FINDING AN "ULTIMATE TRUTH": UNCOVERING MORAL ECONOMIES ON WASTE-TO-ENERGY INCINERATION IN BALTIMORE

by

Tanisha Washington
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
Anthropology

Committee:

_____  Director

_____

_____

_____  Department Chairperson

_____  Dean, College of Humanities and
                                                                        Social Sciences

Date:  _____       Summer Semester 2021
                                                                George Mason University
                                                                Fairfax, VA

Finding an "Ultimate Truth": Uncovering Moral Economies on Waste-to-Energy
Incineration in Baltimore

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts at George Mason University

by

Tanisha Washington
Bachelor of Arts
Christopher Newport University, 2018

Director: Christopher Morris, Professor
Department of Anthropology

Summer Semester 2021
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

## DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to all the kind and nurturing souls who have kept me grounded, motivated, and inspired throughout this entire process. The first soul worth commemorating is my grandfather, James "Dick" Richard Washington, as his light and that of my ancestors compels me to new inconceivable heights I did not know I could dream of. I recognize that without his strength and those of my forebearers like his wife Geneva, Grandma Nita, and (great) Grandma Mary Francis, that I am able to live in this moment and write this text. In this regard, I have to say "thank you" to all those in my present who believed, empowered, and encouraged me to see this thesis to the end which includes my life partner Joseph, my best friend and mom Angela, my father Ralph, my brother Darius, and my trusted canine Bubba. Lastly and most importantly is this thesis dedicated to the little Washingtons: Khalia, Maysun, and Myles. May this work serve as inspirational proof to my future self and little ones to come that we can do anything we put our minds and hearts to.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF FIGURES

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Black, Indigenous, People of Color ................................................................................ BIPOC
Baltimore Refuse Energy Systems Company ....................................................... BRESCO
Chesapeake Bay Foundation ....................................................................................... CBF
Chesapeake Bay Trusts ................................................................................................ CBT
Critical Race Theory ..................................................................................................... CRT
Energy Justice Network ................................................................................................ EJN
Healthy Harbor .............................................................................................................. HH
Institutional Systems Provisions ................................................................................... ISP
National Park Service .................................................................................................... NPS
Nongovernmental Organization ................................................................................. NGO
Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard ......................................................................... RPS

# ABSTRACT

FINDING AN "ULTIMATE TRUTH": UNCOVERING MORAL ECONOMIES ON WASTE-TO-ENERGY INCINERATION IN BALTIMORE

Tanisha Washington, M.A

George Mason University, 2021

ThesisDirector: Dr. Christopher Morris

This thesis adds to the anthropological literature of morality as it seeks to understand the innerworkings of the moral economy of waste-to-energy incineration in Baltimore. The objective of this thesis is to ascertain the mechanisms that perpetuate this injustice which is completed by employing a moral-economic framework that extrapolates stakeholder priorities in three levels of analysis including the State regulation of waste incineration, the varying stakeholder groups and their moral inclinations of the market, and the agency expressed by nonprofit workers organizing around environmental issues in these contexts. Findings reveal that the State's validity of waste-to-energy incineration as a viable source of renewable energy morally legitimizes the negative health outcomes and ecological degradation incurred in the market. However, this contingency is being challenged by nonprofit workers who morally prioritize the amplification of the collective needs of the community as defined by the residents themselves.

# INTRODUCTION

When one thinks of Baltimore, several *conflicting* images may come to mind which may portray the city in a negative light highlighting the high rates of crime, homelessness, and corruption. On the other hand, positive images of Baltimore's multitude of outings may arise such as exploring the Inner Harbor, visiting the National Aquarium, or strolling through Fort McHenry National Monument. Another potential fun activity is to take a tour with the Healthy Harbor Initiative of the Waterfront Partnership of Baltimore where you can learn about the cool innovative ways environmental degradation is being tackled. The initiative's most famous face is Mr. Trash Wheel who is a solar and water-powered trash inceptor that eats up the debris floating down the Jones Falls River. Mr. Trash Wheel has single-handedly captured over 700,000 plastic bags, over 12 million cigarette butts, and over one million plastic bottles plus more—he was instrumental in helping pass the Baltimore city comprehensive Bag Reduction Act as well as the statewide ban of Styrofoam food containers. Still with all these great feats, one still has to ponder Mr. Trash Wheel's never-ending appetite for trash, because what happens to all the things Mr. Trash Wheel eats? The answer: it ends up in the real belly of the beast, the incinerator. On his website, Mr. Trash Wheel proudly notes the fact that the trash he eats is "incinerated to **generate electricity."** Perhaps this would have been a *fun* fact if the externalities produced by waste-to-energy (WTE) incineration did

not cause heightened respiratory issues for workers and predominantly low-income and African American communities living nearby. This is where the ethnographic puzzle arises around the contradictory behavior of how nonprofit workers who embrace sustainable energy to save the environment actually participate in (not creating but) perpetuating climate injustices associated with waste-to-energy incineration. Before we paint these environmental nonprofit workers, Mr. Trash Wheel, and Baltimore into a corner of being right or wrong, it is important to peer deeper into the nuances surrounding waste-to-energy incineration which I assert can be analytically undertaken via the development of moral economies and the employment of semi-structured interviews among nonprofit workers.

Baltimore was chosen as the primary location for this study due to the prolific amount of environmental nonprofit organizations. Additionally, like most cities, Baltimore has many social issues that result in precarious conditions like poverty and homelessness. Therefore, there is a need to understand the synthesis of how concern about local ecosystems and the welfare of Baltimoreans collide. This outlook may be conceptualized as environmental justice. But for the purpose of this study, climate justice will be the framework used to go beyond the reductionist approach of the former, which centers on the disproportionate effects of environmental hazards on vulnerable groups. Climate justice furthers this claim by extending the scope to incorporate how the local and global phenomenon of climate change disproportionately affects those who least contributed to climate change, such as the predominantly low-income and African American urbanites who live near Wheelabrator's waste-to-energy incineration plant known as the Baltimore Refuse Energy Systems Company (BRESCO). Baltimore is a suitable fieldsite for analysis

as it has been a location filled with contentious debate surrounding the vitality of waste-to-energy incineration as a legitimate form of clean renewable energy.

Extricating the moral sentiments invoked around WTE incineration will demonstrate why and how the problem persists. Specifically, the moral economies framework will outline key stakeholders and their priorities with a prime focus on the State, Baltimore City Council, Wheelabrator and nonprofit workers. This framework is ideal to utilize as it has the potential to firstly, illustrate how ethics are performed and distributed. Secondly, a lens of moral economies prioritizes a political economist approach to understand how values and ethics are created among classes and different social groups by assuming all economies are inherently moral (Palomera and Vetta 2016). Moreover, comprehending the issue of waste-to-energy incineration via moral economies significantly expands on previous literature conducted on Baltimore by going beyond the public health analysis of correlating asthma rates to air pollution (Kelly and Burkart 2017) or trying to understand the politics around incineration (Ahmann 2019). Therefore, understanding how nonprofit workers from the Chesapeake Bay Trust (CBT), the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF), Energy Justice Network (EJN), and the Healthy Harbor initiative (HH) of the Waterfront Partnership of Baltimore develop a moral economy around waste incineration that prioritizes the need of community as defined by the community itself.

