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Published online: 31 Dec 2024.

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The cultural politics of eco-shaming

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ABSTRACT

In the face of deepening changes in our socio-environments, understanding how people socially and politically engage with, and disengage from, socio-environmental changes has become a major concern. Eco-shaming has recently emerged as a way of apparent engagement with the environment. Therefore, eco-shaming – shaming on environmental grounds – is analyzed as a cultural politics of the environment. First, we identify five different eco-shaming patterns, exposing their heterogeneity. Second, eco-shaming is discussed as to how it embodies a technique of governing, an affective politics acting on identities, and a form of resistance against dominant norms to demonstrate its function as a cultural politics of the environment. An analysis of eco-shaming statements in the media, policy, and advocacy field in Belgium exposes eco-shaming as an ambiguous, political, and contested way in which not only environmental engagement but also disengagement is continuously shaped and negotiated.

Introduction

In the face of deepening changes in our socio-environments, understanding how people socially and politically engage with, and disengage from, socio-environmental changes has become a major concern. Recently, eco-shaming seemingly appeared as a way of environmental engagement through which people are shamed for their environmentally harmful behavior. Having proliferated in Sweden as "flight shaming" (Morrison 2020), it quickly expanded to other countries, including Belgium, and to a diverse set of environmentally harmful practices, including meat shaming, plastic shaming, and delivery shaming (ANW 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). Yet eco-shaming is not uncontroversial. From accusations of being a moralizing practice over critiques of its inefficiency in altering environmentally harmful behavior to the deliberate organization of counter-campaigns by industries that feel threatened by it (De Morgen 2019; Baumers 2019; Sudinfo 2019; VRT NWS 2022).

This article explores eco-shaming as a culturally and politically contested way through which people articulate, give meaning to, and contest today's socio-environmental changes. If eco-shaming is a way of engagement with, or disengagement from, the environment, first, what different eco-shaming patterns

can be distinguished and, second, how exactly do they work as environmental (dis)engagements?

Rather than analyzing eco-shame as a passive emotional response to socio-environmental changes (Ahmed 2004; Munt 2007), eco-shaming is examined as an active sociopolitical way of environmental (dis)engagement. Whereas psychologists and behavioralists have been busily studying eco-shame for its effects on mental health and pro-environmental behavior (e.g., Rees, Klug, and Bamberg 2015), less consideration has been paid to the sociocultural and political dimensions of eco-shaming (Kałwak and Weihgold 2022; Vandenhole, Bauler, and Block 2024), except for systematic, organized regulatory and judiciary eco-shaming by governmental regulators (Yadin 2023).

Yet, as Harriet Bulkeley and colleagues contend (Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016, xiii) "what is at stake in society's response to climate change [environmental changes] are not the isolated actions of individual agents, but, rather, the socially and materially constituted ways in which climate change comes to be made meaningful, realized, and contested." Therefore, we analyze eco-shaming as a cultural politics of the environment, leaving aside common understandings of eco-shame to opening up more complex, varied, and generative understandings of eco-shaming. As

such, rather than assessing the effectiveness or moral reprehensibility of eco-shaming (e.g., Claeys 2020), the focus is on developing an understanding of how eco-shaming functions as a popular way of environmental (dis)engagement.

We analyze eco-shaming as a cultural and politicized way through which socio-environmental changes are negotiated and contested. A cultural politics approach allows to interrogate the culturally contested ways in which people socially and politically give meaning to, and engage with, socio-environmental changes (Baviskar 2003; Goodman, Doyle, and Farrell 2020). It enables to explore how informal, mundane, loosely organized daily sociocultural practices are political and how the political is organized, shaped, expressed, and performed through everyday sociocultural activities (Boykoff, Goodman, and Curtis 2009; Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016; Goodman, Doyle, and Farrell 2020; Norgaard 2011) – how people engage with and confront environmental changes through ordinary eco-shaming in a multitude of spaces. While most studies on the cultural politics of the environment explain why our societies are so deeply entrenched in socio-environmental changes, we analyze eco-shaming as a potential way through which such entrenchment is simultaneously uncovered and supported, challenged, and reinforced (Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016).

The cultural politics of eco-shaming is analyzed drawing on Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple's (2016) three analytical elements, which enable to explore how human-environment relations are socio-culturally organized and practiced: devices (what kind of technique of governing is deployed), desires (what kind of emotions and affective language is evoked), and dissent (how and what kind of behavior or norms is resisted). Observing differences in how eco-shaming variously embodies device, desire, and dissent is used to identify different eco-shaming patterns and outline the heterogeneity of eco-shaming. Further elaborating on how eco-shaming embodies device, desire, and dissent then enables to understand how eco-shaming works both to disengage from, and engage with, the environment.

This analysis of environmental (dis)engagement from a cultural politics approach to eco-shaming complements scholarship in which environmental (dis)engagement is explained by individual traits, values, modes of reasoning, and possessed knowledge (environmental psychology and behavior studies, e.g., Milfont and Sibley 2012) or ideological and policy-based dynamics (environmental policymaking, e.g., Campbell 2005).

The next section provides theoretical background on eco-shaming and a cultural politics approach.

The third section presents the methodological framework including background on environmental (dis) engagement in the empirical case of Belgium. The fourth section uncovers the heterogeneity of eco-shaming through the identification of five different eco-shaming patterns. The fifth section analyzes eco-shaming as a cultural politics of the environment by discussing eco-shaming as a technique of governing (device), an affective politics (desire), and a form of resistance (dissent). The sixth section exposes eco-shaming as a complex, ambiguous, contested, and political way of environmental engagement and disengagement before concluding in the final section.

