

Green governmentality and responsabilization: new forms of governance and responses to ‘consumer responsibility’

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An extensive literature examines political or green consumption, attending to how people make sense of their consumption relative to norms of individual responsibility and pro-environmental behaviour. Similarly, a small but growing literature addresses green governmentality, focusing on new governance forms and responsabilization processes. These two strands seldom meet, resulting in poor understanding of the links between consumption governance and people’s sense-making and actions relative to the moral imperative of being ‘responsible consumers’. We address this weakness by juxtaposing these two strands of literature, improving our understanding of the processes of responsabilization and some of their consequences. We argue that, to understand the effects of this form of governance, we must realize that subjects are not inevitably positioned and predetermined by a hegemonic discourse. At the same time, we must acknowledge that responsabilization processes give rise to compliance and to a range of ambivalences and forms of resistance.

Keywords: green governmentality; responsabilization; green consumption; environmental governance; anti-consumption

Introduction

Parallel to international negotiations and regional, national, and local initiatives to tackle a range of growing environmental problems, observers are paying attention to the environmental load of households and to aspects of individuals’ everyday lives, such as transportation, food, and clothing. Attention to the environmental impact of everyday consumption is followed by a range of advice on how people can easily change small things in their lives to benefit the environment. Paradoxically, ‘simple solutions’, such as changing light bulbs, having meat-free days, and choosing public transport, are being highlighted at a time when the global, transboundary, and complex character of environmental problems is being acknowledged. However, we can view this in light of wider processes of individualization: citizens are increasingly addressed as actors who

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‘understand and enact their lives in terms of choice’ (Rose 1999, p. 87). This way of addressing citizens is a crucial element of regulatory mechanisms that appeal to ‘free will’, implying the individualization of responsibility. However, this is not the same thing as, or necessarily congruent with, whether and how people *are* individualized, meaning that they act and define themselves primarily as individuals rather than as parts of collectives or in terms of their social relationships (Middlemiss 2014, pp. 929–930).

The idea of individualization is prominent in various policy areas, having ‘a knock-on effect on the design of policy’ (Middlemiss 2014, p. 936). Here, we assess policy measures designed to promote individualized responsibility as ‘technologies of responsabilization’. Such policy measures are designed to help individuals address these responsibilities by informing, guiding, and providing products and tools facilitating individual choice; they can take many forms (e.g. campaigns, news media reports, eco-labelled products, and tools for calculating personal carbon emissions) and may be initiated by various actors (e.g. state actors, media, private companies, or non-governmental organizations) (Hursh and Henderson 2011).

We acknowledge that while ‘governing through free will’ is a prominent feature of today’s environmental governance in the Western world, it is not the only mode of governance. Technologies of responsabilization coexist with modes of governance that represent traditional state-centred regulation (e.g. legislation and taxes) and/or target technical systems (e.g. smart grids) or collectives (e.g. Vélib bicycles). Responsibilities can also shift from individual consumers to nation-states (e.g. the threat to the ozone layer from CFC gases). Nevertheless, individualized responsibility has received increased attention in environmental policy, public debate, and the media; it has emerged as a new area of research (Connolly and Prothero 2008, Berglez *et al.* 2009, Adams and Raisborough 2010, Olausson 2011).

We review and synthesize two distinct bodies of research literature treating the rationalities and technologies of responsabilization involved in shifting environmental responsibility to individuals, and how people make sense of and react to particular environmental subject positions shaped by this responsabilization, addressed mainly in studies of political or green consumption. Although the environmental governance and green consumption literatures are extensive, these two bodies of work seldom meet. Our main contribution is to juxtapose these two research streams and, most importantly, to improve our understanding of the process of responsabilization and some of its consequences. The governing through technologies of responsabilization has the effect of shaping a dominant subject position, i.e. that of ‘the responsible consumer’. Our aim is to demonstrate that, although this broad category may have become dominant, the related meanings and actions are not direct consequences of it.

We divide the discussion into five parts. Following this introduction, the second part elaborates on the missing link between governmentality approaches and in-depth understandings of people’s sense-making regarding environmental

responsibilities. The third part argues that consumer responsabilization has become a key element of current environmental governance. The fourth part analyses a selection of the literature on political and green consumption. In relation to this literature review, we discuss whether people's various positionings relative to consumption and environmental responsibility that are articulated in this research can be understood as responses to green governmentality and, if so, how. In this part we demonstrate that people make sense of their consumption, responsibility, and conditions for agency in multiple ways and that the responsabilization strategy also gives rise to a range of ambivalences and forms of resistance. The fifth and concluding part demonstrates that juxtaposing the two approaches enables a more nuanced understanding of how identification with and resistance to dominant subject positions are intertwined with, rather than being direct effects of, forms of social order governance.

