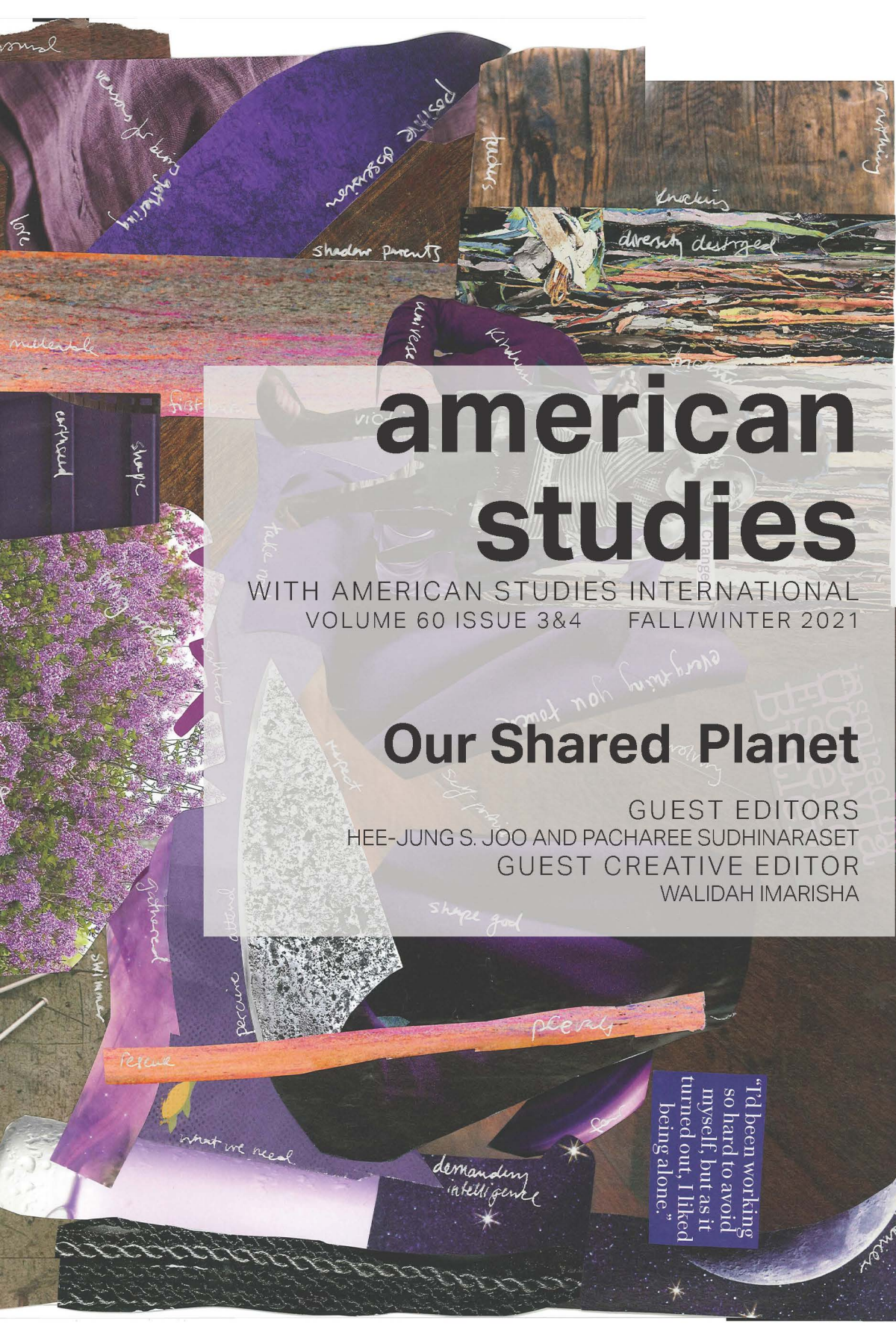

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Our Shared Planet

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HEE-JUNG S. JOO AND PACHAREE SUDHINARASET
GUEST CREATIVE EDITOR
WALIDAH IMARISHA

"I'd been working so hard to avoid myself, but as it turned out, I liked being alone."

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On the cover: "Octavia" by Alexis Pauline Gumbs.

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WITH AMERICAN STUDIES INTERNATIONAL

2021 VOL. 60, NO. 3/4

Notes from the Editors

We, the editorial team, are delighted to present *Our Shared Planet: The Environment Issue* Volume 60:3/4. Our special issues often come from proposals by potential guest editors. This theme, however, came to us from our Editorial Board at our 2017 meeting at ASA in Chicago. We put out a call for proposals for an issue on the environment entitled "Our Shared Planet," and received two extraordinary submissions, conceived very differently, from two sets of guest editors. When we brought these to the 2019 meeting in Hawaii, we knew it would be a difficult choice. What we didn't anticipate is that the Editorial Board would accept both! Thus, the double-album! Not two sides, A and B, but a double issue with two curated pathways and conversations, with echoes between, to be explored in tandem.

The environment is a global issue, experienced locally, if unevenly. For many, the local effects have become increasingly intense. For the editorial team in Lawrence, Kansas, we feel those local effects as our region faces perilous ecological challenges around water usage and agriculture. The Ogallala Aquifer that underlies Colorado, Kansas, and Nebraska is quickly drying up, threatening to make the region that *AMSJ* publishes from a desert. Our regional ecological crisis forced us to think about Climate Change and the realities of desertification in our immediate future. It called for us to respond as an interdisciplinary humanities journal. How might we contribute to the refashioning of our environmental narratives that guide many of cultural, economic and political policy choices?

Our editorial team has put a great deal of intellectual energy into this publication alongside the guest editors. We are especially pleased that these two volumes are so timely and representative in terms of scholarly topics and scholars from across North America and Europe. We could not be more delighted.

Sherrie Tucker and Randal Maurice Jelks

0026-3079/2020/5904-023$2.50/0 American Studies, 60.3/4 (2021)

Introduction

Hee-Jung S. Joo and Pacharee Sudhinaraset

As the first two decades of the twenty-first century herald an era of climate change and ecological and species demise on a planetary scale, this special issue centers the perspectives of writers, artists, activists, and scholars of color to explore survival and regeneration. The compendium critically interrogates the supposed universal notions of a shared planet, ecological demise, and what it means to be human. It showcases critical engagements with the notion of a "shared planet" that enable timelines, histories, perspectives, and futurities to refuse linear, colonial time. For Indigenous and racialized people, the notion of a future has never been a given. Whether through the policies and practices of state-sanctioned genocide, slavery, internment, or forced relocation and migration, people of color have found ways to survive their worlds ending over and over. To cite Kyle Powys Whyte (2017) in his discussion of Anishinaabe restoration practices, it is "our ancestors' dystopia now" (206). Yet it is only now, in the beginnings of the twenty-first century, that the idea that humans may not have a future is taking hold in the popular settler imagination. The panic surrounding the end of the world, it turns out, was rooted in the assumption that it is the end of the "first world." A special issue on critical approaches to studying the catastrophes of "our shared planet" must begin with a few comments on the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the inequalities it laid bare, and the eruption of racial uprisings in the past year and a half.

On May 25, George Floyd was murdered by a police officer. As the virus cleaved communities in expected ways, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement gained even more momentum amid—and not despite—the global COVID-19

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pandemic. Protests spread globally as well as in smaller towns and rural areas across North America. On March 16, 2021, the Atlanta spa shootings resulted in the murder of eight people, six of whom were Asian women: Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park, Yong Ae Yue, and Xiaojie Tan. Indebted to the blueprint and lessons learned from BLM, Asian-identified migrants organized during an intensified moment of anti-Asian racism as COVID-19 was racialized as Asian. Community organizers responded to Soya Jung's (2014) call for a "model minority mutiny" to understand how that myth—that Asians are the "good" minorities—will not nor has ever protected them. In May 2021, almost exactly a year after the murder of George Floyd, the remains of 215 children were verified to be buried at Kamloops Residential School (known as American Indian boarding schools in the United States) on the unceded land of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc in what settlers named Canada. Overnight, public and communal installations of children's shoes appeared on the steps of governmental buildings and art galleries across the country. Since then, dozens more school grounds have been excavated across Turtle Island, and the list only continues to grow. The stories of missing Indigenous children run deep across the entire continent.

These recent events by no means exhaust the apocalyptic stories in which so many communities of color are currently living. Rather, they provide some of the context many of our contributors were not only writing about and responding to, but also living through: the uneven distribution of livability on an unshareable planet. The convergence of the pandemic; the murders of people of color, including children; and racial uprisings and protests constitutes a culminating moment of a slow disaster (to borrow from Rob Nixon's formulation of "slow violence" [2011]) that has been brewing for some time: the results of rampant, racial capitalism that thrives on the extraction of resources, labor, lives, and land from Indigenous peoples and people of color. Here was the world that speculative fiction writers such as Octavia Butler had been telling us about all these years. Although published in 1993, *Parable of the Sower* reached *The New York Times* bestseller list for the first time in 2020. Although many read her for her prescience and uncanny predictions, the brilliance of Butler's work is that it never takes this world for granted and never assumes this world is the only one possible. What the *Parables* trilogy speculates on is not impending disaster, but how (not if) we are to survive it. Importantly, it does so through the perspective of a young Black woman, showing what is enabled when race is foregrounded in imagining speculative futurities.

Critical inquiry into climate change and its impacts have taken off as interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary endeavors with activists, artists, and academics scrambling to make sense of what it means to be "living on a damaged planet" (Tsing et al., eds, 2017). Despite the growing body of scholarship on climate change and species extinction, much of it still assumes or reiterates a linear, settler colonial timeline of development and demise. Constituting what Chela Sandoval (2000) refers to as a "methodology of the oppressed," "a set of

processes, procedures, and technologies for decolonizing the imagination" (68), the cultural forms included in this issue respond to the ways impending global impacts of climate change often lead to universalizing assumptions that promote colonialist power hierarchies and exacerbate, not eradicate, racial inequalities. Although scientists continue to research and debate whether humans have surpassed the point of no return on our shared planet, it is the work of cultural producers and critics to articulate how neither the idea of "our shared planet" nor the "human" have ever included "us all." "Articulation," according to Stuart Hall (1986), "enables us to think how an ideology empowers people, enabling them to begin to make some sense or intelligibility of their historical situation, without reducing those forms of intelligibility to their socio-economic or class location or social position" (53). Rather than considering race as a peripheral or ancillary extension to such planetary concerns, the collection posits racial formation as central to it. Our collection is, thus, focused on two interconnected goals: 1) to interrogate the racial politics of survival and demise, abundance and apocalypse and 2) to imagine new worlds in ways that do not reiterate familiar versions of Western liberal humanism and recuperation. Overall, the issue is focused on anticolonialist, anticapitalist, and antiracist visions that promote socially just futures of our planet. Drawing from Julie Sze (2020), we are committed to cultural forms that envision "environmental justice *as* freedom" (9, emphasis added).

The issue is bound by a commitment to speculative and multitemporal artistic creations that critique, reject, or exceed settler colonial timelines of catastrophe, both future and past. Speculative fiction, a genre associated with scientific discovery and colonialist adventure—histories that have been hostile to populations of color—becomes a powerful medium when picked up by writers and artists of color. Whether it is Betsy Huang's (2010) argument that Asian Americans can "retool" the genre, "providing different narratives lenses for revising generic imperatives and epistemologies" (102); Grace Dillon's (2012) observation that "Native slipstream thinking, which has been around for millennia, anticipated recent cutting-edge physics" (4); or Jayna Brown's (2021) assertion that "unburdened by investments in belonging to a system created to exclude [Black people] in the first place, we develop marvelous modes of being in and perceiving the universe" (7), there is a deep tradition of Indigenous scholars and scholars of color who understand how speculative fiction can illuminate the time and place of those who exist out of sync with settler temporality. As well, speaking specifically of a future for queer people, José Esteban Muñoz (2009) calls for a "collective temporal distortion" that rejects the hegemony of straight time (185). The issue, thus, engages recognizable speculative fiction by Octavia Butler, Cherie Dimaline, Ruth Ozeki, Wilson Harris, and others and also the work of artists and activists who have been imagining, organizing, theorizing, and living in worlds that many assumed—and still assume—impossible: viable worlds of community care, mutual aid, harm reduction, and transformative justice. As guest creative editor Walidah Imarisha (2015) notes elsewhere, "all organizing is science fiction. … For those of us from communities with historic collective

trauma, we must understand that each of us is already science fiction walking around on two legs. Our ancestors dreamed us up and then bent reality to create us" (3, 5). This sort of centering of the literary, artistic, and activist speculation of people of color committed to better worlds can reclaim, in Aimee Bahng's (2018) terms, the notions of speculation and risk from capitalism's future.

Putting into practice Sandoval's "methodology of the oppressed," we bring together in one place artistic and creative works, activist and curatorial essays, a plenary transcript, an interview, a critical review, a short story, and a syllabus and class assignments alongside peer-reviewed essays. We include a variety of work by activists, visual artists, creative writers, students, independent scholars, and scholars embedded in academia, all of whom answered the call for how to think through planetary demise without succumbing to settler colonial endings. Many of the authors and artists in this issue exist in and blur the boundaries of multiple worlds: academia, activism, and art. In the transcript of "Writing New Worlds," an Allied Media Conference plenary held virtually during the pandemic, the conversation opens with the famous words of Toni Cade Bambara, who noted that the role of the artist is to make revolution irresistible (2012). The pages that follow are filled with the knowledge, theories, and creations of a wide range of people of color invested in imagining otherwise: "culture workers," as Bambara may have identified. In this way, the issue supports *American Studies*' commitment to scholarship that is "accessible to a variety of readers, not solely to academic specialists" so that it may be insightful and appealing to social activists and potentially useful sources for classroom teaching. The work of climate justice demands no less than this type of expansive, creative, and speculative engagement.

Including ourselves, our guest creative editor Walidah Imarisha; two graduate student research assistants, Ifeoluwa Adeniyi and Piu Chowdhury; and our contributors, we total 32 scholars, activists, and artists of color from across the world currently located across three regions of North America: Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean. Together, our work contributes to the "comparative, international, and/or transnational" scope of *American Studies* to engage in a longer discussion regarding the place and possibilities of ethnic American cultural production, including those of diasporic, transnational, and Indigenous peoples and cultures that exceed (and have always exceeded) the parameters of the nation-state. Broadly defined notions of what constitutes U.S. cultures and histories provides productive critiques of U.S. exceptionalism, particularly in the context of climate change as a global phenomenon rooted in colonialism and racial capitalism.

Abolitionist activist and scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2020) insists that "freedom is a place." Our issue evokes spaces both familiar and new: Chicago; Washington, DC; New York; and Oakland as well as the Pacific Ocean, Guyanese hinterlands, Amazon rainforest, an alternative China, and other entire planets. At times, it pauses upon a cluster of trees, a Target store, on an unnamed sunny beach, and at the molecular level of the COVID-19 virus itself. Through

critical engagements with such myriad spaces and at a range of scales, all of the contributions to this special issue share one common assumption: the end is not the end. Disaster serves as a portal of sorts, as Arundhati Roy (2020) recently described. It enables us to see what else is possible, including taking careful stock of what we would like to bring with us through it and what will be important to leave behind. The artwork, which is introduced in more detail in the following creative introduction, is dispersed throughout the volume so that they are equally positioned as critical interventions. The critical essays bridge the art and creative pieces and vice versa.

Appearing on our cover designed by **Alexis Pauline Gumbs** and mentioned consistently throughout, the works and thoughts of Octavia Butler buttress the entire collection. The first of two mini art curations opens with the Afrofuturist visions of artists **John Jennings**, **Kamau Grantham + Stacey Robinson as BLACKMAU**, and **La'Nora Boror aka Echo Artist Healer**. In **Reynaldo Anderson** and **Sheree Renée Thomas**'s accompanying essay, they reflect on their experiences of co-curating virtual art exhibitions during the pandemic, respectively, titled *Curating the End of the World* and *Red Spring*. The focus on critiques of dystopia and/as reality is sustained in **Celiese Lypka**'s "Métis Survivance: Land, Love, and Futures in Cherie Dimaline's Dystopian Novels." Through multiple frameworks of Indigenous theory, including notions of "survivance," "landedness," and "decolonial love," Lypka traces how the novel's Métis characters navigate a world devastated by settler colonialism in order to redefine community. Also concerned with Indigenous resistance, **Hannah Regis**'s "Trajectories of Resilience: Indigenous Healing Folkways in the Selected Short Stories of Wilson Harris" focuses on works of the Guyanese and Windrush generation writer from the 1970s already concerned then with ecological destruction. Regis examines how Wilson's fabulous fiction is formed by his engagement with Indigenous worldviews that did not function according to colonial notions of time and space. Through his distinct lyrical form, Regis shows, Harris is able to not only reframe demise but also assert abundant futures. Located between these two essays, **Darcie Little Badger**'s contemplation of death, grief, and tree rings outside of a bedroom window resonate quietly and powerfully as an ecological understanding of human emotions. **Dani McClain**'s short story, "Homing Instinct," ruminates on the choices of its protagonist to be rooted or to wander within a nation wrecked by climate change, questioning whether biological kinship is the only way to make a safe community.

The transcript of a virtual plenary at the 2020 Allied Media Conference titled "Writing New Worlds" features writer–activist–scholars **Alexis De Veaux**, **Alexis Pauline Gumbs**, and **Walidah Imarisha** discussing visionary fiction, tangible futures, and histories that never happened. Relatedly, **Smaran Dayal**'s "Octavia Butler and the Settler Colonial Speculative: *Xenogenesis* and Planetary Loss" asserts how speculative fiction enables reengagements with history, not to offer mere allegories (of past worlds), but rather to understand history as continuous and expansive. As well, **Ifeoluwa Adeniyi**'s interview with fantasy writer **Rebecca**

Kuang explores the aesthetic and political possibilities of considering history, and not just the future, through the speculative genre. The notion of histories that refuse to stay neatly in the past is also a concern of **D.E. St. John** in his article, "Our Toxic Transpacific: Hydro-Colonialism, Nuclearization, and Radioactive Identities in Post-Fukushima Literature." Drawing partly from Mel Chen's work on queer and racial animacies, his essay focuses on representations of the Pacific Ocean in the works of Lee Ann Roripaugh and Ruth Ozeki that depict it as both a site of hydrocolonialism as well as irradiated possibilities for Asians and Asian American embodiment. Extending such critiques of humanism, **Edmond Y. Chang**'s review essay, "'Do They See Me as A Virus?': Imagining Asian American Environmental Games" walks (or, rather, plays) us through a cluster of recent Asian American games created by Asian Americans that also explore the relationship between race and environmentalism, including two that directly and creatively challenge the racist conflation of Asians with the COVID-19 virus.

Chang's essay is followed by his syllabus on Asianfuturism and descriptions of assignments to give a sense of how research manifests in the classroom. Pedagogy, after all, is a practice, and in this sense, the work of teaching is often the first site of putting theory to practice for educators. Woven in between the pieces that discuss theory in praxis—the artmaking process of cultural activists, designing video games, and teaching and pedagogy—is art that documents activism. **A.J. Hudson** photographed the 2019 Climate Justice Youth Summit in Brooklyn he helped to organize and which took place only a few months before the pandemic reached New York. The images capture a moment just before masks became a common accessory when in public. Hudson's accompanying creative essay boldly asks—and answers—the question that sustains our entire issue, "the end of the world, for whom?" **Ananda Gabo**'s illustrations were used as promotional materials to start a community biology lab in Chinatown, Toronto. Critical of the exclusionary nature of professional science, the community project aimed to amplify ancestral knowledge and learn how to bridge the gap between the two. Such artworks document the practices of community organizers devoted not simply to social change, but rather social justice.

The final pieces included in the collection return us to the immediate moment. The cowritten "The 2020 Social and Environmental Apocalypse: Reimagining Black America" by **Tatiana Height**, **Olivia T. Ngadjui**, **Fushcia-Ann Hoover**, and **Jasmine A. Dillon** commemorates a moment of convergence between COVID-19 and racism, exploring how an Afrocentric analysis lays bare how environmental injustices are racial injustices and vice versa. Black activists' calls for inclusion, recognition, voice, destruction, and revolution are calls for reimagining space as space remains fundamentally unshareable within settler capitalist logics. Their essay is followed by a reprint of select artworks from a 2013 exhibition curated by **Mariame Kaba**, *Picturing a World without Prisons,* that reimagines spaces in radical (and radically mundane) visions of abolition. This second mini art curation features the works of **Veronica Stein**, **Silvia Ines**

Gonzalez, and a collaboration between **Sarah Jane Rhee**, **Cadence**, and Kaba, all of whom envision abolitionist futures as possible now. Together, they exemplify Gilmore's assertions that "what the world will become already exists… abolition is presence, it is life in rehearsal." It is the choices Indigenous peoples and people of color make every day to create the world in which we live, the choices we strive to make every day to create the world we all deserve, over and over again, day in and day out. Our issue concludes with **Kaanchi Chopra**'s larger-than-life illustration of a brown-skinned goddess that takes up all the space. She is a wonderfully monstrous, unapologetic, and uncompromising mythical creature that cannot exist but has always existed, everywhere. She's right here.

Our call for papers was released in February 2020 and within a few short weeks the world changed. But in many ways it merely magnified the ongoing crises within which communities of color have long lived. This special issue came together through a global pandemic. Contributors created and curated art, submitted and revised multiple essay drafts and responded to ceaseless emails all while caring, worrying, and sometimes grieving for loved ones. This type of labor should not be normalized, and we find it important to draw attention to this. We acknowledge the labor, commitment, and care of creators of color working on the concerns of this special issue in and for their communities during a pandemic that continues to exacerbate existing social inequalities. In our view, doing so constitutes a more expansive, ethical, and relevant understanding of research than academia traditionally defines. We hope that the issue reflects—and does not smooth over—all that the contributors went through and are still going through.

We thank the University of Manitoba Creative Works Grant Program for helping to provide honoraria for artists and community activists who contributed their work to this special issue. Special thanks are due to Ifeoluwa Adeniyi and Piu Chowdhury, our brilliant research assistants at the University of Manitoba. Hee-Jung S. Joo expresses her gratitude to QPOC Winnipeg, especially Uzoma Asagwara and Karen Sharma, for what they continue to teach her about collaboration, centering voices, and building community. Pacharee Sudhinaraset is thankful for Hee-Jung S. Joo's ceaseless dedication to the work.

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Creative Introduction

Walidah Imarisha

"But in their own way, the new generation—to whom so much had been given, from whom so much was being stolen, for whom so little would be promised—would not settle for the things previous generations had been willing to settle for. Concede them a demand and they would demand more. Give them an apocalypse, and they would dance" (Chang 19).

Jeff Chang's words above were written about the youth who created hip hop in 1970s South Bronx. And yet it feels timeless and absolutely relevant today. This is partially because the same structural inequalities, staggering disparities, and systemic oppressions that shaped the lives of late 20th century poor/working class urban Black and Brown kids still sculpt the present. But likewise, this same spirit of creative resistance, righteous rebellion, and innovative audacity pervade the art of those who are metaphorically dancing through this current apocalypse.

The ability to dance through an apocalypse is something communities of color have honed and perfected over the countless generations of destruction they have survived, in this nation and globally. Having lived through so many historic and ongoing assaults, communities of color have made themselves into fire-activated seeds, like the eucalyptus. The eucalyptus understands the world it lives in, understands fire is inevitable, and plans for it. The heat releases the seed, allowing new life to be birthed in an inferno.

As Black feminist science fiction writer and luminary Octavia E. Butler wrote, "In order to rise / from its own ashes / A phoenix / First / Must / Burn" (137).

The rise of so many movements for justice and liberation within communities of color is the seed sprouting in the blaze, the phoenix ever rising from previous

0026-3079/2020/5904-023$2.50/0 American Studies, 60.3/4 (2021)

generations' pyres. Amidst the literal fires ravaging our planet, along with so many other climate catastrophes, Indigenous communities continue to be the warrior caretakers for us all. Through the decades and centuries of onslaught against Black communities by law enforcement, again and again resistance movements like Black Lives Matter have exploded forth. And of course all of these movements are not only connected, they breathe deeply as one, exhaling liberation dreams.

Those in these movements hold hope even in the face of the unimaginably brutal. "Let this radicalize you rather than lead you to despair," prison abolitionist Mariame Kaba instructed us. Art is a powerful arena for this alchemic process of transmuting pain and horror into hope. Art allows us to not only sustain ourselves through trauma, but also allows us to imagine a way through it. When we cannot see beyond the abyss beneath our feet, we cling to the edge. But what if the abyss is actually a portal?

As A.J. Hudson writes in the essay "The End of the World, for Whom?": "One way or another Climate Change will end our world. But not all endings are bleak."

The "Curating At the End of the World" exhibit shows that apocalypse has happened before. It is sometimes necessary for the new to be born. Created to respond to the multitude of intersecting "existential threats" to Black people in the diaspora, the first section of the exhibit opened online during the beginnings of the pandemic, when so much felt terrifying and unknown, dystopic and devastating. The three art pieces reprinted here show the breadth of the response to that ongoing crisis, which of course is connected to all other crises. The images capture the horror but also the hope not just of these artists but also Black communities. It helps recenter the historic certainty of Black visionary survival rooted in Black creativity that is our birthright.

As Reynaldo Anderson and Sheree Renee Thomas write in their essay, "This work is remembrance and resurrection, resistance and restored hope in a social, economic, and political landscape of uprisings and upheaval, strange fruit buried in scorched earth."

This is the charge of the artist in all times but especially these times.

If artists of color are truly honest about themselves, their communities, and this world, they have to be disruptors and subversives. In a country rooted in white supremacist hetero-patriarchal capitalism (word to bell hooks), to see people of color as whole complex beings is a subversive act. It demands a disruption in the everyday narrative, a fracture from business-as-usual racism.

Art like "Brown Skin Goddess" by Kaanchi Chopra is such an intervention. Showing anti-patriarchal frameworks as completely embedded in and intertwined with natural elements, Chopra creates "this brown-skinned female body who reclaims public space." The distortion in size, with her being so much larger than the constructed landscapes behind her, is actually a distortion that sets right what is wrong, allowing the viewer to finally see things in proper perspective.

This intertwining of nature and complex humanity also comes through beautifully in Darcie Little Badger's two pieces. The creation of a ritual with a fallen tree to help hold the overpowering grief of losing a loved one is both a poignant individual

act, and an offering of a collective ritual of mourning, of holding, of healing in a time of scarred landscapes and missing loves.

A collective experience, in joy or rage or grief or hope (or all of the above) is central to all of the art in this issue. It can felt be through the collections "Curating At the End of the World" or "Picturing A World Without Prisons," both of which give us a multiplicity of perspectives to explore the topics the larger exhibits focused on. It can be felt through an individual perspective on collective movements, like the photographs of the Climate Justice Youth Summit, capturing the urgency as well as the vibrancy of the present. Likewise, Ananda Gabo's poster for the community lab in Chinatown is not only about advertising for a specific community project. The questions on the poster art create a time-and-space-defying invitation to those who see it, inviting the viewer to join the process of interrogation.

We are often told we have to choose between the individual and the collective, but the reality is that making space for our individual brilliance only strengthens the whole, and moving in tandem with community allows us a vision beyond what we could have imagined on our own.

Because we are working to move beyond what we have been told is possible. And that is terrifying to do alone, stepping into the unknown, into what we have been told our whole lives is impossible. It becomes less terrifying and more possible when others are by our side. We need each other to move. And move we must. Because the world is figuratively and literally burning around us, and communities of color have been on fire for centuries, and we can no longer wait for the slow unraveling that is moderation on issues like climate change, racial justice, gender justice, abolition (which are, really, all the same issue = liberation). Now we must imagine beyond, into the realm of "the impossible" because there is where our collective salvation lies.

As science fiction writer Ursula K. LeGuin said in her 2014 National Book Foundation award acceptance speech, "We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable – but then, so did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art."

Projects like the photo exhibit "Picturing A World Without Prisons" is the kind of liberated world-building project that truly allows folks to question an institution we have all been told for decades our society cannot exist without, the carceral system. The images reproduced here from the exhibit offer us examples of what abolition could look like on larger scales, as well as ways that abolition practices are already being grown and cultivated. This exhibit highlights that art not only helps you to intellectually engage with potential liberated futures, but lets you feel them to your core, lets you immerse yourself in them.

Art like this is a necessity for us to engage with, to use to push our own understanding further. We have all been fed the same stories about what is and is not possible, and if we are to transcend those, we cannot become complacent. We must always try to imagine more and bigger. Alexis Pauline Gumbs (who created the stunning collage tribute to Octavia E. Butler's work that graces our cover), said on the panel transcribed here "Writing New Worlds Plenary," "This idea that

we could really vision to the end of what we could imagine, and what we had been working so hard to achieve… allows me to see the limits of my own imagination… It allows me to be creative there. Which then means I'm not being reactive to the present situation, I'm being expansive and going as far as I possibly can with my imagination…"

And of course, the goal of all of this creativity and imagination and subversion is to create real world changes. This work of imagining just and sustainable worlds is the most serious of business. It is not an intellectual exercise, it is a biological imperative if we are to survive. And key to that is rejecting the artificial limits placed on our ability to change social systems. Those limits are part of how resistance is controlled.

Like the main character from Dani McClain's short story "Homing Instinct," we have been and continue to be offered two unacceptable options. Let this art inspire you to reject the societal controls placed on you. Join the countless around the globe who are creating third, fourth, fifth, infinite other options that carry the chance of saving both our world and every single life that calls it home.

So, Octavia E. Butler wrote in her personal journals, "So be it! See to it!" (The Huntington).

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Curating the End of the World, Red Spring, and 2nd-wave Afrofuturism

Reynaldo Anderson and Sheree Renée Thomas

Curating the End of the World is an online, multimedia, multi-genre, Black speculative pop-up exhibition. It began by looking at the concerns Black people address across the diaspora through Black speculative lenses in response to existential threats.

Organized by Reynaldo Anderson and Stacey Robinson, and originally curated by Tiffany E. Barber as a collaboration between the Black Speculative Arts Movement and New York Live Arts, the exhibit is displayed on the Google Arts platform in conjunction with the Live Ideas Festival *Altered Worlds: Black Utopia and the Age of Acceleration.* It was created with support from other Black cultural formations like Afroflux, Black Kirby, NubiaMancy, Xion network, Kaos Network, Blerd City Con, and others.

The two-part exhibition brings together an international cadre of artists whose work responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Black violence, climate change, poor governance, trans-humanism, and an accelerating, technologically driven economic system on the verge of collapse. *Curating The End of the World* and its second installment, *Red Spring,* are a second wave Afrofuturist, or Afrofuturism 2.0, commentary on the end of our current age of "cyclical chaos" (as conceived by Sheree Renée Thomas), interrogating the racist pathology and corruption that influences policy around the world.

The second exhibition, *Red Spring*, curated by Sheree Renée Thomas, Danielle L. Littlefield, and Dacia Polk, focuses on Black artistic reactions to the pandemic and the political unrest that followed the murder of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and others. *Red Spring* explores the circular nature of systemic racism and the

0026-3079/2020/5904-023$2.50/0 American Studies, 60.3/4 (2021)

public policies—public safety, health, and wealth—that adversely impact Black and Indigenous communities. This work is remembrance and resurrection, resistance and restored hope in a social, economic, and political landscape of uprisings and upheaval, strange fruit buried in scorched earth. The international visual artists, musicians, designers, and writers gathered here ask the essential questions that plague us all. What ancient and familiar new blossoms will spring up from the change the world demands now? What sacrifices and compromises will be made in the days ahead? *Red Spring* evokes the clarion call for dignity, equality, and justice of Claude McKay's classic Red Summer poem, "If We Must Die." It speaks to the temporal and systemic changes that must come to pass throughout the diaspora in order to birth futures where Black lives truly matter.

Black Speculative Art is a creative, aesthetic practice that seeks to interpret, engage, design, or alter reality for the re-imagination of the past, the contested present, and act as a catalyst for the future. Second wave Afrofuturism/Afrofuturism 2.0 and the Black Speculative Arts Movement are indebted to previous movements like the Black Arts Movement (BAM), Negritude, The Harlem Renaissance, AfriCOBRA and other continental and diasporic African speculative movements (Anderson R. 2016). Our understanding of the multi-dimensionality of the Black experience—the good and the bad, the respectable and the undesirable—are explored. We see our curatorial work as a reinvigoration of the Black/African political imagination. Current issues concerning human and technological obsolescence, time, futurity, and economic and ecological forecasting are what plague our collective consciousness during this time of crisis. Long treated as dark matter, Black bodies have been integral to the emergence of modern capitalism, science, medical practice, and cultural assemblages, but little or not enough attention to Black health, precarity, and other threats within the context of Black futures and existential risk is developed (Alexander M. 2011; Jones E.L. 2016). *Curating the End of the World* and *Red Spring* aimed to address this absence through a mix of new and existing works of site-specific, participatory drawing, painting, photography, collage, sculpture, and performance.

Utilizing BSAM's international network and partners, our specific focus is to showcase through art the relationship between science, anti-blackness, and Black bodies in science fiction, technology, and public health. As such, *Curating the End of the World* and *Red Spring* are both consistent with BSAM's mission in that they demonstrate how art can be a point of departure for engaging with and possibly transforming socio-political issues facing Africa and the African Diaspora.

Of particular interest are three artistic works from the *Curating the End of The World* exhibition produced by visual artists John Jennings, Stacey Robinson, and La'Nora Boror. John Jennings's piece *JES'GREW* was originally produced for the Afrofuturist exhibition *Unveiling Visions: The Alchemy of the Black Imagination,* hosted at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City in 2015. Jennings noted:

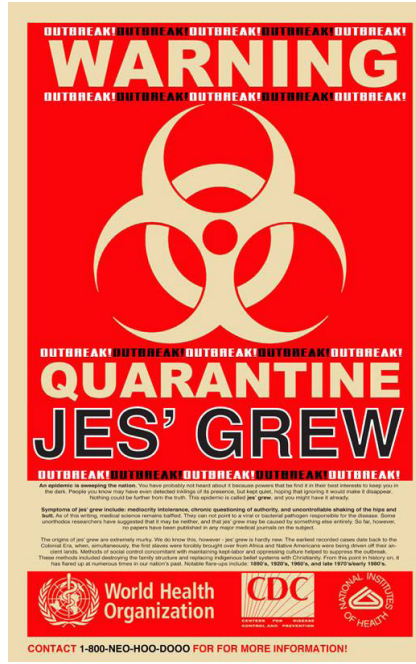

Figure 1: John Jennings, *JES'GREW* (2020).

> The idea was to create a piece of discursive design that fused together the utilitarian nature of a CDC poster with the fantastic allegory that Ishamel Reed used to create the malady of "Jes Grew." The poster served as a diegetic prototype that reified the concept that Reed was proposing (Jennings 2021).

JES'GREW piece was repurposed for *Curating the End of the World* as it seemed to capture the spirit of the time. It presciently and graphically illustrates the chaotic atmosphere surrounding the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and, similar to the tropes identified in the novel *Mumbo Jumbo* by Ishmael Reed, captures the reactionary response of the American public attitude to a disease that spread invisibly, disrupted social norms, and spread xenophobic behavior.

Correspondingly, visual artist Stacey Robinson, also an organizer for the beginning of *Curating at the End of the World*, helped to develop a piece for the exhibition, noting:

> *UNADJUSTEDNOWRAW* speaks to Black now, the survivalist state of being. We are always surviving, always unadjusted, always unjusticed, and in all ways, unmoved. The pandemic only heightened this state of regularity. Whether policed by tear gas, or airborne pathogens our activity always lies within enemy

Figure 2: Kamau Grantham and Stacey Robinson as BLACKMAU, *UNADJUSTEDNOWRAW* (2019).

> lines. Always finding our footing in what is a regular state affair as we battle police, pandemic, and pandemonium. Yet we hold onto our Africaness as transformative as it is advancing. We find the beauty in the midst of brutality, joy despite the injustice, and we rise above it all, transforming reform into revolution (Robinson 2021)

UNADJUSTEDNOWRAW captured the desperation of the African-descent community as it realized that the conditions of the pandemic exposed the precarious nature of their existence on the healthcare margins of American society. Furthermore, the art represented the stark nature of systemic racism in the United States, how fragile the social fabric of American life was, and how quickly it unraveled in the face of catastrophe.

Finally, La'Nora Boror's piece *Life-Altering* captures the new reality of life in a mask for Black people, and intentionally looks at the intersectional position occupied by women. Art critic Florian Kijlstra asserts:

> By placing a Black woman in a position that historically—and presently—is mainly reserved for White men, the work reclaims the practice of epistemological contemplation and defies the intersectional oppressive mechanisms that have prevented, and often still prevent, Black women from filling such positions.

> Through this engagement, *Life-altering* subverts the exclusionist and racialized implications of Western Enlightenment from an intersectional perspective (Kijlstra 2020).

Figure 3: La'Nora Boror aka Eco Artist Healer, *Life Altering* (2020).

In summation, the *Curating the End of the World* exhibition series serves as an online visual archive of the African diaspora experience in America during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the acceleration of capital to online platforms as working class people of color did not have the luxury of working from home, often functioning as front line workers that still had to pick up garbage and prepare or deliver food. Finally, the exhibition also serves as a turning point in the formation of platform capitalism as Black digital artists began to demonstrate an increasing sophistication with blockchain technology, developing NFTs or Non-Fungible Tokens as an alternative to the traditional route of using art dealers, other elite outlets, or hegemonic platforms like Google and more that control their artistic expression.

The first exhibition, *Curating the End of the World,* features creative works by Chloe Harrison, Jessi Jumanji, Kinnara : Desi La, Jordan P. Jackson, lovenloops, Zeal Harris, Kimberly Marie Ashby, Stacey Robinson, Patrick Earl Hammie, Jon-Carlos Evans and ReVerse Bullets, Shawanna Davis, Edreys Wajed, La'Nora Boror, Delia Martin, Sherese Francis, John Jennings, Damian Duffy, David Brame, Motherboxx Studios, Muniyra Douglas, Ingrid LaFleur, BLACKMAU, Zeal Harris, Nettrice Gaskins, William Falby, Charles E. Mason, Walidah Imarisha, Sheree Renée Thomas, Stefani Cox, Clinton R. Fluker, PhD, and ZiggZaggerz the Bastard with Tobias c. Van Veen.

Artists featured in *Red Spring* represent a variety of mediums and aesthetics and hail from around the world, including: Gerardo Castro, Jimmy James Greene, Algernon Miller, Bryce Detroit, Arthur Flowers, Shawn Theodore, Nicole Mitchell Black Earth Ensemble, S. Ross Browne, Jorge Elecer Bermudez, Ashundra Norris, Andea Rushing, Zeal Harris, Jackie B, Nicki Monteiro, Roldan Muradian, Jasteria, Eric Towles, Adeyemi Adegbesan (Yumg Yemi), Mahwyah Milton, Elle. L Littlefield, Ekpe Abioto and the African Jazz Ensemble, Linda D. Addison, Kristina Kay Rob-

inson, Weenta Girmay, Winifred Hawkins, Patience LeKien, Julia Mallory, Tokie Rome-Taylor, Regis and Kahran Bethencourt (Creative Soul Photography), Danian Darrell Jerry, Yasin Allah aka Mmilk. Hippy Soul (Idi Aah Que and Teco Sensei), Quentin VerCetty, Meighan Morson, Muniyra Douglas, Dedren Snead, M. James. Cooper, Jacqueline Johnson, Adebukola Buki Bodunrin, Street Genius, InnerGy, Intergalactic Soul (Marcus Kiser, Jason Woodberry, Quentin Talley), Picket Fence (Jay Webb), Cudda Mack, Mike Colley, A Slate, Audra D, Ron Herd II, Morisha Daneé, Taylor Deed, Paul Thomas the Recycle King, Daniel Coates, and tobacco brown.

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Métis Survivance: Land, Love, and Futures in Cherie Dimaline's Dystopian Novels

Celiese Lypka

"Who knows what it's like to leave, to give up a piece of land? If you do,
it might haunt you forever, follow you till you come back."
Marilyn Dumont[1]

Although widely different in their composition of Indigenous futurisms, Métis author Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (set in the dystopian future, [2017]) and *Empire of Wild* (set in the present as a dystopian landscape, [2019]) reveal the impossibility of a shareable future between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples under settler colonialism. In both novels, Indigenous bodies and land are co-opted by settler communities to be mined for capital gain. *The Marrow Thieves* presents a horrific future in which Indigenous bodies are harvested for their ability to dream, something that non-Indigenous peoples have lost the ability to do. The narrative focuses on a young man named Frenchie, who is trying to make sense of the colonial past and present, while looking toward an Indigenous-centric future. In *Empire of Wild*, Joan searches for her husband who loses control over his mind and body after suggesting they sell her family land to developers for mining and pipeline projects. The protagonists of both texts are Métis,[2] and the novels can be read as quests to find a sustainable community for the characters who, through processes of colonization, have forgotten Métis practices and ways of being—knowledge that is integral to healing and reconnecting with the land to build a better future in a postcapitalist world. Both Frenchie and Joan[3] begin their respective narratives lost and alone, in search of a specific place or person rooted in "decolonial love," what Leanne Betasamosake

0026-3079/2020/5904-023$2.50/0 American Studies, 60.3/4 (2021)

Simpson outlines as "a rebellion of love, persistence, commitment, and profound caring" that is a "generative refusal of colonial recognition."[4]

Kyle Whyte articulates how, through the sustained militaristic campaigns of settler colonialism across the globe (which includes damaging ecosystems for colonial gain, violent assimilation, and containment processes, as well as forced dependency and instilling conditions of mass fear), Indigenous peoples "already inhabit what our ancestors would have understood as a dystopian future."[5] This essay analyzes the representation of Métis communities within the dystopian settings of both novels, identifying the fractures of Métis identity as a result of land dispossession. Dimaline's dystopias detail various ways in which Indigenous people and the land they live on have been devastated by the violence of settler colonialism, leaving them in a nightmarish landscape where they are insidiously disconnected from land and Indigenous ways of being. I argue that through the processes of learning and putting into practice Indigenous storytelling rooted in landedness—what acclaimed Métis scholar Emma LaRocque defines as "Metis love of land"[6]—the protagonists come to embody decolonial love that cultivates Indigenous futures by upending colonial constructions of identity and community through relational resilience. Landedness, in its relationship with "a particular and unique land area . . . where we carry out body and home-stitching everydayness" is a "place where we become familiar" to ourselves, a place where we live and grow in decolonial love that nurtures Métis identity outside of colonial structures. This idea is particularly important in Dimaline's novels, as landedness is continuously threatened by the dystopian structures that abolish Indigenous land and ways of being.

