crisis by demonstrating the importance of re-building robust and reciprocal relationships between humans and more-than-humans when advocating for ways to navigate towards a climate-just society.

Keywords: youth; climate change; race; ontology

Introduction
This reflective essay explores the journey of the youth who formed and belonged to the Auckland Chapter of the School Strike 4 Climate New Zealand (SS4CNZ). It traces their success and subsequent disbandment due to them recognising and acknowledging that their Chapter occupied a racist, white-dominated space that stems from our colonial history in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is written from my perspective as an environmental education researcher and educator who has been involved in this field for some time. I am Pākehā (New Zealand European of settler ancestry) and privileged, just beginning a journey to explore unconscious racial bias and the structural inequities inherent in Aotearoa New Zealand society. My initial involvement with the SS4CNZ strikes was intellectual; I signed their open letter (Radio New Zealand (RNZ), 2019a) and supported their strikes. I did not become invested in this movement until October 2019 when, as a member of the Auckland Branch of the New Zealand Association for Environmental Education, I helped to organise a panel discussion where the leaders of the Auckland Chapter presented their aspirations for education in terms of climate justice to an audience of educators. The depth and range of their emotions — their passion, anger, despair and fear for the future — were palpable. Their emotions really affected me, making me realise that I needed to do more for the future, both in my personal and work life.

In April 2021 after a highly successful strike event, the Auckland Chapter announced it was disbanding, shutting down, due to the racist space it had occupied and its tokenistic treatment of

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others, in particular Māori and Pacific Islands youth. This announcement met with mixed reactions. Some welcomed the announcement as an acknowledgement of the racism present in the SS4CNZ and in wider society. Others hoped the Auckland Chapter would reassemble when it was ready to be inclusive of all people.

Personally, I was very shocked, as were some of my fellow academics who work in the environmental education space. As I write this essay, I realised that I had overlooked the opportunity to reflect on my 'taken-for-granted beliefs' (Sammel, 2020, p. 129). Because the Auckland Chapter leaders had expressed the need for including Māori and Pacific Islands knowledges and perspectives in education, I had assumed that these were indicators of them having respectful and reciprocal relationships with their Māori and Pacific Islands peers. The disbandment showed that they did not.

I decided I needed to reflect and deconstruct my ideas and beliefs to consider how relationships of dominance that originate in colonialism, inscribe and re-inscribe racism in Aotearoa New Zealand, resulting in the SS4CNZ being a 'default white space' (Curnow & Helferty, 2018, p. 143). I regard the Auckland Chapter's announcement and the mixed reactions it received are worthy of exploration, because I believe that all people are needed in the struggle for a just transition to a sustainable society. This essay is my response and search for ways that people in Aotearoa New Zealand can move forward together to create such a transition.

I begin with a celebration of the highly admirable achievements of the SS4CNZ movement. Next the way in which the tensions in the SS4CNZ became apparent is discussed, along with the differing reactions to the Auckland Chapter's disbandment. Next, I turn to a way forward, towards ways we can navigate towards climate justice through the re-building of relationships between Pākehā people such as myself, and Māori and Pacific Island peoples. As Whyte (2019) argues, we are not facing a climate emergency but rather a relational emergency, since colonialism, capitalism and industrialisation have destroyed relationships between Western and Indigenous peoples. These relationships need to be re-built, as according to Whyte, only then can we begin work to mitigate and solve the problems caused by climate change. Going further, I then argue that such a re-building also needs to include relationships with more-than-human (all living entities on Planet Earth), which will demand an ontological shift away from the dominant liberal-humanist ontology (Verlie, 2021) that is expressed through human exceptionalism, to a relational one.

The Success of SS4CNZ

Inspired by Greta Thunberg's Fridays For Future (FFF), and building on the Australian School Strike 4 Climate movement (SS4C), Aotearoa New Zealand's own School Strike 4 Climate (SS4CNZ) movement began in late 2018 (Handford & Maever, 2020). The aspirations of both FFF and SS4C movements are the same, however School Strike 4 Climate organise a smaller number of strikes with the intention of mobilising a larger number of people at each event. Thus it is a grassroots organisation that also has global links (Thomas, Cretney, & Hayward, 2019). The SS4CNZ's goal is to hold the Aotearoa New Zealand Government accountable for its lack of progress in tackling the causes and effects of the climate crisis. Working alongside experienced activists, scientists and other climate activist groups in Aotearoa New Zealand, the national SS4CNZ team developed an initial list of demands outlining what the Government should be doing, which were updated for the April 2021 strike (SS4CNZ, 2021).