This project attempts to delineate the moral economies surrounding waste-to-energy incineration by prioritizing how nonprofit workers exercise and negotiate their ethics of community-first against moral structures presented by the State and other proponents of waste incineration. This thesis will outline the literature on political

economy, an anthropology of ethics, and moral economies. Next, the methods will divulge the steps around conducting semi-structured interviews and an exploratory content analysis. The discussion section will reveal three parts into the window of waste incineration's moral economy by outlining how it is regulated, how different groups moralize it, and how individuals act in the everyday on their ethical interests. Lastly, a conclusion to summarize how these findings within each layer congeal will reveal how the issue of WTE incineration is maintained and how nonprofit workers are responding morally to the injustice. The objective of this thesis is to outline the moral economies unfolding around waste-to-energy in Baltimore to understand how the issue is perpetuated by the State and how nonprofit workers are contending morally by putting the community first within these contexts.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

For this study, three primary research areas have been chosen to uncover how environmental workers prioritize and negotiate their ethics around waste-to-energy incineration: political economy, anthropology of ethics, and moral economies. A political-economic framework situates WTE incineration by allowing the phenomena to be examined on multiple sociopolitical and economic scales that range from the national or federal level to a local level. This capability of scalability within the political-economic framework allows capitalistic motivations to be extracted. An anthropology of ethics background will lay the foundation to understand how ethics are maintained and disseminated. Lastly, the synthesis of these two research areas, involving political economy and ethics, provides a window into the study of moral economies; this framework simultaneously prioritizes the theoretical needs to comprehend ethical production and how it is embedded within an economy. Moral economies are significant to this study as this lens facilitates the extrication of values and ethics tied to the sociopolitical economy of WTE incineration. This literature review is meant to lay the groundwork to understand why and how waste-to-energy incineration persist and how nonprofit workers are contending morally within this context.

In her study of waste-to-energy incineration in Baltimore, Chloe Ahmann (2019) demonstrates how subjunctive politics of waste and race among residents maintain the

operation of waste-to-energy incinerators as a rational solution to cope with future

uncertainties caused by climate change (Ahmann 2019). Such work however does little to

study up (Nader 1972) to reveal other sources of rhetoric that entangle nonprofits roles

in affecting environmental and social change against Wheelabrator especially since their

facility is the largest stationary emitter of nitrogen oxide (Kelly and Burkhart 2017).

Although there are many public health studies that show how the disparities in exposure

to environmental and climate risk and injustice are tied to poor health outcomes (Buse

and Patrick 2020; Katz, Cheff, and O'Campo 2015; Kelly and Burkhart 2017), there is still

a need to understand how ethics operate in the context of waste-to-energy incineration.

**A Lens of Political Economy**

A political economist understanding of WTE incineration demonstrates how the

mechanisms of capitalism on a national scale is synthesized into new cultural forms on

the local and regional levels. Classical political economists prioritized studying "the

political character of capitalist exchange" as a means "to understand the morally

exploitative dimensions of wealth distribution" (Erickson and Murphy 2017, 145). This

facet is explicated through the origins of political economy which are found in Marxism

which centers on dialectical materialism. In 1848, seminal scholars Karl Marx and

Friedrich Engels published *The Communist Manifest* outlining the tenants of dialectical

materialism as a framework to capture the notion that social relations are determined by

an individual's relation to the means of production (or how they earn a living).

Moreover, this Marxist understanding of how one works (and whether or not they own

the means of production or are exploited by it), sheds light on the political economist

perspective by illuminating how culture and society are informed by unequal access to capital and power (Marx and Engels 2018). In short, the ability for economic structures to influence social relations (which hegemonically reproduces inequitable systems and corresponding ideologies) makes it difficult to unravel personal thought and agency from built up internalized systems of oppression and the external sociohistorical contexts they are born in.

A political economist understanding of WTE incineration demonstrates how the mechanisms of capitalism on a global and national scale is synthesized into new cultural forms on the local and regional levels. Classical political economists prioritized studying "the political character of capitalist exchange" as a means "to understand the morally exploitative dimensions of wealth distribution" (Erickson and Murphy 2017, 145). Therefore, the underlying notion of political economy asserts that inequalities are reproduced, addressed, and understood differently on a variety of regional and local scales. Most notably does sustainability researcher, Elke Pirgmaier (2020) lead the charge of synthesizing theories of political economy to explain how the restraints of capitalism deny social intervention to reach social justice and planetary health. They quote Ngugi wa Thion'o from *Decolonizing the Mind* offering, "Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others" (Pirgmaier 2020, 277). This insight predicates how economic structures influence social makeups and interactions making it pivotal to understanding those that control and benefit from the economic base; States deserve to be analytically prioritized for their role in reproducing social relations informed by capitalistic interest which reverberates varyingly among

socioeconomic classes (Hampton 2015). Therefore, it is within the power of the State and how it regulates economic processes that influence stakeholder assumptions and morality of the market.

**A Second Lens on Ethics**

An anthropology of ethics is important as it provides a complementary theoretical framework to the political economist lens. Ethical considerations are vital to this study to understand how nonprofit workers are enacting agency and using their lived experiences to uphold and negotiate their ethics. Author of "Ordinary Ethics" Michael (Pirgmaier 2020) argues that locutionary judgements and criteria are the motivational forces in employing ethics. Honesty is an important aspect as well as he notes, "Truthfulness and committing to specific ways of doing or being are fundamentally ethical matters" (Lambeck 2010, 47). In this regard, Lambeck believes ethics are a phenomenon to practice, not a static set of values—thus deserving methodological attention to the mundane. Morality anthropologist Jarrett Zigon (2007) similarly believes ethics are performed but not in the trivialities of everyday life like Lambeck but in specific moments of referred to as the moral breakdown. They theorized the moral breakdown as the moment when ethical demand is experienced whereby the self becomes reflexively aware of a problem at hand and thus employs ethics to return to the everyday state of living unreflexively. Another primary distinction between Lambeck and Zigon is their theoretical underpinnings as Lambeck's assertion of ordinary ethics takes on an Aristotelian approach while Zigon's moral breakdown follows the Foucauldian approach.

Ethics anthropologist, Cheryl Mattingly contends that understanding the similarities and (more notably) the differences of Aristotelian and Foucauldian approaches is vital to the discipline's growth of studying ethics. Both approaches deny a universal set of rules that dictate moral reasoning and action. Also, both virtue ethics framings assert that the moral is associated with self-care practices and is a "communal enterprise" whereby no one is exempt from "the technologies of virtue and the aspirations about the good life to which individuals ascribe" (Mattingly 2012, 164). Distinctly, Aristotelian (also known as first-person and humanist) ethics are centered on "agency, experience, and motive" in how individual agents act on their intentions, judgements, and desires (Mattingly 2012, 165). Conversely, a Foucauldian framework re-envisions 'I' and 'we' as the locus of control and agency to being situated and shaped by historical and cultural contexts. Moreover, this framing fosters that individual ethics are explained by societal moral codes by imploring what kind of self is produced due to the structures they live within. Mattingly (2012) believes the separation of these two approaches is significant and that future anthropologist should follow the humanist perspective as the Foucauldian approach delimits moral creativity and opportunity for social change.

## A Synthesis of Moral Economies

The political economy framework is foundational to the complementary work on ethics in building the scaffolding for moral economies. The term moral economies was coined in 1968 by E.P. Thompson in his work on food riots in medieval England. Thompson created this term to capture the sentiments of justice endowed with the dominated class. More recent literature however shifts theoretical weight from the

economy to the moral (Fassin 2011; Daston 1995) where the focus is on how values and ethics are circulated. Other studies ascertain that both the dissemination of values and ethics is prioritized as well as its embedded nature within economic structures and relations (Thompson 1991; Fassin 2020; Palomera and Vetta 2016; Edelman 2005). Moral economist researchers Jaime Palomera and Theodora Vetta (2016) proclaim that "The strength of this [moral economy] perspective lies in its capacity to highlight the ambiguous logics and values that guide and sustain livelihood practices, by looking at the dynamic fields of struggle around the boundaries of what is good and acceptable, their power hierarchies and the political projects they might inform" (414). It is with this proclivity that the moral economy framework lends itself to extrapolating key stakeholders, their ethical priorities, and its associated economic dispositions.

