



Run for Your Life: Embodied Environmental Story-Telling and Citizenship on the Road to Paris

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In December 2015 the United Nations held its Twenty-First climate change conference (COP21) in Paris. While political leaders convened to negotiate a new climate treaty, a diverse landscape of social movements, grassroots organizations, activists and artists assembled to mobilize public support for climate justice. In this paper we draw attention to one example of such non-traditional climate mobilization: *Run for Your Life*, organized by the Swedish theater company Riksteatern. Framed as a “climate performance,” this initiative enrolled thousands of people to run distances in a relay race for climate justice, starting in Arctic Sweden and arriving in Paris on the first day of COP21. Public events were organized along the way, and the entire race was video recorded and broadcasted online. When signing up, runners were asked to submit their own climate story. Drawing on this archive of personal stories, we examine how Run for Your Life mobilized citizen engagement for climate justice. By paying attention to the multiple ways in which climate change is storied into people’s lives, we seek to understand why citizens decide to take climate action and which subject positions are available to them in the broader environmental drama. While the scripting of climate change as a planetary emergency perpetuated by global injustices serves an important function in the politics of climate change, we argue that it is in situated stories of environmental connection that climate change gains personal meaning. Here, kinship and solidarity are articulated, opening up for progressive social change.

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INTRODUCTION

Snow is falling through dimmed winter light. A young woman walks toward the viewer. Her clothes are typical to the indigenous Sámi tradition¹. Close to the camera she stops briefly, holding out her hand covered in a thickly knitted woolen mitten to show a small stone, gray and softly rounded. In a voice-over she speaks first in Sámi, then in English. “Take a stone in your hand,” she says, “and close your fist around it until it starts to beat, live, speak and move”; a quote from a poem by the Sámi poet Nils-Aslak Valkeapää. Her gaze is intense as she tells the viewer about herself and her struggle, as an artist, activist, mother, companion and human being, to defend Sámi culture and Mother Earth against the threat of climate change. As her walk continues, she is joined by more people, some of them dressed in Sámi clothing and jojking² in their indigenous language. An accompanying text

¹The Sámi traditionally live in northern Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia, in an area referred to as *Sápmi* in the indigenous language.

²A jojk is a traditional form of song in Sámi culture. Rather than telling about something, the performance of a jojk is intended to evoke a person, an animal, or a place.

tells us that the name of the young woman is Jenni Laiti, and that the place is Kiruna, northern Sweden, 4,500 kilometers from Paris (see **Figure 1**).

This video clip, dated 10 November 2015, shows the first steps of *Run for Your Life*, a relay race organized by the Swedish theater company Riksteatern and labeled as a “climate performance.” During 20 days, thousands of people participated by running or engaging in events along the way to the 21st UN Climate Conference (COP21) in Paris, passing on the stone that was originally picked up from the Arctic Ocean. On 30 November a group of runners reached the goal: the conference hall Le Bourget in Paris where COP21 was held. The stone was passed on to Milan Loeak, activist and COP delegate from the Marshall Islands, who brought it inside to the negotiation rooms. Most of the race was live streamed on the campaign’s YouTube channel. As runners signed up for the race, they were encouraged to submit a personal story conveying their motivations to run. A selection of these stories was recorded and broadcasted online, along with the video images of the runners.

In this paper we examine *Run for Your Life* (hereafter RFYL) as a political event that combined elements of art and activism to mobilize citizen engagement with climate change through personal stories, physical movement and suggestive mass communication. This “activist” intervention (Aladro-Vico et al., 2018) was situated in a growing climate art scene that has played with affective and participatory strategies to activate the viewer’s environmental awareness by way of embodied sensory experience (Davis and Turpin, 2015; Hornby, 2017; Motion, 2019). By placing the participating subjects’ active interventions at the center of the work’s meaning, RFYL turned into an experimental site where multiple expressions of climate concern and subjectivity were brought to the fore. As such, we argue, it provides an interesting public scene for scholars interested in environmental story-telling and citizenship. Our study draws on two interviews with organizers prior to and after the relay race, as well as a close study of the event’s campaign material and a thematic analysis of the collected individual climate stories, further outlined below. In an effort to extend the study in an ethnographic direction, we also participated ourselves in the race and carried the stone several kilometers across the Swedish cities of Linköping and Lund. Through our engagements with RFYL we explored different aspects of the action, from the very physical and time-specific event of bodies running and sweating, to the online streaming which happened in real time but also featured afterwards as recorded video clips on YouTube.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we revisit the scholarship on environmental citizenship and ask what notions of green agency and subjectivity it rests upon and projects. In particular, we engage with feminist and post-Marxist interrogations into the situated and embodied dimensions of environmental activism. This literature asks how environmental subjectivities are shaped by the physical, social, and cultural environments that we inhabit, and what forms of political agency these attachments engender. Against this backdrop, we analyze how RFYL was staged as a climate performance in the months prior to the UN climate conference in Paris and what political narratives and subjectivities that informed its