Consumption and environmental responsibility

As many scholars have noted, focusing on individual consumers gives a narrow and simplistic view of both green political consumption and everyday activities (Shove 2003, Terragni *et al.* 2009, Adams and Raisborough 2010, Halkier *et al.* 2011). A single-minded emphasis on consumption may result in the neglect of other everyday activities undertaken for political or ethical reasons and of various ways of renouncing consumption (Micheletti and Stolle 2007, 2012, Boström and Klintman 2009). We need a more complex understanding of the concerned consumer as reflective, uncertain, and ambivalent, as well as further research into the historical and social process 'that has led people to believe that they, as individuals, can help solve environmental problems' (Connolly and Prothero 2008, p. 142).

In the context of climate change research, Shove (2003, 2010) has forcefully argued that sociologists need to contribute by linking more complex theories of social change to the dominant paradigm, which assumes the simple attitudes–behaviour–choice (ABC) model. Shove (2010, p. 1283) argues that one step in this direction would be to 'reopen a set of basic questions about the role of the state, the allocation of responsibility, and in very practical terms the meaning of manageability, within climate-change policy'.

One line of research that takes an explicit stance against the simplistic view of the individual as a relatively isolated entity, decontextualized from social structures and interaction, draws on theories of social practice, for example, in studies of consumption (Warde 2005) and green political consumption (Halkier 2009, Gram-Hanssen 2011, Hargreaves 2011). These studies, based on Andreas Reckwitz's (2002) development of practice theory as a heuristic device, draw attention to the routinized character of practice and stress that various elements, such as body, mind, things, knowledge, discourse, structure, and agency, are interconnected in everyday activities. Rather than using individual behaviour and attitudes as the main analytical categories, the 'actual behavioural practices,

situated in time and space, that an individual shares with other human agents' are at the centre of the model (Spaargaren 2003, p. 688). In Spaargaren's model, elements of social practice, such as clothing, housing, food, and travel, constitute the central units of analysis, understood relative to the concepts of lifestyle and system provision, representing the 'actor' and 'structure', respectively.

While valuing the important contributions of these studies, we note that they do not appreciate the consequences of seeing practices as interconnected by fully acknowledging the emergence of new forms of governance. These forms imply the distribution of responsibility for a number of issues that were previously seen as the responsibilities of sovereign nation-states, to actors such as private companies, interest organizations, and individual consumers. Following the implications of practice theory one step further, Barnett *et al.* argue that consumption, and consumers' activities, should be understood as part of a network of production, distribution, and marketing; we need to look at broader, more complex patterns of activities and 'how efforts at governing consumption engage creatively with people's existing ethical disposition' (Barnett *et al.* 2011, p. 87).

Another line of research considers various aspects of anti-consumption. For example, Amine and Gicquel (2011) discuss anti-consumption in terms of deviance, as it challenges the contemporary culture of consumption. Anti-consumption can be performed for various reasons, ranging from economic constraints to deep ethical concerns and anti-capitalist ideology (Gronow and Warde 2001a, Cherrier *et al.* 2011, Alexander and Ussher 2012, Portwood-Stacer 2012). Studies of consumption based on practice theory as well as studies of voluntary simplicity and anti-consumption enable us to see the variety of ways people can respond to the moral imperative to take their 'environmental responsibility' seriously. The work of Barnett *et al.* is valuable in seeking to understand the links between consumption governance and people's active sense-making and actions in relation to consumption in a broad sense, and not exclusively in relation to 'environmental subjectivities'. Our point of departure is a shift towards modes of governance that can be subsumed under the term 'green governmentality'. Green governmentality works through a multiplicity of rationalities and agencies that seek to shape the conduct of human behaviour. Although various coexisting modes of environmental governance rely on various rationales and forms of regulation, the mode of governance relying on technologies of responsabilization is widespread in most of the Western world today.

Green governmentality and responsabilization

As environmental problems are increasingly understood as global, transgressing boundaries of time and space, other regulatory measures, complementing national legislation and traditional regulation, have been called for. Climate change is a topical example of a complex environmental risk that traditional regulation and control systems fall short in managing. While nation-states are

still crucial actors, private actors and individual responsibility have been increasingly emphasized in environmental policy.

