

Climate Migration Fiction and Multispecies Mobility in the Racial Capitalocene

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One of the main features of our contemporary time is the immense growth in human movement worldwide (McDonnell 2018). The phenomenon continues to be understood and regulated through national and international legislation that date to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These laws fail to consider how a warming climate is exacerbating the socioeconomic and political conditions that have served as main push factors for migration. Climate change is a major feature of what climate scientists Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer have proposed as a new period called the “Anthropocene,” which dates to the industrial revolution and is marked by the effects of human activity on the earth’s geology and ecosystems (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000).

Among the work by social scientists and humanists on alternative origins of the ecological crisis, Jason Moore’s concept of the “Capitalocene” is arguably the most incisive in describing climate change as a *consequence* of the capitalist world ecology (2017, 619, emphasis in original). The system originated in sixteenth-century commodity production, consumption, and exchange; accelerated in the context of European colonialism; grew after 1850; and exploded after 1945 (Moore 2017, 621). Françoise Vèrges (2017) has amended Moore’s concept to the “racial Capitalocene” in order to acknowledge the history of racialized environmental politics and the uneven ecological impacts of the modern world system of “racial capitalism” (Robinson 1983) on minoritized populations and those in the Global South. We are currently in the last, neoliberal stage of the racial Capitalocene, which dates to the 1980s. Dominated by the belief in unregulated markets, this phase is characterized by dramatic increases

in socioeconomic inequality (Harvey 2005) and by the failure of nation-states to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions as the predominant drivers of climate change.

The increasingly more unequal distribution of climate change burdens during this phase expands upon and exacerbates the effects of longstanding racialized systems of socioeconomic inequality and stratification that drive human movement. More extreme and frequent weather events associated with climate change as well as the slow-onset effects of a warming climate, such as drought, desertification, and sea level rise, are creating vanishing or increasingly uninhabitable geographies. Attempts to design legal frameworks that recognize climate change as a factor for cross-border movement from such locations have stalled (Wintour 2017; Dempster 2020). This is in part because the more frequent storms, floods, and fires that regularly displace people have not yet led to large-scale international migration. Instead, most refugees tend to move to nearby locations, and only some enter other nations under special, and often only temporary, refugee provisions.

Although the scale of climate-induced cross-border mobility appears small, the U.S. government has already characterized a warming climate as a “threat multiplier” for conflict in the Global South that will lead to major international climate migration. This “greening” of anti-immigrant sentiment and policy (Marzec 2015) expands upon predictions from the 1970s of migrants as “resource degraders” who burden the ecologies of destination countries. Such predictions shaped the emergence of U.S. think tanks like the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) in 1979. U.S. governmental discourses on climate refugees also rely on the insights of more recent climate scholarship on the role of global warming for ongoing Syrian migration, mainly to Europe. This work has argued that declining water resources and drought led to crop failures and economic decline, which contributed to mass migration to urban areas, political instability, and a civil war, and rendered Syrians the numerically largest refugee population in the world (Todd 2019).

Migration studies scholars, who mainly work in the social sciences, have criticized the discourse on climate refugees for privileging the environment over other drivers of movement (Boas et al. 2019). While the founders of the field acknowledged the role of the natural environment, key migration theories from the twentieth century, such as neoclassical and neo-Marxist migration models, paid little attention to ecological issues (Piguet 2013). Migration studies scholars have only recently begun to develop an understanding of how climate change might intersect with the more widely examined socioeconomic and political drivers of human mobility (Parsons 2021).

As work in migration studies is addressing the climate dimensions of human movement, the growing body of American Studies scholarship that engages with questions of climate change rarely mentions the growth in mobility during the neoliberal racial Capitalocene. Histories of human movement have been central to the transnational reorientation of American Studies since the 1990s,

which has relied on models like the Black Atlantic, *la frontera*, and the Trans-Pacific to describe the connections of U.S. racialized communities to colonialism and U.S. imperialism. But American Studies scholarship on climate change has largely been informed by environmental justice concerns with the uneven impacts of fossil fuel-driven industrial development in the United States and the Global South, concerns which rarely attend to questions of contemporary migration (DiChiro 2016). As Andrew Baldwin and colleagues have argued, climate research more generally has also been less attentive to “the ontological primacy of mobility and movement, the ever-presence of movement in social life, and the insight that mobility is political and thus a fundamental mechanism of social stratification” (2019, 289).