FIGURE 1 | Jenni Laiti and other participants at the start of run for Your Life. Photo: Alexander Linder. Copyright: Sveriges Radio. Reprinted with permission. Original source: Sveriges Radio webpage, <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=98&artikel=6298188>.

dramaturgical script. As a second step we trace how this script multiplied and changed through the creative process and active involvement of the aspiring runners. By working through the embodied meanings and experiences of the participants, RFYL generated a rich online archive of personal climate stories in which local attachments and sensibilities become entangled with global solidarities and concerns. In the final section we reflect upon the political potential of these stories told on the way to Paris. We note that the staging of climate change as a planetary emergency fueled by global injustices serves an important dramaturgical function in the global politics of climate change. Climate art can help to complicate and multiply this story through immersive encounters with the social and physical world. After all, we argue, it is through the situated stories and lived experiences of a changing climate that progressive social change is most likely to take meaning and form.

SITUATING THE DISCOURSE ON ECOLOGICAL CITIZENSHIP

After years of alarming media reports about melting ice sheets and extreme weather events, climate change is today established as a major public concern. According to recent studies, climate change tops the list of greatest societal worries among Swedish citizens (SOM-institutet, 2016, 2018). Unusual heat and severe forest fires in the country in the summer of 2018 attracted media attention and public alarm. Nonetheless, for many Swedes—as in other places in the Global North—climate change remains a distant and abstract threat. Informed by scientific projections of global mean temperature trends, climate change is often depicted as a spatially unbounded problem that is insensitive to place and context. Climate change is everywhere and nowhere, hence not easily synchronized with “the mundane rhythms of lived lives and the specificities of human experience” (Jasanoff, 2010, p. 238). How, then, can concerned publics make sense of climate change and translate their worries into environmental action?

As outlined by Heise (2008), modern environmentalism derives its energy from a combination of local attachments to particular places and more cosmopolitan forms of solidarity and community. In environmentalist thought, the local has for long offered the ground for individual and communal identity and represented an important site of connection to nature that modern society has undone (Heise, 2008, p. 9). These efforts to recuperate a “sense of place” have, however, evolved in parallel to a “sense of planet” and global interconnectedness. The 1968 Apollo pictures of the Earth from space are often referred to as the foundation of Western environmental awareness and an icon of the Earth as a single, organic whole (Höhler, 2008). The image of the “Blue Marble” traveling across space was quickly appropriated by the environmental movement and informed the rise of transnational environmental organizations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth (Heise, 2008). Jasanoff (2010, p. 241) reminds us that the shifting scale of environmentalism from the local to the global does not automatically entail a loss of meaning or caring. Notions of belonging, solidarity, and responsibility can indeed develop on a planetary scale. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 is a moment in history when new environmental movements formed around global-scale problems such as climate change (Jasanoff, 2010). More recently we have seen the rise of the climate justice movement that draws energy from the global imagining of climate change to foster solidarity and responsibility across spatial and temporal scales (Hadden, 2015).

However, the figure of the “global environment” does not sit comfortably with traditional conceptions of community and polity, and therefore calls for new allegiances and affinities across cultures and places. How to cultivate such cosmopolitan bonds and attachments has been subject to intense debates in green political scholarship. The *ecological citizen* is a political subject that is often invoked in these debates (Dobson, 2003; Dobson and Bell, 2006). While the citizenship ideals drawn upon in environmental discourse vary, they often converge around a notion of competent and active political agents ready to do their bit in the collective enterprise of achieving sustainability (Barry, 2006). Acting on behalf of an imagined planetary community, the ecological citizen is regularly called upon to transcend short-term private interests in the pursuit of the common ecological good. The political task of this ecological agent is to actively participate in public deliberation on questions of common purpose and to ensure a just distribution of ecological space by making responsible consumer choices, recycle household waste, conserve energy and develop sustainable travel, and dietary patterns (Bradley, 2009; Paterson and Stripple, 2010; Hobson, 2013). Being a good ecological citizen, suggests Dobson (2003, p. 118–120), thus entails taking responsibility for one’s own ecological footprint and causal role in the environmental injustices produced by an increasingly globalized economy.

