

**ENTANGLEMENTS: PLACE-BASED LITERATURES FOR ECOLOGICAL
LIBERATION**

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Abstract

Resource extraction has devastating impact on human and more-than-human environments. My dissertation, *Entanglements: Place-Based Literatures for Ecological Liberation*, examines the effects of extractivist violence on both humans and nonhumans through literary texts set in South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. The six texts that I analyze represent specific forms of environmental devastation and land loss in specific places. More crucially, these texts show that environmental issues, even when they are universally recognizable, are rooted in particular places and are entangled in their related cultural, political, and ecological histories. Using a place-based framework, I argue that human and nonhuman animal lives often intersect and the common threat of extractivism produces precarity that cannot be compartmentalized.

My dissertation focuses on literatures from the Global South, where the specter of colonialism and its ongoing extractive practices disrupt and permanently alter indigenous ecologies, along with human-nonhuman interdependencies and epistemologies. Each chapter explores traumatic, long-term fractures produced in non-Western communities through violent Eurocentric modes of control and investigates the implications of this fragmentation for both human and nonhuman inhabitants using place-based theories. The first chapter, “Knowing a Place,” examines Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (2000), and analyzes how historical (and ongoing forms of) colonial violence destabilizes both geographical and temporal boundaries of a place with consequences for the displaced. The next chapter, “Relating to a Place,” analyzes two Caribbean Bildungsromane, Jan Carew’s *Black Midas* (1958) and Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), and traces the effects of alienation caused by colonialism on both a nation and its atomized subjects. The final chapter, “Inhabiting a

Place,” focuses on narrative techniques, specifically the use of an animal point-of-view, in Barbara Gowdy’s *The White Bone* (1998) and Tania James’ *The Tusk That Did the Damage* (2015), both of which creatively inhabit animals’ minds, and explore how nonhuman place-worlds intersect with human ones, resulting in conflict but also in opportunities for cooperation. The texts are paired carefully to substantiate the centrality of place in literary analysis and to explore imaginative ways of envisioning resistance to extractivist violence through radical cooperation across differences in race, gender, and species.

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INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial Environmentalism

Much has changed in literary studies since Rob Nixon claimed that “[a] broad silence characterizes most environmentalists’ stance toward postcolonial literature and theory, while postcolonial critics typically remain no less silent on the subject of environmental literature” (“Environmentalism” 233). In part, this silence was perhaps owing to the way “environmental literature” was initially loudly led by North American critics who focused on questions of nature, wilderness, and conservation, which continue to remain pertinent in that part of the world. This is not a criticism of Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm’s important work, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), but a recognition that field-defining frameworks are often conceived narrowly, addressing concerns that are immediate to the critics’ place and time. In the past decade alone, scholars such as Rob Nixon, Cajetan Iheka, Bryon Caminero-Santangelo, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Pablo Mukherjee, Graham Huggan, and Helen Tiffin among others, have expanded the scholarship of environmental literature to include representations of ecological devastation that impacts people in the Global South.

This dissertation joins the ongoing work of investigating literature’s contribution to the study of environment. More narrowly, I examine the way literatures of the Global South respond to the rampant extraction of resources, land, and labor to fuel capitalist expansion. In the ground-breaking work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1973), Walter Rodney states quite simply that, “African and Asian societies were developing independently until they were taken over directly or indirectly by the capitalist powers.¹ When that happened, exploitation increased and *the*

¹ As in, following their own destiny towards independently-envisioned goals.

export of surplus ensued, depriving the societies of the benefit of their natural resources and labour” (25; original italics). As the foremost cause of underdevelopment and ecological destruction in the Global South, resource extraction, its resulting land loss and labor exploitation, is the occasion for this dissertation. Throughout this project, I use “resource extraction” to move beyond the primary focus on extraction of fossil fuels,² natural gas, and minerals and include the commodification of any part of nature that results in impoverishment and harm without any consideration for sustainability, renewability, and justice for humans and nonhumans. The utilization and/or extraction of resources is a regular aspect of human activity for the purposes of subsistence to ensure the continued progression of human society. However, in this dissertation, resource extraction (unless specified otherwise) is a reference to the imperialist exploitation that accelerated extraction and the export of resources for capitalist profit which steadily deprive(d) and impoverish(ed) societies. As part of the project of postcolonial environmentalism, this dissertation examines literary works from the late 20th and 21st centuries to foreground the environmental issues they raise and to reassert their continued significance. Mining, poaching, and capitalist labor extraction are some of the key issues I analyze through three pairs of texts—Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (2000); Jan Carew’s *Black Midas* (1958) and Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987); and Barbara Gowdy’s *The White Bone* (1998) and Tania James’ *The Tusk That Did the Damage* (2015). Through a critical examination of narrative time, place, and voice in the above pairs, respectively, I delve into the ways the violence of extraction impacts humans and more-than-humans in the Global South.

² See Joan Martinez-Alier, et al’s “Is there a global environmental justice movement?” (2016). See also Macarena Gómez-Barris’ *The Extractive Zone* (2017), in which she explores the “material and immaterial forms” of extraction that “[converts] Indigeneity into exchange value, where intellectual and spiritual resources are taken to produce new forms of colonial currency” (10).

Entanglements as a Literary Argument

My central argument is that both humans and nonhumans are impacted in devastating ways by the capitalist project of extracting surplus. This attention to the entangled relationship between humans and nonhumans, I argue in this dissertation, is indispensable when addressing ecological devastation across the globe, and especially in the Global South, where human and nonhuman animal lives often intersect and are made precarious by the common threat of extractivism. In *Naturalizing Africa: Ecological Violence, Agency, and Postcolonial Resistance in African Literature* (2018), Cajetan Iheka notes the paucity of scholarship that engages with both humans and nonhumans (broadly referring to animals, plants, soil, forest, and abiotic factors) without solely privileging a human perspective. He cautions that “placing a premium on human lives to the detriment of Others carries the risk of reifying the anthropocentrism that leads to ecological disasters in the first place” (2). Although Iheka’s work focuses on African literature, his central assertion advocating for the recognition of nonhuman agency remains valid for the rest of the Global South where humans and nonhumans are inextricably caught up together in moments of ecological crises, finding themselves either at odds with each other or forming uneasy alliances to resist a common threat.

That humans and nonhumans are “entangled” in a complex relationship with each other is now recognized in many environmental fields in both humanities and in the sciences.³ In *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction* (2004), Paul Robbins claims that:

Material characteristics of non-human nature and its components (dung,

³ See the field-defining works of Donna Haraway’s *When Species Meet* (2008) and Karen Barad’s *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007).

climate, refrigerators, bacteria, lawn grass, road salt, goats, and tropical soils) impinge upon the world of human struggles and are entwined within them, and so are inevitably political. Yet as these characteristics and agents assume new roles and take on new importance, they are also transformed by these interactions. (23)

In a similar vein, the literary theorist, Stacy Alaimo uses the term “trans-corporeality” to argue that, “Emphasizing the material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world...allows us to forge ethical and political positions that can contend with numerous late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century realities in which ‘human’ and ‘environment’ can by no means be considered as separate” (*Bodily Natures* 2). According to Robbins and Alaimo, among other materialist theorists, recognizing nonhuman agency⁴ is only the first step in understanding the myriad ways in which humans shape the nonhuman world and are, in turn, shaped by their actions. Min Hyung Song, a climate theorist, envisions a “shared agency” where the now democratized notion of human agency leads to political action, towards actually mitigating the current climate crisis.⁵ There are yet others who argue that the concept of “entanglements” has led to an “analysis paralysis” of sorts, which does not always translate to much-needed political action. In *What Comes After Entanglement?* (2019), Eva Giraud worries that “Irreducible complexity...can prove paralyzing and disperse responsibilities in ways that undermine scope for political action”

⁴I utilize the concept of agency that the sociologist, Bruno Latour, developed in Actor-Network Theory. According to Latour, agency quite simply means the capacity to act, impact and influence human lives (with or without intention) that emerges from a set of behaviors.

See also Stacy Alaimo’s essay “Trans-corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature,” in which Alaimo tackles the problem of defining and recognizing the agency of nonhuman nature.

⁵ See Song’s latest work, *Climate Lyricism*.

(2). This is why, I believe, that literary fiction is particularly well-suited for demystifying complex environmental issues that appear to have no apparent cause or point of origin by narrativizing quite simply: who did what? Who was affected by whom? Obviously, not all stories clarify causal mechanisms, but my analysis of the texts chosen for this project *disentangles* the problem of extraction and explains what is at stake and for whom.

Why Place Studies?

Place is the framework I use to examine human-nonhuman relationships affected by extractive violence. As environmental issues are rooted in specific ecological practices, politics, cultures, and history, and also vary widely in nature and severity, defining a “postcolonial environmentalism” becomes a problem of scope. Given that the novels in this dissertation are set in South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean—where colonialism and its afterlives operate in distinct ways—place serves as a dynamic frame that can be adapted for widely disparate contexts. A platial framework allows me to analyze “postcolonial literatures”—an umbrella term that brings into its fold texts which vary widely in their specific histories and geographies—and to stay cognizant of various power differentials at work to avoid producing flattened ontologies. At the same time, I am careful not to reproduce counterproductive binaries of global versus the local. As Anna Tsing points out rightly, global networks and relationships are embodied and enacted in particular places,⁶ and, thus, a meaningful critical framework telescopes to see how the local and the global inform and constitute each other.

The theoretical and methodological spark for my dissertation comes from the

⁶ See Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s *Friction : An Ethnography of Global Connection*.

famous essay, “After Nature: Steps to an Antiessentialist Political Ecology,” by the anthropologist, Arturo Escobar, in which he outlines how nature is better understood as a set of relationships that different actors have with their environment (as opposed to the idea of a fixed, unchanging, and objective nature). To illustrate his point, Escobar crafts a “narrative of nature” (4) set in a rain forest on the Pacific Coast of Colombia and portrays a fictive environmental crisis with three actors or characters: 1) the local Black and Indigenous communities; 2) a capitalist developer; and 3) a techno-biologist. According to Escobar, these actors “embody significantly different regimes of articulation of the historical and the biological,” which he terms as “organic nature, capitalist nature, and techno-nature respectively” (5). These three actors have their own relationship with nature and may compete or cooperate with each other in their access to natural resources. Escobar admits that “the knowledge we have at our disposal for examining each regime is uneven and differentiated” (6) and proposes different areas of study for each regime. What Escobar does not consider, and what this dissertation offers, is the role of literary studies in examining the various interrelationships with nature. What better way to study the motivations of various characters and the way they negotiate conflicts than through literary fiction? Literature may not have all the answers to anthropogenic environmental issues, but I assert that it is indispensable in making legible the messiness of such a tentacular issue with global implications. Instead of, yet again, boxing away the study of environmental issues into separate disciplines, literature can bring them all together on the same page and open up creative possibilities for co-operative knowledge-sharing.

Examining the interrelationship between human and nonhuman nature that is severely fractured by the violence of extraction is still too broad a scope for this dissertation. I use a platial framework to sharpen my focus on specific environmental situations that evince various

responses from the human and nonhuman actors who inhabit a place. For instance, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) draws attention to the ongoing issue of tiger conservation in the Sundarbans, where refugees who have settled on a few islands deal with threats from the proximate tiger population, as well as by forest guards enforcing unjust laws in the name of conservation. The three main characters—the local fisherman, an out of place translator, a cosmopolitan biologist—could very well be actors in Escobar's own illustration. Each character has a unique relationship with the Sundarbans, examining which reveals how deeply everyone's life is shaped by the place. The novel offers “thick descriptions” of the place that poses unique challenges to humans and nonhumans. Each character navigates this treacherous terrain with life-altering consequences for all inhabitants. Centering place offers new ways to understand the motivations of the primary stakeholders and reveals the complexity of the conservation issue without privileging one perspective over another.

Place is not a new framework. It is well-established in cultural anthropology where the ethnographic method is rooted in the particular and often in place. Most notable among cultural anthropologists is Keith H. Basso, whose foundational text, *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996), offers a cohesive theory of place based on his study of the relationship that Western Apache people in Cibecue have with their place. I borrow his term “place-world,” which he defines as “a particular universe of objects and events” (6) and envision, for instance, what nonhuman place-worlds look like. My project also draws inspiration from the works of the place philosopher, Edward Casey, for whom phenomenology is the way to make sense of how humans inhabit a place. He challenges the conception of place as a rigid, fixed, passive location outside of human relationships where

meaning is created and argues, instead, that we are “in concordance”⁷ with place in a reciprocal relationship. Central to this dissertation are also the concerns of Marxist geographers like David Harvey⁸ and Neil Smith⁹ who explore the production/alteration of material environment by capitalism.

However, my aim here is not merely to apply a platial framework to literary fiction and synthesize the results. One of the main objectives of this dissertation is to examine the representation of places—mainly, places that are subjected to extraction—and to theorize their contribution to Place Studies. The texts that I examine here represent places that are in conflict, where the violence of extraction ruptures interdependencies among humans and nonhumans producing disruptions in ways of life and knowledge-systems, which, even if originally imperfect, were far more sustainable than ones that form under extraction conditions. From the Sundarbans in *The Hungry Tide*, to Qolorha in Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (2000), and to Cockpit Country in Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), the texts in this dissertation are set in particular places laden with historical and cultural significance. Even Tania James’ novel, *The Tusk That Did the Damage* (2004), although set in the fictional sanctuary of Kavanar, remains true to the ecology of Periyar National Park as it narrativizes the issues of poaching that beset the park and its surrounding villages. Although a platial framework may be readily deployed in novels that are “placed” in specific geographies, I chose these texts for their complex representation of environmental issues that are relevant for my discussion here. My analysis of the above texts demonstrates the importance of centering place in making visible the complex systemic factors that

⁷ *Getting Back Into Place* (1993).

⁸ See, for instance, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (1996).

⁹ Mainly, *Uneven Development* (2008).

create environmental conflicts.

Narrative Connections and Chapter Summaries

The texts in this dissertation are set in postcolonial South Asia, South Africa, and Caribbean, where colonialism continues to cast its shadow in varying shapes and degree. Given the vast differences in geography, time periods, and political situations of these texts, it is, perhaps, more appropriate to group them under the umbrella of “literatures of the Global South,” which draw attention, not to a geographical location, but to oppressive conditions produced under global capitalism and its logic of extraction. Each text, in some way, exposes this logic and struggles to articulate a suitable response. Each chapter focuses on a pair of texts where I show how the first text in the pair poses a problem or a limitation to a particular environmental situation and the second text offers a complementary or an alternative way of thinking about it. Using a platial framework for each paired reading, I explore what liberatory potentials open up when texts envision cooperation and alliances with nonhuman nature.

The first chapter, “Knowing a Place,” examines two works that I am referring to as historical fiction (quite simply because each novel is invested in recalling/retelling a local history)—Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (2000). Here, I lay the groundwork for place theory that I build upon in later chapters. The threat of wildlife poaching which necessitates the need for animal conservation is the common context for both novels. Ghosh’s novel relates the history of a massacre on one of the islands in the Sundarbans and paints a sympathetic picture of the precarity of the villagers. But, while *Hungry Tide* is unable to offer a closure or a resolution that benefits both humans and nonhumans, Mda’s novel explores

how the trauma of a massacre is deployed in a resistance movement in the present day. In this chapter, I ask: what do edges of a place and a narrative have in common? Focusing on the material and metaphorical interrelationship of edges, I attempt to define what constitutes “place knowledge.” I analyze the ways in which extractive violence destabilizes both geographical and temporal boundaries of a place (where knowledge is produced) with consequences for the displaced.

The next chapter, “Relating to a Place,” analyzes two Caribbean Bildungsromane, Jan Carew’s *Black Midas* (1958) and Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), and inter-links the development of a place with the formation of the main character. I argue that the historical processes that alter the landscape of a place are not a backdrop for human drama but that the two are co-constituted. Carew’s novel portrays the gradual fragmentation of the main character’s subjectivity as he carries on with gold extraction in Guyana. Aron’s loss of autonomy is not a metaphor for the underdevelopment of Guyana but rather a symptom of the latter. Carew’s novel ends on a bleak note with Aron’s isolation and complete downfall. I pair Carew’s novel with Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven* in which Clare Savage, a biracial woman, overcomes her feelings of isolation and her crisis of identity by drawing inspiration from maroon history and joining a group of guerrilla fighters. Plantation slavery, with its long history of transforming the relationship between enslaved people and the landscape through stolen labor of the former, is the historical context for both novels. However, while Aron internalizes racism and participates in the ongoing impoverishment of the land through unsustainable extraction, Clare learns to care for the place, and ally with it to resist modern iterations of a familiar oppressive system.

The final chapter, “Inhabiting a Place,” focuses on two animal narratives,

specifically their use of an animal point-of-view. Both Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone* (1998) and Tania James' *The Tusk That Did the Damage* (2015) creatively inhabit animals' minds and explore how nonhuman place-worlds intersect with human ones, resulting in conflict but also opportunities for cooperation. *The White Bone* is an immensely popular "serious" novel in the genre of animal narratives. It portrays the lives of elephants dealing with the constant threat of poaching, food scarcity, and other environmental conditions that affect their everyday lives and their social formations. But the novel is almost entirely devoid of particular place markers, setting the elephants, instead, in an abstract African landscape. While this hyperfocus on the elephants does paint a sympathetic (or rather, sentimental) picture, the novel is unable to view them as political actors. James' novel, on the other hand, by switching between three perspectives, one of which is an elephant's, is able to explore the complexities of poaching and conservation. I assert that, despite the problematics of anthropomorphism, it is a powerful tool in rendering an entangled environmental problem as well as envisioning an alliance with nonhumans.

The three chapters together represent the threats of extraction and land loss experienced by both humans and nonhumans but I shift the focus in each to enlarge and draw attention to a narrower part of this entangled relationship. Though Place Studies traditionally privileges "staying put,"¹⁰ I show what it means for humans and nonhumans to inhabit a troubled, unsettled, and exploited place, from which springs the radical possibility for resistance and change.

¹⁰ See Horwitz, Jennifer. *Relearning the Earth: Place-Based Educations in American Literature*. 2021. Tufts University, PhD. dissertation.

Chapter One: Knowing a Place

Historical Fiction: Time and Conflict in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

In *Forest of Tigers: People, Politics and Environment in the Sundarbans* (2009), the anthropologist, Annu Jalais calls the people of the Sundarbans, “environmental determinists,” because of their strong belief that the harsh, barren, cyclone-prone place shapes not just the behavior of people but also the moods of tigers. And, reciprocally, “[the islanders] see themselves as similarly endowed with the capacity to affect the environment and tigers’ natures. For example, the islanders argue that poaching and brutal political dealings ‘pollute’ and transform the forest into a violent place” (8). The islanders, not through their own volition, inhabit a place that puts them in close proximity to tigers and other endangered species that face threats from pirates and poachers in addition to other natural threats. The result is as much a humanitarian crisis as it is a crisis in conservation.

My first chapter focuses, in part, on Amitav Ghosh's novel, *The Hungry Tide*, which portrays this uneasy coexistence between humans and nonhumans in the Sundarbans. The novel captures the various threats that the islanders and tigers routinely face both from each other and from external factors. Jalais argues that the “cosmopolitan tiger”—the image of the tiger that is circulated globally to attract funds for conservation—is disconnected from the “local ‘Sundarbans tiger’” which is enmeshed in human politics that endanger both animals and low-caste islanders. Ghosh's novel portrays this impossible situation which is further complicated by the tumultuous place that is the Sundarbans.

Ghosh invokes the history of the Morichjhāpi massacre in which more than a

hundred villagers were killed by the state in 1979 after a failed attempt to evict them citing conservation needs. In a parallel narrative, the novel explores the adventures of Piya, a marine biologist and a conservationist, who visits the Sundarbans to study an elusive species of dolphins. Why does Ghosh revive the history of the massacre and weave it with this parallel narrative? What does the narrative accomplish (aesthetically or politically) by yoking together these disparate timelines? I attempt to answer these questions by showing how the narrative functions as an “embankment,” resembling the bādh of the Sundarbans. The purpose of an embankment is to preserve life and, thus, stories—to create an archive for posterity. But the narrative edges, much like the mud banks, are unstable and prone to leakages. Meaning, the history of the place is not in its past but a powerful agent influencing the course of events in the present. Ghosh’s novel struggles to hold up this narrative bādh as the past steadily reshapes the place and its politics in the present.

Mda’s novel, on the other hand, takes this temporal instability as a given by structuring *The Heart of Redness* to mimic the dizziness resulting from temporal confusion. Set in Qolorha, a historic site where, in 1856, the prophetess Nongqawuse ordered the mass killing of cattle as an anti-colonial response to the British invasion of kwaXhosa. The Cattle-Killing movement, as it came to be called locally, brought about widespread famine that decimated the Xhosa population and brought kwaXhosa under British Imperial rule. The descendants of the movement fall into two factions—the Believers (who believed and followed Nongqawuse’s orders) and the Unbelievers (those who were skeptical of the prophecy). In the present day, Qolorha is set to be reshaped by tourism development policies that would bring a significant number of the local population under wage labor. The question that faces the Xhosa people in the present is the same one that faced their ancestors: what form should their resistance take?

Ghosh's novel memorializes a history that is now largely forgotten outside the Sundarbans, but, because little has changed in the circumstances that led to the massacre, it remains a history that haunts the villagers and reminds them of their disposability. In Mda's novel, Qolorha gains popularity and attracts tourist attention because of the Cattle-Killing movement which becomes a spectacular tragedy over time. The villagers plan to mobilize this traumatic history of a "failed" resistance movement to acquire a heritage status for the place, thus warding off (perhaps, only temporarily) foreign control over their land and resources.

By focusing on how the villagers in each novel relate to their place (the Sundarbans in *Hungry Tide* and Qolorha in *Heart of Redness*), this chapter formulates the stakes of knowing a place. In Ghosh's novel, Fokir, the local fisherman, embodies place-knowledge which includes an intricate and intimate understanding of the place as constituted by the people, their history, the animals, the weather, the mythology, etc. Place-knowledge is juxtaposed with Piya's way of viewing the world which is far more systematic through years of scientific study. I am reluctant to draw too fine a distinction between the two because, as the novel itself shows, these perspectives often interpenetrate; the novel does, however, push back on the privileging of a scientific worldview that is abstracted from ground realities. By re-inserting the importance of place-knowledge, especially in issues of conservation and development, *Hungry Tide* makes a political ecological case to recognize the human cost of environmental protections. In *The Heart of Redness*, Qukezwa could be read as Fokir's counterpart who takes it upon herself to protect the place, the animals, birds, forests, along with the people and their traditions, thwarting capitalist attempts to extract/exploit local ecology and culture. But, importantly, each novel avoids essentializing and idealizing place-knowledge by resisting a romantic portrayal of local villagers as environmental-minded. My analysis of the texts

draws attention to the fact that knowing a place does not always translate into environmentalism and that different political actors negotiate their needs primarily to ensure their own continued survival.

Chapter Two: Relating to a Place

The Environmental Bildungsroman: Development and Resistance in Jan Carew's *Black Midas* and

Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*

In her extensive work on the genre of Bildungsroman, Helena Maria Lima explores the reasons for the genre's enduring popularity among postcolonial writers and notes the irony of utilizing a genre that reproduces colonialist ideology and paradoxically limits the growth of the postcolonial subject. Lima argues that "the 'growing up' in the European educational system is also the 'growing away' from traditional social practices, resulting in the post-colonial protagonist's (often permanent) inscription in a cultural Middle Passage" ("Decolonizing Genre" 434). Thus, "questions of identity, pedagogy and power,"¹¹ which are central to a postcolonial Bildungsroman, point to the ways colonialism and slavery shape a subjecthood that is fundamentally formed through trauma and marked by alienation. Importantly, the Caribbean novels that Lima considers were written at a time when countries that newly gained independence from imperial rule were trying to self-define themselves an autonomous nation. Lima argues that, given this political situation of the former colonies, the genre of Bildungsroman is apt allegory for the formation of a nation that parallels the condition of the colonized subject.

In this chapter, I introduce the term "Environmental Bildungsroman" to raise the stakes for a novel of development from individual psychological maturation by showing that the

¹¹ See José Santiago Fernández Vázquez's "Recharting the Geography of Genre: Ben Okri's, *The Famished Road* as a Postcolonial Bildungsroman" (2002).

growth and success of a colonized subject are intertwined with the treatment of the place. While I do not dispute Lima's treatment of the Bildungsroman as an allegory, I argue that, as Environmental Bildungsromane, the texts in this chapter yoke together the psychological development of the protagonist with the materiality of the environment. Nature is neither an unmoving, passive backdrop for the protagonist's actions nor a mirror that reflects back his/her struggles. I analyze the arc of development of Aron Smart in Jan Carew's *Black Midas* (1958) and Clare Savage in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) and assert that the development (or under-development) of the character is directly tied to their relationship with the place they inhabit.

Written at a time when Guyana was still under British occupation, *Black Midas* reflects Carew's anxieties about a country whose resources are extracted for the enrichment of foreign powers at the expense of the Afro-Guyanese subject. Although Carew himself was deeply involved in anti-colonial activism, *Black Midas* is full of foreboding for the Black subject who has endured centuries of dehumanization in the systematically oppressive conditions of plantation slavery and colonialism. Carew's novel narrates the effects of alienation and internalized racism that lead to the undoing of the main character who perpetuates the extractive logic of colonialism. Aron feels angry, alienated, and antagonistic towards a world that he finds impossible to fit-in and thus decides to enrich himself through any means available. He participates in ruthless exploitation of the land through gold mining and makes unscrupulous choices at every turn. It is only towards the end, when the devolution of the character is complete, that Aron realizes he has paid the price for the land's impoverishment with his own humanity.¹²

¹² In *How Nature Works: Rethinking Labor on a Troubled Planet* (2019), Sarah Besky and Alex Blanchette use the term "mutual fragility" to examine how the transformation of nonhuman nature through labor, in turn,

I juxtapose Carew's novel with another Caribbean Bildungsroman, Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*.¹³ Cliff writes *Abeng* (1984) and *NTH* almost two decades after Jamaican Independence from British rule. Unlike Carew's novel, which makes little reference to Guyanese history or politics, Cliff's novels are steeped in Jamaican history of slavery and colonialism. Together, the two novels of development involve Clare's informal education in Jamaican history (mainly Maroon history) which culminates in political action. Cliff's novels incorporate popular criticisms of the democratic socialist Prime Minister, Michael Manley, who, forced by IMF into accepting their economic "reforms," introduced privatization and liberalization policies that squarely benefited the bourgeoisie and exacerbated the poor living conditions of the working class. In one of the moves to increase foreign interest and promote tourism, Manley made it economically attractive for Hollywood to shoot films in Jamaica.¹⁴ In *NTH*, Clare joins a guerrilla group that plans to attack a film-set where an unnamed Anglo-American production crew is filming a Westernized version of Maroon history. Lima describes the guerrilla group's attack as a "symbolic act of revolution" that lacks the momentum and intensity needed for meaningful social transformation. Regardless of the "symbolic" target that Clare's group plans to sabotage, my analysis of *NTH* (particularly when juxtaposed with Carew's novel) shows that it is Clare's reenactment of a part of Maroon history and her positive relationship¹⁵ with the land that allow her to overcome the alienation of "growing away." If Carew's novel explores a negative relationship

transforms the nature of human/labor. In this "ecological relationship," nature acts upon humans, changing the relationship we have with the natural world as well as changing the definition of what it means to be human.

¹³ Which I refer to as *NTH* from here on.

¹⁴ See Novotny Lawrence's *Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s: Blackness and Genre* (2007).

¹⁵ In the chapter, I define in depth what I mean by a "positive relationship." Briefly, it is characterized by the way Jamaican Maroons (especially in Cockpit Country) had an intimate knowledge of the place and how they mobilized this knowledge for subsistence and resistance.

with place where the land is tied to his oppression, Cliff's novel shows how liberation could be possible through a positive relationship with the land.

Chapter Three: Inhabiting a Place

Imagining More-Than-Human Place-Worlds in Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone* and Tania James'

The Tusk That Did the Damage

Places where humans are not present are neither “empty” nor dead. This chapter challenges the notion of viewing the world as populated only when it is inhabited by humans¹⁶ and instead focuses on narratives that represent the world as a lively place even when (or perhaps, especially when) there are no humans around. As Cronon points out in his famous essay, there is no part of the natural world that is “remote from humanity and untouched by our common past” (13). Animals, then, inhabit places dramatically altered by human activity that steadily reorganizes the natural world and shapes the nature of the relationship that nonhumans have with/in it. With or without even *direct* human intervention, nonhuman lives are interlinked with human actions and are changed in the Anthropocene. This chapter looks at novels that offer two different perspectives of imagining the way nonhuman animals inhabit and navigate a changed world.

Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone* (1999) dramatizes the lives of Kenyan elephants

¹⁶ I infer this from Cronon's “The Trouble With Wilderness,” in which he dissects the construction of wilderness as *tabula rasa*—as a space that is unmarked by human presence. The worldview that wilderness is empty space fails to observe the myriad nonhuman lives that are teeming in even seemingly barren places. See also Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, where they discuss the settler colonial legality of “*terra nullis*,” which “justified [settler] claims to occupation by citing their belief that British settlement had effectively extinguished indigenous entitlement to land” (146). Settler logic, which did/does not recognize the existence and rights of Indigenous peoples, most certainly did not care for the existence and rights of nonhumans, especially in occupied lands.

while Tania James' *The Tusk That Did the Damage* (2015) imagines the plight of an elephant community in a forest in Southern India that is gradually diminishing owing to a rapid increase in human settlements. Although they are set in entirely different places, in unique ecological and political climates, the two novels worry about the devastating impact of poaching on the lives of elephants and humans. The lexicon of resource extraction rarely covers environmental issues such as poaching or smuggling, treating them, instead, as secondary or collateral¹⁷ to larger (in terms of economic value) concerns of mining or oil removal. But as a multi-billion dollar industry that is driven by the commodification¹⁸ of animals, poaching is quite simply representative of extractive violence. Gowdy's novel focuses exclusively on the tragic lives of elephants whose journey towards survival and redemption is interrupted by human greed for ivory extraction. By exploring the motivations that drive the heinous actions of poachers, *Tusk* paints a more nuanced picture of elephants hunted for their tusks. However, a humanized portrayal of poachers does not minimize the suffering of elephants which is rendered with attention and care. The juxtaposition of the two novels shows that, while *White Bone* dwells on abstract questions of animal communication and consciousness, *Tusk's* nuanced representation of poaching creates an urgent need to disentangle and dismantle the problem of extractivism.

Based on the narrative structure of Gowdy's and James' novels, I define and theorize the difference between "a-platial" and "placed narratives." *The White Bone*, as an experimental novel, attempts to portray a world inhabited mainly by elephants and other animals, while humans are specters haunting the margins who make occasional violent incursions into the

¹⁷ Possibly because other, more prominent, forms of resource extraction are often ongoing in places (especially in African countries) where poachers also operate.

