

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

STATES OF COMPLAINT: DISSATISFIED CITIZENSHIP, ENVIRONMENTAL HARM,
AND THE DEMAND FOR WELFARE IN GLOBAL SOUTH LITERATURE, 1956-2017

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2018

Table of Contents

List of Figures	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Dissertation Abstract	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Adjudicating Interests: Oil Revenue and Pollution in Nigerian Legislation and Chinua Achebe's <i>Anthills of the Savannah</i>	44
Chapter 2: The Claims of Bodies: Practices of Citizenship After Bhopal in Survivor Testimony and Indra Sinha's <i>Animal's People</i>	92
Chapter 3: Middle Class Reform/Reforming the Middle Classes: Development in Amitav Ghosh's <i>The Hungry Tide</i> and Arundhati Roy's <i>The Cost of Living</i>	132
Chapter 4: Ordinary and Extra-ordinary States: Toward Pacific Futures in Pacific Island Legislation, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's <i>Iep Jaltok</i> , and Keri Hulme's <i>Stonefish</i>	167
Bibliography	222

List of Figures

1. Photograph from *Te Kaniva: Tuvalu Climate Change Policy 2012*. Page 181.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who deserve thanks for this project. Firstly, my dissertation committee. Benjamin Morgan always encouraged me to be confident in my own scholarly voice, even when I wasn't sure of what I wanted to say. Christopher Taylor pushed me to greater conceptual precision and to think of my arguments as fine-grained strategic interventions with other scholars and my fields. And Sonali Thakkar, who has been a committed mentor from my first year of graduate school, has helped me to think deeply about my argumentative stakes and to situate myself in wider conversations. The project owes much to their generous and attentive reading, and it would not have become what it is without their consistent support, feedback, and encouragement.

The dissertation has also benefitted immensely from other faculty and students at the University of Chicago. In particular, it owes much to the members of the Climate Change: Interdisciplinary Challenges to the Humanities and Social Sciences Reading Group, which provided a stimulating environment for thinking about problems in the background of this project. Dipesh Chakrabarty and Fredrik Albritton Jonsson were generous interlocutors in its very earliest and most inchoate stages. I am also indebted to many outside the University of Chicago. Greg Garrard, Astrida Neimanis, and Sunila Kale have all offered professional support and critical feedback on versions of the first two chapters, and a special thanks goes to the Global South/Postcolonial Workshop, who offered valuable insights about the last chapter and have provided an incredibly enthusiastic and warm community. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Teresa Shewry generously responded to queries from a stranger, and their feedback has informed my last chapter.

My graduate student colleagues have been an endlessly valuable resource. Thanks to

Rachel Kyne, Kevin Kimura, Brady Smith, and Chandani Patel for imparting their wisdom at various stages of this graduate school journey; and thanks to Mollie Mcfee, Allison Turner, Sarah Kunjummen, Samuel Rowe, and Katharine Mershon for being invigorating interlocutors as well as dear friends. I would never have weathered the storm of these challenging years without their perspective, warmth, and companionship. Thanks to Annie Heffernan, who helped me find another intellectual home at the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, the Wolverines writing group for teaching me to set reasonable goals, and Joya John; I look forward to crossing paths as we both pursue our ecocritical interests. Janet Zong has been a great companion from afar, offering endless cheer and a comparative perspective on the field. Thank you also to my dearest friend Kira Allmann, for whom neither time nor distance has mattered, and who reminds me that there's intellectually interesting life outside academia.

My interest in literary research and my commitment to thinking of literature as robust social theorizing began at the University of Virginia. I study postcolonial literature largely because of Vicki Olwell. I also owe great thanks to Michael Levenson, who guided my first clumsy attempts at independent research, Rita Felski, who laid my intellectual foundations in critical theory, and Peter Capuano, without whom I would never have had the courage to go to graduate school at all.

I am also grateful to my parents, Kelly and Charles. You have always pushed me to be endlessly ambitious and have always believed in me. Thank you for cultivating my love of reading, and for your love and support, even if you haven't always understood my writing. To my siblings Diana and Eddie, thank you for keeping me grounded and for remembering all our old jokes. I am so grateful for you and so glad we have grown closer as we've grown older. Thanks also to my parents-in-law Janice and Bruce, who have provided a calming second home.

Finally, my deepest thanks are due to Charles. I cannot imagine having gone through any of this without you. Your optimism, humor, and belief in me have kept me anchored and have been my light in the worst of times. Your love and support mean the world.

Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation is a literary and cultural study of how environmental harm has shaped political life in the global South since the 1950s. It argues against anti-statist orthodoxies in postcolonial literary studies, ecocriticism, and academia at large to make a recuperative case for the welfare state in the lives of the global poor. The project argues that environmental harms have prompted the poor into agonistic relation with the failures of state welfare and that environmental harm has therefore been central to practices of postcolonial citizenship, the development of the postcolonial interventionist state, and the meanings of welfare to which this form of the state is committed.

Through a heuristic called dissatisfied citizenship, this dissertation studies how the welfare state is revised and negotiated in India, Nigeria, and the Pacific. I argue that discourses of environmental complaint index popular expectations and desires for better forms of governance in the guise of cataloguing political failures. I find that in doing so these discourses remake a variety of hegemonic political norms to imagine versions of the state that respond more properly to harm. Each of my chapters shows how a different political ideal like national interests, futurity, welfare, and development, while not originally conceived of as addressing environmental harms, is mobilized and amended into a platform for environmental claim-making. By considering the work of global Anglophone novelists and poets like Chinua Achebe, Indra Sinha, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, and Amitav Ghosh alongside popular declarations, juridical cases, and state policies, I reveal how they make up a shared world of political poesis within the discursive archive of particular environmental harms.

Chapter one begins by exploring the multiplicity of political ideals attached to oil imaginaries in Nigeria. I contrast a minor strain of concern with oil pollution in national

legislation and Chinua Achebe's critique of the violence of resource control in *Anthills of the Savannah* with dominant conceptions of oil as revenue. I argue that while the view of oil as revenue encourages competition within Nigeria's federal structure, the former concerns generate alternative political ideals of inclusive community and recognition of enmeshed local and national needs. The second chapter moves from pollution to poison. This chapter compares the testimony of survivors of the Bhopal gas explosion (December 2-3, 1984), widely considered the worst industrial disaster in modern history, legislation surrounding the explosion's settlement, and Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's People*. I argue that survivor testimonies evoke bodily pain in order to claim foregone promises of government welfare. I then examine Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* which, I argue, posits that post-disaster terms of political relation must arise from the citizenry as they articulate the unpredictable materiality of their toxified bodies.

Chapter three focuses on the place of middle class reform vis-à-vis state development and the history of community based organizations (CBOs) as precedents to the anti-poor bias that has characterized Indian development discourses in the post-1980s. I consider how Arundhati Roy's *The Cost of Living* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* pose middle class interests as an obstacle to but also a potential source of reform for state priorities that discount the needs of rural populations. The final chapter addresses the threat sea level rise poses to Pacific statehoods and futurity; it considers how national plans for climate adaptation and literary texts like Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's *Iep Jaltok* (2017) and Keri Hulme's *Stonefish* (2004) imagine both ordinary and extraordinary futures in order to contest the determinism of climate refugeeism.

Introduction

I. Environmental Harm: Political Failure and Dissatisfied Citizenship

That environmental harm is a global phenomenon no one will dispute. Toxicity, pollution, nuclear radiation, severe storms, flood damage, desertification, and drought cross North and South divides, respecting neither geopolitical privilege nor national borders. Environmentalism the world over has been called “a response to the failure of politicians to mobilize effectively” around issues of environmental concern, and harm may be one place where Northern and Southern environmentalisms are closer to each other than in most other respects.¹ Consider the exposure of Louisiana bayou communities and islands in the Sunderbans, both of which exist outside storm protection infrastructures. Or Bhopal, which while famous as the site of the world’s worst industrial disaster, is not the world’s only poisoned city; its groundwater contamination connects it to the infrastructural neglect of Flint, Michigan. Concerns over corporate oil pollution in the Niger delta are echoed in the Amazon and the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

But neither would anyone agree that the effects of harm are equally felt or equally damaging across these sites. When Ramchandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier coined the phrase “environmentalism of the poor” in 1997, they did so explicitly to contrast the general tenor of Northern and Southern varieties of environmentalism.² In doing so they identified the differing ideological and cultural traditions of Northern, especially American, environmentalism from what counts as environmental concern outside the North; and they emphasized that for the poor,

¹ Ramchandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* (London: Earthscan, 1997), 17.

² Guha and Martinez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism*, ch. 1.

“issues of ecology are often interlinked” with larger political questions.³

The relationship between humans and their environments is perhaps the point of largest divergence between Southern and Northern environmentalisms, especially the Northern variant known as “wilderness” environmentalism. This sees the natural world as external to humans, pure, and to be protected from human interference.⁴ Southern environmentalisms of the poor by contrast have started in local struggles over subsistence and survival, where human dependence on the environment is paramount. For the “compendious category” of the poor, environmental concerns are “seamed through with other economic and cultural causes as they experience environmental threat not as a planetary abstraction but as a set of inhabited risks.”⁵

“States of Complaint” takes up the centrality of environmental harm to the lives of the poor in the global South, and argues that such harms bear particularly on their political claims. Bringing together postcolonial literary studies and ecocriticism, the project analyzes how the poor pursue political agency and traces how environmental harms have contributed to practices of postcolonial citizenship, the development of the postcolonial interventionist state, and the meanings of welfare to which this form of the state is committed. I argue that environmental harms have prompted the global poor into agonistic relation with the failures of state welfare since the 1950s, and through a heuristic I call dissatisfied citizenship, I show the ways in which

³ Guha and Martinez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism*, 18.

⁴ The antihumanism in this dominant wilderness strand has begun to be corrected by Northern ecocritics like William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed., William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995): 69-90 and Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007). Its assumptions about nature underpin preservationist discourses, apocalyptic and pastoral narratives, and often hide racialized and classed assumptions about who gets to occupy a privileged place toward nature.

⁵ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011), 4.

complaint indexes citizen expectations, desires, and aspirations for the welfare state in the guise of cataloguing political failure. I thus consider how modes of complaint are politically generative, for dissatisfied discourses create surprising openings for political poesis and revision.

Such political poesis is treated as a question of literature, culture, and discourse. But far from purely textual concerns separate from material conditions, this project's archive is one in which the world and the text mutually impinge. Across the project I examine how global Anglophone novelists and poets like Chinua Achebe, Indra Sinha, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, and Amitav Ghosh complicate, critique, or augment civilian discourses of complaint and testimony such as those found in the Ogoni Bill of Rights or the personal accounts of Bhopal's survivors. In turn, I examine how juridical cases and political documents like national constitutions or legislative acts intersect with popular discourses and the political imaginaries offered in literary writing. My project is thus a literary and cultural study of how environmental harm has shaped political life in the global South. When read as intertexts or mutual supplements, I show how popular declarations, state precedents, and literary representations together redefine hegemonic political values not traditionally conceived of as addressing the environment in an on-going, intermittent, but persistent project of reimagining the workings of the postcolonial interventionist state. These texts are considered together as part of a shared world of political poesis within the discursive archives of particular environmental harms.

Environmental harm has been one of the most prominent and consistent collaterals of two central aspects of postcolonial modernity: state-sponsored development and welfare. Whether manifesting as effluent runoff, toxicity, pollution, resource extraction, ruined subsistence resources, or other versions of what Rob Nixon has called "displacement without moving,"

environmental harm often threatens the most vulnerable.⁶ It can be found accompanying almost every development project imaginable, from dams to tourism, oil drilling, mining or industrial factories. Those adversely effected include the urban dwellers of Southern megaslums, subsistence farmers and fishers, women, low castes and minority groups, or ecosystem peoples, who Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha have defined as those who depend closely on their surrounding environments to meet their most basic needs.⁷ These are also subaltern peoples, who inhabit “all the seemingly nonmodern [...] relationships and life practices that constantly leave their imprint on the lives of even the elites [...] and on their institutions of government.”⁸ In general they are non-hegemonic communities that do not enjoy a robust formal citizenship of reciprocal rights and duties vis-à-vis the postcolonial state, and are cast as the nationally unwanted, backwards, or invisible.

Complaint in this context is the refusal of a harmful status quo. When considered as political engagement, subaltern complaint illuminates the generative capacity of the political imaginaries of the poor. The force of complaint is not only toward more just forms of governance but toward revised conceptual borders, as complaint cathects to itself the purchase of widely held political demands in order to skew them beyond the normative terms of their recognition. Hence, for example, development in the Sundarbans might come to mean not only infrastructural megaprojects that displace the poor or the protection of a dwindling tiger population under Western-style conservation, but also the fostering of grassroots development projects pursued between the poor and the middle classes beneficiaries of state development.

⁶ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 19.

⁷ See Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), 11.

Complaint against, about, and to the state reactivates the processural quality of political life and, I will suggest, links the demands of dissatisfied citizenship with the earlier impetuses toward greater justice and freedom that motored decolonial processes. Rather than cataloguing yet again the partiality of national belonging or the exclusions of the nation-state, which have been discussed in postcolonial literary studies *ad nauseum*, this project takes such imperfections as its point of departure. In doing so it situates itself within the pursuit of political change that underpinned midcentury independence movements and their aspirations to a more just world. This is not at all to suggest that the poor are the successors of elite anti-colonial nationalists, but to correct for what has been seen as the stagnation of political life when it is too closely identified with the frieze of a disappointing nation-state.

That environmental harm and dissatisfied citizenship offer an impetus toward political revision may be initially surprising, not least because environmental harm seems to baffle traditional theories of agency. If agency has traditionally been understood as the capacity to act in line with one's will or desire, definitive action seems stymied by the spatial diffusions and temporal dilations of harm. Indeed, Rob Nixon has written brilliantly of environmental harm as a form of "slow violence" - diffuse, delayed, invisible, and accreted.⁹ Environmental harms can also be acute: sudden floods, storm surges, and deadly for those without warning or shelter. They can be unpredictable and all too lively, as in the unruly morphings of bodies exposed to poison or radiation. But it is above all their *longue durée* and irresolution that present the foremost challenge to subaltern agency.

Recently, posthumanist theorists such as Bruno Latour, Jane Bennett, and Stacey Alaimo have reinvigorated traditional conceptions of agency by extending its basic premise - the

⁹ Nixon, *Slow Violence*.

capacity to act – to nonhumans. Expansions of agency also underpin the recent vogue of the Anthropocene, which names a new geological age in the background of this project’s last chapter, and in which the human species as a whole is considered an agentic subject. Such developments make clear that agency can no longer be solely attributed to humans.

Environmental harm too, affects nonhuman plants, animals, and landscapes as much as it does human individuals and communities. However, “States of Complaint” is interested in the agency of the human poor precisely because their ability to act is so often limited, partial, or attenuated. Given the constraints imposed on them by harm as well as by failed welfare, it is all the more important to examine the ways in which the poor do act within the severity of their constraints, and to propose heuristics, concepts, or modes which might augment the efforts of their own discourses.

This selective focus on the human poor is not meant to recreate a false division between humans and the nonhuman world. It does, however, follow from the unevenness of environmental harm between the South and North and within the global South itself. A commitment to human difference and particularity, drawn from postcolonialism’s general suspicion of the universal, leads me to consider the problem of agency for those most persistently denied its full and free expression. Such commitments to difference do not arise for the mere sake of cultural plurality but because differential positioning shapes the kinds of knowledges one occupies or the kinds of horizons one desires; as Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has elegantly put it, “it is only in this way that we can create plural normative horizons specific to our existence and relevant to the examination of our lives and their possibilities.”¹⁰

Similarly, that environmental harm is of political concern to people of color and

¹⁰ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 20.

indigenous peoples in the North is not in dispute. But I do not primarily or only mean “political” in terms of Foucauldian distributions of power and resistance; such an emphasis might well need to encompass the racialization of harm in the North. Instead I focus on the global South because environmental harm has been uniquely central to the development of the postcolonial interventionist state and the meanings of welfare and governance to which it is ostensibly committed.

Environmental harms in the global South are never isolatable from larger political claims for justice, fair distribution, land rights, water and food security, education, national interests or other political concerns. I argue that complaint about environmental harm challenges the parameters of mainstream values not generally conceived of as addressing the environment, and therefore the parameters of normative governance in the global South. As my chapters will show, these revised and revisionary values include national interests, development, welfare, and futurity. Discourses of dissatisfied citizenship thus link what might otherwise be seen as the niche or minor concerns of subaltern populations to normative political values held widely by fellow citizens or articulated by postcolonial states themselves as central tenants. In this way dissatisfied citizenship takes up the provisions for citizen well-being central to welfarist postcolonial states, and which have so often been the occasion for disappointment. The central paradox that structures this project is that political failure is a spur to political poesis, and that such revisions are demanded by those who have least cause to address the interventionist state. It is this paradox that I explore through the work of dissatisfied citizenship as its forms of complaint reshape political relations, the state, and welfare in the global South.

II. The Many Faces of the State: Nation-State, Welfare State, Anti-Statism

The archives of this project illuminate the ways in which assumptions of state welfare remain a primary site of expectation and desire for citizens, and the ways in which their imaginaries, and modes and forms of address, are part of the on-going fabrication of the meanings of welfare in an age of burgeoning environmental harm. But, despite the centrality of the welfare state to postcolonial modernity, it occupies a strangely elided place within postcolonial literary studies, ecocriticism, and academia more generally. In postcolonial studies, discussion of the nation-state as a failed ideal has occupied the center of scholarship since the 1990s. Concerns with national cohesion can be found in anticolonial nationalist writings, such as Fanon's chapter on "The Problem of National Consciousness" in *The Wretched of the Earth* or B.R. Ambedkar's claim that the Indian nation as such did not exist. The conceptual and practical difficulties of creating cultural nations that might coincide with their new territorial states can be seen in the work of colonial administrators, who were well aware of the artificial nature of the boundaries they had drawn, and the bloody civil conflicts, such as the Biafran civil war and the Partition of India and Pakistan, that erupted early in the histories of independent postcolonial states.

Such conflicts seemed to confirm the impossibility of national cohesion, and this was taken up as a conceptual problem later in postcolonial literary theory. The positive feedback between Homi Bhabha's edited volume *Nation and Narration* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, arguably postcolonial literature's most famous novel, confirmed the problem of fragmented national communities as of paramount literary concern. When Fredric Jameson erroneously wrote that all third world literature is national allegory, he nevertheless contributed to the predominance of national unity as a problem for postcolonial literature, and these works all

gained impetus from Benedict Anderson's theory of the nation as imagined community.¹¹ In short, it is arguable that in postcolonial literary studies, interest in the nation-state, and the proper or improper alignment between the cultural nation and the territorial governing state, has occupied academic attention to the eclipse of other considerations of the state.

In particular, the fact that the vast majority of postcolonial states began as interventionist and welfarist, enshrining social rights and provisions in their national agendas, has received far less attention in literary criticism. This project does not aim to be a literary history of the welfare state, but it takes the predominance of the welfare state form in the global South as its historical frame. I ask how this governing model has fared since the 1950s and I examine how this version of the state, and the framework it provides for relations between the state and its citizens, has been revised and negotiated in the wake of environment harms. Instead of focusing on the cultural, epistemological, or ontological foundations of national communities, this project begins from a more material premise, that of the development projects and welfare goals that shaped the national visions of postcolonial leaders and which are often enshrined as ruling mandates in postcolonial constitutions.

For its part, ecocriticism has traditionally not engaged with the state, nor has it until recently moved beyond a preoccupation with nature writing in America and Great Britain, where the wilderness model prevailed. Northern varieties of ecocritical writing have largely advocated the local and bioregional, where the local has served as a privileged ethical locus. Local attachments and attunements have been seen as a way to counter the negative effects of

¹¹ See Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, no. 15 (Autumn 1986): 65-88, <http://doi: 10.2307/466493> and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (Verso: London, 2006). The scholarship on the nation-state in postcolonial studies is legion and I have named only a few influential examples.

modernization, urbanization, or globalization and to provide opportunities for personal transcendence that can be traced back to pastoral or Romantic conceptions of nature. Ursula Heise's groundbreaking *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* worked against both these tendencies by foregrounding the shared risks of toxic or nuclear natures, and by calling for forms of eco-cosmopolitan awareness and aesthetics.¹² Her horizon though was the planetary or transnational, and the national slips out of her conceptual expansion from the local to the global. Other ecocritics, especially postcolonial ones or those concerned with environmental justice, have usually considered the state only to denounce its collusion with extractivist capital, resource exploitation, violations of indigenous rights, or other pernicious consequences of development.¹³

Indeed, in the global South the failures of the interventionist state are compounded by the ways in which its projects for development come to favor corporate interests over those of citizens, for the internal kickbacks that siphon off loan monies and leave national treasuries indebted, and for the forms of violence that sometimes accompany the short-term "costs" of pursuing the long-term "benefits" development projects should provide. As such, development as a means to welfare seems false consciousness at best and outright corruption at worst. It was under the auspices of critiquing development for instance that Arundhati Roy, hard on the heels of her Booker prize-winning *The God of Small Things*, wrote an essay entitled "The Greater Common Good." One half of the slim volume *The Cost of Living*, it offers an unsparing polemic against state-sponsored national development, for as the title of the essay suggests, the general goods of development are as unevenly distributed as its costs.

In terms of the geopolitics of development, political economist and Nobel winner Gunnar

¹² Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2008).

¹³ See Nixon, *Slow Violence* and Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments: nature, culture, and the contemporary Indian novel* (Basingstroke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

Myrdal popularized the idea of a “north-south” divergence in his 1957 book *Rich Lands and Poor*. Since then the concept has become a loose shorthand for the workings of a new kind of economic imperialism that zones the world into the relative privilege of the North and the poverty of the South.¹⁴ Arturo Escobar, in *Encountering Development*, has pointed out the ways in which development discourses perpetuate older structures of colonial expertise and exploitation, as well as economic inequality, between developed and developing countries.¹⁵ The invention of underdevelopment as a concept can be traced back further to 1949, when US President Harry Truman used it to describe his plans for promoting the “improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas” of the world.¹⁶ Despite his rhetoric to the contrary, the imperial continuities of development funding and development’s hierarchical ideology are hard to miss, and critiques of international development have been numerous.

But this project does not engage the neocolonial aspects of development per se; rather, it takes up development as part of a larger paradox within the postcolonial welfarist and interventionist state. For it is through development projects, as well as by participating in circuits of global capital, that social rights, basic provisions, poverty alleviation, and material equality have been pursued. That development projects have not often been successful is right cause for criticism, and yet it has meant that analyses of development and welfare have too often been totally subsumed into their negative effects or assumed to be ideological illusion all the way down.

Such protestations are part of larger anti-statist trends widespread in academia. These are

¹⁴ Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2018), 108.

¹⁵ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995).

¹⁶ Gustavo Esteva, “Development,” in *The Development Dictionary: a guide to knowledge as power*, ed. Wolfgang Sachs, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2010), 1.

particularly marked around discussions of capital expansion and state violence. In the latter, the reach of the state has exploded, geopolitically as in the American war on terror but intellectually also, where the huge popularity of Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* is symptomatic. In that work, Agamben argues that the character of modern political relations is that of sovereign violence, in which the state relates to its people primarily through suspended legality. As such it may kill its citizens with impunity, and modern nation-states become comparable to virtual concentration camps. Achille Mbembe has taken up this view of the state in his concept of "necropolitics," and both are indebted to Michel Foucault, after whom it is impossible not to see the state as a disciplinary apparatus able to "make live and let die."¹⁷ In terms of the former, the state is considered the hapless victim of neoliberal deregulation, its social democratic priorities of provision and services a relic of a golden past before the worldwide deregulation of markets that is said to have begun in the 1970s and continues today.

Within this catalogue though, a paradox is already apparent. For if in terms of modern capitalism the state has most often been announced obsolete, in the realm of state violence it is robust as ever, and this limited range is incapable of fully considering the casualty of state provision. Lauren Goodlad and Michael Rothberg have also noted this paradox, and at a conference convened on the "States of Welfare" at the University of Illinois in 2006, urged a consideration of the "Janus-faced dimensions of the state." Their frame was precisely "the massive state disciplinary power that post-9/11 militarism had claimed to justify. On the other [hand], we could see how neoliberal governments were failing to ensure basic welfare at multiple levels." Given this, "the need was clearly to think together both aspects of the state without

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 241.

succumbing to paralysis or oversimplification.”¹⁸

Goodlad and Rothberg point out that literary critics, in responding to neoliberal deregulation on the one side and reinvigorated militarism on the other, have also neglected to examine the weakening of democratic social institutions and services that have accompanied these dual attacks on the welfare state; or rather, such weakness has been noted only to be taken as yet further inducement to anti-statism. But in doing so, academics have also failed to contribute to shoring up the very ideals of social democracy to which most in the profession are committed, and which are under attack from all sides. As Rothberg and Goodlad put it in the “Preface” to the proceedings of the conference published in a special issue of *Occasion*, “we seek to explore how and why the mechanisms of collectivism, redistribution, and egalitarian entitlement once heralded to promote democracy have become objects of opprobrium or indifference throughout the political spectrum.” In doing so they also hope to “facilitate much-needed self-reflexivity among humanities scholars about our own embeddedness in the state.”¹⁹

“States of Compliant,” as its title suggests, also takes up the residues of the welfare state. Unlike Goodlad and Rothberg though, my motivation is not reflexivity about the state in academia or Euro-American democracies. I also depart from the kind of literary history Bruce Robbins has recently written, where the welfare state’s democratizing principles are seen to be intrinsic to modern American literature.²⁰ Instead the global South is my intellectual foreground, where debates over welfare provisions and political boundaries are sites of persistent discursive engagement and poesis.

¹⁸ Laruen E. M. Goodlad and Michael Rothberg, “Preface: States of Welfare,” *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities* 2 (2010): 3, <http://occasion.stanford.edu/node/39>.

¹⁹ Goodlad and Rothberg, “Preface,” 4, 5

²⁰ See Bruce Robbins, *Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Toward a Literary History of the Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), ch. 1.

Precisely *because* a negative view of the state is so entrenched in academia, it becomes all the more important to find ways of thinking about the consequences of state failure in ways that do not merely clarify their causes and effects in greater detail. This is not necessarily because the state is an unadulterated good; indeed, its negative reputation is well earned, as the foregoing discussion can only outline. Nonetheless, such clarification does little to support the values or capacities the interventionist state is meant to secure for the benefit of its most vulnerable; more importantly, the interventionist state in the global South continues to be a site of desire and expectation *for those it has failed*. This means, in other words, that the welfarist, interventionist conception of the state has proved sustaining for the very subjects most exposed to forms of neoliberal abstraction, capitalist extraction, or environmental harm. The welfare state is therefore an integral part of how we must understand the possibilities for changing or improving these conditions.

This project's archive therefore shows how remnants of the welfare state persist within its decline, and how demands for the welfare state are informed by past and current failures that prompt demands for better forms of governance. "States of Complaint" examines how subaltern claims are not merely for inclusion within existing rights but for the redefinition of a wide variety of political ideals that did not originally address environmental harm. The environmental demands of the poor expand the meaning of values like national interests, development, welfare, and futurity beyond their hegemonic limits. In doing so they change the parameters of the kinds of claims such values can be seen to address and the peoples who might lay claim to them. This revisionist or poetic engagement with the state is what I am calling dissatisfied citizenship; it offers a heuristic for understanding how popular modes of limited agency contest the terms of a polity that has never fully catered to the needs of all its citizens, least of all the poor.

As even the brief discussion here makes clear, “defining” the state in the singular is largely futile. Indeed, debates about “what the state is” have raged in political theory. One of the most influential theories of the state, which resists defining exactly “what” or “where” it is, has been Philip Abrams’ “idea-effect” of the state.²¹ This notion combines the theoretical and empirical aspects of statehood to argue that the state can only be understood through the dialectic of its idea and effects. That is, the institutions, laws, and practical manifestations of the state through which most ordinary citizens encounter its force or take advantage of its services, cannot be made meaningful apart from the idea of what kind of state is produced from and comes to seem antecedent to, these practical effects. Hence, violence is an effect of and produces the idea of a militaristic state, while provision might effect the idea of a benevolent one. It is the dialectic of ideas and effects that together make up “the state” and can thus account for the multiple and indeed contradictory versions of it we commonly acknowledge and which I have touched on here.

“States of Complaint” argues that the idea-effect of the interventionist welfare state continues to have a great deal of purchase in the global South, not in the minds of its elites or those who have manifestly benefited from its interventions, but precisely in the discourses of its subaltern and unimagined communities, where one would not expect to find such investments. It argues in that far from dying out, the welfare state has proved surprisingly tenacious as it has been remobilized and rearticulated by those on the fringes of its imaginary. If these peoples are also created by the absence of welfare, their dissatisfaction with the status quo and their persistent demands upon the state for redress offer an archive of the paradox of the welfare state:

²¹ Philip Abrams. “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1 no. 1 (1988): 58-89, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6443.1988.tb00004.x>.

as that which while never fulfilling its purposes perfectly, has been constantly invoked by subjects normally seen as agentless in order to improve their lives. Indeed, their dissatisfied citizenship proves a source of political generativity; in refusing a harmful status quo they also engage in forms of political poesis that remake the parameters of state intervention and reimagine in various ways the meanings of modern postcolonial governance. Within the poesis of dissatisfied discourse, relations with the state can be seen as processural rather than static, and the current limits of the political become once again plastic rather than given.

III. Welfare's Lively Legacy

Welfare has long been understood as a form of justice, in the global South and outside it. While the “welfare state” was not formally coined until William Temple used the term in 1941, Samuel Moyn has provided a recent history of state-sponsored welfare that traces its much longer antecedents. Popular expectations for social justice, especially in terms of basic provisions like food, stretch back to ancient times and are included in Biblical pronouncements, the writings of Thomas Aquinas, and the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601. If welfare can be found as moral, religious, and political prescriptions for popular need, these were not necessarily foundational to state order. The antecedent of the modern the welfare state can though, be seen to go back at least to the Jacobins. Drawing on R.R. Palmer, Moyn notes that the Jacobin state was a new kind, “interventionist, offering social services; it was to plan and guide the institutions of the country using legislation to lift up the common man.”²² Thus, as early as the French Revolution, state-sponsored welfare could be found as a grounding political framework and not merely part of a hodge podge of general social policy.

²² Palmer quoted in Moyn, *Not Enough*, 13.

In Britain, welfare was only generalized from its selective application in various Poor Laws to the entire populace midway through the twentieth century.²³ This was also the time when the welfare state reached its European apex. Enshrined in the post-1945 British welfare state and the National Socialist state of Hitler's Germany, which operated for the good of the German race by its genocidal orientation toward everyone else, welfare also came into the UNDHR's inclusion of social and economic rights in 1948. As Moyn points out, this latter move canonized the idea of powerful national states that would guarantee material and social benefits equally with political freedoms for their citizens.²⁴

Outside Europe, the welfare state inhabits another paradox, for European welfare states like Great Britain, France, and Germany were also the twentieth century's foremost imperial powers. Within empire, welfare was one of the logics by which colonialism was perpetually justified: colonial state welfare worked within a Hegelian model of historical development, wherein one's place in a linear conception of time became translated as cultural and spatial distance; that is, history became a temporal hierarchy where one could only be ahead or behind, and postcolonial subjects were all behind. This version of historicism cast colonized subjects into the "waiting room of history," not yet ready to rule themselves and in need of provisions only empire could provide.²⁵ Anticolonial nationalisms rejected both these premises in their bid for independence.²⁶ In turn, the majority of newly independent postcolonial states pursued welfare

²³ See Asa Briggs, "The Welfare State in Historical Perspective." *European Journal of Sociology* 2, no. 2, (1961): 221-258, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23987939>.

²⁴ Hence also Hannah Arendt's astute argument that those who lost the rights associated with national citizenship lost also then the right to any other rights. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, new ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1985) especially ch. 9.

²⁵ See Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, Introduction.

²⁶ Anticolonial nationalism was itself contested by schemes that did not end in the nation-state, such as imperial federalism. See for examples Karuna Mantena, "Popular sovereignty and anti-colonialism" in *Popular sovereignty and anti-colonialism*, eds. Richard Bourke and Quentin

states of their own, not as a derivative of the European model but, I suggest, as a continuation of their pursuit of greater justice and freedom, of which political independence was part and indeed only the first step.²⁷

National commitments to socialist principles and welfarist provisions were widespread across new postcolonial states; indeed the welfare state is arguably *the* dominant governing paradigm of the postcolonial state.²⁸ Examples abound, from the 1950 Indian constitution's "Directive Principles of State Policy" which include socialist goals, to more unlikely candidates such as the Nigerian constitution of 1979. Though promulgated under a dubiously democratic government, it nevertheless includes shockingly wide mandates for state provisions. Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, put his welfarist goals in a 1957 national broadcast:

My first object is to abolish from Ghana poverty, ignorance, and disease. We shall measure our progress by the improvement in the health of our people [...] by the availability of water and electricity in our towns and villages; and by the happiness which our people take in being able to manage their own affairs. *The welfare of our people is our chief pride, and it is by this that my Government will ask to be judged.*²⁹

Anti-colonial activist and Kenya's first president Jomo Kenyatta similarly declared: "Our achievement of independence, for which we have struggled so long, will not be an end in itself. It will give us the opportunity to work unfettered for the creation of a Democratic African Socialist Kenya [...] *Socialist* because political freedom and equality are not enough; our people have the right to be free from economic exploitation and social inequality."³⁰ Social welfare was more

Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016), 297-319 and Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014).

²⁷ For nation-states as derivative discourse after the European model, see Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed, 1986).

²⁸ Moyn makes this case throughout *Not Enough*.

²⁹ Fenner Brockway, *African Socialism* (Chester Springs: Dufour Editions, 1963), 64. Emphasis mine.

³⁰ Brockway, *African Socialism*, 23. Emphasis original.

than mere piecemeal legislation in these contexts, or aimed at only certain portions of the populace. New postcolonial leaders made welfare by state intervention central to their political programs from the outset of independence, and many states went so far as to enshrine duties or obligations for various social goods in their national constitutions.

For Moyn though, the centrality of welfare as a national, and indeed globalized enterprise after postcolonial emancipation, declined in the 1970s.³¹ He links the detriment of the welfare state and its social provisions to the embattled place of socialism during the Cold War, its demise after the fall of the Soviet Union, and the ascent, at the same time, of neoliberalism beginning in Pinochet's Chile. Moyn is careful to track the early contingency of neoliberalism's appeal and its hedging about unregulated markets, a thought almost inconceivable in the popular and academic orthodoxies of today, in which neoliberal deregulation appears an entrenched *fiat accompli*. But this also leads Moyn, like many others, to pronounce the welfare state defeated and to call for a return to its priorities.³² This project is sympathetic to calls for reinvigorated welfare, but taking its cue from Goodlad and Rothberg, argues that welfare has never left the South and indeed, that attention to its attenuated but persistent forms is long overdue.

This conclusion arises most strikingly from the fact that subaltern subjects themselves make constant recourse to the state in the form of complaint, dissatisfaction, and catalogues of wrongs. In the early 1990s, Ken Saro-Wiwa wrote about the ruination of Ogoniland from oil drilling and demanded redress from the federal government through the Ogoni Bill of Rights (chapter 1); in Bhopal annual vigils are held on the December anniversary of the explosion at

³¹ His further argument is that postcolonial states uniquely attempted to globalize equality, an ambition European states never articulated let alone pursued.

³² Specifically, Moyn urges a return to the welfarist project of pursuing equality rather than basic needs. He argues that postcolonial states attempted to institutionalize equality at a global level and this unprecedented priority has been entirely lost under neoliberal auspices. See *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* chs. 4, 5, and 6.

Union Carbide's pesticide factory, as survivors and their advocates protest the legal settlement negotiated by the Indian Supreme Court in 1989 (chapter 2). In the Sundarbans, forms of destructive development and an anti-poor bias that has accompanied Indian economic reforms are combatted by the rural grassroots development projects of middle class led community-based organizations (CBOs) (chapter 3); and as of the writing of this work, Pacific island states are mobilizing their protective mandates in the face of rising seas (chapter 4). The welfare state is being produced and reproduced out of such demands, which go far beyond the original provenances of welfare's basic provisions. The interventionist state is, we might say, undergoing an environmentally induced renaissance in the shadow of neoliberal capital.

Such discourses testify to the widespread persistence of welfare expectations in the midst of neoliberal takeover. While subaltern subjects also pursue agentive strategies by turning away from the state altogether, toward transnational solidarities or local, sub-state forms of struggle, complaint outward and upward to the state is a widespread approach. It should be clear though that the relative weakness or strength of the welfare state is not in question; these discourses are produced by peoples who have only ever experienced the weakness, indeed sometimes the nonexistence, of welfare protections. Nor is it this project's aim to judge whether such strategies of state revision are more or less effective than turning away from the state. Rather, "States of Complaint" begins from the premise that the poor refuse to accept current hegemonic configurations of state welfare or to limit welfare to the political values, benefits, and meanings within its official scope. Instead, complaints about environmental harm make up forms of dissatisfied citizenship that testify to the powerfully poetic, and practical, place of the welfare state in the lives of the poor.

This project thus returns to the potentiality and aspiration for the state that was perhaps

expressed in its most fervent form in anti-colonial nationalism, and the early welfarist hopes of national state leaders. If such ambitions have ended up severely disappointed, not least because of the paradoxes of welfare and development that frame this project, early independence was at least a moment in which the state was seen as a site of positive good, inclusion, and provision. This project does not nostalgically return to such aspirations as if they could be repeated; it does however draw upon their general impetus, as part of postcolonialism's larger pursuit of justice in a world not only of greater economic inequality, but of increasingly globalized, and yet increasingly uneven, slow, and unpredictable distributions of environmental harm.

However weak the national welfarist state might be, this is all the more reason to study its persistence in the demands of the poor. Such appeal might be commonsensical – the state is there to hand, and more available than the media/ed attention of transnational activists. Partha Chatterjee suggests as much in his recent *The Politics of the Governed*, where he suggests that the poor do not pursue robust citizenship and instead merely negotiate with local bureaucratic, service arms of the state. His argument though, is belied by the generativity of dissatisfied citizenship; for subaltern demands, as this project shows, rarely accept hegemonic definitions of political norms, ideals, or services but instead articulate novel understandings of them based in local needs.

Looking at the claims of the poor through environmental harm moves the focus of welfare away from its conventional associations with distributive justice or social services. In this way, dissatisfied citizenship links what might otherwise be seen as the niche or minor concerns of subaltern populations to normative political values held widely by fellow citizens and articulated by postcolonial states themselves as central tenants. Rob Nixon points out that environmentalism in the global South has rarely been “single-issue,” and dissatisfied citizenship

is one way of negotiating not only state responses to harm but the parameters of national inclusion.³³ It works to expand the values that underpin the national life of postcolonial states at large, and it is a way of remaking forms of citizenship that have been exclusionary by engaging with values already seen as worthy of national investment or normatively of national concern. Thus the environmental claims of the poor might be taken up beyond a localized interest to become a platform for more widespread national attention or investment.

In short, this project dwells in resistance and revision as responses to state failures. If such readings seem minor or the poesis of dissatisfied citizenship too meager, Antonio Gramsci theorized decades ago the revolutionary potential of molecular movements. In *The Prison Notebooks* he calls revolution a constant war of position, accomplished as much by small shifts as by large upheavals.³⁴ This project situates the subaltern revisions of the welfare state as a radical movement of agency by the presumably agentless, and more importantly as a guerrilla counter to the versions of neoliberal statehood that would evacuate the state of its last welfare residues. Interrogating the persistence of the welfare state is one way of contributing to subaltern resistances to harm and to recuperating the citizen provisions that constituted central ambitions for postcolonial states. While these foundational tenants have been almost forgotten in the wake of state failures they nevertheless remain vital to both the discourses of the poor and the project of postcolonialism.

IV. Postcolonialism Remains

In 2006, the flagship journal of the humanities, *PMLA*, announced the death of the

³³ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 4.

³⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. By Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 2012).

academic field known as postcolonialism. The tellingly titled “The End of Postcolonial Theory?” offered a roundtable discussion by luminaries in the field. Together these brief essays traced the uses and limitations of postcolonial literary studies as it had developed since Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978. While all assessments were careful to trace the immense work postcolonial studies has done in revising English departments, especially in Euro-America, and making possible new kinds of questions and perspectives within both teaching and scholarship, the general consensus was that while postcolonial theory had had its uses, it was also severely limited. Most notable among complaints was an old division between the textual and material emphases in postcolonialism. In this kind of critique postcolonialism is usually accused of paying too little attention to political economy or material conditions and too much attention to postmodern textuality and culture. In the *PMLA* debate, this error was identified as postcolonialism’s celebration of deterritorialized migration, cosmopolitanism, and cultural hybridity to the detriment of material realities, such as the kinds of environmental harm this project takes up.³⁵

From the perspective of postcolonialism’s alliance with a postmodern politics of signs, perhaps it makes sense that postcolonial theory is seen as unfairly charged with political and material realities at which it can only fire textual volleys. But this is only one way of looking at postcolonial theory’s relationship to the world. Indeed, one participant in the roundtable, Sunil Agnani, points out that Said himself emphasized the task of postcolonial critics as one of examining the worldliness of the text in its historical conditioning.³⁶ Such a sentiment is close to the approach of this project, which questions binary oppositions between the textual and the

³⁵ See “Editor’s Column: The End of Postcolonial Theory? A Roundtable with Sunil Agnani, Fernando Coronil, Gaurav Desai, Mamadou Diouf, Simon Gikandi, Susie Tharu, and Jennifer Wenzel.” *PMLA* 122, no. 3 (May 2007): 633-651.

³⁶ Sunil Agnani, “The End of Postcolonial Theory?” 638.

material by approaching the material through the textual; as I show, postcolonial subjects have for decades pursued better material conditions not only through practical policies and movements but through discourses of welfare. The textuality of complaint in this case is part of illuminating, critiquing, and seeking to change the material world.

The selectivity of the *PMLA* challenge was taken up in a different vein a few years later in another round of academic debate spurred by two essays in *New Literary History*. In one of them, “Postcolonial Remains,” Robert Young offers a perspective on the larger project of postcolonial studies that is apposite to this project’s focus on the welfare state, and which the disciplinary purview of the *PMLA* debate perhaps misses. As Young so bracingly puts it, “‘Postcolonialism’ is not just a disciplinary field, nor is it a theory which has or has not come to an end. Rather, *its objectives have always involved a wide-ranging political project*—to reconstruct Western knowledge formations, reorient ethical norms, turn the power structures of the world upside down, refashion the world from below.”³⁷ What the participants of the *PMLA* discussion called a gap between “the state of the field and the state of the world,” a gap that renders postcolonial theory limited or seems to ask more than it can deliver, Young takes as an invitation to further work.³⁸ So long as the world remains structured by unequal powers, limited freedoms, outright oppressions and, as this project adds, unequal distributions of risk and harm, postcolonialism’s task cannot be ended.

For Young therefore, “[t]he postcolonial will remain and persist” because it has never involved a singular theoretical formation, but rather an interrelated set of critical and counterintuitive perspectives, a complex network of paronymous concepts and heterogeneous practices that have been developed out of traditions of resistance to a global historical trajectory of imperialism and colonialism. [T]he only criterion that could

³⁷ Robert Young, “Postcolonial Remains,” *New Literary History* 43, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 20. Emphasis mine.

³⁸ See especially Jennifer Wenzel’s contribution to “The End of Postcolonial Theory?” 633-634.

determine whether ‘postcolonial theory’ has ended is whether [...] imperialism and colonialism in all their different forms have ceased to exist in the world.³⁹

Postcolonialism remains then because the entrenched inequalities, unfreedoms, and aspirations to a more just world that birthed it, both in its mid-century political form of anticolonial resistance and national independence struggles, and its academic form of discursive resistance to exclusionary and falsely universalist knowledges, also remain. For Young, and for this project, so long as postcolonialism is seen as drawing its critical purchase from an unequal world, its task is constantly generative, altering to meet new forms of harm and aspirations for justice.

For this reason “States of Complaint” considers the place of the welfare state in postcolonial modernity. The welfare state is a site in which the social justice project of postcolonialism not only remains, but has been continuously reimagined, negotiated, and expanded. While the historical impetus of the welfare state is one of ensuring the well-being of postcolonial citizens as part of the legacy of national independence, in the wake of the failures of this goal, the continuity of the welfare state in literary and popular imaginaries continues the project of social justice with which the welfare state began. In a world of intensified, attritional, and unequal harm, it is to further pursue the goals of social justice at the root of postcolonialism that the welfare state must be considered amidst all talk of its decline.

V. Methodology: Poesis and Multiplicity

To this end, “States of Welfare” employs a method that can illuminate and articulate the vicissitudes of dissatisfied citizenship, as well as the limited agency it must confront. For while agency is most often understood as the capacity to act, environmental harm throws this capacity into doubt. Since environmental harms are most characterized by their extended timelines and

³⁹ Young, “Postcolonial Remains,” 20.

spatial diffusions, how then might agency be conceived, practiced, produced, and represented? What method might track the forms of discourse that accumulate around environmental harms as they endure over time? In parallel, what kind of analytic approach might track or make visible the revisionary quality of political poesis as it evokes the limitations and forgotten precedents of mainstream political values, as well as the demands at the edges of national imaginaries? In short, the methodological question of this project is: how might the accumulated discourses that come to make up the archive of a *longue durée* problem like environmental harm be mobilized to support the agency of the poor?