Between 2019 and 2021, SS4CNZ have organised and participated in four strikes to protest about the Government's lack of progress towards addressing the effects of climate change. As well as holding the Government to account, they are demanding change at a societal level in order to move to a just and sustainable future (SS4CNZ, 2021). Over the course of these four strikes, not only did the number of participants grow, adult support for these student strikers increased.

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Criticisms of the strikes mostly ceased and adults began to take youth's demands for change more seriously.

The first strike was held on 15 March 2019 and attracted around 20,000 people marching in various cities in support of SS4CNZ's demands (Handford & Maever, 2020). But reactions to the first strike were very mixed. Some parents, teachers and other adults applauded the strike and voiced their support for youth who they saw as standing up for their right to a future. Substantial support came in the form of an open letter that was signed by over 1,000 academics, researchers and teachers commending the striking students for taking crucial action about an issue concerning the 'wellbeing and survival of current and future generations' (RNZ, 2019a, para 2).

However, there was resistance from other adults. This resistance centred around ideas that youth should be in school learning and that the strike was pointless. For example, some adults objected to the strike taking place during school time, arguing that any strikes should take place on weekends or on a day when teachers went on strike (RNZ, 2019b). There were schools who stated they would mark striking youth as truant and others stating that the strike was just an excuse to skip school and were dismissive of any resulting effects.

Similarly to adults, politicians also had mixed responses. The co-leader of the Green Party and also the Minister for Climate Change James Shaw, was supportive, lauding their actions in standing up for their future. Some politicians expressed positive views, such as stating they would be happy for their children to strike and others were impressed that these students were dealing with their future (RNZ, 2019b). Although initially muted, the Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern did eventually offer her support to the upcoming strike, acknowledging the power of youth voice despite their inability to vote. Other politicians, such as the Minister of Education, were ambivalent. He stated that, 'If taking part in this action is part of the learning process, then there may be some merit in it'. (RNZ, 2019b, para 7).

However, many of the right-wing politicians were more scathing in their responses. They dismissed the power of the strike to effect change, with disparaging remarks being made and one politician opining that, '... their little protest is not going to help the world one bit'. (RNZ, 2019b, para 20).

Devastatingly, the strike was interrupted on that day by a terrorist attack in Ōtautahi Christchurch where 51 people were killed. It was one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most tragic days and the elation at the SS4CNZ's success was understandably eclipsed.

When another international strike was announced for 24 May 2019, the SS4CNZ decided to plan further action. With a higher than usual national security alert level and with many communities still in mourning, grieving for the deaths in Ōtautahi, the national organisers decided that each regional chapter should decide on their own actions. While some planted trees and organised beach clean-ups, others marched in the streets again, with a turnout similar to that of the March protests (Thomas et al., 2019). Reactions from adults to the strikes continued to be mixed. Some students said that their schools and families were supportive of their strikes because it was such an important issue (RNZ, 2019c). At some venues such as in Whakatū Nelson, onlookers expressed their support for striking students. However, negative reactions continued with other students reporting their schools scheduling credentialling assessments on the strike day to get the students to stay in school while other students were marked as being truant (RNZ, 2019c).

The next strike was held on 27 September 2019 and involved the largest number of people up to that date. This strike involved 40 different events nationally and attracted approximately 170,000 people (RNZ, 2019d). This was a huge increase from the reported 17,000 people at each of the two previous strikes (RNZ, 2019e). More importantly, this number represented 3.5% of Aotearoa New Zealand's population and according to a Harvard University political scientist Erica Chenoweth, having this percentage of a population actively participating in protests can ensure 'serious political change' (RNZ, 2019f). Also, it was the second highest turnout per capita internationally in the September strikes (Handford & Maever, 2020).

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Support came from wider sectors of society, such as trade unions who not only communicated information about the strikes to their members, they also provided financial and logistical support. All but one tertiary institution, the University of Auckland, put their support behind the strike, endorsing the SS4CNZ's actions and encouraging staff to take part (RNZ, 2019g). Handford and Maever (2020) reported that over 290 businesses not only gave their support but enabled their staff to take part in the strike. The critics were quiet.

After the disruptions of COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 and the beginning of 2021, a fourth strike was held on 09 April 2021. There were no reports of numbers, just that 'thousands' of students had abandoned classes (RNZ, 2021). This time, the student strikers had a list of demands that were given to the Minister for Climate Change. The demands included prohibiting the use of fossil fuels, reducing agricultural emissions, including climate education in formal education, honouring our Pacific Island neighbours where climate change is already markedly affecting their lives, and the Government investing in a just transition to a future that is sustainable for all (RNZ, 2021).