While the ecological citizen discourse seeks to resolve the tension between the cosmopolitan imagination of modern environmentalism and “the lived immediacies of the local” (Heise, 2008, p. 42), it has been criticized on several grounds. To many feminist scholars, ecological citizenship comes across as a

masculine concept rooted in Western ideals of human autonomy, self-determination and rationality (MacGregor, 2006). The subjects empowered by this discourse are primarily enlightened agents who are “positioned to understand or imagine, and potentially engage in, a very particular green ‘good life’” (Gabrielson and Parady, 2010, p. 377). Being recognized as a good ecological citizen is thus a matter of privilege, as it depends on the individual’s ability to participate in public discourse and make informed consumer and lifestyle choices. People who lack the economic means, knowledge and time required to commit themselves to “the good green life” are excluded from the privilege of citizen pursuits (MacGregor, 2006). The ecological citizenship discourse has also been criticized for privatizing environmental responsibility and hereby overlooking the asymmetrical dependency relations that underpin affluent life in advanced liberal societies (Kenis, 2016). For instance, a Swedish study shows how green lifestyle ideals are modeled on a particular kind of white, middle class subject who is ready to recycle waste and buy organic products, while neglecting other, and potentially more resource intensive, aspects of private life such as transportation patterns and size of housing (Bradley, 2009). By placing the onus on the self-regulating and self-determining individual, the ecological citizenship discourse thus runs the risk of leaving the unfair division of environmental labor and burdens unquestioned (MacGregor, 2006).

In critical response, feminist and post-Marxist scholars have advanced alternative conceptions of citizenship that seek to multiply and politicize the forms of environmental subjectivity and agency available in the quest for sustainability. One such example is Gabrielson’s and Parady’s (2010) notion of “corporeal citizenship.” Rather than making citizenship instrumental to an idealized conception of the good green life, a corporeal approach recognizes the diverse forms of attachments that individuals have to social and material worlds. Here, ecological citizenship is not staged as an enlightened epistemic privilege. Instead it emerges from individuals’ socioecological situatedness in intersectional relations based on, for instance, gender, class, age, race, and nationality. Noting that human subjectivity and agency always is embodied and embedded, corporeal citizenship invites recognition of the different articulations of “greenness” that may emerge in particular material and discursive settings (Gabrielson and Parady, 2010). By drawing attention to the body as a site of environmental connection and harm, this situated account of citizenship enters into conversation with studies of environmental justice.

Since the environmental justice movement took form in the United States in the early 1980s, political ecologists have demonstrated how individuals become activated and mobilized in face of threats to their local environments. When protesting against dumping of toxic waste or the appropriation of indigenous lands, justice activists draw on their embodied and lived experiences of environmental harm to open up spaces of green subjectivity (see Tsing, 1999; Agrawal, 2005; Escobar, 2008; Kaijser, 2014). These spaces are diverse and shift across contexts and over time, as people mobilize whatever resources and motivations they can access at the moment. In contrast to the universal citizenship ideals that dominate

green political thinking, work in this field situates green subjectivity and agency in relation to intersectional politics of vulnerability and difference. When grounded in lived experiences of environmental connection and harm, articulations of ecological citizenship multiply and give room for a diversity of “green” perspectives, identifications and forms of agency (Machin, 2013).

In the following we draw upon this “situated”³ understanding of ecological citizenship to interrogate the forms of green agency and subjectivity that were imagined and performed as part of RFYL. Staged as an embodied form of grassroots activism, RFYL encouraged participants to articulate stories of climate change that were situated in particular places and entangled with local environments. However, grounded in the political struggle for climate justice, the dramaturgical script also invited the involved runners to extend beyond their situated experiences and concerns, and respond to the call for global solidarity and justice. The action thus provided a site of connection, linking the participants’ own lives with global matters.

STAGING RUN FOR YOUR LIFE: MOBILIZING THE GRASSROOTS FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

Thousands of people, Thousands of kilometers, Thousands of reasons to run.

We will not end here

Take a stone in your hand and listen

Remember

We are not fighting for nature

We are nature defending itself

(RFYL webpage)⁴.

At the top of the “about” section of the official RFYL web page is a quote by Henry Red Cloud, a renewable energy entrepreneur (see **Figure 2**), politician and member of the Native American Lakota tribe: “There are times when we must accept small steps forward – and there are other times when you need to run like a buffalo. Now is the time to run” (RFYL web page)⁴. In the RFYL campaign, Red Cloud’s words are given as an impetus to set thousands of bodies in motion toward Paris. The idea to run for the global climate was first developed in 2014 by Troja Scenkonst, an independent stage art collective based in Stockholm, inspired by Naomi Klein’s book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. Troja seeks to “treat current politics on an existential and emotional level”⁵. The concept of a relay race was first tested in a sports arena and later presented to the Swedish touring theater company Riksteatern. In spring 2015 Riksteatern decided to take on the project⁶.