Significantly, consumption scholar Kathryn Wheeler builds a methodological scaffolding to match the theoretical prowess of the moral economies framework. Wheeler (2019) outlines three interdependent layers as the (1) State regulation of the economy, (2) the collective customs and critical discourse through which different groups in society actively moralize the market and (3) the lay normativities of consumers" (277). The first level is meant to recognize the legitimate power the State has in promoting and sanctioning economic processes that result in beneficial or harmful impacts to society and the environment. The second level lies within the intentions and propensities of various groups seeking to enact their moral priorities on the market. The third level is intended to capture the everyday norms of the individual in how they act according to their ethical proclivities. Wheeler contends that these layers act flexibly on one another to shape economic processes which can further influence how institutions, businesses,

10

communities, and individuals act with morality within markets; this system of interactions is historically situated in what Wheeler deems the institutional system of provision (ISP). The ISP is vital to pinpointing clashes and synergies within the market, making it an agile framework to remedy conflicts by identifying moral structures and highlighting agency for social change (Wheeler 2019). Moreover, this conceptualization of moral economies has the capacity to contend with morality as maintained by systems (in the Foucauldian sense) while also acknowledging the capability of individual experiences and agency to shape these structures (and be self-interpreted as such as denoted in the Aristotelian ethical approach). I explicitly emphasize both the economy and the moral in this moral-economic framework to significantly distinguish how socioeconomic differences and racial representation attribute to the negotiation of the moral viability of WTE incineration.

## METHODS

The geographic focus of this project is Baltimore which was chosen due to its location on the Chesapeake Bay and its strides towards cleaner water, fresher air, and trash-free parks and streets. The city is a maritime port and prides itself on its history characterized by blue-collar industry (Ahmann 2019). Moreover, Baltimore is a diverse city with a history rife with race-based riots and racial tensions that precede the 2015 policed-murder of Freddie Gray (Jones 2017). Furthermore, the NGO sector in Baltimore is robust, filling the city's need to address common social issues (such as poverty and crime) and environmental degradation issues (such as poor water and air quality).

Environmental nonprofits have been chosen to be the focal point of this analysis which include: Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF), Chesapeake Bay Trust, the Healthy Harbor (HH) Initiative of the Waterfront Partnership of Baltimore, and Energy Justice Network (EJN). These NGOs were chosen for being committed to protecting natural resources and promoting access to diverse audiences. I have selected to study Energy Justice because of its drafting the Baltimore Clean Air Act and its strong commitment to climate justice. These organizations were chosen specifically to understand how waste and water pollution are politically connected in terms of managing the tradeoffs and priorities of these chosen nonprofit organizations. This study was conducted virtually via a password-secure Zoom meeting to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Participants of this ethnographic study included environmental nonprofit workers interested in clean water (CBF, CBT, HH) and energy (EJN) initiatives. The major data collection method for this research was semi-structured interviews with employees from each organization. I conducted four 30 to 45-minute-long interviews virtually and remotely from my home in Alexandria, Virginia with one individual from each NGO. The semi-structured manner of these interviews has allowed nonprofit workers to show which matters surrounding climate justice are most important to them, revealing how they are tackling and prioritizing WTE incineration. This approach is significant to employing thematic analysis as it allows patterns of beliefs and thought processes to rise across the data set. Thus, the semi-structured format of these interviews were key to illuminating how nonprofit workers use their agency and lived experiences to bridge their ethical priorities, to the needs of the community, and to the missions of their nonprofits.

Additionally, to understand how the moral economy is developed around WTE incineration, I spent four months conducting a content analysis of screenshots from Fort McHenry National Monument webpage. This content analysis was meant to address the narrative around racial inclusion and access to natural resources. Additionally, research was conducted to supplement the interviews of nonprofit workers by outlining the priorities of other stakeholders including the State, Wheelabrator and Baltimore city. The primary analytical framework used to present the findings will be Wheeler's (2019) conceptualization of moral economies as employed in her study on consumption. Rather than consumption, WTE incineration has taken center stage to extrapolate the moral contingencies.

## THROUGH THE LENS OF MORAL ECONOMIES

An important component of the moral economies framework is its ability to capture socio-historical contexts on macro and micro scales, making it a prudent fit to grasp the correlation of consequential contingencies of waste-to-energy incineration in Baltimore to the broader impacts of climate change on local, regional, and national levels. This facet is vital to understanding the circulation of ethics and values as it presents moral economies as dynamic, never fixed entities (Fassin 2011; Palmera and Vetta 2016) able to capture a composite of three levels of analysis: how the State regulates the economy, the collective discourse different groups engage in which moralizes the market, and the everyday practices of individuals (Wheeler 2017, 277). To recall, the innerworkings of these three layers upon one another forms what Wheeler conceptualizes as the institutional systems of provisions that explains how the market is always moralized and shaped by socio-historical and temporal contexts.

Furthermore, because the ISP is comprised of these different layers of scaled analysis, it provides a critical lens that allows this contingent duality to take shape and shift as needed to capture (1) how morality and ethics are maintained by systems and (2) how individuals exert their agency and practice their ethical judgements to further and transform these systems. Being able to simultaneously hold a Foucauldian and Aristotelian approach to ethical considerations demonstrates the essential core of moral

economies as it is able to extract State regulatory agendas, outline the discursive moral gaps and intersections of stakeholders, and depict on an individual level how "lived experience" inform actions (Wheeler 2017, 277). Understanding the moral economy around waste incineration via the extrication of institutional systems provisions will demonstrate the nuanced complexities in which environmental nonprofit workers contend.

**Regulating Waste-to-Energy Incineration**

Since the first layer of Wheeler's (2017) framework aims to clarify the role States play in influencing behavior and beliefs via regulation, it is pertinent to outline the Maryland's position on waste-to energy incineration. The point of this first level is to understand how the State regulates waste incineration. In this context, it provides a window into the moralizing structures in which nonprofit works negotiate in. In Maryland, the Public Service Commission details that the State's Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard (RPS) program has the purpose of identifying and developing a profile comprised of renewable supplies. This is done by requiring energy suppliers to meet an approved minimum of retail electricity that is sourced from what the commission deems allowable which is delineated by their classification of Tier 1 or Tier 2 energy sources. Waste-to-energy incineration is labeled Tier 1 and therefore shares the same status with solar, wind, methane from a landfill, geothermal, ocean, some hydroelectric, poultry litter-to-energy, and refuse derived fuel. Tier 2 is comprised of larger hydroelectric power facilities. If these suppliers do not meet the minimum retail energy expectation, they are penalized with a fine for failing to acquire enough renewable energy credits. From the outset, we begin to see the foundational mechanisms that foster and promote

waste-to-energy incineration as the State program, RPS, is meant to recognize "environmental and **consumer benefits** associated with renewable energy." I have drawn your attention to consumer benefits to acknowledge the subjectivity of this statement as nonprofit workers do not see the negative health impacts of WTE incineration as a benefit. This point will be revisited later in the section on Moralizing the Market. Additionally, de-prioritizing clean energy by the State cultivates an ambiguous space for issues of protection and accessibility to natural resources to flourish. Thus, a lens on critical race theory (CRT) is pertinent to understand how institutional policies (like the State-led RPS program and its classification of WTE incineration as renewable) disproportionately impacts low-income and African American people. Critical race theory (Delgado and Stefancic 2017) challenges the exclusion of BIPOC viewpoints from institutional processes.