Celebrating the Achievements of SS4CNZ

Under the umbrella of SS4CNZ, these four strikes had far reaching effects on Aotearoa New Zealand society, raising public awareness of the effects of climate change and the depth of concern, anger and fear that youth hold about their precarious future (Fleming et al., 2020). I believe there has been some shift in attitudes and consensus about need for change due to the effects of climate change. Consequently, I think that on individual, community/local and societal levels the SS4CNZ movement achieved a great deal through their political leadership.

Notably, one of the SS4CNZ's greatest achievements was that their support helped the passing of the Zero Carbon Bill in 2019 (Thomas et al., 2019). Although this legislation was written by another youth activist group Generation Zero, the SS4CNZ strikes did help to put pressure on politicians, leading to nearly unanimous cross-party support for its passing (Handford & Maever, 2020). Even though this legislation did not set the strong emissions targets and legal enforcement that the SS4CNZ wanted, it still sends strong signals about the direction Aotearoa New Zealand society and its economic sector are heading.

Another significant outcome was that local councils began to declare climate emergencies as a result of the strikes and SS4CNZ chapters presenting at council meetings (Thomas et al., 2019). Such declarations are important because councils then embed climate change action into their decision-making. In addition, these declarations make councils accountable and ensure that mitigation and adaptation strategies are developed specifically for and with particular communities.

Furthermore, some youth were candidates in their local council elections and became councillors. For example, Sophie Handford, one of the founders of the SS4CNZ, was elected at 18 years of age to the Kāpiti Coast District Council (Milne, 2021). There was a flow-on effect for other young adults who were also successfully elected, such as Tamatha Paul. She gained a seat on the Wellington City Council at 22 years of age in 2019. Ms Paul asserted that prior to the SS4CNZ strikes, she would not have been successful but now many more adults see young people as 'capable and competent … [and can] do a good job in governance'. (RNZ, 2019h).

Moreover, the SS4CNZ strikes have led to a shift in perceptions about the role of youth just taking the lead in the political arena. As a result of these strikes, youth are being recognised by adults as having autonomy and able to be competent citizens (Thomas et al., 2019) because they have created a space that enables them to participate in the political arena in a genuine, not tokenistic, manner.

Finally, with the SS4CNZ calling out the Government and applying pressure for action towards a sustainable future for all, there has been a societal shift in attitudes and discourse about the need for change, resulting in such change. This shift is important because it is indicative of greater social

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licence. Social licence is concerned with the degree of sanction people will give to an important but risky activity if polled about their opinion (Bioethics-Panel, 2019). It determines whether such an activity can begin, or continue if already started, because the entity undertaking it would either gain popular support, or whether such support would be lost. In a society, having social licence for an activity that is important but potentially risky, for example the dismantling of our carbon-intensive ways of life, is crucial. I believe that due to the success of these strikes organised by the SS4CNZ, the Government felt it had sufficient social licence to pass the Zero Carbon Act 2019 and hopefully will continue to make other necessary changes towards a sustainable future.

The Revelation of Tensions

Despite the success of these strikes and to the shock of many people, on 12 June 2021, the Auckland Chapter of SS4CNZ announced it was disbanding. The reasons given were that it had been a 'racist, white-dominated space' and had 'avoided, ignored and tokenised people of colour voices and demands, especially those of Pasifika and Māori individuals in the climate activism space' (Cardwell, 2021a, para 4–5). They apologised for the stress and trauma they had caused, acknowledging that any apology could never be sufficient to make up for their actions. They also declared that their apology was but one step in taking accountability for their actions. It was stated that they would not hold any further strikes and had split from the national organisation. They also challenged other regional chapters to emulate their decision (Greally, 2021). No further communication has been heard from the Auckland Chapter. They are silent.

It is important to note that the SS4CNZ is not the only youth climate activist group working in Aotearoa New Zealand. They are a very newly formed activist group. There are others who have been advocating for Indigenous people for some time. One group is the Pacific Climate Warriors who have been active for over ten years in 15 Pacific Island nations under the umbrella of the 350.org global climate change movement (Totua, 2020). The Pacific Climate Warriors in Aotearoa New Zealand focus on helping other young people to understand climate change and how to take action. They demand that Indigenous climate experts should be leading conversations about climate justice since Pacific Island peoples are the most resilient when managing the effects of climate change. Another group is Te Ara Whatu, made up of Māori and Pacific Island youth, who have attended the Youth Delegations at the International UN Climate Change Conferences in 2017, 2018 and 2019 (Te Ara Whatu, n.d.). Their aim is to ensure their cultures and whānau (extended family or community of related families) are protected in any climate change global solutions. 4 Thaa Kulture is a South Auckland climate advocacy group. This group is focused on fighting for Indigenous rights and the environment (Wannan, 2021). Similarly to the Pacific Climate Warriors and Te Ara Whatu, they believe that climate change solutions are too Euro-centric and are advocating for the inclusion of a diversity of perspectives when designing solutions to climate change's impacts.

