

Climate Change Discourse in Contemporary Women's Speculative Fiction

Lucy Jane Rowland

Submitted in accordance with the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of English

July 2019

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Acknowledgements

This thesis was supported by AHRC through the White Rose College of the Arts & Humanities [grant number AH/L503848/1]. Many thanks are due to WRoCAH for their generous support of my PhD, and for the brilliant opportunities that I have benefitted from with their help.

Material from Chapter 1 of this thesis has also appeared online in the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* as the article 'Indigenous Temporality and Climate Change in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006)' <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2019.1598472>>. This material is reproduced here with kind permission of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*.

My biggest thanks go to my supervisors, Dr Clare Barker and Dr David Higgins, for their thoughtful, perceptive and encouraging feedback over the course of my project, and for all their advice and support of my professional development outside my PhD. They have been fantastic mentors. I am also grateful to the late Anthony Carrigan, whose input into (and support of) my original PhD proposal helped to secure my place at Leeds. I hope he would approve of the project's final incarnation.

Professor Danielle Fuller's supervision of my Master's dissertation at the University of Birmingham helped to lay much of the groundwork for this thesis, and her support and encouragement of my work at this stage was invaluable. I'm also grateful to the members of the Environmental Humanities Research Group (and attendees of the EH Reading Group), the AHRC Land Lines project (particularly Dr Pippa Marland), and the Priestley Centre, many of whom have offered fascinating conversation, interventions, support and opportunities during my time at Leeds.

No less importantly, to my office-mates and friends, Kate Moore and Steve Whiting: thanks for unfailingly sharing in my increasingly dark humour, and for offering frequent distractions, jokes and welcome reality checks over the last four years. Without your support this thesis would not have materialised. Thanks also to Katrina Longhurst, Dima Chami and Gianluca Guerriero for illuminating discussions, insight and camaraderie. My penultimate thanks go to my family and friends outside Leeds: my siblings, Maisie, Ellen and George, and my parents, Kate and Steve, for their constant support (and for indulging in my book obsession!). Thanks also to Emma Baker, Emily Daniel, Beth Akielan, Sarah Chatterley, Annie Dickinson, Lizzie Cook, Chloe Morgan, Katie Sales, Olivia Spence, Adrian Ranieri, Lucy Stubbs and Kasey Robinson, for all the important conversations, friendship, and laughs.

Finally, much love and thanks to Edward Gordon, who has happily failed to become a pessimist over the last seven years (despite my best efforts), and whose humour, enthusiasm, and unshakeable belief in my abilities has been a wonderful antidote to the gloom entailed in studying climate change.

Abstract

Over the last few decades, increasing critical attention has been paid to fiction that depicts futures of the Earth under conditions of anthropogenic climate change. In particular, scholars working in the environmental humanities are increasingly investigating what literature can offer to conversations around our changing planet. However, what still remains to be fully scrutinised is how discourses of climate change can operate in ways that can exacerbate environmental damage, condone human exceptionalism, or further entrench existing global and societal inequalities. This thesis analyses six novels by contemporary women authors (Maggie Gee, Octavia Butler, Alexis Wright and Clare Vaye Watkins) who approach the subject of climate change from various cultural perspectives. It seeks to answer the following questions: how do contemporary women authors engage with oppressive contemporary discourses on climate change? What do these novels bring to scholarly work on climate change and literature, and the environmental humanities more broadly? Over the course of three chapters on temporality, spatiality and migration, this thesis investigates how these authors engage with, critique, and construct contemporary discourses about climate change. Via a feminist ecocritical approach, I contend that these novels work against hegemonic discursive constructions of climate change, and diverge from popular culture depictions of environmental disaster and climate changing scenarios. Articulating the fallacies of colonial, patriarchal and neoliberal discourses, each text exposes fundamental logical instabilities embedded within many Western narratives of climate change, and disrupts the meta-narrative of climate change as an unprecedented disturbance to a global equilibrium.

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List of Abbreviations

EH — *Environmental Humanities*

GECs — *Global Environmental Changes*

IPCC — *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*

ISLE — *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (Journal)*

LIT — *Literature, Interpretation, Theory (Journal)*

NPR — *National Public Radio*

SF — *Science Fiction*

UNFCCC — *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*

Introduction

On 11 October 2016, after Australia's Great Barrier reef experienced a bout of devastating coral bleaching, the magazine *Outside* published an article online, entitled 'Obituary: Great Barrier Reef (25 Million BC-...)'.¹ The article went viral.² Tracing its pre-human history, journalist Rowan Jacobsen relived the life of the reef from its birth during the Miocene epoch, to the threats posed by oil companies in the 1960s, and to its designation as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Jacobsen alludes to its place in the marine 'community', and to its 'friends' who attempted to protect and intervene in its slow death:³

No one knows if a serious effort could have saved the reef, but it is clear that no such effort was made. On the contrary, attempts to call attention to the reef's plight were thwarted by the government of Australia itself, which in 2016, shortly after approving the largest coal mine in history, successfully pressured the United Nations to remove a chapter about the reef from a report on the impact of climate change on World Heritage sites.⁴

Jacobsen's piece was lambasted by scientists for inciting nihilism and hopelessness, as the majority of the reef still remained alive at this time,⁵ but these criticisms arose from a simplistic reading of the article. Although it follows the traditional format of an obituary, which may at first appear to be nihilistic or hopeless in tone, the narrative perspective originates from an unspecified point in the future, beyond 2016. The title of the article does not list a date of death, and the writer mentions that the reef's eventual demise was brought about by atmospheric CO₂ concentrations of 450 parts per million, a statistic that he states was reached in the year 2025. Locating the article in a future moment in time can be read as an attempt to incite attentive readers to take preventative action: donations are encouraged to the charity

¹ Rowan Jacobsen, 'Obituary: Great Barrier Reef (25 Million BC-...)', *Outside Online*, 11 October 2016 <<https://www.outsideonline.com/2112086/obituary-great-barrier-reef-25-million-bc-2016>> [accessed 5 March 2019].

² Poul Holm and Ruth Brennan, 'Humanities for the Environment 2018 Report: Ways to Here, Ways Forward', *Humanities*, 7.1 (2018), 1–10.

³ Jacobsen, para. 4 of 13; para. 9 of 13.

⁴ Jacobsen, para. 10 of 13.

⁵ Holm and Brennan, p. 6. The article was criticised by Terry Hughes, director of the Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, for its potential harming of the tourism industry, which both directly and indirectly contributes to reef damage. See Chris D'Angelo, 'Great Barrier Reef Obituary Goes Viral, To The Horror Of Scientists', *Huffington Post*, 14 October 2016 <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/scientists-take-on-great-barrier-reef-obituary_n_57fff8f1e4b0162c043b068f?> [accessed 9 April 2019].

Ocean Ark Alliance in the final paragraph of the article. Harnessing the power of a sensationalised momentous event via the imagined death of the reef, but mitigating this through his complication of temporality and scale, Jacobsen depicts a speculative scenario, one that could still be averted. Its message is also rendered far more powerful in that Jacobsen figures the Great Barrier Reef as a collective and complex agential system, and as a creative participant in world ecosystems, rather than as passive scenery for human drama. Rather than assigning human qualities to the reef, Jacobsen mourns the loss of its enormous complexity and energy. He articulates this within a familiar narrative of human tragedy, but one void of any sense of catharsis. The article can therefore be read as a movement towards a type of media discourse on climate change that combines multidisciplinary perspectives (history, earth science, and politics) with speculative narrative techniques in order to incite an affective response in its readers, while communicating vital information about the climate crisis.

Taking a multidisciplinary perspective, the obituary alludes to a fundamental tension in how humans have historically understood climate change, and the actions that have been taken to prevent it or mitigate its effects. It has been decades since climate change was first understood to be a significant and anthropogenic threat to the Earth and its ecosystems, so why has the powerful scientific evidence not induced mass political and societal behavioural changes? Why does it remain so easy, in certain spheres, to disregard this evidence and deny reality? Or worse still, why is it common political practice to acknowledge the breadth and scope of the problem, yet to delay or outright prohibit direct action through complicated layers of bureaucracy, drawn-out political negotiations, and protected capital?

The answers to these questions are complex, and move across the cultural, historical, and political domains. To begin to address them, it needs to be acknowledged that until very recently, the way that we produce knowledge *about* climate change has not been adequately scrutinised, and the way that this knowledge circulates across different social strata has not received sufficient critical examination. If the urgency of our environmental crises has not so far been effectively conveyed by those in power, the true nature of the problem exceeds the domain of the physical sciences and extends into the realms of philosophy, history, politics, literary studies, and beyond. Addressing climate change requires the expertise of multiple disciplines, especially from within the Environmental Humanities (EH). The EH seeks to reinsert the 'human' into climate change research in all forms, and actively participate in debates over global environmental changes (GECs) rather than offering a commentary on the knowledge produced from other disciplines (usually the physical sciences).⁶ It is paramount that

⁶ Libby Robin, 'Environmental Humanities and Climate Change: Understanding Humans Geologically and Other life Forms Ethically', *WIREs Climate Change*, 9.1 (2018), 1–18 (pp. 1–2).

contributions to climate research, particularly those from the EH, must critically analyse the nature of the production and origins of climate change knowledge in all its forms.

With these imperatives in mind, this thesis examines six contemporary works of speculative fiction by women authors that address, at various levels and scales, the multiple effects of climate change and environmental crises. It offers a critique of their deployment of familiar (and some unfamiliar) climate change discourses. The texts in question are two novels by Maggie Gee (a white British author), *The Ice People* (1998) and *The Flood* (2004), two novels by Australian and Indigenous Waanyi author Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria* (2006) and *The Swan Book* (2013), white Californian author Claire Vaye Watkins' 2015 novel *Gold Fame Citrus*, and the late African American author Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993). Scholars have pointed out that far from being voiceless victims who are unable to contribute to climate change discourse and policy, historically women have been the largest producers of food in rural areas and the Global South in particular,⁷ and are often worst affected by environmental disasters, due to their roles as caregivers and collectors of food for families.⁸ Women are therefore especially well placed to contribute to decision-making and policy on climate change, yet they are systematically and structurally denied opportunities to participate in decision-making processes regarding adaptation, mitigation and prevention of environmental disasters.⁹ With these facts in mind, this thesis combines a focus on speculative fiction written by women (which predominantly addresses the experiences of women and other oppressed groups and nonhumans) with a theoretical approach — feminist ecocriticism — that brings their commentary on climate change and criticism of climate discourses to the fore. This presents a strong challenge to the embedded cultural norms that have contributed to humanity's overconsumption, and subsequent inertia, in the face of global warming.

The feminist ecocritical approach that I take here works alongside Simon Estok's suggestion that feminist ecocriticism will 'buil[d] on the strengths of [ecofeminism and ecocriticism], looking at the ways they complement each other'.¹⁰ However, this thesis will not

⁷ Joane Nagel, *Gender and Climate Change: Impacts, Science, Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 38; Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, Development*, 3rd edn (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic, 2016), p. xiii.

⁸ Eric Neumayer and Thomas Plümper, 'The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy, 1981–2002', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 97 (2007), 551–66 (p. 555). Greta Gaard, 'From Cli-fi to Critical Ecofeminism: Narratives of Climate Change and Climate Justice', in *Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism*, ed. by Mary Philips and Nick Rumens (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 169–92 (pp. 180–81).

⁹ Gaard, 'From Cli-Fi to Critical Ecofeminism', p. 180.

¹⁰ Simon C. Estok, 'Bridging the Great Divide: Ecocritical Theory and the Great Unwashed', *ESQ*, 31.4 (2005), 197–209 (p. 199).

simply insist upon the continued relevance of both these two approaches, or of feminist ecocriticism. The aptness of a feminist ecocritical approach to contemporary writing on climate change and environmental crisis by women is fairly self-evident, as the world enters a period of increasingly extreme and frequent weather events and ‘natural’ disasters, and an unprecedented rise in global temperatures, where women and people in the Global South suffer the worst effects of climate change and subsequent environmental disasters.¹¹ The patriarchal and capitalist structures that uphold and exacerbate existing global inequalities, and fail to address the consequences of climate change, need systematic dismantling. Discourses such as climate change denial, neoliberal individualism, techno-scientific masculinity, colonialism and militarisation, require a critical engagement informed by intersectional feminism and environmental concerns. I contend that feminist ecocriticism is the most appropriate theoretical approach on the basis of its inclusivity, its recognition of difference and heterogeneity (cultural, material, social), and its emphasis on the recognition of oppressive patriarchal structures and regimes in the context of climate change.

Across three chapters on temporality, spatiality and migration, I argue that my selected works of speculative fiction imitate, challenge, and complicate climate change discourses. I demonstrate that the texts offer unique and challenging investigations into the injustices that play out within climate-changed environments, in particular with relation to gender, race, colonialism and capitalism. I show that, in their divergences from (or modifications of) conventional Western climate fiction and its tropes, these novels offer radically disruptive contributions to climate change discourse. They deploy innovative formal techniques, which strengthen and sharpen their critique of Western-centric, racist and misogynistic contemporary climate change discourses. These texts expose the fallacy of the belief that climate change disrupts a stable societal, environmental and political global equilibrium. Instead, they narrate human vulnerability to climate within global capitalist and patriarchal hegemonic systems, through exposing the flaws and hypocrisies within these structures. This is in contrast to many other climate fiction texts which seek to narrate human innovation, resilience and strength in the context of climate change. By critiquing the hegemonic discourses that sustain myths of human exceptionalism and obscure the complex power relations behind the acceleration of climate change, these writers expose the fundamental logical instabilities embedded within many Western narratives of climate change.

¹¹ See Nagel, *Gender and Climate Change*, pp. 2–3; Greta Gaard, *Gender Justice and Climate Justice: Making the Connections*, online video recording, YouTube, 15 July 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qFqIP0teKY>> [accessed 11 October 2016].

Climate and Literature: A History and (Eco)Criticism

At a time when the effects of climate change and related environmental crises are accelerating rapidly, writers of fiction face new challenges in illustrating the possible futures of the Earth. We are increasingly experiencing the fulfilment of some of the most pessimistic scientific and literary forecasts from the last forty years, including huge increases in drought, desertification, wildfires, flooding, extreme weather events, the melting of ice caps, glaciers and permafrost, and the mass extinction of plants and animals across the globe. Contemporary writers of climate fiction must therefore negotiate these ongoing disasters, and depict their visions of climate change at a scale that readers can comprehend. Problems of representation abound in climate fiction: how do we depict the distorted ‘hyperobject’ of climate change, to use Timothy Morton’s term, which can resist representation entirely?¹² What forms should these attempted depictions take, and how do writers stylistically communicate the complex problems entailed with climate change-related environmental crises while resisting problematic tropes? In many different examples of what is now often called climate fiction (or ‘cli-fi’)¹³ as well as in popular culture (film, television, the news), it is possible to discern how and where problematic discourses on climate change are reproduced. Andrew Baldwin and Greta Gaard have discussed, for example, the narrative trope of the return to the heteronormative family unit within representations of climate-changed dystopia.¹⁴ In this narrative, the reader or viewer is comforted by the protagonists’ eventual return — after arduous journeys through apocalyptic landscapes — to the prospect of a nuclear family unit (see, for example, Cormac McCarthy’s 2006 novel *The Road* and the 2004 film *The Day After Tomorrow*). Another common narrative trope in climate fiction is the depiction of global catastrophes that are mitigated, averted or investigated via the adventures of white male scientists (or other elites) working against the establishment: a few examples of this may include Ian McEwan’s *Solar* (2010), Nathaniel Rich’s *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013), Simon Rosser’s *Tipping Point* (2011), and Michael Crichton’s *State of Fear* (2008). These texts can also often be grouped by their use of the enduring Romantic trope of the ‘last man’: a lone, heroic

¹² See Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). A ‘hyperobject’ is an object (for example, climate change) that is extremely vast and spread enormously across space and time, so as to be incomprehensible, but is simultaneously experienced, albeit in a distorted and partial way, at close quarters.

¹³ Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), p. 8.

¹⁴ See Andrew Baldwin, ‘Rearranging Desire: On Whiteness and Heteronormativity’, in Andrew Baldwin and Giovanni Bettini, eds, *Life Adrift: Climate Change, Migration, Critique* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), pp. 211–26; Greta Gaard, ‘From Cli-fi to Critical Ecofeminism’, p. 171.

and usually Western male figure carrying the weight of civilisation forward, struggling with the ‘end of all history’.¹⁵ Although these tropes do not dominate all climate fiction, in many of the novels and films listed above, there are literary remnants of these colonial tropes, such as the traversing of threatening landscapes, and one-dimensional portrayals of women and/or people of colour, who serve as accessories to the adventure and action. Narratives of this kind often represent catastrophic momentous events and the immediate repercussions of these, as opposed to the nuances of societal and political breakdown, or the more quotidian effects of environmental crises and their long-term consequences.¹⁶ Prioritising spectacular and dramatic scenarios as opposed to the ‘slow violence’ of climate change,¹⁷ many cli-fi narratives also pitch the hierarchical order and rationality of the white Western world versus the chaos and danger of the Global South. The novels discussed in this thesis, however, counteract this dichotomous framing and instead articulate the multiplicity and diversity of individual and collective lives across the world, working actively against the homogenising and marginalising forces that support these structures.

The questions surrounding the representation of climate change in fiction are, of course, not exclusively applicable to the last few decades. Adam Trexler notes that ‘human altered climates were of grave concern to authors before greenhouse gas emissions attracted a wide scientific interest’.¹⁸ This is evident from mid-twentieth century texts such as J.G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World* (1962) and *The Burned World* (1964), and Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), among many others. Representations of altered weather patterns and climate can also be perceived in novels as far back as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), which followed the eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815 and the subsequent ‘Year without a Summer’.¹⁹ The possible threat of large-scale climate change has evidently been established in public consciousness and popular culture for decades (or even centuries). Trexler also acknowledges, however, that there has been a vast increase in the output of fiction dealing with the consequences of anthropogenic climate change over the last few decades. He particularly highlights a turn in the 1980s towards global warming, which becomes evident in the production of increasingly environmentally focused fiction during this time. Trexler also

¹⁵ Matthew Bradley, ‘Pole to Pole: Romantic Apocalypse at the Victorian Fin-de-Siecle’, in *Legacies of Romanticism: Literature, Culture, Aesthetics* ed. by Carmen Casaliggi and Paul March-Russell (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 130–48 (p. 131).

¹⁶ See *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *Geostorm* (2017), *Snowpiercer* (2014), and the film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2009).

¹⁷ See Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ Trexler, p. 8.

¹⁹ David Higgins, *Writing Tambora: British Romanticism, Climate Change and the Anthropocene* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 56.

cites Al Gore's defeat in the US presidential election by George W. Bush in 1999 as a catalyst in the production of climate fiction. Alongside the creation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992 and the subsequent introduction of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, this indicates a steady increase in awareness of climate change throughout the nineties: in 1988 public awareness of climate change in the US was 58%, and as of 2015 it was 96%.²⁰ Full studies of societies in other areas — primarily countries in the Global South — were not conducted until the 1990s, but their eventual conclusions also supported a growing public awareness of climate change.²¹ In general, most studies have shown 'increasing public understanding of the human causes of climate change, concern for the problem, and general support for a range of policy alternatives to address it'.²²

There is a correlation between the growing awareness of climate change and its consequences within the last few decades, and the growing amount of fiction that imagines drastically climate-changed worlds. In the last few decades, novels usually cited under the banner of climate fiction include Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, Ian McEwan's *Solar* (2010), Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour* (2012), Kim Stanley Robinson's *Science in the Capital* series (2004–2007), and Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2009) or *The Water Knife* (2015). This increasing engagement with climate change is also traceable in academia: the last decade in particular has seen a vast amount of critical work on climate, environment and fiction within the humanities, mainly under the banner of ecocriticism (a branch of literary criticism that attends to the relationships between literature and the environment).²³

One important example of this is Trexler's *Anthropocene Fictions*. The premise of this climate fiction survey is that 'the concept of the Anthropocene helps explain the widespread phenomenon of climate change fiction'.²⁴ The Anthropocene, the name given to a new geological epoch on Earth proposed by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in the year 2000,²⁵ is defined by the impact of humans on the climate and geology of our planet, marking a divergence from the Holocene epoch. Although the estimated beginning dates of the

²⁰ Rachael L. Shwom, and others, 'Public Opinion on Climate Change', in *Climate Change and Society: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. by Robert J. Brulle and Riley E. Dulap (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 269–99 (p. 276).

²¹ Shwom and others, p. 271.

²² Shwom and others, p. 274.

²³ Cheryll Glotfelty, 'Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. xv–xxxvii (p. xviii).

²⁴ Trexler, p. 9.

²⁵ Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, 'The Anthropocene', *International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme Global Change Newsletter*, 41 (2000), 17–18.

Anthropocene are widely disputed²⁶ — as is the very term and concept itself — it has been broadly adopted in academic discourse over the last decade. References to the Anthropocene have also begun to enter into media and public discourse within the last few years, although the term is still far from widespread within public spheres globally. Dipesh Chakrabarty, a leading environmental historian in the theorisation of the Anthropocene, has stated that since its creation in 2000, ‘the term Anthropocene helped focus public attention on the possibility that human beings now so dominated the planet that their collective impact was comparable to those of very large-scale planetary forces’.²⁷ However, this claim appears unsubstantiated. Studies of public engagement with (and understanding of) the Anthropocene as a concept have not yet been undertaken, and even the Anthropocene Working Group itself specifies that the term is used primarily by scientists and the ‘scientifically engaged public’,²⁸ which rules out a large proportion of populations across the world (particularly in countries in the Global South, where limited access to mass media or formal education may further inhibit awareness of the term). As Amitav Ghosh has identified, the ‘discourse around the Anthropocene [...] remains largely Eurocentric’.²⁹ There are many other difficulties with the term Anthropocene, which I will detail later in this thesis, and Trexler’s advocatory use of the Anthropocene as an explanatory tool is not employed here. On the contrary, I argue that contemporary academic discourse on the Anthropocene has the potential to reinforce a Western, anthropo- and androcentric framing of climate change, especially when imposed on literary texts that exceed or refute its fundamental assumptions, for example the existence of a homogenous and all-powerful figure of the ‘human’.

Although they offer different opinions on the usefulness of the term ‘Anthropocene’, in the context of ecocriticism, Trexler’s monograph reveals similar leanings to Timothy Clark’s *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (2015). Both of these

²⁶ There has been contention over the proposed start date of the Anthropocene among the members of the Anthropocene Working Group, with some advocating for the start of the Neolithic Revolution c. 8,000 years ago (WF Ruddiman), some for the Industrial Revolution (for example Paul Crutzen), and others arguing for the first nuclear weapons test in 1945 (Jan Zalasiewicz) to be the official beginning of the Anthropocene. For a further summary of positions on this issue see Matt Edgeworth, and others, ‘Diachronous Beginnings of the Anthropocene: The Lower Bounding Surface of Anthropogenic Deposits’, *Anthropocene Review*, 2 (2015) 33–58.

²⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘Anthropocene Time’, *History and Theory*, 57.1 (2018), 5–32 (p. 7).

²⁸ Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, ‘Working Group on the Anthropocene: What is the ‘Anthropocene’? Current Definition and Status’, <<http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene/>> [accessed 12 March 2019], para. 6 of 6.

²⁹ Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 87.

works are critical of the goals of contemporary ecocriticism, and are suspicious of its findings.³⁰ Through analysing the tropes of contemporary ecocritical perspectives on the novel, Clark finds that ecocritics tend to 'highligh[t] the book as enacting in fictional miniature a cultural politics that could be held usefully to apply, scaled-up again, to innumerable people and situations in actual life'. Suggesting that this has the potential to reduce the complexity of environmental issues into a 'bioregional parable',³¹ Clark dismisses this practice as unproductive. In this thesis I avoid a reductive approach to texts that insists on their relevance to 'innumerable people and situations', instead focusing on the diversity of writerly approaches and the specificity of their targets of critique. However, I also reject the idea that a 'parable'-based or metaphorical reading of the text is always unhelpful or regressive. As environmental historian Libby Robin has pointed out, 'metaphors are important in framing environmental management and are useful tools for understanding human responses to crisis and change in environmental variables such as climate'.³² As this thesis demonstrates, authors frequently deploy metaphors and parables in order to strengthen the critical and affective power of their interventions into climate discourse.

Other key critical works in the fields of climate and speculative fiction include Antonia Mehnert's 2016 monograph *Climate Change Fictions: Representations of Global Warming in American Literature*, which surveys American literature dealing with climate change via ideas of scale, time and discourse. Mehnert's book is a productive study that interrogates the nature of climate fiction in our contemporary moment, and includes a diverse range of fiction from within the US. Mehnert argues, crucially, that fiction has the capacity to 'mediate and shape our very reality', and advocates for understanding climate change 'within a broader context of discourses and narratives'.³³ Astrid Bracke's *Climate Crisis and the 21st-Century British Novel* (2017) is another important contribution to the field of climate fiction studies: in this work, Bracke examines the intricacies of British cultural and political responses to the climate crisis as depicted in post-millennial British literature. Similarly to Mehnert, Bracke argues that the texts she discusses 'participate in a reshaping of existing narratives to present new ways of imagining the natural environment in a time of climate crisis', and advocates for the presence of the climate crisis beyond texts that overtly depict scenarios of climate change.³⁴ More

³⁰ Trexler, pp. 16–17; Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 139–58.

³¹ Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, p. 77.

³² Robin, p. 8.

³³ Antonia Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions: Representations of Global Warming in American Literature* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2016), pp. 3–4.

³⁴ Astrid Bracke, *Climate Crisis and the 21st-Century British Novel* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 6.

recently, Adeline Johns-Putra's *Climate Change and the Contemporary Novel* (2019) not only examines the general capacity of literature to engage with the climate crisis, but demonstrates a more specific turn towards the concept of posterity within climate fiction, interrogating how the 'use of posterity as environmentalist rationale' is both reproduced and challenged across a range of novels by British and American writers.³⁵

Within the last decade, then, substantial critical work has been produced on climate fiction by mainly white British and American authors. There remains space, however, for a more directed consideration of the racial, gendered, and geopolitical power dynamics at work within contemporary literary and cultural production. The six texts I consider here are written in English, and originate from Australia, the US and the UK, by women writers from differing cultural and racial backgrounds, with diverse experiences of, and perspectives on, Western colonialism, patriarchy and neoliberal politics. In the following analysis, I avoid taking an approach that constructs an image of the West (particularly the US) as the epicentre of climate-related discourse. By including a diversity of female global literary voices, and paying consistent and close attention to the racial, gendered and class injustices depicted within Western settings, I aim to destabilise the rhetorical dichotomies of the West and Global South in academic climate change discourse. Whilst recognising the global nature of climate change effects, I also pay close attention to the crucial differences in how these effects play out within my chosen texts, on different geographical, temporal and cultural stages, and at multiple scales. As Trexler has noted, within the vast arena of contemporary criticism on climate fiction, there has been a disproportionate focus on a small canon of texts.³⁶ Within this canon, the novels themselves are often concerned with the lives of primarily middle-class, white Western scientists, in Western middle-class contexts (such as Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* trilogy, Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour*, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Science in the Capital* series, and Ian McEwan's *Solar*). This canonisation risks fetishizing particular narratives of environmental crisis, rather than taking the diversity and range of experiences of climate breakdown into account. If, as Bracke suggests, contemporary novels 'do not only reflect existing conceptions of climate crisis, but also participate in the construction of new narratives', and also have the capacity to 'influenc[e] how climate crisis is perceived',³⁷ it is essential to consider how critical attention is allocated to contemporary novels that approach climate change. Critics must examine the possible consequences of reinforcing problematic dialogue that sees Euro- and US-centred drama taking centre stage, and which also views

³⁵ Adeline Johns-Putra, *Climate Change and the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 6.

³⁶ Trexler, p. 11.

³⁷ Bracke, p. 4.

these nations as the governing authorities on the effects and processes of climate breakdown. In light of this imperative, in most texts under consideration in this thesis, the narratives either follow women protagonists living through desperate environmental and social conditions, or articulate the concerns of marginalised subjects working against political and structural oppressions as a priority, and satirise the self-imposed predicaments of those in power.

Climate Discourse and the Contemporary

The self-reflexive approach I take in this thesis arises in part from my adoption of a feminist ecocritical methodological approach, and demands a justification of the key terminology and concepts around which this thesis will revolve. Throughout this thesis, I offer more detailed explanations of the terms and phrases that I have adopted (or rejected) as models, tools or frameworks. It is important at this stage, however, to define both my conceptualisation of the 'contemporary' and my use of the term 'climate discourse' (or 'climate change discourse', which I use interchangeably). In delineating the contemporary, I have chosen novels with publication dates that range from 1993 to 2015. The beginning of my periodisation was defined by the adoption of the UNFCCC in 1992, which marked the explicit and global recognition of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions as the main contributor to climate change, and acknowledged that these must be reduced in order to minimise the potential for drastic changes in the Earth's climate systems. As my thesis analyses the inter- and intra-action between literature and discourses of climate change in the context of mass public, scientific and political awareness of climate change as a current, tangible phenomenon, it follows that the most relevant novels have arisen from the time period following the establishment of the UNFCCC.

Analyses of climate change discourse often identify a series of defined strains of discourse within their chosen material.³⁸ Hugh Doulton and Katrina Brown identify a range of discourses in British mainstream newspapers from 1997–2007, noting that 'public understanding and support for [international action on climate change] is likely to be informed and shaped at least in part by media coverage'.³⁹ Other critics look to other empirical material for information on differing climate change discourses, including journal articles, scientific

³⁸ See Jeffrey Broadbent and others, 'Conflicting Climate Change Frames in a Global Field of Media Discourse', *Socius*, 2 (2016), 1–17 (p. 3); Seema Arora-Jonsson, 'Virtue and Vulnerability: Discourses on Women, Gender and Climate Change', *Global Environmental Change*, 21 (2011), 744–51; Jonas Anshelm and Martin Hultman, *Discourses of Global Climate Change: Apocalyptic Framing and Political Antagonisms* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2015), p. 4.

³⁹ Hugh Doulton and Katrina Brown, 'Ten Years to Prevent Catastrophe? Discourses of Climate Change and International Development in the UK Press', *Global Environmental Change*, 19 (2009), 191–202 (p. 192).

literature, books and mass media.⁴⁰ Literature of this period, then, can be analysed in terms of its engagement with contemporary climate change discourses in the media and politics. In light of this, I combine these two approaches of identifying discourses both within both my chosen texts and in news articles, scientific commentary and analysis of contemporary political and social conflicts. I use the term *discourse* to refer to identifiable, specific narrative framings of climate change, and its related effects, that occur within the novels. As socio-cultural linguist Mary Bucholtz has described, although discourse is a concept used frequently within the field of linguistics to analyse ‘particular instances of speech or writing’, ‘for many scholars outside of linguistics [...] the notion of discourse is often broader’, and refers to ‘the way in which a topic [...] is conceptually framed at a particular historical and cultural moment, especially within powerful institutional contexts’.⁴¹ In this thesis, my understanding of discourse is closely aligned with Bucholtz’s description here, along with Adger and others’ conceptualisation of discourse as a ‘shared meaning of a phenomenon’ that can be reproduced, adhered to, and modified through ‘written and oral statements’.⁴² Bucholtz writes that ‘cultural discourses are akin to ideologies in that they are culturally shared sets of beliefs that are often understood as simply “the truth” yet in fact bring social reality into being’.⁴³ This articulates the constitutive nature of discourse within a fictional text, but also recognises a text’s potential to challenge the ‘culturally shared sets of beliefs’ that formulate the basis of a particular discourse. In my chosen novels, these shared meanings and beliefs are constructed and critiqued through intertextual allusions to established narrative framings, the deployment of specific tropes and linguistic registers, and through the satire of the contemporary worlds in which the novels were produced. Taking heed of Jan Blommaert’s definition of discourse as a concept that ‘comprises all forms of meaningful semiotic activity seen in connection with social, cultural and historical patterns and developments of use’,⁴⁴ I draw on the connections between the novels and their political and cultural contexts, and bring out the associations between these and the patterns of semiotic activity within the novels themselves. Using the focal areas of feminist ecocritical theory to identify the specific targets of my discussion — for example, neo-colonial, masculinist, techno-scientific and sensationalist media discourses — I analyse these in

⁴⁰ See Anshelm and Hultman, p. 4.

⁴¹ Mary Bucholtz, *White Kids: Language, Race, and Styles of Youth Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 7.

⁴² W. Neil Adger and others, ‘Advancing a Political Ecology of Global Environmental Discourses’, *Development and Change*, 32 (2001), 681–715 (p. 683).

⁴³ Bucholtz, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Jan Blommaert, *Discourse: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 3.

accordance with Blommaert's summary of critical discourse analysis as a practice that should reveal the dynamics of power within society.⁴⁵

I also extend and partially revise Blommaert's understanding of discourse and discourse analysis, in that I recognise the potential for nonhumans and humans to collaborate with each other (intentionally or otherwise) in the construction of discourses of climate change. Blommaert states that 'the use of language and other meaningful symbols is probably what sets us apart from other species'.⁴⁶ There are, of course, numerous examples from the natural world of nonhumans using different types of language, colours and symbols to communicate with each other. This has been well documented over decades by scientists in the fields of ethology, behavioural ecology, animal psychology, and zoology, as well as more recently, by scholars working in biosemiotics and zoosemiotics.⁴⁷ As well as rejecting the human exceptionalism within Blommaert's statement and recognising the inherent value of communication systems between nonhumans — which underpin the structure of ecological systems across the globe — throughout my thesis I consider the participation of nonhumans in the creation of climate change discourses. Their involvement in the disruptions of problematic or hegemonic discourses are often crucial to my analysis, for instance in my discussion of the swans in Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* in Chapter Two, and my analysis of urban ecologies in Maggie Gee's *The Flood* in Chapter One.

In using the term '*climate discourse*', I am referring to a general category of discourses that shape and create meaning, knowledge, and action on climate, and more specifically, about climate change. Throughout this thesis, I identify different climate discourses under the broad categorisation of my chapter themes (temporality, spatiality and migration), across the realms of politics, race, gender, and philosophy. These discourses originate from different milieus: the media and journalism, academia, science, politics, and populist intellectual circles. It is necessary to recognise the different loci of power within these disciplines in order to interrogate the basis of each discourse. Doulton and Brown have summarised the differences between Foucauldian discourse analysis, which is broadly concerned with ideological and societal issues, and critical discourse analysis, which pays closer attention to linguistics.⁴⁸ I do not consider either of these categories as totally distinct, and following Doulton and Brown

⁴⁵ Blommaert, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Blommaert, p. 4.

⁴⁷ See Timo Maran, Dario Martinelli, Aleksei Turovski, eds, *Readings in Zoosemiotics* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011); Donald Favareau, *Essential Readings in Biosemiotics: Anthology and Commentary* (New York: Springer, 2010).

⁴⁸ Doulton and Brown, p. 192.

and John Dryzek,⁴⁹ I will adopt methods from each of these approaches, synthesising close analysis of my chosen texts into an analysis of the wider narratives and ideas that they engage with. I take forward Adger's hypothesis that particular stories, narratives and archetypal figures are often associated with a discourse,⁵⁰ and extend this by proposing that contemporary climate discourses (as represented within fiction) often draw on, and can reinforce, inequitable dynamics of power rooted in historical value systems, such as colonialism, patriarchy, and anthropocentrism.⁵¹ Therefore the hegemonic climate discourses I perceive in my chosen novels are often intertextual, relying on fundamental narratives of Western society (the teachings of the Bible, the supposed necessity of colonial expansion, or the framing of science as the only legitimate system of knowledge) in order to reinforce their shared meanings and thereby sustain a system of white, capitalist heteropatriarchy. As Adger and others write, 'a discourse may be labelled hegemonic if it dominates thinking and is translated into institutional arrangements',⁵² which is often the case both within the texts and in our contemporary moment.⁵³ Whilst I pay close attention to the hegemonic discourses at play within my chosen novels, I also identify the ways in which the texts construct their own discourses of climate change that resist the imperatives of the hegemonic narratives, and problematize the logic that underpins them. As Dryzek has stated, 'discourses both enable and constrain communication',⁵⁴ and in this thesis I assess how discourses of climate change as presented in fiction can enable and constrain communication of the significance and gravity of environmental crisis. This approach is directed by my adoption of a feminist ecocritical framework, which seeks to interrogate the structures that produce unhelpful responses to climate change, and prevent strategies for meaningful action or understanding of the scope of the global catastrophes that occur as a result.

Feminist Ecocriticism: A Rationale

As Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur and Anthony Carrigan state in the introduction to their edited collection *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches* (2015), 'drawing from the methods of postcolonial and feminist scholarship, environmental

⁴⁹ See John S. Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁵⁰ Adger and others, p. 685.

⁵¹ This is particularly relevant in my discussions of colonialism and exploration in Chapter Three in relation to Gee's *The Ice People*, and Chapter Two's consideration of Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*.

⁵² Adger and others, p. 685.

⁵³ Hegemonic discourses influence both the structural arrangements of the texts themselves, and the phenomena that they represent.

⁵⁴ Dryzek, p. 10.

humanities researchers treat knowledge as always culturally situated'.⁵⁵ In this thesis, I take this approach forward by using feminist and postcolonial scholarship as my foundational critical material, and allowing these critical perspectives to guide my analysis of the novels and the origins of their culturally situated knowledges. Via my feminist ecocritical approach, I aim to reinforce postcolonial and feminist positions within the environmental humanities by emphasising the discipline's indebtedness to these forms of research. The term feminist ecocriticism has emerged over the last decade, partly as an alternative to ecofeminism.⁵⁶ Ecofeminism, a movement shaped in the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s by environmentalist and feminist scholars,⁵⁷ was catalysed by the various anti-establishment 'counter-cultural movements' during the late twentieth century, such as environmentalism, anti-nuclear sentiment and second-wave feminism.⁵⁸ According to Karen Warren, ecofeminism can be classified as 'a twofold commitment to analyzing and undoing historical connections between the unjustified dominations of women (and other human subordinated groups) and nonhuman nature.'⁵⁹ In other words, ecofeminists seek to identify and extrapolate the various interrelations between the oppression of the environment, nonhumans, people of colour, women, and people in the LGBTQIA+ community, by heteropatriarchal, racist, speciesist, and classist power structures. Ecofeminism is, historically, a self-reflexive and self-critical movement, demonstrated by the wealth of critical work assessing the state of the field and responding to its criticisms. Val Plumwood, Karen Warren and Catriona Sandilands explicitly revised the cultural feminist undertones of ecofeminism in the 1990s, taking more social constructivist and materialist stances on the link between feminism and environmentalism.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan, 'Introduction: A Postcolonial Environmental Humanities' in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches*, ed. by Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1–25 (p. 9).

⁵⁶ See Greta Gaard, 'New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism', *ISLE*, 17 (2010), 643–65; Greta Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism', *Feminist Formations*, 23.2 (2011), 26–53; Serpil Opperman, 'Feminist Ecocriticism: The New Ecofeminist Settlement', *Feminismo/s*, 22 (2013), 65–88; Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok and Serpil Oppermann, 'Introduction', in *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, ed. by Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok and Serpil Oppermann (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁵⁷ The first use of the term 'ecofeminisme' was by French feminist Françoise D'Eaubonne in 1974, as noted by Douglas A. Vakoch in his work *Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women, and Literature* (Plymouth: Lexington, 2012), p. 2.

⁵⁸ Greta Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', p. 28.

⁵⁹ Karen J. Warren, 'Feminist Theory: Ecofeminist and Cultural Feminist', in *The International Encyclopedia of Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. by Paul B. Baltes and Neil J. Smelser, 26 vols (Oxford: Elsevier Science Ltd, 2001), VIII, 5495–99 (p. 5495).

⁶⁰ See Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993); Catriona Sandilands, *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy*

Ecofeminism is, however, now viewed by some as a failed project. Greta Gaard, Simon Estok and Serpil Oppermann acknowledge that ecofeminism failed to maintain a space within environmental studies for feminism and failed to bring environmentalism into mainstream feminism.⁶¹ Instead, they advocate for the term ‘feminist ecocriticism’, which has the potential to correct this failure in its explicit bringing together of feminism and environmentalism. There are a multitude of possible reasons for ecofeminism’s perceived pitfalls: accusations of essentialism (which I explore further below) prevented critics from taking up relevant issues within studies of gender and environmentalism. It is also probable that ecofeminism was perceived as a self-contained and narrow sub-field, rather than a wide-reaching branch of criticism that readily associated itself with other theoretical positions. As Joni Seager writes, in ecofeminist academic work of the 1990s, ‘debates became inward-turning’ and rested on anti- or pro-ecofeminist sentiment, which was ‘counterproductive to the larger enterprise of putting and keeping environmentalism on the feminist agenda and feminism on the environmental agenda.’⁶²

Perhaps as a result of this, many ‘deep ecologists, social ecologists, Greens, animal liberationists, and other environmentalists’ have ‘responded to ecofeminism with skepticism’,⁶³ something that has been echoed in mainstream ecocriticism.⁶⁴ This must be, at least in part, based on long-standing assumptions of essentialism, which are derived from ecofeminism’s roots in a cultural feminist belief in an innate and liberating relationship between women and ‘nature’ (the Mother-Earth-Goddess trope).⁶⁵ This scepticism disregards the progressive nature of much contemporary ecofeminist thought, which has moved beyond such essentialisms and incorporates more nuanced social constructivist and intersectional understandings of feminism, womanhood and ‘nature’.⁶⁶ However, many ecocritics continue to

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What it Is and Why it Matters* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

⁶¹ Gaard, Estok and Oppermann, p.2.

⁶² Joni Seager, ‘Rachel Carson Died of Breast Cancer: The Coming of Age of Feminist Environmentalism’, *Signs*, 28 (2003), 945–72 (p. 949).

⁶³ Gaard, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’, p. 39.

⁶⁴ Greg Garrard has criticised radical ecofeminism for its ‘essentialism’ and ‘irrationalism’ in *Ecocriticism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p. 27. Although he briefly recognises the achievements of later ecofeminist thought (citing Warren and Plumwood), his discussion of the movement is confined to a small subsection of his entire volume, which disregards its position as one of the formative contributing lines of thought in contemporary ecocriticism (and the accusation of ‘irrationalism’ in a feminist movement is problematic in itself).

⁶⁵ Warren, p. 5495–96.