¹⁸ See Raman Sukumar's *The Asian Elephant: Ecology and Management* (1992). Also, John Frederick Walker's *Ivory's Ghosts: The White Gold of History and the Fate of Elephants* (2009).

lives of elephants. To retain some kind of imagined narrative purity, Gowdy's novel is scrubbed of time and place markers that could offer a clear context for the animal drama. The elephants in the novel are portrayed to have a remarkable understanding of their place-world. However, the abstractions of timelessness and placelessness in the narrative make it seem that the violence of poaching is natural, inevitable, and bound to recur with tragic consequences for the elephants each time. Poaching is part of the worldscape of the elephants and not a political problem with its own causal agents, and hence there are no resistance mechanisms available to counter it. Despite the active need to challenge anthropocentric narratives, a-platial, and, thus, a-political animal narratives do little to undermine the status quo of extractivism which devastates nonhumans lives, places, and relationships. James' novel, in comparison, is set in a place that is an unmistakable stand-in for Periyar National Park, a protected reserve in Kerala, bordering Tamizh Nadu, in Southern India. James shares Gowdy's aim to center animal voices but, by drawing on particular issues and focusing on human-nonhuman relationships, she is able to represent extractive violence as a systemic problem and not as a tragic event that happens without a cause.

This chapter is, in a small way, an intervention in animal studies dominated by the Western philosophical tradition that concerns itself with questions of animal sentience, intelligence, communication, agency, and rights.¹⁹ While there is no dearth of animals and other nonhumans in literature, especially in postcolonial literature, how we talk about them is still evolving from a motivation to demystify or de-code the enigma of animal lives²⁰ and moving

¹⁹ See Sundhya Walther's *Multispecies Modernity: Disorderly Life in Postcolonial Literature* (2021) in which she offers an overview of the broad field of animal studies and its more recent intersections with postcolonial studies.

²⁰ The novel form puts some of the philosophical conundrums to rest by making it explicit that questions of animal suffering or rights or consciousness can only ever be mediated through humans and human language. Such a filtered perspective does not make these questions any less important, but, rather, they

towards an intersectional framework that studies how humans and nonhumans share a common nature.²¹ However, attention to nonhumans in environmental justice or postcolonial contexts is still bare.²² In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2009), Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin explore some of the reasons for the hesitation of postcolonial studies scholars to engage with the field of animal studies including a “first-things-first” argument that prioritizes human problems over ones that nonhuman animals face (135-8). The texts in this chapter, like the others in the dissertation, make a clear case that the two are not easily separable. Even when animal place-worlds do not intersect prominently with human place-worlds (like they do in the case of urban or domesticated animals), issues like poaching throw the two together with dire consequences for both. This chapter focuses on human-nonhuman entanglements²³ formed under the rubric of extractivism that binds the fate of one form of life with another.

form the premise that undergirds any examination of human-nonhuman relationships. See David Herman’s *Narratology Beyond the Human: Storytelling and Animal Life* (2018). See, especially, chapter 6, “Animal Minds Across Discourse Domains” in which he takes on narratology’s approach to the question of animal consciousness as posed by Thomas Nagel in his famous essay, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” (1974).

²¹ See, for instance, Susan McHugh and Garry Marvin’s *Routledge Handbook of Human-Animal Studies* (2014).

²² For an important engagement with animal studies in the postcolonial context, see *Postcolonial Animalities* (2020) edited by Suvadip Sinha and Amit R. Baishya.

²³ This focus is distinct from recent lines of inquiry in postcolonial animal studies which examine the way colonialism has impacted animal lives. Such an approach *still* treats nonhuman lives as a discrete subject of study. Whereas, I focus on issues in this dissertation that has consequences for humans and nonhumans at once.

Chapter One: Knowing a Place

Historical Fiction: Time and Conflict in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000) narrativize historical political conflicts in South Asia and South Africa respectively. The main timeline of *The Hungry Tide* is set in the early 2000s and follows the journey of an Indian-American cetologist, Piya, who travels along the Irrawaddy river in the Sundarbans, guided by a translator, Kanai, and a fisherman, Fokir, in search of the elusive *Orcaella brevirostris*. Running parallel to the main narrative that centers Piya and Kanai, the Morichjhāpi massacre of 1979 is recalled through a series of journal entries by Kanai's uncle, Nirmal. Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, too, is structured as a non-linear narrative, weaving in the historical, anti-colonial Cattle-Killing movement of 1856, with the fictional story of Camagu, who returns to post-apartheid South Africa for the first democratic election in 1994 after living in America for almost thirty years. In their own unique ways, both novels construct a complex narrative structure by recalling and reconstructing a historical past within a fictional framework.

My chapter analyzes the motives of the two novels for invoking the specific histories of the Morichjhāpi massacre and the historical Cattle-Killing movement and examines the function of this double register. I treat the non-linear narrative as a representation, in part, of unstable temporal boundaries of the two sites of historical violence—the Sundarbans and Qolorha.²⁴ Just as geographical boundaries that are constructed to define and demarcate the edges

²⁴ I've adhered to the Xhosa spellings used by Mda in the novel.

of a place experience political instability as they mutate and become porous, the temporal boundaries of a place, too, experience the seepage of history. Through an analysis of Ghosh's and Mda's novels, this chapter investigates ruptures at temporal edges in the two narratives and explores the radical potential of reconstructing a violent historical past that seeps through these fissures, arguing that, while Ghosh's novel retells the history of a massacre that is not well-known, Mda's novel reconfigures the past as a site of knowledge—knowledge that not only sheds light on historical oppression, but also instructs how to resist its modern iterations.

Place and place-based philosophy form the critical lens through which I analyze the representation of history in the two novels. I take Edward Casey's definition of "place" as "the concrete basis of location, inhabitation, and orientation on the part of human beings and other animals" (xxi), and complicate it by considering the experience of a place by *displaced* people. Some of the events narrated in *Hungry Tide* are about people who have been forced to move as a result of political conflict and survive by making a living on contested borderlands. The characters in Mda's novel are dispossessed in other ways. They are marginalized in their own lands first by settler colonialism that disenfranchises Xhosa people, who, even after independence, find themselves fighting for survival and protection from neocolonial incursions into their ways of living.

How do displaced and dispossessed people inhabit places marked by violence? This is the central question that I attempt to answer in this chapter. Both *The Hungry Tide* and *The Heart of Redness* represent places that are targets for resource extraction and exploitation owing to capitalist greed for their ecological and cultural wealth. Sundarbans, an ecologically rich place, is frequently targeted by poachers and pirates who, operating either in cahoots with the local forest department or independently, extract its natural wealth for profit through trade. The extractivism

at work in Qolorha, in addition to the steady removal of ecological wealth, also operates in more subtle ways by exoticizing and commodifying local landscape and culture. I look to the two literary texts for their responses to a legacy of violence and examine how place-knowledge is deployed in each text. I use “place-knowledge” to mean knowledge that emerges from a set of relationships humans have with other humans and nonhumans with/in a place. I use it to represent, not a steady or fixed bulk of information *about* a place that is somehow amassed exclusively by native peoples, but rather, geographical, historical, ecological, cultural, mythological, phenomenological knowledge that accretes over time by virtue of inhabiting a place. The two novels that I analyze reveal important ways in which place-knowledge becomes part of an effort to ensure the continued survival and protection of humans and nonhumans.

As Casey suggests, place is more than the immediate locus or “a mere backdrop for concrete actions or thoughts. Place itself is concrete and at one with action and thought” (Casey xiii).²⁵ Just as any interaction with a place leaves a mark on it, shaping it in some concrete form, places, too, determine the lives of its human and nonhuman inhabitants in many ways. Therefore, knowing a place, which involves discerning the extent of its entanglement with other lives, becomes necessary for survival itself. The history of a place or its ecology or even the experience of simply being in a place serves as a source of knowledge about the place. The more diverse the sources of knowledge, the richer is the understanding of a place. I concentrate on the temporal dimension of a place as a valuable source of knowledge that has implications for the problem of conservation, and that could also allow an opportunity for the emplacement of those who have been unsettled through political violence.

²⁵ Although “place” is at times used abstractly to mean space, position or stage, I will continue to use the term mainly to mean a concrete location.

As places sustain humans and nonhumans, they are of significant interest to environmentalism and its concerns about ecological degradation and conservation. But the reciprocal relationship of various inhabitants with a place is not without internecine and/or external conflicts. In *The Hungry Tide*, the threat of extraction of its natural wealth necessitates conservation laws which are often enforced punitively by the state. State violence creates systematic conflicts and interrupts interdependencies among a place, and its human and nonhuman inhabitants, by fundamentally altering their existing connections to sources of knowledge that are vital for surviving and resisting political oppression. I do not imply that these inhabitants enjoyed a perfectly harmonious relationship with their place prior to political conflicts, nor do I suggest that only they possess the knowledge to sustain the place. However, by focusing on traumatic and long-term fractures produced in non-Western communities through violent, “a-platial” modes of governance/control, I examine the resulting discontinuities in knowledge that unsettle people from their own history.

In both novels, I focus on moments of historical conflicts that have ecological consequences for the place in which they are enacted and for its people who are consequently displaced. Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* traces the formation of the settler state of South Africa and the ongoing conflicts around conservation and development in post-apartheid Qolorha. The novel’s central event is the historical prophecy of the fifteen-year old Nongqawuse in April 1856 that brought about the Cattle-Killing movement and the eventual annexation of independent kwaXhosa (Xhosa land) by British Kaffraria. When there seemed to be no end in sight in the long and bitter battle between Xhosa people, along with the Khoikhoi, and British settlers, a young prophetess, Nongqawuse, claimed that once Xhosa people sacrificed their cattle and built new

kraals, the dead ancestors will arise and drive the settlers into the ocean. The prophecy fractured Xhosa community eventually producing the Believers, the ones who faithfully followed the orders of the prophetess, and the Unbelievers, the ones who denounced her claims. The novel recalls the prophecy and explores its fallouts in a fictional setting in the present day when a tourism development project threatens to reshape the landscape and exploit the culture of Xhosa people. Nongqawuse's prophecy continues to play a pivotal role in the conflict in the coastal community of Qolorha as the Believers and the Unbelievers struggle to avoid repeating historical "mistakes."

The Hungry Tide, too, invokes a troubled historical past to meditate on its impact in fictional setting of the present day. The main plot follows the adventures of a young Indian-American cetologist, Piya, on the Irrawaddy river in the Sundarbans, accompanied by Kanai and Fokir to navigate the unfamiliar history and terrain of the place. The parallel plot, narrated in the form of a series of journal entries, follows the events that led to the historical Morichjhāpi massacre of 1979. In the 1970s, one of the islands in the Sundarbans forest, Morichjhāpi, became home to a group of refugees, escaping the violence of the Indian partition. These refugees from East Bengal, who were mostly Dalit, had previously been settled by the Indian government in refugee camps in, among other scattered places, Dandakaranya, a dry and arid place that is geographically antithetical to the Sundarbans. By 1979, a large group of the refugees sold their small plots of allotted land and made their way back to the only place that they recognized as home—the tidal country of the Sundarbans that is southeast of Kolkata, on the Bay of Bengal, and settled the island of Morichjhāpi. But the state government had declared Morichjhāpi a protected Forest Reserve and attempted to evict the refugees forcibly. The government sent out troops to lay siege to the island and enforced an economic blockade, preventing food and other essential

supplies from entering the place. The troops escalated the situation by razing huts and sinking the boats of refugees, so they remain trapped on the island. According to highly contested versions (to which I will attend shortly) of the events of January 31st 1979, patrol troops opened fire on the refugees and killed countless people and dumped their bodies in the crocodile-infested waters of the Sundarbans. In the fictional strand of the novel, Piya sets out on a quest for the Irrawaddy dolphin unaware of this historical violence that informs the tenuous relationship between humans and animals in the Sundarbans.

To demonstrate my argument that history functions as a site of knowledge for resistance and ecological renewal, I focus on the historical conflicts mentioned above and examine the way they shape the fictional moments in the novels. The chapter attempts to answer two important questions: Why *this* history? Why *now*? The first section of this chapter, “Conflicts on the Edges of Place and Time,” investigates the way the Cattle-Killing movement of 1856 is narrated in *The Heart of Redness* and the Morichjhāpi massacre of 1979 in *The Hungry Tide*. Here, I focus on the non-linear structure of the two novels and analyze how temporal leakages drive the plot in the present. The two non-linear narratives show that the violence of the past is not contained and threatens to spill into and complicate the present. In the second section, “Placeless in a Placed World,” I show that dominant epistemologies reproduce historical violence by applying universalized forms of knowledge when studying *about* (instead of also learning *from*) indigenous places and their history. Piya, as a traveler and scientist, dismisses the material forms of knowledge embodied and embedded in the place, only to assert her scientific knowledge as superior, producing further conflict. In the next section, “Traditions of a Place,” I analyze the violent history of settler colonialism and its modern iteration of neo-colonialism in Qolorha, when tourism

development threatens once again the ecology and culture of the place with extinction. Here, I argue that “development,” with its roots in discourses of colonialism and modernity, rejects historical or place-knowledge as “backward” and “uncivilized.” In the final section, “Conservation of a Place,” I demonstrate that place-knowledge contributes not just to ecological conservation but also to the liberation of human and nonhuman inhabitants of a place.



Fig. 1 Aerial Image of the Sundarbans by Allen Jesse, © NASA

Conflicts on the Edges of Place and Time

Edges play an important role in both *The Hungry Tide* and *The Heart of Redness*. Looking at the aerial image of the Sundarbans (Fig.1), we find that edges lend the delta its distinctive form, separating one island from another. But, as Edward Casey asks in *The World on Edge*: “[W]hat if

edges are not merely incidental aspects of perception? What if they are distinct presences in their own right—indispensable not just to perception but also to many other kinds and parts of our experience of the world?” (xiii). *The Hungry Tide* takes a close look and magnifies the events happening along the edges of the country. The edges in the novels are not just natural margins, but as my reading of the novels shows, they are also places in their own right that are politically and socially marginalized from the mainland. With tidal forests that reshape its edges overnight, the Sundarbans is a place where the fight for survival by humans and nonhumans goes largely unheeded by the state.

Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* is set in the Sundarbans, the tidal forests of West Bengal in the Bay of Bengal. It spans from Hoogly River in India to Baleshwari River in Bangladesh. The Sundarbans has the world’s largest single block of tidal halophytic mangrove forests. The Sundarbans National Park (in West Bengal) is home to a variety of land mammals, reptiles, cetaceans, crustaceans, and a thousand other submarine creatures that are not readily visible. As a protected Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage site, the Sundarbans National Park has a large number of the Bengal tigers and salt-water crocodiles, among several other endangered species of animals (UNESCO). The aerial image (Fig. 1) of the Sundarbans shows a striking network of estuaries and mangrove forests broken by the tidal waters of the Bay of Bengal. The fine network of the delta delicately outlines the thousands of islands that constitute this archipelago. The image invites us to imagine the strength of the tidal waves that continually erode the edges of this place and test the resilience of the land. The place is a transition zone that exists in a turbulent negotiation between land and water; past and present. It appears to have no memory and therefore no history: “It is common knowledge that almost every island in the tide

country has been inhabited at some time or another. But to look at them you would never know: the speciality of mangroves is that they do not merely recolonize land; they erase time. Every generation creates its own population of ghosts” (*Tide* 43). The slick mud erases human and animal footprints alike, making it impossible to tell who came before.

In writing *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh envisions himself as a historian navigating the choppy waters of a changeable terrain with its even more unstable temporality. Ghosh takes up the challenging task of excavating the history of the Morichjhāpi massacre that is locally well-known and remembered to inform a larger audience. I use the word “inform” carefully to note Ghosh’s straightforward aim to make the massacre known without much other purpose. Utilizing academic sources, Ghosh weaves the historical event into his narrative as a way of offering an important political dimension to the human/environment conflict in the Sundarbans. In the Author’s Note, Ghosh mentions that “the Morichjhāpi incident was widely discussed in the Calcutta press, English as well as Bengali. Today the only historical treatment available in English is an article by Ross Mallick” (332). His two other sources are an unpublished dissertation by Nilanjana Chatterjee and an article by the anthropologist, Annu Jalais, that was published a year after *The Hungry Tide*. Both Mallick’s and Jalais’ essays delve into the political factors that led to the Morichjhāpi massacre but neither can ascertain the actual events of the day of the killing or the exact number of people who were killed by the West Bengal police. My aim is not to establish the historical accuracy of the claims made by either of these authors but to evaluate what this re-telling of an event, whose details are murky by all accounts, accomplishes in Ghosh’s novel.

In the novel, the massacre is known or recalled by a few characters who are peripheral to the main plot. When Kanai, the translator, returns to Sundarbans after living in the

city for many years, he tells his aunt, Nilima, that he doesn't remember the details of the massacre. During his stay with his aunt at Lusibari, Kanai discovers Nirmal's journal that was left for him and thus begins a secondary narrative that sheds light on a fading past. In the journal, Nirmal declares the purpose of documenting the events at Morichjhāpi and leaving it for Kanai to read. Ghosh projects his authorial intentions on Nirmal, who despairs that "There is nothing I can do to stop what lies ahead. But I was once a writer; perhaps I can make sure at least that what happened here leaves some trace, some hold upon the memory of the world" (59). Nirmal's greatest fear is that "after the storm passes, the events that have preceded its coming will be forgotten" (58-9). As a writer-historian (and a proxy character for Ghosh), Nirmal records the Morichjhāpi massacre by following the "trace" of the event in an attempt to resist the mutability of the place and the erasing forces of its time.

Through non-linear narration, Ghosh traces the history of the massacre and lends it distinctive temporal edges. The main plot alternates with excerpts from Nirmal's journal as Kanai makes steady progress reading it while accompanying Piya on her expedition on the Irrawaddy. The clear structure keeps the past firmly in the past, attempting to prevent temporal spillage into the present. In fact, the distinction is so rigid that only Kanai (and the readers) is privy to the history that Nirmal so painstakingly relates. I read this temporal structure of the novel as a metaphor for the physical demarcations in the land—the embankments—that separate land from water. In the tide country, "the bādh (embankment) is not just the guarantor of human life on our island, it is also our abacus and archive, our library of stories" (168). Just as the contours of the place sustain and preserve life, the formal edges of the narrative serve to protect the history of the Sundarbans. Within the archives of the tattered notebook, the memory of the massacre is revived

and preserved.

The history of the massacre is the story of Fokir's mother, Kusum, who is killed in Morichjhāpi. In the first person narrative, Nirmal reveals his conversations with Kusum who explains the plight of the refugees. With nowhere to go, the refugees attempt to settle a small island and rebuild their lives and livelihoods. But survival in the Sundarbans is a challenge because of the poor soil and the existential threat from tigers prowling the mangroves. Tide country tigers regularly wander into human settlements and attack humans—a propensity that “came from the peculiar conditions of the tidal ecology, in which large parts of the forest were subjected to daily submersions...washing away their scent markers and confusing their territorial instincts” (200). Unable to establish a safe boundary to protect human lives, the refugees live in constant peril. The government, instead of finding a way to save both human and animal lives, decide to declare the island a Reserve Forest and try to evict the villagers from the island. Kusum recounts the dehumanization suffered by the refugees at the hands of the government which launched a militarized attack with the explicit aim of displacing the refugees yet again:

It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, were worth less than dirt or dust. ‘This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the world...’ Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them? Do they know what is being done in their name? Where do they live, these people?...As I thought of these thing, it seemed to me that this whole world had

become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil. No one could think this is a crime unless they have forgotten that is how humans have always lived—by fishing, by clearing the land and by planting the soil. (217)

By declaring that people do not belong in the forest, the government criminalized the refugees' efforts to clear the land and cultivate it. Since the massacre, the Forest Department is vested with more power to ensure the protection of the forests, even if that entails persecuting fishermen living in abject poverty, trying to eke out a living on the edges of tide country.

The Forest Department (a central government outfit) continues to control the Sundarbans and enforce conservation laws in the present timeline. These government sanctioned laws are often enforced in a militaristic fashion by the guards of the Forest Department. While the threats to the habitat from poachers and pirates are legitimate, innocent villagers frequently get caught in the crossfire. As the armed Forest guards patrol the edges, scouting for poachers, they strike terror in the hearts of fishermen who try to carry on with their regular fishing activities. When Piya is assigned a Forest Guard to accompany her on her expedition, the guard shows up with a rifle as "regulations required it because her route would take her through the tiger reserves. There was always the possibility of an attack" (27). It is legal for the Forest Department to kill tigers when it suited them, but when the villagers kill a tiger in self-defense, they pay a heavy price for the tiger's death. The motives of the villagers are always already suspect owing to their caste and class marginality. The rifle, in this case, is symbolic of the forest guard's impunity that comes with unchecked power. The Forest Department treat the forest as their fiefdom. The villagers know that

“of all the hazards of the Sundarbans none is more dangerous than the Forest Department, which treats the area as its own kingdom” (42). The enforcers of the forest laws do not care about the principles of conservation or even about the animals themselves.

Occupying the edges of an unpredictable place, the Forest guards are notoriously venal and administer their laws selectively. For the armed guards, the surveillance of the Sundarbans becomes an opportunity for extortion and harassment. When Piya first spots Fokir in his boat, she wishes to ask him if he has witnessed any dolphins. But the situation soon takes a dangerous turn when the Forest Department guard appointed to her, chases Fokir and accuses him of poaching: “[T]he fisherman had been casting his net in an off-limits area. He had chosen that spot so he would be able to get away if an official boat came along. He had assumed the launch to be just another tourist boat and hadn’t realized until too late that there was an armed forest guard on board. Now he was going to have to pay either a bribe or a fine” (39). The guard terrorizes both the fisherman and his child and demands a bribe that can go undetected by bureaucratic channels (unlike an official fine). After slipping the money into his pocket, “[the guard] gave the boy a parting slap and climbed back into the launch” (41). The slap is meant to humiliate the father and remind him of his powerlessness. In this brief moment, the violence of the bullying guard reveals a larger and more prolonged situation of governmental violence that puts people in “their place” in the social order and quashes their right to question the rationale of a law that criminalizes their existence. The guard can steal and threaten with impunity knowing that the fisherman cannot fight back for fear of retaliation. After all, the memory of the Morichjhāpi massacre is fresh on the minds of the villagers as a constant reminder that their lives are disposable.

Nirmal's journal offers a glimpse into the ecological and political conflicts that plague the people of the Sundarbans. Piya, too, after her brush with the Forest Department police and her witnessing the oppressive power they wield, starts to understand the precarious lives of the villagers on the edges of "civilized society." However, Piya learns about the Morichjhāpi massacre, a vital context to the conflict, only in passing. When Piya questions Kanai about the circumstances around Fokir's mothers' death, Kanai responds briefly that "The land belonged to the government, so there was a standoff and many people died" (181). This one-line summary of Nirmal's journal predictably fails to make an impression on Piya who continues to remain in the dark. When Piya attempts to read the journal for herself, she realizes that it is written in Bengali, a language she doesn't know. The journal as an archive is reduced into a curious artifact that Kanai seems to care about and nothing more. By keeping Piya in the dark, Ghosh reveals his intention that she is not the intended audience for this piece of history—only the readers of the novel are (through Kanai's eyes).

Even as an archive, Nirmal's journal is an incomplete one as it has no record of the events that transpired on the day of the massacre itself. The journal ends with Nirmal taking Kusum's child, Fokir, to safety before the blockade is set up and the people get killed. In the novel, there are no witnesses to this horrific incident. Nirmal entrusts the journal to Kanai in his final entry, stating "I feel certain you will have a greater claim to the world's ear than I ever had. Maybe you will know *what to do with it*" (230; emphasis mine). Having accomplished the task he set for himself as a story-teller, Nirmal wants the story of Morichjhāpi to be passed on through Kanai. But Kanai, though deeply moved by the journal, is unable to relate the events even to his immediate audience, Piya. Ironically, towards the end of the novel, Kanai loses the journal in a storm and it

gets washed into the ocean. It is then left to us readers to determine “what to do with it”—with a history that is entrusted to us but that’s not our own (at least not for most of us who do not live in the Sundarbans). Having satisfied his purpose of narrating a troubling past, Ghosh fails to come up with a purpose or direction for this history in the present moment. In an effort to preserve it, the history of the massacre is so securely defined and removed from the present that it is rendered inert and thus unproductive. Retelling the history in a place where time is steadily erased is the only act of defiance that Ghosh envisions for the narration.

Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*, on the other hand, taps into the radical potential of temporal instability between the past and the present and employs it to resist political and capitalist oppression.

Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* follows the story of Camagu, who returns to post-apartheid South Africa for the first democratic election in 1994 after living in America for almost thirty years. He returns as “a stranger in his own country” (29) and tries to find a job as a consultant in economic development. At the time of the novel’s publication in 2000, the African National Congress (ANC) was still in power with Thabo Mbeki as the President. But the economic problems that had plagued South African Black people during apartheid persisted even after independence. Black political control did not translate into economic power that continued to be wielded by minority white South African capitalists.²⁶ Through Camagu’s character, Mda explores the state of dejection that pervades the “Rainbow Nation” after the much celebrated election in 1994. Disillusioned with the corruption in the public sector and racism in the private sector,

²⁶ For an analysis on persisting economic inequities and White racial capitalism, see Andrew Tzvi Farkash’s “The Ghosts of Colonialism: Economic Inequity in Post-Apartheid South Africa.”

Camagu does not find a job that would make use of his qualifications. Feeling pessimistic about the future of the country, he spends most of his time at a nightclub with other patrons who are “disaffected exiles and sundry learned rejects of the society” (26) like him. One day, when he joins a group of mourners, he becomes enchanted with one of the singers, NomaRussia. Camagu goes to Qolorha in search of NomaRussia and instead finds himself embroiled in the local conflict between two feuding families—the Believers and Unbelievers.

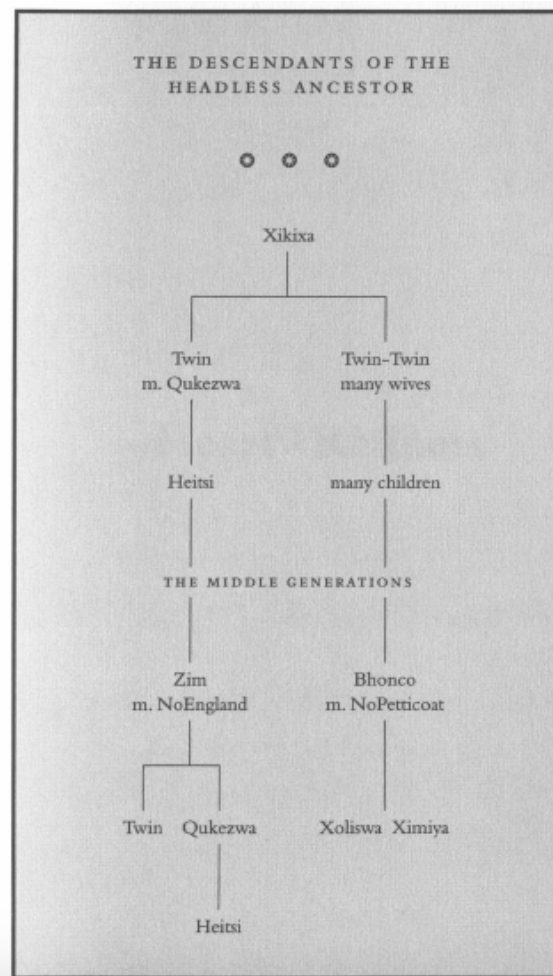


Fig. 2. The Descendants of the Headless Ancestor, © Zakes Mda

Alongside Camagu’s story, *The Heart of Redness* narrates the nineteenth century anti-colonial struggle for independence between amaXhosa (Xhosa people) and European settlers. In

this strand which focuses on the past, the narrative follows the lives of the children of Xikixa, who is beheaded by a British settler, John Dalton. Xikixa's twin children, Twin and Twin-Twin fight their enemy together until Nongqawuse's prophecy marks the beginning of the division between the two siblings and the downfall of amaXhosa (Fig. 2). According to the prophecy, if the amaXhosa killed all their cattle and burned their crops, the dead ancestors will return and drive the British settlers into the sea. Twin and his Khoikhoi wife, Qukezwa, follow the prophecy while Twin-Twin does not. The Cattle-Killing movement produces a rift in the family that continues for over a century with Twin's descendants becoming the Believers and Twin-Twin's, the Unbelievers. In the present day in the novel, Zim is the leader of the Believers and Bhonco, the leader of the Unbelievers. They continue to fight over Nongqawuse's prophecy, which leads to their opposing positions on a tourism development plan that claims to put Qolorha on the global map.

The history of the events that led to the Cattle-Killing movement of 1856 in British Kaffraria is highly contested. Although the story of Nongqawuse's vision on the banks of Gxarha is orally circulated among South African communities as an enduring myth, these oral versions of history are often conflicting or embellished. Mda follows the first scholarly study on Cattle-Killing, *The Dead Will Arise* by J.B. Peires, for a detailed historical account of the extraordinary prophecy and its fallouts.²⁷ Peires' study shows that the events that led up to the cattle-killing were far more complex than colonialist interpretations that blamed the defeat of Xhosa people on their belief in a "stupid" prophecy, which was then used as a premise to justify more colonial violence. The study tries to answer these questions: Was Nongqawuse an unwitting accomplice set-up by the colonizers

²⁷ Refuting plagiarism charges, Mda recounts the popularity of Nongqawuse and her prophecy even as he was a child growing up in South Africa in the essay, "A Charge Disputed."

to sabotage the Xhosa community from within? Or does she represent one of the many ways in which white settlers were the cause of horrific misfortunes for the amaXhosa? *The Heart of Redness* re-narrates this painful historical moment, not to redeem Nongqawuse, who comes to be referred to as “a young girl who deceived the amaXhosa nation into mass suicide” (35). Mda does not offer his own version of what transpired in the past but re-situates the past amidst the development conflict in the present timeline of the novel. As the site of historical Xhosa defeat, Qolorha becomes a tourist spot for those who wish to visit this place for its macabre history. The Unbelievers, who did not follow the directions for cattle-killing, hope to benefit from the place’s bloody history by supporting tourism development. The Believers, on the other hand, blame the Unbelievers for Xhosa defeat in the past and blame them once again for the development project that will permanently alter the landscape and steadily erase Xhosa traditions. Even in its afterlife, the prophecy remains as the cause of conflict between the two families and their disagreements over Qolorha’s future.²⁸ Here, I examine the way Zakes Mda resurrects this painful moment in Xhosa history and argue that the knowledge of the past “failure” is conscripted into the service of a resistance movement in the neocolonial present.

The narrative structure of *The Heart of Redness* switches between the struggles of the past and the present at times confusingly. Mda employs a visual line break to indicate a temporal shift from past to present and vice versa. In this dual or rather twinned narrative, there is further twinning in the names of characters,²⁹ where a few of the characters are named after their ancestors. For example, there is a moment when the narrative focuses on Zim’s daughter,

²⁸ For an analysis on the lasting legacy of the prophecy and its role in the South African imagination, see Jennifer Wenzel’s *Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond* (2010).