Neither Troja nor Riksteatern had any previous experience of a project like RFYL. A call for participation was disseminated



FIGURE 2 | Picture from the campaign material of Run For Your Life. Design and copyright: Maria Glansén. Reprinted with permission. Original source: Run for Your Life webpage.

via social media and during the summer months of 2015 the organizing team visited cities along the path of the race to recruit aspiring participants. The team encouraged people from all social and cultural backgrounds to join the race and also invited people with physical disabilities to participate in ways that worked for them, e.g. walking or in a wheelchair. In places where recruitment proved difficult, the organizers contacted local communities, from environmental organizations to schools and sports clubs, in order to raise interest. The race successfully took off from the Swedish city of Kiruna on 10 November 2015, and the stone first carried by Jenni Laiti continued southwards, changing many hands during the 20 days that followed. Local groups organized various kinds of public events – from concerts and movie screenings to manifestations – in the cities and villages along the way. There was significant media attention, especially around participating celebrities, and the live streaming attracted many online followers.

After the race had started, much of the organizational work was done *ad hoc*, as unexpected needs arose. Practical matters, including the logistics around the many runners and the technical equipment for streaming, took a lot of time, especially when the race reached the European continent^{6,7}. The tragic terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November, and the declared state of emergency that followed, posed challenges as RFYL advanced southwards. The organizers decided to partly change route and, for the sake of safety, not drive or run during night time. According to the original plan, the relay race would culminate in the Global Climate March in Paris on 29 November. When the march was banned as an effect of the declared state of emergency, the grand finale was instead transformed into a solemn walk up to the negotiation site, involving poetry and singing by indigenous artists, before the stone was handed over to the activist and delegate who brought it into the conference venue (RFYL webpage 2015⁴; Höijer, 2017).

³Following Haraway’s work on “situated knowledges” (Haraway, 1998).

⁴Run for your Life webpage. Available online at: www2.runforyourlife.nu

⁵Troja Scenkonst webpage. Available online at: www.trojascenkonst.se

⁶Interview (2016). 2016-05-30. Interview with one one member of RFYL’s artistic team, Stockholm.

⁷Interview (2015). 2015-12-02. Interview with three three members of the RFYL core team, Paris.

RFYL was labeled a “climate performance” and described by the organizers as an explicitly artistic intervention. However, informed by the global quest for climate justice, RFYL also aligned itself with a transnational network of activists campaigning for a just climate deal in Paris. The climate justice movement is known for its resistance to mainstream climate policy discourse and practice (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand, 2016). Ever since the 2009 UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen, a broad network of social groups and grassroots organizations have used the term climate justice to foreground the unequal relations of power and problems of social exclusion resulting from neoliberal and capitalist responses to climate change (Chatterton et al., 2013). Rather than accepting the dominant staging of climate change as a global threat that can be resolved by technical fixes and market solutions, climate justice activists have insisted that rich countries in the global North “keep fossils in the ground” and do their fair shares in the transition to sustainable and equitable economies. The slogan “System Change, Not Climate Change” has turned into the leitmotif of this international grassroots movement and its efforts to link climate change to the broader politics of global justice (Hadden, 2015).

Due to the terrorist attack and the declared state of emergency, the streets of Paris were not the main space of climate justice activism during COP21. Instead a diverse landscape of social movements, grassroots organizations and artists assembled in cultural institutions and exhibition halls around Paris to mobilize public support for an ambitious and just climate agreement. One hub for artistic reflections during COP21 was the art festival ArtCop with more than 550 cultural events, but artistic expressions were also a more general element of climate activism and protest throughout the city. Thus, while RFYL was a pioneering project with regard to its form and artistic ambition, it was situated in a context of transnational climate activism and a burgeoning climate art scene. Informed by the narrative of climate justice, the artistic team sought an expression that would insert radical energy to climate policy discourse and mobilize the grassroots for long-term system change⁶. However, as the project depended on thousands of individual runners, it took on multiple meanings along the way, not least expressed in the personal stories submitted by the participants.