⁶⁶ For examples of this work, see Gaard, Estok and Oppermann’s *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, particularly Chiyo Crawford, ‘Streams of Violence: Colonialism, Modernization, and Gender in María Cristina Mena’s “John of God, the Water-Carrier”’, pp. 87–100.

ignore ecofeminism and feminist ecocriticism entirely,⁶⁷ even though many ecocritical ideas have stemmed from, or have been strengthened by, ecofeminist thought (for example critiques of speciesism in animal studies, interspecies relationality and standpoint theory).⁶⁸ Joni Seager recognises that ‘feminist work on animal rights builds on the foundational ecofeminist effort to understand linkages between environmental oppressions [...] and human social oppressions of many kinds’.⁶⁹ The anti-anthropocentric rhetoric now commonplace in posthumanist and materialist ecocriticism was also heavily fortified by ecofeminists, who have consistently worked to dismantle the patriarchal ranking and categorisations of ‘humanity’ and ‘nature’, not only arguing for a dissolution of the abstract boundaries between these terms, but also drawing attention to the androcentrism of exploiting a feminised landscape or ‘nature’ for human consumption. Many ecocritics (and even former ecofeminists) now distance themselves from the ecofeminist movement, whilst reiterating ideas that were originally brought to the fore by ecofeminists ‘decades ago’ without acknowledging their basis.⁷⁰ For example, Clark dismisses ‘ecofeminist programmes’ that ‘trace environmental destruction back to primarily cultural or cultural political factors’,⁷¹ yet this is undermined by his use of ecofeminist ideas as a foundation on which to develop his work on scale and the Anthropocene in Chapter Two of his book. Here, he problematizes the Whole Earth Image: the view of Earth in its entirety from space.⁷² This analysis is based on work by ecofeminist Yaakov Jerome Garb that was published as early as 1985, and explored again in greater detail in 1990.⁷³ Although Clark only cites Garb’s later work, a chapter in the volume *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (1990), only once, Garb’s ideas on the cultural difficulties of perceiving the Whole Earth image pervade Clark’s entire chapter. This serves as a case in point of how ecofeminism has been appropriated and marginalised within ecocritical circles.

In their edited collection *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism* (2013), editors Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok and Serpil Oppermann emphasise their use of the term

⁶⁷ Gaard, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’, p. 42.

⁶⁸ Gaard, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’, p. 27.

⁶⁹ Seager, p. 950.

⁷⁰ Gaard, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’, p. 27. Recent works on environmental justice studies have addressed the gender biases and social inequalities exacerbated by environmental damage, and grassroots activism in its capacity to incite resistance against environmentally destructive activity: these are issues first examined by ecofeminists from the 1980s onwards.

⁷¹ Clark, p. 19.

⁷² Clark, p. 33.

⁷³ See Yaakov Jerome Garb, ‘The Use and Misuse of the Whole Earth Image’, *Whole Earth Review*, 45 (1985), 18–25; Yaakov Jerome Garb, ‘Perspective or Escape?: Ecofeminist Musings on Contemporary Earth Imagery’, in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. by Irene Diamond and Ferman Orenstein (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club, 1990), pp. 264–78.

‘feminist ecocriticism’, describing this particular phrasing as a movement beyond ecofeminism,⁷⁴ although some critics do continue to call their work ecofeminist,⁷⁵ and there has been a very recent revival of explicitly ecofeminist work within the last few years (the terms do not appear to be mutually exclusive).⁷⁶ Gaard, Estok and Oppermann position feminist ecocriticism in alignment with Gaard’s view: as ‘ecofeminism revisited’,⁷⁷ and as Oppermann attests, ‘feminist ecocriticism brings a more pronounced feminist dimension to ecocritical studies’.⁷⁸ Rather than prioritising feminist concerns over environmental ones (although these are in no manner mutually exclusive), feminist ecocriticism recognises environmental degradation across all species and human populations, without assigning a value-hierarchical approach to the damage caused by their destruction. This is an important transformation of previous ecofeminist thought, and if used and justified carefully, according to the self-reflexive conventions of ecofeminism, there is great potential in this revision of ecofeminist aims. Feminist ecocriticism offers a more explicit opportunity to investigate the material linkages between gender inequality and environmental injustices — reducing the possibility of polarising ‘human’ versus ‘other’ environmental concerns — without risking essentialism. It also rejects the assumption of an inherent link between feminism and environmentalism, which scholars such as Stacy Alaimo have warned against,⁷⁹ partly by way of omitting the linguistic contraction of ‘ecology’ and ‘feminism’ that is present within the term ‘ecofeminism’. This rejection of the term prohibits the adoption of a logic that links the concerns of gender and environmentalism by default. Val Plumwood has discussed the patriarchal tool of ‘backgrounding’, which is using a concept as a backdrop for an issue that is perceived as being of higher importance. She writes that the ‘backgrounding of women and nature is deeply embedded in the rationality of the economic system and in the structures of contemporary society’.⁸⁰ This concept can therefore articulate the risk of feminist concerns overshadowing environmental or other-than-human concerns within ecofeminist work. Feminist ecocriticism, in contrast, literally positions these concerns alongside each other,

⁷⁴ Gaard, Estok and Oppermann, p. 2.

⁷⁵ See the edited collection by Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens, eds, *Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism* (London: Routledge, 2014), Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* (London: Lexington, 2017).

⁷⁶ See Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* (London: Lexington, 2017); Lara Stevens, Peta Tait and Denise Varney, eds, *Feminist Ecologies: Changing Environments in the Anthropocene* (Cham: Springer, 2018); Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens, eds, *Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

⁷⁷ Greta Gaard, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’.

⁷⁸ Oppermann, ‘Feminist Ecocriticism: The New Ecofeminist Settlement’, p. 67.

⁷⁹ Stacy Alaimo, ‘Ecofeminism without Nature? Questioning the Relation between Feminism and Environmentalism’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 10 (2008), 299–304 (p. 300).

⁸⁰ Plumwood, 1993, p. 21.

offering a more equitable intellectual framework, and encourages criticism that investigates how links between feminism and ecocriticism operate, rather than assuming inherently shared practices and aims. Feminist ecocritical attention to environmental and feminist issues also identifies the ways in which the two approaches intersect and overlap, which is critical in demonstrating the multiple levels of oppression at work when confronting hegemonic patriarchal structures.

Other critics, such as Timothy Clark, have noted that ecofeminist approaches fall into the trap of asserting that supporting one cause is necessarily beneficial to other causes.⁸¹ My use of feminist ecocritical theory in this thesis will instead demonstrate that the types of racial, classist, sexist and speciesist oppression that occur within my chosen novels are linked to the heightened pressures exerted upon human and nonhuman populations by climate change and its related disasters. This is not to say that to fight one battle against oppression is to fight them all, as Clark warns against, but rather that drastic environmental and climatic change act as catalysts, forging new types of dynamic relationships between the subjects of marginalisation due to their shared experiences, the damage inscribed physically on their bodies, their silenced voices and diminished agencies. These unstable and many-layered connections require thorough examination, so that the hidden power relations that enforce and maintain these oppressions can be exposed and challenged. As Gaard has recently noted, a productive way of approaching climate fiction might be to ‘brin[g] a critical ecofeminist standpoint — bridging feminist animal studies, posthumanism, material feminism, ecofeminism and feminist ecocriticism — to illuminate the strengths and shortcomings of literary narratives that present the problem of climate change from a (masculinist) technological-scientific perspective’.⁸² A feminist ecocriticism informed by multiple strands of feminist knowledge is therefore vital in developing ecocritical thought. To address and dismantle the (fundamentally patriarchal) economic, social and political orders that underpin environmental exploitation and climate change as represented in contemporary literature, a critical approach that prioritises feminism and environmentalism is essential. In taking this approach, I unpack the ways in which my chosen texts and their authors draw on, and make interventions into, the critique of mainstream climate change discourses. I also examine their contributions to — and divergence from — the more commonplace and hegemonic narratives. This facilitates my interrogation of the facets of the novels that challenge neoliberal rhetoric within environmental discourses. It also allows me to consider how such rhetoric permeates contemporary culture, and enables the continued heteropatriarchal and capitalist subjugation

⁸¹ Clark, p. 110.

⁸² Greta Gaard, ‘From Cli-fi to Critical Ecofeminism’, p. 169–70.

— material and otherwise — of minorities, women, nonhumans, and other marginalised groups.

Feminist ecocriticism can also promote a closer alignment of new materialist theories with feminist thought. New materialism seeks to redress anthropocentrism, which manifested in very early ecocriticism through its emphasis on human relationships to ‘wilderness’, and on the human mediation of nature, almost exclusively through nature writing.⁸³ It also challenges ideas of the ‘unified self’, adopting some tenets of poststructuralism,⁸⁴ and emphasises the agency of the nonhuman, corporeality, entanglement, and notions of the posthuman.⁸⁵ There are numerous overlaps here with feminist ecocriticism, which promotes ecocritical discourse that is both anti-anthropocentric and anti-androcentric, and attends to matters of corporeality and embodiment.⁸⁶ As well as offering ‘posthuman analyses of power, gender, and ecology’,⁸⁷ much like new materialism and materialist ecocriticism, feminist ecocriticism retains a focus on gender, which disallows neglect of the feminist (specifically ecofeminist) roots of ecocritical thinking. Richard Kerridge is wary of material ecocriticism’s potential to enmesh ecocriticism into a solely academic domain,⁸⁸ and Clark laments that ‘a reader of “material ecocriticism” can only be reminded so many times that ecology is all about interdependence [...] and that this should reinforce an ethic of respect for ‘the other’’.⁸⁹ These are valid concerns: much materialist ecocriticism is uncontroversial from the perspectives of most left-leaning academics. Simply deploying different or new cultural art forms to reiterate these points is not necessarily original or ground-breaking work.

There have also been criticisms levied against new materialism that critique the very concept of its gathering of ideas and theories as ‘new’. Firstly, the very idea of a ‘new’ materialism disregards earlier twentieth century philosophical ideas, some of which demonstrate very similar conceptual frameworks.⁹⁰ Secondly, and perhaps more gravely, new

⁸³ Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace, eds, *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2001), pp. 2–4.

⁸⁴ Richard Kerridge, ‘Ecocritical Approaches to Literary Form and Genre: Urgency, Depth, Provisionality, Temporality’, in *The Oxford Handbook to Ecocriticism*, ed. by Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 361–76 (p. 368).

⁸⁵ See Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2008); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, *Material Ecocriticism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014).

⁸⁶ Gaard, Estok and Oppermann, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Gaard, Estok and Oppermann, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Kerridge, ‘Ecocritical Approaches to Literary Form’, p. 368.

⁸⁹ Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, pp. 146–47.

⁹⁰ See Steven Shaviro’s discussion of nineteenth-century philosopher Alfred North Whitehead in *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

materialism has marginalised Indigenous materialisms,⁹¹ many of which hold similar ideas about ‘vital materiality’ to new materialist criticism, but predate the advent of ‘new’ materialism by centuries (if not millennia).⁹² For Alison Ravenscroft, Indigenous Australian materialisms represent notions of human and the nonhuman as so ‘extensively, elaborately and constitutively’ entangled that many of the terms that provide the basis of a Western-oriented epistemology of human relationships to the environment are effectively void within this framework.⁹³ Citing the work of key new materialists Karen Barad, Vicki Kirby and Jane Bennett, Ravenscroft identifies the curious absence of Indigenous materialisms in their work, stating that in many instances, ‘the Western subject slips in, installs itself, and assumes the sovereign’s mantle even in those new materialist writings that sustain some of the most profound critiques of this very centrism’.⁹⁴ This recognition is key to my considerations of Indigenous Australian texts in this thesis, as I aim to centralise Alexis Wright’s own theorisation of her work in my analysis of *The Swan Book* and *Carpentaria*, in particular emphasising the relevance of her commentaries to the philosophical approaches to spatiality and temporality that I perceive within the texts.

There are problems, then, within new materialism, and material ecocriticism: potential stagnation in terms of the diversity and originality of new work, and the marginalisation of Indigenous materialisms. Therefore, in order to retain the relevant aspects of materialist ecocriticism and feminist ecocriticism, I bring these (and other) critical approaches together to analyse and problematize the texts under consideration. Within this thesis, I do not simply attend to the ways in which the texts I am studying fulfil the ideals of new materialism or material ecocriticism. Rather, I identify and extrapolate the strains of climate discourse and the politics — both cultural and governmental — that the texts engage with, and investigate the ways in which combining cultural and gendered perspectives on these discourses may challenge major social, political and global inequalities that add fuel to the climate crisis. With this in mind, I combine a feminist ecocritical approach with a critical

2014), Google ebook. See particularly Whitehead’s affirmation of the ‘interrelatedness of all things and the ways that their interactions and variations continually lead to consequences that are new and unforeseen’.

⁹¹ See Alison Ravenscroft, ‘Strange Weather: Indigenous Materialisms, New Materialism, and Colonialism’, *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 5 (2018), 353–70 (p. 356); Jerry Lee Rosiek, Jimmy Snyder, and Scott L. Pratt, ‘The New Materialisms and Indigenous Theories of Non-Human Agency: Making the Case for Respectful Anti-Colonial Engagement’, *Qualitative Inquiry* (2019), <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419830135>> [accessed 20 June 2019].

⁹² Ravenscroft, ‘Strange Weather’, p. 365.

⁹³ Ravenscroft, ‘Strange Weather’, p. 355.

⁹⁴ Ravenscroft, ‘Strange Weather’, p. 356.

focus on contemporary works of fiction written by women that subvert popular forms, trends and narratives of climate fiction. This combination can shed new light on the complexity, diversity and power of contemporary speculative fiction by women authors.

Climate and the Speculative in Contemporary Women's Fiction

In this thesis, I analyse six texts over the course of three chapters. I have selected the novels — *The Ice People* (1998) and *The Flood* (2004) by Maggie Gee, *Carpentaria* (2006) and *The Swan Book* (2013) by Alexis Wright, *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015) by Claire Vaye Watkins, and *Parable of the Sower* (1993) by Octavia Butler — primarily due to their contrasting and complementing approaches to climate change. Across the texts, climate change is readable both in terms of the momentous environmental disasters and apocalyptic scenarios it can cause (and which a lot of climate fiction tends to depict), and also through notions of the everyday implications of climate breakdown. The varying cultural backgrounds of these authors constitute heterogeneous and differentiated perspectives on climate change and environmental disaster. The interlinked histories of colonialism, patriarchy and capitalist exploitation inform these novels at the conceptual and formal levels of their engagement with climate change, and the texts approach, from multiple angles, the fundamental injustices that sustain exploitative environmental practices and exacerbate the effects of climate change. Particularly within the novels of Indigenous Australian author Alexis Wright, there is an explicit focus on ongoing settler colonialism in Australia. In her 2013 novel *The Swan Book*, this focus is projected into a climate-changed speculative future in the form of government-controlled Aboriginal detention camps. In Wright's own words, *The Swan Book* is a 'book of challenges concerning global climate change, and the stark realities about survival that demand attention in the Aboriginal mind'. The novel was influenced by Wright's grandmother's 'close affiliation with everything in the natural world', as well as by the 'senior Aboriginal people' she has worked with throughout her life as an activist and advocate for Indigenous communities.⁹⁵ Her epic style produces novels that challenge the conventional Australian literary tradition, and bring to life different stories and voices of Indigenous people in speculative settings. Alongside her fiction, her activist work within environmental and Indigenous community circles has consolidated her position as a respected social commentator, as well as a celebrated author.

Maggie Gee, a white British author, is known for her fictional representations of contemporary British society, and her self-expressed concern for 'the ordinary, the mundane,

⁹⁵ Rachel Fogle de Souza, 'Award-Winning Novelist Alexis Wright Talks to BookTrib About Her Latest Work, *The Swan Book*', *BookTrib.com*, 19 February 2018 <<https://booktrib.com/2018/02/alexis-wright-interview-swan-book/>> [accessed 30 April 2019], (para. 11 and 3 of 23).

the minutia of everyday life and familiar things' in her writing.⁹⁶ Her novels 'tend to expose gender biases by scrutinising their impact on both men and women',⁹⁷ and examine the consequences of entrenched systems of social inequality with a satirical eye: she is a self-described 'satirist'.⁹⁸ *The Ice People* and *The Flood* exemplify this approach in attention to mundanity of survival, the hypocrisies of political movements, the gradual, uneven processes of climate change, and repercussions for racial, gendered and class dynamics. Gee has stated that she has been 'writing about [climate change] for nearly 30 years', since her first literary engagement with the concept in her 1985 novel *The Light Years*.⁹⁹ As Adeline Johns-Putra has recognised, *The Ice People* (1998) is an 'early novelistic engagement with climate change', which crucially 'precedes the twenty-first-century fanfare around climate change fiction'.¹⁰⁰ As such, this text pairs well with African American author Octavia Butler's novel *Parable of the Sower* (1993), which is demonstrative of an even earlier novelistic engagement with climate change, arriving shortly after the establishment of the UNFCCC in 1992.

Butler is known foremost as a science fiction writer: her novels *Fledgling* (2005) and *Kindred* (1979) are among her most well-known and bestselling standalone novels, alongside the Patternist series (1976–1984) and the later Xenogenesis trilogy (1984–1989). During her lifetime, Butler received both the Hugo and Nebula science fiction awards on multiple occasions, and was widely celebrated within science fiction (SF) circles and beyond. Butler has also been described as an Afrofuturist and feminist writer,¹⁰¹ as much of her fiction deals with African-American histories as well as futures that are 'directed by the survival and even the resurgence of black people and their cultures, experiences, and designs'.¹⁰² In *The Parable of the Sower*, however, the 'designs' or creations of the African American protagonists are not technological, as they are in much Afrofuturistic literature, but are instead ideological and political. Although Butler was not particularly vocal about the issue of climate change outside her fiction, she expressed concern in an interview in 1997 about the future of humanity's relationship to the nonhuman world, stating that 'people are being encouraged to see the

⁹⁶ Mariella Frostrup, 'Interview with Maggie Gee', *Open Book*, BBC Radio 4, 21 August 2006.

⁹⁷ Johns-Putra, *Climate Change and the Contemporary Novel*, p. 75.

⁹⁸ 'Twenty Questions with Maggie Gee', *TLS Online*, 11 March 2019 <<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/twenty-questions-maggie-gee/>> [accessed 3 May 2019] (para. 5 of 32).

⁹⁹ Maggie Gee, 'Writing Climate Change', in *Memory in the Twenty-first Century: New Critical Perspectives from the Arts, Humanities, and Sciences*, ed. by Sebastian Groes (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 170–74 (p. 171).

¹⁰⁰ Johns-Putra, *Climate Change and the Contemporary Novel*, pp. 56–57.

¹⁰¹ Susana M. Morris, 'Black Girls are the Future: Afrofuturist Feminism in Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling*', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 40.3/4 (2012), 146–66 (p. 146).

¹⁰² De Witt Douglas Kilgore, 'Afrofuturism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction*, ed. by Rob Latham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 561–72 (p. 563).

environment as their enemy. Go out and kill it. If they're really unlucky, they will succeed'.¹⁰³ The droughts, fires and societal breakdown in the fictional California that Butler envisions in *Parable of the Sower* are undoubtedly responses to the forecasts of global warming that began to gain traction in the early nineties.

Another writer who has taken forward the concerns of a drought-ridden futuristic California is the white Californian-born author Claire Vaye Watkins. Her 2015 novel *Gold Fame Citrus* depicts the story of an unplottable sand dune sea as it overtakes the US Southwest in a speculative future. In *Gold Fame Citrus*, Watkins exposes the collapse of wealthy Californian society through intensifying desertification. She also articulates how different segments of society respond to climate breakdown, through their impulse to control and regulate people and resources, or even deny outright the gravity of the problem. In this text, Watkins' concern with the water crisis in the US Southwest plays out through innovative stylistics and seamless movements across space, time, and history. This approach facilitates the novel's attack on what she calls the 'ravenous, arrogant appetite of white American patriarchy' in the American West, and its misplaced faith in 'agri-infrastructure as spirituality' (for example, the belief that there is always more water to be discovered and used).¹⁰⁴ Although she remains suspicious of the rhetoric that purports that 'all art is resistance' in the age of Trump, Watkins sees herself as 'an activist' in her work 'on and off the page'.¹⁰⁵ *Gold Fame Citrus's* critique of the legacies of colonialism and capitalism, and its examination of how these ideologies maintain the infrastructure that accelerates climate change, serves as an example of how this activism feeds in to Watkins' fiction. In this text, it is clear that Watkins' affiliation with the US Southwest, and her hopes and fears for its possible futures, informs the style and form of *Gold Fame Citrus*. In an approach that shares characteristics with the epic scope of Wright's fiction, Watkins discusses the storytelling tradition she has inherited from her mother, describing it as 'an interplay between the sweeping and the massive, macro-level kind of story of how the world came to be as we know it, but also the human story'.¹⁰⁶ This ability to move across vast scales of time and space allows *Gold Fame Citrus* to attack the long-standing ideologies that have

¹⁰³ Joan Fry, 'Congratulations! You've Just Won \$295,000: An Interview with Octavia Butler', in *Conversations with Octavia Butler*, ed. by Consuela Francis (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), pp. 123–33 (p. 129–30).

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Horton, 'Writ in Water: An Interview with Claire Vaye Watkins', *Ploughshares at Emerson College Online* <<http://blog.pshares.org/index.php/writ-in-water-interview-with-claire-vaye-watkins/>> [accessed 7 May 2019] (para. 10 and 8 of 19).

¹⁰⁵ Horton, (para. 19 of 19).

¹⁰⁶ Rebecca Bengal, 'Nevada Gothic: An Interview with Claire Vaye Watkins', *New Yorker Online* <<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/nevada-gothic-an-interview-with-claire-vaye-watkins>> [accessed 8 May 2019], (para. 23 of 27).

contributed to climate change, as well as address its possible consequences both in the contemporary age and far in the future.

It is true that ‘no single knowledge form can be a panacea for addressing climate change and other [...] long-term environmental concerns’.¹⁰⁷ This is germane to this thesis in two ways: firstly, in terms of the critical approach I will be taking, and the compound nature of feminist ecocriticism itself, and secondly, in terms of the texts I have chosen. This thesis redirects critical trends following contemporary climate fiction, which concern themselves primarily with ‘an incredibly small number of writers’.¹⁰⁸ As Trexler observes, publishing houses and subsequently the ‘academic promotion system’ create a ‘preselected canon’ of works, which poses limitations to the scope of both academic and mainstream discourses on climate change and literary representation. In addition, when texts that recreate and reinforce problematic tropes and discourses are consistently the primary focus of literary criticism, alternative climate change narratives, cultural approaches, and epistemologies are obscured and this singular narrative is in turn reaffirmed as the only one worthy of critical attention. If ‘no single knowledge form’ can address the global phenomenon of climate change and environmental disaster, Western and first-world cultures cannot be the only contributors to artistic and literary critiques of contemporary climate change discourse.

In a similar vein, if it is true that ‘no singular influence or unitary “idea” connects all climate fiction’,¹⁰⁹ this raises the question of how and why particular texts are positioned alongside each other. It therefore follows that the inclusion and exclusion of different genres, authors and texts in this thesis require further explanation and examination, as they are of critical importance. This quotation might also raise the question of why fiction, and novels in particular, should be the focus of this study. In response to this, I propose that the novel form is uniquely placed to offer an extended critique of contemporary climate change discourses. Amitav Ghosh purports that the novel — and in particular, the realist novel form — is incapable of representing or revealing the climate crisis in any meaningful way. He states that the novel form is necessarily based on a series of ‘distinctive moments’, but the ‘wildly improbable’ nature of weather events related to climate change would not be convincing when depicted in the context of a novel: ‘the writer will have to work hard to make it appear persuasive’.¹¹⁰ On the contrary, I suggest that the discursive nature of the novel allows for polyvocal and layered narratives that can go some way to articulating the scale of climate

¹⁰⁷ DeLoughrey, Didur and Carrigan, p. 20.

¹⁰⁸ Trexler, p. 11.

¹⁰⁹ Trexler, p. 11.

¹¹⁰ Ghosh, pp. 23–24.

change, and responding to its multiple, complex layers of social and environmental impacts. Rob Nixon has identified within popular culture responses to climate change a tendency towards the apocalyptic, sensational and momentous spectacles that we have come to associate with supposedly natural disasters, which can displace the ‘slow violence’ of climate change and other related environmental disasters that is often experienced by those most vulnerable and exposed to environmental damage.¹¹¹ The novels that I have selected here often counteract this tendency towards immediacy and sensationalism, in both their depictions of everyday life in climate-changed scenarios, and their portrayal of grand timescales and spatial transformations through formal and stylistic innovation. Indeed, some of the texts under consideration in this thesis critique the contemporary public consumption of climate change spectacle overtly (see my discussion of Maggie Gee’s *The Flood* and her critique of sensationalist media in Chapter One). The formal possibilities offered by the novel, too, in terms of blended narrative styles, interludes and experimental techniques, present intricate and extended studies of climate change discourse through diverse perspectives. For example, one commonality between many of the texts is the presence of satire. Ghosh has remarked, in his discussion of the failings of the contemporary novel to respond to climate change, that contemporary novels do not usually register events of magnitude in time and scale, due to their ‘finitude’, but when they do, ‘the temptation to lapse into satire [...] becomes almost irresistible’.¹¹² I disagree with Ghosh’s argument that the novel does not allow engagement with massive timespans and scales (my discussion of *Carpentaria* in Chapter One challenges this). Furthermore, Ghosh does not delve into the implications of why the employment of satire in novels about climate change should be viewed as a ‘lapse’, rather than a considered creative decision. I argue in this thesis that on the contrary, satire within these novels allows the authors to reject moral didacticism whilst encouraging inquiry and provocation into contemporary issues of paramount public importance. These practices are best facilitated by satire, particularly within the novel genre.¹¹³

One rather broad way of categorising the texts I have selected is under the banner of ‘speculative’ fiction. Although first coined in 1948,¹¹⁴ the term speculative fiction has been pioneered in recent years by Margaret Atwood, among others, who use it to describe a genre

¹¹¹ See Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, pp. 2–5.

¹¹² Ghosh, p. 61–62.

¹¹³ Charles A. Knight, *The Literature of Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 4–7.

¹¹⁴ Gerald R. Lucas, ‘Speculative Fiction’ in *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth Century Fiction: Vol II: Twentieth Century American Fiction*, ed. by Patrick O’Donnell, David W. Madden, and Justus Nieland, 3 vols (Chichester: Blackwell, 2011), II, p. 840–43 (p. 840).

of fiction that is closely inter-related with science fiction.¹¹⁵ It is seen to encompass a more ‘inclusive purview’ than traditional SF, in that it exceeds the usual techno-masculinist tropes of SF, moves beyond a narrow focus on science and technology, and articulates the concerns and plights of a wider and more diverse range of people.¹¹⁶ For example, although Octavia Butler preferred not to explicitly attach her work to a particular genre or label,¹¹⁷ like much of her fiction, *Parable of the Sower* may best suit the heading of speculative fiction as opposed to science fiction. In this novel in particular, there is very little focus on the extra-terrestrial, there is no time travel, or emphasis on futuristic technology. In an interview in 1991, whilst writing *Parable of the Sower*, she noted her point of departure from the kind of SF that imagines an Earth ‘wiped clean of people’, instead describing *Parable’s* setting as a future in which the ‘greenhouse effect has intensified’, stating that ‘it’s not a postapocalyptic book, it’s a book in which society has undergone severe changes, but continues’.¹¹⁸

Speculative fiction could also be said to incorporate climate fiction: although the tropes and characteristics of climate fiction can be traced centuries back, the notion of climate fiction as a distinct genre is a contemporary one. Many of the texts I consider in this thesis — particularly *The Ice People*, *Gold Fame Citrus* and *The Swan Book* — could be described in terms of the cli-fi genre. However, it is too limiting a descriptor for all the texts under examination here. Anthony Carrigan’s reading of Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria* illustrates this:

Its creative integration of many factors that have driven global warming — from colonialism to extractive industry — permit us to read *for* climate change at multiple narrative levels, and in ways that reflect the culturally differentiated responses that are needed to address climate change in reality.¹¹⁹

I uphold this notion of reading *for* climate change in the novels I have selected for this thesis. This approach does not limit my focus to novels that offer explicit representations of climate change, and allows me to explore contemporary texts in a way that recognises both the overt effects of climate change, and the more implicit drivers that have contributed to the intensity and acceleration of the climate crisis.

¹¹⁵ Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (London: Virago, 2011), pp. 6–7.

¹¹⁶ Lucas, p. 840.

¹¹⁷ Randall Kenan, ‘An Interview with Octavia E Butler’, *Callaloo*, 14 (1991), 495–504 (p. 495).

¹¹⁸ Kenan, p. 502.

¹¹⁹ Anthony Carrigan, ‘Nature, Ecocriticism, and the Postcolonial Novel’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, ed. by Ato Quayson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 81–98 (p. 95).

To use Atwood's definition, speculative fiction is a genre that asks 'what if?'.¹²⁰ This functions as a helpful framing to the texts I have chosen here. The speculative does not confine readerly expectations to themes of space travel, advanced technology and alien life-forms like traditional science fiction, or the more common tropes of contemporary climate fiction. Instead, the speculative can offer a space in which to explore how human and nonhuman life exist together on Earth, via a vast range of possible (or in the case of climate change, probable) scenarios. Speculative fiction is said to have been shaped by the long narrative history of the intrepid voyage, but also by the utopian literary tradition.¹²¹ The influences of these two traditions in particular have led to what Gerald R. Lucas has called a 'concern with the progress and extension of human knowledge and its relationship to the benefit or detriment of humanity' that is present in most speculative fiction.¹²² This is a helpful framework when thinking about twentieth-century speculative fiction, and taking into account the more recent developments in the genre, I would suggest that contemporary speculative fiction by women exemplifies this concern via style, form and mode. Through challenging hegemonic modes of knowledge production in their implicit and explicit allusions to discourses on climate change, the novels I consider here build on fundamental 'postmodern sensibilities' that characterise post-Second World War speculative fiction.¹²³ They incorporate knowledge of climate change, and its material and predicted effects, into their narratives in radical ways. With this knowledge, the authors pose not the question of 'what if things were to change?', but 'what if these political, social and environmental structures *stay the same*?'. The Obituary for the Great Barrier Reef serves as an example of this exercise in thinking, and demonstrates the power of the speculative imaginative mode in climate change communication. In this article, like the novels, the speculative draws from different temporal realms, incorporating knowledge produced in present day with a future in which anthropogenic climate change intensifies. The critical strength of the speculative lies, therefore, in its propensity towards challenging the methods of knowledge production, and deconstructing the possible ramifications of these methods. This approach is integral to the study of climate change.

I have divided this thesis into three chapters under the broad headings of 'Temporality', 'Spatiality', and 'Migration'.¹²⁴ These three concepts, I argue, shape most

¹²⁰ Margaret Atwood, 'Writing *Oryx and Crake*', in *Writing with Intent: Essays, Reviews, Personal Prose: 1983–2005* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2005), pp. 284–86 (p. 285); Lucas, p. 840.

¹²¹ Lucas, p. 840.

¹²² Lucas, p. 840.

¹²³ Lucas, p. 843.

¹²⁴ Although I do not perceive temporality and spatiality as necessarily divided entities, some of the novels make explicit commentaries on timescales and others engage more with the

contemporary thinking about, and concerns over, climate change. Thinking through the climate crisis usually involves questions such as: how can we engage with the many different pasts of our planet and plan for the many possible futures? How will human understandings of space, place, environment and landscape be altered or challenged by climate change and its associated effects? How will the world's communities — human and other-than-human — shift and travel across space and time to accommodate or respond to the climate crisis? In these three chapters, I explore literary responses to these questions through the perspectives of various discourses on climate change.

In Chapter One — 'Times of Change: Climate and Temporality' — I use recent debates around the Anthropocene to ground my textual analysis of Maggie Gee's *The Flood* and Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*. Here, I engage with the problematic implications of academic Anthropocene discourse, arguing that its anthropocentrism, its origins and development within a male-dominated Western scientific context, and its portrayal of humanity as an equally culpable species mass, obscures the intricacies of social and species hierarchies. I consider how these novels critique and engage with discourses of deep geological time and Anthropocene framings, arguing that the authors present alternative temporal epistemologies through rejecting the traditional Western conceptualisation of 'time's arrow'. Using work by Stacy Alaimo, Astrida Neimanis and Rob Nixon to inform my feminist ecocritical interpretation of the texts, I address how Gee represents multiple and flexible temporalities throughout her narrative, and consider Alexis Wright's Indigenous Waanyi conceptualisation of temporality in *Carpentaria* alongside the climate crisis. I also investigate how sensationalised representations of momentous events can supersede the slow violence of environmental degradation. Ultimately, this chapter reveals that temporal discourses are relative — in terms of culture, gender, and politics — multiple, and also diverse. In both texts, time exists in different frameworks, whether simultaneously and separately, for different characters. This conceptualising of time undermines the pervasiveness and hegemony of linear time discourse in all its forms (for example in academic Anthropocene discourse, or disaster sensationalism).

In Chapter Two — 'Depopulation, Disintegration, Dispossession: Climate Change and Spatiality' — I synthesise knowledge produced through the spatial turn in the humanities along with developments in new materialism, in order to examine contemporary discourses of spatiality in Claire Vaye Watkins' *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015) and Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* (2013). Informed by my readings of the work of Anna Tsing, Doreen Massey, and others, I

notions of space, place and landscape, and therefore in order to address each concept with the necessary level of nuance and detail, it was most appropriate to dedicate an entire chapter to each.

argue that these texts expose what some hegemonic discourses of climate change and space — for example, Western legal discourses or climate change denial — seek to obscure. These two texts were placed together in this chapter due to their close proximity in their time of writing and publishing, and also due to their similarly satirical approaches to their subject matter. Both authors approach contemporary conditions such as the post-factual, exploring the ways in which hegemonic discourses on climate change can distort experiences of space. This chapter argues, first and foremost, that the trajectory of climate change forces the spaces represented in the novels to eventually fulfil the myths of colonial spatial discourses that were applied to the Australian and US landscapes. Across this chapter, I discuss the legacy of colonial figurations of land as they manifest in the novels, examining Watkins' allusions to the early American colonial explorers, and relating these to the colonial impulse of mapping supposedly uncharted wilderness spaces. In *The Swan Book*, I discuss the legacy of the colonial concept of *terra nullius* — or empty land — and discuss its fundamental incompatibility with some Indigenous Australian spatial configurations. This chapter demonstrates that the legacies and ongoing practices of colonialism, along with the depletion of nonhuman agency and life, contribute to the disintegration of the relations and relationships that allow life (including human life) to flourish. Instead of the hegemonic colonial discourses on climate change and spatiality producing 'relative stabilities'¹²⁵ and societal order, I argue here that they are in themselves drivers of drastic change.

Chapter Three, 'Moving Targets: Migration, Climate Change and Neoliberalism', centres on a discussion of contemporary migration in the context of climate change in Maggie Gee's *The Ice People* (1998) and Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* (1993). In this chapter I identify several key discourses on climate change and migration that are prolific in political and media rhetoric in each text: for example, archaic colonialist discourses, and discourses of securitisation, militarisation, and racialisation. Informed by the work of scholars such as Andrew Baldwin, Betsy Hartmann, Adeline Johns-Putra and others, throughout this chapter I engage with real-world examples of these discourses in order to draw out relevant material from the texts, exploring their relationships with their contemporary contexts. This chapter argues primarily that *The Ice People* and *Parable of the Sower* harness the satirical mode in order to critique the white, heteronormative and neoliberal framings of traditional and colonial migration narratives. In doing this, they expose the implicit racialisation of the figure of the climate migrant. I also contend here that both of these texts reveal the

¹²⁵ Claire Colebrook, 'Transcendental Migration: Taking Refuge from Climate Change', in *Life Adrift: Climate Change, Migration, Criticism*, ed. by Andrew Baldwin and Giovanni Bettini (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), pp. 115–30 (p. 117).

connection between climate change and migration as a product of power relations, rather than a simple cause-and-effect process. Similarly to the first two chapters, my commentary on migration discloses the ways in which racialized and gendered hegemonic discourses sustain the idea that climate change is disrupting a previously secure and stable global equilibrium. Instead, these texts work to expose the fallacy of this belief, and interrogate how it is constructed and upheld.

My analysis of the novels considered in this thesis offers critiques of contemporary climate change discourses, but also outlines the texts' own counter-narratives to the linearity, polarity and hegemony inherent within many of these discursive strategies. Through a feminist ecocritical process of deconstruction and revision, I demonstrate that the texts consistently satirise the Western desire for control over the environment and climate, over the distribution and movement of populations, and over individuals who exhibit resistance to mandated behaviours. My analysis of these narratives reveals how the hegemony of global capital has exacerbated human and nonhuman vulnerability to the effects of climate change, and ultimately operates through exposing the power dynamics that shape patriarchal and anthropocentric myths of human exceptionalism. In the following chapter, I begin by discussing how an inflexible worldview on temporality upholds this fallible epistemology.

Chapter 1 – Times of Change: Climate and Temporality

Introduction: Discourses of Time in a Climate-Changing World

Contemporary academic discourse in the humanities frequently situates the phenomenon of climate change within a framework of deep geological time. Citing the vast geological impact that humanity has exerted on the planet, from the deposition of plastic across its surface and oceans to atmospheric warming, from ocean acidification to mass extinction, scholars place constant emphasis on the incomprehensible scope of anthropogenic effects on our planet.¹ Yet, there are recurring debates regarding how this conceptualisation of climate change might allow for, or disrupt, human comprehension of the multiple scales and far-reaching effects of global warming. Such unfathomably wide gulfs between the actions of the individual and the collective action of the species, or between human lifespans versus geological timeframes, are extremely difficult to psychologically navigate.²

In scientific communities over the last few decades, the following question began to arise: how should the planet's new geological status, one that radically departs from any climatological or geological precedent, be designated and communicated? Thus the term *Anthropocene* came into being. A name given to our contemporary geological epoch, the Anthropocene is intended to convey the significance and gravity of humanity's active participation in our contemporary geological and climatic moment. Popularised by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer,³ and officially recommended to the International Geological Congress in 2016 by the Working Group on the Anthropocene,⁴ the term names an epoch in which humans, as a collective species, have imparted such significant geological and atmospheric traces upon the Earth that it has entered a 'no analogue state'.⁵ The critical debates that revolve around the Anthropocene — ones that query its origins, its etymology,

¹ See Morton, *Hyperobjects*, and Claire Colebrook, 'We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counterfactual', in *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. by Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), pp. 1–20.

² For a more detailed investigation into the matters of comprehension and scale in the context of climate change see Morton, *Hyperobjects*.

³ Crutzen and Stoermer, pp. 17–18.

⁴ Damian Carrington, 'The Anthropocene Epoch: Scientists Declare Dawn of Human-influenced Age', *Guardian Online*, 29 August 2016

<<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/29/declare-anthropocene-epoch-experts-urge-geological-congress-human-impact-earth>>, [accessed 15 August 2017].

⁵ Paul Crutzen and W. Steffen, 'How Long Have We Been in the Anthropocene Era? An Editorial Comment', *Climatic Change*, 61 (2003), 253 (p. 253).

and its implications — are too many to detail in full within the necessary limits of this thesis.⁶ However, in the following discussion, I address some of the relevant and pertinent epistemological challenges presented by the notion of the Anthropocene epoch, and consider how these translate into climate change discourse. A feminist ecocritical engagement with these challenges questions how geological framings of global time can be assimilated within political discourses of climate change, and how a geological framing of temporality communicates the possibilities of climate change to global audiences (rather than exclusively academic ones). I propose that Maggie Gee's *The Flood* (2004) and Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006) present alternative ways of communicating global environmental issues within the public arena, and that they engage with potential difficulties in geological earth-scientific framings of climate change. The two texts offer alternative ontological or epistemological systems that can be used as a framework with which to approach and navigate these challenges. Through addressing the novels' engagement with and critiques of contemporary discourses on temporality and climate change, including the Anthropocene, I argue that both novels demonstrate a critical perspective on Western epistemologies of temporality and climate change. Most importantly, the texts present discourses of multiple, alternative and non-linear (deep) time. The following discussion articulates how these concepts shape the novels' form and content.

E. M. Wolkovich and others have stated that 'time is about order and events. In its classical definition, it is a dimension that allows: (1) sequencing of events from past, present to future and (2) the measurement of durations between these events'.⁷ This appears to be the accepted and dominant definition of time within Western epistemological frameworks. Stephen Jay Gould's landmark work *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (1987) explores and expands on this conceptualisation of time in much more detail. Here, Gould investigates the paradoxical Judaeo-Christian understanding of time, explaining that within this framing, there exists two central conceptualisations: 'time's arrow' and 'time's cycle'.⁸ He writes that for humans, 'history is an irreversible sequence of events [...] all movements, considered in proper sequence, tell a story of linked events moving in a direction'.⁹ This is what he names 'time's arrow': the 'primary metaphor of biblical history',

⁶ See recent issues of *The Anthropocene Review*; Clark's *Ecocriticism on the Edge*; Adam Trexler's *Anthropocene Fictions*; and the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty for more extensive engagement with these debates.

⁷ E. M. Wolkovich and others, 'Temporal Ecology in the Anthropocene', *Ecology Letters*, 17 (2014), 1365–79 (p. 1366).

⁸ Stephen Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 18.

⁹ Gould, pp. 18–19.

a perpetual forward motion punctuated by events. On the other end of the dichotomy, Gould describes ‘time’s cycle’, in which ‘time has no direction’, and ‘apparent motions are parts of repeating cycles’. Crucially, Gould also remarks that he ‘present[s] nothing original here’, emphasising the acceptance of this temporal framework across scholarly discussion.¹⁰ Indeed, Amitav Ghosh writes that an ‘agnostic consensus’ has now been reached in geology, one that acknowledges both catastrophist and gradualist framings of temporality.¹¹ The significance of these arguments in relation to this chapter, however, lies primarily in the fact that although Gould acknowledges the coexistence of both views, he writes that ‘we can scarcely doubt that time’s arrow is the familiar or “standard” view of most educated Westerners today’.¹² Therefore, in this chapter I seek to investigate how these texts work against this perspective whilst acknowledging its hegemony and the ways in which it threatens to silence alternative views on time. Gould accepts that both the ‘time’s arrow’ and ‘time’s cycle’ formulations of time can encapsulate slightly different versions of the narratives across different cultures,¹³ which allows for contrasting discourses on temporality (and on the temporality of climate change) to emerge from this variation. However, time as it is presented in these novels vastly exceeds the boundaries of the ‘arrow’ and ‘cycle’ frameworks. At once, the two texts depict the need for more diverse conceptualisations of time when responding to the vast scales of climate change temporality, and also demonstrate the ways in which traditional Western conceptualisations of time can become fallible in and of themselves.