²⁹ For an analysis of the significance of the names, see also Yolisa A. Kenqu’s “Splitting and Becoming Double in Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*.”

Qukezwa, who is a Believer and one of the main ecological-minded characters in the novel.

Qukezwa, an unwed mother to Camagu's child, Heitsi, tries to comfort the crying child: "[Heitsi] bawls all the time. The women say it is because the sacred rituals of his father's clan have not been performed for him" (230). After a line break, the narrative continues: "Heitsi bawled for the entire world to hear. Qukezwa sang a lullaby, hoping he would sleep. She was beginning to despair. Twin walked in front of her, humming a song about the coming salvation" (230). This narrative shift causes disorientation momentarily as the reader tries to distinguish Qukezwa from the past from the one in the present. Notwithstanding the formal break in the text, indicating a shift in the timeline, the narrative resists interpretive conventions that would code the two Qukezwa and Heitsi as different people. The non-linear structure alternating between the two time periods, although confusing, shows that there are no clear temporal distinctions in Qolorha. This textual disorientation makes us question if our attempt to establish a temporal difference is even productive. The ancestor is present to defend and protect her descendants across the century that divides them. The ancestor is also alive (in a way) as the descendant herself. Towards the end of the novel, the distinctions between past and present are entirely collapsed as the narrative smoothly follows the lives of the ancestors and descendants at the same time. The novel makes it clear that the past is never truly in the past, thus, complicating the way history is usually produced and understood—as an account of events that happened *then*—through clearly delineated temporal boundaries.

For history to be written and learned from, the past is often discursively rendered distinct from events unfolding in the present and kept at a certain temporal distance in order to make sense of it as an artifact. But, as the South African Studies scholar, Adam Ashforth, points

out, “for people whose ancestors are always with them, and whose present lives are not only shaped by the burden of their ancestors’ doings but are lived in a continuing dialogue with preceding generations, the nature of happenings four or five generations previous might not just be things of the disembodied past” (588).³⁰ This kind of temporal simultaneity of a place is at once a source of comfort and a threat to the descendants who are unable to move forward without also looking behind.

The people of Qolorha speak of the prophecy as if it happened yesterday. Bhonco, the leader of the Unbelievers, is physically tormented by the past almost every day. He carries “the scars that were inflicted on his great-grandfather, Twin-Twin, by men who flogged him after he had been identified as a wizard by Prophet Mlanjeni, the Man of the River. Every first boy-child in subsequent generations of Twin-Twin’s tree is born with the scars” (13). The conflict between the families is etched on Bhonco’s body. It’s not a passive, old scar but one that turns sore and causes discomfort from time to time. “Why he has to be burdened with the scars of history, he does not understand” (12). Bhonco bears the sign of past injustices suffered by his ancestor. He embraces his scars and “holds to them dearly, for [the conflicts of generations ago] have shaped his present, and the present of the nation” (6). The raw scars of the past, which never heal, disrupt every opportunity for cooperation between the two families. When the past lives on as the present, the threats of the past are no longer at a safe manageable distance. Mda’s novel is a reminder that the Xhosa community have not triumphed over all the threats facing them. The brutal battle between Xhosa warriors and British settlers remains unfinished and spills into the present moment in the form of the tourism development project. In post-independence South Africa in the novel, the

³⁰ From “The Xhosa Cattle Killing and the Politics of Memory” by Adam Ashforth.

struggle continues for the independence and autonomy of Xhosa people. With mounting pressure from foreign investors on the locals to give up kwaXhosa (Xhosa land) and their economic independence, history threatens to repeat itself in this contested place and so do the “failures” of the past. The Unbelievers wish to break this destructive pattern by rejecting their past and embracing modernity, which they hope would finally resolve their cursed past. The Believers, on the other hand, fear that the modernity promised by the tourism plan is not the newness that it claims to be but merely a new disguise for old colonialist practices.

The function of the non-linear narrative is to disrupt linear temporal movement from the past to the present and represent temporal simultaneity. Crucially, as I will show in the following sections, the narrative also disrupts the linear mode of thought embedded in the discourse of modernity, which falsely constructs tradition as static and blindly resistant to progress. At the end of the novel, the Believers, along with others who supported them, build a tourist hostel run by local women to showcase and celebrate their tradition and keep alive the memory of Nongqawuse. The legacy of Nongqawuse’s prophecy is immortalized in Qolorha, giving Xhosa people the opportunity to come up with a viable alternative that protects both their culture and ecology from the foreign development plan. Although Nongqawuse’s prophecy did not protect Xhosa people from imperial bullets in the past, it does protect them in the present by helping people achieve independence from foreign control—the liberation that was once promised.

Placeless in a Placed World

In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Mary Louise Pratt argues that, since the 18th century, travel and exploration of Africa and Americas contributed to the

formation of European subjectivity, while simultaneously constructing “the rest of the world” (4). The “discovery” of places hitherto uncharted by Europeans fired the imagination of explorers whose vivid accounts guided the efforts of colonial expansionist projects. The newly-discovered places served as a source of knowledge that European scientific explorers and naturalists extracted to enrich the discourse on the ecologies of Africa and Americas that then directly shaped Western colonial policies. The British empire commissioned exploratory studies in the colonies with the aim of documenting and organizing scientific knowledge. For instance, writing about Sir Roderick Murchison, one of the founders and presidents of the Royal Geological Society, the historian, Robert A. Stafford, says: “Murchison maneuvered to institutionalize natural science as an integral component of both imperial administration and foreign policy. By promoting exploration, resource reconnaissance, commercial expansion, and imperial development and security, he stimulated systematic exploitation of the empire and the entire periphery” (1, 3).³¹ The British empire installed scientific institutions dedicated to streamlining the wealth of knowledge pooling in from the colonies and utilized systematized knowledge to wield more administrative power.³² Scientific explorations, rarely carried out for their own sake or for the achievement of abstract Enlightenment ideals, were undertaken, directly or indirectly, in service of the Empire. Travel-writing, thus, played a key role in colonial rule that was invested in discoveries of “new” places, peoples, animals and other living beings which could then be studied and scientifically classified. The system of classification of scientific knowledge is embedded in notions of nation and empire. In this way, travel-writing produced valuable, *portable* knowledge that itself could travel and

³¹ Robert A. Stafford’s *Scientist of Empire: Sir Roderick Murchison, Scientific Exploration and Victorian Imperialism* (1989).

³² See also John Gascoigne and Neil Tranter’s *Science in the Service of Empire: Joseph Banks, the British State and the Uses of Science in the Age of Revolution* (1998).

transform into a consolidated resource for hegemonic enterprises.

In Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (1899), when the unnamed narrator exclaims—"What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth!...The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires" (3), he venerates Thames as the river that made possible, explorations on terra incognita. The "germs of empires" have their origin in the British nation with their destination set for "a place of darkness" (8). Knowledge-building about this "dark place" is framed in a similar linear way. In Marlowe's adventure, the Congo, shrouded in darkness, is the "unknown" that passively awaits its discovery. The place does not exist until the European explorer learns of its existence and charts it on his map. The ways and means of *knowing* the natural world are retained in the mind of the scientist explorer, who makes sense of the wild, "uncivilized" Congo and "discovers," catalogues, and names its flora, fauna, forests and minerals in great detail. But this study is not undertaken merely to satisfy the natural curiosity of a scientist upon encountering a new place. Examining the role of natural history in empire-building in *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany and Representations of Nature*, David Phillip Miller argues that "[t]he science of botany was, of course, by no means confined to the garnering of practically useful knowledge...[I]t is surely a mistake to draw a sharp divide between the impetus provided by curiosity and that provided by the search for utility" (7). Gathering knowledge was not an apolitical activity but one that was constantly guided by a need for economic advantage. Exploration is inextricably tied with exploitation. Through Western systems of knowledge, the "place of darkness" is gradually illuminated and constructed as such to provide a justification for the ivory trade in the Congo. By folding knowledge of the natural world into the colonial enterprise, the Congo is reconstructed and reduced into a commercial resource

that is fought over by competing colonial interests. This legacy of extraction and exploitation underwrites Marlowe's adventure in *The Heart of Darkness* and embeds the novel in Western ways of knowing and protecting the interests of the Empire in the colonies.

The Heart of Darkness remains a starting point for a number of Anglophone (especially, postcolonial) works that challenge the novel's construction of otherness, the presumed savagery of Africa and other issues related to colonialism.³³ Both *The Hungry Tide* and *The Heart of Redness* partly recall and re-narrate Conrad's novel in their own way. *The Hungry Tide* has echoes of *The Heart of Darkness* with Piya's expedition as a postcolonial, and possibly a feminist, re-envisioning of Marlowe's journey on the "dark" Congo river.³⁴ As an Indian-American, who is more or less a foreigner in the country, Piya travels on a boat along the Irrawaddy river, searching for her elusive dolphin. Mirroring Marlowe's physical and psychological journey, Piya's expedition leads her, not towards darkness, but to a deeper understanding of the place and people of the Sundarbans. On the other hand, Camagu's return to Qolorha from America in *The Heart of Redness* is almost entirely an interior journey of self-discovery. "Redness," the color of ochre, a specific cultural symbol for Xhosa people, replaces "darkness," along with its racist insinuations of savagery and backwardness. Instead of a place of unspeakable horrors, Mda's novel represents a culturally rich place with a complex history, grappling with neocolonial policies that threaten to

³³ Despite Conrad's anti-imperialist agenda in writing the novel, *Heart of Darkness*, nevertheless, reproduces several colonial tropes of otherness. Chinua Achebe's popular essay, "An Image of Africa," offers a scathing analysis of the novel's racist legacy.

³⁴ For a critique of the static, almost two-dimensional, female figures in Conrad's novel, see Gabrielle McIntire's essay, "The Women Do Not Travel: Gender, Difference, and Incommensurability in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*." Although not within the scope of this project, it is possible to read *Hungry Tide* as Ghosh's attempt to offer a feminist revision of Conrad's novel by recasting the figure of Marlowe with a Brown woman who, nonetheless, inherits similar Enlightenment goals that animated her white, European scientist ancestors.

carry on the “civilizing mission” in the name of development. Camagu realizes that this “redness” is at stake and that he must pick a side to protect the culture and land of Xhosa nation. But, beyond “writing back” to *The Heart of Darkness*, Ghosh’s and Mda’s novels perform an even more profound task of re-imagining the relationship between a traveler and a place.

The Hungry Tide troubles the figure of the science explorer that is well-registered in Western writings on naturalist expeditions especially to colonized places.³⁵ The figure is often a white, able-bodied man who enjoys a romanticized, almost mythical position in the sub-genre of travel writing, which documents and celebrates the discovery of so-called “new” places, people or animals. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a sudden increase in the number of ethnobiological studies of remote places that resulted from naturalist enterprise, coinciding with the rise of colonialist expansionism. Ghosh’s novel recasts a brown Marlowe and locates Piya in this romantic tradition of exploratory travel in order to make explicit the figure’s exploitative position and to upend stereotypical representations of the explorer in travel narratives. Although nineteenth- and twentieth-century travel writing is abound with female travelers recounting their experiences in distant lands, it was yet unusual for a female scientist to lead a research mission. But even in contemporary times, when female scientists are not a rarity, Piya’s situation is unique in more than one way.

Hungry Tide challenges a conventional understanding of identities as fixed and shows, instead, that they are formed in relation to a place. In the Sundarbans, which is typically not frequented by female scientists, Piya stands out as an object of curiosity for the locals and makes her more vulnerable in a way that her male counterparts would not be. But as someone who

³⁵ See Pratt. See also Paul Smethurst’s *Travel Writing and the Natural World, 1768-1840*.

travels alone for her research, Piya has learned to push aside her discomfort and focus on conducting her observations; “[b]esides, she had always felt herself to be protected by the sheer matter-of-factness of what she did: the long hours of standing in unsteady boats, under blazing skies, scanning the water’s surface with her binoculars, taking breaks only to fill in half-hourly data sheets” (30). Piya tries to shield herself from prying eyes by seeking refuge in the mundaneness of her work. As much as note-taking and data-recording are integral to her scientific work, they are also actions performed to de-feminize herself by evoking the stereotypical maleness associated with the demeanor of a serious scientist.

Piya’s racial identity, too, complicates her position on the boat. She does not stand out in a country where people assume she belongs. But she does not speak the local language nor is she familiar with the social mores of the place:

She had not realized then that on the Irrawaddy, as on the Mekong and the Mahakam, she had also been protected by her unmistakable foreignness. It was written all over her face, her black, close-cropped hair, the sun-darkened tint of her skin. It was ironic that here—in a place where she felt even more stranger than elsewhere—her appearance had robbed her of the protection. (30-1)

Piya finds herself in a unique situation where she is stripped of some of her usual privileges that protect her from unpleasant behavior during her travels. When she stands out as a foreigner on the Mekong or the Mahakam, it is understood that she would not know the place well enough. But when she is on the Irrawaddy river, owing to her appearance of belonging, she is expected to *know* the place and speak the local language. Piya bears the markers of belonging, like her name and her race, so the only thing that sets her apart from the people of the Sundarbans is her

ignorance for which she is mocked. She is painfully aware of her disconnect from a place where she is expected to belong. Her position is a reversal of the stereotypical representation of the intrepid white male discoverer, who arrogates to himself a superior position owing to his foreignness in an “exotic” country. Piya does not have the demeanor or access to a register of a class-system that can situate her in a higher place. On the contrary, the situation on the unmoored boat makes her aware of her own placelessness in the world.

At other times, Piya idealizes placelessness. She romanticizes the figure of the traveler-scientist who is marked by her itinerancy and her perpetual quest for knowledge in foreign places. Itinerancy is a seductive lifestyle for an explorer who feels at home in a new place every day. Her interest in biology is not driven purely by the demands of the discipline; “she had been drawn to field biology as much for the life it offered as for its intellectual content—because it allowed her to be on her own, to have no fixed address, to be far from the familiar while still being a part of a loyal but loose-knit community” (106). Learning about a place from a safe distance allows her to depoliticize scientific studies by isolating and engaging with a narrow area of interest without much regard for the people or their politics that impact the ecology. She is vastly knowledgeable about the origins of the study of Irrawaddy dolphins—a creature she had never seen before her arrival at the Sundarbans—and yet, she is unaware of the Morichjhāpi massacre in the very place where the dolphins are found. She believes that the living conditions of the people of Sundarbans or the events of the past are extraneous to her study. By embracing her placelessness, Piya allows herself the liberty of extracting and creating knowledge from the places she studies about without embedding herself in their history or culture.

The allure of scientific discovery is not just the creation of new knowledge but also

the glory of trailblazing bestowed on the scientist after such a discovery. In Piya's scientific work until her travel to Sundarbans, book knowledge preceded experiential knowledge. She learns about the mysterious Irrawaddy dolphin by reading the body of work produced by a succession of nineteenth century naturalists like William Roxburgh, John Anderson, Edward Blyth, and Henry Gray. Owing to chance findings, misidentifications, missed opportunities, partial conclusions, the *Orcaella brevirostris* remained a relatively less understood species. As "[Piya] recalled the mythologies of discovery that had attracted her to the sciences as a child, and how the most miraculous seemed always those that had the most quotidian origins—Archimedes and his bathtub, Newton and his apple" (105), she yearns for her very own "eureka" moment. Piya is thrilled to be the first person to study the unique behaviors of the *Orcaella brevirostris*. She observes that the Irrawaddy *Orcaella* leave their pools twice a day unlike the Mekong cousins that migrated once every year: "Had they found a novel way of adapting their behavior to this tidal ecology?" (104). Piya realizes that this behavioral pattern "might well have profound implications for the conservation of this endangered species" (104). Following the footsteps of her idols such as "Jane Goodall in the mountains of Kenya, Helene Marsh in the swamps of Queensland" (105), Piya hopes that, one day, she, too, will join the pantheon of naturalists as the authority on the subject of Irrawaddy dolphins. But unlike her male predecessors, she minimizes the significance of her study knowing that "whatever came of it would not revolutionize the sciences, or even a minor branch of them, but it was also true that if she was able to go through with it—even a part of it—it would be as fine a piece of descriptive science as any. It would be enough; as an alibi for a life, it would do; she would not need to apologize for how she had spent her time on this earth" (106). While the study of cetaceans gives meaning to her life, she is unencumbered by questions about its applications or the impact of

conservation on the people who inhabit the Sundarbans.

The people of Sundarbans possess local knowledge about the dolphins long before Piya even decides to study them. Fokir, the fisherman, who guides Piya to find the dolphins, has extensive knowledge on the behavioral patterns of these cetaceans. Like everyone else in the Sundarbans, Fokir, too, knows about the dolphins or shushuk through the legendary story called *The Glory of Bon Bibi*. The story is an etiological myth that narrates how human and animal came to co-exist in wild and turbulent mangrove forest. Bon Bibi, the tiger goddess of the forest, defeats the demon king, Dokkhin Rai and makes one part of the tidal country fit for human habitation: “Thus order was brought to the land of the eighteen tides, with its two halves, the wild and the sown” (86). The people perform the story of Bon Bibi over generations as a reminder that they have the right to live in the same forest that is also home to wild animals. Bon Bibi, represented at once as a tigress and a human, is both fearsome and merciful. Under her protection, the people are safe from the tiger who has his own domain in the forest. In this epic story of struggle to survive in the tidal country, shushuk play an important role. They are Bon Bibi’s messengers signifying hope and safety. When someone is lost in the forest, all they have to do is wait for the low tide when the dolphins emerge, signaling “that deliverance is at hand” (194). Thus, woven into the mythology is the knowledge of migratory patterns of the Irrawady dolphins.

Knowing the mythology of the dolphins is also essential for fishermen to know where to fish. Fokir, who grows up hearing the story from his mother, Kusum, becomes an expert on the movements of the dolphins. Without Fokir’s knowledge about the shushuk, Piya’s study may never have been possible. But for Piya’s scientific mind, myth is incompatible with real-world knowledge. She is baffled that Fokir expresses no surprise when Piya hears the dolphins for the

first time, “as though there were nothing unexpected about this encounter and he had known all along that they would be there...[H]ow could he have known that they would be there on that day, at that time? Groups of migrating Orcaella were anything but predictable in their movements. She decided to shrug off these questions for the time being” (95). Fokir’s is place-knowledge that accretes over years of living in the tidal country and dealing with its steady mutations. Myth, then, embodies this knowledge, making it collective and transferable. Although she finds the local myths fascinating, Piya dismisses them as a valid form of knowledge that passes through oral history and stage performances. Place-knowledge only serves to validate further Piya’s own scientific observations of the dolphins, showing that the two forms of knowledge enrich the understanding of the elusive Orcaella. But invariably, myths are somehow seen as less legitimate or reliable, while scientific knowledge upholds its position as the authority on the natural world. Even when there are gaps in Piya’s understanding of the migration patterns of the dolphins, she does not turn to Fokir’s story to find answers. As a self-appointed Orcaella expert, Piya carries on with her binoculars and data collection tools to help her “discover” the reason for dolphin migration.

Piya’s binoculars fit into her myopic worldview by isolating and studying individual creatures and their lives, instead of developing an understanding of the broader implications of the politics of the place that affect both humans and nonhumans. Neglecting the larger violence at work, Piya adopts “pet causes” in an effort to save *one* dolphin. She shows a lot of sympathy for lost dolphins as she recounts the plight of the Cambodian Orcaella whose population dwindled during the Cambodian Campaign:

The Mekong Orcaella had shared Cambodia’s misfortunes: in the 1970s they had suffered the ravages of indiscriminate American carpet bombing. Later they

too had been massacred by Khmer Rouge cadres, who had hit upon the idea of using dolphin oil to supplement their dwindling supplies of petroleum. The once abundant population of Orcaella in the Tonle Sap, Cambodia's great freshwater lake, had been reduced almost to extinction. These dolphins were hunted with rifles and explosives and their carcasses were hung up in the sun so their fat would drip into buckets. This oil was then used to run boats and motorcycles. (252)

What Piya doesn't recall is the massacre of several hundred Vietnamese civilians whose bodies were then dumped in the Mekong river, so the actual numbers remain undetermined. The incident is hauntingly reminiscent of the Morichjhāpi massacre but this connection is lost on Piya. Wars and massacres happen to humans but the Orcaella become collateral damage in political attacks. It is understandable that Piya is horrified by the killing of creatures carried out in the course of human politics in which they do not have any role; such creatures are seen as sinless and undeserving of the fate that meets them. But, in a desperate attempt to do something, Piya is determined to save a lone dolphin, Mr. Sloane. Piya's singular focus represents the symptomatic "saviorism" embedded in conservation efforts that are undertaken to rescue animals while neglecting the political turmoil in which they are inextricably entangled. Piya becomes invested in saving one token animal to assuage her guilt and her feeling of helplessness.

Piya re-lives the same sense of helplessness in the Sundarbans as she watches a tiger-killing by a group of villagers. Attracted by the sounds of a buffalo giving birth, a tiger had wandered into a human settlement to hunt, where the villagers trap and attack it with sharpened staves (241). Piya is horrified and attempts to intervene by snatching a spear from one of the men

and breaking it in two. She fails to grasp that the tiger is not killed as a sport in a hunt or as a trophy. What she witnesses is a conflict between humans and other predators that inhabit this challenging place and fight for survival. Tigers do not care for human borders—physical or ideological— while the villagers, on the other hand, do not have the means to protect themselves and their livestock without killing the predator. But it is the villagers who will pay a dear price for protecting themselves: “In the past, similar incidents had led to riots, shootings and large-scale arrests” by the Forest Department because the poor cannot bribe their way out of “punishment” for killing a tiger (244). Piya is unaware of the long history of grim consequences meted out to the villagers in the name of conservation.

The Hungry Tide, ironically, by setting up Fokir as a foil, highlights Piya’s ignorance, showing that her scientific knowledge is founded on place-knowledge, which is absorbed, reorganized, and rendered universal. Piya is unaware of the history of the place and the challenges faced by the villagers towards whom she feels sympathy only when she starts recognizing the complexity of the place and its politics.

Traditions of a Place

Like Piya, Camagu, in *The Heart of Redness*, feels placeless in a country where he wants to belong. Having been away during the anti-apartheid struggles, Camagu returns from America in 1994 for the first multiracial democratic elections in South Africa, after being away for almost thirty years, “a stranger in his own country. He was swept up by the euphoria of the time, and decided that he would not return to New York. He would stay and contribute to the development of his country” (29). But Camagu’s staying back in South Africa does not translate

into belonging. In every job interview that Camagu goes for, he is viewed as an outsider: “The big men of the government said to him, ‘You have been out of this country for many years. What makes you think you can do this job? How familiar are you with South Africa and its problems?’” (30). In every interview, Camagu is painfully reminded of the fact that he did not participate in the freedom struggles. He is unable to do the *toyi-toyi* as “[h]e never learned the freedom dance. He was already in exile when it was invented. While it became fashionable at political rallies, he was completing a doctoral degree and working in the communications department of an international development agency in New York. He regrets now that he acquired so much knowledge in the fields of communication and economic development but never learned the freedom dance” (29). The freedom dance as a form of protest is lost on him—its revolutionary power inaccessible. By dismissing the dance as “fashionable,” Camagu believes that acquiring knowledge about economic development that was far more important than showing up for protests. The narrative portrays Camagu as opportunistic for staying away during apartheid struggles and for showing up at a moment when he believes his skills make him more employable.

Camagu’s arrival coincides with the neocolonial moment in South African history, when the ruling class held power through nepotism and corruption. But as an outsider, his ambitions are thwarted, “because he was not a member of the Aristocrats of the Revolution, an exclusive club that is composed of the ruling elites, their families, and close friends” (33). He is passed over for jobs in favor of candidates, who “lived vividly in the memory of decision-makers as the best dancer of the freedom dance” (32). Private sector jobs, too, were unavailable because “the corporate world did not want qualified blacks. They preferred the inexperienced ones who were only too happy to be placed in some glass affirmative-action office where they were displayed as

paragons of empowerment. No one cared if they ever got to grips with their jobs or not. All the better for the old guard if they did not. That safeguarded the old guard's position" (30). The control over the new economy and politics resolutely remained with the "old guard," but under the guise of progressivism. Disheartened and embittered, Camagu decides that "[t]he best option for him is to go back to exile" (31). He removes himself from the political situation and remains exiled in South Africa.

Camagu, with his expertise in economic development, believes he can apply his book-knowledge and contribute to South African development, although he knows little about the country other than a vague sense of nostalgia of growing up in the inlands: "He remembers the fruit trees and the graves of long-departed relatives...There are beautiful houses too: the four-walled tin-roofed ixande, the rondavels, the cattle kraal, the fowl run, the toolshed. Then the government came and moved the people down to the flatlands, giving them only small plots and no compensation" (59). Camagu's separation from his land by the colonial government marks the beginning of his separation from Xhosa people, their traditions, and their ecology. After the government dis-places him by seizing the lands and animals, Camagu embarks on a long journey of exile which continues even upon his return to South Africa. Although he returns armed with expert knowledge on development, Camagu initially fails to recognize that abstract theories of development do not account for the particularities of a place. Although he is ready to "bring" progress, Camagu does not ask the important question: Who benefits from the development? He is so convinced about the economic benefit of development that he doesn't pause to consider its costs and who will bear them. As someone who has little stake in the matter, Camagu believes he is the objective voice in the feud between Believers and Unbelievers.

The Believers and the Unbelievers continue their century-old feud by taking opposing positions on the tourism development project. Citing economic development as the intention, “a big company that owns hotels throughout southern Africa wants to build a casino on the Gxarha River mouth. They want to introduce water sports in the great lagoon. Tourists will come from all over the world to gamble and to play with their boats and surfboards. At last Qolorha-by-Sea will see progress. But it seems some people in the village are against these developments” (66). The Believers oppose the proposed plan while the Unbelievers, led by Bhonco, resolutely “stand for progress”(92). Bhonco is convinced that, “The new development will bring tourists. The new developments will create employment for us all. The new developments will bring people from all over the world. From America!” (92-3). Newness is the refrain in development discourse, presupposing the obsolescence of traditional modes of thinking that question meretricious developments. Zim’s protests stem from the concern that tourists do not care about the long-term welfare of a place but only for its exotic views and souvenirs. He believes that “new” developments are extractive and ultimately detrimental to local ecology with their exclusive focus on economic growth, which neglects the health of a place.

Mda’s novel parallels the resistance to tourism development with the anti-colonial struggle against invading British settlers. Echoing the historical fight for sovereignty, the Believers are yet again associated with superstition and “backwardness” because of their adherence to tradition. On the other hand, the Unbelievers continue to be associated with progress, modernity, and “civilization.” For the Unbelievers like Bhonco, support for the casino plan means rejecting every aspect of Xhosa culture that is considered backward:

The Unbelievers are moving forward with the times. That is why they support

the casino and the water-sports paradise that the developers want to build. The Unbelievers stand for civilization. To prove this point Bhonco has now turned away from beads and has decided to take out the suits that his daughter bought him many years ago from his trunk under the bed. From now on he will be seen only in suits. He is in the process of persuading his wife to do away with the red ochre that women smear on their bodies and with which they also dye their isikhakha skirts. When the villagers talk of the redness of unenlightenment they are referring to the red ochre. But then even the isikhakha shirt itself represents backwardness. (71)

Development is, thus, embedded in the discourse of modernity that hails the rejection of traditional cultural markers like the isikhakha skirt or the red ochre. By simply adopting different signifiers of progress—like the suit—Bhonco believes that he is ushering in modernity for himself and for Qolorha. For the Unbelievers, redness has a metonymic relationship with backwardness and “unenlightenment.” If Enlightenment posits rationality and scientific knowledge as a superior way of knowing the world, then tradition poses an antithetical worldview to “modern” ideals. It is mired in irrational practices and it is, thus, resistant to changes that can herald a new age of progress for Qolorha. In other words, the Believers do not *know* what is good for them. Their adherence to the traditional Xhosa way of living precludes them from accessing a superior source of knowledge that could guide them out of their darkness and set them on the path to progress and modernity.

Development is essentially a modernizing project which has its roots in Eurocentric conceptions of what constitutes “modernity.” Embedded in Eurocentrism, development discourse

lays out a teleological path on which the colonized country trudges along, expecting to “catch up” to the modern world.³⁶ Development discourse stipulates a rigidly linear trajectory where the final destination is Western-style modernity. From this vantage point, colonized places appear to be suspended in a state of not-yetness, marked by its distance from “progress” and “civilization.” In such places, time itself slows down, because time, too, is in sync with Western modernity. In fact, the path to modernity is so well-lit by European enlightenment ideals that traversing back on this path un-does time and thus progress, recalling an age of darkness and ignorance. The clearest example of the undoing of time can be found in *The Heart of Darkness* in which Marlowe exclaims, “Going up that river was like *traveling back to the earliest beginnings* of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings” (136; emphasis added). For Marlowe, traveling up the river, deeper into Africa, is a journey back in time. Although colonized people are forced to follow Western education and culture, and their countries are put in the service of a Western capitalist economy, they still remain in the “back”—in an undeveloped and a not-yet civilized place. In this autochthonous place, vegetation riots uninterrupted by carefully-planned patterns of modernity and progress. But since the goalpost of modernity is nothing but a shifting mirage, the colonized are forever a backward people. In Mda’s novel, as the only “enlightened” community that realizes how far the people are from modernity, the Xhosa Unbelievers urge the others to follow the path of progress by welcoming the construction of the casino. In the meeting for the casino investors, the developers ask the Believers: “how will you stop progress and development?”

³⁶ There is a wealth of scholarship that examines the discourse of development and how it is frequently constructed/wielded as a mechanism to control poorer/formerly colonized countries in the Global South. See Samir Amin’s *Eurocentrism* (1989); David Scott’s *Conscripts of Modernity* (2004); Neil Smith’s *Uneven Development* (2008); Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe* (2000); Arturo Escobar’s *Encountering Development* (1995).

Progress is presented as an inevitable force that only those who are backward would resist it. A standardized template of progress is taken for granted without considering its suitability for a particular place and its people.

The promise of modernity is alluring on the surface. But the primary objective of the proposal for economic development by building a casino and a water-sports complex is not the economic liberation of the people of Qolorha. The objective is to attract foreign capital through tourism for the benefit of some high ranking South African officials. However, in order to placate the people of Qolorha and to get them to willingly give up guardianship over their land, the proposal is packaged with the promise of employment, Western goods and more importantly, civilization. Unbelievers, like Bhonco's daughter, Xoliswa Ximiya, believe that opening Qolorha to tourism would put the place on a global map: "This is a lifetime to be like some of the holiday resorts in America. To have big stars like Eddie Murphy and Dolly Parton come here for a holiday...Cape Town is now becoming a celebrity paradise. Qolorha can be one too if these conservative villagers stop standing in the way of progress"(67). The Unbelievers are enticed by the glittering, glamorous world of American celebrity and culture, which could be imported readily if it weren't for the Believers who worry that their culture will be threatened.