Furthermore, it is with this contextual knowledge of the State's perspective and operationalization of WTE incineration as a viable sustainable source of renewable energy that elucidates the divisional positions of proponents and opponents on the issue of waste incineration. Stakeholder positions of the State, Wheelabrator, and Baltimore City become ubiquitous as Fire from the Energy Justice Network shared the contention around the Baltimore Clean Air Act:

> That was a bill that my boss wrote that we got passed in February of '19 which was awesome. We figured Wheelabrator would try to sue but they sued on so many ridiculous grounds. They try to sue on a civil rights ground which was ridiculous and all this stuff but their main argument was that 'Hey you know the State is the one who sets air permit quality. You can't do that. You're not a State,' even though State law specifically says that you can as a municipality have stricter air quality standards, you just can't have weaker ones but the judge that oversaw their suit decided with their argument even though the law does not say what Wheelabrator

suggest it says and so we push the city to appeal. We had a die-in, this whole thing. The day we had the die-in in front of the incinerator, the former mayor had agreed to appeal but we uncovered in the Summer that he was trying to do some backroom dealing to extend the contract and have a settlement because the thought that 'Oh you know well we're not going to win this case' even though, clearly the law was on our side so he backed down, gave them a ten-year contract as part of the agreement and they are supposed to strengthen their nitrogen oxide standards but they're only going to spend about 40% of what we actually know that they need to spend to upgrade their nitrogen oxide emission and so they're... yeah it's just kind of maddening that the out-going mayor brought into this aspect that we need this incinerator an 'We're so screwed if we don't have it' and just chose to be a coward quite honestly and that's led us to this new contract.

Here, we are allowed a window to peer into how the priorities of the city council became co-opted by the interests of the State favoring Wheelabrator and waste incineration which fits the rationale depicted by the fact that RPS considers waste-to-energy incineration as a Tier 1 energy source. Additionally, anger and intensity are felt as Fire called out the out-going mayor of Baltimore for playing both sides as a proponent and opponent of waste incineration. Regardless of the political shenanigans, Fire believed the end of waste-to-energy incineration is closer than proponents would admit as they continued,

We feel there are ways to still push the incinerator out sooner than a decade from now and we're going to utilize all of those ways that we've looked into so I'm excited to see that come sooner than 2031/ 32. We were so pissed in November and the thing was—just really quickly so on November 4th was when they tried to get the new contract signed with the incinerator so the day after the elections, so that's already shady and then on November 2nd, Baltimore county they were sued by Wheelabrator for not sending them enough trash over the previous year and they had tried to sue them for $32 or $38 million dollars in damages because they haven't sent them enough trash here and so they decided to settle with Wheelabrator as well that they were going to extend their contract for six years and it would be mandated to send 250,000 tons to the incinerator every year or pay a penalty for it and their argument was well we have to do this or otherwise we'll end up having to pay that $38 million dollars. Well the contract that they signed is for $56 million dollars so I mean

you're still paying more money even if you didn't try to fight the damn thing. And it was such a dumb argument and they just shadily passed it and if it had not been for the council people, it kind of would have been like a package of contract agreements and they would have voted on it without anything at all without having a conversation about it so it was a zoom meeting, still in the pandemic so like it could have been done without any issue and there was a small conversation about it even though people were still misinformed that would have cost the council but just shady, shady, shady.

Again, Fire's frustration around Baltimore County's decision to sign a more expensive contract with Wheelabrator, which seems illogical due to the financial components, is the epitome of the diverging trajectories of waste-to-energy incineration as sustainably renewable or not. Again, this anecdote around Baltimore County's contract reflects the issue of how waste incineration is regulated by the State as the RPS program recognizes the eligibility of PJM States. This means that 13 States and Washington D.C. are eligible for renewable energy credits because they fall under PJM's purview of the transmission of wholesale electricity. Proponents of waste-to-energy incineration prioritize economic considerations because the State-led RPS program will financially penalize participants like Wheelabrator if they are not meeting their prescribed minimum of generated electricity for retail consumption. The program asserts that this consequence is in place to promote the generation of Tier 1 renewable energy sources. Still, the moral question remains of whether or not WTE incineration should be considered renewable which calls into question who benefits and suffers from the current regulation of WTE as renewable. The negotiation of this moral boundary by Baltimore city, Wheelabrator, and participating environmental nonprofits will be explored further in the next layer of moral economies.

**Moralizing the Market**

The second layer of analysis centers on how various stakeholders prioritize their moral ideation of the market. Wheeler states the purpose of this level as where the "impetus for these actions [promoting and discouraging sanctions] may be found in the second layer of the framework as social movements, community activists, businesses, public figures and academic critiques actively challenge, defend and appropriate different understandings of market morality which in turn has the potential to shape the market in line with their image of it" (2017, 277). The three primary groups that deserve attention are Wheelabrator, Baltimore City Council, and environmental nonprofits. These groups were chosen due to the varying priorities on waste-to-energy incineration. Wheelabrator would like the continuation of the incinerator. Baltimore City has mixed priorities but should be considered pro-incineration. As Fire revealed, the City signed a new 10-year contract with Wheelabrator in 2020. Nonprofits have varying priorities based on their mission statements; therefore, some NGOs like Energy Justice Network are definitely anti-incineration while others like the Healthy Harbor Initiative are more ambiguous.

Wheelabrator is moralizing the market of waste incineration as a green local source of renewable energy as their website boasts,

> The Wheelabrator Baltimore waste-to-energy facility converts up to 2,250 tons of post-recycled everyday waste from Baltimore area homes and businesses as a local, sustainable fuel to generate as much as 64.5 gross MW of clean, renewable electricity for sale to the local utility — the equivalent of supplying the electrical needs of ~40,000 Maryland homes as well as its own operations.

Their site continues that they serve over 250 businesses as they "create a local-energy ecosystem that recycles metals, provides power, reduces the need for landfill, and lowers

CO2 emissions." They pride themselves on diverting energy from the landfill which reduces methane emissions. Wheelabrator considers themselves as a staple in Baltimore's revitalization for over three decades. Besides the providing renewable energy, they consider them viably green for the initiatives they created which include partnering with Maryland Department of Natural Resources to foster an aquaculture facility. They also work with communities and business on projects to teach waste reduction as exemplified by their We Can Baltimore project. With this regard for the environment, Wheelabrator is emplacing themselves and the role of waste incineration as essential to Baltimore's functioning as an already green city with sustainable energy practices.

To concur, Baltimore City would agree on this point which would explain why the Mayor entered into a new contract with Wheelabrator. In an interview with Earth from Healthy Harbor, they noted "I mean Baltimore is bought and sold on keeping the incinerator for instance." However, the city's stance may be more nuanced than that as they are currently implementing a project called Less Waste, Better Baltimore. This plan acknowledges that the landfill in Baltimore only has a capacity of about seven more years and that waste-to-energy incineration may not be a viable long-term option. The plan consisted of three main components that included research on the city's waste and recycling habits, analyzing stakeholder priorities, and developing a plan in the form of a set of recommendations that are able to receive community feedback. On June 23, 2021, the Baltimore City Department of Public Works completed a press release announcing a $9.5 million public-private partnership meant to increase recycling rates. Partners of the project include The Recycling Partnership, with American Beverage's *Every Bottle Back* initiative, Closed Loop Partners, Dow Packing & Specialty Plastics, the Baltimore

Civic Fund, and Rehrig Pacific. The project will provide free recycling bins to 190,000

households along with training materials. The press release quotes Mayor Brandon M.

Scott as saying, "My administration is committed to implementing the City's Less Waste,

Better Baltimore Plan and building greener, healthier communities." Additionally the CEO

of the Recycling Partnership, Keefe Harrison, shares his thoughts:

> With this investment in Baltimore, The Partnership's largest cart grant to
> date, every curbside-eligible household in the city of Baltimore will receive
> educational materials and a recycling cart at no cost, making the city's
> recycling services more equitable and accessible to all and improving the
> health and safety of sanitation workers while enabling the city to divert
> more waste from landfills and incinerators, supporting greater
> environmental justice.

It is in this second layer of analysis that the sentiments around waste incineration by

Baltimore city fluctuate depending on known and unknown factors that range from

personal motivations to meeting the needs of their constituents.