The first part of this chapter argues that Gee’s *The Flood* reveals the multiple temporal frameworks at play in a time of climate change and environmental disaster, which complicates and challenges the dominant narratives of time perpetuated in Western society (particularly in discourses deployed by the government and media). By remaining alert to the social demographics of British society as represented in the novel — which include characters of different genders, races, and social classes — Gee exposes the ways in which different temporal framings of environmental disaster can be deployed and inhabited, demonstrating the oppressive potential of particular temporal discourses and revealing the possible consequences of these for those who are most at risk. *The Flood* can be described as a work of climate fiction due to its narrative arc, which pivots around a city in environmental crisis, as it becomes partially submerged by a ‘rising tide of water’.¹⁴ Although it does not mention climate

¹⁰ Gould, p. 11.

¹¹ Ghosh, p. 20.

¹² Gould, p. 12.

¹³ Gould, p. 13.

¹⁴ Maggie Gee, *The Flood* (London: Saqi, 2004), p. 78. All further page references to this work will be given in parentheses after the quotation in the text.

change explicitly as the cause of the permanent flooding, Gee herself has stated that climate change is ‘central’ to the novel.¹⁵ Its plot is communicated through an omniscient narrator, and mediated via the viewpoints of several key characters who are interlinked in various ways. It is set in an unspecified future time, yet its setting closely resembles contemporary London. Gee only slightly alters the names of well-known London areas and the names of contemporary politicians in the novel. In this parallel city, constant rains and flooding have permeated low-lying districts, which also happen to be the most socially deprived areas. It is suggested that these environmental changes are anthropogenic in origin, as corresponding water shortages take hold in the Middle East (pp. 114–15), mirroring the effects of contemporary global warming. The resultant flooding in the city inhibits normal daily life for the inhabitants of the Towers — the local name given to the collective of high-rise buildings housing the poorest inhabitants of the city — but remains an avoidable inconvenience to those who live in the wealthier areas.

The novel follows loosely on from the plotline of Gee’s earlier novels *The White Family* (2002) and *Light Years* (1985), as well as alluding to the plotline of *The Ice People* (1998) at certain points in the text.¹⁶ Characters who feature in the smaller novelistic world of *The White Family* also reoccur in *The Flood*. However, Gee’s focus in *The Flood* thematically and tonally shifts back to the concerns of her earlier novel *The Ice People*,¹⁷ considering more large-scale politics, social inequality, and climate change. *The Flood* also recalls *The Ice People* in other ways: for example, in both novels, Gee uses references to much wider timescales in order to frame the narratives. Whereas *The Ice People* opens with a series of epigraphs describing long term geological and climatic changes, as I discuss in Chapter Three, in *The Flood* there are frequent references to time at an extra-planetary level, which serves to foreground the ‘outside time’ narrative perspective that appears at the beginning and end of the novel (something explored in more detail later in this chapter).

The satire on contemporary life that is evident in *The Ice People* is also identifiable in *The Flood*, in that it ‘retain[s] some of the forms of conventional satire’ but ‘better reflect[s]

¹⁵ Gee, ‘Writing Climate Change’, p. 172.

¹⁶ On page 127, *The Flood* references two characters named Millie and Samuel, who are the parents of *The Ice People*’s main character, Saul. They are referred to as members of a prominent religious cult, the ‘One Way’.

¹⁷ Alfred Hickling, ‘Water, Water Everywhere’, review of Maggie Gee, *The Flood*, *Guardian Online*, 28 February 2004, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/feb/28/featuresreviews.guardianreview10>>, [accessed 19 July 2017].

the existential and philosophical crises that characterize the modern world',¹⁸ particularly in its approach to environmental disaster. This attention to wider existential and philosophical matters allows for more abstract epistemological considerations of temporality within the text. A few key characters in the novel also have significant and unique relationships with time: Kilda, a young girl from the Towers, has prophetic visions of events across time; Davey Lucas is a celebrity TV presenter with an interest in astrophysics; and Davey's stepfather Harold writes a huge treatise on physics and the multiplicity of time, which gets accepted by a major publisher. Finally, Bruno James, a preacher of a unique brand of Judaeo-Christian religion — the One Way cult (p. 187), possibly a satirical reference to the 'Third Way' politics of Tony Blair, who was PM when the novel was published — spreads word across the Towers that the 'last days' (p. 30) of the world are coming, proclaiming to the masses that there is only 'one way out' (p. 30): by submitting to God. Layering these different figurations of time across the plot through various characters, representations of media, and politics, Gee weaves criticism of contemporary discourses of climate change and temporality throughout the novel. The text's proximity to the early 2000s in Britain offers a pivotal vantage point for contemporary British readers, from which it is possible to critique the socio-political conditions of the country and its approach to environmental disaster.

It is important to note that *The Flood* is not an entirely unproblematic text: at times there is a heavy-handedness in Gee's characterisation of people of colour. Her use of inconsistent dialects can approach caricature: the dialogues of more minor characters, for example, such as the owner of a Chinese takeaway shop (p. 132) and a Caribbean boatman (p. 216) shift unpredictably, and their dialects are stereotyped. This can also be seen in conversations between black British characters like Viola and Zoe (p. 171–75), which include inconsistent deployment of slang terms and contractions that move inexplicably back and forth between Caribbean English and Estuary English ('ear me now', 'tiefed', p. 171, 'dem tings', p. 173). The parallels between the novel's real-world context and the world of the novel itself (for example the references to the Blair and Bush era and the Iraq War) are often overly explicit, as one reviewer remarked upon the book's release.¹⁹ These pitfalls contribute to a text that, in places, lacks the persuasiveness of some of Gee's other novels. However, despite these shortcomings, *The Flood* is worthy of in-depth critical attention due to its distinct formal and

¹⁸ Lisa Colletta, *Dark Humour and Social Satire in the Modern British Novel: Triumph of Narcissism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 6.

¹⁹ Liz Hoggard, 'Damp If You Do', review of Maggie Gee, *The Flood*, *Observer Online*, 15 February 2004, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/feb/15/fiction.features3>>, [accessed 19 July 2017].

theoretical engagement with climate change temporalities, and its consideration of social and political inequalities in its speculative setting.

In the second half of this chapter, I turn my attention to *Carpentaria*. This section argues that Wright's novel offers an articulation of a distinctly Waanyi conceptualisation of 'collapsed time',²⁰ which is informed simultaneously by Wright's terms 'collapsed history'²¹ and 'all times',²² as well as by 'Dreamtime'.²³ I refer to 'collapsed time' in this chapter as a temporal framework that conceives of all events in time and all histories existing simultaneously, in a way that renders them capable of shaping the present. I argue that this understanding of temporality in *Carpentaria* exhibits an acute temporal awareness of — and sensitivity to — environmental degradation and change. This is something that the prevalent Western discourses on climate change and time can fail to register, due to their reliance on a teleological, linear perspective: Gould's arrow, for example, binds the idea of capitalist progress to the escalation of environmental damage, implying the inevitability of climate change as the end result of human progress. This can also have the effect of situating the consequences of climate change in a perpetual future. *Carpentaria*, however, centralises the diversity of Indigenous experience of time, registers and challenges the threat to continued Indigenous survival in the Gulf of Carpentaria, and crucially, it apprehends the effects of climate change through an Indigenous temporal framework.

A year after its publication in 2006, *Carpentaria* was awarded the prestigious Miles Franklin Award, the first text by an Indigenous Australian author to win the award outright.²⁴ The novel represents the complexities of Australian history, social justice, and Indigenous

²⁰ Lynda Ng, 'Translocal Temporalities in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*', in *Postcolonial Translocations: Cultural Representation and Critical Spatial Thinking*, ed. by Marga Munkelt and others (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 109–26 (p. 121).

²¹ Wright, Alexis Wright, 'A Family Document', in *Storykeepers*, ed. by Marion Halligan (Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 2001), pp. 223–40 (p. 239).

²² Alexis Wright, 'On Writing *Carpentaria*', reprinted from *HEAT Literary Journal*, n.s. 13 (2006), 79–95 by *University of Western Sydney Online*, pp. 1–17 (p. 3), <http://logincms.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/385949/Wright-HEATessay.pdf> [accessed 20 June 2019].

²³ 'Dreamtime' is a term invented by anthropologists in order to give a name to the complex systems of Aboriginal beliefs and traditions that form their understanding of their country and how it came into existence. For a fuller description see Alison Ravenscroft, 'Dreaming of Others: *Carpentaria* and its Critics', *Cultural Studies Review*, 16.2 (2010), 194–224 (p. 197); Diana James, 'Tjukurpa Time', in *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place*, ed. by Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb (Acton: Australian National University Press, 2015), pp. 33–46 (p. 36). Debating the veracity of the term and its legitimacy in colloquial dialogue is beyond the scope of this thesis: I use it here primarily for consistency, in order to reflect Wright's frequent use of the term in the novel.

²⁴ Aboriginal author Kim Scott's win for his novel *Benang* in 1999 was tied with white author Thea Astley's *Drylands*.

rights through the story of a fictional town called Desperance, set in the Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory. It follows various Indigenous and white inhabitants of the town, most frequently returning to Indigenous elder Normal Phantom and his family (in particular his activist son Will). The narrative depicts their skill and autonomy in their navigation of the land, their struggle to come to terms with the environmental damage wrought by multinational mining companies, and the murder and suffering of their friends and family at the hands of the mining industry. A landmark novel in Australian literature, *Carpentaria* comprises many serpentine strands of narrative, mediating through the tradition and style of Indigenous Australian oral modes of storytelling. The novel's literary voice is derived from the Indigenous communities that Wright has worked with for decades (including her own people, the Waanyi),²⁵ which marks a critical departure from the white Australian literary establishment. The novel's stylistic and conceptual approach to climate change, however, invites a literary ecocritical perspective.

Carpentaria has been considered previously via a feminist ecocritical framework by Kate Rigby, in her contribution to Gaard, Estok and Oppermann's *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism* (2013). Here, she emphasises the 'poetics of decolonization' and 'utopian possibilities' that she perceives in the novel,²⁶ drawing primarily on the foundational ecofeminist work of Val Plumwood in her analysis.²⁷ Rigby astutely warns against the 'adoption of a purely negative hermeneutic' when approaching *Carpentaria*, stating that to affirm the text's total resistance to all non-Waanyi perspectives 'would be to decline the invitation that it extends to non-Waanyi readers'.²⁸ Therefore one of the main focuses of this chapter section is a discussion of the novel's discourses of resistance against hegemonic conceptions of climate change temporality. I will also detail the ways in which the novel registers the threat of oppressive, colonial and neo-colonial discourses to the continued existence and agency of Indigenous people: the way Wright expresses these threats through the narrative and, crucially, through the novel's form is one of its many sources of critical power. However, Rigby's final conclusion that the floods and cyclone swamping Desperance 'ope[n] a utopian horizon'²⁹ is at odds with the overriding desolation and chaos of the novel's final scenes. As

²⁵ Wright, 'On Writing *Carpentaria*', p. 3.

²⁶ Kate Rigby, 'The Poetics of Decolonization: Reading *Carpentaria* in a Feminist Ecocritical Frame', in *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, ed. by Greta Gaard, Simon Estok and Serpil Oppermann (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 120–36 (p. 123).

²⁷ Rigby makes particular reference to Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993) and *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002).

²⁸ Rigby, 'The Poetics of Decolonization', p. 124.

²⁹ Rigby, 'The Poetics of Decolonization', p. 133.

Wright has remarked herself, 'what I know of our [Aboriginal] struggle gives me no cause for celebration or hearty optimism'.³⁰ In deploying my feminist ecocritical perspective as a guiding force rather than a tool of extraction, then, I intend to investigate the text's temporality in terms of its overwhelming sense of a threatening future, which (as I will discuss Chapter Two) is fully realised in Wright's third novel, *The Swan Book* (2013).

I have chosen to examine the novel in this chapter alongside Gee's *The Flood* for several reasons. The two novels are radically different in style: *Carpentaria* is written in a way that reflects and reconstitutes cyclical and non-linear oral storytelling traditions from Wright's Indigenous Waanyi community,³¹ which encourages readers to question their own value-systems and epistemological frameworks in order to make their way through the text. In contrast, *The Flood* is written in a free indirect narrative style, moving definitively between the perspectives of different characters with clear textual markers and signposts, similarly to a significant proportion of contemporary Western literary fiction. The texts also diverge in terms of Wright's representations of ongoing colonisation in Australia, and her commentary on the relationships between humans and the landscapes that they inhabit. In contrast, *The Flood* remains concerned primarily with urban ecologies, social segregation and class. However, the novels are comparable in several key ways. Both texts depict a large flood near the end of their respective narratives, which destroys the settlements in which the majority of the novels' action takes place. Climate change also features implicitly throughout both of these books, with the threat of looming environmental disaster and gradually altering weather patterns directing the narratives. Although climate change is not named specifically in the texts, both novels' depiction of flooding, rising waters, cyclones and tsunamis cannot be dismissed as textual features independent of any notion of climate change. Extreme weather events, flooding and water-borne diseases in Mozambique, the US, and Europe throughout the early 2000s would not have escaped public notice, and in the media, connections were of course made between these events and climate change. A special report on the 2000 Mozambique flooding in *The Guardian* was tagged under the topic of climate change,³² and the slow-rise nature of the flooding was connected to the La Niña phenomenon, the effects of which were

³⁰ Alexis Wright, 'Breaking Taboos', *Australian Humanities Review*, 11 (1998), <<http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-September-1998/wright.html>>, [accessed 20 March 2018] (para. 12 of 22).

³¹ Wright, 'On Writing *Carpentaria*', p. 3.

³² Chris McGreal, '160mph Wind Hits Flooded Mozambique', *Guardian Online*, 23 February 2000, <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2000/feb/23/weather.mozambique>> [accessed 3 August 2017].

exacerbated by global warming.³³ Both texts also employ a satirical mode, which is perceptible at various points throughout the narratives. There are differences in how this satire is enacted: Wright chooses a specific Indigenous perspective in order to reveal the hypocrisies and inadequacies of the governing cultural and capital systems, whereas Gee employs a less subjective and more generalised satirical tone, targeting nearly all the characters and institutions in a similar way. However, the naming of characters and places in both novels (something that I will explore in greater detail in the following analysis) often demonstrates the gulf between the public perception of the character or institution being criticised, and their true actions. Similarly, the texts share some commonalities in the targets of their more fluid and subtle satirical approaches. Both novels address (as noted above) inequalities in society, but interrogate how these inequalities are perpetuated by satirising the neoliberal capitalist system and the governments and institutions that uphold it.

Thematically and stylistically, both texts demonstrate an acute awareness of the possibility for multiple conceptualisations of time, and work against hegemonic discourses to propose alternative understandings of temporality from different epistemological sources. Both pay attention to social inequality in the context of vast environmental damage: a key concern of much feminist ecocritical work. They also expose the disconnection between, on the one hand, the temporal representations of disaster represented by the media, government, and industry, and on the other, individual experiences of disaster temporalities (or in the case of *Carpentaria*, individual experiences united by a sense of shared history and oppression). Most importantly, however, just as *The Flood's* narrative is framed from its opening pages as a critical examination of time and how humans are bound by their temporal perspectives, *Carpentaria* opens with a section entitled 'From time immemorial', which describes the creation of the Gulf country by the ancestral serpent, in a time before humans. Critically, Wright has repeatedly made clear that her aim in writing *Carpentaria* was to write 'a novel capable of embracing all times'. This intention to exceed the 'boundaries and fences which encode the development of thinking in [Australia]' clearly applies to the 'all times' temporality that is shaped through her novel.³⁴ The notion of 'all times', which Wright has

³³ Greg O'Hare, John Sweeney, and Rob Wilby, *Weather, Climate and Climate Change: Human Perspectives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 139. La Niña is a phenomenon coupled with the El Niño, and describes a period of colder-than-average sea surface temperatures across a period of months. It can affect global weather patterns, causing drought in some areas, storms and flooding elsewhere.

³⁴ Wright, 'On Writing *Carpentaria*', p. 3.

stated was in her mind when she conceived of the novel, infuses its structure, form, and language with a uniquely Aboriginal ‘non-linear sense of time’.³⁵

Both texts, in their emphasis on the social inequalities exacerbated by the effects of climate change, and the discourses that shape action and policies as a result, interact productively with my feminist ecocritical approach. In this chapter, I draw on the work of Deborah Bird Rose, Stacy Alaimo, Rob Nixon, Astrida Neimanis, and Kate Rigby, who work loosely within or around feminist, ecocritical and EH parameters, to inform my reading and interpretation of these texts. I go beyond this work, however, in my interpretation of how the critical idioms produced through this scholarship — Nixon’s ‘slow violence’, Alaimo’s new materialism, and Rose’s advocacy of temporal diversity, for example — could interact with contemporary mainstream and public discourses on climate change and temporality beyond exclusively academic circles. In the second half of this chapter, I engage similarly with contemporary theory on Indigenous temporality, but prioritise the integration of Alexis Wright’s nonfiction work, essays and interviews into my analysis, ensuring that an Indigenous perspective on *Carpentaria* remains central to the discussion. My feminist ecocritical approach here identifies strands within the relevant narratives which represent an intermeshing of environmental, feminist and new materialist concerns, or ones that offer a commentary on how these concerns interact and conflict with hegemonic discourses on temporality. Combining my critical approach with explicit attention to the formal aspects of the texts, and using climate change temporality as a thematic framework, I identify multiple discourses of climate change temporality within these novels. These include geo-scientific Anthropocene discourses, slow violence, apocalyptic and sensationalist discourses, and alternative temporalities. In this chapter, I investigate how these bolster or deconstruct damaging techno-scientific and Eurocentric discourses of the temporal framings of the changing climate.

The Flood (2004)

Deep Time Discourse: Anthropocene Temporality and Urban Ecology

The notion of the Anthropocene entails thinking of our planet’s histories through deep geological time.³⁶ Stacy Alaimo writes that the ‘*Anthropocene*’ has now joined ‘*climate change* and *sustainability* as a pivotal term in public environmental discourse’,³⁷ and whilst I would

³⁵ Wright, ‘On Writing *Carpentaria*’, p. 5.

³⁶ See Jeremy Davies, *The Birth of the Anthropocene* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), p. 12; Claire Colebrook, ‘We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counterfactual’, p. 1.

³⁷ Stacy Alaimo, ‘Your Shell on Acid: Material Immersion, Anthropocene Dissolves’, in *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. by Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp. 89–120 (p. 90), original emphasis.

argue that this is an overstating of the term's pervasiveness, there is no doubt that the geological-temporal discourse of the Anthropocene is now widespread in academic circles, and has begun to feature in some strands of political, scientific, media and public discourse. Its conceptualisation of 'the abyss of time', which 'stretches back from a few thousand years ago to the beginnings of the earth',³⁸ has the potential to function as 'language-in-action',³⁹ shaping public comprehension of climate change temporal framings, and therefore possible future policies, political action and cultural representations of climate change from art to journalism. Yet as Timothy Morton has discussed at length in *Hyperobjects*, rhetorically situating our world within a deep time history that precedes human memory entails complex and myriad problems of communication and understanding. Questions are therefore arising over the viability of the Anthropocene, both as a term in itself and as an academic discourse. As mentioned previously, Amitav Ghosh has criticised the 'largely Eurocentric' nature of 'discourse around the Anthropocene, and climate matters generally',⁴⁰ and the genesis of the term has come under close scrutiny from feminist scholarship in particular.⁴¹ Astrida Neimanis has described the problems inherent in the male-dominated formation of the Anthropocene Working Group (31 male to 5 female members), as well as in the marginalisation of feminist thought within Anthropocene scholarly literature (such as the total absence of any feminist work in *The Anthropocene Review* in its first four issues).⁴² This absence of feminist and female recognition within much academic Anthropocene discourse recalls the side-lining of feminist thought within much ecocritical and new materialist scholarship.⁴³ As well as sustaining a patriarchal academic hierarchy, practices such as these ensure that the voices of feminist scholars, who may be best placed to articulate how climate change may exacerbate social inequalities based on race, gender, and class, remain excluded. A formulation of the Anthropocene that assimilates a strong feminist scholarly presence into its related discourses will remain more alert to (and can redirect) its exclusionary and homogenising potential, and could allow scholars to consistently investigate and challenge more problematic usages of the term in all contexts.

The chronology of the Anthropocene has been said to 'present human history in a linear, deterministic and teleological frame at odds with both scientific and social scientific

³⁸ Davies, p. 10.

³⁹ Blommaert, *Discourse: A Critical Introduction*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Ghosh, p. 87.

⁴¹ Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 12.

⁴² Neimanis, *Bodies of Water*, p. 12–13.

⁴³ See the introduction to this thesis for further discussion on this matter.

understandings of evolutionary and historical contingency'.⁴⁴ As Lesley Head has noted, there is a (latent or explicit) teleology of deep time within much academic Anthropocene discourse. This works within the accepted notion of linear evolutionary progress, comprising of a start point, progressive development, and — by implication — an end point. As Head remarks, 'the long evolutionary path is a common trope in the standard Anthropocene narrative,' even when, in truth, evolutionary processes are uneven and indirect.⁴⁵ Whilst acknowledging Dipesh Chakrabarty's assertion that capitalism (and by extension globalisation) and climate change 'are not identical problems',⁴⁶ I propose that a linear historical conceptualisation of the Anthropocene collaborates with, and draws on, the damaging capitalist notions of progress that underlie much of modern political, cultural and social organisation.

It is important to note that this is not the case in some more recent academic contributions in Anthropocene thought. In his recent monograph *The Birth of the Anthropocene* (2016), Jeremy Davies makes very clear that he does not use the notion of Anthropocene deep time temporality to 'advocat[e] a distanced, Olympian perspective on the human condition',⁴⁷ and states that the Anthropocene is not 'a concept that reduces humankind to an undifferentiated mass'.⁴⁸ Similarly, Ghosh emphasises the role of imperial and colonial processes in suppressing carbon economies from emerging in the global East since before the Industrial Revolution, drawing attention to the continuing uneven distribution of carbon emissions across the globe, and therefore the uneven contributions to what we now call the Anthropocene.⁴⁹ In contrast to these perspectives, however, there are no shortages of generalisations, reductive rhetoric, and anthropocentrism in much contemporary discourse on Anthropocene temporalities,⁵⁰ and these need to be acknowledged and challenged if a geological deep time view of the Anthropocene epoch is to truly 'yield a new way of understanding and responding to the modern ecological catastrophe'.⁵¹ It is also of course critical to note that however nuanced an academic deep time discourse of the Anthropocene may be, when appropriated and circulated by different media and political spheres, the ways in which the term is used in the public arena will be distorted. As Alaimo has warned, 'the concept of the Anthropocene testifies that *Homo sapiens* has "achieved" an exceptional feat,

⁴⁴ Lesley Head, 'Contingencies of the Anthropocene: Lessons from the "Neolithic"', *The Anthropocene Review*, 1 (2014), 113–25 (p. 114).

⁴⁵ Head, 'Contingencies of the Anthropocene', p. 116.

⁴⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Politics of Climate Change Is More Than the Politics of Capitalism', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 34.2–3 (2017), 25–37 (p. 25).

⁴⁷ Davies, pp. 7–8.

⁴⁸ Davies, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Ghosh, p. 107.

⁵⁰ Neimanis, pp. 11–13.

⁵¹ Davies, p. 4.

that of epoch-making planetary alteration'.⁵² It also has the potential to 'reinstall rather familiar versions of man' as the 'disembodied, rational subject' that material feminisms have long critiqued, and can encourage sexist and anthropocentric understandings of the Anthropocene as a concept.⁵³ Although Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that 'the expression "Anthropocene" now refers more to (mostly human-driven) changes to Earth System [sic] as a whole and less about moral culpability of humans (or some humans) in causing them',⁵⁴ this statement incurs the crucial question of who is using the expression, in what context, and to what end? Is it desirable, or even possible, to regulate how the term is used? As Lesley Head writes that in the realms of social media, the '#Anthropocene' becomes 'an emblem of the way humans pervade all dimensions of the Earth', and could therefore be deployed in a multitude of ways.⁵⁵ A nuanced academic explication of Anthropocene temporality that is re-presented in the public domain is therefore left open to reduction and oversimplification. Disconcertingly, it can be used to simply reaffirm ingrained Western cultural norms, such as linear teleological figurations of time and progress.

As Deborah Bird Rose has noted, even if 'we are well attuned to the importance of diversity: cultural diversity, biodiversity, linguistic diversity, and habitat diversity [...] we are perhaps less accustomed to thinking of temporal diversity',⁵⁶ and learning to accommodate a conceptualisation of time that goes against ingrained temporal epistemologies is fraught with difficulty. When the capitalist structures of the globalised world run according to particular hegemonic narratives of temporality — for example, that of 'progress',⁵⁷ which is heavily reliant on the 'time's arrow' temporal framing — it is difficult to reach beyond them.

⁵² Alaimo, 'Your Shell on Acid', p. 90. For an example of this very phenomenon, see the following article by Joe Pinkstone, 'Scientists Declare Earth has Entered the "Age of Man": Influential Panel Votes to Recognise the Start of the Anthropocene Epoch', *Daily Mail Online*, 27 May 2019 <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-7074409/Scientists-declare-Earth-entered-Age-Man.html>> [accessed 30 May 2019]. The bullet-point summary of the article does not mention climate change or the damaging effects of the Anthropocene. The article itself frames the idea of the Anthropocene in terms of human exceptionalism, using vocabulary such as 'distinguishable' and 'distinctive', describing the 'incredible consumption' that has contributed to the phenomenon.

⁵³ Alaimo, 'Your Shell on Acid', p. 90.

⁵⁴ Chakrabarty, 'The Politics of Climate Change', p. 28.

⁵⁵ Lesley Head, *Hope and Grief in the Anthropocene: Reconceptualising Human-Nature Relations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 4.

⁵⁶ Deborah Bird Rose, 'Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time', *Environmental Philosophy*, 9.1 (2012), 127–40 (p. 128).

⁵⁷ See Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 20–21.

The Anthropocene has also been challenged due to its proximity to Enlightenment humanism, in that it arises from a ‘human exceptionalist approach to life’,⁵⁸ which prioritises notions of contained human (and implicitly masculine) subjectivity, rationality and elevated human consciousness over an externalised nature. As Head writes, ‘although it is widely argued that the Anthropocene proclaims the death of the Enlightenment human-nature dualism, the modernist vision of nature is in other ways remarkably persistent’.⁵⁹ Similarly, Neimanis has emphasised that much ‘Anthropocene talk’ continues to ‘pi[t] Man against Nature “out there”’,⁶⁰ which is a clear regression to deeply-ingrained human-nature dualism in the face of threatening, externalised concepts that are seemingly beyond human understanding. This regressive aspect of Anthropocene discourse is detrimental to the long-term projects of new materialist, materialist ecocritical, and feminist ecocritical thought, which all aim to dismantle the damaging value-hierarchical epistemologies and binaries that form the basis of much Western philosophy. The exceptionalism embroiled in certain temporal framings of the Anthropocene, then, inhibits any non-Anthropocentric temporalities — for example, notions of time figured in relation to nonhuman animals — from being incorporated into (or fully acknowledged in) much Anthropocene academic discourse.

From the outset of *The Flood*, however, there are explicit references to a multitude of different temporalities that frame the text’s narrative, which preclude a singular anthropocentric teleology (Gould’s ‘arrow’) from being recreated in either the form or content of the novel. In the opening pages, Gee introduces what she calls ‘the earthly city’ (p. 7) — the alternate London setting — describing it as ‘a place which holds all time and places’ (p. 7) and remarking that ‘in the distance was the other city, the city of dreams, the place we half-know we have seen at night’ (p. 8). These allusions to other structures of time and place foreground the fluidity of temporality in the novel, and the possibility of multiple narrative temporalities existing simultaneously. Gee continues her introduction of the novel’s setting with sensory images of urban ecologies within the city that exist alongside the human population: ‘urban foxes. Twisting and fossicking, yipping and screaming mobs of red musk. Narrow-faced, amber-eyed, rufous, fearless. And swarming rats, and mice, and pigeons’ (p. 8). This emphasis on nonhuman populations within the city foregrounds nonhuman temporalities, which often go unacknowledged in much discourse on climate change and the Anthropocene. These urban species are flourishing, rather than diminishing, in the novel’s contemporary time. In this small beginning segment of the text, the lives of nonhuman species are increasingly bound up with

⁵⁸ Neimanis, p. 11.

⁵⁹ Head, ‘Contingencies of the Anthropocene’, p. 115.

⁶⁰ Neimanis, p. 12.

spaces of human habitation, and later, scenes of rats and foxes scavenging from human food waste punctuate the novel (pp. 72–73, 245, 255–56). The microbes, foxes, pigeons and rats (pp. 7–8) described here both live on human waste, and inhabit spaces of human influence or dominion. Although they rely on human activity in these spaces for their survival, this reliance is a by-product of the Anthropocene, in all its excess. In Gee’s depiction of these animals, there exists an anti-anthropocentric mode of survival and life that flourishes despite other environmental problems. This contradicts the dominant Anthropocene narrative of degradation and destruction, twisting the ‘arrow’ of time in an alternative direction. The nonhuman animals inhabit their own individual temporality of survival as well as dwelling in the anthropogenic Anthropocene, but these clusters of life inform and co-create the Anthropocene, influencing its topography and temporality, which challenges a singularly human narrative. Gee’s attention to these urban ecologies complicates the singular narrative of finality, which implies that anthropogenic environmental destruction is totally inevitable.⁶¹

This is also visible at the end of the text. When the city is engulfed by a tidal wave that threatens to wipe out all life, the artist Ian sets birds free from the aviary in the city zoo: ‘the highest flyers, the boldest wing-tips, power up the air, their mountain slope, needing nothing at all in that single second but steely hope, *survive, survive*’ (p. 314, original emphasis). The birds’ ability to escape through the air, when the humans themselves cannot survive the disaster, demonstrates their ability to occupy temporalities other than a singular narrative of inevitable destruction. This alternative temporality of survival — the fact that these animals may outlive humanity and survive beyond our own narrow versions of history and time — is also foregrounded at other points in the novel. The wealthy couple Harold and Lottie visit the flooded city gardens, and struggle to navigate the watery landscape in an unstable boat. Here, they see a ‘family of foxes, who barked frantically for a second at the boat and then swam singly back towards the banks, where they ran dark and drenched up the green towards the buildings’ (p. 114). There is also a stark contrast between the behaviour of the humans and the foxes as the tsunami approaches. The wealthy people, we learn, are ‘fleeing, fleeing; they are falling over; they are dragging trunks and boxes of paper; they are telephoning taxis, airports, heliports [...] The rich are trying to leave the city’ (p. 303). The foxes, however, are described as a ‘tide of muscle and bone and bite [...] a brazen army [...] with their strenuous paws and strong narrow bodies’ (p. 255) who appear after the city’s Gala to feast on the leftovers.

⁶¹ See Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren, and Matthew Chrulew, ‘Introduction: Telling Extinction Stories’ in *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death, and Generations*, ed. by Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren, and Matthew Chrulew (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 1–18 (pp. 2–8).

Eventually, the foxes ‘melt sinuously away’ (p. 256) from the oncoming devastation, avoiding the panicked and chaotic end that the human population experiences.

We do know with certainty that ‘climate change has fundamentally altered how organisms experience time’, in that it prompts changes in the ‘phenology and behaviour’ of animals.⁶² But the representation of these altered behaviours — for example, the foxes’ inhabitation of urban conurbations as opposed to rural areas — complicates linear Anthropocene temporalities that could bolster the ‘singular phenomenon of extinction’ narrative,⁶³ which describes an unstoppable descent towards death and extinction. As Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren and Matthew Chrulew have warned, narratives of ‘inevitable decline’ within discussions of extinction can obscure the complexity of the meaningful life processes of nonhumans. However, borrowing from Donna Haraway, the authors remark that through ‘*staying with*’ the lives of other beings — a practice which is employed in *The Flood* — it is possible to prevent ‘the perspectives afforded by evolutionary deep time’ from ‘invalidat[ing] the fragile temporalities by which singular living communities make their worlds and make their way in ours’.⁶⁴

This flourishing of ecologies in tandem with human cities — though it is not at the forefront of critical discussion surrounding the Anthropocene — demonstrates the unevenness of human activity on the planet, and disrupts linear narratives of degradation and destruction. Gee emphasises this unevenness further in describing human consumption of nonhumans at a critical point in the novel, the government-organised City Gala (p. 250). Here, ‘dozens of endangered species are eaten, flown in for the occasion from all around the world [...] their animal nature vaporized’ (p. 250). The sixth mass extinction of the planet’s nonhuman populations, something often cited as a potential identifying feature of the Anthropocene epoch,⁶⁵ is reflected here in the text. It is particularly present in the animals’ ‘vaporiz[ation]’: in this metaphor, their extinction is literally inseparable from the carbon emissions required to transport these animals for consumption. Gee’s satirical emphasis on ‘endangered’ animals being eaten at a luxurious and celebratory event, and the contrast that this makes with the abundant urban nonhuman population, is significant. While some nonhuman life-cycles are enabled by flourishing urban ecologies in the Anthropocene, others are decimated. The linear ‘arrow’ — the deterministic and event-bound temporality of some figurations of the

⁶² Wolkovich and others, p. 1365.

⁶³ Bird Rose, Dooren, and Chrulew, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Bird Rose, Dooren and Chrulew, p. 8, original emphasis.

⁶⁵ A. D. Barnosky, ‘Palaeontological Evidence for Defining the Anthropocene’, in *A Stratigraphical Basis for the Anthropocene*, ed. by C.N. Waters and others (Bath: The Geological Society, 2014), pp. 149–66 (p. 162).

Anthropocene — is complicated and disrupted by the way Gee addresses these nonhuman narratives of Anthropocene temporality. It is implied that the foxes pre-empt the disaster and escape, and that the birds set free from the aviary in the zoo also manage to evade the tsunami. Instead of moving towards an apocalyptic ending in which human endeavour obliterates all nonhuman life (a trope favoured by some climate fiction novels), Gee disturbs this temporal determinism. In so doing, she draws attention to the patchiness — the constant interchanging of retrogression and progression — of multiple human effects on geology and climate.

Amy J. Elias and Joel Burges state in their recent work *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present* (2016) that capitalism depends on the simultaneity and multiplicity of different temporalities in order to profit from seemingly infinite marketable possibilities.⁶⁶ However, throughout *The Flood* Gee draws attention to the existence of multiple temporalities, some of which *resist*, rather than support, capitalist exploitation. This is evident in the depiction of the urban ecologies of foxes, rats, and birds that choose to rely on human waste for their sustenance: easy access to refuse supersedes the animals' traditional food sources, leading them to resettle in human-dominated environments. As we have seen above, the nonhuman urban beings of the novel do not simply *manage* to live *despite* capitalism and its climate-altering effects; they instead harness its remnants to sustain their lives. Therefore, in this scenario, rather than humans moving up the supposed evolutionary scale through technological progress and enlightened thinking, the human population is unwittingly drawing certain systems of nonhuman life — ones that are low on the human-nature hierarchy — into closer proximity through capitalist practices. As humans are not dependent on the flourishing of these nonhumans and their urban ecologies, the lifespans of the urban animals are in many ways independent from the capitalist exploitation that humanity may inflict on other ecological systems. Through their constant appearances in the novel, Gee places the urban animals' narratives alongside the human ones, emphasising their own temporal agency. The animals' capacity to reproduce and flourish on the discarded parts of capitalist consumerism appears to conform to a temporality that works backwards, in direct opposition to the linear evolutionary temporality of the Anthropocene. In the opening pages of her monograph *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015), Anna Tsing presents a concept extremely relevant to the urban ecologies referenced here. She

⁶⁶ Joel Burges and Amy J. Elias, 'Introduction: Time Studies Today', in *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present*, ed. by Joel Burges and Amy J. Elias (New York: New York University Press, 2016), pp. 1–34 (p. 6).

introduces the notion of “‘third nature,” that is, what manages to live despite capitalism’,⁶⁷ writing that:

To even notice third nature, we must evade assumptions that the future is that singular direction ahead. Like virtual particles in a quantum field, multiple futures pop in and out of possibility; third nature emerges within such temporal polyphony.⁶⁸

There are multiple temporalities of life and survival working towards and away from each other simultaneously in *The Flood*: ones reminiscent of Tsing’s ‘third nature’ that do not conform to the linear temporalities of evolution, enlightenment, and extinction, or to the capitalist notion of progress and profitability. This undeniably complicates the interlocking notions of geological deep time, linear evolution and capitalist progress in Anthropocene discourse. It also exemplifies the idea that although ‘the Anthropocene is presented as a time period defined by the activities and impacts of the human’, it is ‘paradoxically also a period that is now out of human control, due to rapid, unpredictable and non-linear change’.⁶⁹

Gee’s disturbance of linear deterministic conceptualisations of temporality in the Anthropocene also relate to her satirical critique of capitalist processes, and the capitalist temporal imperative of ‘progress’ that is so often devastating to human and nonhuman life. This can be identified at many different scales in the narrative, but the description of events at the city Gala can offer some interesting examples of this particular satirical approach. Ian the painter, for example, features in the novel at certain points. We learn that he has been financially successful in the past selling portraits to wealthy clients through Isaac the art dealer (p. 292), but then began to paint caricatures, which people would not buy: ‘Ian saw people as animals, jackals, hyenas, wild-cats, snakes’ (p. 292). As his work is admired by Isaac and by the art museums who purchase his paintings, Ian is able to satirise the wealthy population of the city whilst maintaining his own social standing. At the Gala, he sketches the party-goers — the celebrities, politicians, and the rich — as monkeys, penguins, and flamingos (pp. 238–41). He exaggerates the attendees’ formal clothing, and their comical stature and behaviour. This combines two of the key features of contemporary diffused satire, in Kathryn Hume’s definition: the humorous element ‘differentiates [the satirical attack] from hell-fire sermonizing’, something that Gee also condemns in the novel, but also characterises the attitude of ‘mockery and ironic disparagement’ that also features in contemporary satirical

⁶⁷ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, p. viii.

⁶⁸ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, p. viii.

⁶⁹ Head, *Hope and Grief in the Anthropocene*, p. 5.

novels.⁷⁰ Ian's satirical artwork can also, crucially, be linked to a comment made by the teenager Lola earlier in the novel: 'most anti-capitalist actions seemed to involve paint, or posters, or flour' (p. 71). If we read Ian's work as a satire of capitalist practices, his paintings of the Gala celebrities as animals both strengthens Gee's commentary on their radical differences from other animals in their consumer-based lifestyles, and also reduces them to their underlying animal traits. As the elite Gala party-goers are the consumers of the endangered animals, Ian's artwork also satirically gestures towards the cannibalistic nature of consumption. By consuming animals in this mindless and excessive manner, the attendees are seen to be consuming a part of themselves, but crucially, they are also consuming their own future. By depleting the wild animals participating in vital ecosystems across the globe, they ensure a future of degraded environments that become increasingly inhospitable to humans. Their actions are, ironically, entangled with human death. It is clear, then, that an implicit critique of linear and deterministic Anthropocene deep time teleology is at work in the novel from the outset.⁷¹

Deep Time Discourse: Temporal Multiplicity

There are many examples of the alternate realities and temporalities shaping and informing the narrative of *The Flood*. For example, the novel opens — as previously described — with descriptions of two seemingly parallel cities from a disembodied narrative voice: 'the earthly city' (p. 7) and 'the other city, the city of dreams' (p. 8). These two alternate existences have been compared to the symbols of the living city and the necropolis: juxtaposition of these two states is a common trope of contemporary urban satire.⁷² The ending of the novel continues this idea: after the tsunami has wiped out the alternate city, the presumably dead characters reappear fully alive in what is described as Kew Gardens, London (p. 322). However, I suggest the novel goes beyond this dualistic representation, because references to multiple, even infinite moments weaving an endless structure of time occur frequently through the narrative. We learn early in the novel that Harold, a middle-class author married to the wealthy and superficial Lottie, is writing a non-fiction book about time. His manuscript is accepted the publishing house Headstone, another satirical foreshadowing of the novel's events. Davey, Harold's stepson, describes Harold's new and unique conceptualisation of time and physics:

⁷⁰ Kathryn Hume, 'Diffused Satire in Contemporary American Fiction', *Modern Philology*, 105 (2007), 300–25 (p. 305).

⁷¹ Head, 'Contingencies of the Anthropocene', p. 116.

⁷² Magdalena Maczynska, 'This Monstrous City: Urban Visionary Satire in the Fiction of Martin Amis, Will Self, China Miéville, and Maggie Gee', *Contemporary Literature*, 51 (2010), 58–86 (pp. 66–67).

Harold's answer lay in the physics of time (unsurprisingly, perhaps – his own father was a physicist). All that had ever been, still was [...] Harold's physics allowed for no past or future, only a single infinite structure. A hall of time from which the moments opened, a mansion of many sunlit rooms. Davey imagined an unending honeycomb. (p. 91)

This notion of an infinite, three-dimensional honeycomb structure, in which all possible moments of time are happening simultaneously and separately, exceeds the earth-scientific figurations of temporality discussed previously in the chapter. Ironically, however, although Harold's book is progressing towards publication with Headstone, the tsunami at the end of the novel means that his hypothesis is never disseminated to the wider public. This functions as a satire of academic thought, its slow dissemination, and its often limited reach (highly relevant in relation to academic conceptualisations of the Anthropocene). It also satirises the way academic thought can fail to translate accurately into public discourse. This facet of the novel can be read as a commentary similar to the one Bird Rose offers in 'Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time', which — as I have discussed above — suggests that we are not accustomed to thinking through diverse conceptualisations of time.⁷³ With the exception of Harold and a handful of people at Headstone, this radical new understanding of temporality is lost.