The Believers know that the proposed development project threatens to disrupt more than just the indigenous way of life in Qolorha. The project intends to modify the landscape of Qolorha to suit the needs of the tourists. Although Western tourists desire to explore an exotic, foreign place, especially one with a "fascinating" history of a young prophetess and a millennialist movement, they nonetheless need a familiar landscape to feel more "at home." The tourism development model aims to create the familiar—the casino, the seaside resort, etc.—by altering the

unfamiliar local landscape. The white tourists who visit Qolorha for the summer regularly have built cottages along the shoreline where “[i]t is illegal to build within a kilometer of the coast. But the cottage owners don’t observe that” (68). The land to build these cottages is also obtained illegally through corruption and bribery: “The white people—and some well-to-do blacks from the old Transkei bantustan—bribe Chief Xikixa with a bottle of brandy and he gives them some land” (68). With the steady influx of tourists from East London and other cities, the local landscape undergoes dramatic changes.

Foreign tourists, who are ready to pay a pretty penny for the pristine coastal landscape of Qolorha, feel entitled to the view and the wildlife. Altering the existing landscape to suit the wishes of the tourists means disrupting existing ecological interdependencies among flora and fauna. Along with the changes to the shoreline that push out indigenous people in order to build cottages for white people, the threat of extraction also haunts indigenous animals and trees. Zim worries that the influx of tourists would lead to the plundering of vegetation that is native to Qolorha: “[The tourists] come to steal our aloes and our cycads and our usundu palms and our *ikhamanga* wild banana trees” (93). Zim’s stress on the pronoun, “our,” envelops the aloe, cycads, usundu palms and the *ikhamanga* trees into the fold of the Xhosa community and identity. This collective belonging, which also includes the local lizards and birds, is important for Zim who tries to protect every member of his community. For Bhonco, on the other hand, protecting a bush is meaningless. To him, the bush “is a sign of our uncivilized state” and getting rid of it “will bring modernity into our lives, and will rid us of our redness” (92). For Bhonco, tradition, with which redness is associated, is a burden (not unlike his scars) that he is longing to unload. But unlike Bhonco, Zim does not view the bush as a mere symbol but as a material being that co-existed

“since the days of our forefathers” (92). Zim feels the loss of the bush as viscerally as he does the disruption of Xhosa history. He protests the steady evacuation of Xhosa culture and ecology by neocolonial enterprises that attempt to uproot indigenous vegetation along with the people.

Development discourse bears traces of a colonial past when white settlers set out on their “civilizing mission” in Xhosa land. In the nineteenth century, the British crown deployed general after general to subdue the amaXhosa and to make kwaXhosa habitable for British occupation. Sir George Cathcart was deployed to win the brutal battle against Xhosa guerrilla warriors. Cathcart killed people indiscriminately: “If he could not defeat the amaXhosa people in the field of battle, he was going to starve them into submission. He ordered his soldiers to go on a rampage and burn amaXhosa fields and kill amaXhosa cattle wherever they came across them, instead of spending their time hunting down guerrillas in their crevices of the Amathole Mountains. When the troops found unarmed women working in the fields, they killed them too” (24). By targeting the natural resources that sustain the amaXhosa, Cathcart’s ruthless campaign was successful in weakening the guerrilla warfare. The cattle belonging to the amaXhosa became the target as they started succumbing to the newly introduced disease called lungsickness: “White people knew of lungsickness because it came from their country. There were reports that it had killed many cattle across the seas in the land of the whites” (50). But because the disease had a foreign origin, the Xhosa people did not have the knowledge to treat their cattle. The weakened and impoverished people became susceptible to the strategy of “divide and rule” that produced the earliest fractures in Xhosa society by the introduction of Western “civilization.”

After Cathcart is killed in the Crimean War, Sir George Grey takes over as the governor of Cape Colony with a strategy that would ultimately undermine Xhosa sovereignty.

Grey's "only motive for coming to and ruling the land of the amaXhosa was to change the customs of the barbarous natives and introduce them to British civilization" (85). The scathing satire here exposes the insidiousness of Grey's strategy that he implements effectively under the veneer of progress: "He had been a governor in Australia and New Zealand, they said, where his civilizing mission did many wonderful things for the natives of those countries. Of course he had to take their land in return for civilization. Civilization is not cheap" (84). In the logic of colonialism, the loss of land or even sovereignty is framed as an acceptable cost for civilization and progress. Civilization is also framed as an equal exchange or trade that the Xhosa people desired. However, inequality is the fundamental basis for Grey's civilizing mission: "Grey believed that all men were equal—well, almost equal—as long as they adopted a civilized mode of dress and decent habits" (85). The "civilizing mission" is founded on the notion that indigenous traditions are backward. But since civilization is synonymous with whiteness, even those Xhosa people who relinquish their traditional clothes, language and religion are not treated equally. What results is a deeply fractured society with the Unbelievers forming "a strange alliance with people who had deserted their own god for the god of the white man" (85). On the other hand, for the Believers, the history of land theft by settler colonizers is a constant reminder to beware of "development" plans that promise to bring civilization to Xhosa land.

In post-independence Qolorha represented in Mda's novel, although the current conflict is no longer strictly between racial lines, the division between the Believers and the Unbelievers is itself a legacy of colonial control. The Unbelievers not only welcome "progress" but they also reject the use of traditional Xhosa symbols like the isikhakha skirt or the red ochre. Shame functions as a Foucauldian self-correcting mechanism that perpetuates self-hatred and a

rejection of any cultural practice that is deemed backward. Bhonco's daughter, Xoliswa Ximiya, is ashamed of her mother who is one of the *amahomba*—"those who look beautiful and pride themselves in [Xhosa] fashion" (43). Xoliswa Ximiya, who wears only Western outfits is ashamed of this fashion: "To the *amahomba*, clothes are an art form. They talk. They say something about the wearer. But to highly civilized people like Xoliswa Ximiya, *isiXhosa* costume is an embarrassment. She hates to see her mother looking so beautiful, because she thinks that it is high time her parents changed from *ubuqaba*—backwardness and heathenism. They must become *amagqobhoka*—enlightened ones—like her" (44). The *isiXhosa* outfits "talk" so loudly that they offend Xoliswa Ximiya's "highly civilized" sensibilities which struggle to silence them. Her hatred of her own culture runs so deep that she can no longer bring herself to live in Qolorha. Her only desire is "to leave Qolorha-by-Sea, to be away from the uncivilized bush and the hicks who want to preserve an outdated culture" (88). Xoliswa Ximiya uses "uncivilized" as a racially coded term to deride Xhosa culture along with the place that makes her people unenlightened. She is ashamed of their very history: "She hates Nongqawuse. The mere mention of her name makes her cringe in embarrassment. That episode of the story of her people is a shame and a disgrace" (96). She despises and distances herself from the place, its history and culture, hoping that doing so would earn her the respect of white Americans. Thus, the Unbelievers dismiss as backward the Believers' struggle to maintain the traditions of a living culture and to protect the local ecology. Both the Believers and Unbelievers want to be freed of their troubling past that haunts them, but they cannot see eye-to-eye on the path to attain freedom.

Conservation of a Place

The threat to ecological sovereignty from tourism development looms large in Amitav Ghosh's novel as well. Around the time of the publication of *The Hungry Tide* in 2004, the Indian conglomerate, Sahara group, signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the West Bengal government to develop Sundarbans into a tourist hotspot.³⁷ The plan was to construct offshore "floatels" that would include a casino, a health club, an entertainment center among other tourist attractions by developing a few sparsely occupied islands outside the Tiger Reserve for tourists to enjoy nature from a safe distance without facing any of its perils, i.e., estuarine sharks, tigers and crocodiles. Writing against the Sahara tourism project, Amitav Ghosh³⁸ delves into the dangers of clearing forested areas in the hurricane-prone zone:

The mangrove forests have historically absorbed the first shock of incoming cyclones: they are the barrier that protect the hinterland. This is why the people who live in this region have generally been wary of creating settlements that abut directly on the sea. That this region will be hit by another devastating storm is a near certainty, in this era of global warming. Much of the destruction caused by cyclones is the result of 'storm surges'—the massive tidal waves that precede an incoming storm. ("Folly in the Sundarbans")

Along with the dangers of a changed, more vulnerable landscape, a more recent study,³⁹ which explores the implications of ecotourism for human/nature relationships in the Sundarbans

³⁷ Annu Jalais' essay, "The Sundarbans: Whose World Heritage Site?"

³⁸ Amitav Ghosh's "Folly in the Sudarbans." <https://www.amitavghosh.com/essays/folly.html>.

³⁹ Priyanka Ghosh and Aditya Ghosh's study, "Is Ecotourism a Panacea? Political Ecology Perspectives from the Sundarban Biosphere Reserve, India."

Biosphere Reserve, found that “[t]he locals described their relation with the nature as one of kinship whereby they co-constructed each other. Some of the tourist guides who were local residents from either the farming or fishing communities, claimed that the tourists from the cities were not only outsiders who could not appreciate such a relationship but were also quite detached from the nature and its laws (“Ecotourism” 357). In addition to the adverse impact on conservation efforts, the study found that the bulk of the profits went to elite capitalists, who do not live in the Sundarbans (357). The fishing and farming community is at risk of becoming an economically dependent subsidiary of the tourism industry.

The predicament of the villagers in *The Heart of Redness* is not unlike the tourism project in the Sundarbans. When Camagu starts listening to Zim about how the casino would affect the people of Qolorha, he realizes that “a project of this magnitude cannot be built without cutting down the forest of indigenous trees, without disturbing the bird life, and without polluting the rivers, the sea, and its great lagoon” (119). Camagu knows that the developers will take the place away from the people, alter the landscape and offer jobs to local people as compensation. The project will effectively strip the people of their sovereignty by absorbing them into the capitalist system of wage work. Camagu repeats Qukezwa’s warning:

‘What do villagers know about working in casinos? What education do they have to do that kind of work? I heard one foolish Unbeliever say men will get jobs working in the garden. How many men? And what do they know about keeping those kinds of gardens? What do women know about using machines that clean? Well, maybe three or four women from the village may be taught to use them. Three or four women will get jobs. As for the rest of the workers, the

owners of the gambling city will come with their own people who are experienced in that kind of work.’ (103)

The villagers will have to give up making their livelihood through their place-knowledge and instead learn how to operate machines. Not only will the casino turn the villagers dependent on it for their wages, it will also sever their epistemic connections with the place whose knowledge will be transformed or rendered obsolete in the capitalist system. Additionally, by losing collective ownership of the land, the people “will have to pay to use [the sea]” (200). The jobs will come “at the expense of the freedom to enjoy the sea and its bountiful harvests and the woods and the birds and the monkeys” (103).

The casino also prioritizes the aesthetics of the place over its health. The casino plans to turn wild-grown land into well-designed gardens⁴⁰ by planting trees that appear more pleasing than plain bushes. The developers discuss their plans to expand the tourist center into a city of its own by cutting down all the trees to make way for “a shopping mall, tennis courts, and an Olympic-size swimming pool” and even a retiring home (202). But since tourists also desire to experience a certain amount of greenery, the developers decide to “plant other trees imported from England. We’ll uproot a lot of these native shrubs and wild bushes and plant a beautiful English garden” (202-3) with names that end in Grove, Close, or Dell to transform Qolorha from a hostile, wild place to one that feels familiar and welcoming to the tourists. The Unbelievers, too, favor the developers in planting foreign trees, thinking that “It is foolish to talk of conserving indigenous trees. After all, we can always plant civilized trees. Trees that come from across the seas. Trees that

⁴⁰ Refer to Patricia Fara’s *Sex, Botany, and Empire* (2003) for her chapter on botanic gardens and their role in empire-building.

have no thorns like some of the ugly ones you want to protect” (146).

Qukezwa realizes that the invading people bring “civilization” in the form of invasive species of trees that are both predatory and ill-suited for the place.⁴¹ She takes it upon herself to cull invasive species regularly to maintain the health of indigenous plants. Qukezwa explains in the court that “the trees that I destroy are harmful as the inkberry. They are the lantana and wattle trees. They come from other countries...from Central America, from Australia....to suffocate our trees. They are dangerous trees that need to be destroyed” (216). It is not the mere presence of non-native trees that Qukezwa protests, but rather their predatory nature that prevents indigenous trees from flourishing. The thorny bushes may not be aesthetically pleasing for the tourists but the non-native trees need more resources than what the natural environment can provide, like the wattle tree that “uses all the water. Nothing can grow under the wattle tree. It is an enemy since we do not have enough water in this country” (216). The wattle tree can be read both literally and figuratively as an extension of settler colonialism that eliminates indigenous lives and extracts resources exploitatively. Qukezwa’s ecological resistance, thus, operates at ecological, cultural and metaphorical levels by fighting for indigenous rights that do not see these different dimensions of oppression as discrete or unrelated. For her the foreign trees “are not the trees of our forefathers” (215).

Qukezwa’s kinship with the place, its trees and birds, shapes Camagu’s relationship with Qolorha. Inspired by Qukezwa’s efforts to save the native trees and birds, Camagu, too, becomes committed to saving isiXhosa culture by promoting a cooperative society run by women.

⁴¹ For a reading of Qukezwa as an eco-feminist, see Harry Sewall’s “‘Portmanteau biota’ and Ecofeminist Interventions in Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*.” See also Nettie Cloete and Richard Ndwiyamato Madadzhe’s “Zakes Mda: Shifting Female Identities in *The Heart of Redness*.”

As an alternative to the corporate-owned tourism project that would be detrimental to Qolorha, Camagu proposes a backpackers' hostel for "tourists who like unspoiled places for the sole purpose of admiring the beauty of nature and watching birds without killing them" (239). As a collectively-owned project, the hostel would serve various types of shellfish harvested by the women and cooked traditionally. In addition to the hostel, the cooperative comes with the plan to build a cultural village that would celebrate isiXhosa culture. Unlike a museum that freezes indigenous cultures in time, severing artifacts from forming meaningful relationships with their local community, the cultural village aims to show that isiXhosa traditions are alive and dynamic. Camagu reminds those who object to the cultural village: "I am interested in the culture of the amaXhosa as they live in it today, not yesterday. The amaXhosa people are not a museum piece. Like all cultures, their culture is dynamic" (248). Thus, the villagers' cooperative, while challenging a Eurocentric model of modernity, is not against the kind of modernization that sprouts from place-knowledge, which can be mobilized for ecological and cultural independence. The narrative also disrupts the linear mode of thought embedded in the discourse of modernity that falsely constructs tradition as static and blindly resistant to progress. Unlike Western modernity that was introduced by settler colonialism, producing a nature/culture rift (in the form of Believers and Unbelievers), the amaXhosa do not insist on a distinction between culture and nature. As Camagu learns eventually, cultural liberation is integral to the ecological sovereignty of a place.

As protagonists, Piya and Camagu occupy an uneasy position in the narratives, *The Hungry Tide* and *The Heart of Redness*, respectively. They are both insiders/outside in their community from which they are estranged by having spent their lives in America and by their

Western education. By following the perspectives of these two unsettled characters, the novels allow the readers to glimpse into their world and make explicit issues that would otherwise appear mundane. The characters function as proxies for the readers to whom the local disputes are explained by villagers who initially see them as interlopers. But Piya and Camagu aren't simply plot devices placed in the narrative for our edification. They are both marked by their sense of unbelonging and placelessness.⁴² They start out as transitory figures, chasing their own ambitions, without any vested interest in the place. Working with a predisposed way of knowing, Piya and Camagu are keen to *apply* their Western knowledge without considering that the place may have its own knowledge to offer. The two characters pursue their own personal goals and inadvertently find themselves as participants in ongoing ecological disputes. They are unable to relate to the place and believe that the local problems are divorced from their own. But it is through love (of Fokir in Piya's case, and Qukweza in Camagu's) that both protagonists learn about the place and find a way to conserve it. Both *The Hungry Tide* and *The Heart of Redness* invoke familiar tropes from colonial travel narratives to expose their epistemic shortcomings and to establish that knowledge is a function of time and care, and that the two itinerant characters have to "drop roots" and become part of a place in order to protect it. By committing to a place-world and by relinquishing the objective position of an observer, the two characters become a part of the place.

⁴² Displaced not just spatially but also temporally as characters who are placed outside local history.

Chapter Two: Relating to a Place

The Environmental Bildungsroman: Development and Resistance in Jan Carew's *Black Midas* and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*

In the introduction to *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, the editors of the collection on the female Bildungsroman claim that “It has become a tradition among critics of the *Bildungsroman* to expand the concept of the genre: first beyond the German prototypes, than beyond historical circumscription, now beyond the notion of the *Bildung* as male and beyond the form of the developmental plot as a linear, foregrounded narrative structure” (13-4). Originating in a specific moment in German history, the Bildungsroman morphed as it was adopted to depict other histories that challenged a Western-centric form to sabotage it and/or to make it accommodate the development of non-normative characters. But, in addition to depicting characters that are not necessarily white, male, or able-bodied, the postcolonial Bildungsroman, according to Maria Helena Lima, “indirectly [parallels] the formation of the young self to that of the developing nation” (“Revolutionary Developments,” n.p). Although each variation of the genre is embedded in its own history, Lima argues that postcolonial novels of development are more explicit in the representation of historical turmoil through the central character in a Bildungsroman.

Jan Carew's *Black Midas* (1958) and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) track the journey of self-identification through the successes and false starts of the main characters, Aron Smart and Clare Savage, respectively. But the historical changes in the countries (Guyana and Jamaica respectively) where these novels are set in are not a backdrop that run “parallel” to the

development (or underdevelopment) of the central characters. I argue that political upheavals that alter the trajectory of the countries' histories are co-produced with the (under)development of the characters—that is, the development or underdevelopment of the characters is enmeshed with the fate of the country.⁴³

Both *Black Midas* and *No Telephone to Heaven* are Bildungsroman set in the Caribbean, the former in Guyana and the latter in Jamaica for the most part. A comparative analysis of the two novels offers valuable insights into the ways in which the development of the main characters and the place they inhabit are co-constituted. Although Guyana and Jamaica are vastly different in terms of their ecology and economy, my analysis of the two novels shows that the racist legacy of colonialism and the relentless extractivism of capitalism have the effect of gradually eroding Caribbean ecology and economic autonomy of both countries. The genre of Bildungsroman serves the double function of narrating the growth and changes of a young person whose development is entangled with that of the nation. In this chapter, as illustrations of what I call the “environmental Bildungsroman,” the two novels depict material modes of under/development by yoking together the psychological with the ecological. The chapter brings together the related questions of individual and environmental growth and argues that while Carew’s novel represents a destructive form of individualism, *No Telephone to Heaven* succeeds as a

⁴³ In his popular essay, “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” Fredric Jameson argues that “the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society” (69). However, in an allegory, the immediate aesthetic object at hand has a symbolic relationship with some broader issue or point, without necessarily a clear and direct connection between the two. I extend Jameson’s claim, which may allow to read most Bildungsromane as an allegory for larger national issues, and argue that the works I discuss here are not merely representations of what is happening in their countries at that moment, but are enactments of a history that shapes both the subject and the nation state at once. Particularly in *Black Midas*, the racist colonial legacy that underdevelops the country also has detrimental effects on the psychology of the main character, whose very actions in the novel enact the way Guyana comes to be ecologically and economically drained.

model of environmental Bildungsroman by rejecting the limitations of the traditional genre and envisioning the formation of a collective political identity. My analysis of the novels shows that unsustainable resource extraction has the combined effect of diminishing the autonomy of a place and draining human agency, and that liberation from colonial and capitalist domination must involve forming kinships across differences including collectives with more-than-human nature.

Jan Carew's *Black Midas* is set in the coastal village of Mahaica and focuses on the main character of Aron Smart who lives with his grandparents after the death of his parents. Aron works with a road-building gang and tries to support his grandparents, even as he feels stifled by their dependency on him. Under the direction of Brother C., Aron begins his formal Western education with the hope that it would allow him access to better opportunities outside Mahaica. Aron eventually moves to Georgetown to apprentice under Dr. Ram so he can be a pharmacist, but he continues to feel restless and stifled. In his apprenticeship, as with the time he spent with his grandparents, Aron feels that is being forced to fulfill other people's expectations for his life rather than following his own desires.

Spurred by the doctor's driver, Santos, Aron abandons his apprenticeship and runs off to the mines of Perenong to become a pork-knocker—someone who prospects for gold and diamonds independently. The novel follows his fortunes as he strikes it rich as a diamond prospector and buys a house in Georgetown to enjoy his wealth with Belle, a former prostitute, and his long-time friend, Bullah. It does not take long for Aron to lose all his wealth by throwing lavish parties, after which he has no choice but to return to the bush, this time to prospect for gold. Driven by greed, he takes more and more risks to mine for gold, resulting in the loss of many lives along the way. The novel ends with Aron losing a limb when he goes too far in his mining

activities, and without a resolution to the physical or psychological uncertainties that shroud Aron's life.

While Aron goes through life alienated and unable to make a connection with the natural world or with the people around him, the protagonist of Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare Savage, learns to form alliances with a resistance group to fight for a common cause. Clare is introduced as a young twelve-year old girl in the prequel, *Abeng*, who, like Aron, is formally educated in the Western colonial curriculum that is largely whitewashed. But as a bi-racial child born to a white father and a dark-skinned mother, Clare's revolutionary education happens extramurally as she learns about the various histories of oppressed people all over the world and tries to find herself a place in them. As a growing young woman in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare's journey of interiority is mapped through her travels in the world, as she continues to question her own personal gender and sexual identities. Through a series of letters, Clare's transgender friend informs her about the gradual deterioration of Jamaica and impels her to join a guerrilla group and fight for liberation and self-representation. The group decides to attack an Anglo-American film set that is producing an exoticized representation of Nanny of the Maroons.⁴⁴ Angered by the misrepresentation of Jamaican history and its heroes, the guerrilla group lies in ambush to destroy the film set but before they could carry out their plans, they are shot and killed by military fire.

While both novels end abruptly in a rather pessimistic fashion, my analysis of the novels shows the importance of a radical and transformative politics that is predicated on collectivity by rejecting the conventional individualism of the classical Bildungsroman. In *Black Midas*, Aron is alienated from himself and from the natural world. As the novel progresses, Aron's

⁴⁴ For a historical treatment of Nanny's role in fighting slavery, see Stella Dadzie's essay, "Searching for the Invisible Woman: Slavery and Resistance in Jamaica."

life descends into drunkenness and sexual dissipation, leaving him lonely in the midst of fellow pork-knockers. Clare, on the other hand, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, is able to overcome or set aside her internal conflicts about her racial identity, and educate herself in revolutionary histories that would one day fuel her own anti-colonial actions. While *Black Midas* illustrates the estrangement of “Man”⁴⁵ from “Nature”⁴⁶ through unsustainable resource extraction, *No Telephone to Heaven* opens up possibilities for forming a more-than-human collective with diverse beings through anti-colonial⁴⁷ praxis.

Jan Carew and Caribbean Environmentalism

Jan Carew’s study of Caribbean history and his role in Guyana’s politics influenced his literary and non-literary works. He was a versatile writer known for his novels, poems, children’s books, political writings and book illustrations. Carew stated that he consciously did not “make any differences between literature and politics” (qtd. in Joy Gleason Carew 28). His politics of pan-Africanism, anti-colonialism and environmentalism are reflected in his works regardless of the genre. In his non-fiction works, such as *Fulcrums of Change* and *Rape of Paradise*, Carew writes about Guyana’s rich natural world and its unique location as a Caribbean country in continental America situated at the intersection of plantation ecologies in the islands as well as the systematic

⁴⁵ As a signification of the white, Christian male of the Enlightenment era who finds himself at odds with “Nature” that he sets out to conquer and distinguish himself from. I am drawing upon Sylvia Wynter’s theorization of “Man” as a universalized figure, free of bodiment and exclusionary by definition. By retaining this exclusionary term, I make explicit the violent masculinist ideology that underscores the nature/culture discourse, which is at work in *Black Midas*.

⁴⁶ See Moore’s *Capitalism in the Web of Life* in which he claims that “the manifold projects of capital, empire, and science are busy making Nature with a capital ‘N’—external, controllable, reducible” (14).

⁴⁷ Not in the sense of a historical event but as a critical analytic of uprooting the effects of colonialism or rejecting its ongoing forms.

exploitation of natural resources in the Amazon-Orinoco basin in the hinterland. The political concerns of littoral Guyana, which was far more populated and culturally diverse because of the former plantation system, differed significantly from those of the more impenetrable hinterland where indigenous peoples predominantly lived. As Walter Rodney explores in his comprehensive work, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*, the political center continued to have trouble uniting the disparate ecologies, economies, and cultures of this Caribbean country on mainland South America.

As a Marxist, who was concerned about the developmental trajectory of the country, Carew sought to understand the root cause of the economic and racial divisions that troubled Guyana, and worked towards mending them through active participation in Guyanese politics. Carew aligned himself with Cheddi Jagan, who was the founder and leader of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) of, what was then known as, British Guiana. Under the leadership of Cheddi Jagan, who was seen by his supporters as "the champion of the exploited, the dispossessed, and the forgotten" (*Politics of Power* 18), the PPP attempted to unite people of both Indian and African descent—the two largest ethnic groups in Guiana. But in the post-war moment, Britain and the U.S. started to feel threatened by the rise to power by the party with its vocally communist and anti-colonialist rhetoric and promoted the propaganda of the "Red Scare." The British Colonial Office, aided by the CIA, forced Cheddi Jagan from office just 133 days after his victory in April 1953, and with that the tensions that existed within the party came to a head. The resulting fracturing of the party along ethnic lines had a tremendous impact on Guyanese economy for several decades, splitting the country between parties that aimed to implement radical leftist policies, and liberal ones that sought to attract middle-class capitalists and foreign investments.

Furthermore, the colonial legacy of racism—in its external and internalized forms— in conjunction with colonialist/capitalist extraction of mineral wealth, further disrupts Guyanese economic autonomy and turns Guyana into a peripheral nation in the world-system. PPP's staunch ideological commitment to anti-colonialism at a time of uncertainty about the future of Guyana forms the political context for *Black Midas*. Carew's novel narrates these disruptions produced by a long-history of slavery and indenture and represents their effects on the Guyanese landscape, as well as on the psyche of the colonized subjects, whose fragmentations are epitomized in the central character.

Written in 1958, *Black Midas*, is Jan Carew's first and one of his two popular novels in West Indian literature, the other one being *The Wild Coast* which is another coming-of-age novel published in the same year. The latter novel, too, advances some of the themes Carew explores in *Black Midas*, mainly the psychological effects of a colonial education and the resulting isolation from traditional cultures. Though both novels, to some extent, narrativize and trace the origins of alienation of colonized subjects from their place and culture to centuries of colonial occupation and the commodification of the natural world by the plantation system, *Black Midas*, as an Environmental Bildungsroman, is more explicit in its portrayal of the dehumanizing effect of environmental exploitation. Carew is troubled by the harmful world view inherited by the formerly enslaved and the indentured from white colonial masters to dominate the natural world and treat it as an expendable resource. The gradual loss of Guyana's ability to self-regulate its economy because of the commodification of nature through neoliberal globalization informs the themes of alienation and loss of subjectivity in the novel.

In *Black Midas*, Carew paints a stunningly rich picture of the Guyanese landscape

and juxtaposes it with the overwhelming sense of alienation that haunts the protagonist's relationship with nature. The themes of alienation and exile are important for Carew for whom the colonized Caribbean subject is psychologically impoverished by losing the ability to form mutually enriching connections with life-sustaining elements of the natural world. In the essay, "The Caribbean Writer and Exile," Carew writes about the Akan theatre that typically features a central figure who is surrounded by conflicting spirits. He writes that the only way these externalized conflicts are resolved is "if the human being periodically renewed contact with communal wellsprings of rhythm, creation, and life" (453). But Carew believes that colonialism disrupts precisely this capacity for self-rejuvenation, diminishing the subject's vitality and agency to negotiate everyday conflicts. He adds that "the colonizing zeal of the European made indigenous peoples exiles in their own countries—Prospero made Caliban an exile in his" (453). As the colonizers raided Latin America for gold, the colonized lost "connections with a vast network of secret tributaries that led into the mainstream of the memory of mankind. The total reservoir of memory was seriously impoverished by this loss" (460). Carew claims that the culturally untethered European, with his "psychic voids," only succeeds in perpetuating further exhaustion and depletion among indigenous habitations all over Latin America. In *Black Midas*, Carew traces the consequences of this long legacy of mindless rapacity that empties out the ecological wealth in his home country of Guyana, leaving every succeeding plunderer, too, in a negative relationship with nature and with one's own self.

In a move that has now become the norm, *Black Midas*, like many other postcolonial Bildungsromane, deviates from a linear trajectory of progress that is typical for the classical novel of development. Jed Esty argues that, "[c]olonial modernity unsettled the progressive

and stabilizing discourse of national culture by breaking up cherished continuities between a people and its language, territory, and polity” (6). The resultant discontinuities get encoded in the characters as stuntedness, who no longer possess the adequate means to grasp a world that is rapidly shifting under colonial terms. *Black Midas* epitomizes such a “failed or frozen *Bildung*” in which the central character is unable to actualize a coherent sense of self throughout the novel. The same “shifting sense of self” that defines Aron’s childhood, persists through his every adventure. As the discontinuities multiply, Aron increasingly becomes alienated from the natural world and experiences a repeated fracturing of his subjectivity and a further erosion of his sense of self.

Carew contributes to the proliferating variations in the genre of Bildungsroman by constructing a character whose subjectivity is altered negatively through an undoing of sorts. *Black Midas* is also one of the examples of a Black Bildungsroman that explores the causes and implications of Black underdevelopment in the Caribbean world. As the title of the novel emphasizes, it is a story of Blackness and particularly what it means to be a Black man who grew up in poverty. Like his Greek namesake, everything he touches turns to gold but his success alters the way he relates to the world and to the people around him, who become a means to achieving an end. His ambitions to attain the same social class position as the white explorers who came before him only result in further psychological impoverishment. As Geta Leseur argues in *Ten is the Age of Darkness: The Black Bildungsroman*, “The Black experience in the United States or the West Indies cannot be limited or defined by parochial frames of reference and value that are derived from traditions (White and European) from which Black people have been largely excluded” (2). In, what can be described as, an attempt to capture a particular “collective [Black] experience that is

unique in terms of its circumstances of history and geography” (Leseur 2), *Black Midas* ties together the psychological experiences of a colonized subject with the “modernization” of a nation at the cusp of independence. The nature-culture binary that has its origins in Eurocentric thinking is reproduced in colonized countries with its insistence on proving mastery over nature in order to establish the notion of a superior civilization. When a poor Afro-Guyanese man like Aron inherits this binary logic, it sets him on a path of relentless extraction and commodification of nature that leaves him chasing the moving goal-post of a respectable social class position.