Posing the question of method this way makes method a vehicle for the political generativity of dissatisfied citizenship. “States of Complaint” therefore mobilizes the quintessentially literary skill of close reading within a hybrid methodology that draws from literary new historicism and postcolonial theory. By drawing on the commonality and complementarity between new historicist and postcolonial methods, I offer an agentic reading practice attuned to the kinds of discursive subversions and revisions produced when one reads intertextually across the fictional, poetic, legislative, juridical, official and popular texts of a harmful archive.

While new historicism in literary criticism emerged in the 1980s as a way of re-politicizing canonical literary texts and has classically been associated with Renaissance and Romanticist scholarship, it has become a widely used method and bears fruitful commonalities with postcolonial theory. In particular, I combine insights from the British version of new historicism dubbed cultural materialism, postcolonial literary theory, especially the work of Edward Said, and postcolonial historiography, especially the work of the subaltern studies group and the later work of Dipesh Chakrabarty. From Said and cultural materialism generally I draw

an emphasis for reading texts “against the grain” for the non-hegemonic discourses and perspectives embedded in them, and in doing so participate in their common tradition of treating literature as a site of resistance to dominant forms of power; such methodological commitments also arise from their common root in Foucauldian discourse analysis.

I combine this privileging of subaltern perspectives with nonlinear conceptions of historic time and cultural relation. This latter method is drawn from the idea of residual and emergent cultures evoked by Raymond Williams and traceable to Gramsci. It is also foundational to the democratization of history underpinning the subaltern studies group and Dipesh Chakrabarty’s influential *Provincializing Europe*. These methods make nonlinear, nonsynchronous, and residual conceptions of historical time foundational to cultural analysis, and allow me to consider discourses within nonlinear relationships to each other; hence the archives of environmental harm in this project not only span many kinds of texts, but shuttle back and forth between later texts and their precedents.

I expand upon these threads below, not to claim a “new new historicist method,” but to point out the convergences I have found useful between the specific methods of postcolonial studies as a subfield and more widespread forms of Marxist cultural critique and new historicism in literary criticism. Together these offer a robust method for analyzing the poetic quality of political complaint in state precedents, popular demands, and literature as they all respond to the irresolutions and *longue durées* of environmental harm.

VI. Historicism: New, Postcolonial, Historical, Intertextual

Historicism, old and new, is one of the dominant methods of literary criticism. Proponents of new historicism in particular take the idea that texts must be understood in context

as methodological *sin qua non*: “New Historicism broke the base/superstructure, text/context dichotomy, by insisting that works of art are themselves events, which intervene materially in history, rather than mirrors of reality”; “Representations do shape history [...] but are shaped by history in turn, since they are terrains of struggle as well as of submission.”⁴⁰ As it emerged on both sides of the Atlantic, literary new historicism rejected both the formalist tendencies of New Criticism, which isolated texts from contexts, and from an older version of historicism. Exemplified in the stock figure of E.M.W. Tillyard’s *The Elizabethan World Picture*, old historicism is often critiqued for assuming that literature merely reflects the external world, and moreover, that the social world reflected is unitary and homogenous. This kind of ‘world picture’ ends up being the dominant or orthodox one, keyed to hegemonic perspectives and to static rather than evolving and dynamic conceptions of historical time. New historicism contests these ideas and has achieved widespread currency as a literary method since its emergence.⁴¹

Central to both the British and American versions of new historicism is the discourse analysis Foucault introduced to the academy. As is well known, for Foucault knowledge is produced by and in turn produces power; thus knowledge and power are two sides of the same coin (“knowledge/power”). Discourses, as sites through which knowledge is articulated and disseminated, can no longer be considered isolated from the networks of power they enable and participate in. But because of this they are also key sites of resistance, since Foucault theorized the saturation of power to be always shadowed by resistance. Thus, centrally for my project as well as for the British version of new historicism known as cultural materialism, because power

⁴⁰ Richard Wilson, “Introduction: Historicizing New Historicism,” in *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama*, eds. Richard Wilson and Richard Dutton (London: Longman, 1992), 11, 16.

⁴¹ Indeed since it emerged with a host of dissenting scholarship, including academic feminist theory and postcolonial studies, its general resistance of domination and dominant forms is part of a larger trend.

is everywhere, so is resistance. Texts as sites of discourse then become central to how dominant discourses are resisted and subverted from within.⁴²

Resistance was the central refrain of cultural materialism: “ruling culture does not define the whole of culture, though it tries to, and it is the task of the oppositional critic to re-read culture so as to amplify the voices of the ruled, exploited, oppressed, and excluded.”⁴³ The duty of critics in this method is to reinsert the multiplicity of history into its dominant narratives, and to make visible the processes of social struggle and resistance to dominant power that appear within texts. This is not only because, after Foucault, all discursive production is bound up in power, but because as Marxist critic Raymond Williams put it, “we cannot separate literature and art from other kinds of social practice, in such a way as to make them subject to quite special and distinct laws.”⁴⁴

Whether it is seen to come from Foucault’s twinning of knowledge and power or from Marxist theories of culture as multiple and shot through which non-hegemonic forces, the new historicist collapse between the literary and the nonliterary “necessitate[s] a radical contextualizing of literature which eliminates the old divisions between literature and its ‘background’, text and context.”⁴⁵ Postcolonialism shares many of these methodological premises. Commonalities are particularly apparent in the version of discourse analysis Edward Said employs in *Orientalism*, and later developed in *Cultural and Imperialism* as the practice of

⁴² This contrasts to the American version of new historicism which came to be known as cultural poetics under Stephen Greenblatt. There resistance was always already co-opted by power, and the possibility of agency much diminished. This view repeated some of the apolitical tendencies of formalism, and has been critiqued by other American new historicists like Alain Liu and Carolyn Porter.

⁴³ Frank Lentricchia quoted in Jonathan Dollimore, “Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism” in *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama*, eds. Richard Wilson and Richard Dutton (London: Longman, 1992), 55.

⁴⁴ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005), 44.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Dollimore, “Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism,” 47.

contrapuntal reading.

Said takes up, from the outset of his *oeuvre*, the relationship of the text to the world. The main task of *Orientalism*, despite critiques that it comes close to reproducing the inequalities of colonial knowledge by giving inadequate space to forms of resistance, was precisely to point out how knowledge shapes practical and material power; to show how the knowledge apparatus that grew up around the Orient enabled political and military domination of actual spaces in the colonial world, and in revealing the complicity of knowledge with power to contest its ‘disinterested’ status. Partially to respond to *Orientalism*’s critics, the later *Culture and Imperialism* elaborates a theory of textual resistance that Said called “contrapuntal reading.” His most famous example, that of the hidden foundations of plantation wealth to the seemingly distant lifestyle drama of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, displays Said’s commitment to reading the inequalities of power hidden in the interstices of texts, and of drawing these buried dynamics to the surface.⁴⁶ More generally then, his reading practice is one of resisting the surface quality of texts, especially those that appear non-political. Contrapuntal reading not only reveals the hidden dynamics of colonial and postcolonial power, but induces critics, when they read in this way, to participate in forms of resistance and disruption to what count as dominant and especially apolitical narratives.

It should be apparent then, that Saidian reading practices, alongside new historicist ones, not only share a common root in Foucauldian conceptions of discourse, resistance, and knowledge/power but because of that, also common commitments to practices of reading that might reveal the contingent, non-hegemonic, and subversive perspectives embedded within texts. In beginning from subaltern perspectives in my own project, I draw upon this legacy, arguably at

⁴⁶ See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), ch. 2.

the core of postcolonial literary studies and widely employed in literary criticism more generally, in order to privilege the discourses of the environmental poor who contest official state discourse of welfare.

More significantly, I examine the ways in which subaltern discourses not only critique dominant ones but expand and change the parameters of what counts as politically available within them. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams articulated a similar conception of resistance reading for cultural materialism: “[w]e have to emphasize that hegemony is not singular; indeed that its own internal structures are highly complex, and have continually to be renewed, recreated and redefined; and by the same token, that they can be continually challenged and in certain respects modified.”⁴⁷ Postcolonial literary theory and cultural materialism thus share much in common methodologically: they take discourse seriously as a site of contested power, assume the multiplicity of discourse in order to privilege the subordinated or non-hegemonic perspectives within it, and highlight the alternatives such multiplicity enables, or the practices and processes of change which it makes visible; in short they insist on analyzing together the text and the world. The method of agentive reading employed throughout this project is part of this longer literary and critical lineage.

But I also treat texts written at different historical moments as supplements or intertexts, an approach to the archive that privileges not descent but the kinds of nonsynchronous and nonlinear temporal and cultural relationships found in Marxist cultural critique and postcolonial historiography. This method is especially prominent in Dipesh Chakrabarty’s work and which he locates originally in the Indian Subaltern Studies group. Chakrabarty’s critique of historicism is not about the apolitical formalism of texts but the linearity of Western time. For Chakrabarty,

⁴⁷ Williams, *Culture and Materialism*, 38.

postcolonial modernity inaugurated a novel challenge to historicism in the social sciences; for as practiced in Europe, historicism “posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance [...] that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West.”⁴⁸ Because historical time since Hegel has been assumed linear and progressive, linearity translates into notions of developmental hierarchy; as previously mentioned, this kind of assumption also underpinned notions of ‘tutelage’ and ‘provision’ predominant in the British empire and by which other empires, like the French, justified their existence in the run up to decolonization.⁴⁹

For Chakrabarty, such historicism meets an irrefutable challenge in postcolonial modernity, because the linear assumption that postcolonial subjects were ‘not yet’ ready to rule themselves was abruptly terminated by independence and the modern political subjects it inaugurated. In particular, while historicist assumptions remain alive and well, they are belied by the “phenomenon of the peasant as full participant in the political life of the nation (that is, first in the nationalist movement and then as a citizen of the independent nation), long before he or she could be formally educated into the doctrinal or conceptual aspects of citizenship.”⁵⁰ This paradoxical leap in political status leads Chakrabarty to question the nature of historicist time and to conclude that postcolonial modernity is irreducibly multiple.

Indeed, this challenge to linear time was central to the Subaltern Studies group, which “attempted to democratize the writing of Indian history by looking on subordinate social groups as the makers of their own destiny.”⁵¹ Gayatri Spivak, in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” made it impossible to claim nonmediated representation of the subaltern and thus cast the goals of the group into doubt, rightly claiming that no privileged subject could speak for without speaking

⁴⁸ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 7.

⁴⁹ See Moyn, *Not Enough*, ch. 4.

⁵⁰ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 9.

⁵¹ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 11.

over the subaltern; yet the fundamental impulse to pluralize what or who counts as a political subject, and which underlies both the Subaltern Studies group and Chakrabarty's later book is, I argue, still relevant. For what Subaltern Studies brings to the fore is a methodological and epistemological frame in which the "history of power in global modernity" is "fundamentally pluralize[d]." The postcolonial challenge to historicism insists that "historical time is not integral, that it is out of joint with itself."⁵²

Subaltern Studies thus foregrounds the principles at center of this project's method of agentive reading: that experiences of modernity, in this case of modern postcolonial welfare, development, and environmental harm, are irreducibly plural and that this plurality is available alongside dominant discourses. This leads me not to 'speak for' the subaltern in an unmediated way but to examine the discourses, written and oral, that subaltern subjects themselves produce. For they pluralize what counts as dominant history or hegemonic values in the very practices of occupying their own disadvantaged spaces within welfare states. And, by reading their discourses within a nonlinear understanding of historical relation, their texts can be mobilized with others as intertexts responding to the same ongoing harm.⁵³ These insights from cultural materialism, postcolonial literary theory, and postcolonial historiography form the foundation of my method of agentive reading.

VII. Supplementing Agency

Given the challenge to the separation between text and context found in cultural materialism and postcolonial theory, I treat this project's archive of literary fiction, juridical

⁵² Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 14, 16.

⁵³ Cultural materialism, in Raymond Williams' conception of residual and emergent cultures, shares this premise, which goes back to Gramsci and of course originally to Marx.

cases, popular manifestos, and national legislation as mutual intertexts or supplements. If Derrida's original theory of the supplement is usually more associated with its second part, that the supplement is that which "takes the place of" the original to undo the structural primacy of original presence, here the supplement is more associated with the first part of his definition, that which "adds itself" as a surplus to what is already available.

The notion of supplementation is especially important for questions of agency within environmental harm, where real world effects have been disappointing, but also where neither literary nor popular responses alone have accounted for the full scope of problems or the full range of agentic moves available. In situations where agency has stalled or become foreclosed, the primary task of agentic reading is to make conceptions of change visible within what has become static; and yet when harm is long term, slow, or otherwise on-going, no final resolution is possible. Instead agentic reading aims to provide an analytic mode that can articulate disparate discourses together in new ways, and in doing so illuminate occasions for political poesis. In the following chapters I read popular demands, state precedents, and literary representations in this way to reintroduce a processual sense of agency into the dilated time of environmental harm.

At its most basic, the texts in this project's archive can be seen to "add themselves" to each other because they constitute a common world of discourse in the shared archive of a particular harm. I do not mean to say that reading a novel is akin to enacting legislation. But environmental harms accumulate discursive histories that come together as a legible archive through the commonality of the unresolved harm they address. In chapter one for example, I read the Oil Pipelines Act (1956) as a forgotten legislative precedent that facilitates environmental protection in Nigeria; it is an available discourse which both the popular imaginary of the much

later Ogoni Bill of Rights (1990) and Chinua Achebe's last novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) fail to engage. Nevertheless it remains available as part of the discursive history of oil pollution in Nigeria and can be mobilized as a supplement to literary and popular representations of oil pollution.

This method also refuses, and indeed makes conceptually suspect, what Anne McClintock called "a fetishism of form," where form stands in for actual political work: "The question is whether it is sufficient to locate agency in the internal fissures of discourse." For McClintock, this would "[run] the risk of what can be called a fetishism of form: the projection of historical agency onto formal abstractions that are anthropomorphized and given a life of their own. Here abstractions become historical actors."⁵⁴ This impulse is sometimes critiqued as part of postcolonialism's interest in the "textual" rather than the "material"; but as I have suggested this binary is falsely drawn, and even the select methodological antecedents I have discussed above, in both literature and historiography, belie their necessary opposition.⁵⁵

If this project privileges the methodological and epistemological desire to expand agency, it is also always asking how and whether the agentive imaginaries found in texts can become resources outside the text. As will become apparent, my chapters all read for and within the constraints of the world on the text, while also seeking to create, by reading intertextually, possible agentive moves beyond existing realpolitik constraints. As Catherine Belsey put it cannily: "The intertextual relations of the text are never purely literary."⁵⁶ But context constrains my readings deliberately, such that any formal, thematic, conceptual or stylistic alternative is

⁵⁴ McClintock quoted in Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 31.

⁵⁵ See also Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, "Whence and Whither Postcolonial Theory?" *New Literary History* 43, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 371-390, doi:10.1353/nlh.2012.0010.

⁵⁶ Catherine Belsey, "Literature, History, Politics" in *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama*, eds Richard Wilson and Richard Dutton (London: Longman, 1992): 41.

never complete on its own or equivalent to social change.

In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon offers one strategy for thinking the relationship between the literary and the nonliterary in the service of pursuing positive environmental change: “I have underscored those places where writers, by drawing on literature’s testimonial and imaginative capacities, have engaged nonliterary forces for social change.”⁵⁷ This project shares the goal of “[keeping] questions of political agency and historical change central in order to connect specialist knowledge to broader public worlds.”⁵⁸ But my engagement with it is primarily methodological. In addressing environmental harm, political revision, and dissatisfied citizenship I have sought to integrate reflections on agency, citizenship and resistance with questions of literary method. I have assembled examples of an agential reading practice in which the literary, national, and popular discourses in the archives of environmental harms might be brought together to supplement each other, and in doing so illuminate once again the processual quality, and availability, of political change.

VIII. Exemplary Cases of Common Harms

Given its globally distributed but locally variable scope, a project about environmental harm must range widely. This project has thus taken a comparative approach to harms in Nigeria, India, and the Pacific. Because different harms have produced specific responses and discourses, each chapter gathers and illuminates a different political value that has come to resignify nationally in the wake of harm: national interests in the first chapter, welfare in the second, development in the third, and futurity in the fourth. Rather than taking a specific regional focus I look across a range of sites in the global South in order to convey the pervasiveness of harms but

⁵⁷ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 32.

⁵⁸ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 32.

also to remain attentive to the specificity of agentive discourses as they are subject to local articulations of complaint and dissatisfied citizenship.

For example, the explosion of Union Carbide Corporation's pesticide factory in Bhopal, which I take up in my second chapter, is considered the worst industrial disaster in modern history. But as Indra Sinha notes about Khaufpur, his novelistic stand-in for Bhopal, it is "every place in which people have been poisoned and then abandoned. It could be Seveso, Halabja, Minamata, Caracas or Sao Paulo. I did toy with the idea of setting the novel in a Brazilian favela, or a contaminated city in West Africa."⁵⁹ Sinha highlights a certain portability in terms of toxicity's widespread harm; yet Bhopal is also a particularly dramatic case of state failure that illuminates the vicissitudes of independent India's modernization.

I have chosen to focus on countries with extensive histories of environmental harm, ones that offer flashpoints within larger constellations or distributions of harm across the South. Approaching the global through the particular allows "States of Complaint" to examine how agency is produced within the variable consequences of postcolonial development and welfare. The motives of dissatisfied citizens and the political values taken up are unique in each chapter, but cumulatively across the project they illuminate the poetic quality of subaltern demands for more, better, and different forms of welfare. And as a whole, "States of Complaint" reveals a range of values that have become amenable to revision under the force of dissatisfied citizenship.

The three sites that appear in this project are not meant to offer a comprehensive catalogue of environmental harms, but they are considered because they offer exemplary cases of common harms. India and Nigeria have also been at the forefront of geopolitical shifts after decolonization. India is the world's largest democracy, and boasts a huge economy, population,

⁵⁹ Indra Sinha, "Bhopal: A novel quest for justice," *The Guardian*, Oct. 10, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/oct/10/india-bhopal>.

and globalized forms of culture in its own right. Nigeria's significant oil resources and membership in OPEC means its international clout has been unquestioned. As powerhouse states, their responses to harm and welfare shape how these conceptions work and circulate in the global South.

Both countries have also been central to postcolonial literary studies, generating canonical novels in the field and influential theoretical paradigms. India's postcolonial Anglophone writers make up some of the most recognizable and widely taught, from Salman Rushdie, whose name once practically eclipsed the field altogether, to Amitav Ghosh and Sinha himself. Similarly, Nigeria holds a preeminent place among postcolonial African literature, shaped by the literary and political sensibilities of Chinua Achebe; his writing has been hugely influential both to second-generation Nigerian writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche and to African literature more generally.

My first three chapters thus focus on India and Nigeria. My first chapter explores how competitive resource control and pollution in Nigeria shape the political imaginary of different populations in ways that both entrench and challenge the oil regime central to Nigeria's post-independence autonomy. I analyze how the Nigerian Constitution (1979) and the Ogoni Bill of Rights (1990) both equate political autonomy with resource control, and contrast these with the alternative political imaginaries of Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) and the Oil Pipelines Act (1956). *Anthills* offers a temporal critique of resource control and the authoritarian violence it supports as inappropriate to the modern nation-state. It posits a vision of democratic, inclusive community as an alternative to politics defined by appropriation and violence. However, while the nexus of resources and power motivates Achebe's critique, he also falls short of fully addressing it. The Oil Pipelines Act provides a supplement to Achebe's political vision

and a forgotten precedent to the resource narrative of Nigerian modernity by posing environment protection from pollution as a basis for local and national interests alike.

The second chapter addresses the bodily consequences of toxicity after the Bhopal gas disaster of 1984, not only as failures of governmental protection and the privileging of international capitalist interests, but also as a site of citizen demands and expectations that revise the role of the state in toxic redress. It departs from scholarship on the inadequacies of the disaster's legal settlement to consider the place of bodily complaint in the settlement's aftermath. Reading ethnographic interviews and victim statements as an interpellation of promises of welfare enshrined in the Indian Constitution (1950) and the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster (Processing of Claims) Act (1985), it argues that bodily testimony evokes protective promises in these documents that predate and contradict the settlement, and therefore provide a basis for claim-making. The chapter then turns to consider how Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's People* (2007) complicates welfare as a shared term of political legibility. I argue that Sinha's novel suggests that post-disaster terms of political relation must arise from the citizenry themselves as they articulate the unruliness of their toxified bodies, specifically characterized as nonhuman assemblages.

In chapter three I turn to the politics of development and middle class reform in the Sundarbans, where local communities have been subject to destructive state development. The chapter examines how Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2005) theorizes the history of middle class led community-based organizations (CBOs) as a historic precedent to the anti-poor bias that has come to characterize state development since the 1980s. I also consider how Ghosh, along with Arundhati Roy in *The Cost of Living* (1998), propose the reform of the contemporary middle classes who have largely abandoned these grassroots roles for the pursuit of material

gains; insofar as their class priorities undergird development projects destructive to the poor, reforming the middle classes is seen as an indirect way of reforming state development priorities.

Both authors mobilize environmental frameworks as catalysts to middle class sympathy with the poor, and cast narrative mediation as a way of addressing middle class epistemological distance from the environment. While previous chapters addressed political revision to the state, Ghosh and Roy take up the insulation of privileged middle class citizens as a primary factor contributing to local neglect and supporting state hierarchies of development. I argue that *The Hungry Tide* and *The Cost of Living* pose historic middle class reform and the reform of the current middle classes as tools to address contemporary state development, and that practices of citizen-citizen obligation outside the state act to reform and supplement the state's development priorities.

The fourth chapter turns to the Pacific. In contrast to Nigeria and India, this region has conventionally been considered a geopolitical lightweight, and its literature has not shaped mainstream postcolonial studies to the same degree as Indian and African literatures have. The Pacific emerges as exemplary though in a kind of environmental harm that has become recently salient: sea level rise, and its larger roots in climate change and the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene denotes a new geological age in which the human species as a whole has become an agentive force akin to the planet's climate systems, and since Paul Crutzen coined the concept in 2002, it has inaugurated a multitude of debates.⁶⁰ These are not within the scope of this project.

Sea level rise does, however, take up at a larger scale the inseparability of the human and the nonhuman that is considered in other chapters largely at the level of harmed bodies –

⁶⁰ See Paul Crutzen, "Geology of mankind," *Nature* 415 (Jan. 2002): 23, doi:10.1038/415023a.

polluted, poisoned, or exposed to inclement weather. Considered as a planetary consequence of changing climate, sea level rise threatens all low lying islands and many coastal communities exposed to warming ocean waters and global ice melt. Thus it might be appropriate to consider sea level rise as part of a dilated chain of harm that has its roots in the fossil fuel economy that has pumped carbon and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere since the 19th century. In this project however, sea level rise is considered primarily as a form of harmful environmental change that threatens the statehood, communal identities, and indigenous cultures of Pacific islanders.

In bringing us up to the present, the last chapter of my dissertation confronts some limitations to agential reading, as the coextension of this reading practice with the available archive of sea level rise as a problem is more explicit. It is not that its archive is thinner, but rather that sea level rise, unlike the other instances of ongoing harm, is threatening primarily because of its *truncated* rather than extended timeline. For sea level rise is not actually a *longue durée* problem: it is one that threatens the lifeways of low-lying islands all too quickly, and for which their in-place adaptations or petitions to the international community may work too little too late.

This final chapter thus examines the ambivalence of Pacific ambitions toward futurity, moving between Pacific commitments to ordinary futures, in terms of conventional statehood and place-based identity and community, and contrapuntal discourses that jettison ordinariness. Rather than re-reading available but overlooked discourses, the task of agential reading in this chapter is to contribute to the creation of an archive of multiple futures which, against the material reality of sea level rise's dire timeline, have been difficult to imagine outside commitments to the ordinary.

The fourth chapter begins by first considering the national adaptation plans of Kiribati (2016) and Tuvalu (2012) alongside Marshallese poet Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's collection *Iep Jaltok* (2017), which historicizes and deflates Pacific extinction narratives. The discursive commitments to ordinary futures in these texts make clear the costs of sea level rise but do not challenge the existing status quo of territorially-bound statehood that is being ever more severely challenged by sea level rise. Because of the conceptual limitations of the ordinary, the chapter then turns to considering extra-ordinary futures; it re-reads Kiribati's national plan against its surface meaning as a critique of Westphalian statehood, alongside Keri Hulme's short story collection *Stonefish* (2004). These stories advocate embracing an ethos of flexibility and adaptation that normalizes rather than resists drastic environmental change. Rather than posing extra-ordinary futures as supplements to ordinary commitments though, in this chapter these versions of the future sit uneasily alongside each other. One is not assimilable to the other; instead futurity appears in this chapter as a split, doubled and incommensurable value within the timeline of sea level rise's threat to Pacific states.

In examining agency through a hybrid historicist method that aims to more fully reveal the political possibilities within the discursive archives of various environmental problems, "States of Complaint" contributes to postcolonial studies, ecocriticism, and the environmental humanities. It argues for a view of the state as a site of welfare, agency, and provision from the bottom up. By analyzing the environmental discourses of the global South, my project helps us better understand how devastating environmental consequences have been addressed within political practices and discourses of dissatisfied citizenship. It eschews anti-statism and alarmist environmental frames, instead analyzing how subaltern subjects produce agency within a harmful present and in doing so it recuperates the welfare state from both its neglect and its

attenuation.

Chapter 1

Adjudicating Interests: Oil Revenue and Pollution in Nigerian Legislation and Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*

In 1955, British historian Lord Malcolm Hailey described Nigeria as “perhaps the most artificial of the many administrative units created in the course of European occupation of Africa.”¹ Cobbled together under British administrative rule, contestations between the Muslim, Hausa-Fulani north, Yoruba west, and Igbo east are only the largest of the territorial, religious, and ethnic divisions enfolded into Nigeria's governing structure. These divisions have not lessened with independence; as Eghosa Osaghae notes in *The Crippled Giant*, his thoroughgoing analysis of postcolonial Nigeria:

What has been the character of Nigerian politics since independence? It may be summarized as a long-drawn-out decay or decline, whose empirical elements are political instability, a low level of national cohesion, and economic crisis, all of which are mutually reinforcing [...] Politics in the country, especially contestation for state power and resources, tended to be organized around regional, ethnic and religious interests. The centrifugal pulls emanating from this pattern of politics made resolution of what Nigerian social scientists refer to as the ‘national question’ difficult. Fundamental issues of minority rights, resource distribution and power-sharing remain volatile [...] The result is that even in the fourth decade after independence, and after a civil war provoked by unresolvable issues of the national question, the country's continued existence as one unit was not assured and could not be taken for granted.²

Like other large and diverse postcolonial nation-states, Nigeria adopted a federal government after independence. However, while classic theories of federalism define it as a governing structure of shared and separate powers, “a system of government [embodying] predominantly a division of powers between general and regional authorities, each of which, in its own sphere, is

¹ Quoted in Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (London: Saros International Publishers, 1992), 19.

² Eghosa E. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since independence* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998), 15.

co-ordinate with the others, and independent of them,”³ Nigerian federalism has more often been written about as the organization and adjudication of competing interests and diverse claims amongst its incredibly heterogeneous populace. As Peter Ekeh puts it, “[i]t is in order to lessen conflicts between state structures and the forces of society, and to minimize the danger of the partisan control of the state by dominant sections of socially plural nations, that federalism has emerged as a common system of government in post-colonial nations [...] According to this view, federalism is a governmental solution to inter-community conflicts.”⁴

In Nigeria, most of these conflicts and federal responses to them have been motivated by oil. Oil is not only the most valuable and extensive of Nigeria’s natural resources, making up 80 to 95 percent of government revenues between the 1970s and 1990s, its centralized management is also enshrined in the 1979 and 1999 Constitutions as a way of facilitating national unity and loyalty.⁵ Yet, violent competition between federal, state, and local community claims to oil monies has dominated the history of its use. As such, Nigeria seems a case study in the politics of resource control, as claims to oil have more often impeded than facilitated the national cohesion they were meant to secure.

This chapter explores how conceptions of oil shape local interests in Nigeria and how these interests are adjudicated within Nigeria’s federal system. I argue that Nigerian federalism contains (at least) two contradictory ways of managing local interests. The first, exemplified in the 1979 Constitution, minimizes local allegiances in favor of cultivating loyalty to Nigeria’s federal center. It does so by utilizing oil revenues as a way to cultivate equal dependence of state

³ K. C. Wheare, *Federal Government*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford UP, 1951), 32-33.

⁴ Peter P. Ekeh, “The Structure and Meaning of Federal Character in the Nigerian Political System” in *Federal Character and Federalism in Nigeria*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh and Eghosa E. Osaghae (Ibadan, Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Limited, 1989), 20.

⁵ Andrew H., *The Pan African Nation-State: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2005), 27.

and local governments upon the federal center, and thus to minimize competitive, partisan claims to the oil wealth that is central to Nigeria's post-independence economy.⁶ The second contradicts this minimization of local interests, by considering how local interests attach not to oil revenues for partisan use but instead to protecting the environment from oil pollution. Exemplified in the Oil Pipelines Act (1956), this second form of adjudication considers local interests as imbricated within national interests; I argue that the OPA theorizes local interests in protecting the environment as a constitutive part of national interests in developing the oil industry, and also that local risks from oil pollution become generalized to national scale as a virtual or potential threat through the way in which the OPA imagines the nation's pipeline network, namely as one subject to leakage and breakage.

These two models of how federalism might adjudicate local interests are in turn supported by two different conceptions of oil. The first cultivates and relies on oil as dematerialized revenue, while the second conceives of oil through its liquid materiality and corrosive, polluting effects. I examine the first by looking at oil imaginaries dominant during the oil boom, the 1979 Constitution, and the Ogoni Bill of Rights (1991), a document written by the Ogoni ethnic minority of the Niger delta. The latter conception of oil is drawn from a contradictory clause within the Ogoni Bill, the Oil Pipelines Act (1956), and a recent court case,

⁶ It must be noted that Nigeria's pursuit of oil revenue, while of central domestic importance as this chapter argues, was also motivated by external debt. Nigeria was indebted at independence after Britain imposed a ten-year Colonial Development and Welfare plan in 1946, of which Nigeria was supposed to pay for 23 of the £55 million cost. The oil boom in the 1970s generated huge revenues, but the state also pursued exorbitant development projects and private embezzlement. Nigeria implemented a 'homegrown' SAP in 1982 to mitigate its rising debt and falling revenues. However, this was ineffective and by the time Nigeria negotiated an SAP with the IMF in 1986, it was deeply in debt and considered a hazard to Western creditors. See Julius Omozuanvbo Ihonvbere and Timothy M. Shaw, *Illusions of Power: Nigeria in Transition* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998), Introduction and ch. 1-2 and Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, ch. 3-7.

The Bodo Community and Others v. Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited (2014). Chinua Achebe's last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, (1987) provides the hinge between these two perspectives and their nexus of governance and resources; it offers a mediation on and rebuke of the centralized resource control endemic to Nigeria's federal state, while positing an alternative political imaginary divorced from resource control altogether.

I begin this chapter by examining how the 1979 Nigerian Constitution shifted control of oil revenues to the federal state, and reallocated many political powers away from state governments to the federal center;⁷ in doing so the federal state set itself up as a paternalistic provider vis-à-vis the rest of the nation, in an attempt to facilitate national cohesion and a sense of loyalty to the federal center. Similarly, this Constitution formalized the creation of new states and a quota system of representation within the levels of government to promote equal access to centralized revenues across Nigeria's diverse populace. Such moves were intended to minimize partisan loyalties and partisan claims to oil money by casting all citizens and lower tiers of government as equal beneficiaries of the federal state; local interests would be minimized and dissipated by being equally met. Unfortunately, these measures did little to change the commonly held view of oil revenues as private goods to be re-distributed back to partisan constituencies. As such, formal constitutional efforts to purchase national loyalty, perhaps unsurprisingly, have met with little success.

I then move on to analyze the Ogoni Bill of Rights, written by representatives of the Ogoni minority group in the Niger delta. This document is exemplary of the failure of the

⁷ See Osagahe, *Crippled Giant*, especially ch. 4. I use the 1979 constitution because it is the constitution to which the Ogoni Bill responds and was in force when Achebe wrote *Anthills of the Savannah*. It has since been replaced with the 1999 constitution upon Nigeria's return to civilian rule.

Constitution's approach to minimizing local interests, and points up the reactionary potential of communities whose interests are seen to be neglected or ignored by the federal center's distributive ethos. The Bill calls for local control as a response precisely to the unequal treatment of local interests within the federal model. Its foregrounding of Ogoni local interests at the expense of other citizens and certainly the federal center in some ways highlights the dangers of partisanship the Constitution was meant to guard against; but in repeating the very unequal distributive infrastructure it critiques, it can be seen as merely an extreme case of the partisan interests in oil revenue created by the 1979 Constitution's attempts to buy national unity through centralized revenue distribution.

By comparing conceptions of local interests in these texts I illuminate the status quo of entrenched competitive rights over oil and the political fracture that has characterized the history of Nigerian governance.⁸ The Constitution's centralization of power can be seen an attempt to address the centrifugal force of partisan loyalties, while the Ogoni Bill exemplifies their continuity as well as the basis they provide for claim-making against the federal government's minimizing aims. Centralized resource control has paradoxically naturalized a conception of federalism that puts national and local interests in contention, where good for some can only come at the expense of good for others, and where grounds for shared, noncompetitive interests across different local sites or between local and national interests seem foreclosed.⁹

⁸ Resource control has justified and perpetuated the fractures enfolded into the country's initial creation under British rule.

⁹ Competitive attitudes toward resources are apparent in the Biafran civil war (1967-70), which was waged partially over the control of oil, the continual carving up of Nigeria into ethnically-dominated states at the expense of ethnic minorities, the agitation for oil minority rights that reached a head with the murder of Ogoni environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa by the Abacha regime in 1995, and the upsurge of militant ethnic violence in the delta over oil pollution and political and economic marginalization from the late 1990s through the present. All attest to national fractures perpetuated by and because of, the resource and revenue regime.

To begin tracing an alternate imaginary to this dominant conception of oil interests, I next turn to Chinua Achebe's critique of violent resource control and the democratic political imaginary he proposes to it in his last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). I argue that *Anthills of the Savannah* critiques the utility and appropriateness of centralized resource control and the violence required of appropriation *in toto*, concluding that such practices are anachronistic in the modern nation-state in both part and whole; however, while it critiques the centralized control and abuse of resources in common with the Ogoni Bill, rather than advocating local control, the novel is invested, like the 1979 Constitution, in cultivating a basis for national cohesion. Rather than minimizing local interests it posits, I argue, a democratic polity that might encompass and address them. Characterized by popular, inclusive participation and a responsive style of leadership that can hold different interests in relation, Achebe's imaginary serves as an alternative to autocratic rule and offers a model for adjudicating the competing interests and perspectives of Nigeria's citizenry as neither revenue nor force have done.

Finally, as a complement to Achebe's turn from resource control, I argue that oil's political economy of distributed revenue is complemented by a political ecology of material harm. This is partially apparent in a clause of the Ogoni Bill that contradicts and modifies its investment in local control of oil, and is explicitly articulated in the Oil Pipelines Act. I consider this latter text an ur-text of Nigerian oil legislation, one which posits a model of shared local and national interests based in the threat of oil's potential for environmental pollution.

While the Ogoni Bill shares an investment in oil revenues with the federal state, it does so largely in response to the intense environmental costs of oil extraction, which have been pervasive in the delta where most of Nigeria's oil is found. Oil spills, gas flaring, and the general

pollution of land, water, and air in the delta are ubiquitous. The Bill's demands for local control and political separatism are thus in part compensatory, given that its local interests in environmental clean up, and cultural and economic development, have been systemically ignored. Yet it also posits the protection of the environment from degradation as an addendum to current constitutional duties, and thus suggests a revision to what might be considered national, and not only local, interests in addressing the polluting effects of oil.

The final part of this chapter turns to the Oil Pipelines Act to argue that it offers a profound revision of the competitive relation between local and national interests. In contrast to the 1979 Constitution's minimization of local interests vis-à-vis national ones, this text argues for the centrality of local concerns within national interests. By considering the liquid properties and material consequences of oil, it interrupts and indeed may be considered a forgotten precedent to dominant conceptions of oil as revenue. Specifically, I argue that the OPA legislates local protections from oil pollution as constitutive parts of the national interest in developing the oil industry, and that it further posits local concerns as themselves generalizable to national scale; for in the OPA local environmental harms also enact a speculative potential of national pollution, and local and national interests are made co-extensive through its sense of the distributed risk of oil pollution.

Together these texts highlight the complexities and contradictions of how resources are imagined in Nigeria and the kinds of claims that are then built upon these contradictory imaginings. I compare the Ogoni Bill and the Constitution because at first blush they seem diametrically opposed - the Ogoni Bill is nothing if not a trenchant critique of the entire federal model. Yet it shares with the federal state an assumption about how resources work, namely that resource access and distribution is precursor to and manifestation of, a just and fair polity.

Achebe's novel offers a contrasting view of resource control as irrevocably damaging, and the Ogoni Bill's constitution addendum adds to such a critique the notion that resource control might be complemented or displaced by a model of environmental protection from resource excess. The Oil Pipelines Act brings these strands, which oppose the dominant imaginary of resources as revenue, together by accounting for environmental pollution as a basis not only for rights to protection but also as a basis for national unity.

Together, the Ogoni Bill's constitution addendum, Chinua Achebe's political alternative of a democratic polity, and the Oil Pipeline Act's conception of oil as material harm, offer counter models to the minimization of local interests enshrined in the 1979 Constitution. They foreground not only the continuity and predominance of local allegiances and concerns, but seek to capitalize on these interests by appropriating them for a revised conception of national interests, and thus a federal state toward which local communities might indeed bear allegiance. Such a polity would, as Achebe suggests, acknowledge different viewpoints and needs, and in doing so, unite them; as the Ogoni Bill's minor strain and the Oil Pipelines Act's major premise also suggest, this version of the Nigerian federation would take local concerns about environmental pollution as a blueprint for shared national interests. Together these reconsiderations of local interests hold out an alternative to the competitive resource infrastructures of Nigeria's centralized federal system and its dematerialized oil imaginary. More specifically the vision of oil governance in these documents offers a rival political framework for the role of the state, one based in protecting the environment from oil rather than providing oil revenues as the basis of a just polity.

I. 1979 Constitution: Minimizing the Local or, Oil's Constitutional (Dis)Unity

The dominant story of Nigerian federalism is one of increasingly centralized power. As Eghosa Osaghae notes, the succession of military regimes that governed Nigeria between 1970, with the conclusion of the Biafran civil war, and 1979 when it transitioned briefly back to civilian rule, facilitated the “subordination of the states to the federal government which, contrast to basic federal principles, became the ‘master government,’ the controller of almost all of the country’s major resources, and the centre of development on which the states had to depend.”¹⁰ In contrast to the early, pre-civil war republic, which allocated much more autonomy and revenue to the regional governments,¹¹ postwar Nigeria’s political structure was fundamentally reorganized to allocate political powers, responsibilities, and control over national revenues to the federal center.¹² States lost control over services like education and electricity, and came to depend upon federally-provided funds for 70 to 90 percent of their revenue needs.¹³

This centralization was not, however, only a way of weakening state and local governments.¹⁴ Cultivating dependence on the federal center was meant to be one way of

¹⁰ Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, 100. This centralized model continued through 1998, and while the 1999 Constitution has decentralized power to some extent, the distribution of power and revenue between Nigeria’s governing tiers remains uneven.

¹¹ The 1960 and 1963 Constitutions also had a central federal revenue pool, but almost all of the funds were distributed to the regions, and very little kept for the center. This changed with the 1979 constitution.

¹² These regimes also undertook ambitious development projects, and their restructuring of Nigeria’s federation were enabled by an unprecedented and never-to-be repeated boom in Nigeria’s oil production. According to Andrew Apter, between 1972 and 1974, Nigeria raised the price of oil from \$3.56 per barrel to \$14.96, assumed 55% participatory shares in oil companies, and expanded its share of oil revenues by raising royalties from 12% to 20% and profit taxes from 50% to 61%.¹² GDP reached \$25.2 billion in 1975 and \$27.2 billion by 1976. See Apter, *Pan-African*, 25.

¹³ Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, 100.

¹⁴ According to Kenneth Wheare’s classic treatment of federalism, federalism only exists when differing levels of government are independent of each other and fully capable of enacting the duties in their jurisdiction; because of the dependence of state governments upon the federal

addressing a fundamental concern of Nigerian nationalism: namely, its absence compared to the multitude of other, local, partisan interests amongst its populace.¹⁵ Committees charged with facilitating the transition to civilian rule, including the Constitutional Drafting Committee, the Constituent Assembly, and the Federal Electoral Commission, were thus all concerned with “[trying to] establish a means of ensuring that each government in the federation, including local government, had adequate revenue to discharge its constitutional responsibilities [...] and to balance the imperatives of population, equality, even development, derivation, geographical peculiarities and national interest in allocating revenue among states.”¹⁶ The idea of centrally collected and distributed revenue was suggested as one way of adjudicating between the competing claims of states and their component ethnic, religious, and demographic interests. Dependence upon the center was a way treating Nigeria’s diverse states equally and thus ensuring that certain groups did not have disproportionate access to national revenues.

The 1979 Constitution adopted the centralized revenue allocation that had developed under military rule, and moreover specified that the federal state would “control the national economy in such a manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom, and happiness of every citizen” and ensure that “the material resources of the community are harnessed and distributed

center Nigeria would, according to traditional models, not count as a true federation. See his *Federal Government*.

¹⁵ The problem of national unity is, of course, not unique to Nigeria and the literature on it in postcolonial studies is extensive.

¹⁶ Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, 92. The Constitutional Drafting Committee was tasked with drafting a civilian constitution and most of its recommendations were adopted in the final 1979 Constitution. The Constituent Assembly debated and ratified the constitution and the Federal Election Commission oversaw the transition elections. It must be noted that the 1979 constitution has been seen by some as illegitimate since it was promulgated under military and not civilian rule. Ken Saro-Wiwa has written about the 1979 Constitution’s illegitimacy extensively. However, a new constitution was not written until 1999 after the death of military leader Sani Abacha.

as best as possible to serve the common good.”¹⁷ These directives, formalized under the Constitution’s “Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy” underscore the federal monopoly on revenues and resources – namely oil – as well as the logic of national unity and beneficence undergirding centralized control.

The 1979 Constitution also attempted to address minority claims to federal funds through political mechanisms of state creation and a novel “federal character principle.” From the federal perspective, creating more states would enable minorities to access distributed revenue as easily as majority ethnic groups; thus equal dependence on disbursement from the federal center was supposed to create a sense of national unity and loyalty to that center through a common status of shared dependence.¹⁸ As Osaghae has described it, the state set itself up as a sort of “Father Christmas” vis-à-vis the rest of the nation.¹⁹ Similarly, the federal character principle inaugurated a new representational quota system to ensure equal representation of Nigeria’s many ethnic groups across all levels of government. Formalized in section 14(3) of the Constitution, the federal character principle specifies:

The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few State or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies.²⁰

Like the directive of centrally and equally disbursed revenue, the federal character principle was

¹⁷ The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979 at § 16(1a) and 16(2b). The two clauses are identical in both constitutions, except that in 16(2b) of the 1999 Constitution, “community” has been replaced with “nation.”

¹⁸ However, these constitutional provisions backfired by merely expanded the number of states dominated by ethnic majority populations. See Osaghae ch. 2 for a discussion of the shortcomings of state creation and the federal character principle vis-à-vis minority interests.

¹⁹ Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, 22.

²⁰ Constitution of Nigeria, 1979 at § 14(3). The same provision applies to state and local governments in 14(4).

meant to “assure every group, state and region access to power in the federation [...] the main objective was to ensure that the kaleidoscope of the country’s diversity was reflected in composition of government at all levels.”²¹ And, as the principle’s wording itself makes explicit, such assured and equally distributed representation was meant to promote “national loyalty” and “national unity” over partisan attachments.

In other words, the federal state used the distribution of centralized revenues and representation as a way of cultivating national unity and cohesion in the face of contrary local loyalties; in principle, at least, the equal distribution of oil revenues and participation in government were both meant to adjudicate the plethora of unequally distributed ethnic, regional, and religious interests structuring claims within Nigeria’s oil economy.²² Constitutional paternalism was meant not only to counterbalance partisan forces but to promote a sense of “national unity” and attachment to the Nigerian federation as states became equal beneficiaries of the nation-state’s oil bounty. Insofar as constitutionally-mandated distribution was a primary mechanism of nation-building, it might be said that the foundational role of postwar government in Nigeria *was* the governing and control of oil resources. This paternalistic framework envisioned a nation bound together by networks of distribution, as state and local governments, and citizens alike became beneficiaries of the federal center’s disbursement of services and funds.

However, while these constitutional provisions essentially sought to minimize or displace local interests by meeting them equally, oil’s status as a national resource made it a object of competing claims and exclusionary practices between the federal center, lower branches of

²¹ Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, 115.