The revelation of Harold's theory is a significant moment in the novel, as his figuration of time is echoed throughout the rest of the text by other characters, particularly the teenager Kilda. A girl from the Towers, we learn that Kilda has a second 'sight'. She describes her abilities whilst in conversation with a member of the 'One Way' (p. 24) cult, stating that she can see into the 'past, future, I can do both' (p. 126). Throughout the novel, Kilda becomes more involved with the practices and teachings of the One Way (a cult led by Bruno James, who proclaims that the only way to be saved from the coming apocalypse is through their teachings). However, she is eventually outed by someone within the cult for making prophecies of her own at the City Gala (p. 300) and for mingling with so-called sinners, rather than preaching the word of the One Way. In punishment, she is seized physically from her home and brought to a makeshift trial before the cult's members. In response to the accusations, she defends herself, stating that:

I do see, like, the end of the world, the thing you're always going on about. What you don't get is, there's lots of different endings. It isn't, like, One Way, not at all. There are worlds that are all bright, like worlds of light, and a world of darkness, but it all,

⁷³ Deborah Bird Rose, 'Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time', p. 128.

like, splits, it goes on and on, so there's lots of worlds, and the pieces get shuffled... it's doing it now. Every day, every moment. (p. 302)

This extract is both a meta-textual reference to the novel's own temporality with its disjointed ending, and to a view of temporality that takes into account multiple epistemologies, ontologies, and cultural frameworks of time. There are also implications here for Kilda as a woman, and as someone from a disadvantaged background. A linear, teleological conception of apocalyptic temporality, which is reflected in the teachings of the appropriately-named 'One Way' doomsayers, is explicitly associated with masculinity in both a techno-scientific sense, and in a patriarchal, religious sense. Kilda is persecuted for having (and disseminating) a perspective that allows her to view multiple endings and multiple timeframes, one that deviates from a linear, patriarchal temporality that imagines an end in which women, in particular, will suffer. The cult's leader Bruno James imagines that — in the apocalyptic ending he envisions — 'the rich and the decadent would suffer: old women, who he hated the most; painted women, weak women [...]. They were the sores upon the face of the earth, but God would wash it clear again' (p. 17). For Bruno, persecution must be visited upon women who deviate from his patriarchal idea of a linear teleology: after kidnapping Kilda and putting her on trial in front of the court, he states that she has 'left the true path, the One Way [...] You have defied your Father's instructions' (p. 300), for using her visions and speaking out about her personal understanding of time. As we learn from the structure of the book and Harold's book, Kilda's visions of time are viable and — it is suggested — accurate, but her predictions of the flood are silenced and ignored in favour of patriarchal ideology. This ironically ensures the death of everyone in the One Way cult, instead of liberating them in the event of — as they see it — divine justice being brought upon the world, as Kilda sees the tsunami coming but is ignored.

As demonstrated in Kilda's speech above, there are striking similarities between Harold's 'honeycomb' temporality, and Kilda's own understanding of time: she sees the many different worlds and moments in time 'split[ting]' and going 'on and on', in an infinite and shifting structure with 'lots of different endings'. This aligns with Harold's 'infinite honeycomb', a 'single infinite structure' with many different 'rooms' splitting off from a hall of time. Both characters, then, arrive at the same conclusion from different points of origin. While Harold's theory is set for publication before it is destroyed in the tsunami, Kilda, who comes from a poor family living in the Towers, cannot read (p. 302). Kilda therefore cannot rely on the literary to provide her worldview and her own understanding of time, and instead derives one from her internal experience. Although Harold's thesis is silenced by the disastrous ending of

the novel, his ideas are accepted by the publishing industry. In contrast, Kilda's statements are silenced by the One Way group due to her refusal to conform to biblical gender roles and stay silent: she is told 'you have tempted Adam as Eve once did' (p. 300), and Bruno states that 'this woman is damned for rejecting the Book!' (p. 300). In joining Kilda and Harold through their shared understanding of time, Gee juxtaposes their experience of privilege. In the context of environmental degradation and disaster, the knowledge and experience of a young, working-class woman is likely to be actively suppressed by the patriarchal structures that become further entrenched in times of crisis, whereas Harold's theory is accepted and celebrated by the establishment.

As well as marking her divergence from oppressive temporal structures and rejecting the religiously imposed confines of her gender, Kilda's testimony also takes into account the possibility of multiple disasters. The infinite 'endings' that Kilda references allude to the complex and frequent disasters that are cited throughout the novel. For example, the tsunami that engulfs the world at the end of the novel has no definitive impetus. Many possible causes are mentioned, including the Varna dam tidal wave (p. 57), a particular alignment of the planets affecting Earth's gravity (p. 86), and an asteroid hitting the earth (p. 283). Kilda's speech therefore exemplifies the novel's rejection of the temporal determinism that, as I have discussed in the previous section, is key to some figurations of Anthropocene teleology. Building on this disavowal of sequential cause-and-effect temporality, Gee does not depict a sensational aftermath to the tsunami, set in the new water-covered world. Instead, the perspective of the novel shifts to an alternate reality before the outcome of the tsunami is fully described, and the potential singularity of the apocalyptic tsunami is therefore undermined by its multiple possible causes. However, the notion of the singular disaster event is also challenged by the constant fluctuations of the flooding throughout the rest of the text: a slow disaster that counteracts the powerful immediacy of the tsunami.

Slow Violence: Temporality and Flooding

Throughout the text, politicians, academics and the media all play a significant role in both the negotiation of slow disasters — in the form of the fluctuating and ever-present floods that envelop the city — and in the construction of narratives surrounding the more instantaneous disaster events (such as the tsunami and the bombing of the fictional Middle-Eastern country of Loya). In this section, I focus on Gee's narrative of flooding, exposing how the novel works to acknowledge and apprehend discourses of slow violence, and later how this interacts with media sensationalist discourses of disaster and temporality.

The novel engages closely with the idea of gradual environmental degradation, or what Rob Nixon has termed ‘slow violence’: a term that describes the damage inflicted by long-term environmental damage and by climatic change.⁷⁴ *The Flood* interrogates the detrimental effects of the short term, crisis-response scenarios that are over-represented in media discourses on climate change,⁷⁵ and through its narrative, draws out representations of slow violence, demonstrating how this discourse of climate change temporality is suppressed by other, more privileged mediums of representation. These include disasters that are presented as cataclysmic ‘freak’ and ‘natural’ spontaneous events, and narrated within sensationalist and apocalyptic framings. Obscuring the longer-term and multifactorial causes and effects of these environmental processes — and thereby creating a hegemonic discourse — sensationalist apocalyptic narratives can be harnessed by hegemonic systems of power (corporations, governments) in order to promote partisan and combative political epistemologies.⁷⁶ A sensationalist apocalyptic discourse can work both within and against longer-term geological discourses on temporality in the context of climate change, and as I argue in the next section, this has the effect of sustaining inertia and stasis in public and political responses to climate-related disasters. Sensationalist apocalyptic narratives can induce a sense of shock and paralysis, an overwhelming sense of powerlessness, or a kind of nihilism, all of which stem from an imagined inability to alter the course of such momentous events. In this section, however, I examine how Gee’s representations of slow violence in *The Flood* can disrupt these tendencies.

My definition of slow violence in this context is close to Nixon’s, in that it is ‘a violence [...] neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales’.⁷⁷ It is true that the floods in Gee’s novel are not necessarily ‘unfolding over years, decades, [...] centuries’, as Nixon describes, and when relativized by the novel’s references to astronomy and space time, the movements of planets and asteroids, their relative insignificance is heightened further. However, I propose that the use of ‘slow’ is appropriate in here, as the creeping floods are directly juxtaposed against other ‘event[s] or action[s]’ that are ‘immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, [...] erupting into instant sensational visibility’.⁷⁸ The instantaneous nature of these events emphasises the relative slowness of the flooding. I argue that the term ‘slow violence’ is also necessary to describe the flooding precisely because of the way the disaster is normalised

⁷⁴ Nixon, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Nixon, p. 6.

⁷⁶ Nixon, p. 2.

⁷⁷ Nixon, p. 2.

⁷⁸ Nixon, pp. 2–3.

and backgrounded by certain social groups within the novel, something that I will explore in greater detail in the next section of this chapter.

Through *The Flood's* engagement with some of the fundamental problems that contribute to slow environmental violence, Gee demonstrates how the temporal framing of gradually damaging environmental catastrophes might be employed by governments to achieve certain political ends. For example, the city's president is named Mr. Bliss, in a satirical allusion to Tony Blair. In the novel it becomes clear that Mr. Bliss consistently aims to redirect public attention away from the affected areas of the city's flooding, towards foreign policy campaigns overseas. The reader learns through the contributions of various characters in the novel that the flooding has cut off vital resources to the poorer districts of the city, like the south-eastern Towers (p. 170). At a mid-way point in the novel, Viola — a resident of the Towers — remarks that 'it's been horrible here [...] We couldn't get milk, or papers, or nothing. We, you know, bartered, some days, for food. That wasn't in the papers, was it? The government did fuck all for us' (p. 170). Making an explicit reference to the disparity between political action and media representation, Viola articulates the erasure of the city's economically deprived inhabitants, whilst Mr. Bliss's political actions — in an obvious parody of the Iraq War of 2003–2011 — redirect public fear and insecurity elsewhere. Rather than acknowledging the life-threatening nature of the gradually worsening flooding, especially to the poorer sectors of society, Mr. Bliss focuses his attention on suspected 'germ warfare' in the city — which supposedly originates from a Middle-Eastern country (p. 37) — and on an overseas 'hostile power' (p. 287), which he suggests caused the flooding. In his political manoeuvring, he advocates harnessing what he calls 'a new mood among our people,' stating that 'there is a historic opportunity here. We have to be big enough to seize it' (p. 38), as he incites support amongst his cabinet for a further episode of bombing. As one of Bliss's advisors bluntly puts it, 'the people are restless around the Towers. A common enemy will unite us' (p. 38). From these examples, it is evident that the government's control in the novel functions through the manipulation of public sentiment. The interventionist agenda of deploying military action under the guise of protecting the nation from perceived foreign threats and 'liberat[ing]' foreign citizens from tyranny (p. 78) is integrated into the government's rumour-mongering and influence over the media (pp. 148–49). Its aggressive foreign policy, which is pursued throughout the novel, culminates in the heavy bombing of Loya, the Middle-Eastern country where the perceived threat is located. The destruction here is justified through the government's constant references to some kind of 'sabotage' (pp. 204, 234, 285) of the flood defences. It is stated that the sabotage:

‘has endangered the safety of our nation, and is a clear and present danger’: the airforce, already flying nightly missions, is promising ‘swift, resolute action’; tonight, it is confidently expected, an escalation of the war will be announced, though luckily, it’s happening a long way off. (p. 234)

Attempting to assuage the anger of the people of the Towers and other poor districts, a government spokesperson states that ‘the worst of the floods was over. A full inquiry had been launched into apparent failures of emergency planning, with particular reference to the “alleged” lack of pumps and boats around the Towers in the east’ (p. 148). This is both trivialised and satirically undermined by the report that follows: ‘a bus [...] swept away down river, fifty-three passengers had been drowned’ (p. 149). If ‘satire [...] seeks to undermine precisely those dominant, conventional, or clichéd forms of representation that are based on stirring a reader’s compassion’,⁷⁹ it is easy to perceive this tendency in the often emotionally detached narrative mode that Gee uses to present these tragedies. This particular image — the bus being swept away — articulates the gulf between those who rely on government-controlled public transport to live, and those who have private means of transport, without relying on direct appeals to emotion. Another episode in the novel illustrates this further. When the publisher Delorice visits her sister Viola in the Towers, the water-bus needed to access the building is two hours late. Delorice remarks on the inconvenience — ‘I don’t know how you put up with it’ — and Viola answers, ‘It’s been like this for effing weeks. The effing council have stopped answering the phones. Nothing here works’ (p. 168). This interaction offers an explicit critique of governmental failure in responding to the slow violence of the flooding, and the uneven distribution of its effects across social classes, but it also reveals a critique of the temporal framings of disaster that constrain the daily lives of the Towers’ residents. What should be a routine daily commute for the inhabitants of the Towers becomes a personal risk of life-and-death proportions: food becomes scarce and workers cannot reach their jobs, and must risk death in the hazardous environment, for example taking the now dangerous public transport, to access amenities and resources. As Nixon puts it, people without financial or social leverage in the context of environmental disasters are necessarily ‘hell-bent on survival’, bound by the ‘eternal today’ and therefore unable to plan for any kind of future.⁸⁰ In this novel, then, the inhabitants of the Towers are forced to live via two contradictory experiences of time. They experience the ‘eternal today’ cycle of poverty, as their everyday activities must include going to work, and accessing food and resources.

⁷⁹ Jonathan Greenberg, *Modernism, Satire and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 14.

⁸⁰ Nixon, p. 58.

However, these activities are simultaneously trivial (for example, a commute to work), and life-threatening (the threat of disease, poverty, and death through drowning). Therefore, they experience these supposedly mundane events as traumatic violence, in that the risk involved in these activities is greatly exacerbated by their low status in the social hierarchy. Living in the Towers guarantees its inhabitants a kind of psychological trauma through the pressure exerted by the dual experience of both the everyday temporality, and the violent temporality of survival that is imposed on them by the government's inaction and uneven distribution of wealth and services. Here, the multiple temporalities that Gee reveals through the characters' experiences of time, push back against singular narratives of climate change and related environmental disasters, exposing the limits of both the hegemonic 'time's arrow' and the disaster sensationalist discourses.

Gee's depiction of the immobility of the poorer population also functions as a satirical subversion of the experiences of their wealthy counterparts. Harold and Lottie, for example, decide to take a leisurely trip to the gardens to celebrate the completion of Harold's book. On finding the tube closed due to the flooding, they decide to drive instead, and find that 'the water did not come up to their axels' (p. 105): a phrase that simultaneously indicates their position of privilege in the social hierarchy and their physical distance from the flood waters. This idea is reinforced by frequent references to the triviality of the flooding for wealthier citizens: 'trapped motorists listened to their radios; more rains predicted; demonstrations in the south and east, where the populace claimed they were being neglected, their basements left flooded, their drains left blocked. Business as usual. They sighed and switched off' (p. 81). The significance of the flooding to the inhabitants of the south and east of the city, and its associated violent consequences, is literally transformed by the media into background noise for the rest of the population. Nixon claims that 'because novels about slow violence suffer from a drama deficit, they risk resorting to sentimentality and political moralizing as substitutes for arresting spectacle and narrative tension'.⁸¹ However in *The Flood*, Gee transcends this deficit of drama through her combination of slow violence scenarios and sudden disaster events, which lends the novel the visual power of spectacle without neglecting the quotidian violence of slow disasters. Through its satirical form, too, it evades both Greenberg's 'clichéd forms of representation' and Nixon's 'sentimentality and [...] moralizing' through Gee's juxtaposition of different temporal experiences of the flooding, across different social classes and individuals. In shifting between these different character perspectives, the

⁸¹ Nixon, p. 52.

novel exposes the diversity of temporal experience, counteracting singular discourses on climate change and temporality.

A similar formal approach is taken in Gee's depiction of the government and its participation in different kinds of disaster events. With this strand of the narrative, Gee reveals how the hegemony of media sensationalism, deployed strategically by the government in these instances, actively obscures the slow violence of the flooding. Through President Bliss's sections of the narrative, we learn that the government's redirection of public attention, through lavish and highly visual momentous events such as the Gala and the bombing of foreign countries, obscures the creeping violence associated with the flood waters surrounding poverty-stricken areas. This facet of the novel pre-empts Alaimo's recent statement that contemporary 'visual depictions' of the Anthropocene 'scal[e] up so that human poverty, drought, flooding, or displacement is obscured from sight and the viewer is not implicated, nor is someone potentially affected by climate disasters or slow violence'.⁸²

This deployment of dramatic visual scenes, like the bombing in Loya that is shown on the TV and the explosive celebrations of the Gala, are intended to distract the public and overwrite the continuing violence of the flooding (as discussed in the Cabinet scene on pp. 37–38). However, through the shifting narrative perspective in *The Flood* that moves between characters, their experiences of slow violence are affirmed and sustained throughout the narrative. The government's statements and actions are positioned against the testimonies of inhabitants of the Towers, such as Viola, Kilda, and members of the One Way movement. This contrast exposes the raw and pervasive suffering that is rendered quotidian by the rising floodwaters. An implied lack of adequate nutrition and clean water renders a young mother unable to breastfeed her jaundiced baby, as 'her milk hasn't come' (p. 16), and throughout the latter half of the book, the supposedly water-borne 'flood sickness' (p. 263) arises, eventually killing Franklin, one of Shirley and Leroy's sons. Through the insidious effects of this environmental disaster sweeping the city, Gee emphasises the effects of individual and collective damage arising from slow violence, ones that are intentionally obscured by government interference and manipulation of public sentiment. The flood sickness and failure of the mother's milk epitomises what Neimanis has called 'lived embodiment', that is to say the ways in which environmental alterations and subsequent 'foreign' toxins or bacteria become implicated in our lived bodily existence, and how they therefore possess the power to alter our experiences and perceptions of our own bodies.⁸³ In the example of the breastfeeding mother, the flooding and its permeation of her body changes her ability to fulfil

⁸² Alaimo, 'Your Shell on Acid', p. 99.

⁸³ Neimanis, p. 58.

the stereotypically female responsibility of nurturing her child through her milk, transforming the ways she can participate in her child's care.

The infectious human disease borne from the constant presence of stagnant water exemplifies Alaimo's notion of the dissolve: her recent work has detailed how ocean acidification, accelerated by elevated CO₂ levels, can dissolve the shells of creatures that form an important part of ocean ecologies, thus eliminating food sources and disrupting balanced ecosystems.⁸⁴ Similarly to the gradual acidification eroding the bodily boundaries of these creatures, the diseases spread by the floodwater are relatively slow-developing, and they are results of gradual environmental alterations that are uneven and unpredictable in terms of their timescales and distribution. They are neither 'simply "natural"' effects, nor are they 'managed by human intention'.⁸⁵ A connection can be made here between the acidifying ocean dissolving of the shells of Alaimo's small sea creatures, which exposes the vulnerability of their bodies, and the water-borne disease that permeate the bodily boundaries of the humans in the novel. Counteracting the immediacy of the sensationalist disasters which are represented and critiqued in the text, this drawn-out temporality of disaster goes beyond the practical disruptions of the flooding, such as transport and communications, and attains new levels of disturbance. Similarly to some of the other texts explored in this thesis (Gee's *The Ice People* and Wright's *The Swan Book*, for example), those who suffer the brunt of the negative effects of slow environmental violence are the most vulnerable, and the most physically exposed to the dangers. Predictably, then, in this novel most of those who fall ill with the disease are those who are in the closest proximity to the infected waters: inhabitants of the Towers, the 'poor north-east', the 'south-east reaches down by the river', the 'broken down estates' and the 'refugee centres' (p. 232). Similarly, the slow violence of steadily dwindling food supplies, like the increased proliferation of disease, manifests more severely in the bodies of those with dependents, such as the mother attempting to breastfeed her malnourished child (p. 16). When Alaimo's notion of the dissolve is brought into conversation with the slow violence of the floodwaters, we can perceive how both ocean acidification and the standing floodwaters have the potential to disrupt both large-scale and small-scale ecosystems through eroding bodily boundaries. Further still, this connection emphasises that 'no species is safe, removed, or protected from the biological, chemical and physical alterations of the planet'.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Alaimo, 'Your Shell on Acid', p. 89.

⁸⁵ Alaimo, 'Your Shell on Acid', p. 104.

⁸⁶ Stacy Alaimo, 'The Anthropocene at Sea', in *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, ed. by Ursula K. Heise, Jon Christensen, Michelle Niemann (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 153–62 (p. 156).

Through its apprehension of the potential slow violence of climate change in urban areas, the novel presents a critique that can be applied not only to the Anthropocene as a concept, but also to the 'traditional' linear understanding of time itself that informs scientific temporal framings. As mentioned earlier, Gould's 'time's arrow' describes a typical geo-scientific temporal discourse. However, Gee's emphasis on slow environmental violence and dissolution counteracts the scientific impulse to measure time as a series of sequential events, instead adding significance to imperceptible and miniscule changes and fluctuations — in climate, topography, water, and bodies — which represent a variety of simultaneous, interactive temporalities. As discussed at the beginning of this section, Nixon writes in the introduction to *Slow Violence* that the 'calamitous repercussions' of the phenomenon 'pla[y] out across a range of temporal scales'.⁸⁷ This is a critical point: although the occurrence of flooding in the novel is not necessarily 'slow' relative to the progression of geological time, Gee employs the quotidian and progressively worsening flooding to illustrate the more hidden environmental violence inflicted upon the poorer populations in the novel. *The Flood* is therefore alert to the possibilities of temporalities working against the dominant Anthropocene temporal narrative, recognises the nuanced consequences of smaller, gradual sufferings, and articulates the plight of those who are most at risk from these acts of obscured slow violence.

Disaster Sensationalist Discourse

Thinking about temporality in terms of 'time's arrow' is well established within most contemporary cultures. As Gould writes, 'it is the product of one culture, now spread throughout the world, and especially "successful," at least in numerical and material terms'.⁸⁸ However, the normalisation of this event-based conceptualisation of temporality is now entangled with (and complicated by) the advent of widespread visual media in our contemporary time. These phenomena both reproduce and mutually reinforce each other. In our contemporary world and in *The Flood*, sensationalism is deployed by the media for profit, whether it is disseminated through the context of a genuine environmental disaster, or through the obfuscation of nuance and multiple causalities in order to create what appears to be a singular disaster event. In *The Flood*, a discourse of disaster sensationalism and apocalypse functions to facilitate the transmission of false or exaggerated representations of environmental disaster temporalities. It is employed for both corporate gain through media conglomerates and for political ends, and throughout the text, Gee depicts an increasing public

⁸⁷ Nixon, p. 2.

⁸⁸ Gould, p. 13.

consumption of images of disaster events. In one section of the narrative, two middle-class teenage girls, Lola and Gracie, watch predictions of disaster events through their laptops:

All the exciting stuff was in other cities. Protests in Varna where a massive new dam was said to be threatening the whole coastline. A chunk of the island as big as a city could apparently fall into the sea. Eco-protesters envisaged tidal waves, global disaster, millions drowned [...] the two girls stared riveted, for a moment, at a computer simulation of a tidal wave. Tiny people struggled like ants. Something big and important at last. Something marvellous that would sweep them away and spare them the slow bits of growing up. Something massive, sexual, final. (p. 57)

Gee's choices in wording and imagery here are especially revealing: the reduction of humans to a minute scale and the climactic purging of the earth are invoked to articulate the girls' emotions at viewing this simulated disaster. The image that the girls are mesmerised by is perceived as entertainment, and as a catharsis of their boredom: an apocalyptic and revelatory urge is reflected in this moment as a desirable distraction. The media's propagation of sensationalist discourse here instigates within the girls a sense of intrigue and awe, creating a thrilling rush of excitement which displaces any comprehension of the slow environmental violence taking place all around them. Nixon, in his discussion of Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007), hones in on the displacement of slow violence to postcolonial locations by corporations, a process that is strengthened by neoliberal deregulation. However, Gee relates the obscuring of slow violence to the government's political agendas themselves, and the ways in which the media is indirectly influenced by these agendas, as opposed to concentrating on corporate exploitation of economic systems such as deregulation. In *The Flood*, the 'shadowy economic overlords'⁸⁹ who wreak slow violence in novels like *Animal's People* are less of an explicit danger to the population than the local government itself. The government blames abstract threats — primarily terrorism — for the constant flooding and lack of resources and support provided for people in the Towers (pp. 148–49), and utilises the media's need for public consumption of 'spectacle-driven' representations of disaster for its own ends.⁹⁰ When riots break out in the Towers due to lack of food, resources, power and transport links, the government is 'surprised when there's a little bit of trouble' (p. 170). Subsequent media coverage of the riots (with headlines such as "Violent Riots" and "Towers Mob Rule", p. 170) similarly neglects any discussion of the slow violence experienced by the inhabitants — 'that

⁸⁹ Nixon, p. 53.

⁹⁰ Nixon, p. 11.

wasn't in the papers, was it?' — (p. 170), again privileging violent spectacle at the expense of the slowly degrading environmental conditions suffered by the poorer sectors of society.

The disaster sensationalist discourse present in the novel is, then, at odds with most of the characters' experiences (with the exception of those in the richer districts, who see the flooding as minor inconvenience at worst). It also explicitly seeks to erase their individual and collective narratives of temporality, with disaster sensationalism instead becoming the 'predominan[t] [...] temporal orde[r]'.⁹¹ The inhabitants of the poorer districts of the city are, as discussed in the previous section, bound to different temporalities. The disease is connected to the indeterminate length of time the floods have been stagnant surrounding the city. The city-dwellers are locked in a daily battle for survival, living 'day to day, from hour to hour. Their temporal element is now "o'clock"'.⁹² The intricacy of these simultaneous modes of temporal existence, then, is masked by the government's mutually reinforcing relationship with media spectacles. A climate discourse that might recognise and comprehend the slow violence of the flooding — as well as the drought experienced in the novel's Middle East, the social effects of which are exacerbated by destruction from Western bombing (p. 114) — is pre-emptively displaced by sensationalist discourse. We might also perceive a stronger diffused satirical approach in this strand of the narrative. If a tendency of contemporary satirical novels is towards 'a penchant for exaggeration, extrapolation of present patterns to a more extreme future version',⁹³ we can see the social and environmental inequalities already present in contemporary British society (and indeed global environmental inequalities too) writ large in the speculative future of *The Flood*.

The final section of the novel is at odds with the slow fluctuations of the flooding that occupies most of the narrative until the last pages. In the culmination of the plot, a vast tidal wave sweeps across the city, destroying everything in its path. Although some characters attempt to escape the final apocalyptic moment of the novel, we see through the staccato segments of prose describing the tidal wave (pp. 306–20) that no one is spared. At first reading, this part of the novel can seem like a strange acquiescence to the theatrical (post)apocalyptic images and narratives that populate contemporary Hollywood blockbuster films such as *Deep Impact* (1998), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), or *San Andreas* (2015). The idea of a God who will 'wash' the earth 'clean again' (p. 17) also features in the novel, which connects the tsunami explicitly to the Biblical tale of Noah, the Ark and the Flood. As Sarah Dillon has remarked, 'in contemporary Western discourse, apocalypse and its imagery are

⁹¹ Nixon, p. 61.

⁹² Nixon, p. 58.

⁹³ Hume, p. 305.

frequently applied to political and natural events in order to suggest their cataclysmic, disastrous, or catastrophic nature'.⁹⁴ In cultural as well as political spheres, then, images like these — what Nixon terms the 'illusion of the singular event'⁹⁵ — perpetuate the sequential, event-based temporal order that has reached dominance in Western contemporary life. As we have seen through the previous analysis, they encourage the consuming of dramatic, thrilling images and narratives of disaster whilst obscuring the nuance, slowness and complexity involved in the occurrence of most environmental disasters. The sensationalist discourse therefore propagates the problematic notion that 'the merely material realm of nature follow[s] its own mechanistic principles that [are] entirely separate from human morality and social relations'.⁹⁶ Certain communities (usually ultra-conservative religious ones) do occasionally draw links between natural disasters, human sin and divine retribution, however, the prevalent human versus nature dichotomy is at work in most media and political coverage of such events. The rhetorical separation of the human realm from the causes of environmental disaster in the disaster sensationalist discourse also deprioritises the accumulation of smaller disastrous events or processes which create different temporalities among themselves. It could be surprising, therefore, that Gee chose to end the novel with a momentous and spectacular disaster, after the careful negotiation of multiple more nuanced understandings of climate change temporality. Close analysis reveals, however, that the apocalypse that takes over the final pages of the novel undermines the notion of a singular disaster event. As mentioned earlier, the apocalyptic culmination of the novel has multiple possible causes, and none are explicitly identified as the primary source for the disaster. This actively prevents a linear cause-and-effect temporal framing of the tsunami from being applied to the novel, challenging both the nature and construction of the discourse, and the linearity and inevitability of 'time's arrow'.

Another significant factor which undermines the sensationalist disaster discourse favoured by the government and the media within the novel is Gee's refusal to conclude the narrative within the same teleological plotline. The coda to the novel — the section titled 'After' (p. 321) — follows Winston and Gerda (two children lost to the tsunami) as they pop up in a glasshouse pond, but their story is shifted into the alternate temporality in Kew Gardens, in which the tsunami and flooding did not take place. This elision of the disaster aftermath prevents a sensationalist media discourse from becoming fully realised. Previously in the novel,

⁹⁴ Sarah Dillon, 'Imagining Apocalypse: Maggie Gee's *The Flood*', *Contemporary Literature*, 48 (2007), 374–97 (pp. 375–76).

⁹⁵ Nixon, p. 51.

⁹⁶ Kate Rigby, *Dancing with Disaster: Environmental Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), p. 3.

Gee notes that when the public was in an 'apocalyptic mood' due to the constant rains, there was 'lots of tabloid coverage' (p. 151) of sensationalist disasters such as the potentially dangerous outcomes of impending planetary line up (p. 150). Davey Lucas, the TV astronomer, is set to host a two hour TV show on the night of the planetary line-up, entitled 'The End of the World Spectacular' (p. 82). Even though Davey acknowledges that the production company is targeting 'treble their usual' audience ratings (p. 82), and showing 'computer simulations' of 'repercussions [that] could be cataclysmic' (p. 82), he recognises the superficiality of his 'world that prefer[s] entertainment' (p. 83) whilst he 'believ[es] in truth, and accuracy' (p. 83). Gee's acknowledgement of the power of visual media in its capacity to displace truth in favour of theatricality and entertainment renders her choice of ending even more significant.

Disconnecting the narrative with the final segment of the novel, Gee undermines the hegemonic power of the sensationalist discourse of disaster temporality, refusing linear progression in both structure and content. Here, Gee addresses both the capitalist framework that exploits disaster sensationalist temporalities for financial gain, and the governing structures that encourage the privileging of this particular temporal discourse in order to maintain control and manipulate public sentiment. Through her dual emphasis on the effects of slow violence and on the effects of privileging a disaster sensationalist discourse, the novel depicts a kind of temporal paralysis similar to the one exhibited in our contemporary time. The emphasis on the present within the disaster sensationalist discourse prevents recognition of past behaviour that may have contributed to the disaster, and therefore inhibits the development of infrastructure that may reduce the risk, or lessen the impacts, of future disasters. Gee's novel demonstrates the existence of multiple temporal frameworks through which to consider environmental degradation, rather than a singular irreversible arrow of linear teleology, yet within the novel (as in many contemporary responses to environmental disaster) we are shown the material effects of privileging the singularity, immediacy and visual power of sensationalist discourses. Measures are not taken by the government to address the inequalities exacerbated by the disasters, due to the obfuscation of complex and slow processes. The possibilities of temporal multiplicity (Harold's novel and Kilda's visions, for example) are curtailed. The narrative of the novel outlines the possibility for alternative perspectives on time and environmental disaster, whilst exposing the threat of interventionist governments and their attempts to obscure social inequality in a time of rapid environmental and societal change. It also registers the inherent myopia within dominant discourses on climate change, and temporality.

Sarah Dillon writes that ‘the story of *The Flood* is told from a temporal location after the end of the world’.⁹⁷ It is true that in the beginning segment of the novel, titled ‘Before’, an omniscient narrator speaks of ‘how it happened’ (p. 7), referencing the ‘the waters that have covered the earth’ (p. 7). However, instead of simply looking backwards over the rest of the novel, or coming from a time after (or before) the apocalypse, I would argue that the narration comes from a point outside of time itself. In a telling excerpt, the narrator states, ‘if time is an endless unspooling ribbon, the living see only the short bright section to which they cling, panting, struggling, peering out, blinded, from the spot-lit moment’ (p. 9). The significance of this quotation lies in both its commentary on human myopia, and in its sense of perspective. Viewing ‘time’ as a ‘ribbon’ from an outside perspective requires the narrator to speak from an atemporal location, somewhere outside the ribbon, from a place in which all of human time is seen to simultaneously exist, all at once. This conclusion is supported by the fact that Gee’s ‘After’ section occurs in the alternative temporality where the flooding and tsunami never occurred at all. This refutes the teleological narrative structure implied by the use of the ‘Before’ and ‘After’ sections of the novel. Susan Watkins has touched on this idea of ‘time outside time’ within *The Flood*,⁹⁸ but does not investigate the significant implications of this atemporal perspective in detail. Explicitly noting that living people can only see the ‘short bright section to which they cling’ (p. 9), Gee allows the narrator to speak from a nonhuman perspective, one that permits a view of all possible temporalities and temporal locations, something that the characters in the novels cannot achieve. This temporal framing at once emphasises the fallacy of subscribing to one particular temporal discourse, and — most importantly — the inability to see beyond the ‘section’ that they inhabit. Drawing this quotation into conversation with the Anthropocene, then, might suggest that the division of temporality into linear sections, with the most important section viewed as the one that humans inhabit, is short-sighted and one-dimensional. As Head has remarked, ‘the linear view of history [...] is embedded within the dominant modes of visual representation—timelines and stratigraphic diagrams’.⁹⁹ Gee explicitly undermines these inflexible images with another, more mutable figuration of temporality in her use of the ‘ribbon’. The parts of the narrative that deal with astronomy and space-time, too, serve to exaggerate the insufficiency of these one-dimensional and myopic perspectives. Dillon has emphasised the somewhat circular structure of the novel,¹⁰⁰ which is supported by a quotation in a final fragment of Chapter Eighteen:

⁹⁷ Dillon, p. 377.

⁹⁸ Susan Watkins, ‘Future Shock: Rewriting the Apocalypse in Contemporary Women’s Fiction’, *LIT*, 23 (2012), 119–37 (p. 135).

⁹⁹ Head, ‘Contingencies of the Anthropocene’, p. 116.

¹⁰⁰ Dillon, p. 397.

one last white curve would complete love's circle
 the future bending to find the past
 life from the end to the beginning (p. 320)

I would suggest that this temporal structure, when positioned alongside the temporal ribbon image, the disrupted ending of the novel, and Harold and Kilda's notion of the honeycomb of infinite time, formally registers the multiple temporalities that are referenced throughout the novel. By consistently resisting the possibility of singular, linear teleological time by offering a series of different perspectives on temporality and disaster, *The Flood* articulates the fundamental failures within contemporary discourses on climate change temporality: primarily, their emphasis on a single, linear narrative. Undermining the notion that there is a finite scientific 'time' that must serve as a singular epistemological framework during times of climate crisis, the novel reveals a reality of multiple onto-epistemologies of disaster temporality. As Ghosh has recently pointed out, an essential quality for fiction dealing with climate change is 'to imagine other forms of human existence'. This, he writes, 'is exactly the challenge that is posed by the climate crisis'.¹⁰¹ *The Flood* — through its representation of multiple temporalities of climate change — works towards this necessary imagination. This multiplicity is essential for acknowledging nonhuman temporalities, critiquing the problematic implications of discourses of deep time, apprehending slow environmental violence, and disrupting sensationalist media discourses of disaster temporality. Notions of temporal multiplicity are also addressed in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006). As I explore in the rest of this chapter, *Carpentaria's* centralising of an Indigenous temporal perspective carves out a larger space for resistance against oppressive discourses on these matters, and articulates understandings of climate change, disaster and temporality that exceed and transcend the notions of time grounded in Western scientific discourse.

¹⁰¹ Ghosh, p. 128.

Carpentaria (2006)*Carpentaria* and the Critical Climate

The presentation of the Miles Franklin award to Alexis Wright for her novel *Carpentaria* in 2007 came at a time of heightened tensions between the Australian government and Indigenous Australians. In the light of a report into child abuse in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, the Australian government launched a controversial set of measures that eventually became known as ‘The Intervention’. This included a series of changes to welfare payments, additional deployment of police and military personnel, bans on liquor and pornography, and alterations to native title land ownership.¹ The Intervention targeted Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory due to the region’s lack of legislation that would normally prevent federal interference in territory matters. In addition to its initial material repercussions, many commentators have described the Intervention as a neoliberal project, intended to promote the assimilation of Indigenous Australians into a Western way of life.² Although the Intervention initially garnered bipartisan political support, along with the support of some Indigenous activists and politicians, its implementation has since been widely criticised by members of the UN Commission on Human Rights, as well as by countless inquiries and investigations since its introduction.³ In *The Intervention: An Anthology* (2016), Rosie Scott and Georgina Gartland have emphasised the lack of consultation with Indigenous people in the years before the Intervention was implemented, as well as the manipulation and misrepresentation of the initial report’s findings in the media, including mentions of paedophile rings that have since been widely discredited (and for which an apology has not been given).⁴

Wright voiced her views on the Intervention on national Australian radio the day after accepting her award for *Carpentaria*, lamenting the government’s failure to take into account the recommendations and testimonies of Aboriginal communities that were given in past meetings and criticising the establishment’s ‘sledgehammer approach’ to social issues within those communities.⁵ As an activist for Indigenous rights (and having written in 1997 a non-

¹ Rosie Scott and Georgina Gartland, ‘Preface to New Edition’, in *The Intervention: An Anthology*, ed. by Rosie Scott and Anita Heiss (Sydney: New South, 2016), pp. ix–xvii (p. x).

² Martin Renes, ‘Dreamtime Narrative and Postcolonisation: Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria* as an Antidote to the Discourse of Intervention’, *Journal of the European Association of Studies on Australia*, 2.1 (2011), 102–22 (p. 111).

³ Scott and Gartland, p. xi–xiii.

⁴ Scott and Gartland, p. x.

⁵ ‘*Carpentaria* author unimpressed by NT action’, *AM*, ABC Radio, 22 June 2007, <<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2007/s1958781.htm>> [accessed 24 January 2018].

fiction book named *Grog Wars* that documented the plight of Indigenous Australian communities affected with high rates of alcoholism), Wright's political views are well-known. Her timely speech criticising the absence of forethought, planning and consultation in the deployment of the Intervention becomes even more poignant when set alongside *Carpentaria*. Her apprehension over the intrusion of the government and big industries into Aboriginal lives and communities is discernible in the novel's satirical style. Through a consideration of Indigenous and Western temporal frameworks, it is these threats of intrusion, disruption and the erosion of Indigenous agency (in the context of climate change and environmental degradation) that I will emphasise in my analysis of *Carpentaria*.

Much of the published criticism on *Carpentaria* over the last decade falls into one of three categories. Alison Ravenscroft has noted that 'white critical efforts to make meaning of Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* have sought to anchor it to the big names among white Australian novelists'.⁶ Following this, the first category of criticism comprises attempts to situate *Carpentaria* within the white mainstream Australian literary tradition, by identifying shared traits with other popular Australian literary works,⁷ even though Wright herself has explicitly expressed her lack of interest in — and sense of disconnection from — many of these writers.⁸ Secondly, critics attempt to relate the novel to Western critical theories and genres, for example the carnivalesque, Foucault's heterotopia, and most commonly, magical realism, in ways that often seem reductive or inappropriate in relation to the scope and complexity of the novel.⁹ In the third category, the critic recognises the novel's detachment from the genealogy of a predominantly white Australian literary tradition, and addresses the problems entailed in trying to classify or define the novel in Western terms.¹⁰ Even in this third category, which has

⁶ Alison Ravenscroft, 'Dreaming of Others', p. 194.

⁷ For examples of this mode of criticism, see Frances Devlin-Glass, 'Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*', *Antipodes*, 21 (2007), 82–84; Ng, 'Translocal Temporalities in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*'; Jane Sullivan, 'From Here to Carpentaria', *The Age Online*, 9 September 2006 <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/books/from-here-to-carpentaria/2006/09/08/1157222309164.html>>, [accessed 26 January 2018] (para. 17, 34 of 35); Renes, pp. 107–09.

⁸ Ravenscroft, 'Dreaming of Others', p. 205.

⁹ See Diane Molloy, 'Finding Hope in the Stories: Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* and the Carnivalesque Search for a New Order', *Journal for the Association of the Study of Australian Literature*, 12.3 (2012), <<https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/view/9836>> [accessed 26 January 2018]; Demelza Hall, 'The Isle of Refuse in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*: Reconstituting Heterotopic Space', *Southerly*, 72.3 (2012), 1–13; Ben Holgate, 'Unsettling Narratives: Re-evaluating Magical Realism as Postcolonial Discourse through Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* and *The Swan Book*', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 51 (2015), 634–47; and Ng, 'Translocal Temporalities in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*'.

¹⁰ See Alison Ravenscroft, 'Dreaming of Others'; Kate Rigby, 'The Poetics of Decolonization'.

rightly scrutinised the politics of critically attending to Indigenous texts like *Carpentaria*, close textual engagement with the novel's form, language and style — where attempted — is not sustained or detailed. Events in the novel are usually only referenced, rather than explored in-depth, in order to provide an example to support the more contextual focus of the article or chapter in question. Direct quotations from the text are often used sparingly, mainly to illustrate overarching points. This is especially surprising due to the complexity and richness of the language, style, and formal organisation of the novel.

In the following discussion, I situate my critical position as a departure from the critical trends described above. My analysis here is primarily concerned with Wright's engagement with, and criticism of, discourses of temporality and climate change in *Carpentaria*. I examine the novel through three separate points of interest: firstly, diverging from most recent criticism, I pay close attention to *Carpentaria's* narrative form, addressing the anti-linear organisation of the novel in terms of its overarching structure, formal arrangement, and style. I also address the tendency in previous criticism to ascribe the novel to a 'magical realist' tradition. Secondly, positioning my critique alongside my earlier discussion of the Anthropocene, I address Wright's representation of Indigenous understandings of time, and the novel's recognition of the connections between geology, topography and ancestry. By demonstrating the way in which narratives of time and climate change are challenged through these three aspects of the novel, the remainder of this chapter seeks to amplify *Carpentaria's* perspectives on climate change temporality.

Alison Ravenscroft has rightly warned against treating *Carpentaria* as a mine of information from which Aboriginal knowledge can be extracted, and against translating complex Indigenous concepts into white Western epistemological frameworks.¹¹ An academic engagement with this text should not attempt to fill a gap in Western understandings of Indigenous culture, or suggest that Indigenous epistemologies should offer ways to correct the damage inflicted by settler colonialism 'as if those we have conquered should now save us'.¹² However, Indigenous perspectives cannot be excluded from the global conversation on climate change and environmental damage, precisely because the survival of their culture and relationships with their country are increasingly at risk.¹³ It is for this reason that an analysis of

¹¹ Ravenscroft, 'Dreaming of Others', pp. 198, 214.