Theoretical framework

Eco-shaming

While eco-shame has commonly been defined as "the shame that people feel when they are aware of, or concerned about, environmentally harmful behavior" (Mkono and Hughes 2020, 1223), eco-shaming has less regularly and less consistently been defined. The available definitions go as follows: eco-shaming "is a strategy to achieve pro-climate social change by shaming individuals and making them feel guilty" (Humeniuk 2023, 210); "relates to shaming in response to various types of activities that are considered harmful to the environment" (Yadin 2023, 7); and entails "being pressured to feel moral shame over actions that are viewed as harmful toward other non-human animals and the environment at large, things that in most of modern western society are considered morally irrelevant" (Gonzalez 2020, 2). These definitions suggest eco-shaming has to do with societal change, environmentally harmful behavior, and morality, yet in quite different ways. This diversity of definitions is not surprising given the undetermined and unsettled conceptualization of "shaming." "Shaming" is "an elusive concept" (Pinto and Seidman 2023, 2), "polymorphous" (Allison 2022), a "thick act-description" (Allison 2022), a "nexus" (Creed et al. 2014), and a "heterogeneous phenomenon" (Allison 2022). For example, shaming has been defined as "the action of expressing condemnation of a characteristic or behavior to an audience, with the intention of invoking a shame response and a change in behavior consistent with the shamer's perceived norm" (Gee and Copeland 2023, E21). Yet scholars have argued that shaming does not always aim to inflict shame on its targets but rather seeks to draw attention to the violation of social norms (Billingham and Parr 2020). Others have therefore defined shaming as "exposing a transgressor

to public disapproval" (Jacquet 2015, 5) and "a practice of public moral criticism" (Billingham and Parr 2020, 1002).

Here, Braithwaite's (1989, 100) definition of shaming as "all social processes of expressing disapproval which have the intention or effect of invoking remorse in the person being shamed and/or condemnation by others who become aware of the shaming" is used. Shaming is thus recognized as a "thick act-description" (Allison 2022) which encompasses a large affective family of emotions, including shame, pride, and guilt (Brader and Marcus 2013; Jensen 2019; Kasabova 2017; Nussbaum 2004). As such, pride "is dependent [and] predicated on the… denial of its own ostracized corollary, shame" (Munt 1998, 4) while guilt and shame "come together as two dimensions of the same emotion" (Wormbs and Söderberg 2021, 321). Reducing eco-shaming to explicit verbal expressions or thin descriptions of shaming would deny that "to describe something as 'shaming' is to indicate that it has certain rich social meanings" (Allison 2022, 5), which are precisely to be uncovered through the analysis of eco-shaming's heterogeneity from a cultural politics perspective (Billingham and Parr 2020; Scheff 1990).

Cultural politics

The cultural politics of the environment engages with the environment as an intervention in people's lives. It interrogates the culturally contested ways in which people socially and politically give meaning to and (dis)engage from/with socio-environmental changes (Baviskar 2003; Goodman, Doyle, and Farrell 2020). For example, Head (2016) and Norgaard (2011) documented how cultural emotional norms and processes of grieving profoundly shape the way in which people respond to environmental changes, namely with denial. Here, eco-shaming is analyzed as a cultural and politicized way through which environmental changes are negotiated and contested, shaping environmental (dis)engagement. A cultural politics approach understands environmental (dis)engagement to "take multiple forms and work through different registers" (Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016, 10), not only through information, technologies, imaginaries, and policies but also through dynamic, fluid, and undetermined sociocultural interactions and people's ambiguous experiences (Baviskar 2003). It enables exploration of how informal, mundane, loosely organized sociocultural practices are political and how the political is organized, shaped, expressed, and performed through everyday sociocultural activities (Boykoff, Goodman, and Curtis 2009; Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016; Goodman, Doyle, and Farrell 2020; Norgaard 2011). A cultural politics approach recognizes that people's level of being informed cannot account for the diversity of environmental (dis)engagements and allows for more complexity. For example, the sociocultural work performed by the multinational corporation Unilever – its socialization of climate branding and care works – contributes to understanding why and how societies are so deeply entrenched in environmental changes (Doyle, Farrell, and Goodman 2020). While most studies on the cultural politics of the environment explain why our societies are so deeply entrenched in socio-environmental changes, eco-shaming is analyzed as a potential way through which such entrenchment is simultaneously uncovered and supported, challenged and reinforced (Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016). Focusing on how eco-shaming entails a mundane practice of the cultural politics of the environment complements studies which are focused on environmental communication and framing within studies on cultural politics (Goodman, Doyle, and Farrell 2020).

The cultural politics of the environment unfold through several elements, which are used to analytically identify and distinguish between heterogenous eco-shaming patterns. Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple (2016) propose devices (materialities), desires (emotions/subjectivities), and dissent (resistances) as those elements through which human-environment relations are socioculturally organized and practiced. Devices refer to objects, technologies, and techniques that actively operate as non-neutral actants, such as techniques of governing that (dis) enable particular forms of conduct. Desires refer to emotional spaces and affective politics as expressed in subjectivities (Head 2016). It includes the "affective and visceral dimensions of social life – hopes, fears, joy, and anguish – and their embodied expression…the emotional and affective means through which what comes to be regarded as compelling, virtuous, improving, or guilt-ridden" (Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016, 9, 11). Dissent entails contestations, conflicts, and resistances around devices and desires as well as the ways in which they are negotiated and diverted. It calls attention to the mundane, incremental, and provisional ways in which power is exercised, legitimized, and contested in places of and beyond the formal political arena. Accordingly, eco-shaming is analyzed as to how it embodies device, desire, and dissent – as to what kind of technique of governing it is, what kind of emotions and affective language it evokes, and how and what kind of behavior or norms it resists. Devices, desires, and dissent are inextricably entwined and in their dynamic interaction produce specific engagements with, and disengagements from, the environment. For example, eco-shaming might entail a specific engagement with the environment which

relies on governing others (device) elicited by a desire to contest environmentally harmful behavior (dissent), itself prompted by indignation (desire) and expressed in morally charged terms (desire). These three elements do not account for the entire complexity of the cultural politics of the environment but are analytically helpful in starting to unpack how such politics of eco-shaming is produced and practiced.

Methodological framework

Belgian context

Belgium is a small, wealthy, heavily industrialized and urbanized liberal democratic and corporatist welfare state. Environmental concern and awareness, especially of climate change, is high in the country, with 80% of Belgians considering climate change a problem which needs urgent action (SPF 2022) and 82% recognizing that environmental issues have a direct effect on their daily life and health (European Union 2024). Yet the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2021) evaluated Belgium's environmental performance in 2021 as generally weak, expressing, for example, concerns about the status of habitats and water bodies, threatened species, nitrogen and phosphorus balances, and the country not being on track to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. Boussauw and Vanoutrive (2017), in turn, demonstrated how a discourse of sustainable transport has been used to legitimate unsustainable policy outcomes. Most Belgians are not satisfied with the government's efforts to address or adapt to climate change and demand better cooperation between the different political authorities of the country (SPF 2022; Klimaatzaak 2024), as Belgium's complex federal structure (involving three regional and one national minister of climate) was found to favor status quo policies for climate change (Happaerts 2015). Yet green political parties (*Groen* and *Ecolo* combined) only received 7% of all votes in the latest federal election of 2024, a decrease of 5% compared to the federal elections of 2019 (FOBZ 2019, 2024). Belgians tend to underestimate the role of households in contributing to climate change and to attribute responsibilities to industries and the transport sector, yet they also express dissatisfaction with their own actions and a willingness to make efforts themselves (SPF 2022).