The SS4CNZ saw these three groups as their allies, as co-hosts in strikes and actively involved them. Indeed, these partnerships between youth climate activist groups were viewed as recognition that leadership needed to come from Indigenous communities who are most affected by climate change and who hold experience and knowledge that would form part of solutions. Their involvement was seen as a step towards ensuring that a range of voices, especially marginalised youth, were empowered to be heard and guaranteed the success of the strikes (Handford & Maever, 2020).

However, there were background murmurings about racism in SS4CNZ. In their analysis of the first year of SS4CNZ, Sophie Handford, who was one of its leaders and Raven Maever, who was involved in its establishment, did admit that further work and learning were necessary to ensure that Māori and Pacific Island voices were fully and meaningfully included (2020). Citing the rapid growth of the organisation and lack of time as reasons for not fully engaging with Māori and

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Pacific Island peers, they acknowledged they have yet to address issues such as 'structural racism and negative power dynamics' that are inherent in Aotearoa New Zealand society (p. 227).

The identification of racism within the SS4CNZ came to the fore again just prior to the April 2021 strike. Kera Sherwood-O'Regan of SustainedAbility, a disability climate justice network, stated that Māori and Pasifika activist groups have always been excluded from climate activism in general, even though they have been working for systems changes for many years without recognition (Cardwell, 2021b). Luhama Taualupe, who is based in Aotearoa New Zealand and identifies as a wavemaker, an Indigenous conception of an activist, agreed and went further, expressing her anger that Western people only started listening to climate change concerns when Greta Thunberg came along because she is someone they feel comfortable listening to and not seen as a threat (Cardwell, 2021b). Taualupe referred to this selective listening as subconscious racial bias.

There were mixed reactions to this dissolution. On the one hand, a spokesperson from Te Ara Whatu welcomed the disbandment, stating that there had been racism in the SS4CNZ for a few years with the Pāhekā-dominated climate activist groups receiving the vast majority of the resources and media attention. They also admitted racism was a widespread problem in Aotearoa New Zealand (Cardwell, 2021a). On the other hand, the Pacific Climate Warriors commended SS4C Auckland for accepting accountability for their racism but encouraged the Auckland Chapter to reassemble when ready to be inclusive of all. They declared that the 'fight for Climate Justice requires all hands on deck ... Allyship is crucial ... the work requires all people in this fight' (The Coconet.tv, n.d., para 9).

As mentioned above, I was extremely shocked at their announcement as were some of my fellow academics. Like me, it was a complete surprise for one of my colleagues who had no knowledge of these tensions and he opined that it was a 'great shame to see the vitriol' circulating (Pers. communication 14-06-21). Another colleague expressed sadness at the disbandment, considering it 'tragic' (Pers. communication 14-06-21). It seemed that we were oblivious to the internal politics of the Auckland Chapter. As outsiders we had only seen the strikes that the Auckland Chapter had organised. My colleague summed up our feelings when she wrote that we 'will look back on our lack of support for them — as they are, with their mistakes and all — as our own shame' (Pers. communication, 18-06-21).

I now turn to the issue of racial tensions that are the ongoing legacy of Aotearoa New Zealand's colonial past. I assert that these tensions are at the heart of the disbandment, and that Pākehā need to re-build their relationships with Māori and Pacific Island peoples, so that in partnership, decisions about responses to the climate emergency can be made in a just manner for all. Furthermore, I argue that this re-building of relationships needs to go further to include more-than-humans, which will necessitate an ontological shift in many humans' perceptions of themselves in the world. Such a shift from an ontology rooted in a liberal-humanist tradition that is expressed through human exceptionalism to a relational one, is essential for a just transition to take place.