¹² Deborah Bird Rose, *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004), p. 2.

¹³ The term 'country' is a significant one for many Indigenous Australians: although the meaning can vary across communities and between individuals, country broadly refers to the multi-faceted relationships between the land and its human and nonhuman occupants. Country can therefore refer to a person's homeland and their strong traditional connection to

Carpentaria is essential within the parameters of this thesis. To apply multiple Indigenous theories originating from other countries to the novel would also be to imply a homogenous, global Indigenous perspective on temporality. Alongside other scholarship, throughout the following discussion I pay close attention to Wright's own commentary on the novel and her concerns surrounding Indigenous politics and environmental issues in Australia, as she is one of the few Waanyi voices speaking about *Carpentaria* in a critical context, and, most importantly, she has been explicit about her usage of an Indigenous Australian temporality in the novel. Although Wright's comments must not be elevated into a position of absolute truth, her thoughts and intentions regarding *Carpentaria* must remain integral to any interpretation of the text. Via a feminist ecocritical approach, I focus here on facets of the novel that engage with the global problems threatening Indigenous survival, in terms of the continuation of Aboriginal cultures, communities and epistemologies. Rather than identifying what I might perceive as feminist ecocritical commentary in the novel — which would be to both approach *Carpentaria* with a specific agenda, and impose a particular reading upon it — I use feminist ecocriticism's roots in environmental activism, and its concerns with the intersections of race, colonialism and gender in order to guide my analysis and reveal deeper connections between the text and the wider global problems gestured towards in the novel.

Following Wright's notion of 'all times', Lynda Ng has described *Carpentaria* as 'a novel that confronts Western assumptions about temporality',¹⁴ and discusses its use of what she calls 'collapsed time'.¹⁵ Wright has used the alternative phrase 'collapsed history'¹⁶ to describe a specifically Indigenous mode of storytelling. Closely related to the idea of 'all times' existing simultaneously, 'collapsed history' is a temporal perspective through which the psychological and material distances between historical events are eliminated; instead, the past is represented as an agential power capable of transforming the present (and vice versa). The

that space, it can be constitutive of individual and community identities, and of relationships with nonhumans. As Revell and others explain, 'the individual is born to Country, not just in Country, but also from Country'. See Grant Revell and others, 'Enough is Enough: Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Living Heritage and the (Re)Shaping of Built Environment Design Education in Australia', in *The Handbook of Contemporary Indigenous Architecture*, ed. by Elizabeth Grant and others (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2018), pp. 465–94 (p. 472). In *Carpentaria*, and later in *The Swan Book* (2013), Wright depicts country as be an agential, reciprocal, and creative phenomenon.

¹⁴ Ng, p. 109.

¹⁵ Ng, p. 121. It appears that the term 'collapsed time' is a misquotation from Kelly O'Brien's interview with Wright (Kelly O'Brien, 'Alexis Wright Interview', *Hecate*, 33 (2007), 215–19) as neither Wright nor the interviewer use this particular phrase according to the interview transcript. Wright does, however, use the term 'collapsed history' in 'A Family Document', p. 239.

¹⁶ Wright, 'A Family Document', p. 239.

simultaneity of ‘all times’ and the creative agency of ‘collapsed history’ feed into the overarching temporality of the novel, which, following Ng, I will refer to hereafter as a ‘collapsed time’ framework. Ultimately, *Carpentaria* articulates the complexities of climate change through its attention to the temporality of environmental damage and changing weather patterns, and challenges normative Western temporal discourses, decentring what Mark Rifkin has named ‘dominant settler reckonings of time’.¹⁷ Wright embeds Indigenous temporalities in the novel’s temporal frameworks and narrative trajectories, upholding their intrinsic importance ‘beyond their incorporation or translation into settler frames of reference’.¹⁸ In the following sections of this chapter, I navigate the tensions between imposed colonial and Indigenous temporalities, arguing that the novel interrogates and disrupts the fundamental epistemology behind Western framings of time (for example, teleological Anthropocene discourse) in the context of climate change. Wright simultaneously articulates the possibilities of upholding Indigenous notions of temporality in a climate-changing world, whilst registering the threat and damage inflicted on Indigenous peoples and cultures by ongoing settler colonialism, forced assimilation, and an exploitative capitalist approach to natural resources that accelerates environmental damage and climate change. *Carpentaria* sustains a unique temporality of climate change through its non-linear form, narrative voice and style: a temporality that is not solely confined to scientific logic or notions of teleological time. While it engages with the threats to Indigenous culture and survival, its unique temporal perspective also ensures the continuation of Indigenous agency through its refusal to conform to the very colonial and capitalist notions of linear progress that fostered industrialisation, resource exploitation, and ultimately climate change.

‘The Power of Words at Work’: Style, Form, and Narrative Time *

Carpentaria’s form encodes a narrative of temporality that derives from Wright’s active participation in Indigenous rights matters and her Indigenous community, but also from her intention to ‘portray the world of Indigenous Australia as being in constant opposition between different spaces of time’.¹⁹ Her recognition that this conceptualisation of time must entail ‘the resilience of ancient beliefs overlaying the inherited colonial experience’ provides a productive starting point for the following discussion.²⁰

¹⁷ Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), p. vii.

¹⁸ Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, p. ix.

* Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria* (Artarmon: Giramondo, 2007), p. 88. All further page references to this work will be given in parentheses after the quotation in the text.

¹⁹ Wright, ‘On Writing *Carpentaria*’, p. 5.

²⁰ Wright, ‘On Writing *Carpentaria*’, p. 5.

Carpentaria has been described as ‘difficult stylistically’.²¹ Much is made of its ability to confound readers, in part due to Wright’s rejection of a linear plot and narrative teleology.²² Accordingly, the content of the chapters do not follow on from one another in adherence to a particular timeline, and instead reflect different moments or events in rich and complex detail, or explore a particular character’s abstract motivations alongside their actions. This structural organisation prevents the text from being ‘contained in a capsule that [is] either time or incident specific’, a kind of limitation that Wright wanted to avoid whilst writing it.²³ Her statement also articulates how the novel rejects the rigidity and confines of a linear temporal frame marked by sequential events, or in other words, the chronology of Gould’s ‘arrow’ of time. In accordance with the overarching structure of the novel, Wright’s language also often rejects a teleological communication of the events or topics being explored. Instead, *Carpentaria* integrates disembodied or collective voices in italics that ask questions or comment on the goings on in the novel, and uses staccato sentences to build overlapping, contradictory narrative perspectives. Across the duration of the text, these collective voices appear to represent — at different times — the views of the Uptown folk (the white population of the town of Desperance), the Pricklebush people (the Indigenous inhabitants of the town), Australian society as a whole, and the voices of powerful structures or institutions. A few examples from the novel illustrates the efficacy and mutability of this stylistic decision. For example, in Chapter One, the reader is informed that:

The descendants of the pioneer families, who claimed ownership of the town, said *the Aboriginal was really not part of the town at all. [...] Furthermore, they said, the Aboriginal was dumped here by the pastoralists [...] Right on the edge of somebody else’s town, didn’t they?* (p. 4)

This articulates a rewriting of Aboriginal history by the white population of the town, and reflects on the erasure of Indigenous agency and Indigenous relationships with the land that have informed their culture for thousands of years. Here, the Indigenous Australians of Desperance are instead ‘liv[ing] in a human dumping ground next to the town tip’ (p. 4), and are described as a ‘foreign infestation’ (p. 4). In a manifestation of Wright’s characteristic satire, the voices represented here reveal the irony of using the concept of a ‘foreign infestation’ to refer to Indigenous people under ongoing colonial practices. At other times,

²¹ Jane Perlez, ‘Aboriginal Lit’, *NY Times Online*, 8 November 2007 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/18/books/review/Perlez-t.html>>, [accessed 6 February 2018] (para. 1 of 14).

²² See Ian Syson, ‘Uncertain Magic’, *Overland*, 187 (2007), 85–86.

²³ Wright, ‘On Writing *Carpentaria*’, p. 3.

however, the dialogue in italics articulates the plight of the Pricklebush inhabitants, which writes over and contradicts the words of the Uptown population. In the following extract, the Aboriginal elders, or 'old people' (p. 204), reaffirm their own sense of Indigenous history and technology. They state:

Just because it was widely recognised that the white man invented aeroplanes and the black person was believed not to have had aeroplanes [...] *Trust your intuition and of course you will see Aboriginal people flying themselves around and no reported crashes yet.*

They said Will's scar came from such a battle that took place in the skies with sea eagle spirits over the Gulf sea, long before he was born. (p. 204)

Linking Will's birthmark to an Aboriginal notion of time that encapsulates narratives of creation and history transcends the temporal gulf between Will's birth and the air battle that the elders describe. This reinforces the connection between the body, the country, and notions of time that resist white history's overwriting of Aboriginal narratives. This particular example of Wright's use of the collective voice reflects her efforts to write *Carpentaria* 'as a traditional long story of our times [...] reminiscent of the style of oral storytelling that a lot of Indigenous people would find familiar'.²⁴ The weaving of the narrative in this imagined collaboration of voices precludes a unified narrative standpoint, disallows a fixed readerly perspective, and also challenges colonial histories and legacies.

Stylistic choices like these may be the reason for one reviewer's declaration that Wright is 'more concerned with the pyrotechnics that explode out of her storyline' and with 'weav[ing] dreamscapes out of conflict and love and desire' than with 'generat[ing] a plot'.²⁵ This comment both assumes that Wright's de-prioritisation of a linear plotline is in some way deficient, and also suggests that there is a disorderly chaos inherent in the text (which presumes a universal readerly experience of what a 'plot' might mean). Perceiving difficulty in the novel's arrangement because of the absence of a traditional linear plot can both steer critical attention away from the formal intricacies of the text, and discourage exploration of the purpose and effects of these literary devices. Wright has been explicit in her movement away from Australian literary traditions with the novel, stating clearly that 'there probably isn't much Australian writing I identify with'.²⁶ She also emphasises the variety and diversity of

²⁴ Wright, 'On Writing *Carpentaria*', p.2.

²⁵ Syson, p. 85.

²⁶ Alison Ravenscroft, 'Politics of Exposure: An Interview with Alexis Wright', *Meridian*, 17.1 (1998), 74–80 (p. 77).

literary influences that she has taken inspiration from throughout her life: ‘the greater influence on my own writing has been other Indigenous writers — South American writers, Africans, Irish writers, Maoris’.²⁷ I argue that Wright does not ‘insis[t] on an independent Aboriginal configuration while adapting Western form and content to Indigenous needs and interests’,²⁸ as one critic writes. Instead, *Carpentaria* reflects and refracts a rich array of cultural and literary influences (primarily Indigenous ones) in the complexity of its form, style, and structure, which reveals the critical fallacy in positioning the text solely in its relation to white Australian literary tropes and critical trends. Wright’s strong belief in Aboriginal agency and self-determination extends to her conviction that Aboriginal Australians should ‘choose their own voices’, and ‘write their work as they see fit’.²⁹

This aspect of Wright’s literary practice also foregrounds *Carpentaria*’s satirical mode. The novel uses both ‘oppositonality’ within its form and content, in the sense that it clearly works against the institutionalisation of white Western literature and its tropes, and also ‘referentiality’, which provides a ‘localized cultural grounding’ for the basis of the novel, through which ‘specific local or national contexts and subjects for writing are privileged’.³⁰ Whilst I would argue that there are elements of ‘writing back’ in *Carpentaria* (not least through its title, which some have hypothesised to be an ironic reference to Xavier Herbert’s *Capricornia*),³¹ I also propose that Wright moves beyond a solely reactive satire. John Clement Ball writes that in postcolonial satirical novels, ‘the postcolonial writer uses the colonizer’s language to oppose the hegemony of imperial and neocolonial power’.³² In *Carpentaria*, however, Wright often rejects the coloniser’s language altogether. She integrates Waanyi words and phrases into the text, frequently interweaving these through the dialogue and sometimes leaving them untranslated altogether: for example, references to ‘*maranguji men*’ (p. 122) and phrases such as ‘*binjuna Malbu kuluwulugu*’ (p. 153) and ‘*Wangabiya dandaayana*’ (p. 291) are left unexplained to those who do not speak Waanyi. As she attests, ‘the way I write, and the way I speak, come from a particular region, from my traditional land in the Gulf of Carpentaria’.³³ Both her style and her use of language, then, are inherently Waanyi. Her use of Waanyi language and storytelling form strengthens her critical position as a writer, allowing her to reject the customs, traditions and occasionally the language of Western

²⁷ Ravenscroft, ‘Politics of Exposure’, p. 77. See also Alexis Wright, ‘Politics of Writing’, *Southerly*, 62.2 (2002), 10–20 (pp. 11–12).

²⁸ Renes, p. 108.

²⁹ Ravenscroft, ‘Politics of Exposure’, p. 76.

³⁰ John Clement Ball, *Satire and the Postcolonial Novel* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 2.

³¹ Ng, p. 114; Ravenscroft, ‘Dreaming of Others’, p. 218.

³² Ball, p. 2.

³³ Ravenscroft, ‘Politics of Exposure’, p. 76.

literary tradition. This approach serves to sharpen the satirical eye that critiques oppressive climate discourse in the novel.

The ‘magic’ within magic realism, when used in critical analysis of *Carpentaria*, is deployed to describe notions of dreaming or unconsciousness, and Dreamtime: a term invented by anthropologists in order to give a name to the complex systems of Aboriginal beliefs and traditions that form their understanding of their country and how it came into existence.³⁴ The association between magic and Dreamtime comes with its own set of problems: the first of which is that within this narrative, Indigenous people are perceived to exist apart from historical time, and therefore their historical (and continuing) struggles against and suffering under white colonialism are removed from history. This association also entails a reinforcement of racist tropes that associate Indigenous people with primitivism and prehistoricism. There are similar problems with critics’ persistent use of the word ‘myth’ to refer to Aboriginal narratives of creation.³⁵ Wright has used the word ‘myth’ herself when describing narratives of different cultural origins,³⁶ but using the term when approaching the text from a critical perspective transforms the power dynamics at play. For example, when the word is used interchangeably in the same paragraph to describe both Indigenous narratives of creation, and a ‘Victorian myth’ that suggested ‘indigenous Australians represented an earlier form of mankind’,³⁷ it becomes evident that a different critical vocabulary is required in order to prevent the word from becoming synonymous with ‘untruth’. Therefore, throughout this chapter I refer to ‘narratives’ rather than ‘myths’ of Indigenous creation and ways of living, taking my lead from the novel, which asserts the relativity of narratives of temporal truth and reality whilst exploring the flaws and inconsistencies within them. It is clear that accepted distinctions and associations between myth/magic and truth/reality must be critically rejected in order to reject the latent colonialism that maintains the value-hierarchy of these concepts. *Carpentaria* thinks beyond these terms, and allows for the existence of multiple simultaneous narratives of time, in a similar way to *The Flood*.

This is perceptible throughout the novel in its interweaving of notions of Dreamtime, time measured by clocks and devices, and ancient geological time: all of these conceptualisations of time feature alongside each other. This is perhaps best illustrated in the

³⁴ Ravenscroft, ‘Dreaming of Others’, p. 197. See my earlier note on ‘Dreamtime’ in the introduction to this chapter for a justification of my use of this term.

³⁵ See Renes, p. 103, p. 113, p. 115; Ng, p. 121.

³⁶ Alexis Wright, ‘On the Question of Fear’, in *Tolerance, Prejudice and Fear: Sydney Pen Voices, the 3 Writers Project*, ed. by Gideon Haigh, Cristos Tsiolkas and Alexis Wright (Crows Nest, Victoria: Allen & Unwin, 2008), pp. 129–69 (p. 138); O’Brien, ‘Alexis Wright Interview’, p. 216.

³⁷ Ng, p. 121.

scene in which Will, who is the son of Normal Phantom (a Pricklebush elder), returns to Desperance after years travelling Australia along the song-lines³⁸ in a convoy with Mozzie Fishman, another Indigenous man who wants to ‘change the world order’ (p. 408). We learn that ‘time was a fleeting whisper for Will sitting on the edge of the lagoon that had been carved by an eternity of rushing floodwaters inside the remains of a forest that lived a million years ago’ (p. 164), but simultaneously, Wright states that ‘Will, who had spent too long following the illusions of the Dreamtime, was thrown back into the real world, where men became clowns and clowns men, which was another string of illusions altogether’ (p. 165). It’s evident from these examples that Will’s comprehension of time is informed by both ancient weather and climatic events — a ‘thudding of ancestral footsteps [...] pounding loudly in his head’ (p. 164) — and by the ‘real world’. These temporal frameworks are — according to the narrator — all equally illusory, but no less significant or tangible. In this multi-faceted existence, then, a temporal ‘reality’ is relative to the perspective of the subject, and no particular narrative is seen as more ‘real’ or ‘true’ than another. As Kyle Whyte argues, ‘anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change is an intensification of environmental change imposed on Indigenous peoples by colonialism’, and the collapsing of time depicted here exposes the inherent connections between past colonial (and environmental) atrocities, and climate change.³⁹ In refusing a dichotomy between the concept of reality and myth, *Carpentaria* refuses the very binary of this colonial logic itself, insisting on mutable and shifting perceptions of reality that incorporate knowledge and narratives from many different cultures and refusing to privilege a particular viewpoint.⁴⁰

As well as recognising Wright’s refusal to privilege specific understandings of time in *Carpentaria*, it is also imperative to examine the Indigenous temporal framings that shape the novel. These work consistently against a linear narrative chronology that would move further away from Aboriginal histories, rendering them increasingly unreachable in the distant past. Wright registers the tension between linear teleology and Aboriginal temporality, and

³⁸ According to Indigenous scholars Len Collard and Grant Revell, a song-line or Dreaming cycle is ‘a ceremonial, trade, and social route through the Country. For Indigenous Australians, Australia is crisscrossed with such tracks that deliberate and create relational landscape through story, song, and dance’. Len Collard and Grant Revell, ‘Wedjemup Wangkiny Koora, Yeye and Mila Boorda (Wedjemup Talking from the Past, Today, and the Future): An Ex-Modern Way of Thinking and Mapping Landscape into Country?’ in *Cultural Mapping as Cultural Enquiry*, ed. by Nancy Duxbury, W.F. Garrett-Petts, David MacLennan (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 119–36 (p. 135).

³⁹ Kyle Whyte, ‘Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene’, *English Language Notes*, 55 (2017), 153–62 (p. 153).

⁴⁰ For more discussion on dualisms, binaries and the logic of colonisation, see Val Plumwood, ‘Dualism: The Logic of Colonisation’, in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 41–68.

emphasises the violence of Will's dual inhabitation of the 'real world' illusions and those of the Dreamtime. It is the 'collapsed time' of Wright's Waanyi temporality, however, that drives both the plot and the structure of the novel, rendering ancient events and narratives as relevant to Desperance's modern day Aboriginal population as they would have been to the early ancestors of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the town. This is evident in the way Wright moves the plot across different events and points in time, and describes them in the same fashion as other parts of the plot that appear to be occurring in the present day. This exemplifies Wright's refusal to adhere to a specific viewpoint that moves chronologically through the novel, but also ensures that events in the distant past directly influence the outcomes of the events of the novel.

This is perhaps best demonstrated by one of the later scenes in the novel that follows Normal Phantom on his journey to bury his friend Elias Smith — who was murdered by a mining corporation — at sea. Following the Dreamtime tracks of groper fish (p. 249) and navigating across the Gulf of Carpentaria to an 'ancient reef crater of a sea palace, a circular fish city full of underground caves' (p. 249), Norm slips Elias's body into the sea (p. 253), returning his body to the 'abyss' that the fish 'could have returned to from the land in ancient times like the palaeontologists say, or skies if they flew like the elders say in the Law of the Dreamtime. Millions of years ago, what was it like? Remember!' (p. 249–50). Here, it is clear that Norm's understanding of this sacred place is not only informed by evolutionary narratives of time, but also the Dreamtime narratives that imagine the animals taking a different temporal path to their current home in the sea. As Norm gazes into the sea:

He saw the abyss that descended down the many levels of a Mesozoic bluff. The deep hole could have been the result of a Dreamtime volcano, or a meteorite the size of a mountain, or a city that had sunk deep down into the earth. (p. 257)

Norm's vision of this space is layered, then, across different temporalities and across different framings of temporalities, for example in the juxtaposition of the 'Mesozoic' and 'Dreamtime'. He views these frameworks and times as existing simultaneously, in the same image and visible in his own present day. The narrator, appearing as a voice prompting Norm to connect with different times, encourages a psychological connection with the distant past, ensuring that the country of 'millions of years ago' is fixed in the minds of those who inhabit the land in the present. Knowledge and recognition of this sacred 'circular fish city' in the sea represent a constant revisiting and remembrance of ancient times, a temporal state that can be inhabited psychologically by the Indigenous characters like Norm.

Significantly, in reaching this place and navigating himself across the sea, Norm is guided by a sense of time that is informed by 'the time when the migratory birds were coming back to the coastline of the Gulf' (p. 259). Norm knows that the birds are:

Travelling along a special route made from the evaporation left by the heat in the cooling atmosphere made by the trail made by the big fish on their journeys into the sky world of summer [...]. Then when the heavy rains finally stopped and the waters became calmer the following year, the big fish would return, as was the natural cycle of things. (p. 259)

This Indigenous notion of time, then, is also informed by the climate and its associated patterns, particularly in relation to the migration and movement of animals, their absences and reappearances, and the ways in which their histories have shaped Norm's own time, which Wright refers to as his 'spectacular clock' (p. 259). However, on this occasion, Norm's expectations of the weather and behaviour of the fish are not realised. After he buries Elias at sea, an unyielding mist descends upon Norm's boat and fish refuse to bite his line. A storm follows, instigated by the 'dark shadow of the sea lady' (p. 261), which one critic has interpreted as a representation of the Waanyi narrative of the *Mararabarna*, or women sea spirits, whose powerful sexuality allows them to control men.⁴¹

Wright describes the storm in terms of the sea lady clasp and taunting Norm (pp. 261–66), until he becomes disoriented. Norm recognises that 'the winds were coming from two directions now — south-east and north-west, colliding in squalls, after the mists had long ago been blown apart' (p. 263), and 'the victorious north-west winds, still crazed into conquering the seasonal change, blew the heavy rain in horizontal lashings that blistered through the sea' (p. 266). The victorious north-west winds that 'conquer' the 'seasonal change' (p. 266) describe an unpredictable and unusual diversion from normal patterns, implying a climatic shift. As this occurs, Norm becomes unable to direct his journey or make sense of time and its passing. The storm forces him into a 'state of wakeful consciousness sifting and sorting time, place and current' (p. 255) and his usual methods of orienting himself — for example, through bird or fish song-lines (p. 259) — fail. His internal metaphysical 'spectacular clock', which indicates the depth and intricacy of his knowledge, cannot help him during this storm. He unintentionally enters sacred areas of the sea that are forbidden (pp. 267–68), trespassing against his own history and traditions. Here, there is a suggestion that conflicts between 'normal' seasonal changes and new weather events, such as those associated with climate

⁴¹ Devlin-Glass, 'A Politics of the Dreamtime', p. 395; pp. 401–2.

change, have the power to further disassociate Indigenous people from their traditional ways of understanding landscapes and seascapes.

As well as communicating this threat of climate change through the interweaving of narrative discourses on weather patterns and disruptive spirits, Wright also considers some ways in which Indigenous survival could prevail through this turbulence. For example, arriving finally on an unknown archipelago, Norm finds a small Aboriginal boy named Bala. He eventually comes to realise that Bala is his grandson, who was taken into hiding due to the threat of the mining company who seeks to kill his father — Norm's son Will Phantom — who is an activist and saboteur of the mine's activities. However, another threat reaches them on the island: a massive tidal surge sweeps through the bush, trapping Bala in a tree. Similarly to the storm, the tidal surge is framed simultaneously in different ways. Firstly, it is described in terms of an ongoing battle between the land and sea woman spirits (p. 276), and secondly, in terms of Norm's reading of the weather and tide patterns, as he 'expected the incoming tide would be affected by the winds and the power of the storm. It would bring in the surge and it was going to be high' (p. 296). When Bala becomes trapped, and Norm is unable to reach him in the boat, the significance of this part of the novel is revealed. An Indigenous people called the Yanngunyi appear alongside Norm and guide him to Bala (pp. 300–06). A people 'related to all tribes', also referred to as the '*yinbirras*', the reader learns that they were said to have 'disappeared into the wilderness of life', 'no one remembered when, *because no one was keeping a look at the clock*' (p. 299, original emphasis). The *yinbirras* direct Norm through the fast-moving water, and help him to reach Bala by linking together and holding his boat steady (p. 305). This can be read as a metaphor that suggests Norm's connection to community and other Indigenous peoples, and a recovery of history, is imperative to literally and figuratively weathering the storms of climate change. The Yanngunyi people are described as 'guardian angels' and a 'ghostly tribe' (p. 302), that exist physically and guide Norm's actions. In light of the rumour that the Yanngunyi disappeared because they 'did not want their histories contaminated with oppression under the white man's thumb' (p. 300), this reading is even more significant: only through a constant return to an alternate temporality in which another Indigenous tribe exists free of oppression, can the future of Norm's family (through Bala) survive. This connection to Indigenous ancestors and relatives, and the subsequent connection to ancient knowledge and tradition, allows for a possibility of survival.

In addition to the kinetic structure of *Carpentaria's* plot and its disruption of a linear sequential narrative, then, it is clear that Wright's Indigenous mode of storytelling, informed by her community and the tradition of Indigenous oral narratives, is significant in communicating her commentary on 'collapsed time' temporality and climate change to her

readers. Through these formal features, Wright emphasises the importance of revisiting ancient customs and histories, keeping them alive and fully present in Indigenous lives and memories, and allowing them to direct and shape personal narratives of survival and resistance. As Wright stated in the years before *Carpentaria* was published, in her writing she aims ‘to explore the gift of our true inheritances by disallowing memories of times passed to sink into oblivion’.⁴² From statements such as these, and from the discussion above, it is clear that the idea of Indigenous survival ties together the narrative discourses of time and climate change in the novel that are conveyed through *Carpentaria*’s unique style and form. In order to explore this in more detail, it is necessary to examine how the novel’s Indigenous discourse of time engages with contemporary Anthropocene discourse, whilst maintaining the validity and importance of traditional Aboriginal approaches to history, geology and ancestry.

Outside the Anthropocene: Survival and Collapsed Time

As the previous discussion attests, notions of time and history are central to *Carpentaria*. As Wright has stated, the concept of ‘all times’ influenced her writing of the novel, and I argue that this is indicative of her refusal to separate or privilege particular discourses of temporality. ‘All times’ also describes the multiplicity of narratives that *Carpentaria* entails. Wright has also acknowledged how history is collapsed in the telling of Dreamtime narratives,⁴³ and has asserted that Aboriginal storytelling can ‘bring all the stories of the past, from ancient times and to the stories of the last 200 years (that have also created enormous stories for Indigenous people), and also stories happening now’.⁴⁴ This idea of ‘collapsed history’⁴⁵ is effected through Wright’s notions of Indigenous storytelling, and articulates the elimination of distance between different times. As stated earlier in this chapter, I suggest that the two notions of ‘collapsed history’ and ‘all times’ help to construct the novel’s overarching ‘collapsed time’ temporality, whilst also remaining distinct phenomena in their own right. Lynda Ng has argued that *Carpentaria*’s ‘collapse of time can be seen as a defiant critique of the Darwinian-influenced belief that indigenous cultures were at more primitive stages of development than European cultures’.⁴⁶ However, I propose that this concept of time is not simply a reactive phenomenon that exists solely in defiance of European culture. Rather, the novel’s collapsed time temporality is representative of a specific Indigenous temporal discourse. This discourse advocates — similarly to *The Flood* — a view of time that can accommodate and acknowledge the idea that all times (ancestral times, the time of Australia’s initial colonisation, and more

⁴² Wright, ‘Politics of Writing’, p. 19.

⁴³ O’Brien, ‘Alexis Wright Interview’, p. 216.

⁴⁴ O’Brien, ‘Alexis Wright Interview’, p. 216.

⁴⁵ Wright, ‘A Family Document’, p. 239.

⁴⁶ Ng, p. 121.

recent events) exist simultaneously, rather than being separated by thousands of years, and that they are tightly interlinked and mutually influential. Ng also states that the novel ‘draw[s] our attention to the way in which members of the Pricklebush are capable of relating present-day events to deeper layers of temporality and history’,⁴⁷ but rather than only being *capable* of making these connections, I argue that Wright demonstrates that collapsed time fundamentally underpins the Indigenous Waanyi epistemology represented in the text, forming the basis of key Waanyi worldviews.

In times of increasingly frequent environmental disasters exacerbated by climate change, and the subsequent threat posed to the continuation of Indigenous culture, seeing the world through the lens of collapsed time is crucial to the Pricklebush characters’ survival. ‘Collapsed time’ is also linked closely with threats to the survival of ‘country’, which is a term used by some Indigenous Australians to describe the reciprocity of their relationship with their land: ‘they take care of the country, the country takes care of them’.⁴⁸ As Indigenous activists and academics Megan Davis and Marcia Langton have described, the term ‘country’ also refers to ‘a social resource’ as opposed to a solely physical one in most Indigenous cultures.⁴⁹ Country is not only the land itself, but the ‘landscapes, seascapes and riverscapes’, and the sacred sites embedded within these. It ‘involves special knowledge and practices that the traditional owners [of the country] bring to the task’, and articulates the ‘spiritual power’ and agency of the environment.⁵⁰ Country is therefore integral to many Indigenous epistemologies surrounding environmental damage and climate change. Wright communicates the interaction between collapsed time, country and survival through the form, style and organisation of the novel. This is particularly evident in scenes such as the tidal surge on the island that upholds the notion of ancestral tribes existing alongside contemporary Indigenous people, and helping to direct their actions and behaviour.

Wright’s collapsed time also has far-reaching consequences in relation to the novel’s commentary on contemporary discourses on time, climate change, and human history. Crucially, the novel pre-empts the practical difficulties of Anthropocene linear time, instead using collapsed time to transcend the problems of conceptualisation that we encounter when grappling with the Anthropocene. Rejecting a linear history of human influence on the environment (which is associated with notions of capitalist progress, as described in my

⁴⁷ Ng, p. 122.

⁴⁸ Rose, *Reports from a Wild Country*, p. 173.

⁴⁹ Megan Davis and Marcia Langton, ‘Introduction’, in *It’s Our Country: Indigenous Arguments for Meaningful Constitutional Recognition and Reform*, ed. by Megan Davis and Marcia Langton (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2016), pp. 1–26 (p. 1).

⁵⁰ Davis and Langton, pp. 1–2.

discussion of *The Flood*), collapsed time offers an alternative perspective on ancient history, ancestry, land formation, and geology, one that can be more accessible to those whose points of cultural reference are not solely derived from Western scientific epistemologies. This is not to say that the text rejects the concept of climate change or denies its effects. Instead, *Carpentaria* demonstrates that climate change — and the discourses that shape our understanding of it — is tightly linked to settler colonialism and the attempted erasure of Indigenous knowledge, and is not the result of a homogenous body of humanity gradually exerting more and more power over the environment. The novel therefore resists the potential singularity of Anthropocene discourse, critiques its implications and offers an alternative narrative temporal framing of climate change, whilst remaining alert its devastating effects. Collapsed time also precludes the hierarchical ordering of times, with the human-centric Anthropocene epoch becoming the most influential. Instead, collapsed time demonstrates that ‘all times are important’,⁵¹ and encourages a heterarchical framework of time: something integral to feminist ecocritical thought.⁵² Furthermore, rather than attempting to communicate a vast scale of time divided into periods, epochs, and ages — scientific framings of millions of years, imposed upon the past — Wright imagines a disruption of this linear temporal structure, one that holds past times as integral to, and simultaneous with, the present day. As the Indigenous elder Joseph Midnight remarks to Will Phantom, ‘What contemporary world? It’s the same world as I live in, and before that, and before that. No such thing as a contemporary world’ (p. 379).

In a similar way to notions of deep time, collapsed time in the novel reaches beyond human memory. The beginning section of the narrative, entitled ‘From time immemorial’, describes how the ‘ancestral serpent [...] came down from the stars’:

Scoring deep into — scouring down through — the slippery underground of the mudflats, leaving in its wake the thunder of tunnels collapsing to form deep sunken valleys. The sea water following in the serpent’s wake, swarming in a frenzy of tidal waves, soon changed colour from ocean blue to the yellow of mud. (pp. 1–2)

Shaping the land through its movements and creating rivers, coasts, dunes and salt plains (p. 2), we learn that the ‘giant serpent continues to live deep down under the ground [...] its being is porous; it permeates everything. It is all around in the atmosphere and is attached to the lives of the river people like skin’ (p. 2). In these beginning segments, communicated through

⁵¹ O’Brien, ‘Alexis Wright Interview’, p. 216.

⁵² Julia Corbett, *Communicating Nature: How we Create and Understand Environmental Messages* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2006), p. 47.

the present tense, Wright simultaneously emphasises the agency and 'creative enormity' (p. 1) of the landscape in a time outside of human habitation, and the continued relevance of Dreamtime narratives to Indigenous people who retain an understanding of the land through this particular history. We learn that the 'inside knowledge about this river and coastal region is the Aboriginal Law handed down through the ages since time began' (p. 3), which is integral to Indigenous survival and in this country. As the narrator asks, 'otherwise, how would one know where to look for the hidden underwater courses in the vast flooding mud plains, full of serpents and fish in the monsoon season?' (p. 3). The contemporary times of Norm and the Pricklebush residents, then, are not shaped and defined solely in terms of human influence on the landscape and climate, as an Anthropocene-based reading may suggest. Instead, Wright defines this present-day time in terms of how it is still affected and shaped by the ancient history of the Dreamtime narratives, and how this continued influence of ancient times on the present day inhabitants ensures their survival.

This discourse of collapsed time therefore articulates the agency and geology of the landscape in a time before humans. It counteracts a narrative of human impact upon the environment that can be exacerbated by an Anthropocene temporal framing, which both situates time before humans in a distant place, one that is inaccessible and impossible to envisage, and imagines the landscape as a passive background to human endeavour. Instead, collapsed time simultaneously eliminates psychological and physical distance from the past, whilst figuring ancient time as powerful, agential and creative, and most importantly, devoid of humanity. For example, Elias describes to Norm the geological history of their area, which included fossilised tree stumps, megafauna and ancient rainforests (p. 248), but Norm 'did not know whether it was true or not. He had other stories' (p. 248). However, after these discussions with his friend, we learn that afterwards Norm 'saw both these worlds whenever he looked at one' (p. 248), and is able to view the ancient landscape, the current landscape and his own stories existing simultaneously together through his own experience. This unquestionably decentres an exclusively human framing of time: Norm is able to see the landscape as it was millions of years ago existing in the present day, and acknowledges that human stories have helped to shape it into its current manifestation, rather than rendering pre-historic time inaccessible and incomprehensible. His own time is overlaid with other times that exist together, and the hierarchy that privileges the human present, which functions as part of Gould's 'time's arrow' and as part of much Anthropocene discourse, is dismantled.

The notion of collapsed time also describes the ways in which other measurements of time, for example a reliance on clocks and other technologies, are fallible and problematic. The novel shows that these methods of measuring time impose specific, and culturally white

Western, understandings of time on to a region that has historically been understood through readings of climate and seasonal cyclicity, which are derived through perceived interactions between nonhumans, weather, and the sky, rather than external devices. Collapsed time discourse also gestures towards the novel's 'unknowability'⁵³ for white Western readers, and its explicit inclination towards an Indigenous readership that Wright has alluded to.⁵⁴ This is perhaps best exemplified by a scene in the narrative that exhibits a link between powerful weather events and notions of time. Early in the novel, a 'once-in-a-hundred-year' storm (p. 43), Cyclone Leda, arrives in Desperance. As it arrives on land, 'a wind full of sand whistled over the coast from the sea bringing with it the hardest rain ever imagined, and afterwards, all time stopped' (p. 44). A momentous weather event, unpredictable and violent, disrupts the measurement of time that was brought to Australia with the colonial settlers: 'time stopped tick-tocking, because there was too much moisture in the air and it had interfered with the mechanical workings of dozens of watches and clocks that ended up jiggered' (p. 44). Although the worst of the storm passes the town by, the townsfolk were 'suddenly struck with a single idea, a sense of hopeless prognostication that before too long there would be another ominous piece of bad luck [...] It was hard to describe how the anxiety intensified through people's bodies after they had awoken to the strange sensation' (p. 45). With no means of measuring the progress of time through watches and clocks, anxiety builds within the population, and a 'change-in-the-weather influenza' (p. 45) takes hold. Physical and psychological maladies take hold of the town, and 'all who dwelled safely within this world of Uptown' (p. 46) are disturbed by the 'spine-chilling realisation that such a mighty town like Desperance might have no power at all, if it came to the crunch' (p. 46). The power wielded by the Uptowners begins to dissipate as soon as they are unable to use their devices to measure time and orient themselves: the traditionally western methods of measuring time are disrupted by the storm, indicating that the unpredictability of climate change and its effects — such as increasingly extreme and erratic weather events — exceed these one-dimensional systems of measurement.

Wright also remarks that for the Uptowners, 'as daylight came [...] the world had turned red. When they looked at their own fair skin, it was another shock to their lives to see their skin was red' (p. 46), which gestures almost comically towards their humiliation and confusion. This is contrasted with the reactions of the town's inhabitants who are 'local by nature' (p. 46). Reading the 'locals by nature' to be the Indigenous population of the town, we see that instead of suffering strange afflictions and disorientation, these people 'ventured out

⁵³ Ravenscroft, 'Dreaming of Others', p. 214.

⁵⁴ Wright, 'On Writing *Carpentaria*', p. 2.

of their houses. They were trying to understand what was happening, for everywhere they looked, they saw trees, the landscape, grass, even the sea water had taken on hues of red' (p. 46). Attempting to use alternative measurements of time that depend on the natural environment rather than simply the reading of clocks to orient themselves in the changed landscape, these 'locals by nature' look outwards to the rest of the world, and to each other, in order to shape their response to the changes, rather than inwards at their own bodily afflictions. In the world of the novel, then, traditionally Western methods of measuring time fail in the face of weather events such as the storm, indicating that the unpredictability of climate change and its associated environmental changes exceeds these one-dimensional systems of temporality.

When the final storm approaches Desperance, Indigenous characters Mozzie Fishman and Will Phantom both sense the low-pressure system building in the Gulf, 'sensing it in their bones as something different. Seriously different, according to Fishman, twitching his nose in the air to catch the scent of rain coming out of the gidgee trees' (p. 445). Their awareness of the weather and its interactions with their own bodies, as well as with the trees, means that they have the time and foresight to try and reach safety, allowing them to maintain their autonomy and agency whilst navigating unpredictable environmental change. As the narrator asks at the very beginning of the novel:

Can someone who did not grow up in a place that is sometimes under water, sometimes bone-dry, know when the trade winds blowing off the southern and northern hemispheres will merge in summer? Know the moment of climatic change better than they know themselves? (p. 3)

This quotation demonstrates that an awareness of the cycles, seasons and patterns that contribute to Indigenous notions of time should take precedence over considerations of the self, and individualistic concerns over how one's own body and mind are affected by a perceived loss of control over time and predictability. This is just one of the ways in which the Western measurement of time, externalised and dependent on technology, fails to be of use in the context of changes in weather and climate. The 'unknowability' of Indigenous notions of time for Westerners comes about through a failure to engage with and interact with the landscape, its patterns and cycles, and its historical and contemporary times. Collapsed time, therefore, can be read as just one facet of Indigenous, or Waanyi, notions of temporality, alongside notions of awareness of environmental changes, patterns and cycles, and a reliance on community knowledge passed through generations. The thread that connects these different facets, however, is the notion of survival. Survival — both embodied survival, and in

the sense of the continuation of Indigenous cultures and epistemologies — unifies these different facets of Indigenous time-telling, formulating what Wright names an entirely ‘different reality’ within the Gulf: a reality in which the impossible is possible.⁵⁵

Bodily survival, as a way of measuring time, is also central to the novel. Wright consistently uses imagery that connects the country of the Gulf of Carpentaria with embodied survival, referring to the ‘water arteries’ of the river and lagoon near Desperance (p. 169) and the rising tidal waters ‘pulsat[ing] in rhythm’ with Norm’s ‘heartbeat’ (p. 18). Tellingly, Wright states in her essay ‘Politics of Writing’ that the voices and characters she evokes in her writing are ‘the pulse—as we say in the Gulf of Carpentaria—the pulse of our heartbeat’ and indicates ‘where we are’.⁵⁶ This indicates firstly that the pulse, or heartbeat, is a way of exploring and orienting oneself in the country. Wright also reiterates in ‘On Writing *Carpentaria*’ that the heartbeat of the Gulf comes from Indigenous ‘difference’ as it is occurring now, and that it ‘was alive. It was not a relic. It was not bones to examine [...] The beat I heard was stronger and enduring even while tortured and scarred through and through’, and this assisted Wright in her resistance against simply retelling the history that ‘drags every Aboriginal person into the conquering grips of colonisation’.⁵⁷ This recalls Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor’s notion of Indigenous narratives of ‘survance’, which are ‘renunciations of dominance, detractions, deracination, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry’.⁵⁸ These are all traits identifiable in *Carpentaria* and in Wright’s commentary on its production: Indigenous lives are central and ever-present in the novel and in her own concerns, and *Carpentaria*’s narrative actively resists the Australian government’s policies of forced homogenisation and assimilation, as well as past (and ongoing) colonial atrocities. However, although Wright’s Indigenous reading of time is formed through a sense of awareness and interconnectedness with country and climate, it is important to note that the novel also explicitly registers the oppressive threat of the curtailing of this relationship, and therefore the potential curtailing of Indigenous survival and resistance. We learn that although Norm is connected with the tide and the ancestral people who help him through the island flood by his heartbeat, he is also made starkly aware of the mortality of his people. In running with the tribe across the island to save his grandson, he recognises that ‘he had joined a dying race’ (p.