MAKING CLIMATE CHANGE INTIMATE: THE ARCHIVE OF PERSONAL STORIES

When signing up for RFYL, participants were asked to submit a personal story declaring their motivation to run, prompted to start with the sentence “I run for...” On the basis of these stories the project’s artistic team selected the runners that would feature on the RFYL webpage⁴. When time and technology permitted, the stories were recorded and broadcasted online along with the video of the runners in real time. Some were also chosen to be recorded beforehand and used as online campaign material for the relay race. A member of the artistic team describes the selection process as subjective, favoring diversity as well as politically and morally invested contributions. Stories containing

advertisements were rejected, and the team actively looked for narratives that channeled activist energies, structural critique, and local protest⁶.

Due to lack of time on behalf of the organizers, there is no full record of all the submitted stories. Our analysis therefore rests upon the around 1,000 available submissions, of which some were eventually selected by the artistic team for the webpage and online broadcasting. The stories are from a few sentences to a page long, and all bear witness of personal engagement and climate concern. A great majority are written by Swedish participants, while a smaller number are written by mainly Danish, German, Dutch and French participants who ran along the European stretch of the relay. The personal stories were explored through thematic analysis (see Guest et al., 2011; Bryman, 2016). As a first step, we read through all the submissions to get an overall picture of their contents and then made a second reading to identify codes for further analysis in an inductive process. These codes were then used for color-coding the entire material. Through this coding process, a number of themes related to green subjectivity and agency emerged from the stories; *Urgency*, *Hope or despair in face of COP21*, *Loss and change*, *Children and future generations*, *Climate justice and solidarity*, and *The embodied act of running*. These were themes that arose frequently, or that were especially emphasized by authors. In the following, we explore individual contributions to RFYL according to these themes. We have selected quotes from the stories that illustrate these themes. All quotes that were originally written in Swedish have been translated to English by the authors.

Urgency

“For me, the action of running itself is simple; it has to do with being in a hurry. You have to get sweaty to get something done,” said a member of RFYL’s artistic team when asked about what it means for her to run for the climate⁷. This sense of urgency informed the campaign material of RFYL and is recurring in many participants’ individual stories. Numerous runners express despair in face of the lack of political action on climate change and concern about the losses that may follow. Many participating runners play with the image of speedy physical movement as a metaphor for the political urgency that the world is facing: “I run for life, I hurry all that I can, because I know that it is urgent,” and “I want to run because I want the development to go fast. I want to run because I am in a hurry toward a bright future.” Another contributor takes the running metaphor further and states that “we use more resources today than what the Earth can handle. And we continue to pump carbon dioxides into the atmosphere. We behave like long-distance runners who think they can run like a hundred-meter runner.”

Hope or Despair in Face of COP 21

Several participants connect the sense of urgency to the importance of making progress in the UN climate negotiations in Paris. One story is rhetorically addressing decision-makers: “Dear politicians. It is for real now. And actually quite urgent. Please, dare to be brave and believe in a better future with sustainable

solutions. Paris is our shared opportunity.” In a similar tone, another participant writes: “There is still some time to change the direction of development, but it needs to happen within the next few years. Therefore it is so important that the politicians in Paris agree on adequate reductions of emissions.” While these and other stories reflect hope and belief in the UN-led negotiation procedure, others, are more skeptical: “It is just talk and talk and talk, meet and meet and meet, but nothing really sticks and makes any difference. That’s enough. I run! For the climate, life and the future.” Several contributors doubt the political will of world leaders and efficacy of political institutions: “We face the most important challenge for humanity. There is a strong desire among the people to succeed and the opportunities to achieve necessary change have never been greater. But those in power, both political and economic, have other plans. COP21 means perhaps their last chance to show that the current system is not too inflexible to deal with climate change.” Others call for more participatory and decentralized forms of climate governance: “I want to run because I do not believe in COP. I do not think this is an issue that can be resolved at the top level. I believe that it is the local level that has to step in and show the way. Therefore, I want to run.”

Loss and Change

Many participants dwell upon their own first-hand and situated experiences of a changing climate: the extinction and migration of species, the risks of flooding by ocean waters and rivers, threats to local cultural practices such as reindeer herding. Some participants describe concrete threats to particular places, like this story from a lignite mining area in Germany: “My home town would be situated immediately next to the edge of the mine. We are supposed to live a “life near the pit”: with the multiple stresses for the people who live here, with noise pollution, radioactive emissions, pollution with particle matter and other toxins.” Another story concerns the threat of flooding: “In 25 years my home here in Gothenburg is expected to be under water. Whatever solutions they come up with to decrease the water flows of the river Göta Älv, none of them will help in the long run.” A participant from Sápmi writes: “Climate change directly affects the conditions for the reindeers to survive. A changed climate with warmer winters, more precipitation and more extreme weather will mean big problems for reindeer herding in the future.” Another contribution concerns the loss of a particular glacier: “I once wandered toward a glacier in the mountains west of Abisko⁸. According to the map we were rapidly approaching the edge of the glacier, but in reality it was still far to go. The map was a couple of decades old, in that time the glacier stretched far – now the ice had lost the grip against the warmer world caused by humans.”