The propagation of eco-shaming in Belgium coincided with waves of substantial climate protests and school strikes in 2019 (*The Brussels Times* 2020; Kenis 2021; Vandepitte 2023). By politicizing the issue and going straight against the hegemonic, technocratic, and market-oriented discourses to climate change, the School Strikes for Climate put climate change on the public agenda for months (Kenis 2021). Nevertheless, the movement lost momentum and environmental problems, including climate change, were soon again depoliticized. Eco-shaming, however, got linguistically institutionalized as meat shaming, plastic shaming, delivery shaming, and more, with flight shaming shortlisted for word of the year in 2018 (ANW 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; VRT 2019).

Methodology

Data collection

To explore eco-shaming as a way through which people engage with or disengage from the environment, a sample of 2,155 text documents were analyzed from three different empirical fields (Boykoff, Goodman, and Curtis 2009; Koschut et al. 2017). Since cultural politics takes place in a diversity of public spaces (Boykoff, Goodman, and Curtis 2009) and includes issues beyond consumption (Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016), eco-shaming was analyzed in the fields of media, policy, and advocacy. The sample consisted of 548 articles published in the top three most popular (in terms of sales) newspapers in Flanders and Wallonia (*Het Nieuwsblad*, *De Standaard*, *De Morgen*, *Le Soir*, *L'Avenir*, *La Libre Belgique*) for the field of media, 1,158 written questions asked in the three regional and the federal parliaments for the field of policy, and 449 newsletters from the largest environmental organizations in Flanders and Wallonia (Natuurpunt, WWF, Greenpeace, Les Amis de la Terre) for the field of policy. These documents were issued between January 2018 and May 2021 in Belgium in either French or Dutch. Selection happened by searching for at least one of the words "climate," "environment," "global warming," or "shame" in the title of the articles/questions/newsletters and were compiled from online databases (GoPress for articles; websites of environmental organizations and parliaments). The cultural politics of eco-shaming is concerned with eco-shaming as a mundane, everyday, ordinary way of (dis)engagement as opposed to eco-shaming as a large, organized campaign (e.g., Bloomfield 2014) or formal, institutionalized procedure. The analysis here thus differs from studies on eco-shaming initiated by governmental regulators (regulatory shaming, e.g., Ministries of Environmental Protection publishing information on corporate violation of environmental rules, Cisneros, Zhou, and Börner 2015; Yadin 2023) or courts (judiciary shaming, e.g., courts ordering companies to issue public apologies

for environmental dumping, Stewart 2016). Whereas these studies largely draw on theories of corporate reputation, the focus here is on understanding eco-shaming as a way of (dis)engagement from/with the environment.

Data analysis

Following the constitution of the dataset, we analyzed the sample using NVivo12. First, we familiarized ourselves with the data. Then, we systematically scrutinized them in search of statements embodying eco-shaming. Because eco-shaming is not always explicit, data were not only evaluated for emotional terms (e.g., "shaming," "shame," "blame," "scandalous") but also for emotional connotations (e.g., "polluter," "criminal," "confess," "hypocrite"), metaphors, comparisons, and analogies (e.g., "responsible for," "these are excuses," "be decried," "I win from," "at odds with") (Koschut et al. 2017; Retzinger 1995; Scheff 1990). The final dataset consisted of 701 documents containing eco-shaming (297 in the media field, 306 in the policy field, 98 in the advocacy field).

We examined eco-shaming statements in depth to identify different eco-shaming patterns and those elements that distinguish them from one another. A long and iterative, inductive process resulted in the identification of five eco-shaming patterns which were initially distinguished based on five elements: the kind of language used, the environmental orientation of the target, the trigger for eco-shaming, the motive for eco-shaming, and the field in which it mostly happens. Yet after re-reading Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple (2016), we realized that these five elements actually embodied different dimensions of a cultural politics of the environment and hence should be understood in terms of device, desire, and dissent (Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016). For example, what was initially identified as language was actually the affective register of different eco-shaming patterns, in other words, their different desires. So, whereas we identified the five eco-shaming patterns inductively, we further analyzed and discussed them in terms of device, desire, and dissent.

The process of identifying patterns entailed going back and forth between statements and formulating tentative patterns only to have them changed or removed after having checked them against further empirical data. For example, concrete expressions of device vary from "governing the other" to "governing the self." The challenge involved analyzing how concrete expressions of device co-occurred with concrete expressions of desire and dissent. For example, in the pattern "finger-pointing," "governing the other" (device) co-occurs with "morally charged language" (desire), while in the pattern "veiled shaming," the same device co-occurs with "suggestive language" (desire).

The patterns represent ideal types, meaning that in reality a specific expression of eco-shaming might not perfectly disclose all the characteristics of devise, desire, and dissent as defined by a given pattern, and that boundaries between patterns are neither clear-cut nor fixed. The following statement, for example, displays elements of both *dissonance-spotting* and *veiled shaming*:

> While short plane trips are under fire all over the world due to their impact on the climate, Flemish Minister of Mobility Lydia Peeters (Open VLD) took a plane for barely forty kilometers, from Brussels to Antwerp…Peeters is unaware of any wrongdoing (*Het Nieuwsblad* 2020).

The next section presents five eco-shaming patterns and subsequently discusses how they embody a cultural politics in terms of device, desire, and dissent.

Results

Eco-shaming patterns

The analysis resulted in the identification of five different eco-shaming patterns. We discuss each pattern using the analytical elements of a cultural politics of the environment approach (Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016) and illustrate them with empirical quotes. Table 1 provides an overview of the different eco-shaming patterns and how they variously embody device, desire, and dissent.