⁵⁵ Wright, ‘On Writing *Carpentaria*’, p. 13.

⁵⁶ Wright, ‘Politics of Writing’, p. 20.

⁵⁷ Wright, ‘On Writing *Carpentaria*’, p. 12.

⁵⁸ Gerald Vizenor, ‘Aesthetics of Survivance: Literary Theory and Practice’, in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, ed. by Gerald Vizenor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), pp. 1–24 (p. 1).

303). This is a satirical allusion to the doomed race theory,⁵⁹ a colonial idea perpetuated by new understandings of Darwinism, which disseminated the idea that Aboriginal Australians were inevitably dying out. The adoption of this belief into colonial infrastructure was used to justify paternalistic colonial policies, to consolidate the image of Indigenous people as primitive relics of the past,⁶⁰ and to justify the appropriation of Aboriginal lands.⁶¹ We also learn that, as Will Phantom attempts to move Elias's body from the lagoon where he was murdered, Will 'could never escape the words he heard in his heartbeat' (p. 176). The complex cultural relationship that these characters in particular share with the Gulf country and sea, then, is a mode of survival in itself. A threat to the country and climate, and the complex ecosystems within these, also means a threat to the survival of Indigenous modes of time-telling and self-orientation. This also works reflexively. Threats to Indigenous epistemologies through the forced assimilation of Indigenous people into white Western culture — for many, a kind of death in itself — entails both an erosion of Indigenous knowledge of complex weather, climate and environmental systems, and a triumph of individualist thinking in the governing of the area:

Harmless coercing of the natives, the social planners hummed, anxious to make deals happen for the impending mining boom [...] those Aboriginal people who took the plunge to be councillors, wisely used their time in public office to pursue scraps of personal gain for their own families living amidst the muck of third world poverty. (p. 8)

This approach facilitates easier acquisitions of Indigenous land by multinational corporations for capital gain: we learn that 'numerous short-lived profiteering schemes were concocted for the locals, in order to serve the big company's own interests as they set about pillaging the region's treasure trove: the publicly touted curve of an underground range embedded with minerals' (pp. 8–9). In this sense, it becomes clear that environmental damage from the mine is a multi-faceted threat. It is both a stark danger to the bodily survival of Indigenous people who work in the mine, and a threat to the cultural survival of Indigenous epistemologies. For example, Norm's son Kevin works with his brothers at the mine after he finishes school, even though physically, Kevin is 'skin and bone', and deemed 'too clumsy' to help Norm on his fishing boat (p. 106). Although Kevin is rejected from many manual labour jobs, due to his

⁵⁹ Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997), p. ix.

⁶⁰ Russell McGregor, 'The Doomed Race: A Scientific Axiom of the Late Nineteenth Century', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 39 (1993), 14–22 (p. 16).

⁶¹ McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 17.

tendency to destroy expensive machinery and motors (p. 107), he ‘went down the mine for the money and the bosses took him on because how would they know? They did not even pretend to know who fronted up for work from Pricklebush’ (p. 107). He suffers devastating injuries from an explosion at work, and his physical and mental states are immobilised by his condition: Wright states that ‘nobody knew Kevin’s world anymore’ (p. 219) and describes his violent seizures (p. 219), during which he loses control of his body and its functions. After a particularly bad seizure, we learn that ‘Kevin wanted to speak to [his family] but his mind felt ancient, as though it needed to come back across the mountains of a million years, to learn many languages to be understood’ (pp. 219–20). Throughout the novel, it is clear that Indigenous people are ‘framed by [the] dominant political discourses in the past tense, as members of a prior order, even as they continue to exist in the present’.⁶² Kevin continues to exist in his body after his accident, firmly in the present day, but experiences the dual suffering of both bodily injuries, and — as the quotation above demonstrates — the psychological internalisation of a discourse that imagines him as a member of a ‘prior order’, locked in an inaccessible past that cannot be articulated. His status as an Indigenous labourer absolves the mining corporation (named ‘Gurfurrit International, p. 366) of any blame for his accident — as the corporation ignore their Indigenous employees — even though they could have prevented it by considering Kevin’s mistakes in his previous manual labour work (p. 107). Kevin’s accident, then, can be read as a satirical metaphor for the Indigenous inhabitants of the town who are forced, out of necessity, to participate in capitalist practices: he becomes confined to a hyperbolic caricatured figure of the Aboriginal relegated to the past, one that is unable to keep up with capitalist notions of progress.

Wright also shows that defining the Indigenous community as relics of a distant past is beneficial for the right-wing media, multinational companies and other political actors, as it allows them to frame Indigenous people as regressive barriers to capitalist notions of progress and production. When the mining executives and politicians meet to ‘set about pillaging the region’s treasure trove’ (p. 9), they jostle for a ‘photo opportunity’ with Normal Phantom, after whom a local river was renamed as a token gesture to the Indigenous population, even though the locals knew that ‘the river had only one name from the beginning of time [...] *Wangala*’ (p. 10). As well as appropriating Norm’s image in order to lend their media campaign a superficial veneer of political correctness, the executives and politicians also treat him as an ‘old hero’ (p. 9), a symbol of times past, which can be exploited in order to lend a sense of authenticity and continuity to their ‘pillaging’ of the land. In this way, those pushing the mine’s agenda are

⁶² Elizabeth Strakosch, *Neoliberal Indigenous Policy: Settler Colonialism and the ‘Post-Welfare’ State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 19.

profiting simultaneously from this image of Norm as an archaic relic, as well as from the legitimacy his supposed compliance provides to their attempts at exploitation of the land.

Throughout the text, Wright demonstrates that environmental degradation resulting from the mine can influence the way collapsed time is perceived and understood as a temporal framework, alongside climate change. The excavation and disturbance of the land during mining activity can affect and transform the creation narratives associated with that land. In *Carpentaria*, geological strata are exposed during the mining process, and the excavation also provokes ancestral spirits that do not want to be disturbed: during Kevin's accident, he 'heard the ancestor's voice when an explosion with fiery rocks went flying at him' (p. 109). In this case, it is clear that ancestral spirits of ancient times are intricately connected with the present day, with the power to enact violent repercussions if their Law is violated. Environmental damage does not only disturb framings of ancient histories, however. Pollution and climate change are closely linked in the novel: at the end of the text, 'unseasonal change' (p. 461) to the climate occurs, as tidal waves and cyclones ravage the islands and coastline. As Will listens to news about the tidal surge caused by the cyclone, we learn that:

Country people, old people, said it was the sound of the great spiritual ancestors roaring out of the dusty, polluted sea all of the time nowadays. Will believed this. Everyone clearly saw what the spirits saw. The country looked dirty from mining, shipping, barges spilling ore and waste. (p. 401)

It becomes evident here that through the activities of the mining company, and through the climatic changes creating unseasonal cyclones and other weather events affecting lands 'a thousand miles away' (p. 461) from the Gulf, environmental damage permeates the present and causes harm. This defines the lives of the country's inhabitants for centuries to come: in this example, the polluted sea of 'all the time' is bound up with the unseasonal changes in the weather. Crucially, however, understanding the climate, weather and landscape through the lens of collapsed time allows some characters in *Carpentaria* to apprehend and adapt to the ramifications of climate change.

As the cyclone and flood approach at the end of the text, Will realises that 'he was being prepared for change, instinctively, like an animal sniffing the air and sensing danger approaching, sensing a quickening in the atmosphere, sensing the future of a place' (p. 461). By paying close attention to the changes in the atmosphere, 'sensing the future' through his collapsed time perspective, and by recognizing his own vulnerability, Will can prepare and adapt for the storm and its possible outcomes. Unlike others in Desperance, Will survives the

cyclone. If we consider the cyclone in the context of extreme weather events that will become more frequent and unpredictable as the climate continues to warm, Will's apprehension of imminent environmental change, and his ability to consider the possible futures ahead, articulates how the collapsed time perspective can aid in comprehending the magnitude of climate change and large-scale environmental disasters in an attuned and responsive way.⁶³ This kind of apprehension is not enabled by the linear temporal arrow of the Anthropocene, which is contained within the accepted notion of evolutionary progress, comprising a start point, progressive development, and — by implication — a final end point. In the world of *Carpentaria*, in order to match the scale and intensity of environmental damage and climate change wrought upon the environment in the Gulf, a temporal framework is needed that understands time as multiple, simultaneous and all-encompassing. Through this, it may be possible to recognise the urgency of practical mitigation against oncoming disasters, to adapt in various ways to the vast and complex effects of climate change, and to ensure psychological resilience against multiple threats against survival (both Indigenous and global).

Conclusion

Although the activities of the mine discussed above are not explicitly linked with the effects of climate change in the novel, it is telling that Will sees the reports of the building cyclone at sea as 'the sound of the great spiritual ancestors roaring out of the dusty, polluted sea of all the time nowadays' (p. 401). Through his 'collapsed time' perspective, Will makes the connection between pollution, exploitation of the land, and ancestral anger: when the country and sea are violated, the effects are violent and unseasonal storms that threaten the coastline of the Gulf, affecting the distant future as well as the present. Wright's recent poem 'Hey Ancestor!', written for IndigenousX to mark 2018's Australia Day, exemplifies this idea in its following proclamation to unseasonal weather events:

The environmental science people said that the freak storms coming more frequently are a consequence of climate change, but I think that your appearance is the result of those little pieces of paper telling lies about land ownership by people who don't know

⁶³ Following Rob Nixon, I am using 'apprehension' here to describe the recognition and possible mitigation of 'imperceptible' threats, such as climate change, that are 'too vast or too minute in scale, or are played out across a time span that exceeds the instance of observation', *Slow Violence*, pp. 14–15.

your power. I suppose the ancestral story should look the way you have decided to show yourself, your powerful story of millenniums revealed in full swing.⁶⁴

Here, Wright explicitly rejects a scientific framing of the storms, and by proxy a wider Western view of Australian climate and country. The poem draws stark links between colonial settlements (coupled with an insufficient respect for, or understanding of, the land) and violent or unexpected weather events, and suggests that acknowledging the validity of traditional Indigenous understandings of the environment is vital when addressing the consequences of climate change. Like *Carpentaria*, 'Hey Ancestor!' registers the power dynamics of the multiple framings of these issues, and their perpetual entanglement with issues of social justice and colonialism. The recognition of this entanglement underpins the novel's critical ideas regarding contemporary climate change discourses, and the significance of this novel's intervention into these discourses is clear. Through a style that actively resists a placement within the white Australian literary tradition, Wright ensures that *Carpentaria* remains a novel that works against the 'gatekeep[ing]' of Indigenous knowledge and stories by 'lawyers, anthropologists, historians, scientists, economists, accountants, doctors, health professionals, consultants and administrators',⁶⁵ as well as academics, and instead remains for and of Indigenous Australians. This is achieved through Wright's upholding of Indigenous worldviews on temporality throughout the novel, which cast a critical eye over ongoing colonial practice in terms of both hard and soft political power (for example, outright violence, as well as the more insidious campaigning by the media). Readers of *Carpentaria* are not shielded from the consequences of climate change and environmental damage that are inflicted upon the country. Instead, we are exposed directly to a temporal framework that registers the past and future as simultaneous and present, and in which the effects of environmental disaster, climate change, and the threat of disappearance and marginalisation, are experienced viscerally by its subjects. Long-term and gradual effects of disaster and climate change encroach upon the present, and past histories and creation narratives remain integral to the continued survival of the country and its Indigenous inhabitants.

The Flood and *Carpentaria* both raise multiple questions of how we can represent and understand temporality in the context of climate change. The novels' indirect engagement

⁶⁴ Alexis Wright, 'Hey Ancestor!', *Guardian Australia Online*, 25 January 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/26/alexis-wright-hey-ancestor>>, [accessed 23 February 2018].

⁶⁵ Alexis Wright, 'What Happens When You Tell Somebody Else's Story?', *Meanjin Online*, Summer 2016, <<https://meanjin.com.au/essays/what-happens-when-you-tell-somebody-elses-story/>> [accessed 9 May 2018], (para. 52–53 of 86).

with climate change as a phenomenon, their considerations of the temporalities of disaster, and their satirical targets all demonstrate the authors' close attention to issues of social and environmental justice in different global contexts. The two texts perform incisive critiques of how oppressive discourses on climate change and temporality can exacerbate inequality within the contemporary world, and present methods of resistance against these. In *The Flood*, Maggie Gee registers the problematic implications of linear temporal thinking, paying particular close attention to the complex issues embedded within the way humans comprehend climate change and the Anthropocene, and its associated implications for the nonhuman world. Crucially, she also demonstrates the significance of remaining alert and open to a plurality of different conceptualisations of time, and plays out the consequences of subscribing to, and culturally enforcing, a singular narrative of time, progress and finality. *Carpentaria* takes on similar conceptual challenges, yet explores in greater depth how and why damaging temporal discourses are mobilised, constructed and perpetuated by Western and colonial cultures. *Carpentaria* therefore dismantles singular, linear and scientific temporal frameworks at a granular level, by challenging the colonial foundations of environmental exploitation and climate change. Wright's Indigenous conceptualisation of 'collapsed time' transcends Western time-telling strategies, exposing the extent of the cultural and environmental damage being wrought against Indigenous Australians and their country, and implementing counter-narratives through *Carpentaria's* cyclical style and form.

The content of these two novels also, critically, looks forward to the next chapter of this thesis, which addresses the notion of space in climate changing scenarios. As I explore in greater detail in the following discussion of Wright's later novel *The Swan Book* (2013), and Claire Vaye Watkins' *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015), spatial politics are closely linked to political discourses on temporality, and come under increasing pressure as the environments of the novels change drastically into increasingly inhospitable landscapes.

Chapter 2 – Depopulation, Disintegration, Dispossession: Climate Change and Spatiality

Introduction

Climate change is fundamentally altering how we perceive the spaces we inhabit. Coastline cities are at risk from rising sea levels, deserts are encroaching on previously green and temperate areas, and glaciers and sea ice are dissipating at unprecedented speed.

Anthropogenic climate change has the power to visually and structurally shift the ways in which humans interact with both urban and more remote spaces across the globe. These vast changes are registered within scholarly work on geopolitics and space. A ‘spatial turn’ within the last few decades has been identified by many scholars across the humanities and social sciences.¹ Although this is not a simple correlation with growing awareness of climate change, it indicates that academic concerns over the politics of space have become increasingly important. The spatial turn articulates a poststructuralist understanding that positionality and context are key within all constructions of knowledge. It also suggests that a ‘reworking of the very notion and significance of spatiality to offer a perspective in which space is every bit as important as time in the unfolding of human affairs’.² Particularly within the last two decades, as the effects of climate change have become increasingly perceptible across the globe, advances within the theorising of space have become increasingly urgent and necessary. As human and nonhuman relationships with spaces and places are being redefined and curtailed, it is now clear that the many possible effects of climate change must be taken into account in academic considerations of spatiality.

This chapter builds on the previous chapter’s explorations of climate change temporality, and its argument that alternative conceptions of time are needed, in order to meet the epistemological challenges that climate change presents. In the following discussion, I explore how Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book* (2013) and Claire Vaye Watkins’ *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015) address the threats that climate change and related environmental disasters pose to historic and contemporary cultural conceptions of space. I view time and space here as necessarily enmeshed rather than separate entities, and perceive space in terms of its social dimensions. This entails acknowledging the inherent dynamism of different spaces, their

¹ Bill Richardson, ‘The “Spatio-Cultural Dimension”: Overview and a Proposed Framework’, in *Spatiality and Symbolic Expression: On the Links between Place and Culture*, ed. by Bill Richardson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 1–20 (p. 1).

² Barney Warf and Santa Arias, ‘Introduction: The Reinsertion of Space into the Humanities and Social Sciences’, in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Barney Warf and Santa Arias (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 1–10 (p. 1).

transformative possibilities, and the processes that take place within them.³ My perspective is also informed by Edward Soja's well-established notion of a 'socio-spatial dialectic': in other words, the idea that space is inherently shaped by social dynamics, as social dynamics are too influenced by spatiality.⁴ If the multiplicity of temporality is a key focus of the previous chapter, in this chapter I recognise the simultaneity, inter-relationality and processes that are present within different spaces.⁵ Just as the problems with Gould's 'arrow' of time were examined in the previous chapter, the texts under consideration here question culturally ingrained ways of imposing meaning upon particular spaces and landscapes (for example, the idea of space as an absent void of nothingness, or the conceptualisation of the ground as a uniform surface upon which meaning can be inscribed).⁶ Similarly to the other novels discussed throughout this thesis, the texts also question the problematic modes of thought that perpetuate the notion of humanity's dominion over the land. In the context of climate change in our contemporary moment, it is necessary to investigate the consequences of massive spatial alterations, and how literary representations of spatial change navigate speculative (and current) conflict over habitable spaces. As well as imagining large-scale global consequences of climate change in the short and long term, these texts both examine climate change-affected spaces at a micro level, in the connections between individual humans, their bodily mediation of space and their interactions with nonhuman beings that dwell in particular spaces. Tim Ingold has argued against the use of the term 'space' in contemporary scholarship, as he considers it 'the most abstract [term], the most empty, the most detached from the realities of life and experience'. Instead, he advocates for the use of 'lifeworld' to refer to the processes of life and their existence.⁷ However, I suggest that this is the very flawed conceptualisation of space that *Gold Fame Citrus* and *The Swan Book* work against: instead, the texts consider space to be, among other things, a dynamic medium constituted by its embedded ecosystems, structures and material relations. The novels also recognise space as being vulnerable to change through human intervention, representing it as fundamentally material, rather than abstract.

Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* (2013) is her third novel, after *Plains of Promise* (1997) and *Carpentaria* (2006). Although independent of *Carpentaria* in terms of its plot, *The Swan Book* takes a similar narrative and stylistic approach. It also takes forward one of the more

³ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), pp. 2–4.

⁴ Edward Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 4.

⁵ Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 2.

⁶ Tim Ingold, 'Footprints Through the Weather-World: Walking, Breathing, Knowing', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 16 (2010), 121–39.

⁷ Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 145; 142.

implicit themes within *Carpentaria* in its concern with climate change, which becomes the explicit focus of *The Swan Book*. Set in the near future, *The Swan Book* depicts the Northern Territory of Australia (and indeed the entire globe) in an entirely altered state. As climate change disrupts weather and climate patterns across the world, Northern Europe is plunged into an early Ice Age,⁸ with refugees fleeing the cold to southern countries, including Australia. The Northern Territory (and indeed the rest of the country) becomes fraught with increasingly unpredictable storms and ‘heavy, cyclonic rain’, tempered with long periods of drought and ‘days of dust’.⁹ Due to mass migration globally and across Australia, Aboriginal people who are deemed unable to assimilate within white, western Australian settler culture are rounded up and kept in detention camps, living in squalid conditions. One of these camps is the focus of the novel, and is where the Indigenous protagonist Oblivia lives with Bella Donna, a European immigrant. The camp is set around a rubbish dump and polluted swamp, where black swans arrive unexpectedly, as climate change-induced drought forces them to leave their natural habitats (p. 16). The teenaged Oblivia is mute, and it is suggested that this is a traumatic symptom of a rape she experienced at the hands of petrol-sniffing boys when she was a child. She shares an affinity with the swans, taking it upon herself to witness their comings, goings, feedings and failed hatchings. The novel follows Oblivia throughout her life, as she is coerced into marrying an Aboriginal politician, Warren Finch, and removed from her camp to an unnamed southern city, against her will. Here, she is trapped in a high-rise apartment away from the public eye, but finally manages to escape following the death (and possibly her murder) of Finch. Oblivia makes her way back north (along with other migrants) on foot, continuing to care for and communicate with the swans, which have followed her south. In this text, the way Wright presents Indigenous Australian perspectives on space, environment and landscape reveal how climate change can exacerbate colonial settler conceptualisations of spatiality. This draws out the implications of dislocation for Indigenous communities from their country and its rhythms, patterns and songlines.¹⁰

Gold Fame Citrus, published two years after *The Swan Book*, follows the story of Luz and Ray, a couple who live in the drought-ridden Southwest of the US, in what used to be Los

⁸ This is a scenario also imagined in Maggie Gee’s *The Ice People* (which I discuss in more detail in the final chapter to this thesis), where it is also an event that prompts mass societal breakdown and migration.

⁹ Alexis Wright, *The Swan Book* (London: Constable, 2015), p. 18. All further page references to this work will be given in parentheses after the quotation in the text.

¹⁰ According to Indigenous scholars Len Collard and Grant Revell in ‘Wedjemup Wangkiny Koorá’, a song-line or Dreaming cycle is ‘a ceremonial, trade, and social route through the Country. For Indigenous Australians, Australia is crisscrossed with such tracks that deliberate and create relational landscape through story, song, and dance’ (p. 135).

Angeles. Luz, a young Mexican American woman who has been used her entire life by the media as a poster child for the effects of the drought, and as a marker for its progress, becomes a fashion model in her teens. She is exploited by the industry, abused sexually by the men who take her photographs and book her for work, and used by her father in order to sell his personal brand of evangelism.¹¹ As a young woman, Luz finds herself unable to leave California with the rest of the 'Mojavs' (p. 23) who flee the drought.¹² Instead, she settles in an ex-Hollywood starlet's mansion with Ray, a soldier who is AWOL from a 'forever war' (p. 6) which is referenced, but not explained, early in the narrative. Ray focuses on providing for Luz, fetching water rations, food, and ensuring her safety. Luz occupies herself with reading about early American writers and explorers (such as John Muir, Lewis and Clark, and John Wesley Powell) and their tales of the Southwest, and trying on the old clothes of the Hollywood starlet. On a mission to procure some blueberries, now a rare commodity, Luz and Ray stumble across a child, who they name Ig. Seeing that Ig is in the possession of a group of dangerous people, Luz and Ray take Ig home and decide to look after her, intending to migrate north into the wetter and cooler states of Washington and Oregon (p. 55). Upon learning that they cannot acquire identity papers due to Ray's desertion of his military post, they instead drive towards Georgia, intending to skirt north around the ever-growing dune sea named the Amargosa, with Ig in tow. It is on this journey into the Amargosa that the vulnerable Luz and Ig are rescued from dehydration by a travelling community, led by a prophet-like man called Levi. Described by his followers as a water-diviner, Levi is said to have unprecedented knowledge of the Amargosa and its movement across the Southwest, and produces food and shelter for his community. However, Levi has his own agenda, and seeks to disseminate a particular discourse on the existence of the Amargosa: something I will discuss further in the next section of this chapter.

Unlike some of the other novels covered in this thesis that approach the subject of climate change and its effects more indirectly, *The Swan Book* explicitly references anthropogenic climate change as the major cause of the societal and environmental breakdown depicted in its narratives. *Bella Donna*, for example, is seen as 'one of those people who had invented climate change' (p. 65), and there are frequent references to 'climate change' and 'the wars such a catastrophe created' (p. 104). *Gold Fame Citrus*, although it does not mention climate change by name, is framed entirely by its 'drought of droughts' (p. 4), and is set in an area where the effects of climate change are already increasingly tangible in our

¹¹ Claire Vaye Watkins, *Gold Fame Citrus* (London: Quercus, 2015), pp. 16, 12. All further page references to this work will be given in parentheses after the quotation in the text.

¹² 'Mojavs' is a derogatory term in the book, used to describe migrants fleeing the Southwest of the US.

contemporary moment. Watkins also takes care to frame the drought and the resulting desertification as an anthropogenic problem. The retreating communities in the text 'comfor[t] themselves by categorizing the dune as a natural disaster, though by then it had become increasingly difficult to distinguish the acts of God from the endeavors of men' (p. 120), and the narrator asks:

Who had latticed the Southwest with a network of aqueducts? Who had drained first Owens Lake then Mono Lake, Mammoth Lake [...] leaving behind wide white smears of dust? [...] Los Angeles City Council, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, City of San Diego, City of Phoenix. (p. 120)

These novels consider the effects of climate change in different parts of the world, and represent two very different cultures and the ways they will each be affected by the unpredictable and drastic alterations in weather and climate. However, there are some similarities in their narrative styles. Although informed by contrasting cultural traditions (North American and Indigenous Australian), both novels have an intermittent omniscient narrator, and an indirect free narrative that moves between characters. In both texts, this style frequently shifts to a broad, more removed commentary on the state of the world, examining the effects of climate change at a planetary level. Additionally, both narratives most frequently take the perspective of a female protagonist, journeying across altered and sometimes alien landscapes, depicting their particular bodily and psychological reactions to these changes. In a departure from *Carpentaria* — and possibly as a consequence of Wright's self-described turn towards the social politics of climate change and environmental damage in Australia¹³ — *The Swan Book* deals more explicitly with the plight of Indigenous women, whose sexualities, voices and agencies are often silenced by others. These oppressions are registered in Oblivia's muteness, and in the etymology of her name, which suggests a void, an absence, or even an extinction. Oblivia's gender is also drawn into close conversation with representations of the environment in which she lives, and the ways she is forcefully separated from the country that she knows and understands. *Gold Fame Citrus*, too, makes frequent reference to Luz's sexuality and the ways that this is exploited by others in order to survive in the new, dangerous spaces that anthropogenic climate change has created. The ethnicities of the protagonists also intersect with how they are perceived and exploited by others: as an Indigenous woman, Oblivia's needs and desires are marginalised by both the white establishment and Indigenous men, who make decisions about her movement, conduct and

¹³ 'A Brief Conversation with Alexis Wright', *World Literature Today*, 82.6 (2008), 55 (p. 55).

identity. As a Latina woman, Luz is viewed as interchangeable with other Latina models, and her body is both sexualised and demonised by the industry and the men who control it (pp. 166–67).

As in the previous chapter, both texts take a particular satirical angle on the discourses through which climate change is mediated. *The Swan Book* casts a critical eye over contemporary individualist neoliberal attitudes within Australian politics, in the form of the politician Warren Finch. The text examines how individuals can rise to power through populism and hunger for control — particularly in times of crisis — rather than through a track record of successful policies and an alleviation of poverty and inequality. Similarly, *Gold Fame Citrus* depicts a man in a position of leadership, seeking power and personal gain, and taking advantage of vulnerable people by creating an entirely new narrative of climate change and its subsequent disasters. Watkins' novel also demonstrates the fallacy of using a poster child for a particular crisis: from a baby and throughout her childhood, Luz is used as a marker in the media for the watershed moments in the intensifying drought (pp. 10–11). This synecdoche is used by politicians both as a rhetorical device in order to make pledges and promises, and in the hope that individualising the climate crisis into the figure of 'Baby Dunn' (p. 10) will prompt change through empathy. Both novels comment on the failures of contemporary cultural responses to climate change, whilst resisting the cathartic impulse of many apocalyptic cli-fi novels, which tend to imagine an end after the end, or a potential direction for new life (for example, *The Road*). A dark humour permeates each text, and clear ways forward for the continuation of humanity are not always articulated or imagined.

In this chapter I will also discuss the implications of new spatial constructs that are imagined and implemented by humans, sometimes filling the void that is left from the death or recession of human (and nonhuman) life in climate changed spaces. In *The Swan Book*, Oblivia lives on the edge of a rubbish dump in an Indigenous detention camp. The creation of the detention camp itself is a division of space that becomes increasingly prevalent in the futuristic landscape Wright creates, something echoed in *Gold Fame Citrus* as the population fleeing the encroaching desert dune sea is kept in squalid migrant prisons. The legal and political discourses that justify these types of internment and spatial management are heavily critiqued within the novels. Similarly, the fundamental changes in climate and landscape sculpt new environments from the characters' countries that are beyond the control of human intervention: the Amargosa Dune Sea that features in *Gold Fame Citrus* is a prime example of this, as is the perpetually flooding southern city that Oblivia is taken to in *The Swan Book*. Amongst these examples, the breakdown of human control over certain spaces is often overwritten in public circles, by discourses of denial or technological solutions.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that discourses of climate change can be used in unexpected and subversive ways to reinforce or challenge both accepted definitions of space, and the culturally specific ways that humans interact with the nonhuman environment. My examination of the ways in which these novels represent media, political and scientific discourses on space, and — crucially — ideas of climate change denial, reinforces my central thesis, which is that these texts dismantle the hegemonic discourses that reinforce current structures of power and can exacerbate the effects of climate change. Close engagement with the texts also reveals their modes of resistance against damaging epistemological framings of the environment. In accordance with other novels studied in this thesis, both texts also pay explicit attention to the dynamics of gender and race within the context of spatial politics, and to the ways in which drastically altered climate changed spaces may serve to exacerbate existing injustices in the speculative futures they present. I propose that the novels register, through their constructions of discourses on space and climate change, the increasing threat of *absence* that becomes more prevalent in environments deeply affected by anthropogenic climate change. Adeline Johns-Putra has usefully analysed *The Swan Book* in the context of its postmodern sensibility, and the absence of a singular, definitive dominant narrative voice within the novel.¹⁴ Taking this premise further, I would suggest that unlike many cli-fi texts, there is a presupposed absence of any spectator or future reader in this novel, which marks a divergence from the tendency of apocalyptic cli-fi narratives that foreground the existence of a society after humanity's impact on the Earth has reached its peak. I also take forward Johns-Putra's assertion that *The Swan Book's* stance of silence (in the form of Oblivia's muteness, among other things) is a rebellion against the anthropocentric bias of fiction,¹⁵ and suggest that this silence simultaneously records and draws attention to the increasing absence of nonhuman creatures in the climate-changing world. In addition to this, I argue that Oblivia's muteness is a resistance against a legal spatial framework that demands the vocalisation of secret Indigenous spatial knowledge in order to legally protect it. There is also an increasing absence of sensory stimulation (colour, taste, sound, and spectacle) in these novels, particularly in Watkins' representations of desertification and the Amargosa Dune Sea, which psychologically affects the characters within the text in profound ways. I identify an absence of what I will call *constitutive agency* in the texts: this refers to the creative and constitutive power of nonhuman life and geology. This is partially related to Gerald Vizenor's term 'active presence', which he uses to describe Indigenous stories that arise from the practices of

¹⁴ Adeline Johns-Putra, 'The Rest Is Silence: Postmodern and Postcolonial Possibilities in Climate Change Fiction', *Studies in the Novel*, 50 (2018), 26–42 (p. 27).

¹⁵ Johns-Putra, 'The Rest is Silence', p. 27.

survivance.¹⁶ He suggests that narratives of Indigenous survivance do not simply exist, but constitute an active (or native) presence. This is a sense of being that resists the invisibility, superficiality and absence latent within the colonial construct of the 'indian'. Narratives of survivance that produce active presence are 'traces of the originary'.¹⁷ If active presence articulates Indigenous resistance to colonial practices of marginalisation through human narratives of survivance, my term constitutive agency can be viewed as a recognition of nonhuman life processes, transitions and movements, and their significance in co-constructing landscapes (and in this case, country) alongside humans. In a climate-changed environment, the loss of constitutive agency could refer to a retreating glacier, or the literal disintegration of indigenous flora, or human-engineered spaces that harbour monocultures, or bring about a total absence of ecosystems altogether (for example the dune sea or fields of dead yucca trees in *Gold Fame Citrus*).

Lastly, and following on from the idea of the absence of agential nonhuman life, the texts draw on the associations between barren and lifeless lands, and the absence of fertility within the female body. Both novels gesture towards the connections between the increased risk of sexual trauma and violence against women in the chaotic climate changed-spaces (as suggested by both female protagonists' histories of sexual abuse). The texts describe the increasing hegemony of toxic masculinity in climate-changed settings, the worsening exploitation of women, and in a satirical reversal of the 'Mother Earth Goddess' figure that is harnessed in much environmental discourse, the novels articulate a scenario in which their female protagonists are unable to sustain and nurture future life (despite their efforts). I suggest that this is both a resistance against the trope of the Mother Earth Goddess, which (as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Three) places the burden of reproducing and nurturing solely on to women. It is also a subversion of other contemporary climate fiction novels and media, which often end with the hopeful return to a family unit (Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*), a character finding faith in children (Ian McEwan's *Solar*), or the possibility of newly populated posthuman futures (Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* trilogy). In contrast, both of the novels under consideration here end with the implied death of the female protagonists. At the end of *Gold Fame Citrus*, Luz steps into a flash flood and gets swept away, and in the final stages of *The Swan Book*, Oblivia is dying of starvation and dehydration (pp. 317–20), but she reappears in the last few pages of the novel, back at what is left of the destroyed swamp, holding the last swan of its species (p. 332). She is

¹⁶ Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), p. 15.

¹⁷ Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, pp. 34–36.

described by visitors as a spirit or ghost-like figure who roams the swamp at night, and ‘always stayed like a *wulumbarra*, teenage girl’ (p. 334). With the implied deaths of the main characters, then, refuge spaces are closed down, and the possibility of children (or posthuman progeny) can no longer ensure a future society. The female characters are separated from the beings they nurture (Oblivia’s swan cygnet in *The Swan Book* and baby Ig in *Gold Fame Citrus*), and their futures are left uncertain. In summary, I argue here that some of the discourses of climate change and space in these novels attempt to obscure or rectify, in different ways, the sense of absence that is experienced by the characters in the texts. The seemingly hopeless endings to the novels work to undo any obscuring of this absence, and they resist attempts to imagine a repopulating of devoid spaces within their powerful final scenes.

I frequently use the terms ‘space’, ‘place’, ‘landscape’ and ‘environment’ in this chapter. Although some of these terms — particularly the last two — are often used interchangeably, each encodes crucial differences. Massey has conducted substantial critical work on the (gender) politics of space and place, and how these terms are deployed as cultural constructs. She notes the mobility of both terms,¹⁸ but gestures towards problematic framings (both academic and not) of place as ‘bounded [...] a site of an authenticity, as singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity [...] which rests in part on the view of space as stasis’.¹⁹ Building on Massey’s theorising, Ingold further interrogates the problem of viewing place as a bounded location within a wider space, instead advocating for ‘wayfaring’: a recognition that humans live and inhabit the world ‘not inside places but through, around, to and from them, from and to places elsewhere’,²⁰ constituting places through the density of intertwining paths of movement. Not ‘bound’ by place, then, but ‘place-binding’.²¹ In light of these definitions, in this chapter I talk about space in terms of its mutability and dynamism, whilst remaining cognisant of spatial narratives that imagine it to be otherwise (that is, vacant or abstract). Similarly, when referencing place, I consider the politicised and problematic elements of traditional notions of enclosure and place-making, whilst negotiating the foregrounding of less restrictive ideas of place in the novels. It is also important to note that when I refer to ‘different’ or ‘particular’ spaces, although I maintain that the continuity of space is one of its fundamental characteristics, I am referring to spaces that are characterised by more distinct sets of interrelations of matter. For example, ocean spaces are populated, dynamic and fluid, with particular sets of ecosystems or types of human interactivity that constitute their existence. Another type of space may be considered in contrast: an ice field that is less

¹⁸ *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 1.

¹⁹ *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 5.

²⁰ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 148.

²¹ *Being Alive*, pp. 148–49, original emphasis.

diversely populated and fast-moving, with cavernous gaps that mark breaks of matter in its composite surface, and ecosystems consisting of clusters of microorganisms or lichens rather than fish, mammals or insects. Although permeable and co-constitutive, these spaces can still be characterised and differentiated by, for example, the presence of different states of matter (for example water, ice or sand) and the ecosystems (or lack thereof) that they support. Similarly, the social processes and dynamics that constitute particular spaces (and that are in turn informed and shaped by those spaces) will necessarily be different, therefore creating diverse, heterogeneous, yet interrelated spaces.

I use the term 'environment' to refer to the material surroundings represented in the novels in question, from biological, to anthropogenic, to geological phenomena. In contrast, 'landscape' describes the overarching structure of these surroundings, drawing on Burel and Baudry's definition, which purports that 'landscape' imagines a structure that exists at a higher level than the ecosystems present within a particular environment. They also argue that landscape 'exists independently of perception'.²² Whilst it should be recognised that landscape can be an objectively identifiable structure within an environment, in a literary sense it is relative to perception, and therefore cultural. This is not only in terms of how it may be viewed from a particular location, but also because multiple meanings can, of course, be derived from a single landscape. It is also pivotal to consider this in relation to the weather (and by extension, I suggest, climate): as Ingold has pointed out, the weather is 'not so much as an *object* of perception as what we perceive *in*',²³ shaping the landscapes that we perceive through its effects on light, sound and movement of matter. The words and phrases that Alexis Wright uses in *The Swan Book* to describe Indigenous conceptualisations of the environment are equally important to the terms I use above: for example, her references to country, songlines, and Dreamtime.²⁴

Gold Fame Citrus (2015)

Gold Fame Citrus and Narratives of the American Southwest

Claire Vaye Watkins makes explicit reference to many famous American writers and pioneers of industry in *Gold Fame Citrus*. Allusions to authors such as John Muir, William Mulholland and John Wesley Powell (among others) are scattered throughout the novel: Luz even carries works by these writers with her on her journey into the Amargosa Dune Sea. As Susan Kollin has pointed out, these men were:

²² Françoise Burel and Jacques Baudry, *Landscape Ecology: Concepts, Methods, and Applications* (Enfield, NH: Science Publishers, 2003), p. 43.

²³ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 130.

²⁴ See Chapter One for definitions of these terms.

Figures whose lives intertwined with water and the development of the American West, either as guide, explorer, and conservationist, or in the case of Mulholland, as the person responsible for building the infrastructure providing LA with its modern water supply.²⁵

This contextualisation of the novel's vaguely futuristic setting, in a deserted and desertified Los Angeles, foregrounds the novel's place in the literature of the American Southwest, but also places the text in stark contrast with its forerunners. In citing these men and their writing, which often documents their attempts to map, scrutinize, record and traverse the west of the US, Watkins makes reference to — and pits *Gold Fame Citrus* against — what Massey has called the 'masculinism of geography', which seeks to enclose and control feminine-coded space (in this case, the fertile unchartered territories of the US).²⁶ This is perceptible at crucial points in the text. Early in the narrative, the narrator remarks that:

Nature had refused to offer herself to them. The water, the green, the mammalian, the tropical, the semitropical, the leafy, the verdant, the motherloving citrus, all of it was denied them and had been denied them so long that [...] it became more and more impossible to conceive of a time when it had not been denied them. The prospect of Mother Nature opening her legs and inviting Los Angeles back into her ripeness was, like the disks of water shimmering in the last foothill reservoirs patrolled by the National Guard, evaporating daily. (p. 7)

The image of Mother Nature literally shutting out humanity from her fertile body is a trope that derives from the metanarrative of colonialism, and the controlling or mapping of supposedly unoccupied fertile new lands. Sarah Upstone has named this the 'initial colonial project of spatial ordering', which is in itself a 'fantasy of space as a medium that is capable of being ordered'.²⁷ However, there is hyperbole perceptible in this segment of the text, with its overemphasised sensory language and cataloguing of adjectives like 'water, green, the mammalian [...] leafy, verdant'. In this extract Watkins is satirically recreating the idealisation of nature in the early narratives of colonial exploration into supposedly uncharted territory, and thereby satirising their romanticised perspective on the environment and its inhabitants. For example, John Muir, a nineteenth-century naturalist and botanist who inspired the

²⁵ Susan Kollin, 'Environments in Western American Literature', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* <<https://oxfordre.com/literature/>> [accessed 10 August 2018].

²⁶ *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 7.

²⁷ Sarah Upstone, *Spatial Politics and the Postcolonial Novel* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 5; p. 6.

designation of many US National Parks such as Yosemite and Sequoia, wrote an essay entitled 'Wild Wool' in 1875. 'Wild Wool' extols the virtue of 'wildness' over cultivation, and views Mother Nature as a welcoming and nurturing figure who cares for her 'bairns' through her 'love-work'.²⁸ As well as the figure of the nurturing mother, Muir also depicts the lands across which he travels in the same vocabulary of hyperbolic fertility and feminisation that Watkins satirises: his description of the Puget Sound in Washington State, feminised as 'she', remarks upon 'her copious rains and deep fertile soil, being clothed with forests of evergreens', with landscapes that are 'exquisitely fine and fresh, and full of glad, rejoicing life'.²⁹ In these examples, Muir extols an idealisation of nature characteristic of this time: nature as the caring and nurturing mother, who bestows kindness and affection on her creatures, but also as the fertile feminine subject who produces and sustains 'glad, rejoicing life'. Finding order, design and feminine qualities (such as care and affection) in nature is a typical example of the feminisation of nature in writing from this period, and in these examples and the extract from *Gold Fame Citrus*, 'nature' is imagined as a fertile woman who exists to serve others (men, her 'bairns', or humans in general). In the extract above, Watkins alludes to these tropes, but exaggerates the metaphor to a hyperbolic extent, following through this feminisation of nature to an extravagant and sexualised conclusion. Instead of the welcoming and nurturing mother — a paradoxical de-sexualised giver of life — in this scenario Mother Nature becomes a symbol of denial and rejection, refusing to care for, nurture, or offer pleasure to humans. This extract also exemplifies another narrative tradition in US colonial writing. As Susan Kollin has noted:

When European explorers and Anglo-American tourists first arrived in the Southwest, they struggled to comprehend the geographical and climate challenges posed by the desert. As a way of making sense of the terrain, many writers described the space

²⁸ John Muir, 'Wild Wool', in *Wilderness Essays*, rev. edn (Layton: Gibbs Smith, 2011), pp. 227–42 (p. 229; p. 230). By prioritising 'wildness' over cultivation, Muir also erases the history of Native American presence and cultivation practices in these areas: by viewing these landscapes (here, he references the Sierra sheep of the Sierra Nevada mountains in California) as pristine wilderness free from human intervention, Native American presence and knowledge of the area is overwritten and marginalised, and simultaneously degraded. Cultivation and agricultural practices that worked to shape the landscape that Muir praises are ignored. Muir frequently wrote disparagingly of Native Americans and saw them as impure and dirty: see Carolyn Merchant, 'Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History', *Environmental History*, 3 (2003), 380–94. Similarly, Muir's conservation practices and support of the National Parks system worked to solidify the removal of Native Americans from their land in these areas, making it impossible for them to ever return and settle there again. For more detail on this matter, see Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁹ John Muir, 'Puget Sound', in *Steep Trails*, ed. by William Frederic Badè (Salt Lake City: Project Gutenberg, 1995), n. p. Project Gutenberg ebook.

through a familiar language, using biblical imagery to situate the desert as a New World Holy Land waiting to be claimed.³⁰

In the extract from the novel, the inhabitants of the now completely desertified California view the previously temperate climate and hospitable landscape as a right that is being ‘denied’ them, by the fickle and unreliable Mother Nature. This aligns with Kollin’s comment about the tendency amongst European colonisers to narrate the new landscape of the Southwest in a way that framed their occupation of it as a divine right. This premise is supported by Watkins’ comment in a radio interview following the book’s release: she states, referring to the Southwest (where she herself grew up), that ‘I don’t know of a region in America that is still buying into their own mythology so unquestioningly. We’re still under the impression that we deserve to be there [...] guzzling up whatever resources because it’s our manifest destiny’.³¹ Watkins demonstrates an awareness of this prevalent discourse of instrumentalism, the legacy of which determines human interaction with the environment in this area, and the novel exposes the hypocrisy, mythology and denial latent within this idea.