Black Midas: An Anti-Bildungsroman

As a Bildungsroman of a poor Black man who struggles to “move up” to a more secure class position through the exploitation of the environment, Carew’s novel straddles a number of closely-related, or even overlapping, genres, the contours of which I attempt to trace more clearly here in the way I deploy these terms. If the genre of Postcolonial Bildungsroman, with its “questions of identity, pedagogy and power” (Vázquez 86) is about making room for the construction of postcolonial subjectivity, then *Black Midas* is certainly an instance of this genre. More specifically, however, I show how the novel is a work of “antidevelopmental” fiction (to use Esty’s term) where “the attainment of a mature social role [is thwarted] through plots of colonial migration and displacement” (*Unseasonable Youth* 2). As the novel progresses, Aron’s moral lapses intensify with the reproduction of the colonial logic of extraction, leading to a psychological “de-growth” and loss of agency. Reading *Black Midas* as an Anti-Bildungsroman is central to the segment of my argument that focuses on the corrosive effects of colonialism on Aron’s psyche. But Aron’s anti-development is not his alone—Guyanese ecology is also at stake in this undoing.

I establish that *Black Midas* belongs to the genre of, what I call, an *Environmental Bildungsroman*. I define it as a genre that yokes together the psychological development of the protagonist with the materiality of the environment. In an *Environmental Bildungsroman*, nature is neither an unmoving, passive backdrop for the protagonist's actions nor a mirror that reflects back his struggles. An analysis of Carew's novel reveals the ways in which the development of the main character and the natural world he inhabits are co-constituted. The racist legacy of colonialism and the relentless extractivism of capitalist logic have the effect of steadily eroding Caribbean ecology and economic autonomy of Guyana through its own subject who internalizes a reductionist logic in his treatment of nature. It is important to recognize that this antagonistic relationship with nature is one that was imposed through plantation slavery where the exploitation of stolen land was carried out through stolen labor. Slavery and indenture conjoined the oppression of the enslaved with the landscape, pitting one against the other. The result is that, as Édouard Glissant bemoans, "the descendants of slaves [are] alienated from the land that could never be theirs" (*Poetics* xxii). The framework afforded by the term, *Environmental Bildungsroman*, makes visible this critical linkage between the main character and the land, and emphasizes that the two are not easily separable in a study of Caribbean literature.

Carew's break from the more recognizable elements of the classical *Bildungsroman* is not simply an aesthetic choice but also a political one that is rooted in the colonial underdevelopment of Guyana. In *History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*, Walter Rodney lays out the ways in which colonial (mis)management led to the underdevelopment of Guyana and undermined its ability to function as a self-sufficient economy. Instead of relying on domestic resources for food supply and industry, Guyana was made to depend on foreign imports since the

early twentieth century that created an economic and power imbalance which would continue for decades (91). Rodney presents detailed economic analyses to show that the hinterland suffered more neglect compared to the coastal plantations that were highly profitable for large-scale planters. The only resources of value in the bush country were the diamond and gold mines that became highly sought after, especially after the end of slavery and indentured labor. Barring pork-knockers, who were self-employed miners, predominantly Afro-Guyanese, such as those described in *Black Midas*, the majority of the mining in Guyana was carried out by small domestic and large foreign mining corporations. But the working conditions in the mines were no better than in coastal plantations: “All workers on the coast and in the interior remained under the shadow of the plantation, and it is important to stress the factor of continuity in the hegemony exercised by the plantation” (*History* 103). The anxiety and restlessness engendered in a country that is undergoing flux as it leaves behind a plantation economy to be forcibly joined with a global capitalist economy through liberalization policies reverberate through its subjects who seek new ways of gaining social mobility. *Black Midas*, then, is not just the story of Aron’s transformation but also that of a country that struggles to shake off “the shadow of the plantation” and find new ways towards progress and autonomy. But Carew’s Bildungsroman reveals that shaking off the shadows of a racist history and forging a path to economic success are neither straightforward nor attainable for an Afro-Guyanese subject.

Black Midas shatters the linear trajectory of the classical Bildungsroman. While, on the surface, the novel is structured linearly from Aron’s boyhood to adulthood, a closer reading exposes the disruptions in his childhood, the stagnations in his adulthood, and the misgivings about his future. This trajectory of development may resemble a European working-class Bildung,

but for a postcolonial subject, the traumatic history of slavery renders the middle-class position inaccessible and casts whiteness as aspirational. The apparent impossibility of Aron's ambitions, coupled with the entrenched systems of oppression in the form of racism, leaves him in a permanent state of dissatisfaction and inadequacy at every turn in his life.

Aron's early life is marked by a deep dissatisfaction of living in a small village with his aging grandparents. The feeling of being burdened by caring for his ailing grandparents is transposed as claustrophobia that comes with living in a small village: "I wanted to escape from Mahaica, but I couldn't. My grandparents wrapped themselves around me and I knew no way of fighting against their feebleness" (22). He is tied to Mahaica by the obligation of supporting his aging grandparents whom he looks upon as vampires that "must feed on the young,...claw at their young limbs with dried-up hands and gloat over their innocence" (22). The decrepitude of aging is juxtaposed with the supposed innocence of childhood, interrupting the progression of a conventional *Bildung* as the story of growth from innocence to experience. Children in Mahaica do not remain young or innocent for too long under the shadow of slavery. Aron, as a fit, young, six-year old, first starts working as a mule boy for a white overseer on his rounds at a sugar estate and then with a road-building gang with an overseer who responds to a white master. Economic responsibility and the maturity that comes with it are thrust upon Aron from the very beginning of the novel, challenging the traditional association of childhood as an age of innocence. Aron believes his youth is being sucked out of him leaving him weary in a place that has nothing much to offer him anymore. Stifled by the shrinking horizons of his tiny village where there is no more room for new adventures, Aron starts looking for a way out to freedom and excitement.

Education, in its formal and informal modes, is a key aspect of a *Bildungsroman*

and an important path in the protagonist's journey of self-formation. In *Black Midas*, Aron's training in formal Western education, sponsored by a mysterious benefactor, becomes his ticket to the city and more importantly, out of Mahaica. After the sudden deaths of his grandparents, Aron is free to leave Mahaica and choose a suitable livelihood for himself. He begins his education under Brother C, who is determined to ensure that he passed the Junior Cambridge Exam. But, as is often the case in a postcolonial Bildungsroman, Western education that is supposed to shape the identity of the protagonist and nudge him or her into an upper social class, only results in further rootlessness. Studying for the exam marks a distinctive phase in Aron's life when he starts to evolve and to disconnect from his childhood village: "I struggled with words and intersecting lines and figures and grew conscious of myself changing while everything around me remained the same" (49). As Leseur points out in *The Black Bildungsroman*, "Formal education in [West Indian] works is the traditional, structured formula sent over from England" (24). The curriculum dictated by the Mother Country is supposed to prepare the colonial subject for a life outside the confines of the islands.⁴⁸ By excluding West Indian people's history, the curriculum teaches its Black and Brown subjects to model their lives and ambitions on white bourgeois men.

Aron's Western education, which results in self-loathing and a rejection of his meager origins, forms the roots of anti-development. His move to the city of Georgetown to apprentice under Dr. Ram is fueled by his growing disdain for his village: "I suddenly realized that I hated [Brother C] and the village and the black faces with their white teeth shining in the sun.

⁴⁸ Cliff's *Abeng* explores in greater depth the alienation that results from training in a whitewashed curriculum that is intended to erase and sanitize violent colonial histories with the aim of creating a new workforce of educated Jamaicans who will be less likely to resist the installment of colonial practices and more likely to participate in them to fulfill their personal class ambitions.

Mahaica was a womb out of which I had been wrenched and I did not want to return to it” (51). Western education does not just alienate Aron from Mahaica—it divides him from himself. It teaches him to internalize anti-Blackness and to despise his connections with his community in Mahaica. Aron’s individuation is marked by a violent rejection of the place and its people that have come to bear a metonymic association with backwardness, and economic and psychological stagnation. His personal childhood connection to “the sun...the swamp and the river, the amber sea, the savannahs” is severed by book knowledge that makes him view the landscape from a shifted, rather distorted perspective. Instead of empowering him, his education sends him hurtling into a future that is not the journey of self-discovery the genre traditionally promises.

As Dr. Ram’s apprentice, Aron once again grows disenchanted with the mundaneness of a middle-class life and its promises of respectability and stability. Seeking adventure and quick profits—neither of which is accessible through a middle-class living—Aron escapes to the diamond mines of Perenong with Dr. Ram’s driver, Santos, hoping to strike it rich quickly. Aron is not new to the prospecting trade. Aron’s father pursued the same adventure and died in a mining accident. Beauchamp, Aron’s benefactor, who anonymously funded his initial education, was his father’s partner from their prospecting days. Aron comes to learn that Beauchamp’s largesse was motivated by guilt because it was his reckless greed for gold that led to his father’s premature death in the gold mines. Beauchamp confesses to Aron that “Gold and diamonds make monsters out of men, drive all decency and kindness from their hearts, turn honest men into thieves and liars, good men into fiends” (90). But Aron dismisses the lesson that assigning intrinsic value to gold and diamonds comes with the heavy cost of depravity and dehumanization. Instead, he becomes even more determined to run away from his “safe career”

and pursue diamond prospecting. From this point, the novel is less about Aron's education or growth as a person and more about his adventures with fellow pork-knockers whose only aim in life is to prospect for diamonds during the day and lead a life of debauchery and excess at night.

It is at this point in Aron's life that the novel more clearly reverses into an anti-Bildungsroman through Aron's choices, which lead to his eventual undoing. His move to the mines takes him away from a profession that is socially-deemed respectable and towards a life of profligacy and dissolution. Instead of a story of growth and development, the novel abandons the structure of progressive character development and presents a series of the protagonist's adventures (or rather misadventures), and his encounters with various working-class characters on the quickest path to economic success. A close examination of Aron's actions and excesses reveals the gradual de-"generation" of his selfhood, when his encounters in the mining world start having the adverse effect of diminishing his humanity as material wealth starts gaining more prominence in his life. By resisting any notion of class progress with a main character that festers with discontent and self-destructive ambitions, *Black Midas* essentially turns into an anti-Bildungsroman.⁴⁹ The novel brings into sharp relief the character's fall to a lower class-position, guided by questionable moral choices, and driven by an insatiable appetite for gold and adventure. The lack of a forward movement in the plot, coupled with the steady deterioration of the protagonist's subjectivity, is a particular instance (rather than an allegory or a metaphor) of a country that is undergoing economic and ecological underdevelopment.

⁴⁹ I use this term to distinguish more clearly the novel's departure from the classical genre and not to suggest that it is somehow structured differently from other postcolonial Bildungsromane, for, as Ericka A. Hoagland rightly points out, "The depiction of a broken, or even impossible, maturation process, and an ethical critique of the society into which the protagonist seeks entrance, which typifies the anti-Bildungsroman tradition, may also be discerned in the postcolonial Bildungsroman" (219-220).

At first, Aron finds it liberating to lead a life of hedonistic excess but he is soon overcome with guilt and fear that manifest as superstitions and signs of bad luck. Like the centuries of colonial explorers before him, and like Beauchamp whose path he follows, Aron is horrified to discover the kind of person he turns into in the forests of Perenong. In his ambition to acquire wealth quickly, Aron inherits the greed and guilt of the prospectors who came before him, reliving and repeating their rapacity. As Beauchamp had warned, Aron's insatiable appetite for diamonds robs him of agency to act morally and to prevent the death of his friend in a mining accident. As the novel progresses, Aron's sense of self increasingly becomes attenuated as his guilt and self-hatred intensify. But the consequences of Aron's actions are not just personal. His ruthless desire for wealth and the path of extraction that he sets on to achieve it directly contribute to the depletion of Guyanese ecology and economy. In this Environmental Bildungsroman, where the Guyanese natural world is set up as a threat to "tame" and to overcome in order to reap material rewards, its unsustainable extraction is produced by its own subject at the cost of his humanity.

Alienation and Metabolic Rift

In the mining camps of Cuyuni-Mazaruni, Aron is reminded of the familiar sounds in Mahaica as he "listened to the noises of the Mazaruni—the ooskudo owl hooting, the death-cry of a frog caught by a snake, the hoofbeats of deer running past the camp and the wind in the forest" (120). But littoral culture and ecology are far more domestic and harmless than the bush in every way. While Aron associates Mahaica with predictability and stagnancy, bush-life is filled with excitement of the unknown and the unexplored for Aron and his pork-knocker friends. From a

young age, Aron is used to killing the occasional boa constrictor for sport, but the threats to his life in the bush are manifold. If Aron felt enervated in Mahaica, his relationship with the natural world in Mazaruni is a far more antagonistic one. Every wild animal, every snake, every river or tree either poses a threat to his life or an obstacle on his path to riches. Aron and his crew of miners chip away at the land and mountains as if they were in battle trenches. United by a singular goal of getting rich quickly, the men waged a relentless war against the natural world, determined to control it by systematically siphoning off its wealth.

The miners pepper the land with powerful explosives to extract valuable minerals and create irreparable fissures that crisscross the earth. Metaphorically, the gaping chasms left behind represent the men's rift from the natural world—they are unable to view the land as anything but a means to an end. But the man-nature rift that is at play in the mines of Cuyuni-Mazaruni is not just a metaphorical or psychological one—it represents a “metabolic rift.” Marx's articulation of “metabolic rift” is an apt framework to examine Aron's psychological alienation that is linked to the unsustainable mining of gold and diamonds in Guyana. In his work, *Marx's Ecology*, John Bellamy Foster explains that capitalist agriculture produced “a metabolic rift in the relation between town and country, human beings and the earth,” (141-2) creating a crisis in both environment and society. Foster focuses on the importance of Marx's use of the term “Stoffwechsel” that is commonly translated as “metabolism” but a more literal translation of the term would be “stuff or materials exchange.” Essentially, metabolism is the exchange of vital matter between “man and earth” that is needed for mutual prosperity and well-being. According to Marx, with the advent of industrialized agriculture, there is an “irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself. The result

of this is a squandering of the vitality of the soil, which is carried by trade far beyond the bounds of a single country” (qtd. in Foster 155). This rift effectively disrupts interdependencies by interrupting the very conditions needed to sustain a materials exchange, creating a shift from use to exchange value. When exhaustible resources get commodified through unsustainable extraction, the soil is left poorer and unable to replenish itself. Marx writes that there are simultaneous social consequences to this metabolic rift: it is human labor that sustains this exchange of vital matter and an interruption of that metabolism leaves the worker enervated and alienated from nature. In *Black Midas*, as Aron steadily chips away in the diamond mines, he forms an unequal relationship with nature that is defined by extraction and the erosion of natural wealth. Through Marx’s conception that metabolic rift impoverishes both Man and earth, severing him from life forces that sustain him, *Black Midas* shows that there are material implications to the psychological anti-development.

Michael Niblett is another scholar who theorizes metabolic rift and examines its operation in *Black Midas* and the colonial context that produces it. Here, I dwell on Niblett’s analysis of the novel for the additional reason that it’s the only published in-depth scholarly work on *Black Midas*. Niblett expands on Bellamy Foster’s theorization of metabolic rift and examines the forced integration of the Caribbean into the capitalist world-system through plantation economies that produced large-scale underdevelopment in Guyana. He charts Aron’s movements from the village of Mahaica to the hinterland and then back to Georgetown as a representation of “economic and social organization and a specific relationship to nature” (243), with capitalist logic operating to distance society from nature at each stage. Though Mahaica, to some extent, represents a place that doesn’t quite embody this separation from nature, Niblett claims that this

degree of communality “would be impossible to maintain under the full force of the disaggregating effects of capital” (243). Niblett suggests that Aron overcomes his feeling of alienation once he moves to the interior because the market economy is absent there. However, my analysis shows that Aron becomes more disconnected in the bush through relentless extraction and denudation of Guyanese ecology by treating the natural world as an infinite resource—as a means to a better social position. The capitalist logic is at work regardless of the geography of Aron’s location because it is embedded in the very relationship Aron has with the environment.

Although “metabolic rift” lends itself as a metaphor for alienation from nature, the concept of “metabolic shift” or “singular metabolism” put forth by the Environmental Sociologist, Jason W. Moore, is perhaps better suited to examine Aron’s material relationship with nature. While Rift analyses inadvertently subscribe to the Cartesian dichotomy of nature versus society (by posing Man as alienated, and thus separate, from Nature), Moore brings the focus back to society *in* nature for the simple reason that humans are also part of nature and not a separate and distinct entity located outside of it. This ontological distinction has important consequences for an analysis of *Black Midas*. For one, Aron is never truly isolated from and unmoved by nature. His shifting relationship with it from his boyhood to adulthood shows that Aron’s discontent and his growing feeling of being trapped are tied to his treatment of the natural world. Colonial logic is at work when he views himself as separate and superior to nature, which allows him to justify its exploitation without remorse or concern for the material or psychological outcome. In this structure of entanglement, Aron’s psychological trauma and loss of agency are not an allegory for the exploitation of Guyanese ecology but together the two form a singular historical process that is co-produced. Alienation is the result of the commodification process that reifies nature and alters

nature's lively form to an inert object that can be possessed and traded. He gradually loses a stable sense of self, as he starts to model an identity mainly through the commodified objects that he helped produce. Both nature and man are diminished, as commodities and conspicuous consumption of these objects assume greater significance in Aron's life.

This inverse relationship between Aron's subjectivity and his increased appetite for commodities is nowhere more evident than when he moves to Georgetown in pursuit of a more domestic and stable life. For Moretti, stability, in so much as the hero no longer needs to embark on a quest for self-actualization, marks the culmination of a Bildungsroman. With marriage and domesticity, the protagonist's socialization is complete and he has fulfilled the goals of the *Bildung* (*Way* 22). So when Aron gives up mining, buys a house in Georgetown with his newly acquired wealth, and pursues a "a respectable life" with Belle, it may seem that *Black Midas* is back in line with the traditional Bildungsroman. But unlike in the classical convention, the novel does not end with Aron's move to Georgetown but it becomes yet another occasion for further instability and restlessness.

Aron's only model for a life of wealth and comfort is based on white bourgeois men and so he buys a white man's house and tries to make it familiar by transforming it to mimic the natural space of Mahaica. With the help of Belle, he attempts to exorcize the white man's presence by decorating the place with "ocelot, monkey tail, red howler rugs on the floor, and...toucan and macaw feathers glued on to ... bamboo in bright colors" (176). But the sterile and eclectic collection of objects in the house is far removed from the liveliness of the Mahaican landscape. His diamonds buy him things that he believes would make the house more familiar but, detached from their natural context, where they had formed organic associations, these things are rendered inert

and uncanny. By being forced to co-exist in the new setting, these objects create new meanings in the Georgetown house as symbolic of the power of material acquisition that places importance on the display of commodified objects.

In an attempt to purchase cultural capital that was reserved for the white occupant of the house, Aron transforms himself as well by starting to “dress like a diamond king, to wear silk shirts and doeskin flannels, a white broad-rimmed velour hat, a silk-scarf with a twenty-carat diamond stuck in the knot, deer- or snakeskin shoes, and a diamond ring on each finger” (136). In both his occupational pursuits and aspirations of domesticity, Aron rejects his Blackness and models himself after white men who epitomize success and class status. In this contract with capitalism, he becomes a walking pastiche of fetishized artifacts from the natural world that are now commodified and ascribed social value. Within this “enclosure of fantasy,” Aron conforms to the way he believes a wealthy man ought to live. Commodified objects begin to take up more psychological space in this invented environment of success, as his own subjectivity runs out of room and his actions become constrained by conspicuous consumption that he feels compelled to maintain for the world.

As Aron’s greed intensifies, he carries on with his rapacious mining activities that eventually cost him his relationship with Belle and his trusted friend Bullah. Diamonds, and mining for them, become more important to Aron and he does not notice that his cherished relationships begin to wither and lose their value. His rationalized relationship with nature that allows him to view land or animals as either means or obstacles to his goal of accumulating diamonds, extends to his relationship with close friends and family, who, if they do not appear to be of any value to his ambition, are cut out of his life. He does not realize that his fetish for

diamonds chips away at his humanity as he starts to weigh human lives against the assigned value of diamonds. In an incident that is reminiscent of the way Beauchamp's greed kills his father, Aron watches one of his close friends get killed in a dangerous mine that everyone cautions him to stay away from. Throughout the novel, Aron is unable to shake off the guilt and fear of bad luck that have a hold over him. For every animal he kills for sport or survival,⁵⁰ and for the loss of every life that he felt no remorse over, Aron lives in constant fear of retribution from nature itself. The metabolic shift that is at work in Aron's life sets him on a spiraling path of alienation that isolates him from his own humanity until the loss of subjectivity is complete when he feels paralyzed by the significance of commodities in his life.

In Aron's one-sided relationship with nature, he views the land, the vegetation, the animals, including the people around him, as a means to an end. It helps him justify and rationalize his callous relationship with nature, so he does not have to owe care or nourishment to the land and to the people that he depends on. But as his prospecting companion reminds him, "when you take thing out the earth and you en't put nothing back, the land and the river does claim sacrifice" (257). Aron realizes belatedly that the sacrifice is his very humanity after the years of psychological and ecological dissipation.

Maria Helena Lima, invoking Lukács' term of "transcendental homelessness," describes the impossibility of ever returning home by the protagonist of a postcolonial Bildungsroman, by either dying or "growing away."⁵¹ Although Carew's hero does not die, his

⁵⁰ Carew's novel challenges Western representations that "uncritically idealize 'natives' as perfect environmentalists" (Mwangi 3) and instead portrays a character who carries the deep scars of colonialism that prevent him from seeing the importance of caring for his environment.

⁵¹ "Decolonizing Genre."

depletion of material and cultural capital at the end concludes his anti-development. However, he dreams of returning home “to buy land in Mahaica, a piece of land that will stretch from the sea to the forest, ... to grow coconuts and rice and ground provisions” (254-255). The readers don’t see Aron carry out this plan but the ending signals that his remorse for the loss of lives and limb on his path to success takes the shape of a desire to go back to his origins and rehabilitate his relationship with the land. Aron’s wish to return home specifically to re-grow ground provisions is a significant moment in this Environmental Bildungsroman. As I have shown, until the very end, the novel charts the underdevelopment of Guyana through its own subject. Conversely, the novel’s hints that the liberation of a nation can be made possible through the postcolonial subject’s maturation. Written during the peak of the anti-colonial movement in British Guiana, *Black Midas* ends with uncertainty that is laced with optimism by signaling the possibility of a “resistance to the market system and market values” (“Novel and History” 99). If land has been tied to oppression, then liberation, too, is made possible through land. Although this possibility may not be within Aron’s reach, Clare Savage, in *NTH*, finds purpose in allying with the land and with the people, who are invested in protecting it.

Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*

If *Black Midas* is a novel of rift and alienation, *No Telephone to Heaven* can be read as a novel of forced heterogeneity—a coming together of broken, disparate pieces for a common cause. In *If I could Write This in Fire*, Michelle Cliff shares what it means to be fragmented and severed from one’s history, culture, and community as a result of colonialism: “We are a fragmented people. My experience as a writer coming from a culture of colonialism, a culture of

Black people riven from one another, my struggle to achieve wholeness from fragmentation, while working within fragmentation, producing work which may find its strength in its depiction of fragmentation, through form as well as content, is similar to other writers whose origins are in countries defined by colonialism” (ix). *NTH* depicts the purposeful coming together of a disparate group of people to fight for a common cause.

NTH is framed by a description of the guerrilla group that is en route to attack an Anglo-American film set and the fate they meet with at the end. The novel follows Clare’s journeys through the US, England, and Europe, while also unfolding her interior explorations as she grapples with her racial and sexual identities. Although the bookended sections are set in Jamaica when Clare is an adult, through a series of flashbacks, the novel narrates Clare’s adolescence in America where her father, Boy Savage, tried to “pass” as white, while her mother, Kitty, struggles with racism. Eventually, Kitty returns to Jamaica with Clare’s darker-skinned younger sister, leaving the light-skinned Clare to be raised by her father. Clare’s formal education continues in America after which she pursues graduate work in at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. Growing restless and disillusioned with racism in the “mother-country,” Clare leaves London to wander through Europe with a traumatized war veteran, Bobby, who breaks off with her after Clare has a miscarriage. She returns home to Jamaica, in part, because of her transgender friend, Harry/Harriet, who persuades Clare that she is needed back in Jamaica. Moved by the radical politics of Harry/Harriet, this final journey takes a political turn when she joins the guerrilla group to attack the film set that is shooting a movie about the famous Maroon leader who is popularly called Granny Nanny in Jamaica. But before the group could even launch their attack, they are gunned down and the members of the group die amidst a cacophony of gunfire and

jungle noises.

In the 1993 interview with Meryl Schwartz, Michelle Cliff explains the reason for concluding *NTH* with the brutal deaths of the resistance fighters, “highlighting the difficulty of resisting neocolonialism.” Sounding weary and defeated herself, Cliff says that “[t]here are so many levels on which the struggle has to be waged. There’s self-hatred, there’s distrust of each other, there’s the fact that whenever Jamaica...has taken a shot at revolutionary change, when Manley tried his socialist experiments, for example, it didn’t last very long” (“Interview”). Cliff bemoans the loss of Black public intellectuals and artists such as Bob Marley, Walter Rodney, and Maurice Bishop who died young when the cause of global Black liberation needed them the most. With the loss of these important voices, Cliff believes Jamaica, especially, is outmatched by capitalist imperial powers, which she believes are “so ranged against movements of self-definition in the Caribbean that change is almost impossible at this point” (“Interview”). For Cliff, any question of individual self-definition is tied to the political condition of the country. So, the steady loss of Black artists, intellectuals, and activists over the years takes the form of futility in the novel, even as she understands that Jamaicans cannot give up fighting against colonialism and its ongoing legacy. In *NTH*, although Cliff imagines a resistance movement that is necessary to challenge capitalist oppression, she feels she must represent the resistance ending in defeat since the contemporary political moment would not allow her to imagine its success. At least, not just yet.

Cliff is both frustrated and angered by the neocolonial demands of economic liberalization that set out to undermine Manley’s socialist policies at the cost of Jamaica people’s economic well-being. Writing at a time when capitalism seems an insurmountable system, Cliff despairs that, with all his good intentions, Manley had not been successful in dismantling the

oppressive system. Both *Abeng* (1984) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) were written after the defeat of left-of-center People's National Party led by Michael Manley⁵² and after Edward Seaga, the conservative leader of Jamaica Labour Party, took office. Jamaican people had grown disillusioned with Manley's "socialist experiments," when poverty and unemployment remained unchanged during his tenure. But his failure was guaranteed from the start as First World capitalist powers of Britain, Canada, and the US, made every effort to undermine the establishment of socialism in Jamaica through the power they wielded in the IMF. Manley attempted to improve the flagging state of domestic production but the stringent conditions imposed by the IMF had a disastrous effect on Jamaican economy as Manley refused to devalue the Jamaican currency by the dictated 40% (*Jamaica* 161-2). Manley is critical of the way IMF enforces policies in order to maintain an economic stranglehold on some of the Third World countries, saying "The IMF was created by the capitalist countries after World War II. It is designed to apply capitalist techniques and to serve the ends of those who created it originally" (*Jamaica* 165). But it is his support of Cuba that threatened foreign powers, especially the United States, which did not support any Caribbean country that appeared to be sympathetic to communism and communist powers.

By contrast, Edward Seaga was seen as ally to the United States and revoked Jamaica's support for Cuba. Additionally, he devalued the Jamaican currency by 40% and boosted the tourism industry dramatically. But although Jamaica developed rapidly as a tourist haven, very little changed for the extremely poor. Luxury hotels existed side-by-side with sprawling shanty towns as the local population struggled to afford food and to find employment. It is this sharp economic and social divide that Michelle Cliff represents in *NTH* portraying an abject underclass

⁵² Published after Manley lost, but *NTH* is set during Manley's tenure as PM.

that waits on wealthy Jamaicans and holidaying Americans. The Jamaican identity suffered fragmentation under slavery and then under neocolonialism, there is yet another splintering in the social class hierarchy.

The novel narrates the class divide through the story of Christopher, a gardener who works for a wealthy brown family. When they deny him money to buy a small piece of land to bury his grandmother, in a violet fit of rage, Christopher slaughters the whole family. The horror of his own act drives him mad and he wanders the town as a mendicant without ever getting caught. We find out that Christopher lived with his grandmother in the one of the largest shantytowns in the outskirts of Kingston, nicknamed the Dungle which is “[a] town of structures built by women and children. Structures made from packing crates which once housed Vauxhalls, Morris Minors, Renaults, Kelvinators, Frigidaires, Maytag washer-dryers” (31). The people of the Dungle live in the abject condition of repurposing for survival the assemblage of trashed packing materials of items that are commonly consumed by middle-class households. The “dung-heap jungle” does not distinguish between *what* it is, that is excreta— detritus that must be discarded— with *who* occupies the “jungle”—the dehumanized poor, who are removed to the periphery of society. The “rusty zinc wall” is intended to keep the squalor away and out of sight from the “exotic” parts of Jamaica—the parts that are to remain profitable for the wealthy upper-class. But it is the shantytown that provides a steady supply of labor for the tourism industry, housing the busboys, the drivers, the gardeners, and the waiters on whose cheap labor the entire industry is built.

Early in the novel, Clare is either unaware or uninvolved in the economic and political issues that plague Jamaica. To understand the current predicament of Jamaica, Clare

would need to know its history but her formal education both in Jamaica and in the US had primarily been whitewashed history. *Abeng* deals with Clare's formative years in Jamaica when she is subjected to a colonial curriculum that teaches her the perspective of colonizers, while the "history of Jamaica [is taught] as it pertained to England—the names of the admirals who secured the island from the Spanish, the treaties which had made the island officially British, the hurricanes and earthquakes which had stirred its terrain and caused the failure of cash crops, the introduction of rubber planting after sugar failed, the importation of 'coolie' labor after the slaves were freed—all these things were dated and briefly described, and the class competed to see who had memorized them most perfectly" (84). The one-sided curriculum completely elides the history of Jamaicans from the perspective of the enslaved or the colonized, and ensures that the students do not oppose the formal version of events. To counter the alienation that results from a Western education that is intended to sever Jamaicans from their own history, people, place, and culture, the narrative structure of *Abeng* splices Clare's formal education with Jamaican marronage history throughout the novel.⁵³ Clare struggles to locate her confusion borne from a mixed race ancestry among various histories of the oppressed that the novel weaves through as a counter to dominant, whitewashed histories.