Finger-pointing

A first pattern of eco-shaming takes an explicit form and is therefore called *finger-pointing*. This form of eco-shaming is triggered by the environmental impact generated by dominant environmentally harmful norms as well as by others' behavior. *Finger-pointing* overtly shames, denounces, and condemns others. It mobilizes provocative and morally charged language and offensive signs. Consider the following examples: "Flying? How dare you!" (*De Morgen* 2019) and

> Rant from the mayor: "Shame on all these polluters…During our journeys in town, we noticed that the quantity of waste we collect in three hours is particularly significant. Among the waste collected last Sunday, there were two medium-sized illegal dumps (including three bags of ripped waste, searched by animals). This incivility is scandalous. It is a shame to have people who spoil the environment and the

Table 1. Overview of how different eco-shaming patterns differently embody three elements of a cultural politics of the environment (Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016) and the field(s) in which they predominantly appear.

		Concrete elements of a cultural politics of the environment embodied by each eco-shaming pattern			
		Device	Desire	Dissent	Dominant field(s)
Eco-shaming patterns	Finger-pointing	Governing others, triggered by the environmental impacts of behaviors and environmentally harmful norms	Explicit shaming expressing strong aversion; use of offensive, provocative, and morally charged language; express indignation, frustration, anger, injustice	Antagonistic and overtly oppositional; contest and resist dominant contemporary environmentally harmful behaviors and norms; negatively valenced	Media & advocacy
	Dissonance-spotting	Triggered by inconsistent behaviors or cognitive dissonance		Contesting current behaviors; Negatively valenced	Policy & media
		Governing others	Explicit shaming; use of provocative, offensive, and morally charged language; express irritation, anger	Antagonistically contest environmental advocating	
		Governing self and others	Use of subtle language, rhetorical questions; express incomprehension, incredibility, mild indignation	Contest contemporary environmentally harmful behavior	
	Parading	Governing others, triggered by environmentally beneficial aspirations and behavior	Unintended, implicit shaming; use of positive language; express pride and inspiration	Agonistically contest and resist contemporary environmental norms and actively create environmentally friendly norms; future-oriented; positively valenced	Media & advocacy
	Mirror-watching	Governing self, as individual, through the other or as part of a group; triggered by environmental aspirations and environmentally harmful behavior	Explicit shaming; use of provocative, morally charged language; express anger, disappointment, guilt	Contest current environmentally harmful behavior	Media
	Veiled shaming	Governing others, triggered by environmental aspirations and refusals to dismiss environmentally harmful behavior	Implicit and concealed shaming; use of inoffensive language, questions, irony and sarcasm	Agonistically contest and resist refusals to engage in environmentally friendly behavior or dismiss environmentally harmful behavior; resist dominant environmentally harmful norms; positively valenced; future-oriented	Policy

rural character of our communities. It's unfortunate that in our time, we have such scandalous behavior when these are current issues to which the vast majority of people say they are sensitive. But, alas, there are diehard polluters. Shame on them," exclaims the mayor (*L'Avenir* 2019).

Finger-pointing expresses aversion, disapproval, indignation, frustration, and anger against the ashamed others. The indignation in the following statement is palpable:

"Neckermann [name of a tour operator] makes students study in Djerba in the south." What a noble initiative, they must have thought. I had to read the message three times. Was this a hoax? A satirical news item? So Neckermann wants to convince young people that it is a good idea to fly to a destination where all they will see is a row of palm trees and a row of white umbrellas next to the swimming pool. I understand that "flight shame" is a difficult word for a tour operator. But this stunt is a shameful denial of that word (*De Standaard* 2019).

Finger-pointing tends to be overtly oppositional and antagonistic, conceiving of the ashamed other as fundamentally bad because they have traveled by airplane, as such leaving limited room for the other to contest their point or to fully restore themselves. The following statement effectively expresses this antagonism:

How would you react if we just let a thousand cars run in a parking lot every day, "just for the fun of increasing CO_2 [carbon-dioxide] emissions?" No doubt you, climate conscious as you are, will point the finger at that person as dangerously deranged.

But anyone who uses a private plane dozens of times a year for fun trips is called a successful bon vivant…It's time to call the child by its name: CO₂, the price for life, is death with a delay, which makes the so-called bon vivants "killers in slow motion" (*De Standaard* 2018).

Finger-pointing is negatively valenced as it strongly focuses on past or contemporary shameful behavior, norms, and impacts. It seeks to contest and resist dominant contemporary environmentally harmful behaviors and norms. *Finger-pointing* mainly happens in the media field, where journalists or interviewees eco-shame specific companies (such as tour operators) or groups of people (such as frequent flyers or owners of detached houses) using opinion pieces, as well as in the advocacy field, where environmental organizations eco-shame specific companies and industries (rather than individual celebrities).

Dissonance-spotting

A second pattern of eco-shaming embodies shaming that relates to environmental issues yet is not primarily triggered by them. Instead, it is triggered by the cognitive dissonance or inconsistency of someone's behavior in their relation to the environment and is therefore called *dissonance-spotting*. The focus is more on one's behavior and less on environmental impacts per se or on changing social norms. *Spotting* not only refers to observing dissonance but also to marking with spots: *dissonance-spotting* deeply affects people in their personhood and identity by publicly exposing them as untrustful, hypocritical, and without virtues, hence is deeply negatively valenced.

Dissonances and inconsistencies refer to clear discrepancies between stated beliefs or expectations and effective behavior. It includes both deliberate and unconscious or unintended contradictions between one's proclaimed image and their effective behavior, such as in

Isn't there a paradox between the impressive [climate] demonstrations of the last few days and this kind of measures?…It gives the impression that there is, on behalf of the different ministers, a totally contradictory discourse and practice (Walloon Parliament 2019).

It is also evident between one's expectations and their deeds, such as in

I confess: I fly too often. Although my mere air miles may not be so bad compared to what Erik Solheim, chief of the United Nations Environment Program, has been performing for the past 22 months…He did so ironically to go around the world advocating for more political and public attention to environmental issues (*De Standaard* 2018).

Two strands of *dissonance-spotting* can be distinguished. A first uses others' environmentally harmful behavior to denounce their environmental advocating as hypocritical. It antagonistically attacks others by suggesting their incoherent behavior is malevolent (transforming behavioral incoherencies into hypocritical people). It overtly shames others using provocative, offensive, and morally charged language while expressing irritation and anger. Consider the next example:

Top British actress Emma Thompson thinks we should fly much less, and it would also do the environment and ourselves good if we ate less meat…. She was caught in the superdeluxe first class of a British Airways plane en route to New York. In her private cabin, she sipped a glass of Laurent-Perrier champagne and poked at a plate of carpaccio. The headline was quickly coined: "First Class Hypocrite" (*De Morgen* 2019).