As mentioned, NGOs have varying missions which means they have different

iterations of how the market should reflect their interests when it comes to waste-to-

energy incineration. The primary division between the Chesapeake Bay Trust (CBT), the

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF), and Healthy Harbor Initiative (HH) compared to

Energy Justice Network (EJN) are the former NGOs are interested in water quality. In

contrast, EJN is concerned with redressing polluting energy and waste technologies. For

instance, Wind explained that CBT's mission and values were "science and innovation,"

"diversity and inclusion," and "accountability and transparency." Flow from CBF shared

that their goals are to "reduce pollution and improve water quality of all the waters and

streams that lead to the Chesapeake Bay and specifically Baltimore we work on policy

and regulation that protects residents and water quality. Also provide equitable resources

for everyone that lives in the Chesapeake Bay watershed." Similarly, Earth from HH

offered,

> My role is helping Baltimore city residents connect to their natural
> resources or to understand their impact and the role they could play in
> clean water and so it's kind of abstract. That's a little abstract but how it
> relates a lot in Baltimore to people is like everyone wants a clean,
> beautiful neighborhood so its connecting those dots—helping them
> understand how to keep it clean and how it relates to the bigger picture
> of clean waterways which is my mission a Healthy Harbor.

There is an important similarity among Flow's and Earth's remarks: both interviewees

note the importance of connecting residents and locals to their natural resources. This

aspect can be surmised as being part of the "inclusion" value Wind offered as the Trust's

website also states the importance that "local communities benefit from these healthy

resources, and everyone participates in restoring and protecting our natural resource

treasures." Understanding the missions of HH, CBT, and CBF and their prioritization of

water quality (and not clean energy generation) demonstrates the lack of opposition

against the State's agenda on WTE incineration. Conversely, EJN is directly challenging

proponents of WTE incineration as they are moralizing the market to be zero-waste.

With Energy Justice Network's mission pertaining directly to clean energy

sources, they prioritize air quality as their main advocacy focuses on promoting clean

energy, zero-emissions, and zero waste. Contrary to the ambiguous standards put forth

by RPS on environmental and consumer benefits, Fire explained the advantages of

divesting in waste-to-energy incineration by moralizing the market from the resident's

perspective offering,

> We learned that over the years or at least while I've been fighting in
> Baltimore but just when it comes to general citizens obviously they are
> trying to make ends meet, trying to pay bills, and keep their homes and
> everything and support their kids and apartments and stuff. It's not as

easy to just be like 'Let's spend sometime trying to shut down this facility that is not necessarily going to go anywhere soon. It's been here 36 years so but when you start connecting the pieces of well what does that mean if it isn't fought in terms of asthma contributions and lead emissions and mercury emissions, things like that and the fact that we are not the only ones that send trash to our incinerator. It's Baltimore county, the other counties in Maryland. It's a few States that send stuff here in small amounts but like sending it hundreds and hundreds of miles to burn in our backyard and how maddening that is so a lot of people just got really pissed when they started learning about that aspect and they pay attention and want to engage a little bit more so its really important now, and it always has been, but like if anything to speak to the health impacts as well as the economic benefits that can come out of fighting the incinerators and building out in a different way across the northeast...

In these remarks, Fire clearly outlined how transitioning away from incineration will reduce toxic emissions leading to increased health outcomes for those with asthma. Fire also mentioned the potential economic benefits Baltimore can have without relying on Wheelabrator. They elaborated further on the economics of waste incineration by talking around the "misconception" of waste-to-energy as a renewable energy source,

I think a lot of misconception about the process like the fact that we can just toss things into a green bin and it just goes away in this very cradle-to-grave perception... but you realize once you put it in the green bin, 'Oh it's gone,' but in actuality it isn't. You still have to have it dealt with and so for the last 36 years we've said 'Hey you know, go home put it in the bin and then we'll burn it and we'll try to make it seem like it's green energy along the way,' and so a lot of folks/ leadership over the years in particular bought in here, in Baltimore, and in other communities and that it is more sustainable than trying to reduce and reuse and compost, and what have you of manufacture's material and it's just kind of fascinating because we're always worried about if the city has the money to do X, Y, or Z and yet we spend about 10 million dollars a year to burn trash that has at minimum half that value in it when you're burning so it's like we're going to spend $10 million dollars to burn $5 million dollars—that doesn't make any sense but folks don't—I don't know—there's still this assumption that if the incinerator is gone we'll just be swimming in trash and how dare us try to do that to Baltimore...I think there is a lot of classist and racist perspectives built into the assumption that we need to have a trash incinerator... and speaking to some of the council folks over the years, it's very clear that that is still there. Some folks realize that there are classist and racist components to it. Other

> folks probably don't want to realize that they are classist and racist so I
> think that is also playing a role but you know as time goes on we're
> proven more and more right and it'll just be how it goes and hopefully
> people recognize that that's what we need to do.

Fire has moralized the market of WTE incineration as economically erroneous when the

materials being incinerated have monetary value. Additionally, Fire attributes the

misconception of WTE as being maintained by classist and racist values.

Anthropologist Chloe Ahmann (2019) wrote on the subjunctive politics of waste-

to-energy at the Curtis Bay facility in Baltimore. She met residents in south Baltimore to

gauge sentiments about the incinerator in Curtis Bay, trash, and racial relations in the

area. She notes the racist rhetoric of two men: "Lyle's description of poor, black residents

as "roaches" and Scooter's unabashedly racist talk were among the most transparent

narratives of waste, race, and decline that I encountered during fieldwork" (333). The

social identity and significance of these men as residents, incinerator workers, or neither

are unclear in her study. Regardless, it is with these remarks that a CRT framework is

appreciated for its ability to reveal the need to understand the role and ethical value that

racial inclusion and community play in the moral economy of WTE incineration. Cri

Even further, this development of moral economy sheds light on historical master

narratives of racial exclusion when it comes to Black, Indigenous, People of Color's

(BIPOC) relationship with the environment and right to natural resources.  The epitome

of this exclusion is in the fact that the Wilderness Act and the Civil Rights Act were both

passed in 1964 yet had little to no engagement with one another (Finney 2014). The

Wilderness Act affirmed the need to preserve natural resources for future generations

without any diversity or inclusion standards. Nonprofit workers in this study are aware

of these histories of exclusion and often advocate for BIPOC perspective to be included

in programing and engagement efforts. As an example, Wind shared how they advocate

for Latinx communities,

> I think about, kind of as an example, is that a lot of national parks which
> we're trying to get people to go out to you know the uniform for a lot of
> the parks are similar to regular police officers and so in the Latinx
> community, if you see someone like that walking around the park,
> immediately you're not going to feel as safe and you're not going to feel
> as comfortable so I think things that are not always thought about that
> kind of need to be driven forward by people who are passionate about
> this to kind of remind other people so it's definitely currently that maybe
> some staff members including myself that are kind of driving that work a
> little bit more.

Wind's anecdote about Latinx groups feeling included and welcomed is supported by

screenshots taken from the website of the Fort McHenry National Monument. Figure 2

below show the same young white girl twice in what can be assumed are two different

instances. In contrast, there is only one photo of BIPOC kids shown in uniforms alluding

to issues of access and BIPOC representation in nature.

# O! say can you see,...

by the dawn's early light, a large red, white and blue banner? Whose broad stripes and bright stars... were so gallantly streaming...over Fort McHenry! The valiant defense of the fort during the Battle of Baltimore on September 13-14, 1814 inspired Francis Scott Key to write the words that became the U.S. national anthem. The fort's history holds many other stories too, from the Civil War to WWII.



**Plan Your Visit›**

What is open? What is closed? Are there fees? What can I do there? Find answers to all of these questions and more!