In relation to environmental issues, as well as in other areas of life, new forms of regulation are combined with a heightened focus on ‘the responsible consumer’ (cf. Hobson 2004, 2013, Dolan 2009). This way of governing individual conduct is evident in fields such as health, career development, and, not least, the environment. People are invited or encouraged to choose, for example, a green lifestyle. Since the 1960s, the concept of lifestyle has increasingly been employed in advertising and marketing. In this discourse, lifestyle is associated with individual or cultural expression and with the construction of identity through consumption (Hayward 2004).

At the same time as various lifestyles and modes of expression are being recognized, the modern concept of the individual implies a specific understanding of individual freedom and responsibility that Beck (2002) refers to as ‘institutionalized individualism’. In line with this notion, Rose (2000) speaks of ‘technologies of freedom’ that govern *through* the individual’s free choice. In this discourse, ‘each person [is] obliged to be prudent, responsible for their own destinies’ and, it could be added, responsible for the global environment (Rose 2000, p. 324).

Moreover, this implies that governing is ‘no longer limited to the elected government’ (Hursh and Henderson 2011, p. 177). According to certain norms, all attempts to discipline behaviour under the veil of deliberation and free will are relevant to understanding how we govern and are governed. News media, websites, information campaigns, and labelling all advance the construction of activism through consumption choices (Adams and Raisborough 2010, pp. 256–257).

While forms of governing and governance were previously related more strongly to obligations, duties, solidarity, and citizenship, they are now increasingly related to consumption, responsible choices, and lifestyle (Rose 1999, p. 166). This results in a form of self-regulation that leads to a paradoxical situation for the individual. While individuals are free to accept and apply or to reject available advice and guidelines, governing techniques are dispersed among various actors to the extent that, to most consumers, they do not appear to be forms of governing.

The individualization of responsibility thus reinforces certain ways of being and acting while suppressing others. Modes of governmentality can be analysed by focusing on visibility (what is revealed and what is concealed), technologies and practices (organizing principles and tools of governance), forms of knowledge that inform and arise from the practices used, and identities presupposed by the practices and technologies chosen (Oels 2005, p. 192).

Following this line of reasoning, we find environmental examples of this productive form of governance dispersed over a range of actors and technologies of government, such as information campaigns, mass media, and products available for consumption. These technologies of government are not independent of

national context and policy area, and they coexist in various combinations with other modes of governance. Despite apparent differences in modes of environmental governance, we see that technologies of responsabilization are common in various policy areas and across countries and regions in the Western world.

Information campaigns have been a common tool in the endeavour to influence consumption behaviour. The UK government's campaign 'Helping the Earth Begins at Home', launched in 1991, is an early example of an attempt to link the local and global. Although the campaign 'aimed to foster a global consciousness and a collective will' (Hinchliffe 1996, p. 53), it was consumer oriented and based on the idea of the rational consumer and the efficiency of market mechanisms. In the 1990s, other British campaigns, such as 'Are you doing your bit?' and the 'Global Action Plan UK', were launched. These campaigns aimed to find positive ways to encourage lifestyle changes using a 'small step' approach (Hobson 2004, p. 126). More recently, similar campaigns have been used to mobilize people in climate change mitigation, for example the public awareness campaign 'You Control Climate Change', launched in 2006 by the European Commission, which sought to complement and reinforce political and legislative efforts, and to clarify what individuals could and needed to do to reduce the threat of climate change. On the website, the individual is straightforwardly summoned to 'Choose wisely', 'Say no to paper towels!', and 'Travel responsibly!' (European Commission 2012). Implicit in such messages is a normative and moral content, guiding free will in a certain direction (cf. Adams and Raisborough 2010). Similar messages can be found in the Australian campaign 'Be Climate Clever: I can do that' launched in 2007 (Kent 2009) and the Swedish Climate Campaign launched in 2002 (Ugglå 2008).