²² This domination was most prominently by the Northern Muslim Hausai-Fulani against the Southern Yoruba and Igbo groups and by all three majority groups against minority ethnicities in the Delta and elsewhere.

government, and citizens across the country. Rather than accepting positions of equal dependence upon the center, the nation-wide entitlement to revenues formalized by the creation of more states, the federal character principle, and the Constitution's centralized revenue schema created (perhaps unsurprisingly) a competitive sense of entitlement amongst Nigeria's many political participants instead of a sense of common plenty. As Peter Ekeh sums up in a sharp critique of the federal character principle: "Government is conceived as sharing the fruits of power. The hero in Nigerian politics is one who brings such fruits from the Centre to his own people."²³ Andrew Apter argues similarly that "public resources flowed back into private hands. These flows took many forms [...] the diversion of public resources and funds was at the core of the Nigerian career trajectory, which required powerful patrons, loyal clients, and a 'long leg.'"²⁴ In this way the distributive function the federal state tried to accrue to itself actually became the template of political participation and economic access overall, and those able to access centralized revenues worked primarily to redistribute them back to the partisan interests of their local centers and supporters (or their own pockets).

Estimates of how much national revenue was taken out of circulation and development projects by this "privatization of the public sector"²⁵ are uncertain but, over the tenure of Nigeria's numerous military and civilian regimes, taken to be vast.²⁶ From the perspective of minorities in the Niger delta though, where the majority of Nigerian oil is found, national distribution has not reached far enough. As resources have shifted to the federal center,

²³ Peter Ekeh, "Federal Character," 36. Ekeh also stresses that this distribution system discourages state contributions toward the center; given the neglect of agricultural or industrial development at the expense of oil however, it is unclear how much states could contribute even if such an expectation did exist.

²⁴ Apter, *Pan-African*, 39.

²⁵ Apter, *Pan-African*, 39.

²⁶ Apter, *Pan-African*, ch. 1, Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, ch. 6 and 7.

communities at the sites of oil derivation have seen their access to oil monies narrow exponentially.²⁷ Oil wealth seems to have accrued everywhere but the sites of derivation, where returns on oil have not only failed to appear in the form of revenue or benefits, but *have* appeared in the form of ecological devastation and pollution produced as byproducts of oil extraction.

Oil from this perspective is an instrument of inequality and localized exploitation. Local interests have patently not been pacified through monetary compensation and instead are articulated in counterclaims for local control of resources and revenues. Laid out in documents like the Ogoni Bill of Rights, such claims to resource control can be seen as compensatory and even appropriate; they offer limited redress to communities whose lands and livelihoods have been destroyed by oil and who have been excluded from the benefits oil was supposed to bring to all. However, the Ogoni Bill also takes the practice of privatizing public assets that developed from the Constitution's disbursement ethos to an extreme. In intensifying the consequences of oil's distributive economy through its reactionary local claims, the Ogoni Bill throws into relief the centrifugal force of Nigeria's state-sponsored unity.

II. The Ogoni Bill of Rights: Maximizing the Local or, Distribution's Unlikely Twin

The Ogoni Bill of Rights, presented by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1991 to then-military leader Ibrahim Babangida, is an exemplary rather than unique record of delta experience. The Bill, and other documents inspired by it, enumerates the many failures of non-local government (both state and federal) to account for Ogoni needs,

²⁷ At independence, sites of derivation received 50% of oil rents; from the mid 1960s to 1980s they received only 1.5%. For a more detailed discussion see Michael J. Watts, "Chronicle of a future foretold: The complex legacies of Ken Saro-Wiwa," *The Extractive Industries and Society* 2 (2015): 635-644, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2015.08.002>.

including the most basic provisions for political participation or material infrastructures.²⁸ In doing so it offers an indictment of the minimizing model of the federal center by showing the extent to which local interests fail to be accounted for equally within it.²⁹

In response to these failures, the Ogoni Bill calls for local political autonomy and control of oil revenues. Such a counter claim of local governance is understandable given the history of neglect and marginalization that prompted the writing of the Bill; indeed demands for resource control are one way indigenous groups pursue some level of restitution and self-preservation in the face of environmental destruction.³⁰ However, the Bill's positing of local interests over and against non-local interests, whether of the federal center or of other states, is troubling in that it mirrors and reinforces the very unequal resource distribution it critiques. As I will argue, the Bill's call for local autonomy can be seen as contributing to the infrastructure of unequal distribution that motivated its writing and solutions.

The Ogoni Bill does not call upon the Nigerian government to fulfill what it lists as failed duties and obligations. Instead, it proposes a turn away from dependence on or expectations of provision from centralized governance toward local political autonomy, not as a supplement to federal action but instead of it. The crux of the document's complaint is that: "in over 30 years of oil mining, the Ogoni nationality have provided the Nigerian nation with a total revenue

²⁸ Among other minority documents are the more overtly militant Kaiama Declaration and the Ikwerre Rescue Charter. MOSOP has also inspired similar movements for resource rights by other minority groups across the delta. See Michael J. Watts, "Chronicle of a Future Foretold." See also Michael J. Watts, "Petro-Violence: Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology of a Mythic Commodity," in *Violent Environments*, ed. Nancy Lee Peluso and Michael Watts, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001), 189-212 and Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005).

²⁹ Among other things, the Bill charges that Ogoni only have local and state representation, but are not represented in any national federal-level institutions.

³⁰ It is debatable whether the Ogoni should be considered any more "indigenous" than other ethnic groups in Nigeria, but Ramchandra Guha's definition of ecosystem people surely applies to the Ogoni, who make their living by subsistence farming and fishing.

estimated at over 40 billion Naira (N40 billion) or 30 billion dollars” and yet “in return for the above contribution, the Ogoni people have received NOTHING.”³¹ Expanding upon the meaning of “nothing,” it goes on to argue:

That today the Ogoni people have:

- (i) No representation whatsoever in ALL institutions of the Federal Government of Nigeria;
- (ii) No pipe-borne water;
- (iii) No electricity;
- (iv) No job opportunities for the citizens in Federal, State, public sector or private sector companies;
- (v) No social or economic project of the Federal Government.³²

This litany of deprivation marks the Ogoni experience as one of lack and harm; while Ogoniland has undergone intense pollution from broken oil pipelines, gas flaring, and other infrastructures of oil production, it has also been subject to the systemic denial of basic goods infrastructures like roads and electricity as well as political infrastructures of equal governmental representation, whose provision the federal government arrogated to it itself by rewriting Nigeria’s federal structure. It thus disputes the 1979 Constitution’s idea that centralized distribution might not only meet local interests but mitigate them. Among other grievances are “That the search for oil has caused severe land and food shortages” and “That the Ogoni people lack education, health, and other social facilities.”³³

These latter grievances in particular correspond to federal constitutional obligations to provide adequate food to all citizens, facilities for social, religious, and cultural life, health facilities, and free education at all levels.³⁴ Such promises are striking for their ambition and breadth; that the state should mandate to itself the responsibility to ensure free education,

³¹ Ogoni Bill of Rights, prepared by The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: 1992), 5 at § 9, 10.

³² Ogoni Bill, 5 at § 11(i-v).

³³ Ogoni Bill, 5 at § 15, 17.

³⁴ The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979 at § 16(2d), 17(3b), 17(3d), 18.

healthcare, food, shelter, and cultural life to all, not merely the right to them, seems an overextension even of the paternalistic state.³⁵ Nonetheless, these responsibilities are enshrined in the Constitution's "Fundamental Objects and Directive Principle's of State Policy," and in naming these particular failures, the Ogoni Bill indicts the paternalistic ethos of Nigerian federal provision at large, rather than any specific piece of legislation or single inadequacy.

In light of these federal failures, the Bill demands resource control and political autonomy as a remedy to the lack and harm that have been the twinned responses to Ogoni interests under federal misrule. In short, since their interests in development and subsistence have been ignored rather than addressed and minimized by the federal state, the Ogoni, like other communities marginalized by their national governments, resolve that they can and must fend for themselves. The Bill asserts that continued participation in the Nigerian federation must take a local and separatist form: "NOW, therefore, while reaffirming our wish to remain a part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, we make demand upon the Republic as follows: That the Ogoni people be granted POLITICAL AUTONOMY to participate in the affairs of the Republic as a distinct and separate unit."³⁶

Amongst the demands for and conditions of said autonomy are the right to control Ogoni political affairs and the right to use a "fair proportion of Ogoni resources for Ogoni development."³⁷ However, while it stipulates a "fair proportion" and further goes on to make the disclaimer that "We make the above demand in the knowledge that it does not deny any other ethnic group in the Nigerian Federation of their rights and that it can only conduce to peace, justice and fairplay and hence stability and progress in the Nigerian nation," within the separatist

³⁵ The federal government arrogated these services to itself as part of the 1979 Constitution's centralizing agenda and state-sponsored social development facilitated by the oil boom.

³⁶ Ogoni Bill of Rights (1991), 5 at § 20. Emphasis original.

³⁷ Ogoni Bill of Rights (1991), 5 at § 20(ii).

context of their demands and specifically as they arise from a sense of resource reclamation, the focus on resources in the Ogoni Bill threatens to repeat the terms of exclusion that motivated its own writing.

The extremity of the Bill's promotion of local claims to oil revenue over and against national ones or even the local claims of other citizens, becomes especially apparent in the Forward to the Bill. Written by Ogoni environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, it states that "Ogoni resources for Ogoni development" are meant to enable Ogoni autonomy and indeed freedom from what he calls "incompetent indigenous colonialism" enacted upon Nigeria's minority groups.³⁸ Saro-Wiwa's hostility toward the "Nigerian intrusion" as he terms majority domination, is even clearer in *Genocide in Nigeria*, published a year after the Ogoni Bill.³⁹ The title of Saro-Wiwa's manifesto signals his argument, as does the paratextual Author's Note: "I have known and argued earnestly since I was a lad of seventeen that the only way the Ogoni can survive is for them to exercise their political and economic rights."⁴⁰ Yet, the possibility of sharing these political and economic rights to oil is, for Saro-Wiwa, mooted by the partisan structure of oil interests: "Nothing works in Nigeria because rulers and ruled owe loyalty, not to the country, but to their ethnic groups. Theft of government funds is not considered a crime because the nation lives on oil money which rightly belongs, not to everyone or to the government, but to the ethnic minorities who are in no position to control it."⁴¹ Saro-Wiwa here underscores the zero-sum character of access to oil; in his estimation oil wealth is not for the Ogoni in a "fair proportion" but "rightly belongs" to them wholly rather than to the government

³⁸ Saro Wiwa's Forward was added to the second version of the Ogoni Bill, which also includes an Addendum to the international community; this version was drafted after the original Bill drew no response from the Babangida regime.

³⁹ Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide*, 19.

⁴⁰ Saro Wiwa, *Genocide*, 7.

⁴¹ Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide*, 90

or non-Ogoni citizens.⁴²

Thus, rather than proposing an alternative to the system of competitive resource accumulation and distributive statism that have justified the appropriation of revenues from the delta, the Ogoni Bill maximizes the claims made on behalf of local interests. However, its vision of local autonomy also goes beyond even partisan accumulation by assuming a self-reliance that many groups outside the delta cannot replicate. Saro-Wiwa acknowledges as much in a bitter charge: “None of the States or local governments so created except those in the oil-bearing areas is viable,”⁴³ referring to the proliferation of states in Nigeria from three at independence to nineteen in 1976, and thirty in 1991.⁴⁴

From this perspective state creation is not a way of meeting and minimizing local interests as the Constitution would have it, but is instead only a way of displacing exclusive Ogoni claims to oil. Yet, because other states were created in part to offer more opportunities for revenue distribution they do, in fact, rely heavily on oil revenues. Saro-Wiwa’s quite accurate assertion that states created outside the delta are “not viable” without oil money would mean that, in the event of exclusive local resource control, they would be doomed to the same poverty from resource exclusion that the delta experiences. If the problem at present is that access to oil revenues and government services are not equally distributed, reverse resource control seems only to contribute to and perpetuate the same problems it is meant to address.

⁴² Commentators like Apter, Osaghae, and Ekeh have articulated the predominance of parochial claims to public funds as the privatizing of public wealth. See Apter, *The Pan-African Nation* and Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*. Ekeh makes a similar argument in “The Structure and Meaning of Federal Character in the Nigerian Political System.”

⁴³ Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide*, 88.

⁴⁴ Henry E. Alapiki, “State Creation in Nigeria: Failed Approaches to National Integration and Local Autonomy,” *African Studies Review* 48, no. 3 (Dec. 2005) 50, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20065139.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Af18587a7f1daed9f49ffb11e66d31a0c>.

III. “Useless Ways”: Resource Control and Authoritarianism in *Anthills of the Savannah*

Anthills of the Savannah, Chinua Achebe’s last novel, attempts neither to maximize nor minimize local interests in oil wealth, but rather to divest from the resource control narrative altogether. While Africanist literary scholars have tended to read Achebe’s novel as a fictional response to the problem of Nigerian leadership he poses in the polemical tract *The Trouble with Nigeria*,⁴⁵ this section turns to how *Anthills of the Savannah* mobilizes a heuristic of resource control to critique the limitations of authoritarian governance; it goes on to examine how Achebe’s proposals for an alternate, democratic polity adjudicates diverse interests but cannot fully encompass the nexus of resources and governance that initially motivated his critique of authoritarianism.

Specifically, this section first examines the narrative doubleness of Abazon, which appears in *Anthills* both as an atemporal paradigm of state-founding based in violent resource appropriation, and as a drought-stricken region in Kangan, the fictional African country where the novel is set. I argue that this doubling of Abazon’s signification within the text offers a

⁴⁵ Achebe argues that: “The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership.” See Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (Exeter, N.H.: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983), 1. Neil ten Kortenaar and Ali Erroutouni have argued that Achebe is principally concerned with critiquing the distance and alienation between Nigerian political leaders and ordinary citizens. They variously argue that Achebe’s novel explores the strategies and challenges of creating connections between the political elite and ordinary citizens, between the state and the nation, and between the traditional and the modern, while Jennifer Wenzel takes up the opposite position to make a similar point about political distance, arguing that Achebe’s interest in the problem of leadership leads him to exclude the perspective of the masses from his narrative. See Neil ten Kortenaar, “‘Only Connect’: *Anthills of the Savannah* and Achebe’s *Trouble with Nigeria*,” *Research in African Literatures* 24, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 59-72, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3820113>; Ali Erritouni, “Contradictions and Alternatives in Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 29, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 50-74, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3831792>; Jennifer Wenzel, “The Trouble with Narrators” in *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, ed. Ernest N. Emenyonu (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2004), 319-332.

temporal critique of state violence and resource control. The novel contrasts the use of violent appropriation in the “legendary time” of Abazon’s founding with a modern version of Abazon that responds to resource deprivation through peaceful supplication and recognition of the state as a site of provision; I read the political tactics of Abazon within the modern nation state as a critique and disavowal of the violence endemic to its founding. Thus, as constituency rather than conquering community, Abazon posits the “uselessness” and untimeliness of authoritarian power in the modern nation-state. Abazon’s temporal shift, from the time of legend to the time of the nation-state, casts the model of its original founding as anachronistic within the sphere of modern national time. Thus, Abazon’s temporal doubleness and displacement enacts a critique of state violence in general and of resource control in particular, as out of joint with the role of the modern nation-state. Abazon also provides an opportunity for Achebe to critique the farcical and illegitimate nature of political power that remains ensconced from the needs of its constituents.

Given these critiques of the centralized authoritarian state, at the end of the novel Achebe offers a model of the ideal national community in microcosm, as a hybrid household. Composed of members from numerous backgrounds and standpoints, they are brought together by a “sensitive” style of leadership and act as a foil to the novel’s authoritarian regime. This democratic model posits responsive leadership and inclusive community as a forum for adjudicating diverse interests, moving between them and holding them in tandem. Such a democratic approach to interests emerges as the allegorical polity’s central ethos and purpose.

However, the political imaginary Achebe posits as a contrast to authoritarianism never reaches the space of Abazon’s drought or “the heart of the disaster.”⁴⁶ Instead, I suggest that while Achebe’s vision of political reform offers a counter to the problem of authoritarian state

⁴⁶ Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* (New York: Anchor Books, 1987), 194. Subsequently cited in the text as *AS*.

power, it also leaves resources as an unresolved political remainder. While the nexus of resources and power motivates the novel's authoritarian critique, Achebe proposes only a political solution to an eco-political problem. Resource scarcity remains the unresolved and unappeased disaster outside the novel's horizon of political possibility.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Abazon figures as an atemporal model or parable of violent state founding and simultaneously as the correction and displacement of that model. Doubly present in the text as a myth of violent resource appropriation "long, long ago in legend" and as a "peaceful and loyal and goodwill" delegation in the diegetic time of the plot, Abazon both is and is not the nation-state of Kangan in microcosm (*AS* 29, 15).⁴⁷

Abazon's origins are related in a prose-poem, "Hymn to the Sun," which employs stylistic elements of oral narrative, most prominently apostrophe.⁴⁸ Premised by an address to the sun or "Single Eye of God," the poem opens with a meditation on violent force, both climatic and political: "Wide-eyed, insomniac, you go out at cock-crow spitting malediction at a beaten, recumbent world [...] Relent then for your own sake; for that bulging eye of madness that may be blinded by soaring motes of an incinerated world [...] Remember: Single Eye, one-wall-neighbor-to-Blindness, remember!" (*AS* 28) This invocation to the sun seems at first an account

⁴⁷ A number of critics assume Kangan to be a fictionalized version of Nigeria, and Abazon to represent the Igbo portion of the country. This section focuses on Abazon's temporal rather than spatial signification.

⁴⁸ It is commonplace to note elements of oral narrative, style, and form in Achebe's *oeuvre*. See for example Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction* (London: J Currey, 1991), Robin Ikegami, "Knowledge and Power, the Story and the Storyteller," *Modern Fiction Studies* 37 no. 3 (Fall 1991): 493-507, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.0.0934> and Solomon O. Iyasere, "Oral Tradition in the Criticism of African Literature," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 13, no. 1 (Mar. 1975): 107-119, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/159699>.

of African cosmology, as the poem is introduced shortly after a fragmentary radio transmission detailing the unrelenting heat and drought Abazon is experiencing; it also evokes, however, the first chapter's comparison of Sam, Kangan's dictator, to a burning sun: "And he is almost friendly and conciliatory the amazing man. In that instant the day changes. The fiery sun retires temporarily behind a cloud" (*AS* 3).⁴⁹

This opening apostrophe to incendiary power hovers ambivalently between metaphorical references to unrestrained political power and the desiccating force of the sun's heat, both of which are oppressive in Abazon's present; however, the poem also posits a causal link between the two in its account of Abazon's history. Of Abazon's origins we are told: "The earth broke the hoes of the grave-diggers and bent the iron tip of their spears. Then the people knew the time had come to desert their land [...] Such was the man and such his remnant fellows who one night set upon the sleeping inhabitants of the village of Ose and wiped them out and drank the brown water in their wells and took their land and renamed it Abazon" (*AS* 29). Thus Abazon is founded explicitly out of genocidal violence, conquest, and resource appropriation, and its position in legendary or mythic time sets it as an atemporal model of Kangan's own modern practices of resource control.

In the Abazon of legend, political agency is equated with securing resources, and questions of countervailing rights, obligations, or limitations to state power seem obviated by the overwhelming mandate of securing bodily survival. Unlike the control of oil in Nigeria, this resource control is presumably a matter of bodily survival rather than accumulated revenue; and yet it still repeats the assumption that control over and access to resources is a competitive

⁴⁹ C.L. Innes also argues that "The Hymn to the Sun" is about "the arrogance and cruelty of naked power," contrasting it to a feminized version of power Achebe elsewhere evokes as the Myth of Idemili. See C. L. Innes, *Chinua Achebe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP 1990), ch. 9.

enterprise: the water cannot be shared but must be taken, and the history of former owners (the village of Ose) is wiped from the map and replaced with a new story of original owners (Abazon).⁵⁰

If Abazon's founding lends resource control a dubious credence, such legitimacy becomes altogether questionable in the practices of the modern Kanganian state. For in the present of Kangan, Abazon reappears as a modern political constituency victimized by the enduring logic of resource control: "Because you said no to the Big Chief he is very angry and has ordered all the water bore-holes they are digging in your area to be closed so that you will know what it means to offend the sun. You will suffer so much that in your next reincarnation you will need no one to tell you to say yes whether the matter is clear to you or not" (*AS* 116). Construed as political troublemakers, those who invaded Ose and created Abazon for the sake of resource security have in turn become a population defined by and governed through state-sponsored resource scarcity. Abazon thus both exploits and endures the consequences of monopolistic and violent resource control. However, as is made clear in the cyclic shift from beneficiary to victim of resource control and in the corresponding temporal shift from Abazon's mythic founding to its present, resource control is shown only to perpetuate its own violent logic, rather than provide an opportunity for other forms of governance not sustained by violence.

However, Abazon's victimization in the present does not generate in turn a search for a new Ose. Once again faced with life-threatening drought, the people of Abazon in the diegesis,

⁵⁰ It might be argued that the materiality of water rather than oil matters for the argument I am making, given that water is necessary for life while oil is merely a commodity. However, here I make an argument not out of the particularity of resources as I do with the OPA, but about a shift in the effects of resource control as a political strategy. Insofar as the novel represents political violence legitimated by resource control as inappropriate, the fact that water is central to life only intensifies the novel's critique, by pointing out the illegitimacy of resource control in its necropolitical as well as its capitalist versions.

as opposed to the Abazon of legend, do not respond with violence; instead they acknowledge the national government to which they are subject and to whom they must turn for redress. Zero sum resource control and violent usurpation are no longer viable for Abazonians: “today no one can rise and march south by starlight abandoning crippled kindred in the wild savannah and arrive stealthily at a tiny village and fall upon its inhabitants and slay them and take their land” (30). The residents of Abazon “send instead a deputation of elders to the government who hold the yam today, and hold the knife, to seek help of them” (*AS* 30).

Abazon’s new political dispensation, of supplication and requests of aid from the state, places it within a line of historical change rather than the atemporal time of myth; its new political strategy can be seen to mark the development of the nation-state, whose borders and boundaries now circumscribe both the possibility of free movement across land and the genocidal violence needed to secure it. Such a shift from violence to peace and from usurpation to supplication tracks a historical shift to a world structured by bordered states, and which nullifies the former political possibilities of resource seizure; the colonizing model of appropriation and conquest has, between Abazon’s founding and its present, been replaced by new norms of political claim-making.

If Abazon is the original paragon of the state as violent, appropriative, and monopolistic, in the course of the novel it emerges from the time of legend and the space of liminality to participate in the modern nation-state on terms of “peaceful and loyal and goodwill [sic]” (*AS* 15). Once it does though, the model of its founding – conquest and violence – is revealed to be anachronistic. Its shift from a “legend” to a political actor within the modern time of Kangan suggests that such state practices no longer have a place in national time. Abazon’s delegation is further represented in moments of self-conscious modernization, cultivating new knowledge for

what they assume is a world of reciprocal political duties and recognition whose rules must be learned: “We do not fully understand the ways of today yet but we are learning [...] So we are ready to learn new things and mend our old, useless ways” (AS 117). In this context, those old and useless ways amount to the ways of violence and appropriation that characterized Abazon’s founding.⁵¹ A shifted role for the state is thus played out as the temporal shift in Abazon’s signification. While it is precisely the resource-appropriative and violent state that dominates Kangan, Abazon’s counterpoint of peaceful supplication and temporal development asserts the untimeliness and “uselessness” of this model, if not its actual dissolution.

In addition to providing a temporal critique of the authoritarian state, the modernized version of Abazon is also a platform upon which Achebe posits the illegitimacy and farce of the authoritarian state’s withdrawal from the needs of its citizens. *Anthills of the Savannah* in fact opens with a discussion of Abazon in the present, as it functions not as a rebuke to the anachronistic and improper quality of state violence in modern time, but as a reminder of the illegitimacy of a state that does not respond to articulations of local citizen needs and interests.

Anthills opens in the *medias res* of a closed cabinet meeting where readers are given privileged access to a cloistered realm of closed windows, air conditioning, and unilateral decisions. Sam, Kangan’s dictatorial leader, has just declared: “You’re wasting everybody’s time, Mr. Commissioner for Information. I will not go to Abazon. Finish! *Kabisa!*” (AS 1) This refusal comes in response to Chris’ suggestion that Sam visit Abazon to assess the state of drought and citizen need there. Chris Oriko, the aforementioned Commissioner for Information and narrator of this chapter, goes on to satirize Sam’s authoritarian rule, where decisions of state

⁵¹ Achebe has also valorized adaptability as a cultural strength of the Igbo. See Byron Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green: African literature, environmental justice, and political ecology* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2014) for a discussion of this in relation to *No Longer at Ease*.

are enacted through “ceremonial capitulation” by the cabinet (*AS* 1). The false *Kabisa* of authoritarian refusal, however, points up not only the artifice but the illegitimacy and unsustainability of a state that withdraws from the requests and claims of its citizens.

Kabisa should function as a speech act, an imposition of finitude molding external circumstances in its own image. *Kabisa* as dictatorial fiat should do things in the world. And yet, the whole first chapter enacts a questioning and interruption of this kind of unilateral, authoritarian refusal of citizen address. The ‘end of discussion’ reverberates and repeats throughout this chapter, signaling the irresolution of Abazon’s request rather than its finality. When Sam finally imposes his will by physically exiting the meeting, he is forced back into the room moments later by the sounds of a “chanting multitude” which turns out to be a delegation of Abazonian elders as well as “Abazon indigenes in Bassa: motor mechanism, retail traders, tailors, vulanizers, taxi and bus drivers [...] and others doing all kinds of odd jobs or nothing at all in the city. A truly motley crowd!” (*AS* 8, 111) Abazon has come to Kangan, as this “chanting multitude” answers the regime’s silence and failure to acknowledge its requests for redress with an insurgent demand for recognition. As Sam puts it, “They want personally to invite me to pay them a visit and see their problems” (*AS* 17). It is this invitation and the local interests in environmental redress within it that continue to reverberate throughout and against the finality of authoritarian refusal.

Kabisa as a failed speech act highlights the illegitimacy of dictatorship and its supporting structures and assumptions; its declaration is occasioned by the inequalities of shelter, exposure, and resources which frame the refusal of the state to be responsive, let alone accountable, to the chanting multitudes in the heat or the demands of the goodwill delegation from Abazon. *Kabisa* functions as a metonymic condensation of authoritarian rule, its illegitimacy, and the insecurity

of its own governing enactments.

And yet, the civilian request that occasions Sam's refusal nonetheless reinvests the state with the duty of securing bodily survival and basic resources. If in the time of legend such a mandate justified state violence, the delegation now reframes the need to secure basic resources as no less of a mandate. It is, however, one no longer approached through zero-sum exercises in resource control. As the delegation leader notes: "It is proper that a beggar should visit a king"; the assumption being that the king recognizes the beggar and his needs, that power recognizes the terms by which it is supplicated and responds to address them (*AS* 117). Abazon assumes that its requests for state provision will not result in complete refusal or a repeat of the annihilation at Ose; in the modern national time to which Abazon now adheres, a dialectic between citizen needs and state responses is supposed to structure the political behaviors of each.

Neil ten Kortenaar notes that the signification of Abazon in *Anthills* is ambivalent, since it shifts in scale spatially between a single village and an arid region in Kangan's north.⁵² While Kortenaar reads such slippage of scale to mean that Abazon becomes a vehicle for addressing different scales of national fragmentation, this chapter has argued that Abazon is as well understood through its temporal slippages, as a reminder of the anachronism of authoritarian violence in the modern nation-state and thus of the illegitimacy of any government that continues to rule by this model. *Kabisa* and its rejoinder in the form of a polyvocal multitude enact in microcosm the clash between authoritarian withdrawal and democratic response at the center (and indeed at the beginning and end) of *Anthill's* political experiments.

By novel's end, Sam has been kidnapped and replaced by a political crony of the same type. And while Achebe's elite narrators, Chris, Ikem, and Beatrice, have all developed

⁵² Neil ten Kortenaar, "Only Connect."

connections and solidarities with ordinary citizens over the course of the story, Chris and Ikem have been killed by state security forces. Chris, part of Sam's cabinet as the Minister of Information, and Ikem, editor of the *National Gazette*, might have introduced a sea change into the top levels of political leadership by their own willingness to meet with and learn from ordinary citizens; yet, whatever institutional inroads they might have symbolized are foreclosed.

Instead, Beatrice Okoh, the novel's only remaining protagonist, becomes the center of an allegorical polity that stands in opposition to the authoritarian model Achebe has so effectively critiqued. She brings together another "motley crowd" of diverse citizens under a paradigm of consensual, inclusive membership and responsive leadership. Beatrice is, we are told, "a captain whose leadership was sharpened more and more by sensitivity to the peculiar needs of her company" and one who therefore practices and facilitates the kinds of democratic attributes Achebe has shown to be lacking in but required by the modern African state (AS 213). Beatrice's sensitivity and responsiveness pose her as a foil to Sam's monolithic will; the community itself is represented as a hybrid household, made up of members from different classes, genders, professions, ethnicities, and religions, which stands diametrically opposed to the state's homogenized view of the citizenry. This household, I contend, stands in as an allegory for the nation-state, rather than posing an idea of kinship or family against the state. I read the household, with Jameson, as a national allegory because it here depicts precisely the kind of ideal community that neither Kangan nor Nigeria have been able to achieve: a harmonious and consensual one that unites diverse members and interests.⁵³ Simon Gikandi in his classic work *Reading Chinua Achebe*, has noted that Achebe is invested in the nation-state as the future of

⁵³ See Fredrick Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital."

African political life and in the novel's role in facilitating a common sense of national identity.⁵⁴

I therefore read Achebe's closing household as an alternative ideal – one that revises how political community might function rather than suggesting another kind of community as an alternative to the political. Thus I argue that Achebe closes the novel with a microcosm of his ideal polity, adding to the novel's critique of violent governance an allegorical nation-state that contains diverse members but unifies their conflicting interests.

Achebe presents such democratic qualities as imperative for Nigeria's political futurity; this point is underscored by the household's cohesion and elaboration around the birth of a child, paradigmatic symbol of the future.⁵⁵ Amaechina, daughter of Ikem, an intellectual, and Elewa, a market woman, embodies the harmonious mingling of elites and peasants that is also modeled in Beatrice's hybrid household. In naming Amaechina and assuming collective parental duties over a child whose interrupted lineage casts her outside given lines of belonging, Achebe's allegorical polity further elaborates the democratic ethos suggested by its membership. It eschews *a priori* social roles and categorical group affiliations, enacting instead an investment in the interests of individual community members and in Kangan's collective "life," signaled here not by a multitude of bodies but by a polyvocal exchange evacuated of specific and thus exclusionary referents. This is apparent in the ritual prayer offered by Elewa's uncle:

What brings us here is the child [God] sent us. May her path be straight...
Ise! replied all the company.
May she have life and may her mother have life.
Ise!
What happened to her father, may it not happen again.
Ise!

⁵⁴ See Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe*, Introduction and ch. 1.

⁵⁵ Children are paradigmatic symbols of futurity; for an argument against the pervasive and historic investment in futurity signaled by children, see Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004).

When I asked who named her they told me All of Us. May this child be the daughter of all of us.

Ise!

May all of us have life!

Ise! [...]

Everybody's life!

Ise!

The life of Bassa!

Ise!

The life of Kangan.

Ise! (AS 211-212)

This call and response sequence recreates the participatory style of African oral narrative and appears as a communal catharsis to the violence and loss that have preceded it.⁵⁶ As it goes on however, it becomes progressively more difficult to pinpoint either a speaker or a referent within the exchange; it moves from calling for the futurity and well-being of Amaechina and Elewa to a more general call for the well-being of All of Us, a proper noun that at first signifies the members of the household and the political alternative they represent. But "all of us" is then repeated without capitalization, shifting to an improper noun phrase which no longer designates a specific recipient or beneficiary of "life" and instead might invite and encompass all the citizens of Kangan, which the ritual then goes on to suggest in its hailing of "The life of Bassa" and "The life of Kangan." This sequence thus moves from addressing specific members and their needs or interests to encompassing the national whole within a dialogic community of shared participation in a common "life."

This ritual formalizes in both structure and content, the democratic future of inclusive participation and responsive leadership that Achebe has already begun setting up through his allegorical household. The ritual's dialogic exchange formalizes the plurality of Achebe's

⁵⁶ Sackey has discussed how an oral exchange is often used to formally open an oral narration as well as build rapport between speaker and audience. See Edward Sackey, "Oral Tradition and the African Novel," *Modern Fiction Studies* 37 no. 3 (Fall 1991): 389-407.

democratic imaginary and its investment in the kind of futurity elaborated in Amaechina's naming ceremony. Such a democratic future enables "life" for all of Kangan, more specifically a kind of life where the interests of individuals and the political collectivity in which they participate can be addressed synchronously, and for which Achebe's closing community provides a model.

Yet at the same time, Achebe's vision of reform is incomplete, for he proposes only a political solution to an eco-political problem, leaving aside the environmental damage that motivated his earlier critique. While Abazon moves in an arc from violent conquest to peaceful claim-making, from atemporality to the modern time of the nation-state, the resource scarcity that prompted both its founding and its turn to diplomacy drops out of the narrative's democratic conclusion. While Abazon's delegation also aligns with the goals of a democratic future, there is little indication that Achebe's ideal polity addresses, or even acknowledges, either Abazon's contribution to democratic reform or the environmental hardship that produced it. Similarly, the ideal model of Beatrice's household and Amaechina's naming ceremony focus exclusively on redefining political interactions between citizens and between citizens and their leaders, and moreover associate the life of Kangan as a whole with the life of Bassa, its urban center.⁵⁷ Democracy might have replaced authoritarianism but it never reaches the "heart of the disaster" in Abazon. Abazon's environmental devastation remains an unresolved and unaddressed disaster outside the novel's vista of democratic citizenship and its critique of state violence. The problem of resources is thus the environmental remainder of Achebe's political imaginary.

⁵⁷ Brady Smith has argued that urban settings, as much as rural ones, must be considered environmentally important sites in African novels. See Brady Smith, "Red, Black and Green: Ecology, Economy and the Contemporary African Novel" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2015), <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/1667727311/7E31EC6218E34C7CPQ/3?accountid=14657>.

IV. Relinquishing Resources: The Ogoni Bill's Speculative Constitution

Achebe's resource remainder returns us to a surprising contradiction in the Ogoni Bill. As I have argued, the primary thrust of the Bill's rhetoric poses it as sharing in the myopic vision of resource politics found in the 1979 Constitution; yet, embedded in its complaints about Nigerian federal failure is also a revision of constitutional duty. While the Bill's call for local control extends the parochialism of interests in oil revenue that, as argued above, have become endemic to political participation in Nigeria, it also contains a more implicit vision of local interests, one that might provide a sharable framework for interests across Nigeria's federal constituencies. This minor counterclaim addresses the environmental devastation that has plagued Ogoniland; it is not borne out in the overall claims and grievances of the Bill, but appears as an addendum to constitutional duty by listing environmental damage and degradation in the Bill's litany of federal failures. I argue that this charge acts as a speculative revision of constitutional duties,⁵⁸ and unlike the Bill's exclusionary claims to oil revenues, this concern with environmental protection interrupts and tempers the Bill's separatists demands. In doing so the Ogoni Bill registers a qualified investment in revising and improving Nigeria's ruling mandates and in articulating a platform for local (and national) interests outside the resource regime.

Commentators often describe oil wealth as "magical" – a shorthand for the disarticulation of oil wealth from a productive base, either of industrial infrastructure or labor.⁵⁹ Perhaps most famously theorized as the "occult economies" of Jean and John Comaroff, the language of the paranormal used to describe oil money indexes its minimization of productive infrastructure as

⁵⁸ As Osaghae notes, constitution writing has been central to every transition program in the country including the repressive Babangida regime. See *Crippled Giant*, 225.

⁵⁹ See Apter, *The Pan-African Nation* esp. ch.1, Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1997) and Michael Watts, "Petro-Violence."

well as the extra-national, global forces of demand and consumption that drive oil production beyond the control or knowledge of nationally-bound labor.⁶⁰ The other side of this “magical” quality of wealth without labor, of results conjured seemingly without effort, is the perception that oil is in turn relatively “costless.” As Timothy Mitchell has noted in the transition from coal to oil as the primary source of fuel in the world economy, oil can be produced with a fraction of the labor power – and democratic worker demands – of coal. Oil’s liquid materiality and the ease of transporting it through unmanned pipelines make its production comparatively a de-populated endeavor.⁶¹ Its minimal production cost is the other side of its laborless value; however, especially in Nigeria, its costlessness is also upheld by sequestering and minimizing oil’s polluting effects in its sites of derivation.

In the Niger delta, oil shows up foremostly as pervasive and unaddressed pollution from oil spills and gas flaring. An ultimate case of dirty extraction, pollution has virtually destroyed the traditional subsistence fishing and farming lifestyles of delta communities. Oil spills are frequent and Shell Petroleum alone flares up to a staggering 76 percent of the natural gas that is the byproduct of its oil extraction (in contrast to the 0.6 percent it flares in the United States).⁶² A 2011 report by the United Nations Environmental Programme only confirmed the general

⁶⁰ Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, “Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony,” *American Ethnologist* 26, no. 2 (May 1999): 279-303, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/647285>.

⁶¹ The evacuation of labor power is precisely what enabled companies, rather than workers, to assume control over the production of oil and, in Mitchell’s argument, to close down the democratic institutions and infrastructures demanded by coal workers. See Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2013), ch. 1-2.

⁶² As Michael Watts notes: “Figures provided by the NNPC [Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation] document 2,676 spills between 1976 and 1990, 59 percent of which occurred in Rivers state [...] 38 percent of which were due to equipment malfunction. Between 1982 and 1992 Shell alone accounted for 1.6 million gallons of spilled oil.” See Michael Watts, “Black Gold, White Heat: state violence, local resistance and the national question in Nigeria” in *Geographies of Resistance*, ed. Steve Pile and Michael Keith (London: Routledge, 1997): 53.

situation by concluding that “Oil contamination in Ogoniland is widespread and severely impacting many components of the environment” including soil, groundwater, vegetation, and air quality.”⁶³

There is no disputing that Ogoni and other delta communities have suffered massively from the ecological costs of oil extraction. However, in contrast to the Ogoni Bill’s explicit agenda of accumulating oil monies for local improvement, it also includes a clause that adds environmental protection to the terms of national obligation. This pollution addendum addresses the ecological toll on Ogoni lands and livelihoods, expanding the arena of what counts as oil interests to include environmental protection alongside resource revenues.

I argue that the Bill asserts a right to environmental protection by phrasing pollution as an object of federal failure: “neglectful environmental pollution laws and substandard inspection techniques of the Federal authorities have led to the complete degradation of the Ogoni environment, turning our homeland into an ecological disaster.”⁶⁴ Since a law is not named, it is not clear if reference to “neglectful laws” refers to any particular legislation. But the other complaints in this section of the Bill largely coincide with existing provisions in the 1979 Constitution, and the charge of environmental failure appears similarly in the list of deficiencies the Ogoni have experienced under federal misrule. In this case however the charge is speculative and declarative, given that environment protection does not appear in the 1979 Constitution as written. The Bill’s naming of environmental degradation amongst existing government failures *ipso facto* posits protection of the environment as an object of government care or duty on par with services and goods the state already obligates to itself, like equal political participation,

⁶³ United Nations Environment Programme, *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland*, DEP/1337/GE, 204 (Nairobi: 2011), https://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/OEA/UNEP_OEA.pdf.

⁶⁴ The Ogoni Bill of Rights (1991), 5 at § 16.

food, shelter, education, and cultural life. In introducing environmental protection as an object of federal failure, the Bill thus addresses a speculative version of the constitution, one where environmental protection *would have been* a federal provision to which the Ogoni had a right. The declaration of past and current environmental harm thus functions as if such a right had been violated and doubles as an imperative for future protection.

Similarly, articulating environmental harm as hypothetical constitutional provision inserts the environment into the political imaginary as an object of national care and intrinsic value, in contrast with its current status as mere object of use. This is a notable departure in conceptions of the environment given that the 1979 Constitution's references to the environment are limited to mineral oils and natural gas rights; that is, environmental concerns appear only as concerns for generating and consolidating revenue. The Ogoni Bill suggests an amendment to constitutional obligations by recasting the status of the environment as object of care rather than only object of use.

It should be clear that the Ogoni Bill of Rights is ambivalent about oil, and resists the national narrative of oil revenues as a means of minimizing local interests and cultivating national allegiance; but by promoting environmental protection as a national duty it also qualifies its own predominant call for localized resource control and political separatism. Insofar as it adds environmental protection from pollution to its list of constitutional duties - that is, to those interests the state has obligated itself to provide - it suggests a ground for national interests in oil that aligns with its own local interests in minimizing oil pollution; it posits that protection of the environment should be as much a basis for local and national interests as oil revenue. However much this suggestion is qualified by the Bill's parochial thrust, by interrupting its own resource narrative the Bill's attention to the environment signals the kind of common ground possible

between local and national interests when both are distanced from resource control.

V. The Oil Pipelines Act: Rematerializing Oil, Redefining Local Interests

If the Ogoni Bill of Rights suggested that environmental pollution can be an amendment to resource control and that the protection of the environment from pollution should be considered a national duty, the Oil Pipelines Act actually legislates for these premises.⁶⁵ Like the Ogoni Bill's pollution addendum, its provisions for environmental protection produce, I argue, a radical reconception of how federalism might adjudicate local interests. In this it differs from the minimization of the 1979 Constitution, the overt parochialism in the Ogoni Bill, and Achebe's politically ideal but environmentally evacuated imaginary. All three of these texts mobilize resources and their control as a proving ground for the federal adjudication of local interests. And yet, Nigeria's juridical and legislative history also offers another framework and precedent for interests in oil. This final section turns to the Oil Pipelines Act (1956) and its amplification in a recent court case, *The Bodo Community and Others v. The Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited* (2014) to argue that they posit environmental protection as an oppositional, interruptive, and prior platform to revenue interests in oil. Like Achebe's novel, the OPA holds multiple interests in tandem and in relation to each other; but rather than conceiving of these interests as mediated by the right kind of national leadership, it recalibrates the relationship between the whole of the nation and its parts, between local interests, that is, and national ones, altogether.

In its opening statement, the OPA declares itself "[a]n Act to make provision for licenses

⁶⁵ As far as the author knows, Saro-Wiwa never mentions the Oil Pipelines Act in his published writing. It is impossible to say if he chose not to mention it or was unaware of its existence. That he does not mention it in his numerous writings implies that he did not, especially since it would have given him the kind of leverage against the state that he sought by writing the Ogoni Bill.

to be granted for the establishment and main-tenance of pipelines incidental and supplementary to oil fields and oil mining, and for purposes ancillary to such pipelines,” thus setting out guidelines for oil companies to facilitate their business and the national profits to be gained from oil rents and royalties.⁶⁶ As *Bodo* notes in its introduction, the OPA was meant to “provide a statutory framework for the creation of an oil industry.”⁶⁷ It cites Muhammadu Ribadu, the Minister of Land, Mines and Power’s explication of such aims to the House of Representatives on 2 August, 1956:

Wells have been bored in a number of localities and traces of oil found, but *unfortunately it is as yet too early to say whether it has been found in commercial quantities*. But if, though I would much prefer to say when, it is found in such quantities it is essential that the company finding it should have facilities to convey the oil easily and cheaply to a place of shipment or to its place of utilization.⁶⁸

The regulation of pipelines and means for granting licenses to prospecting companies was thus put in place *before* the expansion of the industry, and with the anticipation that the federal state would want to facilitate such industry for the national benefit. Mr. Ribadu continues: “I point out that mineral resources are a national asset in the hands of the Federation [...] Mr Speaker, Sir, I must make it clear to hon. Members that facilities must be given to these people who spend millions of pounds in order to find oil in our country, which in turn will go a long way to assist the economy of our country.”⁶⁹ Thus, the need to promote the oil industry itself becomes part of the familiar resource control narrative of oil as a national good and asset. Yet, the OPA also imposes nationally mandated burdens upon companies to maintain their pipelines in good order

⁶⁶ Oil Pipelines Act 1956, No. 31 of 1956, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN) 2004, <http://lawsofnigeria.placng.org/view2.php?sn=425>.

⁶⁷ *The Bodo Community and Others v. The Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited*, [2014] EWHC 1973 (TCC) at § 3, <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/TCC/2014/1973.html>.

⁶⁸ *Bodo v. Shell* [2014] EWHC 1973 (TCC) at § 3, emphasis added.

⁶⁹ *Bodo* [2014] EWHC 1973 (TCC) at § 3.

and holds them liable for land damaged by oil spills if they do not.⁷⁰ It was in violation of these premises that *Bodo* was settled out of court in 2014 for £55m, the largest payout for oil damages to date.⁷¹ In asserting the right to pursue compensation for damaged land the OPA also asserts the right of local communities to pursue compensation for damages that affect them most – precisely the kind of political calibration that motivates but is lacking from claims to local control like those in the Ogoni Bill.⁷²

The Oil Pipeline Act's basis for citizen claims to oil damage is focused in the interplay between sections 11(5) and 20(2), which both concern the grounds upon which oil companies can be held liable for oil pollution.⁷³ They articulate national safeguards and standards for the oil industry, and thus also offer nationally-sanctioned grounds for citizens to pursue compensation in cases of environmental harm. 11(5) sets out the circumstances under which companies must pay compensation thusly:

(a) to any person whose land or interest in land (whether or not it is land in respect of which the licence has been granted) is injuriously affected by the exercise of the right conferred by the licence, for any such injurious affection not otherwise made good; and

⁷⁰ It also enjoins them to refrain from disturbing common resources like water or public safety. Oil Pipelines Act 1956 at § 17(4).