Reading the colonial history of North America reveals the specific and insidious instances in which Indigenous peoples have been systematically eradicated to legitimize settler state claims to land, practices, and power. However, as Danika Medak-Saltzman identifies, "Yet, and despite the best efforts of settler colonial societies to deny Native peoples the possibility of meaningful futures, narratives about the future have always been, and remain, deeply entrenched in, and important to, Native communities."[7] And it's important to note, more specifically, how Indigenous storytelling embodies the interplay between the past, present, and future, acting as a method of narrative resistance in the face of the ongoing violent and linear colonization processes. At the same time, it also offers persistence in Indigenous peoples' connection and relationship to the land by providing a theoretical application to construct a viable future, including concerns over climate and ecological crisis brought about by unbridled capitalism. Thus, storytelling is predicated on creating a tethered line from the past to the present, allowing for a continuation of Indigenous knowledges into the future. In Dimaline's novels, Indigenous storytelling is paramount for sharing vital knowledge that holds power to stem ecological crisis and revive the land for possible future generations. This, Medak-Saltzman goes on to state, is the radical potential of Indigenous futurisms, "Since Native presence in North America, by colonial design, is always-already vanishing (rendering Indigenous futures

impossible), inserting ourselves into future narratives (as subjects, authors, and participants in futurity) is a particularly powerful act."[8] Sharing stories of the future in ways that are conjoined with the past and present is not only a "powerful act" of sovereignty, it's also "vital for survival."[9]

Stories, however, are not always easily shared; they are often dismissed, repressed, or forgotten. For many Indigenous communities, including the Métis, this is a constant reality under the processes of colonial fragmentation and kinship dispossession. Eurocentric worldviews have devalued Indigenous teachings; ancestry and relations have been repressed in the face of violent assimilation methods; and the severance of Indigenous kinships by nation-state systems has resulted in many difficulties concerning the transmissions of stories. However, as Lee Maracle reminds us, "Although our knowledge was scattered, it was not destroyed."[10] So long as there are story-keepers, there remains hope to collect knowledge and share stories for future community-building. Dimaline's work centers the need for Indigenous storytelling, both traditional and contemporary narratives such as her own, as a vital mode for healing the land from the devastation of settler colonialism and capitalist structures while also safeguarding spaces of decolonial love. Her method of storytelling is deeply rooted in Métis knowledge and ways of being that decenter colonial narratives of their identity as liminal and rootless. Employing language and stories from Métis histories, Dimaline shows the profound relationship between Métis communities and their landscapes that rejects settler logics of ownership and extraction, one that is based in everyday family life and livelihood on ancestral land. Thus, these novels deftly depict how Métisness is forever entangled in and in balance with the land. Frenchie's constant search for family in relation to his growing sense of his Métis identity in *The Marrow Thieves* parallels Joan's quest to save her husband and bring balance to her community in *Empire of Wild*, with both symbolizing the fractures of Métis identity and displacement from the land. These novels are invested in Indigenous futurisms, creating characters that cultivate a sense of self-love with their Indigenous communities to upend settler colonial formations of both indigeneity and the future. Frenchie and Joan, in their acts of decolonial love explored below, are active forces in Indigenous community-building and story-keeping that enacts Métis survivance, ensuring the continuance of their Indigenous sovereignty and care for the land in the present and, hopefully, into the future.

Métis Identity: Protagonists Who Are Lost, Not Liminal

The protagonists' specific connection to their Métis community is not always at the forefront of the novels; however, it is visible in the background of the narratives—acting as a framework while Frenchie and Joan endeavor to secure a sustainable future in their respective dystopian landscapes that threaten their respective Indigenous futures. They individually have lost connection with their sense of identity as Métis—Frenchie has little memory or knowledge of Métis history and Joan knows her family stories but often forgets or dismisses them—

but the language, stories, and structuring of the narratives evoke a relation to Métisness, suggesting that reconnecting with this identity is necessary to secure a viable future that fights back against the settler capitalism that threatens landedness. Although neither Frenchie nor Joan contextualizes their respective journeys as a mode to reconcile the colonial destruction of their individual senses of Métisness, I read the depiction of their division from Métis knowledge and the land as a reminder of the insidious ways in which colonialism is always working to sever Indigenous claims and kinship. The "forgetfulness," as Dimaline writes it, of both characters concerning severed connections with (home)land and practices of decolonial love can be read as a metonym for ways that settler colonialism threatens to disturb not only a secure sense of Indigenous identity but also the possibilities of Indigenous resurgence. Aubrey Hanson defines "resurgence as the regrowth of Indigenous communities from strong roots toward strong futures, building upon tradition and heritage through processes of revitalization and reclamation in order to create healthy, vibrant, self-determining nations."[11] Resurgence, therefore, is predicated on Indigenous communities and their relationship to the land—the desire and necessity of building and rebuilding Indigenous worlds. And Dimaline's work weaves together a continuous refrain of how land, identity, and knowledge are integral to one another and vital for futurity.

The ongoing politics of Métis identity crises in Canada, fueled by colonial interventions into Indigenous self-determination and safeguarding, speak pointedly to the formation of community-building in Dimaline's novels that reflects how the Métis nation has "struggled and survived" in a setting that continues to unsettle the formations of its culture.[12] In his study of the racialized project of Métis identity in Canada, Chris Andersen provides an illuminating history of the (mis)recognition of Métis Nation and how colonial narratives continue to frame Métis as a "biological mixedness" between indigeneity and whiteness rather than a distinct people and culture.[13] Andersen's unpacking of colonial understandings of race-based politics of Métis identity complements LaRocque's criticism of the (little) scholarship available on Métis literature, which "has been subject to a series of misrepresentations and misnomers emerging from the legacy of colonial history… It is almost impossible to treat Métis literature without dealing with the intricacies of identity."[14] This colonial gaze of reducing Métis identity to race-based politics of hybridity is an active attempt to delegitimize them as an Indigenous group while also hiding the collective moment of the Métis resistance that is embedded with a desire to secure a sovereign future.[15] This dismissal of Métis Indigenous identity is also entrenched within nation-state politics of land and resource entitlements that led to the dislocation of Métis communities, severing their livelihood and kinship networks that were predicated on their connection to homeland, which was based in a purposeful relationship with waterways and landscape for livelihood (fur trade and buffalo hunting), extended family structures, and daily cultural practices. As LaRocque points out, many "contemporary Metis writers and scholars seek to deconstruct the West's stereotype of the itinerant hybrid and to re-inscribe or, more properly,

re-root the Metis with home(land), community, culture, and agency."[16] In both *The Marrow Thieves* and *Empire of Wild*, Dimaline represents Métis characters who are lost but not liminal and employ decolonial love to reconnect with their Métisness (their kin, ways of life, and love of the land) while actively combating settler colonialist desires to fracture Indigenous community.

In *The Marrow Thieves*, Dimaline depicts this journey towards Métis understanding as an uneasy path for Frenchie, a young teenager who stumbles and makes mistakes along the way—not always recognizing where knowledge comes from or how best to honor it. The novel opens with "Frenchie's Coming-to Story," which describes the events leading up to his meeting with Miigwans's family in the woods of former Northern Ontario. The story begins with Frenchie and his brother Mitch on the run from "school" (the new system of residential schools set up for marrow harvesting). Within a matter of moments Recruiters capture Mitch, and Frenchie is left on his own to ruminate over his recently lost family members: first his father, then mother, followed by Mitch. His memories, which explain why his family has been moving north to escape Recruiters, are couched explicitly in language that evokes Métis history. Frenchie remembers his feelings of disappointment when his family was still together and had to move from their temporary settlement: "none of us were keen on leaving, especially me and Mitch. We had family here, blood and otherwise. There were other families, people like us, who had settled here. The old people called it the New Road Allowance. And now we were jamming clothes and jars of preserves wrapped in blankets into our duffel bags to move again."[17] To calm his dislike of moving, Frenchie's father insists that in doing so, "We'll find a way, … up North is where we'll find home."[18] In this passage, Dimaline implements a traditional dystopian narrative—the drive to move north for possible safety, away from the tyranny and wreckage of urban centers[19]—only to echo how the Métis have previously made and lived along this path. This mapping of the Road Allowance People, dispossessed Métis groups from the end of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century who moved north from the Red River Settlement across the prairie provinces to settle on crown land intended for infrastructure in rural areas, demonstrates the continued struggle for Métis in the spaces of the novel.[20] Frenchie's comments about his connection to the makeshift settlement demonstrate his desire for a sense of landedness, of being able to build and make connections with the landscape so as to foster community and security.

There are other moments in the novel that evoke the history of Road Allowance People, and it's important to note how Frenchie seems unaware of the specifics of this history—he simply knows that the "old people" placed the word "new" to the previous labeling, indicating that perhaps they lived like this once before. In the opening chapter, we learn the deliberateness of this lack of knowledge, as Frenchie's father laments how lucky his children are that they "didn't remember how it had been, so [they] had less to mourn."[21] Significantly, by not imparting the history to his son, Frenchie's father inadvertently ensures a further disconnect for his children of the specific connection of Métis identity and unacknowledged

land claims by the colonial nation-state. Thus, Frenchie doesn't hold the history of rebellion or the fight for sovereignty to be defenders of the land. This history, of course, is remembered by "the old people"—which includes Frenchie's father, Isaac (Miigwans's lost "halfbreed" husband), and Minerva (an elder and story-keeper). However, this history isn't specific to only Métis communities in the present, as all Indigenous peoples are attempting to evade the Recruiters while moving along the roads in makeshift communities. And these concerns and politics directly reflective of Métis nationhood are not overtly dealt with in the novel. In fact, the Métis or "halfbreeds" are only referenced a handful of times; the first instance is found in the second chapter when Frenchie identifies to the reader the members of Miigwans's "patchwork family."[22] Frenchie and a young girl, RiRi, are the only members of the family specified as Métis, and Frenchie makes a note of how he was nicknamed "as much for my name [Francis] as for my people—the Métis. I came from a long line of hunters, trappers, and voyageurs. But now, with most of the rivers cut into pieces and lakes left as grey sludge puckers on the landscape, my own history seemed like a myth along the lines of dragons."[23] Through multiple generations of dislocation, Frenchie has become so removed from his kinship histories that the stories become unfamiliar and almost magical. Although Andersen's in-depth study makes clear that there are no easy answers to the understanding of Métis nation and peoplehood, he does contend that their "sense of peoplehood was produced, first, in [ongoing] conflict and, later, in the diplomacy of interactions between a growing Métis people as they dealt, in collaboration with their Indigenous relatives, with encroachments by European settlers."[24] Most importantly, however, Frenchie notes how their settlement is made up of family members both "blood and otherwise," showing how community is made up of multiple Indigenous families uniting for a cultural and political purpose of survival, reverberating the history of Road Allowance.

Empire of Wild is more direct in its framing of Métis identity and cultural community consciousness as integral elements of the novel's plot and structure. Even still, rather than focusing on how Dimaline combines considerations of Métisness with current ecological concerns, the novel is hailed as a "supernatural thriller" with little mention of the novel's care for contemporary Indigenous concerns. This is particularly evidenced in a review for National Public Radio that frames the novel as a slight story that is simply "about Joan, [a woman] who has lost her husband. And who means to get him back. That's all. There are no worlds to be saved, no history to be altered."[25] This oversimplification of the plot (which is predicated on an assumption that Indigenous storytelling is both "mythic" and not epistemologically equal to Euro-American history) completely misses the point of Dimaline's novel and her approach with storytelling: the importance of cultivating community practices to preserve Indigenous ways of tending to the land and kinship, countering settler colonialism as the only possible future. In actuality, in *Empire of Wild* there are histories to be remembered and worlds to be saved—the literal empire of wild that surrounds the community is under threat by mining companies. As the novel progresses and the insidious process of mining

practices on Indigenous communities is depicted in various ways, readers are invited to recall the novel's opening that provides an attentive and sustained description of the kinship and land practices of Joan's Métis community in Georgian Bay, Ontario. The prologue, "A New Hunt," begins as a rooted explanation of the connection between the Métis of the fictional area called Arcand and their relation to the land. The narrator reflects on how, within this area, "In any halfbreed home there were jars of coins and a wistful plan to buy back the land, one acre at a time,"[26] echoing the history of Métis land claim concerns also evidenced in *The Marrow Thieves*. The history detailed in the prologue is put in tension with the present moment, where Joan's family and other Métis community members struggle with finding sustainability and maintaining family land. In the opening chapter, Joan's brother gets into a fight with their grandmother about the possibility of working for the mines so he can make enough money to keep their land. Joan's mother eventually snaps at Mere: "What are we supposed to do? Stay poor? Would that prove to you that we're Indian enough?" and Mere serenely answers no, "we are supposed to stay right with the community. That's how we know we're Indian enough."[27] This scene highlights how (even momentary) lapses in practice relating to the care and nurturing of community directly connects to the ability (or lack thereof) to preserve the land.

Importantly, Dimaline's opening line of the novel reassures readers that the connection between storytelling and practice, the ancestral gift of "old medicine," is preserved in the land so long as people are open to it: "Old medicine has a way of being remembered, of haunting the land where it was laid. People are forgetful. Medicine is not."[28] Not surprisingly, given the function of memory and forgetting that structures the novel, the urgency of landedness that begins the novel is seemingly forgotten by the end of the narrative. In an interview, Dimaline reveals that the opening sentence reflects the discord of forgetting that haunts Joan of Arcand.

> I was trying to write about my community. … [Joan is] a very modern woman and she's still in her community, which can exist at the same time. She had just forgotten that beauty of being an Indigenous women [sic]—that she had forgotten, but that place that she is from had not forgotten. I always wanted it to be about Joan and that she had forgotten something and something beautiful that could be really powerful.[29]

Dimaline's words thus slant the novel's perspective to focus more on Joan's relation to herself and indigeneity rather than her need to find her husband, Victor. Of course, the narrative is about Joan's quest to save her husband, but it is also about a journey that leads her to reconcile her sense of identity with her Métis community, to reignite her Métis love for land. Like Frenchie, Joan is lost; Frenchie does not have the memory of connection to healthy Indigenous relations of land (this has been taken from him by the systems of the New Order), but Joan appears in the novel in the middle of a crisis, having forgotten that "her

land made her happier than she could have imagined. … The place reminded her who she was."[30] There is a switch for Joan in the narrative, where her sense of self—of the land's ability to "remind her who she was"[31]—is replaced with her desperate need to recover Victor. Dimaline appears to be suggesting, through her reimagining of a traditional romance plot, that heteronormative Western notions of love as all-consuming are in direct conflict with decolonial love rooted in self-love and ties to community kinship. Strikingly, the need to recover Victor only comes about because of his own inability to "stay right with the community," revealing his personal gap with decolonial love. He only goes missing after he and Joan fight "about selling the land she'd inherited from her father."[32] And it's no coincidence that once Victor leaves, all future chapters that detail his first-person perspective are set within "a twenty-six-acre cell,"[33] the exact amount of land that Joan inherited from her father and that would be destroyed by mining companies if Victor had convinced her to sell.

Storytelling: Reconnecting Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being

While *The Marrow Thieves* is interested in showing the relation between story-keepers and the future, of how those who hold ancestral knowledge unfold Indigenous storytelling in ways that secure a future (however tenuous), *Empire of Wild* demonstrates this to readers in its very unfolding of a story that is being told to and lived by Joan as it happens—her story, which is based in traditional Métis stories, is necessary for repairing the future for herself and kin. In these ways, Dimaline demonstrates a fundamental aspect of the importance of storytelling within Indigenous communities, that of theoretical application and practice. This aligns with Dian Million's observation that "Story has always been practical, strategic, and restorative. Story is Indigenous theory. If these knowledges are couched in narratives, then narratives are always more than telling stories. Narratives seek inclusion, they seek the nooks and crannies of experiences, filling cracks and restoring order."[34] Combining the theoretical framework of Indigenous storytelling with the application of Indigenous futurisms that envisions speculative spaces of possibilities, hopes, and dreams gives a way of reconciling the past in the present while creating a generative space for the future. This restoring of order and reconciliation of Indigenous ways of being agrees with Grace Dillon's contention that all instances of Indigenous futurism "are narratives of *biskaabiiyang*, an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of 'returning to ourselves,' which involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world."[35] Through this "process of returning to ourselves," Indigenous peoples must also return to and navigate trauma of the past (which is often trauma that continues into the present) that has separated the individual from their community. In *The Marrow Thieves* and *Empire of Wild*, part of the "emotional and psychological baggage carried" by the protagonists is

an unarticulated struggle to reconcile their dislocated subjectivities as resulting from their separations from Métis identity through settler colonial violences of removing Indigenous bodies from homelands.

Dimaline signals in Frenchie's young perspective the disjunct between his sense of self and his Métis identity, and how this displacement and missing stories leave him unprepared to cultivate a strong sense of decolonial love. While his journey leads to many nonblood kinship ties across Indigenous communities in a way that celebrates Indigenous relations, he is also missing essential stories from his ancestors that could help him learn more of himself and his community outside of a settler gaze. This is perhaps most evident when considering Frenchie's understanding of hair braiding: "I did have the longest hair of any of the boys, almost to my waist, burnt ombré at the untrimmed edges. I braided it myself each morning, to keep it out of the way and to remind myself of things I couldn't quite remember but that, nevertheless, I knew to be true."[36] The significance of braiding is known to Frenchie, but there is dissonance in his understanding of the underlying storytelling that is bound up with the act of braiding—a story that reinforces the connection to ancestors, earth, and the creator. He enacts practices without "quite remember[ing]" for what purpose, not seeming to realize how the very act of braiding brings him closer to his culture and kinship ties, how the process is an act of love that strengthens cultural relationships. Instead, Frenchie compares the length and braiding of his hair to the other Indigenous boys in the community (particularly his rival Derrick), surveying them in ways that are complicit with settler colonial understandings of what makes an Indian: how Indigenous they look based on colonial notions of cultural signifiers. Whenever Frenchie feels unsure about his place within the community or how he "stacks up" against other male members of the collective, he reassures himself by noting that he "still had the longest braids. . . . That made [him] a better Indian, after all."[37] Though it may at first seem like typical young adult behavior, these insecurities are reflective of Frenchie's gap between storytelling (which holds Indigenous knowledges) and practice within his community.[38] Part of the novel's ingenuity and its YA perspective is how often Frenchie stumbles in his quest, showing readers his misrecognition of the importance of storytelling to reconcile his displaced Métis identity.

This can also be seen in his thoughts regarding the elder of their group, Minerva, who turns out to hold the key to ending the new residential school systems. It is because of Minerva and her ancestral songs that there is hope to create meaningful change in the future by restoring the land to Indigenous communities and repairing what capitalism has destroyed. For most of the novel, Frenchie dismisses the value of Minerva—echoing how in the novel, settler communities fail to understand the nuances of ceremony and the power of medicine. For instance, Frenchie views Minerva as someone who needs to be "babysat" rather than someone who can impart vital knowledge. He considers himself "lucky" when he gets to go hunting with Miigwans and learn from him,[39] prioritizing the male leader's knowledge of "Apocalyptic Boy Scouts" skills over

"crazy old Minerva" and her connection to ancestral knowledge,[40] which he doesn't "quite get."[41] In contrast, Rose, a fierce young woman with Indigenous and Black heritage, immediately recognizes Minerva's importance to the community's future through her gift as story-keeper, and Rose practices being in good relation with Minerva by pursuing closeness and learning as much as she can from their time together. When Rose speaks a Cree word to Frenchie, one that she learned from Minerva, he becomes animated in his annoyance: "'How do you have language?' My voice broke on the last syllable. My chest tightened. How could she have the language? She was the same age as me, and I deserved it more. I don't know why, but I felt certain that I did. I yanked my braid out of the back of my shirt and let it fall over my shoulder. Some kind of proof, I suppose."[42] In this scene, Frenchie does not recognize the power of Minerva's love embodied in connection to language and ancestral knowledge. Instead, he displays a moment of toxic masculinity in which he believes that his gender and braid are markers of his merit over Rose to hold language. Even after the group learns that Minerva holds the ancestor's power within her and uses it to destroy Recruiter marrow extraction tools, Frenchie misunderstands this power and is anxious to find Minerva to learn her process of destruction. Miigwans tiredly explains to him that, "She didn't find anything. She always had it. Maybe we just need to be better listeners."[43] This gap in listening for Frenchie is rooted in his removal from Métis knowledge and storytelling. He is anxious for hearing and learning more stories throughout the novel, soaking in the historical stories that Miigwans narrates to the group and even getting excited when Minerva tells children's stories to the younger members of the family. But because this process of storytelling is new to him, due to both his father's reluctance to tell him stories and the severs of settler colonialism that have kept him from communities like Miigwans's, he hasn't yet learned how to truly listen to the lessons of the story-keepers and put them into daily practices of restoration.

The idea of being a better listener (in ways that transmit tradition and knowledge to enact resurgence) also ripples through *Empire of Wild* as Joan repeatedly recalls the stories of her youth but fails to translate them into practices that bring her closer to her Indigenous identity—an issue that both her grandmother and friend Ajean comment on frequently. The two older women narrate stories to Joan, who expresses her "exasperat[ion] by all this Indian shit" while the storytellers reprimand her for being "no good at listening."[44] Ironically, Joan is given all the practical information that she needs to save Victor and bring balance to herself and the community from the beginning of the novel, but because she dismisses the teachings, her journey is that much more difficult. The main story being told is that of the rogarou, a community tale found within Métis nations.[45] In an interview, Dimaline clarifies the use of the figure in her stories, stating that the rogarou

> is different in every Métis community. But in mine, he's a big black dog who also kind of looks like a man and talks. … He had

> this seductive quality to him, but he would lure [women] and could cause great harm. And for the people who identified as male in our community, the rogarou was the story you would hear for what you could turn into; so, if you broke the rules of the community… in particular, if you didn't listen to or take care of the women in the community, you could turn into the rogarou. … It was like a curse.[46]

In this conversation, Dimaline outlines how the rogarou is used to interpolate the Métis individual, causing them to reflect on what makes them a "good enough Indian" and to always be mindful of how their actions affect the balance of the community.[47] The prologue outlines this specifically, noting that when the Métis Arcand "forgot what they had asked for in the beginning—a place to live, and for the community to grow in a good way—[the rogarou] remembered, and he returned on padded feet, light as stardust on the newly paved road. And that rogarou, heart full of his own stories but his belly empty, he came home not just to haunt. He also came to hunt."[48]

Initially, the novel sets up Joan as lost because of Victor's disappearance; and the act of forgetting that has led this Métis community into imbalance is because Victor (an outsider who has drifted most of his adult life) had no strong ties to the community and their stories and thus forgot (or rather never held knowledge) about the importance of land. When Joan visits her grandmother the day after Victor leaves to try and make sense of what has happened in their relationship, Mere steers the conversation into his connection with their community and ways of being.

> "Victor, he's from out west, isn't it? He didn't grow up in community, yeah?"
>
> "He did when he was littler, with his mom, but then he went with his dad to Winnipeg." She cut the twine with a small pair of sewing scissors and knotted it.
>
> "Sometimes we forget what's real. For him, he sees a different way of being secure, I suppose." Mere touched some of the smaller leaves thoughtfully with her pointed fingernail, appreciating the architecture of the plant. "It's not bad, just not right."[49]

This moment, initially, seems only to be directed at Victor and his actions concerning the land, his dismissal of the land to bring security to him and his family; indeed, his inability to understand the land's potential to enact sovereignty. But in this conversation, as Mere muses on "different way[s] of being secure" while making a physical connection to the earth by gingerly touching a plant, she is also commenting on Joan's own lapse in "forget[ting] what's real." Implicit in this scene of Mere's consideration of what makes community and reality is

the missing link of storytelling. Victor lacks the security gained from being connected to kinship through the knowledge passed down from generation to generation in storytelling—knowledge that keeps the community balanced and establishes a reciprocal relationship with the land. And, more importantly, Joan is also complicit in this moment of forgetting the stories that keep her tied to her Métis family and homeland. The division that Victor has brought into their lives through the act of land and kinship betrayal pulls Joan further from knowing and being herself. Therefore, the rogarou comes not only because of Victor's betrayal but also because Joan has lost her connection with her Métis roots: "She felt lighter leaving the burden of young and old relatives behind, lighter and without boundaries. It was scary to be this weightless, to be unheld."[50]

Indigenous Futurisms: Imagining Métis Landedness

The Marrow Thieves constructs a world in which settler communities come to face one of the unsettling feelings that racialized people experience: that of not being able to see themselves in the future. Set in the not-so-distant future, when our "world [is] nearly destroyed by global warming,"[51] the novel depicts a reprisal of the partnership between the Canadian government and religious organizations under the residential school systems, first established in New France, showing how settler colonialism continues to enact similar violent structures to destroy Indigenous life and bodies. The realization of a missing secure future unfolds for settlers like a Greek tragedy: "At first they just talked about it all casual-like. 'Oh, funniest thing, I haven't dreamed in months.' 'Isn't it odd, I haven't dreamed either.' . . . [But then,] they turned on each other, and the world changed again."[52] Later in the novel, an observation is made that a man without dreams is just a machine, echoing back to the epigraph: "The way to kill a man or a nation is to cut off his dreams, the way the whites are taking care of the Indians: killing their dreams, their magic, their familiar spirits."[53] The irony of this reversal of settler societies, who have historically stolen futures from racialized peoples, losing the ability to imagine themselves in the future after decades of pillaging from the land and communities is surprisingly not often commented on in reviews or scholarship.[54] This is most likely because this reversal in the novel, while throwing settler communities into desperate action, still does not overthrow the power imbalance of settler nations continuing to enact violent colonization processes over Indigenous peoples. Thus, readers are more likely to reflect upon the novel's main premise: that without dreams, there are no futures; and with no futures, what point is there?

If we read this question as a way to reconceive the difficulty of imagining a future for Indigenous peoples as they navigate colonial processes that actively attempt to eradicate their presence and culture, then Dimaline recenters approaches to the future by repositing her dystopian narratives to enact modes of decolonial love through reconnection with the land by Indigenous practices. Of course, before doing this, *The Marrow Thieves* sets up a picture in which settler communities actively refuse to accept Indigenous worldviews and knowledge

as answers to repairing the world or offering a promising vision of the future—because this future is centered on a sharable world rather than one based in capitalist structures. Now, however, as the world crumbles around them and they suffer physically and mentally from their inability to dream, settler communities in North America grow frantic at the possibility of losing their position of power and contrived sense of control:

> At first, people turned to Indigenous people the way the New Agers had, all reverence and curiosity, looking for ways we could help guide them. They asked to come to ceremony. They humbled themselves when we refused. And then they changed on us, like the New Agers, looking for ways they could take what we had and administer it themselves. How could they best appropriate the uncanny ability we kept to dream? How could they make ceremony better, more efficient, more economical?[55]

Linking the government and Recruiters of the present to the harmful commodification process of New Agers from the 1970s onward, Miigwans articulates how disassociated the New Order is from the ongoing ecological crises that are leading to the death of millions. In the face of ecological apocalypse, the government originally dismisses the need to slow down its commodification of the land before it must give up on further development due to the irreversible damage it has inflicted; it then shifts its approach to focus on the fastest way to co-opt methods from Indigenous communities to give dreams to non-Indigenous peoples and settle their growing unease. They have lost sight of what is important; they have forgotten (or, more likely, never knew) that the land is vital, above humans, for survival. This lapse in settler knowledge, of continuously refusing to understand what is vital for balance in the future, is contrasted by Frenchie and his active memory work of re-establishing family ties and building a community of knowledge centered on tending to devastated homelands.

As the embodiment and keeper of dreams from the ancestors, Minerva represents the promise of a better future for the land and community. At first, the death of Minerva is too great and signals, particularly for the younger members of the community who have fewer memories of traditional ways of being, their collective certain death—without the language and dreams that Minerva carried in her bones, the family has lost the key to overthrowing the New Order. The future that they believed was so near, in which settler colonial structures could be destroyed and Indigenous ways of being would flourish, appears lost. The characters believe themselves to be in an even worse predicament than where they started at the beginning of the novel because they have lost their youngest member (Riri and her symbol of the future) and their elder. The loss of Minerva strikingly coheres with Maracle's assertion that Indigenous peoples "are operating from a diminished capacity to imagine the future not because we are

not capable of brilliance but because the knowledge we were to inherit has been seriously diminished, scattered, or altered."[56] But, as previously noted, Maracle also asserts that scattered knowledge is not gone, simply mislaid; and even though Indigenous peoples have been further displaced in *The Marrow Thieves*, with many no longer connected to their kin or ancestral knowledge, characters like Minerva demonstrate how storytelling not only imagines a better future, but it also creates one. Through the stories she holds and shares, Minerva imparts vital knowledge that can be used to "start healing the land. We have the knowledge. … When we heal our land, we are healed also. …We'll get there. Maybe not soon, but eventually."[57] This passage articulates the growing consciousness of the rebel Indigenous group, particularly with the older generations who recognize that their mission is not just destroying the Recruiters and New Order but also establishing homelands and a viable connection with landedness—no matter how long the process.

How the rebel Indigenous community moves forward in their planning for the future resonates with Andersen's articulation of the specific movements of Métis political and cultural consciousness, revealing that the postcapitalist dystopia is also depicting the longer ongoing story of Indigenous survivance. He argues that rather than a colonial notion of Métis nation as liminal peoples who hail from First Nations women and European fur traders, the Métis are a kinship community that arose under the particular conflict and violence experienced in the Red River area and grew into a specific Indigenous peoples. Andersen intends to demonstrate how "Métis national origins" are more correctly articulated as "a political consciousness" formed due to the need for Métis sovereignty and connection to care for and tend to the land.[58] Thinking about these cultural and political relations is integral for considering the ending of the novel and the actions of the rebel Indigenous community, which opens a space specifically for thinking through the dynamics of cultivating Indigenous futures in a way that echoes the Métis nation:

> The council spent a lot of time piecing together the few words and images each of us carried: hello and goodbye in Cree, a story about a girl named Sedna whose fingers made all the animals of the North. They wrote what they could, drew pictures, and made the camp recite what was known for sure. It was Bullet's idea to start a youth council, to start passing on the teachings right away, while they were still relearning themselves. Slopper was tasked with putting that together, and he thrived under the responsibility. He even gave them a name: Miigwanang—feathers. We were desperate to craft more keys, to give shape to the kind of Indians that could not be robbed. It was hard, desperate work. We had to be careful we weren't making things up, half remembered, half dreamed.[59]

The above passage demonstrates the collaborative consciousness of the rebel community moving forward—combining Cree words, an Inuit creation story, forming a new council with an Ojibwe name, and other unnamed aspects from various Indigenous nations. The community, recalling the survival practices of Métis nation, is a collective consciousness determined to retain knowledge and move forward toward a better future. Dimaline's reimagination of Métis nation practices—a postcontact Indigenous nation that assembled a political, social, and cultural consciousness of kinship alongside moments of violent conflict with settlers—under this new Indigenous rebellion enables a parallel reading of the practices for enacting Indigenous resurgence and survivance.

In *Empire of Wild*, the Recruiters and New Order are reimagined in the form of Thomas Heiser, a PR consultant hired by mining projects, and his group of roving evangelists that demonstrate how settler colonialism is organized with the specific aim of eliminating Indigenous sovereignty by destroying their relationship to the land. Heiser comes to symbolize the long history of Métis dispossession of land and sovereignty, which is causally related to how the land shapes Métis identity. In a similar way that *The Marrow Thieves* evokes Road Allowance People, *Empire of Wild* employs Heiser and his conceptions of the problem of Métis to his project to depict the legacy of industrial encroachments and strategic fracturing of Métis communities. He articulates the colonial notion that the Métis sprang up, seemingly from nowhere, as an Indigenous project to counter settler land claims: "Fucking Métis never used to be an issue. No one gave a shit about halfbreeds in these deals. But now, they were everywhere, on everything."[60] Near the end of the novel, readers learn that Heiser found Victor after his betrayal of Joan and her family. Heiser seizes the opportunity to use Victor in his vulnerable state of the rogarou to co-opt his charm and connections to sway the local Métis community into giving up their homeland to pipeline projects. And, as depicted in the novel, his strategy proves successful; Victor, under the control of the rogarou, persuades the community that

> "These lands were given to us by the Lord Himself," he insisted. "They are ours to live on and prosper from. This entire wilderness is ours for the very purpose of celebrating and honoring the glory of God. . . . This entire empire of wild is ours in order that we may rejoice in His name. . . . We must build churches, new homes, better schools, thriving businesses—all in His name. This is how we move forward. This is how we heal."[61]

In this passage, Victor articulates a sense of healing the land and Indigenous bodies with a similar type of language used in *The Marrow Thieves*, but with an obviously different rhetorical purpose. Rather than reconnecting Indigenous communities with a sense of landedness that supports reciprocal healing of Indigenous bodies and land, Victor, under the curse of the rogarou, spews the

message Heiser has instilled in his consciousness to distract the local Indigenous communities and move forward with his mining project. In this way, the "empire of wild" is stripped of the Métis love for land that opens the novel in the prologue. Victor's speech also brings up the ongoing tensions that underlie his conflicted relation to the land. Even under the power of the rogarou, Victor continues to need a physical connection to the land, choosing to sleep outdoors often during the mission's travels: "He slept in the woods when he could. He said that to be under the stars made him feel closer to God."[62] Of course, being in the wilderness does not actually bring Victor closer to God; it brings him closer to Joan and his previous connection to the land of her community before his act of betrayal.

Ironically, it's the mining worker Joan meets in a bar one night that reveals to her the link between the ecological destruction in the community and Heiser's mission tents. While flirting and buying her drinks, Gerald comments that "The only real threat to a project—to our jobs—are the Indians. They're the ones with the goddamned rights, I guess. Always protesting and hauling us to court."[63] It's Gerald's rants, as he tries to get closer to Joan's body, that unfold the truth to Joan about the connection between Heiser's group and the land: "Mission tents are an important part of mining, of any project really—mining, forestry, pipelines"; leading Joan to the conclusion that "Missions are *part* of the project."[64] If she had listened to Mere at the beginning of the novel—when she tells everyone that the church is a part of the mining industry, but the family blows this information off as a "conspiracy theory"[65]—Joan would already have this knowledge. But her failure to listen to her grandmother's wisdom has left her without this vital information. However, at the pivotal moment when Joan realizes her one chance to save Victor from his rogarou, she recalls Ajean's stories and uses the knowledge to release him from the curse: "Remind him he is a man under it all. You can do it by making the thing bleed. Make him remember." Minerva expresses a similar interaction that she had with a rogarou: "It starts with that violence and ends with that singing in my gut—another violence. He comes as beast and I make him bleed. … When I bring the blood, he brings the man." When Joan strikes two blows to Victor, once for his killing of Mere under the rogarou curse and once for his betrayal to Joan and her land, the shedding of the blood wakes him from the curse and restores him. In so doing, the violence Joan exacts rebalances Victor's violence that perpetrated capitalist notions of extraction, monetization, and ecological desolation.

Decolonial Love: Strengthening Kinship and Identity

Decolonial love can be envisioned in many ways, and Dimaline's novels in this study offer two vastly different approaches: one explored through coming-of-age tropes of discovery concerning kinship, ancestors, and land; the other through adult autonomy and passion in the face of colonial nation-state dislocation. Notably, the characters' processes of finding love are intrinsically tied to their understanding of the importance of story-keeping, as well as the moments in which they forget the power of their ancestors' teachings about

land and kinship. Thus, their quests for decolonial love are tied to rebalancing a sense of landedness with their communities and homelands, working to establish an active process of, what Gerald Vizenor terms, Native survivance: "an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent."[66] While Vizenor's articulation of survivance doesn't at first appear to provide an explicit consideration of decolonial love, when thought of in connection with Simpson's conditions for "resurgent struggle" it becomes clear that survivance is the ultimate act of self-love needed to enact Indigenous futures: "When my Indigeneity grows I fall more in love with my homeland, my family, my culture, my language, more in line with the idea that resurgence is my original instruction, more in line with the thousands of stories that demonstrate how to live a meaningful life and I have more emotional capital to fight and protect what is meaningful to me."[67] The moment of finding oneself and community, as discussed below in Dimaline's novels, is vital for the Métis protagonists to thrive and, hopefully, upend settler-colonial power. It leads to a powerful act of decolonial love and resurgence. By the end of the novels, both Frenchie and Joan come to find themselves and embody a sense of decolonial love that allows them to accept and give recognition to all the fractured parts of their Indigenous selves, which brings them closer to restoration and balance.

Despite this thriving collective consciousness at the end of the novel, Frenchie thinks his journey of community finding isn't over yet. Although he has come to respect and care for the power of ancestral relations that Minerva embodied, he still doesn't understand how the "key" Minerva holds works, which is through a connection to the ancestors through decolonial love. Frenchie chooses to leave his new family, which now includes his biological father, to follow Rose on a new journey to travel and find other communities; however, the young couple's journey ends before it begins. When they are about to leave, Frenchie and Rose join group members who rush to encounter new travelers trespassing outside the settlement site. They soon discover that the newcomers' leader is Miigwans's long-lost husband, Isaac, who speaks Cree fluently and has a strong connection with the ancestors and land. Interestingly, both Minerva and Isaac are labelled as "halfbreed" in the novel, while Minerva is Métis though not articulated as such.[68] In this revelation that Isaac is alive and holds the power of decolonial love that Minerva also embodied, Frenchie comes to realize all the acts of love and connection to the ancestors' knowledge that he has witnessed in relation to Indigenous survivance—his father leaving, his brother's sacrifice, Minerva's gift of ancestral song, and Isaac's continued search for Miigwans. Frenchie's journey isn't just about learning, healing, and fostering communities in the hope of repairing the earth, it is also learning about decolonial love that counters the generational trauma of settler colonialism: "That bundle I carried in my chest, the one that inflated when I heard about our triumphs, the one that ached with our losses, the same place where my love for Rose nested and the painful memories were enshrined and mourned: from there came the push, and I set off running."[69]

This feeling "push[es]" Frenchie back towards the rebel community and their consciousness of extended kinship building, as he and Rosie decide to ultimately stay at the settlement.

> And I understood just what we would do for each other, just what we would do for the ebb and pull of the dream, the bigger dream that held us all.
> Anything.
> Everything.[70]

At this moment, Frenchie experiences at full height the true power of decolonial love—the "bundle" that carries all the sadness and hope of an Indigenous community into the future.

It is not only the rebel Indigenous community in *The Marrow Thieves* who understands the connection between body, land, and healing; in *Empire of Wild,* Dimaline is careful to note how Joan comes from "a particular Red River family" who grew medicine "salt [that] came from the[ir ancestors'] actual bones."[71] The bone salt is used as a means of protection for homes and people. Notably, the family legacy of bone salt is grounding to Joan, reminding her of her connection to the land she is on, including both her current quest and also the family memories that were laid there. Importantly, it is the combination of her Mere's bone salt and the power of her sexual connection with Victor that leads Joan to her victory over Heiser. With the salt and her physical love, Joan subdues Victor long enough to wound him in the flesh, which ignites his humanity and reminds him of his ties to Joan and her community. In many ways, the story's finale is an action of decolonial love, breaking the cages and restrictions of colonial captivity, both figuratively and literally. However, this healing that enacts the bringing together of physical bodies and emotional connection between Victor and Joan does not explicitly address coming home or healing the land from settler colonialism. Yet, I argue that their coming back together is symbolically linked to a return of connection with the land and resurgence of cultural community—a reunion that mends the break from Victor's betrayals and opens up space for Joan to reconnect with her Métis community. Interestingly, the novel ends with a shifting tension similar to Frenchie's short-lived decision to leave the rebel community, where Joan realizes that there is another conflict in her community that needs her attention and love—her young cousin, Zeus, who has been her sidekick throughout her journey to save Victor, has also become a rogarou.

Conclusion

What's most important in Dimaline's dystopian novels is not that they offer alternatives for the present moment in terms of imagining or creating a better future; instead, Dimaline offers her protagonists the possibility of shifting the way they see and move within the spaces of their respective worlds. Although *The Marrow Thieves* and *Empire of Wild* are novels that build different Indigenous

futurisms, the depiction of their storytelling, the relationships between Indigenous and settler communities, the unbalanced structures of power, and the growing urgency of climate change and ecological destruction are all authentic reflections of Indigenous oppressive realities in the here and now. Thus, what at first appears as ecological disaster fictions are revealed to hold Indigenous worldviews of survival and survivance, countering settler colonialism through Indigenous futurism. Instead of world-building a possibly different future, one that solves the problems or offers joy that isn't viable or sustainable in the present, Dimaline's dystopian novels reiterate how decolonial love and landedness are the answer to crises of the past, present, and future—no matter the situation. In centering Indigenous perspectives, Dimaline takes the sense of responsibility in Indigenous communities seriously in *The Marrow Thieves* and *Empire of Wild,* depicting how to cultivate and transmit teachings in order to unsettle colonial understandings of knowledge, while framing a more sustainable future enacted by practices of decolonial love. I argue that the very act of creating Indigenous futurisms, of writing any version of an Indigenous-centric perspective into a future setting and space, enacts a mode of decolonial love—ensuring that Indigenous love, knowledge, and ways of being in the world continue in the face of colonial structures that continuously try to silence them.

It's unsurprising, then, that both of Dimaline's narratives attest to an unshareable future within their dystopian settings. Frenchie and the rebel group cannot survive without destroying the New Order based on settler capitalist practices, and Joan and Victor can't reconnect with the Arcand Métis community while Heiser's project continues dislocation practices. These settings reflect the longer history of settler colonialism that has severed and continues to sever relations between Indigenous communities; and while they have been extremely successful in severing all Indigenous relations, it is especially true for the Métis. Colonialism has created, as LaRocque mentions, an external sense of shame, lost identity, and liminality for the Métis, so when they recover themselves, when they return home, when they accept a decolonial love, there is no possibility of moving forward in the future alongside the structures that continue to enact colonial violence. Simpson reiterates these concerns of how Indigenous communities must continue to grow into the future:

> Indigenous futures are entirely dependent upon what we *collectively* do now as diverse Indigenous nations, with our Ancestors and those yet unborn, to create Indigenous presences and to generate the conditions for Indigenous futures by deeply engaging in our nation-based grounded normativities. We must continually build and rebuild Indigenous worlds. This work starts in motion, in decolonial love, in flight, in relationship, in biiskabiyang, in generosity, humility, and kindness, and this is where it also ends.[72]

Dimaline's work enacts the practices that Simpson outlines above, of creating pathways and stories that lead to Indigenous resurgence, "which is an Indigenous community's capacity to adapt in ways sufficient for its members' livelihoods to flourish into the future."[73] In both *The Marrow Thieves* and *Empire of Wild*, Dimaline depicts how resurgence is embodied within the characters, how "Indigenous bodies are part of the land, and Indigenous bodies are everywhere. Indigenous bodies carry those teachings and that resistance with them."[74] In the end, Frenchie and Joan both construct a space of landedness—"which is purposeful; [landedness] gives meaning to language and life"[75]—and enact decolonial love that ensures their Métis survivance in the present and, hopefully, into the future.

Notes

1. Marilyn Dumont, "The Gift," in *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada, an Anthology,* ed. Jeanne Martha Perreault and Sylvia Vance (Edmonton: NeWest, 1990), 41.

2. Métis scholar Chris Andersen defines his community as "an Indigenous people that originated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century on the northern plains of what is now southern Manitoba. Centered historically in and around Red River (now Winnipeg) and intimately tied to the buffalo-hunting economy, the Métis became a powerful force that pushed back against the Hudson's Bay Company's claims to economic monopoly and later led two armed resistances against the Canadian state." "Who Can Call Themselves Métis?" *The Walrus*, December 29, 2017.

3. Both protagonists are seemingly named to highlight the French aspects of their Métis heritage. Frenchie, given name Francis, is both a nickname and reference to the French Empire's involvement in the colonization projects of North America. Joan appears to be an evocation of Joan of Arc, a young woman sainted for her steadfast belief in homeland sovereignty and French resistance. Importantly, these characters and their reminders of New France/French history emphasizes the etymology of the word métis that originates from a French adjective for people of mixed heritage; it was later used in the sixteenth century by French colonists to denote peoples of mixed European and Indigenous heritage. The adjective, of course, is not synonymous with the Métis (noun) as a distinct people. See Heather Devine's *People Who Own Themselves: Aboriginal Ethnogenesis in a Canadian Family, 1660–1900*.

4. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 9.

5. Kyle Whyte, "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene," in *Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 207.

6. Adele Perry et al., *Place and Replace: Essays on Western Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2013), 179.

7. Danika Medak-Saltzman, "Coming to You from the Indigenous Future: Native Women, Speculative Film Shorts, and the Art of the Possible," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 29, no. 1 (2017): 146.

8. Ibid.

9. Lee Maracle, *Memory Serves* (Edmonton: NeWest Publishers, 2015), 134.

10. Ibid., 128.

11. Aubrey Jean Hanson, "Holding Home Together: Katherena Vermette's *The Break*," *Canadian Literature,* no. 237 (2019): 31.