News media and popular culture are also involved in spreading normative messages, addressing individual citizens as both empowered and responsible for climate change mitigation. Studies of the news media, for example, identify a shift towards an individualized media discourse since 2000 (Berglez *et al.* 2009, Olausson 2011). This shift implies a transfer of responsibility from nation-states and industry to the individual, drawing on the same logic as the above-mentioned campaigns. Likewise, David Guggenheim's film *An Inconvenient Truth*, about Al Gore's engagement in the climate change issue, has been described as 'a mix of alarm and hope' that 'succeeds in bringing a "moral imperative" of reducing greenhouse gases to a personal level' (Minkel and Stix 2006, p. 51). Other forms of popular culture such as children's books convey simple guidelines for how children can act or encourage their parents to act in environmentally friendly ways. Studies analysing children's books using a governmentality approach have examined books originally published in the United States, Sweden, and the UK (Maniates 2001, Larsson 2012).

These examples visualize the problem of climate change in particular ways and compile and present selected forms of knowledge that presuppose certain identities and responsibilities of targeted groups. Alongside those giving advice and information, other examples invite the user or consumer to engage in other ways. For

example, as noted by Paterson and Stripple (2010, p. 347), the ‘conduct of carbon conduct’ is a form of government that works through certain forms of knowledge and technologies (e.g. carbon calculators) that enable individuals to measure their own carbon footprints. This form of governance is a practice that mobilizes ‘a certain subjectivity (the individual as carbon emitter)’ and enables the invention of ‘calculative selves’ (Paterson and Stripple 2010, p. 359).

We have highlighted in this section that individualized responsibility is a form of environmental governance that is widespread in the Western world; citizens are increasingly addressed as responsible consumers by a number of actors, such as governments, corporations, and the mass media. This entails a moral imperative of individualized responsibility that works through subtle forms of power whose effects depend on the sense-making and responses of the governed subjects. To understand the interaction between discourse, sense-making, and action, in the next section we analyse previous studies that contribute to an understanding of various ways of identifying with or resisting ‘consumer responsibility’.

Responses to the ‘responsible consumer’

How can we understand the effects of individualized responsibility and the idea of green consumption? People respond both in ways that serve to uphold social order (for example, by reproducing ideas about what is ‘normal’ or ‘reasonable’ environmental concern) and in ways that, based on ideological commitment, challenge the current social order by resisting the consumption logic of contemporary society. The literature includes studies analysing how individuals respond to, are ignorant of or indifferent to the ideas of green consumption and individualized responsibility.

A complication in the study of green consumption and individualized environmental responsibility – as in most studies of human experiences – is that researchers, by raising certain issues or posing certain questions, tend to evoke the understandings and emotions that are supposed to be the topic of investigation. Although this dynamic is one that researchers must reflect on and address, the readiness of many interviewees to relate to and reproduce the notion of individual environmental responsibility indicates that this is a predominant discourse (Dahl 2014, p. 332). While the idea of individualization is predominant in current society, its basis can be criticized because the realities of individualization are more complex than generally assumed. The main criticism of individualization theories is that they convey a dichotomy, portraying people as either reflexive or traditional, implying that collective action and engagement are *passé*. These theories have also been criticized for abandoning sociological concepts such as class and gender (Gronow and Warde 2001b, p. 225 ff., Middlemiss 2014, pp. 939–940).

Our literature search is based on four assumptions about how people may respond to green consumption and individualized environmental responsibility.¹

First, it is reasonable to distinguish between the notions of green consumption and individual responsibility, as it is fully possible that people may reject the former while accepting the latter and vice versa. Second, it is reasonable also to consider other forms of environmental engagement, such as recognizing or rejecting the notions of green consumption and/or individualized responsibility that does not exclude political or other kinds of collective or organized environmental engagement. Third, rather than categorizing people's actions and sense-making as expressing clearly demarcated alternative positions to that of the 'responsible consumer', the following analysis is directed towards illustrating the ambiguous ways people relate to green consumption and individualized responsibility. Fourth, it is important to consider positions of resistance, ignorance, and indifference. We now deal with literature that highlights, on the one hand, the bodily, pre-reflexive aspect of consumption and, on the other, motivations for consumption that are unrelated to environmental concerns.

Indifference to individual environmental responsibility

To discuss the effects of individualized environmental responsibility, it is also relevant to consider the consumption patterns and ways of being that we cannot interpret as active responses to this form of governing. There are aspects of people's consumption that are non-reflexive and routinized, ways people do things without thinking about them. Gronow and Warde (2001a, p. 4) describe ordinary consumption as 'practices which are neither highly visible nor in any way special and which often stand in a subsidiary relationship to some other primary or more conscious activity'. The consumption of water and energy is often an unseen part of everyday practices, including activities such as eating, doing laundry, and commuting, all of which are socially embedded. Thus a study of energy and water usage in families with teenagers in Denmark demonstrates that in some families the norms of cleanliness took precedence over environmental concerns (Gram-Hanssen 2007, cf. Jack 2013, for Australia). In this sense, people's everyday consumption could be described as ignorance of or indifference to the notions of green consumption and individual responsibility.