A second strand contests environmentally harmful behavior of the self or others by demonstrating its incoherency with their identity, beliefs, function, or other behaviors. Being confronted with not behaving in accordance with one's values is morally reprehensible and shameful. This strand of *dissonance-spotting* draws on subtle language and rhetorical questions, expressing incomprehension, incredibility, and indignation, such as

Are Lille-Lesquin airport's ambitious growth plans therefore not at odds with its environmental protection objectives? (Federal Parliament 2020),

Aren't those companies' exemptions at odds with our intention to be carbon neutral by 2050? (Federal Parliament 2020),

A reader mailed last Sunday. "While in Brussels 70,000 people are braving rain and cold for the climate, you are calmly and delicately sending your readers to all corners of the world…How can today's comment be reconciled with the full-page advertisement on page 29?" another reader wanted to know (*De Standaard* 2019)

Members of the Flemish Parliament are considering a plane trip to Bordeaux to study sustainable mobility…How can you expect people to make an effort for the climate if you don't set an example yourself? (*Het Nieuwsblad* 2018).

Dissonance-spotting mainly happens in the policy field, where parliamentarians tend to eco-shame Ministers of the Environment for taking policy decisions (presumably) at odds with their function (e.g., granting a dumping permit to polluting companies) as well as the media field, where journalists tend to mainly eco-shame celebrities who champion pro-environmental measures and Ministers of the Environment for engaging in environmentally harmful behavior.

Parading

A third pattern of eco-shaming is called *parading* and triggered by environmentally friendly behavior of the self to influence or govern others. Environmentally friendly behavior is explicitly shown, articulated, and contrasted with "normal," environmentally harmful behavior of others. Consider the following quote:

> We don't have a dryer anymore. That's an energy guzzler. As a result, we hang a clothesline in the house in the winter…We try to live according to our insights. You shouldn't be too lax about that (*De Standaard* 2018).

Parading constitutes an unintended and implicit form of eco-shaming because of the confrontation of the ashamed's own environmentally harmful behavior (in the above quote: the reader who uses a dryer and therefore implicitly does not live according to their insights) with the more environmentally friendly behavior of others ("we don't have a dryer anymore" and "we try to live according to our insights") especially when the ashamed's behavior is denounced as a lack of effort or determination ("you shouldn't be too lax about that"). Consider, in particular, the last sentences in this example:

> An IT consultancy company that provides data management services to various industrial companies…and yet they show up at their customers' places without company cars. Unique in the sector…that it is impossible without a car is not true. These are excuses. You just have to do it (*De Standaard* 2018).

Parading might draw on comparing a single behavior (as in the examples above: using or not using a dryer or a car) as well as between different behaviors, as in this example:

> I do not eat meat and have not fathered any children. With that last point, I already win from everyone who does have children…I contribute less to global pollution than the most extreme self-sufficient goat-wool vegan with a child (*De Morgen* 2018).

Parading mobilizes language with a positive tone and expresses positive emotions with the self, including creativity and pride. Yet, positive emotions, in particular pride, have a reverse side through which they convey negative emotions to others, in particular shame (Ahmed 2004; Yadin 2023). Hence, by positively appraising the self, *parading* conveys negative appraisals of others. By contrast to other eco-shaming patterns, *parading* not only agonistically contests and resists contemporary environmental norms, but it also actively seeks to create and shape a future in which more environmentally friendly behaviors constitute the norm.

Parading mainly happens in the media field, where interviewed public figures expose their own environmentally friendly behaviors, as well as in the advocacy field, where environmental organizations seem to avoid "moralizing" (e.g., through *finger-pointing*) by instead "showing" or "inspiring" people how to live in more environmentally friendly ways.

Mirror-watching

A fourth pattern of eco-shaming is triggered by the relation between a self's environmental aspirations and the environmentally harmful behavior of the self or others. It is called *mirror-watching* because the eco-shaming is oriented toward the self. Most obviously, the self (I) eco-shames the self (myself) for their own behavior (self-shaming), like this:

> I have been ashamed of flying for a longer time already…This is about remorse. Crunch. Self-loathing. Flying to another country and thinking: "Yes, I throw my tea bags and coffee filters in a separate container at home, but this flight to Spain alone will melt a hundred kilos of Arctic ice" (Het Nieuwsblad 2020).

Yet the self is a social self: it is not isolated, so the self might also be a group of which the individual is part of, expressed in words such as "we," "humanity," and "the affluent West" (Solomon 2015). Such *collective shaming* is less individualizing and more abstract. For example,

> We already are the generation responsible for climate change, do we want to be the litter generation too? (*Het Nieuwsblad* 2018)

> Humanity has a nasty flaw, which is called greed… This is the heart of contemporary drama…we are in the process of eliminating species that we have not even been able to study yet. It is a shameless waste (*Le Soir* 2018).

While the shaming is oriented toward the self, the environmentally harmful behavior that triggers the shaming does not necessarily originate in the self, except when the other is conceived as the extension of the self (Solomon 2015). As such, a newspaper article describing the shamefulness of a tour operator offering plane trips to students titled "vicarious flight shame" (*De Standaard* 2019). The author describes eco-shaming themselves for the environmentally harmful behavior of the tour operator. The eco-shaming here takes the opposite direction of *parading*, in other words, eco-shaming the self through the other's behavior.

Mirror-watching is an explicit form of shaming that mobilizes provocative and morally charged

language expressing anger, guilt, and disappointment. It is focused on contesting contemporary environmentally harmful behavior. The next example expresses the affective register of eco-shaming as it describes not only how someone has been eco-shamed but also how they eco-shame themselves:

> When a while ago I flew from Frankfurt to Dresden for lectures and someone reprimanded me in shock, I hastened myself to say that "they" had planned the whole trip for me. I felt my cheeks burning annoyingly as I raised that umbrella. I confess: I fly too often (*De Standaard* 2018).

Mirror-watching mainly happens in the media field, where public figures discuss the causes of environmental problems by referring to "humanity" in interviews while opinion makers tend to discuss the difficulties of behaving in environmentally friendly ways by confessing their own environmentally harmful behavior.