Climate Justice: Relationship Building and Ontological Change

Groups that advocate for climate justice can be found all over the world. These climate justice organisations have grown out of the environmental justice movement, whose origins can be traced back to the 1982 protests about the disposal of PCB-contaminated soil into a landfill in North Carolina, USA (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). The landfill was situated in a poor community of mostly African-American people and brought together environmentalists, civil rights activists and leaders of black communities to campaign against the injustice of the landfill's placement. A unique characteristic of this movement is that its early activists were not the middle and upper-class white people who typically belong to mainstream environmental organisations but people of low income and of colour (Agyeman, Schlosberg, Craven, & Matthews, 2016).

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Over the following years, the environmental justice movement grew internationally and broadened to include issues such as food sovereignty, slavery, deforestation, land appropriation and waste disposal to name but a few.

While there were prior signals of its emergence, it was the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 that birthed the climate justice movement (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). Climate justice is synonymous with equity: intra- and intergenerational equity; equity for all humans and equity for more-than-humans (Agyeman et al., 2016). It is concerned with accounting for the inequities and prejudices that result in the causes and effects of climate change, then re-dressing and preventing these inequities and prejudices from reoccurring (Verlie, 2021). Climate justice can be regarded as an ideal, which like sustainability, can be seen as a journey. Because this journey is situated in complex webs of socio-cultural-ecological relationships, fraught with uncertainty and change and resulting in unforeseen outcomes (Lundholm & Plummer, 2010), it is difficult to identify endpoints.

Inequities due to climate change exist both between and within countries. Climate justice recognises that it is the humans who are least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions who will suffer the most from the effects of these emissions. It is the poor communities living on the Global South coastlines, people involved in agriculture in developing countries and the urban poor globally who are most affected (Agyeman et al., 2016). Furthermore, these vulnerable groups are the ones who are least able to negotiate effectively during international forums, such as COP Summits, limiting their abilities to hold major emitters of greenhouse gases responsible for re-dressing climate change's effects.

Increasingly, Indigenous rights organisations have become allied with the climate justice movement. They too are disproportionately affected by climate change's effects (Watene & Yap, 2015; Whyte, 2019) and also because of exploitation of and/or their displacement from ancestral lands because of resource extraction (Agyeman et al., 2016). Consequently, because the groups of humans who are most vulnerable to the risks and effects of climate change are indigenous groups, people who are not white and others from developing countries or the Global South, climate change is more than an environmental crisis — it is a social crisis that is exacerbating structural inequities internationally. As such, climate change is a violation of human rights and an 'insidious form of racism' (Agyeman et al., 2016, p. 324). A just transition to a postcarbon, sustainable society is not achievable while these inequities and prejudices remain.

At present, many solutions to the effects of climate change are being conceptualised within the dominant liberal-humanist traditions, for example changes to the capitalist economy that incentivise sustainability or restricting the use of fossil fuels (Whyte, 2019). But these changes will not lead to climate justice. Instead they will perpetuate existing, entrenched inequities because those who can least afford to make the drastic changes will continue to bear their brunt. For instance, in Aotearoa New Zealand, restricting fossil fuel use will adversely impact on many Māori and Pacific Island people. Since many live in South Auckland where public transport is difficult to access and they have to commute long distances to their employment, they will have to bear the increased costs of using fossil fuels at the expense of their wellbeing and that of their families (Cardwell, 2021b).

In order to begin our journey towards climate justice, I argue that we need to build quality relationships with each other. It is relationships that are key; they are more important than the solutions devised. A quality relationship is characterised by reciprocity, high levels of respect and trust and mutual accountability (Whyte, 2019). In addition, as argued by Watene and Yap (2015), having quality relationships is a form of wealth. Through quality relationships, humans could then develop mitigation and adaptation responses collectively that are equitable for all. However, as Whyte (2019) argues, we have a relational crisis because colonialism, capitalism and industrialisation have destroyed relationships between Western and Indigenous people. Western colonising humans did this by imposing their liberal-humanist ontology and systems on Indigenous people, forcibly acquiring their lands, suppressing use of their languages and

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cultural practices with the aim of assimilation to impose homogeneity (Pihama, 2019; Whyte, 2019). The journey towards climate justice will require a re-building of relationships between Western and Indigenous people. Re-building will not occur quickly as it can take generations for mutual trust and reciprocity to be built (Whyte, 2019). And, as we know, time is running out.

As we respond together to the effects of climate change, a re-building of respectful and reciprocal relationships with Indigenous people could lead to them finally achieving self-determination. Not only would having self-determination give indigenous groups a voice in decision-making at all levels, something that is currently absent (Pihama, 2019; Tschakert et al. 2020), it would also enable indigenous groups to control their own social, economic and cultural development (Watene & Yap, 2015).