Halkier (2001, p. 43) argues that it is impossible to sharply distinguish between reflexive and routinized consumption, because 'everyday life is characterized by contingency: social life is neither entirely coincidental nor entirely determined'. This mix of routine and reflexivity may evolve when people express identity through their consumption, but do so in 'normalized ways' or by using reflexivity to legitimize routines; people may well give reasons for their routines when asked to do so. Likewise, boycotting certain brands or products and consuming eco-products, initially based on reflexivity and conscious choice, can become routinized.

Another possible response that could be seen as indifference to or dismissal of the notion of individual environmental responsibility is based on lack of resources or scarcity. The vast majority of people's everyday activities are not

only routinized, but rational and economically informed (Gronow and Warde 2001a, Wilska 2002). People with low incomes do not have to feel environmentally responsible in order to have a lower environmental impact than many people with higher incomes; people with low incomes generally consume and travel less, and heating an apartment is not as energy consuming as is heating a detached house (Bradley 2009). Moreover, people may acknowledge green consumption as reasonable in endeavouring to address environmental problems but, because they lack resources, reject seeing themselves as responsible.

Routinized ordinary consumption is circumscribed by economic structures and class-related differences in lifestyles and norms. This potentially leads to at least two forms of indifference to being addressed as a responsible consumer: environmental concerns are not at all reflected on because the behaviour is routinized; or other norms and concerns are emphasized instead. People's consumption can have very different impacts on the environment independently of their concerns about the environment and their individual responsibility and, as such, this consumption can hardly be understood as an active response to or sense-making concerning the imperative to be environmentally responsible consumers. The boundary between the unreflected-on and the reflected-on, however, is not always easily drawn. People's concerns and identities arise through multiple relationships between people, technologies, and environments. We employ the term pre-reflexive here in order to emphasize the bodily, and not merely cognitive, aspects of people's concerns and identities (Engdahl 2004). Although the pre-reflexive dimensions of consumption cannot be understood as active compliance with or resistance to individualized environmental responsibility, they can nevertheless entail more or less friction with particular forms of governing. It is through such friction, when our actions are inhibited, that the pre-reflexive can become reflexive (Engdahl 2004, cf. Soneryd 2007, p. 299). The pre-reflexive aspect of consumption is intertwined with identities presupposed by practices and technologies, for instance by the way the infrastructure for consumption facilitates or impedes the development of certain routines (cf. Oels 2005).

Green consumption, negotiating the reasonable, and constructing normality

When people try to make sense of the subject position of the environmentally responsible consumer, they are simultaneously involved in shaping and reshaping what is deemed normal and appropriate.

For most people, everyday life is full of inconsistencies, ambivalence, and dilemmas. Consumers may boycott certain products because of ethical concerns, while other consumption choices are made without further ethical consideration. Likewise, 'green choices' are embedded in social relationships. Some practices are labelled as 'bad', yet perceived as central and meaningful in social relationships, for example, when, as expressions of love, certain products are bought to fulfil a child's wishes (Connolly and Prothero 2008, Cherrier 2009).

Furthermore, discussions of certain issues, such as saving energy, may be avoided to prevent conflict (Gram-Hanssen 2007). In this sense, people are negotiating opposing values and in various ways trying to make sense of what being a 'responsible consumer' entails as they are 'juggling [their] lifestyle' (Connolly and Prothero 2008, p. 126).

Because consumption choices are guided largely by compromise, the green lifestyle ideal does not necessarily lead to consistent changes in consumer behaviour (Hobson 2013). Instead, people may experience feelings of guilt concerning their environmental performance (Bickerstaff *et al.* 2008, p. 1320). For example, Skill and Gyberg (2010) discuss how Swedish household members described themselves as sometimes 'cheating': they were well aware of how they 'ought' to behave in an environmentally responsible and morally defensible way, but did not always live up to the ideal. This struggle with responsibility and guilt in everyday life results in negotiations as to what is considered reasonable.