12. "Cherie Dimaline on Empire of Wild," *The Next Chapter*, CBC Radio Canada, September 13, 2019. https://www.cbc.ca/books/empire-of-wild-1.5212680

13. Chris Andersen, *"Métis": Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014), 11.

14. Emma LaRocque, "Contemporary Metis Literature: Resistance, Roots, Innovation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature*, ed. Cynthia Sugars (New York: Oxford University Press), 131–2.

15. There are two main resistance movements in Métis Nation history: the Red River Rebellion of 1869–70 and the Northwest Resistance of 1885—both movements were against Canadian governmental interference and regulations of Métis homelands.

16. Ibid., 140.

17. Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* (Toronto: Dancing Cat Books, 2017), 6.

18. Ibid.

19. For other examples of this dystopian trope, see Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1987); Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993); Sarah Hall's *Daughters of the North* (2007); Doris Lessing's *Mara and Dann* (1999); and Fiona Shaw's *Outwalkers* (2017).

20. For further information on Road Allowance Peoples, see: https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/road-allowance-people/.

21. Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*, 9.

22. Ibid., 150.

23. Ibid., 21.

24. Andersen, *"Métis,"* 110.

25. "'Empire Of Wild' Tells A Small Story—But Not A Slight One." Review of *Empire of Wild*, NPR, July 29, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/07/29/896445003/empire-of-wild-tells-a-small-story-but-not-a-slight-one.

26. Cherie Dimaline, *Empire of Wild* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2020), 3.

27. Ibid., 21.

28. Ibid., 1.

29. "A Native Woman Battles Neocolonialism and Werewolves in 'Empire of Wild,'" *Electric Literature*, November 25, 2020, https://electricliterature.com/cherie-dimaline-empire-of-wild/.

30. Dimaline, *Empire of Wild*, 72.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., 6.

33. Ibid., 42.

34. Dian Million, "Intense Dreaming: Theories, Narratives, and Our Search for Home," *The American Indian Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2011): 322.

35. Grace L. Dillon, *Walking the Clouds*: *An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (University of Arizona Press, 2012), 10.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., 190.

38. These ideas are further reflected in the novel, where there is much speculation by the characters as to who is a "real" Indian or "pretendian" working for the Recruiters. There is a growing sense of unease among the Indigenous rebels over securing ancestral knowledge to safeguard the community and land.

39. Ibid., 34.

40. Ibid., 34, 37.
41. Ibid., 149.
42. Ibid., 38.
43. Ibid., 178.
44. Dimaline, *Empire of Wild*, 145.
45. The rogarou also appears in *The Marrow Thieves* in a section where Minerva tells the tale of her own encounter with a "dog that haunts the half-breeds but keeps the girls from going on the roads at night where the men travel," 66.
46. "Cherie Dimaline on Empire of Wild."
47. In another interview, Dimaline discusses how while the rogarou can be used as teaching tool and as a metaphorical layering within stories that he is also literal and real within her community, "A Native Woman Battles Neocolonialism and Werewolves in 'Empire of Wild.'"
48. Ibid., 4.
49. Ibid., 84–5.
50. Ibid., 23.
51. Cover copy, *The Marrow Thieves.*
52. Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves,* 45.
53. From William S. Burroughs' *The Place of Dead Roads*.
54. In his reading of the novel's ending, Daniel Heath Justice comments on the elements of survivance, how family and kindship ties are prevailed upon to build some sense of the future: "Family—kindship—carried through relations that extend through this life and beyond it, is the key to the critique of settler expropriation and exploitation" (137–8). *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2018.
55. Ibid., 88.
56. Maracle, *Memory Serves*, 134.
57. Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*, 193.
58. Andersen, *"Métis,"* 109.
59. Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*, 214.
60. Dimaline, *Empire of Wild*, 46.
61. Ibid., 122.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., 220.
64. Ibid., 220–1.
65. Ibid., 22.
66. Gerald Vizenor, *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 85.
67. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Anger, Resentment, and Love: Fuelling Resurgent Struggle," *Native American and Indigenous Association*, June 6, 2015, Washington, DC.
68. Minerva tells the Métis story of the rogarou that she learned from her grand-mère; it was also confirmed through correspondence with the author that Minerva has a Métis parent.
69. Ibid., 229.
70. Ibid., 31.
71. Dimaline, *Empire of Wild*, 2.
72. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 265.
73. Kyle P Whyte, "What Do Indigenous Knowledges Do for Indigenous Peoples?" in *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Learning from Indigenous Practices for Environmental*

Sustainability, ed. Melissa K. Nelson and Daniel Shilling (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 68–9.

74. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Glen Coulthard, "Dechinta Bush University, Indigenous land-based Education and Embodied Resurgence," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, October 18, 2014. https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2014/11/26/leanne-simpson-and-glen-coulthard-on-dechinta-bush-university-indigenous-land-based-education-and-embodied-resurgence/.

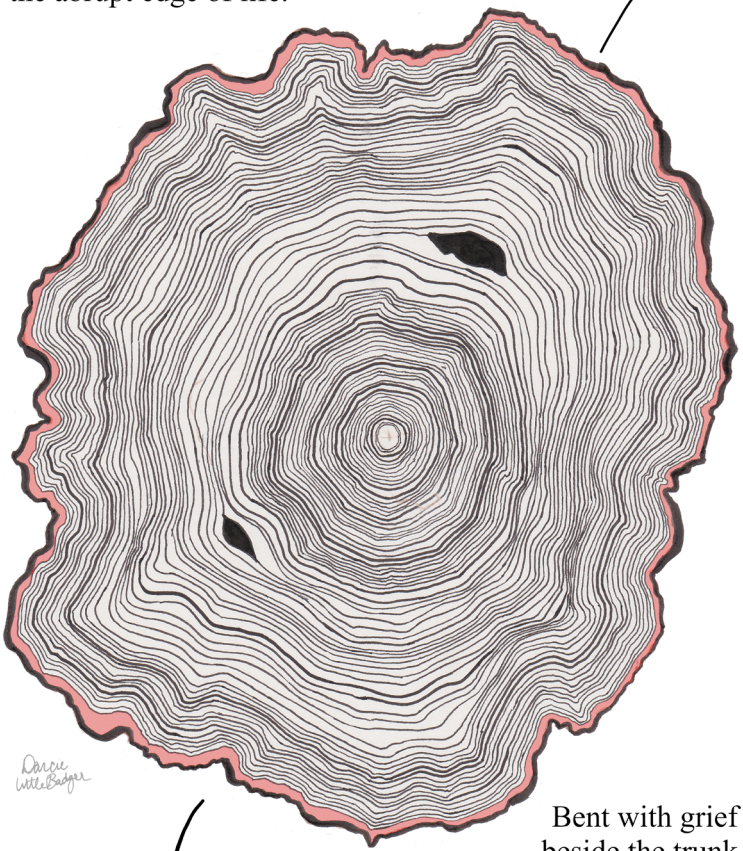
75. LaRocque, Emma. "For the Love of Place—Not Just Any Place," *Place and Replace: Essays on Western Canada*. Edited by Adele Perry et al. Winnipeg: U Manitoba Press, 2013,182.

“Dendrochronology”

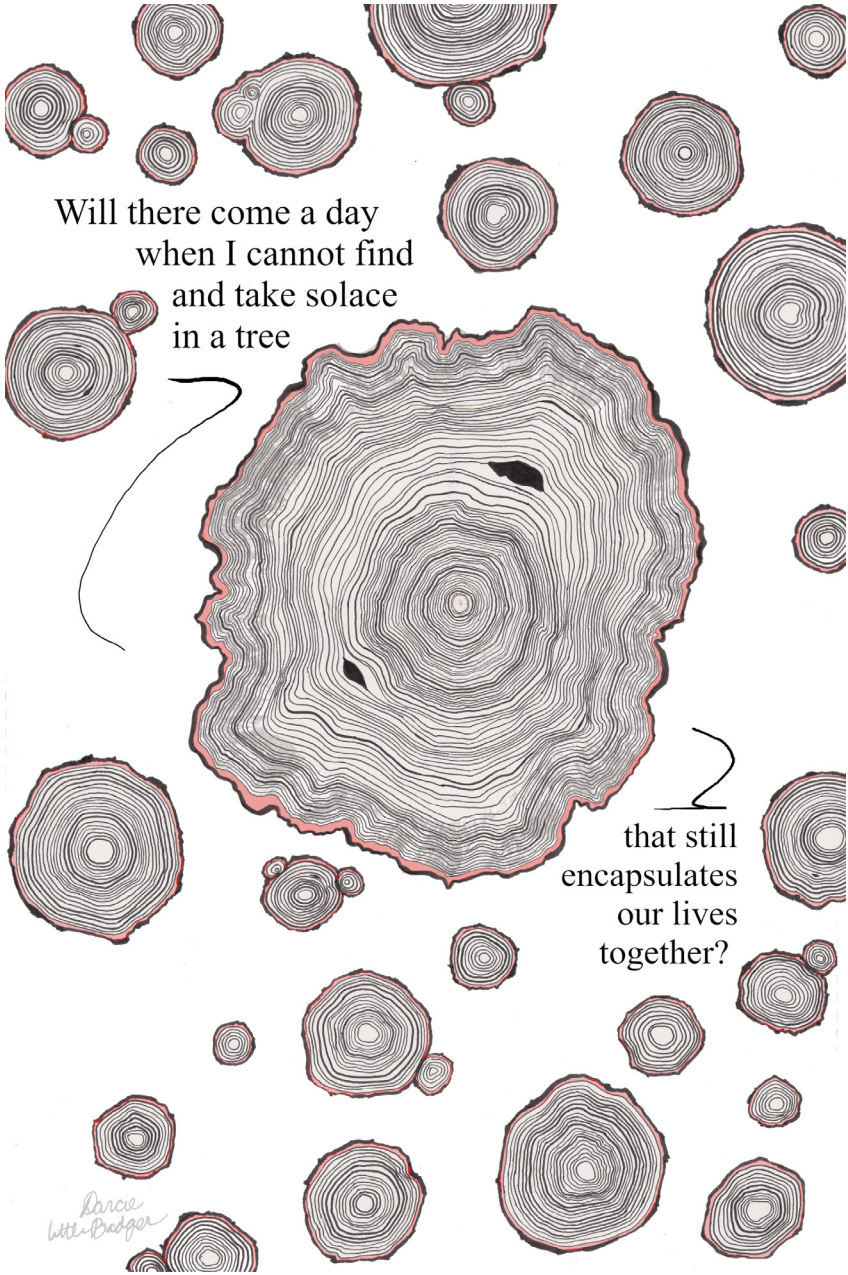
Darcie Little Badger

0026-3079/2020/5904-023$2.50/0 American Studies, 60.3/4 (2021)

The week you died,
two men felled the old red maple
that once lived outside my bedroom window,
exposing memories
rippling outward until
the abrupt edge of life.



Bent with grief
beside the trunk,
I counted back annual rings to
the season of your birth.
A moment of rest,
latewood cradled by the growth of gentle springs.


Will there come a day
when I cannot find
and take solace
in a tree
that still
encapsulates
our lives
together?
Darcie Little Badger

Homing Instinct

Dani McClain

Originally published in Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories From Social Justice Movements*, AK Press, 2015. Reprinted by permission.*

"Greedy" is the word that comes to mind. As the announcement's meaning sunk in, I got greedy for the 70-degree days in the middle of February and the way sunlight bounces off the leaves of jade green succulents no matter what time of year. How the air—even in the middle of downtown Oakland—smells like flowers (yes, and weed and sometimes urine). The options always presenting themselves: Look toward the hills and see yellows and browns and the promise of a place where the wind blows a little less. Look toward the bay and see it glistening like a sheet of light, dotted with sails and bits of sky.

I got greedy for things that likely wouldn't be around much longer anyway.

As I listened to Breslow speak, my mind wandered to the parties at the New Parish and, before that, Oasis, places where old Stevie Wonder jams and Chaka Khan remixes brought back memories of childhood. The Malcolm X Jazz Festival in East Oakland and the Ashby flea market, the same people always turning up at all the same places.

When EO 3735 came down, I got nostalgic for the things around me. It should have made the decision easy, but it didn't. Paloma, on the other hand, knew immediately.

"I'm staying here," she told me just moments after the press conference at which the executive order was announced. Because the situation was so dire, the president had said, everyone would have ninety days to reposition themselves.

0026-3079/2020/5904-023$2.50/0 American Studies, 60.3/4 (2021)

That was the word she had used: "reposition."

"They couldn't even put it to a vote?" I said to Paloma, realizing that this would be the only conversation that mattered for the foreseeable future.

"Why? So the people who still believe all that snow proves the climate isn't changing can get on TV? If it had gone through Congress, we'd have to listen to their ignorant rants get equal time with the scientists and the people who won't let their fear override what's in plain sight."

We'd watched the speech together and talked it over from every angle we could think of once the president had answered her final question and walked offstage and away from the press corps.

"I'm glad Breslow just went ahead and said, 'Here's what's up: Figure out where you want to be and get there. And quit all this jumping on planes, trains, and automobiles all the time like your presence is so desperately needed at this meeting and that conference and this family reunion and that weekend getaway.'"

She was from Chicago but she knew her home was Oakland. It didn't feel so cut and dry to me.

*****

I walked home thinking that if the Breslow administration were smart, it would hire Paloma to do a series of PSAs. For the print ads, it could just be her face, serious and resolute, eyes staring straight ahead. The caption in bold, block text would read, "COMMIT." For the online and broadcast versions, it could be her voice saying something like, "When you move"—and the phrase would hang in the air while you watched quick takes from footage of the latest disasters: a shot from the Outer Banks of North Carolina when they still existed, the wind whipping giant waves into the cottages and splintering their stilts to shreds—"you prove"—and now the stampede on the Venetian Causeway during the Miami Beach exodus—"that you don't get it." The now iconic images of people swimming in the streets of New Orleans would fill the screen as Paloma said, her voice heavy with disappointment and judgment, "You still don't get it."

Playing off of people's fear, their memories of the disasters no one even bothered calling "natural" anymore, was key here. The relationships between water and land, between humans and the weather, *had* changed dramatically. And, yes, it was long overdue for a political leader to demand that people stop living in the fantasy of infinite. But this change, this new emergency rule that mandated that people lock themselves into a location, was replacing the fantasy of the infinite with the fantasy that immobility would bring safety. The new lie around which people were to orient their lives was the possibility of buffering one's self from the chaos and destruction that had come to define the times.

The first questions at the press conference had, surprisingly, been the right ones:

What happens if people decide not to register their location in the database?

Aren't you creating the conditions for a black market in travel?

Won't the people who need food and shelter sell their mile allotments to people who can afford and want them?

Aren't you making mobility a luxury item?

And then came the expected ones.

Isn't travel expression? Isn't this a violation of the First Amendment?

Will the government take over the airlines, the high-speed trains? Will all transport be socialized?

Breslow had delivered her answers with a calm and diplomacy that made phrases explode in my mind like popcorn kernels in hot oil: "sex for sky miles," "rooftop heliports." I remembered reading about dog collars that sent a shock when the animal got too close to an invisible fence. What would be the logistics of this new boundary? In the absence of knowing, my mind ran wild: Women would be selling their bodies to get a flight to a dying parent's bedside. The people who marched around in knee breeches and three-cornered hats screaming about the founders would pull their usual publicity stunts, protesting EO 3735 for all the wrong reasons. But would they resist? Would anyone? Why refuse to register and be shipped off to an up- or out-state federal penitentiary, the fate Breslow had said resisters would meet? By the time I got to my apartment, I'd decided that anyone who went that route was a fool. Why refuse if it meant having someone else choose home for you?

*****

The next day, the administration announced its title for the mandate: Operation HOMES (Honoring Our Most Enduring Settings). A secondary goal of this thing was to get people to move away from the coasts, the places the oceans reclaimed for themselves more and more each year. There would be financial incentives for people who chose to leave the Gulf Coast and much of Florida and California. They would get "sky miles" (the government had jacked the phrase from the airlines) added to their allotments.

Commentators had already found a way to turn this into a political debate, as if various Republican and Democrat perspectives were relevant as people scrambled to make intimate decisions. I took a break from following the commentators and the presentations and called my mom back east.

We danced around it for as long as we could, talking instead about what this pundit had said about the policy and what that news report had revealed about how it would be enforced. We touched on the high points from the coverage—the man who had broken down crying as he recounted that his wife had told him in no uncertain terms that she and the kids would be moving to Virginia to be close to her family and that he could do what he liked, the Wisconsinite who stood thigh-deep in snow declaring that she was a seventh-generation Badger and those goddamn Floridians better not flood her pristine state. Well, the news had bleeped out one word, but you could see it forming on her blue lips.

Finally she asked the obvious: "What do you think you'll do?"

She had always accepted my wanderlust. More than accepted, she'd financed it at the start and encouraged it once I wanted her blessings more than her money. And though it had meant we hadn't lived in the same state for more than a decade, she had settled into the rhythms: I would be home a week in the summer and a

week at Christmas, and Mom would travel west so we could spend time together at Thanksgiving, and another week together in the spring. A month total. One out of twelve. That's what we had together. The new law capped all oil-dependent travel at twenty miles per month. So it would take either one of us ten years of sacrificing all other car or plane trips to save up the miles needed to close the distance between California and Ohio.

I knew she was thinking it, so I went ahead and said it: Say I had a child. Say it happened this year. You would be able to meet your grandchild when it was what, nine? And that's if I chose to make my birthplace my first destination. What if I wanted to go someplace else? Take the child to some part of the ocean that was warm and calm enough to swim in? Or to another country, to see how other people lived? When would we see each other again, and how would it feel when we finally did?

People in Washington weren't talking about this new law like it was a temporary measure. When it was discussed, there was never an expiration date attached. It was the new way. It was the new scaffolding for our lives.

"What do you think you'll do?" she asked.

I took a deep breath and fought the urge to hold it. "What would you like me to do?"

She chuckled. "I know better than that, missy. What do you want? Hasn't that always been what I told you to figure out first?"

"Yep. Sure has been." Now silence was heavy in the exchange. "I haven't figured it out yet. Yesterday I told myself I had a week to decide. So that's what I'm taking."

"Did you make your pros and cons lists?"

I laughed, thankful for the constancy of my mother's belief that logic and the length of one list measured against another could solve any problem the world threw at you.

"Yes, ma'am. I'm just starting them," I said, but of course I didn't plan to. I already knew everything that would go into a column making a case for staying in Oakland. The list would confirm my fears that I was an individualist to the bone, that I had turned into someone who placed personal comfort and loose camaraderie above the bonds of blood and going—instinctively, without the need to think it through—where family needs you and you know you need them.

If I couldn't be safe—and I couldn't, no one could—I should face the chaos shoulder to shoulder with the people whose love and care I'd been able to count on for decades, right? And I should pick the place where those people were concentrated, yes? The answers should have been obvious, and I'd always thought that when push came to shove, I'd know what to do. But they weren't and I didn't.

*****

Some people were angry drunks or got sloppy and far too certain of their own wit or brilliance after too many glasses of wine. Paloma got spiritual. Or rather, a little liquor made her willing to talk about ideas she usually kept close to the vest, ideas that could easily be used against her by anyone looking to paint a picture of the Bay Area as home to a set of loopy, half-serious seekers who stayed high

on positive thinking and law of attraction bromides.

We were at Tony's apartment, and I washed the dinner dishes and listened. The first sign was that Paloma had used the word "transformative" at least three times in a handful of sentences as she spoke to the group that had gathered to pretend their lives weren't about to radically change. Similar indicators followed. Paloma, who had been my bestie for more than a decade, first referenced "the universe" as the source of her strength in the midst of EO 3735 talk, then thanked "the most high" for keeping her grounded.

A petite, intense woman named Robin spoke. "You need to be thanking President Breslow. She's about to keep you grounded for real."

I smiled and looked away from the sink and toward the table where my friends sat.

"Go ahead, laugh," Paloma said, her face relaxed as she set down her wine glass. "Y'all know about that river flowing fast these days. It's so great and swift that some will be afraid. They will try to hold onto the shore. They'll feel like they are being torn apart, and they will suffer greatly." The lilt dropped from her voice as she said with a wink, "That's not you, is it Rob? 'Cause I don't want to be the one that has to come pry your hands off that shore, girl. I really don't."

Robin raised her eyebrows and shook her head slowly. "Nope. That's not me. I know the river has its destination. Now go ahead. Finish preaching, Reverend Doctor."

Tony jumped in instead, continuing the lines. "But we all know we must let go of the shore, push off toward the middle of the river, keep our eyes open, and our heads above the water."

I sat down at the table, drying my hands on the front of my jeans. "See who is there with us and celebrate," Tony added.

It was just something that had gotten shared around. A message attributed to the old holders of an even older wisdom in a place none of us had ever been, somewhere in Arizona with a vowel-heavy name where Native people had decided to advise anyone who'd listen on how to live. It was very likely the Internet ramblings of some Berkeley hippie who honestly believed "Hopi elders" had asked him to communicate on their behalf. But Paloma had been taken by its pointed questions—"Where are you living? What are you doing? What are your relationships? Where is your water?"—the message's urgency and the way it seemed to point a path toward accepting and making sense of a nonsensical and ever-changing world. She had painted some of the words in black block letters on a huge canvas and decorated the remaining space with images of pregnant women, gardens in bloom, children dancing, and a pack of wolves howling together at the moon. When Paloma had mounted it on a wall in her living room, we all praised her artistry, but I admit I rolled my eyes a bit at the Earth Mama archetypes.

That night in Tony's kitchen, I realized the message had lodged itself in our minds, finding a place to settle amidst the cynicism, fear, and doubt.

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Later that night, I dreamed that the sky was red and the air smelled like burnt

oranges—tangy and smoky in a way that made my mouth water and my eyes tear up. I knew I was on a long and likely futile walk eastward, with no maps or sense of direction other than the knowledge that I was walking away from the ocean and toward a place called Nevada, followed by a stretch called Utah, followed by an obstacle course called Colorado, followed by an expanse called Nebraska and on and on. I walked toward the hills and eventually through the Caldecott Tunnel, and after that I knew nothing other than that I was passing the towns where men had tested open carry laws in Starbucks, so bold in their love for the Second Amendment that they brandished their guns like shiny new toys. I looked up at the sky and knew that it was always some shade of red or orange now, everywhere. I knew that to the west, in the direction I had come from, redwoods were dying, toppling over on each other with loud, disastrous sounds like a chorus of whips cracking at once. And to the east, in the direction I was headed, great lakes were drying into exaggerated puddles. I stood still and felt a cold prickling move like a wave through my body. I knew that feeling. It was my body accepting some hard truth before my mind was ready to. The sensation was there as I woke up, and with it a clear string of words echoing in my head: "Not a place to live, but a way of living."

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My body traveled its normal paths the next day, but my attention was elsewhere. In the shower I wondered who I could trust. Paloma? My cousin whose libertarian leanings sometimes brought us to the same conclusions? Were there others whose minds had already landed here (there had to be), and, if so, how would I find them? How would we find each other, and what would we do once we did? Walking the blocks to the BART station I considered what I might need and how I could possibly prepare. I had my idée fixe—that phrase stuck in my head and pulled me forward. Toward what and how, I had no idea.

Without warning, my thoughts ran full speed into a wall of fear that left me paralyzed, nervous about having peeked through this door that was opening. Some part of my consciousness, deputized by the Breslow administration, kicked the door shut, admonished me for even thinking that path was a possibility. I muttered a silent apology to the watcher within and shrank back from the risk, the threat of punishment. And that's how I remained until I found myself that afternoon ostensibly typing an email to my boss but unconsciously straining to remember all I could about Fred Korematsu. Assata Shakur. Others who had hidden, escaped, run, resisted.

By the time I was home again that evening, I was clear. Sure, the law was right to urge people to think about where the land could actually sustain them. But geography was not destiny. Nowhere was safe and nothing was infinite, and to impose a law predicated on an outdated belief in stability was immoral. I would not obey an immoral law. Instead, I decided to let go of the shore, the nostalgia, the need for certainty. I thought of Tony, Robin, and the others, my family in Ohio, people I knew all over the country. Who among them would refuse to register and what would they do once they did? When I pushed off toward the middle of the river—if I could keep my eyes open and my head above the water—who would I see there in the torrent?

Trajectories of Resilience: Indigenous Healing Folkways in the Selected Short Stories of Wilson Harris

Hannah Regis

The Guyanese philosopher and writer Wilson Harris[1] has long emphasized in his fiction and theoretical writing the myriad ways in which the Caribbean and South American human and natural worlds are interwoven. The deep impact of the Guyanese topography upon Harris's psyche has its roots in his early vocation as a government land surveyor during the 1940s and 1950s. His connection between the fluidity of the South American landscape and his creative imagination served to unfix reading habits that divided the world into colonial binaries. Inspired by the ancestral faces which he perceived in the ravines, rapids of rivers, tides, waterfalls, and rocks, Harris developed a literary methodology that encoded this reality. This critical process is emphasized in fluid time scales in the narrative, the coexistence of the dead and the living, juxtaposed images, and a dreamlike universe.

Historically, European capitalists designated the Caribbean and South American territories as destinations for capital flows and resource extraction. The vast volume of water, hectares of thick tree canopies, and giant freshwater lakes were prime attractions for Spanish, Dutch, and English undertakers. This historical backdrop encapsulates the deterministic cycles of conquest and disempowerment, which decimated the Caribbean's Indigenous people groups and landscapes. From the colonial gaze, the New World was fundamentally perceived as monolith, one-dimensional, and incapable of independent creativity and self-productivity. This led to the European scientific objectification of the Caribbean universe, which translated into conquest and mastery.

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Many communities and ecosystems were sacrificed at the altar of relentless production. Although Harris's main focus has been on the South American hinterlands, his planetary and geological turn opens up ways to think about the global, historical, and modern dynamics of neocapitalism marked, for example, by forms of debt and bonded labor, territorial dispossession, and ecological plunder. He searches for a radical change to these tragic fates through the cultural horizons of myth. In the essay, "Profiles of Myth and the New World," he defines myth as the sedimented aspects of culture that pertain to every ethnic group in the Caribbean and South America (1999, 201). He avers that these foundational vestiges, which have been lodged in the Caribbean and South American womb of space, can be retooled in literature as identified in settings or locations that contain spiritual gateways, sacred figures, archetypal characters, totems, spirit companions, and a sense of time that is fluid—all for rebuilding a viable reality (1999, 201–211).

The way in which Harris intermixes a diversity of cultural histories in his fiction has been documented by many critics, including Sandra Drake. Drake notes that Harris's deployment of dualities, conjoining motifs, and ambivalences can be read as his rejection of any perspective that resembled tyrannical paradigms (1986, 177). Harris scholar Michael Gilkes also observes that Harris's poetics of "heterogeneity" and "radical dialectic," with its intersecting expressions of Greek deities, West African limbo and Haitian vodun, Meso-American bush babies, resurrection motifs in Christianity, and Indo-Caribbean mythologies (as in the multilimbed Kali goddess), enable a rethinking of worldly dynamics (1989, 10). Guyana's vast sociocultural and ethnically diverse position can consequently be seen to have inspired his global approach. The aim of this essay is in part, to build upon the multicultural and theoretical value system of Harris's aesthetic markers. At this point, it should be noted that while the intended audience for this inquiry encompasses the First communities and people-groups impacted by (neo) colonialism, it does not preclude any other demographic (formerly colonized or otherwise) from meaningful engagement with the work. The tradition of Caribbean literature is a naturally comparative one, particularly within the context of postcolonial critique and the world at large. Given that Harris's concerns have been framed within a cross-cultural ethos, a greater degree of participation and affective understanding of Indigenous communities are afforded.

In this vein, Harris is not alone in his literary experimentation with multicultural, theoretical models. In *Caribbean Man in Time and Space* (1974), the Barbadian writer Kamau Brathwaite conceptualizes the wholeness of the Antilles as "the curve" sweeping from Florida to the Amazon and Brazil (1–14). This reterritorializing of the Antilles sounds new directions in Anglophone Caribbean literature as Brathwaite attempts to reinvigorate a cultural expression of the Caribbean as a space of multiple, intersecting spatialities that connects with North American historical realities of globalization through forced migration and the rise of the global economy. Similarly, in "Caliban's Guarden" (1992) Brathwaite asserts: "I also began to recognize that these broken islands were the

sunken tops of a mountain range that had been there a million years before. That in addition to the death of the Amerindians I was also witnessing the echo of an earlier catastrophe. That the islands had been part of a mainland" (4). Brathwaite's archipelagic emphasis and multicultural disposition, not unlike Harris's cross-cultural poetics, seek to understand the complex imperatives of space.

In other words, the Atlantic's cross-currents, for Brathwaite, reveal the Americas (North, Central, and South) to be connected by ecology long before they were grouped together by colonialism. Importantly, this worldly approach moves away from nation-centric understandings of space, which arguably cannot account for the ecological ties that bind each territory. Some of the solutions to the present constellation of global crises could come from the long-dismissed voices of Indigenous peoples, who historically have been at the forefront of its economic, social, and political fallouts. It is therefore critical to note that Brathwaite is tracking how the coexistence of ancestral elements within the already hybridized moorings of each nation works toward the production of cultural newness[2] and resilience.

This attunement to the relations of space and time via cosmological perspectives is evoked, for example, in his story, "The Black Angel," when he perceives that the Jamaican and Barbadian woodland territories contain the calcified memory of the dead:

> It was as if my spirit was waking up in the middle of
> a very dark night
> as if I was alone in a wood of presences and powers
> vague enraged personalities I could not see or name. (1994, 28)

In this regard, Brathwaite's theoretical and creative works fulfill the sociocultural and geological imperative of reclaiming stolen territories through the creative imagination. Cynthia James fittingly states, "The Black Angel is a story of affirmation in which the landscape [is] a private and personal talisman" (1994, 759). Brathwaite's assertion, similar to Harris's, carries the ideology that Caribbean space is a vast memorial of sorts as it houses the vestiges of every ethnic migrant culture. The landscape, in this sense, functions as an indomitable entity that will continue to intensively regenerate itself through acts of remembrance and ritual contact.

In close proximity to Brathwaite's archipelagic formulation, J. Michael Dash (1998) puts forward the idea of the "other America" that creates a bridge between the different geographies of the Americas. Dash invites the reader/critic to envision the diverse historical, economic, political, and cultural realities of the Caribbean and South American continent as important sites that offer alternative articulations of the Americas within an aggressively globalizing world. Although Dash concretizes the connection between the Caribbean and North America via the image of the Mid-Atlantic Sea Ridge, he cautions that this dimension of intercultural criticism does not seek to neutralize the strong, visible

signs of internal difference and diversity but rather, facilitates important, visceral connections based on similar historical origins (3). He provides the paradigms of liminality and tropicality to capture the common history of movement, myriad self-expressions, travel, and the workability of a hyphenated identity to enable planetary insurgency against hegemonic forms of power that seek to pauperize, restrict, oppress, and undermine developing nations and its peoples (149–151).

Jan Carew (2006) makes good sense when he notes that any critical turn to the multicultural interests of the Americas would do well "to look back at… [the] seminal cultural developments… in Guyana over half a century ago, for these were replicated in many islands and mainland territories around the Caribbean Sea" (23). Taking a lead from Carew, this essay looks to a selection of the Amerindian fables written by Harris in 1970. Guyana is often linked to the origin of the term meaning "land of many waters" (Ludewig 2019, 79). In a symbolic sense, the definition emphasizes the liquidity of Guyanese social and cultural identity, which is usually divided into various ethnic groups: Indo-Caribbean, Afro-Caribbean, the First Peoples, and a small portion of Chinese, Portuguese, and Caucasian groups.

Harris's short stories in *The Age of the Rainmaker* focus on the First Inhabitants/Amerindian Peoples who occupied the region before the advent of any other ethnic group. The original inhabitants are further subdivided into the Taino, Carib, and Warrau communities of the South American basin. Indeed, an extensive anthropological overview of the Guyana First Peoples would require another discussion altogether. However, this introduction serves to contextualize the springs of Harris's thoughts, which interrogate the manner in which Indigenous cultural and religious traditions are wielded to repair a vision of the Caribbean/South American environment as multivalent. His utility of the mythic imagination with its focus on the deeply felt ideology that the land is a physical and psychic sanctuary, a complex repertoire of values, and a nexus of ancestral power relations, provides an alternative approach to envision new ways to be human. It is also worth noting at this point that while this essay extends existing theoretical standpoints on Harris's oeuvre, it also proposes and sharpens the argument that ancestral memory is so powerful in the psyche of each protagonist in the selected narratives that it begins to command its own attention, and each individual is made to listen to its eruptive power.

Interestingly, Harris in "Tradition and the West Indian Novel" (1967b) distinguishes his New World epistemologies from Eurocentric structures by deconstructing ideas of linearity (28–47). Instead of monolithic paradigms that elided the complex spiritual tapestry of Caribbean experience, Harris presents the novel of fulfillment, which is characterized by its aesthetic features of geological motifs, mythic time scales, embodied characters, spatial metaphors, and gateways through which the wreckage of colonial history is manifested. It reflects a philosophical dimension that is related to Harris's belief in the regenerative capacity of the Caribbean environment.

Harris's elaboration on the tapestry of Caribbean ecology via literature reflects the imperatives of liberating the human imagination from predetermined reading habits. His critical practice eschews monopolistic analyses of texts for alternative readings that are attuned to subtle resonances, fossils, buried clues, and opacities. Anita Patterson (2008) aptly notes that Harris seeks to re-enable a vision of the "continuity [of life that] appears to have vanished in the New World" through the intuitive imagination (138). In *The Sleepers of Roraima and The Age of the Rainmakers* ([1974c] 2014c), he recuperates Amerindian ontologies as a way of resisting empires' depersonalizing instincts and cultural severance from Caribbean ancestral epistemologies. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley fittingly postulate that Harris's eco-socialist convictions of nurturing the wounded landscape give rise to incisive cultural forms with the power to instruct and heal the psyche of the generations in the wake of neo-imperial dispossession (2011, 26). They contend that Harris accomplishes this through extensive flashbacks (allowing the narrated time to cover strategies for survival against eco-imperialism) and the construction of the landscape as an ineradicable presence (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 26). In *The Sleepers of Roraima and The Age of the Rainmakers* ([1974c] 2014c) and in particular, "The Laughter of the Wapishanas" ([1974b] 2014b) and "The Age of Kaie" ([1974a] 2014a), Harris appoints the environment as both a vessel of memory to repurpose the lifeways of Indigenous communities and to impart modalities of healing in a postindustrial era.

Interconnected Visions and Forests of the Imagination

The narrative "The Laughter of the Wapishanas" portrays a series of excursions into the Guyana heartland by a young girl called Wapishana who is desperate to return humor to her people, and whose habitats have been repeatedly destroyed by a series of colonial and neocolonial violence. It is written in the third person point of view and the plot enacts the protagonist's journey into the Guyana hinterlands to "search [for] the colour and nature of the laughter… which she was determined to restore to the lips of her people" ([1974b] 2014b, 143). The critical horizon of the text can be expanded through an ethnographic framing. Harris's introductory note provides the evidence that the group was indeed solemn and laughter-loving ([1974b] 2014b, 141). He likewise records the period of the 1960s, which marks the tumultuous years of transition from British colonial rule to an independent government under Forbes Burnham, whose Soviet leadership style exacerbated racial and ethnic rivalries. The backdrop of violence and the brutality of tyrannical regimes destroyed the hope of the ethnic communities who remained perennially exploited and controlled. Frank Birbalsingh cites George Lamming's sentiments that "the long survival of Mr. Burnham as Prime Minister and President of Guyana depended on the manipulation of race as a device" (1997, 11). In light of this chain of historical events, the story reflects on both colonial and postcolonial expropriation and disillusionment.

Subsequent to the author's insightful introductory remarks, a complex plot emerges: the narrator journeys into a primordial landscape to make known her complaint about the loss of ancestral territories, the abrogation of her community's ways of hunting, fishing, and grazing rights, and the de facto cancellation of their interaction with nature. It is an allusion to the First People's struggles against (neo)colonial extractive activities in Guyana, namely the degradation of oil reserves, logging, polluted landscapes left by bauxite mining, the contamination of watercourses, and deforestation. Harris posits:

> The predicament of the Indian continues to deepen with new uncertainties as to the authority which governs him. Such authority has been at stake for centuries with the decimation of the tribes. And a political scale is still lacking: the land under his feet is disputed by economic interests and national interest. ([1974b] 2014b, 141)

Harris's attention to the despoliation wrought in the name of national interest hints to the enterprises of postcolonial governments that acted upon its Indigenous population in similar ways to previous colonial rule. With the future of the geophysical world under threat, Harris subsequently sets up the coping mechanisms of the Wapishana woman—a survivor of colonialism—who does not accept the evil of conquest and who sets out on a journey to reclaim her territory.

As the plot unfolds, Wapishana searches out the gift of laughter, which carries imperishable healing properties, and which she believes, will revoke the "years of drought" that plague the island ([1974b] 2014b, 143). The narrative divulges that not only did the colonial and postcolonial foreign experiments disrupt Indigenous ecosystems, but also equally devastated a symbiotic relationship between human and habitat. This inextricable connection between Amerindian ontology and the environment is underscored by Harris in the essay, "The Question of Form and Realism in the West Indian Artist" (1967a) where he observes that the "cosmic [interface] brings… authority […] in terms of understanding and protect[ing] the kind of world we build, the kind of living substance we realize and cherish" (19–22). For Harris, the fates of creation, the people, and the woodland itself rest in a vision of cosmic interrelatedness.

An appreciation of the living cosmos is echoed by Wapishana who repurposes the role of native archetypes and myth in times of crisis. As she embarks upon her journey, she inspects the fate of the dying trees and the brokenness of "hunted bird and fish, animal and god" ([1974b] 2014b, 143). She laments about the poaching of species that deranges the natural population growth of the wildlife. As the narrative unfolds, she encounters a secret staircase while making her way deeper into the ruined heartland. While bravely climbing the set of steps, she sees that she is accompanied by a shamanic figure who explains that it is only through navigating a spirit-infused terrain that she will be

able to locate the right dosage of tonic to bring healing to her people. Thus, it is through her laboring movements and commitment to defend the livelihood of her community that the process of social and ritual support is set in motion.

In his conceptually insightful essay, "Tradition and the West Indian Novel" (1967b), Harris expounds on the appearance of spirit guides or shamans in the world of the living, whose particular functions are to warn, instruct, and bless (30). Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveros de Castro[3] (2012) observes that Amerindian[4] perspectivism integrates ideas of the human world with spirituality (117). de Castro asserts that this "conception [of a] universe…inhabited by different sorts of… human and non-human [entities]" (83) predicates a standpoint of "ecosophic [or intuitive] knowledge" (95). de Castro is describing a reality where the region's First Inhabitants were in constant partnership with forces who occupied the cosmos (94–95). It signposts a revolutionary horizon, which advances the point that despite modernity's growing instincts toward accelerating violence and sterile life forms, a path to knowledge is enacted by way of a cosmically attuned and eco-critical imagination. It is a perspective that has existed for eons longer than colonialism. Demonstrably, the elder's instructions in the narrative propel the young protagonist into a path of extremities, which involve her crossing through difficult and multiple thresholds. This sense of terrestrial simultaneity creatively connects with a nuanced understanding of Caribbean/South American historiography since the region's history cannot be expressed through images or ideas of linearity. Jean Antoine-Dunne observes that the physical and psychic shape of the environment, in itself, "is a map of the impact of the past as a broken set of miles" (2017, 30). The present reality is therefore caught in a circuit of relations that generates a multiplicity of possibilities. This pluralism is associated with the assemblage of realms and energies in Harris's story.

In terms of fictional methodologies, Harris opposes the machinery of imperialism, which produced taxonomies of the self that sought to negate mutualities, parallel time, and ancestral faiths. The logic of historical materialism, with its heavy focus on the concrete universe, produced the effect that the corporeal and social world must be commensurate with ideas of linearity. Damien Grant in *Realism* explains that the human world, according to Western realist narrative conventions, thrives on a hierarchy that compartmentalized communities and people groups based on caste, rank, and consciousness ([1970] 2019, 9). It is a reading practice that divided the sacred from the material and omitted the creative power of spiritual intermedialities. In a counterdiscursive manner, Harris assembles the haunting presences of history in the current milieu of the Wapishana woman. This style of narrative hybridity (as delineated in the pursuit of material and immaterial realms, the melting pot of human and nonhuman knowledges, and a merging of past and present times) foregrounds creative insights and provisional modes of freedom. When Wapishana arrives at the top of the staircase, she hears a cacophony of spirit voices that coalesce into one reality.

Several interesting ideas emerge at this point. The spatial metaphor of the staircase facilitates a new treaty of relations between spiritual energies and earthly beings. It also transposes the protagonist into a time tunnel of history and a world of the dead. Embedded in the concept of the steps that connect earth to sky, and the image of a self-determined woman climbing the staircase, is the sense of numinous intercourse. The ladder imagery provides the apparatus for establishing a dialectical relationship between heights and depths, not simply in content but in form. It represents a new genesis or vision of reconceiving the landscape as an entity with agential significance.

For Wapishana, the vibrancy of her ancestral past is heard across the seemingly dying landscape, which invigorates her consciousness. In this vista, she observes a "cloud of rain… [and] on one… horizon [there is a feathered man with a] yellow beak, crest [and] claws" ([1974b] 2014b, 144–45). The fictional use of bird-headed figures unfolds as an imprint of immortality. The kinship with animals and constellations suggests the ways in which Harris's cross-cultural imagination is activated to reverse the burdens of imperial, monolithic history. Interestingly, Harris's pursuit of folk images, as outlined by Maes-Jelinek and Ledent (2002), encapsulates the myth of the feathered serpent god, Quetzalcoatl[5] to signify the evolutionary wedding of earth and sky as well as outward and inner space (xix). The Mesoamerican myth of Quetzalcoatl—a prime creator-deity who provides rainfall for the fertilization of the earth—carries the idea of regeneration incurred through a merging of the elements (de Montellano 1990, 46–8). This reliance on mythical forms supports Harris's philosophical interpretation of the revitalizing dimensions of Caribbean space, which sets in motion avenues for Wapishana's self-fashioning. Accordingly, in this spiritual force-field, her consciousness expands and she is able to metamorphose into a communal self. This is evoked when "[s]he recalled how she seemed part and parcel of the… fabric of space—as if she herself… moved [through] inner and outer horizons […]. Each step she made… corresponded to inner and outer crenelations of [the] psyche" ([1974b] 2014b, 145). This movement through interlaced spaces are consonant with shamanic passages that bring to the scene multiple personae—mystic plants and deceased shamans—that enable the discovery of new possibilities. Shamanic encounters thus energize the quest for liberty from the inside of rituals and ceremonies.

It comes as no surprise that in the ceremonial space of the Guyana interior, Wapishana enters into a folkloric consciousness, which undermines the silencing and erasure of oppressive practices. It is worth considering Harris's attention to psychic intercourse on the facets of the protagonist's journey. She must abolish the material or corporeal self that has been overexposed to imperial forces and embrace the heightened consciousness of the mythic beings who imprint upon her mind, the knowledge that she desires to restore her community's health. In this nirvanic or transcendental state, she observes young trees or seedlings that stand rooted in the timberlands, breathing forward an imperishable balance and cohesion into the community. Here, Harris continues to bridge the divide

between the earthly plane and the cosmos, the material and the spiritual. It is through this intimate rapport with ancestral memory that the protagonist can recover transformational tactics for the benefit of the tribe. As Wapishana garners knowledge, she encounters the "Elder Tree of the Fish" ([1974b] 2014b, 146) and sees through the mists of time, the "bridegroom of conquest" (147) whose bargaining schemes of gold and silver precipitated the space-taker over of the hinterlands. The images of the "scissors of light" (146) that cut through her legs, the conquistador's arms that "clasped her to his breast" (147), and the "tyrannical" flood that "pull[s] her down into the depths of the pool" (147) suggest the logics of vulnerability, seduction, and entrapment. The light that pierces through the shadows of her limbs speaks to the assault that is cloaked in Europe's global civilizing projects. However, the girl is saved by the retributive rainfall that the shaman induces, and she swiftly advances into a reunion with the "Elder Tree of Animal" ([1974b] 2014b, 148).