**Fees & Passes ›**

Find information about fees and passes to Fort McHenry



**Virtual & Self-Guided Tours ›**

Explore the fort and its grounds through virtual and self-guided tours



**Photos & Multimedia ›**

View the visitor center orientation film, see photo galleries, watch videos, and connect to virtual tours
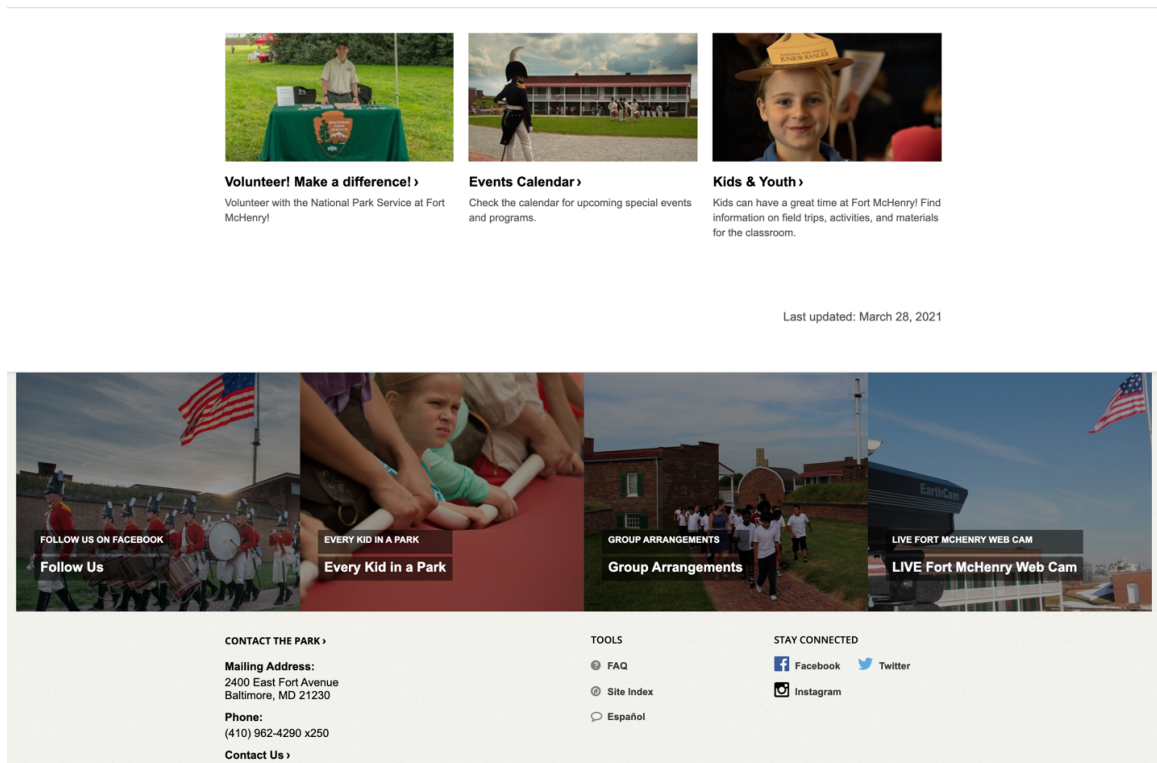
**Figure 1 Fort McHenry Website Top**

**Figure 2 Fort McHenry Website Bottom**

The monument is about a ten-minute drive to Wheelabrator's facility which is less than five miles apart. The correlating undercurrent binding Wheelabrator and Fort McHenry is the (un)conscious role they play in mystifying the rights of BIPOC to clean natural resources. This assertion is based in Wheelabrator's commitment to waste-to-energy incineration despite the ecological and health challenges it poses on predominantly low-income and African American neighborhoods living nearby. Moreover, it is in these master narratives of mystification around who has the right to unpolluted natural resources and thus clean renewable energy that the moral economies of waste-to-energy are shaped and negotiated by the socio-historic contexts in which they are embedded in.

Despite the national and regional socio-historic contexts fostering narratives of racial exclusion, Fire advocates for local's rights to clean natural resources as they noted:

> The high level of police funding, the lack of support for a lot of low income communities and choosing—what are these called, fixes that will never actually work for the city and so to suggest that 'Oh it's progressively run'—it's not progressively run there's just a lot of policies that have been internalized and perpetuated by the folks who have led the city over the last several decades and that has played a role in waste management as well so there's just so many pieces to unpack but my hope now is that folks now more and more are pushing back against that status quo that one day in the next few years we'll see us not having an incinerator here and actually having the zero waste infrastructure which is cheaper to build then selling updated pollution controls at the incinerator which is absolutely ridiculous but it just shows again that the way we're advocating for our rights so.

This statement depicts how the moral economies of waste incineration operate through organizations such as the City Council, which are run by people with internalized unprogressive systems that prefer business as usual instead of radical change. Fire advocates for radical change to happen now by declaring the straight-forward means to implement this change is tied to reallocating funds in the City's budget. The connections of crime and policing are explored further in the third layer where lived experiences of organizing in Baltimore are accounted for in how ethics and values are navigated and negotiated in the moral economy of waste-to-energy incineration.

**Acting on Agency and Lived Experiences**

The third layer of analysis captures how everyday decisions are invoke individualized ethics. This level assumes that actors participate in the moral economy by reflecting on themselves and acting accordingly based on their interests. This layer is significant as it meets the Foucauldian approach to ethics expressed in layer one and two with the Aristotelian approach characterized in this layer. The Aristotelian or humanist

approach to ethics understands the ability of the individual to define their own moral

rules; ethics anthropologist Cheryl Mattingly (2013) clarifies that "moral frameworks

developed within first-person humanist virtue ethics offer a rich vocabulary for

considering humans as 'self-interpreting' moral beings whose perceptions, interpretations

and actions help shape moral subjectivities in the singular as well as the collective" (171).

With this assertion, it is important to provide a more localized backdrop for organizing

around environmental issues like waste incineration in Baltimore to understand how

agency and lived experience shape ethical decisions and actions.

As mentioned in the introduction, Baltimore has many reputations that show the

city in positive and negative light. The nonprofit workers participating in this study are

aware of the social challenges, such as crime and poverty, which influence their approach

to environmental activism. When I asked Earth to tell me how they became a nonprofit

worker for Healthy Harbor, they offered "I just fell in love with community work and I

was kind of doing/ working on a lot of different issues. When I saw this Healthy Harbor

job; I could focus on one issue and it was an issue I had noted in all the community

meetings I had went to in my organizing work. I always heard people talk about—their

major concerns were clean, green, crime, rats and trash. Rats, trash, and things being

cleaned were always at the top of the list." Earth explained later in the interview, "I mean

yeah right, Baltimore's demographic is so divided in a lot of ways that it's hard to talk

about Baltimore as a whole even." When I asked how Baltimore was divided, they

elaborated with

> I mean like there is a huge amount of poverty that the other part of
> Baltimore just can't even fathom. And like right for Maryland being one of
> the richest States in the U.S. and for like a huge—I can't remember the—

for the watershed area that we work in, for majority of the people to be
working under the poverty level is pretty intense and Baltimore is special
in that one neighborhood that's four blocks away from another can have
doubled housing values, so right I think it's why to talk about Baltimore
as a whole because it can be—parts are very different.