⁷¹ John Vidal, "Shell announces £55m payout for Nigeria oil spills," *The Guardian*, Jan. 6, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jan/07/shell-announces-55m-payout-for-nigeria-oil-spills>. It is also the first case where money has been given both to a community at large and directly to individuals without the intermediary of chiefs or middlemen. It was also brought not in a Nigerian court but the Technology and Construction Court of England and Wales. The court, however, applied Nigerian law which, when not specifically amended or superseded by Nigerian legislation like the OPA, is received English common law. It also employed former Nigerian Supreme Court justices as its advisors.

⁷² Monetary compensation can of course be seen as an inadequate response compared to environmental cleanup or local autonomy; what I want to emphasize is that the OPA attempts to make provision for local interests, even if the form of its provision is imperfect.

⁷³ Of course, multinational companies have as often benefited to the detriment of citizens in Nigeria. However, at least discursively, the OPA upholds the protection of citizens from oil companies.

(b) to any person suffering damage by reason of any neglect on the part of the holder or his agents, servants or workmen to protect, maintain or repair any work, structure or thing executed under the licence, [sic] for any such damage not otherwise made good; and

(c) to any person suffering damage (other than on account of his own default or on account of the malicious act of a third person) as a consequence of any break- age [sic] of or leakage from the pipeline or an ancillary installation, for any such damage not otherwise made good.⁷⁴

The OPA recognizes damage to land as a basis for claiming compensation both under a general mandate 11(5)(a) and then more specifically for cases of land damaged by neglect, leakage, or breakage 11(5)(b)(c). *Bodo* has assessed these specific and general provisions for claim making as “much more generous overall for the victims than the common law in many respects. In this context, it is of course correspondingly more restrictive and onerous on the licence holder than under the common law.”⁷⁵ The *Bodo* judgment further delineates the OPA’s provision for local interests by interpreting the latter specifications *against* neglect to impart a corresponding positive duty *for* attentive upkeep: “it is my judgment that the protection requirement within Section 11(5)(b) involves a general shielding and caring obligation.”⁷⁶ Thus, the double negative of “not neglecting” is articulated in the positive as a duty *to* maintain, care for, and shield pipelines from wear or corrosion, thus diminishing the possibility of leakage or breakage. Both explicit and implicit articulations function to prevent oil spillages and by extension the environmental contamination and damage that would result. Environmental protection is thus the final positive consequence of the original negative mandate not to neglect.

Section 20(2) largely repeats these premises, specifying that the criteria for damage named in 11(5) must form the basis of compensation assessments. As just discussed, these are generally and specifically for damage to land. Section 20(4) however, clarifies how and when

⁷⁴ Oil Pipelines Act 1956 at § 11(5)(a)(b)(c).

⁷⁵ *Bodo* [2014] EWHC 1973 (TCC) at § 64(c).

⁷⁶ *Bodo* [2014] EWHC 1973 (TCC) at § 92(g).

damage to land is legible *as* damage by specifying that “No compensation shall be awarded in respect of unoccupied land.”⁷⁷ Thus what emerges as the basis for oil extraction liability is damage to land that is occupied, relied upon, and used by humans – or in the law’s terms, in which they have interests.

Thus, the OPA stipulates that damages to land are only legible as such under conditions of human use. In the OPA’s vision of local interests, the way to protect people adversely affected by oil is not by protecting them directly but by protecting the land on which they rely. Nigerian jurisprudence has established a pattern of protecting land *in order to* protect people, and conversely of protecting land *only when* it supports human livelihoods. A circular chain of legibility thus emerges: land is recognized as damaged when it is land that supports human need or use; thus land damaged outside human interests does not count as damaged at all. At the same time, other kinds of human harm that might result from oil spills are not recognized on their own when divorced from land. Damage is chiasmic under the OPA, as damage to land and to the people who live on it each provide the necessary criterion of legibility for the other under the law. While it rightly might be argued that such a limitation problematically ignores both the wider array of human harms that result from oil spills and the extensive damage of oil’s spread outside land of human interest, this provision also works to yolk human and environmental harm closely together and to formalize their mutual dependence.

The OPA’s approach to damaged land is thus meant to address local and situated harm. If this returns to the idea of local interests as best interests that the Ogoni Bill also addressed, it differs in many ways, foremostly in that this local provision makes no pretention to the partisan mentality of the Ogoni Bill or its centralized corollaries in the constitution. Instead the OPA

⁷⁷ Oil Pipelines Act 1956 at § 20(4).

implies a different kind of national vision and a different conception of adjudication, one that facilitates local agency and is attentive to localized harms while also supporting the national interest in pursuing oil wealth.

Passed before Nigerian independence, the OPA preceded the boom of Nigeria's oil industry and the environmental devastation that was produced in its wake.⁷⁸ It might thus be considered the ur-text of Nigerian oil legislation, and is especially striking as an anticipatory and generative act of governance. It speculates both that the oil industry will succeed, and anticipates that local compensation will be a necessary byproduct of pursuing this interest; if this legislative prophecy seems to naturalize the environmental degradation that results from oil production, it also institutes safety measures and standards that will minimize harm and grants agency to local communities to respond to harms as they arise. The model of adjudication the OPA presents offers a level of attunement to competing needs and differentiation amongst competing claims, without necessarily providing for a single winner as the zero-sum structure of resource control contends. By enshrining the right to local protection from harm alongside guidelines for facilitating the oil industry and its profits, the Act frames local interests *as* a part of national interests and sets a polyvalent precedent for federal adjudication.

Beyond this, the OPA's legislative imaginary can be read as a revision of the distributive ethos that has characterized Nigeria's stance toward oil benefits. For the Oil Pipelines Act legislates for oil not as dematerialized revenue but as material pollution, and more specifically as

⁷⁸ Though Nigeria did not gain full independence from Great Britain until 1960, it took steps toward self-rule before this date; in 1953 the major political parties in Nigeria gathered in London for a Constitutional Conference, which determined that Nigeria would be a federation rather than a unitary state, that the regions would have substantial powers, and that regions could have full internal self-government by 1956. These decisions came into force on Oct. 1 1954 and the first nation-wide elections to the federal House of Representatives were held in the remainder of that year; it was this nationally elected legislature that passed the Oil Pipelines Act in 1956.

pollution whose threat is distributed by the infrastructures of its production. As we have seen, the Pipelines Act legislates for compensation in the face of pipeline breakdown; as such, it begins from the imagination of pipelines' material exposure and fragility, in anticipation of their corrosion from oil within or from wear without. Unlike the proverbial Heideggerian hammer whose materiality becomes known by its breakdown, the assumption and anticipation of material failure is the Oil Pipeline Act's central premise.

Oil pipelines, as Timothy Mitchell has argued in *Carbon Democracy*, are more impervious than other infrastructures to disruption by people; the relative lack of human labor power needed to pump and transport oil has made it amenable to monopoly by oil companies (and states) in ways that other forms of energy are not.⁷⁹ What I want to emphasize is that from this perspective, oil pipelines are seen as enclosed and separated from their surroundings; they ensure the smooth transport of oil because humans can be removed from their production. In this way the depopulated landscapes of pipelines uncannily resemble the aristocratic landscapes Raymond Williams has described in *The Country and the City* - "a rural landscape emptied of rural labour and of labourers [...] from which the facts of production had been banished."⁸⁰ The Pipelines Act, by theorizing pipelines as breakable and liable to spill oil, disputes this vision of rarefied production by re-embedding oil in the landscape through which pipelines travel, and by re-populating the surroundings of oil production, not with those who labor on pipelines but by those who suffer from oil spills.

In doing so the OPA formally recognizes that local vulnerability is in fact distributed and generalizable to the scale of national interests. Insofar as pipelines actually cross the landscape, moving from the delta to refineries in the southern cities of Warri and Harcourt, to Kaduna in the

⁷⁹ See Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, esp. ch. 1-3, 6.

⁸⁰ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), 125.

north, they distribute the possibility of leakage or breakage nationwide. Pollution becomes generalized to national scale as a virtual or potential threat because the OPA's legislative imaginary conceives of the nation's pipeline network as defined by leakage and breakage. Rematerializing oil as distributed pollution rather than dematerializing it as revenue thus serves to frame oil within the auspices of a potential shared interest, wherein the local risk of oil pollution and local investments in environmental protection double as templates for latent national interests.

In *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, Ursula Heise, drawing on Ulrich Beck's notion of risk society, has spoken of risk as a way of connecting vastly different places and scales: "risk awareness has also come to reshape the imagination of the global in its environmentalist as well as other dimensions. To some extent, one could argue that [...] an awareness of ecological and cultural connectedness implies a knowledge of the kinds of risk that are generated by such connectivity."⁸¹ While Heise is primarily interested in connecting local and global scales, I suggest that the OPA's imaginative dispersal of oil's polluting risk might serve a similar connective purpose, if not to unify the nation, at least to make discreet local concerns legible to each other and legible as potential distributed risks outside circumscribed experiences of harm. Despite being written at a time when Nigeria had only three regions, the Pipelines Act evidences an awareness of a polity bound together by the potential risks of oil's materiality.⁸² The Oil Pipelines Act reconceives of federal adjudication then not as a matter of common dependence or partisan appropriation, but as a matter of protecting the nation at different scales from the materiality of oil.

⁸¹ Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, 121. See also ch. 1.

⁸² Like states created later, these regions were still dominated by ethnic majorities and full of minorities demanding their own regions or states to ensure their own avenues of political representation and access.

This characterization of the material properties of oil and oil pipelines might seem problematic insofar as it substitutes a kind of blunt infrastructural determinism over the deliberate cultivation of a democratic polity, as Achebe has argued is necessary for Nigeria's political futurity. However, by distributing the threat of oil as the primary ground of shared interests across the country, the OPA has the advantage of facilitating the very recognition of local oil pollution that Ken Saro-Wiwa sought and those who have disproportionately borne the costs of oil production still seek. The OPA sets protection against pollution not only as another way of conceiving interests in oil but presents it as a national interest rather than a marginal one at odds with the interests of the rest of the nation-state.

The OPA thus supersedes the shared partisanship of the 1979 Constitution and the Ogoni Bill to posit the imbrication of national and local interests and the distribution or generalization of local interests to national scale *as* the model Nigeria gave itself before the development of oil production and the environmental wreckage that was its byproduct. In the OPA, local interests in environmental protection are not only nested within national interests in pursuing oil revenues, but can themselves be thought of as latent national interests through the OPA's treatment of oil's polluting circulation and the breakable materiality of pipelines.

In these ways the OPA comes closer than any other document analyzed here to providing a vision of federal adjudication that can encompass and address local and national needs by relating them robustly and mutually, rather than through minimization, parochialism, or evacuation. And, insofar as its vision of differentiated but entangled interests predates both the success of the oil industry and the resource control narrative that oil facilitated, its anticipatory and protective view of local interests can be seen as a contrary precedent to Nigeria's resource modernity.

Close reading legal texts thus allows me show the complexities and tensions within the documents themselves, as in the Ogoni Bill's contrary constitutional amendment. It moreover allows me to examine how these texts articulate imaginative precedents and intellectual countercurrents at odds with the realpolitik of Nigerian governance and the ways dominant imaginaries of oil as revenue have shaped Nigeria's political history. By doing so I am also able to track how such texts come to signify newly as the sociohistorical contexts in which they circulate change and develop. Finally, as a literary and cultural scholar, I can read legal texts not for the practical administrative tasks for which they were written or the circumscribed sphere of adjudication named explicitly in their clauses, but for the ways in which they manifest particular viewpoints and value systems. In the next chapter we shall see how such value systems are amended and revised through comparing documents about Bhopal; here I highlight how documents about oil contain multiple value systems that might serve as grounds for competing rights claims and citizen desires.

In short, reading legal texts through a literary lens allows me to foreground the conceptual dilation of legal precedents beyond the ways in which they manifest in practice, and to consider their meanings both at the time of their writing and across the temporal development of the contexts in which they are embedded. The OPA for example, has been largely ineffective since its writing; the *Bodo* case is recent and previous cases based on the OPA have largely been overturned on appeal. Reading the OPA as a legal, policy, or political scholar might, where concern for how the law has actually been implemented and whether or not it is effective, closes down the meanings it might have beyond its applications. As a literary scholar I can treat this text not only for the concrete ways it legislates protections and guidelines but argue that it exceeds its practical designation to produce a vision of the nation-state outside the constitution's

official version. By situating the OPA within the development of oil pollution after its writing, and given the institutional power of legal texts to shape and enforce social and political practices, I am able to consider the OPA for the ways in which it imagines the coherence and vulnerability of the nation-state, and therefore suggest that it envisions a role for the state as enforcing protection from pollution.

VI. Conclusion

While together the Ogoni Bill's constitutional addendum, Achebe's democratic ideal of inclusive community and responsive leadership, and the Oil Pipeline Act's conception of oil as diffused material harm do not amount to a total revision of federal adjudication per se, they are all attempts to produce an accounting of oil interests outside the framework of the 1979 Constitution's minimization of local interests and its dematerialized oil imaginary. They interrupt Nigeria's resource modernity by invoking contrary precedents of environmental protection and differentiated but interlinked local interests as grounds for national cohesion. Insofar as federalism in Nigeria has primarily been seen as a way of addressing diverse and conflicting interests, Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, the Ogoni Bill, and the Oil Pipelines Act fulfill such a mandate more thoroughly than the 1979 Constitution. They suggest that rather than minimizing localism and relying on resource allocation, the federal government might explicitly align itself with the environmental interests of local constituencies, and in doing so redeploy these interests as a basis for national cohesion and allegiance.

As a note in closing, it is striking that Nigeria's most recent constitution, of 1999, seems to do just this; it includes a clause formalizing environmental protection: "The State shall protect and improve the environment and safeguard the water, air and land, forest and wild life of

Nigeria.”⁸³ This newly generated duty may have been inspired by the demands of oil minorities in the delta and the Ogoni Bill of Rights,⁸⁴ or it may be seen as the fruition and formalization of the much older precedent of environmental protection set out in the Oil Pipelines Act. Insofar as it formalizes the interests of communities like the Ogoni and simultaneously articulates an investment in protecting the Nigerian environment for all, we might say this clause brings Nigeria closer to fulfilling Achebe’s democratic prescription of adjudicating diverse interests together for the life of Nigeria.

⁸³ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 at § 20.

⁸⁴ Ken Saro Wiwa’s environmental campaigning and death raised the profile of environmental harm in the Niger delta and amongst the international human rights and environmental NGO communities. The 1999 Constitution may also attest to the influence of his struggle for environmental protection amongst Nigerians.

Chapter 2

The Claims of Bodies: Practices of Citizenship After Bhopal in Survivor Testimony and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*

Most scholars rightly consider the Bhopal gas explosion of 2-3 December 1984 and its aftermath as a matter of grave injustice. Rob Nixon has summed it up as an event that “throws into relief a political violence both intimate and distant, unfolding over time and space on a variety of scales, from the cellular to the transnational, the corporeal to the global corporate.”¹ Almost all accounts focus on the many failures and inadequacies of the \$470 million settlement reached in February 1989 between the government of India and Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), the company that owned the pesticide factory at the center of the disaster.

Scholars who are also activists in Bhopal or whose ideological sympathies lie on the side of survivors consistently recount the circumstances that led to the explosion and the systematized legal and political neglect that followed, in order to denounce the Indian government and Union Carbide and to demand redress. Some also examine the ways in which citizens have turned away from the state in the years after the settlement to forms of local activism.² Given the widespread corruption of officials, gridlocked bureaucracy, bribery, demands for documentary evidence that the majority of survivors either do not possess or which list them as “unaffected” by the gas, and continued poisoning from contaminated soil and groundwater, citizen disillusionment with the state is common.

Indeed, regimes of toxic governance have not often responded generously to survivors. After Chernobyl, the Soviet Union reacted much like the Indian government, deferring treatment

¹ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 46.

² See Suroopa Mukherjee, *Surviving Bhopal: Dancing Bodies, Written Texts, and Oral Testimonies of Women in the Wake of an Industrial Disaster* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

and information, downplaying the number of affected survivors, and minimizing the effects and spread of harm, as does Belarus today.³ In the Bhopal case, the needs of survivors were differentiated from and weighed against the ostensible needs of the Indian populace at large and the government's pursuit of economic growth after market reforms in the late 1970s.⁴ Given the pervasiveness of offshore dumping, dirty extraction, leaked pollutants, and secondary safety and building standards often applied to chemical and nuclear plants in the global South, practices of survival and claim making within situations of inadequate protection are the norm more often than the exception.

Postcolonial ecocritics have therefore rightly emphasized the transnational dimensions of the many problems propelling environmentalisms of the poor across the global South.⁵ Literary postcolonial studies in general has had a vexed connection to the postcolonial state, often viewing it as a site of failed promises and the retrenchment of neocolonial hierarchies or economic piracy despite formal independence.⁶ And many recent critical accounts of the state, inspired by Giorgio Agamben's assertion that sovereign state power is coterminous with the ability to regulate and produce death within suspensions of the law, have gone beyond theorizing

³ See Adriana Petryna, *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens After Chernobyl* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002), especially ch. 1.

⁴ Until the late 1970s, India tried to balance its goals of development and equality. With the 1974-1979 Five Year economic plan however, it began shifting toward favoring economic growth and technological advancement more overtly. The primacy of economic development over redistribution or social reforms has only accelerated since the economic liberalizations instituted by Manmohan Singh in 1991, which are considered the watershed of modern Indian economic reform.

⁵ See Nixon, *Slow Violence* and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan, eds. *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁶ See Jameson, "Third World Literature," Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1991): 336-357, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343840> and Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*.

merely a predatory or disappointing state.⁷ This chapter does not discount scholarship establishing the survival tactics of citizens who turn away from national states nor the diagnosis and exposure of transnational environmental double standards. However, I argue that state politics do not only run to the necropolitical, and that the state remains an important mediator between transnational problems and their pervasive, subnational reach. As Jean and John Comaroff declare in their work on millennial capital, citizens still expect the state to provide “coherence and control in a world run amok,” expectations that are then felt through the “void left by the withdrawal of the state.”⁸ This chapter dwells in the contours of state failures and withdrawals after toxicity to examine how such failures are lived through and mobilized by Bhopal’s citizens for their own purposes in the years since the settlement. Indeed, the ways in which survivors have invested in the state as a site of redress, welfare, and resources is the impetus for interrogating practices of citizenship central to this chapter.

I argue that survivors continue to engage with the state through forms of political claim-making and complaint that center around the injured body.⁹ I do this by first examining the rhetoric of survivor testimonies, The Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster (Processing of Claims) Act (1985) which established the principle of *parens patriae* or state-as-protector and gave the government the right to represent citizens in the Bhopal legal proceedings, and the Indian Supreme Court case *Charan Lal Sahu v. Union of India* (1989) which judged the

⁷ See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 11-40, <https://doi-org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11> and Nicholas Morwood, “From ‘Magic’ to ‘Tragic Realism,’” *Interventions* 19 no. 1 (Jan. 2017): 91-107, <https://doi-org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1080/1369801X.2015.1129912>.

⁸ John L. and Jean Comaroff, *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2001), 36.

⁹ Adriana Petryna has argued similarly that in Ukraine a form of “biological citizenship” emerged after Chernobyl. See *Life Exposed*.

constitutionality of the Act. The role of state as protector is further elaborated by examining the rhetoric of “The Ten Bhopal Principals on Corporate Accountability,” published by Greenpeace in 2002, before the chapter moves to examine Indra Sinha’s 2007 novel *Animal’s People*, a fictionalization of the disaster’s aftermath.

In comparing these texts, I argue that invocations of bodily pain in survivor accounts and legal documentation testify to failures of just redress, but more importantly seem to interpellate a version of the state and its duties enshrined in the Processing of Claims Act and the logic of *parens patriae*, or state-as-protector, that preceded the settlement and contradict its final outcome. Victims have come to formulate personal and political subjectivity through bodily suffering, and in doing so they mobilize physical pain as a way of making claims upon the state; specifically, to call for the kind of government protections articulated in the logic of *parens patriae* and thus for a welfare state which has not manifested in practice. In other words, victim testimonies not only mark the failure of justice in the Bhopal case but specifically configure it as a failure of just governance that should be remediated by earlier government promises of citizen protection and provision. Almost two decades after “that night” and the “full” settlement, these testimonies and principles continue to invest the state with the right and responsibility of protecting citizens in spite of the neglect that has characterized their relations on the ground.

These evocations of welfare are revisionary however insofar as they are specific to the needs of survivors *qua* survivors, and differ from the state’s conception of welfare before and after the explosion. While welfare has been part of the Indian constitution since independence and is therefore a term shared between the state and survivors, the government’s conception of welfare and provision has largely been conceived of as economic development with the aim of addressing the country’s widespread poverty, not care for the bodily pain specific to survivor

experience. While the government primarily conceives of welfare as a generic national need, since the disaster, survivors view welfare in terms specific to their bodily injuries. Thus, the work of bodily testimony militates against the legal, temporal, and compensatory closures imposed by the settlement, but also against discrepancies in the meaning of welfare that have been detrimental to survivors.

Welfare emerges as a central term of claim making because it was used to legitimate governmental representation of citizens in the first place, beginning with the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster (Processing of Claims) Act and continuing in the Indian Supreme Court case *Charan Lal Sahu v. Union Of India* which upheld the constitutionality of the Act's founding principle, *parens patriae*. This right to represent citizens deemed *non sui juris* or unable to represent themselves before the law, was based on the assumption that only governmental representation could ensure proper legal representation and thus the protection of citizen welfare. As cited in the *Charan* case, a certain conception of welfare is interpreted to be the *sine qua non* of government legitimacy and relation vis-à-vis citizens. Bodily complaint then twists the meaning of welfare and the legitimacy which is based in it toward the specific needs of survivors.

Unlike the testimony of survivors, the characters of Sinha's novel do not interpellate an alternate version of the state or hold it accountable to the historic roles it has articulated for itself. In *Animal's People*, the state is not invoked as a site of desire or protection but rather shows up as an oppressive apparatus characterized by corruption and policing, in line with the actual failures of the state following the Bhopal settlement. Moving beyond the revision of a shared category of political legibility, I argue that the novel extends and radicalizes the revision of state and citizen relations offered by survivor-specific concepts of welfare by proposing that the state become accountable to experiences of ongoing toxicity as set forth by citizens themselves.

Rather than attempting to mobilize the state's own historic category of relation to citizens, *Animal's People* posits that post-disaster terms of relation arise from the citizenry as they articulate the unruliness of their toxified bodies, specifically characterized as nonhuman assemblages. The novel suggests that nonhumans must be recognized alongside humans as part of a toxified polity, and that doing so revises the parameters of both citizen claim-making and state recognition; not only does the concept of an exclusively human citizenry collapse in the presence of more-than-human bodies, but the unpredictable of bodily morphings then characterizes the quality of citizen claims and the necessity of adaptive state responses.

While the novel's frame addresses an international Anglophone reading public through the figure of a 'jarnalis' (journalist) who stands in for Western readers,¹⁰ the activist strategies represented within the novel do not embrace the international sphere as an alternative to the state; the characters and plot do not court an international public or interpellate the regulatory and moral weight of international governing bodies like the UN, networks of environmental activists, or humanitarian readers and aid organizations. Instead, like the continuity of survivor demands, they remain invested in local responses to the ongoing effects of the disaster.

In *Animal's People* the reconfiguration of the terms of political relation, claims, and obligations occurs as citizens rebel against state forces. In doing so they widen the sense of who

¹⁰ For suspicious engagements with the novel's frame see Jennifer Rickel, "'The Poor Remain': A Posthumanist Rethinking of Literary Humanitarianism in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*," *ARIEL* 43 no. 1 (Jan. 2012): 87-108, Literature Resource Center and Julietta Singh, "Post-Humanitarian Fictions," *symploke* 23 no. 1-2 (2015): 137-152, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/605667>. For accounts that see the relation between frame and readers as more ambivalent or even mutually beneficial see Adele Holoch, "Profanity and the Grotesque in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*," *Interventions* 18 no. 1 (2016): 127-142, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2014.1001420> and Liam O'Loughlin, "Negotiating Solidarity: Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* and the NGO-ization of Postcolonial Narrative," *Comparative American Studies* 12 no. 1-2 (June 2014): 101-13, <https://doi.org/10.1179/1477570014Z.000000000073>.

or what counts as a citizen to include considerations of the nonhuman within human political life, and specifically as manifest in the unnatural developments of characters' own toxified bodies.

The climatic scene of rebellion in the novel presents human bodies and their needs as shaped by the repercussions of toxic exposure and entanglement with nonhuman agents; in other words, the nonhuman consequences of political neglect are presented as central to human political claim-making, and thus also to forms of accountability and recognition between citizens and the state.

If testimony militates against the limitations of the 1989 settlement by evoking and revising promises of government welfare laid out at independence, *Animal's People* points up an alternative to these practices by insisting on the more-than-human quality of injured bodies; in articulating a revision in the makeup of political constituencies twenty years after the disaster, *Animal's People* opens a space for nonhuman activity within political recognition that is in fact a trenchant commitment to the unpredictability of injured bodies and the future-oriented modes of political engagement they require.

Practices of citizen claim-making in *Animal's People*, survivor testimonies, and legal documents mobilize bodies as sites through which political relations might be reconfigured. Survivor testimonies can be seen as addressing an ideal of the state from the place of the suffering individual in what this chapter reads as an address not to the legal settlement but to the political commitment to welfare enshrined in The Processing of Claims Act, the Indian Supreme Court case *Charan Lal Sahu v. Union of India*, and the "Bhopal Principles on Corporate Accountability." Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* moves away from the revision of welfare and introduces the idea of a posthuman citizenry or a more than human constituency in Bhopal's aftermath. It replaces a shared term of political intelligibility with a more radical notion of political accountability and recognition as practices that must be attentive to and characterized by

the continuous morphings of toxified bodies and their nonhuman components.

Both the testimony of victims and the novel *Animal's People* revise the parameters of political accountability and claim-making in situations of toxic governance, simultaneously militating against the disappointing political realities that underpin the previously mentioned state critiques, while mobilizing the injured body to induce alternative practices of claim-making and relation with the state. Together, this chapter argues that these accounts re-envision the role of the state in toxic redress and environmental harm, turning citizens' strategies of survival into suggestions for better forms of postcolonial governance.

I. State Betrayal: Against the Settlement

Late on the night of 2 December 1984, tanks containing MIC (methyl isocyanate), a volatile component of the pesticide Sevin, were contaminated with water from a cleaner's hose and effluents from dirty pipes. In combination with a faulty slip cover, untrained janitors, an understaffed plant, and broken safety equipment, the gas explosion that resulted was the culmination of cost-cutting measures by the owner of the plant, Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), in the months leading up to "that night."

That night, MIC reacted with water to metamorphose into 40 tons of noxious gases that would come to hover in a 25-mile radius over Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh. By 2:30am on December 3rd, an hour and a half after the leak started, 4000 people had sought treatment at the local Hamida Hospital and by noon on December 3rd, 25,000 people swamped its facilities, floors, lawn, and tents provided by the army. Immediate physical symptoms included cornea damage, pulmonary edema, stomach pains, internal bleeding, and death, mostly from what appeared to be cyanide poisoning. Slower, delayed effects included chronic illnesses and their

complications: lung inflammation, shortness of breath, renal failure, physical weakness, susceptibility to tuberculosis and pneumonia, nerve damage, loss of memory and cognitive functions, lung and cervical cancers, pelvic infections, spontaneous abortions, deformed infants, loss of the ability to work, and intensified poverty.¹¹

By the government's count, 1,754 people died and 200,000 were injured in the leak; these numbers are dwarfed by activist and scholar estimates that place the number of dead at 3,000-10,000 and the number injured at 300,000 or more.¹² In February 1989, the Supreme Court of India approved a settlement between the Central Government and Union Carbide Corporation, the parent company of Union Carbide India Limited and owner of the factory in Bhopal. Originally staked upwards of \$3 billion,¹³ the final settlement set the much lower sum of \$470 million as "full settlement of all claims" for those affected by the disaster.¹⁴ This logic of monetary compensation was largely premised on an attenuated, atomized version of the body.

As Kim Fortun explains in her activist/ethnographic work *Advocacy After Bhopal*, the official number of victims and the amount of settlement compensation eventually negotiated in 1989 were based on a medical schema that sorted victims into "severe," "permanently disabled" and "temporarily disabled" categories that overlooked many victims completely or distorted the actual damage they suffered.¹⁵ It "[subordinated...] complexity into categories with which

¹¹ See Dan Kurzman, *A Killing Wind: Inside Union Carbide and the Bhopal Catastrophe* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987) and Larry Everest, *Behind the Poison Cloud* (Chicago: Banner Press, 1986) for detailed accounts of the lead-up to the Bhopal explosion and its immediate aftermath.

¹² Accounts of victim numbers vary but scholarly and activist accounts uniformly place the numbers of dead and injured higher than the government's count. See Kim Fortun, "Remembering Bhopal, Re-figuring Liability," *Interventions* 2 no. 2 (2000): 187-198, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/136980100427306> and Kurzman, *A Killing Wind*, 130-131.

¹³ Kim Fortun, *Advocacy after Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2001), 38.

¹⁴ Union Carbide Corporation v. Union Of India (1989), 1 SCALE 380, 382 (India).

¹⁵ Fortun, *Advocacy*, 38.

bureaucracy could work” in the name of delivering “expedient justice” to the victims.¹⁶ The data was based on a scoring method that ranked bodily systems and categorized patients according to degrees of injury and disability. Separating and comparing bodily systems quantified but also falsely isolated the damage, downplayed the extended timeline of effects, and utterly bypassed collateral effects of physical harm, such as losses in income or the ability to work.

In other words, the official count was created through an atomizing logic of the body, where bodies were partitioned into individualized systems or damaged organs considered in isolation. It was not meant to account for the wholistic and multi-system scope of bodily damage nor the transcorporeal, transgeographic, and transtemporal nature of toxic effects. Indeed, many victims, especially those not diagnosed in the first few days after the explosion, were actually deemed “unaffected” even if they were treated in Hamida Hospital’s MIC ward or exhibited symptoms of exposure to the gases.

Given this, the settlement and the Processing of Claims Act (1985) by which the government assumed the status of *parens patriae* or legal representative of the victims, have been the object of intense critique. The inadequacies of both documents have been thoroughly discussed and need not be addressed at length here.¹⁷ Briefly however, these accounts deem the doctrine of *parens patriae* a denial of victims’ rights to represent themselves and correspondingly as a ploy by the state to minimize the burden of compensation to which Union

¹⁶ Fortun, *Advocacy*, 146.

¹⁷ Many activist accounts of the disaster address the failures of the settlement and view the Processing of Claims act as the impetus of the government’s denial of citizens’ rights. See Suroopa Mukherjee, *Surviving Bhopal*; Bridget, Ward Morehouse, and Satinath Sarangi eds., *The Bhopal Reader: Remembering Twenty Years of the World's Worst Industrial Disaster* (New York: Apex Press, 2005), the website of the Bhopal Medial Appeal, www.bhopal.org and the opposing arguments in *Charan Lal Sahu v. Union of India* (1990) 1 SCC 613, 639 (India). Veena Das and the opposing arguments of *Charan Lal Sahu* further dispute the applicability of *parens patriae* to conditions of poverty, as the *non sui juris* status that usually legitimates *parens patriae* is usually reserved for minors or the mentally incompetent.

Carbide would have been subject in order to facilitate capitalist investment in India.¹⁸ Veena Das, in a characteristically suspicious reading of the settlement, asserts that the government “compromise[d] the rights of victims by unilaterally arriving at a settlement and granting immunity to Union Carbide against the expressed wishes of the victims.”¹⁹ Suroopa Mukherjee similarly argues that “[t]he Claims Act was the ultimate red herring used by the state and the corporation to hide its need to ‘settle’ matters with each other while claiming to act on behalf of the people [...] To underplay its own complicity in causing the disaster, the state officially aligned itself with the victims, it affirmed the regular role of the state and sought an executive action to overcome judicial complexity.”²⁰

Such critiques are clearly a response to the inadequacies of the settlement and are no doubt filtered through the realities of government corruption and neglect in its wake. Mukherjee has documented the rampant corruption of government officials charged with distributing paperwork and compensation claims, the mistreatment of claimants by officials, and the perspective of many victims that the government has prioritized corporate investments and economic growth over their lives.²¹ As one woman, Champa Devi, tells Mukherjee: “First the company tried to minimize the number of those affected, then the government joined them in

¹⁸ Dan Kurzman and Kim Fortun have argued similarly that the government’s agreement to settle signaled its friendliness to overseas corporations looking to invest in India, where life (and labor) had just been proven cheap. Fortun has further analyzed the decision to settle as part of the government’s strategic prioritization and division of “who counted as the Indian people” – the affected people of Bhopal, or the Indian people in general, who would ostensibly benefit from continued multinational investments. See Fortun, *Advocacy After Bhopal*, 39 and “Remembering Bhopal,” 192.

¹⁹ Veena Das, “Moral orientations to Suffering: Legitimation, Power, and Healing,” in *The Bhopal Reader: Remembering Twenty Years of the World’s Worst Industrial Disaster*, ed. Bridget Hanna, Ward Morehouse, and Satinath Sarangi (New York: Apex Press 2005): 51-59. Originally published in *Heath and Social Change in International P Korten’s perspective*, eds. Lincoln Chen, Arthur Kleinman, and Norma Ware (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993).

²⁰ Suroopa Mukherjee, *Surviving Bhopal*, 62.

²¹ Suroopa Mukherjee, *Surviving Bhopal*, chapters 2, 3, 4.

speaking the same language. You would think the government is for us – the people – but living through that night made it very obvious who is with us and who is against us.”²² These kinds of accounts dismiss the possibility of government welfare as more than a cover used by the state to hide its own collusions with UCC at worst, or at best a legitimization of limited, short-term compensations that could not address most of the consequences of the explosion.

Yet, while the effects of the settlement work according to a logic of foreclosure and containment, its language does not precisely adhere to the schema of individualized harm used to write it nor the temporal finitude it was meant to enforce. Paradoxically, the settlement actually acknowledges many potentially emergent effects in its attempt to negate them:

This settlement shall finally dispose of all past, present and future claims, causes of action and civil and criminal proceedings (of any nature whatsoever wherever pending) by all Indian citizens and all public and private entities with respect to all past, present and future deaths, personal injuries, health effects, compensation, losses, damages and civil and criminal complaints of any nature whatsoever against UCC...²³

This move to contain such a range of possible effects, “past, present and future” might be read against its legal intent as a covert acknowledgement of the range of effects and temporal scales assimilated into the compensatory, single and singular payment structure the settlement enforces. Why guard against personal injuries, health effects, losses, and damages unless they were deemed likely to occur and cause further litigation? Their range gestures to the *longue durée* of harm and all that falls outside monetary compensation, including nonhuman life harmed by the gases and soil and groundwater contamination, which have been identified as a “second poisoning” in the years since the leak.²⁴ Insofar as the settlement compresses the temporal

²² Mukherjee, *Surviving Bhopal*, 44.

²³ Union Carbide Corporation v. Union Of India (1989), 1 SCALE 380, 385 (India).

²⁴ Pablo Mukherjee notes that the settlement did not acknowledge harm to plant or animal life. See Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*. See also Sarah Goodman, “Poisoned Water Haunts

dilation of the disaster's "past, present and future" effects into a singular moment of legal resolution, the assimilation and homogenization of all these to a scheme of monetary equivalence enacts compensation as a violent and violating containment that activists, scholars, and lawyers are right to take up.

Because of the narrowness of the settlement, critics have focused on the government's right to represent victims and to negotiate on their behalf during the proceedings, a right first articulated in the Processing of Claim Act (1985). Because the settlement is the formal outcome of the Act, the Act has been interpreted as enacting the same violences upon survivors as the settlement. However, remarkable discrepancies emerge between the limitations imposed by the settlement and the language of the Processing of Claims Act and the court case *Charan Lal Sahu v. Union Of India* through which the constitutionality of the Act was judged.

Examining the language of the Act, separately from the settlement that was its eventual outcome, reveals large differences in the intent of the state and its approach to citizen claims and welfare. The Processing of Claims Act names a much more capacious scope of redress and governmental responsibility at odds with the language of containment, minimization, and closure in the settlement. Among these are:

- (a) compensation or damages for any loss of life or personal injury which has been, or is likely to be, suffered
- (b) claims arising out of damage to property
- (c) claims for expenses incurred in containing the disaster
- (d) claims for loss of business or employment
- (e) in the case of death caused by the disaster, benefits for spouses, children, and unborn children.²⁵

Bhopal 25 Years after Chemical Accident," *Scientific American*, Dec. 1, 2009, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/groundwater-contamination-india-pesticide-factory/> for discussions of groundwater poisoning.

²⁵ Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster (Processing of Claims) Act 1985, No. 21 of 1985, India Code (1993) at § 2.

These specifications acknowledge a long game of toxic effects, which might encompass future generations (e), injuries that develop in the future even if they are not manifest at the time of the writing of the act (a), loss of livelihood (d) and potentially cleanup of the environment as part of the disaster's containment (c). It is within these provisions and directives for human and nonhuman victims, and human victims present and future, that the state claims the right and the duty to represent those affected: "Subject to the other provisions of this Act, the Central Government shall, and shall have the exclusive right to, represent [...] every person who has made, or is entitled to make, a claim."²⁶

It is only in the language of the settlement that these extensive earlier directives for government representation and protection are truncated and made equivalent to one-time monetary claims citing "the enormity of human suffering occasioned by the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster and the pressing urgency to provide immediate and substantial relief to victims of the disaster."²⁷ In the settlement, in contrast to the Processing of Claims Act, only humans are considered victims, and only human suffering in the *present*, which may be addressed by "immediate" relief, are considered grounds for compensation. The temporal, transgenerational dilation of toxic effects, concern for health as well as livelihood, and the implied cleanup of the environment as part of the containment of the disaster that originally justified *parens patriae* representation, have all been practicably erased.

Against the eventual erasures of the settlement, how does the doctrine of *parens patriae* articulate the role of the Indian government? What are the state's responsibilities? How does *parens patriae* conceive of citizens? How do citizens conceive of themselves within this schema and their relation to the state? In December 1989, the Indian Supreme Court set out to judge not

²⁶ Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster (Processing of Claims) Act 1985 at § 3.

²⁷ Union Carbide Corporation v. Union Of India (1989), 1 SCALE 380, 380 (India).

the settlement but the initial Processing of Claims Act and the constitutionality of the doctrine of *parens patriae* that undergirded it. This right to represent citizens deemed *non sui juris* or unable to represent themselves before the law, had been used to legitimate governmental representation of citizens under the assumption that only governmental representation could ensure proper legal representation and thus the protection of citizen welfare. *Charan Lal Sahu v. Union of India* acknowledges the need to alleviate suffering²⁸ as a basis for the eventual settlement, but its stance toward *parens patriae* upholds a capacious sense of government provision and interprets that provision itself as the *sine qua non* of government legitimacy and relation vis-à-vis citizens.

Notwithstanding the realpolitik failures that have plagued Bhopal's victims, it is this burden of provision and protection as the basis of the relationship between citizens and state that, I suggest, is mobilized by some victims in the aftermath of the settlement. Rather than merely indicting the temporal and spatial closures of the settlement or the conflation of monetary compensation with just redress, victims continue to formulate their personal and political subjectivity through the suffering of their bodies, suffering for which the government is held responsible. Their various claims reopen the meaning of suffering outside the rubric of immediate relief and instead hail the promises embedded in the Processing of Claims Act and as articulated as the basis of legitimate and just governance in the *Charan* case itself. In doing so they also hail an alternate version of the state and its role in toxic redress.

II. Hailing the State: *Parens Patriae* and the Legitimacy of Welfare

Charan Lal Sahu v. Union of India upholds the legitimacy of *parens patriae* against a number of contestations. The most prominent source of legitimacy is a general mandate for the

²⁸ *Charan Lal Sahu v. Union of India* (1990) 1 SCC 613, 639 (India).

state to protect and guarantee the welfare of its citizens. Section 3.2 of the Headnote, on the meaning of *parens patriae*, specifies citizen welfare as an obligation and responsibility enshrined in the Constitution as foundational to the self conception and legitimacy of the Indian state:

Conceptually, the *parens patriae* theory is the obligation of the State to protect and take into custody the rights and privileges of its citizens for discharging its obligations. Our Constitution makes it imperative for the State to secure to all its citizens the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and where the citizens are not in a position to assert and secure their rights, the State must come into the picture and protect and fight for the right of the citizens. The Preamble to the Constitution, read with the Directive Principles contained in Articles 38, 39 and 39A enjoins the State to take up these responsibilities. It is the protective measure to which the social welfare state is committed.²⁹

The Constitutional articles to which the section refers fall under the “Directive Principles of State Policy,” all of which are premised by a general directive article: “The provisions contained in this Part shall not be enforceable by any court, *but the principles therein laid down are nevertheless fundamental in the governance of the country and it shall be the duty of the State to apply these principles* in making laws.”³⁰ Within this interpretative framework of fundamental government duty, the court identifies three directives as foundational to the legitimacy and necessity of *parens patriae*. These pertain to “promoting the welfare of the people” in general (38), specifically in aspects such as livelihood and health (39), and the duty of the state to ensure the legal system works to promote justice and legal aid for all (39A). Of these it focuses on article 38 not as one article brought into question by the Claims Act, but as the overriding directive within which the state relates to the people and as the foundation of its own sovereign existence:

...what the Central Government has done in the instant [sic] case seems to be an expression of its sovereign power. This power is plenary and inherent in every sovereign state to do all things which promote the health, peace, moral [sic], education and good order of the people and tend to increase the wealth and prosperity of the State. [...] This

²⁹ Charan Lal Sahu v. Union of India (1990) 1 SCC 613, 618 (India).

³⁰ Constitution of India, 1950, art. 37. Emphasis mine.

power is to the public what the law of necessity is to the individual. It is comprehended in the maxim *salus populi suprema lex* -- regard for public welfare is the highest law.³¹

Thus *Charan* conceives of the welfare of the people as the “highest law” of the state, both the highest law it may impose and the highest law sanctioning its actions. This mandate legitimates its position as *parens patriae* in the Bhopal case, but also burdens it with civilian maintenance; indeed, the judgment goes so far as to read a “major inarticulate premise” for interrum relief for the gas victims in the lag time between the settlement and Union Carbide’s payments.³²

In light of this double conception of welfare as both that to which just governance is beholden and burdened to ensure, and which it in turn mobilizes to justify its actions, the oral testimony and interviews of victims collected by anthropologists, literary scholars, NGO volunteers, and local activists about the disaster, can be re-read. Most of these accounts frame victim narratives as evidence of state neglect, collusion with Carbide, or selective prioritization amongst the nation’s citizens, as detailed above. Survivor testimonies also, however, largely focus on their own bodies, and more specifically their bodily ills and pains. What Animal in *Animal’s People* refers to as “what horrors might yet emerge,” are elaborated by survivors in personal, fleshy detail. They hold forth their suffering bodies and somatic developments as central to personal and political subjectivity alike. A few examples:

“My husband’s name was Dukhishyam. He got a lot of gas in him [...] Twice he was admitted to the hospital. The second time he was admitted, he never came back. He died in the MIC ward. I gave an application for Rs 10,000 in interim relief, but they haven’t done anything about it yet [...] I stay sick. I have come back from the hospital on 13th of this month [November 1990]. I was there for one and a half months. I never got breathless before the gas; I used to work as a laborer. Now I get badly breathless and my chest pains.” – Natthibai

“I used to work as a porter for transport companies. Since the gas, I have not been able to work for a single day. The gas killed my daughter; she died in the morning after the gas leak. I am

³¹ *Charan Lal Sahu v. Union of India* (1990) 1 SCC 613, 618 (India).

³² *Charan* 1 SCC at 681.

breathless all the time and I cough badly. My eyes have become weak, too. I have been admitted to the MIC ward more than 5 times since 1987. Last year, I was there for 9 months at a stretch. This year, I have come home after eight months.” – Chhotelal

“This is the sixth time I have been admitted to the MIC ward. I have been here since the last month of 1985. When I feel a little better, the doctors send me home but I can’t stay there for long. My breathlessness becomes acute and my husband has to bring me back to the hospital. [...] Before the gas, I had never seen the insides of a hospital. And now, I have spent most of the last five years on this hospital bed.” – Narayani Bai ³³

Like most survivors of the disaster, the memories and experiences of these survivors are bifurcated into a “before” and “after” the event, and their primary conceptions of self revolve around the ways in which their bodies have changed, weakened, and sickened after the gas leak. Personal and political subjectivity become mutually reinforcing. In articulating their bodily injuries and the ways in which these impact work, leisure, and everyday life, the persistence of their symptoms over the *longue durée*, and by keying these changes to exposure to the gas, these survivors can be seen to articulate a charge against the governmental mandate of ensuring “health, peace, and good order.”