In the period 2011–2017, during which Watkins wrote and published *Gold Fame Citrus*, California was experiencing the driest, most intense drought since record-keeping began, leading to the implementation of water restrictions, a sharp increase in the risk of wildfire (a problem that has intensified in the past two years), and increased threat to native wildlife.³² All of these effects are realised in the novel: from the beginning of the text, there is a distinct absence of plants, wildlife and water (pp. 6–7). Instead there are only ‘scorched hills’ and ‘a coyote carcass going wicker in the ravine’ (p. 7). Particularly in this opening segment, Watkins reverses the optimistic colonial narrative tradition of the American Southwest: Luz is reading a biography of John Wesley Powell, and visits the library in the mansion where she and Ray live (p. 5), listing the works of ‘Lewis and Clark and Sacajawea and William Mulholland and John Muir’ that are kept there (p. 8). However, the scene Watkins presents — a dry, lifeless canyon populated only with abandoned mansions and dead creatures — acts as a foil for the ‘New World Holy Land’ that Kollin describes in colonial writings of the Southwest. The future that the colonial discourse of the ‘New World Holy Land’ imagines is revealed to be a myth. *Gold Fame Citrus* operates, therefore, as an investigation of the consequences of these damaging

³⁰ Kollin, ‘Environments in Western American Literature’.

³¹ Steve Inskeep, ‘California’s Growing Dunes in *Gold Fame Citrus* Force Residents to Retreat: Interview with Claire Vaye Watkins’, *Morning Edition*, NPR, 7 October 2015 <<https://www.npr.org/2015/10/07/446499515/californias-growing-dunes-in-gold-fame-citrus-force-residents-to-retreat>> [accessed 20 June 2019].

³² Public Policy Institute of California, ‘California’s Latest Drought’ (July 2016), <<http://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-latest-drought/>> [accessed 10 August 2018].

narratives, that promote (as Watkins puts it), the ‘guzzling [of] resources’ in the Southwest, in the misguided belief that its population ‘deserve[s] to be there’. Tellingly, the epigraph placed at the beginning of the first chapter (named ‘Book One’) is a quotation from William Mulholland, the engineer who built the water supply for Los Angeles, which prompted the California Water Wars that lasted throughout much of the twentieth century. The epigraph reads: ‘There it is. Take it’ (p. 1). This ironic framing recalls the long history of the colonisation, agriculture and city-making within the American Southwest, but most significantly, it distils the discourse of resource exploitation within this landscape into a few words, allowing the novel’s premise to satirically undermine the viability of this statement as it progresses. Massey has remarked that conceiving of space as in the voyages of discovery — as something to be crossed and potentially conquered — ‘has particular ramifications’. One of these ramifications is thinking of ‘other places, peoples, cultures simply as phenomena “on” this surface’, which ‘is not an innocent manoeuvre’, as these phenomena can then be perceived as solely material resources to be used by the supposed conqueror.³³ In *Gold Fame Citrus*, Watkins undermines this conceptualisation of space through the ultimate failure of the colonising and civilising project in the Southwest, and its utter depletion of natural resources.

Although the novel is set in a speculative future, Watkins describes the drought and desertification already occurring in the region in the present, and imagines the American Southwest of *Gold Fame Citrus* as a logical progression of the effects that many of its inhabitants are already currently experiencing. This self-conscious styling of the novel reads like an epilogue to the writing of the likes of Lewis and Clark, John Muir, and others, and therefore adds weight to Kollin’s claim that, in the novel:

A certain kind of nature writing itself faces extinction in this future West, as it becomes increasingly clear that forms of writing celebrating the virtues of pure nature are not likely to be viable or effective literature in struggles for the region’s survival.³⁴

This is particularly relevant in relation to Muir’s ‘Wild Wool’. In this essay, Muir advocates for wildness above all forms of human cultivation or agriculture (using the example here of wild versus cultivated sheep’s wool). Here, the idea of purity within nature that Kollin identifies is sustained and prized above all else. The implications of this are obviously troubling, in its hierarchical framing of nature and culture as entirely separate entities. Similarly, the extended conceit of Nature as carer, curator and God in Muir’s essay appeals to a human desire for

³³ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 4.

³⁴ Kollin, ‘Environments in Western American Literature’.

some semblance of control over the environment. In encouraging his readers to retreat from cultivating practices and instead give these over to Nature's management, Muir is not challenging the implications of this desire for control, but rather satisfying it with the reassurance that this external control is being exerted by another anthropomorphised figure, that of Mother Nature.

Whilst it is difficult to judge what Kollin means by the term 'effective literature' in the 'struggles for the region's survival', in *Gold Fame Citrus*, readers bear witness to the end result of the deification of nature that is extolled in these earlier writings. Whilst the scenario Watkins provides is not a hopeful one, it exposes the possible consequences of adhering to a discourse that relies upon the dual constructs of a nurturing and faithful Mother Nature, and a God-given right to the natural resources of the land. Instead of protecting the supposedly new lands described in these colonising narratives of the Southwest, the framing of these spaces as endlessly nurturing, bountiful and fertile eventually renders the land empty and drained of both water and nutrients: California and the West of America are now almost completely uninhabitable spaces for humans and the ecosystems that once thrived there. The irrigation systems in the area that were implemented by Mulholland — following Brigham Young's irrigation of Utah — have drained the land, fulfilling Mark Reisner's astute observation that 'confronted by the desert, the first thing Americans want to do is change it'.³⁵ The novel's constant revisiting of John Muir serves as a satirical reminder of the fact that designated 'natural' and 'protected spaces' were not immune from the over-exploitation of land and the ensuing drought and desertification that occurred beyond their boundaries. It also implicitly suggests that their designation (for example in the form of National Parks) may not have been entirely beneficial in the first place: Native American communities were banished from their land in the wake of these enclosures (especially in Yellowstone, Yosemite and Glacier), and their usage of the land (including controlled burning, hunting, and the cultivation of plants) was curtailed.³⁶ As Mark David Spence has argued, 'uninhabited wilderness had to be created before it could be preserved',³⁷ or in other words, this particular discourse of space as wilderness had to be culturally constructed and normalised before it could be enclosed. In a moment of pessimistic clarity in the novel, Luz sees 'the National Parks for the tokens they were. Everything she once knew of the natural world was revealed to be propaganda or at best publicity' (p. 212), and we learn that as the drought extended and the dune sea progressed,

³⁵ Mark Reisner, *Cadillac Desert* (Martin Secker and Warburg: London, 1990), p. 2; p. 4.

³⁶ Spence, pp. 4–5; 44–45.

³⁷ Spence, p. 4.

the government dismantled the national park system completely (p. 145) as the desertification of the parks rendered them inaccessible and devoid of life.

The narrative direction that Watkins takes with *Gold Fame Citrus* articulates a clear shift from the writings of colonial pioneers in the US — with their purposeful and exploratory journeys and the promise of fertile new lands, new resources and wilderness — to a narrative in which the protagonists are journeying into a threatening unknown, one that has no potential for cultivation, refuge or solace. Whilst it is true that the first European explorers of the US would have often been journeying into lands previously unknown to them, the Amargosa Dune Sea forecloses any notion of comfort, or fertile new lands. It also disallows any true form of navigation or mapping (which were the primary goals of European colonisers in the US Southwest). The Amargosa is changeable, unpredictable, and hostile, and almost entirely devoid of life. Those who traverse it cannot hope to embed themselves successfully within the landscape, make their homes within it or live from the land. It is a type of space that prohibits the possibility of any kind of place-making. In the scenes that take place within the dune sea, Watkins articulates a discourse on climate change that consolidates the future of the American Southwest as a permanently lifeless and inhospitable environment. Within this discourse, however, the text enacts the loss of refuge spaces within climate-changed landscapes, and registers the multiple, contradictory and complex process of mourning this loss.

Discourses of Loss: Mourning Consumption

In the previous chapter, we saw that the literary disruption of ‘time’s arrow’ was often indirectly referenced in the texts, in order to carve out space for new epistemological understandings of time and climate change. In this section, I show that a similar process is taking place in the disruption of specific Western conceptualisations of space (such as imagining space as a static surface upon which other phenomena exist). The loss of direction and orientation experienced by the white inhabitants of Desperance in *Carpentaria*, for example, arises as a result of their reliance on Western modes of time-telling, which fail when met with drastic environmental change. In *Gold Fame Citrus*, however, Watkins centralises the psychological suffering of her protagonists. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, in *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, Timothy Clark points out that one strand of unproductive contemporary ecocritical methodology is ecopsychology, or the tendency to diagnose entire communities (within and outside literary texts that might be under consideration) with psychological disorders that are only applicable, in a clinical sense, to individuals. This approach — like diagnosing a society with some kind of arrested development, which Clark cites as a typical example — attempts to distil the vast and complex emotional and

psychological impacts of climate change into a supposedly manageable and singular issue, which is in itself fraught with problems. As Clark attests, 'to frame the scale at which one considers a problem', in this instance to frame it at the level of an entire community or society, 'is also sometimes a way of evading it'.³⁸ This approach also suggests that a group of people can be defined holistically by its individual members' psychological state, which is of course reductive and obscures difference within groups. It is important to note, then, that by discussing the psychological impacts that climate-changed (or *changing*) spaces have on the characters in *Gold Fame Citrus*, I do not ascribe a particular illness or condition to society or community at large. Rather, I consider how the protagonists directly respond to these increasingly depopulated and undifferentiated spaces. Without diagnosing entire societies in the novel with disorders via an ecopsychological approach, it is necessary to consider how discourses that obscure and deflect from climate change and its root causes can be internalised and challenged at a psychological level. In order to examine how particular discourses on space and climate change are constructed and sustained, individual psychologies require special attention. This allows for a thorough consideration of how individual experiences of spatiality and climate change are refracted through intersections of gender, race, and social class. As Massey has attested, 'geography matters to the construction of gender',³⁹ and therefore gender must influence the discursive framing of geography.

In *Gold Fame Citrus*, the characters' psychological distress occurs firstly as a result of their loss of orientation and direction in climate changed spaces, secondly as a result of the loss of refuge within those spaces, and thirdly due to the material loss of nonhuman (and human) beings, ecosystems, and agential matter within the spaces described in the novel. This is evident in some of Watkins' commentary on how she conceived of the driving narrative force of *Gold Fame Citrus*, the Amargosa dune sea:

The desert is a really powerful unsubtle landscape. Sand dunes are especially, I think, a little bit creepy because they're always moving [...] You might look back over your shoulder to try and get your bearings, and the horizon is completely different.⁴⁰

This idea has clearly informed the novel at multiple levels, most obviously in the text's overarching discourse of loss. One particular excerpt explores this sense of loss in terms of depopulation of animals and plants from the previously biodiverse Californian environment. At the beginning of the novel, when Luz and Ray are living in a Hollywood starlet's abandoned

³⁸ Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, pp. 74–75.

³⁹ *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Inskeep, 'California's Growing Dunes'.

mansion in the Los Angeles hills, Luz remarks that ‘any and all vinery was dead. Plantwise there was the dried pool slime and the gnarled leafless grapevine and spiny somethings coming through the planks of the deck, too savage to kill’ (p. 6). She notes the absence of ‘wild things seeking refuge from the scorched hills’ (p. 7), and instead finds only ‘scorpions coming up through the drains, a pair of mummified frogs in the waterless fountain, a coyote carcass going wicker in the ravine [...] she yearned for fauna more charismatic’, to which Ray replies “‘It’s thinking like that that got us into this’” (p. 7).

Here, Watkins demonstrates an awareness of how wildlife and plant life is ranked hierarchically: Luz is unfulfilled by the scorpions and spiny plants, instead desiring ‘charismatic’ creatures, ‘birdsong’ (p. 7) and colourful ‘bougainvillea’ (p. 6) to decorate her home. The word ‘charismatic’ here is key, as it gestures towards the dangers of privileging certain types of fauna and flora within environmentalism and climate change communication, due to their perceived aesthetic or affective power.⁴¹ It also suggests that Luz’s desire is derived from her need to be entertained and stimulated, rather than a desire for biodiversity to exist for its’ own sake. This is further exemplified by the explicitly stated lack of ‘wild things seeking refuge’ (p. 7) in Luz’s world, and the distress it causes her: she ‘yearned for menagerie, left the windows and doors open day and night to invite it, even when Ray complained of the dust, even when he warned that the Santa Anas would drive her insane’ (p. 7). This appears to be a manifestation of Albrecht’s ‘solastalgia’: the ‘negative affect that is exacerbated by a sense of powerlessness or lack of control over the unfolding [environmental] change process’.⁴² Rather than expressing sadness or distress directly, however, as Albrecht’s interviewees have done, Luz appears to express the symptoms of this psychoterratic condition in more indirect ways.⁴³ The absence of any other life, or the sensory stimuli of the ‘menagerie’ Luz wishes for, causes her to risk exposure to the unpredictable climate: her open windows invite ‘air hazy and amber with smoke [...] sand in the bedsheets and in her armpits [...]. Jumping bugs nesting in the mattress’ (p. 7). As well as noting the explicit absence of refuge spaces for the animals wanting to hide from the ‘scorched hills’ (p. 7), the description of the sand and bugs invading Luz’s home and body emphasise the lack of refuge for herself and Ray from the effects of the warmed climate and desertified landscape. Other creatures do appear, such as the prairie dog that she finds in the house, but its sudden movements and sounds spook Luz, and she kicks it

⁴¹ See, for example, Ursula K. Heise’s description of ‘charismatic megafauna’ and their unique place in environmental narratives in *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016), p. 35.

⁴² Glenn Albrecht and others, ‘Solastalgia: the Distress Caused by Environmental Change’, *Australasian Psychiatry*, 15 sup. (2007), S95–S98 (p. S95).

⁴³ Albrecht and others, ‘Solastalgia’, pp. S95–S98.

into the library where Ray kills it (“‘I think it was rabid,” she lied’, p. 9), which demonstrates her paradoxical desire to be removed from nonhumans as well as needing the sensory stimulation that they provide. This scene exemplifies Luz’s romanticising of the aesthetic qualities of ‘menagerie’ and biodiversity, but also her unwillingness to interact directly with nonhuman life.

The novel casts a satirical eye over the consumerism and excess that has led California and the Southwest into its current state. The title, *Gold Fame Citrus*, is impossible to ignore, as it ensures that capitalism — the acquisition of wealth, material goods and the implementation of large-scale agriculture — frames the way the novel is approached. Punning on the neighbourhood’s former name (Laurel Canyon, near Hollywood and Mulholland Drive), Luz describes their ‘laureless canyon’ as a ‘ruined heaven’ (p. 7). The wordplay here draws explicit attention to the absence of the laurel plant that literally defined the area. The Hollywood home, in a metaphor for the excess of LA society in previous years, no longer provides an effective shelter from the ‘ever-beaming, ever-heating, ever-evaporating sun’ (p. 4). This is reinforced early in the opening section of the novel, when Ray tells Luz that her people came to California in the first place for ‘something better. Gold, fame, citrus. Mirage’ (p. 23), or in other words, searching for wealth (which, as this extract indicates, is a temporary and illusory ‘mirage’). This satire intensifies through the text’s criticism of a specific narrative of loss that has resulted from capitalist and individualist values: the loss of nonhuman nature as an accessible commodity. For example, we learn from the passage explored above that Luz feels a sense of unease, loss and boredom in response to the lack of creatures, plants, and their colours and sounds populating the space that she has claimed as her home. She instead tries to comfort herself by trying on the clothes of the Hollywood starlet who previously occupied the house: she dresses herself in a ‘peachy silk shift [...] a handwoven poncho of oranges and golds’, and then ‘a delicate tennis bracelet [...] Like dewdrops strung around her wafer wrist, something the photographers would have said’ (p. 4). Finally, she tries a ‘clinging cobalt mermaid gown dense with beads [...] she looked liquid’ (p. 4). Recalling the vanished citrus and fruit from her home state, and the similarly non-existent water, these clothes are reminiscent of the remnants of nature after extended human intervention: it becomes commodified, is exploited and controlled, and then eventually disappears completely. Watkins’ emphasis on Luz’s body, with her ‘wafer wrist’, ‘grimy skin’ and ‘filthy hair’ (p. 4), draws attention towards her lack of nourishment and poor hygiene due to the absence of water. Ultimately, the aesthetic contrast here between her body and her adornments underlines the failure of these nature substitutes (the clothing), to fulfil and nourish her body in the way that their natural counterparts would. The kind of loss that Luz experiences here, as in the passage above where

she notes her desire for 'menagerie', is an individualistic one: a mourning of the lack of sensory stimulation, of sound, colour, taste and touch, and a mourning for the loss of a personal benefit from these stimuli, rather than of the loss of the phenomena itself. This, I suggest, is a discourse that presents the loss of nature as a commodity, and as something to be acquired and used for personal gratification, as the true tragedy of desertified and climate changed spaces. This is something that Luz later realises:

We fill our homes with macabre altars to the live things we've murdered—the floral print of the twin mattress in her childhood bedroom, stripped of its sheets when she soiled them; ferns on throw pillows coated in formaldehyde; poppies on petrochemical dinner plates; boxes and bags of bulk pulpstuffs emblazoned with plant imagery [...] A rock on a window ledge, cut flowers stabbed in a vase, wreath of sprigs nailed to the front door—every house a mausoleum. (p. 212)

With these commodified consumer versions of nature no longer valuable as cultural capital in this part of America, due to the societal and environmental breakdown of the area, a different idea fills this void and becomes the currency with which people bargain. Ray hears of blueberries from Seattle becoming available at the 'raindance' (pp. 14; 19), which is a black market gathering of tradespeople and the remaining public for the exchange of goods. On hearing of this, Luz whispers "'Seattle," [...] the word itself like rain' (p. 19), which recalls John Muir's description of the Puget Sound in Washington discussed previously. This fantasy of reaching Seattle in the north, in which Luz later imagines 'a little cottage on a sound where the air is indigo and ever-jeweled with mist', and 'velvet moss and steady evergreens' (p. 55), becomes something that she subconsciously believes can be accessed via purchasing the blueberries, which later turn out to be 'tasteless mucus' (p. 40), like the rest of the fruits and vegetables that they occasionally manage to procure, which are 'flaccid', 'ashen', or 'filled with dust' (p. 17). The sense of loss of nature and natural features, coupled with the yearning that Luz feels, are a hangover from the consumerist Los Angeles society she was previously a part of. As the text reveals, there is not any intrinsic value in the blueberries themselves, as they are tasteless and devoid of nutrients. It is rather the idea that this fruit can still exist elsewhere, in Seattle — an alternative space that remains undamaged by drought and desertification — that holds value for the characters. In this way, the discourse of loss in this strand of the narrative functions as a superficial comfort to the characters, rather than allowing them to access any new understanding or insight into their situation.

This discourse of loss also entails the increasing absence of refuge places in a desertified US, which is exemplified more clearly when Ray, Luz and baby Ig journey into the

Amargosa, intending to escape Los Angeles and ultimately reach Georgia. Taking a car loaded with supplies donated by a local black-market supplier, the family reach the Amargosa quicker than they expect: as Ray notes, 'it's just that big' (p. 84). It is described as a 'sandsnow mirage', and as they gaze upon it, the characters become 'hypnotized by fertilizer dust and saline particulate and the pulverized bones of ancient sea creatures, though they did not know it' (p. 85). This is a significant moment: it marks the point in the text at which it becomes apparent that the anthropogenic desertification in the novel is at once awe-inspiring in its magnitude, and also the driving process of the literal disintegration of landscapes, environments and spaces within the world of the novel. The characters' awed reactions to the Amargosa invoke the 'nature-as-sublime' trope that is employed in much environmentalist discourse — in other words, the viewing of an immense expanse of landscape as a 'space separate from culture'⁴⁴ — whilst simultaneously undermining it. However, the Amargosa is not living nonhuman nature, or a collection of 'pristine' ecosystems that represent something 'beyond human comprehension'.⁴⁵ Instead, it is a mass representative of anthropogenic climate change; it is the result of a capitalist drive towards expansion, progress, and of an instrumentalist view of the environment. Other sections in the novel explore similar reactions to seeing the expanse of the Amargosa: a Mojav refugee describes being 'overcome with this very powerful feeling [...] a feeling of, well, belonging' as she gazed upon it (p. 124), and a stockbroker flying over the dune sea in a plane described becoming 'very full but also incredibly calm [...] like heaven, or the rush of warmth before you freeze to death' (p. 125). The narrator remarks, following these descriptions, that 'the Amargosa is both siren and jagged reef, its good vibes a blessing, its curse just as likely' (p. 125). The dual experience of wonder and trepidation articulated in these sections of the text therefore operate in a similar way to the discourse of loss produced by the inability to commodify nonhuman nature, in that it reveals a feeling of trepidation over the imagined loss of pristine 'natural' spaces, as the Amargosa is almost totally absent of nonhuman life. Simultaneously, however, it has a 'pull [...] far beyond topographic charm', a 'tug of iron in the blood' (p. 124), which is both a sense of 'belonging', in that this vast alteration of space was the logical ending to capitalist expansion, and a recognition of the impending death that this entails (as the stockbroker articulates in the quotation above). It becomes apparent here that the sense of loss and absence that permeates the text in these different manifestations is not simply the effects on an individual of the disappearance of external phenomena. Rather, this dissolution is literally bound up with collective human action, in the mix of manmade fertiliser, salt, and ancient fossilised creatures that makes up

⁴⁴ Chaseten Remillard, 'Picturing Environmental Risk: The Canadian Oil-Sands and the *National Geographic*', *The International Communication Gazette*, 73 (2011), 127–43 (p. 132).

⁴⁵ Remillard, p. 132.

the Amargosa, even though Luz and Ray are not fully aware of this in their initial confrontation of the spectacle. With these scenes, Watkins floats the possibility that the narration of individual emotional responses and experiences of loss in climate changed spaces is not solely selfish and individualistic, but has the potential to unite individuals through a sense of collective responsibility and 'belonging' to the Amargosa. In collectively contributing to the desertification that creates the Amargosa, the sense of connection with it, which some of the characters above express, articulates an underlying comprehension of shared culpability.

Another facet of loss that features heavily throughout the text is the idea of disintegration. This is most perceptible in the scene in which Luz, Ray and Ig stop to look at a forest of yucca trees that they come across on their journey. On touching the trees, they realise that they are all dead and are turning into dust: the first tree they touch falls apart 'like the tearing of a very delicate fabric. Gossamer, or cheesecloth. A crepe-ish rip, and the massive hairy yucca swayed, somehow. Luz and Ray staggered back and the tree fell between them, sending up a dry veil of dust' (p. 87). The pair then destroy the last vestiges of the dead forest for fun, finding the 'dessicate death rattle' of each trunk 'vastly satisfying' (p. 88). Watkins writes,

They continued like this, crushing large swaths through the papier-mâché forest, trampling the flimsy giants, pulverizing the ghostly gray cellulose carcasses and sending up great clouds of dust and cinder. Dessication vibrated in their sinews, destruction tingled in their molars. (p. 88)

The language used here is a paradigm of the novel's depiction of disintegration and loss. Luz and Ray's expectations of finding living trees to show to Ig are undermined: as they look more closely at the gathering of trees, Luz remarks that 'this was no forest but a cemetery' (p. 88). However, the shock they experience when they first witness this landscape is mitigated by the sense of control they acquire as they destroy the dead trunks, ensuring that the trees become part of the dissipated and unstable dune sea as they are turned to dust, and perhaps mitigating the effects of solastalgia. The sensory stimulation that they gain from these actions is emphasised; the sounds and vibrations from the trees breaking and hitting the ground leave them 'satis[fied]' (p. 88). Although the characters feel a sense of loss at the death of the yucca trees as they first approach the scene, they do not see themselves as fully implicated in that death. Instead, they revel in the return of the tree carcasses to the dusty earth. Luz and Ray's lack of self-awareness as they take pleasure in dismantling the remnants of the plants becomes hyperbolic: they stand among 'their own gleeful debris' (p. 88), in a microcosm of the

destruction of the American Southwest by a society that fails to acknowledge the environmental consequences of their exploitation of resources.

Watkins ends this scene by stating that ‘a supernatural stillness overtook them, the fear they had tried to laugh away’ (p. 88). This last comment indicates that the characters are suppressing the notion of their own implication in the destruction of their landscape. Here, it is only when the absence of populated space — in this case, the vanishing of the final dead husks of a Californian ecosystem — becomes overwhelming, that Luz and Ray demonstrate some psychological awareness of their actions. The sense of loss that is perceptible here, as a response to climate-changed space, is not individualistic, or a selfish mourning of the loss of nature as a commodity. Instead, in this scene the characters seem to begin to show an understanding of the interconnectedness between human behaviour and the environment, and a comprehension that this interconnectedness can disrupt ecosystems in such an extreme way. The characters’ hunger for sensory stimulation (evident through Watkin’s use of sensory language in this scene) appears to be a way to reconnect themselves bodily with their surroundings, and draw themselves again into conversation with the environment. This approaches what Timothy Morton has called the ‘ecological thought’, which ‘is the thinking of interconnectedness [...] a vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection without a definite center or edge. It is radical intimacy, coexistence with other beings, sentient and otherwise’.⁴⁶ The possibility of this, however, is tempered with the characters’ increasing self-awareness, and their implicit acknowledgment of the damage caused by anthropogenic climate change. Instead of solely inhabiting the undifferentiated ‘mesh’ that Morton imagines connecting all beings, in order to accept a level of responsibility for this damage, it is necessary for the characters to acknowledge, and feel the effects of, their own (socially constructed) exceptionalism. This example from the text does not appear to be a positive or ‘enlightened’ recognition that ‘all bodies are kin’, and that we are ‘inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations’,⁴⁷ as much new materialist criticism advocates.⁴⁸ Similarly to the mining explosion and anger of the ancestors at the mining practices in *Carpentaria*, this scene is instead a realisation of the negative possibilities of interconnection, and the potential for one species to exploit this connection until the relationships are severed and the opportunity for reciprocity has been curtailed.

⁴⁶ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 7.

⁴⁷ Bennett, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Timothy Clark has lamented the overemphasising of the ‘mesh’ and networks within new materialism, and suggests that it is a vague and unproductive avenue for ecological thought (*Ecocriticism on the Edge*, pp. 146–47).

This scene also demonstrates that the characters are becoming much more aware of the death of less 'charismatic' (p. 7) Californian desert ecosystems, of which yucca trees (in particular the Joshua tree) are a significant part.⁴⁹ This awareness is intensified and transformed by the fact that rather than the regeneration that follows death in most ecosystems, there is no hope for renewal or new life in the context of the anthropogenic desertification in *Gold Fame Citrus*. The matter that could hold the potential for regeneration is now so disparate and dispersed — as seen in the quotation above that describes the saline particulate make-up of the Amargosa — that recreation is impossible. This touches on Ian McHarg's conceptualisation of evolution and ecological systems as a creative process called 'negentropy',⁵⁰ which refers to the way life forms are creative disruptions of the sun's energy on its tendency towards entropy (or disorder), instead creating a higher and more complex order or structure of matter from disorganised matter. In the world of *Gold Fame Citrus*, the creative process of negentropy that governs most ecosystems is halted through anthropogenic climate change, which renders the Amargosa dune sea a permanently depopulated space. The realisation that the characters experience after their destruction of the yucca graveyard, then, is simultaneously both Morton's 'ecological thought', and grief in response to the loss of the creativity, sensory stimulation, and sense of belonging that can arise from being an interconnected creature within a particular system or space.

Watkins has stated previously that the desert is 'something that I find sustaining, embracing and fertile. I really have always been miffed by the idea of the desert as a place that's barren and empty'.⁵¹ At first reading, this statement seems at odds with the premise of the novel itself: the Amargosa dune sea is undoubtedly an empty, unsettling space, devoid of ecosystems or any other self-sustaining life-forms. However, I suggest that Watkins' remarks here instead clarify the novel's overarching narrative: a commentary on how society has wrongly ascribed particular attributes to different types of space to serve its own ends (such as the first European explorers of the American West). The novel investigates the end point of these discourses — in this case, the self-fulfilling narrative of the barren, empty desert — and undermines them. Watkins demonstrates here that it is only drastically altered spaces, which

⁴⁹ Sam Schipani, 'How a Tree and its Moth Shaped the Mojave Desert', *Smithsonian Magazine Online*, 10 August 2017, <<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/how-tree-and-its-moth-shaped-mojave-desert-180964452/>> [accessed 24 August 2018].

⁵⁰ Ian L. McHarg, 'The Theory of Creative Fitting', in *Conversations with Students: Dwelling in Nature*, ed. by Lynn Margulis, James Corner, and Brian Hawthorne (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), pp. 19–62 (p. 22); see also William Rueckert, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 105–23 (p. 111).

⁵¹ Inskeep, 'California's Growing Dunes'.

occur as a result of anthropogenic activity, that threaten to fulfil this narrative and eventually ensure that the spaces become almost entirely uninhabitable for all creatures and nonhuman life. Engineered by unsustainable agricultural practices, climate change-induced drought, and destruction of natural ecosystems, the Amargosa is made up of ‘the wanderlusting topsoil of Brigham Young’s aerated Southwest free at last, the billowing left behind of tilled scrub, the aloft fertilizer crust of manifest destiny’ (p. 117). The phrasing here, in particular the idea of a ‘manifest destiny’, supports my premise that the Amargosa represents the fulfilment of the problematic discourses that have shaped the US Southwest. It also places the consequences of climate change — so often rhetorically situated in a vague, distant future — firmly in the tangible, material present. Although the deserts that Watkins imagines — the ones she grew up within — are by no means barren, infertile, or empty, the Amargosa, a desert created by human activity, fulfils this narrative.

Some scholars, perhaps in light of Watkins’ earlier statement about deserts, have misread this aspect of the novel. Arnaud Schmitt contends that:

Instead of dwelling on the potential fatality of this climatic shift, Claire Vaye Watkins concentrates on its poetic premise and promise, on the experience of living in this world, going as far as providing quasi-documentary representations of this ‘neo-fauna’ [...]. Here again, our social and physical environment is altered, but not annihilated; readers are confronted with defamiliarization instead of annihilation.⁵²

Here, Schmitt references the bestiary — a collection of descriptions of new desert animals — that the leader of the travelling community, Levi, creates and gives to Luz. As the novel progresses, we learn that Levi has documented an entirely new ecosystem within the Amargosa in a bestiary (drawings are also provided of these new animals in the text). Levi says that this new animal life is being censored by the government for its own ends. However, we eventually learn that this is a lie, and Luz is being drugged to keep her compliant and living in the community, in order that her image as the poster girl for the drought can be exploited for Levi’s own political gain. This contradicts Schmitt’s reading: the ‘neo-fauna’ are falsified and imaginary, and this entire ecosystem, which for Luz holds the promise of a repopulated and fertile space, is non-existent. As I will explore in greater detail in the next section of this chapter, this feeds in to one of the more damaging discourses on climate change that the novel challenges, which is a discourse of climate change denial.

⁵² Arnaud Schmitt, ‘Chronicles of the End of the World: The End is not the End’, *Transatlantica*, 2 (2016), 1–12 (p. 5).

Discourses of Denial: Politicising, Myth-making and Repopulating Space

Like many of the novels in this thesis, in *Gold Fame Citrus*, different discourses on climate changed spaces are both built into the narrative, and simultaneously dismantled. Aside from Watkins' engagement with colonial narratives of the US Southwest and her investigation of personal loss in response to climate changed spaces, this approach is demonstrated most clearly in the way that Watkins interrogates different discourses of climate change denial, which occur when the characters are faced with ecocide, drought and societal breakdown. Unlike some of the other novels I consider in this thesis, *Gold Fame Citrus* does not only deconstruct the discourses of denial that operate through a neoliberal industrialism that supersedes governmental power. In *Carpentaria*, for example, the 'Gurfurrit International' mining company ignores the negative environmental effects of their operations, and in *Parable of the Sower* (discussed in Chapter Three), the all-powerful corporations attempt to halt the rising sea levels in particular locations. In *Gold Fame Citrus*, however, Watkins pays equal attention to both the capitalist consumerist culture that characterised Los Angeles before the drought, and the fallacies and weaknesses within more left wing-aligned climate change discourses, in a similar vein to Maggie Gee's satire on the feminist political party in *The Ice People* (see Chapter 3), and to Wright's critique of the 'messiah' populist politician in *The Swan Book*.⁵³ Rather than analysing the novel in a way that only serves to 'affirm [in the text] values and environmental truisms most readers [...] would hold in any case',⁵⁴ my reading of *Gold Fame Citrus* challenges these commonly-held values and truisms, revealing the ways that they can covertly contribute to further environmental degradation, even when they are veiled by superficially pro-environmental rhetoric.

This is most clearly identifiable in the text through the part of the novel that follows Luz and Ig at Levi's travelling camp in the Amargosa. Luz is seduced by Levi's power within the community, which arises from his personal charisma, his ability to 'dowse' for water with his own hands (p. 173) across the Amargosa, find food, and oversee the growing of fruits and vegetables in mobile greenhouses within the camp. Crucially, he also possesses a knack for apprehending the desert's movements and weather patterns, moving the camp as the dunes shift. This is significant in relation to the text's discourse on space: Levi's ability to read the patterns of the shifting sands functions to recreate pathways, places and landscapes from the dissipating and formless mass of sand and saline. Instead of confronting the loss of landscapes,

⁵³ Jane Sullivan, 'Interview: Alexis Wright', *Sydney Morning Herald Online*, 3 August 2013 <<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/interview-alexis-wright-20130801-2r045.html>> [accessed 26 November 2018], para. 14 of 20.

⁵⁴ Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, p. 78.

ecosystems and even societal structures that no longer inhabit the area, Levi rebuilds these through his narrative of the Amargosa and its history, obscuring the blankness that Luz and Ray were beginning to confront, and repopulating the space with his creative imagination. It is this, I suggest, that Watkins is drawing the reader's attention to: Levi's particular formation of spatial discourse in the Amargosa is positive and hopeful in its framing, but is ultimately shown to be as easily destroyed as the dead yucca trees.

This is enacted through several layers of storytelling in the text: in terms of its form, this section of the novel is extremely significant. As Luz familiarises herself with her new surroundings, the narrative takes on several different structures, contrasting with its previous chronology. Watkins collects testimonies from each character, or group of characters, presenting them under headings of their own names. The testimonies situate each character or group in their place within the camp society, and describe each other from alternating perspectives. For example, 'The Girls', a group of young women who stay with the community in exchange for sex work, present their labour as a spiritual contribution to the people of the camp (pp. 170–71). Jimmer, an older male who acts as the camp's healer, describes his unusual and superstitious treatments for bodily ailments. Cody, another man, describes his gardening practices, and displays 'snow peas, your watermelon, over there your cantaloupe, your leafy greens. Everything organic, everything heirloom' (p. 173). Levi is introduced and described through other means: he retells his story to Luz in the first person, describing his professional ascent through different government agencies, eventually landing in a project that was intended to create 'new faults' that would 'tap new aquifer' (p. 150) in the Southwest region. His story is punctuated by government documents, presented on the page in a different typeface and laid out in the form of official questionnaires (pp. 141–46), adding an authoritative voice to the narrative and building an archive of documents that bolster his narrative of events.

This unusual deployment of form, in a novel that has up to this point in the text read in a fairly standard chronological fashion, staying closely with the protagonists — with the exception of an interlude (pp. 111–26) that takes a wider narrative perspective to describe the formation of the Amargosa and its global reception — culminates in what Watkins calls Levi's 'primer'. Levi presents to Luz a book that he has written, entitled 'Neo-Fauna of the Amargosa Dune Sea' (see Figure 1). Occupying different spaces on the physical pages of the novel in terms of the arrangement of illustrations, text, and the grid like backdrop to the pages of the primer, an entirely new ecosystem is presented (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 1: Opening Page to Primer in Gold Fame Citrus

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Figure 2: Page 194 from the Primer in Gold Fame Citrus

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Figure 3: Page 196 from the Primer in Gold Fame Citrus

From carnivorous plants to burrowing owls and transparent scorpions, the text offers Luz a complete and colourful menagerie of the type that she has been mourning. Introduced alongside each animal or plant's family Latin name, for example '*Strigidae*' and '*Thelyphonidae*' (p. 194, see Figure 2), each description is given in a scientific, naturalist style, remarking on the animal or plant's characteristics and habits in a way that implies a direct eyewitness account. When Luz says that she finds the primer 'magic', Levi replies that 'it's science' (p. 206).

The intervention of this bestiary in the book's narrative contributes to the archive of authenticity that is built from the government questionnaires and the testimonials from different characters that feature in the previous pages, and works to construct an intertextual network, reinforcing Levi's narrative and encouraging the reader to invest in him as a trustworthy character and as a certified expert. He tells Luz that the government is covering up the ecosystem — 'we're told this is a wasteland because they need it to be a wasteland' (p. 206) — because they want to blow up the Amargosa with nuclear warheads in order to establish an 'empty' repository for nuclear waste to be stored (pp. 207–10), using the rhetoric that 'it has to go somewhere' (p. 209). Levi refutes this principle, saying that 'to establish a national repository is to promise we will use nuclear power forever and never hold the industry responsible for making its waste safe' (p. 209). This draws from, and feeds into, both environmentalist left-leaning anti-nuclear rhetoric (and the pseudo-science that sometimes accompanies left-wing conspiracy theories such as the anti-vax movement) and right-wing conspiracy theories that maintain that climate change is a widespread scientific hoax that is deployed in order to justify global government and centralised power.⁵⁵ Levi instead offers the possibility of a repopulated Amargosa. Far from being barren, empty or degraded, with the bestiary's existence the desert space becomes one of Anna Tsing's 'refugias':⁵⁶ a space for nonhuman recovery, recuperation and flourishing away from human intervention. McHarg's negentropy begins again in the Amargosa, and nonhuman life re-establishes its networks and food chains, reshaping the space through tracks and traces (p. 297), burrows (p. 294) and occupying the different spaces across the Amargosa: for instance, the 'sand coral', which 'constitute the most diverse ecosystem in a dune', take residence on 'the Amargosa's north-facing stoss slope', building their own structures within the landscape (p. 198).

⁵⁵ Monika Grzesiak-Feldman, 'Are the High Authoritarians More Prone to Adopt Conspiracy Theories? The Role of Right-wing Authoritarianism in Conspiratorial Thinking', in *The Psychology of Conspiracy*, ed. by Michal Bilewicz, Aleksandra Cichońka and Wiktor Soral (Hove: Routledge, 2015), pp. 80–99 (p. 90).

⁵⁶ *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, p. 176.

It is true of course that climate change may alter some ecosystems in a way that is conducive to different sorts of nonhuman life, in ways that humans cannot anticipate or predict. However, the consequences of this type of discourse can bolster climate change denial. At this stage, the novel appears to be proposing the existence of a possible ‘afterlife’: the dune sea is reformed into a functioning ecosystem(s), an agential assemblage of beings whose knowledge of the space supersedes human understanding. One of the creatures is said to travel at speeds of 70mph, and a new type of rattlesnake is said to travel by inserting its own tail into its mouth, which allows it to ‘locomote[...] via axial revolution’ (pp. 196–7). Traits such as these have no precedent in the existing natural world. However, for Luz, the bestiary repopulates the devoid space, and offers a remedy to the lack of ‘menagerie’ that she so often mourns. Levi’s bestiary offers a discourse on climate changed-spaces that suggests that even the most desolate anthropogenic environment can bounce back from human exploitation. This, I suggest, follows a similar logic to James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis, which imagines the Earth as a complex system that can regulate itself: in Levi’s version of events, the human-made Amargosa Dune Sea can reconstitute human endeavour and create a new ‘natural’ equilibrium among nonhuman species.⁵⁷ Aside from the scientific criticisms that have been levied against the Gaia theory, I suggest that it can be deliberately invoked in order to support climate scepticism and denial. The idea that human damage — in the form of mass extinctions of nonhuman life, and total depletion of natural resources on which all life depends — can be rectified without human intervention is an alluring one. It is also an idea that allows humans to psychologically alleviate themselves of culpability, and thereby offers a way of denying the extent of the devastating effects of anthropogenic climate change. As Jonas Anshelm and Martin Hultman have identified in their analyses of climate change discourses, this type of denial is common, particularly in the US, where sceptics have frequently argued that ‘climate change is all part of the Earth’s natural cycle’.⁵⁸

Despite the fact that (particularly within scientific circles) climate scepticism is far outweighed by those who accept reality, it is crucial to note that climate change denial is usually perpetuated by those in utmost positions of power (political, industrial, and academic). It is also, as Anshelm and Hultman write, ‘intertwined with a — currently declining — masculinity found in industrial modernity’.⁵⁹ As a result, it can often be wielded publicly and to great effect, in order to secure power and monetary interests. President Donald Trump’s

⁵⁷ Lovelock’s hypothesis has been deployed before by climate sceptics, and by those with financial interests in particular industries, such as nuclear power, as Jonas Anshelm and Martin Hultman describe in *Discourses of Global Climate Change*, pp. 26–27.

⁵⁸ Anshelm and Hultman, p. 101.