The periphery of the rain and the watchful shamanic figure provides a site of complex interconnection with a variety of agencies. Harris is building new discourses about ecological renewal rituals aimed at facilitating awareness and validation of alternative healing pathways, which were condemned by imperial and neo-imperial powers. At this phase of her quest, Wapishana is confronted by a thick veil, behind which the laughter of her people is audible. She is advised by her spirit guide to attune herself with the music of the living landscape so that entry can be gained. As she obliges, the veil is torn and she enters into a horizon of spirits. Harris is evincing the potentialities of partnering with alternative systems of knowing as a precondition for the emergence into a new state of consciousness. While crossing into the arch of space, Wapishana encounters the "Elder Tree of God" who offers her a token that contains the "maiden juice of… laughter" (151). The remedy is rumored to awaken the human senses from the inhibition of the colonialism. As her primal instincts are aroused and the cheer penetrates the cells of her being, "the rain [begins] to fall from the elder tree of life" (151) and the land is fertilized.

This experience reveals cogent aspects of and interlapping connections among human expression and the natural world. Harris is conveying the precolonial mixture of landscape, hinterland, collective history, and personal geography. By affectively reorienting herself within the landscape, Wapishana as a human archetype plumbs the material topsoil of the land to locate the remedy that will dispel the spiritual and material drought that plagues her community. The ritual of laughter is presented as an elixir of life, which is necessary to repair the fragmentation induced by historical amnesia and geological dislocation. The impact is the repurposing of a usable past and a viable being in the world. The events in the narrative illuminate the extrahuman qualities of the environment and the ceremonial knowledge of deceased shamans who become instruments in restoring the soul of the tribe. At the narrative denouement, Wapishana's actions prove effective: the drought ceases and the exuberance of the community is restored. It is a demonstration of the sustaining power of transhistorical unity and

inventiveness. Through this fable, Harris, in Sylvia Wynter's words, pits "against those various faces of domination [...] the creative determination of women, workers, dominated races, and other groups to... affirm themselves" (1995, 64). Certainly, utopias are not found in Harris's narrative, but its ingredients are perceptible in the alliances with the material and nonmaterial world, the act of claiming communal responsibility, the establishment of networks of solidarity, and alternative ways of knowing, which are essential to any form of psychological and physical healing for the once-colonized.

Ancestral Partnership and Radical Modes of Healing

In keeping with the thematic concerns of Harris in "The Laughter of the Wapishanas" ([1974b] 2014b), the issue of environmental plunder and its effects upon other Indigenous communities of the Amazon rainforest are also depicted in the short story, "The Age of Kaie" ([1974a] 2014a). The protagonist, Kaie, is both the heroic ancestor as well as his contemporary descendent. He plays the part of the charismatic, native leader who sacrificially drowns himself to end the enemy of drought that exposes his community to social and cultural vulnerabilities. In this allegory, Harris portrays the historical specificity of capitalistic machinations that repositioned the center of the world economy toward the Amazonian hinterlands. Moreover, by focusing on the rainforest artery of the Amazon, which supports global life, Harris not only links North and South America but also asserts his global, environmental concerns. The consciousness of the landscape becomes a method for Harris, which he concretizes in the tensions and national catastrophe of the Rupununi rebellion. Evoked in the metaphor of the insurgency is the larger framework of territorial invasion. He provides therapeutic interventions to the social and environmental upheaval through the creative use of the Macusi myth of Kaie.

Seated at the edge of the Central Highlands plateau in Guyana, Kaieteur is the site of transcendence and healing against the background of the Rupununi uprising in Harris's fiction. By entering into the myth of Kaieteur, Harris changes the "discovery" of European conquest into a recovery of space and events. Importantly, Kaie derives his interiority and strength from an intimate connection with the land. As the society plummets into civil war, the Indigenous communities suffer spiritual distress and loss of morale. The elders' roles are threatened and the unavailability of low water reserves induces dislocation and communal fragmentation. Contextually, the causes and events of the 1969 Rupununi uprising were fueled by the greed and uncontrolled ambitions of transplanted European cattle ranchers of the savannahs and a group of Venezuelan rebels who disputed national borders. The effect was the displacement of Indigenous communities, who were open targets to state violence and modern warfare. In Harris's tale, the effects of civil unrest erupt into cosmological disorder. The images of the "fire... across the landscape" ([1974a] 2014a, 115), "the torn waterfall" (109), "the diffused radiance of... leaves" (111), and "the decline in the volume of the river" (113) foreground the ecological collapse. Not

only were the forests damaged by planned fires—with the intent to destroy habitats and ecosystems—but also there were the subtle ruses of tyrannical governance, which betrayed former peace treaties with tribal communities. The reterritorialization of lands, which were given to Indigenous small-scale farmers, for example, compromised any semblance of trust and mutual respect. The keen narrator observes that the voices of the gods have gone silent and their absence is felt in the prolonged drought. However, from the many lacerations and communal traumas, Harris conceives an aesthetic of rebirth via specific acts of sacrifice and metamorphosis.

Not unlike the role of Wapishana, the writer illustrates the transformational power of human responsibility in the character of Kaie. There is the deep understanding that Kaie's determination to invoke rainfall, which he believes will end the dry spell and famine, is connected to alternative cosmologies of time and space that exceed capitalism's materialistic narrative of modernity. To begin this enterprise, he summons out of the nearly dried-up waterways, "[h]is namesake ghost [and] long-dead ancestor" ([1974a] 2014a, 117) who possesses the knowledge to produce rain. An essential feature of Harris's organic concept of community is the absence of a fixed boundary between the living and the dead. The coexistence of both the living and the deceased is cognate with an awareness of the double-faced view of reality and the relativity of time. The symbol of the resurrected ancestral presence serves as a retributive counterpoint and agent of justice to the impact of neocolonialism.

Through this ancestral recovery, Harris delineates the substratums of the Caribbean and South American womb of space to make connections with supposedly exterminated peoples who cannot be erased from the environment no matter the circumstance present. It is through the cultural practices of remembrance, enactment, and cognitive processes, which recall submerged memories, that Kaie can invoke his namesake ancestor. Equally important is the point that these ghostly presences and buried bodies of the Amerindian holocaust allow for the recirculation of the small histories of those who have been marginalized because of their difference. As the deity rises to the surface, he imparts the knowledge that cosmic healing can only be afforded through a full reunification with the landscape. He admonishes Kaie that animal, vegetable, mineral, and human life are evenly valuable in the circle of life and divinely connected to the geological balance of the earth. After internalizing this knowledge, Kaie determines to sail his "sacrificial boat" ([1974a] 2014a, 117) over the waterfall to appease the rainmaking gods.

While making his crossing, he calls upon the power of the cosmos for pardon and healing. It is an act that foregrounds the precipitation of "[t]he rain [which] began to grow… until a spectre of flood arose" (Harris [1974a] 2014a, 117). As Kaie submerges himself into the constellations of water, sky, and sunlight, he arises as an everlasting deity. Ingrained in both his sacrificial leap and the lack of distinction between the human (Kaie) and the nonhuman (water) is the idea of renewal. The ability to sink wholly into the landscape demonstrates patterns

of continuity. The concept of continuity is potently epitomized in the title and cascading beauty of the *Kaie*tueur Falls that sit valiantly today in a section of the Amazon rainforest. Possession of or integration with the earth reflects Harris's eco-cultural resistance to exploitative progress and systems of plunder, which are evident in the era of globalization. For Harris, this act of repossessing the environment through reunification with the region's mythical presences produces a vision of reclamation.

Following his crossover into the world of the gods, Kaie enters into a theater of memory and becomes "aware of two anchors… one grey, one green—lodged together. His namesake ghost… had sown the grey one" to Kaie's hook ([1974a] 2014a, 117). It is here that he comes to the understanding that "the two ages—past and present—[were destined to be] intertwined" (117). The image of the entangled anchors—one old and the other new—facilitates ideas of twinship, which becomes an important continuation of thought for Harris's eco-critical eye. The interconnected images of colonial and neocolonial resistance convey the significance of rootedness and attunement through conscious acts of repossession. The anchors are not only agents of psychic and physical forces, but also are signifiers of a guiding vision. It is in this instance of ceremonial contact that the spur of creation is achieved, thus setting in motion the turbulent "torrent" (12) that drenches the entirety of the rainforest.

There is the profound awareness that while aggressive neo-extractivist enterprises such as logging, mining, pollution, and deforestation may succeed in destroying the topsoil of the land, the luminous spirit of the folk community cannot be eradicated. They are reborn to redress the devastation of habitat and creature perpetuated by invading forces. This is evoked in the narrative of Kaie, who becomes an everlasting rainmaking deity and returns to the earth as water. In relation to the myth, Arthur Seymour (1965) avers that as Kaie "feels the impact of the waters [while] plunging to [his] death on the rocks below [… he is] resurrected into lovely mist" (37). The landscape thus appears as a factual co-presence in the text, which provides important support for human communities.

The narratives "The Laughter of the Wapishanas" and "The Age of Kaie" both influence the shaping of a significant ecological imagination and work to ventilate the utterances, instructions, and guidance from the nonhuman world. As postulated by Harris in *The Mask of the Beggar* (2003): "The world [itself] will be the driver on [wo/mankind's] return to nurture… the birds, the snakes, the fish, the whales, the seals, the lambs, the sheep, the tigers, the butterflies [… and the list of] interminable series of destroyed and threatened species" (111). There is the revelation that the very landscape with its animist associations and mythic dimensions will generate its own forces to outmaneuver the systems that have vilified and truncated Indigenous cultures and folkways of being. By close observation of the submerged presences lodged within the Caribbean/South American environment, Harris offers a rich repository of insight into the values, priorities, and vigorous cultural practices that are grounded in Indigenous praxes for survival. Thinking through these pathways in relation to the contemporary

global space of remembrance engages evidentiary strategies of resistance through discovery and responsibility. It delivers a powerful inventory of how people groups make meaning of their lives and catastrophes, which can be utilized for contemporary and future applications.

Notes

[1]Harris's first published novel was *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), followed by an additional twenty-three novels with *The Ghost of Memory* (2006) as the most recent. His poems and experiments with drama are found in *Eternity to Season* (1954) and *Fetish* (1951). His short fictions include "Kanaima" (1964) and *The Sleepers of Roraima and The Age of the Rainmakers* ([1974c] 2014c).

[2]While the scope of this essay does not permit an extensive overview of the Caribbean's intellectual history, it is important to note that there are various phases to Caribbean literature. The fighting or early anticolonial category that emerged in the 1950s gave epistemic and thematic saliency to revolutionary and material, social action. Opposed to Europeanized-inflected discourses, which negated the ontologies of Caribbean persons, intellectuals like Frantz Fanon and C. L. R. James deployed political symbolism and naturalist existentialism, which affirmed the self-rule of societies and people-groups. However, beyond the realism of the canonical writers was a cultural awakening that marked a revival of folk culture in order to assert a more inclusive expression of resistance toward neocolonial forces. This community of intellectuals were known as the poeticists voices, which included figures such as Earl Lovelace, Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, George Lamming, Wilson Harris, and others, whose works championed causes of intercultural reconciliation, ecological preservation, cosmic-human interrelatedness, and syncretic spirituality. Discourses of this nature effectively facilitated modalities of self-autonomy, healing, negotiation, and affective bonding. This shift became definitive after independence (1960s onwards) and has continued through to the current era. For further insight into the history of Caribbean intellectualism, see Silvio Torres-Saillant's *Caribbean Poetics: Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature* (1997) and Paget Henry's *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (2000).

[3]Anthropologist and theoretician Eduardo Viveros de Castro has dedicated the last four decades of his life to assessing the ontologies of the South American and Caribbean First Peoples. His discipline initiates the ontological turn within Amazonia communities and offers a decolonial method to understanding the group's ideologies, religion, politics, commerce models, and cultural pathways. His research addresses the absence of Indigenous cultures in literary criticism and production from the 1970s onward and seeks to fill the gap. He accomplishes this by assessing the worth of Amazonia ecology and the multiplicity of interactions between natural and social agents—a disposition that has been eschewed by Eurocentric discourses. de Castro's multidisciplinary works include *Cannibal Metaphysics* (2015a), *From the Enemy's Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society* (2020), and *The Relative Native: Essays on Indigenous Conceptual Worlds* (2015b).

[4]Although the term, "Amerindian" is arguably outdated and has been replaced by "Indigenous" in contemporary discourses, the phrase is referred to in this essay by its original appearance in de Castro's and Harris's respective texts. It is also imperative to note that the titles, "First Peoples," "Amerindian," and "Indigenous" are used interchangeably within Caribbean criticism. According to the scholarship of Gordon Rohlehr in "Folk Research: Fossil and Living Bone" (2007) and Jennifer Rahim in "Issues and Developments in Caribbean Literary Theory and Criticism" (2013), the expressions have been derived from the oral traditions

used to depict the communities of the Caribbean's First Inhabitants.

[5]The myth of Quetzalcoatl, as deployed in this narrative, illustrates Harris's cosmo-political vision and his emphasis on the entanglements between forests and nature-based communities. The multiplicity of relations established between different mythologies and Indigenous communities calls for a re-appreciation of the role of shamans and deities as brokers, mediators, and translators among diverse spaces.

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The End of the World, for Whom? or, Whose World? Whose Ending? An Afrofuturist and Afropessimist Counter Perspective on Climate Apocalypse

A.J. Hudson

With the horrific disasters our planet and this country have been confronted with this year, it is almost easy to forget that the world is supposed to be ending sometime soon due to climate change. According to the UN, we have 10 years to get our act together. 9 years. 8 years. 7 years. 6… How many years are even left? A few years for us to change everything about our society. Faced with a pandemic that has only helped to make time feel truly meaningless, I know I can't be the only person fearful that they have lost count. I can already feel the time left for us to right the ship escaping me, like sand falling between my fingers. I know that for many, when they think of the responsibility we have before us to "fix" what is so deeply broken, they are transfixed with terror, paralyzed by a fear of loss, or frozen by the enormity of the crisis.

I am not here to tell you that it will be ok. If it was ever my job to console you, it certainly is especially not my job in this moment, as a Black man who just survived 2020. I am actually here to confirm that the apocalypse is coming. The world is ending. Nothing will ever be the same. But I am also here to question whether that is even a bad thing. If it is a bad thing, then who is this ending a bad thing for. Whose world is ending?

Truly, on this planet, there are many people for whom the world is already over. Who have very little to lose. Some of them live a world away; some of them live a mile away; some of them live even closer. They will never see the nature that so many environmentalists are fighting to protect, they continue to have very little if any access to the resources that the climate change advocates are asking them to conserve, and they are not a respected part of the climate change conversation.

0026-3079/2020/5904-023$2.50/0 American Studies, 60.3/4 (2021)

Our society fears a coming climate apocalypse, but so many people in our society have already faced their own personal apocalypse, and at the hands of the same reckless and greedy powers which have caused this current catastrophe. When will their suffering hold meaning for the rest of us?

This is why climate change cannot be fixed with a simple chart depicting emissions reductions, creative blockchain carbon taxation, or other magical accounting that allows us to cancel out local emissions through trees planted (allegedly) entire continents away. There is no technology that can save us from ourselves, and If we can't see the incredible opportunity before us to change the problems that lead us to this very precipice in the first place, if we can't embrace that challenge then… who are we? If we don't want to face that reality of the billions of apocalypses both gone and current, and instead choose half measures that will take carbon from the air but leave the world a shattered and unequal place… then do we even deserve this precious planet?

For many fearing climate change apocalypse, they fear their lives changing forever, their access to natural wonders canceled, their children's economic futures uncertain, their sacrifices of comfort and convenience in vain due to petty partisan politics. It is their world that is ending. For so many others, the Apocalypse has already happened. In fact, the world has already ended several times. It ended the moment Columbus landed on the islands of the Caribbean. It ended for the kidnapped villagers in Western Africa—my ancestors—when they were stuffed into the wicked belly of a slave ship and cast into slavery in a strange land with a strange new climate. It ended with the first blanket covered in smallpox. It ended on Thanksgiving Day. It ended with the Trail of Tears. Agent Orange. Hiroshima. The Holocaust. It ended with Hurricane Katrina, Maria, Kenneth, Harvey and Dorian. It ended for George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. It ended in an ICE camp on the border. It ended for the 2 million, and counting, killed by COVID-19.

So many people have already faced the ends of their own civilization. So many people have already faced the ending of their personal worlds. Most of these shattered worlds never truly recovered. None of them have ever been given what they, as sacrifice zones sanctioned to enable the perpetual motion of our economy, are owed. They have never even had a real slice of this world, to begin with. This was not their world. These people and their ancestors know better than any of us how to tackle what's coming, and what forces have allowed it to come, even as they face the new onslaught of climate change impacts which they have so little responsibility for causing.

Our global civilization, the one that everyone reading this article is benefitting from, was built on the literal ashes of other civilizations. Meanwhile, a few white men from a few white nations have made nearly all of the decisions that have led us to this present point. To this present danger. Ending any inconvenient worlds that fell into their path along the way. Justifying their revolting actions with caste and class. In many ways, this looming chaos is nothing more than the culmination of those generations of recklessness. In many other ways, the terror of oncoming apocalypse only reminds those with broken worlds of how forgotten they are and

have always been. My family, and my colleagues in the BIPOC-led climate justice movement, have grown up out of these shattered post-apocalyptic worlds, they are our story, our burden, and our strength, and to be frank, the world that so many fear losing… is not a world that we have ever had full access to.

This is not to mean I am hopeless or bitter. I find great strength in honoring the generations of pain and suffering that have allowed me to exist, and given me my own small chance to change the story. It is in fact these billions of broken worlds that allow me to access a stream of radical imagination and audacious hope, to see a future that many mainstream climate activists, academics, and policymakers could scarcely picture. One way or another Climate Change will end our world. But not all endings are bleak. Not every end carries with it tones of Ragnarok or Armageddon. The future could hold the end of human life *as we know it*… but are you really certain that would be a bad thing? Sure, this coming age could be the end of life on our planet. Alternatively, it could be the end of all the ugly things that caused our environmental problems in the first place.

We are offered an unprecedented attempt to change the very worst things about our society. To redistribute the power which has been abused continually to lead us to this point. We are also offered an unprecedented attempt to see our doom looming before us and to do nothing in response but suck carbon out of the air and spray aerosols. Apolitical ahistorical solutions for a political problem that bleeds history. Like taking a mild decongestant when you have a critical case of pneumonia. In approaching climate change, we have a unique chance to change the scale of our society. To right centuries of wrongdoing. See, we have a choice: ignoring the social implications of climate change is also ignoring human suffering, the reckless extravagant greed, and the global inequality that allowed climate change to happen. Honoring that suffering, and centering it, abolishing it, may be our only hope. For so many of us, the world is already over! Protecting this spent shell, that a few live on prosperously, is not an inspiration for us.

Imagine a world without inequality. A world that doesn't depend on resources reaped through modern-day imperialism. An economy that doesn't depend on environmental degradation, or take homelessness, illness, and starvation as givens. A world without first-worlds or third-worlds. Without poverty and endless war. A world where nature itself has indisputable rights, and people of all colors have indubitable entitlements to access that nature safely without harm from police violence, pollution, and corporate exploitation. A world where wealth distribution matters far more to us than GDP. A world where we don't even need vacations because we have redefined and reclaimed labor as a source of joy, fulfillment, and healing. Is it hard to imagine? Ok, that's fair. But how difficult? More difficult to imagine than a world-ending cataclysm like a megadrought? More difficult than the end of humanity itself? Perhaps that is a large part of the problem at hand: we need to learn how to radically reimagine the world that's possible.

Yet those voices who could teach this radical envisioning of the future, those voices who have already survived apocalypses, are so often excluded from this conversation. Their pain, and suffering, and broken worlds are not a part of the

discussion. When you find yourself in rooms of privilege and power, with apolitical solutions to climate change that do not address its social responsibility being poured into your ear, ask yourself who is not sitting at the table, and who is missing? Call attention to whose voice is not being heard. Who is not a part of the climate change dialog? So let me also ask: Who has the most to teach our society about triumphing over unbelievable odds and hardship? Who is already faced with apocalyptic conditions on a daily basis? Who has witnessed the end of the world? When do we let them speak? When do we honor their pain?

For those of us still feeling the urgency of our survival, and the fear of loss in the face of climate change, perhaps we need to reexamine the entire premise. My ancestors and my tradition frame this problem entirely differently. Human society will persist. The real question is: what will survive of who we are now? The best of our world… or the very worst? It's our job, our privilege, to decide that, and as environmental practitioners, as activists, as academics, as concerned human beings, we will need more than carbon offsets to do our part. We will need outspoken bravery, a commitment to justice, and audacious levels of radical hope. We will need to know ourselves, and we will need to know history: that hideous stream of imperialism and colonialism that led us to this most current apocalypse, and ended so many beautiful worlds on our way here.

This radical hope, this fearless acknowledgement of the horrors of the past, and bold imagination aimed towards the future is a key difference between the mainstream Climate Change movement and the Climate Justice movement that I have joined: we know that a world with less carbon in the air isn't necessarily a better world. Yet in fighting to keep carbon in the ground, not with technology, but by changing who we are and what we stand for… we can build a world that is better for everyone. A world that is more just, more kind, and so much less precarious than what we have right now. A world where pandemics and hurricanes and government-sanctioned killings don't shockingly "reveal" what so many of us have known as truth for generations. A world that finally begins to do justice to the countless worlds sacrificed in the name of this one. Truly, the world is ending, and honestly, it's about time. Not all ends are bad. Far from it. The end of sexism, racism, corporate corruption, inequality, and apartheid in all its forms. The real thing here is hope and the audacity, the bold daring, to imagine a future that is so much better than what we have right now. Ask. Have you given yourself permission to see this future?

That audacity begins with realizing that the world we have now simply isn't that great, and for so many people—the world's global majority, in fact, it never has been. This audacity is endowed to many of us whose ancestors were never a part of this world, who proudly and enduringly carry the ends of shattered civilizations on our shoulders. Put more simply, it's not our world that's ending, and by letting go of it we are left with an incredible freedom. We are freed from those half-measure solutions that attempt to preserve the status quo, those mere slivers of prosperity we have guaranteed a few, and in doing so gamble with our survival rate like the quarterly profit margins for some Dow Jones corporation. This is the gift of

the Afropessimism and Afrofuturism embedded in the climate justice movement: instead of simply fighting to protect the world that we already have, a lie that we could never afford to believe in, we are able to struggle to create the world that we don't have. So I ask again, the end of the world… for whom?

Photos from the Climate Justice Youth Summit, 2019, Brooklyn, NY, by A.J. Hudson.

Local middle schoolers from across Brooklyn, preparing for the 2019 Climate Strike March. Brooklyn, NY, A. J. Hudson

Climate Strike March 2019 through DUMBO Brooklyn, A. J. Hudson

Climate Strike Youth Protest 2019, Brooklyn Bridge Park, A. J. Hudson

"Writing New Worlds," Allied Media Conference 2020 Plenary

Alexis De Veaux, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and Walidah Imarisha

This is an edited transcript of the plenary "Writing New Worlds" from the Allied Media Conference, July 24, 2020. The plenary brought Alexis De Veaux, Walidah Imarisha, and Alexis Pauline Gumbs together for a conversation about legacy, possibility, and the role of writers in making the future we deserve intriguing, imaginable, and irresistible.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs is a Queer Black Troublemaker and Black Feminist Love Evangelist and an aspirational cousin to all sentient beings. Alexis is the founder of Brilliance Remastered, an online network and series of retreats and online intensives serving community accountable intellectuals and artists in the legacies of Audre Lorde's profound statement in "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" that the preceding statement is "only threatening to those… who still think of the master's house as their only source of support."

Alexis De Veaux is a Black queer feminist writer whose work in multiple genres is nationally and internationally known. Born and raised in Harlem, New York City, Ms. De Veaux is published in five languages—English, Spanish, Dutch, Japanese and Serbo-Croatian. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies and publications, and she is the author of numerous books including *Spirits In The Street, Na-ni, Don't Explain, Spirit Talk*, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde,* and *Yabo*.

Walidah Imarisha is an educator, writer, public scholar, and spoken word artist. She has co-edited two anthologies including the visionary fiction collection *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements.* Imarisha's nonfiction book *Angels with Dirty Faces: Three Stories of Crime, Prison, and*

0026-3079/2020/5904-023$2.50/0 American Studies, 60.3/4 (2021)

Redemption won a 2017 Oregon Book Award. She is also the author of the poetry collection *Scars/Stars.*

Alexis Pauline Gumbs – We are so excited to bring you all this Writing New World plenary. Toni Cade Bambara is the person who inspired the language behind the description for this particular plenary. Toni Cade Bambara, for folks who don't know, was an incredible writer, filmmaker, self-identified cultural worker, was a pre-Allied Media Conference (AMC) visionary, because her work was grounded and accountable to the people, and she was all about the work of creating a culture where we can be free. And some of the language that came up is the idea that the role of the revolutionary artist is to make revolution irresistible, which Toni Cade Bambara said.

Also, the idea which I learned from Aishah Shahidah Simmons, that sister is a verb. These are phrases that I feel my co-interlocutors today fully embody.

For the three of us, for everybody who's watching, we want to invite you to dedicate your participation in this conversation to somebody who is not in real time part of this conversation, who is part of why you showed up for this. Maybe they've been especially on your heart, mind. Maybe they're part of the reason why you want to write new worlds. Maybe someone older or younger than you, living now, lived before. It can be anyone that you want.

I am dedicating my participation to the great Cheryll Greene, who is looking at me. I have a photo with her in it that's on my desk facing me right now. She was and is an incredible editor, worked for many years for *Essence* magazine, was one of the people who was responsible for so many important books, especially for Black liberation, including Assata Shakur's autobiography for example. And she has personally been a mentor to me since I was a teenager.

She's now in the ancestral realm. She also is a person who connected me with Alexis De Veaux, because they collaborated together to create an incredible series of transnational Black feminist works in the, some would say, unlikely pages of *Essence* Magazine at a time when it wouldn't have been imaginable except they imagined it. It's an example of writing new worlds, it's an example of sistering that absolutely has informed my life, and, yes, I'm here with some of Cheryll's books, right with me. And I'm dedicating my participation in gratitude to her.

Walidah Imarisha – I'm definitely thinking a lot about Octavia E. Butler. And I have a little frame picture for her behind me too. I'm just thinking so much about her impact on my understanding of new futures. Reading her work, when I was still in high school, I felt like I had both permission and a North Star as a Black woman to imagine myself into these futures.

And not just imagine my presence, but imagine my agency and my ability to create change, whatever happens. *Octavia's Brood*, which grew directly out of my understanding of Octavia Butler's work, has definitely, I feel like, made revolution irresistible for me and has created so much sistering through everyone involved in the project who identifies in that way, and then so many connections that are still being made every day.

Alexis De Veaux - I would like to dedicate my participation in this conversation this afternoon to the historical Black "she," those individuals irrespective of gender who identified with, embraced, wore as clothing, and assumed the locations of Black and female in the so-called new world.

Their feet are my feet today. And my breath is their breath. So, I have learned that and I have to honor all of them, and include my grandmother and my mother and so many beings who have claimed this space of Black and female who are no longer living on this earth, but who live in the aura and the atmosphere of this earth.

So, let me begin with a question to you, Walidah, and to you, Alexis, and to myself. Because I've heard each of you say this word vision or visionary in our opening comments. And I want to begin by asking us, how did we arrive at the term, "visionary fiction"? What does it mean? How did we arrive at it? Where is it going? Where is it taking us? Or where does it want to take us?

And how is visionary fiction kin to or not kin to what we have also known as Black speculative fiction.

Walidah Imarisha - Well, I can start us off. I'm so appreciative of that question and the space that it opens up. For me, I started to use the term visionary fiction, I think, maybe ten years ago. Specifically in relationship to creating a special issue of *Left Turn* magazine that was looking at radical science fiction.

And, you know, we kept saying radical science fiction but I really wanted a new term that I felt encapsulated the deep connection between this fantastical art and creation—and the space of organizing in revolution and change. And so, we called it the visionary fiction issue. And I started molding more of my work around that. And then when I connected with adrienne maree brown, my co-editor for *Octavia's Brood*.

When adrienne and I started to join forces and adrienne was doing work around emergent strategy, we saw the connections between visionary fiction and emergent strategy and the ways that they sort of intersected to allow us to imagine different futures and then build them into existence.

So, for me, as a Black woman, I think of visionary fiction as absolutely rooted in Blackness. And in the experience of oppressed peoples creating decolonized dreams of the future. Visionary fiction is rooted in that. It is a space where others can come to that as well. But for me, it is not visionary fiction if we're not rooting in the understanding that those who have held the liberated dreams of the future that they were told were told again and again were science fiction are the oppressed and the marginalized, are black and brown folks and that they are the ones who dreamed the impossible dreams and then changed the entire dreams to make them all of our lived realities.

And, so, I don't think Black speculative fiction and visionary fiction are one of the same; but I don't think that you can separate them out from each other.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs – Of course, Walidah, I learned and I first read visionary fiction from you because you asked me to be a part of that issue of *Left Turn* magazine. And now, I'm just realizing this in this moment. I'm like, oh, this is part of what prepared me to be able to say yes later when you all asked me to write something for *Octavia's Brood*, because you asked me to interview this incredible artist, Cauleen Smith, for the *Left Turn* visionary fiction issue.

This idea that we could really vision to the end of what we could imagine, and what we had been working so hard to achieve. Like as you say, imagining every day with our organizing and our practice and our decision to be part of revolutionary movements—we could go all the way to the end of what we could imagine and then be creative there.

That's what was offered to me and I saw it as, and have continued to experience it as, a blessing in so many ways. Because what it does for me is it allows me to see the limits of my own imagination. And it allows me to see whatever it is that I think I really wish would happen that would be better than this current situation. It allows me to be creative there. Which then means I'm not being reactive to the present situation, I'm being expansive and going as far as I possibly can with my imagination, which also makes me rigorous with myself, right?

So, it's like if everybody would just stop doing this form of oppression I'm fighting is a reaction. But to say what is the most beautiful thing I can imagine? And how can I be there, put myself there through my art? And then be creative all over again from there? And it's challenging. It has led to decisions in my everyday life. It has made me a more generous participant in the present because I understand that I have a creative role in not just the future that we can have, but importantly, the future that we can imagine.

I would say that's what visionary fiction means to me.

Alexis De Veaux - I would like to add that for me this term that you've been critical to imagining and putting into language is precisely the idea of a Black woman making language that addresses who we are as Black diasporic peoples.

I'm always in favor of Black people creating language. I'm always in favor of people creating language. I think English as a language is, you know, it only gets vibrant when Black people start speaking. Because when we—you know what I'm saying—when we, when we feel the need, we have to open it up and create some new word that is the "it."

So we know our ability to infuse English with another English, or what June Jordan used to call "an other where." The places that we can be—we're here, and we can be other where, that idea.

I love that you said, Black speculative fiction and visionary fiction are not one in the same, but they also don't cancel each other out. And what I particularly like about the construct of visionary fiction is the movement towards the decolonial project, to decolonizing the power structures around Black and Brown diasporic lives.

That, I think actually is an important distinction if you will; between Afrofutur-

ism, and a lot of what is popularly known as speculative fiction. The notion of the decolonizing project. Because that really sets a particular tone in terms of looking at narratives of resistance. I'm going to not use the term "history" right now. Because I think that term often suggests a "back there" or "before" or something that no longer is. And I'm actually trying to wean myself off of some of this language.

I like that both of your comments did not suggest the word "hope," and the reason why I like that is because I have begun, lately, to wonder about the term "hope." Is it a passive term? What has hope to offer us now? Is there some other way we can think? Maybe we need to think in more active terms? Like vision? Which means to see or envision, which is the act of seeing and therefore doing. So I really appreciate that in constructing this language.

Walidah Imarisha - That's so powerful. So often when we talk about hope, it's so tentative, right? It's something where we're reaching out and we don't know if we'll be able to even be able to even catch a taste of it. And I absolutely agree with what you're saying.

And for me, I think the power of visionary fiction—that combination of the imaginative, the speculative, rooted in community organizing and revolution—is that we know that we can change the future because we've done it again and again and again. And so, in alignment with what you're saying, I want us to claim the future with the same certainty that we claim, as you're saying, not the history, but what came before. And also that we're attempting to claim the present with that same certainty.

I'm so excited to be sharing this space with y'all for so many reasons because of your brilliance, your creativity, your innovation. And I think the way that all of our work sort of sees naturally Blackness as time travel, or as time subversion. That we are able to reclaim or re-envision what has been and, you know, use that in active embodiment in the present or for the future.

I think a lot about the past, especially as Black folks. Because, not only do we have to reclaim it, we do have to reimagine it sometimes, because so much of these stories have been purposefully obliterated. And, I think there's a sadness to that but there's also a power to that because we bring ourselves into that reimagining as well. We infuse what was with ourselves to give it life. That's a huge responsibility, a sacred one, and it's one that you both have done and are doing so beautifully and poignantly. So, I guess we're thinking about the future but we're also understanding time is a construct. So what lessons from y'alls work holding what has been, and especially as Black people, can we and do we need to build the futures that we want?

Alexis De Veaux - One of the things that's evolving in my work, in terms of what we call the past, is to understand precisely this idea of the absence of time in our memory. I'm really working to not so much reconstruct and retell or particularly reimagine the past, but to be able to tap into memory in ways that communicate our narratives. And if the narrative is about being a runaway at a particular point

in the story of Blacknesses, then that is still true. There's still runaways. Maybe in different ways, utilizing different strategies, but we are still runaways.

So we can't talk about it was and it no longer is because we're still in it. We are still in it. We are still enslaved by the structural injustices that created the moment for Saidiya Hartman to understand and then to articulate for the rest of us this is the afterlife of slavery, what we're living through now. So it's not over, it had a life and it also has an afterlife or what I call the death life. So, I'm less interested in picking through the past, which is a viable strategy for writers; but I'm less interested in that as a project than I am in the memories that we need to attach to the present reality.

The present is still the slave ship. It's a slave ship in different forms, but it's still the slave ship. How do we connect with what we think of as these lost narratives or lost historical facts or voices that we no longer hear. Actually, we still hear those voices. Or, I should say, I still hear them. In fact, I hear the ancestors very loud these days. Very loud! So if that's true for me, then I can't have a sense of them being not present, because they are.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs – That resonates so much with me. I hear ancestors right now and at all times. One thing that Barbara Smith—and if folks don't know, Barbara Smith is a Black feminist icon, one of the founders of the Combahee River Collective and Kitchen Table Press and absolutely an unstoppable media-maker for our freedom. What's interesting to me is that she said that enslaved people must have been organizing while in enslaving ships. She said, "How do I know? Because we still exist." So the capacity to organize even in a situation of horrific context like the hold of an enslaving ship, the evidence of that capacity—that Black organizing capacity is our very lives.

At the same time that I think about the persistence of the context, I feel that my role is really about facilitating our presence to that transformative lineage—and I feel like that's my role because I'm obsessed, I am full of longing, I'm full of desire and love. I want to have been there. I want to have been there, Alexis. I mean now, I've been in your living room salons because you're still having the living room salons, but I want to be at the first one. And I love imagining what was it like. What did it smell like? What do people have on? I feel I was present in that moment, even as a dream and I feel loved by that. And I feel that there's a way that the moment that we're in now also has that accountability. Where there are those dreams that we're having that will be looking for the evidence of this. Because we're calling right now with what we're doing, what we're saying, what we're leaving, what we're changing, the energy that we're putting out. And so that's how I think about this idea of time travel that there's something so loving about it.

And I do spend a lot of time quite literally picking through the past. I spend a lot of time sitting in archives, literally reading every piece of correspondence, however trivial it may seem. From Black feminist writers and folks who are involved in Black feminist publishing and organizing and that comes out of the fact that that's a portal. Those physical items to me are sacred and they have the power to translate energy and to bring me clarity about what that moment was already

calling for that I'm accountable to right now. Because it is all now.

I think about how much I love the possibilities—I love to look at the things that didn't happen. I love to look at Toni Cade Bambara at the 1988 Essence Black Women's Retreat—which was organized by Cheryll Green—and she said we should create an anthology. And it should be everything. It should have poems, it should have stories, it should have recipes. It should have star maps and it should have legislative proceedings.

And that particular project did not happen within Toni Cade Bambara's lifetime but I love going to that moment. I understand it's not that everything we call into being is to be owned by us as individuals in this lifetime. Or even as collective participants in a particular organization or at a conference or in a moment. It's actually every time that's another portal that opens. And we can go live in those portals anytime, if we just know that it was there, if we just sense it and believe in it. This is what visionary fiction has taught me: if we can even imagine it ourselves, we can travel there and come back through to this moment through that energy. I think that's my lust for the archive. That is my constant wondering. It feels generative to me to want something that I know is always going to cause me to be creative because I can never fully have it.

Walidah Imarisha - You have become in a way part of that memory, right? You are now an active participant and you're a kind of like a receptacle for that memory. But in a living way. You're not a cold, lifeless container. You are an organic holder of this memory because you have seen it or read it or witnessed it. So you're adding your own breath to it to give it more life. But it's also infusing itself into you as well.

It's that multiplicity of transfer. And that piece is an important part of visionary fiction, and of any liberatory movement—challenging linear time as a one-way street. Nobody Black or Brown ever believed that. None of us thought anything like that until western capitalist imperialism came along and said we have to commodify time. We have to stake it to the ground. We have to stretch it and measure it and then hold it there. The idea that is so powerful in what both of you are saying and the work you live is recognizing time as fluid and not only flows backwards and forward, but is doing so at the same time. It's moving in all directions at the same time.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, I think of your piece "Evidence" in *Octavia's Brood*, which is about this future that is one of the most beautiful futures that I have read or engaged with. One of the things I love about it is your idea that this person in the future is sending messages back to the past to tell us, "Y'all are going to get through this. And this work will not be lost." It's obviously reassuring as someone in the moment that feels so uncertain to get that long view and have it say, "No, it's inevitable that you will build this future."

But I also think it also speaks about the responsibility of the future to the past. That the future doesn't just exist. It is in motion. It's in conversation, it is in relationship, and all relationships are built on accountability and responsibility in the most joyful foundation of that. And so the future speaking back to us and saying, "We

know it's our responsibility to give you strength when it seems like you are not going to make it through," and then thinking that the work that we're doing, the work that y'all have—it's doing the same thing to those folks in the past that have given us so much. That is our responsibility to send back to them as well. "Hey, everything you are fighting for, everything you pulled down, maybe you didn't feel like you've held it then but you pulled it here and we will help hold it for you."

Alexis De Veaux – I would add to this part of your own definition for visionary fiction: those we call our ancestors dreamed us and then bent reality so we could be. And this idea of, again, in an absence of linear time, the relationship between one memory and another which creates the third memory, I think is quite powerful. And very much a part of how we are each describing what we do in our work, which is bending the reality of what we call before us, bending the realities of the present us, and bending the realities to come.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs - I have a question about our writing practices because I know that many of the people who are watching this, the people who are attracted to this AMC space, are creators, they are mediums. I always say the "Media" in Allied Media Conference is actually that we are all mediums, portals bringing this future through.

And I think it's really useful to talk about our writing practices and our creative practices more generally. What those practices do to us and how that exists in relationships, how it changes our relationships, how it's nurtured by relationships. I love what you said about accountability, Walidah, and that it's actually an ancestral accountability, and the accountability to the future, and then there's the accountability in the present that is accountable to that. So I would love to hear anything y'all have to say about your writing practice and how it's been transformative to you in relationship.

Alexis De Veaux- That's such a wonderful question because for me, it actually requires me to sort of think along the spectrum of the genres that I've written in. Recognizing that I have written children's books. memoir, fiction, short fiction, essays, biography, poetry, and plays. It's easy to say all of that and also not easy to articulate how each of those things has been transformative.

I think what I understand about my work now and my writing practices, is that my work is moving towards what I call the sacred, what I call "Black sermonic text." I am not someone who is grounded in the particular church experience. But I know the value and the need of Black sermonic text in Black life in narratives of Black life, and in narratives of Blacknesses. So, in that way, my practice is really more about engaging with something I'm now calling "afictional philosophy." It's afictional because it's moving away from fiction and more towards what I as a writer see as a sermonic text. And a Black sermonic text can be a sentence as much as it can be a book.

I recognize in my work now the sacred and the movement towards philosophy, towards trying to philosophize difference. And also trying to find a philosophy of Blackness, recognizing that that means that my work is much more organic than it used to be. 20, 30, 40 years ago, I used to go to my desk, write eight hours a day. I would be spent afterwards. And that was how the work got accomplished, these long sessions in isolation. Now my work is more organic because it's more grounding in this notion of something sacred. I'm no longer hoping to create characters as much as I am trying to speak with spirit. So spirit comes, tells me their name, what their thing is in relation to this narrative, and how to move from there. Sometimes spirit comes on the regular—sometimes spirit don't show up.

And I have learned to understand that doesn't mean that I'm having something called writer's block. I've never had writer's block in my life. I'm either with the pen and the notebook or I'm not. This notion of writer's block comes, I think, comes from someplace else, culturally. And in this effort to really have a practice around afictional philosophy, moving away from the constraints of story and time in the narrative, has meant for me more currently that I'm working on this project around parables.

I thought these were short stories. But there's a difference between short stories, which are part of that narrative, and parables, which have much more to do with the sacred and Black sermonic text.

And also, I discovered that I wasn't really talking about parable as a noun, like a person, place, or, thing. I was actually talking about "to parable"—the verb, to parable. It was several months before I even understood the definition of that. And there are now some twelve different definitions of the verb to parable.

So my process and my practice has to do with, again, philosophizing difference and really looking at Blackness as the abolition project, not just as a racialized state, but as a movement toward abolition itself. And within that, trying to connect to the notion of Blackness being the dominant narrative in whiteness. isn't that what the 1619 Project showed us? When you look across at what has become known as America, Black people and Black culture are foundational to all of that. So Blackness is the dominant narrative in the whiteness project. Whiteness is the dominating narrative. Whiteness is the predatory narrative. Whiteness is the thing that hooked itself up with heterosexuality and made heterosexuality normative. So, for those of us who are in this current moment practicing wokeness and who identify and have identified as white—whether it's a writing practice or an activist practice—one of the questions here is to really discover is how did whiteness become practice? Both in terms of the social contract and also in terms of the thing that is on the table right now, literature. What gave whiteness itself, basically.

And that's part of my practice as a writer, to not necessarily inform those of us who identify as white about that, but to write in ways where not only am I writing against something like whiteness or homophobia or transphobia or ageism or a multitude of structural injustices, but my question to myself as a writer for every project is, what am I writing towards? Not just what am I writing against, because that holds me, constrained by that imagination.

I hope I'm doing this in the parables, writing towards.

Walidah Imarisha – For me, I know *Octavia's Brood* has changed every aspect of my life. It's changed how I create. It's changed how I imagine and dream. It's changed how I organize. It's changed how I am in relationship with people.

I am so thankful for *Octavia's Brood* as its own entity, separate of me, that we have all given life and breath and love to nurture. Because it has gone in places and brought things into being that I never could have imagined. I think one of the things specifically created, connected to my own writing project, is how incredibly collaborative every aspect of *Octavia's Brood* was and the many different collaborations with folks who are bringing different pieces of shared visions of liberated futures, both in what we are building, but also how we are with one another.