In their study of people engaged in environmental organizations in Ireland, Connolly and Prothero (2008) illustrate how their interviewees justified their own consumption relative to others', or rather, relative to others' perceived consumption. One's own consumption could then be defined as just meeting basic needs or at least be deemed less than that of others. Skill and Gyberg (2010) elucidate how household members negotiate their own identities relative to stereotyped others. One such stereotype is 'the irresponsible other', a person who behaves improperly by, for example, littering at the recycling station or not recycling properly, whereas 'the fanatic other' is a person who exaggerates her environmental concern, for example, by never travelling by car or aeroplane or by abstaining from material consumption. In relation to these ideas of the other, household members negotiate their own identities as responsible but not over-zealous. Skill and Gyberg (2010, p. 1878) conclude from their interviews with household members that activities such as recycling, ecologically responsible driving, and energy saving are seen as reasonable, whereas adapting one's whole lifestyle is considered both radical and unrealistic.

Negotiating the normal and reasonable also includes weighing the pros (environmental benefits) and cons (awkward or time-consuming aspects) of everyday activities such as meticulous composting, recycling, and home production. Likewise, comparing activities and selecting certain symbolic ones, such as buying organic products, can help construct a positive self-image as environmentally responsible (Skill and Gyberg 2010, p. 1880). Based on focus groups involving people grouped according to a range of social categories (university students, industrial workers, recent parents, and sports amateurs), Wibeck and Linnér (2012) argue that expressed limited agency and lack of knowledge of how to act can also be seen as ways of negotiating one's perceived responsibility. The focus group participants expressed uncertainty about what could be expected of them and what effects their actions would have on climate change mitigation. They often asked 'Does it help?' in relation to personal efforts to live more environmentally friendly lifestyles, indicating that it is difficult for laypeople to

gauge the effects of their actions and consumer choices (cf. Boström and Klintman 2009, Hobson 2013).

Another study based on focus groups in the UK illustrates how the participants felt entangled in energy-consuming lifestyles, and therefore regarded the state as the main actor in climate change mitigation (Bickerstaff *et al.* 2008). Interestingly, some study participants stated that it was the government's responsibility to enable and shape citizen behaviour: as one interviewee put it, 'The government has to say "This is what you have to do"' (Bickerstaff *et al.* 2008, p. 1322).

These studies illustrate how people relate to the notions of green consumption and individual responsibility in reflexive but also ambiguous ways. Although the idea of green consumption is generally accepted, individualized responsibility is negotiated and made sense of relative to a larger context and structural constraints. This context needs to be understood in relation to historically and culturally specific patterns of governing. What are conceived as 'reasonable' actions (e.g. buying organic products or recycling) will differ depending on how the moral imperatives have been imbued with particular content through dispersed forms of governing techniques. Simultaneously, as people construct environmentally responsible identities, the normal and reasonable are also constructed. In current forms of governmentality, however, this is done within a post-ecologist framework in which some values and needs are non-negotiable (in terms of mobility, technology, or shopping opportunities), which is why such responses can be seen as part of regimes that are 'sustaining the unsustainable' (Blühdorn 2013, p. 20).

The above studies can be understood as responses to individualized responsibility, which in a certain sense is compliant with this form of governing. The 'responsible consumer' subject position is accepted in the sense that the boundaries of individual responsibility are negotiated rather than contrasted to alternative ways of being. These responses also include elements of resistance, for example, by stressing the responsibilities of the state. At the same time, people's readiness to negotiate the boundaries of individualized responsibility can largely be seen as underpinning processes of responsabilization. Through these negotiations, people are active in giving governance its form and effect (cf. Walters 2012, p. 2).

Anti-consumption, collective identities, and working on the self

In contemporary society, systematic anti-consumption constitutes a rebellious or 'heretical attitude' towards consumption culture (Cherrier 2009). In a study of an 'anarcho-environmentalist group' in Australia, Shepherd (2002) demonstrates the importance of social belonging and collective identity in resistance to consumption and the endeavour to create alternative lifestyles. At the same time, asceticism and continuous 'work on the self' were important dimensions of engagement and collective identity. Similarly, other studies of systematic anti-

consumption and alternative lifestyles – ranging from boycotting certain brands to freeganism, voluntary simplicity, and anarchism – highlight the intertwining of collective identity and the individual's struggle to perform in accordance with certain values and group norms (Edwards and Mercer 2007, Cherrier 2009, Barnard 2011, Fernandez *et al.* 2011, Pentina and Amos 2011, Portwood-Stacer 2012).