Veiled shaming

A fifth pattern of eco-shaming is triggered by the self's environmental aspirations and others' refusals to dismiss environmentally harmful behavior. *Veiled shaming* refers to the implicit, indirect way of eco-shaming which happens under the veil of questions. It mobilizes seemingly inoffensive language as well as irony, sarcasm, and rhetorical questions. By asking questions and appealing to "innocent" language, shamers leave open the possibility that the ashamed engaged in environmentally harmful behavior not from a malevolent attitude but as the unintended or unconscious result of a lack of information (cf. *finger-pointing*).

> Given the multiple advantages that we have offered to nuclear power and that we will continue to offer it, does the Minister not think he can ask for a little more effort from the energy industry which will leave behind an immense burden on the environment? (Walloon Parliament 2018)

> Both the European Union and Belgium have not yet achieved their climate goals…In Belgium, climate youth gave our country a 4 out of 10 for its climate policy on June 18, 2020…After all, Belgium is one of the nine countries and the only founding member of the European Union that has not signed the call from environment ministers to maintain climate ambitions despite the crisis. How do you explain such a backwardness of our country? (Federal Parliament 2020)

> Maybe the train is even more ecological and a better idea to bet on (Flemish Parliament 2019)

> At a time when Flemish agro-industrial production is being decried for its negative impacts on animal welfare and the environment, doesn't he think it is a disservice to our farmers to associate them with this type of farming? (Walloon Parliament 2020)

At the same time, it is clear that the shamer does not believe in the unintended or unconscious character of the ashamed's environmentally harmful behavior. These statements suggest that the ashamed is not willing to use the available information to behave in more environmentally friendly ways. *Veiled shaming* is thus a more agonistic way of contesting and resisting dominant environmentally harmful norms (cf. *finger-pointing*). It is positively valenced in taking a more suggestive, innocent tone that expresses a willingness to contribute to a more environmentally friendly future rather than accusing others' contemporary environmentally harmful behavior. *Veiled shaming* mainly happens in the policy field, where parliamentarians frequently use rhetorical questions to put Ministers of the Environment in an embarrassing, shameful position because of their environmentally harmful behavior or policies.

The cultural politics of eco-shaming

Eco-shaming is analyzed as a form of cultural politics in relation to the three analytical elements proposed by Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple (2016). First, eco-shaming operates as device in being a technique of governing in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault 2004). Second, eco-shaming expresses desire through conveying an affective register of shame. Finally, eco-shaming embodies dissent in contesting dominant sociocultural environmentally harmful practices and norms.

Eco-shaming as device

Eco-shaming functions as a technique of governing in the Foucauldian sense (Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016). Shaming can be oriented toward others or toward the self (*mirror-watching*). Others can be specific persons, companies or industries, or loosely defined groups of people, for example plane travelers. The self can be the self as individual, through the other (vicarious shaming) or as part of a group (collective shaming). Yet the self and others do not just constitute targets of eco-shaming (as the ashamed), they are also fundamentally and inevitably involved in the process of eco-shaming: *I shame the other* (or myself) before *myself* (Sartre 1992, 385). Shaming thus has three dimensions: the self, the other, and the self through the other (Ahmed 2004). Each dimension highlights a different facet of eco-shaming as a technique of governing (Foucault 2004): the self as shamer, the other as ashamed, the self through the other as the reference against which

to judge the other. They are deeply knitted with desires and dissent: The shamer governs the self through their desire for a specific subjectivity and (subversive) identity. In *finger-pointing*, for example, the self governs their behavior in accordance with the identity of "green citizenship" against dominant liberal interpretations of citizenship. Eco-shaming highlights the shamer's concern with environmental changes, as such further constructing their "green subjectivity," eventually allocated to a larger group and portrayed as the norm: "We all find it shameful to see this industry grow into a chip factory that is harmful to agriculture, local residents and consumers' health!" (Les Amis de La Terre 2021).

Producing the ashamed governs the other from a desire of shaping the other into more desired and "normal" subjectivities, including "environmentally conscious citizens," "responsible companies," and "concerned politicians" in *finger-pointing*, *veiled shaming*, and some *dissonance-spotting*. The other is governed through the self: by judging the other against the self's desired subjectivity. When eco-shaming others, shamers also turn their gaze inward: they evaluate the shamer against their own subjectivity and seek to avoid being shamed themselves, especially since *dissonance-spotting* is never far away (Bates and LaBrecque 2020). Eco-shaming operates as what Foucault called a disciplinary power technique of governing; through watching, normalizing, and examining the self and the other in relation to social norms which dictate human-nature understandings and relations (Creed et al. 2014).

Governing the self and the other through eco-shaming builds on the attribution of responsibilities (McDonald 2020). To eco-shame is to impose and enforce a sense of responsibility upon people so that in the end they feel (at least partly) responsible for environmental changes or for tackling them, as expressed in "This climate bill exposes the shame that should be felt by the leaders who have had to deal with the problem in recent years" (*Le Soir* 2019). Scientific arguments and tools are used to impose responsibilities upon people and to legitimize eco-shaming, with the absence of scientific arguments becoming something shameful in itself:

> The head of Nature et Progrès believes that the opinion of the SPF Santé experts is "a real shame" insofar as it is not based on any new analysis, whereas Europe has banned these substances on the basis of scientific studies that leave no doubt as to their deleterious effects on the environment (*L'Avenir* 2020).

The kind of available knowledge, the ways in which environmental impacts are measured and compared against each other, and to whom knowledge is available function as devices that profoundly shape which behaviors are defined as shameful. In particular, the assessment of impacts in terms of ecological footprints has been denounced as serving industrial interests by individualizing responsibility and has raised concerns with social justice (Fuller 2017). At the same time, it suggests that dominant norms are not only "emotionally"-morally experienced as wrong and insufficient, but also "rationally"-scientifically so. Yet even when people do not experience a sense of responsibility for environmental changes, they might experience eco-shame for not acting in accordance with social norms or with the person they believe they are, often as a result of *dissonance-spotting* or *mirror-watching* (especially vicarious) eco-shaming (Gausel and Leach 2011; McDonald 2020).

As a technique of governing, eco-shaming intervenes not only by relaying particular (social and environmental) norms, knowledge about environmental impacts, and forms of rationality (which problematize cognitive dissonance), but also by inducing particular forms of behavior, subjectivity, identity, and subject position, which as such reorder social-material configurations. Eco-shaming not only relays but also relies on a set of material triggers, such as social norms and environmental impacts (e.g., plastics, dead fish) as they materialize in the particular behaviors of people. So, as eco-shaming makes people and their behavior objects of knowledge, it materializes their governing.