And not just the writers themselves. We were lucky enough to have Sheree Renee Thomas, who edited the incredible anthology, *Dark Matter: 100 Years Of Speculative Fiction From The African Diaspora*—which if folks haven't read that two volume set, you must go get your life right now, it's waiting for you. And she was so incredibly generous with her time and her wisdom, giving us feedback for each individual story, for the project, and then just speaking to adrienne and myself, you know, as Black women, speaking as a Black woman who has created an anthology and has seen it move in the world, to just gift us that wisdom, that guidance. And so, I think that process of collaboration is so incredibly important.

At the beginning of *Octavia's Brood*, I could not begin to imagine the ways it would change and shape me as I was changed. That process of collaboration is incredibly important and I think especially for artists trying to create change. How can we create different worlds if we are not practicing how to be different as artists in that process as well? And I think the process of creation is as transformative as the outcome of it. I've read every story in *Octavia's Brood* many times, and I'm transformed by those stories. But having the immense honor of seeing that process and that process of collaboration transformed me in different ways.

Right now, I'm feeling incredibly lucky in this moment to be working on another collaborative anthology project that is headed by Wakanda Dream Lab and Policy Link called, *Memories of Abolition Day.* It's a collection of Black writers who have been brought together. And we've shared space to collectively imagine a post abolition world. And then we are writing stories within that world. And it was the project I didn't know I was needing in this moment until Calvin Williams, who has been spearheading it, reached out to me and said, "Do you want to be a part of this?"

And what came out of it, that I think is so important in this moment, is we created this world and then wrote individual stories that naturally span a 500 year period, starting in 1919 going to 2419. The time span shows abolition as a process, not as a destination. All of us had something in our story that we began collectively calling Abolition Day, the day the last prison closed. But the story continues for hundreds of years after Abolition Day, because we were all struggling, struggling in the most positive way, with the idea of what comes next? How do we push beyond what we can imagine, what we're told is possible. Abolitionists don't want prisons.

But what happens when we get that? And what's our responsibility to the future and the present to say, "This is what we do want." It's been incredible to see the brilliance that so many Black creators are bringing to this, the different visions of the future. The multiplicities of futures in one, the containing of multitudes, and to see there's space for everyone's vision in this real collaborative project way. It's one thing to say it, and then it's another to actually create that space for it.

It has inspired me so much just in terms of thinking about this on the ground organizing that's incredible and visionary and revolutionary right now, and the futures that we are pulling into existence every single day around the globe. And to just really take that long view of the future and to know it's all important. The next year is important, the next 50 years is important, the next 500 years is important. And they are all there waiting for us to connect, as Alexis De Veaux said, one memory to another. And I feel like this project has enabled me to connect as one memory to so many other folks' memories past, present, and future.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs - What do we mean by future? Alexis, if you would say a little bit about this idea of future or thinking of time beyond future, which I think is actually very related to, Walidah, whatever you want to say about what it is to be living in an abolitionist present with a shared language in a way that it's not been before.

Alexis De Veaux - I want to put this back on you, baby, I want to say something about your work in relation to this idea of future. Because we have *Spill*, we have *M Archive*, we have *DUB*, we have *Undrowned* that's coming out. I want you to talk about this, like and we've used the term a lot—future—but we haven't really said what we mean and culturally. When we use the term future or the future it's always gesturing toward some time or place that's far off, and we're not necessarily going to see, view, witness, in our lifetime. Some years ago, when I was living in Buffalo, New York, I heard Reverend Gerard Williams say the future is your next breath. And I remember being so arrested by that idea, that it was my present, it wasn't something that I potentially would never see. So let me just pose that to you, Alexis, in terms of the incredible body of work that you have put forward already.

How do you construct the future both as part of your practice and also part of your visionary strategies in terms of the kinds of literature and the subjects of your books?

Walidah Imarisha - I absolutely want to second that. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, what about your brilliant futurism. Your futures are not only so beautiful and so compelling, but so visceral. You are also doing this incredible work of making the future tangible, which I think is such important work to be done and a key part of us being able to get to that future. But as creators, it is hard because we live here. And so, how do you, Alexis, do this amazing work of making these beautiful futures tangible?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs - Oh, I almost got away, if it wasn't for you pesky geniuses (laughs). Thank you for asking me to do that explicitly, and I could listen to you all for days and I want to and I love to.

I would say my writing practice is daily, it is a core commitment. It really is a spiritual practice. Any books that I have published or will publish are very much artifacts and evidence of a ceremony that's going on.

People do sometimes ask, "How can you put so much out there?" It really is a by-product. Like if I'm going to work out, it's the sweat. There is a way that what I know that I need to do as an artist, making the revolution irresistible, in the legacy of Toni Cade Bambara, is I need to wake up and create this day. I need to do that first. So, before I even engage with my loved ones or with whoever I'm collaborating with, I actually have to create first and live inside of that. And it's a rigorous practice because for me, when I wake up, it's still dark. Sometimes, I can see some planets, I've been seeing Mars and Venus out my window these early dark mornings this week.

Often I write things and I don't understand it. And sometimes there's stuff I'm still learning what it really means. But what I will say what I started to notice when I was writing *M Archive*, which was coming out of a daily practice sparked by M. Jacqui Alexander's work and particularly questions from her book *Pedagogies Of Crossing*, I started to see that even though some of the scenes are literally, hopefully out of this world, on a planet of sulphur where we're with somebody and her heart is turning to coal, then to diamond. And then that's what I saw. I didn't think about what does that mean? How do I relate that in a linear way? I don't even do interpretive work. I just allow it to be. And what I started to see is the little pieces of what I wrote every day. The day I wrote about the planet of sulphur and the heart, the beautiful black heart that was turning to coal, turning to diamond, I literally walked into an art gallery and there was all this white beautiful sculpture and then there is there was a black heart in the middle of the thing. It just met me like that. And I thought, "Okay."

So ultimately, I think my practice is a faith practice of believing through my creative practice I can tap into all time and prepare myself for the ethical responsibility of being in this day. Noticing and looking at this day in a way that I wouldn't get from just reacting to what is filtered through the media. It has to come through a different form of tapping in, one I see as spiritual. And that process is a self-loving process. And what I found is that it generates spaces and artifacts that other people can engage in and they feel loved by it.

Octavia Butler and the Settler Colonial Speculative: *Xenogenesis* and Planetary Loss

Smaran Dayal

Introduction

As one of the two major African American science fiction writers of the late twentieth century, Octavia E. Butler is the writer—along with Samuel R. Delany—most often associated with "literary Afrofuturism" (Lavender III and Yaszek, 2020). Her most well-known work is *Kindred* (1979), a time-travel novel assigned in U.S. public schools, arguably followed up in popularity with her near-future disaster duology *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), which made the *New York Times* bestseller list in the particularly dystopian year of 2020. Notwithstanding the critical and popular acclaim of these texts, it is her *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987–89) that is in some ways her most classically and genre-consistent science fiction work of literature. It includes some of Butler's most ambitious handling of questions of human nature, identity, gender, race, reproduction, and colonialism. In this paper, I turn to Butler's three *Xenogenesis* novels—*Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989)—to outline what I argue is her theorization of settler colonialism in the Americas, a theory centered around the core political issues of land and sovereignty. My contention is that *Xenogenesis* can be productively read as a literary-speculative theorization—but not mimetic or historically situated representation—of the massive waves of invasion, settlement, dispossession, and forced assimilation that have swept across Indigenous nations and communities across the planet over the last half-

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millennium. Rather than crafting a realist account of the experience of European colonial arrival and dispossession from the perspective of a single Indigenous community or nation, Butler deploys the generic possibilities and conventions of science fiction to help us imagine this process on a planetary and species scale. Humanity's loss of Earth to a space-faring settler species becomes the frame through which Butler paints a fantastical account of European settler colonization.

Established scholarship on *Xenogenesis* attests to the diversity and complexity of Butler's ideas, with a few scholars, including Gerry Canavan (2016), Mark Rifkin (2019), Aparajita Nanda (2020), and Gregory Hampton (2020) engaging with colonialism/colonization as an analytic in interpreting the series.[2] Whereas all four scholars find aspects of colonialism in the human-Oankali relation in *Xenogenesis*, only Canavan (2016) begins to extend that reading to account for a specifically settler colonial condition through a comparison with Native American history.[3] This paper builds on Canavan's initial provocation of a settler colonial reading and takes Nanda's and Hampton's readings one step further by specifying the *kind* of colonialism we encounter in the series. Moreover, my focus on settler colonialism constitutes a shift to the dominant discussion of the novel that revolves around race and racism. Critics such as Mark Rifkin, Donna Haraway, and Frederic Jameson, while not in conversation with each other, all mention the thematics of race and slavery in their readings, rendering their interpretations as what I term "race readings" of African American literature. A reading of the trilogy centered on the thematics of "the afterlife of slavery" (Hartman 2007, 6), race, and Blackness is a generative way of approaching these novels. However, as I will show, it may not be able to account for what I argue is Butler's central undertaking in *Xenogenesis*: a complex speculative thought-experiment about planetary dispossession. Butler's use of the generic conventions of science fiction offers a literary-speculative theorization of the structure of settler colonialism. Drawing from theories of land and sovereignty in Indigenous Studies, this paper demonstrates how "Indigenous critical theory" (Byrd 2011, xxx) can help us better understand some of the central conceptual moves at the heart of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy.

Dawn (1987), the first of the three *Xenogenesis* novels, follows the protagonist Lilith Iyapo as she comes to terms with a new reality facing humanity, after awakening on an alien spaceship. Humans have destroyed Earth and almost everyone on it in a nuclear war. The comparatively small number of survivors of this planetary holocaust are rescued by an alien race called the Oankali. They heal Lilith and as many other survivors as they can, taking them on board their living ship, Chkahichdahk. After about 250 years of cryogenic stasis or "sleep," Lilith is awakened by the Oankali. Their plan is to train Lilith to survive on Earth with a group of other humans whom she is tasked to awaken from stasis. The second novel, *Adulthood Rites* (1988), is narrated from the perspective of Akin, Lilith's first male "construct," or part-human part-Oankali, child. By this point, the Oankali

have returned large numbers of humans to Earth and given them two options: they can either join Oankali communities, find Oankali mates, and bear construct children; or they can become "resisters" and live out their lives in human-only villages—with one catch: they will remain sterile. As the novel progresses, Akin manages to convince the Oankali to allow humans to establish a free colony on Mars, independent of the Oankali. This adds a third option for postapocalypse humanity. *Imago* (1989), the third and final novel, traces the life of another of Lilith's children, Jodahs, who matures to become the first interspecies/construct ooloi (third-gender person). In the process of their[4] metamorphosis into an adult ooloi, Jodahs meets two unusual humans in a forest who turn out to be reproductively capable siblings from a remote human community that has managed to regain its fertility, but at the cost of sexual violence, incest, disease, and deformity. This fertile Andean community has thus far existed as a concealed fourth option for humanity, that is, until the very end of the trilogy. The series ends with this final outpost of humanity on Earth coming into the Oankali imperial fold and deciding to form ties and interbreed with the Oankali.

Through a close reading of the trilogy, I emphasize that it is the nonmimetic representational work carried out by Butler's fiction, through fantastic and speculative registers, that is able to forward revisionist understandings of historical settler colonialism. The generic possibilities of science fiction allow forms of expression and modes of processing historical experience that are unavailable to other genres of literature (*cf*. Bahng 2018, 7–8; Rifkin 2019, 7–8; Schalk 2018, 21–22). *Xenogenesis* skillfully mobilizes the narrative, conceptual, and world-building possibilities of the genre of science fiction to reimagine settler colonialism on a planetary scale. An extensive thought experiment of the kind carried out by these novels, which posits the existence of a space-faring species who arrive in Earth's orbit only to settle the planet, dispossess its inhabitants of their home world, and extract its resources in the process, constitutes a form of literary world-building both contingent to and emergent from the discursive possibilities of science fiction. As Matthew Wolf-Meyer suggests, "[s]ocial theory and speculative fiction are two sides of the same coin" and the division of "legitimate" forms of social-theoretical scholarly knowledge from that produced by speculative fiction writers comes down to an arbitrary distinction based on "colonial relationships" (Wolf-Meyer 2019, 5-6). Butler's *Xenogenesis* narrates the history of settler colonialism in a manner unavailable to nonspeculative genres of writing. It does this by revisiting and inhabiting that history (and present) *in abstracto*, powerfully liberating it (*i.e.*, the speculative literary text) from the realist compunction to accurately recapitulate the facts of particular events. It thereby enables a variety of readers to imagine themselves as its addressees. While Indigenous critical theory, Black Studies, and postcolonial theory undertake powerful revisionary work in the scholarly discourses of the humanities, Afrofuturist and Indigenous futurist fiction, I argue, undertake similarly expansive conceptual and political work, albeit in the *literary* register of speculative fiction.

Black Science Fiction and Racial Realism

Gene Jarrett, in his introduction to the *Alternative Reader* of African American literature argues that anthologists of the tradition have often allowed "race to overdetermine the idea of African American literature" (Jarrett 2006, 2). Moreover, expectations of "African American protagonists alongside certain historical themes, cultural geographies, and political discourses, or subjectivities defined by race" and overall "protocols" of authenticity collectively "contribute to the idea that… African American literature only portrays the realities of black life, or practices what I call racial realism" (Jarrett 2).[5] Butler herself, in some cases, responded to the tendency of her work to be quickly reduced to allegories of slavery, most notably in her afterword to the title story of her *Bloodchild* short story collection (Butler 2005). That afterword is one of a number of Butler's interventions into correcting what she saw as reductive interpretations of her work. In it, Butler specifically pushes back against readings of the story as an allegory of slavery. "It amazes me that some people have seen 'Bloodchild' as a story of slavery. It isn't. […] The only places I am writing about slavery is where I actually say so" (Butler 2005). She echoes this same frustration in an interview: "[S]o many critics have read this [Bloodchild] as a story about slavery, probably just because I am black" (Potts and Butler 2010, 66). Critics such as Jarrett have suggested that "readings of the story as a metaphor for slavery are based on extra textual reasons as much as textual ones" (Jarrett 2006, 408).

The scholarship on *Xenogenesis* is not immune from this tendency to read Black science fiction as racial realism. Mark Rifkin (2019), offering one of the most comprehensive and wide-ranging recent interpretations of Butler's Xenogenesis, finds its engagement with Indigeneity largely wanting. The text's failure to do justice to Indigeneity arises from the fact that it approaches Indigenous politics through the historical and theoretical framework of Black history. One of his primary contentions is that humanity writ large comes to occupy the place of Indigeneity. This "singularizing" of humanity is not helpful because it effaces the specificity and importance of a rigorous conception of "peoplehood" that is foundational to Indigenous politics. "[I]f humanity as a whole constitutes a single 'people,' with the Earth as its 'home,' then whatever ethical force peoplehood has in the novels attaches to its use to refer to the species as such rather than to intraspecies (political) collectivities" (Rifkin 110). The novels, he writes, offer "an antiracist account of human unity," but fall short of representing "meaningfully distinct human 'societies' and 'ways of life'" (Rifkin 110). Fredric Jameson, for his part, takes up the representation of alienness in Butler's work.[6] His contention is that race in SF is "relatively neutralized by the presupposition of alien life," and that, in Butler's fiction, alienness comes to "stand as the allegory of race" (Jameson 2005, 140).[7] Donna Haraway, too, reads *Xenogenesis* as an allegory of race and slavery.[8] She describes the series as figuring "deracinated captive fragments of humanity packed into the body of the aliens' ship [which] inescapably evoke the terrible Middle Passage of the Atlantic slave trade that brought Lilith's ancestors to a 'New World'" (Haraway 1991, 228). Haraway even goes so far as to

describe the *Xenogenesis* series as "Butler's science fictional 'middle passage'" (Haraway 228).

What ties these three readings of *Xenogenesis* together is their shared sense of the trilogy as, in one way or another, predominantly (if not exclusively) about issues of race, transatlantic slavery, and/or Blackness. Such readings tend to focus on the Oankali as an analogy of Blackness, alongside their mutable and antiessentialist characteristics (they are, by definition, a species without a fixed origin as they are constantly "blending" with other species) and their praiseworthy traits: environmentalism, queer kinship formations, veganism, nonviolence, and democratic forms of communal life. However, such a focus not only elides an analysis of the structural conditions of Oankali arrival, conquest, and domination of humanity and Earth, but it also furthers the well-worn practice of reading African American literature primarily for thematics of race/racism and slavery, sometimes at the expense of aesthetic, formal, genre-specific, and other topical interpretations of the poetry and fiction of Black American authors. As I argue below, it is not primarily or only race that is Butler's preoccupation in *Xenogenesis*. Rather, she forwards both a speculative theorization of the complex/structure of settler colonialism as well as a radically speculative understanding of race, one that goes beyond merely representing what we already know about how it functions as a system of power. Butler's *Xenogenesis* mobilizes the speculative mode to highlight the ways in which "racializing assemblages" (Weheliye 2014, 4) remain operative even when abstracted of their contingent spatiotemporal contexts.

Science Fiction on Its Own Terms

Moving from an exclusively race-focused reading of *Xenogenesis* to a reading centered on settler colonialism requires us to answer a more fundamental question about the relation between real-world histories and their reworking and rendering in speculative fiction. What happens to histories of slavery and colonialism when they are refracted through the complex metaphors and conventions of speculative and science fiction? What we are faced with is not simply a game of metaphorical substitution, where the Oankali aliens of *Xenogenesis* come to stand in for Europeans and humans for Indigenous peoples. Instead, a sophisticated analysis of speculative fiction requires that the fantastical worlds of the novels, stories, and films we study be approached first as internally coherent totalities which invite us to parse them on their own terms. The same might be said of other genres of literature to a certain extent. However, a realist text such as Marlon James' *The Book of Night Women* (2009) gains its coherence first through its insertion into the actually existing history of transatlantic slavery and not through a complex metaphor about alien contact that relies on the specific generic conventions of science fiction. Thus, to figure out how a work of speculative fiction approaches and renders real-world histories of slavery and colonialism without reducing their alternative worlds to what we already know demands an extra degree of analytical work. Butler consciously exploits the narrative and world-building freedom made available to her through

the genre of science fiction, I argue, in order to reimagine the history of settler colonialism on a planetary scale.

Thinking through real-world histories of settler colonialism and slavery as they relate to fiction poses a particular problem for the study of literary genres that do not have a straightforwardly mimetic relation with "real" history—genres, that is, such as science fiction. Even in the case of nonrealist genres like surrealism and/or magical realism, they still often retain a clear relation to particular, postcolonial and/or national histories—think Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1970), Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1986), or Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991). Speculative fiction by definition entails a more robust level of detachment from such mimetic linkages to the real world. To say that is not to claim that speculative fiction is somehow bereft of any and all ties to history, reality, context, or politics. In fact, in the case of Black writers of speculative fiction, the opposite is true.

The salient difference between speculative fictions of slavery and realist modes of narration, Madhu Dubey argues, is that the former "attempt[s] to know the past as something other or more than history" and refuses "the burden of realist racial representation" (2010, 780). Sami Schalk, in her book *Bodyminds Reimagined*, lists some of the methods employed by speculative fiction in refusing the burdens of realism: these include "the rejection of verisimilitude, the use of nonmimetic devices, the disruption of linear time, and other tropes which subvert our expectation of reality" (2018, 22). Similarly, if we turn to Darko Suvin's canonical description of science fiction, we see that he defines the SF text as

> a fictional tale determined by the hegemonic literary device of a *locus* and/or a *dramatis personae* that (1) are *radically or at least significantly different from the empirical times, places, and characters* of the "mimetic" or "naturalist" fiction, but (2) are nonetheless—to the extent that SF differs from other "fantastic" genres […] simultaneously perceived as *not impossible* within the cognitive (cosmological and anthropological) norms of the author's epoch. (Suvin 1979, viii; emphases his)

In other words, what sets science fiction apart from other genres of fantastic literature, on the one hand, and realist and naturalist fiction, on the other, is that it manages to both diverge from contemporary reality as we know it ("the empirical times, places, and characters" of realist fiction) while retaining a degree of plausibility from the vantage of the present. Science fiction, Suvin suggests, takes the present we inhabit and are intimately familiar with and *extrapolates* from it into another temporality or reality, most often (but not always) the future. Accordingly, faithful interpretations of Butler's fiction, especially those works which engage the conventions and tropes of mainstream science fiction (aliens, the temporality of the future, new technology, etc.), are those undertaken with

an awareness of the specificities, limitations, and genre conventions of science fiction. *Xenogenesis*, prime among Butler's fiction, is congruent with Suvin's definition of SF, in that its description of events is "radically or significantly different from the empirical times, places and characters" of twentieth century Earth, even as it remains "within the cognitive [...] norms of [Butler's] epoch" (Suvin 1979, viii).

Planetary Dispossession

The overarching theme that ties the three *Xenogenesis* novels together is the progression of the overall Oankali project and presence on Earth, and the problematics of land and Indigeneity. *Xenogenesis*, when approached through a reading that foregrounds these problematics, amounts to nothing short of an elaborate theorization of settler colonialism.

Territoriality or land, primary among various aspects of human existence, is foundational to Indigenous politics, as well as to Indigeneity as a political and conceptual category. This for the simple reason that Indigeneity is grounded in and emerges from Indigenous nations and communities' ties to their lands. In their now-canonical essay, "Being Indigenous: Resurgences Against Contemporary Colonialism," Taiaiake Alfred (Kanien'kehá:ka) and Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee), explain this constitutive interrelation of Indigeneity and land:

> The communities, clans, nations and tribes we call Indigenous peoples are just that: Indigenous to the lands they inhabit, in contrast to and in contention with the colonial societies that have spread out from Europe and other centers of empire. It is this oppositional, place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against the demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples, that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous peoples from other peoples of the world. (Alfred and Corntassel 2005, 597)

Indigeneity, precisely for its relation to land, is not always or necessarily contiguous or compatible with either Third World anticolonialism or antiracism in the West, even though their concerns are often overlapping.[9] Formerly colonized countries like India and the Philippines, for instance, have their own Indigenous populations, distinct from their (constructed) national, ethnic, caste, and religious majorities. Likewise, antiracist movements led by African diasporic "arrivants" (Byrd 2011, xix) and immigrants of color in settler colonial countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia often seek equality and incorporation into states that, even as they move toward some modicum of racial equality, continue to dispossess Indigenous nations and peoples, upon whose lands they exist. A reading of the *Xenogenesis* novels that foregrounds an antiracist or Third Worldist framework at the expense of a settler colonial framework risks similarly glossing over the decisive nuances between these overlapping but *meaningfully distinct* political responses to European racial and colonial domination in the

modern era. Our entire perspective on the Oankali presence on Earth—that is, whether we see them as something more or other than benevolent beings seeking to save humanity from itself—hinges on our ability to read them through a settler colonial and critical Indigenous lens.

If we turn to the field of settler colonial studies and the work of two prominent historians of comparative colonialisms, Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini, we can likewise see the central importance accorded by each of them to land in an understanding of settler (vs. franchise or resource) colonialism. For Wolfe, land is the basis for life, and the takeover of Native lands is causally linked to Native elimination. "Territoriality," he writes, "is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element" (Wolfe 2016, 34). Elsewhere he argues that "the primary object of settler-colonization is the land itself rather than the surplus value to be derived from mixing native labour with it" (Wolfe 1999, 163). Such a role for land is similarly true for Veracini's account of settler colonialism:

> [M]ore than other political regimes (and in particular *colonial* regimes, where transient colonials do not commit to remaining in any specific place, and as it dispenses with the labour of colonised Others), a *settler* colonial project is predominantly about territory. At the same time, the territorialisation of the settler community is ultimately premised on a parallel and necessary deterritorialisation (*i.e.*, the transfer) of indigenous outsiders. (Veracini 2010, 80–81; emphasis his)

The important difference being marked here by Veracini is that between franchise or resource colonialism (the extraction of resources from the colonies), on the one hand, and settler colonialism on the other (*cf.* Wolfe 2001, 868).[10]

Having established the foundational character of land to Indigeneity and the dispossession of land to settler colonialism, we might now turn to *Xenogenesis* for a reading enabled by this fundamental insight of Indigenous critical theory and settler colonial studies. When viewed through the lens of a settler colonial analysis, the Oankali's designs on Earth appear in a very different, acquisitive light. Rather than accepting their ostensible desire to "sav[e] the humans from extinction" (*cf.* Magedanz 2012, 51) at face value, by centering the question of land and to whom it belongs, we are able to more clearly identify the Oankali project as thoroughly settler colonial in nature. In a passage in *Adulthood Rites*, we learn that the Oankali's longer term plan is not only to replace humans with the "construct" descendants of humans and Oankali—humans have been made reproductively incapable without the Oankali—but also to grow ships on the surface of Earth, which will consume "much of the substance of Earth," leaving behind "less than the corpse of a world" (Butler 2000, 365). Furthermore, if we take into account Alfred and Corntassel's definition of Indigeneity, humanity in the novel comes to very clearly figure, in line with Mark Rifkin's reading (2019, 110), as this speculative-futurist tale's Indigenous subject: a people being de-

prived of their land and their right to exist there autonomously of a foreign (here: extraplanetary) power.

If there is one single issue that Butler scholars are sharply divided over, it is the question of what to make of the Oankali. Gerry Canavan (2016) argues for a revisal of what many scholars—including Donna Haraway (1991) and Nolan Belk (2008)—consider to be the benign and/or benevolent nature of the Oankali in *Xenogenesis*. In Haraway's reading of *Xenogenesis*, the Oankali's "essence," she writes, "is embodied commerce, conversation, communication—with a vengeance. Their nature is always to be midwife to themselves as other" (Haraway 1991, 227). Haraway's account of the Oankali registers all of these characteristics ("embodied commerce, conversation, communication") as unambiguously positive. From a postmodernist perspective, it makes perfect sense to celebrate the repudiation of origins and essences embodied in a species that is permanently merging with other species and adapting itself along a never-ending chain of difference. However, for Canavan, the Oankali's intentions are not as straightforward as they appear in Haraway's account. He asks, "Are the Oankali humanity's saviors or its executioners? Do they represent a deviation from the colonial and imperial history that has made human history such an existential horror, or do they rather represent the ultimate perfection of the colonial enterprise?" (Canavan 2016, 97). Whereas, as Canavan suggests, the "pro-Oankali position… is probably the 'intended' reading of the novel" (Canavan 102), I would argue that Butler intentionally foregrounds such a reading precisely to push readers to reach their own independent conclusions about the Oankali—and by extension settler colonialism, on the basis of the "facts" of the novels.

In Canavan's reading of the trilogy, if one views the basic Oankali narrative, freed of its superficial details, what you get is "a plain retelling of the brutal history of imperialism" (Canavan 106). Even the one action that appears to be unambiguously benevolent, the Oankali's decision to allow unaltered, fertile humans to settle Mars, is "structurally identical to the nineteenth-century project of Indian removal in the Americas" (Canavan 107). Building on Canavan's reading of *Xenogenesis*, I argue that the Oankali project on Earth not only lends itself very easily to a reading of the Oankali as engaged in a kind of colonialism, but that Butler's vivid portrayal of this scene of alien contact is a specific metaphor for a liberal "multicultural settler colonialism" (Byrd 2011, xx), one which bears all the traits of individual and interpersonal benignity and celebrates difference through the fluid, xenophilic and adaptive lifeways of the Oankali—all the aspects of the Oankali celebrated by Donna Haraway—but which serve to divert one's attention away from and veil a broader structural project of systematic land theft, Indigenous erasure, and genocide.

The Mars Reservation

A crucial pivot in the trilogy's narrative arc is the struggle for a Mars colony in *Adulthood Rites* (1988), the second *Xenogenesis* novel. Akin, Lilith's construct son and the protagonist of the book, after spending part of his childhood at the all-

human "resister" village of Phoenix, comes to believe that human beings deserve the choice to live free of the Oankali. The Oankali, we learn, have subdivided into three kinship groups upon their arrival in Earth's orbit: Akjai, Toaht, and Dinso. Akjai are the single group that will not interbreed with humans. They are the Oankali's backup plan if their "gene trading" or interbreeding with the humans goes awry. The Toaht, by contrast, will mix with humanity but leave Earth, sailing off into space in their own independent direction. The Dinso, the group we see the most of in *Xenogenesis*, will mix with humans and settle Earth, only to "grow" ships on the planet's surface, extracting its resources, and eventually leaving it a stripped, uninhabitable rock unfit for life.

The three Oankali kinship groups and their relationship to land (Earth), in fact, come to resemble different kinds of colonial conquest. The Dinso, most obviously, can be thought to stand in for European settler colonists in the Americas, who both sought the land and intermarried with Indigenous people, even as they refused to integrate within Indigenous nations and social structures, but instead, like the Oankali, coercively assimilate those they form bonds with.[11] (The Dinso are the kinship group that Lilith becomes a part of as a result of her mating with the Oankali individuals Nikanj, Ahajas, and Dichaan.) The Toaht, for their part, are not unlike the administrators and bureaucrats of the late British Empire: emissaries for resource extraction, agents of franchise colonialism. They arrive, conquer, acquire, then leave, taking with them clones ("prints," in the vocabulary of the novels) of humans with them on their subsequent travels through space. In the case of the Oankali, the resources they extract are the genetic material of humans and a planet for their Dinso (read: American) brethren to settle. Finally, the Akjai are not unlike the neocolonialists of late capitalism: they, like the Toaht, travel space for resources, conquer, but unlike the franchise colonists, don't "bring home" any former subjects. There isn't a Brick Lane aboard their mothership—they are only there for the resources. Akin comes to believe that just as the Oankali have their Akjai, humans ought to have their Akjai too: a branch of the species which would not have to "gene trade" with the Oankali and can continue their lives unaffected by the Oankali. Akin imagines Mars as the site for such a human Akjai.

If we take into account this aspect of the Oankali settler colonial project, we see that land is absolutely central to it, just as Wolfe, Veracini, and others argue that it is to historical settler colonialism in the Americas and Oceania. And that aspect is the question of Earth and to whom it belongs. After the Oankali join humans in the resettlement of Earth, two and a half centuries after its destruction, they essentially assert absolute sovereignty over it. Building on Nichols' (2019) analysis of dispossession in the absence of Lockean forms of possession, we can also see how humans in *Xenogenesis*, even if they never "possessed" the Earth (how could they?), nonetheless come to be robbed of it.

Furthermore, the only place that humans are allowed to live and reproduce independently of the Oankali is on the less-than-hospitable human reservation of Mars, a space that is decidedly not their ancestral land—or here, planet. Along

these lines, the longer-term Oankali plan for Earth is to "grow" spaceships on and with the material of the planet's surface, eventually departing on those ships, leaving behind no more than an uninhabitable, stripped rock that resembles the moon. Finally, in the process of settling Earth, we learn that the Oankali shuttles that bring the Oankali and poststasis humans to Earth intentionally land on the ruins of former human cities and settlements, consuming them and in the process erasing all traces of their precontact species history, achievements, and knowledge bases (*cf*. Nichols 2019, 34, 602). If this doesn't bring to mind the nineteenth-century westward expansion of the U.S. settler state, then we are undoubtedly missing the forest for the trees.

As we saw above, Canavan reads this process of struggling for and founding a Mars colony as a direct analogy of Indian removal in North America (*cf*. Canavan 2016, 107). This reading becomes even more plausible by the fact that the independent human colony is specifically not to be founded anywhere on humanity's original lands, but on an entirely separate and quite literally "alien" geographical entity: a terraformed Mars. Mars in *Xenogenesis* becomes, not unlike "Indian Territory," lands West of the Mississippi in present-day Oklahoma to which the Southeastern Native nations were forcibly removed, a kind of "human territory": a place where humans have so far not lived but are now assigned to as their only autonomous territory. Just as the Five Nations were presented with the option of being subsumed by the expansionary and extractive imperial nation or being removed from their homelands in order to retain some degree of autonomy, humans can stay on Earth, interbreed with the Oankali, assimilate into their social system, and enlist themselves and their offspring in what we might term, after the Oankali mothership, the United States of Chkahichdahk. Or they can permanently leave for the newly created human reservation of Mars.

Sterilization and Genocide

Genocide is a second place one might begin an inquiry into Butler's portrayal of the Oankali project on Earth. The most striking intervention by the Oankali into human biology is the mass sterilization of every single human being that they manage to rescue from the irradiated planet after the nuclear war—"humanicide," Lilith calls it (Butler 2000, 8)—that precipitates its destruction. When brought to their mothership, Chkahichdahk, all humans were rendered sterile by the Oankali, and henceforth only allowed to reproduce with the aid of an Oankali "ooloi," a third-gender person essential to Oankali reproduction and sociality. We learn that the Oankali believe that humans are a fatally flawed species, characterized by two conflicting traits or features: intelligence and hierarchy. They call this the human contradiction. If humans are allowed to reproduce, the Oankali believe, they will simply repeat history and end up where the Oankali found them: in the wake of a nuclear holocaust or another similar scene of self-annihilation.

Article II-d of the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention specifically defines genocide as the "Imposing [of] measures intended to prevent births within [a] group" (United Nations 1948). Canavan also advances a reading of

the Oankali project as a systematic genocide of humanity, not simply through the prevention of births, but a number of other factors that line up with legal definitions of genocide, such as killing members of a group, causing bodily and mental harm, inflicting conditions that would lead to the group's destruction, and the forcible transfer of children out of the group (*cf*. Canavan 2016, 106).[12]

A complicating factor in *Xenogenesis*, however, is that the Oankali mass sterilization of humans is preceded by humanity's own—or more specifically, the United States' and Soviet Union's—"humanicide" through nuclear warfare. In other words, humanity when viewed as a species had already attempted to commit mass suicide before the Oankali encountered them. The sterilization of rescued humans is justified by the Oankali as an act of generosity towards humanity. Its rationalization is the aforementioned "human contradiction." They deduce this arguably social and political condition afflicting humanity from their biological knowledge about human genetics. Jdahya, one of Nikanj's parents and the first Oankali Lilith encounters, tells her as much early in her stay aboard the Oankali ship:

> "Your bodies are fatally flawed. The ooloi perceived this at once. […]."
> "What are you talking about?"
> "You have a mismatched pair of genetic characteristics. Either alone would have been useful, would have aided the survival of your species. But the two together are lethal. It was only a matter of time before they destroyed you." (Butler 2000, 38)

The Oankali claim, on the basis of their ability to perceive human DNA, to both know humans better than humans know themselves, and to know what is best for humans as a result of this knowledge. So, even as Jdahya can say to Lilith, "No one will touch you without your consent" (39), in instances when the "general will" of the Oankali (which quite straightforwardly resembles the Rosseauian political concept) has to be carried out, humans lose their ability to choose, consent, or refuse their subjection to that will.

Moreover, in the second *Xenogenesis* novel, *Adulthood Rites*, when Lilith's son Akin insists to the Oankali subadult ooloi Dehkiaht aboard the mothership that humans ought to be free to decide their fate for themselves, the ooloi's retort reiterates the Oankali belief that humans are determined by their biology and therefore cannot be free even if they think are (*cf*. Butler 2000, 467). Lillith's immediate interlocutor in the passage quoted above might be the particular Oankali individual, Jdahya, but he is both speaking for—and she is thus speaking with—the larger, and unaccountable, Oankali species-collective.

Settler Democracy, or The United States of Chkahichdahk

This brings us to a further and final aspect to *Xenogenesis* that lends to the trilogy's reading as a speculative staging of settler colonialism: the political

structure of the Oankali species-collective, which it seems apt to describe as a "settler democracy." As Patrick Wolfe explains, "For Indigenous people, the concept of settler democracy can only be an oxymoron. Their attrition at the hands of that democracy reflects a core feature of settler colonialism, which is first and foremost a project of replacement" (Wolfe 2016, 32–33). Moreover, a settler democracy, exactly like the Oankali settlement of Earth, is an expansionary project and "require[s] a constant supply of new territory with which to satisfy the proprietary aspirations of its burgeoning population" (Wolfe 2016, 80). While ostensibly highly democratic and even consensus-based, it specifically excludes humans, even as its decisions intensely impact humanity, from humans' ability to reproduce themselves as a species to whether they can continue to exist on their own planet without biologically and socially merging with, and being subsumed by, the Oankali settlers. Akin's attempts to convince the Oankali species-collective of the merits of a human Akjai are long and difficult and only come to be put into practice in the third novel, *Imago* (1989), at which point, we are told, the Oankali-assisted human settlement of Mars has begun. At every stage of his petitioning the Oankali collective, Akin is dismissed as naïve, overly sentimental, immature, not capable of understanding Oankali truths, and finally, he is excluded from the Oankali's democratic deliberations on the basis of his allegedly biological incapacity to communicate directly with the species-collective.

Butler's description of the manner in which the Oankali communicate with the species as a whole resembles modern telecommunication networks and the satellite and cable grid that currently underpins the modern Internet—technology that did not exist at the time of her writing these novels. However, as with all Oankali technology, their equivalent of the species-"Internet" used to engage in political discussions and reach consensus-based decisions about the species as a whole is grounded in biology, and not external tool- or object-based technology. Butler dedicates a short chapter of *Adulthood Rites* (Butler 2000, 469–71) to this enactment of remote and virtual Oankali democracy. The Oankali collective are referred to in the narration as "the people."

> The Akjai spoke to the people for Akin. Akin had not realized it would do this—an Akjai ooloi telling other Oankali that there must be Akjai humans. It spoke through the ship and had the ship signal the trade villages on Earth. It asked for a consensus and then showed the Oankali and construct people of Chkahichdahk what Akin had shown Dehkiaht and Tiikucahk. (Butler 2000, 469)

At different moments in the trilogy, we learn that "the people" can be communicated with through the different ship entities: the mothership, Chkahichdahk; the shuttles that ferry people between Chkahichdahk and Earth, which are kind of bonsai version of motherships grown specifically for short-

distance space travel; and the various Oankali "trade villages" on Earth, which are themselves premature versions of motherships, which will eventually consume the Earth and its resources as they grow atop its crust—not unlike the settler states that parasitically grow upon Turtle Island, feeding on its resources.

The chapter in question describes in detail the Oankali's deliberative democracy and the process by which consensus is reached among the collective. Akin, since he is not yet an adult, is only able to participate in this process through the intermediary of the Akjai elder (*cf*. Butler 2000, 470), much as he was only able to get a taste of the experience of open space by interfacing with the shuttle that brings him up to Chkahichdahk through his Oankali father Dichaan (*cf*. 441). However, all humans share the fate of immature constructs and are biologically excluded from participating in Oankali democracy. And since Akin is the first construct male to be born on Earth, and there are only a few construct females that precede him, constructs are also de facto excluded from the Oankali's political decision-making process.

We receive some insight into the functioning of Oankali democracy when we learn that it is the "majority opinion" of the Oankali that determines the path that the species-collective will take when it comes to permitting humans a Mars reservation (*cf*. Butler 2000, 471). Similarly, in other passages in *Adulthood Rites*, we learn that when Akin was kidnapped and sold to the resister village of Phoenix, it was "the people" who decided not to aid Lilith, Nikanj, and the rest of Akin's immediate family in searching for him. When they finally did aid in his search, and Akin was found, it was only because "[t]he people believed that [Akin] had learned enough" about the humans (414). Dichaan, Akin's Oankali father explains how this decision was reached:

> "Was I left among them for so long so that I could study them?" Akin asked silently. Dichaan rustled his free tentacles in discomfort. "There was a consensus," he said. "Everyone came to believe it was the right thing to do except us. We've never been alone that way before. Others were surprised that we didn't accept the general will, but they were wrong. They were wrong to even want to risk you!" (414)

What is confusing about this explanation is that the "consensus" that is reached isn't really a consensus but rather the mob rule of the Oankali majority. Akin's family—those most impacted by the Oankali's decision not to actively search for him—clearly did not consent to their child being left with the resister humans. Moreover, it is never entirely clear how "the general will" of the Oankali is constituted. Is it contiguous with "the people" as a whole? Is it a racialized or speciesized category that excludes humans, who do not count as part of that collective? And are "the people," and the consensus they arrive at, truly inclusive of all Oankali and constructs? To return to the term I introduced above, all of these

aspects of the Oankali's political structure strongly resemble the form of rule Patrick Wolfe and others refer to as "settler democracy."

The Oankali "people" seem to have decided here to make Lilith's construct son Akin an unwitting ethnographer of the humans of Phoenix, against both his and his family's will. Stacy Magedanz (2012) has perceptively described the episode of Akin's capture in Adulthood Rites as an intentional allegory by Butler of the historical American genre of the "captivity narrative" in which white settler colonists wrote about being held hostage by Native Americans. Among the characteristics that Akin's captivity narrative share with early colonial captivity narratives are his captors' search for "human-looking children to sell to the childless resisters, echoing a motif of many Indian captivities, in which a white child is taken in order to replace the dead child of a bereaved Indian mother" (Magedanz 2012, 51). Moreover, the human resisters who hold Akin captive "are cast into the role of the brutal, primitive captors, displaying many of the stereotyped tendencies toward inhumanity that early American captivity narratives ascribed to the Indians" (Magedanz 2012, 51). If Magedanz's likening of the captivity narratives of Mary Rowlandson and others with Akin's captivity in Xenogenesis is accurate, we have yet another reason to believe that Butler was very consciously painting a speculative scene of settler conquest, even as she was subverting the genre in important ways.[13]

In a later appearance of the Oankali-collective's decision-making power, we see them exile another of Lilith's children from their Oankali village. In *Imago*, we learn that "the people" have decided that the novel's protagonist, Jodahs, Lilith's child and the first construct ooloi, must return to Chkahichdahk, since they (*i.e.*, Jodahs) are not fully in control of their abilities and "the ship was a much older, more resistant organism" (555). Whereas Lilith's trade village, Lo, is not yet able to protect and heal itself from the injuries Jodahs inadvertently inflicts upon it, the mothership would be able to better handle these. "And on the ship, I could be watched by many more mature ooloi," Jodahs says (555). However, since Jodahs is against leaving their family and returning to the ship, "[t]he people would permit me Earth exile" (555). Finally, to return to a related moment in *Dawn*, when Lilith asks Nikanj for a pen and paper to assist her learning of the Oankali language and ways, not only is she denied, but it tells her that "[t]he people have decided that it should not be allowed" (62).

While being partially inclusive of constructs, what is most striking about these repeated invocations of "the people" and "the general will" of the Oankali-collective is that they remain absolutely unaccountable to and unrepresentative of the humans who are on the receiving end of the dispossessive and assimilatory settler colonial Oankali social system/state/society. In that way, there is a real parallel to be drawn between the relation of the Oankali society to humanity and that of settler states to Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. What, one might ask, has U.S. democracy historically meant to American Indians? What does it continue to mean to the sovereign First Nations of Turtle Island today?

Butler is, arguably, asking precisely this question through the speculative register of her fiction. What, if anything, does Oankali democracy mean to humans? Is it beneficial in any but the most superficial of ways to humanity that this alien species appears to engage in egalitarian debate and consensus-based deliberation among themselves about their own—and, arrogantly, other subject species'—collective political futures?

The Oankali settler project, as Lilith and the various human and construct characters encounter it, operates not unlike the bureaucratic and democratic settler state that is the United States. Whether through generalizing, unaccountable language and expressions of power through the passive voice, or the fact that only constructs like Akin—and only through the intermediary of Oankali elders—and not other humans (who are described as childlike) are even allowed to address the broader Oankali species-collective, wherever you turn, humanity in the speculative world of Butler's *Xenogenesis* is found attempting to survive the onslaught of a voracious and all-consuming, colonizing settler society that has decided to make Earth its own.