An emerging body of creative work, which I call climate migration fiction (cli-mig-fi), has the potential to move issues of mobility to the forefront of American Studies scholarship on climate change. This work adds a focus on migration to the emphasis on a warming climate that has informed a growing number of Anglophone literary productions, the so-called climate fiction (cli-fi). Coined in 2007, the term denotes the ability of works in the genre to visualize apocalyptic futures as a result of a warming climate, pollution, and the decimation of natural resources in an effort to appeal to readers’ emotions and effect cognitive and behavioral changes toward climate change (Ullrich 2015; Schneider-Mayerson 2017). Climate fiction, such as Ian McEwan’s *Solar* (2010), Nathaniel Rich’s *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013), Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl* (2009) and *The Water Knife* (2015), and Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior* (2012), focuses on climate change in the United States and United Kingdom, and rarely addresses questions of international migration.

In contrast, the two representative works of climate migration fiction that I explore in this article—Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange* (1997) and Merlinda Bobis’s *Locust Girl: A Lovesong* (2015)—centrally engage with issues of displacement to two Anglophone settler colonial nations in the prelude to and aftermath of synergistic ecological and economic catastrophes. The novels focus on cross-border movement to fictionalized versions of the United States and Australia, respectively. *Tropic* represents undocumented migration to a preapocalyptic southwestern United States across the militarized U.S.-Mexico border. *Locust Girl* portrays refugee movement from a war-torn postapocalyptic geography toward the last remaining state-like green oasis, which attempts to curb migration through warfare, anti-immigrant violence, and border policies that fictionalize Australia’s system of offshore refugee detention. A comparative reading of the two novels highlights the capacity of settler colonialism, a concept indebted to the work of Australian scholar Patrick Wolfe (1999), to move American Studies scholarship beyond the interest in the transnational aspects of migration to the United States and its imbrication in racialized histories of U.S. empire and nationhood. A reading of the two novels places U.S. migration instead in a more global context that is characterized by the simultaneous and overlapping acceleration of climate change and mobility, and by inadequate

settler colonial state responses to these two major features of the neoliberal racial Capitalocene.

The two novels overlay their portrayals of dystopian futures as logical outcomes of the neoliberal racial Capitalocene with more hopeful, magical-realist imaginaries of multispecies movement. Migrating protagonists cross militarized borders with the assistance of plants and animals that are the products of evolutionary adaptation to degradation caused by settler colonial forms of racial capitalism, and that also act as co-agents with humans in their responses to worsening climate change. This focus on the multispecies nature of migration parallels the concerns of multispecies ethnography on “human entanglement with animals, plants, fungi, and microbes, [that were] once seen as part of the landscape, a food source for humans, as symbols” (Kirksey and Helmreich 201, 545). The concept of “migrant ecologies” draws on this work to describe the simultaneity of human movement and the mobility of “living species, [...] pathogens, germs, microbes, and viruses,” some “driven by their evolutionary pathways, some others by political reasons and economic deprivation” (Oppermann 2017, 243).

The two novels’ extended magical-realist allegories of multispecies migration despite enforced borders move beyond the dominant dystopian plot in cli-fi (Evans 2017, 95), which, as Ursula Heise has argued, rarely shows how “to generate and sustain more functional social structures and healthier natural environments” (2016, 31). As the novels’ magical-realist metaphors critique the inadequacy of settler colonial policies toward migration and climate change, they also emphasize the need for combined struggles for migrant rights and environmental mitigation. The rapid acceleration of climate change in the form of historically unprecedented wildfire activity in Australia and the United States in the twenty-first century and the emergence of the largest anti-racist protest movement in the United States’ history in 2020 underscore the prescience of the novels’ magical-realist metaphors.