Eco-shaming as desire

Eco-shaming functions as affective politics by mobilizing the affective register of shame to organize social and moral norms and socially constitute subjectivities and identities (Björkvall and Westberg 2021; Gössling 2019), as well as co-shaping the self and the other, the individual, and the collective (Ahmed 2004). It is socially constituted and revolves around a social dimension because it builds on the deep affective and practical meaning of whether others accept the self or not (Aaltola 2021; Scheff 1997). It uses people's desire for being accepted to shape their behavior and make them internalize norms (Jacquet 2015). Not being accepted translates particular behavior into a problematic self (Nussbaum 2004, 184, 207). The sense of failure does not just concern behaviors but more fundamentally shapes the kind of being people aspire to be. Speaking of the ashamed as "criminals" ("Building a detached house now is criminal," *De Morgen* 2018), "torturers" ("Animal torturers are still being treated far too laxly today," *Het Nieuwsblad* 2018), "killers" ("Whoever takes a plane is a killer in slow motion," *De Standaard*

2018), and "diehard polluters" (see example below, *L'Avenir* 2019) demonstrates how shaming defines its targets as inherently bad and impinges on their dignity. This example (quoted earlier in the section on *finger-pointing*) shows how eco-shaming comes to occupy the entire self:

> This incivility is scandalous. It is a shame to have people who spoil the environment and the rural character of our communities. It's unfortunate that in our time, we have such scandalous behavior when these are current issues to which the vast majority of people say they are sensitive. But, alas, there are diehard polluters. Shame on them (*L'Avenir* 2019).

As such, a single behavior might determine one's entire identity: a single instance of eco-shaming might forcefully move to the background one's environmentally friendly lifestyle and threaten one's identity as an environmentally friendly person, such as in the example involving Emma Thompson mentioned above in the discussion about *dissonance-spotting*. Hence the deeply affective character of eco-shaming: how it affects subjectivities and identities seems to play a bigger role than how it directly alters environmental impacts. *Dissonance-spotting*, in particular, focuses on the disparity between one's green subjectivity or identity and one's behavior often without considering the amount of environmental harm caused by that behavior. Similarly, whether or not behavioral alternatives are available is in many cases, especially *dissonance-spotting* and *mirror-watching*, less critical to eco-shaming than the discrepancy between one's (alleged or real) desire for a green subjectivity and their effective behavior (cf. Claeys 2020, 259).

Eco-shaming's relation to a problematic self also materializes in a different way: eco-shaming as being not about the "uneasiness over engaging in consumption that is energy-intense and climatically problematic" (Gössling 2019) but more fundamentally (Jensen 2019) about "the mere existence as a rich…citizen with huge ecological footprints, being at least partly responsible for climate change and the Anthropocene condition" (Bruhn 2018, 66) or even the "ecological shame felt simply because one belongs to a human race which one deems to be shamefully destructive toward the more-than-human world" (Pihkala 2022, 14). On one hand, a desire exists to not be a rich citizen with huge a ecological footprint, yet, on the other hand, a (constructed) desire exists for those behaviors that are precisely made possible through the existence as a rich citizen with a huge ecological footprint:

> Perhaps we should try to change the way we view travel. And in the wake of that, our perception of what is valuable. Maybe we need to question the

belief nestled in our brains that being able to travel often is a basic right. Frankly: I find that a difficult exercise, as the urge to travel keeps pace with my flight shame (*De Standaard* 2018).

Eco-shaming is an emotional space where a specific affective register around shame is at play, including anger, indignation, disappointment, frustration, guilt, and pride (especially with *parading*). Consider the various emotions at play in this statement:

> [A] local resident…is outraged. "I don't understand how it could have come this far. What a shame to still be confronted with such a denial of the tree" (*La Libre Belgique* 2020).

To state that one is "outraged" reinforces eco-shaming as a political practice of contestation and resistance because disgust and anger have been documented to matter politically (Holmes 2004). In particular, shame and pride are two sides of the same coin: they rely on the same moral-normative framework (Ahmed 2004). The dialogical relation between *finger-pointing* and *parading* is especially strong. Consider the following statement:

> But Sevens [name of a person] does not want to expose every passenger to the pillory of shame. "You don't have to be ashamed, just find an alternative. Be 'bus happy,' 'bike proud,' or 'train proud'" (*De Morgen* 2019).

Eco-shaming as dissent
Eco-shaming functions as dissent by offering a way of contestation and resistance against dominant contemporary environmentally harmful behaviors, social norms, and societal lifestyles. Most daily shaming operates as a mechanism of social control. Yet shaming's social and political function not only includes (re)inforcing social norms and conformity, but also opening up possibilities for resistance against a dominant morality (Bates and LaBrecque 2020). Scholars have differentiated conventional shaming, aimed at social control, from disruptive shaming, aimed at social change (Adkins 2019; Jacquet 2015). Eco-shaming emerges as a disruptive form of shaming because it questions and challenges the normalcy of dominant environmentally harmful norms and seeks to replace them by less harmful norms (Jacquet 2015). Stating that "building a detached house now is criminal" (*De Morgen* 2018) in a country characterized by "a significant share of detached dwellings…[which] is very strongly tied to Flemish sociocultural norms and aspirations" (Bervoets et al. 2015, 302, 309) is a clear expression of resistance. Some statements explicitly call for eco-shaming as a way to resist contemporary environmentally harmful norms:

Getting people to that point means not only providing insight, but also making them feel guilty. Not so long ago, the tide only turned when the community came to label smoking as irresponsible, antisocial and ultimately illegal. For example, the fight against global warming will only have begun in earnest when today's flying parents are as stigmatized as their smoking predecessors of yesteryear (*De Standaard* 2018).

This suggests that the goal of eco-shaming is less to change the immediate behavior of ashamed persons than to change the societal norms that facilitate such behavior. As scenically described in the following two newspaper articles:

Yes, children, it was once a great honor to be considered part of the jet set. Indeed, that meant something like "the flying club"; a loose collection of the richest, most beautiful, most talented people on earth who traveled in jet-powered planes from New York to Rio, the wedding of the Shah of Persia or the beach of Saint-Tropez…Those days are quite gone. Flight shame creeps over us all, and rightly so, because the planet is having a hard time (*De Morgen* 2019).