Taking all of this into consideration, it is hard to see the Oankali as anything other than a superficially democratic, polite, and benevolent—read: liberal—yet structurally destructive, eliminatory, and violent speculative incarnation of the actual history of European settler colonialism in North America. They are settlers who are engaged collectively—whether individual Oankali and constructs that make up this collectivity intentionally choose to participate in it or not—in the "elimination" of the human Native (*cf*. Wolfe 2006).

Conclusion

I want to conclude by returning to the problem raised by Mark Rifkin in his reading of *Xenogenesis*: that in rendering humans as the Indigenous subject of the novels, it "singularizes" humanity and effaces the specificity of peoplehood. The difficulty with such a reading of *Xenogenesis* is that it sidesteps the question of genre opened up above. *Xenogenesis*, as a thoroughly nonrealist work of science fiction, does not aim for an accurate mimetic representation of any particular Indigenous nations or their singular historical experience of dispossession.[14] Butler deliberately remains at a certain level of abstraction from actual history in order to advance a theory of intragalactic settler colonialism[15] and planetary dispossession that helps us understand the processes by which settler colonization unfolded in the Americas. To charge Butler for "consistently orient[ing] away from engaging the politics of peoplehood," as Rifkin does (2019, 111), is to at least somewhat misapprehend the medium and genre of Butler's art. Butler's figuration of humans as the Indigenous subject of the series cannot be interpreted outside of the genre specificities of science fiction. In fact, it is precisely the narrative and world-building freedom Butler affords herself through the generic conventions of science fiction that allows her and her readers—Indigenous, arrivant, and settler, all equally if differentially estranged by

the speculative world of *Xenogenesis*—to imagine anew the history of settler colonialism on a planetary scale. Aparajita Nanda, for instance, argues that Butler chooses science fiction to narrate the colonial history of the Atlantic for its defamiliarizing effect: "[Butler] locates her narratives, whether 'Bloodchild' or *Xenogenesis*, deliberately in the science fiction genre, as this genre provides an unfamiliar context, one exempted from historical baggage. […] Her speculative treatment, not beholden to any historical era, facilitates discussion of abstract concepts and opens up interdisciplinary approaches" (Nanda 2020, 119). Butler thereby enables her readers to partake momentarily in an extremely nuanced and complex thought experiment structured by the speculative provocation: "what-if?" *What if humanity was confronted by a space-faring settler species whose only aim was to eliminate the species and its home planet?* Moreover, it is arguably the case that Butler's choice to constitute humanity as the dispossessed subject of the novels increases the likelihood of liberal white and other non-Indigenous readers being interpellated into an imaginative scenario of planetary dispossession than a story narrated from the perspective of specific Indigenous nations. The empathic gap between the settler reader and Indigenous history—not unlike the occasional maw between the white reader and authors of color—is a reality of which Butler was certainly cognizant.

The nature of speculative fiction is to traffic in fantastic and nonrealist worlds. If, as Madhu Dubey argues, what sets "speculative fictions of slavery" apart from other genres is their "attempt to know the past as something other or more than history" and to refuse "the burden of realist racial representation" (Dubey 2010, 780), there is a strong basis to conceive of speculative fictions of settler colonialism in a homologous way. *Xenogenesis* can be read as attempting to know the past "as something other or more than history," while refusing the dictates and burdens of realist representation. A speculative fiction of settler colonialism might not always necessitate the historically accurate (*i.e.*, realist) representation of particular peoples, events, and places. In a genre largely untethered to the world as we know it, whether through a temporal displacement or other nonmimetic and speculative narrative devices, there exists more than one way to parse Butler's rendition of humanity as Indigeneity.

In contrast to the critical interpretations of *Xenogenesis* that read it primarily through the lens of race and slavery and thereby miss its extensive, complex, and nuanced speculative theorization of settler colonialism, how might we live up to Gene Jarrett's plaidoyer to resist the tendency to let "race to overdetermine the idea of African American literature" (Jarrett 2006, 2)? Moreover, how might we do justice to what Katherine McKittrick refers to as the "brilliant and diasporic and multi-scalar and global intellectual worlds" of Black thought (McKittrick [@demonicground] 2020)—in this case, the speculative fiction of Butler? What rearrangement of critical categories would enable us, as literary scholars, to register the capaciousness of Afrofuturist novels such as *Xenogenesis*? How might our interpretations make and hold space for the full spectrum of histories

and experiences that Afrofuturist writers attempt to render in their speculative prose—including, but also exceeding, that of the African diaspora? Finally, how might Tiffany Lethabo King's notion of the offshore formation of the "shoal" as "an analytical site" bridging Black and Indigenous life and experiences of violence speak to the text of an Afrofuturist writer like Butler theorizing settler colonialism through her fiction (King 2019, 29)?

Butler's *Xenogenesis* is an immensely rich trilogy of novels, one that projects the histories and lived realities of settler colonial conquest and Indigenous dispossession into the imaginative register of science fiction. In doing so, it works through conceptual problematics of individual and collective agency, kinship, self-determination, autonomy, sovereignty, species boundaries, and sexual, social, and political consent in ways unavailable to other genres of fiction.

Notes

[1]This essay has benefitted immensely from feedback, conversations, workshopping, or simply coworking with a number of scholars, mentors, colleagues, and/or friends: the anonymous peer reviewers; the special issue editors: Hee-Jung Serenity Joo, Pacharee Sudhinaraset, and Walidah Imarisha; my dissertation committee at NYU: Sonya Posmentier, Jini Kim Watson, and Jay Garcia; Dean Saranillio, S. Heijin Lee, Gene Jarrett, Uli Baer, Manu Chander, André Carrington, Lenora Hanson, Maureen McLane, Isabel Hofmeyr, Crystal Parikh, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Tyler Harper, Andrew Ross, Amrit Trewn, Kassandra Manriquez, Justin Linds, Nicole Eitzen Delgado, Andrés Olán-Vázquez, Zavier Wingham, Lukas La Rivière, Anneke Rautenbach, Toya Mary Okonkwo, Dominic De Martini, Khushboo Shah, Kelly Roberts, İlker Hepkaner, Avinash Rajagopal, Nerve Macaspac, Zifeng Liu, Benjamin Rubin, Manish Melwani, Zane Koss, Kate McKenna, Emily Foister, Valène, William Cheung, John Linstrom, Alex Ramos, Raj Saikumar, Reecha Das, Eesha Kumar, Sonya Merutka, Cindy Gao, Minju Bae, the NYU Postcolonial, Race, and Diaspora Studies Colloquium; and the Brown Town group chat: Param Ajmera, Saronik Bosu, Sri Chatterjee, Suvendu Ghatak, Anwesha Kundu, Neelofer Qadir, Manasvin Rajagopalan, Oishani Sengupta, Jay Shelat, and Bassam Sidiki. And most of all, I thank my mother Tanmayo, whose library brought me to literature and who encouraged me—sometimes a little too enthusiastically—to write.

[2]Previous scholarship on *Xenogenesis* has addressed a variety of themes and issues, including Butler's contested biological determinism (Zaki 1990; Johns 2010; Vado 2020), utopia and dystopia (Zaki 1990; Brataas 2006), gender, sexuality, and eroticism (Brataas 2006; Belk 2008), sexual consent and agency (Burnett 2020), posthumanism and transhumanism (Haraway 1989 and 1991; Goss and Riquelme 2007; Jenkins 2020; Dunkley 2020), and reproduction and reproductive futurities (Bollinger 2007; Streeby 2018; Vado 2020).

[3]Rifkin (2019), for his part, sees a greater parallel between Third World anticolonial nationalist movements and human resistance in the novels than a settler colonial situation, while also problematizing Butler's engagement with Indigeneity. Nanda comes closest to a classically postcolonial reading of *Xenogenesis* when she states that "Butler's text deconstructs the rigid binary of oppressive, colonizing aliens and victimized, colonized humans" (Nanda 2020, 119). Hampton (2020) undertakes a comparative reading of the first Xenogenesis novel, *Dawn* (1987) and Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (1972),

highlighting how both texts demonstrate the impact colonialism has on both the colonized and the colonizer.

[4]Butler uses the third-person singular pronoun "it" to refer to ooloi in *Xenogenesis*. In my own work, I substitute "it" with "they," as I imagine she would have in a historical moment when the third-person plural has come to be widely used by nonbinary, trans, genderqueer, and agender speakers of English.

[5]For more on the practice of "reading for race" in the history of African American letters, see Kenneth Warren's *What Was African American Literature*? (2011), Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* (1993), and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self* (1987). Gates writes, "Black criticism, since the early nineteenth century, seems in retrospect to have thought of itself as essentially just one more front of the race's war against racism. Texts, it seems to me, were generally analyzed almost exclusively in terms of their content as if a literary form were a vacant enclosure that would be filled with this or that matter. This matter, moreover, was 'the Black Experience,' and an author tended to be judged on his or her fidelity to 'the Black experience.' This, it seemed to me, was a dead end for black literary studies." (Gates 1987, xxii)

[6]Though he doesn't specify, he can only be referring to *Xenogenesis* (1987–89) or Butler's precursor short story *Bloodchild* (2005 [1995]), given the theme of alien contact.

[7]This argument parallels his infamous description of "Third World Literature" as allegory (Jameson 1986).

[8]*Xenogenesis* holds an important place in the writing and thinking of Donna Haraway, appearing in the conclusion to *Primate Visions* (1989), two chapters of *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (1991), the revised version of her 1985 "Cyborg Manifesto," and "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies."

[9]For a detailed articulation of this argument, see Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's essay, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor" (Tuck and Yang 2012), and Haunani-Kay Trask's seminal book *From a Native Daughter* (Trask 1999).

[10]In a similar contribution to the theorization of land under settler colonialism, the political theorist Robert Nichols, in his book *Theft Is Property!* (2019), demonstrates how, even if those who were dispossessed of their lands by European colonialism did not "possess" that land in Lockean terms, their dispossession can nonetheless be clearly accounted for.

[11]In his comparative study of the distinctive ways in which US settler society has historically racialized Native Americans and African Americans, *Traces of History*, Patrick Wolfe argues that "in Australia and in the USA, White authorities have generally accepted – even targeted – Indigenous people's physical substance, synecdochally represented as 'blood' for assimilation into their own stock" (Wolfe 2016, 2). The assimilation of Native Americans into white society, Wolfe notes, effectively contributes to destroying Indigenous nations as distinct and sovereign political entities. Thus, "the irreconcilable Native difference that settler polities seek to eliminate can be detached from the individual whose bare life can be reassigned within the set of settler social categories, yielding a social death of Nativeness" (ibid. 186). In a similar vein, in her work on Indigenous sovereignty, possession, and property, Aileen Moreton-Robinson demonstrates the centrality of gender and "the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty" to the dispossession of Indigenous peoples (Moreton-Robinson 2015, 81). The anthropologist Audra Simpson offers us a detailed example of the working of that possessive logic, describing how US and Canadian laws such as the Indian Act led to "the fomentation of a patrilineally based, heteropatriarchal property regime on the reserve," effectively depriving Mohawk women of their citizenship rights if they married outside their community (Simpson 2014, 60).

Much as the institution of marriage has been historically weaponized by the settler against Indigenous sovereignty, we can see a similar dynamic at work in the Oankali's formation of kinship units with humans in *Xenogenesis*. It is never the Oankali who adapt themselves in any substantive way to human social structures and kinship forms, but the humans who are inserted as individuals—and not nations or communities with any countervailing claims to sovereignty and political autonomy—into Oankali society.

[12]There is a history of the use of forced sterilizations towards genocidal ends in the United States. D. Marie Ralstin-Lewis, in an article on Indigenous women's reproductive rights, describes how sterilization has been against Native women as recently as the 1970s (Ralstin-Lewis 2005, 71–72). Other scholars such as Karen Stone (2016) and Brianna Theobald (2019) have similarly demonstrated the centrality of sterilization and the control of Indigenous women's bodies to genocide.

[13]Unlike a bulk of early colonial captivity narratives, Akin is neither white nor female—he is a mixed-race (Black and Asian), mixed-species (Oankali and human) child. There is also a sophisticated complication of roles in Butler's deployment of the captivity narrative: as Magedanz writes, "[r]eaders will recognize the resisters as members of contemporary industrial society. By casting the resister humans in the role of the [supposedly] primitive social group, however, Butler calls into question the resisters' image of themselves as representatives of civilization." (2012, 51) This functions as a simultaneous critique of contemporary colonialist-capitalist American "civilization," as well as that of the Oankali's colonialist attitude towards humans, whom they "repeatedly deny…choice and self-determination." (ibid. 52) Thus, "by casting the Oankali as the dominating, colonizing social group, Butler also uses the captivity narrative genre to criticize their handling of the otherwise doomed human society they encounter." (ibid. 51)

[14]Butler, however, did take a genuine interest in Indigeneity in South America and conducted fieldwork in the Peruvian Andes and Amazon for *Xenogenesis*. Though not an institutional anthropologist, she was well read in the field. We know this from several sources (*cf*. Govan and Butler 2005; Johns 2009; Brown and Butler 2010; Hampton 2010, 146; Canavan 2016, 92; Streeby 2018; Russell 2019). In my developing book project on Afrofuturist fiction, I describe Butler's interest in anthropology and her fieldwork as "speculative ethnography." Butler harbored a lifelong dual commitment to anthropology and speculative fiction. Due to limitations of space, I defer a more extensive discussion of Butler's ethnographic practice and its relation to Indigeneity for another time and place, but wish to mark it as fertile avenue of inquiry.

[15]The Oankali are from another solar system within the Milky Way, but not another galaxy (cf. Butler 2000, 172).

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Speculative World-Building as a Refracting Prism: An Interview with Rebecca F. Kuang

Ifeoluwa Adeniyi

Rebecca F. Kuang is the author of the fantasy novels *The Poppy War, The Dragon Republic,* and *The Burning God*. Her upcoming novel *Babel, or The Necessity of Violence: An Arcane History of the Oxford Translators' Revolution* will be released in August 2022.

Ifeoluwa Adeniyi is completing her PhD in the Department of English, Theatre, Film, and Media, University of Manitoba. Her research explores the politics of death in feminist Afrofuturist writings by Black women. Ifeoluwa is a lecturer in the English Department at the University of Winnipeg where she teaches literature and creative writing.

IA: Thank you for agreeing to do this interview. I have thoroughly enjoyed reading your novel, *The Poppy War*, and I was fascinated by your style and your characters. Your characters especially are so memorable, so relatable, and so real even when they seem to dwell in a bizarre phantasmagorical world. I'm wondering if you could speak to what made you write, why you write, and when you discovered that you want to write.

RK: I can't remember a time when I was sentient and not writing. When I was in elementary school, I was so enthralled with *Star Wars* that I stapled together pages of printer paper to create my own illustrated novel about the adventures of Luke Skywalker during his childhood on Tatooine (featuring myself, of course, as his author—insert girlfriend). In high school, I kept open a massive file where I jotted down scenes about teenagers zooming around on hover boards in a post-

0026-3079/2020/5904-023$2.50/0 American Studies, 60.3/4 (2021)

apocalyptic world engaged in some nebulous resistance against some nebulous authoritarian state. The plot and world-building weren't important; this alternate universe was only a backdrop for me to play out my own fantasies and anxieties at fifteen. I wrote the girl I had a crush on as the love interest for the main character. I wrote the history teacher I liked into a mentor figure for the heroes. So writing, for me, has always been about sorting out what's fascinating or bothering me—making sense of the world by recreating the same issues I'm struggling with in a speculative world and watching the pieces interact.

I never considered writing professionally until I went to China between my sophomore and junior years. I had finally become fluent in Mandarin that year, and I was having conversations with grandparents who I hadn't spoken much to since I immigrated to the States as a toddler. I was struck by the stories they told me about their experiences during the vicissitudes of the past century. I was amazed by all they had survived. I wanted to record all of their words somehow, but as an undergraduate, I didn't have the training or abilities to do the research required to write a family autobiography. So I did what I've always done—tried to make sense of events by recreating them in a fictional setting.

That's still why I write. Historical events are so abstract when you read about them in a classroom environment. In the study of China's WWII, for example, it feels so antiseptic to talk about things like war crimes, occupation, collaboration, and sacrifice from a bird's eye view. It removes all the messiness, the nuance and complexity. Writing fiction lets me try to see the world from the perspectives of actors whose decisions I don't initially understand; it puts the humanity back in history.

IA: This is so interesting, that you grew up immersed in science fiction, and then going to China compelled you to want to write in the professional sense of the word. Have you ever considered your investment and talent in imagining new worlds as partly cultivated through the experiences of transnational immigration? I find this an interesting way to subvert the idea that SSF [science fiction and fantasy] is escapist; rather, it most closely captures the cultural frictions of transnational migration.

RK: Certainly, especially since consuming SFF pop culture was one of my entry points into understanding American culture. I immigrated to the U.S. before I had a proper grasp of English, and one of the ways my family learned it was by watching American films—notably, in my memory, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *Star Wars*. I remember jumping up and down on the bed with my siblings yelling "Chance! Chance!" though we didn't have any clue about the meaning of the word; we'd only heard it in the Dreamworks film *The Prince of Egypt*. I remember running around the living room shrieking "FATHER! FATHER" after seeing Darth Vader's big reveal in *The Empire Strikes Back*. I bring up *Star Wars* over and over again because it is so integral to my identity as a storyteller. I watched those films so many times that I was able to recite whole scenes from memory; when my mother banned me from watching too much TV, I took out the scripts in bound book form from the library and read them over and over again. I can still remember such specific lines from certain scene descriptions that it's no surprise the original *Star Wars* trilogy has imprinted itself on my storytelling bones.

I like how you put the escapism of SFF and the frictions of diaspora in conversation with each other. Just as there were hardly any other Chinese American students at my elementary school, there was also no space for Chinese Americans in the fantastic worlds of most of the children's books I consumed—the *Magic Treehouse*, the *Pendragon* series, the *Spiderwick Chronicles*, and even the *Star Wars* children's books seemed to have space only for white kids, even though they had space for magic, time travel, shape-shifting, and alien races. I still projected myself onto those protagonists, because when you're a child you need narratives to wrap yourself in. But for me, being white enough to be one of Bobby Pendragon's friends was as unrealistic as the dimension hopping magic of the *Pendragon* series itself. There was a part of me that recognized, even as I projected myself into a story, that I didn't really belong there. In a way, consuming SFF for me was a way of escaping into whiteness, though at the time I didn't realize it. It wasn't until a long time later that I realized if I couldn't find myself in those speculative worlds, I could at least create those worlds for others.

IA: You hint at constellations of environments that captivated your own storytelling imagination: the environment of *Star Wars*, of your classrooms and schooling, and immersing yourself in recollected stories of real-life experiences. It's such a rich and complex mix of artistic influence and inspiration, seamlessly blending and blurring the borders of science fiction, fantasy, reality, and memory. It is not surprising then that in *The Poppy War*, you based a fantastical story of an orphan woman, Rin, on historical events of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Why did you yoke history and fantasy in such a way? What do you think is the work that fantasy does in articulating history and the work that history does in elucidating fantasy? There is something incredibly generative about this combination.

RK: Why speculative fiction in particular, though? Fantasy is cool because you can use speculative world-building as a refracting prism to exaggerate, re-interpret, and interrogate particular elements you want to hone in on. I like SFF where the magic is quite obviously a metaphor for something else; it's like injecting an ink tracer to better allow you to see the effects of things that often lay under the surface. N.K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season* does this particularly well with the magical abilities of orogenes. In *The Poppy War* I wanted to examine the outsized role that poppies and opium hold in Chinese national imagination—it's so strongly linked to the Century of Humiliation—hence the magic system based on psychoactive substances.

IA: I want to go a little bit into the story of Rin, the hero of *The Poppy War*. But, first, I want to be clear that my questions about your character are understood purely as dealing with your art and your craft. There's the tendency, when it comes to racialized, non-white writers, to treat our work sociologically. Our fiction is often read as containing materials that provide anthropological insights into the societies that we write about, instead of as works of fiction. So, my question about Rin is based on my interest in the imagination and craft that went into her creation. What's this character to you? Who is Rin? Do you see her as someone history has overlooked, who had the power to

change everything had she not been overlooked? Or a figure that can only be imagined now, in retrospect?

RK: Rin is an original figment of my imagination created to grapple with historical issues. She's not based on any one particular figure, but she's inspired by the questions that several figures raise—Qiu Jin for the power of the cultural image that a woman revolutionary creates, Ding Ling for the failed promises of liberation the Chinese Communist Party made to women, and, obviously, Hua Mulan for the struggles that women face in male-dominated environments.

Most obviously, however, she's inspired by Mao Zedong. You cannot think about modern Chinese history without thinking about Mao. When I was an undergraduate, I spent so much time wondering about what kind of man he was. And modern Chinese society is so conflicted on Mao! He was responsible for terrible things, and no one—not even the PRC under Xi Jinping—denies that. And yet there is so much nostalgia for the Maoist era. Mao kitsch is so popular. Mao's *Little Red Book* still flies off shelves. Who *was* Mao, and what explains this complicated relationship to his legacy?

IA: In *The Poppy War* you created a fantasy world about such a monumental history through the experiences of an orphaned woman who has to confront impossible odds (of gender, class, identity, etc.). Rin embodies several qualities of dispossession and marginalization. Yet in the story she comes around to insist on being heard and she gains enormous "spiritual" powers that she turns against the oppressors of her people. What were you trying to do with the agency that Rin embodies?

RK: The trope of fate—of being destined for greatness, of being born into greatness—is so prevalent in fantasy. We love princes and princesses; we love court intrigue and plot twists about secret sons and daughters. *Star Wars* has taught us that heroes are heroes because of their bloodline; the Skywalkers are the main characters because they are Skywalkers. (*The Last Jedi* suggested that perhaps a "nobody" was just as capable of saving the galaxy as someone with special parentage, but *The Rise of Skywalker* quickly reversed this course.) Daenerys Targaryen in *Game of Thrones* goes on a seven-season long rampage to claim the throne for no better reason than that she is a Targaryen and therefore thinks she has a rightful claim to it.

But that's not how revolutions work, is it? I'm so fascinated by how someone from the outside claws their way into the ranks of power. Rin is determined to rewrite her place in history. She's told from the beginning of *The Poppy War* that harmony is achieved when everything fulfils its proper role—that orphan child brides should be content with being orphan child brides. But she wants more than that. She wants her life to matter. She seeks every opportunity to propel herself into greater historical importance. I'm interested in those jumping off points—how do people from the outside seize the right moments to work their way into the machineries of power? How do they go from nobodies to leaders of armies and rulers of nations? Is it cunning? Charisma? Ruthlessness? Chance? Fate?

Great man theories of history often assume heroes step into roles they were

born for, but they don't take into account all kinds of historical contingencies. There was nothing predestined about Mao's place in Chinese history, and there's nothing predestined about Rin's story in the Poppy War trilogy. She makes history.

IA: What you're saying about Mao here speaks to the attempt to reconsider established historical accounts and figures through the margins. I'm especially struck by the examples of failed "outsiders" you mention (from *Star Wars* and *Game of Thrones*). As an orphan, Rin is an outsider and also a queer figure, in the sense that she is severed from biological lineages and this in turn allows her to imagine other futures outside of reproductive patriarchy. Yet if history is something made, as against something predetermined, isn't it possible to argue that the very act of making history requires the exercise of power, the kind that "the wretched of the earth" (as Frantz Fanon would have it) do not possess?

RK**:** This is actually something I'm exploring in my fourth novel, which is set in 1830s Britain right before the first Opium War. I think a lot about historical inevitability, determinism, and path dependency. Was the British Empire destined to rise after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo? What things could have pushed it off its path to near global domination? Who would have been in a position to stop it? Historical power and oppression can feel so entrenched that it's difficult to imagine alternate ways things might have gone. We take factors like geography and technological superiority as the end-all be-all without examining how much hinges on personal choices and critical junctures. My protagonists, four students at a fictional institute for translation studies at Oxford, are trying to prevent the first Opium War, which I've isolated as one such critical historical turning point. What if Britain had not been able to reverse its silver deficit with China? What if it had never acquired Hong Kong, or kicked off what China refers to as its century of humiliation? This book is an exploration in resistance when the odds of defeat are near total, and my underlying argument is that history is more fluid and unfixed at every stage than we might think.

But how do four students stop the machinations of empire? Here I'm inspired by Fanon's theorizing on violence, which suggests that the colonized have more power than they think they might. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon explains how the pressures of capitalism in fact, paradoxically, aid the forces of revolutionary violence. The colonized territory is the source of profitability; is the origin of labor and raw materials. The empire can't destroy its own golden goose. This is why Fanon writes that scorched earth policies are a thing of the past, and why revolutionary forces can overcome the power asymmetry. Violence is the one thing that might bring the colonizer to the negotiating table, because it is indeed so disruptive to the economic center.

IA: It is interesting that in Rin's process of making history, she has to become powerful. Rin reminds me of Onyesonwu, the hero of Nigerian-American African-futurist writer Nnedi Okorafor's novel, *Who Fears Death*. In it, Onyesonwu confronts similar odds as Rin and gains enormous powers that she turns against the oppressors of her people. Just like Okorafor's hero, Rin in

your novel uses her powers to unleash genocidal violence on the enemies of her people—her act of history. So, I'm wondering about the ethics of this use of power by formerly victimized and marginalized people. What's your artistic vision and commitment in granting Rin such power of destruction that she uses so devastatingly in the name of justice and the salvation of her own people?

RK: I'm still sorting out how I feel about retribution. *The Poppy War* came from a very raw place; I sometimes describe it as a 560-page long revenge fantasy, because that's where I was emotionally after learning about the Nanjing Massacre for the first time. These feelings persist for many Chinese people and members of the Chinese diaspora today; that instinctive, burning desire for vengeance is valid. Of course, we know such emotions are dangerous, and particularly so when they're yoked to nationalist agendas. Violence begets violence; there is no lasting peace founded on retribution. Rin's actions at the end of *The Poppy War* do not lead to healing, they don't fix anything, and they certainly don't end the war. I granted Rin those powers to show the awful impulse to vengeance that grief and rage can create, but I explored the devastating consequences of those powers in the sequels.

IA: Your novel makes it impossible not to think about the future, especially the future of humanity given the histories of absolute use of brute force and power and the rage for vengeance that you memorably chronicled. Could you speak to your thoughts about a future that proceeds from such past and present mass atrocities?

RK: I don't know what a future that successfully proceeds from past atrocities looks like. I wrote my undergraduate dissertation on popular commemoration of the Nanjing Massacre, so I've thought a lot about collective trauma and memory, and the upshot is we still don't really have answers on what genuine healing looks like. We know more about what a failure of commemoration looks like. We see a lot more politicization and grand standing over past atrocities than any genuine acknowledgment of what was done to victims. Denying atrocities leads to harm. Sensationalizing atrocities for propagandist benefit leads to harm. Using atrocities to further nationalist agendas leads to harm. The Nanjing Massacre has become so wrapped up in modern Sino-Japanese relations that the victims have gotten lost in the conversation, and I think this is a pattern with many high-profile tragedies. The Chinese Communist Party is extremely good at mythmaking, and I tried to explore this with *The Burning God* especially—Rin constructs and disseminates her founding myth in the process of seizing control of the south.

But all that just goes to show the power of narrative. If narrative can be used for state agendas, it can also be used for counter-histories. I'm not sure about what a future that proceeds from atrocities look like because I think we have so few examples of such success, but it probably includes local, community, and bottom-up stories and histories.

IA: You raise the issue of commemoration as a kind of response to atrocity history. Do you consider your work as a kind of commemorative gesture to the Second Sino-Japanese War; in other words, an attempt for you to

imaginatively memorialize that past? From your view, what is the connection of memory and imagination and history (since, as you suggested earlier, history is what is made and not what is) in the artistic process that went into the creation of *The Poppy War*?

RK: I see *The Poppy War* less as a formal entry into the public commemoration of the Nanjing Massacre (I don't know how I could ever accomplish that without feeling disingenuous; public mourning requires speaking for so many people in a way that I feel wholly unequipped for) and more as my very public attempt to understand, personally, this indescribable atrocity. I mentioned above that history feels so antiseptic when we learn about it in classrooms, decades later and oceans away. It feels like something that could never happen to us, carried out by actors upon victims that we could never relate to. The Second Sino-Japanese War in particular is such a violent breach, a traumatic lacuna that I just could not make sense of when I read about it for the first time. So *The Poppy War* was partially the result of my trying to understand a history and experience that feels too grotesque and unimaginable to ever be understood.

It's also how I tried making sense of the Chinese Civil War, Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap Forward. The tragedies of that era, to us, come off as the product of wildly irrational decision-making. What produces that kind of crazed violence? What produces such a massive failure of governance that millions of people starve? I can't just accept that this happens; I have to know how. I'm convinced that the space between you and I and the kind of person who would stone their teacher to death under the frenzy of radical peer pressure is quite small. Fortunately, there are now pretty decent compilations of primary sources, as well as interviews with people who lived through those eras. I sank myself into that literature and tried to inhabit those thought processes as I reinterpreted those historical events in my trilogy. I never let a character make a decision until I've convinced myself that under the right circumstances, I could too. That's how I connect memory and imagination.

IA: This idea of counter-histories or counter-narratives aligns well with the fights of other BIPOC in the U.S. who have also actively imagined other worlds for quite some time, including Black struggles for abolition and Indigenous struggles for sovereignty (both of which continue to this day). How do you see your work engaging in, if at all, the struggles of other BIPOC SFF writers?

RK: I'm actually still at the point right now where I'm trying to emphasize difference over the similarities. Asian American writers are still fighting to have their fiction recognized as worthy of inclusion in the broader Western SFF canon, as opposed to a niche, small literature that can all be grouped together and described with vague or misapplied terms like "Asian inspired" and "silkpunk." We are united in a joint struggle to have our voices heard, but the messages we're trying to send are so very diverse. For example, my work is very often classified with Ken Liu's *Dandelion Dynasty*, which explores the project of nation-building and national mythologizing and draws from sources like the *Aeneid*; and Fonda Lee's *Green Bone Saga*, which is about family and loyalty and draws from sources like *The Godfather*. Those are very, very different projects, and their thematic ambitions

are very far from what I'm trying to do. I'd argue that *The Poppy War* is more in conversation with *Ender's Game* than it is with either of those works. And I worry that if we continue to be lumped together, our work won't be read against, and won't be accepted as part of, the larger Anglophone tradition in which we're all working.

Publishing has a problem with tokenizing BIPOC writers, which is a symptom of white people in publishing seeing marginalized identities as a niche marketing category rather than an epistemological standpoint worth deferring to. Certain editors will argue that at acquisitions meetings since they already have an Asian fantasy writer, a Black fantasy writer or a Latinx fantasy writer, it would be redundant to sign on another one; they assume that readers, indeed, would not *want* to read multiple books by BIPOC writers. So my continued emphasis on the diversity within BIPOC storytelling is in part a reaction against this harmful assumption that all BIPOC work is engaged in the same struggle in exactly the same way. Our voices are so different, and crucially, our messages often disagree with each other. There's a lot of value in those disagreements. I'm focused right now on making sure readers and editors know that we're not a monolith.

A Bio Lab in Chinatown

Ananda Gabo

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A bio lab
in Chinatown
WHAT DOES A BIOLOGY LAB LOOK LIKE IN CHINATOWN MALL?
WHO WOULD IT BE FOR?
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A DIALOGUE
in ACTion

Community biology is a practice that democratizes scientific inquiry by creating opportunities for the public to engage, learn, and contribute to research. In doing so, it actively protests against the current models of life sciences and its high barriers of participation. In building an accessible body of knowledge that exists in the commons, community biology includes and honors ancestral knowledge in research that is relevant or borrows wisdom from those sources. Science can be exclusionary to ideas that don't fit into their models of knowledge production, which sometimes can be harmful or dismissive as they "other" alternative processes of research. This is understandable as pseudoscience and misinformation can be harmful, but how can we create better relationships between ancestral knowledge and maintaining a scientific practice?

On April 16th, 2019 in the basement of a mall in Toronto, a dialogue entitled "A bio lab in Chinatown" was held at a small community arts center in the heart of Chinatown. It was an open invitation shared through networks of community arts organizations and the turnout held a small but diverse handful of disciplines. These social media posts are an example of science practiced outside of academia and how science can be shared amongst communities.

From biologists to food writers and community activists and artists (and often a combination of more than one discipline) we discussed our relationships to the practice of science not only within the realm of academia but also within activism and the arts as well. And from this conversation, Pàocài Bio was born—now a series of workshops that teaches microbiology techniques through an East Asian lens while creating new bodies of knowledge of ancestral technique and scientific wisdom to pass on to future generations in the form of zines and artifact making.

Pàocài Bio is more than just a workshop series, it is an active dialogue as a tool for research in exploring what it means to incorporate scientific and ancestral knowledge. The goal is to familiarize participants with relatable subjects (such as food and fermentation) and then study them on a molecular level. This project is independently funded. The list of our workshop topics so far include:

- Intro to Chinese Fermentation
- Intro to Traditional Chinese Medicine, Food as Medicine
- Intro to Public Health, What is COVID-19?
- The Living Brushstroke, Intro to Agar Art

Each workshop lives on our publicly accessible Google Drive where research papers are stored related to workshop topics. On occasion where there is specific knowledge, zines are produced for each workshop as a takeaway and for participants to use for note taking. Pàocài Bio is on Instagram @paocaibio, including links to resources and zines.

With the COVID-19 pandemic preventing in-person workshops, a branch-off project was cultivated. *Culture*^{2}*,* a virtual conference, enabled the continuation of dialogue, and a new journal of the same name has been launched. The conference archive and journal details can be found at: culture-culture.com/conference.

Our Toxic Transpacific: Hydro-Colonialism, Nuclearization, and Radioactive Identities in Post-Fukushima Literature

D.E. St. John

Within the various subfields of literary study, the ocean is one of the most ubiquitous metaphors. From the shoreline, Herman Melville—whose *Moby Dick* has proven to be an urtext for oceanic discourse—views the ocean as a monolith, the "yawning gulf" that "rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago" (580). Meanwhile, Melville's similarly canonized contemporary, Walt Whitman, dips his toes into the shallows and establishes a network between "the fishes that swim, the rocks, the motion of the waves, the ships with men in them" (327). Others resist this humanizing impulse, seeking to divorce the ocean from its metaphorical contexts, focusing instead on the material conditions, histories, and lived realities of oceanic and adjacent life-forms. Often invoked in terms of an assemblage or a network, the ocean serves as a conduit for scholars seeking to contextualize the history of Black cultures and communities, such as Christina Sharpe and Paul Gilroy, who write from the wake of transatlantic slave ships, undertaking the important work of remembrance.[1] Complicating all of these varied and divergent aesthetic approaches are the dual realities of climate change and colonialism, of which there may be no clearer intersection than the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and subsequent fallout at the Fukushima nuclear power plant, collectively known as the 3/11 disaster.

The trauma of that event—in which more than 15,000 people died with thousands more missing—prompts the poetry of Lee Ann Roripaugh, who contributes her own metaphor to the bank of literary oceanic symbolism: the tsunami itself, personified as a female speaker. Rather than name the tsunami, Roripaugh employs imagery of spillage to denote both the societal imprisonment

0026-3079/2020/5904-023$2.50/0 American Studies, 60.3/4 (2021)

of women and the global impact of the tsunami's visibility. The speaker implores us to call her both the "scalded splash / of tea jarred from / a broken cup's cracked glaze" and the "*meme* / infecting your screen … the *malware* / gone viral" (2019, 1, 3). Far from the background setting of humanity's anthropogenic struggle, Roripaugh's sea is itself a kind of metahuman hybrid: water, woman, and web-based all at once.

Although other nuclear disasters, such as Chernobyl and Three Mile Island, have been critically imbricated with the cold war politics of U.S. and Soviet relations, the approach to 3/11 and the Fukushima emergency has been submerged in the global politics of climate change and environmental justice.[2] This shift is due in large part to Fukushima's oceanic immersion and its global witnessing. The nuclear fallout at the plant has been blamed for at least one cancer-related casualty and the leakage of a sizable quantity of radionuclides—iodine, cesium, and tellurium—into the waters of what was once a prominent commercial fishing region (Lochbaum et al. 2014, 156). Meanwhile, cellphone and closed-circuit cameras captured the disaster in real time, allowing viewers from all over the world to see cars lifted and entire towns swept away. We can understand this event as a nuclear incursion into time, in which, in the words of Karen Barad, "nuclear time, decay time, dead time, atomic clock time, doomsday clock time—a superposition of dispersed times cut together-apart—swirl[ing] around with the radioactivity" (2017, G107). Roripaugh's writing as well as the videos, novels, and other artifacts that emerged after 3/11 prompt us to consider a new metaphorical interpretation of the ocean: that of a swirling irradiated storm that is itself a toxifying force upon humans caught in its path.

Even as this essay risks contributing to an already exhaustive catalog of oceanic metaphors, such revisioning is important in holding settler colonial discourses accountable. By focusing on Roripaugh's depictions of the aftermath of 3/11, I hope to, in the words of Stacy Alaimo, "evoke evolutionary kinship across vast temporal and oceanic expanses," while also avoiding the pitfall of these studies being "dismissed as ancient history if they do not open out onto the present moment, acknowledging how human bodies participate in global networks of harm" (2014, 189). The Tohoku earthquake, tsunami, and subsequent leakage of radiation into waters connect such global networks as coastal nuclearization, Pacific island colonial occupation, and transpacific militarization. In much the same way as "9/11 literature" emerges as a field to discuss the global impacts and sociopolitical ramifications of a singular day of terrorism, literature written in response to the 3/11 disaster invokes wide-ranging issues important to human and nonhuman survivors, including narratives of trauma, postnational geographies, and posthuman ontologies.

In thus engaging material ecocritical, transpacific, and decolonial scholarship, this essay employs a reading practice indebted to Isabel Hofmeyr's (2019) "hydro-colonial" neologism.[3] In pursuit of new routes in oceanic studies, hydro-colonialism refers to the ongoing occupation, instrumentalization, and resource extraction of the seas, waters, and oceans by national or corporate

powers. This hegemonic striation of the ocean takes the form of military bases, fishing conglomerates, penal colonies, aircraft carriers, plastic landmasses, and nuclear power plants. In reading hydro-colonialism in works of literature, I hope to contribute to the recent "oceanic turn" toward a "tidalectic consciousness"—a concept coined by Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite and mobilized by Elizabeth DeLoughrey to explore "the complex and shifting entanglement between sea and land, diaspora and indigeneity, routes and roots" (2007, 2). Hydro-colonial critique builds upon postcolonial and material ecocriticism while shifting focus away from terra-centric and historicist models of colonialism. This pivot creates space for the materiality of the sea to emerge as an agential force while simultaneously buoying postcolonial and Indigenous perspectives to the surface.

Read in this light, 3/11 literature takes on a global significance. In addition to lamenting the staggering loss of life, the novels and poems produced post-Fukushima view the nuclearization of the Pacific as a continuation of Japanese and American colonization. These texts show how governmental oversight and failure to proactively respond to climate change–related disaster resulted in environmental injustice—where the fallout of 3/11 had specific consequences for poor Japanese and Japanese women, whose bodies have been metaphorically and literally altered. This essay navigates these hydro-colonial channels while placing them within the broader backdrops of material ecocriticism and globalization studies.[4] I begin by forging connections between hydro-colonial nuclearization and global racial capitalism as depicted in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), which has emerged as the preeminent "American" novel in response to 3/11.[5] For Ozeki, both racist and deracializing aspects of hydro-colonialism are mitigated through entanglements with nonhuman animals and objects. I establish this theoretical groundwork before examining poems from Roripaugh's 2019 collection *Tsunami vs. The Fukushima 50*, demonstrating how imagery of irradiation and toxicity present a posthuman response to the 3/11 disaster, global hydro-colonialism, and the ongoing climate crisis.

Colonial Catfish: Folkloric Rectifications to Hydro-Colonialism in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*

Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* begins when Ruth, a novelist living on the coast of British Columbia, discovers a Japanese lunch box washed ashore, carried across the Pacific by the drift of oceanic gyres. Inside the box rests the diary of Naoko Yasutani, a Japanese schoolgirl living in Tokyo. Ozeki's narrative leaps between these dual protagonists, crossing expanses of space and time in the process.[6] As Ruth reads the journal, more of Nao's story is revealed: how she set out to write the life story of her great-grandmother Jiko, a Buddhist nun, but was distracted by rampant bullying at school and her father's depression and suicidal ideation. Meanwhile, the act of reading Nao's journal raises questions for Ruth about the nature of writing, memory, and time. These dual narratives take place before and after the Tohoku earthquake with the disaster serving as a nondiegetic event that occurs outside the time of the novel, yet the disaster

haunts the lives of both Ruth and Nao. For Ruth, the act of reading Nao's diary is an act of recovery, in which she is able to bring both narratives to a satisfying resolution even as the aftermath of the 3/11 disaster is ongoing with some bodies never discovered and the long-term effects of the fallout remaining to be seen.

Recent years have seen a number of analyses of the novel through the critical lenses of Asian American literature, Pacific Rim scholarship, and transpacific discourse. In *Ocean Passages*, Erin Suzuki describes how "transpacific" has become shorthand for studies of Asian and Asian American diaspora while the broad geographical swath cut by Pacific Rim studies can enact the same homogenizing of Indigenous persons and those from smaller Pacific islands of which the term "Asian American" itself is emblematic. Suzuki praises Ozeki for rendering the Pacific Ocean as a site of "submerged and belated histories that have been ignored or occluded by the capital-driven structures of contemporary transpacific politics, economy and policy" (2021, 1). This reading coalesces with Michelle Huang's (2017), which focuses on Ozeki's depiction of the 80,000 tons of floating plastic called the Great Pacific garbage patch, which lies at the center of the very gyres that prompt the transpacific journey of Nao's diary.[7] In imbricating environmental devastation, cultural erasure, a disproportionate impact upon raced bodies, and capitalist extraction, these existing readings of *A Tale for the Time Being* underscore the human and material costs of globalization. However, they do not explicitly address 3/11 or the symbolism of irradiation as a hydro-colonial by-product.[8]

To extend these readings of the novel further into the hydro-colonial requires that we take up the challenge laid down by Laura Winkiel, who demands that we account for the way predominantly Western governments and corporations "have polluted the seas with heavy metals, nuclear waste, and plastics, with the result that human bodies, along with marine and terrestrial animals, carry profound, often life-threatening, *toxic* burdens that are assumed unevenly across the globe" (2019, 1 emphasis mine). Toxicity is one way in which the impact of hydro-colonial nuclearization can literally be measured, whether it be in clicks of a Geiger counter or gallons of irradiated water. This radioactivity is not often visible on the surface level but internalized within the bodies of humans living adjacent to and dependent upon water or in the apparatus of nation-states willing to expose communities to danger for economic gain. After adopting and instilling pronuclear rhetoric and policies following the conclusion of World War II, the Japanese government set up the pieces of the 3/11 disaster, and climate change, accelerated in part by the rise in global emissions brought on by global corporations, knocked them down. The reality of the 3/11 aftermath is that its ecological dangers have been downplayed by the Japanese nation-state, which supplants arguments of health, environment, and public safety with that of a "postpolitical" need for global political standing and power.[9]

In response to this sociopolitical and quantifiable understanding of toxicity, Ozeki layers contemporary nuclear irradiation on top of the history of colonization

of Miyabi prefecture. Ruth recounts how, as the floodwaters devastated Japan in real time, she watched interviews of fathers who lost their families and was "mesmerized" by the footage of devastation (112). These images were followed up with a shift in coverage away from the human toll toward the national economy. Ruth explains how "occasionally an article would appear in the *New York Times* about TEPCO's mismanagement of the meltdown or the government's failure to respond and protect its citizens," but for the most part, these were replaced by "gloomy reports about the cost of Japan's cascading disasters, deemed to be the most expensive in history" (114–15). For Ruth, this predictable response proves the hubris of the Japanese government, which ignored local knowledge and built a nuclear power plant at a location where stone markers more than six centuries old warned "Do not build your homes below this point" (114).