Other stories evoke a more general sense of loss. Changing seasons is frequently mentioned. One participant writes: “I am worried that we will lose our seasons, that summer, autumn, winter and spring will all lose their charm and become some kind of monotonous “in between” where we never get to experience the distinctiveness of different seasons’. Snow is repeatedly

brought up as an icon of loss: “It is so trivial. It is either white, or it is not. But what does it mean when it is not white anymore?,” and “Besides running for the Earth, our borrowed residency and joint responsibility, I’m running for the snow. I love snow and winter sports. The silence that follows the first snowfall. How the sun makes the crystals sparkle. The rustling under the skis early mornings. How surroundings suddenly have a completely different look under the flakes. This I run for. For this I want to preserve for us and future generations. The snow, I really do not want to see disappear”. Many stories link snow to personal memories and cultural traditions, as in these two accounts: “I grew up in The Netherlands. As a child I loved to play in the snow, to make snowmen and to ice skate. But over the years the snow and ice became less and when I was a teenager there were winters without a single snowflake,” and “When I celebrated Christmas for the third consecutive year without snow, I realized that something very fundamental was wrong.”

In these stories, climate and weather are often given existential meaning and linked to lived experiences of “being in the world.” Contributors place the local, threatened climate in a longer history of ancestors and belonging: “I have always had a great interest in nature. Being in the woods, picking berries and skiing, tracking animals and walking in the mountains is my way of connecting with our world. These activities put me in a historical context to generations of ancestors and thus provide roots and a sounding board for my own existence.” These stories of belonging are often extended to future generations, which brings us to the next theme.

Children and Future Generations

A common concern brought up by the runners is what kind of environments future generations will inherit from us. Many contributors express feelings of responsibility, like in this quote: “I am 53 years old and want to be able to look my future great-grandchildren in the eye. We have only one Earth. We have borrowed it and we will return it.” Another participant exclaims: “What kind of world are we leaving behind us! We owe it to our children to solve this.” Parenthood as an inducement for taking action is a common theme, as in these two stories: “Having kids was the tipping point for me. It is imperative that we do all we can to reverse the effects of global warming so that future generations can call Earth home,” and “1.5 years ago my daughter was born, and then I realized that I have a responsibility. A responsibility to protect our environment so that my daughter and her future children will get to enjoy the environment as much as I do.” Several contributors extend their parental responsibility to all children. For instance, one runner writes: “I run for the baby in my belly. I think of all the children of the world. All future generations. I think about my son and my unborn child who is just now growing in my belly.” In other stories, participants speak about their efforts to influence their children to take responsibility for the climate: “I want to contribute to a better world whenever I can. I want my children to see that you can do this in many different ways.”

Concerns for future generations are frequently tied to notions of tradition and belonging, and the threat a changed climate poses to particular places: “Since I had children, I have realized that a

⁸Abisko is the name of a village and a national park in northern Sweden.

large part of the reality I have taken for granted while growing up—and that has been self-evident for thousands of years—is subject to change and loss. What will my children drink when the glaciers have melted and the rivers dried? What will be left of the taiga when the temperature rises? How dark will not winter be when the snow disappears from our subarctic latitudes? I want to run for my children's right to enjoy the nature and culture that are so typical of the subarctic landscape." Another contributor writes: "Each fall I go hunting with my great-uncles. They tell of the land, the animals and our family as if they were reading a book as we move into the forest. Their knowledge goes back all the hundreds of years we have lived right there. My dream is to teach my grandchildren what they teach me. But the environment is changing so rapidly now that I'm afraid that my traditional Sámi knowledge may not be valid anymore when I am 90 years old like them, and much of what I am is lost and ruined because of the ruthless exploitation of nature going on."