[T]here was a time, not so long ago, when we proudly posted on Facebook that we were standing in Zaventem airport and would soon board a plane towards a temporary dream: "Lieve has checked in at Brussels Airport for the flight to Muscat," you know it. It was an announcement that invariably triggered a whole series of spontaneous travel wishes. We didn't seem to realize that there was also a poisonous snake in the grass. Then came 2018, the year of the Fall, the year in which we did it less and less, the checking in at airports using Facebook. It gave us red cheeks and a bad feeling inside. Thou shalt not board an airplane, was the new eleventh commandment (*De Standaard* 2018).

Discussion

Eco-shaming appears as a diverse way – manifest in different patterns: *finger-pointing*, *dissonance-spotting*, *parading*, *mirror-watching*, *veiled shaming* – of environmental (dis)engagement working as cultural politics of the environment by embodying device, desire, and dissent. The next paragraphs elaborate on how eco-shaming operates both to engage with and disengage from the environment.

Environmental politics is performed in the heterogeneity of mundane sociocultural patterns of eco-shaming. As a way of environmental engagement, eco-shaming seeks to raise concern about environmental changes and to change dominant social norms in favor of less environmentally harmful norms. As the socially organized denial of environmental change relies on social interactions and norms more than on competing interests or a lack of knowledge (Head

2016; Norgaard 2011), eco-shaming embodies a potential to break in on this denial. In the processes of public contestation and renegotiation of cultural values and social norms – in "help[ing] determine what is laudable or shameful in times of climate change" (*De Standaard* 2019) – the imperative to tackling environmental problems gets performed (McGregor 2015). As the obduracy of environmentally impactful societies is made contingent in the flux of interrelations between devices, desires, and dissent (Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016), eco-shaming might be "capable of inviting wholesale critical reflection on current, environmentally damaging practices and cultivation of more virtuous ways of co-existing with the rest of the natural world and other species" (Aaltola 2021, 1). Yet, as a way of disengagement, shaming people for behaving in ways that appear in contradiction with their environmental advocacy or green identity (*dissonance-spotting*) might affect their credibility, something which fossil industries know well and largely deploy against environmental scientists and advocates (Attari, Krantz, and Weber 2016; Schneider et al. 2016).

The ambiguity of eco-shaming as a way of environmental engagement as well as disengagement particularly relates to the difficulty of cultivating and upholding a green identity or environmental subjectivity in a world where modern existence requires effecting environmental impacts. In this context, efforts to change social norms to promote less environmentally harmful behaviors and nurturing environmental subjectivities are acts of resistance. Yet these acts engender important dissonances: they produce ambivalent subjectivities haunted by aspirations to environmentally friendly ways of living within interlocking systems of power which dictate environmentally harmful lifestyles (Ford and Norgaard 2020). This inevitably culminates in personalized climate hypocrisies or the hypocrite's trap (cf. *dissonance-spotting*) (Gunster et al. 2018; Jensen 2019). The hypocrite's trap suggests not just that people are trapped into a system (there is no way of getting out) but that, more fundamentally, they are forced to participate in a system which they seek to change, their participation which is then used to brandish complicity to the system in order to silence critique and hinder resistance to the system (Schneider et al. 2016).

Eco-shaming is ambiguous and complex, contested and politicized, embodying diverse environmental (dis)engagements and human-environment relations which are continuously reshaped and renegotiated. Eco-shaming demonstrates how subjects become invested in environmental (dis)engagements through behavior and norms (Ahmed 2004) and how a

single moral framework can be used by both pro-environmental and anti-environmental actors to delegitimize as well as relegitimize behavior and moral norms (Björkvall and Westberg 2021; Gunster et al. 2018). Hence, eco-shaming suggests that focusing attention on people for behaving in environmentally harmful ways might be more complex and political than scapegoat ecology suggests (Schmitt 2019). Defined as an emergent trend, scapegoat ecology discusses how environmentally oriented people blame and focus vitriol on others for behaving in environmentally harmful ways. Yet eco-shaming demonstrates that not only pro-environmental people focus attention on others for behaving in environmentally harmful ways and that neither is it only about decrying the actions of the others since the gaze is also turned inward (e.g., *mirror-watching*). Yet as with scapegoat ecology, there is a danger with eco-shaming to "promote widespread ecological sentiment, but also largely enable a status quo approach to ecology" (Schmitt 2019, 160). In light of this situation, the heterogeneity of eco-shaming shows how environmental (dis)engagement is not only ambiguous but also contingent and polymorphic (e.g., how environmental movements tend to engage with *finger-pointing* when targeting companies and industries but with *parading* when targeting individual citizens) while stimulating reflection on the contingency of our knowledge about the environment and our ways of relating to it.

Conclusion

In the face of deepening changes in our socio-environments, eco-shaming emerges as an ambiguous, political, and contested way through which people both engage with, and disengage from, these changes. As a way of environmental engagement, eco-shaming challenges contemporary norms regarding human-environment relations. As a way of environmental disengagement, however, it uninnocently plays into the hypocrite's trap. First, we identified five different patterns of eco-shaming (*finger-pointing*, *dissonance-spotting*, *parading*, *mirror-watching*, and *veiled shaming*) and demonstrated the heterogeneity of eco-shaming. Second, we discussed eco-shaming as a technique of governing, an affective politics shaping identities and subjectivities, and a form of resistance against norms which dictate human-environment relations. We demonstrated how eco-shaming acts as a cultural politics of the environment.

Future research should elaborate on eco-shaming in terms of the role that it plays as a technique of governing, the kind of subjectivities and identities it

(re)produces or challenges, and the power of resistance it entails. Such research could, for example, analyze these elements through a Foucauldian framework (Bulkeley, Paterson, and Stripple 2016). It could also further spit out the sociomaterial constitution of eco-shaming in terms of actants and how this relates to power – a clear limitation of this research (Ford and Norgaard 2020) – and on the relation between eco-shaming and scapegoat ecology, in particular with regard to their online presence (Schmitt 2019). Finally, it could relate eco-shaming as a way of environmental (dis)engagement to more organized and institutionalized forms of eco-shaming, such as regulatory, judiciary, and corporate eco-shaming (Bloomfield 2014; Yadin 2023).

Our analysis of eco-shaming opens up reflection about the diversity of ways through which people engage with, or disengage from, the environment. It fosters reflection about the ambiguity of such (dis)engagements and about human-environment relations. It suggests new possibilities for environmental action which are sensible to this ambiguity.

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