In *NTH*, Clare's informal education about Jamaica's present political troubles takes the epistolary form. While she pursues a graduate education in London, Clare is exhausted with the racism from her peers and from the general political climate that permeated the country at a

⁵³ In his important work analyzing the way Caribbean modernism counters Eurocentrism, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (1992), Simon Gikandi argues that *Abeng's* "the reconstruction of elided black identities and African fragments long lost in the colonial archive is as urgent as the deconstruction of modernism and modernity" (233).

time when the far-right political party of National Front was spewing anti-Black and anti-immigrant hate. Just after Clare is told that she is different from “the sort” of people against whom the National Front is protesting, the narrative switches to a letter she receives from Harry/Harriet saying “Jamaica needs her children” (140). Later when Clare is visiting Paris with Bobby and she has just suffered a miscarriage, she receives another letter from Harry/Harriet writing about the fire in Eventide Home for the elderly in Kingston when 167 women were burned to their deaths. The fire in 1980 is suspected to have been politically motivated when Jamaica was going through one of the most violent election seasons of all time as Michael Manley was set to face his conservative contender, Edward Seaga. In the letter, Harry/Harriet bemoans: “Is what kind of world this, girlfriend? Is how long we must endure? We are in a fury down here” (160).

Any time Clare is consumed with a personal crisis or confusion, the narrative punctuates these moments with snapshots of larger political conflicts that contextualize her individual predicament. Her personal crisis is never portrayed as so isolated that it cannot be understood through a collective, political lens. As a Bildungsroman then, both *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* attach questions of personal growth to political progress and action.

Creolized Identities

As the second half of a two-novel Bildungsroman, *NTH* moves from questions of personal identity and development that were important to Clare in *Abeng*, towards collectivity and collective liberation. *NTH* challenges the conventions of the genre by testing the limits of a Bildungsroman as a novel of *individual* self-formation. Although, for the most part, the novel centers upon Clare’s interiority, it culminates with Clare joining a group of people whose

individual names and stories are subordinated to their collective cause. I claim that the novel rejects essentialism of any kind, presenting instead the possibility of a transformative politics that affirms a dynamic heterogeneity. I use the term “heterogeneity” to indicate the purposeful adoption of a political identity that transcends differences and individualisms.

NTH represents collectivity in action by people whose identities and kinships have been splintered by the violence of slavery and its aftermath. By embodying an assemblage of people from different backgrounds, the guerrilla group forms a collective that is not homogenous—that is, made up by people of any one demographic—but rather a heterogenous multitude. I also claim that constituted in this multitude is the Jamaican landscape with which the group allies and forms a kinship that is more than just human.

The opening pages of the novel depict the guerrilla group as a concerted heterogeneity. *NTH* opens with a description of an open-back truck ascending through Cockpit Country in Jamaica, transporting a group of roughly twenty “pale and dark” men and women in camouflage, drenched in sweat in the humid weather. This is the guerrilla group en route to the film set that they plan to attack. Were these people outside the truck, they would barely know each other, “for the shades of their skin, places traveled to and from, events experienced, things understood, food taken into their bodies, acts of violence committed, books read, music heard, languages recognized, ones they loved, living family, varied widely, came between them” (4). Clare is part of this group but the narrative does not identify her at this point. She is one of the many unnamed members of the group that barely know one another.

There is little that binds this group together and the narrative makes it clear that this is not by chance but the result of a brutal and deliberate disunion that rends people apart

right from birth: “That was all to be expected, of course—that on this island ...many of them would have been separated at birth. Automatically. Slipped into places where to escape would mean taking your life into your own hands. Not more, not less. Where to get out would mean crashing through barriers positioned by people not so unlike yourself” (4-5). The omission of an explicit mention of slavery in these lines opens up the context to include other ongoing forms of oppression. Cliff focuses on the way differences continue to be produced as the landscape shifts around the Jamaican people, signaling the timelessness of the various barriers that keep apart people who would be kin under different circumstances. The differences that come between them are not “natural” (in any sense of that word) and but rather they are ones constructed “as part of this small nation.” Slavery and the eventual nation-building project are founded upon disruptions at the level of individual identities and the relationships that have been disallowed.

In thinking about the power and purpose of this collective, it is useful to apply the term “creolization” to this coming together of a group of people who are otherwise separated by their differences. To emphasize the significance of the heterogeneity of the guerrilla group, I invoke the particular conception of “creolization” by Edouard Glissant.⁵⁴ In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant writes that, “Creolization, one of the many ways of forming a complex mix...is only exemplified by its processes and certainly not by the ‘contents’ on which these operate...We are not prompted solely by the defining of our identities but by their relation to everything possible as well—the mutual mutations generated by this interplay of relations” (89). In *NTH*, the guerrilla group illustrates a form of creolization that transcends individual racial and gender identities (without negating these differences at the same time) and creates relations that are occasioned by a

⁵⁴ I want to note that “creolization” is a term that has been defined by a number of prominent Caribbean thinkers, but I refer to Glissant specifically because of his attention to place in the articulation of this idea.

unified purpose. To borrow Glissant's term, the group embodies a "métissage" but one that "moves from a narrow range of racial intermixing to become a relational practice affirming the multiplicity and diversity of its components" (214). In other words, the differences that embody this group do not disappear but their coming together—in this particular form, for this particular reason—challenges the primacy of individualism and emphasizes, instead, the collective purpose for which the group has come together.

In his essay "Genres of Human: Multiculturalism, Cosmo-politics, and the Caribbean Basin," Rinaldo Walcott draws attention to an important aspect of Glissant's articulation of creolization by stating that "creolization is that which arises out of the brutal context and unequal power relations through which differing cultures come into contact and engagement with each other" (187). The brutal context is the original sundering of kinship and affiliations right down to the fracturing of individual identities by slavery and colonial practices that necessitates this creolization. In Cliff's *NTH*, the guerrilla group confronts this violent legacy and fights for autonomy of control and representation.

Cliff does not indulge in any romantic notions by depicting the creolized guerrilla group as one that is full of camaraderie and good cheer. As perhaps a semi-autobiographical character, Clare is a light-skinned woman who is on a truck "alongside people who easily could have hated her" (5). The differences among the various members are so deep-rooted that "the bitterness, the fury some held, could be strip-mined" (5). But "[d]ressed as they were, they might move closer. Sleeping on the ground, squatting at the roadside, evoking the name of Nanny, in whose memory they were engaged in this, they might move closer" (5). The fighters have come together with their differences and even their hatred intact, because they know that joining forces is the only way to

take anti-colonial action.

The purpose, which binds this group together, is not about asserting their individual identities no matter how much each person has suffered in their own way. Contrarily, the group comes together by surrendering their uniqueness and adopting “similar clothes, signifying some agreement, some purpose—that they were in something together—in these clothes, at least, they seemed to blend together” (4). The uniform symbolizes not just their unified purpose for this particular occasion, but also their larger anti-colonial action.

The khaki uniform— the “survival dress” of the group—is a complex signifier. It evokes the image of the colonial army: “Some of the men had worn khaki once before, when, under the crown and among the vestiges following independence, they were enrolled in the state schools spread across the island or the public schools in Kingston. How many stiff bolts of the stuff had been spun to outfit the empire? The soldiers and the schoolboys...Now the purpose of khaki *had turned for them*. A likeness had been a goal back in those days too, but for quite different reasons” (6; emphasis mine). The dust-colored fabric, which was violently thrust upon the people of Jamaica to erase their identity, is a ubiquitous signifier of colonial power. Enforced first as a school uniform and then as a military uniform, khaki symbolized both homogeneity and conformity. By imposing a uniform on colonial subjects that demanded the surrendering of individual agency, students were clearly marked for control through colonial education. The color appropriated by the British army militarized the very landscape it occupied and redeployed the symbol to control both the people and their land. Each person on the truck wears the khaki as a symbol of the colonial power that organizes their life and also as the impetus that now drives their anti-colonialism.

Creolized Places: Ruinate as Resistance

Jamaican landscape, too, forms an important part of the creolized group as the members “blend with the country around them—this dripping brown and green terrain” (5). But the Jamaican forest is not untouched, pristine wilderness. The vegetation, too, has survived and mutated since the days of plantation agriculture. This kind of a forest is called “ruinate” or “ruination” in Jamaica. Cliff opens the first section of the novel, titled “Ruinate,” with a definition of the term: “This distinctive Jamaican term is used to describe lands which were once cleared for agricultural purposes and have now lapsed back into....‘bush.’ An impressive variety of herbaceous shrubs and woody types of vegetation appears in succession, becoming thicker and taller over the years until ‘high ruinate’ forest may emerge” (1). Long after slavery is abolished, the land re-forests without human intervention in a subtle reminder that the land may not need the people, but it is the people, who depend on the land for their survival and liberation even in the days of slavery and even long after. The place is not so much “in ruins,” as the term “ruination” would have us think, but it is a symbol for what it has ruined—a system of oppression that involved controlling the land and the people who were enslaved to work on it.

Large swathes of the island were once cleared for the rise of plantation economy that cultivated mainly profitable monocultures with no regard for valuable and sustainable biodiversity. But the forest, or in this case, the “ruinate,” rises back up and reclaims land that is no longer under human control. Operating within non-human scales of time, the forest is impervious to human life cycles and incorporates every new change into itself: “The forest had been moving up from the river for twenty-years. In that time the hillside of coffee and shade trees had also been taken over, and thick-trunked vines and wild trees settled into the hillside and strangled the

precious, delicate coffee bushes” (8-9). Coffee plants—the symbol of capitalistic cultivation—that require human effort to sustain and flourish do not stand a chance against the burgeoning ruinate that is unsupervised and self-sustaining. The verb “strangle” underscores the agency of the place as it attempts to reinstate autonomy and echoes the kind of violence the guerrilla group adopts to achieve freedom. Over and over again, the Jamaican forest takes back lands that were once sites of violent oppression. And like the ruinate, the guerrilla group, too, resists the homogenizing logic of capitalism.

The ruinate is antithetical to plantations that are strictly maintained for maximum control over both the land and the people who are forced to work it. While surveillance is the instrument of control on lands cleared for capitalist agriculture, the ruinate evades every form of colonial control. It is dense, unpredictable, and willfully autonomous. It was once conscripted during Maroon Wars to protect the freedom fighters, who adapted the invisibility offered by the forest to their advantage. Its thick diversity accommodated soldiers who relied on the forest cover to carry out their attack strategy, which often involved the soldier turning himself into the forest in a way. To ally with the forest in this way, the Maroons needed an intimate knowledge of the Cockpit Country, its layout, its hiding spots, and its potentially fatal spots. The root-workers among the fighters would know about plants that heal and the ones that harm. The Maroons did not control the place or alter it in any significant way, but they trained themselves to use its richness to protect them. From the use of the *abeng* (the animal horn typically used by the Akan people that was later part of the Maroon community) to mimicking animal and forest noises to relay messages to each other, the Maroons possessed strategic knowledge of the place that the planters did not, which made their liberation possible. In the present moment, the “people of the

bloodlines of the Maroons” (106) wear camouflage and draw on the strength of the forest and the knowledge of their ancestors for the mission at hand.

The ruinate is not static or unchanging. It bears the mark of having been reworked from time to time. Parts of the ruinate are cleared yet again but this time by the guerrilla group. The fighters rely on the land, in more than one way, to sustain themselves while they plan their attack on the film set. They borrow the use of the land from the forest and “clear enough bush to have land enough to plant. At first they used machetes, fixing themselves in a line against the green, ..., swinging their blades in unison, sometimes singing songs they remembered from the grandmothers and grandfathers who had swung their own blades once in the canefields” (10). The very act of working the land recalls the painful history of slavery but its reenactment in the present moment of anti-colonialism is healing and restorative. In the context of the rebellion, the clearing of the bush takes on a new meaning—that of self-sustenance and anti-colonialism. In this way, the group forges a kinship with the land with the knowledge that the ruinate will eventually reclaim this parcel of the land, too, regardless of their success or failure.

Neocolonialism poses a threat to the land, its history, and its people. The capitalist logic simplifies and reduces complexities by homogenizing them. This reductivism that once threatened Jamaican vegetation with pernicious monoculture resurfaces again in the form of the tourism industry that attempts to reduce Jamaica to a “monoculture” of a different kind. The heterogeneity of Jamaica—its land and its people—is simplified and repackaged as an exotic commodity to be consumed by Western tourists. The whitewashed and large-scale representation of Jamaica as a tourist haven is precisely what the guerrilla group is fighting against.

Resisting Neocolonialism

Towards the end of the novel, as the guerrilla group prepares to attack the movie set, the text breaks away to include the following excerpt from an actual article, titled “U.S. Film Makers Lured by Jamaican Incentives,” that *The New York Times* ran on August 27, 1984. The article goes to great lengths to describe Jamaica as a tropical paradise and a tourist haven. The Jamaican landscape is praised for its diversity from its beaches with “sparkling clear water and foliage you would expect from a tropical island, ...[to] mountains that rise to more than 7000 feet, waterfalls, caves, wide open areas that resemble the African plain and even arid sections that will pass for desert” (200). The urban landscape is similarly diverse with the juxtaposition of “concrete and glass cities, elegant suburban homes, [with] ramshackle slums and villages with thatched huts” (200). The article does not make a distinction between naturally diverse landscapes and ones that are the result of violent colonial control, creating deep economic disparities which leave their mark on Jamaican urban landscape. Instead, they are described merely as profitable opportunities for Anglo-American filmmakers to have their pick in terms of exotic locales for upcoming movie projects.

The article announces major plans by popular Hollywood studios to shoot a number of big budget movies in Jamaica which was once popular locale in the 60s when a few James Bond movies were shot. The original article goes on to quote a Hollywood producer who gushes about the Jamaican landscape and cheap labor: “I found a place that looks like the English countryside...and a place in the mountains where there’s an Oriental community. I found any number of types of people for extras. The labor situation is fantastic and the Government is going out of its way to be helpful” (NYT). The juxtaposition of “elegant suburban home” with

“ramshackle slums” offers money-saving prospects for the film industry that can take advantage of Jamaica’s mixed locale and people. The Jamaican landscape and its people are exoticized and commodified for easy extraction by the American film industry that is keen on identifying cheap ways to produce highly profitable movies.

The neocolonial government headed by an American-friendly Prime Minister, Edward P.G. Seaga, “who is regarded as President Reagan’s closest ally in the Caribbean,” barter its working class for American dollars. The article continues: “Expecting to reap badly needed foreign currency from the film makers, Mr. Seaga is offering tax incentives, waivers on customs restrictions so that equipment can be moved quickly, escorts and guides for scouting shooting sites and, at a modest fee, the rental of jeeps, tanks, helicopters and troops from Jamaica’s small army” (NYT). To put it another way, Jamaica is constructed as a place “without boundaries,” so that Americans, American money, and the army can move through it unhindered. The Jamaican underclass, the ones who dwell in the slums and villages are at the disposal of the wealthy American producers who have the complete support of a desperate government, along with its military. The unironic statement that “you can drink the water” indicates that safety will be guaranteed to the visitors at any cost—but not necessarily to local Jamaicans. The militarization of tourism ensures precisely that. The guerrilla group’s fight for self-representation gains even more urgency in the context of the NYT feature.

Advertised as “A world of culture without boundaries” (6), Jamaica routinely attracts foreign tourists, chiefly white Americans. It is promoted as an exotic place where tourists reenact tropical adventures of the past selectively curated to omit the brutality of slavery. It’s a place where history is “whitewashed” in the dual sense that the brutality of the past is concealed

under an exotic veneer and also in the sense that history is sanitized and repackaged for the entertainment of a primarily white audience. Commenting about how far the tourism industry would go to exoticize a collective trauma, Harry/Harriet says that “if they were really imaginative, girlfriend, they would hang some whips and chains on the walls, dress the waiters in loincloths, have the barmaid bare her breasts, and call the whole mess the Middle Passage” (121). There is nothing too horrific that capitalism cannot find a way to profit out of. Harry/Harriet bemoans the fact that “Our homeland is turned into a stage set too much” (121). In that simple statement, Harry/Harriet exposes the material effects of representing Jamaica as a vacation haven for wealthy white tourists. Jamaican land and lives are carefully organized to preserve an image of a pristine retreat where tourists can visit, unwind, and leave their mess to be cleaned by the invisible hands of Jamaican servants. Behind the “stage set” of historic galleons lies an impoverished underclass whose labor is yet again extracted in order to sustain a capitalist industry.

Driven by the material consequences of the way Jamaica is discursively constructed, the guerrilla group targets an Anglo-American film set that they believe is part of this hegemonic control. Although the movie is about the local legendary warrior, Granny Nanny, who fought in the Maroon Wars, it matters how she is represented in the movie. In the Hollywood interpretation, Granny Nanny is played out by an artist who:

“wore a pair of leather breeches and a silk shirt—designer’s notion of the clothes that Nanny wore. Dear Nanny, the Coromantee warrior, leader of the Windward Maroons, whom one book described as an old woman naked except for a necklace made from the teeth of whitemen—sent by the orishas to deliver her people...Such detail was out of the question, given these people even knew the truth. Or cared” (206).

Nanny, who embodied anticolonialism, was being played by a Black actress who was “called in whenever someone was needed to play a Black heroine, whether Sojourner Truth or Bessie Smith” (206). Granny Nanny, a unique historical figure was being represented by someone whom Hollywood regarded as fungible. Nanny’s fierceness is tamed and mildly sexualized to show that the figure no longer poses a threat to colonizers by fixing her exploits firmly in the past. The fighters choose to attack this movie set because representation is control and this kind of simplification of a complex and cherished figure is a deliberate distortion to please a white Western audience. The fighters attempt to take back control of the narrative and to challenge the notion of Jamaica as a peaceful tourist haven that replicates a master-slave dynamic through neocolonial class systems.

The group hides among the trees and “lay in preparation for the act, hidden by dark and green, separate, silent—as silent as Maroons—they watched the scene below them” (206). Even the attack has a theatrical quality to it as if the fighters know how it would end for them and so they decide to place more emphasis on reproducing Maroon history to challenge the way it is being represented in the set below. The attack does not last long and, in a blend of cinema and reality, the fighters get killed in no time. The final words are a chaotic amalgam of shellfire sounds, people dying, trees getting shot, making it impossible to tell which sound is natural and which one is not.⁵⁵ This final collapse, too, in a way, is a creolization of sounds that is engendered by violence. The novel ends with the words “Day broke,” signaling the dawn of a new day but it also doubles as patois signaling the shattering of the collective. They broke.

NTH does not offer a resolution, only recursivity, with the resistance group

⁵⁵ Reminder that creolization of any kind is founded first on violent fragmentation.

asserting their autonomy by reenacting Maroon history and momentarily thwarting a colonial incursion. This reenactment, which some may argue is a failed one, nonetheless succeeds in invoking an important part of Maroon history to show that it is available to the descendants to draw power from should the need for a revolution arise yet again.

As a Bildungsroman, *NTH* ends with the shattering of a collective—the fragmentation of bodies and sounds—and with the death of the main character. But unlike it is for Aron in *Black Midas*, fragmentation has not been the only state of existence for Clare. Where Aron fails and Clare succeeds is in her understanding of the systemic nature of her alienation. She understands that the matrices of colonialism, slavery, and capitalism intend to atomize the people they control and thus quell the possibility of resistance. Clare’s informal education of Maroon history and contemporary Jamaican economic and racial conditions aids in the formation of a *political identity* rather than a personal one that is typical for the genre. *Black Midas* narrates Aron’s perpetuation of a vicious cycle of extraction and destruction of human and nonhuman life, without imagining the possibility for Aron’s redemption through collective liberation. *No Telephone to Heaven* imagines this possibility, albeit, with a pessimistic realization that such a collective may only be short-lived but it is, nonetheless, the only way to drive forward anti-colonial action. Cliff is purposeful in bookending the novel with the guerrilla group, and thus subordinating Clare’s individual issues in those pages, in order to foreground the deliberate political choices that bring together this disparate group of people and the fragile alliances they form among themselves and with the place to ensure their mutual survival.

Chapter Three: Inhabiting a Place

Imagining More-Than-Human Place-Worlds in Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone* and Tania

James' *The Tusk That Did the Damage*

This chapter centers resource extraction and land loss as experienced by nonhuman animals in literary fiction that represent animals as inhabitants of a place-world⁵⁶ that is uniquely theirs. More narrowly, I examine animal narratives in which nonhuman place-worlds intersect with human ones to understand the way different actors negotiate this intersection and the conflict that arises from their encounters. Although this chapter touches on some of the key preoccupations of popular animal narratives, such as the issues of anthropomorphism,⁵⁷ anthropocentrism,⁵⁸ animal ethics,⁵⁹ the nature of animal being,⁶⁰ among others—all of which are popular lines of inquiry in Animal Studies—I focus mainly on narrative techniques, specifically the use of animal point-of-view and what it reveals (or obscures) in terms of the way extractive violence alters the relationship between animals and their place-world.

Broadly (and perhaps somewhat simplistically) construed for my purpose here, animal narrative⁶¹ is an umbrella term that includes sub-genres ranging from ancient fables and folklores, which also intersect with children's literature, to more contemporary and so-called

⁵⁶ A term that I introduce earlier in the dissertation to refer to a relationship with a world that is constituted of particular places, including all material objects and immaterial associations embedded in these places.

⁵⁷ See Robert Mitchell and Nicholas Thomson's collection, *Anthropomorphism, Anecdotes, and Animals* (1996). This interdisciplinary work is one of the earliest collections on the subject of anthropomorphism to lay out the debate surrounding the uses and limits of anthropomorphism.

⁵⁸ See Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2015).

⁵⁹ See the works of the philosopher, Lori Gruen, mainly *Ethics and Animals: An Introduction* (2011).

⁶⁰ See the works of Cary Wolfe, especially *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal* (2003).

⁶¹ See Susan McHugh and David Herman

“serious” literatures written for an adult audience that fictionalize animals by either centering animals as characters or treating them as important subjects. My aim in this chapter is not to give an overview of this capacious genre or look at popular texts in this genre, but to study rather closely works that represent animals as inhabitants of a place that is impacted by extractive activities, turning the place into a dire conflict zone. Anthropocene fiction⁶² is replete with works that center human experience while also critiquing unchecked human expansion that threatens the continued existence of more-than-human place-worlds. This chapter presents a complementary perspective of imagining altered worlds as a result of resource extraction that is experienced by animals and shows that the inclusion of such animal narratives is crucial to question the conception of human and animal lives as strictly compartmentalized when, in reality, they impinge upon and shape each other immeasurably. Ruthless and unsustainable resource extraction has put plenty of animal species on the endangered list and triggered the need for their conservation.⁶³ Here, I focus mainly on representations of poaching of elephants for their tusks and their entanglements in human politics.

Joseph Conrad’s *Heart Of Darkness* (1899) runs through this dissertation, albeit in a marginal way, partially informing the analysis of my chosen texts. In this chapter, Conrad’s novel serves as a reminder that the commodification of elephant tusks has its roots in imperialism. Even before Marlowe locates Kurtz, “the word ‘ivory’ rang in the air” (26) and what it stands for—both the mystique of ivory and the greed that hypes up its demand — reverberates through the text.

Although ivory was popularly traded long before European occupation of Africa, imperialist

⁶² See Gregers Andersen’s *Climate Fiction and Cultural Analysis: A New Perspective on Life in the Anthropocene* (2019).

⁶³ See William Adams’ *Against Extinction: The Story of Conservation* (2013); Michelle Nijhuis’ *Beloved Beasts: Fighting for Life in an Age of Extinction* (2021).

extraction of ivory decimated the elephant population in most parts of the continent.⁶⁴ In Conrad's novel, Kurtz is known for amassing ivory with single-mindedness. As Marlowe vouches that "[t]he old mud shanty was bursting with [ivory]. You would think there was not a single tusk left either above or below ground in the whole country" (49). Ironically, and perhaps aptly, Conrad's novel has little to nothing to do with elephants. The elephants, which are madly sought after for their tusks, are entirely erased in the novel. The elephants and their lives are not relevant to Kurtz: "The severed tusk, in addition to being the ivory of material wealth, is also the elephant hunter's trophy, the symbol for Kurtz of his mastery over nature and therefore the reification of his personal subjective identity" (Myers 101)⁶⁵. But elephants are not the only inhabitants missing from the narrative. As Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin point out in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, "Conrad, via his narrator Marlow, depicts Africa as a blank, a *terra nullius*, not because it was not inhabited, but because such inhabitation was of no consequence to Europeans" (161). The authors add that "the racism/speciesism nexus is particularly important in terms of representation, with specific relation to the human/animal symbolic economy" (166). Ivory is just one of the many resources for which entire populations of humans and animals are killed and/or enslaved.⁶⁶ The other chapters in this dissertation attend to the human aspect of this "nexus." This chapter is mainly to reinscribe the animal perspective that largely goes unattended in discourses on resource extraction.

However, the chapter is not exclusively about animals. By using place as a framework to examine the lives and experiences of animals, I emphasize the relational aspect of

⁶⁴ See Raman Sukumar's *The Living Elephants: Evolutionary Ecology, Behavior, and Conservation* (2003).

⁶⁵ "The Anxiety of Confluence Evolution, Ecology, and Imperialism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (2001).

⁶⁶ See Walter Rodney's influential work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972).

human and nonhuman interaction that challenges the traditional privileging of either anthropocentric or zoocentric perspective. While a human-nonhuman relationship can indeed be one of mutual cooperation, I focus primarily on moments of extractive violence that result in threats to animal conservation, habitat loss and fragmentation, forced displacement of humans or animals, among other political ecological issues through two novels, Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone* (1999) and Tania James' *The Tusk That Did the Damage* (2015). Poaching of elephants for their tusks is the central issue that is represented in these two novels. While ivory extraction impacts African elephants in Gowdy's novel differently from Asian ones in *Tusk*, both novels explore loss of community and psychological trauma of elephants that are relentlessly hunted by poachers. These two works of animal fiction, though they both draw attention to the plight of elephants due to poaching, could not be more different. Gowdy's *The White Bone* is an important work⁶⁷ of animal fiction that treats its elephant subject with seriousness and even reverence. Set around Maasai Mara National Reserve in Kenya and researched in the 1980s when poaching of elephants was at its peak, *The White Bone* is an anthropomorphic novel that is narrated exclusively from the animal's perspective. While human activity, particularly poaching, is pushed to the periphery, *The White Bone* imagines the aftereffects of human depredations on the elephant community that is consequently displaced and traumatized. The novel offers an opening into elephant psyche, inviting the readers to inhabit this animal mindscape and gain a secondhand experience of their plight. It is also a uniquely experimental text that imagines the way elephants know and relate to the place they inhabit. Set in the 1990s,⁶⁸ Tania James's *The Tusk That Did the Damage*, too, offers

⁶⁷ See *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2015) for Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's treatment of Gowdy's novel as a response to Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (1899).

⁶⁸ Although India had banned legal ivory trade in 1991, poaching continued to remain rampant due to high demand for ivory. For an overview of ivory trade ban, illegal trade, and China's recent ban to drive down

an anthropomorphic rendering of elephant trauma but, unlike Gowdy's novel, *Tusk* is interspersed with human perspectives, establishing a more conscious relationship between humans and animals that shifts between care and conflict.

As in my previous chapters, this one, too, is invested in the politics of a place and the way they impact the relationship between the human or nonhuman inhabitants and their place. But this possibility of examining place politics is largely foreclosed in *The White Bone* which, in eliminating both a human perspective and the particularities of a place, becomes apolitical and a-platial.⁶⁹ By avoiding a simple reversion of anthropocentric novels, *Tusk* is more complex in its representation of human-nonhuman conflicts, making it possible to examine it using the framework of place. Both human and nonhuman animals are cast as actors who negotiate the inhabitation of a place, which is made precarious by complex systemic forces of neocolonialism and global capitalism. Through an in-depth analysis of the narrative schemes of the two novels, I argue that exclusively zoocentric animal narratives are a-platial and politically inert. To evoke any kind of meaningful political and ecological action that takes into account the complexities of human-animal entanglement, a place-based reading of animal narratives is essential. While animal suffering may be universal and readily recognizable by a sympathetic audience, animal conservation is rooted in particularities. This is why *Tusk* is more successful in drawing attention to the issue of poaching and elephant conservation mainly because it attends to the material realities particular to a place.

demand, see Elizabeth Bennet's "Legal Ivory Trade in a Corrupt World and Its Impact on African Elephant Populations" and Xuehong Zhou et al's "Elephant Poaching and the Ivory Trade: The Impact of Demand Reduction and Enforcement Efforts by China from 2005 - 2017."

⁶⁹ A term that I introduce and explain in Chapter 1.

Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone*

In an interview with the writer, John Bemrose, Barbara Gowdy shares her experience of finding inspiration for her experimental novel from a National Geographic documentary in which the narrator describes how an elephant mourns a dead one of the species by “[passing] a hind leg over the remains, as if carrying out a religious rite. Gowdy was electrified. ‘I found shivers going up and down my back,’ she recalls. ‘It seems to me that if you’re conscious of death, then you’re conscious of life. And whatever consciousness is awareness, sadness, dreaminess or speculative thought the elephants had it’” (“Pachyderm Saga”). To Gowdy, this small gesture offered a glimpse into elephant consciousness⁷⁰ and the potential implications of possessing a keen awareness of oneself and the world. It opened up for her the possibility of exploring the elephant psyche that may not be all that different from that of humans. The moment is a small spark that ruptures the primacy of anthropocentrism and ignites her imagination to conjure, instead, a world populated by elephants, but one that is not unlike our own.

Barbara Gowdy's novel, *The White Bone* (1999), is written entirely from the perspective of elephants in a realistic⁷¹ way, detailing the plight of a small group of African elephants trying to survive drought and poaching. The central character in the novel is a young elephant cow, Mud, whose entire family is slaughtered by poachers at the time of her birth. She is taken in by an adoptive family, known as the She-S's, and cared for by the cow, She-Scares who had recently given birth to a stillborn calf. The She-S's, too, are hunted by poachers and some of the remaining elephants get separated while the others search for them as they also search for the mythical Safe Place that is free from “hindleggers” (humans). The narrative follows the long

⁷⁰ This is her primary interest. Poaching appears to be a secondary focus.

⁷¹ I attend to the elements and limitations of this “realism” below.

journey of various members of this family of elephants that believe that “the white bone,” a rib of a newborn, would lead them to the Safe Place. As a fantastical novel, the elephants are described as having their own culture, mythology, superstitions, and specific ways of communication that are largely based on the author’s research into actual elephant behavior.⁷²

The novel opens with the renaming of the main character, Mud, to “She-Spurns” after the bull, Tall Time, successfully mates with her during her first estrus. “She-Spurns” is in accordance with the tradition of her adoptive family’s way of naming where every member’s name starts with an “S” following the prefix “She” that signifies the matrilineal heritage of elephant families. Some of the members of each family are gifted with special traits that allow the elephant to either possess an exceptional sense of smell or an ability to “calculate the likelihood of something happening” like She-Measures or the power to see things before they happen, like in the case of Mud. Mud’s birth coincides with the slaughter of her birth family, the She-M’s by a group of poachers.⁷³ Mud manages to escape and gets adopted into the family of She-S’s by the cow, She-Scares. As the horror of poaching is unleashed on several elephant families, the She-S’s come upon the recently attacked family of the She-D’s when one of their members mentions that they seek the now legendary Safe Place, the location of which can only be revealed by the “white bone” which is a rib of a newborn that is supposed to be found at “the centre of a circle of boulders...None of the humans who passed the boulders ever spotted it, even though, over the years, it bleached to a

⁷² Gowdy’s novel is popularly compared to the English novel, *Watership Down* (1972), by Richard Adams, in which Adams narrates the adventures of a group of rabbits on its way to finding a safe place that is free from snares and other perils. Although the novel resembles the elaborate cosmology of elephants in *The White Bone*, *Watership Down* is purely fantastical without any correspondence to actual rabbit behavior or society. *The White Bone*, on the other hand, is a more complex narrative that weaves together studied elephant behaviors, social structures, and mating rituals, with a fictional story-telling style.