Climate Change, Free Trade, and the Militarized U.S.-Mexico Border

Tropic of Orange employs magical realism to imagine multispecies mobility across an enforced U.S.-Mexico border in the neoliberal phase of the racial Capitalocene. The novel contextualizes key events of the 1990s in the longer history of European colonization and imbues them with futuristic overtones through magical realism. Yamashita has said that she intentionally employed the genre in her novel (Murashige 2000). As she writes in the opening unnumbered pages, the plot of *Tropic* is set in a “future [that] is perhaps about the recent past; a past that, even as you imagine it, happens.” Framed in cyclical notions of time, *Tropic* presents mutually supportive connections between an unseasonal orange in the Mexican *municipio* of Sinaloa that is “magically” connected to the nearby Tropic of Cancer and a 500-year-old laborer, performance artist, and undocumented migrant called Arcangel who symbolizes the histories of

hemispheric settler colonialism and U.S.-Mexico border migration. The novel explicitly mentions climate change as the cause of the fruit's emergence. The omniscient narrator describes how a singular orange grew on a tree in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, planted to mark the property's location directly at the Tropic of Cancer, in response to the "rains [that] came sooner this year." The narrator continues, "it was an orange that should not have been. It was much too early. Everyone said the weather was changing. The rains came sooner this year. [...] Global warming. Yes, that's it" (11).

The novel's representation of mutually supportive mobility between the orange and the mythical border-crosser as forms of adaption to climate change has remained understudied. Critics have predominantly analyzed the novel's critique of neoliberal globalization (e.g., Wallace 2001); its concerns with the effects of free trade on U.S.-Mexico border migration (e.g., Sadowski-Smith 2008); and its focus on ecological (e.g., Rody 2004) or environmental justice themes (e.g., Sze 2000; Crawford 2013). Elizabeth Ammons has linked *Tropic's* environmental justice emphasis most clearly to its acknowledgement of climate change, arguing that the novel shows how the poor and culturally disenfranchised disproportionately experience the fallout from a warming climate (2010, 151–2).

Tropic's narrative of multispecies mobility is set in motion when a vendor sells the unseasonal orange to the prospective border-crosser Arcangel. The orange bud miraculously attached itself to the nearby Tropic of Cancer for protection from the assault of increasingly erratic weather. This invisible and imaginary line, which separates the temperate from the subtropical hemispheric climate zone, is represented in the image of a thread. As soon as the "bud had broken through the tree's branch," the narrator explains in language that underscores the agential—rather than passive—nature of this act, the bud "*grasp[ed]*" onto a line "finer than the thread of a spider web as its parent, if a line could be a parent" (12, emphasis added).

Tropic speculates that the fruit's agential and adaptive attachment to the Tropic of Cancer expands upon the orange tree's history of colonial displacement to and mutation in the Americas. Spanish and Portuguese explorers brought orange trees to Mexico, South America, and Florida during the colonial phase of the Capitalocene when the unprecedented dispersal of fauna, animals, pathogens, and people significantly altered ecosystems and humans, and contributed to climate change (DeLoughrey 2019, 24). The transportation of organisms across once-disconnected oceans contributed to "a swift, ongoing and radical reorganization of life on Earth without geological precedent," which climate scientists Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin have identified as another potential starting point of the climate crisis (2015, 174). In Brazil, one of the displaced trees mutated into a navel (*citrus sinensis*). The propagation of its grafts in nineteenth-century California spurred the development of the state's citrus industry, which eventually rendered the navel one of the most widely consumed fruit in the world. Because they are seedless and can only be propagated through

grafting cuttings on other varieties of citrus trees, all navel oranges have the same genetic makeup as the fruit from the first mutated Brazilian tree (Rowe 2018).

Just as the original navel emerged through mutation from trees dispersed to the Americas during the colonial phase of the Capitalocene, the genetically identical unseasonal orange's agential attachment to a climate zone in an effort to survive erratic weather patterns represents plant adaptation to worsening climate change during neoliberalism. Arcangel's pronouncements about his 500-year cyclical life span and his northward journey similarly symbolize how U.S.-Mexico border crossings, which date to the settler colonial creation of national borders in the Americas, surged in response to the passage of free trade agreements during the neoliberal phase of the Capitalocene. Arcangel plans to cross the border into Los Angeles to fight SUPERNAFTA in a performative *lucha libre* wrestling match, for which he takes on another of his personas, El Gran Mojado (the "Great Wetback"). In Arcangel's antagonist, the novel fictionalizes the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its effects on U.S.-Mexico border mobility and Mexico's ecology at the time of *Tropic's* production, the highpoint of the neoliberal Capitalocene. The import of heavily subsidized, low-priced U.S. agricultural products under the agreement undermined the profitability of Mexican agricultural production and also imperiled subsistence farming. The outsourcing of U.S. manufacturing to cheap labor in Mexican border towns encouraged large numbers of people to move from rural areas to cities, where unregulated industrial and population growth also accelerated pollution and placed greater strain on water and energy resources—all factors that contributed to further cross-border mobility (Cohen et al. 2013, 57).