Climate Justice and Solidarity

In the RFYL online material the event is described as a "relay race across Northern Europe to promote climate justice and a sustainable future" (RFYL website)⁴. The narrative of climate justice is frequently repeated in the individual stories. Here, reference is often made to global injustices and developing countries being most affected by climate change while causing the least emissions. Many of the stories on this theme refer to news reports or describe personal encounters with affected and vulnerable societies. Several contributors contrast their experiences from other places with the privileged situation in Sweden, and place responsibility for solidarity and action on citizens and decision-makers in the West. Here are two examples: "I have traveled with work and visited developing countries in rural areas, including in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Indonesia. If we do not make radical changes the people I have met who live in fishing villages might completely lose their homes and their land when the sea level rises and the icebergs melt," and: "I am from the UK and have Indian roots having also lived in Delhi before moving to Sweden. I have witnessed grinding poverty in Indian cities where unsustainable development has had a huge toll on people's lives. This contrasts sharply with life in Sweden but many of the causes of climate change are here. I run for climate justice and to show that we all in the West and East are responsible for taking action." Another contribution reads: "I see the terrible fact that the industrialized Western world does not take its responsibility to mitigate/curb emissions and the climate change that follows from them, which largely affects poor countries and also means that they are prevented from achieving the same prosperity that we have. Deeply unequal!" In the following story the contributor's love for a particular place is connected with the impacts of climate change in other parts of the world: "Kolmården is one of Sweden's most beautiful forest areas, and Bråviken is the largest bay in the country. Here I grew up and here I have cultivated my love for nature. When I was at the Climate Summit in Copenhagen in 2009 and heard representatives from different island groups in the Caribbean talk about how climate change affects them, I understood the seriousness."

Also intersectional aspects of climate injustice are brought up in the stories in relation to gender, ethnicity, age and non-human species. Some contributions identify women as a particularly vulnerable group: "It is the poorest who will suffer most from a warmer world, and often the most vulnerable are women. Efforts toward equality is a prerequisite for environmental politics, in the long run the entire patriarchal world order needs to be questioned." Indigenous people and their cultures are also pointed out as being particularly threatened by climate change. Several of the contributions are from indigenous Sámi people who are concerned about their possibilities to continue traditional reindeer herding. Threats to animals and plants are sometimes mentioned as another dimension of injustice. One contributor writes: "To me, the main victims are the animals who are completely innocent of causing climate change." Polar bears recur frequently as victims of climate change, like in this story: "I run for the polar bears. Fantastic, beautiful animals. [...] I get so sad when I see pictures of starving bears fighting for their survival on the little ice that is left." Some participants refer to their running as an act of solidarity with humans and non-humans who are already negatively affected by climate change.

The Embodied Act of Running

Many participants were attracted to the physical and bodily dimension of RFYL. For them, physical movement in nature evokes a sense of environmental connection and draws direct attention to looming changes: "The rain in your face, the wind in the trees, wheat fields swaying in the wind. Just me, my breath, my steps and nature. Never am I so aware of nature as with my running clothes on. It is freedom, but it is also scary. Frightening because the rain, the wind and the fields will change unless we are willing to sacrifice something." Another runner writes: "I run wherever I go and I often describe places based on how they are to run in; the terrain, the views, unexpected encounters, the weather, the smells. The descriptions are endless, as many as the places, but I have never needed to refrain from running because it has not been possible. I do not want to have to write... "you can hardly breathe," or "the boardwalk is under water." I want my children and other people to be able to run there and wherever they want—tomorrow or in 20 years."

The sense of environmental connection and self-care invoked by physical activity is in some contributions extended to a responsibility for the planet as a whole. As one participant writes: "Why don't we see the link between the wellbeing of Earth and our own personal health? [...] I want to take care of the Earth like I am taking care of myself. Therefore, I want to run." Another contributor reflects: "I have realized how connected the environment is with our bodies and health. I believe that sports is not only a way to improve your body and performances but also a way to bring yourself closer to some lost values and to the environment." Some contributors see their participation in RFYL as a way of handling climate anxiety and demonstrating their commitment to positive change: "Running is one of my hobbies, this time not only for fun or for my health, but just to bring my little stone for the

health of the whole planet and of the people living on it.” Another runner writes: “If my running can contribute to the on-going climate disaster getting more attention and if it in some way can contribute to a better climate agreement in Paris, the benefit of running becomes not only my own.” Thus, for many participants, the embodied act of running is symbolically connected to a collective movement for a stable climate.