Suroopa Mukherjee, having interviewed numerous orphaned children for her fieldwork during the writing of *Surviving Bhopal*, sums up their “deep sense of hurt and anger at being let down by the state government.”³⁴ As one man she interviewed, Shahid Noor, puts it: “We were promised education, jobs, and protection by the state but none of the promises were kept. We feel truly orphaned.”³⁵ Chander Singh, who testifies about his experience in a section titled “Voices from the Aftermath (1985-1990)” says: “I have written six applications to the Collector, six to Chief Minister, six to the Commissioner, Gas Relief. I also wrote letters to the Prime Minister and the President about the poor conditions of my family. In my letter to the speaker of

³³ “Voices of Bhopal, 1990,” quoted in Kim Fortun, *Advocacy After Bhopal* (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2001), 46-48.

³⁴ Mukherjee, *Surviving Bhopal*, 87.

³⁵ Mukherjee, *Surviving Bhopal*, 88.

the legislative assembly I asked permission to immolate myself along with my family. I was so desperate.”³⁶ The bodily complaints quoted above, as well as accounts of citizens’ adherence to government procedure – applying for relief – and committees – as with Chander Singh – evidence their investment in apparatuses and procedures that should be responsive to the suffering of survivors.³⁷

Within this context of the state as guardian and guarantor of welfare, citizen invocations of suffering bodies and bodily suffering can thus be read not merely as indictments against the state but as supplications or interpellations of the state in precisely the welfare role it articulates for itself in the Processing of Claims Act and the *Charan* judgment.³⁸ However, this very investment in the ideal of a protective state runs afoul of the state’s own conception of welfare. Survivor interpellations are therefore revisionary and accusatory insofar as the primary locus of welfare for survivors has become the injured body, an approach to welfare that differs from the government’s conception of it before and after the disaster.

It is clear from the Constitutional provisions cited in *Charan* that welfare is not a term only mobilized by survivors after Bhopal; it has in fact been integral to the Indian state’s conception of its own duties and obligations since independence. Arjun Appadurai and others have noted that the Indian government tried to pursue both economic growth and socialist goals of equality and poverty elimination in the constitution and early national policies.³⁹ Therefore,

³⁶ Mukherjee, *Surviving Bhopal*, 113.

³⁷ Addressing suffering was also the primary logic of the settlement, but this was again enacted as monetary relief rather than health or care.

³⁸ It is no question though that the Indian government has in general failed to meet the socialist welfare goals written into the constitution and has been more successful at pursuing economic growth. For a discussion see Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact* (London: Verso, 2013).

³⁹ See Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact*, ch. 9 and 15.

welfare goals such as promoting equality and alleviating poverty were to be accomplished largely through economic development that could address material and social inequalities simultaneously.⁴⁰

In 1974 Union Carbide was granted a license to manufacture pesticides on site in Bhopal in this context of achieving social welfare by addressing material want. At the time, Madhya Pradesh was one of the least modernized and economically developed states in India, and the factory was perceived by the government and local residents alike as providing much needed economic opportunities. As Dan Kurzman sums up in *A Killing Wind*: “Like human moths, they had gathered around the flame that signaled new jobs, new life; they were part of the nearly 50 percent of Bhopal’s population that had drifted in from outlying villages.”⁴¹

After the explosion though, those affected by the gases no longer approached government welfare in ways that align with general national goals of economic development or the provision of material resources. Instead, as evidenced in their testimonies above, both personal and political subjectivity have come to be centered around bodily injuries. I read these testimonies to index a shift in the meaning ascribed to government welfare; at issue is less the fact that in the wake of the disaster the duty of government protection is compensatory and derivative, but that the most prominent lack is no longer material scarcity so much as the failure of bodily protection

⁴⁰ Until the late 1970s, India tried to balance its goals of development and equality, but with the 1974-1979 Five Year economic plan, began shifting toward favoring economic growth and technological advancement more overtly. This shift in policy and priorities is the context for the opening of the plant in Bhopal. The primacy of economic development over redistribution or social reforms, has only accelerated since structural adjustment reforms of 1991.

⁴¹ Kurzman, *A Killing Wind*, 9. See the remainder of Kurzman’s ch. 1 for other narrated accounts of local investment in the factory’s economic opportunities. Though Kurzman does not offer quotations from his subjects, his book does offer an extensive list of all the people he interviewed during its writing. Kim Fortun provides more direct interview evidence: “For a long time we thought the factory made medicines to kill rats. In H.P. Nagar we hardly knew anyone who had a job in the factory. Such a person would be an object of envy for we had heard the company paid higher wages than government jobs.” Hazra Bi quoted in Fortun, *Advocacy*, 17.

and subsequent need for care and compensation.

This discrepancy in the meaning of welfare is especially apparent in the general urbanization and economic development that has continued in Bhopal through the late-2000s. As per the Bhopal Gas Tragedy Rehabilitation and Relief Department website, government resources in Bhopal have gone toward the creation of green belts, parks, roads, and sewage lines, all of which are grouped under a general heading of “Environmental Rehabilitation.” The website states “Toxic leakage has caused severe damage to the environmental [sic]. The people, those who are living in gas exposed localities has been suffering [sic] from various ailments including respiratory disorders so there is great need of open spaces for pure air.” But what the government has called gas rehabilitation actually has little to do with the specific needs of gas victims and instead is tantamount to general urban development.⁴² With the exception of water tanks meant to provide water to “gas affected wards,” most of the efforts do not address the needs of victims specifically but instead approach the general poverty and lack of amenities in Bhopal. This discrepancy registers a persistent government approach to welfare as alleviating material poverty and resource scarcity, rather than the specific meaning of welfare as keyed to the ongoing bodily pain of survivors.⁴³

Thus, while welfare is a term shared by both survivors and the state, their understanding of what it entails has proved troublingly at odds. In this context, evocations of state failure can also therefore be seen as evocations of expectations held by citizens about what the postcolonial

⁴² “Environmental Rehabilitation,” Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of Madhya Pradesh, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.bgtrrdmp.mp.gov.in/Environmental%20Rehabilitation.html>. Suroopa Mukherjee makes a similar point in *Surviving Bhopal*, 94.

⁴³ Even the medical clinics ostensibly set up to address the bodily needs of survivors are considered inefficient at best and discriminatory and ruinously expensive at worst. None of the government-run clinics are seen as meeting the needs of survivors. See Mukherjee, *Surviving Bhopal* and Fortun’s *Advocacy After Bhopal* especially chs. 6 and 7.

Indian state could or should provide. This chapter reads the continuity of their complaint as a measure of continuous demand for a particular kind of state apparatus: both for provision beyond the limited terms of the settlement, and for a kind of state welfare that might address their injured bodies. In the reality of Bhopal's aftermath, such calls interpellate a state that is otherwise from the present reality of closure and neglect imposed by the settlement on the one hand, and general commitments to welfare that do not consider the particularity of survivor needs on the other. Even as their relationship with the state is an accounting of systemic state failure, it also maps the remnants of investments and expectations vis-à-vis India's official governing promises. Precisely because the Indian state enshrines the welfare and well-being of its citizens as the basis of its own legitimacy, the general and specific revisions to welfare in the Bhopal case can be seen as a strategy by which Bhopal's victims practice citizenship as an ongoing negotiation and contestation of the state's normative political ideals.⁴⁴

III. Internationalizing National Protections: "The Ten Bhopal Principles on Corporate Accountability"

In its August 2002 newsletter, Greenpeace released "The Ten Bhopal Principles on Corporate Accountability" after international meetings in Bhopal, Bangkok, New Haven, and London. Assembled as a supplement to the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development released a decade earlier, the Principles address the continuing failure of states to hold international corporations accountable for pollution, environmental degradation, and the costs of

⁴⁴ Insofar as this chapter reads victim practices of bodily complaint as indicative of the way they imagine their relationship to the state, it draws inspiration from the method of Subaltern Studies, which Chakrabarty has described as one of "[examining] practices [...] to decipher the particular relationships [...] that are acted out in them and then attempts to derive from these relationships the [...] imagination inherent in those relationships." See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the wake of subaltern studies* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2002), 15-16.

development.⁴⁵ In the opening paragraphs of the newsletter, the writers note “We have chosen to call them the ‘Bhopal’ Principles because this disaster more than any other, highlights the current failure of governments to protect public welfare and the failure of corporations to observe basic standards.” But despite state failures, including the Bhopal disaster that gives the Principles their name, they reaffirm the protective role of the state and the place of the state as the primarily protector of its citizens. Like *Charan*, the Principles affirm that “States are ultimately responsible for public welfare.”⁴⁶

Of the ten Principles, only one directly addresses corporations. Clearly intended to prevent a repetition of the mutual denial of responsibility between the parent company Union Carbide Corporation and its subsidiary, Union Carbide India Limited during the Bhopal proceedings, it mandates that corporations must be held “strictly liable for all damages arising from their activities” and that both parent and subsidiary companies are liable for compensation and damages. The *other nine* principles all address states, beginning with the simultaneously aspirational and assertive phrasing, “States shall.” Despite its status as an international body of principles akin to the Rio Declaration, the Bhopal Principles continue to invest the state with the primary role and responsibility of citizen defense through a fantastic extension of state authority and efficacy beyond national borders. Moving beyond traditional conceptions of territorially circumscribed sovereign right, the Principles envision an active role for the state within situations of transnational harm.

⁴⁵ Commonly known as the Earth Summit, the Rio conference on Environment and Development enshrined principles of sustainable development and environmental protection as international goals. The Bhopal principles were released a decade later in recognition that states and corporations failed to adhere to many of the Rio principles.

⁴⁶ “The need for an international instrument on corporate accountability and liability,” Greenpeace International, accessed June 17, 2018, <http://www.greenpeace.org/sweden/Global/sweden/p2/skog/report/2006/forest-crime-file-corporate-crimes.pdf>.

Principles 3 and 4 are most striking in this regard. Principle 3, titled “Ensure Corporate Liability for Damage Beyond National Jurisdictions” asserts “States shall ensure that corporations are liable for injury [...] beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, and to the global commons such as atmosphere and oceans.” Principle 4, “Protect Human Rights,” asserts that “States have the responsibility to safeguard the basic human and social rights of citizens” and that to do so “States must ensure effective compliance by all corporations of these rights.” These principles envision state authority as exceeding national borders even as the delimitations of national authority provide the foundation of the modern system of nation-states and makes such a document of international accords possible. Nonetheless, such a move is legitimated by the very same logic that *Charan* called upon to justify the Indian state’s *parens patriae* status: protecting the welfare of national citizens is the highest law.

The “shall” of these statements is in some ways reminiscent of the logic of “fabulous retroactivity” that Jacques Derrida has argued accompanies the act of declaration.⁴⁷ In discussing the American Declaration of Independence, Derrida has noted that the “are” and “ought” of the famous phrase “these united Colonies are and of right ought to be free *and independent States*” enact in their dual-temporal modes of present and subjunctive, of present facticity and future-oriented desire, an autogenesis of political sovereignty.⁴⁸ In the moment of declaration, a set of political rights are both created and presented as given, so that the instability of what is not-yet-present (ought) and only emerges through the act of declaration, is stabilized and given temporal extension as well as political legitimacy by what is already-there (are); thus the declaration can be said to merely acknowledge what *is* and therefore dispense with the need for external sources of legitimacy. The temporal instability of “are” and “ought” thus articulates

⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Declarations of Independence” *New Political Science* 15 (1986): 10.

⁴⁸ Derrida, “Declarations,” 11, emphasis original.

the contours of a generative temporal mode, and the felicity of declaration is such that the future tethers its unstable forms retroactively to a present that is said to already contain and ensure those forms.

The Bhopal Principles have no such manifest supplement to uphold the fabulous futurity of their declarative mode; they cannot tether their futurity in the present, for “shall” here denotes only what is-not-yet. Nonetheless, it carries the connotation of a present compact with the future, of an obligation grounded not in self-evidence but in the drawing of the wide field of the future to a point where its outcome is made known by the moment of utterance; in other words “shall” enacts a discursive taming of the future by drawing toward the present a particular kind of futurity.

The ideal envisioned in these documents is not only of a benevolent state, but one that utilizes the eroded borders that facilitate capitalist expansions and unequal risks (such as the Bhopal factory) to also augment the protective mandate usually limited to national territory. In a world where transnational threats from corporations or from environmental hazards cross national boundaries, the Bhopal Principles envision the state as the primary mechanism of citizen protection; the state is presented as mediating between citizens and the realm of transnational threats, able to enforce compliance with rules for citizen protection outside its own national borders on the strength of its self-appointed mandate to protect citizens and ensure their welfare.

If the decline of the protective state and the porousness of borders are mostly evoked to explain the workings of neoliberal capital and the unequal distribution of environmental harms, these principles envision an erosion of borders that empowers the state to pursue protections for its citizens with similar breadth and transnational impunity, pursuing harm to its lair, so to speak. These ideals of sovereignty as welfare cultivate a robust role for the state within transnational

circuits of harm and risk in addition to domestic affirmations like *Charan* and the constitution. For some scholars though, the idea of welfare as either an avenue of citizen rights or proper state duties is dubious.

In his recent book *The Politics of the Governed*, Partha Chatterjee for one argues that welfare is not an arena of citizen rights and claim-making upon the state. In this work Chatterjee limits citizenship rights to abstract universal notions of freedom and equality and from this particular definition he goes on to argue that claims to governmental care—that is, claims to welfare and the provision of well-being—are not citizen claims at all. This is largely because Chatterjee sees the welfare state as a deviation from an ideal state that upholds universal principles; as such, welfare is merely part of the way in which the Indian developmental state “manages” the poor.⁴⁹ The developmental state is contrasted with a model “sovereign and homogenous” state in which “the universal ideals of modern citizenship were expected to be realized.”⁵⁰ For Chatterjee then, India’s developmental state has displaced the kind of state that could support universal aims of freedom and diverted it toward the governmental goals of “[promising] to end poverty and backwardness.”⁵¹ Therefore, the provision of welfare is the mark of a state that, because it is centered around the care of citizen well-being rather than universal freedoms, is considered a dereliction of the state proper.

It is not entirely clear why a scholar like Chatterjee relies here on a “classical” Western version of the state as the only legitimate one.⁵² His discussion of the state and citizenship in

⁴⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 34-37.

⁵⁰ Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*, 30.

⁵¹ Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*, 37.

⁵² By hewing to an idea of the “homogenous” nation-state *as still* the universally accepted ideal Chatterjee also excludes the extensive literature that has developed on the heterogeneity of the nation-state. This is apparent in Benedict Anderson’s canonical *Imagined Communities* and

theoretically singular terms is especially surprising given that his earlier work critiqued the limitation of nationalism to just these kinds of universal ideals (specifically Enlightenment rationality) and, as part of the Subaltern Studies collective, he participated in a “democratic project” that considered how historical categories of modernity, citizenship, and politics were in fact shaped by subjects excluded from them within Western historiography.⁵³ Nonetheless, in this recent work Chatterjee argues that with the rise of the developmental welfare state, citizens are replaced by “a multiplicity of population groups that were the objects of governmentality – multiple targets with multiple characteristics, requiring multiple techniques of administration.”⁵⁴ The agency of the poor then consists of “temporary and contextual” negotiations with these administrative techniques.⁵⁵ While he clearly seeks to valorize these negotiations as ways in which “people in most of the world are devising new ways in which they can choose how they should be governed,” to demand or require care from the state means that one is not a citizen, since citizenship is defined only by norms of freedom and equality, not need.⁵⁶

Thus, while Chatterjee and I both understand welfare as central to the political lives of the poor, it leads us to oppositional conceptions of the state. As I have argued, by calling attention to the state’s failure to promote their well-being, Bhopal’s survivors ask for state

within postcolonial studies from many standpoints. These include the academic work of David Lloyd, “Nationalisms Against the State” in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, eds. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997): 173-198 and Timothy Brennan, “The National Longing for Form” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990): 44-70; the literary representation of the nation as “Many-in-One” in Salman Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children*, rev. ed. (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 1981), and the realpolitik of India’s federal structure, its language-based regional states, and the communitarianism which justified Partition, to name only a few prominent counterexamples.

⁵³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity*, 19. See also Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*.

⁵⁴ Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*, 36.

⁵⁵ Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*, 60.

⁵⁶ Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*, 77.

redress within the welfarist role it has prescribed for itself in *parens patriae*, Charan, and the constitution. Welfare here is the *sine qua non* of the Indian state and to theorize it as such does not signal a deviation but names the ontological ground of the Indian state's own self-conception, as well as the ways in which it remains available to claim-making by citizens. Welfare is, in the wake of toxicity, hailed as the foundation of state legitimacy; it is also however a foundation under revision, as toxified citizens evoke and remake the terms of welfare to better suit the shifted grounds of their need. For Chatterjee by contrast, the developmental welfare state is a deviation from an ideal state not meant to attend to welfare at all.

I do not mean to imply that welfare is the only political ideal upon which toxified citizens might stake claims. But by drawing on the experiences and testimony of Bhopal's victims, I demonstrate that they present themselves not as governed subjects who will never access citizenship's universal and privileged rights but *as* citizens who invoke foundational state promises in order to more fully inhabit the rights they are formally entitled to. Indeed, by continuing to hail the welfare state in defiance of the settlement, the victims of Bhopal refuse a governmental logic that sees them only as a poisoned population to be pacified and managed rather than citizens entitled to ongoing and more capacious care.

Chatterjee's discussion of Indian governmentality has the merit, however, of highlighting the limitations even of these revisions to the welfare state. Governmentality as he describes it stresses the distance of state ideals from those who do not occupy positions of privilege. As the activist accounts from which I have drawn also make clear, many survivors do not hail a benevolent state and some have in fact turned away from the state as a site of desire or redress at all. For them the kind of invocations I have been tracing would seem hollow or duplicitous at best, and Chatterjee's theory of the limited political horizon of the governed might seem a more

accurate portrayal of their relations with the state.

This is in fact similar to the stance of Indra Sinha's 2007 novel, *Animal's People*. Set in a fictional Bhopal renamed Khaufpur or "city of terror," the state is depicted only as corrupt, neglectful, and abusive. In line with majority views of the state that place it in complicity with Union Carbide at the time of the settlement and global capital development in the years since then at the expense of its own most vulnerable citizens, *Animal's People* depicts the worst aspects of the state's treatment of survivors. And yet, its primary scene of civilian agency is a confrontation between the poor and the state, and in addressing the relationship between situated locals and state power it revises not a duty held in common and differently interpreted, but the very grounds upon which political recognition rests.

Rather than welfare, in *Animal's People* nonhuman impingements upon human bodies in the form of toxic illness become the basis for future political interactions, ones articulated by citizens against the limitations of state recognition. The novel thus revises the terms of citizen-state relations from one of shared if contested terminology to one where citizens articulate and indeed enact their own parameters of political engagement. The novel's climactic scene of rebellion introduces a widened scope for political subjectivity that includes the presence and effects of nonhumans in the body politic as well as an open-ended future of interruptive political actions and unpredictable agency. In contrast to survivor exercises of hailing state response to bodily injury, *Animal's People* approaches injury in other ways, by militating against an oppressive status quo that does not account for the ways in which nonhumans impact human political needs and the ongoing, unpredictable bodily developments of toxic constituencies.

IV. Citizenship Against the State: *Animal's People*

Set almost twenty years after the Bhopal leak, *Animal's People* follows the exploits of its eponymous anti-hero, Animal, a boy whose spine has been twisted by exposure to the gases and who must move around on both hands and feet. Working with and yet skeptical of other characters who pursue various forms of justice and redress, including a group of local activists and Elli, an American doctor who opens a free clinic in the city, Animal provides a running critique of Khaufpur's many grievances while espousing an ethos of hard-scrabble living.⁵⁷ In doing so he resembles a modern day picaro, and Rob Nixon, in one of the most influential readings of *Animal's People*, has indeed called the novel an environmental picaresque.⁵⁸

The novel can also largely be considered a meditation on the uses and limits of different approaches to mitigating the effects of Bhopal's aftermath. The residents of the city or "the kingdom of the poor" as Animal dubs them, mostly exist in a state akin to what Giorgio Agamben has called "bare life," or life that may be killed with impunity.⁵⁹ Such a designation is preeminently political, as it signifies life that may be punished by the law but which has no recourse to the law's protection or rights within it. Agamben's theory places the cultivation of death, either overtly or indirectly through forms of calculated neglect, at the center of modern political power and more specifically at the center of the *relation* between the state and its citizens. Arjun Appadurai has renamed this idea of a political relation built on the minimization

⁵⁷ This is particularly apparent in his personal mantra: "I am an animal fierce and free..." Indra Sinha, *Animal's People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), 172, 217. Subsequently cited in the text as *AP*.

⁵⁸ Nixon identifies the picaresque's characteristic "passion for interrogating the hypocrisies of criminality" and its "parodic and antihumanist strains" as structuring features of Sinha's novel, features that have made the novel a favorite with environmental justice scholars. See Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 55, 57 and see generally ch. 1, "Slow Violence, Neoliberalism, and the Environmental Picaresque."

⁵⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

of rights and protections “bare citizenship.”⁶⁰ Either term seems an apt description of citizen-state relations in the novel. Described best by the quip “this is not my department,” which implies that it might be the department of someone else, governmental neglect occurs through false promises of care and endless bureaucratic deferments (*AP* 106).

Functionaries like the Minister for Poison Relief who routinely refuse to meet with the people and yet who claim “no decision will be taken that is not in your best interests” serve as a mere facade of government involvement; the poor are left much on their own (*AP* 267). Bare citizenship is, however, not equally imposed or practiced; citizens are divided into more and less worthy groups, with more and less access to visibility, resources, and efficacious claim-making. This is particularly clear in the way a wealthy doctor describes the distribution of the populace to Elli, an American who comes to open a free clinic in the city: “Let it go, I say, it’s been nearly twenty years. Let it rest. Maybe there are some people in the slums who want to keep the agitation going [...] Every year [...] they daub slogans and chant. What does this achieve? Nothing. *Meanwhile the rest of us, citizens*, city council, chamber of commerce, everyone, we all want to move on” (*AP* 152-3, emphasis mine). In this rhetorical equivalence of citizens with city council and chamber of commerce, claims to citizenship are keyed to the conservation of a politically unequal status quo that maintains social order and economic stability; it is linked to activities that conserve access to power among an elite echelon rather than dispersing access to the state to those who call upon it for protection; indeed those who “agitate” and “chant” are not seen as exercising rights or making legitimate claims but are instead verbally segregated into “the slums” of othered nobodies in contrast to the everyones of a conservative, institutionalized citizenry.

⁶⁰ Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact*, 118.

Given the official line of state care and the equally official practice of neglect, the legal campaign headed by Zafar, a local activist, is the primary form of remediation available to the populace. A Gandhi-esque figure “robed in the sweet odour of sainthood,” Zafar commands the affection and loyalty of the city’s residents and, through him, they remain invested in formal and institutionalized modes of redress (*AP* 39). While he does not petition the state for compensation, Zafar maintains that the status of “poison victim” is key to legal recognition and compensation from the company within the national court system.

However, though the legal campaign occupies much of the action of the novel, it is ultimately futile and remains entrenched in endless deferral. The novel’s only scene of definitive agency addresses neither the company nor the system of courts; it is instead a scene of collective and spontaneous rebellion against the state. Insofar as this rebellion refuses the ongoing situation of bare life or bare citizenship within which citizens and state interact, it also underscores the centrality of relations with the state, and opens up a space for this relationship to be changed.

The spark of this protest is the apparent death of Zafar, who alone among the citizens has remained invested in using existing forms of redress.⁶¹ Even fellow activists question the efficacy of a system not meant to work for them: “And when the government that is supposed to protect us manipulates the law against us of what use then is the law?” (*AP* 284) It is through Zafar’s focus on the law that the city’s residents have remained tethered to institutional redress and moreover to the mechanisms and versions that currently exist. His death, and the upsurge that immediately follows it, can be seen as a severing of the bond between citizens and the institutional status quo. It is not, however, a complete severing of citizen relations with the state. The rebellion here signifies a refusal of current political relations but not necessarily a total

⁶¹ They are protesting Zafar’s apparent death. He is presumed dead but is later revealed to have been taken to a government hospital.

withdrawal into internationalism, anarchy, sectarianism, or other political forms.

In the scene in question, residents gather at the factory; they are met by an antagonistic police force that imposes on them more of the same devaluation and oppression that has characterized the state's relation to them thus far. The police captain's quintessential demand: "Where is your permission?" is as much a general repression of the rights of the poor to claim rights at all, to protest, to do anything but "lie down and die" as much as it is about their presence in the factory (*AP* 312, 113). The police enact a violent and active version of the repression that is otherwise practiced through forms of neglect and attenuated rights; thus this moment can be seen as one of citizenship against the state, that is, an act of claim-making against the bare citizenship, oppression, and deliberate neglect that have hitherto characterized the novel's citizen-state relations.

In this moment of rebellion, Animal observes: "Then a thing happens that no one could have predicted. From nowhere a tide of ragged people surges over the police and sweeps them away" (*AP* 314). In this moment, the people are described in terms of a collective and massive force, exerting a kind of agency from below. Together they rise like a "tide" to substitute the dominant approach to justice and claim-making (formal, litigious, and institutional) with another (popular, rebellious, and unexpected). This moment which "no one could have predicted" is one in which the poor shift the grounds of their relationship with the state from endured neglect to active opposition. In doing so they answer the question of permission with a demand for a new relation. Agency is configured not only as resistance to oppressive forms of power, but as an act of sweeping away given forms of bare citizenship to stake a claim in future relations that are not a repetition of the same.

Much of the revisionary work of this future relation is elaborated in the novel's

amendment to who or what counts as a political subject. Why present rebelling bodies as a collective force, a ragged tide? This question brings us to the narrative phenomenon of the voices Animal hears inside his head and the ways in which the novel poses the question of nonhuman presence with the human, and more specifically within human political life. As Animal explains at the outset of his narrative, he hears the unspoken voices and thoughts of others: “Since I was small I could hear people’s thoughts even when their lips were shut, plus I’d get en passant comments from all types of things, animals, birds, trees, rocks giving the time of day”; “Voices were shouting inside my head” (*AP* 8, 2).

Animal’s voices might at first seem an instance of magical realism, but such a fantastic iteration can also be taken quite literally, as a bodily heuristic. Seeing into the interior lives of other beings or being permeated by their thoughts and comments can be seen to articulate the breakdown of mental, emotional, and physical boundaries in the wake of environmental contamination. Hearing voices, leaking into other points of view, or accessing the interior of other things make audible and obvious a somatic state that could otherwise be overlooked: the hybridized interior of toxic bodies, criss-crossed by other forms of life and matter. In other words, Animal’s voices give voice to the teeming bodily multiplicities of environmental duress. These moments of narrative plurality presented as narrative porosity put into language the hybridized, more-than-human makeup of bodies in Khaufpur.

The novel’s presentation of teeming bodies throws into question exactly who or what its “ragged tide” of people included. These are people invaded by colonies of bacteria, microbes, (in)organic materials, toxins and cancers, and whose multi-materiality has been facilitated by the forms of bare citizenship they have had to endure. Teeming bodies are preeminently political, produced out of bureaucratic deferrals, lack of medical treatment, and continuous exposure to

chemicals. Civil rebellion is then a moment when the government as an oppressive apparatus is confronted by the full range of its constituents, by the multiply-mattered bodies it has created through cultivating the poor as bare life. As such, that confrontational tide includes the nonhuman or posthuman repercussions of human politics.

Demands for new citizen-state relation thus arise largely out of the ways in which nonhuman life has impinged upon the human, and the ways in which nonhumans shape bodily needs and political demands; precisely since they are lively, unpredictable, and ongoing, the effects of nonhumans must become part of the state's conception of its citizens and of its address to or relation with them. This attention to the nonhuman demonstrates the limitations of pre-disaster responses like welfare, which rely on shared if contested rubrics and coherent narratives about bodily changes. Toxified bodily developments are not always articulable, knowable, or coherent in their emergence, and in characterizing bodies foremostly as unruly assemblages, *Animal's People* demands a recognition of the place of the nonhuman and the unpredictable yet persistent ways in which they shape the lives of citizens, especially those citizens interpellated under bare rather than full citizenship.

This theory of nonhuman agency embedded in human contexts can also be seen as an intervention into recent scholarship in posthumanism and new materialism, in which more than human bodies and nonhuman agents are often thought together as part of a realm of expanded agency. Largely influenced by Bruno Latour's idea of "actants," posthumanism and new materialism take seriously the liveliness, agency, and independence of nonhumans.⁶² In these theories agency becomes divorced from human qualities like intention or consciousness and instead denotes the capacity to act, affect, or be affected in general; it therefore becomes a widely

⁶² See Bruno, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993) and Bruno Latour *Reassembling the Social* (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2005), 54.

available capacity that is in no way limited to humans. However, one of the weaknesses of these theories has been a tendency to flatten social differences and inequalities of power within the category of the human in their bid to make human and nonhuman agency comparable. I suggest that because *Animal's People* combines a theory of the liveliness of nonhumans *within* unequal relations of human power and social difference, it challenges the assumptions of scholarship that homogenizes the category of the human in order to privilege nonhuman agency as a force apart.

Among new materialists, Jane Bennett is one of the few who asks specifically about how nonhumans affect human political life, and the problem of human difference in her *Vibrant Matter* is illustrative of the ways in which an analytic separation between humans and nonhumans sometimes rests upon the categorical homogenization of the human.⁶³ In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett develops a theory of “vibrant materiality” that argues for “the capacity of things [...] to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own.”⁶⁴ In this she resembles other new materialists, who theorize nonhuman agencies as forces independent from humans. With regard to politics, Bennett turns John Dewey’s theory of publics as “a confederation of bodies, bodies pulled together [...] by a shared experience of harm that, over time, coalesces into a ‘problem.’”⁶⁵ In Bennett’s reading of Dewey, the “bodies” that compose publics are defined by their “‘affective’ capacity” that is, “publics are groups of bodies with the capacity to affect and be affected,” and this primary qualification need not differentiate

⁶³ Bruno Latour’s “Parliament of Things,” mentioned in *We Have Never Been Modern* is ostensibly a theory of nonhuman political participation with humans. However, it merely poses humans as translators for the nonhuman and leaves unanswered how one would communicate with nonhumans, make human intentions known to them, or otherwise not repeat the “speaking for others” that has characterized ethnocentric anthropology and practices of colonialism widely construed

⁶⁴ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2010), viii.

⁶⁵ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 100. She also draws on the affect theory of Deleuze/Guattari, itself influenced by Spinozan monadism, to discuss the liveliness of nonhumans more generally.

between human and nonhuman bodies.⁶⁶ Thus for Bennett, publics, as shared sites of democratic life characterized by acting and affecting bodies, offers a theory of political participation that may well include nonhuman things.

However, the idea of publics in which nonhumans may participate requires “[leaving] aside the question of what *kinds* of bodies can do the ‘acts.’”⁶⁷ In other words, differentiation within the categories of the human and nonhuman must be “left aside.” As with other posthumanist work, “the human” and “the nonhuman” only become comparable at the analytic level as homogenized categories. As Ursula Heise similarly notes in talking about the place of nonhuman animals in relation to conservation and biodiversity, the “‘flattening of ontologies’ that comes with questioning the human subject [...] often makes it difficult to address head-on [...] uneven power distributions.”⁶⁸

This bracketing of “kind” isolates the body from its conditioning forces, that is, from the particular contexts and situations of social difference in which it acts and therefore which impinges on how it is, what it is, and what it can do. Bodies that act never do so in a vacuum, and even if bodies were assumed to have the same qualities, like affectivity, it does not necessarily follow that all bodies have the same qualities to the same degree or with the same ability to exercise them. In short, the differences between the bodies that do the acts must in fact be central to any accounting of either the bodies or the actions. It is this criterion of being situated within particular contexts and the bearing of these contexts upon qualities and capacities that the

⁶⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 101.

⁶⁷ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 101 emphasis original.

⁶⁸ Ursula Heise, *Imagining Extinction* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2016), 197. In *Imagining Extinction* Heise calls for a “multispecies justice” that “is the kind of project that requires a more-than-human diplomacy – a project that pursues justice with both a sense of cultural differences and a sense of species differences,” 199. Heise’s multispecies justice amounts ultimately to a more conscientious kind of justice based on the desire to be sensitive to different contexts, but it is nevertheless still activated and practiced by humans.

ontological flattening of the human/nonhuman cannot seem to adequately address.

Animal's People, as we have seen, foregrounds social differences between more-than-human bodies. From its perspective the capacity of bodies to “affect and be affected” could never be treated in a social and political vacuum. Instead it poses nonhumans as implicated within the social differences to which human bodies are subject. The novel is at pains to present such ideas as “lively matter” as quotidian aspects of life in toxified environments, and its focus on ordinary experiences of nonhuman agency as bodily pain befits a realist treatment of the place of nonhumans within human life. As such, *Animal's* inhuman voices work to make more obvious, accessible, and apparent the ways in which nonhuman presences are always intruding in the lives of the poor who must endure them, and to posit that these nonhuman presences cannot be ignored in any address to the poor themselves. They are not an extra-ordinary imaginative sign but an intensification of and making obvious of what is already felt to be real: that these nonhuman things inside me do have a life of their own that shapes my life in turn, or as *Animal* puts it, produce “horrors [which] might yet emerge” (AP 283).

Likewise, in its scene of “sweeping the police away,” *Animal's People* casts the one instance in which citizens confront the state and its repressions as a scaled-up version of what happens inside the individual bodies of citizens every day. In scaling up what counts as the site of multiplicity, the very place and significance of that multiplicity within political relations is brought to the fore. Translating the microscalar into a macroscalar description of bodies in confrontation, *Animal's People* foregrounds the question of who, or what, composes a political constituency and therefore the need to rethink the parameters of political participation so that nonhuman liveliness and unpredictability can be encompassed by political recognition and in political responses.

If those who confront the state as part of the novel's ragged tide must be understood as humans riddled with other presences, the sweeping away of current states of recognition must also be understood as an invocation to a future politics commensurate with the open-ended temporality of more-than-human bodies' unpredictable physical morphings. In failing to fill in the future, *Animal's People* militates against the kind of formal closures inaugurated in Bhopal's legal settlement as well as the de facto closures of deferral prominent in the novel's illustration of bureaucratic and legal justice.

The survivor testimonies and legal documents in the first part of this chapter interpellate a state that makes good on its promises as one strategy of survival against toxic injury and environmental harm. *Animal's People* addresses a repressive version of the state by revising the parameters of political visibility and accountability to include the nonhuman ramifications of human politics. Both mobilize the body as a way to critique the political status quo and substantiate new kinds of claims on the state: the former by articulating injured bodies as unfulfilled promises of state responsibility, and *Animal's People* by rewriting the body politic as a human/nonhuman entanglement; in doing so it makes the continuing, unpredictable morphings of toxified bodies central to the relationship between citizens and the state.

More-than-human bodies must then become a given of state calculations and responses, and the needs of citizens seen as shaped by their nonhuman supplements, especially in cases of illness and toxicity. In rewriting the grounds of future relations between more-than-human citizens and the state, *Animal's People* offers a realist version of the place of the nonhuman in political life and a mode of political relation commensurate with the unpredictable developments of toxified bodies. Whether they hail promises of state welfare and provision, or revise the terms

of political recognition vis-à-vis nonhuman agency, injured bodies have been mobilized after Bhopal to facilitate a range of citizen practices, modes of relation to the state, and claims upon it. These practices militate against states of neglect to hail new states for already more-than-human citizens living within the effects of environmental harm, neoliberal expansion, and lively matter.

Chapter 3

Middle Class Reform/Reforming the Middle Classes: Development in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Arundhati Roy's *The Cost of Living*

I. Development: From Nehruvian Poverty Elimination to Anti-Poor Policies

Since independence in 1947, India has undertaken numerous development projects, with mixed success. The Green Revolution, first implemented in Punjab in the 1960s, is a case in point. Conceived of as a plan to generate both economic revenue for India's farmers and combat food scarcity by replacing the traditional, small-scale, sustainable farming of the majority of India's hinterlands with modern technologically-intensive farming, in its early years its use of specialized seeds, fertilization, and irrigation led to huge crop harvests and increased profits. A minority of Punjabi farmers with large land holdings earned about 1240 rupees/acre compared to the roughly 750 rupees/acre they earned previously, and in 1971-72, their rate of return on investment was over 20 percent.¹

As early as 1978 though, these farmers saw their returns plummet to around 6 percent.² And the vast majority of Punjab's farmers, who owned 15 acres or less, never made enough to break even with the exorbitant costs of the Green Revolution's technology-, pesticide-, and water-intensive cultivation. The Punjabi government concedes that between 1984 and 2004, 2116 farmers committed suicide; they did so mostly by drinking the pesticides that were to herald their successful futures but which had instead destroyed their traditional means of livelihood and hopes for prosperity.³ Farmers outside the Punjab, not subject to Green

¹ See Vananda Shiva, *Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology, and Politics* (Lexington: Kentucky UP, 2016), ch. 5.

² Shiva, *Violence of the Green Revolution*, 179.

³ Farmer's advocate groups report higher numbers, and Pankaj Mishra reports that nation-wide many as 100,000 farmers are estimated to have committed suicide from 1993-2003. See Pankaj Mishra, "The Myth of the New India," *The New York Times*, July 6, 2006,

Revolution investments, were neglected and millions of citizens suffer food scarcity through the present.⁴

The grim turn of the Green Revolution is just one example of the uneven distribution of costs and risks that India's rural population bears within the nation's pursuit of modern development. More specifically it exemplifies the failures of state vision that James Ferguson has elucidated in *Seeing Like a State*. There he argues that state sponsored development so often fails because it does not account for the variability and contingency of local circumstances, needs, or knowledge. Instead, state development plans are often implemented in decontextualized vacuums based on a "high modernist" faith in technology and bureaucratic expertise.⁵

In India this form of development is shaped not just by state ambitions but by the middle classes, to whom the benefits of development have largely accrued and whose desires for material goods and modern infrastructures have in turn justified state development actions. Indeed, in *The Great Indian Middle Class*, Pavan K. Varma laments that the middle classes of India have come to be characterized above all by indifference toward the poor and indeed to anything outside the pursuit of material goods. Such priorities have underwritten and justified both the opening of the Indian economy to free market reform in 1991 as well as development megaprojects like the Green Revolution and the Sardar Samovar damming project on the Narmada river. The middle classes have also pressured the state on other environmental issues detrimental to the poor, such as urban clean ups that displace slum dwellers or commercial

<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/06/opinion/06mishra.html>. Also Bryan Newman, *Development Report No. 15: A Bitter Harvest*, The Institute for Food and Development Policy (Oakland, CA: January 2007), <https://foodfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/DR15-A-Bitter-Harvest.pdf>.

⁴ See Devinder Sharma, "India Shines!!!!!!!!!!?" countercurrents.org, accessed 17 July 2018, <https://www.countercurrents.org/dsharma100204.htm> and Bryan Newman. "A Bitter Harvest."

⁵ James C. Scott. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes of Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998).

forestry investments that do not account for subsistence use of India's forests.⁶ That the middle classes then might be considered potential allies for rural communities suffering the negative effects of state development is not immediately apparent from recent definitions of the class and its interests.

However, this has not always been the dominant form of development in India nor have the middle classes always been defined primarily by their distance from the poor. Raka Roy and Mary Katzenstein note that "During the pre-Independence period and Nehruvian years [...] the twin discourse of poverty alleviation and development, with its attendant contradictions, came to occupy the status of a dominant social script."⁷ Within this period and through the mid-1980s, community based organizations (CBOs) led by the middle classes have a long history of both supplementing the limitations of state development and of doing so within a framework of poverty alleviation originally set by the Nehruvian state. CBOs arose to supplement and critique state failures of welfare for India's poorest but, largely until the 1980s and more ambivalently afterwards, were also motivated by the framework set by the Nehruvian state.⁸ Thus, "The idea that movements should be measured by their accountability to social justice norms is in India broadly thought to be the signatory principle of movement organizing."⁹

While development and poverty alleviation have always been in tension, by the 1990s

⁶ See Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria, "Guardians of the Bourgeois City: Citizenship, Public Space, and Middle-Class Activism in Mumbai," *City & Community* 8 no. 4 (Dec. 2004): 391-406, <https://doi-org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1111/j.1540-6040.2009.01299.x>; Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact*, and Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha, "Ecological Conflicts and the Environmental Movement in India," *Development and Change* 25 (1994): 101-136, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.1994.tb00511.x>.

⁷ Raka Roy and Mary Katzesnstein, eds. *Social Movements in India: Poverty, Power and Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 7.

⁸ See Raka Ray and Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, *Social Movements in India* and Pavan K. Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class* (New Delhi: Viking, 1998).

⁹ Roy and Katzenstein, *Social Movements*, 11.

poverty alleviation had come to be overshadowed by both market capitalism, in the wake of Indian economic reform in 1991, and Hindu fundamentalism. Shifts in the middle class relationship toward the poor, poverty alleviation, and development on behalf of the poor can be seen as part of this larger ideological shift.

This chapter addresses the anti-poor bias of recent large scale state development by considering how two Indian writers, Amitav Ghosh and his contemporary Arundhati Roy, address the recent complicity of the middle classes with harmful forms of development but also hail their historic and potential future agency in reforming state-sponsored development toward more contextualized and localized programs. I examine Roy's essay collection *The Cost of Living*, focusing on the first essay, "The Greater Common Good" (1998) and Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* (2005). In both these works, the normative relationship between the state and the poor under contemporary development is one of unidirectional brutality. This is especially clear in Ghosh's novelistic depiction of the Morichjhapi massacre of 1979, between state forces and residents of West Bengal's Sunderbans forest. But despite this, I argue that Roy and Ghosh are invested in theorizing and modeling how the middle classes might contradict the anti-poor bias of development and mediate harmful forms of state development to offer the poor alternatives outside the destructive status quo in which development has come to oppose the poor.

Emma Mawdsley has argued that the Indian middle classes are an overlooked locus of political influence that must be considered in understanding how development discourses include or fail to include the poor.¹⁰ Similarly, I suggest that in order to reform the post-1980s gap between development and the welfare of the poor, Roy and Ghosh turn to the reform of the

¹⁰ See Emma Mawdsley, "India's Middle Classes and the Environment," *Development and Change* 35 no. 1 (2004): 79-103, <https://doi-org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2004.00343.x>.

middle classes in a dual sense. Firstly, while Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* has largely been read as a novel about environmental justice, conservation, and cosmopolitanism, I read the novel as a meditation on the historic reformist role of the middle classes and the attenuation of that role more recently. It presents both the historic role the middle classes have played vis-à-vis poverty alleviation in community based organizations (CBOs), as well as the need to reform the contemporary middle classes insofar as they have come to support destructive state development. I argue that *The Hungry Tide* interpellates the middle classes within a minor CBO lineage in which the localized development provided by community-based organizations (CBOs) offers a precedent and counter to the anti-poor bias that has come to characterize state projects.

Secondly, in addition to this historic precedent I argue that both Ghosh and Roy address the need to reform the contemporary middle classes, given that they have embraced market expansion and development as a means to material gain and infrastructural modernity. Since the middle classes have largely left behind their reformist role, I suggest that Roy and Ghosh mobilize environmental frameworks that induce civic re-engagement with the poor and confront the problem of mainstream middle class epistemological distance from the poor. Rather than focusing on state reform then, this chapter focuses on how these writers theorize the reform of middle class priorities insofar as changing these priorities may alter the parameters of development discourses. While Ghosh can be seen to hail the middle classes within the CBO tradition, he, along with Roy, also seeks to revise middle class interests. To do so, both writers mediate readerly engagement with the poor through middle class narrators - the speaker of Roy's essay in "The Greater Common Good" and Kanai Dutt, one of Ghosh's protagonists in *The Hungry Tide* - who model the process of becoming sympathetic with the poor for currently unsympathetic audiences.

The mediating work of these sympathetic middle class narrators is similar to what Bishnupriya Ghosh has identified as a “cosmopolitics” of mediating or translating subaltern experiences for distant audiences.¹¹ In the context of globalized literary production and global readerships, Bishnupriya Ghosh has argued that it is the aim of certain “cosmopolitical writers,” committed to “imagining new modes of collective life and agency” to “[forge] translocal solidarities” by [translating] subaltern lives, subjects, and struggles for global audiences.”¹² I suggest that Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh are engaged in a similar project of mediating representations of the poor for middle class national audiences, rather than global ones. But while for Bishnupriya Ghosh this work facilitates “political accountability” on behalf of the nation’s repressed, I argue that in the context of infrastructural development projects seen largely as part of a national modernization in which the subaltern is sacrificial figure, Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy work instead towards middle class consciousness raising and the reform of the kinds of middle class priorities and insulations that support and enable the state’s current development agenda.

Unlike typical postcolonial debates about the imagined community of the nation that hinge on belonging and exclusion, Ghosh and Roy ground their appeals to middle class readers in frameworks of environmental dependence or vulnerability; through their narrators they aim to show how the middle classes are already imbricated in, and thus might come to consider themselves as part of, these environmental concerns. For Roy, arguing that the middle classes are dependent on finite resources and therefore need to participate in protecting them leads to the possibility of greater civic cohesion, while in Ghosh bodily vulnerability to the environment is

¹¹ See Bishnupriya Ghosh, *When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004).

¹² Ghosh, *When Borne Across*, 30.

held out as a force that challenges class difference and leads to a relativization of middle class priorities. In presenting environmental frames as occasions for cross-class relationality, Roy and Ghosh work to revise the delimitation of development from material gain to the ways in which it occasions new relationships between the middle classes and the poor.

In this vein Roy and Ghosh's narrators perform sympathetic engagement with the poor as an exercise that estranges them from middle class readers, while also inviting readers to consider the difference such sympathy opens up between their own positions, that of the narrators, and that of the poor. In considering the social work of sympathy, I follow D. Rae Greiner's claim that sympathy is a process for sharing feeling, and that in doing so it leads one to consider not just the differences between individuals but the contexts that produce such difference.