However, I argue that this necessary re-building of relationships is not simply a matter of Pākehā people like myself inviting Indigenous people to be part of the climate change decision-making process. Quality partnerships need to be formed to tackle the effects of climate change. As these partnerships are built, consideration needs to be given to the ongoing relationships *within* the partnership because different groups of people are aiming to work together in solidarity, much like the groups who comprised the Auckland Chapter of SS4CNZ. Solidarity is key in these partnerships and in this paper, I define solidarity as attending to 'work on behalf of others', a 'process of amplification', and 'standing alongside' other people who share a political vision, as they work towards a more climate-just planet for everyone (Curnow & Helferty, 2018, p. 151). Some solidarity partnerships have been successful when groups of people working together are experiencing the same social and/or environmental impacts, often due to geographical proximity. However, when working together in solidarity, a paradox often arises.

The paradox occurs because of inequitable power relationships. Within any partnership, as people work in solidarity, a particular group can have access to more power and privilege than other groups because of their position in a society. But despite this differential access, they are trying to imagine and enact different kinds of relationships than the existing ones (Curnow & Helferty, 2018). As people try to work across their differences, the power imbalances can become increasingly evident, particularly when there is incompatibility between the groups or communication about goals is lacking. Consequently, tensions arise and the privileged group's goals and strategies 'trump the group' with whom the privileged group claims to be working in solidarity (Curnow & Helferty, 2018, p. 152). As a result of these power imbalances, the privileged group can then abdicate their decision-making roles and thus reduce their productive participation in the solidarity partnership. It is in this way that racist and colonialist relationships are reinscribed.

This solidarity paradox could explain what occurred within the Auckland Chapter of SS4C. The Pākehā students in the Chapter quickly gained access to the media and resources, something Māori and Pacific island youth climate activist groups had not, despite the fact they had been advocating for change for a far longer period of time illustrating the way that Māori and Pacific Islands voices had been ignored and/or marginalised. The choice to disband was an abdication and while it left the space open for their Māori and Pacific Island peers to lead future advocacy, it also reduced their productive participation.

This paradox creates a conundrum for Pākehā like myself. While solidarity in partnerships has been promoted as a way to disrupt racism and colonialism, navigating a way through to more symmetrical power relationships, is a fraught space. How can I take the actions that are desperately needed for a more climate-just world in solidarity partnerships without reinscribing power imbalances that I am trying to disrupt?

There do not seem to be any solutions except to accept that partnerships are imperfect, acknowledging that strategies that rely on inequitable power relations and mobilise one's privileged position might still bring about the necessary changes (Curnow & Helferty, 2018). One must remain fully cognisant of the contradictions within the partnership. Curnow and Helferty go further, arguing that this position is an ethic — a purposeful endeavour to take responsibility to engage accountably, avoiding any movement towards innocence, and know there are no

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straightforward solutions. They refer to this as sitting 'with the violence' and accepting both the 'magnitude and senselessness' of the damage our colonial and racialised history has done and continues to do so (p. 155). In taking this position, Pākehā like myself have to struggle with the contradiction that racism and colonialism are inscribed in our environmental advocacy and in our relationships with others, yet it is a foundation from which there is potential to build different types of relationships, possibly those described by Whyte (2019).

Along with re-building relationships with indigenous peoples, I also assert that Pākehā and other Western humans need to re-consider their worldviews, leading to an ontological shift. Ontology refers to the way in which a person perceives themselves in their world and it determines one's actions and willingness to change. Currently, the dominant ontology is a 'liberal-humanist' one (Verlie, 2021, p. 3). Here, 'liberal' refers to the notion that rational individuals make up the world and while they can form superficial relationships with others, individuals essentially retain their own independence and autonomy. In addition, 'liberal' can also refer to collectives, such as nation states, who can maintain established boundaries that result in uniformity and concordance among these humans.

In a liberal-humanist ontology, 'humanist' means that humans are the only beings who matter; only they can exercise agency, be intentional and as such are the only beings who deserve 'moral, ethical, political or legal consideration' (Verlie, 2021, p. 3). Thus 'humanist' aligns with the notion of humans' sense of exceptionalism — humans placing of themselves as above and having power over every other living species on Earth (Taylor, 2017; Tschakert et al., 2020). This sense of exceptionalism means humans see themselves as separate from our environment, or what Latour (2015) refers to as a bifurcation of nature and culture. This bifurcation is a binary that sets humans apart from nonhumans, reinforcing this sense of human exceptionalism (Taylor, 2017).