When Arcangel takes the orange with him on a northbound bus, the fruit assists him in his transformation from laborer to undocumented border-crosser in a symbolic reference to the long historical movement of Mexican citizens to the United States. Arcangel drags the bus with the passengers and orange on board across the U.S.-Mexico boundary in a performative exhibition of his physical strength and his ability to evade manifestations of the historically largest U.S. border enforcement during the 1990s, implemented in anticipation of large-scale human migration in response to free trade. Because the orange remains connected to the climate zone in which it was grown, Arcangel's performative feat brings both immigrants and significant weather changes into the United States. As the climatic patterns of Mazatlán's seasonal wet-dry conditions and larger amounts of precipitation that come with the subtropical climate zone arrive on the U.S. side of the border, the weather in the fictionalized Los Angeles begins to alternate between heavy, sudden monsoon rains and periods of seemingly endless, intense sunshine.

Tropic's metaphor of multispecies mobility points to the future of Mexican migration, the free trade agreement, and climate change in California. The novel's concluding wrestling match ends undecided: SUPERNAFTA implodes after sending a missile launcher into Arcangel's human heart. His death anticipates

the virtual cessation of large-scale Mexican undocumented migration after the 2007 U.S. recession, when more Mexicans began to return home than arrived in the United States. SUPERNAFTA's demise, in turn, predicts the growing disenchantment with neoliberalism and the dissolution of NAFTA in 2020 when it was replaced by the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA). As it “quite literally enacts development's role in climate change by burning to a cinder” (Ammons 2010, 154), SUPERNAFTA's fiery implosion can also be read as a reference to the acceleration of climate change during the more than two decades after *Tropic*'s publication. The allegory of a northward-moving orange-climate zone anticipated California's worsening drought, more frequent heatwaves, and historical levels of wildfire activity during the 2000s. The years 2020 and 2021, in particular, witnessed the hottest summers on record and the eruption of megafires of such an unprecedented magnitude and intensity that they were described as apocalyptic. In conjunction with the oppressive heat, the smoke from the fires created the worst air quality on the planet.

Tropic represents systemic racism as a colluding force in synergistic catastrophes that exacerbate the uneven distribution of economic benefits and ecological risks in the neoliberal phase of the racial Capitalocene. As a parallel to the novel's apocalyptic wrestling match that marks an end to the symbols of neoliberalism and undocumented migration, *Tropic* depicts state and federal raids on the city's homeless and *indocumentados* who establish a new kind of community in vehicles abandoned along a gridlocked freeway. This community transforms cars into homes, vegetable gardens, and the backdrop for TV shows on a now deserted highway, thus refashioning tools of mobility that cause significant ecological damage (Ammons 2010; Thompson 2017). The catastrophic destruction of this community references the violent reactions to the 1992 L.A. uprisings in response to the acquittal of white police officers after their violent beating of Rodney King, an African American man, following a high-speed freeway chase. The homeless, poor, and immigrant communities in *Tropic* repurpose cars—the main engines of carbon consumption in a place where it most often occurs—and the L.A. uprising underscored the connection of cars and highways to environmental racism and racialized state violence. Highways tend to be built in and at the expense of communities of color, further deepening housing segregation and causing disproportionate harm to the health of residents. African American drivers are often racially profiled as suspected “criminals” and stopped for searches that lead to injury, incarceration, or death (Thompson 2017, 93).

As it points to the overlapping catastrophes of systemic racism, neoliberal capitalism, and climate change, *Tropic*'s magical-realist metaphor of multispecies mobility also embeds hope in the novel's otherwise apocalyptic ending. While SUPERNAFTA is dead at the end of the wrestling match, Arcangel may not be. The unseasonal orange, which assisted the cross-border movement of undocumented migrants and climate as a challenge to SUPERNAFTA, plays an equally central role in Arcangel's potential rebirth. When the dying Arcangel