Following Adam Smith, for Greiner it is significant not only that one may not feel the same thing as the person whose feeling one observes, but moreover that this gap between self and other invites a range of responses, including thoughts. More specifically, sympathy leads one to consider "context" because it draws attention to "one's adjacency to or distance from others with whom one does not merge."¹³ I argue that Roy and Ghosh can both be seen to induce this kind of readerly sympathy or consideration toward the poor through their already-sympathetic middle class narrators. In *The Hungry Tide* and *The Cost of Living*, environmental frameworks are the catalysis for their narrators' already-achieved sympathy and for their reader's future sympathetic consideration; such sympathy begins not by identifying with the poor but with middle class narrators who, once unsympathetic themselves, are presented as models of now-sympathetic subjects whose epistemological process of becoming-sympathetic with the poor

¹³ D. Rae Greiner, "Thinking of Me Thinking of You: Sympathy Versus Empathy in the Realist Novel," *Victorian Studies* 53 no. 3 (Spring 2011): 421, muse.jhu.edu/article/448895.

middle class readers might come to share.

For Roy, an address to the middle classes frames the entirety of the essay collection *The Cost of Living*, of which “The Greater Common Good” is the first part. The collection’s Preface is one in which the threat development poses to limited environmental resources is identified as a shared national problem that the middle class beneficiaries of development projects can no longer ignore. In “The Cost of Living,” past narratorial and future readerly sympathy is framed through forms of global awareness that return to the need for local action. Though at times Roy scales out environmental problems from the local to the global, the whole essay is framed as an invitation to forgo middle class material insulation and epistemological distance. I argue that it is to break through the withdrawal of middle class attention from the poor that she resorts to a cosmopolitan language of planet-wide resource scarcity. By mobilizing planetary metaphors, Roy addresses middle class readers as potential allies for the poor, not by attempting to appeal to their priorities of consumption and development directly, but by attempting to expand their priorities to include shared environmental dependence; her narrator’s sympathy for the poor is then an opportunity to reflect upon shared contexts and leads, for Roy, to the possibility of greater social cohesion and civic unity.

For Ghosh, the tradition of middle class service he situates as a counter to state development is a minor one, and does not necessarily disrupt the entrenchment of contemporary middle class materialism. Because of this I argue that Ghosh works to relativize mainstream middle class priorities through the treatment of one of his protagonists, Kanai Dutt. I suggest he invites readers to sympathize with a character who is recognizably middle class and who undergoes a kind of epistemological consciousness-raising that readers have yet to experience. Specifically, Ghosh stages an ambivalent ritual of bodily empathy in which Kanai, who stands in

as the avatar of ambitious, successful, and materially-oriented middle class personage, shares the bodily experience of helplessness and vulnerability to the environment the constitutes ordinary life for the poor.

After Kanai shares this experience, he moves away from his prior middle class subjectivity, values, and privilege. I suggest this distance initiates for readers the kind of “process of sharing feeling” that Greiner argues is central to the social work that sympathy does. Drawing on Greiner’s argument that sympathy is a “mental exercise but not an emotion” I argue that Ghosh’s text invites middle class readers to ponder how bodily distress produces Kanai as an unfamiliar subject; somatic empathy with the poor rifts Kanai’s middle class identity and middle class readerly identification with him. This distance is then an opportunity for sympathetic contemplation of the causes of Kanai’s physical vulnerability, which in turn stands in for the experiences of the poor.

Further, though Greiner stipulates that “[w]e do not sympathize with feelings felt; rather, considering context enables our sympathy with the wide array of possible feelings a given situation might elicit,” because Kanai is so obviously representative of the middle classes, I suggest that Ghosh presents his specific feelings of humility, openness to others, and awareness of his own limitations in the wake of vulnerability as responses readers might also consider for themselves; having identified with Kanai, his new experience asks readers to sympathize with his change, and thus to consider the ways in which his new feelings relativize the middle class priorities to which he previously adhered.

Together Roy and Ghosh make a case for the reform of the middle class itself and for its historic role in supplementing state development. Such reform efforts might take the form of middle-class led CBO development that promotes local community needs or a new set of

emotional and epistemological class priorities that no longer support the social divisions of recent state development agendas. I thus argue that Roy and Ghosh theorize middle class reform as a combination of epistemological processes and locally-rooted practices that can diversify the status quo of middle class materialism and the kinds of top down development that support and are supported by it. Insofar as the middle classes dominate the public sphere, including debates about environmental issues and current development spending, reforming their national priorities and perceptions of the poor are presented as a way of indirectly reforming the state.

II. *The Cost of Living*: Indian Dam(nation) and Civil Society

In 1954 at the inauguration of India's first megadam, the Bhakra Nangal, Prime Minister Nehru declared dams to be the temples of modern India. Since then, India has built at least 3,300 dams that qualify as big dams out of a national total of 3,600. At the time Arundhati Roy wrote "The Greater Common Good," a polemical anti-megadaming essay in 1998, one thousand more were slated for construction. While dam building is now falling out of favor in some countries, for much of the history of big dams their construction has been part of national development. In India as elsewhere, dam building became synonymous with nation-building, the size, scale, manpower and resources required of dam construction both marking and propagating Indian modernity. Dams were lauded for providing irrigation to India's massive rural hinterlands and hydroelectric power to its cities, as well as by standing as testaments to modern mastery over nature. But as the title of Roy's essay suggests, the proposed benefits of dams often distribute largely away from the rural poor, toward the "greater good" of infrastructural development and economic growth centered in India's urban centers.

In the case of India's dams, it is not only that the areas projected to be irrigated by dam

developers and engineers have always been far greater than the areas actually irrigated after construction. Or that the moral cause of bringing water to arid regions such as Gujarat, far from major rivers, has been undermined by the siphoning of water into upstream cities. Dam construction has also caused massive environmental damage, from the waterlogging of arable land to flooding or bulldozing of planted fields, to the excavation of otherwise cultivatable riverbanks. It has led to the proliferation of standing water that provides breeding grounds for mosquitoes and leads to higher incidences of malaria around dam sites. And it has displaced millions and millions of people.

That dams have not been the silver bullet of Indian development is no surprise, and Nehru himself came to revise his position on them only a few years after his secular invocation to the gods of big dams. In 1958 he gave an obscure speech entitled “Social Aspects of Small and Big Projects” to the Central Board of Irrigation and Power. In it he critiqued the “disease of gigantism” in India, of which big dams have been one symptom. This “idea of doing big undertakings or doing big tasks for the sake of showing that we can do big things—is not a good outlook at all.” Instead he proposes that it is “the small irrigation projects, the small industries and the small plants for electric power which will change the face of the country, far more than a dozen big projects in half a dozen places” and without “the national upsets, upsets of the people moving out and their rehabilitation and many other things, associated with a big project.”¹⁴ As Ramchandra Guha notes, at the time of his speech there were no anti-damming campaigns as there are today; Nehru’s reversal on the desirability of dam construction as a motor to Indian futurity might be attributed to his opposition to the corruption accruing around dam construction and payoffs, or his willingness to evaluate new evidence about the inefficacy of dams and their

¹⁴ Ramchandra Guha, “Prime Ministers and big dams,” *The Hindu*, Dec. 18, 2005, <https://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2005/12/18/stories/2005121800180300.htm>.

tendency to disfigure “the face of the country” in a geophysical sense. But its face is also recognizable in Nehru’s explicit citation of the displacement of peoples, mostly Adivasi tribals and rural lower caste peoples, by big dams.

In “The Greater Common Good,” Arundhati Roy brings this concern to the pitch of polemic: “But the government of India does not have a figure for the number of people who have been displaced by dams or sacrificed in other ways at the altars of ‘national progress.’ Isn’t this astounding? How can you measure progress if you don’t know what it costs and who has paid for it?”¹⁵ Roy goes on to equate this kind of national development with an “unacknowledged war” (CL 21). With this move, she reframes how the story of the Narmada as a particular damming project can be understood and consequently the moral and political response it demands. She specifies:

The war for the Narmada valley is not just some exotic tribal war, or a remote rural war or even an exclusively Indian war. It’s a war for the rivers and the mountains and the forests of the world. All sorts of warriors from all over the world, anyone who wishes to enlist, will be honored and welcomed. Every kind of warrior will be needed. Doctors, lawyers, teachers, judges, journalists, students, sportsmen, painters, actors, singers, lovers [...] The borders are open, folks! Come on in. (CL 43)

The framing of this development project as a protracted, diffuse war also reframes the valence and scope of violence in Roy’s narrative of the valley. The Narmada valley becomes not only a story of developmental progress and its costs, or of competition between rural and urban needs. In contrast to these circumscribed narratives centered on the nation-state, Roy connects the specific destruction of the Narmada to a wider realm of global conflicts over resources and uneven distributions of environmental harm whose scales are tantamount to planetary crisis.

Other writers have also proposed versions of cosmopolitan, transnational, or global

¹⁵ Arundhati Roy, *The Cost of Living* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 16. Subsequently cited in the text as *CL*.

connectedness based in a common vulnerability to environmental threats or dependence upon finite resources. Ursula Heise for example, calls for a practice of eco-cosmopolitanism, which begins from an ecocritical commitment to “local places” but extends one’s sense of place, care, and attachment to the “non-local” of transnational sites and global scales.¹⁶ For Heise, aesthetic forms like mixed media art and literature help one cultivate such an awareness while for Roy, literary techniques like comparison and metaphor are key to making the scale and reality of environmental destruction accessible and apprehensible for those not immediately affected by them.

However, the Preface to *The Cost of Living* as a whole and thus also to “The Greater Common Good” makes it clear that Roy’s political imaginary is less transnational than it seems. The previous moment of cosmopolitan awareness is tempered in the Preface by the specific problem of unequal infrastructural development and middle class distance: “I have tried very hard to communicate the urgency of what is happening in the valley. But in the cities, people’s eyes glaze over. ‘Yes, it’s sad,’ we say. ‘But it can’t be helped. We need electricity’” (CL x). Hence, development as the pursuit of modern infrastructure, the forms of human and resource expendability it produces, and the divisions it reinforces between rural and urban populations, provides the frame and occasion of her critique as much as destructive state activities themselves.

In the face of class priorities that emphasize infrastructural development and material gains, Roy asks readers to “Put your hand in mine and let me lead you through the maze. Do this, because it’s important that you understand. If you find reason to disagree, by all means take the

¹⁶ See Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*. See also Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage, 1992) and Ulrich Beck, *World at Risk*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity 2009).

other side. But please don't ignore it, don't look away. [...] Numbers used to make my eyes glaze over. Not anymore" (CL 21). As request, Roy's rhetoric indexes the contingency and fragility of civic engagement. But it also returns to the physical symptom with which the collection opens, now with a difference. Whereas in the Preface the glazing of eyes is a symptom of state development's classed status quo, when it reappears as Roy's former symptom it indexes instead the change between her present and past self. In posing herself as a once unsympathetic subject, she invites readers to identify with her own position – with her former indifference but also with her present engagement, and thus to have a thought about her change of attention and the contexts that produced it.

Roy can be seen to cite emotional allegiance with her readers in order to model a change in middle class sympathy toward the rural poor; she asks them not to identify with the poor but to consider her own status as a middle class subject who has already learned to think about the contextual costs of development: specifically, the ways in which these produce intensified harms and deprivations for ecosystem peoples but also the threat they pose to shared and limited resources. Following Greiner, who suggests sympathy is a process of coming to think about difference, I suggest Roy here presents readers with an opportunity to participate in a similar kind of epistemic and emotional exercise, one that could lead to a new class mindset that is attentive to development's uneven effects but also the ways in which it aligns the dependencies of the middle classes and the poor.

The Preface and the previously discussed paragraph similarly support a model of enhanced civic engagement.¹⁷ For the Preface does not only catalogue a status quo of class

¹⁷ Of course, Roy's status as middle class at the time of her writing is questionable, since her Booker prize-winning *The God of Small Things* had already lead to celebrity status.

indifference against which Roy writes; it also poses protecting environmental resources threatened by state development as a cause common to poor and affluent citizens alike: “The story of the Narmada valley is nothing less than the story of Modern India. Like the tiger in the Belgrade zoo during the NATO bombing, we’ve begun to eat our own limbs” (x). Posing national development projects as self-destructive to “Modern India” as a whole, “The Greater Common Good” can be seen as an effort to reformulate India’s fractured national community.

This understanding also frames Roy’s call for an environmentally-bordered country. While on the surface an appeal to transnationalism, it also poses environmental protection as part of the role of a thriving civil society. When Roy calls upon “warriors” to protect shared environmental resources, she names middle class professionals in medicine, law, education, and the arts. This enumeration – “Doctors, lawyers, teachers, judges, journalists, students, sportsmen, painters, actors, singers, lovers” – carries with it a sense of the local and particular, of individuals embedded in communities to which each brings a different set of necessary skills. More importantly, in this moment the professional middle classes are hailed not as material consumers but as community members who participate in safeguarding common environmental resources.

This call redefines the criterion of the middle classes from professional and material success to an environmental dependence they share with the poor outside their class; at the same time she maintains an awareness of class difference, of a specific role the professional classes might play in environmental protection against state development. Thus the middle class role in environmental protection here is presented as both part of middle class professionalism and part of renewed civic engagement across class lines. This stands in contrast to the divisive status quo of middle class materialism and state sponsored development and, as we shall see shortly, the mode of environmental protection that appears in wilderness conservation.

Through these invocations to middle class sympathy, professionalism, and shared environmental dependence, Roy suggests that middle class priorities toward development must shift twofold. From state led development and classed materialism, development must be considered for the ways in which it produces national inequality and threatens resources upon which the middle classes and the poor alike depend. In turn part of the professionalism of the middle classes must come to include environmental protection; class identity as such then comes to be defined by new sites and forms of civic engagement. Thus Roy situates environmental dependence and the need to protect resources as both a class-specific and nationally shared task.

III. Project Tiger: Anti-humanism Between Conservation and Development

Roy's call for a middle class that shares common concern with the poor can be seen to allude to the tradition of middle class service for the poor that manifested before and after independence through a wide variety of CBOs or community based organizations. These were inspired in the years after independence by Mahatma Gandhi's ethos of public service, and more lastingly by the Nehruvian state's socialist commitment to the poor.¹⁸ In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh draws more explicitly upon this tradition of community based organizations (CBOs). Usually read as a novel concerned with environmental justice and conservation, I argue that *The Hungry Tide* also interrogates the CBO tradition as an alternative to contemporary state development through a triad of privileged outsiders whose community work spans India's pre-

¹⁸ See Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Classes*; D. J. Sheth and Harsh Sethi, "The NGO sector in India: historical context and current discourse," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 2 no. 2 (Nov. 1991): 49-68, <https://doi-org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1007/BF01398670> and Sangeeta Kamat, "The NGO Phenomenon and Political Culture in the Third World," *development* 46 no. 1 (2003): 88-93, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/docview/216912131?accountid=14657>. See also Roy and Katzenstein, *Social Movements in India*.

independence past through its present. These include Daniel Hamilton, a Scotchman with plans for a cooperative society in the Sunderbans prior to independence, Nilima Bose's healthcare and employment NGO the Badabon Trust, and finally a collaborative, locally-based conservation scheme proposed by Piya Roy that closes the novel and implicitly frames its future. I argue that Ghosh presents this CBO lineage as a project between citizens with little state interference. Unlike historical CBOs which, while critical of the Indian state also largely drew upon its proposed framework of welfare as their *raison d'être*, Ghosh's version of this tradition largely keeps its distance from the state. In doing so I suggest it can be seen to dramatize the historic shift in state development away from poverty alleviation and the welfare of the poor, a shift which also manifests in the novel's representation of Project Tiger's selective anti-humanism and the Morichjhapi massacre of 1979.

Project Tiger was inaugurated in 1973 as a form of wilderness conservation, that is, a form of conservation in which humans are excluded from "wilderness" areas reserved for endangered animals. Such wilderness models are most associated with elite Western forms of conservation that separate humans from the environment. This kind of conservation assumes that humans and designated endangered species cannot co-exist, and as such it has come under critique for the ways in which it ignores subsistence uses of environmental resources on the one hand, and often opens wilderness areas to commercial interest on the other. Thus though wilderness areas are purportedly "off limits" to all humans, the creation of exclusionary zones most negatively impacts ecosystem peoples by cutting local communities off from subsistence resources or requiring their displacement without recompense.¹⁹

¹⁹ State forest management in India has largely been critiqued for these reasons, as have the creation of wilderness reserves and national parks the world over. For India see Ramchandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World

In this chapter though, I consider Project Tiger less as a conservation scheme and more as another manifestation of state-sponsored development. For like other top-down, bureaucratized, and decontextualized development plans, it ignores the poor in pursuit of nationally-defined plans that do not take their needs into account. In fact, wilderness conservation exposes the anti-poor bias of development even more baldly than other kinds of development projects. For national infrastructural plans at least nominally justify themselves with the provision of services, even if these services never manifest or manifest unevenly. Wilderness conservation, insofar as it is explicitly built upon a selective anti-humanism and identified with the elite green interests of international conservation, has no such pretensions to serving human citizens.²⁰

I thus begin this section by considering how Project Tiger foregrounds the national hierarchies and exclusions of conservation-cum-development. In particular, I argue that the anti-humanism of conservation merges with the anti-humanism of state development in the Morichjhapi massacre of 1979, in which state forces killed Bangladeshi refugees and Indian citizens in the Sunderbans under the justification of Project Tiger's conservation mandate. I then go on to consider how *The Hungry Tide* disrupts this dominant narrative with the tradition of middle-class led CBOs.

However, CBO service for the poor is far from the norm for the middle classes, especially in the post 1980s era. I argue that the novel goes on to address mainstream middle class materialism and epistemological distance from the poor through the figure of Kanai Dutt,

Critique," *Environmental Ethics* 11 no. 1 (Spring 1989), 71-83, doi: 10.5840/enviroethics198911123 and for Africa, see Nixon, *Slow Violence* ch. 6. See also Ursula Heise, *Imagining Extinction* ch. 5.

²⁰ Wilderness models have been recognized as problematic for these reasons and conservation in recent years sometimes attempts to include local participation. See Anuradha Joshi, "Roots of Change: Front Line Workers and Forest Policy Reform in West Bengal," abstract (PhD diss, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2000), <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/docview/304656669?accountid=14657>.

who comes to modify his own middle class priorities after experiencing physical helplessness and vulnerability in the Sundarbans; that is, by sharing an experience of bodily vulnerability that mirrors the everyday bodily exposures of the poor. As the protagonist who stands in most recognizably for the privileged middle class citizen, I argue that Kanai's transformation is central to Ghosh's theorization of contemporary middle class reform.

The Hungry Tide's investment in the reform of the middle classes and indirect state reform is not immediately apparent from a surface reading of the novel. The Morichjhapi massacre and its lead up, which occupies close to half of the text, indexes both the defeat of an inclusive social vision in opposition to the exclusions perpetrated by state development, and formalizes the continuity of state violence. But, it can also be said that if in Ghosh the massacre represents the norm of relations between the poor and the state, the kind of zero-sum relationship it illustrates (between the poor and the state and between the poor and the environment) stands to be corrected by the alternative form of development offered by the novel's lineage of middle class CBOs and the novel's process of relativizing middle class materialism. If developmental violence toward the poor seems endemic in Project Tiger and the Morichjhapi massacre, Ghosh suggests reforming the mainstream middle classes and recuperating the reformist role they themselves once performed offers one way to revise the anti-poor bias that has come to define both the mainstream middle classes and state development.

IV. The Morichjhapi Massacre and the Ongoing History of State Violence

In 1979 the West Bengal government starved, forcibly evicted, and killed a number of Bangladeshi refugees who had settled on the island of Morichjhapi in the Sunderbans. Partially justified by conservation concerns surrounding the Bengal tigers of the region, the struggle over

occupation of Morichjhapi was not so much a resource war between peoples as a struggle over the proper distribution of resources between humans and animals as envisioned by the state. To this day the Indian government denies that the massacre occurred at all and claims no shots were fired in a clash between police and settlers on May 15 of that year, though news reports and scholars put the figure in the hundreds at least. *The Hungry Tide* also contests Morichjhapi's officially occluded history, entwining the history of the massacre with the ongoing poverty and resource scarcity of the Sunderbans to expose the continuous logic of developmental violence and state neglect to which the area and its life forms have been subject.

In the decades before the Morichjhapi episode of 1979, tens of thousands of migrants had entered West Bengal in the wake of the Indian Independence Act of 1947, which drew the geopolitical borders of modern Pakistan and India, and partitioned the province of West Bengal into West Bengal and East Pakistan. Unlike the Punjab where sectarian violence erupted immediately after Partition and resulted in large-scale migration across both borders, in the east migration was initially much slower. However, in the 1950s and 1970s large numbers of migrants emigrated from Bangladesh into India following sectarian violence between Muslims and Hindus.

The first migrants in the 1950s were mostly upper caste, middle class Hindus, and some had enough capital or family connections in West Bengal to wield political and economic clout with the Congress government in power at the time. A second wave of lower caste refugees entered West Bengal in the early 1970s, fleeing the religious sectarianism of the Bangladesh War of Independence in 1971-2 that turned the Pakistani province of East Pakistan into the Muslim-majority nation-state of Bangladesh. These later refugees arrived with the encouragement of West Bengal's Left Front opposition party, which historically had promised to rehabilitate

refugees in West Bengal and specifically in the Sunderbans, in contrast to the Congress Party's tendency to settle refugees outside the state.

Rehabilitation of both waves of migrants dragged on for years; the Congress government, assuming the refugee influx was temporary despite all evidence to the contrary, never made permanent, serious provision for their integration into Indian society. Instead, migrants were crammed into badly provisioned camps mostly outside West Bengal, in arid parts of central India. Through the 1960s the Congress party imposed arbitrary deadlines for vacating camps and camp closures, but these did not signal the successful integration of refugees into surrounding communities or the founding of independent settlements. Rather, the government's rhetorical and logistical exercises manufactured an efficacy that did not exist on the ground. When a camp was declared closed, refugees were simply uprooted and resettled elsewhere, often without warning and without any say in where they went or the viability of the site chosen.

Given the conditions of camp life and the precedent set by the Left Front's historic critique of settling refugees outside West Bengal, some refugees attempted to remove themselves to West Bengal of their own accord after the Left Front came to power in 1977. In 1979, approximately 25,000 refugees left camps in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere for the Sunderbans. They cited the old Left Front promises to resettle refugees specifically in West Bengal, cultural, linguistic, and agricultural familiarity with the region, and the abysmal conditions of camp governance.²¹

²¹ See Jhuma Sen, "Reconstructing Marichjhapi," in *Partition: The Long Shadow* ed. Urvashi Butalia (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2015): 102-127; Jhuma Sanyal, *Making of a New Space: Refugees in West Bengal* (Kolkata: Ratna Prakashan, 2003); Ross Mallick, "Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58 no. 1 (Feb. 1999): 104-12, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2658391> and Joya Chatterji, "'Dispersal' and the Failure of Rehabilitation," *Modern Asian Studies* 41 no. 5 (Sept. 2007): 995-1032, doi:10.1017/S0026749X07002831.

Rather than entertaining any of their complaints or looking for available land in West Bengal, from January to May 1979, the Left Front government worked to remove the refugees from the Sunderbans. To legitimate their actions, they cited general overpopulation and economic depression in West Bengal, old justifications for moving refugees to other states; but they also cited an environmental concern for tiger conservation, which was not a factor in the earlier migration policies.

This new concern arose in response to the implementation of Project Tiger, India's national tiger conservation program, in 1973. Project Tiger brought India into the modern age of Western-style conservation based on the "exclusionary" or "pristine wilderness" model, which set off protected areas from human use. Managed by the Tiger Conservation Authority, a branch of the Ministry of Environment and Forests and much acclaimed by international organizations like the World Wildlife Fund, its objectives were to maintain hunting and breeding areas for tigers and to protect their population from hunting, poaching, habitat destruction and other forms of interference by humans. Thus, unlike earlier refugees, those who made their way to the Sunderbans in 1979 were competing with new governmental and international interests in the tiger population of the area.

This exclusionary model enacted and presumed a resource war between humans and animals, as the anti-humanism of wilderness conservation in the Sundarbans forests cast humans and their surroundings only in antagonistic terms. In *The Hungry Tide*, Kusum, an Indian woman native to the Sunderbans who leaves and returns to the area with the Bangladeshi refugees explains: the "worst part" of the police siege before the Morichjhapi massacre was "hearing them

say that our lives, our existence, were worth less than dirt or dust.”²² She then goes on to elaborate the state’s valuation of the island’s forests and tigers in explicit contrast with its devaluation of human life: “This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the world” (*HT* 216).

The need to “preserve” the forest by excluding humans is driven by the assumption that humans - or, more specifically, *these* impoverished or stateless humans - can only destroy, tamper with, or otherwise disturb it.²³ But in this list of environmental haves and have nots, between land designated for human use and land from which humans are barred in the name of conservation, the national “saving” to be done is actually linked to the lure of nationally and internationally recognized development. It is justified by and seeks recognition as, a conservation project on par with international conservation norms. The national sovereignty exercised in creating a reserve forest is sutured into the claim of “belonging” within a hierarchy of national prestige and international cultural currency, and the “part” of the nation that is the forest is actually part of an international order that circles back to guarantee India’s place on the world stage. Thus it becomes clear that tigers and trees are worth saving not for their own sake, but only within this nationally and internationally linked scheme of development. In highlighting the self-interest embedded in the state’s discourse of environmental conservation, Morichjhapi’s

²² Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 216. Subsequently cited in the text as *HT*.

²³ The government had in fact already used part of this island to cultivate cash crops like coconuts and tamarind. See also Ross Mallick, Jhuma Sen, and Annu Jalais, “The Sundarbans: Whose World Heritage Site?” *Conservation and Society* 5 no. 3 (2007): 1-8, <http://www.conservationandsociety.org/text.asp?2007/5/3/335/49239>. For more on exclusionary conservation in India, see Archi Rastogi et. al, “Saving the Superstar: A review of the social factors affecting tiger conservation in India,” *Journal of Environmental Management* 113 (2012): 328-340, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2012.10.003>.

human poor are then recast not so much as the enemies of nature but as the abject of the nation-state, and the anti-humanism of conservation doubles also as the anti-humanism of development.

In Ghosh's text, Nehruvian commitments to citizen welfare are nowhere to be found, and violence is the norm of the state's relationship with the poor. This is made clear both in the narrative of the massacre itself and in the defeat of the Morichjhapi community, which stands for a political alternative to the violence of exclusionary nationalism. Morichjhapi's ethos is one where "there would be no Brahmins or Untouchables, no Bengalis and no Oriyas. Everyone would have to live and work together" (*HT* 44). The violence of the massacre and the defeat of Morichjhapi's inclusive community are both temporally and formally extended, as their narrative alternates with chapters set decades later in which state repression is still endemic in the Sundarbans. And yet, this dominant narrative of violence shares space with another narrative of mutual community building between the poor and the middle classes. If the Morichjhapi massacre highlights the injustices of state development and the seeming futility of developmental reform, a lineage of CBO service and civic engagement invokes an alternative to state development. The text remains skeptical of state reform insofar as this affirmation of CBOs is not connected back to the original Nehruvian principles from which historic CBOs drew legitimacy. But, that the text presents bottom-up, middle class led-development alongside its violent state version disrupts the current anti-poor bias of state development with an older and alternative lineage.

V. Development Against the State: Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Middle Class Reform

The predecessor of Morichjhapi's idealistic community is ironically the vision of Daniel Hamilton, an enterprising turn-of-the-twentieth-century Scotch colonialist who settled in the

Sunderbans and called for “a new society, a new kind of country. It would be a country run by cooperatives [...] people wouldn’t exploit each other and everyone would have a share in the land” (*HT* 45). While it is possible to read this precedent suspiciously, as the scheming liberal colonization of a “monopolikapitalist,” it can also be seen within the CBO counter tradition to the anti-poor development of Project Tiger and the violence of the Morichjhapi massacre (*HT* 42). This tradition treats development as locally rooted and requiring mutual participation across class and caste - not in order to transcend the nation-state but in order to supplement state limitations. Insofar as Hamilton’s cooperative society, like other community based organizations, predate the nation-state and were influential in the early decades after independence, they offer a historical correction to more recent forms of national development like Project Tiger.²⁴

Ghosh extends this lineage into the present through Nilima’s NGO the Badabon Trust and Piya’s idea for a local conservation plan that would provide jobs for local residents. As Nilima puts it: “For me the challenge of making a few little things a little better in one small place is enough. That place for me is Lusibari [an island in the Sundarbans]. I’ve given everything I can, and yes, after all these years it has amounted to something. It’s helped people; it’s made a few peoples’ lives a little better” (*HT* 318-19). Piya similarly closes the novel by suggesting a dolphin conservation plan that would involve local fishermen, and avoid “[doing] the kind of work that places the burden of conservation on those who can least afford it” (*HT* 327). In this explicit contrast to Project Tiger’s conservation-cum-development, Piya suggests a project of conservation committed to “everyday change” and the very kind of localized development the novel has worked to establish as an alternative and precedent to dominant state

²⁴ See Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class*.

forms of development.²⁵ Together these all critique the anti-poor bias that has evolved in state development. If in the post-1980s era development projects are often manifestly harmful to the poor, the provision of services through middle class-led CBOs that support local livelihoods and allow local circumstances to shape how those services are delivered, reframe development within its other lineage, as a community building and civic enterprise between citizens.

The novel also suggests, briefly, that such middle class mediation makes state resources available to the poor in ways that are useful rather than merely repressive. For the kinds of local development Hamilton, Nilima, and Piya pursue contradict state development but also to some degree draw upon the state and its resources. Hamilton originally buys land from the British Raj to set up his cooperatives, Nilima has been awarded a national honor and the Badabon Trust is cited as a “model for NGOs working in rural India,” while Piya’s ability to pursue conservation in the Sunderbans that includes local participation is facilitated by her family connections in the government. (*HT* 17). If such sponsorship smacks of potential conflicted interests or complicity with existing institutional inequalities, I point out these indirectly supported forms of local development because like historic CBOs they nevertheless draw upon the resources of the state to deliver their alternative practices. Rather than supporting the anti-poor biases that have come to dominate state sponsored development, here middle class mediation of state power allows local actors to rework state resources to better meet local needs.

VI. Bodily Vulnerability and Reforming the Middle Classes in *The Hungry Tide*

The tradition of CBOs does not, however, necessarily impinge on contemporary middle

²⁵ Ursula Heise connects this model of conservation to the dolphin paradigm, whereas the novel’s tiger trope highlights the antagonism that sometimes continues to structure human-environment relations. See *Imagining Extinction* ch. 5.

class aspirations for material gain and modern progress that underwrite the state's development projects and its anti-poor bias. The lineage of service for the poor found in Hamilton, Nilima and Piya poses a robust historical and local alternative to national state development, but these figures also stand outside the mainstream urban middle classes and their priorities. Hamilton is a white, wealthy entrepreneur and Nilima has given up the privileges of her class and family - indeed her nephew Kanai is "amazed [...] that someone from a background like hers had lasted in Lusibari as long as she had" (*HT* 18). And Piya is an American field biologist, dogged even before she arrives in the Sundarbans by a perpetual estrangement from communal belonging. Over the course of their time in the Sundarbans all three of these characters come to make their homes on the islands and become integral, locally rooted members of the community. Because of this, and despite their privileged origins, they are at odds with the urban middle classes.

Middle class CBOs are, then, resurrected but not presented as a generalizable model for reforming mainstream middle class priorities. Instead I argue that Ghosh theorizes middle class epistemological and emotional reform as a relativization rather than abolishment of class priorities, a process illustrated through the transformation of his middle class character Kanai. For most of the novel, Kanai is the avatar of both the state's desired citizen and the normative middle classes. From the novel's first pages Kanai has been characterized as someone to whom "things have come very easily," "self satisfied" and full of "casual self-importance" (208, 8). In other words, Kanai stands in for the consumptive and materially successful middle class citizen.

But he also, at times, approaches a vehicle of authorial commentary. After he and Piya witness villagers killing a tiger for example, he explains:

That tiger had killed two people [...] It happens every week that people are killed by tigers. How about the horror of that? If there were killings on that scale anywhere else on earth it would be called a genocide, and yet here it goes almost unremarked [...] And I'm complicit because people like me – Indians of my class, that is – have chosen to hide

these costs, basically in order to curry favor with their Western patrons. It's not hard to ignore the people who're dying – after all, they are the poorest of the poor. (*HT* 248-9)

As Ursula Heise points out, such a statement is “a bit implausible from the mouth of Kanai Dutt.”²⁶ For at this point in the novel, Kanai has exhibited little self-reflexivity about his own privilege or that of his class in the inequalities and dangers faced by Sunderbans inhabitants, nor has he undergone any experiences that would lead to this kind of self-consciousness. Elsewhere, Ghosh presents judgments and perspectives about individuals or about the middle classes through the perspective of other characters; Piya for example, narrates that “she had been struck by the self-satisfied tilt of [Kanai's] head and the unabashed way in which he stared at everyone around him, taking them in, sizing them up, soring them all into their places.” The sentence that follows links such behavior to the middle classes at large: “[Piya] had been put in mind of some of her relatives in Kolkata: they too seemed to share the assumption that they had been granted some kind of entitlement” (*HT* 8). In contrast to these more common moments of more indirect social evaluation between characters, Kanai's statement appears closest to a moment of implied authorial commentary about the middle classes.

So, Kanai is on the one hand representative of normative middle class values and at the same time a more direct vehicle for authorial commentary than the novel's other characters. Because of this I suggest he is at the center of Ghosh's version of middle class reform. While Kanai is not part of Ghosh's alter-tradition of development, he eventually makes visible a process by which the present dilemmas of middle class material and epistemological distance from the poor might be addressed. For Roy such middle class reform is occasioned by appealing to shared dependence on finite resources and the role of middle class civil society in protecting them. For Ghosh, reform is occasioned by Kanai's experience of bodily vulnerability in the

²⁶ Heise, *Imagining Extinction*, 189.

Sundarbans, which opens a dissonance between readerly identification with Kanai's character; such distance offers an invitation to consider the contexts that produce bodily vulnerability, while the subjective transformation Kanai undergoes also presents examples of the kinds of new values to which sympathetic consideration might lead.

As mentioned previously, Bishnupriya Ghosh has argued that authors like Amitav Ghosh translate subaltern experiences for unfamiliar audiences. But in *The Hungry Tide* Amitav Ghosh does not simply represent subaltern subjects for middle class audiences; indeed the novel never narrates from a subaltern perspective and this narrative reluctance can be seen as part of the novel's self-awareness about its inability to inhabit this subjective position.²⁷ Rather, Ghosh theorizes how middle class readers might come to sympathize with the kinds of bodily vulnerabilities and environmental exposures endured by the poor by refracting that vulnerability through a middle class body. It is through the experience of physical helplessness, where class privilege becomes obsolete, that Kanai experiences the same kind of bodily vulnerability as the poor. In doing so, rather than presuming the epistemological distance between the middle classes and the poor might be overcome by imaginative identification, Ghosh asks readers to consider the changing feelings of a middle class personage who shares their values and with whom they could more easily identify. Sympathy here is still an invitation to contemplate difference, but it is less the difference between the middle classes and the poor and more between Kanai as a figure who has undergone a kind of epistemological change or consciousness-raising and readers who have not.

Kanai's transformation occurs toward the end of the novel when Fokir, one of Ghosh's

²⁷ Others have read the silence of the novel's subaltern protagonist Fokir as the fetishization of a rural ideal. See Shakti Jaising, "Fixity and Flux: Aesthetics and Environmentalism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*," *ARIEL* 46 no. 4 (Oct. 2015): 63-88, Literature Resource Center.

protagonists and a subaltern figure who never directly narrates, leaves Kanai on the Sundarbans island of Garjantola. As one of India's privileged citizens, on the island Kanai becomes a kind of "double for the outside world, someone standing in for the men who had destroyed Fokir's village, burnt his home and killed his mother; he had become a token for a vision of human beings in which a man such as Fokir counted for nothing, a man whose value was less than that of an animal" (270). Here Kanai again seems to articulate a perspective not his own, since he himself cannot have this insight into Fokir's perspective. Like the earlier moment in which Kanai explained the role of middle class complicity in wilderness conservation to Piya, this is one in which Kanai as authorial mouthpiece draws readerly attention toward the complicities and injustices perpetuated by mainstream middle class values.²⁸

Fokir leaves Kanai on Garjantola not to repeat the fate of the refugees at Morichjhapi, but for another end: "not because he wanted him to die, but because he wanted him to be judge" (*HT* 270). Fokir does not return in kind the unjustified violence to which the Morichjhapi inhabitants and ecosystem peoples like himself have been subject; instead he seeks what the middle classes have thus far escaped: an end to impunity for the destructive acquisitions by which they have been privileged at the expense of the poor. In what follows on the island, Kanai moves from being emblematic of India's privilege citizen to inhabiting the same kind of environmental exposure and bodily vulnerability as the nation's poor.

How this happens is left ambiguous. The novel is unclear about whether Kanai has a psychotic episode, a hallucination, or really sees and is spared by a tiger, which manifests both the threats the environment has always posed to the poor of the area but also their devalued

²⁸ Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee has read Piya as a mouthpiece for Western scientific rationality, which Ursula Heise disputes. See Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, ch. 5 and Heise, *Imagining Extinction* ch. 5.

status in the eyes of the national state.²⁹ Regardless of its cause, the experience is one in which the protections of class are stripped away: “Kanai’s head filled with visions of the ways in which tide country dealt out death [...] it was as if his mind, in its panic, had emptied itself of language [...] his mind was swamped by a flood of pure sensation” (271, 272). In this progression from thought to sensation, Kanai loses the moorings of his middle class privilege, most notably the resources of language by which, as a translator, he has built his material and professional success. Instead he is reduced to his body, to the “terror [that] was such that he could not move a muscle” (*HT* 272).

In this moment Kanai experiences a kind of bodily empathy or doubling with the poor; his body is rendered as vulnerable to environmental dangers as subaltern characters like Fokir, as he shares their terror of death by tigers. This moment also shifts the relationship between readers and Kanai, from one of identification to sympathy; rather than seeing Kanai as like themselves, he becomes patently unlike them in this moment of exposure by becoming more like subaltern citizens. In creating this moment of dissonance I suggest the novel asks readers to become sympathetic with Kanai, that is, to become aware of the difference between his changed character and themselves, and by extension the difference between themselves and the everyday bodily vulnerabilities of the poor which Kanai shares and makes accessible in this moment.

In treating sympathy as an invitation to consider the contextualized differences between oneself and others, I have followed D. Rae Greiner’s Smithian argument that sympathy is a process of being moved by the experiences of others while being aware of their difference *as*

²⁹ Annu Jalais has documented the Sundarbans’ residents feelings that tigers were “more privileged citizens” than they. See Annu Jalais, “Dwelling on Morichjhanpi: When Tigers Became ‘Citizens’, Refugees ‘Tiger-Food,’” *Economic and Political Weekly* 40 no. 17 (Apr. 2005): 1757-1762, URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4416535>.

others. Rather than the “feeling with” or collapse of subject and object induced by empathy, sympathy is a process of “imaginative approximation” that is “accomplished by thoughts.”³⁰ For Greiner, sympathy therefore invites readers to think about characters with whom they might feel close but with whom they do not feel identical, and in this way sympathy is one way through which “a wide range of mentalities and affects might be imagined, passed on, shared.”³¹ But most importantly for my purposes, sympathy’s differentiation is also an “emphasis on context—one’s adjacency to or distance from others with whom one does not merge.”³²

For Ghosh, I suggest that it is this version of sympathy that Kanai’s experience of bodily doubling with the poor makes available or introduces as a method for reforming the epistemological distance of the middle classes. Kanai is the character with whom middle class readers would most closely identify, given that he articulates their materialist aspirations for the good life and is a model of professional and material success. His experience in the Sundarbans is then likely to seem a sudden rupture in identification. It is this rupture that creates the opportunity for middle class readers to sympathize with or to consider the circumstances of, the new Kanai just as they had readily identified with the old. In this gap between former readerly identification and an unsharable bodily sensation, I suggest that Ghosh creates an opportunity for the middle classes to consider the kinds of bodily vulnerability to the environment they will never have. Such self-reflexive thought is further facilitated by the ambiguity of Kanai’s ordeal; since the causes of Kanai’s bodily sensation are left unclear, this ambiguity invites readers to contemplate the many causes – local, national, mental, material, classed – of the feeling that Kanai experiences.

³⁰ Greiner, “Thinking of Me Thinking of You,” 422, 419.

³¹ Greiner, “Thinking of Me Thinking of You,” 424.

³² Greiner, “Thinking of Me Thinking of You,” 421.

In short, the process of introducing a gap between Kanai and a middle class readership is one which, I argue, works as a proxy for processes of becoming sympathetic with the poor, for whom having sympathetic thought or feeling poses greater challenges. Since the text studiously resists narrating from a subaltern perspective, it instead offers the bodily empathy of its middle class avatar as a proxy for readers who are not yet sympathetic (much less empathetic) with the poor.

But Kanai's ordeal is not only an invitation to consider contexts; it is also a model of potential new middle class values. The novel makes clear that Kanai has undergone a transformation, emerging with "a look on his face so different from his usual expression of buoyant confidence" and a "halting, diffident manner" (*HT* 275, 276). Extrapolating from Kanai's muted ego, these responses can be seen to contradict the self-interest and material accumulation Kanai and the middle classes at large have pursued at the expense of India's most vulnerable citizens. Kanai's volt face thus posits a newfound awareness of the limits of his own claims and interests, and thus poses a model for a class epistemology where self-interest is tempered by acknowledging the needs and claims of others. Because of Kanai's role as middle class representative and authorial mouthpiece, such reform can be read as prescriptive of the kinds of priorities the middle classes might come to adopt by contemplating the causes of Kanai's changed character.

Sympathy here, unlike in Roy, is less an inducement to civic cohesion and more an opportunity for reflection on the kinds of middle class priorities that Kanai used to embody and which are through his Sunderbans experience shown to be relative rather than universal. Earlier in the novel, we are told that: "It was important for him [Kanai] to believe that his values were, at bottom, egalitarian, liberal, meritocratic. It reassured him to be able to think, 'What I want for

myself is no different from what everybody wants, no matter how rich or poor” (*HT* 183). This scene is a direct repudiation of this earlier mode of middle class universalizing. Vulnerability to the environment and the sympathetic thought it induces is here a way of showing the partiality of current middle class priorities and of suggesting ways in which these might come to include other kinds of values.

This is further supported by the novel’s tempered stance toward middle class reform; while it is clear that Kanai has changed, he does not join the lineage of characters previously discussed (Hamilton, Nilima and Piya); he remains identifiably middle class. He does not give up his worldly business or possessions to move to the Sundarbans and serve the poor. He does, however, start to live by his changed priorities. For instance, we are told that he has “restructured his company so that he can take some time off” – which suggests a diluted if not abolished emphasis on material gain (*HT* 329). However brief this allusion, by including it Ghosh suggests that the epistemological and emotional transformation Kanai undergoes has both long term effects and is not incompatible with remaining part of the middle class. If such a change seems too inadequate, it is at least clear that Kanai holds out the possibility of modifying middle class values in ways that dilute commitments to the kind of anti-poor development currently justified by an unreformed middle class.

While the middle classes are at present defined by distance from the poor, infrastructural privilege, and material pursuit, Roy and Ghosh mobilize frameworks of environmental dependence and environmental exposure to theorize methods of middle class reform. For Roy and Ghosh, the mediation of sympathetic narrators offer opportunities to consider contextualized forms of difference, their causes, and the partiality of middle class material priorities. These methods for reforming the middle classes offer corollaries and accompaniments to the alternative

tradition of localized development found in the tradition of CBOs that Ghosh identifies as a counter to post-1980s Indian state development.

Chapter 4

Ordinary and Extra-ordinary States: Toward Pacific Futures in Pacific Island Legislation, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's *Iep Jaltok*, and Keri Hulme's *Stonefish*

As global temperatures rise and sea levels with them, mainstream media outlets, climate scientists, and NGOs outside the Pacific have increasingly touted climate refugeeism—the mass displacement of Pacific peoples from their islands due to sea level rise—as the inevitable future of Pacific states.¹ The starting point of this chapter is Pacific resistance to this mainstream narrative, which has come to define Pacific environmental destiny and identity in the present as one of impending victimization and communal destruction. In contrast to the closure of the future naturalized by refugee and submersion predictions, this chapter examines how state leaders and citizen-writers approach the task of articulating other possible futures. While popular agency in previous chapters has occupied a space of possibility embedded in minor, forgotten, or contrary concatenations of state, civilian, and literary discourses, in the Pacific, states are responding directly to citizen desires for state-based forms of agency that might secure their futures and mitigate the potential losses that accompany sea level rise. These include the loss of formal statehood but also the loss of home, identity, and culture which, produced out of indigenous ontologies of land and place, are equally threatened by rising waters.