⁷³ The narrative does not (or cannot) say so explicitly since it’s from the perspective of elephants, but the readers can presume this since the tusks are hacked and taken by the “hindleggers.”

blinding whiteness. Meanwhile it radiated toward all living creatures a quality of forgiveness and hope. But the hearts of humans were hard, and would not be pierced” (43). Because humans appear to be bent on annihilating the elephants species, this symbol of hope evades their grasp. Finding the white bone means the elephants can finally live in peace and in plenitude.

When the She-S’s are attacked by poachers, the remaining members of the family decide to locate the white bone to help them get to the Safe Place. During the chaos of the slaughter, Mud’s best friend, another young cow called Date Bed, gets separated and lost. The now diminished family sets out hoping to find Date Bed and eventually to get to the Safe Place together. On a separate journey, Tall Time, too, is on his quest to locate the white bone and to reunite with his love, Mud. As a “student of signs, omens and superstitions, or ‘links’” (49), Tall Time hopes that his ability to interpret the landscape around him will help him locate the elusive white bone. The narrative follows the trials of these three groups of elephants as they navigate a devastating drought and the threat of poachers, when the promise of the Safe Place gives them hope to carry on their journey. But the elephants are not reunited—Date Bed gets killed by a snake bite and Tall Time is hunted by poachers. Mud’s group is also beset by loss and grief but at the end of the novel, Mud delivers her newborn and continues the journey in search of the Safe Place.

The Place-World of Elephants

The elephants in *The White Bone* have considerable knowledge about the place they inhabit. The elephants have a deep understanding of every stone, every tree, and every animals species they encounter. The elephants possess generational knowledge about various plants and animals and can tell the difference between a “bad tree” (the toxic euphoria candelabrum tree) and

a “feast tree” (acacia tortilis tree). But a deeper interpretation of the elephant place-world is a specialized form of knowing that only certain individual elephants possess. For example, “A poultice is required, made either from warthog urine and fever-tree bark...or from hyena dung and fever-tree bark. There are only these two remedies for bullet wounds, as every nurse cow knows” (107). Although all elephants have a fundamental knowledge of the place they inhabit in order to survive and procreate, specialized place-knowledge is either inherent or arbitrarily passed on to a chosen elephant. Knowledge thus gained through specialized experience is collective, distributed, and generational among the elephants of a herd. This knowledge doesn’t constitute a static piece of information but rather a living system that changes and adapts, in response to their ever changing environment, which brings with it newer challenges, like the introduction of bullets, and thus evolves their knowledge of bullet wounds.

When Date Bed tries to understand “the logic behind the remedy,” she is sternly told that “You don’t wonder about the cures, you don’t look too hard at them. To do that is to tamper with their power and offend the She” (108). The elephants in the novel firmly believe in the inherent power of life-sustaining and life-saving plants or trees and their healing practices involve knowing the power of substances, but only insofar as they help the elephants. They do not dare to determine the underlying logic by breaking down the substance and analyzing its component parts in—what humans would recognize as—a scientific way. The objects vital to their existence are treated as a taboo that is too sacred to be dissected and meddled with. Thus, in addition to navigating a place with their senses, the elephants in the novel also employ their mystical intelligence to divine the inherent meanings of things and events. In fact, according to the novel, the primary way the elephants understand their world is as a complex set of symbols and

significations. For the elephants, inhabiting a place is inseparably enjoined with its interpretation.

While the elephants acquire and transmit place-knowledge, the novel itself is a-platial in significant ways. Owing to *The White Bone*'s distinctive technique of narrating the novel from the elephant's perspective, it is almost entirely devoid of important recognizable (to humans) markers of place and time, any mention of which would interrupt the synthetic realism of the novel (since elephants cannot interpret the world in terms of human history). The elephants that otherwise have names for various creatures (such as "flow sticks" for snakes) and concepts (like the Eternal Shoreless Water for "the place where the spirits of deceased bulls, calves and tuskless cows go") do not have a name for the place where they dwell. Though the elephants do have names for a few significant places, such as "Blood Swamp" known as the site of one of the most devastating massacres, the land where they live has no name. There is no authorial intervention either in the form of an appendix or a footnote to clarify where the novel is situated. Drawing from multi-generic registers, Gowdy, who acts at once as a translator by including a glossary of elephant terms and an ethologist⁷⁴ of elephants by explaining some aspect of elephant behavior or mythology in

⁷⁴ This multigeneric form, which Gowdy relies on as a narrator, translator, elephant advocate, and ethologist, creates an interesting paradox within the novel that frequently (and often seamlessly) shifts perspectives from animals as objects of study to animals with subjectivity and a capacity to feel and express their interests. David Herman explains the paradox of narrative intimacy appearing at odds with ethological objectivity, using Paul Ricoeur's notion of "distanciation, in which initially taken-for-granted frameworks for understanding are bracketed, reconstrued as targets of explanation, and then reassimilated into (or repossessed as) new forms of understanding. In the case of norm-challenging animal narratives ..., default assumptions about nonhuman agents and human-animal interactions are what come into question— and in the process make possible new ways of orienting to modes of creatural I that extend beyond the human" ("Hermeneutics Beyond the Species Boundary" 4).

See also Susan McHugh's *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines* (2011) in which she uses the term "narrative ethology" to "show how certain engagements with narrative configure people and animals as working together to do things that do not add up to a sum of individual efforts, and so invite more precise considerations of agency and narrative form" (4). Tracking the influence between animal narratives and ethology on each other, McHugh claims that "narrative ethology" is essential to viewing animals as more than just representations and challenging rigid disciplinary boundaries in the process.

the form of pseudo-ethnographic footnotes, makes a deliberate choice not to situate the novel in particular history. It is surprising that Gowdy would represent the journey of the elephants and their escape from poachers as if they were timeless occurrences that are doomed to keep repeating themselves, divorced from the political conditions that materially affect their lives and choices. By avoiding references to a particular place and time, the narrative is, thus, removed from history and thus from politics. Their passive suffering, in this isolated and unnamed corner of the elephant world, is so completely tragic that Gowdy is only able to envision the elephants as perfect victims who are not capable of fighting back.

Towards the end of the novel, there is an uncharacteristic and fleeting reference to “Masai cattle” along with an offhand distinction that “Although black grazing humans are said be harmless, there was a time several generations ago when they weren’t” (305). This is the only hint that the novel offers to situate it in Kenya which is also home to the indigenous Maasai tribe. This is also one of the few references to humans that does not use the term “hindleggers” which seems to be reserved exclusively for poachers. The novel makes a passing note that not all humans are bent on annihilating the elephant species; the “black grazing humans” are a clear exception.

The a-platial nature of the narrative, by refusing to emplace the elephants in history, also makes the narrative apolitical. While Gowdy is eager to convince her audience that elephant lives should be accorded respect in their own right, by hesitating to name and explore the fundamental factor of global ivory trade that impacts African elephants, the narrative inadvertently slips into a fatalistic worldview of recurring slaughter which seems pointless and inexplicably cruel from the perspective of the elephants. The elephants understand that humans “always take away [the tusks] immediately after a slaughter. Where the tusks end up and what the humans want with

them (or with the feet and tails, for that matter) nobody knows for certain. Torrent says he has come across two human corpses whose neck and forelegs were encircled by narrow bands of ivory and he speculates that these bands demonstrate nostalgia for the days when humans were she-ones. He thinks, as nearly every elephant does, that humans also pulverize tusks and inhale the ivory powder in order to heighten their poor sense of smell” (113). Torrent, the old bull, believes that the aesthetic or pharmacological use of ivory makes their tusks a sought-after object for its powers. What the elephant does not and cannot know is the *commodification* of ivory by global capitalist markets that assign it an economic value, superseding the symbolic value that tusks have for elephants. By adhering to a kind of narrative purity (which Gowdy could have worked around had she so wished), the novel rejects exploring the politics of ivory trade that has decimated elephant populations in just a few decades. What we have instead is an animal story that is deeply sentimental in its representation, separating emotions from causal mechanisms that victimize these animals. The apolitical stance of the narrative shies away from exploring what resistance would look like by the elephants that are relentlessly victimized and hopelessly lost searching for a mythical place of liberation.

The White Bone's **Significance as an Animal Narrative**

The Picador edition of *The White Bone*, which is the one that is now more widely available, includes a number of paratextual elements mainly snippets of praise by a number of reviewers of popular journals. Some of these excerpts draw attention to the unique accomplishments of this novel. Caroline Fraser from *Outside Magazine* claims the novel as a “rare thing...starring animals yet written for adults” (back cover). Fraser’s comment implies that animal

narratives are typically written for a children's audience.⁷⁵ The bulk of animal narratives are, in fact, meant for children since anthropomorphism is well-suited for conveying a moral or fostering a sense of kinship with non-human animals. But *The White Bone* does not moralize, not even about ivory-trade or the greed of "hindleggers" who are largely responsible for the plight of the elephants. With thorough research mixed with pseudo-ethnographic notes about elephant behavior, *The White Bone* focuses on immersing the reader in elephant psyche, challenging the notion of realism⁷⁶ as a genre that is reserved exclusively for human subjects. So even among animal narratives, Gowdy's is an experimental novel that makes an effort to portray the fantastical through realist story-telling. One of the purposes of literary fiction is to create a rich world of beings that may not resemble the reader, thus inviting the reader to momentarily inhabit the mind of someone unlike one's own. Although imaginary, such an inhabitation is a phenomenological experience that can open up the possibility of radical empathy, especially, for beings across various differences. Judy Doenges of *The Seattle Times* is quoted in the paratext of the Picador reprint as admitting that "Through the course of *The White Bone* we come to care about the elephants as much as we would humans" (first page). Though Gowdy ensures that the readers never mistakes the elephants as stand-ins for humans, the immersed anthropomorphism invites the readers to acknowledge the personhood of elephants, thus rendering their plight even more devastating.

Writing about the sorrowful fate of the elephants, Charlotte Innes of *L.A. Weekly* claims that the novel "help[s] the reader understand from the inside what it means to be an animal under attack...*The White Bone* has the capacity to arouse not only outrage at human cruelty, but also wonder at the revolutionary power of language to up-end preconceptions" (first page). Gowdy

⁷⁵ Animal narratives are also largely seen as lacking in literary merit because of its intended audience.

⁷⁶ But as a science fiction novel, it can only offer pretensions to realism.

does indeed bend the syntax of the English language to accommodate an elephant ethos, acting thus as a translator, or in her own metaphor, “a mindtalker,” who can break the language barrier across species. Language disconnect among animals, especially between human and nonhuman animals, is often cited as one of the fundamental impediments not just to interspecies cooperation and kinship, but also to destabilize rigid ontological categories, erupting as a significant difference that threatens to reinforce the human-animal binary. Human language is considered to be highly evolved and one of the main bases for the production of complex societies and thus culture. Even if the novel is written in English, by acting as a translator of elephants, Gowdy pushes back against the anthropocentric supremacy of human language and reinscribes the animal world as one that is just as rich and complex.⁷⁷

Gowdy’s novel is a reminder that just because humans and elephants do not share a language does not mean elephants do not have language at all. She goes beyond representing—or more accurately, crafting—elephant language as a rudimentary tool of communication among the species and imagines it as one of the organizing principles of their ethos. Elephant language is imagined as deeply ornate with elaborate metaphors that help the animals make sense of their lives/afterlives. The elephant cosmology is conceived as possible because of their ability to structure their mystical worldview through language. They are also able to make music and sing songs to grieve their dead. Mud’s birth family mourns the death of her mother by “singing a hymn whose first verse was: Let thy blood, here pooled and caking,/Let thy tusks, thy trunk, thy womb/Rise to join the She. Her aching/Love for thee didst will thy doom” (13). The mourning

⁷⁷ Translating elephant language is a significant aspect of Kim Echlin’s novel *Elephant Winter* (1997). Unlike Gowdy’s novel where elephant communication is entirely fictive, Echlin’s novel makes an effort to identify “speech” patterns and correlates them with action or behavior. Regardless of their method, it is central to both novels to show that elephants have a unique and complex way of communicating with each other.

song is also a prayer for the dead cow to be enjoined with the cosmic Elephant which is only possible if she has her tusks intact. The song is a plea for a better fate for one who has been slaughtered violently and also a perpetuation of their belief in a peaceful afterlife that mitigates the ill-fortunes that plague the herds.

The White Bone is a departure from Gowdy's other acclaimed novels and holds an important place among animal narratives for immersing the readers in elephant consciousness and envisioning the social lives of animals. As Bemrose points out, "Outwardly, they do nothing that real pachyderms would not do...But inwardly where Gowdy's imagination takes over they are equally convincing as they experience the griefs and joys of elephant life." ("Pachyderm Saga"). Behind the mundane and discernable physical actions of mating, birthing, or defecating, Gowdy imagines a capacious interiority that elevates the lives of elephants and makes them worthy of love and sympathy.

Gowdy complements her extensive research on African elephants with first-hand experience of encountering them on a trip arranged by a mining exploration company (Bemrose).⁷⁸ As she witnesses the interactions between and among various wild animals in Kenya's Maasai Mara, Gowdy describes experiencing "a sense of mystery and awe you get when you hear a great piece of music or enter a cathedral" (Bemrose). Based on this description of her experience at Maasai Mara, Gowdy's construction of the interiority of elephants as mystical, spiritual beings seems to be a projection of her own state of mind—her sense of awe that only serves to underscore the otherness of these creatures in her eyes. But Gowdy asserts that her representation of these

⁷⁸ The company is owned by Gowdy's sister and Gowdy appears to be uncritical about a Canadian mining company extracting resources out of Africa. I am reading this as one of the instances of Gowdy's apolitical stance on exploitative and extractive practices in Africa by white Western settlers.

elephants is “an act of love” (Bemrose).

The difficulty of overcoming or bridging otherness through anthropomorphism captures the overall problematic of animal narratives. Readers have to contend with anthropomorphism’s premise of treating animal consciousness as a blank canvas upon which the representation is transposed, while asserting that this form of projection comes from a place of love and good intentions—a desire to fathom the depths of animal interiority. This treatment of nonhuman consciousness in entirely human terms typically invites the charge of sentimentalism.⁷⁹ I am not arguing for or against anthropomorphism as a tool but trying to make explicit the paradox inherent in anthropomorphic animal narratives that remains irresolvable in many ways. So why does Gowdy go through the trouble of portraying what could only be *imagined* as their perspective? Firstly, it can be safely said that elephants are not writing any novels nor are they reading any. Most fiction constructs literary characters—human or nonhuman—and invites the readers to view the world as the characters do. In this aspect, *The White Bone* is no different. But the genre of fiction is unsurprisingly dominated by human-centric narratives in which animals are largely a backdrop as companions, objects, or food, thus serving a human subject in one way or another. Animals are readily othered and frequently reduced to two-dimensional symbols, either to signify human values or childhood or artifacts representing certain class positions.

The White Bone self-consciously attempts to break from the well-established mould of anthropomorphic animal narratives where animals are mere stand-ins for human values. Though it closely resembles the anthropomorphized lives of rabbits in Richard Adams’ *Watership Down*, Gowdy’s novel, on the other hand, is resolutely about real world elephants and their

⁷⁹ See Craig Smith refutation of the characterization of anthropomorphism as sentimental in “Across the Widest Gulf: Nonhuman Subjectivity in Virginia Woolf’s ‘Flush’” (2002).

experiences, stripped of anthropocentrism or stereotypes that is carried over from their representation in typical animal fables. However, regardless of the author's intentions, the fact remains that the novel finds itself in an irresolvable paradox of claiming to portray an elephantine perspective while it cannot be anything other than human. Gowdy's determination to upend anthropocentrism runs into the limitations of the novel form which cannot bypass the simple fact that it is a novel written by a human for other human consumption. The novel is successful in accomplishing the author's aim only to the extent the readers suspend disbelief.

More significantly, since animal narratives have been well-established as a genre meant primarily for children, Gowdy also needs her novel, despite its heavy reliance on the tool of anthropomorphism, to represent the lives of elephants and to be taken seriously by an adult audience. To mitigate some of these challenges and to portray elephants as independent beings with agency, Gowdy borrows some of the credibility and rigor of carefully studied animal ethnographies, and goes so far as to imitate the tone and style of an elephant behaviorist. As mentioned above, there are several moments in the novel where Gowdy uses pseudo-ethnographic footnotes to explain some aspect of elephant behavior. For instance, when Date Bed says, "I'll come in a minute" (24), Gowdy anticipates the readers' skepticism that elephants would know anything about the human concept of time. She appends in a footnote claiming:

They calculate the passage of time using a complicated method that takes into account the phases of the moon, the position of the sun, the cycles of rain and dryness and, most important, their diet—whether the grass is green or gold or long or short, whether they are eating primarily swamp vegetation or tree vegetation and so on. This method recognizes seasons and exact twenty-four-

hour cycles as well as the breakdown of such cycles into smaller units, which are not hours or minutes. (24)

This oddly elaborate explanation does very little to clarify the elephants' notion of time except to say it is too complicated to be outlined simply. It also thwarts any effort on the readers' part to parse what is *actual* elephant behavior and what has been made up for the sake of the novel. But it does establish the idea that elephants are capable of constructing abstract and complex systems that organizes their place-world even if they are inscrutable to humans.

The White Bone may not be able to shake-off the charge of sentimental anthropomorphism, but it is nonetheless successful in centering an animal subject that has agency. The novel lends a richer form to animal lives that compels readers to acknowledge and understand animal personhood. By narrating the story from an elephant perspective, Gowdy makes explicit elephant agency that responds to anthropogenic changes in the world and makes decisions with the hope of ensuring the survival of the species. When there is no external interference in their lives, the elephants, led by the matriarch of each herd, gather annually, when the cows go into estrus, for the purpose of mating. But Gowdy's novel delves into the displacement of elephants and "[a]ll the other reasons why a matriarch would take her family away from its home... Drought. Fire. Sickness. Humans. It is this last reason, specifically a rumor of humans abducting newborn calves, that accounts for Mud being born on the banks of a river miles from her birth family's range" (8). Impacted by the rapacity of poachers, the herds have grown cautious in their annual journeys and have taken to moving long distances to bear their newborns. Although they do not fathom why they are relentlessly hunted for their tusks, the elephants alter their very world view and mythology to envision a place where they can yet again be free to feast and carry on their

generations-old mating practices. Gowdy's novel takes pains to represent elephants as willful, motivated, and intentional in their actions.

Not only does *The White Bone* portray elephants as agentic beings, but more importantly, it shows them as *moral beings* with a notion of collective responsibility towards their species that transcends the biological imperative of procreation and survival. When Mud is separated from her family, the She-M's, right after her birth, she is found by the She-S's who mourn the slaughtered cows. Initially, the She-S's are reluctant to adopt Mud but the herd cannot bring itself to abandon the newborn that has lost her family. Though Mud feels like an outsider, she appreciates having a family and a friend in Date Bed. The kinship the elephants feel in embracing Mud is not borne from biological bonds and thus never taken for granted. When the She-S's get separated, Mud is determined to be reunited with Date Bed even when at times the search for Date Bed takes the group away from their journey towards the Safe Place. The group of elephants is not portrayed as having unwavering loyalty towards each other. On the contrary, their loyalty and familial bonds are tested at every turn and difficult choices are made to keep the group together and safe. The various interspecies relationships and alliances are not idealized either. The elephant society, resembling that of humans, is portrayed as sophisticated but also one that is rife with elephants demonstrating petty qualities such as jealousy, pomposity, or overbearingness. Their interactions with other creatures are similarly complex and complicated by competing interests. It's unclear if these characteristics of animals are based on research or if they are solely the novel's effort to make some of the alien aspects of elephant behavior appear more legible to a human audience. But nonetheless, while it may very well not be possible to corroborate through field studies, in the fantastical realm of the novel, the elephants appear to have a clear

understanding of moral behavior and thus be capable of acting in ethical ways.

Gowdy's novel is unique in the way it combines extensive research on elephants with fictional elements that attempt to explore the mystical nature of elephants and its role in the way they navigate the world. Gowdy constructs a complex cosmology that paints a picture of the beliefs and superstitions of elephants, their understanding of paradise where deceased cows ascend to join the sky cow or a lesser place as the The Eternal Shoreless Water where calves, bulls, and tuskless cows fall into without the hope of joining the sky ones. This kind of a cosmology that privileges female elephants, with "the She" as the organizing principle of elephant birth and death, creates a mystical dimension to the matrilineality of elephant society. Gowdy's endeavor to imagine elephant mythos can be charged with anthropomorphism for trying to project an all-too-human belief in paradise or purgatory on to creatures who may or may not have a mystical conception of life cycles. But perhaps what Gowdy's novel is trying to show is that the ability to invent a mythology that can then be passed on to other members of the species may not necessarily be an exclusively human one. Since no amount of study can ascertain one way or another if elephants are capable of constructing and interpreting myths, Gowdy does not eliminate the possibility that elephant-animals, like human-animals, may possess the emotional and intellectual depth for a complex belief-system. The aim of the novel is less about portraying a veridic or verifiable understanding of elephants and more about challenging human exceptionalism by provoking a human audience to consider that animals can be gifted with mystical abilities.⁸⁰

In the midst of all that is base, fleshly, and instinctive (such as sniffing genitals as part of a mating ritual or examining the bolus of another animal), the elephants are also capable of

⁸⁰ In addition to the commonly understood capacities of animal intelligence.

far greater intellectual and spiritual thought than humans have considered possible.

Unfortunately, the human still sets the bar for what is considered intelligent, and though the elephants demonstrate emotions, a great capacity for grief and problem-solving skills, they are also infantilized in some ways owing to their presumed naïveté and an excessive belief in superstitions. Even when the elephants are full of hope in their quest, especially after Mud's newborn survives against all odds, the human audience can perceive this as foolish and naïve, making the plight of the elephants seem even more bleak. Gowdy cannot escape the suggestion that it is only humans who are in possession of superior knowledge which makes one feel hopeless on their behalf while the elephants carry on with their quest in ignorance.

Although, through Gowdy, the human audience has a portal into elephant psyche, the mindtalker among elephants does not have the ability to communicate with humans (among other exceptions such as insects and snakes). Because of this limitation, the elephants remain a studied subject within the scope of the novel and do not “return the gaze” to decipher the motivations of humans or fathom the reason for the relentless slaughter. Oddly enough, the otherwise expressive elephants do not appear to harbor any ill-will or express anger towards humans for causing unrelenting misery. They are aggrieved and despondent but they accept their plight and focus on finding the Safe Place. With only their superstitions to guide them, the elephants lead a desperate search for the mythic Safe Place, which, as human readers would know, does not exist, and makes them appear to be merely hapless victims of a fate that is beyond their comprehension. This portrayal of the elephants solely as victims forecloses any possibility of resistance on their part.

The violence of poaching is brushed with broad strokes painting all humans as

capable of ruthless slaughter, and generally as a species to be wary of. Although humans appear to have the most impact in the lives of these elephants, they do not figure prominently in the novel even during moments when elephants are struck down and their tusks hacked off. The author omits inserting humans and their motivations in the narrative perhaps in an attempt to preserve the purity of the zoocentric nature of the narrative. So as agents of catastrophic change, humans remain largely invisible in the novel and thus become a naturalized force like drought, fire, or sickness. The elephants, which are portrayed as being capable of a wide range of emotions, do not display any rage directed towards humans, nor do they ever confront the creatures responsible for the destruction of their lives. Gowdy's elephants grieve for the ones they lose to poaching, but seem to accept their cursed fate and keep trying to survive, the way they try to survive the drought—by searching for the Safe Place.

Tania James' *The Tusk That Did the Damage*

In an interview with Meredith Turtis, the author of *The Tusk That Did the Damage* (2015), Tania James, speaks about the problem of anthropomorphism and her reluctance to attribute human characteristics to animals while describing the workings of an elephant's mind in her novel. She admits that she was especially wary of writing from a first person perspective that she felt was "sort of fanciful." For a fiction writer, who would otherwise, by the very nature of her profession, write about experiences that are not hers through imagination, James draws a line on knowability and thus narratability of the nonhuman experience.

James' ambitions are not as grandiose as Barbara Gowdy's; the latter aims to craft a fully immersive experience of the elephant psyche and employs inventive narrative techniques to

deliver that. James's results, on the other hand, are far more modest aesthetically speaking. Her novel does not expect the reader to suspend disbelief to the extent *The White Bone* does and offers instead a digestible amount of insight into an elephant's life. If *The White Bone* is a "fanciful" journey into an elephant mind driven by an urge to determine "what is it like to be an elephant," *Tusk* is more interested in investigating the interstices of human-animal encounters.

The novel switches between the perspectives of a poacher, a filmmaker, and the elephant himself, called the Gravedigger. The sections titled "Poacher" explores the lives of two brothers, Manu, and his elder brother, Jayan, who is a seasoned poacher. Manu suffers a personal loss when his cousin is killed by the Gravedigger. The two cousins were supposed to be together protecting the crops but Manu had sneaked out to chase girls while his cousin gets killed by the rogue elephant. Jayan, who kills elephants to collect their tusks dispassionately, develops a vendetta for the Gravedigger when the elephant attacks and nearly kills his pregnant wife. Together, the brothers embark on a journey to slay the elephant that appears to be on a rampage.

Emma is the young American "Filmmaker" who is shooting a documentary about elephant rescue along with her friend and creative partner, Teddy. The star of the documentary is a savvy veterinarian at the Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Center, Dr. Ravi Varma, who is "known for his roughrider methods at animal rescue" (15). This section of the narrative explores the role of the Kavanar Wildlife Park's Forest Department that is implicated in granting timber and mining rights to multinational corporations, while also cracking down at poachers like Jayan.

The third and central character in this narrative web is "The Elephant," the Gravedigger. Through free indirect discourse, the author enters the mind of the young elephant who is traumatized by the memory of his mother's slaughter. In a narrative moment that is

reminiscent of Mud's traumatic birth during her mother's killing in *The White Bone*, the Gravedigger witnesses the butchering of the tuskers in the herd along with the killing of his mother. The sense memory from during this slaughter changes his personality and drives into a grief-induced frenzy every time something triggers that memory.

The narrative sections that focus on the Gravedigger are not always entirely from the elephant's perspective. James deviates from her narrative technique and "[tries] to write around the elephant" (Turtis n.p.) by including his relationship with his pappan (trainer), the Old Man, and narrating moments of his life as well. In *The White Bone*, Gowdy takes creative liberties to envision and represent what goes on through an elephant's mind and presents a perspective that is mostly human-like. This is precisely the pitfall of anthropomorphism that James tries to avoid in *Tusk* and manages to do so successfully to some extent. As Jason Sandhar points out in his essay in *Postcolonial Animalities*, "the novel's foray into the mind of a traumatized elephant overturns anthropomorphism as a literary trope in that James does not imagine the elephant's experience through terms that are recognizable to humans. Instead, she imagines its lived experience— as that which is necessarily unknowable to humans—in a way that is understandable to her reader" (147). No matter how deeply humans care about *knowing* the inner workings of an animal's mind, *Tusk* resists ascribing what would be human feelings and words to an animal that cannot be fully known. But as with Gowdy's novel, regardless of the author's intentions, the novel form does not allow for an animal narrative to be free of anthropomorphism. James attempts to work around this through the perspective of the film-maker who is able to portray the lives of elephants more authentically.⁸¹ These alternating, multi-dimensional perspectives offer a richer representation of

⁸¹ However obvious it may be, I need to note that film-making, too, is not entirely a close representation of animals' lives given the way it is heavily manipulated through editing, voiceover narrating, and other

the lives of elephants in James' novel.

In the "Elephant" sections, James tackles the gaps in human understanding by visually representing the limitation as large spaces between short bursts of text. James explains that the blank spaces "[reflect] the distance between the humans and the elephants: there are pockets that we can understand, but there are also white spaces that we can't" (Turtis n.p.). By acknowledging the limits to understanding and even to imagination, James is cautioning humans from treating the mind of an animal as a blank canvas which would serve as a sympathetic yet uncritical platform for human morals and values. But this limitation does not have to foreclose the possibility of feeling sympathy or comprehending the nature and extent of the elephant's trauma from witnessing his mother's slaughter.

In the Prologue to *The White Bone*, Barbara Gowdy emphasizes that "under that thunderhead of flesh and those huge rolling bones [elephants] *are* memory" (1; original italics). They are made of memory and also unmade by it. Gowdy goes on to claim that because of an elephant's powerful memory, events are "re-experienced" and while Mud does occasionally recall her birth memory that leaves her in a paralyzed state, the Gravedigger's memory of his past trauma in *Tusk* plays a more active role in shaping the elephant's behavior and the narrative itself. The sense memory from the slaughter of his small herd of two tuskers and his mother, particularly the smell of pineapple rot, haunts the Gravedigger for the rest of his life. It is the triggering of this memory that sends him on a terror-filled rampage that often ends with him grieving for the lives he has taken.

techniques that are carefully tailored to present a narrative whose sole author is human. James' novel does not make an attempt to favor one form over the other; it is more invested in examining the problematic of each form by embedding one in another.

While the “Poacher” and “Filmmaker” sections are set in the present narrative moment, the elephant’s perspective is primarily analeptic. The former two perspectives move the story forward, but at the same time, to the central human characters in the novel, the Gravedigger is nothing but a homicidal elephant that needs to be put down. It is only through the elephant’s perspective that the readers get to see a young elephant evolve into a killer through the trauma of his mother’s death compounded by the ill-treatment he suffers at the hands of a young, reckless pappan called Romeo. When Romeo lights up firecrackers near the elephant’s stall, the sounds and smells of “something foul and familiar” transport the Gravedigger to the fateful day of the slaughter. But “what broke the Gravedigger’s mind was not merely the *stab stab stab* of the firecrackers, nor even the sight of Romeo. It was the pomade coming off the pappan’s hair, the sticky pineapple rot that slid through the air and up his trunk, shocking his head with a memory from a day long ago...All the days between then and now collapsed” (389). When memory is so powerful that the past casts a constant shadow, time loses all meaning, collapsing the boundaries between the past and the present, and retraumatizing the elephant without warning. In the sudden absence of anything to tether him to the present, the “*stab stab stab*” of the firecrackers is almost like a command that ricochets in his mind and he thrashes around in a frenzy killing Romeo, a young boy, and his caretaker, Old Man, whom he had grown to trust. This act of butchery becomes the Gravedigger’s first but what earns him his epithet is the way he cares for his victims’ bodies. He cradles the bodies and then covers them with palm fronds which is “how he learned to grieve the dead” by watching his mother when he was still a calf (191). He had witnessed his mother grieve and care for dead elephants and he continues this practice of grieving for dead humans long after he is severed from his herd.