Freegans are often not organized in the same way as the above-mentioned Australian environmental group, but more as loose networks of people sharing certain principal ideas. Both environmental concerns and anti-capitalist ideology are often important to freegans – or 'dumpster divers', as they are also termed (Edwards and Mercer 2007, Barnard 2011, Fernandez *et al.* 2011). In this sense, freeganism is a way to resist the market's power and control, and can be seen as an act of political resistance to a system perceived as unjust and obsolete. Both Fernandez *et al.* (2011) and Barnard (2011) regard dumpster divers' rejection of environmental degradation and capitalism as ideologically motivated; Barnard (2011, p. 420) illustrates how it is combined with public political actions against the notion of green consumption and the understanding that 'capitalism can be ecologically sustainable with minor changes to buying practices'. However, as Fernandez *et al.* (2011) demonstrate, the anti-consumer identity also entails a complex interplay between ideological, economic, and psychological motivations, highlighting the negotiability and balancing of different meanings of 'consumer' or 'anti-consumer' activities (see also Portwood-Stacer 2012 on anarchism).

Voluntary simplicity also represents a movement based on certain basic principles and values representing resistance to what is considered mainstream consumer society. These values include environmental concern, but the movement is broader in scope and includes ideas of how to lead a life characterized by peace and harmony (Sandlin 2009). Studies of voluntary simplicity demonstrate that involvement in the movement largely entails individual and collective identity work, as well as struggles to perform in accordance with certain norms (Sandlin 2009, Lorenzen 2012).

The notion of green consumption as a way to address environmental problems can therefore arouse resistance and political engagement. The performance of these alternative lifestyles evinces an intricate interplay of individual and collective identity construction in relation to various values, norms, and motives, indicating that rejection of the idea of green consumption can be combined with deeply felt environmental responsibility. The resistance to individualized responsibility can also be expressed as rejection of an unjustified shift of responsibility from the state to citizens (Bickerstaff and Walker 2002, p. 2183). This understanding not only rejects the idea of individual responsibility but reflects on individualization as resulting from political decisions that have led to shifted responsibilities.

As the studies cited illustrate, being addressed in a particular way does not mean that one automatically accepts the proffered role and identity of a green,

responsible consumer. Instead, we find various ways in which individuals and groups relate to and make sense of being cast as 'responsible consumers'. This meaning-making concerns various ways of both identifying with and rejecting this position, suggesting alternative identities and ways of being. Parallel to the individualization of environmental responsibility, contemporary capitalist societies are oriented towards values of mobility and affluent consumption, defining the 'good consumer' as one who contributes to economic growth (Urry 2010). Kate Soper (2008) discusses 'alternative hedonism' as a response that questions the values and 'needs' underpinning consumer culture. Alternative hedonism seeks 'an altered conception of what it is to flourish and to enjoy a "high" standard of living' (Soper 2008, p. 571).

In the next and concluding section, we will discuss the implications of our analysis for understanding the effects of individualized responsibility and the idea of green consumption. Before this, we note some limitations to our analysis. One possibility not covered by our literature review is that affluent or excessive consumption expresses resistance to the notions of green consumption and/or individualized responsibility. Several recent studies of affluent or 'excessive' consumption focus mainly on drugs, alcohol, gambling, and other 'deviant' behaviour. Based on the present literature search, we conclude that few, if any, studies explicitly raise the issue of affluent consumption as a conscious act of resistance. We do not suggest that the variations in how people make sense of individualized responsibility described above include all possible responses. Our analysis of the literature review demonstrates that individualized responsibility is a reality, meaning that it is a form of governing and a way to address people today.

Conclusions

If we understand governance not as a set of institutions, but as a practical activity that can be studied 'at the level of the rationalities, programmes, techniques and subjectivities which underpin it and give it its form and effect' (Walters 2012, p. 2), then we also need to focus on people's responses to particular forms of governance. Contemporary green governmentality is an indistinct but potent mode of governance. It is indistinct because a number of public and private actors – sometimes via unclear means and with unclear agendas – together construct a discourse concerning the issue of individual environmental responsibility. At the same time, it is potent because it is based on what can be considered a righteous quest, to engage citizens in urgent environmental action.

Although the main message of contemporary green governmentality is indistinct, its message concerning what needs to be done is clear. The expectation is that individuals should contribute by making minor adjustments in their daily lives and, above all, by being responsible consumers. This type of individualized responsibility may result in the 'depoliticization of environmental degradation' in that we are addressed as 'consumers first and citizens second' (Maniates 2001,

p. 34, see also Akenji 2014), implying that we can attempt to consume our way out of environmental problems rather than gathering as citizens and finding political solutions to institutional problems (Maniates 2001, p. 37, Kent 2009). However, as the literature suggests, people may respond to this call in varied ways.