eats the orange, this act severs the fruit's link to the Tropic of Cancer. Arcangel is buried in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands (where north and south have merged) under another orange tree "at the very edge of the sun's shadow" (269) from which, the narrator tells us, another line could grow. The symbolism of a reborn border-crosser who is connected to climate change through a metaphorically regrown line can be read as anticipating the continuation of U.S.-Mexico cross-border mobility in the context of a warming climate. Large-scale U.S.-Mexico border crossings by migrants from the so-called "dry corridor" of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador have surged since 2014, driven by economic deterioration, political decline, and worsening drought conditions that have led to repeated crop failures and food shortages in the three countries. This migration has not proceeded in the form of undocumented border crossings, but as refugee movement where unaccompanied children and families from Central America predominantly applied for political asylum after their arrival in the United States until this practice ended in 2020 under the pretext of public health mitigation measures during a pandemic. Just as a reborn El Gran Mojado points to ongoing Central American refugee movement in spite of the militarized U.S.-Mexico border, the 2020 anti-racist demonstrations following the violent death of George Floyd can be seen as a successor of the 1992 Rodney King uprising, which is fictionalized in *Tropic*.

The novel's concluding magical-realist prediction of resurging migration and revived struggles for migrant justice, and their connections to climate change and the nonhuman world, are symbolized in the imagery of disappearing borders after the orange is severed from the thread. Another of the novel's immigrant protagonists holds the now separated ends of the wispy line of the Tropic of Cancer, wondering: "What are these goddamn lines anyway? [...] Let the lines [...] go. Go figure. Embrace" (270). Together with the metaphor of SUPERNAFTA's destruction, the image of dissolving borders points to a post-neoliberal future in which immigration reform and migrant rights struggles need to be linked to demands for ecological, economic, and racial equality.

Fossil Capitalism, Wildfires, and Refugee Detention Zones

Published nearly two decades after Yamashita's novel, Merlinda Bobis's *Locust Girl: A Lovesong* (2015) continues *Tropic's* preoccupation with representing multispecies mobility to a fictionalized settler colonial nation with a long history of nativism that is experiencing historical levels of drought and wildfire activity. A reading of Bobis's novel reorients the prevailing Americanist interest in the transnational dimensions of U.S.-Mexico border mobility for U.S. empire and nation-building to a more globalized emphasis on the connections between migration, neoliberalism, and climate change in the Americas and its similarities to other forms of global movement. Even though *Locust Girl* won Australia's Christina Stead Prize for fiction and its Filipina Australian author has already produced a significant oeuvre, the novel has not received much critical

attention. The existing scholarship reads *Locust Girl* as an allegory, fantasy, or futuristic fable of Australian refugee policies (Herrero 2017; Zong 2020).

The novel metaphorically represents contemporary refugee movement from places rendered uninhabitable by military conflict and ecological destruction to equally unsustainable lives in refugee camps, located in a desertified and uninhabitable geography. More clearly than *Tropic*, which references U.S. border enforcement in response to free trade, *Locust Girl* here points to militarization as the single largest cause of environmental destruction (McClintock n.d.). The novel presents a post-neoliberal dystopian future when nation-states and free trade have disappeared and the effects of climate change have become main drivers of mobility exacerbating the economic and ecological devastation caused by military conflict. Bobis has said that she wanted to create “an allegorical place” with “no specific clue to the setting” “so the story can be *owned* by anybody” (Bobis 2015b, original italics). While this allegorical place-making can point to a multiplicity of global migrations, the ecological conditions and policies of the novel’s only remaining state-like entity, called the “Five Kingdoms,” closely resemble those of Australia. As the world’s largest coal-exporting country, the country has been plagued by frequent weather events and the worst drought in living memory since the 2010s (Dewan 2018).

As the victor of multiple wars, the Kingdoms fictionalized in the novel hoard the world’s few remaining oil, water, and food resources. Even though some refugees were resettled there, a much larger number of others, like the protagonist Amedea, live in camps in desertified surroundings that are incapable of producing food or providing any economic opportunities. The Kingdoms’ mined and heavily guarded border prevents refugees from entering and accessing the resources of the “last green home on earth” (101). These fictionalized border policies are reminiscent of the Australian offshore detention regime that was implemented in 2002 for refugees who arrived by sea following the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which contributed to economic, political, and climate breakdowns in these nations. The detention centers were built on the islands of Nauru and Manus, Papua New Guinea as “return oriented environments” to prevent migrants from entering Australia by providing them with only two options—settling on the islands or going back to their places of origin (Liljas 2018). To gain public support for its border policies, the Australian government linked West Asian migrants to the potential of terrorist threats by stoking fears of attacks during a period marked by the tragedy of 9/11.