Humans' sense of human exceptionalism, coupled with them seeing the environment as natural, as something out there that is 'pure' and separate from humans is persistent, makes it very difficult to tackle the impacts of human behaviour, such as climate change (Smyth, 1995; Taylor, 2017). Even when humans engage in protecting, caring and restoring the environment, the problem of the bifurcation of nature and human exceptionalism is not necessarily addressed. Through fostering these ideals of protection and care, humans are continuing to reinforce the nature/culture binary, perceiving themselves as the subjects, who can act on the 'exteriorised world' that is out there (the object) (Common Worlds Research Collective (CWRC), 2020, p. 7). Such actions simply reproduce this binary, perpetuating the belief that humans can act with impunity and at will on the environment (Taylor, 2017). In addition, through their actions of care and protection, humans are illustrating their belief that they are the only living species who have agency (Taylor, 2017), further bolstering bifurcation and their sense of human exceptionalism.

Despite the manner in which a liberal-humanist ontology espouses equality for humans (Verlie, 2021), in practice it excludes particular groups of people. These groups are those who are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as Indigenous and disabled people (Cardwell, 2021b). It is this very exclusion that was at the core of the reasons for the SS4CNZ's Auckland Chapter's dissolution. Recognising their exclusion of Māori and Pacific Island peers' voices, they made themselves accountable for their actions and disbanded in the hope that Māori and Pacific Island activist groups could then be at the centre of climate-related conversations and actions. Their action was regarded as the beginning of a dismantling of institutional racism and hope was expressed that other organisations would follow suit (Greally, 2021).

However, the Auckland Chapter is one small group; I argue that in our journey towards climate justice, an ontological change for many humans is required. Humans need to view their world with a relational ontology, where humans see themselves as an inextricable part of Earth's biosphere (Wals & Benavot, 2017), learning to 'become *with* the world around us' (CWRC, 2020, p. 2). In viewing the world in this way, many of us can rethink our being in the world, calling our attention to the complex ways that all of us, human and more-than-human, are in relationship with each other (Van Dooren, Kirksey, & Munster, 2016). It gives us the opening to interrupt and

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interrogate the binaries and narratives that underpin the way we view our relationships with others and our world. Central to this shift is developing an understanding that the cultural and natural worlds are not separate. Instead, these two worlds are inextricably joined and enmeshed, in what Taylor (2017), drawing on Donna Haraway's work, refers to as 'natureculture entanglement' (p. 1450). Undeniably, the human lived experience does not occur in isolation; it is shaped through various entanglements and in dialogue with the surrounding world (Van Dooren et al., 2016).

In this way, our world is made up of relationships or entanglements, not only with each other, but with tangible entities such as other living beings and geological features like rivers and mountains. It is also made up of relationships with intangible elements, for example: education and legal systems; the stories we tell; social norms; and the flow of carbon through humans, more-than-humans, and the Earth itself; what Barad refers to as 'material-discursive phenomena' (2007, p. 89). However, we are not the only agentic entity in these relationships with the tangible and intangible. Because all matter has agency, the tangible and intangible insinuate their way into the human world and unsettle it. Hence, humans cannot remain autonomous and independent as we are shaped by the impacts of matter and in turn shape matter ourselves. We are part of a 'vast, relational web of co-existence' (Tschakert et al., 2020, p. 5) where relationships are not fixed, they are uncertain and ephemeral, everything is 'constantly in-the-making' (Thomas, 2015, p. 977). We become with the world (CWRC, 2020).

Due to the ephemeral and transitory nature of these relationships, not only is individuality unachievable, boundaries cannot be maintained, both individually and between collectives. The implication of this fluidity means that no single human, entity or element can be completely vulnerable to climate change — a victim, or only a polluter. We are both. For example, in Aotearoa New Zealand, the coal mining industry is still operating and the coal they extract is a major source of greenhouse gases. The industry is a polluter. However, their social licence is being gradually withdrawn as the use of coal becomes less acceptable to society and the Government believes it has sufficient support to legislate against its use, such as in school heating systems. Thus the industry is becoming vulnerable and will have to change, to adapt to a world where carbon-based forms of energy and greenhouse gas emissions are not only unacceptable but prohibited.