In the text, the words from this stone marker are centered and bolded, offset from the rest of the type. Later, Ruth employs the same type formatting when detailing a second sign, this one from Fukushima's pronuclear propaganda machine. This sign reads "Nuclear power is energy for a brighter future! The correct understanding of nuclear power leads to a better life!" (141). Ozeki offers Japan's push for nuclear energy as a framework for understanding the tragic events of the tripartite 3/11 disaster. Crucially, Ruth positions this pronuclear agenda as a contemporary colonialist action. She explains how the land that makes up Miyagi prefecture is stolen, one of the "last pieces of tribal land to be taken from the indigenous Emishi, descendants of the Jōmon people, who had lived there from prehistoric times until they were defeated by the Japanese Imperial Army in the eighth century" (141). In keeping with the transpacific framework of the novel's two narrators, Ozeki juxtaposes Japanese imperialism in one chapter with the landscape of British Columbia, "scattered with the names of famous Spanish mass murderers," and Ruth's own island, nicknamed the "Island of the Dead" due to "the smallpox epidemic of 1862 that killed off most of the indigenous Coast Salish population" (141-42). The toxicity of the Fukushima plant drifts across the Pacific as regional terrestrial forms of colonialism are connected by hydro-colonial nuclear radiation. Ruth obsesses over the inner workings of the plant, pouring over the official update logs that documented the pumps, gears, and valves that made up the nuclear cooling fail-safes that, for days, shuttled and cycled water into exposed reactor cores. The machinery of hydro-colonial hegemony dumps gallons of irradiated water into the Pacific as it simultaneously hides the harm it is inflicting upon the life-forms, human and nonhuman, most directly impacted in the region.

For Ozeki, dealing with a hydro-colonial disaster requires understanding history and responding to it by reframing its violence within established mythology. For example, Ruth compares the 3/11 disaster and aftermath to the legends of the *jishin namazu*, the "earthquake catfish," and the *yonaoshi namazu*, or "World-Rectifying Catfish" (198). Ozeki shows how there are already well-established symbols in Japanese culture that acknowledge this connection between natural disasters and wealth inequality. Rather than immediately shifting the post-

3/11 discussion to the economic repercussions that Japan now faces, Ozeki reminds readers of an animist tradition that links environmental destruction with governmental abuses of power. The working class viewed the *yonaoshi namazu* as a benevolent force that targeted the rich during "a period characterized by a weak, ineffective government and a powerful business class, as well as extreme and anomalous weather patterns, crop failures, famine, hoarding, urban riots, and mass religious pilgrimages, which often ended in mob violence" (199). Like the sign warning settlers not to build houses beyond a certain point, the animist catfish represent forms of traditional knowledge that were overlooked by the Japanese nation-state to aggressively pursue nuclear power in hopes of improving the country's global reach at the risk of endangering its own people.

Although Ruth's mind turns to traditional knowledge and myth, Nao and her grandmother, Jiko, respond to hydro-colonial militarization by gaining *supapawas*. This term is an accented form of the word "superpower," spoken by Nao's grandmother and Buddhist nun Jiko, who suggests that Nao must develop her own original *supapawa* to achieve self-actualization. Unlike conventional superheroes who gain their abilities through gamma radiation, cosmic rays, or toxified arachnids, Jiko asserts that Nao can gain her ability through the Buddhist practice of sitting *zazen*, a meditative act that "if you do it every day, your mind will wake up and you will develop your *SUPAPAWA*" (182). In deriving power through Buddhist meditation rather than through radiation, Jiko reclaims the idea of "power" from Cold War–era nuclear propaganda and the notion of "global superpower," a label the United States owns and that the Japanese nation-state aspires toward. Both Jiko and Nao use their *supapawas* to cope with the lingering trauma of Haruki #1, Jiko's son and Nao's ancestor, a kamikaze fighter pilot who was tormented by his actions during World War II.

Given the complex interrelations between governments, corporations, communities, and individuals, Ozeki's novel illustrates how the Pacific Ocean is more than a body of water, but a hydro-colonial expanse. However, Ozeki reminds her readers that it is not insurmountable, and can be crossed through relationships with nonhuman animacies. Ozeki textually represents this crossing through *kotodama*, "spirits that live inside a word and give it power" (98). These *kotodama* appear in the text as the words "fish" and "crow" anthropomorphized into their shapes (98, 349). *Kotodama* represent crossings from the symbolic to the real and from the literal to the figurative, and they also, importantly, allow for a crossing between Nao and Ruth's narratives. The crow that appears in Ruth's narrative is a particular type of species, nonendemic to British Columbia—a "jungle crow" that was "part of the drift" (55). The crow is similar to other trans-Pacific species mentioned by Ozeki, including oysters and jellyfish, that are buffeted across the sea by currents. However, the crow also reappears as a nonhuman force that seemingly bridges the two narratives by allowing Ruth to witness a surreal meeting between Nao and Haruki #1—a meeting that defies the established logic of the novel (349). Ozeki accompanies this resolution with additional nonhuman imagery: a storm that eventually leads to Ruth and

her husband finding their missing cat, Pesto. Although the interjection of these nonhuman forces does not undo the damage of hydro-colonial militarization in the Pacific, it does allow for its human characters to "set up the conditions for a different outcome" (376) that reestablishes relationships with past knowledge and establishes a more ethical relationship between persons, governments, and environments.

Although Ozeki's novel depicts personal trauma and devastation, it also confronts global disasters of nuclear waste, climate change, and militarism. In this way, the novel is a tale for the present time and also one that looks toward the past while anticipating its impact upon an environmentally fraught future. Hydro-colonial powers restrict water access, devastate oceanic and adjacent life, claim ownership of space that is not their own, militarize pelagic areas, and engage in transpacific trade. These are all acts in which the Japanese government took part, and this is the context behind the decision to build the Fukushima Daichi Nuclear Power Plant in 1967. As Ozeki demonstrates through catfish lore, *supapawas*, and *kotodama*, the Pacific is the site both of Japan's and America's most devastating colonial offenses and where these damages are addressed and reimagined. Having identified the hydro-colonial forms of 3/11, I turn now to the poetry of Lee Ann Roripaugh, who suggests the irradiated water and toxic topsoil of Fukushima is best symbolized through a poetics of bodily augmentation that sees its speakers cross boundaries of the human and nonhuman.

Radioactive Layering and Poetics of Disintegration in Lee Ann Roripaugh's *Tsunami vs. the Fukushima 50*

A Tale for the Time Being mobilizes regional animism to counteract the irradiated consequences of the Fukushima disaster, challenging its readers to reimagine their relationship with a colonized Pacific. Ozeki's dual narratives provide a rim from which to view the transpacific ramifications of nuclear drift. Ultimately, the novel is a recuperative project in which the acts of writing and reading work to ameliorate the personal traumas of its characters. The novel is also a work of speculative fiction, in which temporal distortions allow divergent narratives to coalesce, and digital technology emerges as a response to the information age—when disasters are viewed in real time and personal anonymity is no longer possible.[10] The speculative mode also informs Lee Ann Roripaugh's *Tsunami vs. the Fukushima 50*, a collection of poems that offers a conclusive indictment of oceanic colonization and a thoughtful contemplation on its toxic impact upon racialized and gendered bodies.

Although the tri-disasters of 3/11 occur outside Ozeki's narrative, in Roripaugh's poetry, the earthquake, tsunami, and fail-safe breakdown perpetually approach, recede, and destroy. The poems themselves display haphazard forms, one mimicking the format of a glossary while the others are driven by Roripaugh's powerful elemental imagery and skillful anaphora. Roripaugh's speakers are diverse: Many of the poems are written from the perspective of the tsunami herself, personified as a woman, and others embody male workers who made

up the "Fukushima 50," people who stayed behind to pump seawater into the reactors (51). Still others adopt the personas of irradiated Marvel superheroes and *kaiju*, from the Hulk to Mothra. In mixing Japanese and American popular culture, Roripaugh forms a bridge between pronuclear hydro-colonialism on both sides of the Pacific. As do Japanese American contemporaries David Mura, Kimiko Hahn, and Garrett Hongo, Roripaugh approaches the complex maneuverings of her mixed-race Asian American identity by relating it to place: places that are under perpetual threat of environmental deterioration. Through embodying the personas of irradiated figures and animating the tsunami itself, Roripaugh confronts the legacy of hydro-colonial nuclearization and its racialized violence against Japanese and Japanese American communities.

Roripaugh saturates her poetry with toxic imagery and irradiated symbols, including garbage bags of nuclear waste, blemished bodies, radioactive ocean water, and sloughed topsoil. However, these poems illustrate how toxicity is not only a by-product of hydro-colonial overreach, but, as in the case of her speakers, a bodily augmentation. Exposure to the toxic makes the subject *more than* and presents an opportunity to react and reassert agency in the face of overwhelming environmental disaster. This understanding of toxicity is best expressed through what Mel Y. Chen terms a "toxic" bond. Chen's re-signification of the usually negative term "toxicity" as a force that "propels, not repels" is essential in an irradiated world of *kaiju* and nuclear fallout (2011, 281). Chen's assertion that toxic animacy can be an "alternative, or complement to existing biopolitical and recent queer-theoretical debates about life and death" helps us forge a new paradigm for analyzing how oceanic disasters impact Asian bodies (265). Through analyzing the animacy of lead and the panic toward Chinese people and China following reports of toxic traces in imported children's toys, Chen deconstructs representations of racialized bodies and locates subjectivity within disabled and altered bodies. This is not to argue that nuclear disaster and radiation is in any way justified or beneficial, but Chen's framework helps identify instances of adaptation, in which subjects redefine what it means to be a mutated creature and an irradiated person. Roripaugh applies toxicity as a subjectification event, granting agency to people rendered dead or inert following nuclear disaster.

Roripaugh explicitly tackles the invisibility of Japanese survivors of 3/11 in the poem, "anonymous, as invisible man" (50). Writing from the point of view of one of the Fukushima 50, Roripaugh recasts this Japanese factory worker as one of the classic monsters in the Western canon: the invisible man, rendered a victim of science gone wrong.[11] The speaker's opening request, that he agrees "to speak, but only / on condition of anonymity" establishes the context of post 3/11 Japanese media, which downplayed, covered up, and silenced the severity of the disaster in its immediate and ongoing aftermath. From here, the poem is prosaic: the speaker provides in mundane detail a cataloging of what actually occurred that day, describing how the "the terrible jolts / of the Tohoku earthquake / causing the massive tsunami" resulted in flooded generators, overheated fuel

rods, and hydrogen explosions (50). This accounting is poetic in line breaks only, opting instead to provide a mimetic accounting of the situation for some 30 lines. Roripaugh places the poetic burden of this poem on a single simile, arguing that the Fukushima 50 were "prepared to sacrifice / our lives like kamikaze pilots" (51). In this way, she connects the tragedies of 3/11 with that of the Japanese Empire, illustrating that, in both contexts, the everyman is asked to sacrifice for Imperial interests. The poem asks how one's visibility or invisibility is complicated by hydro-colonial militarism and nuclearization, and it answers through imagery of "layering": The speaker's body, now "unrecognizable" is stripped down and "given a too-big track suit… I decline to reveal / my internal radiation levels" (52). The poem names TEPCO as the main culprit behind this coverup, suggesting that the Japanese nation state's attempts to recover economically serve only to bury its people and their radioactive truth.

This imagery of layering returns in "miki endo as flint marko (aka sandman)." This poem sees Roripaugh embodying the voice of the government worker who died providing voice warnings and alerts during the Tohoku typhoon. As in *A Tale for the Time Being*, transpacific drift plays a major role in transporting detritus from Fukushima to the United States with Roripaugh noting how "sneakers filled with foot bones / began to surface in the pacific" (23). This grim imagery again speaks to the importance of seeing irradiated subjects as layered between their bodily forms and the material conditions of their surroundings. Roripaugh visualizes a human body as an object, dissipating within a tide of severed limbs, assaulted by the "terrible siren / swirling around in a loud howl / inside me, but now scattered" (24). Marvel Comics' Sandman is an apt referent: a bit crook whose exposure to radiation subsequently renders his body into the granular aspects of dirt and rock and, at the cellular level, the subatomic quantum nature of atoms. The speaker questions what it means to be a solid form with an interior and an exterior, remembering a swarm of ladybugs covering an unknown object. As a child, the speaker confesses that she was "scared to think about what / could be hiding beneath / this living armor of marched orange" only to eventually realize as an adult that the subject hidden underneath was "nothing… / I mean, nothing was *there* there" (25). In this poem, the result of hydro-colonial irradiation is a literal destabilization of the subject, a person reassembled within the "clicked ticking of the geiger counter" and the "hibernating tsunami siren" (25). This poetics of disintegration echoes what Chen announces as toxicity, an ontology that "straddles boundaries of 'life' and 'nonlife,' as well as the literal bounds of bodies, in ways that introduce a certain complexity to the presumption of integrity of either lifely or deathly subjects" (2011, 279).

Roripaugh reminds us that ecological enmeshment is not to dissolve the human in favor of the nonhuman—what Suzuki calls some material ecocritics' tendency to "overcorrect" (2021, 6)—but to collide, generate friction, react in tandem with one another. This tension does more than pass radiation from coast to coast; in Roripaugh's poetry, this oceanic drift is understood as "heralds for colonies to come" (55). In "tsunami's debris," Roripaugh's self dissolves into

the perspective of the tsunami, a feminized symbol marked by paradox ("her terrible radiance / her radio-waved wake / an awful blossoming") (54). Becoming a tsunami, becoming toxified, is not to cease being human: Rather, it is a reaction to the hydro-colonial, an understanding that rightfully sees the garbage patch as an extension of Midway's nuclear testing (54). The hydro-colonial is depicted as large-scale events and places, ghost ships and cars, landfills of washing machines. In the immensity of the disaster, what the speaker of the poem seeks out is small, microscopic. Roripaugh's invocation of radioactivity suggests both a dissolution and a reassemblage of self through exposure as evidenced at the end of the poem when the speaker asks:

> what tiny bits of debris will you
> unexpectedly ache for?
> what small particles will you
> cling to / as if you actually could? (56)

Ultimately, Roripaugh's attempt to represent in literary form the radioactivity of oceans and humans post 3/11 demonstrates that, although a return to the past is impossible, toxicity provides the possibility of a recuperative future. Unlike the economic recovery touted by the Japanese nation-state, however, this recovery is individualistic. In "mothra flies again," the speaker—a kaiju perhaps—is unable to reconcile the immediate trauma of the event with the speaker's inability to return to a place and time prior to disaster. Deftly weaving together factual evidence of irradiation with popular representations of unchecked nuclear fallout in science fiction and comics, "mothra flies again" encapsulates the feeling of disassociation with reality resulting from the emergency. The speaker questions "how can we ever go back there?" and "*what if? what if? what if?*"(17). This feeling of distance is echoed in other poems such as "tsunami goes to canada," in which the speaker, displaced from her Japanese homeland, wrestles with her new Canadian home by interspersing natural geographic features with Japanese objects, such as when she admits to being "smitten at the mountains" while also feeling the desire to "fall like that / a silvery levering of pachinko balls" (7). Activating the tsunami as speaker here and throughout the collection sees Roripaugh practicing a form of animacy "beyond personification" in Chen's (2011) words; it is Roripaugh's speaker propelling from inanimate memory into a vibrant, perhaps irradiated, life.

Understanding both *A Tale for the Time Being* and *Tsunami vs. the Fukushima 50* as responses to a hydro-colonial disaster is an important step in recognizing the effects of 3/11 upon Japanese and Japanese American persons. This is particularly important in the contexts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has borne witness to an increased rise in hate crimes and xenophobia toward people of Asian descent. If Asian American literature is often stereotyped as being obsessed with shame, silence, and separation, then reading works with an eye fixed firmly on the influences of capital and global power is a step forward.[12]

The Asian American body has historically and textually been a marker of disaster ("Yellow Peril"), but writers such as Ozeki and Roripaugh underscore a reflexive capacity for toxicity to augment and persevere. Embracing the entanglements of objects, animals, humans, and radioactive material of the Pacific can offer new forms of survivability for Asian American subjects. A focus on hydro-colonial Pacific traffic asks readers to rediscover the particular movements of the ocean, that which swirls, unites, and separates, so that they may imagine a future in which the past and present survive oceanic and nuclear disaster rather than submit and submerge.

Notes

[1]Sharpe's *In the Wake* progresses through multiple permutations of a "wake" from a slaver's path, through a memorial for Black death, and a resuscitation for "keeping and putting breath back in the Black body in hostile weather" (113). Meanwhile, Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* offers up the ship as a "living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion" that questions "the credibility of a tidy, holistic conception of modernity" (1993, 4, 45).

[2]Matanle, Littler, and Slay (2019) argue that the devastation from the tsunami exemplifies Japan's inability or unwillingness to speedily react to rising seawater levels directly resulting from global warming.

[3]In a special forum for *Comparative Literature*, Hofmeyr, with Kerry Bystrom, names three possible meanings to hydro-colonial: "1) colonization by means of water (various forms of maritime imperialism), 2) colonization *of* water (occupation of land with water resources, the declaration of territorial waters, the militarization and geopoliticization of oceans), and 3) a colony *on* water (the ship as a miniature colony or a penal island)" (2019, 3). Hofmeyr continues to refine and extend this concept in a special issue for *English Language Notes*, which is discussed in more detail in the essay.

[4]Material ecocritisim is best understood as a way of reading matter as expressive and agential, matter being the humans, nonhumans, and "inanimate" objects of texts. This approach, among other things, addresses gaps in sustainability rhetoric and underscores the ongoing and emergent relationships between environments, politics, technology, and the symbolic. See Iovino and Oppermann (2014).

[5]Ozeki is Canadian American, born to a Caucasian father and a Japanese mother.

[6]From here, "Ozeki" is used to discuss the author, and "Ruth" is used to refer to the character.

[7]I agree with Michelle Huang in arguing that Asian American novels and poetry can and should shift focus from "nation-states and peoples" to other critical components of textual analysis (2019, 96). This does not mean that scholars ignore history and questions of identity, but I believe it is essential for scholars to embrace nonhuman relationships in their identity analysis. In Huang's reading of the novel, she employs what she calls "ecologies of entanglement" to analyze "networks of circulation that diffuse the boundaries of the human by foregrounding the relationships between us and the world with which we interact" (2019, 98).

[8]Much of the existing scholarship about Ozeki's novel praises its transnational methodology, which allows her to intertwine feminist themes with global power structures. Marlo Starr writes that Ozeki "puts forward an alternative model of feminism through its depiction of Ruth and Nao's transnational relationship" (2016, 100), arguing that she is Haraway-esque in the way literature links Ruth and Nao across time, distance, and bodies.

Chris D. Jimenez adopts a similar transnational approach that unearths Japan's and the Pacific Northwest's "mutual nuclear histories"—not only the dropping of bombs, but their mining, research, and creation on indigenous lands. (2018, 265). These critical readings discuss the expanses between Ruth and Nao and between Ozeki and the reader, but they do not reconcile the hydro-colonial histories of the Pacific Rim novel with Ozeki's contemplations on ecology and materiality. Neither Japan nor the Pacific Northwest, despite their rendering in the text as remote areas, are geographically or economically isolated. These nations—through war, globalization, and capitalism—have made the Pacific into a network of biopolitical violence, nuclear fallout, and engines of global climate change.

[9]Maxine Polleri's analysis of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) shows that, in the decade following the 3/11 disaster, the Japanese government adopted a "postpolitical" stance regarding nuclear energy: that it was a necessity. METI also mobilized the anti–fossil fuel rhetoric of environmental activism to reframe discussions of nuclear safety and radioactivity to that of economic recovery (2020, 574–75).

[10]Suzuki argues that the novel "attempts to reimagine an Asian North American identity—exemplified by the fictionalized Ruth Ozeki—that gets aligned not with the abstract circuits of capital but with the materiality of media and the act of mediation" (2021, 192).

[11]H.G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* (1897) is the most prominent example in English literature.

[12]From *The Woman Warrior* to *The Joy Luck Club* to the film *Minari*, notable Asian American texts tend to foreground themes of diaspora, silence, and trauma.

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"Do They See Me as a Virus?": Imagining Asian American Environmental Games

Edmond Y. Chang

Night Flyer. By Mike Ren Yi. 2020.

Even The Ocean. By Melos Han-Tani and Marina Krittaka. 2016.

Pandemic 2020. By Chanhee Choi. 2020.

Given the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, the national racial reckoning and spike in anti-Asian hate, and the ever-present consequences of climate change and environmental precarity, three recent independent games—*Night Flyer* (2020) by Mike Ren Yi, *Even the Ocean* (2016) by Melos Han-Tani and Marina Krittaka, and *Pandemic 2020* (2020) by Chanhee Choi—engage the interactions and intersections of game studies, environmental studies, and Asian American studies. All three games demonstrate the power and potential of video games as environmental worldbuilding, environmentalist interventions, and ecocritical play; they imagine and engage players' relationship to and even problematic exploitation of their environments, both natural and built, embodied and virtual, utopian and dystopian. As Alenda Y. Chang argues in *Playing Nature*, these games are "environmental texts," referencing Lawrence Buell's criteria in *The Environmental Imagination*, and therefore an environmental game: "the ideal environmental text [and game] produces involvement. It brings the nonhuman world into equal prominence with the human, exposes humanity's moral responsibility to and participation in the natural world, and portrays the environment as fluid process, not static representation" (32). Moreover, beyond the ecocritical values and ideals

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that frame and underpin each, these three games raise additional questions and provocations concerning other norms, identities, structures, even feelings that interact or intersect with their obvious and thematic environmental concerns. These designers and games provide an opportunity to contingently conceive of a growing body of Asian American games to 1) highlight Asian American contributions to environmental studies and game studies, 2) make legible Asian American games as part of environmental literature and media writ large, and 3) creatively articulate what I am calling an Asianfuturist imagining of the environment that points to critical utopian possibilities.

The close readings and close playings of the following games and responses from the game-makers themselves contribute to the growing body of Asian American game studies already underway such as the recent work by Tara Fickle, whose *The Race Card: From Gaming Technologies to Model Minorities* addresses the "ludo-Orientalist" infrastructures of literature, games, citizenship, and nation. Fickle defines "ludo-Orientalism" as the "design, marketing, and rhetoric of games" that "shapes how Asians as well as East-West relations are imagined and where notions of foreignness and racial hierarchies get reinforced" (3). An extension of techno-Orientalism,[1] ludic Orientalism not only engages the digital, computational, or mechanical aspects of video games but also foregrounds the ways that "gaming, both digital and analog, is *used* in everyday life to provide alternative logics and modes of sense making, particularly as a means of justifying racial fictions and other arbitrary human typologies" (9). In other words, Fickle and the work of others like Christopher Patterson and Dean Chan deploy games as theory in order to examine the ways that games not only render race as mere pixels and representation, but they also enact and are embedded with racialized norms, logics, and mechanics. *Night Flyer*, *Even the Ocean*, and *Pandemic 2020* and their respective designers theorize their own work, their relationship to their identities and positionalities, and the potential for Asian American games.

Moreover, the games and designers presented below bridge more traditional environmental studies, Asian American ecocriticism, and the recent environmental turn in video games studies. Robert T. Hayashi, in his essay "Beyond Walden Pond: Asian American Literature and the Limits of Ecocriticism," argues for understandings of nature that are not centered on or by whiteness, to expand the definitions of the environment that does not replicate the "historical assumption that nature is equivalent to environment," and most importantly, to consider "how ethnic/racial minorities have defined, experienced, apprehended, and represented" nature and the environment (61). Hayashi reimagines "how the study of Asian Americans relates to dominant notions of the natural world" (Hayashi "Environment" par. 7). He calls for a consideration of "a wider range of texts, disciplinary approaches, and epistemological assumptions" (Hayashi, 61) regarding the links between social and natural domains, particularly engaging literary canons, immigration, labor, law, technology, and so on. Serendipitously, Alenda Y. Chang's *Playing Nature: Ecology in Video Games* opens with and mediates on Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* as remediated into a digital game by Tracy Fullerton and the Game Innovation Lab

at the University of Southern California. Chang argues (at length) that we must "reframe games beyond the domestic interior… an ecological perspective on video games might cement games' place alongside more mature media like film and television, where maturity is defined not only by aesthetic development but also the capacity for sociopolitical relevance" (6-7).

Given that "ecocriticism has historically excluded designed landscapes and methods of mediated interaction perceived as detracting from direct experience of the natural world" (10), Chang takes up Hayashi's call at face value for a wider range of texts and approaches to include that which may seem unlikely bedfellows. She argues for the need to "displace our existing understanding of games, players, and play contexts… while there are many reasons why game studies and environmental criticism have had little congress to date, none of those reasons are particularly unyielding… we move past the assumption that the natural and the digital are realms inherently inimical to each other" (Chang 10). Here the referent of ecocriticism's ur-text *Walden* by both Hayashi and Chang point to the need to diversify and reimagine what counts as nature or environment, what bodies and identities affect and are affected by said environment, and what texts, mediums, and perspectives are missing or ignored or discounted. All three games foreground Asian American design, experience, and representation (sometimes directly or indirectly), and offer points of view from bats to power plant workers to viruses that decenter white male bodies, gazes, and masculinist fantasies of control or domination over the natural world.

Finally, these games and designers gesture toward Asianfuturist possibilities, potential lines of inquiry, resistance, critique, and even hope that center Asian American identities, experience, engagements, and worldbuilding. In this case, Asianfuturism takes its inspiration from Mark Dery's "Black to the Future," which coins "Afrofuturism" as "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future… to tell about culture, technology, and things to come" (180-1). Asianfuturism is a response to and an alliance with Afrofuturism and other ethnic and marginalized futurisms. As Dawn Chan asks, specifically in relation to Asian American art, "Is it possible to be othered across time? For almost a century already, the myth of an Asian-inflected future has infiltrated imaginations worldwide" (161). Asianfuturism reclaims these too often Othering and Orientalist imaginations and recuperates, repurposes, or even overwrites them. Here Asianfuturism can be defined as any literature, art, and media—including the speculative medium of video games—that critically foregrounds Asian and Asian American cultures and concerns that reconfigure identities, embodiments, and technologies in order to imagine alternative, even radical narratives, desires, relationships, and play as "direct action" that challenges racism, sexism, ableism, phobia, and other technonormativities (Chang "Musings"). The games and designers below create speculative worlds that center characters of color, often drawing from transnational perspectives, and most

importantly, imagine ambivalent futures (and presents) that do not perpetuate white or Western fantasies about power, control, success, and salvation. What follows then articulates each designer's version of Asianfuturism, each hoping to challenge and "reorient" these legacies of disempowerment and to reclaim the future in their own image.

Night Flyer (2020)

Mike Ren Yi is a Chinese American game designer now living in Shanghai. He is known for a number of recent independent games including *Yellow Face*, *Hazy Days*, and *Novel Containment*. Over a five-day period culminating on Earth Day, Ren participated in IndiCade's Climate Jam 2020, which invited "game creators from across the world to join… to explore solutions that can address a rapidly changing world… to take action and raise solutions." Ren's submission was *Night Flyer: A Bat's Journey*, a short five-minute game that, according to the game's webpage, allows players to play "as a nimble bat" and challenges players to try "to survive as your world disappears."

The gameplay of *Night Flyer* is simple and straightforward. The player begins as a young bat hanging upside down on a tree branch. Using the left or right arrow keys (or mouse clicking on the left or right side of the game screen) causes the bat to flap its wings in the desired direction and gaining a little bit of altitude. Each flap propels the bat higher and higher, but when the player holds off on pressing a key (or clicking the screen), the bat gracefully arcs downward into a dive. Flapping and diving, the player navigates a monochromatic, gloomy green landscape of green ground, trees, sky, and clouds. The first goal of the game requires the player to fly and swoop to "Eat 5 Fruit" hanging from the trees, which is measured

by a hunger (or fullness) meter at the top center of the screen. Every time a fruit is consumed, the meter inches right and a small seed or pit falls to the forest floor. In fact, according to the game's "Learn More" pages, the player learns that bats are an important part of seed transportation, reforestation, and pollination. Eventually, the bat matures, and the next goal is to "Find a Bat Partner" by crossing paths with another bat, which results in a triumphant trill and spray of hearts. Then both bats must continue together and "Eat to Survive" before the hunger meter falls to zero. It is in this last stage of the game when the background changes, and the player sees some sort of large bulldozer machine spewing a plume of dark smoke slowly, methodically knocking down the forest, row after row, until there is nothing but devastation. As this happens, food sources become scarcer—fewer moths, fewer trees with fruit—until in the end both bats perish, hearts broken.

But the game does not end with the death of the player's bats. A short coda follows showing a living bat falling to the ground and a mysterious worker caging the now displaced creature. The worker sneezes, spraying the area and ostensibly the bat with their germs. The bat is then loaded onto a truck and taken to a city in the distance. The implication and subtle commentary here, of course, is on the current COVID-19 global pandemic, which is believed to have originated in bats but thus far no conclusive evidence has been discovered or corroborated.[2] Despite the uncertainty as to the etiology of the disease, its discovery in Wuhan, its possible link to "wet markets," open air markets that sell raw fish and meat, and its eventual spread to the West reignited longstanding anti-Asian, "yellow peril" responses particularly in the United States. In fact, according to a report in the *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, given the false belief that "people of Asian descent are solely responsible for causing and spreading COVID-19" (Grover et al. par. 4), the imagined origin, cause, and spread of the novel coronavirus has "enabled the spread of racism and created national insecurity, fear of foreigners, and general xenophobia, which may be associated with the increase in anti-Asian hate crime during the pandemic" (Gover et al. par. 6).

Night Flyer imagines the beginnings of the pandemic as beginning with or at least in a recursive relationship with humans, animals, deforestation, environmental degradation, industrial farming, precarious food systems, and global capitalism. In fact, according to researchers, "the loss of biodiversity in the ecosystems has created the general conditions that have favored and, in fact, made possible, the insurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic. A lot of factors have contributed to it: deforestation, changes in forest habitats, poorly regulated agricultural surfaces, mismanaged urban growth. They have altered the composition of wildlife communities, greatly increased the contacts of humans with wildlife, and altered niches that harbor pathogens, increasing their chances to come in contact with humans" (Platto et al.). It is this site of contact that *Night Flyer* plays with and narrates differently: the assumed trajectory of the virus leaping from bats to humans is flipped or complicated, reconfiguring the circuits of race, environment, and xenogenic and xenophobic fear. Ren explains that the game's inspiration "stemmed from the coronavirus outbreak around the world. When I was starting the project, I

remember seeing a lot of irrational fear aimed at bats, with media sources attributing COVID directly to bats. This misrepresentation pushed under-informed communities around the world to target and exterminate bat populations out of fear. … Bats, which play a crucial role in our natural ecosystem, struggle to survive against the forced destruction of their environment. They end up on a collision course with humans."

***Even the Ocean* (2016)**

Melos Han-Tani describes himself as Taiwanese and Japanese American; he grew up mainly in the suburbs of Chicago and now lives in Tokyo. Marina Kittaka identifies as Japanese American and Yonsei, a great-grandchild of Japanese immigrants to the United States. Together Han-Tani and Kittaka form Analgesic Productions, "a studio specializing in single-player, narrative-heavy adventure games with experimental flair and twists on traditional gameplay." Melos Han-Tani is known for *All Our Asias*, "a surreal, lo-fi, 3D adventure, about Asian-America, identity, race, and nationality." But both collaborated to develop *Anodyne* in 2013 and have recently completed the sequel *Anodyne* 2. In 2016, the duo released *Even the Ocean*, "a narrative action platformer about balancing the Light and Dark energies that hold the world together."

The player moves through the game as Aliph, a power plant technician with brown skin and pink and green hair, which reflects two dominant forms of energy in the world: Dark or Purple energy and Light or Green energy. Her work earns the attention and favor of the mayor of Whiteforge City, the center and capital of the known world, which relies on a number of plants to keep the city running and literally floating over the ground, over those who are not rich, powerful, or fortunate enough to live in the city's brilliant and gleaming towers and spires. Aliph is then tasked to seek out other malfunctioning power plants, armed with only her skill, wits, and

armored shield. She eventually learns that the disruptions in power are symptoms of a larger, existential, environmental threat to the world. Marina Kittaka comments on the game's goals: "One key theme throughout the game is the resonance or relationship between the small scale and the large… we can connect the dots from Whiteforge's imbalanced use of energy, to its stratified society, to the small stresses and preoccupations of the individual characters. I see this as related to adrienne maree brown's *Emergent Strategy* and her discussion of fractals: 'what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system.'"

Even the Ocean's gameplay is a mixture of fantasy role-playing game and puzzle platformer. The player navigates various maps and locations, interacts with non-player characters in the world, and completes a number of tasks or quests at the request of the mayor and others. Woven through and among the narrative and geographical interactions are action areas or levels where the player must use Aliph's jumping, running, climbing, and protective shield to explore, traverse, unlock, and complete the level. In addition to the running, jumping, and climbing mechanics common to the platformer genre, the game adds the complication of Green and Purple energy. Green or Light energy is associated with vertical movement, with the Y-axis; Purple or Dark energy is associated with horizontal movement, with the X-axis. At the bottom of the game screen is a Green and Purple meter which measures how much of either energy Aliph has absorbed. Having more Green than Purple means Aliph can jump higher, and having more Purple than Green means she can jump and move faster horizontally. If at any time, Aliph takes on all one type of energy, she perishes, and the player is restored to their last save point. Success in the game both on a mechanical and narrative level is about using the Light and Dark energies in thoughtful and intentional ways, and about keeping them to a certain degree in a moving, ebbing and flowing equilibrium. This yoking of the ludic to the narrative, the mechanics to the worldbuilding reveals the strength of a medium-specific articulation of game and story; Aliph's relationship to the two energies analogizes her relationship to the social and political powers of the game world.

Even the Ocean's central conceit is that of a world out of balance, a society too dependent on a particular form of energy reflected in the stark divide between those with access and those without. The majesty and literal heights of Whiteforge City rely on Green energy, on Light energy, which allows it to maintain its exalted position. The coding along color lines extends to the characters in the game. Most of the non-player characters the player meets in Whiteforge City are white, affluent, and interested in perpetuating the status of the capitol. For example, the mayor named Richard Biggs (a not so subtle penis joke) and chief scientist Doctor Wodsnick are both white men in charge of the city and Aliph's work. Whereas, most of the characters on the ground and in other parts of the world are people of color, queer NPCs, and characters of a range of identities and embodiments. For Han-Tani, "*Even the Ocean* feels like a powerful game in the way it makes these little character friendships and interactions feel huge in the face of apocalyptic histories and massive ecological disasters. It also homes in on the fear that bad

leaders carry, but how they refuse to work through those fears in productive ways, choosing to hide and be selfish."

Interestingly, Han-Tani and Kittaka did not set out to create an environmental game, but they recognize that the dystopian currents of *Even the Ocean* imagine the conflicts and interactions between nature and civilization and the difference between saving the world and saving its people. The game explores race, class, technology, and the environment suggesting that "Whiteforge is inspired by the excesses of American culture… [and] that the Western version of history is not really where we should be going" (Han-Tani). Though the game ends on a dystopic note, it does present the possibility of hope and of a different future, particularly through the character of the Storyteller, who frames the game's narrative and who functions as witness to the game's events and the player's choices. The hope in *Even the Ocean* is the survival of the story of Aliph and in the consideration of different and more radical ways to imagine the future, an Asianfuturist one that, in the words of Kittaka, "point some people in the direction of learning more about power structures and how they can distort our perceptions of balance.… If players can be a little transported, reflected, encouraged, or challenged, then they might be able to find more than I could personally tell them" (as qtd. in Riendeau).

***Pandemic 2020* (2020)**

Chanhee Choi describes herself as "a first generation culturally-hybrid Korean/American." Originally from South Korea, she is an interdisciplinary, interactive media designer and artist and currently a doctoral student in the United States at the University of Washington in the Digital Arts and Experimental Media program. Choi began working on *Pandemic 2020* at the start of the COVID-19 lockdown in Seattle, Washington after experiencing anti-Asian racism firsthand. She says, "In March, as I walked alone in the city, I was humiliated by the comments of a non-Asian stranger. He said, 'You f—ing Chinese, you brought the coronavirus.' I was very shocked. I started questioning whether it would have happened if I were any other race besides Asian" (as qtd. in Taguchi par. 8). As an aside, Choi says that she goes by "Chanee" as her artist's name because it is easier, simpler, more readable and speakable than "Chanhee," recognizing the multiple marginalizations of being an immigrant, a non-native speaker of English, and even as a woman. Choi's *Pandemic 2020* is a response not only to the ecological and environmental consequences of a global pandemic, particularly in urban spaces, but also to the social, racial, institutional, and media environments in which racism, xenophobia, and nationalism circulate. Beating at the center of the game is an attempt to answer the existential question of what it means to be Asian in the U.S. and what it means to be seen and assumed to be a problem, an outsider, a vector, a virus. Choi wonders, "Would that have happened if I were white? I felt afraid to cough. I wondered if everyone else felt as anxious about being seen as a carrier, if I looked sick, or what would happen to me if I didn't wear a mask? I asked myself, 'Do they see me as a virus?'"

Choi describes *Pandemic 2020* as a first-person, 3D, environmental art game, but instead of playing as a human avatar, the player is transmogrified, put into the literal position of the coronavirus, disembodied looking for a body. She says, "I chose to work in the medium of the 'art game' and virtual experience because it attempts to understand how reality is necessarily distorted by our perception of it. As a medium, it is curious about the gap between how the world really is and how it appears to us." In *Pandemic 2020*, the player plays as a macroscopic coronavirus floating and moving through vivid, picturesque, surreal, and at times nightmarish landscapes and spaces. As the viral avatar, the tell-tale ball shape covered in a "crown" of club-shaped spines or projections, the player explores homes, stores, cafes, streets, and workplaces, all of which are overlaid and interrupted by eerie textures, apparitions and reflections, dreamy lights, and otherworldly figures. More importantly, all of these areas and levels are decorated, hung, interspersed with multimodal and multimedia evidence drawn from real world headlines, social media, news clips, and found objects that render and reify anti-Asian backlashes and xenophobic fearmongering over COVID-19. The player is inundated, graphically oppressed by images and video clips of the U.S. president, screenshots of "China flu" tweets, anti-lockdown protest signs, racist graffiti on walls, jokes and memes about eating bats, and whorls and walls of words that speak of uncertainty, panic, fear, disaster, and hate. Inspired by other experiential and affective games like Mike Ren Yi's *Yellow Face* (2019) or Jason Rohrer's *Passage* (2007), Choi argues, "The video game format as a delivery method is important for this project because individual players can experience different spaces, different scenes, and different events in the game.… Some places are meant as entertainment, some places might make you feel happy, and some will feel like a nightmare."

The central mechanic of *Pandemic* 2020 is exploring, looking, experiencing while floating as a virus through the various places of the game. Games with this mode of play have often been celebrated and denigrated as "walking simulators,"

which privilege observation, investigation, storytelling, and slower movement through the game world rather than the usual, even normative gamic expectations of competition, combat, conquest, accrual of points, winning, and losing. Given the nonhuman avatar of *Pandemic 2020*, the game might better be called, in the words of Bonnie Ruberg, a looking simulator, lingering simulator, or observing simulator (201). As Choi has described, her game is both about witnessing the individual and ideological side effects of the pandemic and finding ways to reckon with and reimagine a world forever changed by disease, phobia, institutional neglect, and powerlessness. The power and potential of an "exploring simulator" like Choi's game and others is that these "experimental games critique the ways in which certain game mechanics and dynamics have become 'normalized' within mainstream games… pushing against conceptions of video games as reliant on 'hyperrealistic' visual representations of bodies and space or as dominantly freeing, immersive, and filled with 'free' choice and player empowerment" (Pow 44). Moreover, as Alenda Chang suggests, games like *Pandemic 2020* disrupt expectations of not only the player's agency and control but also the modes and means of how they interact with or are acted upon by the gamic environment; Chang says, "[T]heir slowness, their lack of action, the absence of people, their spatial storytelling—indirectly indicate a path forward (pun intended) for more environmentally sophisticated game design… [they are] a call to inhabit different game worlds and to inhabit game worlds differently" (*Playing* 43). Playing as a virus plays with notions of viral agency, of the permeability of inside and outside, public and private, exposure and safety, and ultimately, of the spreading of both a biological disease, COVID-19, and a social, cultural, political, and multimedia disease, racism.

Given that Choi has adopted a hybrid status of Korean and American, her response to the formation of a body of Asian American games is focused on how they might "express the experience of being a minority in the United States." She says, "To play a game, people have to engage. This engagement puts them into a more receptive mental state and allows games to resonate with an audience in a way other mediums can't. I'd like to give people the experience of being a minority in America." While Choi does see her game at the intersection of art games and environmentalism, her focus is on a different reading of the environment, in this case the digital environment of social media, mass media, and the ecology of the news cycle: "*Pandemic 2020* is a perception of news, media, and social networks. It's more about how our environment can affect and manipulate us to bring out bias or bigotry that makes us willing to incite violence toward a certain group of people." She turned to her work, her art, her studies in response. She wanted to find not only a way to articulate the social, political, and environmental contexts of her questions and feelings but also to create an affective, mediated response to share her experiences. Choi says, "This is why I decided to make a video game. I needed to describe the surrealistic struggle of this particular moment and engage with the people going through it with me.… The chaos of this moment, the coming election, and the widening cultural divide all make us wonder what we can expect from the future. Where are we? What are we doing?"

The Future of Asian American Environmental Games

Night Flyer, *Even the Oceans*, and *Pandemic 2020* all imagine a grim future in their own ways, a future where it is impossible to deny the difficulties and ravages of capitalism, racism, and climate and ecological disaster. But they also imagine survival, transformation, and possibility, not necessarily easy and palatable solutions. They are Asianfuturist expressions of the dystopian and utopian potential of games, which can "offer powerful critical perspectives through which to interrogate the status quo" and they present "seriously flawed worlds that invite critical reflection" (Schulzke 331). Or as Raffaella Baccolini argues, in this case about speculative fiction, "Utopia is maintained in dystopia, traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with no space for hope in the story, only *outside* the story" but recent works, particularly by feminist writers and creators of color, resist closure and "allow readers and protagonists to hope: the ambiguous, open endings maintain the utopian impulse *within* the work" (520). The games of Mike Ren Yi, Melos Tan-Hani, Marina Kittaka, and Chanhee Choi render this Asianfuturist impulse into playable form. By allowing (even requiring) players to play as a habitat-starved bat, a working-class woman of color, or even a floating, disembodied macrovirus, these games play against the grain of mainstream video games and the technonormative impulse to find easy answers and heroic resolutions. All three games linger in the ambivalence and interrelationships between animal, human, plant, earth, sky, building, technology, and the natural world.

The work of these designers are promising realizations and playful conceptions of Asian Americanist critique and worldbuilding through Asian American games. They demonstrate the need for and possibilities of games of color critique of race, ethnicity, belonging, space, and difference. They demonstrate that "video games present a rich limit-case for the claims of environmental scholarship—ontologically and epistemologically speaking, they are a place where the natural and the digital collide and prompt careful reexamination of our assumptions about nature, realism, and the virtual" (Chang *Playing* 15) and evince the common sense understanding that "games, like the natural world, can provoke curiosity, interaction, and reflections" (Chang *Playing* 2). They demonstrate the ways that race, ethnicity, and globalized identity come into play to "provide a means both to encompass the slippery term 'Asian American' and ground it in the material and cultural conditions of individual and collective experience, so that like those hidden faces, those whom it defines will readily emerge when we deploy the term 'environment'" (Hayashi "Environment" par. 8). And finally, these games and their creators demonstrate alternative ways to design, play, and change the present and envision the future.