In the novel, the refugees’ confinement to camps in a desertified ecology is similarly justified through racialized ideologies of group differences that are designed to prevent border crossings into the Kingdoms. This propaganda showcases the Kingdoms’ efforts to preserve the remaining resources through austerity, while attributing irresponsible levels of ecological consumption to the refugees. The Kingdoms’ preservationist ideology bolsters their claims that they “purified the earth” by returning to preindustrial conditions and limiting the

consumption of food through rationing. Inhabitants of the camps, in contrast, are deemed “wasters” who need to be “cared for and [...] protected from themselves” (104) because they “consumed and dried up nature with their profligate ways long ago” and are “always plotting to waste more, or, worse, to steal what the ‘carers’ worked so hard to preserve” (121). The Kingdoms’ ideology of “caring” for the otherwise excluded refugees literalizes the anti-immigrant “lifeboat ethics” (Hardin 1974) of 1970s preservationist movements, which rejected calls for the more equitable sharing of resources. The Kingdoms’ discourse of “caring” also expands technologies of racialization beyond the focus on racial difference or geographical origin that characterizes similar ideologies in present-day Australia (and in the preapocalyptic United States fictionalized in Yamashita’s novel) to include an emphasis on levels of ecological consumption. A similar shift in attitudes toward refugees is under way in Australia. The country’s harsh immigration policies racialized West Asian refugees through association with terrorism in ways that perpetuated historical forms of racialization based on group identity, such as Australia’s nineteenth-century barring of Chinese laborers and its “White Australia” immigration laws, eliminated in the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act. More recent discussions about the cost of refugee offshore detention have also associated migration with a “green” xenophobic rhetoric similar to that spouted by U.S. anti-immigrant organizations like the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). A majority of Australians favor lower levels of migration, with many arguing that the enormous resources spent on offshore detention should instead be directed toward improving the country’s infrastructure and environment (Lowenstein 2018).

Besides deploying racialized ideologies of group differences based on ecological consumption, the Kingdoms also regularly bomb the camps to prevent residents from crossing the border. Similar to *Tropic’s* emphasis on continued migration despite a militarized U.S.-Mexico border, Bobis’s novel deploys the magical-realist trope of mutually beneficial multispecies mobility to imagine refugees’ success in entering the Kingdoms despite its enforced border and militarized violence. Bobis has acknowledged that her aesthetic is “informed by my Filipino traditions of magical realism and the uncanny,” which she uses “as a means to create metaphor and allegory that engender political critique and subversion” as well as “literary delight and magic” (2015b). The novel’s protagonist Amedea is the sole survivor of her camp’s bombing by the Kingdoms, which “put out the stars” and created an ecological catastrophe that contributed to the further desertification of the area. The bombings had buried Amedea deep into the sand for ten years. She magically awakens as a nine-year-old girl in a nineteen-year-old body with one specimen of the migratory species of locust (*Locusta migratoria*), prevalent in Australia, implanted in her forehead. The novel speculates that in the context of widespread ecological devastation following the bombing, locusts began to feed on the refugees’ remains, thus inverting the ways in which starving humans had earlier sustained themselves

by eating this species of short-horned grasshopper, considered a delicacy in parts of Asia and Africa. One locust buried itself deep into Amedea's forehead, rendering her the magical-realist "Locust Girl" of the novel's title. As Amedea explains, locusts "ate grains as we did. Then grains dried up and they ate sand. Then we ate them and sand. Then they ate their eaters. [One] nibbled its way under my forehead and there slept my ten-year sleep" (8–9).

After attaching itself to Amedea, the locust lends its communicative and adaptive capacities to her voyage to the border in ways that ensure their mutual survival. On her way to the Kingdoms, Amedea joins another refugee camp where she receives the Kingdoms' "caring" distribution of rations, which barely sustain the refugees and make them forget their preapocalyptic past. When the rations suddenly stop, the resulting food insecurity exacerbates the ecological devastation caused by prior military conflict and bombings, and accelerates refugees' migration to the Kingdoms' border. By creating an allegorical geography in which armed conflict and racialized state-sanctioned violence exacerbate other interrelated socioeconomic, political, and ecological drivers of migration, the novel creates a globalized perspective on migration and climate. This lens references not only the complex conditions that drive refugees to Australia, but also invites comparative inquiries into the circumstances that propel Central American U.S.-Mexico border mobility and West Asian displacement to Europe.