A relational ontology is directly connected to Indigenous worldviews where all humans, more-than-humans and the natural world have the same origin and future trajectory (Watene & Yap, 2015). Their culture, societies and relationships are inclusive of not only people, but more-than-human, such as mountains, rivers, animals and trees (Watene & Yap, 2015; Whyte, 2019). Humans are but one part of a narrative that weaves the entire world and universe together (Marsden, 2003). For example, Māori, the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, see themselves as connected to the Earth and with more-than-humans as part of a 'series of ordered genealogical webs' (Harmsworth & Awatere, 2012, p. 274). These webs are referred to as whakapapa, and through whakapapa, Māori trace their ancestors back to Ranginui (Sky Father), Papatūānuku (Earth Mother) and their children, who include the wind, seas, plants, rivers, mountains and animals. Humans were created by these children, and due to this interconnectedness, Māori believe they have a responsibility and obligation to both sustain and maintain the wellbeing of Papatūānuku and their people (Harmsworth et al., 2012). Thus everyone is enmeshed together in 'collective reciprocal relationships' (Pihama, 2019, p. 6). These relationships are key for Māori as the strength of the collective is crucial. It is as a collective that they share responsibilities, obligations, accountabilities along with the power to work together for the common good, which is the wellbeing of their people (Pihama, 2019).

This inclusion of more-than-human reflects an evolution in the discourse and practice of climate justice (Agyeman et al., 2016). It recognises that we are in the midst of an ecological disaster (Whyte, 2019) and that climate injustice reaches beyond humans. It extends to more-than-humans and the natural features in ecosystems. Through this acknowledgement, we understand that a climate-just society requires a flourishing ecosystem for all and as a result, all beings can

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have a sustainable future (Agyeman et al., 2016). In order to incorporate this notion and so enrich climate justice, Tschakert et al. (2020) have proposed adopting a 'multispecies justice lens' (p. 4) to help humans navigate their way through the complexity of the climate emergency towards a climate-just future. Four 'coordinates' (p. 5) are proposed to assist humans navigate their route.

The first coordinate is taking an intersectional approach to climate justice. When using a multispecies justice lens to build a climate-just world, this approach makes explicit the way that differences in beings, for example in class, race, species, are simultaneously enmeshed with societal processes and structures that oppress and result in injustice. It aims to assemble coalitions of beings, all of whom have agency, to develop climate resilience. The second is inclusivity and involves a relational ontology. This coordinate recognises that all things have agency and that we are all entangled in complex webs of being. It can enable humans to understand these connections and demand more-than-human agency and habitat preservation when making decisions as we build climate resiliency. Response-abilities is the third coordinate and it is concerned with embracing differences and learning to live with all things in ecosystems in co-existence. Because all things are bound together in complex entanglements, we need to learn to nurture others, from other humans to the less-favoured living things in ecosystems, for example spiders and cockroaches, as well as the natural features such as mountains. The final coordinate is cosmopolitics. This coordinate involves envisaging a politics that can open up spaces for all voices to allow a diversity of knowledge and practices to be utilised as we work towards a climate-just world.

As Tschakert et al. (2020) argue, the adoption a multispecies climate justice lens provides a plan for humans to chart their way through the climate emergency to build a climate-just world. They specify approaches that can be used and identify ways in which societal structures and organisations could be changed. In addition, as I have argued, they advocate for humans to adopt a relational ontology to overcome many humans' sense of exceptionalism.

SS4CNZ and Beginning the Journey to Climate Justice

Returning to the disbanding of the Auckland Chapter of the SS4CNZ, I believe that their decision illustrates the beginning of the journey to a climate-just Aotearoa New Zealand. Their response was a courageous one as many organisations who are called out for their racist policies and/or practices respond with weak commitments (Greally, 2021). The Auckland Chapter responded strongly by holding themselves accountable for their exclusion and silencing of Indigenous voices, apologising and then showing respect and trust, moved aside for Indigenous climate activist groups to take the lead in future actions. Doing this, along with their demand for a flourishing environment for all living things (SS4CNZ, 2021), illustrates their commitment to building respectful relationships with their Māori and Pacific Island peers and taking response-ability to enact multispecies climate justice. This, I assert, has been the SS4CNZ's greatest achievement to date. Not only are they holding the Government accountable, they are making everyone aware of the need to build respectful and reciprocal relationships with all. They are sitting with the violence as a foundation for building different relationships, putting Pāhekā holding a liberal-humanist ontology on notice that humans can no longer be individuals and autonomous as this ontology is outdated and futile when responding to the causes and effects of climate change. These youth are modelling the way to change. To conclude, in the words of Luhama Taualupe, the Indigenous wavemaker whose work contributed to the decision to disband:

> *You can't stand for climate justice and not stand for social justice and indigenous justice — because [. . .] you're perpetuating the same system you're trying to change.*
>
> (Greally, 2021)

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