TOWARD SITUATED CLIMATE STORY-TELLING AND CITIZENSHIP

The Twenty-First UN Climate Conference in Paris was a critical moment in the history of global climate politics. Held in the hottest year since records began, and in the shadow of diplomatic failure at the Copenhagen summit 6 years earlier, the conference was charged with the urgent political task of keeping global mean warming well below 2 degrees Celsius (Christoff, 2016). While political leaders and diplomats were spending long hours in the conference hall Le Bourget to craft a new treaty text, activists, and artists from different parts of the world joined forces to mobilize public support for safe and just climate futures. Despite the ban on protest following the terrorist attacks on 13 November, COP21 formed a veritable center of gravitation that inspired citizen groups and social networks to experiment with new forms of climate activism and mobilization. *Run for Your Life* is one of the many initiatives that made use of this political momentum to explore the intersection of climate art and activism. By setting bodies in physical motion toward Paris, and recording the stories told along the way, RFYL sought to activate citizens in the quest for climate justice and hereby bring the politics of climate change down to earth.

The political effects of this art performance are of course difficult to establish. Art activism can perform counter-politics by disrupting dominant narratives, de-normalizing attachments to fossil fuels and advancing an enlarged and transformed sense of self and the world (Motion, 2019). However, interventions of this sort are always temporal, open-ended and risky. The final result is the sum of the meanings proposed by the artists and those generated among participating publics (Aladro-Vico et al., 2018). As outlined above, RFYL was set in motion by the civilizational wake-up call found in Naomi Klein’s best-seller *The Changes Everything: Climate vs. Capitalism* (Klein, 2014). Informed by the grand narrative of the eco-socialist left, the dramaturgical script sought to enroll citizens in the global quest for climate justice. However, when working their way through the submitted climate stories, the artistic directors struggled to find the radical political energy they were looking for. The individual stories contained more individual guilt and loss, than social mobilization and critique⁶. Indeed, one by one, the stories are not very spectacular or striking. Yet, grouped together, the narratives bear witness of a subtle political movement in the making. While situated in different geographical and social settings, the collection of climate stories offers a powerful account of worry, sorrow, hope, connectivity, solidarity, and

agency in face of climate change. They contain testimonies of changing weather patterns, loss of cultural traditions, protest against fossil fuel extraction, frustration with the lack of political action, and solidarity with the vulnerable across space, time, and species boundaries. The messages conveyed are multiple and unruly, but the stories add on to each other and together make up a strong mobilizing force and call to action.

Similarly, the video clips of participants running alone on dark icy roads, often through miles and miles of forest, are suggestive when presented alongside each other. The exchange of the Arctic stone along the 4,500 km from Kiruna to Paris linked runners, both physically and symbolically, in chains of solidarity and kinship. To us, the climate story-telling and activism found on the road to Paris provides rich examples of ecological citizenship. The participating runners express concern and responsibility for the future of places, people and species, and share a commitment to the collective enterprise of achieving sustainability. However, in contrast to the universal citizenship ideals traditionally invoked in green political theory, the forms of agency articulated in these stories transcend the modern dualisms of mind/body, reason/emotion, men/women, public/private, and culture/nature. Citizen virtues are not primarily claimed through active participation in public life, reasoned debate, or informed consumer and lifestyle choices. In line with corporeal accounts of citizenship (Gabrielson and Parady, 2010) ecological agency is here instead grounded in the participants’ every-day efforts to imagine and live with a changing climate. Climate change is not framed as a distant and abstract threat, but experienced and embodied in close connection and solidarity with familiar and distant environments. Complex atmospheric processes and aggregate temperature trends take shape and gain meaning in the particular—the snow that does not fall, the flooding river, the coal mine that slowly ingests the land. In these accounts, nature is not the “other” that humans can detach themselves from: on the contrary, nature, or environment, is recognized as the prerequisite for human existence, and inseparable from human cultures, societies, and lives.

In a rapidly warming world, efforts to define and locate ecological citizenship may seem like an academic distraction, especially so when grounded in a temporary art performance. In this paper, however, we argue the opposite. In order to tackle the profound challenges posed by a climate change, we need to look for stories that, in the words of Gibson et al. (2015, p. ii), reach beyond abstractions, enact connectivity, and move us to concern and action. The narrative of climate justice takes an important step in that direction by recognizing the uneven and unequal exposure of human bodies to climate risks, and the diversity of experience and agency that may follow. We argue that initiatives such as RFYL can give substance and strength to the political struggle for climate justice. While mostly situated in Northern Europe—which is generally a privileged region in terms of income, access to resources and climate impacts—the collection of climate stories analyzed here contains grief and mourning for what is being lost, but also enacts new political sensibilities and reparative

possibilities. Together, the stories give account of the multiplicity of green imaginations, subjectivities and forms of political agency that we will need to mobilize in response to a climate changed world.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The datasets generated for this study are available on request to the corresponding author.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The authors contributed equally to the data collection and the writing of the paper.

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