In the novel, the locust uses its ability for phenotypic plasticity to act in sync with Amedea during their joint trip to the border. Short-horned grasshoppers have developed the capacity to change their physiology, color, brain, and body size in response to temperamental and harsh weather conditions, such as those typical of Australia. They form large, coordinated, and fast-moving swarms with other locusts that can traverse long geographical distances and quickly destroy large swaths of agriculture (Baskar 2020). In 2020, locusts destroyed large areas of staple crops like teff, wheat, and sorghum in areas of East Africa, Southwest Asia, and the Middle East (Irfan and Kirby 2020). The novel's fictionalized locust activates its evolutionary trait for phenotypic plasticity to act as a compass for Amedea, a being of another species. It helps Amedea locate life-sustaining water and the route to the Kingdoms' food, thus ensuring their joint survival and mobility.

Through its stridulation, which the novel calls "singing," the locust also assists Amedea in memorizing and remembering other refugees' stories about their preapocalyptic displacement since she lost her own memories in her camp's bombing. These recollections highlight ecological and economic inequities as the cause for apocalyptic wars and converging socioeconomic and ecological disasters, and also shape the conviction that refugees have the same right to the resources hoarded in the Kingdoms as its residents. Merging the migratory and adaptive abilities of the animal with her own, Locust Girl becomes the embodiment of this collective refugee memory, which has the potential to "stop the Five Kingdoms from burying our lives, from burying us alive" (100).

Through her interactions with the locust, Amedea gradually transforms into a transcorporeal entity that literalizes the material-ecocritical emphasis on the constancy of material interchanges between humans, animals, and the environment (Alaimo 2010).

After the locust is burned from Locust Girl's forehead following the bombing of yet another refugee camp, which prompts her to remember the destruction of her own village, the songs of the past that she had memorized with the animal's help live on "inside her skull" (122). Her voicing of preapocalyptic and migratory songs shows that neither the Kingdoms' propaganda of racialized ecological consumption, their memory-altering food rations, their bombings, nor their militarized border can prevent cross-border refugee movement and the challenges it poses to the exclusionary hoarding of resources.

Once she arrives in the Kingdoms, Locust Girl stands trial for her unauthorized singing and border crossing. Her spontaneous implosion after her conviction metaphorically references the intensity of Australian bushfires and the responses of some refugees to their indefinite offshore detention with forms of self-harm that include self-immolation (Herrero 2017, 951; Liljas 2018; Ramzey 2016). Just as Yamashita's magical-realist metaphor of an imploding SUPERNAPTA pointed to California's deepening drought conditions and more frequent megafires, *Locust Girl's* magical-realist implosion anticipates Australia's 2019–2020 bushfire season that was unprecedented in length, intensity, and geographical scale. The worst fires in living memory caused the largest devastation of ecological communities in Australian history and threatened the survival of species and ecosystems that were already under immense stress (Wintle, Legge, and Woinarski 2020). The symbolic references to drought and wildfires in the two novels underscore that, as Umair Haque has argued, the effects of climate change in the United States and Australia will likely change portions of these countries into a largely deserted "Fire Belt" (2020).

But *Locust Girl's* apocalyptic ending also contains magical-realist seeds of hope: following her combustion, the protagonist transforms into a posthuman entity (Herrero 2017, 958) that can still "see when [she is] no more" (Bobis 174). Bobis has suggested that her protagonist chooses self-sacrifice to accommodate all the refugee voices inside her in order "to show everyone that regardless of borders, we are all in this together—in this love-and-plague or redemption-destruction of our world, or what we have reduced it to" (2015b). As a "locust with the heart and voice of a girl" (171), Locust Girl has merged the evolutionary and migratory abilities of animals with those of refugees in their mutual adaptation to the effects of desertification and food insecurity, to which the Kingdoms respond with bombings, a militarized border, and racialized forms of exclusion. Like *Tropic's* magical-realist protagonist Arcangel, at the end of the novel Locust Girl is associated with the possibility of rebirth. As Bobis has said, she is "both phoenix and female Christ," signaling that "we have a capacity for the plague and destruction that we do to the environment and to each other, but we also have the capacity for love and the capacity to redeem ourselves and our

environment" (2015b). This reborn posthuman migrant entity symbolically points to the need for collective struggles that combine demands for refugee justice with efforts to combat climate change.