Earth is also aware of how poverty and crime drive one another but proudly denounces

Baltimore's reputation as dangerous. They shared,

I think I need to be of Baltimore first in order to even be an advocate in
Baltimore I think and I often am like—I often judge people in a similar
way like the first thing I want to know who is an organizer, is how long
have you lived here. I find myself judging but also it has such a specific… I
don't know, street sense to it like you gotta kind of learn over time. And
being a woman has actually helped me in communities. I worked in some
of the more dangerous—well I live in the second most murderous
neighborhood and I organized for like five years in the most murderous
neighborhood before Healthy Harbor and I don't even know what
murderous—I hate that word because people—murderous means when
you know each other. Usually murder means like you/ the person you are
shooting knows each other and that's not really dangerous for me because
I don't know them so they're not really that dangerous. I mean it's not
really that dangerous…

Earth explicated how most murderous crimes are committed against people the

perpetrator knows personally, in which case they not a target. They are trying to break

up the misleading stereotypes that portray Baltimore's social ills as weaknesses. Similarly,

Fire expounded on the relationship between poverty and crime offering,

…on the crime aspect—I'm glad you brought that up because one of the
things I feel like people still assume is 'Oh we need to police the hell out
of everything in order to deal with crime.' I mean Baltimore spends more
per capita on policing than any city in the country. This is our—well
assuming the new mayor which I'd like to hope changes this a bit but at
least over the last five years prior to him coming in, the city spent $500
million on policing and so two and a half billion dollars over the last two
years on a process that clearly does not work. This is our—2020 was our
sixth straight year of over 300 homicides in the city. Like some violent
crimes did go down… like again if that were the thing that was going to
work, we would have seen the results by now but we haven't. We haven't
bothered to really create an economy that would create jobs and remove
the desperation of these folks putting themselves in the positions where
they feel like "Oh I have to fight for those small crumbs that are available.

That means shooting someone  and feeling disrespect out of it' and I'm glad this mayor put forward a trauma healing bill  and that's like the first city to have this trauma informed care aspect in law and the new folks on that taskforce, or what have you, just got signed on or inducted this past Monday and so there are people who realize the general violence but the trauma related to it and that we [are] actually going to try and face that but in addition we still need to move money out of the police budget to build up jobs, stabilize the housing, to create more business and expand more businesses; and one of the ways to do that would be to put that funding towards zero waste infrastructure and so we are tackling so many pieces. Illegal dumping is still an issue in the city ..but most of the stuff that gets dumped is large bulky stuff that could have been recovered like furniture, mattresses like these pieces are connected and we haven't had leadership in our city, particularly of previous mayors and in previous council folks, at time too but more and more are getting on our side to think outside the box and realize that there is a synergy between economics and environmental justice and so now we are hopeful that this new mayor, Mayor Scott does see that and I think he does. Hopefully we'll see more and more come out.

In this statement Fire dissected the interconnectedness of social justice and climate justice in noting the potential economic and environmental benefits of divesting in the Baltimore police department. Similarly, Flow articulated this socio-ecological entanglement surrounding crime as they explain their reason for returning to environmental work after working at a hospital:

I actually decided to leave and go back kind of to my public health aspirations at my hospital in Baltimore city where I got the community outreach and kind of public health aspect but related it to the environmental/ the environment people were living in. So I noticed in West Baltimore, people were dealing with pollution and crime and less greenspace and we built a park through Habitat of Humanity at the hospital and we talked about healthcare and health issues and looked at health determinants: how a lot of where you live is/ the environment that you live in impacts that. So it really made me think a little differently about the environmental movement and how I wanted to make a difference.

Although Flow had worked on an organic farm before transitioning to a career in public health, it was not until their experiences in West Baltimore that they could disentangle how the social and ecological informed one another. It is in these personal accounts of

31

how nonprofit workers individually experience poverty, crime, pollution, and poor health

outcomes through their work that they are able to act and engage with their local

audiences in a way that is humanizing and selfless.

Moreover, with the knowledge of these societal stressors and interconnections to

the ecological, all the interviewees noted the importance of building a "human

connection" (as noted by Wind) with the communities they serve. Nonprofit workers

recognized that these circumstances narrow their priorities which may not extend to

having access to natural resources or renewable energy options. Earth offered

anecdotally, "I always say I got 99 other problems right. People have 99 other problems,

how does this—why should this be at the top?" When I pressed further of how they

engage residents with the knowledge of priorities, Earth elaborated,

> I'm really like satiated by the small wins and sometimes it's just getting
> neighbors who don't know each other to meet so it's like the by-product
> of the mission is like all these really cool things like meeting people right
> but also introducing people to other people—connecting neighbors to
> each other is like where my heart is with it and it could be—I'm
> fortunate that it's on/ around this issue but yeah I think helping people
> understand that other people like them—none of us have a ton of power
> to fix these bigger issues but like together we share the same concerns
> and a lot of times you feel like you're alone in the fight and especially
> with big issues like you feel powerless right but there is power in
> knowing someone else has similar feelings or opinions. You can break it
> down on a small scale in just keeping your block clean or recycling more
> or painting something together so you're building alliances and I think
> that's the first step to the bigger goal.

As mentioned by Earth, individual residents and organizers may "feel powerless" alone,

but there is power in connecting people to people and building a collective voice which

exemplifies the moral agency Earth endows themselves with. The value of people and

their affiliations is a major theme rising across the semi-structured interviews. When

initially asked about their thoughts on waste incineration, Earth gleaned that Baltimore

city was "bought and sold on keeping the incinerator," and continued, "The city is advocating to keep the incinerator. I mean and scientists have mixed opinions of incinerating it seems, so I think like finding this *ultimate truth* that just maybe doesn't exist with some issues is hard like incineration." Next, they shared an anecdote of how a Black female political figure betrayed the mistrust of her community over the issue of marijuana legalization and then related how this same problem of mistrust plays a role in waste-to-energy incineration offering,

> So yeah, there's like all this mistrust and I think that is a big part of climate justice is like the mistrust. You don't know what to trust or how to vote or who—like the incinerator is a good example like you don't know what the best thing to do is...right because one side or one agency is telling you 'Well the landfill is full what are we going to do? We can't like—it's better for the environment if we burn it here than truck it/ drive it somewhere else' and then but we're also importing other people's trash and then like some scientist who are looking at the... emissions are like 'Well it's not really that bad' you know or 'There's no real EPA standards for it'—it's like I don't know, it's hard to tell. It's hard to know how to advocate. As an advocate it's hard to know how strongly to advocate for some things. It's basically like—and all I can do is have the conversation you know. That's the best way I know how, is to...right: invite people to the table and advocate they get to that table if I'm not hosting it.

This anecdote of mistrust is linked to these feelings of powerlessness when trying to confront big issues like waste-to-energy incineration. However, this powerlessness can be assuaged by building alliances and coalitions within the community and beyond to affect change. In this ground-up approach to mobilization, opponents of WTE incineration leverage their collective voice (as a part of the second layer of the moral economy) to bring forth policy change (as a part of the first layer of the moral economy).

Additionally, Fire spoke to the value of allyship building to voice community concerns. This point is expounded on as Fire relates how their experience as a Black man contributes to their activism sharing,

> ...but yeah to be able to speak to certain things and challenge...assumptions about Black men that still kind of exist and what not is a thing I've had to navigate my whole life and you know, I just want to be able to lift up peoples' voices and make sure that for folks who don't have the time and opportunity to go and talk to a council person and what not, to talk about these aspects, that I could at least relay that concern and make sure that the lives for themselves and their kids is more sustainable and I think the moment people see these zero waste businesses pop up, they'll say 'Hey you know, this is where we need to go. This is a new thing. This is the right thing for our city' and yeah we just need to keep pushing and I think that just being in that space has continued to motivate me.

The moral agency expressed by Fire demonstrates their motivation to keep fighting Wheelabrator is bound in serving and representing those most concerned with waste incineration who may not have the time, energy, or resources to advocate alone. Although Fire talked of serving the community be representing their needs and amplifying voices, Earth prioritized serving the community by primarily having residents represent themselves at whatever space or platform they have access to. This point of connecting people to people reiterates Earth's motivation of where their "heart" is in advocacy work and how they are able to maintain this work despite having knowledge of social dilemmas like poverty and crime. Earth is also challenging these liminal assumptions of the roles African Americans play in their community by divulging,

> I often say I want to be a black man sometimes... like in the community the men who are on their game are like just so powerful like Brandon [the current mayor of Baltimore] a black man on his game could just save the fucking city... I don't know. A black woman on her you know... I don't know yeah. That's how I feel as an activist I would have more power as a black woman or black man.