Going back to Chanhee Choi's questions about being seen as a virus, *Pandemic 2020* dramatizes the tensions between the individual and the collective, between the human and the environment, a reconfigured and remediated multiple awareness of what it means to be Asian and American, an invisible disease and a visible outsider. Choi's viral avatar makes macroscopic the "moments of doubled and occluded racial perception, in which Asianness becomes at once the most visible and the most attenuated sign of the convergence of racial and ludic fictions"

(Fickle 3). All three games, in fact, address what it means to embrace and excavate the terms of Asian American, environmental studies, and Asianfuturist games. And all three games attempt to answer or antidote their dystopian realities. The uncertainty and ambivalence of the current cultural, political, and environmental moment continue to be played out along raced, classed, gendered, embodied, and technologized lines, but the impulse for creativity, for change, for reimagining the imbrications and tensions of those lines are what these independent games of color attempt to capture. Or in the words of Choi, "We really can't predict what will happen next, but we should try to find hope."

Notes

1. See David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu, eds., Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media, Rutgers University Press, 2015.

2. See Smitri Mallapaty, "Where Did COVID Come From? WHO Investigation Begins But Faces Challenges," Nature (11 Nov. 2020), https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-03165-9.

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The 2020 Social and Environmental Apocalypse: Reimagining Black America

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Prelude: Writing as Community

While the COVID-19 pandemic has had disastrous impacts on marginalized communities, the global situation has also set the stage for a number of activist movements and virtual writing spaces as a form of resistance. In the midst of the pandemic, the founder of Black Women PhDs® and a former colleague/friend came up with the idea of starting a writing accountability group for women of color. Women of color from several countries and generations began convening to write together in a virtual setting. Writing soon evolved into inviting speakers, holding virtual happy hours, sharing resources, and creating a sisterhood. This article is a product of that virtual space of accountability, and we are all ever grateful to have the opportunity to work together. The lead author, an environmental justice scholar-activist, came across the call and first thought that it would be great to blend their voice with that of a counselor educator and cross-cultural relations enthusiast. This circle was then expanded to bring in the perspectives of two others who would add breadth, depth, and biophysical considerations to the piece. As we each proposed our ideas for the direction of this writing, we realized our ideas were all connected. This article embodies the cohesive, transdisciplinary vision of four scholars and scholar-activists across three time zones.

Inception

Just what is a "shared" planet? Equitable distribution of resources? Optimization of population dynamics across taxa? Shared governance of

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resources and communities? Has the planet ever been "shared," or is it even "shareable?" While arguments abound as to whether or not Earth has ever been a truly shared planet, since colonialism, humanity has existed in an unshared or inequitable sharing of planet. This is evidenced by the exploitation and marginalization of Black, brown, and Indigenous communities to support the mass proliferation and outsized consumption of communities of European descent. As it stands, unshared space is a hotbed for inequity and degradation of both the land and the communities who occupy it. Space (shared or unshared) is an important factor in any future visioning, as food, water, shelter, and *space* are the basic needs for survival. Humanity's current inequitable consumption of Earth's resources is driven by socioeconomic ideologies developed by white oppressors. Much of these beliefs lie at the root of myriad contemporary environmental, economic, and social injustices—which are both the source and an exacerbating factor of the disparate effects of climate change (Martinez 2020). Perhaps the most perverse thing about racist policies and ideals, as both source and aggravator of climate change, is that the very countries most responsible for the massive anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions leading to this human-made phenomenon are those least negatively affected (Nugent 2019).

Indeed, climate change itself is a result of racism (Martinez 2020) and is so deeply tied to other social issues that it is considered by Kamala Harris, vice president of the United States, to be a national security threat (Harris 2019). Despite the promise of free markets, buy-ins to this economic system have magnified preexisting inequitable distributions of exploitative power structures that not only create but also preserve Earth's status as an unshared planet. The U.S. environmental justice movement has arisen to triage some of the damage caused by an unshared planet by marrying the civil rights and environmental movements. In desperate attempts to rectify the impacts of centuries of discriminatory housing, lending, and policing policies, as a society we keep repackaging the injustices of the past; this is the basis for reform. This is why revolution is the necessary step toward justice and a shared planet. However, as we will illustrate in this article, revolution has been long stifled in the United States because it has been intertwined with reformist attitudes and actions. In this article, we first set the stage for how the planet has never been a shared space, citing examples from the U.S. police and vigilante brutality and long-standing environmental trauma that has existed as a result. Next, we discuss one activist response, namely, Black Lives Matter, as it is a modern and salient example for the layperson, but not to negate the fact that many movements have come before it. We then transition into our call for revolution and lay out a vision for the future. While the connections drawn in this article may not be obvious for some, we feel it is important to outline how environmental racism is a branch of the tree of systemic racism that is alive and well in this country. It comes as no surprise that the environment is used as a weapon against Black, brown, and Indigenous peoples considering that 1) dominant Western ideals see people as being at the top of a hierarchy and natural resources as being tools at

their disposal and that 2) white supremacists never intended for Black, brown, and Indigenous peoples to share space with people of European descent, nor do they wish to acknowledge the humanity of the Black, brown, and Indigenous peoples.

Evidence of an Unshared Planet

Earth as an unshared space leads to oppression, suffering, inequitable distribution of power (especially over land-use decisions), and the series of injustices critically interrogated in this article. We center the experiences of the Black diaspora, primarily in the United States, to chronicle the intended and unintended consequences of an unshared planet. As evidence of an unshared planet, the mobility of Black people both historically and currently, is shaped, restricted, and determined by land-use decisions like zoning, redlining, and policing. This section points out how mere methods of policy reform do not go far enough in addressing systemic racism and marginalization because with the reform of one set of policies comes another set of same or worse policies in their place. Instead, we must incite a robust revolution that prioritizes environmental justice and places the needs of the Black diaspora at the center.

Legacy of Police Brutality and the Limitations of Reform

Policing is an issue that goes hand in hand with environmental degradation and environmental weaponization (Hill 2016). In 2020, we witnessed Black folks not being able to breathe due to police chokeholds, not being able to breathe due to contracting COVID-19, and not being able to breathe due to air pollution in our communities. Outcries and protests spread throughout the country and demands to defund or abolish the police ensued. However, these demands were not merely the result of recent events. They are the manifestation of over 400 years of exploitation and oppression of Black people through chattel slavery followed by the systematic disenfranchisement of "freed peoples" through discriminatory laws, policies, and practices that form the U.S. criminal justice system (Hannah-Jones 2019). Many have suggested that the criminal justice system merely needs to be reformed by way of better training for officers or better policies to protect incarcerated people. However, the call for environmental justice must include revolution by demanding true justice in the criminal justice system and dismantling the police force as it operates in the United States.

One of the things that has haunted the United States for decades is the legacy of a criminal justice system used as a form of oppression for Black, Indigenous, and brown people. Many people have disillusioned themselves with the realities of this problem by believing that those trapped in the cycle of the prison industrial system are criminals who deserve punishment and that reforms to this system have constituted progress. However, we assert that what these individuals see as reform is merely a repackaging of the same racism of the past. In the book *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander describes mass incarceration as a form of Black slavery (Alexander 2010). Alexander asserts that since the end

of the original Black slavery, there have been numerous forms of slavery set up to take its place. First, there were the Black Codes, followed by Jim Crow, and now mass incarceration. Many people have said that the criminal justice system is broken, but others have pointed out the truth: the system behaves as it was designed, as it follows suit of these other systems. The criminal justice system is not broken. It is operating just as the oppressor intends, as a system functioning to dehumanize, eradicate, and sicken Black people (Black men in particular) and other nonwhite individuals as "inherently criminal" (Alexander 2010, 197).

The criminal justice system is flawed and racially biased at every level and is deeply impacted by geographical and spatial considerations. It works to oppress BIPOC people through discriminatory policies and enforcement of those policies. The institution of this legacy began back in the day with vagrancy laws that gave police the ability to arrest people for appearing to be homeless or unemployed (Blackmon 2009). An officer could merely look at a Black person and claim they appeared to be breaking a law. This led to a disproportionate number of Black people experiencing the environmentally hazardous and physically tortuous conditions of prisons. It further perpetuated hordes of Black people being subjected to the environmental injustices related to farm labor as white oppressors would pay off the vagrancy fines or court fees incurred by Black people in exchange for often endless stints of farmwork (Blackmon 2009). Over time, as vagrancy laws were repealed, the behavior continued under the cloak of other tools (both legal and unwritten) at their disposal. Alleged petty crimes, stop-and-frisk, suspicion of danger, and even discriminatory lending practices are all current tools used to maintain a system of racial hierarchies and to eradicate Black people from certain spaces. Footage of police officers antagonizing Black and brown people for allegedly "trespassing" abounds, including some instances when the alleged suspects are standing on their own property. The antagonism that is directed at Black and brown folks on their own property is an illustration of the geographical and spatial considerations at play in the criminal justice system. In other instances, the alleged suspects had already abided by the instruction to walk away when the police decided to follow and berate them. When a suspect is abiding by the instruction of the police and operating in a way that is considered correct within the realm of the system and still manages to be shot, one wonders if any method of reform would cause real change. White oppressors have used systems to avoid their greatest fear: Black people will rise up and take back power. Thus, it would seem that the real failure is the fact that white oppressors have been allowed to dominate. The next course of action would be to use revolutionary tactics to overthrow the oppressors, making their deepest fears a reality.

A recent story causing public outrage involved the attempted murder of Jacob Blake, a Black man in Kenosha, Wisconsin, shot seven times in the back by police, in front of his children, as he tried to enter his car (Paybarah and Fazio 2020). A startling image has circulated showing a Black man bleeding from the whips on his back on one side and a Black man bleeding from bullet wounds in

his back on the other side (Figure 1). This image demonstrates the unsettling truth about what happens in the United States when a Black and a white man attempt to share space. Contrast this to the young white supremacist male who walked past several police officers with an assault weapon in hand after shooting and murdering several individuals and was neither stopped nor confronted, in the same city, days apart (Willis et al. 2020). This teen was charged with homicide for murdering several protestors, but pled not guilty (Booker 2021). To some the mere arrest may seem like justice, but it is not justice when an innocent Black womxn gets shot to death in her bed by the police while a white terrorist retains his life (Grassroots Law Project n.d.). It is not justice when a Black man is gunned down by white supremacists, in broad daylight, and the murderers are arrested only when the Black community and allies demand it. And it is not justice when white supremacists are allowed to storm the Capitol during the certification of a free and fair election and the police do nothing to stop it. After such heinous actions, many still produce petitions calling for lawmakers to address these wrongs—showing how even activists have notions of revolution that are much too bogged down by reformist tendencies.

Even in the cases when a Black man does retain his life, his spirit is killed within the confines of the prison industrial system (e.g., spirit murder in Williams 1991). Prisons have been hotbeds for exacerbated income, health, mortality, and environmental inequalities that affect people who are not incarcerated. Black men and womxn receive harsher sentences than our white counterparts (The Sentencing Project 2018). While it is common for white teens to receive probation or a mere warning for small infractions, Black children are often treated as deviants and sentenced like adults in the prison industrial system. In the film *Pushout*, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Monique W. Harris describe the criminalization that Black girls experience in K–12 schools. For young Black boys, they make a silent covenant with their teachers to "behave" in class, and in exchange the teachers have low academic expectations and "relieve" the students from the trap of the school-to-prison pipeline (Noguera 2003). This process continues into adulthood.

Further dehumanization of BIPOC, who are disproportionately imprisoned, occurs in prisons, which are often seen as the only acceptable use of land that has been excessively degraded environmentally, land that is correlated to abnormally high rates of cancer, valley fever, and respiratory illnesses among inmates (Bernd et al. 2017). Black people may not officially be considered three-fifths of a human anymore, but we are still treated as such. Black families are disbanded through the sustained incarceration of young and adult Black men (McClain 2019). On release, they often are unable to vote or secure employment, yet their bodies contribute to the population counts used to calculate each state's Electoral College allocation (Bradshaw 2018). While behind bars, Black and brown folks experience some of the deepest environmental injustices (Bradshaw 2018; Cartier 2020). Many prisons are situated on brownfields and Superfund sites and lack amenities like air conditioning and access to clean and reliable drinking

water (Cartier 2020; Pellow 2021). For instance, Rikers Island jail, with its 56 percent Black and 33 percent Latinx population, is built on top of a landfill (PBS 2017; Pellow 2017). One study found that ZIP codes that contain prisons have higher Toxic Release Inventories than ZIP codes without prisons (Leon-Corwin et al. 2020). It is no coincidence that the most vulnerable populations in the country are subjected to the most heinous environmental conditions in the United States through the prison system.

The powers that be in the United States claim that slavery is abolished, but the prison system is just a reformed version of enslavement, while the criminal justice system serves as a stand-in for a "reformed" overseer. Inmates are legally allowed to be paid pennies on the dollar for highly skilled and highly dangerous labor, a phenomenon that would be unacceptable if they were freed men (Quigley 2003). Many Fortune 500 corporations like Walmart, Victoria's Secret, and Starbucks use prison labor for their products, and even public universities are often state obligated to contract with prisons as well (Burke 2020). This institutional reliance on cheap, enslaved labor is kept alive by policies that enable its existence and continual morphing. This is not a new circumstance. It is further evidence of unshared space and how prisons provide an added layer of complexity to environmental justice issues.

Douglas A. Blackmon's *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* discusses how prisons were used to re-enslave Black people following the Emancipation Proclamation (Blackmon 2009). In the late 1800s, Black people would be arrested for petty offenses and fined at incredible rates. In some cases, they were fined $24 or more, the equivalent of three months of labor. As mentioned earlier, unable to pay the fees, a white man would "step in," pay the fee, and force the offender to work off the debt, effectively forcing them back into an enslaved state. This has startling similarities to the cash bail system of today. In other cases, in the 1800s, sheriffs would sell convicts on the private market, which was allowed under the law. This ludicrous loophole in the law would be exploited further as law enforcement would intentionally not record an arrested individual's charges, the amounts of their fines, or how much time was due to work off the debt. This intentionally poor and inaccurate record system sometimes led to infinite sentencing. Even though record-keeping systems have been reformed, it has not kept Black people from being inequitably sentenced.

In Alabama, there was a pattern of disarming Black men by finding them guilty of a frivolous crime, locking them away, and then pimping them out as physical laborers. Whites were threatened by freed Black people with guns and responded by using the prison system to revoke Black constitutional rights and sovereignty. In some southern states, hard labor markets were driven by convicts. For instance, convicts were often forced to labor in coal mines. In some coal mines, convicts made up half of the employee base. This practice of subjecting inmates to work in coal mines is a prime example of the types of environmental injustices that we propose must be disallowed by dismantling

the prison-industrial complex and the systems that undergird it. Blackmon's book details the accounts of many convicts who endured the worst conditions in the coal mines. They were often unable to bathe or change their clothes for weeks. The mines were an incredible health hazard, which caused some whites to suggest that the convicts not be required to work in the mines. This wasn't due to any humanitarian care but rather to protect their investments. Arguably, this history illustrates environmental racism in the United States long before the term was coined by Dr. Robert Bullard. In recent years, many environmentalists have campaigned to "Quit Coal." While these environmentalists are advocating against coal for environmental reasons, the legacy of slave labor is another reason not to support the coal industry (or the prison system).

The Next Wave of Black Lives Matter

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is one alternative to the menial reforms we have seen from within the system. BLM advocates for the cease and desist of police brutality on Black lives while aiding in the combating of systemic racism (Garza 2014). The valid anger of the BLM movement continues despite ongoing internalized societal pressures and self-directed decorum regarding policing within the Black community (e.g., monitoring vocal tone when pulled over, appearing friendly or less aggressive by smiling, keeping an ID nearby at all times, or keeping hands constantly visible). These measures are taken in hopes of escaping unharmed while being stressed to acclimate in order to fit a predominantly Eurocentric society. Reformists have argued that assimilating or attaining individualistic achievements (e.g., titles, status, or wealth) would quell the negative experiences of Black people navigating daily life. However, the Black celebrities, professionals, and even police who simultaneously experience oppression alongside Black laypeople prove this theory untrue. No matter the respectability politics of self-directed decorum when interacting with police or level of capitalist achievements, the Black body is still subject to execution without regard for safety or context. Nevertheless, the stress to acclimate built up to the point where a revolution became inevitable, and thus the BLM movement was born.

Need for the Movement

BLM attempts to act as a form of revolution by aiming to dismantle a police system that was questionable since its creation. The early police system in the United States lacked formality and consisted of surveillance by community members over those participating in prohibited behaviors related to sexual or betting activities (Waxman 2017). This informal group of community police was known to consume alcohol and even sleep during their shifts (Waxman, 2017). This later led to the need for supervision, but even that supervision was not without flaws, thus requiring informal surveillance to shift into more formal systems in growing U.S. cities (Waxman 2017). Other states promoted the administering of civil law in varied ways throughout the country.

The first civilly financed law enforcement of the U.S. settler state was established in Boston in 1838 to support those with commerce who were in need of protection for their physical property (Waxman 2017). The South later used law enforcement as a means of enforcing the continued enslavement of Black people who were considered property at that time (Waxman 2017). This historical context highlights the earlier roots of racism within the law enforcement structure that continues to influence the disregard for Black people and the resultant hunger for survival in the Black community. Relatedly, Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me* describes the dilemma of the Black body with jarring examples that included Black parents heavily disciplining their Black children out of fear of losing sight of them during outings. This fear is due to the embodied reality of the greater danger faced if their Black child encountered the police (Coates 2015). The fear that Black parents have has been prompted by Black slayings such as Emmett Till, Trayvon Martin, and Tamir Rice, among many others. BLM calls for a revolution that would evoke a world in which this sort of fear is no longer a part of the everyday experience of Black people.

Beginnings of the Movement

Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi coined the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter in reaction to the slaying of Trayvon Martin, who was implicitly criminalized and killed while his killer, a vigilante, was not convicted (Garza 2014). Trayvon, seventeen years old, walked home after purchasing an iced tea and candy while talking on the phone to his girlfriend (Lee 2013). His killer reported that Trayvon appeared to be participating in suspicious activity while looking as if he might commit a crime (Lee 2013). BLM elevated awareness regarding the targeted, senseless, and brutal slaying of a young Black life. The movement deliberately humanized Trayvon's narrative and expanded necessary context to him and many others later murdered at the hands of police officials, refuting the false claims of victims wielding weapons as told by mainstream media. Mainstream media contribute to the diminishing respect for Black lives when it puts forth opposing voices to corroborate and rationalize the slaying of Black people (e.g., if _____ had followed the orders of the officer, _____ had a criminal background, etc.). Thus, social media advocacy led by BLM amplified the movement's mission to dismantle white supremacy and laid the social infrastructure necessary to produce greater action, such as protests and conferences (Garza 2014).

Growth of the Movement

The BLM hashtag was on its own not enough to constitute a revolution. BLM later developed beyond social media in association with community workers to advocate for justice within the Ferguson community after the similar slaying of Mike Brown (Garza 2014). In 2014, eighteen-year-old Mike Brown was walking home through the middle of the street in his neighborhood when his killer, assuming that he had committed a robbery earlier, shot him six times (Chaudhry 2016). The movement continues to advocate for justice in the slaying

of Black lives, including the recent injustices toward Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, while also enabling the revitalization of older activists to participate in the proposed efforts (Rickford 2016). It appears that the movement inspired the (non-Black) masses, but what has really occurred is white people appropriating the movement, thus diluting the original intent (Garza 2014). BLM has a number of limits as a social movement as it relates to their ability to truly revolutionize the United States. As it stands, BLM has fallen short of creating both reform (nationwide changes to policing policies) and revolution (overthrowing the police structure as a whole by any means necessary). Perhaps this is due to the attempts to revolutionize in such a way that still has undertones of reform.

The fact that BLM has yet to produce overwhelming change in the past eight years emphasizes the lack of social and political power from this movement that intends to be revolutionary but is held back by reformist techniques. In 2020, the illumination of the persistent and disheartening lynching of Black lives via social media encouraged a swelling of protests and advocacy efforts. Recent reports bolstered that over 93 percent of protests were acknowledged as peaceful despite continued mischaracterization by the media that labeled them as violent due to concern over looting and the destruction of physical property (Mansoor 2020). While the statistic of almost all BLM protests being nonviolent has been touted as a positive thing, it must also be noted that true revolution calls for the need to understand when it's time to escalate. Leaders such as Harriet Tubman, Malcolm X, and Angela Davis, an earlier affiliate of the Black Panther Party, have shown us that often the threat and willingness of violence is required to revolutionize the social landscape (Davis and Platt 2014; Sandarg 1986).

Complementary to this, the Black Panther Party utilized its symbol, a panther, to describe the group's response of not reacting with violence unless provoked, with the intent of defense (Harris 2001). The earlier creation of the Black Panther Party in the 1960s embodied sentiments related to empowering the Black community by (1) providing autonomy to Black individuals to determine the direction of the Black community; (2) funding jobs, housing, and resources to all of the Black community; (3) decolonizing education to depict the Black reality; (4) restructuring the judicial system to allow the Black community to be jurors in cases involving Black individuals; (5) refraining from involving the Black community in military engagement; (6) ceasing the robbery of Black individuals by white men; and (7) discontinuing police brutality impacting the Black community and freeing Black individuals from jail (Harris 2001). The Black Panther Party later faced issues that included ongoing debacles with another Black group, Karenga's U.S. Organization, as well as internal strife during the bicoastal expansion of the Black Panthers influenced by the criminal justice system (Harris 2001).

With regard to historical strengths and areas of improvement acknowledged in movements similar to the Black Panther Party, BLM has been unsuccessful in ways, but it has gained traction in others. For instance, the protests succeeded in exposing the need for society to address the unjust murders of Black people by both police and white supremacists more broadly. It should also be noted

that despite various attempts at manipulation and theft to not afford credit to its Black Queer Womxn founders, BLM has at minimum had a successful expansion globally, including formalizing multiple chapters across the world and hosting national conferences to organize activism and advocacy efforts (Garza 2014). The movement continues to gain support from "white Americans" despite political efforts to dismantle its impact (Bittle 2020, 9). The 2020 BLM protests resulted in an upsurge of information in the media surrounding the fallacies against Black lives, furthering the exposure of individual, organizational, and structural levels of racial discrimination. Relatedly, the permeation of organizational discrimination is illuminated in the continued impacts of the incarceration system, where it is "6 times more likely for a Black man to be incarcerated than a white man" (Galea and Abdalla 2020, 227). Structural discrimination is illustrated by the lack of representation of Black officials in positions of governmental power and influence. Public murals then have been used as a means of finding voice and taking up space in place of the missing representation.

The creation of murals and other public art symbolizing solidarity with Black lives is part of a spectrum of advocacy efforts tailored toward facilitating social change. Historically, Black art has continued to communicate subversive innovation through varied depictions of narratives that respond to socioeconomic and political events impacting the Black community (Cotter 2021; Raussert 2021). This illustrates how the concept of revolution in the United States is deeply intertwined with reform, as the increase of murals contributes to extinguishing anti-Blackness and white supremacy that "continue to be drivers of hate violence against Black Americans" (US Commission on Civil Rights 2019, 88). In Washington, D.C., visually artistic efforts have been undertaken by BLM supporters to assert proclivity toward Black lives. Doing so in the highly recognized "nation's capital" is groundbreaking, resulting in Google Maps' adjustment to capture the mural from their satellites (Locker 2020). The bold yellow letters displaying the movement's phrase seen also in California and other places further emphasize the continued need for regarding and centering Black lives, particularly as yellow is typically used in society to encourage caution and care (e.g., traffic lights, traffic lines on streets, and school buses). These public displays of artwork supporting the movement shine a light on racism, a problem that many white and non-Black liberals thought was over, as mentioned in *Demonic Grounds* (McKittrick 2006). In alignment with the hope of its founders, BLM will promote Black Liberation, including a heightened focus on intersectionality within Blackness, such as the concerns of LGBTIQ+, disabled, and other minoritized aspects of identity (Garza 2014). It shall not be a fad but rather a way of life.

The Next Wave of Environmental Justice: Environmental Injustice and COVID-19

Environmental injustice is the inequitable distribution of power over land-use decisions in marginalized communities (Taylor 2014). Historically, environmental

injustice has been characterized by BIPOC communities carrying an uneven environmental burden from things such as toxic waste dumping, factories releasing massive amounts of air pollution, and contaminants being released into the waterways (Taylor 2014). These concerns sparked the environmental justice movement. In the United States, the environmental justice movement was launched by a historically Black community in Warren County, North Carolina, battling chemical waste in their community for decades (Bullard 2008). This movement stands in stark contrast to the predominant environmental movement, which assumes a middle-class white positionality and is often thought to have been launched in 1962 by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. While the dominant environmental movement touches on the health impacts of pollution, it centers more on the preservation of nature and wildlife. The environmental justice movement, on the other hand, centers the experiences of minoritized people and the ways in which the environment is used as a tool for further marginalization and oppression. In recent years, the concept of environmental injustice has been expanded to include concerns such as marginalized communities having a longer and more difficult recovery period from natural disasters, small-island developing countries being the worst hit by the effects of climate change despite contributing the least to it, parks and greenspace being of poorer quality in low-income communities, marginalized neighborhoods having limited energy options at unaffordable prices, and, as described earlier, policing and prison ecology. As a result, a number of spin-off movements have grown from environmental justice, such as energy justice, food justice, climate justice, greenspace justice, and green criminology. Additionally, as this article asserts, environmental justice must also consider the interconnected histories of institutional racism that contribute to how environmental injustice is manifested.

In 2020, a new wave of environmental injustice has occurred—dare we call it pandemic injustice? Not only are Black and brown people being disproportionately plagued by COVID-19 and contracting it at higher-than-average rates in prisons, but now there are environmental implications as well. The West End Revitalization Association (WERA), located in Alamance County, North Carolina, submitted an urgent COVID-19 response request to the U.S. House of Representatives with the signatures of a number of individuals and organizations calling for environmental injustice from COVID-19 to be addressed. In this way, WERA has taken action toward reform in favor of environmental justice. The medical waste that has resulted from coronavirus support has been discarded in Black and brown communities across the country. Further, we know that workers living in these very communities are more likely to be dubbed "essential" (a quick turn from the formerly "low-skilled" label) and do not have the opportunity to work remotely or in some cases to work at all (Saraiva and Rockeman 2020). In 2020, prisons were some of the worst-hit places by the COVID-19 pandemic, putting the lives of many inmates at risk (Saloner et al. 2020), while their families are simultaneously and disproportionately impacted by the virus "on the outside" (Dyer 2020). In hospitals too, Black and brown folks are primarily the ones called

on to dispose of medical waste as a part of their work duties and thus are subject to more exposure. This is all while Black and brown people were dying from COVID-19 at the highest rates compared to other racial groups (Johnson and Buford 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, experts have voiced the importance of spending time in nature for mental and physical health purposes. For the Black community, we find that this suggestion is easier said than done, as shown in the following section, which illustrates how environmental racism is about more than natural resources; it is also about the racism that occurs in the human habitat.

"Shared" Space as a Battleground

In 2020, the world began to deal with unprecedented times. Not only have we been in the midst of a global pandemic, but the Black community in the United States is also dealing with a flashlight being shone on centuries-long oppression. While the global pandemic has caused much harm to the people of the world, it has also caused a slowdown in our fast-paced, first-world society, making space for non-Black people to notice the racism that they previously had the privilege of ignoring. One of the original manifestations of that oppression is the existence of public spaces as racist battlegrounds. Since before the founding of the United States, space has been racialized and contested based on racist ideologies of who belongs and who needs to be restricted in terms of both access and freedom of movement. From the robbing of land from Indigenous peoples to create national and state parks to the patrolling of Black and brown people simply trying to enjoy these parks, space has never been shared.

Dispossessing the Wilderness lays forth the argument that "wilderness preservation went hand in hand with native dispossession" (Spence 1999, 3). Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the U.S. federal government and its advocates constructed and pushed for public land management rooted in white superiority and dominance as caretakers and "deserving" users of the parks. For example, the lands seized to create Yellowstone National Park were declared unoccupied despite the park's active use by several tribes and bands, including the Shoshone, Crow, Blackfeet, and Sheep Eater. This land theft for the supposed "greater good" was not limited to the establishment of national parks. Many other so-called public spaces the United States touts as successes are the result of land theft. The 1862 Morrill Act, which is celebrated for its establishment of a nationwide network of public universities, was predicated on the seizure and unratified treaties of Indigenous lands from almost 250 tribal communities (Lee and Tristan 2020). In 1857, Seneca Village—a thriving, Manhattan village built by Black freed men—was demolished to build the infamous Central Park (Gilligan 2017).

Contemporary scholars continue to critique not just the oppressive histories of land and space but also the ways Black and brown folks continue to be monitored, restricted, and abused (Finney 2014; Hoover and Lim 2020; McKittrick 2011; McKittrick and Woods 2015; Porter et al. 2020). For example,

a common ecological concept termed the "tragedy of the commons" can also be viewed through similar analyses of shared space (Hardin, 1968) The tragedy of the commons describes the notion that if shared space exists with unregulated use, individuals will maximize their own production on the land, to the detriment of those sharing the land (Hardin 1968). In *Outdoor Recreation: An Introduction*, Plummer (2009) introduces the concept of the "tragedy of the recreation commons" as a phenomenon that describes the expectations people have regarding how and when they go out to enjoy the outdoors or nature, such as national parks. Often, what people enjoy most about parks is the ability to connect with the environment and the peace and serenity that those spaces provide (and perhaps the expectation that they will not be accosted based on the color of their skin). This results in the inability of some people to enjoy the benefits of parks due to the ventures of others. In the same way the tragedy of the commons rests on an idea of "shared space" being unshareable, the tragedy of the recreational commons rests on the expectations that white park-goers have in interacting with a "natural" space that is devoid of any people of color to accost them and spoil their enjoyment of the "wilderness."

The expectation of who cares for nature, who deserves to have experiences and relationships with nature, and how they experience nature have been managed by white expectations of wilderness, aesthetics, and control. The predictability of whites policing Black people in public spaces to maintain their white supremacy is exhausting yet persistent. Christian Cooper, a Black man and avid bird-watcher, was a victim of the intersection of this tragedy of the recreation commons and white supremacy. While birding in a park, Mr. Cooper asked Amy Cooper (no relation), a white womxn, to leash her dog (per park regulations). Amid her angry refusal and in retaliation for having her whiteness and privilege challenged, she threatened to call the police and followed through with it to report a Black man "threatening her life" (Hoover and Lim 2020). Dr. Carolyn Finney discusses both the experiences of being stopped by park police while leading a group of Black womxn on a hike in a national park and the erasure of her father's forty-year career as the caretaker of a multi-acre property in upstate New York (Finney 2020). Roz Joseph fell victim to this dangerous intersection as well while riding her bike when she was accosted by a white man in Palm Beach, Florida. Ahmaud Arbery was a victim of this vicious intersection when he was taking a run through a residential neighborhood and was brutally murdered by a racist white father and son. These folks and countless Black folks have fallen victim to this harsh intersection in recreational spaces or by merely existing in public space, being antagonized, abused, spit on, or otherwise molested by white oppressors.

An important point to note, however, are the ways Black and brown people have tended to and continue to make the land our home, carving out physical, emotional, and relational spaces to call our own. For example, in satirical response to Christian Cooper's assault and his own personal interactions with whites, Walter Kitandu, also a Black man, composed an "advisory warning" for his white neighbors, "warning" of a man [himself] who is both a birder AND Black

likely to be seen roaming the community with binoculars (Hoover and Lim 2020). In Black geographies, the works of Katherine McKittrick (2013, 2014), Ashanté Reese (2019), and many others paved the way for a reclamation and celebration of what "shared" space means to us. Shared space represents harmony between the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental presence of beings. Furthermore, shared space allows for equity and longevity for both the land and the community who occupies it.

Shared space will continue to be ground zero for battles, as "we cannot have a conversation about sustainability, about any piece of land, unless we [all humans] have dealt with our relationships with each other" (Finney 2020). History shows the way "nature" and "preservation" have consistently served Western and white ideals and principles. What is different in the quest for a "shared planet"? What evidence from the past or present suggests that future shared spaces will somehow be managed differently than past transgressions? White supremacy has proven itself to be unreliable and unwilling to share resources, especially if it means prioritizing the needs of Black, brown, and Indigenous peoples and communities. With this understanding, conversations of climate change, justice, and mitigation become increasingly and intentionally violent when they fail to engage racism, colonialism, and white supremacy.

Hope for a Shared Planet? Black Is the Landscape, Black Is the Cultivator

Reform is so interwoven into the revolutions of real life that no actual example has realized the advanced state of peace and technological achievement as illustrated in *Black Panther*'s Wakanda. The film is a brilliant showcase in Black, Pan-African ownership and Black geographies, a reimagining of Black life sans white supremacy and anti-Black racism, a Black life rich in love, intelligence, ownership, and shared resources. As climate change disproportionately ravages the communities of Black and brown people (Martinez 2020), we build on the aforementioned discussions and look toward the future through the vision of *Black Panther*. The tragedy of the recreation commons plays out on a bigger stage as we critically analyze the impacts of climate change and broader society's propositions for climate change mitigation. An irony of the tragedy of the commons surrounds the simultaneous projecting of a narrative of communal neglect and disregard for shared resources while reinforcing the erasure of the many Black womxn who are often the caretakers of these spaces. But Marvel's *Black Panther* promotes Black womxn as creators and sustainers of technological advancements of Wakanda. Our focus on *Black Panther* aligns with the vision of Black womxn being uplifted and powerful, especially when considering earlier science fiction by authors such as Octavia Butler and her *Dawn* series. *Black Panther* follows the story line of T'challa (played by the late Chadwick Boseman) and his acquiring of the kingdom of Wakanda. The movie blatantly asserts the idea that without Black womxn, there would not be a Black Panther or a Wakanda. It also seamlessly minimizes yet examines the damaging

impact of white influence. For instance, the film showcases the villain focused on harvesting vibranium for global dominance along with another who undergoes a change of heart in his alliance. In this way, the film also broaches the topic of environmental racism.

To Be Continued: An Afrofuturistic Vision of Coalition Building and Change

Freedom is a city in Georgia founded by nineteen families who purchased almost 100 acres of land in coalition with one another with the intention of creating a safe city for Black people in response to the slaying of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd (Moorwood 2020). This initiative began with two Black womxn hoping to create a safe space for their relatives, again emphasizing the reality of Black womxn providing the fortitude and determination for a future of freedom through building alliances and change (Kirkland 2020). The city of Freedom represents a precedent of our Afro-futuristic vision of coalition building and change. Throughout the pages of this article, we provided a thorough outline detailing our understanding of environment and environmentalisms that transcends common interpretations of environmental burdens. We challenged monolithic perspectives regarding nature and documented experiences within unshared spaces by detailing the workings of the criminal justice system and land use, and we discussed our Afro-futuristic vision of shared spaces. Thus, we encourage and necessitate an Afrocentric uprising to channel our ancestral energy to deconstruct contemporary society and rebuild it into something equitable, communal, and just.

We imagine a world apart from a world that has been devastating for Black people due to villainous crack, as mentioned in the film *Brown Girl Begins*, directed by Sharon Lewis. In the film, there is a tension between different groups of Black people in how to respond. One faction wants a holistic plan for combating the health effects of the villain, one seeks to stir revolution and use violent tactics to overthrow the villain, and the last seeks reform by befriending the villain. Liken these three approaches to the state of Black America as outlined above. Getting in good with the oppressor is a tactic that has been used for hundreds of years. During original Black American enslavement, some Black people were tapped as overseers, while others had a place in the big house. Today, a subset of Black folks has been seen publicly supporting oppressors such as those who hold political office. These actions have not gotten them on the path to liberation—quite the opposite, in fact, for the oppressor always retains the upper hand.

Now imagine the health-focused healing approach. This approach centers individual self-care within a world that has been neither revolutionized nor reformed. Flash back again to the original Black American enslavement. Imagine a Black person beaten or raped, as triggering as it may be. There have always been healers in the community who were there to ease the pain (e.g., shamans, herbalists, and pastors). However, when does the pain stop? When can we cease picking up the pieces and stop the break from happening in the first place?

Today, many have taken up roles as midwives, counselors, social workers, or other healers. This has worked to some degree; for example, Black babies are three times less likely to die when cared for by nonwhite doctors. But what about those who don't have the luxury of access to these resources? This approach still leaves something to be desired.

Finally, there has always been a faction that advocates for overthrowing the system. In the days of the original Black American enslavement, some enslaved people like Harriet Tubman led hundreds of Black folks north to freedom. Then there was Nat Turner, who led a rebellion of seventy-five enslaved Black individuals in which sixty white people were killed over the course of two days in a battle for their freedom, later depicted in the film *The Birth of a Nation* (2016). Recall also brother Kunta Kinte, who tried repeatedly to run away until his foot was mutilated to cease the rebellion. Although fictional, this character is an archetype for enslaved Black men who were persistent in seeking freedom.

Imagine now the youth who have staged walkouts from their schools to protest the ways adults disregard climate change, to rally for the Earth that they shall inherit. Is it any less warranted than Harriet Tubman's "walkout" of the racist South? Imagine, too, when organizers in Atlanta, Chicago, and Los Angeles, among others, have risen up and begun looting the cities of the overseer. Is it so unlike the rebellion of Nat Turner? Recall the three Los Angeles transwomxn chasing their attackers to recover their stolen property. Is it any less brave than enslaved Black men running for their lives? There is a dire need for revolution, a revolution that will require the following strategies, among others, to be brainstormed to develop the foundation of a new system, a new Black America:

- Finding words to label and advocate against inevitable inequitable circumstances that may arise, for addressing problems must begin with naming them and acknowledging their harm
- Identifying and recognizing the perpetuation of the white gaze, a Eurocentric lens used to promote acceptance of some Black or otherwise marginalized individuals over others (a concept discussed in *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am* [2019]) so as to combat internalized behaviors of discrimination (Yancy 2016)
- Pinpointing and increasing sensitivity to the pervasiveness of misogynoir, the gender and racial oppression of transgender and cisgender Black womxn (Bailey 2021)
- Studying historical evidence relating to Black revolution worldwide (e.g., the first Black revolution in Haiti, Garveyism and the Liberia program, etc.)
- Allowing Black and otherwise racially minoritized groups to hold space with another, without the fear, confusion, and questioning of white audiences (Tatum 2017)
- Bringing to bear the demands of the Seventeen Principles of Environmental Justice and adding to them principles related to dismantling

> the prison supersystem and disallowing pandemic injustice (First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit 1991)

Now let us envision the future. A future in which a Black baby's chance of survival is no longer dependent on the race of their mother's doctor. A future in which land is no longer stripped from Black and Indigenous folks like the dignity was once stripped from so many young Black and Indigenous girls who went missing and no one came looking for (Mayes 2017). A future in which "since racist criminalisation is the foundation of the U.S. prison system and environmental racism/injustice is a form of criminalisation, then one means of practicing radical environmental justice politics would include an embrace of abolition" (Pellow 2021, 4). A future in which it doesn't take a social media campaign to taste a small bite of the fruits of justice. A future in which onlookers actually intervene when they see a hate crime against a Black human being or a brown human being or a transgender human being instead of recording it on their phone. Better still is a future in which those hate crimes don't exist in the first place. A future in which a Black man can rest instead of working for years through his illness and having to hide it to appear strong. A future in which a Black womxn can have "one damn job instead of five or six" (Cottom 2018, 31). We call for an Afrocentric uprising in which we channel the energy of our ancestors to deconstruct the ever-flawed society of today and rebuild it into something new, beautiful, and just.

Note

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Picturing a World Without Prisons

Mariame Kaba

The U.S. is a prison nation. There is no other society in the history of humanity that has imprisoned more people. Over 2.2 million people are incarcerated in this country; representing an over 500% increase since 1970. Yet research and anecdotal evidence show that incarceration makes people worse and does not improve public safety. Instead of spending money on drug treatment programs, meaningful employment initiatives, health care, affordable housing, and public education, our tax dollars funnel the most vulnerable populations into the prison system so that they may languish with little-to-no access to needed resources. This is not justice. Nor is it humane. We believe that this must change.

We must dismantle the prison industrial complex. In order to do so, we have to envision what a world without prison can and should look like so that we can build that world together.

Through this exhibit, which brings together the visions of incarcerated youth and people on the outside, we want to engage the public in imagining a world without prisons with us.

This exhibition was curated by Project NIA and Free Write Jail Arts & Literacy Program.

It ran from November 11th through December 6th, 2013 at the HumanThread Center/Gallery for Nonviolence, Arts & Education, 1200 W. 35th Street (Bridgeport Art Center, 5th floor), Chicago, Illinois.

https://aworldwithoutprisons.tumblr.com/archive

0026-3079/2020/5904-023$2.50/0 American Studies, 60.3/4 (2021)

Cabrini Coulda Been (2013)

Photo & Statement by Veronica Stein
Found Images: sustainable community design illustration superimposed upon former Cabrini Green site

I experience a visceral reaction in my gut as I pass by the new Target store built upon the site of the former Cabrini Green housing project. I love Target. I get so much satisfaction browsing those spacious, neatly stocked aisles covered in red polka dots, filled with alluring items. I regularly convince myself they are my life's necessities. It's almost as though my conscious mind becomes brainwashed upon entering the store, and the problematic nature of "Made in Vietnam" tags do not influence my willingness to make a purchase. However this new Target is different. This Target I refuse to enter. This Target sparks my imagination of what this site coulda been. If residents were considered privileged community stakeholders, Cabrini Green might have offered affordable housing and included communal establishments such as the Cabrini Freedom School, The Cabrini Peoples Law Office, The Museum of the African Diaspora, The Center for Transformative and Restorative Justice, The Cabrini Center for Youth Advancement, The Cabrini Community Garden, The Cabrini Senior Center, The Cabrini Technology Education Center, The Cabrini Community Food Coop, The Cabrini Public Library, The Cabrini Center of Continuing Education, The Cabrini Center for Medicine and Wellness… This coulda been a site filled with public art, fountains, gardens, a movie theater, independent shopping establishments, sport and exercise facilities; all powered by solar and sustainable energy sources. In a world without prisons, this is what Cabrini Green coulda been. In a world consumed by a prison industrial complex contingent upon the restriction of fundamental human and community resources, this site is now a Target. This time, I refuse to enter.

I Believe, Assata

Photos & Statement by Silvia Inés Gonzalez

Photo 1: Living and Birth
Photo 2: Sweat of Love, Fire of Truth
Photo 3: Seeds grow: Sprouts grow: Trees

I experienced a sensitivity and awareness of light for a fraction of time, as light poetically embodied the concept of hope. The light will never be the exact same as it was that day. Its transformation allows a new narrative. We must continue to redevelop those narratives, believing what light, at a particular moment, can reveal of love, of our existence, of our truths. I believe in a world of vision and hope.

Writing excerpts featured on the photographs are taken from Assata Shakur's poem, "I believe."


Homemade
LOVE
bell hooks
Simon & Kids

"Picturing a World without Prisons"

Photo and statement by Sarah Jane Rhee, Cadence, & Mariame Kaba

It was Victor Hugo who said: "He who opens a school door closes a prison." It is therefore surreal to live in Chicago in 2013 where we just experienced the single largest mass closure of schools in American history. Rahm Emanuel & his hand-picked school board shuttered 49 schools, displacing over 30,000 children, mostly Black. If we believe Hugo, this means that Chicago has opened the door to 50 new prisons.

So when we envision a world without prisons, we think of children reading piles of books for pleasure. We think of them getting lost in imaginary lands, dreaming of all of the adventures they'll have. A world without prisons is one where there is no ceiling placed on children's imaginations… It's a world where we close the doors of prisons and open ones to new schools. Preferably schools near water & sand…