Conclusion

Through their use of magical realism with its dual focus on disaster and hope, the two cli-mig-fi novels discussed in this article move beyond the predominant dystopian emphasis in cli-fi, which often relies on the genre of science fiction. *Tropic* and *Locust Girl* point to more racially inclusive and economically and ecologically just futures as alternatives to the neoliberal phase of the racial Capitalocene, which they imagine as ending or having come to an end, as figured in the magical-realist images of reborn multispecies migrant collectivities with adaptive capacities for inclusive and restorative social justice struggles.

The novels characterize symbiotic multispecies mobility in spite of nativist policies as a hopeful adaptive response to converging ecological, political, and economic disasters produced by histories of settler colonialism, fossil fuel-intensive neoliberal capitalism, and militarized border enforcement in the United States and Australia. *Tropic* focuses on mutually beneficial links between human and plant mobility as an unseasonal orange, produced by climate change, assists in a migrant protagonist's rebirth that symbolizes ongoing migration and its links to struggles for racial, ecological, and economic justice. *Locust Girl* imagines the transformation of a migrating human-animal figure into the posthuman embodiment of collective refugee memory that enables struggles for the more equal distribution of economic and ecological resources. The two novels' interlinked stories of animal, plant, and human mobility in response to colliding human-inflicted crises call on migration studies to advocate equally for migrant rights and for the mitigation of climate change as the field turns to inquiries into the climate dimensions of human mobility. A reading of the two novels also suggests the need for more globalized lenses on U.S. migration and its connection to climate that follows the expansion of Americanist inquiries into expressions of climate change in both the United States and the Global South.

The future-oriented focus on multispecies mobility in the two novels points to other, nonfictional instances of hope for a more equitable future without borders that divide the well-off climate haves from the impoverished climate have-nots, while recognizing human connections to the nonhuman world. Even as widespread climate change denial in the United States and Australia (Dewan 2018) contributes to the diversion of resources away from ecological mitigation to the enforcement of borders, a warming climate is already placing the material embodiments of such unjust migration policies under significant stress. While megafires and drought are threatening to render at least parts of the country uninhabitable, the islands on which Australia's offshore detention centers were built—as well as parts of its own coastline—are in danger of disappearing.

Similarly, climate change will not just drive future displacement from the U.S. Southwest border region, but extreme weather events associated with warming

temperatures have already destroyed portions of the U.S.-Mexico border wall, highlighting that these structures will not survive in their intended form in a world altered by climate change. In the summer of 2021, intense flooding from record-setting monsoon rains in southern Arizona ripped nine border wall gates from their steel hinges, which had just been finished a year earlier (Loya 2021). In 2020, monsoon storms damaged portions of a thirty-foot concrete-filled wall in southern Arizona and high winds knocked over sections of a wall in El Paso, Texas (Prendergast 2020) as well as in Calexico, California, where thirty-foot-high panels were blown to the Mexican side of the border (Guardian Staff 2020).

In 2011, the force of heavy rains not only knocked over a 40-foot stretch of mesh Arizona-Sonora border fence, but turned it into a waterfall (McCombs 2011). The transformation of this structure into a device that better served the border ecosystem can be understood through Jane Bennett's notion of "vibrant matter." Her concept underscores the fact that "things, too, are vital players in the world" (2010, 4) by emphasizing the agential and creative capacity of inorganic matter. As Bennett puts it, "even the humblest forms of matter and energy have the potential for self-organization" (2010, 7, 9). The extended metaphors of multispecies mobility developed in *Tropic* and *Locust Girl* acknowledge that human life and mobility can only thrive if the evolutionary and adaptive abilities of the nonhuman world—as well as the capacities of nonliving matter for change—are taken into account. Migrant-rights struggles and calls for legal frameworks that acknowledge the climate dimensions of migration will thus need to incorporate demands for measures that mitigate climate change on a scale commensurate with the dimensions of this ongoing transformation.

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