Philip Abrams has suggested that the state is best considered an idea-effect whose

¹ See Tanja Dreher and Michelle Voyer, “Climate Refugees or Migrants? Contesting Media Frames on Climate Justice in the Pacific,” *Environmental Communication* 9 no. 1 (Jan. 2015): 58-76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2014.932818> for a thorough overview of the rise and prevalence of the “climate refugee” frame. Also Karen Elizabeth McNamara and Chris Gibson, “‘We do not want to leave our land’: Pacific ambassadors at the United Nations resist the category of ‘climate refugees,’” *Geoforum* 40 (2009): 475-483, doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2009.03.006; Carol Farbotko and Heather Lazrus, “The first climate refugees? Contesting global narratives of climate change in Tuvalu,” *Global Environmental Change* 22 (2012): 382-390, doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2011.11.014.

dialectic composes the meaning of “the state” at a given time.² Across the global South, the idea-effect of an interventionist postcolonial state has proven robust. The prevalence of this version of the state is all too apparent in popular dissatisfactions with the status quo, which serve not only to articulate existing state limitations but also to limn citizen expectations of and desires for the state’s protectionist, welfarist, or rights-granting capacities. Over the course of this project I have attempted to track the productive potential of such dissatisfactions by mobilizing literary and political texts as mutually generative supplements to statist limitations.

As cultural texts, and more specifically as narratives that represent and in turn produce social orders, I have read the ways in which literary and nonliterary texts can articulate political discourses and values anew, in order to promote rather than forestall the agency of those excluded from the dominant forms these values have taken. Caroline Levine has made a similar argument about the potential of literary and nonliterary narratives: “Narratives are valuable heuristic forms, then, because they can set in motion multiple social forms and track them as they cooperate, come into conflict, and overlap, without positing an ultimate cause.” Such social forms can “move across contexts” to work in fiction as well as nonfiction.³

My project has treated the movement of political values as a particular type of social object or form that ranges across literary and nonliterary texts. Insofar as no political value has ever been fully and perfectly achieved for everyone, everywhere, at all times, I have assumed, very simply, that the actualization and conceptualization of these values are always in process and must be analyzed as such. For example, if its hegemonic form in a given historical moment

² See Abrams, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State” and Timothy Mitchell, “The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics,” *The American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (Mar., 1991): pp. 77-96, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1962879>.

³ Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015), 19.

is most apparent in official political documents like constitutions, this is necessarily never a political value's final form; the imperfect scope, realization, or theorization of these values prompt their imagining otherwise in literary or popular texts. Reading across these representations is therefore not a methodological slippage but a deliberate linkage of complementary texts that together shed light on the dynamic nature of changing political values. Reading the literary and the nonliterary together, in short, is a necessary method for tracing the processural or poetic quality of political life.⁴ Such discursive assemblages tap into modes of historical poesis that contest the monopoly of hegemonic values or the limited forms of agency they make available. Such poesis is especially rich around the unequal exposures and longue durées of environmental harm.

This chapter then brings us into the present moment of radical environmental change known as the Anthropocene.⁵ A new geological age defined by the cumulative effects of the human species upon the planet's climate, in such an age the human and the nonhuman are no longer separable.⁶ Nor are the effects of human-induced climate change limitable to fossil fuel accumulations or atmospheric warming; sea level rise, among its most dire and unevenly experienced effects, is also primarily a radical change in and threat to, the lived environments of Pacific islanders.⁷ Unlike other chapters which work to reveal the overlooked environmental potential of a given political value, the Pacific discourses I examine here directly thematize the attempts of Pacific states to conceive of futurity under environmental threat; that is, to fulfill

⁴ This method could be seen as broadly new historicist.

⁵ See Paul J. Crutzen, "The Geology of Mankind."

⁶ Debates touched off by this idea have been legion. A full discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁷ Many other changes are predicted; just now drastic and widespread the impact of sea level rise specifically will be is under debate, but for Pacific islands and other low-lying areas, the effects are already apparent.

their interventionist mandates of ensuring state and civilian futures in the face of anthropogenic climate change.

Within the many responses to sea level rise pursued by Pacific state leaders and concerned citizen-writers, I track two radically incommensurate versions of the future: ordinary futures continuous with and informed by present forms of political organization, especially statehood, and extra-ordinary futures informed by genres of critical utopia that jettison commitments to the state and the limitations that accompany it. I consider firstly how state responses to citizen demands subscribe to normative forms of political life meant to make the future legible from the present. These take the form of territory-based statehood in Tuvalu's adaptation plan *Te Kaniva* (2012), and old histories of labor migration in Kiribati's plan for "Migration with Dignity." I pair these national imaginings of ordinary futures with the layered histories found in Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry collection *Iep Jaltok* (2017). Her collection shares statist goals of conceiving ordinary forms of futurity but does so by working to historicize perceptions of futurelessness and extinction that have long framed the Pacific.

Tuvalu and Kiribati's national plans seek to draw forth lines of continuity between a livable present and an apocalyptic future. Tuvalu's most recent climate change policy document, *Te Kaniva*, focuses on in-place adaptation and commits to the continuity of Tuvaluan statehood; by extension it also seeks to preserve the indigenous ontologies of its citizens, which are based in land, and to resist the profound loss that would accompany migration. In contrast, Kiribati's policy of "Migration with Dignity" (MWD) focuses on making citizens into labor migrants and therefore desirable subjects of capital abroad, while also positing these diasporic labor

communities as sites of cultural nation-building.⁸

Kiribati's reliance on citizens as bearers of the cultural nation, and thus a diasporic version of cultural continuity, is not without controversy given the centrality of placed-based identities across the Pacific. Tuvalu, indeed, has downplayed its own history of quotidian migration to emphasize the importance of land. However, Rob Wilson and Arif Dirlik have suggested the Pacific be considered a rhizomatic zone or "heteroglossic spatiality" mapped and inscribed through the transit and migration of local peoples across the ocean.⁹ And Palauan scholar David Welchman Gegeo, writing about Pacific diasporas and contestations over "indigenous authenticity," has argued that while "place is an existential foundation," it is also made "portable" by cultural practices and kin relations, the very techniques Kiribati turns to.¹⁰

These notions of landed ontology, territorially-based statehood, and historically deep, culturally thick migration constitute "useable pasts" which Pacific states draw on selectively to imagine ordinary political futures for their citizens.¹¹ The first part of the chapter thus focuses on aspirations to political stasis: how political norms are being used to stabilize environmentally uncertain futures in the Pacific. The selective frames of Kiribati and Tuvalu's national policies draw on and posit the continuity of historic relationships that might diminish the specter of unprecedented climate destruction, while holding open ways of inhabiting the future with which

⁸ Kiribati's plan does not make clear exactly what this national culture includes. While Kiribati's national culture is as heterogeneous as anywhere else, for the purposes of MWD, it is represented as unitary and immediately recognizable.

⁹ Rob Wilson and Arif Dirlik, eds., *Asia/Pacific as Space of Cultural Production* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995), 8. Also Matt K. Matsuda, "The Pacific," *The American Historical Review* 111 no. 3 (June 2006): 758-78. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/ahr.111.3.758>.

¹⁰ David Welchman Gegeo, "Cultural Rupture and Indigeneity: The Challenge of (Re)visioning 'Place' in the Pacific," *The Contemporary Pacific* 13 no. 2 (Fall 2001): 493, 495, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2001.0052>.

¹¹ I take this term from Van Wyck Brooks, "On Creating a Useable Past," *The Dial* (April 11, 1918): 337-341.

citizens are already familiar.

I suggest that these circumscribed, partial, and fluid strategies are part of what Arjun Appadurai has called “the politics of hope” or “the capacity to aspire”; that is, “a navigational capacity” of “means and ends, values and strategies, experiences and tested insights” that connect present circumstances and future goals.¹² In the face of sea level rise and land loss, political futurity in the Pacific becomes coextensive with a variety of aspirational capacities that occupy the space between the Pacific’s rapid environmental changes and the ways in which Pacific citizens and states might encounter, overcome, or endure despite those changes.

Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s poetry collection *Iep Jaltok* shares the goal of imagining futures aside from refugee displacement. I examine how *Iep Jaltok*’s narrative strategies and poetic sequences dramatize the human costs of inundation and thus reinforce the work Pacific leaders do in calling for international action; they personalize and concretize climate change at a scale of individual loss with which readers might identify, and which allows the poems to thicken state descriptions of citizen desires to remain in place. However, whereas Pacific states rely on a linear temporality to imagine the continuity of place and place-based culture, Jetñil-Kijiner’s poems mobilize a layered and accreted temporality, wherein past injustices, injuries, and indeed formerly impossible futures, have not only come to pass but recur in the present, disrupting the temporal closures they were supposed to confirm. I argue that in doing so Jetñil-Kijiner envisions ordinary futures by repurposing an unlikely aspect of the Pacific past: the genre of extinction narratives.

Insofar as the extinction narrative works by posing the non-sovereignty and non-futurity of the Pacific, I argue that climate refugeeism can be seen as the latest version of this genre.

¹² Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact*, 188-9.

These narratives have ranged from ideas of “fatal impact” and the physical extinction of Pacific populations in the 19th through early 20th centuries after Europeans brought new diseases to the islands, to skepticism about the viability of Pacific nations after independence and economic “doomsdayism,” to the expendability of Pacific peoples and islands during European and American Cold War nuclear testing. Narratives of climate refugeeism, which encompass the annihilation of Pacific territories as well as the loss of culture and community, continue this lineage of Pacific non-futurity.

While state leaders declare near-term strategies meant to keep refugeeism at bay and provide institutional frames for futures that might be anticipated from the present, Jetñil-Kijiner’s poetry embeds extinction within Pacific history, offering forms for thinking about apocalypse as part of, rather than the end of, Pacific pasts and futures. The first part of this chapter thus examines how political and literary texts resist refugee determinism to imagine ordinary futures in the face of sea level rise and thus to hold open a “geopolitical tension between visions of the future.”¹³

However, these commitments to the ordinary also seem intuitively inadequate, not least because such futures depend on forms like the national state, whose substantive powers and formal definitions are being endangered by sea level rise. The second part of this chapter therefore argues for the inadequacy of ordinary futures and considers alternate forms of extraordinary futurity. I begin by re-reading Kiribati’s national plan for “Migration with Dignity” against its own claims. I argue that, because Kiribati’s civilian dispersal implies the dissolution of its formal state, MWD can be seen as a critique of the status quo of Westphalian statehood from the position of what Leela Gandhi has called the “politics of in consequence” as well as

¹³ McNamara and Gibson, ““We do not want to leave our land,”” 481.

from the critical perspective offered in theories of utopia and dystopia. Finally, I show how Keri Hulme's short story collection *Stonefish* (2004) suggests that commitments to ordinary futures produce climate denialism as a cognitive limit; in response it advocates the relinquishment of the ordinary for an awareness of environmental change and suggests new values that might promote long term futurity. These texts suggest the need to consider extra-ordinary futures and to relinquish aspirations to ordinariness like those found in the chapter's first half.

The second part of this chapter thus begins by considering the ways in which inconsequence might be a form of critique. Resistance to inconsequence has structured Pacific scholarship for the past quarter century, since Tongan anthropologist, novelist, and short story writer Epeli Hau'ofa argued that the Pacific should be considered "a sea of islands with their inhabitants" rather than "islands in a far sea."¹⁴ Writing against prevalent social science discourses that posited the Pacific as "small, poor, and isolated," Hau'ofa emphasized the richness of Pacific cultural, economic, and ecological interconnections, and therefore its import as a region. He argued, in short, against Pacific inconsequence within international affairs and for its robust participation in a globalized modernity.

But in this chapter I draw upon Leela Gandhi, for whom the "symbolic celibacy" of inconsequence signals the harmful nature of an existing status quo.¹⁵ It is within this framework that I reconsider Kiribati's MWD plan. Normatively, Kiribati's dissolved state is a contradiction in terms, since under existing Westphalian rubrics a dissolved state is no longer a state at all and can confer neither rights nor protections for its citizens. And yet, the Westphalian system that makes territory a requirement of statehood does not offer any alternatives by which citizens

¹⁴ Epeli Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 2008), 32.

¹⁵ Leela Gandhi, *The Common Cause: Postcolonial Ethics and the Practice of Democracy, 1900-1955* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2014), 127.

might be protected when territory is threatened as it is under sea level rise. The very seeming inconsequence of Kiribati's plan thus make clear the ways in which formal requirements interfere with a recognizable *raison d'ete* of modern states. Kiribati's aspiration to protecting its national community and culture, exemplified in its call for its own dissolution and for the establishment of national communities abroad, therefore at once appears as inconsequence within, and act as critique of, the existing international system's normative order.

This critical edge is not apparent from a straightforward reading of Kiribati's plan, which only buttresses its global inconsequence in a conventional sense. As a literary scholar, I need not take its plan at face value and can thus mine the implications of its inconsequence for their critical edge. Similarly, when read not as realpolitik planning but instead more generally, as a representation of the future that comments critically upon the present, Kiribati's plan bears surprising affinities with critical aspects of science fiction. I thus also turn to theories of dystopia and utopia to more closely attend to the kinds of anti-hegemonic critique available within MWD.

As scholars like Fredrick Jameson, Tom Moylan, and Ursula Heise have argued, in science fiction representations of the future both suggest desirable outcomes and comment upon troubling aspects of the present.¹⁶ In particular, Heise notes that in recent representations of dystopic futures, the present is presented as "the matrix of the past from which dystopia sprang," while Moylan points out that utopia is "rooted in the unfulfilled needs and wants of specific classes, groups, and individuals in their unique historical contexts."¹⁷ Moreover, utopic representations, as both "symbolic resolutions" to present limitations and as models of thinking

¹⁶ See Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005); Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1986) and Ursula Heise "Introduction: The Invention of Eco-Futures," *Ecozon@* 3 no. 2 (2012): 1-10, <http://ecozona.eu/article/view/468/496>.

¹⁷ Heise, "Eco-Futures," 5; Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, 1.

beyond the limits of current thought, are grounded in what Moylan, following Ernest Bloch, calls “the radical insufficiency of the present.”¹⁸ For Bloch, the “ontological pull of the future” is driven by dissatisfaction with what exists, and in the context of sea level rise, insufficiency is political and material as well as epistemological.¹⁹

From the perspective of Kiribati’s dissolved future state, the international status quo can thus appear as a “matrix of the past” from which the dystopia of an inconsequential state springs; but such a state is also latent with utopian promise insofar as it offers a form of political organization currently unthinkable within the Westphalia system. The dissolved state is thus a doubled response to the radical insufficiency of the present – here not the driving impulse of a literary genre, but a historical context that demands novel epistemological as well as practicable responses.

That I turn to literary theories to analyze a nonliterary object is only problematic if the political and the literary are seen as separate; this project has argued and attempted to demonstrate that these categories may at times be read as mutual narrative supplements to a common problem. Moreover, utopia has never been merely a literary genre. In *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley and Gyan Prakash argue that utopias are not only epistemological conceits but, taking up their long history as actual political and social movements, “reveal [...] a set of abiding concerns and cultural formations that generated both the desire for utopian transcendence *and the specific form that utopia/dystopia took.*”²⁰

¹⁸ Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*. 39.

¹⁹ Bloch quoted in Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), 129.

²⁰ Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash, eds., *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010), 4, emphasis mine.

This section of the chapter thus argues that MWD can be viewed through a politics of in consequence or through dystopian and utopic frameworks, because both offer methods for critiquing the limitations of status quo statehood. In the Pacific, the radical insufficiency of the present makes ordinary politics inadequate *prima facie*; past solutions or existing configurations cannot address the needs of these states nor the desires of their citizens. It is, thus, not entirely surprising that I turn to a body of theory centered in the insufficiency of the present, an insufficiency that produces both epistemological habits of “thinking beyond thought” and novel political configurations. Indeed, my reading of MWD suggests that the epistemological work of estrangement done by speculative texts can also be done by nonfiction, and conversely that new political models that characterize concrete pursuits of utopia might also be found in literary fiction.

In the final part of this chapter, I turn to Keri Hulme’s *Stonefish* partially for this reason. This speculative and experimental collection of short stories extends the critique of ordinary futures begun in my contrary reading of Kiribati’s “Migration with Dignity.” *Stonefish*, however, does not critique the Westphalian status quo’s inadequate territorial logic so much as it does climate inaction and human consumption more broadly.²¹ In particular, *Stonefish* suggests that commitments to ordinariness produce forms of climate denialism, and that therefore ordinariness must be relinquished for a new value system of living well with others within an awareness of environmental change. The text also works to produce a reader who might adopt such values, by formally cultivating an experience of dramatic irony between the narrator of the last story, “Midden Mine,” and the reader of the collection as a whole. Such dissonances suggest a

²¹ Consumption in *Stonefish* is about food and embodied experience rather than fossil fuels. Both might be grouped under the wanton consumption of limited resources.

pedagogic telos or epistemological effect to *Stonefish*'s eclectic form.²²

Stonefish and Kiribati's MWD both point toward extra-ordinary futures. However, neither offer systemic solutions to the radical insufficiencies they expose. Kiribati's critique of Westphalian statehood is shared with other vulnerable island states, but its dissolved state is certainly not proposed as a new universal model. *Stonefish*'s alternate ethos is also only practiced by isolated individuals; it is not offered as an encompassing or even equally available vision of structural change. If the radical insufficiency of the present requires both a change in values and a change in political systems, neither *Stonefish* nor MWD offer comprehensive models for what these might be. As Moylan points out though, "utopia can not be reduced to its *content*," and any model offered will be insufficient.²³ The practicability of future content is, he proposes, less the point of utopic narratives than the epistemological stretching they encourage.

At the same time, this absence of systemic alternatives, and thus of *some* content for the future, butts uneasily against the loss which shadows the Pacific and which motivates the commitment to ordinary futures in this chapter's first half. I argue, then, that both ordinary and extra-ordinary futures must be seen as part of agentive Pacific responses to sea level rise. In this chapter these versions of the future sit uneasily alongside each other. One is not assimilable to the other; instead futurity appears as a split, doubled and incommensurable value within the timeline of sea level rise's threat to Pacific states. It is only in considering them together, not as contradictions, but as representations of a future that still remains in process, available to poesis, and indeterminate, that we might find forms of agency less harmful than refugeeism and yet attentive to the stakes of relinquishing ordinary futures.

²² Moylan argues that utopias after 1850 tend to suggest new values rather than new systems. See *Demand the Impossible*, Introduction.

²³ Moylan 39, emphasis original.

Such agency is not only about resistance to the singularity of a refugee future, but is located in the very process of thinking the future in its variegated forms and multiplicity of temporal spans. Ordinary and extra-ordinary futures bring us to the question of agency at different moments, as it is found in the tension between the needs foregrounded in near and far forms of futurity. Considerations of agency within incommensurable futures then must do the impossible, responding to both immediate material conditions and long-term epistemological limits. I suggest the most robust scholarly engagements with Pacific agency must move between the variegated needs, desires, and anxieties of the short term and the long term future, rather than foreclosing either by adjudicating between them.

I. State (of) Continuity: Tuvalu's *Te Kaniva*

Tuvalu is largely reluctant to countenance the possibility of climate migration, and remains staunchly committed to in-place adaptation.²⁴ These priorities are institutionalized and formalized in its latest official climate change policy document, *Te Kaniva* (2012). *Te Kaniva*'s "Vision," stated toward the policy's opening, is one in which territorial statehood and communal continuity are tightly yolked to and indeed co-extensive with, a desirable future. Tuvalu's insistence on remaining in place may appear to approximate the effects of climate denialism, but its refusal of migration is better seen as an insistence on the moral as well as political stakes of land loss. For migration threatens not only the formality of Tuvaluan statehood but also the basis of its citizens' indigenous ontologies, in which land is the foundation of being. Tuvalu's strategic

²⁴ See Carol Farbotko, Elaine Stratford and Heather Lazrus, "Climate migrants and new identities? The geopolitics of embracing or rejecting mobility," *Social and Cultural Geography* 17 no. 4 (2016): 533-552, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2015.1089589>; Colette Mortreux and Jon Barnett, "Climate change, migration and adaptation in Funafuti, Tuvalu," *Global Environmental Change* 19 (2009): 105-112, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2008.09.006> on Tuvalu's commitment to island-based rootedness, especially in contrast to Kiribati.

refusal to consider migration is not just a commentary on the injustice of sea level rise as a threat which Pacific states suffer first and to which they have contributed least, but also foregrounds the singularity and irreplaceability of land in the lifeways of its citizens. Resisting such loss points to the deeper meaning of land for indigenous ontologies, even beyond the loss of formal statehood and state-based rights.

Te Kaniva's aim is accordingly "To protect Tuvalu's status as a nation and its cultural integrity and to build its capacity to ensure a safe, resilient, and prosperous future."²⁵ That national and cultural integrity inhere in continued residence on the island, rather than, say, the recreation of national community elsewhere, is clear from a number of points. Unlike Kiribati, which encourages its citizens to think about national community as replicable outside state borders despite the importance of land, Farbotko, Stratford and Lazrus note that "among Tuvaluans, climate change has prompted a shying away from mobile histories and geographies, and an elevation of the importance of rootedness." This is especially dramatized in interviews where some residents express a desire "to die in Tuvalu" rather than leave.²⁶ For some of its residents, life is, quite literally, only conceivable on the island.

As a whole *Te Kaniva* was written with the participation of "local leaders and dignitaries of all levels of the society, church leaders, representative [sic] of primary, secondary, and tertiary schools as well as political leaders" and as such "*Te Kaniva* contains the aspirations of the people of Tuvalu on how best to address the impacts and consequences of climate change."²⁷ But its "Goals" make clear that it is primarily the Tuvaluan state that is charged with implementing this

²⁵ *Te Kaniva: Tuvalu Climate Change Policy*, coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade, Tourism, Environment and Labour, Government of Tuvalu (Tuvalu: 2012), 4.

²⁶ Farbotko, Stratford, and Lazrus, "Climate Change and new identities?", 537. It must be stated that there are a range of responses to migration in all Pacific states, and that some Tuvaluans do want to leave, just as many i-Kiribati are reluctant to leave.

²⁷ *Te Kaniva*, 2.

communal vision of staying on the island. Of its seven goals, six name practical measures meant to promote a future on Tuvalu, and include government usage of climate data to improve disaster response programs, enhanced state access to disaster risk funds, the promotion of Tuvaluan energy security, and weather-proofing Tuvaluan infrastructures.²⁸ The seventh goal then seems cumulative, providing a rationale for the aforementioned practices and a motivating logic for remaining in place: “Guaranteeing the Security of the People of Tuvalu from the Impacts of Climate Change and the Maintenance of National Sovereignty.”²⁹

This imperative leads to two differently envisioned futures, illustrated at the bottom of goal seven by two cannily juxtaposed photographs. Dipesh Chakrabarty has written of the parallel, mutually on-going realities of postcolonial subjects who inhabit a capitalist-dominated modernity shot through with past perspectives, temporalities, and practices, thus destabilizing what may be considered “past.”³⁰ These images invite a similar consideration of heterotemporality but they offer less a commentary on the multiplicity of the past-present than a visualization of the multiple futures emerging within Tuvalu’s present moment of climate confrontation.



Figure 1. Source: *Te Kaniva: Tuvalu Climate Change Policy 2012*. Page 25.

²⁸ *Te Kaniva*, 4.

²⁹ *Te Kaniva*, 4.

³⁰ See Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, especially chapter 2.

In both photographs, the eye is drawn to the background: leafy island in one, uninterrupted sea in the other. These backgrounds double as horizons of concern, organizing the citizens in each picture around, toward, or away from the futures they represent. In the image on the left, the horizon is the island of Tuvalu, still green and habitable. The foreground is dominated by a cluster of people grouped in a staggered circle. Their expressions are visible; a few appear to be in animated conversation, while those nearby incline their heads or wear furrowed looks of concentration. Trailing behind this group are small figures on white sand, bringing to mind Greg Denning's statement that "everyone who has come to these islands has crossed the beach."³¹ The vision we get is one of individuals who link foreground and background, a human chain where the concern visible on the faces in the foreground is presumed to extend also to those citizens whose faces we cannot see in the background. This picture poses the habitability of the island as an aspirational future, one it suggests will be secured through the kinds of concerted communal actions laid out in *Te Kaniva*.

Next to this image is one that presents the opposite vision. Here the immediate foreground is of the edge of the beach, with the open sea and sky taking up the majority of the frame. Islanders are grouped haphazardly at the water's edge with bundles and furniture; some trail into the surf while others remain on the edge of the water. An expanse of blue sea and sky makes up the visual horizon toward which the islanders are turned, and between them is a white boat. The line of bodies moves from the beach toward the sea and the boat; we are presented with a scene of imminent departure. In contrast to the other image, these figures are not identifiable or individualized; personhood is swallowed by a shared condition of departure, illustrating the perception that leaving is tantamount to the loss of Tuvaluan identities.

³¹ Greg Denning. *The Bounty: An Ethnographic History*. (Parkville, Victoria: History Dept., University of Melbourne, 1988).

Presented side by side at the end of Tuvalu's official climate change policy, this image suggests that Tuvalu's government and its people are not merely ambivalent about the future, but that they inhabit these two possibilities simultaneously in a kind of doubled present, where the place of their future cannot be determined and thus must be presented as incommensurate and coeval. It must be noted that both of these possible futures are also alternatives to the singularity of climate refugeeism. The first photo presents an image of Tuvaluan political continuity, where Tuvalu remains a habitable territory and retains its place as the central ground of its citizens' communal life and identity. If the second belies this possibility, it is also worth noting what the image refuses. The beach and water are pristine; the people are neatly dressed and their belongings carefully packed; this is not a scene of desperation or forced migration after disaster. These closing images work to situate Tuvaluan citizens within as many futures as possible; contradiction here is less a sign of failure as it is an affirmation of state resistance to the naturalization of refugeeism. Tuvalu's two images present not only an incommensurable choice, but a moment where choice is still available. However fraught the second would be, it participates in the exercise of producing a future not determined by refugeeism.

And yet, the duality of this future is also tempered by the policy's overall emphasis on remaining in place, and examining the text that follows these images, where "strategies" and "outcomes" for a migratory future are further elaborated, reveals the migratory future and its representational image as strikingly emptied-out; leaving Tuvalu, rather than being an equal future, seems to pass beyond the limit of efficacious governance and actionable political thought.

I suggest Tuvalu's disavowal of the preceding migratory image is revealed through the illogic of the "outcomes" and "strategies" that follow it. For example, "strategies" such as "[ensuring] that Tuvaluans continued to have the capacity to remain as a nation," are paired with

the “outcome” of an “[established] legal framework for the resettlement and recognition of Tuvalu within another country as a sovereign state.”³² It is not at all clear how or why this kind of legal framework would be the outcome of safeguarding Tuvalu’s cultural nation;³³ not only does such a legal framework not yet exist, it bears little resemblance to other existing legal precedents and alternatives that could protect cultural nations even without all the formal apparatuses of statehood.”³⁴ Neither of these so-called strategies or outcomes adhere to the categories they purportedly explain; the legal “outcome” seems more like the necessary “strategy” to ensure Tuvalu’s continued national existence rather than the reverse; or, they might both be seen as desired goals neither of which Tuvalu would be able to implement alone; there is also no elaboration about how either “ensuring the nation” in general or “establishing an international framework” would be pursued; instead these strategies and outcomes come to seem more like placeholders for a process of legislative planning and aspirational movement between the present and a migratory future that *Te Kaniva* declines to perform.³⁵

I suggest that the logical mismatch of this section indexes a limit in the political futurity imagined by the Tuvaluan state. Insofar as it resonates with citizen desires to remain on the island and the ontologically privileged place of land for indigenous subjects, this political inconceivability might be seen as a deliberate repudiation of international pressures to migrate

³² *Te Kavina*, 14.

³³ McAdam notes that it is technically possible for one state to exist inside another. See Jane McAdam, “‘Disappearing States’: Statelessness and the Boundaries of International Law” in *Climate Change and Displacement*, ed. Jane McAdam (Oxford, UK: Hart Publishing, 2010), 121.

³⁴ Examples include governments in exile, which operate without territory, or a new kind of state. Both are discussed by Maxine Burkett, “The Nation Ex-Situ: On climate change, deterritorialized nationhood and the post-climate era,” *Climate Law* 2 (2011): 345–374, doi: 10.3233/CL-2011-040.

³⁵ This movement between present and possible futures are what Arjun Appadurai calls “making the future a cultural fact.” See *The Future as Cultural Fact*.

and the loss of indigenous sovereignty and ontology that would accompany migration. While the image above registers migration as a possibility in the face of sea level rise, it goes no further. Migration is rendered as a visible trace but is emptied out of any aspiration, any way of bringing that future closer to present actualization. *Te Kaniva* thus ambivalently admits, only to decline, a migrant future. In *Te Kaniva*'s imaginary, migration is an annulment of cultural continuity and identity that must be resisted. In contrast, and in spite of the centrality of land to indigenous identity, Kiribati's plan for "Migration with Dignity" (MWD) attempts to conceive of migration as a kind of place-making and of diasporic communities as sites of national and cultural continuity. It is to date the only low-lying Pacific state that has taken measures to facilitate migration.³⁶

II. Kiribati's "Migration with Dignity": "Producing Migrants Rather than Displaced People"

Kiribati's climate adaptation plan, "Migration with Dignity," is at its most basic a plan for producing new kinds of labor migrants. In creating labor migrants, MWD can be read as capitulating to the current dominant regime of neoliberal capital, which places the burden of personal risk and responsibility upon individuals while withdrawing collective state protections.³⁷ But in the context of sea level rise, I argue that "Migration with Dignity" more ambitiously attempts to recuperate or repurpose migration as an ontological framework for I-

³⁶ This policy has however recently been reversed with the ousting of Anote Tong from power by Taneti Maamau in 2016. See Matthew Rytz, "Sinking Islands, Floating Nation," *The New York Times*, Jan. 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/24/opinion/kiribati-climate-change.html>.

³⁷ Felli and Castree makes a similar point: "Consequently, responses to environmental degradation are not found in political/economic transformations, but are located at the individual/community level." See Romain Felli and Noel Castree, "Neoliberalising adaptation to environmental change: foresight or foreclosure?" *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 44 no. 1 (2012): 1-4. doi:10.1068/a44680. See also David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP 2007).

Kiribati cultural continuity. Like other Pacific Islanders, I-Kiribati have migrated for work to the US and other areas of the Pacific like Australia and New Zealand since the 1960s, and as of 2005, 2.4 percent of its population worked overseas as migrants.³⁸ The kind of migration promoted by President Anote Tong attempts to minimize the cultural shock of land loss by emphasizing instead Kiribati histories of travel and labor migration that have long been part of everyday life, and which might now be mobilized into a kind of nation-building outside Kiribati's formal borders.

If the classic definition of refugeeism is that refugees are those who no longer have a national state from which they can claim rights and protections,³⁹ for Kiribati the answer to this prospective future is not to turn to the abstraction of universal human rights in lieu of lost national protections or even an expanded definition of refugeeism that might include climate displacement.⁴⁰ Instead it has turned to a suite of state-based disciplinary procedures, such as education and workplace training, to produce subjects with the skills to survive without the protection of a fully efficacious state:

The government's migration strategy aims to improve language, workplace skills and qualifications, in order to make i-Kiribati – Kiribati citizens – 'competitive and marketable at international labour markets,' with options for labour mobility developed over time. [...] 'The key element of our policy is the up-skilling of our nationals at all levels, though we are focusing on the vocational and technical levels at the moment.'⁴¹

In short, the state's reaction to sea level rise is to create new kinds of subjects: the role of

³⁸ See John Connell "The Pacific Diaspora," in *Migration and Development: Perspectives from Small States*, ed. Wonderful Hope Khonje (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2015) 244-264, <https://doi.org/10.14217/9781848599239-10-en> and David J. McKenzie, "Remittances in the Pacific," (lecture, 2005-2006 Werner Sichel Lecture Series, "Immigrants and their International Money Flows," Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, Feb. 15, 2006).

³⁹ See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

⁴⁰ They do have plans for in-situ adaptation but MWD has received far more publicity.

⁴¹ Tessie Lambourne quoted in Nic MacIlelan, "Kiribati's policy for 'migration with dignity,'" *Devpolicy Blog*, Development Policy Center, Jan. 12, 2012, http://www.devpolicy.org/kiribati_migration_climate_change20120112/.

the state has become “to create migrants before they become displaced peoples.”⁴² Such state production is often viewed suspiciously through the lens of Althusserian ideology or the negative valence that sometimes accompanies Foucauldian disciplinary practices.⁴³ Tong suggests though that state production of skilled migrants is less a version of exploitive biopolitical management than a duty to provide for citizen well-being.⁴⁴ As Tong says of state duty in the face of sea level rise and international inaction, “People are getting quite scared now and we need immediate solutions. This is why I want to rush the solutions so there will be a sense of comfort for our people.”⁴⁵ He elsewhere elaborates:

The relocation of the 100,000 people of Kiribati cannot be done overnight [...] It requires long-term forward planning and the sooner we act, the less stressful and the less painful it would be for all concerned. This is why my government has developed a long-term merit-based relocation strategy as an option for our people. As leaders, it is our duty to the people we serve to prepare them for the worst-case scenario.⁴⁶

Kiribati’s Secretary of Foreign Affairs Tessie Eria Lambourne similarly notes: “We know about the painful experience in the refugee field, both for the recipient countries and for the refugees themselves. We do not want our people to experience this.”⁴⁷ State sponsored migration is here

⁴² Erin D. Phelps, “As Waters Rise, a Race to Migrate with Dignity,” *The Migrationist* (blog). Feb. 9, 2015, <https://themigrationist.net/2015/02/09/as-waters-rise-a-race-to-migrate-with-dignity/>.

⁴³ There are many reasons for suspicion, which are not annulled by the protective intent of the state here. Disciplinary subjects are often seen as emptied of autonomy, threatened by state control, bound to harmful institutions, or unequally protected by the putative rights of citizenship. Postcolonial engagements with the inequalities of national citizenship are extensive. See for example Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003), David Lloyd, “Nationalism Against the State,” or Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*.

⁴⁴ These goals are not of course, mutually exclusive.

⁴⁵ Alex Pashley, “Kiribati president: Climate-induced migration is 5 years away,” *Climate Home News*, accessed Dec. 31, 2017. <http://www.climatechangenews.com/2016/02/18/kiribati-president-climate-induced-migration-is-5-years-away/>.

⁴⁶ Tong quoted in Maclellan, “Kiribati’s policy for ‘migration with dignity.’”

⁴⁷ Quoted in Maclellan, “Kiribati’s policy for ‘migration with dignity.’”

articulated as part of a larger self-conceived duty of protecting citizen livelihoods and minimizing the personal toll of relocation.

In trying to produce I-Kiribati as labor migrants before they become forcibly displaced peoples, the state also acts to preserve the nation *en masse* by sending abroad citizens who can provide a basis for future migrations.⁴⁸ As articulated on Kiribati's climate change website, "opportunities must be created to enable the migration of those who wish to do so now and in the coming years. This will assist in establishing expatriate communities of I-Kiribati, who will be able to absorb and support greater numbers of migrants in the longer term."⁴⁹ This statement gestures not only to the overseas communities of Kiribati citizens already living in places like Australia and the US, but also to the networks of material exchange, kinship, and remittances that already exist between these overseas communities, the Kiribati state, and local villages and family networks.⁵⁰

Under MWD such overseas communities are refigured as precedents to the current migration scheme, and work to domesticate the material and cultural loss that shadows the prospect of migration due to sea level rise. Migration then is not only meant to minimize the effects of lost or diminished state protections and national community; it is also meant to enable citizens to situate migration due to sea level rise within older patterns of labor migration and relocation; that is, within an alternate locus of historical experience and cultural meaning that

⁴⁸ Doing so will also relieve the burdens of overcrowding and unemployment that threaten the welfare of citizens remaining at home. See Harriet Farquhar, "'Migration with Dignity': Towards a New Zealand Response to Climate Change Displacement in the Pacific," *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review* 46 no. 1 (July 2015): 29-55, HeinOnline.

⁴⁹ "Relocation," Kiribati Climate Change, Office of the President, Republic of Kiribati, accessed 1 Jan. 2018, <http://www.climate.gov.ki/category/action/relocation/>.

⁵⁰ Epeli Hau'ofa emphasizes this dimension of everyday material transaction. See "Our Sea of Islands." In 2005, 12% of Kiribati's GDP was from migration remittances. See David J. McKenzie "Remittances in the Pacific."

might deflect the ontological rupture that will come from loss of land.

Of course, it is also clear that in many ways “Migration with Dignity” is inadequate and potentially deleterious, despite its well-intentioned design. MWD seems to invest diasporic communities with a protective mandate they cannot possibly guarantee outside state-based rights. And in addition to its potential complicity with neoliberalism, the Kiribati state’s attempt to produce new kinds of citizens who will appeal to and fit within international labor markets may end up supporting the very goals of carbon-producing capitalist states that see relocation as a way to defer the responsibility of emissions reduction.

It also paradoxically repeats and reverses a charge often made against the postcolonial nation-state: that not everyone is incorporated equally into the imagined community of the nation and that therefore not everyone enjoys equal rights, recognition, and protection from the state. Partha Chatterjee has made the latter argument about India’s very poor, who straddle the line between il/legality. For those who eek out a living on the edge of state tolerance, he argues, robust citizenship, defined by reciprocal rights and duties, is out of reach; instead the poor merely seek to negotiate with the administrative branches of the state with which they interact.⁵¹ David Lloyd articulates the former charge in his seminal “Nationalisms against the state,” arguing that the state interpellates only one ideal “nation” or people, namely those aligned with its own ideals of progress; all other national peoples are cast into categories of state-created otherness. These othered citizens are labeled anachronistic, even as they crowd the edges of the state’s singular “ideal” nation and national citizen.⁵²

Kiribati’s plan might threaten to do the opposite: to perform a form of nation-building abroad where ideal citizens are those who fit most easily into Western categories of desirable

⁵¹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*.

⁵² David Lloyd, “Nationalisms Against the State.”

labor; as such these would become the basis for a new Kiribati cultural nation (if not formal state) by representing both the amenability of Kiribati culture to external assimilation and proving I-Kiribati “modern” subjects of global capital. Consequently those left out of the “new nation” of I-Kiribati abroad are not those the Kiribati state deems threatening but rather those who are deemed unfit because unmodern according to the standards of Western labor. The state’s “Migration with Dignity” plan can thus be seen as nation-building in reverse, sending rather than retaining those it deems ideal citizens and, at its logical extreme, akin to state-sponsored population selection where the unmodern are subject to the island’s slow death.

At the same time, it is clear that these new labor migrants are meant to provide a sort of communal avant-garde; while their modern skills offer the impetus for their relocation, it is their continuous ties with those left behind, and the epistemic and material resources they will accumulate and transfer, that is envisioned as enabling the movement of further migrants, including potentially those not easily able to take advantage of restrictive labor categories. Within MWD’s schema, these more vulnerable citizens might be accommodated and supported within the cultural communities built up by its laboring avant-garde. If we return to Hau’ofa’s idea that sovereignty in the Pacific has rarely been about complete autonomy or isolated self-sufficiency, Kiribati’s migration practices in the face of sea level rise seek to maintain this sense of interconnection or interdependence against diplomatic, economic, and climate frameworks that might reassimilate the rights of citizens and the duties of states to an isolationist frame.

On a generous reading then, the Kiribati state can be seen to provide the outlines of a future away from the islands: by promoting individual economic agency, by situating skilled individuals within existing diasporic communities to which they can contribute their abilities and cultural knowledge, and finally by drawing selectively on the migratory aspects of Kiribati’s

history to provide a sense of continuity between the present and an inundated future. If MWD can more easily be seen as problematically supporting the withdrawal of state protections and the abstraction of labor demanded by neoliberal capital, it can also be seen as exemplary of the “capacity to aspire.” Arjun Appadurai uses this term to describe the navigational capacity of subaltern subjects as they pursue forms of agency within constraint; aspiration is central to understanding how the future becomes a cultural fact, that is, an actionable horizon toward which one might move by mobilizing one’s place within existing social relations, local infrastructures, and systems of knowledge.⁵³

Kiribati’s “Migration with Dignity” plan institutionalizes the continued purchase of islander interdependence, assuming that such a strategy will serve it in an inundated future as it has since Kiribati’s independence in 1979 and indeed well before. MWD formalizes a responsibility for citizen care fostered by the state through the production of skilled labor migrants, but also delegates such responsibility to the diasporic communities and informal channels of support that citizens have long provided to each other. At its most ambitious perhaps, MWD seems an attempt to frame older labor migrations and the diasporic communities that have grown out of them, and newer migrations due to sea level rise, as part of a shared lineage of cultural dispersal and nation-building rather than a confirmation of national loss. In short, Kiribati’s leaders envision a political community composed not only by a shared past but by a common future, one oriented by the aspiration of recreating a Kiribati cultural nation where its citizens might remain migrants embedded in community rather than becoming isolated displaced peoples.

⁵³ Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact*, 188.

III. Surviving the Future: Pacific Extinction Narratives and Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's *Iep Jaltok*

In this section I turn to Marshallese poet Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's interventions in Pacific political and cultural futurity. I argue that like the official discourses of Pacific states, Jetñil-Kijiner mobilizes a heuristic of "usable pasts" to envision Pacific futures and delineate the contours of an embattled present. However, rather than conceiving of the continuity of Pacific states and nations, Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry enacts a nonteleological conception of time that poses refugeeism as the very *kind* of future that has already been faced and endured in the Pacific. Rather than merely displacing refugeeism as possible rather than determined, her poetry situates sea level rise within a longer lineage of "impossible futures" or extinction narratives so that, in *Iep Jaltok*, extinction becomes part of history rather than its end.

In *Iep Jaltok*, Jetñil-Kijiner represents Pacific history as a sedimented accumulation that, like Achille Mbembe's notion of time in the postcolony, "is not a series but an *interlocking* of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones."⁵⁴ Such a notion of fluid, recursive, and nonsynchronous time casts the past as always carried forward into and composing with the present; in doing so Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry does not work merely to record Pacific histories of deleterious contact with Euro-Americans so much as to emphasize this history as one of endurance and repurposing. Present moments contain iterations of past harms, myths, and events; in repeating they repeat with a difference and make up a shifting groundwork for conceptualizing the fluid quality of Pacific presents that carry within them the pasts that were supposed to have made future presents impossible. Rather than attempting to plan directly for the continuity of

⁵⁴ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, U of California P, 2001), 16, emphasis original. Such a notion of overlapping time in which the past is carried forward in, informs, and changes within the present, is also found in Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*.

statehood and cultural identity, *Iep Jaltok* mobilizes a conception of time where Pacific peoples and cultures have always-already endured.

Writing from the vantage of a past's future that was never supposed to arrive, whether due to nuclear fallout or sea level rise, Jetñil-Kijiner suggests that useable pasts are precisely the pasts that were supposed to render Pacific islanders futureless. By posing Pacific presents as impossible futures past, *Iep Jaltok* does not “defer” an apocalyptic future. Nor does it insist necessarily on the heterotemporality of modernity.⁵⁵ Jetñil-Kijiner brings forth less a sense of parallel, minor, interruptive time alongside a hegemonic present; instead her poetry presents Pacific temporality as a layering of oral and somatic memory in which adhere both present injustices and a *longue durée* of antithetical pasts-cum-impossible futures. These constitute a lineage or temporal genealogy of surviving the future. Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry speaks from the place of an impossible subject, a subject of history whom history was anticipated to wipe out. This Pacific subject does not signify nothing⁵⁶ but instead articulates an irrevocable *something* – or more specifically, a *sometime* that rewrites the teleological thrust of apocalypse and even of futurity within notions of sequential time.

⁵⁵ See Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. Adorno writes similarly: “What transcends the ruling society is not only the potentiality it develops but also all that which did not fit properly into the laws of historical movement. Theory must needs deal with cross-gained, opaque, unassimilated material, which as such admittedly has from the start an anachronistic quality, but is not only obsolete since it has outwitted the historical dynamic.” Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), 151. Arif Dirlik similarly writes of the relationship of the present with its suppressed pasts: “the past not merely as a route to the present, but as a source of alternative historical trajectories that had to be suppressed so that the present could become a possibility.” Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1997), 3.

⁵⁶ In *On the Postcolony*, Mbembe argues that Africa has signified “being nothing (nothingness)” within Western philosophy. Mbembe, *Postcolony*, 4.

IV. Two Degrees, Two Futures

Iep Jaltok's penultimate poem, "Two Degrees," begins with a scene of domestic distress and personal sentiment: "The other night my 1-year-old was a fever / pressed against my chest." In the autobiographical mode of motherly worry, Jetñil-Kijiner tells us that "LiPeinam" "drapes across my lap, listless."⁵⁷ LiPeinam first appears though, a few poems earlier, in "Dear Matafele Peinam." This earlier poem narrates a moment in which kin, national leaders, and transnational activists are all "going to fight" for action against climate change. In a ringing protest against the inequalities of risk and wealth perpetuated by those "hidden behind platinum titles / who like to pretend / that we don't exist," Jetñil-Kijiner envisions a multiscalar, transnational coalition who are "marching for you, baby / they're marching for us." This poem ends on a line of transformative resolution: "because we won't let you down / you'll see" (*IJ* 71-73). "Dear Matafele Peinam" is a call to action in the present, whose epistolary mode sets its horizon of national and international action as retroactive promise, one whose fulfillment is implied by its address to the adult Matafele Peinam as future reader. By contrast, "Two Degrees" is far more ambivalent and works to register the potential "loss and damage"⁵⁸ outside either state narratives of agency like Kiribati's MWD or the horizon of efficacious action in "Dear Matafele Peinam."