34

Earth explained their reason for feeling this way by attributing this sentiment to their early experiences attending community meetings as a resident in a predominantly African American community:

> I say I was the token white girl for my community association because my community association president would literally call me up and be like we need a white girl at this meeting and I didn't know. I was like oh my god is that okay to like say. Although I appreciated his honesty but I just had no idea. I didn't think about those things but right written in reverse but I also think that we are in the middle of this revolution right now like I feel we are and it's so exciting, maybe that's why I think there is so much power in being Black or Brown right now.

This explanation reveals how Earth's personal experiences of attending predominantly African American community association meetings as a resident (before attending as an organizer) contributes to the power they associate with being a Black or Brown activist. Moreover, this revolution Earth spoke of is characterized by how people of color are advocating for their rights and speaking out against social injustices as seen with the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Moreover, Earth and Fire are pulling from their personal experiences of advocating in Baltimore to assert the need to prioritize the needs of the community first which allows the space and opportunity to address social problems like poverty and crime in tandem with environmentally-focused missions. In this light, Earth and Fire are moralizing the market of waste incineration by inclusively advocating around the communities' rights to exert their agency and speak out on their concerns. In these instances where the voices of the community are debated, constrained, or denied (which occurs in layers one and two of the moral economy), Earth and Fire pride themselves on being an intermediary to enact their individual agency and amplify and communicate the needs of the community to address socio-ecological entanglements like waste-to-energy incineration. Flow reiterated the significance of

building allyship across communities, NGOs, and city departments by sharing, "I think just being aware of what's happening in your community and understanding the right people to talk to can really help you as a resource and there are a lot of people at different organizations, nonprofit organizations, that can be liaisons between community and city agency and things like that." Furthermore, it is in this light that the nonprofit workers in this study are creating opportunities and fostering an inclusive space for community concerns to be heard on issues like waste-to-energy incineration.

# CONCLUSION

The institutional systems of provisions divulged above reveal that the problem persists due to the State's moral consideration of waste-to-energy incineration as a sustainable, renewable energy source. This cuts to the core of the problem: the exclusion of African Americans and low-income residents from processes in policymaking and project implementation. Through a political-economic lens, these areas of exclusion have power in how these positions have the capacity to mold knowledge production and transform ideologies which speaks to how class conflicts characterize the moral economy framework. Moreover, the historical dearth of African Americans and low-income residents in positions of legitimate power offers an inclination into why policies (unintentionally and not) favor White and high-income residents over people of color and those with low incomes.

Furthermore, the ISP demonstrates that the moral economy of waste incineration is being supported by the State, Wheelabrator, and Baltimore city while being challenged outrightly and consistently by Energy Justice Network. The other nonprofits, while not prioritizing the issue of waste-to-energy incineration, recognize the socioecological entanglements and negative externalities WTE incineration poses on nearby communities. Acknowledging social issues such as poverty and crime while organizing demonstrates how nonprofit workers recognize that their constituents may have varying priorities

which may not include access to natural resources or dismantling WTE incineration. Furthermore, future studies should incorporate more findings on the relationship between NGOs and the State to understand how this correlation impacts how responsibility over social plights and environmental issues are negotiated within a moral economy framework.

Significantly, this study dissects the proponents and opponents of waste-to-energy incineration and ultimately offers insights into its demise as recommended by the interviewees which included defunding the police, investing in a zero-waste economy, and amplifying community concerns. It is remarkable how the underpinnings of a moral economy framework manifest in how "moral issues are transformed and ethical questions are reformulated" (Fassin 2011, 487) as Earth reconfigures the moral viability of waste-to-energy incineration from what they think is ethical to being a vessel to allow the opportunity for residents to voice their opinions on the issue. Finally, in an attempt to theorize a key to unlock the constraints of capitalism towards justice and equity, Earth ends their interview by manifesting the power of love by confessing, "I can't figure it out like how to challenge that [money] angle. It's like people power. Like what's stronger than money you know? Love is the only thing stronger than money but how do you use that so it's like that's what builds hope, people's coalitions and that's what gets people to act—I'm not sure." It is with this benign ignorance to do good that these nonprofit workers moralize the market of waste-to-energy incineration to make a better Baltimore for Baltimore, not themselves.

# REFERENCES

Ahmann, Chloe. 2019. "Waste to Energy: Garbage Prospects and Subjunctive Politics in Late-Industrial Baltimore." *American Ethnologist* 46 (3): 328–42. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12792.

Buse, Chris G., and Rebecca Patrick. 2020. "Climate Change Glossary for Public Health Practice: From Vulnerability to Climate Justice." *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health (1979)* 74 (10): 867–71. https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2020-213889.

Daston, Lorraine. 1995. "The Moral Economy of Science." *Osiris* (10): 2–24.

Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic. 2017. *Critical Race Theory (Third Edition): An Introduction*. New York: NYU Press.

Edelman, Marc. 2005. "Bringing the Moral Economy Back in ... to the Study of 21st-Century Transnational Peasant Movements." *American Anthropologist* 107 (3): 331–45. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2005.107.3.331.

Erickson, Paul, and Liam Murphy, eds. 2017. *A History of Anthropological Theory*. Fifth. Ontario: University of Toronto Press.

Fassin, Didier. 2011. "A Contribution to the Critique of Moral Reason." *Anthropological theory* 11,(4): 481–491.

Fassin, Didier. 2020. "Are the Two Approaches to Moral Economy Irreconcilable?" *Humanity* 11 (2): 217-221,255.

Finney, Carolyn. 2014. *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Hampton, Paul. 2015. *Workers and Trade Unions for Climate Solidarity: Tackling Climate Change in a Neoliberal World*. New York: Routledge.

Jones, Shermaine M. 2017. "'I CAN'T BREATHE!': Affective Asphyxia in Claudia Rankine's Citizen: An American Lyric." *South: A Scholarly Journal* 50 (1): 37–45.

Katz, Amy S., Rebecca M. Cheff, and Patricia O'Campo. 2015. "Bringing Stakeholders Together for Urban Health Equity: Hallmarks of a Compromised Process." *International Journal for Equity in Health* 14 (1): 138–138. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-015-0252-1.

Kelly, Leah, and Kira Burkhart. 2017. "Asthma and Air Pollution in Baltimore City." The Environmental Integrity Project.

Lambeck, Michael, ed. 2010. *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Mattingly, Cheryl. 2012 "Two Virtue Ethics and the Anthropology of Morality." *Anthropological theory* 12, (2): 161–184.

Nader, Laura. 1972. "Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained From Studying Up."
 https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED065375.pdf.

Palomera, Jaime, and Theodora Vetta. 2016. "Moral Economy: Rethinking a Radical
 Concept." *Anthropological Theory* 16 (4): 413–32.
 https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499616678097.

Pirgmaier, Elke. 2020. "Consumption Corridors, Capitalism and Social Change."
 *Sustainability: Science, Practice, & Policy* 16 (1): 274–85.
 http://dx.doi.org.mutex.gmu.edu/10.1080/15487733.2020.1829846.

Thompson E.P. 1991. "The Moral Economy Reviewed." In *Customs in Common*, edited by
 E.P Thompson, 259–351. London: The Merlin Press.

Wheeler, Kathryn. 2019. "Moral Economies of Consumption." *Journal of Consumer
 Culture* 19 (2): 271–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540517729007.

Zigon, Jarrett. 2007. "Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand: A Theoretical
 Framework for an Anthropology of Moralities." *Anthropological theory* 7, (2): 131–
 150.

## BIOGRAPHY

Tanisha Washington graduated from Caroline High School, Fairfax, Virginia in 2014. She received her Bachelor of Arts from Christopher Newport University in 2018. When she graduated, she spent a full year in 2019 as a conservation corps member organizing around water quality in Baltimore.