First, the pre-reflexive and routinized aspects of consumption are circumscribed by modes of governance, even though focusing on these aspects takes us away from the ways in which people do or do not identify with the 'responsible consumer'. As people's concerns and identities arise through multiple relationships between people, technologies, and environments, it is important to consider these aspects because the ways in which such relationships are formed can entail more or less friction with particular forms of governing.

Second, we note that when people try to make sense of their own actions and responsibilities, even when they reject certain dimensions of the imperative to be responsible consumers, they are actively participating in the practices that underpin such forms of governance and give form and effect to presupposed subject positions. Some struggle with feelings of guilt, and try to adjust by negotiating their own identity in relation to others, which implies that consumer responsibility entails the subjectivation of the individual, not only as responsible for remedying environmental problems but also as a 'polluter'.

Third, there is a range of literature focusing on political consumption and anti-consumption, which can be interpreted as responses to individualized responsibility that suggest other subject positions by acting out and identifying with collective identities. Whereas some may be insulted by what they deem 'simplistic framings of socio-political relations' (Hobson 2013, p. 62), others reject the whole idea of green consumption as a path to a sustainable society, and engage in political criticism and anti-consumption, which can be seen as protests against a narrowing of political agency and against what constitutes our conceptions of 'a good life' (Soper 2008). To this we can add another response that expresses political agency: consumers becoming mobilized in environmental NGOs that put political pressure on companies and governmental authorities to adapt their governance strategies (Micheletti and Stolle 2012).

However, even though there are some important differences between responses that give form and substance to the 'responsible consumer' subject position by negotiating its boundaries and responses that express alternative subject positions (e.g. collective and political identities), there are also large overlaps. For example, we can see expressions of resistance as well as compliance in both types of responses. By focusing both on the rationalities and technologies of responsabilization and on possible responses to the assigned responsibility, we can see that these two dimensions of environmental governance are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. The various responses to the assigned responsibility do not mean that people necessarily accept individual responsibility, but the current post-ecological condition shapes and limits not

only the forms of engagement but also what is seen as negotiable and non-negotiable (Blühorn 2013).

Regarding environmental governance and responses to responsabilization, it would be valuable for further research to systematically compare what constitutes 'deviant' consumer behaviour, considering both radical anti-consumption and excessive consumption (cf. Amine and Gicquel 2011). While many studies have examined groups of people who either more or less accept this responsibility or who reject the subject position of the responsible consumer by various forms of (collective) anti-consumption, people who engage in 'excessive consumption' as a way to resist the subject position of the responsible consumer have been neglected in studies of green consumption. Attending to this group might lead us away from 'resistance', as we do not know on what basis 'excessive consumption' is justified or made sense of. It would, however, contribute substantially to an understanding of the processes by which people negotiate the subject position not only of the responsible consumer but also of the 'polluter'. Such studies should be combined with studies of governing techniques addressing questions such as: Who is targeted by campaigns, advertisements, or political initiatives to promote pro-environmental behaviours? Who is most susceptible to such appeals? What other governing techniques (justified by other rationalities and in other fields of governance) intersect with and/or contradict the individual as 'polluter' or 'responsible consumer'?

Attending to the rationalities and techniques of governance combined with studying how people make sense of and respond to prescribed identities will continue to constitute an important approach to studying environmental issues and responsabilization, not least because new forms of governance are continuously being requested, tested, and experimented with.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Note

1. In the literature search, we used the Sociological Abstracts database. The search terms (used in various combinations) were: 'affluent consum*', 'anti-enviro*', 'climate change', 'dumpster div*', 'energy, environ*', 'excess* consum*', 'freegan, green, sustainab*', 'hedonis*', 'indiffer*', 'individ*', 'neglect, non-enviro*', 'ordinary consum*', 'political consum*', and 'voluntary simplicity'. The selection of literature was based on reading titles and abstracts, resulting in a selection of 27 studies published during the 2001–2014 period. These studies – each with its own specific aim – are based primarily on qualitative interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic studies of people of various classes, ages, and nationalities from Western democracies. This literature search was complemented with literature found through references in the identified publications and with additional relevant publications found in other ways.

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