The two degrees of "Two Degrees" turns out to be a multiscalar yolk of the domestic

⁵⁷ Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, *Iep Jaltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter* (Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2017), 76. Subsequently cited in the text as *IJ*.

⁵⁸ As Elisa Calliari note of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage due to climate change, there remains a "lack of a common understanding of L&D [loss and damage] by developed and developing countries" where developing countries see loss and damage as that for which adaptation, in place or through relocation, is inadequate. This perspective names the inadequately of legal compensations. See Elisa Calliari, "Loss and Damage: A Critical Discourse Analysis," *Journal of Risk Research* 21 no. 6 (2018): 725-747, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2016.1240706>.

and the global, the intimate and the international. Two degrees marks the inadequacy of expert knowledge and becomes a terrain of epistemological contest. First marking the minimum medical definition of fever: “technically / 100.4 / is a fever / but I can see her flushed face,” this resistance to scientific dismissal is echoed later when the speaker as activist, rather than mother, insists:

At a climate change conference
a colleague tells me 2 degrees
is just a benchmark for negotiations
I tell him for my islands 2 degrees
is a gamble
at 2 degrees my islands
will already be underwater
this is why our leaders push
for 1.5.

Seems small
like 0.5 degrees
shouldn't matter
like 0.5 degrees
are just crumbs like the Marshall Islands (*IJ* 76, 77 bolding original)

At this point in the poem, 0.5 degrees cannot merely signify a diplomatic, statistical, or scientific quibble; at this point in the poem, 0.5 degrees signifies also the looming loss of the Marshall Islands through the affective purchase of LiPeinam's “not quite” fever and her mother's worry, personalizing and individualizing the effects of seemingly abstract numbers. The tacit neutrality and benign distance of “a benchmark for negotiations” collapses, as personal and national losses are conflated to disrupt the international consensus of “negotiations” where action never comes fast enough. In this way, Jetñil-Kijiner's poems augment national plans for cultural continuity by dramatizing the personal and individual losses of sea level rise.

After this sequence the poem returns us to LiPeinam, for whom a degree has inaugurated a sea change: “Today LiPeinam is feeling better / she bobs around our backyard” (*IJ* 77). While

it might be stretching the poem's comparison too far to say that LiPeinam's shift from ill to well, from listlessness to life, acts as a analogy for the difference two degrees will make for the life of the Marshall Islands, her recovery at least concretizes the costs of inaction. The poem takes special pains to personalize LiPeinam and her home through visual and sonic detail: "stomping squeaky yellow / light up shoes across / the edge of the reef" and again in the poem's closing refrain: "stomping squeaky / yellow light up shoes / across the edge of a reef // not yet / under water" (*IJ* 79).⁵⁹ LiPeinam thus works to humanize by individualizing the toll of climate change, and as a child, to underscore the non-culpability of those whose lives will be disrupted by sea level rise. Such details, the poem posits, will make it

So that people
Remember
that beyond
the discussions
numbers
and statistics
there are faces
all the way out here. (*IJ* 78-79)

The faces of individual subjects metonymized in LiPeinam's yellow shoes are not faces of Levinasian Others who must be recognized through the ethical dimensions of difference, but faces with which readers might identify, faces framed within idioms of filial love and childhood innocence proffered as universally recognizable categories. The poem's end, though, also suspends LiPeinam between possible futures.

Like the parallel, competing, nonsynchronous futures of Tuvalu's *Te Kaniva* and Kiribati's "Migration with Dignity," the poem ends indeterminately. While Elizabeth

⁵⁹ The limits of personalizing loss and devastation have been discussed in the context of human rights violations and distant suffering more generally. See for example Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media, and Politics*, trans. Graham Burchell (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1999) and Liam O'Loughlin, "Negotiating Solidarity."

DeLoughrey has noted that poetic stasis might signal an immersion into violent history, Jetnil-Kijijner's temporal pause here is more akin to the potentiality before closure, where multiple futures are possible because none have yet been chosen.⁶⁰ Through its figural child as symbol of the future, the poem simultaneously posits two antithetical ends: the irrevocable loss of vibrant personhood grounded in community that shadows international inaction, and an already-realized future beyond such loss.⁶¹

By holding these contradictory stances in tandem, I suggest that Jetnil-Kijiner envisions alternative futures by repurposing an unlikely aspect of the Pacific past: a genre I am calling the Pacific extinction narrative. Indexing the fate of the Pacific in Western imaginaries, the content of these narratives has shifted historically; formally though, all posit the non-viability and non-futurity of the Pacific. Encompassing the decimation of Pacific populations due to European disease, the expendability of Pacific peoples for post-WWII nuclear interests, and the kind of economic nonsolvency Epeli Hau'ofa wrote against, I argue that climate refugeeism can be seen as the latest version of this literary and political genre.

V. Extinction Narratives

In the context of US settler colonialism, Jessica Hurley has noted "the ongoing power of a white-defined realism to distinguish possible from impossible actions." Discussing the state of exception within which indigenous tribes exist in the American juridical and political landscape, Mark Rifkin has argued similarly that the US exercises "an exclusive uncontestable right to

⁶⁰ Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Heavy Waters: Waste and Atlantic Modernity," *PMLA*. 125 no. 3 (May 2010): 703-712, <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2010.125.3.703>.

⁶¹ I am drawing on the ubiquitous symbolic association of children with futurity. See for example Edelman, *No Future*, ch. 1.

define what will count as a viable legal or political form(ul)ation.”⁶² In other words, certain aspects of indigenous life under settler colonialism fall under the purview of what colonizing powers define as the (im)possible; in the Pacific, Euro-American travellers and settlers alike have deemed the entirety of indigenous life impossible for decades. Pacific scholars have tracked many versions of this “impossibility.” Some of these discourses invoke the actual physical destruction of islands and the biological death of islanders; even when they do not, they share in common an assumption of, and thus work to construct the Pacific as, a place and a people with “no future.”

The theory of “fatal impact” was an early version of the extinction narrative, based in the actual decimation of islander populations due to the introduction of European diseases.⁶³ In *Pacific Islands Writing*, Michelle Keown describes the prevalence of “fatal impact narratives” in 19th century fin-de-siècle writing about the Pacific. As islanders died of European diseases against which they had no immunity, “A belief that Pacific cultures were dying out as a result of contact with Europeans gained widespread currency [...] reinforced by the application of Darwin’s theory of natural selection to Indigenous societies.”⁶⁴ Writers like Robert Louis Stevenson and Jack London perpetuated such theories and incorporated them into their fiction.⁶⁵ While Pacific populations recovered later in the twentieth century, this narrative retained currency for decades.

⁶² Jessica Hurley, “Impossible Futures: Fictions of Risk in the *Longue Durée*,” *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History* 89 no. 4 (2017): 778, <https://doi-org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1215/00029831-4257847>; Mark Rifkin, “Indigenizing Agamben: rethinking sovereignty in light of the ‘peculiar’ status of native peoples” *Cultural Critique* no. 73 (2009): 91, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25619838>.

⁶³ The devastation European diseases wrought on indigenous populations without immunity to them was part of colonial encounters the world over, and not confined to the Pacific.

⁶⁴ Michelle Kweon, *Pacific Island Writings: The Postcolonial Literatures of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Oceania* (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2007), 40. See also Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: colonial discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1997).

Later discourses of Pacific “futurelessness” focused on the aftermath of Pacific independence movements and targeted Pacific political and economic viability.⁶⁶ Greg Fry, writing of Australian representations of the Pacific in the 1990s, notes that the Pacific was regarded as facing “an approaching ‘doomsday’ or ‘nightmare’ unless Pacific Islanders remake themselves.”⁶⁷ These frames asserted a Malthusian future where “the Pacific Island countries are on a path to a future nightmare of overcrowding, poverty, mass unemployment, serious environmental degradation, and decline in health standards. The only hope to avoid this future, it is contended, is to open the island economies to the global market.”⁶⁸ Around the same time and against this same narrative, Epeli Hau’ofa wrote his seminal essay “Our sea of islands.”

And finally, European and American nuclear militarism during the Cold War and after required the Pacific “Basin” to be represented as an empty space.⁶⁹ As numerous scholars have pointed out, the Pacific was chosen for nuclear testing in part because small island populations could be “relocated” with relative ease and were regarded as “exotic, malleable and, most of all,

⁶⁵ See Kweon, *Pacific Island Writings*, ch. 2. These writers also critiqued various aspects of European exploitation of indigenous populations, but this does not diminish their contribution to fatal impact narratives.

⁶⁶ Heather Lazrus has interpreted the Tuvaluan pursuit of independence with only a second-hand cargo ship from the British as testament to British skepticism over its separation from the Gilbert Islands (Kiribati) and Tuvalu’s ethos of “perseverance in the face of opposition.” See Heather Lazrus, “Shifting Tides: Climate Change, Migration, and Agency in Tuvalu” in *Anthropology and Climate Change: From Actions to Transformations*, 2nd ed., eds. Susan A. Crate and Mark Nuttall (New York: Routledge, 2016): 225. See also W. David McIntyre, *Winding Up the British Empire in the Pacific Islands* (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP 2014) and Barrie MacDonald, “The Separation of Gilbert and Ellice Islands,” *The Journal of Pacific History* 10 no. 4 (1975): 84-88, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25168235>.

⁶⁷ Greg Fry, “Framing the Islands: Knowledge and Power in Changing Australian Images of the ‘South Pacific,’” in *Voyaging through the Contemporary Pacific*, eds. David Hanlon and Geoffrey M. White (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000): 25

⁶⁸ Fry, “Framing the Islands,” 26.

⁶⁹ France conducted nuclear tests in French Polynesia until 1996. The empty Basin stands in contrast to the active Asian “Rim” states. See Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu, U of Hawai’i P, 2007), ch. 2.

dispensable.”⁷⁰ Bikini Island, where the first of 67 US nuclear tests took place from 1946 to 1958, was chosen largely because of its remoteness from commuter or commercial air and sea routes, such that geopolitical and demographic priorities rendered islanders’ lives “ungriveable”⁷¹ and the atolls into a space of inconsequential violence.⁷² The latter sentiment was perhaps most famously demonstrated in Henry Kissinger’s dismissal of the Pacific: “There are only 90,000 people out there. Who gives a damn?”⁷³ Nuclear history epitomizes, though it does not have monopoly over, narratives in which non-Pacific futures are counterpoised against the excision of the Pacific from a shared future. Rather than a record of the violence of historic encounter between Pacific peoples and Western neoliberalisms or militarisms, extinction narratives were supposed to proclaim and herald the end of Pacific futures.

VI. Futures Past: Surviving Apocalypse

Iep Jaltok by contrast, re-embeds extinction narratives within the historical time of Pacific modernity. Through the collection Jetñil-Kijiner weaves extinction narratives, especially nuclear militarism, into a revisionist history of the Marshall Islands where the very bodies now

⁷⁰ Teresia K. Teaiwa, “bikinis and other s/pacific n/oceans,” in *Voyaging Through the Contemporary Pacific*, eds. David Hanlon and Geoffrey M. White (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 97.

⁷¹ Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

⁷² See Barbara Rose Johnston, “Nuclear Disaster: The Marshall Islands Experience and Lessons for a Post-Fukushima World” in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches*, eds. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan (New York: Routledge, 2015): 140-161. Logics of emptiness and unaccountability were themselves countered by the problem of resettling Bikini islanders, who had to be moved three times and supported with airlifted food. Further, the Marshall Islands had been turned into a UN Strategic Trust Territory in 1947, for which the US was responsible. Under the trusteeship agreement the US was supposed to promote islanders self-sufficiency and protect them from loss of land and resources. See Barbara Rose Johnston, “Nuclear Disaster” and Jack Niedenthal, “A History of the People of Bikini Following Nuclear Weapons Testing in the Marshall Islands: With Recollections and Views of Elders of Bikini Atoll,” *Health Physics* 73 no. 1 (July 1997): 28-36.

⁷³ Quoted in Teresia K. Teaiwa. “bikinis and other s/pacific n/oceans,” 105.

threatened by sea level rise become also the traveling repositories of a history that is not even past, much less prematurely ended. Beginning with Marshallese founding myths that include the invention of the sail and the birth of Marshallese seafaring, the collection then moves on to chart modern Marshallese history. Weaving the historic with the autobiographical, the second section, “History Project,” spans postwar Marshallese modernity, chronicling material deprivation and starvation after World War II and the onset of international aid, before unraveling the history of Pacific nuclear testing. The section’s eponymous poem “History Project” opens as an exercise in self-education and political consciousness-raising as the speaker, an unnamed Marshallese girl growing up in Hawai’i and loosely based on Jetñil-Kijiner, declares: “time to learn my own history” (*IJ* 20).

This poem highlights the horrific physical consequences of nuclear fallout on Marshallese bodies: “I glance at a photograph / of a boy, peeled skin”; “I read firsthand accounts / of what we call / jelly babies” (*IJ* 20). The poem is more than historical exposure and complaint though, as it is bookended by two poems about nuclear fallout that bring bombing out of its historical moment, extending the temporal, formal, and spatial edges of “History Project” into the somatic immediacy of on-going radiation. Nuclear radiation is refigured within a painful Pacific present rather than part of an extinction narrative.

These surrounding poems bring the physical consequences of fallout into the present and formally beyond a single poem’s containment; indeed, through formal and spatial extension, the point of this “project” seems to be the *longue duree* of violent history. Given the extensive half-lives of nuclear isotopes and thus the multigenerational effects of radiation, it is not surprising that Jetñil-Kijiner represents this extensive temporal horizon by extending the consequences of the bomb across the boundedness of a single poem.

The ancillary extensions of “History Project,” “The Letter B is For” and “Fishbone Hair” cast the consequences of a nuclear past as very much among the living, as somatic residue in the now of the speaker’s (and reader’s) present. While attention to the secondary effects of radiation after the initial spectacle of a bomb’s explosion is not itself unusual, within the context of Pacific extinction narratives, nuclear radiation’s aftermath works as a perverse confirmation of the failure of extinction, evidenced in the slow death of bodies generations removed from the initial tests and spatially remote from the islands. Somatic decay, repeated from “jelly babies” to the speaker’s cousin Bianca, is then proof of uncontained and ongoing history, rather than its ending.

“The Letter B is For” begins ironically with a dictionary entry that quickly proves unable to contain the meanings of the very word it sets out to define:

baam (baham). From Engl. 2(inf, tr
 -e) 3,4,6(-i). Bomb. As in
 Kobaam ke?
 Are you contaminated
 With radioactive fallout? (*IJ* 19)

The bomb’s redefinition as somatic effect rather than temporal marker diffuses threat to at an anonymous “you” that could be anyone, and the poem’s typographically staggered setting, in which the consequences of the bomb slide (or fall) away from the containment of initial definition, grafts an unruly somatic excess onto the semantic and temporal containment of the bomb’s fatal relation to Pacific bodies. The concluding poem in this sequence, “Fishbone hair,” answers the diffused possibility of fallout with the particularity of its effects on an individual, the speaker’s niece Bianca. “There had been a war / raging inside Bianca’s six year old bones,” and her fallen hair becomes the emblem of radioactive fallout in the present (25).

But this poem also gestures to the collection’s later concerns with climate change, obliquely linking the former impossible future of nuclear radiation with the current impossible

future of sea level rise. In “Fishbone Hair” the somatic effects of nuclear testing and Pacific expendability manifest as “*rootless* hair / that hair without a home” (24, emphasis mine). This loss moves from the somatic to the social in the later poem “Dear Matafele Peinam,” where islanders are once again framed as expendable, the victims now not of Western nuclear colonialism but an unchecked and largely external carbon economy:

They say you, your daughter
And your granddaughter too,
Will wander
Rootless
With only
A passport
To call home. (*IJ* 70, emphasis mine)

Here, rootlessness is not a symptom of nuclear militarism in the Pacific but a product of sea level rise brought on by fossil fuel accumulation and anthropogenic climate change. Mutual references like these work to link past and present injustices, expanding the temporal and spatial horizons of Pacific injury but in doing so also underscoring islander continuity and resilience in the face of these violent accretions. In these poems, rather than the linearity of extinction, past harms and present endurance produce each other through perverse overlaps that destabilize the certainty of a catastrophic future.⁷⁴ While Tuvaluan leaders insist on preserving statehood and land together in order to resist ontological rupture and Kiribati touts migration as a lineage that resists the determinism of a refugee future, *Iep Jaltok* invokes the Pacific’s long history of extinction narratives to thicken and augment these political moves. Its somatic and textual layering of violent history underscores the continuity of Pacific peoples in the face of forms of

⁷⁴ In *Foregone Conclusions*, Bernstein warns against the dangers of historical determinism or foreshadowing, as well as “backshadowing,” its corollary wherein the past is reconstructed from present circumstances, eliding the contingency of both present and past. See Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994).

destruction that have seemed as inevitable as climate refugeeism does today.

In this way, Pacific extinction narratives can be considered not only as (neo)colonial ideology, but as perverse precedent. In being made historical, in offering a lineage of futures that were never supposed to come to pass, Pacific extinction narratives conversely testify not only to something like the realpolitik resilience of islanders in the face of a largely, though not completely deleterious history of encounter with Euro-America. More radically, they suggest the impossibility of an impossible future; apocalypse as precedent overturns the very world-ending convention of the genre. By turning extinction into past precedent, world-ending becomes itself a kind of Pacific worlding, and *Iep Jaltok* aspires toward an unknown future that is otherwise and otherwhen from the end.

VII. Against Ordinary Futures

In the first section of this chapter, I have argued that low-lying Pacific states like Tuvalu and Kiribati are rethinking political futurity in the face of sea level rise by seeking to promote futures for their citizens that are not qualitatively different from the past, that is, futures that might be considered ordinary. I have also suggested that *Iep Jaltok* shares this goal by working to imaginatively resituate a seemingly impossible future within older narratives of survival. However, it also seems patently clear that such ordinary futures are limited, and that the national plans in particular will neither wholly nor even largely satisfy the normative criteria they pursue.

In remaining wedded to a territory-based definition of statehood, Tuvalu eschews other forms of climate adaptation and citizen continuity; at its worst such commitment comes close to

producing an effect like climate change denial.⁷⁵ Kiribati's promotion of diasporic national communities leans too much on citizens' abilities to support each other without a state that can guarantee or back up the forms of material and existential support it is now devolving onto these planned communities. Its creation of labor migrants may also hew to the exploitive ideologies of neoliberalism, and within existing frameworks of state-based rights that, in the case of climate migration, are not even supplemented by existing discourses of refugeeism, state withdrawal approaches blatant political neglect. But Kiribati's attempt to protect citizens beyond its exclusive national territory is perhaps most obviously problematic because it contravenes the limits of Westphalian territory-based statehood and thus, the boundaries of state protective agency.

The second part of this chapter thus considers how commitments to ordinariness can work to foreclose futurity rather than enable it. And from this premise I consider versions of extra-ordinary futurity that critique or attempt to move beyond the limitations built in to ordinary futures. In particular I return to Kiribati's MWD plan to examine the dissolved state that is the implied corollary of its dispersed national community. I consider how, against normative definitions of territory-based statehood, the inconsequence of aspirations to state protection beyond territory might work as a form of disruptive critique. I also consider how MWD's proposal for a dissolved state can be framed within utopic and dystopic traditions of "thinking beyond thought."

⁷⁵ Indeed, anthropologists have interviewed residents, especially religious ones, who do not believe sea level rise is occurring in the Pacific. These residents cite the Biblical story of Noah's flood to argue against sea level rise. See Carol Farbotko, "Tuvalu and Climate Change: Constructions of Environmental Displacement in the *Sydney Morning Herald*," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 87 (2005): 279-293, doi:10.1111/j.0435-3684.2005.00199.x and Mortreux and Barnett, "Climate change, migration and adaptation in Funafuti, Tuvalu."

Finally, I consider Keri Hulme's *Stonefish*, which formally and thematically takes up the limitations that attend ordinary futures. Rather than the inadequacies of statehood however, *Stonefish* elucidates how assumptions of climate stability produce atrophied forms of consciousness, posing climate denialism not as an outright rejection of scientific evidence but as the result of epistemological premises that have become incongruent with a present of anthropogenically altered climate. In response, *Stonefish* suggests the need for relinquishing commitments to the ordinary, and in particular works to produce an enlightened reader who might be capable of such a cognitive reorientation.

Ordinary futures can thus be seen as both aspirations and impediments in the Pacific. Rather than bemoaning such contradictory futures however, they are better seen as symptomatic of the epistemological and material indeterminacy of living with sea level rise. They work as testimony to and heuristic for the overlapping, multitudinous and incommensurate processes of political poesis at work in the Pacific. These processes encompass both near and far temporal moments, which necessarily cathect to themselves different commitments, goals, and values. If extra-ordinary futures might follow from a relinquishment of the ordinary, the pervasiveness of attachments to the latter signals the force of immediate harm, and contests the epistemological or cognitive concerns of more distance futures. Both nonetheless underscore the theoretical problem of closure signaled by refugeeism and indeed discredit the binary of "leaving or staying" that such a singular future suggests. Leaving or going is only one way of thinking about the form of the future. Below I suggest others, drawn from both latent and explicit versions of extra-ordinary futurity.

VIII. The Uses of Inconsequence

Along with national territory over which they have exclusive jurisdiction, states are classically defined in international law by an effective government, a permanent population over which that government has sole jurisdiction, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states.⁷⁶ Warrants or assumptions of non-interference make possible the idea of territories and populations over which states have exclusive control; it is this dual foundation of bounded exclusivity/non-interference that is brought into question by the possibilities of lost territories and mobile populations that sea level rise has brought to the fore.⁷⁷

Kiribati's MWD violates these conventions on many levels; overall though, by implying its own dissolution under the current Westphalian rubric, MWD interrupts status quo statehood with an impossible, inconsequential version. If such a plan seems like failed agency from a normative viewpoint, it can also be seen as a stringent condemnation of present conditions. In reading Kiribati's aspirations to supranational protection this way, I follow Leela Gandhi's idea of the politics of inconsequence. Inconsequence, she argues, can serve as a critique of existing circumstances because it "appears as strictly ungenerative and as a type of symbolic celibacy."⁷⁸ As such it amounts to a "refusal to participate in any perpetuation of the status quo."⁷⁹ Inconsequence in this mode appears as such precisely because it fails to conform to normative criteria of causality, consequence, or logic; while this failure to conform is what makes such

⁷⁶ See Article I of the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, Dec. 26, 1933, 165 L.N.T.S. 25, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%20165/v165.pdf>. These rules are also not always followed; military and humanitarian intervention contravene nonintervention and some state-like entities, like The Order of Malta, operate without territory.

⁷⁷ Legal scholars like Maxine Burkett and Jane McAdam have argued that climate change poses a challenge to the very foundations of international law. See Burkett "The Nation Ex-Situ" and McAdam, "Disappearing States" in *Climate Change and Displacement*.

⁷⁸ Gandhi, *The Common Cause*, 127.

⁷⁹ Gandhi, *The Common Cause*, 127.

action appear inconsequential, that very departure from a given realm of consequence is also a way of calling the given into question as violent or unjust; withdrawal from such a status quo is the lesser crime.

Kiribati's dissolved state takes on a new meaning within this rubric. Rather than an outlandish form of political organization, the in consequence of a dissolved state calls into question the sacrificial logic of the Westphalian status quo. More specifically, it dramatizes the erosion of citizen protection, otherwise fundamental to the *raison d'être* of modern states, which follows from international requirements for statehood in a context of anthropogenic climate change. For Westphalian definitions continue to monopolize the effective parameters of protective statehood but do not provide alternatives for re-producing protection when those parameters are threatened. In consequence maps the injustice of this existing system and the limitations of Pacific commitments to conserving and participating in its international order.

In consequence is, in short, one way to critique an unjust status quo. Another can be found in the temporal dimensions of Kiribati's planned future, which bear surprising parallels to critical techniques in recent science fiction. In "The Invention of Eco-Futures," Ursula Heise notes that recent science fiction stories often represent a "near future" to "highlight some kind of loss" in contrast to the classical understanding of science fiction where representations of a distant future historicize the present.⁸⁰ These dystopian near-futures extrapolate from "current configurations" to invite considerations of "the present as the matrix of the past from which dystopia sprang."⁸¹ From this critical perspective, Kiribati's dissolved state can be considered a dystopian future that reflects back upon a present matrix of anthropogenic sea level rise, Westphalian statehood, and the limits the latter places on citizen protections. Or, in reverse, the dystopian dissolved state is

⁸⁰ Heise, "Eco-Futures," 4. For the latter see Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*.

⁸¹ Heise "Eco-Futures," 5.

projected forward from this matrix of present political inadequacy.

MWD can also, simultaneously, provide a utopic narrative because it is “the unthinkable” within the present system. Tom Moylan has argued that such epistemological stretching is the purpose of utopia, and MWD’s violation of status quo statehood then opens a space for thinking new configurations of political organization and protection.⁸² Whether a dissolved state like the one Kiribati proposes would ever come into practice is less significant than the cognitive process of thinking beyond present state forms that the dissolved state invites.

Nonetheless, Kiribati’s planned future most obviously registers the loss of state abilities to protect citizens within the Westphalian status quo. Such losses, like those in recent science fiction, are “not potential future losses but changes that have already occurred and cannot easily be reversed.”⁸³ Though Kiribati’s planned future is certainly not literary fiction, insofar as it offers a representation of the future that comments critically upon the present, it can be seen to mobilize temporally-grounded critiques analogous to the kind enacted in certain science fictions. That real politics and science fiction now share a boundary of critique suggests just how inadequate existing forms of political redress, both national and international, have become in the face of anthropogenic climate change and sea level rise in particular. Kiribati’s imagined state thus highlights the sacrificial or dystopian logic of the Westphalian system of states, which cannot accommodate the priority of safeguarding Kiribati’s national citizens.

The dark side of extra-territorial national protection is of course not to be overlooked; it can be seen in the recourses to “national security” in the international “war on terror” perpetuated by the United States, or the intensified policing of refugees in the European Union and its border areas. In the Pacific context however, such aspirations to national protection work

⁸² See Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, especially ch. 1

⁸³ Heise, “Eco-Futures,” 5.

more to highlight the injustices of an international system that consigns the populations of small states to a mode of “sacrifice for the greater good” of carbon producers or the function of “canaries in the coalmine” for a global future that can only count the Pacific as already-lost.⁸⁴

Such challenges to ordinary statehood are only implicit however, and produced from contrapuntal reading.⁸⁵ Kiribati has not directly embraced non-Westphalian statehood to disrupt an international conservatism that is already attempting to exorcise it; its dissolved state is the implicit shadow of its explicit migratory plan, and it is not a model presented as generalizable for other islands. Nor do other Pacific states critique existing statehood and international climate (in)action by presenting the idea of a dispersed or depeopled Pacific. These latter specters are, as we have seen, undesirable possibilities to be preempted through commitments to ordinariness. Keri Hulme’s dizzying mixed-genre short story collection *Stonefish*, in contrast, explicitly takes on the epistemological challenge that *Iep Jaltok* and Pacific states, even Kiribati, are at pains to avoid: that sea level rise might indeed lead to Pacific futurelessness.

Stonefish raises the problem of futurelessness, however, in order to envision extraordinary approaches to the future. For the collection suggests that a commitment to ordinariness limits one’s awareness of environmental change and therefore the ability to act appropriately; such failures of consciousness and action can only lead to dead ends. In response it suggests these commitments can be replaced with an awareness of anthropogenic change as already-arrived and goes on to suggest a new ethos for living within it.

Stonefish opens in a futuristic world shaped by floods and ends in a world not noticeably different from our own. Its first story, “Floating Words,” is a meditation on proper perceptions of

⁸⁴ The injustice of historic carbon emissions, which threaten those who have produced the least, is also a point emphasized by AOSIS states. Such moral claims are taken into account by principles of “common but differentiated responsibility” established in the Kyoto Protocol.

⁸⁵ See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.

and action in response to, drastic environmental change. It provides an example of living well with such change by relinquishing the prevailing ethos of “man on top” that supports human consumption and domination vis-à-vis other humans, species and resources.⁸⁶ The exhausted world and diffused but inexplicable violence of its last story, “Midden Mine,” can by contrast be seen as *Stonefish*’s warning about the consequences of climate inaction.

I read *Stonefish*’s opening and closing stories within Forrest Ingram’s influential definition of the short story cycle: “a book of short stories so linked to each other by their author that the reader’s successive experience on various levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts.”⁸⁷ I argue that these two stories must be read as linked referents within the collection as a whole. In particular, they can be seen as doubles of each other, both proposing the need for climate action in the present. “Midden Mine,” more specifically offers a failed doubling of the successful climate adaptation staged in “Floating Words” and, by coming at the end of the collection, produces retrospectively an epistemological gap between the collection’s readers and its own narrator. In doing so *Stonefish* positions readers outside ordinary futures to beg the question that is the disavowed horizon of Pacific politics: how to live after the flood.

⁸⁶ Keri Hulme, *Stonefish* (Wellington, N.Z.: Huia Publishers, 2004), 32. Subsequently cited in the text as *SF*. Hulme’s gender dynamics should also be noted here; those characters most amenable to adaptability and nondominance in her stories are women or recognizable female, while men, especially in “The Pluperfect Pā-Wā” embody practices of human species isolation and destruction.

⁸⁷ Forrest L. Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century: Studies in a Literary Genre* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 19. See also Suzanne Ferguson, “Sequences, Anti-Sequences, Cycles, and Composite Novels: The Short Story in Genre Criticism,” *Journal of the Short Story in English* 41 (2003): 1-11, <http://jsse.revues.org/312>.

IX. *Stonefish*'s Alter-Ordinary

Keri Hulme is perhaps best known for her 1985 Booker prize-winning *The Bone People*, a novel that put New Zealand literature on the global literary map and cemented Hulme's place as one of New Zealand's most important contemporary writers.⁸⁸ *Stonefish*, a collection of poetry and short stories released some two decades later, has by contrast garnered remarkably little critical attention. Elizabeth DeLoughrey has produced one of the few scholarly engagements with the collection. In "Ordinary Futures," she argues persuasively that "Hulme depicts creeping sea level rise in terms that emphasize mutation and adaptation rather than the spectacular tone of apocalypse" and thus posits "the sea, climate change, mutation, and the submarine as profoundly ordinary."⁸⁹

For DeLoughrey, this "ethics of environmental adaptability" is most apparent in "Floating Words," which in part plumbs the task of the writer in the face of climatic change.⁹⁰ Drawing on this first story's fluid movements between narrative present and past, DeLoughrey reads the story's temporal mutability as symptomatic and analytic of 'how to live after the flood.' Its ethos of mutation and adaptation is made explicit in the text as well: "We knew – the television told us, the radio mentioned it often – that the oceans would rise, the greenhouse effect would change the weather, and there could be rumblings and distortion along the crustal plates as Gaia adjusted to a different pressure of water. *And we understood it to be one more ordinary change in the everlasting cycle of life*" (SF 18).

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Caffin, "Aotearoa/New Zealand," in *The Novel in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the South Pacific since 1950*, eds. Coral Anne Howells, Paul Sharrad, and Gerry Turcotte (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2017): 46-60.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Ordinary Futures: Interspecies Worlding in the Anthropocene" in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches*, eds. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan (New York: Routledge, 2015): 357.

⁹⁰ DeLoughrey, "Ordinary Futures," 353.

Such conceptions of cyclical rather than cataclysmic change echo Maori conceptions of time, where the past is in front and the future behind.⁹¹ Such temporal understandings do not work to diffuse the threat of futurelessness as this chapter's previous texts have, because change is not perceived as a threat of loss. Instead it can be incorporated within indigenous epistemologies of continuous flux and kinship with the nonhuman.⁹² *Stonefish's* invocations of adaptation, mutation, and interspecies intimacy offer epistemological and ethical models for living large within environmental change rather than seeking to minimize or resist its threat; invocations of immense geological scale (Gaia) within a conception of the ordinary approaches what Elizabeth Povinelli has called geontology, "a mutually constitutive biography/geology" that "incorporate[s] the subject into planetary networks of kinship."⁹³

DeLoughrey's reading of *Stonefish's* alter-ordinary offers a powerful counter to the kinds of limitations I have found in Pacific commitments to ordinary futures defined by Western standards of linear time, territorial states, and national citizens. *Stonefish* also, however, critiques these limitations through the formal relationships between its stories. Proposing an alternative ethos is one challenge; modeling how or why one might give up dominant, non-indigenous forms of ordinariness grounded in destructive consumption is a different, and equally difficult, project. It is one that I argue *Stonefish* takes up by producing the decaying present of "Midden Mine" as a mirror of our own, and as the failed double of "Floating Words'" mutable future. Together these

⁹¹ DeLoughrey, "Ordinary Futures," 359.

⁹² DeLoughrey references here Dipesh Chakrabarty's famous challenge to the representability of human species-being in the Anthropocene, as well as the turn to porous and more than human bodies prevalent in new materialism. See DeLoughrey, "Ordinary Futures" 354 and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "The Cyclical Temporality of Patricia Grace's 'Potiki,'" *ARIEL* 30 no. 1 (1999): 59-83, Literature Resource Center.

⁹³ Cited in DeLoughrey, "Ordinary Futures," 354. See Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2016).

linked stories offer a timely critique of the vicissitudes of our present as readers in and of the Anthropocene.

X. Signs of the Times: “Floating Words” and “Midden Mine”

“Floating Words” begins with its speaker balanced between land and water, and between past and present: “*Thinking back* (I *am* balanced on the end bollard, the slip-rope in my hand) there were omens all along” (SF 5, emphasis mine). In the story’s concluding paragraphs we find this state of suspension is spatial as well as temporal, for the speaker has been about to “drift away” from her home on a makeshift raft bound for open water. But between these moments of imminent departure the speaker thinks back to an earlier moment of asking: “Change, change, change. Where is solidity? Where is the rock?” (SF 6) An earlier moment, that is, in which she hadn’t yet learned to embrace the new normal of a changed climatic world.

This unnamed narrator eventually accepts that “nothing is static, settled, or permanent any more,” a conclusion about her world’s mutating nature that is also a commentary on the place and role of writers: “Storytellers never stay in one place for long” (SF 16, 17). I suggest though that this narrator-writer is not only an imminent wanderer; she has indeed read “the tide in microcosm” and “recognize[s] a sign when [she] is given one so clearly” before deciding to leave home, but it becomes clear that if she advocates an embrace of fluidity she is also a guide for those who still cling to the “rock” of what counted as sober action in an old world of stable climate (SF 17).

We are never told exactly what she writes, but this narrator has sent missives into the ether. Her repository of books – or signs - is left as a “FREE LIBRARY” available to “any reader,” and she dubs the barge she leaves on the “*Pirate Epistle*” (SF 15, 17, 19). Before this,

we find that the narrator has participated in an economy of words, sending chapters from “*The Neverending Novel*” off in a weekly mail blimp: “well-established and dependable. I never did find out who started it, how credit was established, but it worked” (SF 17, 8). In exchange for words she requests and receives foodstuffs; if such an exchange of individual interiority for material provision seems an allegory of modern governance, this traveling blimp also aligns her weekly missives with the floating bubble cities and mobile populations that have come to populate “Floating Words” future world.

This story suggests an environmental ethos that flouts regulation, denounces country and boundary, and pursues a radical freedom; but it is also structured by the formal relationality of epistolary exchange. The missives she leaves span not only an openness toward change, interspecies others, and the relinquishment of human domination. Such an ethos is equally premised upon correctly interpreting signs, realizing that such signs may require novel forms of action, and facilitating those realizations for others. It imagines, in other words, not only what a value system for living with a changed climate might include, but a model for how disseminating such values might work.

Stonefish is also, however, concerned with addressing the costs of failing to change, that is, the risks of not giving up the old system of values that preceded and produced the altered climate of its futuristic opening. These concerns are funneled through the relationship between “Floating Words” and “Midden Mine,” and the critique of the last story is only clarified by reading it against the first. “Midden Mine”’s premise is an archaeological dig between a team of international academics, Dave, Bea, and Cam, who search for remnants of past civilizations and attempt to ascribe to them meaning and measurability. That surface ordinariness belies a changed climate is only revealed piecemeal, through the story’s formal and thematic staging of its

characters' failure to read signs of environmental change as profound as the more obvious ones in "Floating Words."

Following the story's episodic narrative structure, all three protagonists are plagued by personal losses and deadly illness that are never fully explained. If this seems to resurrect narratives of "dying races" that have overdetermined the Pacific, Hulme turns such exhaustion to other purposes here, where fragmentation is both theme and heuristic. The dig reveals a layer of charcoal that testifies to past human disruptions ("Where did they get all the wood?" *SF* 192) and amidst these remnants of trees are human remains. It is unclear if the charcoal is from deforestation or from the practice of sacrificing human bodies. But in twinning past species violence and destructive environmental change, "Midden Mine" sketches for readers a scene apparently ripe for interpretation. We are primed to expect such when we are told early in the story that the narrator, Dave, "gets feelings about sites" (*SF* 193). But instead of fulfilling the injunction to "read the signs" of past violence, "Midden Mine"'s narrator comes up against an epistemological limit. He fails to understand the dynamic of human domination that produces violence toward others and environmental destruction alike, as well as the continuity of these patterns in his present.

This staging of failed knowledge is symptomatic of the kinds of cognitive limits that, over the course of the story, also produce climate denialism as ironic critique. The cognitive failures that make up denialism, though, are produced primarily from of the collection's linked narrative structure and are therefore apparent only to the reader. For example, while the narrator of "Floating Words" "[felt] there should have been intimations of what was going on, shadows and forebodings. To the contrary: my dreams were peaceful and curiously green/rustic/waterless," the narrator of "Midden Mine" does dream of floods: "From the north,

huge roiling tsunamic surf is surging towards me, and my horror almost wakes me – They Cannot Come From the North! This is a dream! And then there is overwhelming thunder and the waves SMASH –” (*SF* 8, 125).

If the narrator of “Floating Words” can read “the sign[s] of the times” and the need to adapt to a changed climate, the narrator of “Midden Mine” cannot. Indeed, even given ample signs of environmental change, he can only interpret them as the stuff of nightmares rather than as evidence of a changed reality: “awake, wet with fear-sweat, wondering why the waves were phosphorescent green –” (*SF* 215). Glowing waves in the time of the first story would fit into the narrator’s understanding of an altered climate; phosphorescent waves are doubled in “Floating Words”’ own strange find, a multi-colored mushroom “glowing with minute blue sine waves” (*SF* 17). But more mundane signs of change abound in “Midden Mine” as well: “it is gusty and chill, *most unusual* for December. Well, for the Decembers I remember from the decades past”; “Overcast, and the *disquieting* feeling that the skies are going to burst”; “We’ve had huge storm surges where a simple southerly *would have been ordinary*, would have been enough” (*SF* 189, 216, 217 emphasis mine). Here, epistemological commitments to the ordinary work to minimize the sense of “disquiet” the narrator admits but then refuses, diminishing also the possibility of a changed consciousness.

“Midden Mine” thus takes us to a world of the dead and dying, but not as part of Pacific extinction narratives. This exhausted world stages a parable of our present, where signs of a changing environment are disavowed or illegible. This is a world where erratic, intense, and unseasonable weather mirrors the very same kinds of climatic changes predicted to occur under anthropogenic climate change, and where unusual rain specifically invokes the drizzling

waterworld of the first story.⁹⁴ “Midden Mine”’s staging of climate denialism suggests that the futurelessness and exhaustion that dogs its characters is in fact our own condition; or rather, the condition of those who fail to act differently in the face of a changed environmental present. Futurelessness here is produced precisely out of a commitment to futures in which the climate is expected to adhere to old patterns. Such a present declines to account for anthropogenic climate change, and is thus cut off from a future now defined by such change.

These linked references in turn produce dissonances or epistemological gaps between “Midden Mine”’s narrator and the collection’s readers. For the reader of “Midden Mine” is also the reader of *Stonefish* as a whole, and the climatic knowledge gained from reading the preceding stories positions readers outside the present whose limit “Midden Mine” traces. From the perspective of enlightened readers then, ordinary futurity appears as false consciousness. So while “Midden Mine”’s narrator is the avatar of a conservative status quo, one characterized by climate denialism and inaction, “Midden Mine”’s readers are of a different epistemological and indeed temporal cast. In representing a dying present that subsequently places its readers in a future form of awareness, “Midden Mine” is a provocation beyond the limited and exhausted commitment to ordinary futures it stages.

Stonefish’s critique of the present is thus multiple and oblique. Read as mutually informing parts of a short story cycle, “Midden Mine” and “Floating Words” together produce an enlightened reader distanced from a present of climate denialism and inaction. Published as a

⁹⁴ See for example Johan Rockström et al., “Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity,” *Ecology and Society* 14 no. 2 (2009): article 32, <https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32/>; Steffen et. al. “The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives,” *Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* 369, no. 1938 (March 2011): 842-867, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41061703>; Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future* (New York: Columbia UP, 2014).

collection in 2004, after the declaration of the Anthropocene, *Stonefish*'s provocation can also be seen as responding to a future of anthropogenic climate change it was not yet clear the international community would be willing to confront.⁹⁵ While *Stonefish* does not suggest a new system of political organization, it does illustrate the costs of failing to act, and provides a model of values – nondomination, adaptability, and intimacy with nonhuman others – through which individuals might learn to relinquish ordinary futures and find new ways of living in and with environmental change.

XI. Conclusion: Near and Far Futures

Kiribati's plan for MWD and Hulme's *Stonefish* might both be considered utopic texts that propose extra-ordinary futures in order to disturb present limitations. Such work is in keeping with the idea that utopia represents the process of thinking beyond thought: "in the absence of a radical theoretical discourse yet to be developed, this figural anticipation of what could not yet be conceptualized is the driving impulse of the genre itself."⁹⁶ Driven by the "radical insufficiency of solutions at hand," utopian narratives offer "no systemic solution" but instead propose themselves as "activity which opens human imagination beyond the present limits."⁹⁷

As Moylan notes, utopia is "first and foremost a process," and as such "utopia can not be reduced to its *content*."⁹⁸ Whether or not the value system of *Stonefish*, or the dissolved statehood of Kiribati would, then, ever be practicably taken up is not the point; their formal

⁹⁵ It was also written before the disappointment of the Copenhagen Accord and the mixed results of the Paris Agreement.

⁹⁶ Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* 40.

⁹⁷ Ibid 40.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 39. Emphasis original.

experiments are instead meant to model epistemological processes for moving beyond what seem immovable limits of the thinkable or sensible.⁹⁹ The “symbolic resolution” of utopic representations then overturn the foreclosure of thought imposed by commitments to ordinary futures, whether in terms of international forecasts of impending refugeeism, the requirements of Westphalian statehood, or Pacific states’ own “useable pasts.”¹⁰⁰

And yet, the urgent political reality of sea level rise and its threat to “faces / all the way out here” make the total relinquishment of content as problematic as it is liberating. If no content or solution might be fully adequate, it seems equally inadequate to rely only on symbolic resolution to a problem that is as material as it is symbolic or epistemological. Not only does a utopic turn leave no recourse in the present for the inadequacies that generate utopic desire, more problematically, utopia, for all its seductive appeal in the face of a disappointing present, consigns that present to destruction in pursuit of the new. Commitment to overcoming the present’s “radical insufficiency” ends up relegating the present, and any attachments to it, as barriers to utopic movement. Utopic futures in this way share with carbon developed countries and powerful states a sacrificial logic in which the commitments of Pacific states and peoples to ordinary futures shaped by presently available political possibilities can only seem unviable.

The utopian “processural form” of thinking beyond thought might be a necessary step toward relinquishing climate denialism and inaction. But if relinquishing the ordinary is a necessary step to long-term living with environmental change, in the meantime, in the gap between the present and the fulfillment of better futures, national plans like *Te Kavina* and citizen-poets like Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner make pleas for the necessity of considering the content of

⁹⁹ I use “sensible” here as Ranciere does in *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

¹⁰⁰ Moylan 39.

the future, however compromised. They make clear not only the causalities of climate inaction, but the causalities of a new and hopeful world; for the old world, riddled with environmental harm and destruction, is also the site of hopes for continuity, of desire for “a reef // not yet / under water.” In language laden with affective excess and symbols of universal identification or sympathy, these other Pacific discourses attempt to find a content for the future less harmful than total loss or utopic sacrifice. Commitments to ordinary futures are limiting, but they also remain sites of investment with which writers, scholars and politicians alike must reckon.

Thus, at one and the same time, Pacific discourses afford two irreconcilable possibilities: futures contiguous with the present and futures radically different from it. That neither can be chosen or proposed as the definitive way forward is on the one hand a barrier against concrete action; but given that both ordinary and extra-ordinary futures have their uses and downfalls, political poesis here may best be considered as the process of holding these incompatible structures in tandem. This chapter has thus not offered a revision of the political form most central to it – or indeed to the project overall: the state. It does not revise the existing form of the state or offer some other form of political organization that might replace it. Contradictory states are part of the irresolution of the future; it is not this project’s aim to bring such irresolution to a close. To do so would be to impose a single temporal horizon on the future when Pacific discourses themselves are working to hold open futures in both the near and far term. But in ranging between both, the Pacific becomes a processural space; where its terms of desirable futurity might lie depend on where and when within such process one looks, and in what kinds of sacrifice underpin the forward movement of living better on a damaged planet. The Pacific then is a vision of our unfolding poetic present, of its limits, and the costs of moving beyond them.

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