For the Gravedigger, however, the cradling and covering the dead take on an additional valence of remorse. In *The White Bone*, Gowdy, too, narrates the way the elephants grieve in their own unique way through special songs and dances of mourning. But in *Tusk*, the elephant's grief is intertwined with the world of humans and is rendered more legible. Unlike in Gowdy's novel, where the grieving process takes on a purely anthropomorphic quality, the Gravedigger's post-frenzy remorse depicts grief as a shared trait instead of an exclusively anthropomorphic one. It's a trait that also baffles the humans in the novel who are forced to recognize the gesture as familiar, so the Gravedigger is not another fungible tusker targeted by poachers for profit, but an individual being who has made the killings personal for everyone. But this recognizability does not mean that the Gravedigger is an exceptional animal that is no longer viewed as the Other or that he is fully comprehensible. His motivations remain unknown and unknowable to those who hunt him and the author carefully avoids presuming the inner workings of the elephant's mind other than his turbulent emotional states. But as Sandhar argues "our window into the elephant's world is not exactly structured around feeling the world from the elephant's body (a phenomenological impossibility) or an anthropomorphized version of the Gravedigger, but from the relationships that structure the shared experiences between the Gravedigger and the people he encounters" (157).

Inhabited by more than just nonhuman animals, the elephant's place-world is a chaotic one. Unlike African elephants that can wander the grasslands without accidentally running into humans, the elephants of Southern India, particularly ones in Kerala where the novel is set, frequently stray into farms and small towns owing to proliferating habitat fragmentation and logging. The Asian elephants find themselves in a rapidly shrinking world, a phenomenon that

leaves them more vulnerable to poaching. Unlike the matriarchal herds of African elephants, the Asian counterparts get around in smaller groups that villagers tend to avoid for their own safety. But as *Tusk* shows, humans and elephants are in close proximity in this place and thus friction is inevitable in what can be described as “contact zones.” In places where forest cover is diminishing, similar to the fictitious place of Sitamala, crop-raiding and attacks on humans by elephants keep increasing in several parts of South and Southeast Asia.⁸² Crop depredation, in turn, results in retaliation on elephants by farmers, complicating conservation efforts to protect elephants from poachers. In a situation that recalls the precarity of villagers who live in the “forest of tigers” in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, the poorer villagers of Sitamala, too, live in a similar predicament of relying on the forest for hunting and foraging and are criminalized by the Forest Department under the guise of protecting what is left of the elephant habitat. The ordinary lives of elephants, even without the presence of poachers, are fraught with the danger of elephants losing their way or calves falling into man-made ditches, hence necessitating the routine need for elephant rescue. The elephant is one of handful of land mammals targeted by conservationists all over the world. Putting aside for a moment the constant threat of being hunted for their tusks, which is a point I will attend to shortly, the pachyderm’s ineffable appeal—⁸³perhaps owing to its immense stature, its prominent call, or its unique and complex social structure, or owing to the long history of

⁸² See the authoritative works on African and Asian elephants by Raman Sukumar. See also Naha Dipanjan and et al’s “Elephants in the Neighborhood” (2020).

⁸³ See Christen Wemmer and Catherine A. Christen’s *Elephants and Ethics : Toward a Morality of Coexistence* (2008) for interdisciplinary discussions on the popularity and treatment of elephants especially in zoos and circuses, and also on broader issues of human-elephant conflict. See also Michael Lundblad’s *Animalities: Literary and Cultural Studies Beyond the Human* (2017) and Garvin Marvin and Susan McHugh’s *The Routledge Handbook of Human-Animal Studies* (2014).

elephant performances in circuses—draws the fascination and sympathy of animal rescuers, conservationists, and ecologists. Importantly, elephants are a popular subject for natural science film-makers⁸⁴ who draw attention to their plight and galvanize conservation movements. In his article, “Science and Film-Making,” Jean-Baptiste Gouyon argues that “knowledge originates from a collaboration between scientists and film-makers while viewers are invited to reproduce for themselves field observations, the evidence on which knowledge claims concerning animal behaviour are based” (17). Gouyon asserts that knowledge about the animal world is not first produced by the scientist and then disseminated through documentary film-making. On the contrary, knowledge is produced in this tripartite relationship among the biologist, film-maker, and audience, though not necessarily as equal partners. Nature film-making is essential for conducting science in the public sphere where the audience is allowed to form an intimate relationship with the animal, and biologists acquire fame for facilitating this relationship (*Thinking With Animals* 176). In such a relationship, Gregg Mitman argues that “anthropomorphism and emotion, more than numbers, have lent greater credence to science” (*Thinking* 176) and drives the impetus especially for elephant research and conservation.

Tania James trained as an environmental film-maker from Harvard University and has an intimate knowledge of the craft. But she chooses not to pursue the art because of her “innate discomfort when making documentary films of feeling exploitative” (*LA Times*). She

⁸⁴ See “Science and film-making” by the science historian, Jean-Baptiste Gouyon, who argues that “film-making has evolved from being subordinate to science, to being an equal partner in the production of knowledge, controlled by non-scientists” (26).

See also, Jean-Baptiste Gouyon’s *BBC wildlife documentaries in the age of Attenborough*. And Gregg Mitman’s essay, “Pachyderm Personalities: The Media of Science, Politics, and Conservation” in *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*.

expresses her ethical conundrum of wanting to stay true to an artistic vision but also knowing that the intrusive nature of film-making may cause harm to the film's subject (Turtis). Instead, she channels her first-hand experience of the power and function of documentary film-making into *Tusk*, exploring a film-maker's perspective that is not entirely as objective as it is often made out to be and its role in shaping the conversation around animal conservation.

Emma and Teddy are the film-making duo that wins grants to shoot elephant rescue missions in Southern India. The novel challenges the popular nature documentary format, where the filmmakers remain hidden behind their lens as they expertly deflect attention from their own positionality and hyperfocus, instead, on the film's animal subjects, while an all-knowing Morgan Freeman-esque voiceover narrates the lives of animals. *Tusk* turns the creative lens towards the filmmakers and trains it to observe every motivation and ethical choice they routinely make that otherwise remain hidden under the veneer of critical distance or objectivity. The narrative exposes the working relationship between Emma and Teddy that is at times fraught with creative differences and struggles for control over aesthetic choices. Emma's and Teddy's professional relationship is complicated by an awkward one-off fling that they both try to put behind them. But the situation gets even more complicated and ethically muddy when Emma sleeps with the elephant rescuer, Ravi Verma, which she realizes "was completely out of bounds, unpardonable, certainly missing from the index of *The Art of Documentary*" (44). The novel goes on to show the impact of these personal situations that eventually color the content of the documentary they produce.

As in any film-making process, Emma and Teddy have to sift through and pare down hours of footage to get to "the heart of our film. During the moment of the mother-calf

reunion, Teddy hadn't fiddled with the zoom, had let the action unfold, giving wide berth to those twining trunks, whose ministrations seemed to suggest comfort and tenderness and yet seemed somehow private, primal, on a plane of communication we could glimpse only directly" (39). The reunion is a powerful moment of intimacy and affection among elephants—expressions that can be readily anthropomorphized and interpreted as maternal. It is a moment that documentary filmmakers patiently await knowing that reuniting a cow with her lost calf would make excellent fodder for heart-wrenching visuals, which the audience would find compelling. While Teddy focuses on shooting these action-packed rescue sequences, Emma shoots B-rolls of the elephant-keepers feeding some calves. She wants to keep the shots "tighter, framing out the keepers, focusing on eyes and tongues and trunks, heightening the sounds of snuffle and whimper, as if to enter their circle instead of observing it. I envisioned a film that included patient, lyrical sequences like these, the absence of human voices opening a channel for a more intimate, visual language" (138). She believes the purpose of nature film-making is to transport the audience momentarily into the world of elephants, which she envisions as one that is devoid of human presence—as if to include humans in the frame would be a corruption of an intimate moment.

In the path-breaking work on film theory, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze*, E. Ann Kaplan explores "subjectivity, interiority, relatedness" (xiv) with the explicit aim of examining the power differential between subject and object positions in film-making where the one who "looks" (the subject) determines the way the object that is gazed upon is framed, positioned, and represented for visual consumption, disabling of the latter's agency at least momentarily. Although, here, Kaplan is dissecting the role of the film-maker's gaze in the context of race and gender, it could be a useful concept to invoke—in a limited and specific way—to

gain a better understanding of inter-species looking, a relationship in which the human assumes the subject position by default and the objectified animal is always already the Other. While there is an enormous amount of scholarship⁸⁵ on what it means for an animal to return the human's gaze, my point remains that film-making has exacerbated the power imbalance⁸⁶ largely in favor of humans dominating this form of storytelling and rendering animals as two-dimensional subjects for entertainment.

Tusk draws attention to the deliberate and unconscious choices that film-makers make in their desire to decode the Otherness of animals for a human audience. So when Emma's instinct is to zoom in narrowly on the elephants "as if to enter their circle," the camera's eye allows her to penetrate the intimate space of animals but without her having to give up her own privileged subject position. The "look," in this case, also simultaneously manages to obfuscate the subject's specific location and embodiment, producing instead a "point of view" that appears abstract and thus universal. This abstraction is not so much Emma's choice as a filmmaker but rather an aspect of animal documentaries themselves. The universalized perspective attracts viewers of a nature documentary to inhabit this subject position, so that they, too, can experience the same position of power to form an intimate relationship with the animal object. However, this momentary intimacy is an illusion because it is not reciprocated by the animal in any form in this relationship of inter-species looking and, thus, the animal continues to remain Othered.

Emma's aesthetic vision represents a recognizable move by natural history film-makers who record the lives and behaviors of animals without the intruding presence of humans.

⁸⁵ See John Berger's essay "Why Look at Animals?" (1980); Gregg Mitman's *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (1999); Jacques Derrida *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2002)

⁸⁶ See Rosemary-Claire Collard's "Electric Elephants and the Lively/Lethal Energies of Wildlife Documentary Film" (2016).

The genre of wildlife and nature documentaries abounds with such intrusive moments that pass for interspecies intimacy.⁸⁷ By zooming in on the lives of animals and by cropping out human presence these documentaries inadvertently mystify the extent of human influence on the natural world and reinforce the notion of pristine nature. Even if it were motivated as a way to challenge an anthropocentric perspective, the erasure of humans from the frame as if they constitute a distraction is in itself an invitation to examine a vital perspective or complexity that is being elided. Zoocentric documentaries are nonetheless tremendously successful in generating a global interest in certain species, especially endangered ones, and garnering popular support for their conservation. But by eliminating human presence and thus influence, the issue of conservation is effectively depoliticized. Animals appear to inhabit a human-free place essentially portraying them as severed from complex entanglements with the human place-world that impacts their lives to a large extent.

In *Tusk*, James re-instates human-animal entanglements thus challenging apolitical approaches that treat conservation as a purely ecological issue divorced from the political realities of a place. The need for Dr. Ravi Verma's elephant rescue services arises because of the proximity between elephant and human place-worlds that frequently intersect. As one of the local men explains to Emma, "if these Forest Department people get too close, [the elephant] will abandon the calf. Once the human touches the baby...Mother will leave it behind... [And it] will be captured, trained, and on like that" (17). An accidental encounter between humans and elephants could result in a fatal loss of either life or in the abandonment and captivity of elephants. And

⁸⁷ For a deeper examination of wildlife film-making as an important, yet problematic, medium that brings together ethology, entertainment, and animal rescue, see Gregg Mitman's *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (1999).

with the rapid diminishment of elephant habitat, these deadly interspecies encounters steadily increase. Ravi Verma points out a thinning grove of bamboo trees and says, “Elephants love the bamboo...so the shortage is drawing them to the farms. And the Forest Department isn’t replanting” (99). But the elephants’ place-world is gradually altered by the rapid expansion of farms by humans who themselves lead precarious lives on the edges of urbanized places. When Gravedigger escapes captivity and runs back to the forest that was once his home where he “knew every bend and corner,” he discovers that the forest was no longer the way he remembered and it had “changed over the years of his absence, blighted by dying bamboo, patched with green and gold farm. No sight was stranger than the treeless swaths through which he and his clan used to cross, taking shady refuge beneath the ribs of trees. Little remained of the rosewood and aanjili, only stumps like rivets in the earth” (191). Rampant logging and smuggling of prized trees, which once formed the elephant’s natural habitat, turn the forest into an uninhabitable place for elephants, complicating conservation efforts that aim to keep the animals away from farms where an encounter between humans and elephants could turn deadly for either.

Tusk takes a close look at one of the central issues around elephant conservation: poaching. James includes the story of a poacher in the tripartite narrative, intersecting with the perspectives of the elephant and the filmmaker. Owing to the ruthlessness that is required in the slaughtering and butchering of wild animals with the singular goal of trading valuable parts for profit, poachers everywhere are universally reviled by conservationists and animal-lovers. Especially in Asia, due to the dwindling elephant population, poachers notoriously kill young male calves for their immature tusks. In Barbara Gowdy’s *The White Bone*, the poachers, seen through the sole perspective of elephants, are nameless and faceless embodiments of pure evil and mindless

destruction. James, on the other hand, takes this amorphous representation of poachers that is easy to loathe, and creates distinctive people with recognizable motivations, resulting in a complex and granular set of characters.

We come to learn that conservation efforts in the fictitious village of Sitamala with the inception of the protected forest reserve of Kavanar National Park resulted in the villager's loss of access to the forest and its resources. Manu, the brother of a notorious poacher, Jayan, and the primary narrator of the "Poacher" section, bemoans the removal of the villagers from the forests citing forest protection laws when the same laws are routinely flouted to favor timber companies: "Our people had been walking the forest long before it took that fussy name. The new laws forbid us from doing anything in the park, not walking, not even picking up a finger length of firewood without being fined for trespass and stealing. Stealing from trees that dropped us fruit and firewood for centuries! Meanwhile, the laws looked kindly on the greenbacks and timber companies, their rows of rosewood, eucalyptus, teak" (9-10). Like elephants, whose habitats have been altered rapidly enough to lose their sense of place, the villagers, too, find their place-world forcibly changed resulting in displacement and economic deprivation. This removal of people from their familiar/familial place resonates with native populations elsewhere that suffer the impact of conservation laws, which do not take into account their lives and livelihoods—an issue that Amitav Ghosh brings up in *The Hungry Tide* with far more deadly consequences for the villagers.⁸⁸

The narrator's brother, Jayan, knows the forest, its vegetation, and its nonhuman inhabitants intimately: "Jayan knew things—how to tell between the slots of a sambar and the pug

⁸⁸ Chapter 1 of this dissertation examines the dispossession of the villagers of the Sundarbans in *The Hungry Tide*.

of a tiger, between cow pie and buffalo turd and elephant scat. He had a botanist's knowledge of wild plants, though he had not studied botany or anything else since age fourteen. To him, the forest was the only school worth attending" (51). However, an intimate knowledge of a place does not guarantee that one would be conservation-minded or awed by the object of his study. In fact, Jayan uses his expert knowledge to hunt and kill wild animals initially for sport and then later for profit.

Jayan's instincts for tracking and hunting animals signal another kind of proximity with nonhuman beings that calls into question the limits of his humanity. The narrator sees his brother as more than or other than just human: "Little creature, my mother used to call him, for the pelt of hair he had worn from birth. And there was something creaturely too about the man he became, all sinew and scruff, the way he looked through you like a cool-eyed cat" (50). The easy trope of dehumanizing poachers for their notorious lack of sympathy or kindness is turned on its head in *Tusk*. Jayan is portrayed as more than a heartless human. As someone who can be characterized as a Deleuzian metamorphic being, Jayan embodies a more-than-humanness that complicates his relationship with animals with whom he shares at once kinship and estrangement. He carries on with his hunting and poaching dispassionately as a matter of survival unbothered by feelings of horror or guilt.

Drawing upon Cary Wolfe and Jonathan Elmer's grid of human-animal interactions as a set of four types of relationalities, "humanized human, humanized animal, animalized human, and animalized animal" (674), Java Singh locates Jayan as an "animalized human" who is finds himself at the bottom of a ruthless hierarchy of poachers.⁸⁹ The narrative—to

⁸⁹ "Materialities of the Non-Human Animal and the Species Matrix of Postcolonial Remains in Selected Contemporary Writing" (2018).

borrow a film-making term—zooms out to cast light on the structural issue of poaching in which Jayan is but a small part of a global nexus of ivory trade. Higher up on the food chain is Communist Chacko, an unctuous character who trades in ivory, sandalwood and every kind of endangered flora or fauna that would earn him a hefty profit. Chacko reveals that the illegal trade would be impossible without corrupt Forest Department officials who “look the other way.”

The same corrupt Forest Department is also implicated in exacerbating the loss of forest cover which is, in turn, responsible for the increasing number of human-elephant encounters. While the villagers are prohibited from foraging in the reserve forest, “the Forest Department had subsidized Shankar Timber Company to fell the trees on their forestland. Technically, it wasn’t the villagers’ land; all forestlands belonged to the Forest Department (as inherited from the British raj, who had previously claimed all forestlands for the queen). But the villagers of Manaloor felt they deserved some say over the lands where they’d been harvesting firewood and honey long before Queen Victoria was in diapers” (41-2). The novel makes it explicit that the Forest Department is, thus, a neocolonial outfit securing the interests of capitalists and allowing the extraction of resources to cater to foreign markets. Unlike *The White Bone* which does not clarify the nebulous logic of “hindleggers,” *Tusk* is careful to trace the causal mechanism of poaching and resource extraction. Although individual poachers are vilified, and perhaps deservedly so, James captures the messy nature of a systemic issue that needs to be dismantled top down.

At the end, while the narrator, Jayan, and another poacher, Alias, are looking for Gravedigger to kill him, they run into the elephant when they are unprepared but, contrary to his wild reputation, the elephant does not attack. Instead, the narrator, Manu, is accidentally killed by

a Forest Department guard who spins his version of the event as a valiant encounter with a notorious poacher. To make the shooting seem legitimate, Samina Hakim, the Divisional Range Officer, enlists the help of Ravi to plant evidence on an elephant carcass that would make Manu appear guilty of poaching. The novel shows that even the well-intentioned and conservation-minded authorities of Sitamala are ready to pin the blame on poachers instead of addressing structural problems that plague both humans and elephants. As Sandhar suggests, Ravi and Samina, although reputed as one of the good ones, “side with the institutional power of state conservation, which is implicated in the generalized imperatives of global capital over the interests of local people and animals” (155).

While the unresolved ending indicates that there are no easy solutions, the novel gets caught up in its own efforts to represent authentically the messiness of a complex environmental issue that it struggles to address systemic *causes* of extractive violence more directly. The “Filmmaker” sections are more clearly critical of the way people in positions of power, such as Ravi, Samina Hakim, and to an extent, even Emma, manipulate a flawed system of conservation to advance their personal agendas. As an elephant rescuer, an environmental law enforcer, and an animal-loving filmmaker, the three characters are inadvertently implicated in a system that perpetuates the need for elephant rescue, even if they mean to be on the right of the issue of conservation. What, then, is suppressed in this representation are “[t]he material conditions of capital, ...[that] remain necessarily ineffable as they flow through state actors, NGOs, poachers, rural dwellers, animals, and global industry” (Sandhar 157). Global capital and the neocolonial government, which facilitates the smooth transfer of capital through these networks that rely on extraction, remain obscure in the novel. Perhaps not to the extent of *The White Bone*, but *Tusk*,

too, is prone to sentimentalism in its tragic portrayal of both the elephant and the poacher, each a victim in his own way. Like Gowdy, James appears too exhausted by the tragedy of poaching, and the many human and nonhuman lives it claims, to envision meaningful and organized resistance.

Nevertheless, both *The White Bone* and *The Tusk That Did the Damage* make important contributions to the genre of animal narratives by grappling head-on with the issue of poaching and imagining an altered worldview through the perspective of victimized animals. When it was first published, *The White Bone* was a path-breaking novel and it is hard not see its influence on James' novel. James has her own take on animal subjectivity but she is primarily interested in exploring human-animal interrelationships. *Tusk* is successful to the extent that it portrays resource extraction not as an evil deed of corrupt individuals but as an exploitative system with multiple agents—human and nonhuman—each driven by their own intentions.

CONCLUSION

Resource extraction is the context for the novels that I examine in this dissertation. Although Jan Carew's *Black Midas* is the only work in this project that deals with the problem of extractive violence directly, the logic of extractivism haunts human and animal lives from the periphery. In *Decolonial Marxism: Essays from the Pan-African Revolution* (2022), Walter Rodney writes: "when we look at [profit's] mechanism closely, we find that it is always a means of transferring to the metropolitan economy capital produced out of the material and human resources of the Third World" (119). The steady siphoning off of wealth from Third World countries (and entire continents) since the 19th century created underdevelopment, scarcity, poverty, and conflict from which these countries are struggling to recover.

The first chapter deals with land loss and displacement and the afterlives of colonialism. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* portrays the crisis of poverty in a place where tiger conservation is an urgent issue. Under the British Raj, the tiger population dwindled within a span of three decades necessitating stringent conservation efforts to protect what was left of the Sundarbans tigers.⁹⁰ But, as Ghosh's novel reveals, the Sundarbans is a complex place with a rich history and ecology, where isolating a single species as the symbol of conservation can be a reductive effort that leads to conflict, violence, and further displacement for people who have nowhere else to go. Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* is set in South Africa which has a long history of resisting settler colonialism that displaced people from their own lands and extracted the natural wealth from them.

⁹⁰ See Anand Pandian's essay, "Predatory Care" for an analysis on the role of the imperial hunt in "securing the bodies and hearts of resistant subjects through spectacles of responsible force" (79).

The second chapter analyzes two Bildungsromane set in the Caribbean where plantation slavery systematically exploited humans and their labor largely to produce monoculture crops. Set in pre-independence Guyana, *Black Midas* by Jan Carew portrays the psychological cost of extractive mining on a young Afro-Guyanese subject, who struggles with his identity and lowered class position. The protagonist in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, too, grapples with questions around her racial and sexual identity at a time when Jamaica is going through a different form of upheaval. Even after the end of plantation slavery and colonial occupation, Jamaica (along with her subjects) is scrambling to become economically independent and to lift millions out of poverty. Under neocolonial conditions, there is a different kind of extractivism at work—the extraction and commodification of Jamaican history and culture that would continue the oppression of Jamaican people in invisible ways (but ones which, nonetheless, have material consequences).

The third chapter looks at two animal narratives that are set in former British colonies to analyze how extractive violence directly impacts more-than-human animals. This chapter is concerned about centering the actual non-human subjects that are caught up in a web of commercial greed for elephant ivory. While Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone* portrays elephants as tragic creatures, Tania James' *The Tusk That Did the Damage* represents more accurately the entanglement of humans and animals as a consequence of the logic of extractivism. The extraction of ivory puts humans on the path of elephants to mutual detriment and loss. James' novel takes pains to highlight the interconnectedness of human and animal suffering brought about by systematic greed and exploitation.

In order to ground some of the extensive aftereffects of extractivism and to lend

them a clearer scope, I introduce Place Studies as a method of literary analysis. Place particularizes extractive violence by drawing attention to the various agents (human and nonhuman) in an environmental conflict and by clarifying the relationships among them. This method, thus, challenges universal and generalized conceptions of extractive violence—quite simply, place dispels the various disguises under which extractivism operates. At the same time, I show how a platial framework, by emphasizing relationality, breaks down interspecies barriers, disciplinary boundaries, and other demarcators that promote narrow analytical foci that lead to more reductive understandings of complex environmental conflicts. And, lastly, in each chapter I demonstrate how knowledge embedded in places (which is otherwise overlooked by dominant epistemologies) is crucial for surviving and resisting environmental violence.

The chapter, “Knowing a Place,” analyzes the representation of the Sundarbans in *The Hungry Tide* as a rich and complex place which is at the center of conservation efforts driven by policies that are drawn primarily from quantitative information about tiger population. The novel humanizes the conservation problem and explores the ramifications of policies that fail to account for people who are displaced and marginalized by the same policies (and otherwise). My reading of the novel shows how knowledge about the place—its history, mythology, culture, politics among other facets—adds more nuance to the problem of tiger conservation. But, more importantly, it shows how “place knowledge” gets reduced, organized, sanitized, and folded into scientific knowledge about a place. In Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*, it is indigenous knowledge about a place that is deployed as resistance against a tourism development project that directly threatens to disrupt human-nonhuman interdependencies and local ways of living. The descendants of the anti-colonial movement turn to their own history and keep alive valuable

knowledge about Qolorha, its flora and fauna, in order to show the importance of conserving local history, culture, and ecology.

The second chapter, “Relating to a Place,” looks at two Caribbean Bildungsromane to understand how a person’s relationship with the place they inhabit (the one they grow up in and/or the one that is significant to them for some reason) shapes their sense of self and identity. In Jan Carew’s *Black Midas*, the protagonist, Aron, has a negative relationship with the place and its human and nonhuman inhabitants. By “negative,” I mean that Aron’s relationship is primarily based on extraction (of the resources of the land and the resources that people have to offer) without reciprocity or responsibility. Aron is not care-full in his treatment of the land and its people and treats them as a means to an end. As a result, not only is the place left impoverished, he realizes belatedly that such a reckless and relentlessly extractive treatment results in psychological impoverishment. Through Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*, I show what a “positive” relationship with the place could look like—as in, a relationship in which the person and her place are mutually dependent and enriched. As the protagonist, Clare, grows up and starts learning more about Jamaican history and the role of Cockpit Country in *marronage*, she begins to identify herself with a collective struggle for liberation from foreign control. Although both novels, as Bildungsromane, share generic similarities (such as themes of alienation, pains of self-discovery, among other elements of a postcolonial Bildungsroman), it is through identification with a place and its history that Clare is saved from a fate of isolation and irreparable fragmentation—a psychological state that leaves Aron feeling trapped and lost at the end. Despite leading an itinerant life in search of answers about herself, her past, and her identity, Clare finds resolution and purpose driven by the need to protect her country and culture from further extraction.

The final chapter, “Inhabitants of a Place,” de-centers human and human relationships with a place, and centers, instead, nonhuman inhabitants and how they navigate a world that is permanently altered through human interventions. Poaching is a human-made crisis that is unleashed on the animal kingdom with devastating consequences for everyone involved. Though tusks (of elephants, rhinoceros, and other critters) are not a necessary resource but an aesthetic or a culturally-attributed status symbol, they are sought after and circulated around the globe through illegal channels by several small-scale and large-scale poachers with little regard for the detrimental effects on the animals or for the local community. By centering animals, this chapter recognizes nonhuman agency and nonhuman capacity for forming important relationships with the place that animals inhabit. Barbara Gowdy’s *The White Bone* is a uniquely experimental novel that transports the readers into the minds of a group of elephants who are displaced from their home grounds owing to drought and the perpetual threat of poaching. While the novel does the important work of recognizing and portraying animal agency, by avoiding any specific place markers to locate these elephants, it misses the opportunity to politicize the problem of poaching. This is exactly what Tania James achieves in her novel, *The Tusk That Did the Damage*, by rotating the narrative among three story-tellers one of whom is an elephant that has suffered the consequences of poaching. By representing the systemic violence that both animals and humans endure because of poaching, *Tusk* successfully traces the complex web of human-animal entanglement and makes an urgent case for dismantling global trade of tusks. The three chapters together show the importance of place as a framework by drawing particular attention to place knowledge which is vital for humans and nonhumans.

Although I suggest that centering and deploying place-knowledge is valuable in

resisting ecological violence, the novels themselves do not necessarily conclude on a liberatory note. In Mda's novel, the threat of tourism development appears only to be temporarily thwarted. The celebratory feeling that accompanies the establishment of a local conservation movement is dampened by the suggestion that it may not be viable enough economically to resist a foreign takeover at some point. In the second chapter, although Clare finds purpose in joining the guerrilla group, the group is shot down within a few minutes by paramilitary forces and their rebellion (and, thus, their voices) quelled. James' novel, too, ends on a grim note of death and devastation. I want to emphasize that while the outcomes in each novel can be seen as instances of "failure," I draw attention to their legacy of knowledge embedded in these so-called failed outcomes. The novels are not about offering a blueprint to a successful environmental resistance movement. Instead, they expose the various disguises under which global capitalism operates and demonstrate the urgent need for breaking down barriers to solidarities across places, cultures, and species, by offering the knowledge/tools needed to facilitate this dismantling.

This project also has the potential to be expanded beyond the limited ways in which I have applied place as a framework. While I focus primarily on human and animal inhabitants of a place, in actuality, a far more complex set of agencies inhere in places that are not be limited to plants, fungi, insects, chemicals, and toxic waste. Take, for instance, Silvia Moreno-Garcia's eco-horror novel, *Mexican Gothic* (2020), which is set in the town of El Truifo where capitalists undertook silver-mining until the 1920s. A veritable mycorrhizal mystery, the novel combines the material effects of unsustainable mining with pathological greed that is addicted to the extraction of surplus. The pathology literally and metaphorically takes hold of the human mind in the form of a fungal invasion where human and mycorrhizal agencies cooperate as a

unified, yet, toxic network whose only need is to self-propagate to retain control over the silver mines. A place-based analysis of Moreno-Garcia's novel could potentially reveal that not all interspecies dependencies are generative and that some are formed to advance exploitative and extractive goals.

The point about harmful entanglements leads me to my concluding meditation on *dis*-entanglements and de-growth. In *What Comes After Entanglement?*, Giraud recognizes that, “Irreducibly complex situations – where human and animal lives, ecological processes, and technical arrangements are impossible to meaningfully separate – cannot be settled by neat solutions that focus on one factor alone. From this perspective, issues such as seaborne plastic pollution cannot be solved by placing the blame on poor waste disposal practices on the part of certain communities, as this masks the role of particular relations of production, leaky plastic recycling chains, and the material properties of plastic itself in constituting the crisis” (1-2). Disentangling from nonhuman environments, thus, may not be a viable, necessary, or morally/economically/ecologically correct step in many cases. However, it does not mean that maintaining (or intensifying) this depth or complexity of entanglement is inevitable or the only way to move forward. Giraud posits an ethics and politics of exclusion where “the act of excluding certain relations is precisely what creates room for others to emerge, or for existing forms of life to be sustained” (11).

In *Marx in the Anthropocene* (2023), Kohei Saito, expands on Marx's *Capital* and attempts to find an answer to repair the “irreparable rift” in humanity's relationship with the environment brought about by unsustainable extraction driven by the pursuit of infinite growth. He defines “degrowth communism” as a “a post-scarcity future without economic growth [that]

aims to reduce the 'realm of necessity' and expand the 'realm of freedom' without necessarily increasing productive forces" (218). Perhaps ecological liberation, then, hinges on the radical deployment of disentanglement and degrowth, which, together, could eradicate the scramble for infinite capital accumulation that fuels all extraction.

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