⁵⁹ Anshelm and Hultman, p. 100.

recent withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement, his almost total dismantling of the Environmental Protection Agency and the removal of information on climate change from government websites serves to illustrate this. Anshelm and Hultman have also identified how elderly men, working in positions of power (mostly within industry) are the typical profile of climate change deniers. Among Conservative white men, correlation is also found between climate change denial and those who profess a self-reported understanding of global warming: it is viewed among this group as a form of ‘identity-protective cognition’,⁶⁰ something that reaffirms identity of an individual within a particular group by rejecting ‘beliefs that might alienate them from their chosen group’.⁶¹ Levi fits a more left-wing profile in his lifestyle and politics, however, so rather than outright denying the existence of human impacts on the environment, he reframes this by deploying his specific discourse of climate denial — which is derived from a kind of Gaia environmentalism and draws on the rhetoric of anti-elitist conspiracy theories — in order to reaffirm his status as the community’s leader. This way, Levi ensures his continued level of privilege and power within the group. His denialist discourse does operate, as Anshelm and Hultman describe above, as a kind of ‘identity-protective cognition’, but rather than allowing him to conform to an existing powerful political or industrial structure, Levi’s denialism elevates and solidifies his position of privilege and leadership within the group, as they believe in his knowledge: he is the one who secures food and water for them all. In turn, this allows him more power, and control over the women members of the community. Although he professes that the community is equal, he becomes manipulative and abusive towards Luz, coercing her into group sex (pp. 233–35) and screaming at her when she raises doubts about participating in his propaganda films that will show the group as ‘a chosen people’ (p. 228). He maintains his abusive power and control at the expense of the women in the camp, like Dallas (a previous partner who bore his child, which died), and attempts to use Luz to reinforce the narrative he wants to publicise.

Here, a discourse predicated on some radical leftist and environmentalist ideas — such as anti-nuclear sentiment and belief in government conspiracy — is delivered via the framework of right-wing masculinist industrialist claims of ‘Earth’s natural cycle’, in order to secure Levi’s exceptionalism and power over the community. The bestiary, along with Levi’s conspiracies, serves to obscure the increasing absence of life in the Amargosa, offering Luz — and by extension, the reader — a sense of comfort and redemption. Humans are exonerated from blame: no matter what we inflict upon the environment, it appears to be able to

⁶⁰ Anshelm and Hultman, pp. 101–2.

⁶¹ Anne K. Armstrong, Marianne E. Krasny, and Jonathon P. Schuldt, *Communicating Climate Change: A Guide for Educators* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), p. 45.

recuperate and flourish. There is another dimension to this, too: as Levi feeds Luz his government conspiracies, repeating that ‘they need this to be a dead place so they can kill it’ (p. 208), Luz thinks ‘really it was just such a relief to finally see, such an effortless swoon [...] How long had she felt doom coming? Ruin, cataclysm, destiny, etc. It was nice to know how’ (p. 210). In this way, Luz can place the blame for the foreboding and mourning that she feels at the feet of a higher power, rather than accepting her own implication in the anthropogenic drought and its absence of nonhuman life. Through Levi’s lies, Luz believes that the Amargosa and all of its newfound creatures will be destroyed intentionally and explosively by the government and its nuclear industry partners. This redirects her concern for the environment away from the tragedy of anthropogenic desertification, and instead encourages her to emotionally invest in the fictional world that Levi creates.

This recalls Watkins’ earlier comments about deserts as ‘sustaining, embracing, and fertile’ spaces, rather than empty or barren ones. Growing up in the Southwest herself, Watkins describes her particular affinity with the desert spaces that she called home. Levi’s bestiary could therefore be read as a realisation of this particular belief in a vibrant and populated desert space. Later in the novel, however, it becomes clear that Watkins has integrated this idea into the narrative — consolidated in the form of Levi, the patriarchal leader — in order to dismantle it. Although it is true that many of the current desert ecosystems around California are populated, diverse and alive, the key differential here is that the Amargosa is anthropogenic, and perpetuated by human exploitation of resources and inattentiveness to the existing ecosystems. This is perhaps best demonstrated through the section of the novel in which Ray arrives in the camp, and Luz realises Levi has been lying to her. Ray was found in the Amargosa when he went looking for help, and taken to an underground migrant camp. He manages to escape and find his way back to Luz in the travelling community. We learn that Levi and his friends found Ray first, but beat him over the head and left him for dead before they picked up Luz and Ig. In the migrant camp, Ray was exposed to the media, which described Levi as a thief: instead of dowsing for water and growing food in greenhouses, as he suggests, we learn that Levi ransacks Red Cross aid convoys, stealing their supplies for his own camp (p. 287), and is wanted in connection with the disappearance of a female former co-worker.

This overturns the narrative that Luz (and the reader) has been led to believe earlier in the text. As Luz tries to convince Ray of Levi’s abilities, we see the text split into two columns down the side of the page: one column is made up of Luz’s words, which describe Levi’s spirituality, and explain that ‘everything’s connected and he can feel the strings’ (p. 284). Likening him to ‘Darwin, or Lewis and Clark’, Luz professes that Levi marks a ‘seismic shift in

the way we understand the environment' (p. 284), and affirms his discourse of denial. The other column, written in the style of a newsreader's report, describes Levi as a criminal, and lists his suspected wrongdoings. These opposing narratives occupy polarised spaces on the page, reinforcing the tension between what the reader may want to believe or desire to be true, and what the external evidence supports. Rather than presenting a singular narrative, then, Watkins chooses to allow the reader to navigate through the minefield of information between the columns: for example, we are invited to negotiate the material and metaphorical lacuna between phrases positioned alongside each other, such as 'the uranium spoke to him' (Luz, Column A) and 'he is a fugitive who may *even* have access to *nuclear weapons*' (newsreader, Column B) (p. 284). Both columns employ hyperbolic descriptions — Luz extols Levi's 'blending of the spiritual and the natural', whereas the newsreader points out his 'extremist radical views' (p. 284) — but the positioning of the two narratives begins to question and complicate Levi's narrative that so far has appeared infallible. This is consolidated when Ig is stung or bitten by something unknown and has an allergic reaction, leaving her gravely ill. Luz decides to stop chewing Levi's 'root' drug (a blend of cannabis, cocoa and peyote, p. 173) and goes into a life-threatening withdrawal. As she does so, she begins to realise that her drug-induced haze was creating a 'lush and infinite miracle world' out of the menagerie she was presented with. However, this miracle world:

Dissolved, finally, leaving behind only its brutal scaffolding: sun of suns, drought of droughts, no rain, no rivers, an impossible pile of sand approaching an unforgiving range. Barren and bereft and lifeless, just like the pamphlets said [...]. No other dimension, no buried menagerie and no trick of the eye or ear or heart could make it otherwise. (p. 312)

This extract perfectly articulates how Watkins' critique of denialist discourses operates. *Gold Fame Citrus* demonstrates how different modes of climate change denial can occupy and sustain each other by drawing on different political agendas, and exploit grief, loss and vulnerability in order to uphold structures of power (at an individual, community, and global level). The reader encounters Luz's navigation between the different truths she is presented with, and experiences with her the revelation of the reality of the empty Amargosa and the drought. This delivers a mode of discourse analysis and critique directly to the reader through their own material experience of the text, dismantling the covert and overt ways in which Levi's brand of denial functions. The extract also ties in to the discourses of loss discussed in the previous section: Luz finally comprehends that her understanding of the drought was predicated on 'trick[s]' of the 'eye or ear or heart', or in other words, a reliance on her need

for sensory stimulation beyond the homogenous Amargosa and the drought. In summary, then, Watkins exposes the ways in which supposedly beneficial environmentalist discourses can be co-opted for nefarious aims, which often serve to maintain the status quo in some fashion (in this case, Levi's patriarchal control over his community).

Eventually, Ig recovers and is forcibly taken by the community. Levi tells Luz and Ray that Ig is 'touched' and that 'her moaning is the same frequency as the dune's song' (p. 334), implying that she belongs in the Amargosa (although it is hinted that Levi needs Ig in order to cultivate his image and maintain control over the community, as Luz realises she is now 'obsolete', p. 334). Ig is therefore left with Dallas, who has been breastfeeding Ig after the death of her own baby. Ray is beaten, and his and Luz's caravan is set alight. Together, Luz and Ray leave the camp, setting off once more into the Amargosa, where they meet a flash flood. Stepping out of the car into the rush of water, Luz tells Ray that she 'has to go' (p. 339). Far from being a climatic relief to the aridity of the desert, however, Luz's death in the flood cements the notion that the Amargosa is unsalvageable. As Reisner writes in *Cadillac Desert*, in the rare instance that rain does meet the ground in the Southwest desert, 'there is nothing to hold it, so it races off in evanescent torrents, evaporating, running to nowhere'.⁶² With this, the reader is left bereft of Luz and the possibility of a positive future between her, Ig and Ray, one that Luz frequently visualised throughout the text. Ig is left with Dallas and Jimmer (both kindly members of the community, who assure Luz 'we can take care of her', p. 334), which recalls other speculative climate fiction novels and their portrayal of the desire for the heteronormative family unit that Baldwin has described. Dallas, particularly, fits the mould of the Mother Earth Goddess figure, as she is able to breastfeed, care for and nurture Ig in a way that Luz cannot. Much is made in the text of the contrast between Dallas' fertile body, with its 'fresh magenta stretch marks' and her numerous children (p. 131), and Luz's 'austere breasts' and her 'unfitness', as she is unable to hold Ig safely when she attempts to take her from Dallas (pp. 131–33). The fact that Ig remains with Dallas and Jimmer (it is implied that they are now in a relationship on p. 308) at the end of the novel might imply a return to a possible human future, with heteronormative parental figures caring for the symbolic child. However, as the community remains under Levi's patriarchal and violent control (to which Dallas and Jimmer both subscribe), Ig appears to be entering a similar inescapable cycle of abuse and exploitation to Luz (Ray even asks Luz, in the midst of her drug addiction, 'has he been taking Ig? [...] I don't want him alone with her', p. 286). This sense of foreboding continues beyond

⁶² Reisner, p. 4.

the end of the novel as Luz and Ray drive away from the community, and the possibility of Ig experiencing freedom remains doubtful.

The reader is also left similarly bereft of the vibrant world created by Levi, his documents, and his drugs. Seeing the narrative through Luz's eyes, the chasm between the discourse of denial that framed the narrative, and the stark reality of the vacant and dissipating Amargosa, is psychologically devastating. Luz's death is a rupture from the cycle of life that characterises most ecosystems: instead of generating further life, she disappears into a mutable, simultaneously flooded and deserted space, out of existence. This recalls her earlier anxiety over the coyote carcass and the body of the Hollywood starlet both drying 'wicker in the ravine' (p.7, p. 56), and satirises her desire for the 'sweet colloidal humus' of the Seattle rainforest, and her need to 'watch grubs and slugs and earthworms at their enrichment business' with Ig (p. 55), which is an ending that her own body is excluded from in death. This is a stark contrast to the ending of Gee's *The Flood*, in which the presence of the foxes within the final apocalyptic moments indicates the existence of life beyond the end of human life. In *Gold Fame Citrus*, the carcasses of human and animal lie together. Instead of nurturing new life through raising Ig, or being returned to the earth, Luz's body is at once lost and suspended in the desert, remaining static in the rupture of space-time of the Amargosa.

The Swan Book (2013)

'Swan Country': Nonhumans, Trespass, and Indigenous Spatiality

In the previous chapter, I explored Alexis Wright's careful exposition of Indigenous narratives of temporality in her 2006 novel *Carpentaria*. The following analysis will consider Wright's third novel, *The Swan Book* (2013), paying particular attention to the points of contact between Indigenous Australian conceptualisations of space and Western-derived legal and political spatial frameworks in a climate-changing world. It is important to note at this stage that although this chapter and the previous one explore time and space separately for the most part, this is the result of a practical division rather than an ideological one. I appreciate the interconnectedness of these two concepts, particularly as they are represented and mediated through different worldviews. *Carpentaria's* 'all times' demonstrates that notions of spatiality, history, narrative and time are closely bound together in traditional Waanyi epistemology. The idea of 'country' represented in *The Swan Book*, as I will explore in greater detail in this section, is similarly imbricated with narratives of ancestry, tradition and Aboriginal Law.⁶³ The division between spatiality and temporality in these two chapters, then,

⁶³ Irene Watson has described Aboriginal Law, or 'Raw Law', as a 'natural system of obligations and benefits, flowing from an Aboriginal ontology', a system that is 'embedded in our

is a recognition that although both of Wright's novels represent space and time as inherently entangled, *Carpentaria* is mediated through an explicit engagement with the politics of temporality through Wright's representation of 'all times'. *The Swan Book* exhibits a similar depiction of the movement of time, but its emphasis on altered spaces offers a complementary perspective to Watkins' *Gold Fame Citrus*, and also a productive lens through which to consider the politics of spatiality in a climate-changing setting. In the following analysis, I will examine Indigenous spatial narratives in the context of *The Swan Book*'s global and local concerns, considering the tensions that arise when Indigenous peoples are forced to assimilate into Australian settler culture, and the consequences of exploiting Indigenous narratives of space for personal and political gain. As well as the racist and colonial ideals governing spatial politics that come under fire within the text, Oblivia is subjected to gendered violence from multiple sources. This invites a feminist ecocritical reading that can reveal connections between her experience of gender and her experience of spatiality.

As explained in the introduction to this chapter, *The Swan Book* examines an increasing threat of absence that pervades the changing environments of a future Australia. In contrast to *Gold Fame Citrus*, in *The Swan Book* this absence is apparent in the diminishing of reciprocal relationships between humans, nonhumans and the land, as well as in the increasing absence of biodiversity and the loss of constitutive agency (the creative and constitutive power of nonhuman life and geology). Through Wright's presentation of black swans and their disrupted migratory movements and dislocation as a result of climate change, I explore how the text probes the tensions between changing climates and ancient Indigenous epistemologies of space and wayfaring, and upholds the significance of nonhuman participation in these narratives. As Wright has remarked in an interview, with this novel she wanted to investigate whether swans 'were taking their stories with them' when they migrated with the altering climate, alongside the question of 'how much more could Aboriginal culture take? How far could we go to survive? Until the last person standing?'.⁶⁴ Through the disrupted migration of the swans, through Oblivia's journey, and through the presentation of other nonhuman creatures and ecosystems within the novel, Wright critically examines the sense of ecological crisis that underpins different experiences and discourses of space in contemporary Australia. In accordance with this chapter's argument, too, Wright's words quoted above suggest that she intended the novel to examine the increasing absence of

relationships to the natural world' in *Aboriginal Peoples, Colonialism and International Law: Raw Law* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 5. This is the definition I follow in this thesis.

⁶⁴ Fogle de Souza, para. 10 of 23.

nonhuman life, communication, and reciprocal relationships that constitute and maintain Australian ecosystems.

The dwindling of human life — the ‘last person standing’ — and the disrupted life cycles of the black swans are just a few examples of this. As the first swan arrives at the lake in a dust storm early on in the novel (p. 13), the swamp people are baffled by its appearance, as ‘there was no song for swans’ (p. 14) in their country. However, Oblivia feels a kinship with the lone bird, as ‘she recognised that the swan was an exile too’ (p. 14). As more swans follow, Oblivia wonders at ‘how long it had taken the huge black birds to make the migratory flight from so far away, to where they had no storyline for taking them back’ (p. 15). Here, Wright introduces the idea of displacement, but from a nonhuman perspective. The narrator describes how the black swans’ habitats ‘had dried from prolonged drought’, and they were instead forced to ‘become nomads, migratory like the white swans of the northern world [...] but unlike them, the black swans were following the rainwaters of cyclones deeper and deeper into the continent’ (p. 16). Connections can be drawn here to the racial politics of *The Swan Book*: the huge changes wrought on the Australian climate threaten to sever the connections of nonhumans to their country, and erase the ‘storyline’ that would allow them to revisit their habitats. Similarly, climate change provides an impetus for the Australian government to further intervene in Aboriginal lives, and for neoliberal policies to sever the opportunities for Indigenous people to reconnect with their country. As I have discussed in the previous chapter (see my footnote in the section ‘*Carpentaria* and the Critical Climate’), the notion of ‘country’ is a significant term for many Indigenous Australians. Although interpretations of the term vary across different people and communities, country is broadly representative of the diverse and co-constitutive relationships between a land and its human and nonhuman occupants. It also can be used to describe the connections between different Indigenous communities and their spiritual homelands, articulating a material bond between people and landscape. Country can also be tightly linked to the eternal narratives of the Dreaming.⁶⁵ Although various and varied definitions of the Dreaming are held by Indigenous peoples across Australia, here I refer to the Dreaming as defined by Milroy and Revell, who describe it as ‘the ancestors’, and simultaneously ‘an ongoing celebration and reverence for past events’,⁶⁶ which passes on the eternal stories that some Aboriginal peoples live through and by.

⁶⁵ Revell and others, p. 472.

⁶⁶ Jill Milroy and Grant Revell, ‘Aboriginal Story Systems: Remapping the West, Knowing Country, Sharing Space’, *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities*, 5 (2013), 1–24 (p. 1).

Understandings of the Dreaming and of country therefore constitute part of how Wright presents Indigenous spatial knowledge. It is also important to note that, unlike the imagined flat surface of Western-constituted space, which Ingold has criticised for its passivity,⁶⁷ ‘Australian space is not emptiness, *terra nullius*, a void to be filled, or a neutral place for action. Rather, space is imagined—*called into being*—by individuals, families and the cultures of which they are a part’.⁶⁸ In *Seeking Spatial Justice*, Edward Soja writes that:

Rather than being seen as a significant force shaping social action [...] the spatial dimension has traditionally been treated as a kind of fixed background, a physically formed environment that [...] has some influence on our lives but remains external to the social world.⁶⁹

It appears that Soja is speaking primarily in a Western context here, as many Indigenous Australian spatialities have not traditionally conceptualised space as a fixed background, separate from the social world. Rather, the Indigenous notion of country is inherently bound up with social activity. Some scholars have remarked that ‘spatial qualities’ of Australia, as an environment with Indigenous cultures that predate many Western epistemologies, ‘negate the uniformity and featurelessness within “country”’. They also allow Country to speak for itself. Indigenous peoples *humanise* their environments because of their (non-material) Country relations’.⁷⁰ This particular conceptualisation of country is of an all-encompassing, creative space that is responsive to human endeavour, and not the static backdrop for human activity that Massey and Ingold have both rejected as a spatial framework (and which also can provide the justification for colonial occupation of land).⁷¹ In *The Swan Book*, under the ever-present pressure of climate change and anthropogenic pollution of the land, the notion of country becomes an even more significant aspect of Indigenous lives.⁷² In order to comprehend, respond to and live with the ongoing ecological disasters that surround the detention camp in

⁶⁷ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 141.

⁶⁸ Revell and others, p. 473, original emphasis.

⁶⁹ Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Revell and others, p. 472–73, original emphasis.

⁷¹ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 141–42.

⁷² It is imperative at this stage to mention that climate change and pollution are inherently linked in this text: the lake becomes a polluted swamp due to military detritus, after the military is deployed in order to supposedly secure communities in the face of the societal breakdown caused by climate change. Similarly, the climate change-induced daily flooding of the tidal surges in the Southern city causes the river to turn ‘brown’ (p. 264) and flush ‘the sewers into the lower, poorer, and central parts of the city’ (p. 239).

the North (p. 65), a reciprocal relationship with country, one that can attend to its changes and its degradation, becomes ever more crucial.

We can read this reciprocity through several facets of the novel. For example, throughout the text Oblivia shares a caring relationship with the swans: she feeds them (p. 69), observes their movements and their mourning for their eggs that don't hatch, and buries or cremates them when they die (pp. 90–91). This reciprocity becomes crucial, however, when navigating unfamiliar territories: towards the end of the novel, Oblivia and the swans travel north to the swamp after Warren Finch's death, as part of a migrant caravan (p. 319). As Meera Atkinson puts it, '[Oblivia's] escape and the swans' drought-stricken fight for survival are brought together in an interwoven affective relation'.⁷³ During the journey, she turns to the swans 'to guide her safely through the laws of the country' that she travels through (p. 321), and she observes them as they 'danced the water' in marshy country, 'knowing how she must read the country now as they do to follow them home' (p. 325). Here, country is read, created, and traversed through Oblivia's connection with the swans, a reciprocal bond of survival and constitutive agency. For example, when the swans find Oblivia after Warren Finch's death, Wright's description of their reunion articulates the re-establishing of key relationships between ancestry, ceremony, time and space, re-creating culturally Indigenous understandings of the land:

Somewhere in this landscape, swans were stirring [...] They had found each's other's heartbeat, the pulse humming through the land from one to the other, like the sound of distant clap sticks beating through ceremony, connecting together the spirits, people and place of all times into one [...] She would follow them. They were heading north, on the way home. (p. 303)

This extract perfectly articulates the constitutive agency of the swans, and their role in navigating across the country alongside the Dreaming and Indigenous narratives of creation. This also revisits Gerald Vizenor's discussions of survivance, active presence, and absence. Following Vizenor, in the following analysis I read 'absence' as a superficial colonial construct that characterises colonial representations of Indigenous people and spaces in Australia.⁷⁴ In contrast to this absence, the active presence of *The Swan Book*, along with its representation of constitutive agency, allows for a recreation and re-presentation of Indigenous country on

⁷³ Meera Atkinson, *The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 168.

⁷⁴ Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, p. 15.

Indigenous terms, and offers a way of reclaiming the land from climate change (which is revealed to be an intensification of colonialism).⁷⁵

It is impossible to give a comprehensive overview of the history of colonial occupation, and colonial perspectives on the Australian landscape and space, within the confines of this chapter. However, it is necessary at this stage to discuss the colonial discourses of spatiality that feature in the novel (often as a satirical target). Similarly to the North American writings of the frontier, narratives of (usually white male) colonial explorers and settlers navigating inhospitable wilderness, dry lifeless desert or apocalyptic disasters feature heavily in Australian colonial writings.⁷⁶ As Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver have noted, 'landscape is always a potent force in colonial Australian adventure fiction', and is 'often desolate' yet always holds the potential for dramatic and threatening change.⁷⁷ Kylie Crane has described two types of traditional Western artistic representations of Australian landscapes: firstly, wide vistas with a focus on a horizontal line dividing the land and sky, and secondly, watercolours that depict the details of the landscape's geology and ecology.⁷⁸ Neither of these types tend to depict human life of any kind, and instead portray a land 'not only without humans but devoid of cultural artifacts'. In this way, Crane perceives that these visions of landscape are 'a highly stylized form of representation within a specific Western tradition'.⁷⁹ This discourse of spatial desolation and depopulation is also reminiscent of Vizenor's notion of absence within stereotypical representations of Indigeneity.

Bill Ashcroft has spoken about the 'horizontal sublime' in eighteenth and nineteenth-century artistic works of Australian landscape, which articulates a vision of the sacred within colonial representations of Australia. The horizontal sublime, diverging from the European 'signifiers of mountains and chasms', is instead perceptible in the 'terrible horizon of trackless desert' often depicted in Australian landscape visual art.⁸⁰ This transformation of the sacred into the horizontal sublime 'originated squarely in the colonial encounter with a new and threatening land, and the post-colonial transformation of that encounter',⁸¹ and the legacy of this threat is still perceptible in contemporary literary and artistic visions of the Outback, as

⁷⁵ Whyte, 'Indigenous Climate Change Studies', p. 154.

⁷⁶ Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver, 'Colonial Australian Adventure Fiction', in *The Anthology of Colonial Australian Adventure Fiction*, ed. by Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2011), pp. 1–12 (p. 10).

⁷⁷ Gelder and Weaver, p. 10.

⁷⁸ Kylie Crane, *Myths of Wilderness in Contemporary Narratives: Environmental Postcolonialism in Australia and Canada* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), pp. 83–108 (p. 87).

⁷⁹ Crane, pp. 87–88.

⁸⁰ Ashcroft, p. 142.

⁸¹ Ashcroft, p. 141.

Crane describes through her analysis of Kim Mahood's memoir *Craft for a Dry Lake*. The empty, wide open spaces and the absence of any perceptible cultural influences in these landscapes reflect and reinforce the colonial construct of *terra nullius*, and the representation of the horizontal sublime indicates simultaneously a sense of wonder and terror at the vastness and supposed emptiness. Similarly, in the colonial writings that Gelder and Weaver discuss, landscapes are often viewed as desolate and barren, but also pose a latent threat to the protagonist approaching them. Although *The Swan Book* acknowledges the significance of the reciprocal relationship between country, humans and nonhumans, rather than simply framing the landscape as a hostile environment to be conquered, the text also registers a kind of threat posed by country. This is framed through the notion of trespass, or in other words, the failure to appropriately acknowledge the constitutive agency of the country in accordance with Indigenous Law, or breaching the customs and traditions of the Law in order to occupy or traverse a territory. Although trespass was in itself a concept brought to Australia by colonisers, who imposed new rules of ownership and boundary-making on to the land and routinely punished Indigenous people for the crime of trespassing,⁸² Wright deploys the term in *The Swan Book* as a mode of resistance against rigid and authoritarian Western conceptualisations of space. In the novel, 'trespass' seems to refer simultaneously to a transgression of Aboriginal Law and customs, and to the occupying or passing through of country without due acknowledgement, self-reflection and consideration of the country and all its inter-relations and inhabitants.

For example, when Oblivia is taken from her swamp detention camp by Warren Finch and three of his henchmen, the journey to his Southern city takes them through a country unfamiliar to Oblivia. She understands the agency of this new territory, becoming 'frightened' of the consequences of her trespassing, and we learn that she 'felt the country's power. Knew it could kill her' (p. 171). Similarly, Finch's henchmen recognise that 'the ancestors were already asking them to consider the consequences of trespassing spirits, and how they connected themselves to land and to her, and what knowledge they would turn to on this country' (p. 167). This new country — similarly to *Carpentaria's* 'all times' — is bound up with its past through the ancestors who lived on the land and continue to influence its traditions and Law. This scene in the novel also articulates the connections between country and the Dreaming: Oblivia's recognition of the ancestors, spirits, and the agency of country in this scene exemplifies how conceptualisations of space reinforce each other within certain Indigenous frameworks. As well as demonstrating the interlinked nature of these spatial

⁸² Thalia Anthony, *Indigenous People, Crime and Punishment* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 33.

frameworks, however, this part of the text conveys the presence of constant threat and danger through the idea of trespassing. Oblivia is aware that her presence in the new country is a form of trespass, but this also points towards the threat of colonial occupation and exploitation of the land, which disregards the Law and its customs. In this scene, I argue that the registering of colonial trespass of the space acts as a warning that through climate change and environmental exploitation, the Australian landscape has the *potential* to become the very homogenous, endless inhospitable space — liable to dramatic and dangerous change — that is so feared in colonial narratives. Wright’s construction of country as reciprocal, social and creative cannot be solely defined by its opposition to Western or colonial spatialities, as Waanyi culture predates Western perspectives of Australian landscapes. However, the spatial epistemology presented in the text incorporates narratives of colonisation — an inherently spatial process — into depictions of contemporary Indigenous spatial knowledge.

For example, the new country that Oblivia travels through with Warren Finch and his henchmen has been irrevocably damaged by extractive industrial mining. Wright reiterates that it was a ‘vista of sameness in every direction’ (p. 173), a ‘flat and wide country’ where ‘the winds collided and spun the soil into clouds of dust’ (p. 166). The ground is covered with rats that move in ‘rolling waves’ (p. 166), indicating (similarly to the Amargosa in *Gold Fame Citrus*) a dearth of biodiversity through the monoculture of this one particular species of native rat. The ‘rolling waves’ also contribute to the sense of constant movement and disorientation, which is intensified by a graphic scene as the group come across a massacre of roadkill. Bill Fox has noted the difficulty of understanding distance and scale in desert environments, as in temperate areas ‘we understand the blue shift in landscape as the land gets farther away from us’.⁸³ The absence of this measurement of distance and scale can lead to disorientation in a ‘flat and wide country’ like the one Wright describes, in a similar way to the ‘persistent emending or erasing of the land-texts and stories posed in Country’⁸⁴ by mining and other practices of resource exploitation. We are told that the mining area is ‘the place where the mind of the nation practised warfare and fought nightly for supremacy, by exercising its power over another people’s land’ (p. 165). This links the polluting and exploitative practice explicitly to both the colonial occupation of the territory, and trespass against the country’s Law, which requires its visitors to consider their history, their knowledge of and relationship to the land. As the group travel further through the country by car, they witness a ‘crescendo of dead —

⁸³ Bill Fox and Kim Mahood, ‘Conceptualising the Canning: A Conversation between Bill Fox and Kim Mahood’, in *Ngurra Kuju Walyja, One Country One People: Stories from the Canning Stock Route*, ed. by Monique La Fontaine and John Carty (Melbourne: Macmillan, 2011), pp. 388–95 (p. 391).

⁸⁴ Milroy and Revell, p. 24.

the carcasses of splattered or bloated bullocks and native animals' lay on the road (p. 165). In this scene, not only are the humans' relationship with country fraught and destabilised by the violent extractive processes of the mine, but the violence of the animals' deaths — 'mangled rabbits', 'broken-back snakes', 'a smashed echidna' (p. 166) — take centre stage. In conjunction with the sense of foreboding that Oblivia experiences in this country, the roadkill and the bizarre overpopulation of rats and owls (that I discuss in more detail below) articulate the environmental disruption and chaos that arise from colonial trespass of the land, which informs the narrative throughout. *The Swan Book* does not offer — as in *Gold Fame Citrus* — the image of a wholly dead, dissipated and vacant space. Instead, Wright describes the power and agency of country, but frames it within a discourse of imminent crisis: relationships between humans, animals and the land are not stable and maintainable, but unpredictable and unequal, an imbalance that is echoed by the imbalance in Finch and Oblivia's relationship. At this stage in the text, we are not necessarily witnessing an increasingly vacant space like the Amargosa, but the severing of heterarchical relationships between inhabitants and country caused by trespass and the disregard of the country's Law that is embroiled within this. If we see the practice of maintaining a self-reflexive and reciprocal relationship with country (of the kind that the ancestors advocate earlier in the scene) as a kind of constitutive agency — something that individuals, communities and cultures can use in order to call space 'into being'⁸⁵ together — it is evident that the text reveals the diminishing of this constitutive agency. This occurs through different vectors of colonisation: through colonial trespass and exploitation of the land, as a result of forced alienation by the government, and through alterations in climate and weather. The loss of constitutive agency, formed through relationships with country, exposes the fraught tensions and imbalances that emerge through the process of disappearance within a climate changing world. The result of the overwhelming loss, in the novel, is an ironic return to the colonial conceptualisations of absent landscapes: the terrible, vast open spaces, absent of any cultural influence or presence.

In addition to resource exploitation in the form of the industrial mine, and the death of the nonhumans in the surrounding area, this section of the novel articulates the connection between the spatial construct of country and climate change. The chapter in which this action takes place is called 'Owls in the Grass', which references the native grass owls that make their way inland, following the 'millions' of migrating rats (p. 176). It is hypothesised by Finch's men that '*different, unusual, changed weather patterns are causing it*' (p. 176, original italics), and they remark that 'the ecology of the country had changed' and wonder 'was this the Law doing something to the country?' (p. 179). These transformations in this country are therefore driven

⁸⁵ Revell and others, p. 473.

by anthropogenic climate change and pollution, alongside the other colonising practices described above. The relationships between the country's occupants are altered drastically, with an unpredictable imbalance in the rat and owl populations: we learn of the owls that *'most of these eggs will hatch but when the food runs out in the summer, the rats will perish, and so too will most of the owls'* (p. 182, original italics). The impact of this observation is complicated by the men gathering owls' eggs to eat, and by Warren Finch forcing Oblivia to consume them too against her will (p. 175). The men are, the narrator remarks, 'totally oblivious to the blot they had created on the landscape' (p. 174). The reciprocity and attentiveness that characterise many traditional Indigenous relationships with country appears to be absent in this scene. This is intensified by the fact that Finch tries to use his connection to the country in order to validate his kidnapping of Oblivia: as he holds her, 'Warren Finch wanted the ancestral world to create the balance in his marriage. He whispered into her ear that this was the way he wanted the land to see them' (p. 187). Rather than acknowledging the immorality of kidnapping a traumatised young woman, Finch appeals to the land and his Indigenous culture to justify the suffering he is causing, and create a 'balance' that obscures the gendered *imbalance* he is maintaining.

During her traumatic journey of separation from the swamp and the swans that she cares for, Oblivia takes refuge in her connection with the creatures. As the group travel in the car, 'her mind began forming a swan map of the country. She could imagine the swans flying above the wires strung across the poles in their slow migration along the Dreaming track from another age' (p. 161). Here, Wright references songlines, or Dreaming tracks, as Oblivia tries to orient herself through her kinship with the swans and her recognition of their own knowledge systems. Songlines — or 'the paths travelled by the Dreaming Ancestors who brought the world into being, crisscross the continent, creating the spiritual bloodlines that link all Aboriginal nations and peoples together'⁸⁶ — are creative processes closely interlinked with country, and connect different Aboriginal communities and spaces across Australia. Crucially, however, 'stories, Dreaming tracks and songlines need to be walked' in order to maintain the traditional knowledge and narratives of Indigenous Australians.⁸⁷ This statement reinforces the idea that the co-constitutive relationships valued by some Indigenous epistemologies need to be actively tended to, revised, and revisited frequently in order to maintain balance among the inhabitants of the country (including humans, nonhumans and plant life). It is also important to note that the songlines are not simply one-dimensional tracks that are traversed. Although they can comprise particular physical routes, they can also encompass different sites, places

⁸⁶ Milroy and Revell, p. 5.

⁸⁷ Milroy and Revell, p. 5.

and other phenomena (trees, shrubs, water, ceremonial areas).⁸⁸ The songlines, or Dreaming tracks as they are also known, can be disrupted, interrupted or overlaid by other interferences with country. Taking this into account, it appears that the songlines can provide a way of connecting people across countries through narratives about the land. For example, when the three henchmen (or ‘genies’ as Oblivia names them), Warren Finch, and Oblivia arrive in Warren’s country (the area discussed above, in which Oblivia feels unsafe and threatened), the three henchmen deliberate over the validity of Finch’s claim over Oblivia and their own connections to her, feeling apprehension over the idea that their traditional countries may not share any stories with hers:

None of them knew the stories from her country. They did not know anything about her, nothing of what she held within her, or the spirits of the law stories that she now brought onto their own territory. How would they know how these stories connected both countries? What other questions should they be considering if her stories did not connect with their country, not even one story-line connecting their lands together, if that was possible? (pp. 166–67)

This disconnect appears to be heightened by the genies’ sense that Finch has taken Oblivia without just cause: they remark that ‘*he’s gone too far*’ (p. 170), which gestures towards both a spatial trespass and a cultural one. It is also exacerbated by the disorienting dust storms (p. 166) and the changing ecology of the country, which (as discussed above) is prompted by the warming climate.

The representation of songlines in the text can therefore indicate harmony, connection and understanding of landscape, space and country (as well as wayfaring knowledge). However, they can also indicate ruptures in the continuation of traditional knowledge and epistemologies, ones that are exacerbated by disregard for the country and its agency, by the changing ecologies of country, and by climate change. This is registered in the text: just after she imagines the swan maps of the country, Oblivia ‘sense[s] everything known to her had disappeared and blamed herself’, whilst wondering ‘had she really negated her responsibility for the greater things in her care?’ (pp. 161–62). The multiple threats that she experiences — the changing climate, her kidnapping by Warren, her forced removal from the

⁸⁸ Frank Rijavec, *Know the Song, Know the Country: The Ngaardangali Story of Culture and History in Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi Country*, 2nd edn (Roebourne, WA: Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corp., 2004), p. 2.

swans and her forced trespassing across new country — prevent her from revisiting, recreating and nurturing the songlines that connect her with the nonhumans and her country.

It is through the spatial frameworks of country, Dreaming, and songlines that it is possible to perceive a Waanyi spatial discourse emerging within the novel, one that recognises and articulates the possibilities for both harmony and rupture in human and nonhuman relationships with the land. These conceptualisations do not exist solely in opposition to Western spatial discourse, which rests primarily on the broad notions of ‘space’, ‘place’, ‘environment’ and ‘landscape’: as Milroy and Revell have noted, many ‘Aboriginal ways of navigating are specifically place bound’. However, these places or sites of significance are ‘wrapped up in ancient ecologically healthy stories, rules and protocols actively celebrated in ceremony and in daily practice, respecting both the individual and the collective cultural well-being of indigenous peoples and their respective Countries’.⁸⁹ In the novel, place is not considered to be fixed and bounded in Indigenous spatial knowledge, but is constituted of spiritual and environmental practices, processes and journeys that create a particular site. In this way, it is possible to identify similarities to Ingold’s narrative of place, which imagines place as made up of multiple pathways knotting together in clusters.⁹⁰ Notions of country do also share some characteristics with Massey’s conceptualisation of space, as something mutable, interrelational and constituted through multiple processes.⁹¹ Country does not exist as a reaction to the Western concept of space as a static backdrop: it predates and therefore inherently exceeds this framing through its fundamental connections with its inhabitants, the Law, and the Dreaming. One of Finch’s wise companions in the novel tells Oblivia that ‘*you should remember that anyone can be a habitual colonist perpetually in search of difference to demystify myths, always trying to create new myths to claim as their own*’ (p. 181, original emphasis), which warns against attempting to reduce Indigenous epistemologies to simple binaries, or approaching them from an exploitative perspective of perpetual difference. Although this binary is resisted, throughout the novel, Wright foregrounds the type of Western spatial understandings that reach their limits when they do not take into account Indigenous knowledge systems, or the effects of drastic climate change. As the preceding discussion demonstrates, the rejection of the Laws and traditions associated with each country through trespass — and by extension through the further colonisation of the land via environmental exploitation and climate change — severs the bonds of reciprocity that call the country ‘into being’. This active disregard of country and its Law acts as ‘language-in-action’: a discourse

⁸⁹ Milroy and Revell, p. 12.

⁹⁰ Ingold, *Being Alive*, pp. 148–49.

⁹¹ Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 2.

that functions to ensure that the country (along with its Indigenous inhabitants) becomes the abstract, void and absent space, as colonial spatial discourses (such as the horizontal sublime and *terra nullius*) originally envisaged it. In the novel, Wright also exposes how the colonising process of disregarding Aboriginal Law is intensified in the context of climate-changing spaces: it can sever the carefully established relationships between nonhuman animals, humans and country, and re-inscribe absence onto the landscape. *The Swan Book* also resists this 'absence' imposed upon the land by Western conceptualisations of space, however, through its depiction of constitutive agency and active presence. In representing the complexity of new relationships forged in climate-changing settings, however, such as that between Oblivia and the nomadic swans, Wright reinforces the adaptability and resistance of Indigenous conceptualisations of country, and foregrounds the limits of more inflexible and binary discourses on space. One of these discourses is the Western legal approach to spatiality.

[The Law and the Land: Legal Spatial Frameworks, Women and Indigenous Land](#)

This foregrounding in the novel is revealed by an examination of the geographical and legal spatial frameworks that have been imposed on Indigenous land through colonial rule. For example, Milroy and Revell have discussed at length the ways that Euclidean mapping techniques have been problematic in Australia, historically and in the contemporary.⁹² Graham Huggan has also summarised the tensions between Indigenous negotiations of land and Western mapmaking, citing cartography's claims to truth, and its incomplete rendition of the environment that it seeks to 'define and delineate'.⁹³ Western cartography is in many ways in opposition to the inherently oral and 'graphemic'⁹⁴ nature of traditional Aboriginal wayfaring knowledge. As well as working from different points of reference when understanding the shape and scope of different spaces, many Indigenous groups have detailed knowledge of multiple seasons and climate patterns that differ significantly from Western understandings of these phenomena. By failing to acknowledge these alternative knowledges, traditional Western mapping practices do not register the myriad changes that occur throughout the year: for example, bodies of water that appear and disappear depending on the seasons, or key changes in flora or fauna that can transform the landscape but are not recorded on conventional maps. As the narrator remarks in the text, Oblivia's internal experience of space was a 'geography that was constantly shifting' (p. 88). Typical Western maps are also in opposition with the notion of songlines as a means of navigation, which rely on a 'flexible

⁹² Milroy and Revell, p. 12.

⁹³ Graham Huggan, *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 143.

⁹⁴ Huggan, p. 143.

system of verbal exchange'.⁹⁵ Instead, traditional Western mapping practices attempt to fix the landscape into a two-dimensional and unmoving frame. The subsequent overwriting of Indigenous knowledge of seasonal changes, landscapes and space is of course a small facet of a wider ongoing colonisation process that seeks to appropriate, marginalise or erase Indigenous land practices. As Huggan has remarked:

The graphic display provided by the standard (Western) topographical map affords not only a means of orientation in the environment it represents, but also an instrument for the eventual appropriation of that environment, or a justification for the terms of its tenure.⁹⁶

From the arrival of the first white settlers in Australia, Aboriginal peoples were massacred, controlled and imprisoned, and their physical and spiritual ties to country forcibly curtailed by new and hostile occupation of the land. After centuries of oppression, the Australian government was forced to grapple with the extent of the damage inflicted upon Indigenous populations across the country, through the court case 'Mabo vs Queensland' (1992).⁹⁷ This implemented the recognition of Native Title, which acknowledged that *terra nullius* did not apply to instances where a territory was already occupied by human inhabitants, regardless of how those inhabitants were perceived by the settlers. Although it is inherently flawed in its failure to recognise Indigenous sovereignty, and its requirement for Indigenous claimants to prove a 'traditional connection' to country (among other things),⁹⁸ Native Title is the most significant change to the legal framework that mapped Indigenous and settler land rights. It recognises that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have rights of access to certain spaces, borne from their spiritual and physical relationships to that space, and demonstrates an awareness of the fact that Australia was already an inhabited and cultural (as opposed to untouched) landscape when it was colonised. Similarly, the Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act in 1976 allowed Indigenous Australians to claim rights to land, on the grounds of spiritual relationships to — and occupation of — that land. The Act implemented Land Councils and allowed Aboriginal Trusts to own, care for and govern parts of

⁹⁵ Huggan, p. 146.

⁹⁶ Huggan, p. 146.

⁹⁷ See 'Case Summary: Mabo vs Queensland', *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)* <https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/products/research_outputs_statistics_and_summaries/overturning-the-doctrine-of-terra-nullius_0.pdf> [accessed 10 June 2019].

⁹⁸ See Greta Bird and Jo Bird, 'Nuclear Waste Dump: Sovereignty and the Muckaty Mob', in *Law as if Earth Really Mattered: The Wild Law Judgment Project*, ed. by Nicole Rogers and Michelle Maloney (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 237–54 (p. 246).

their land under freehold title. However, one of the fundamental tensions in the implementation of Native Title and other Land Rights acts is that they are constantly vulnerable to revisions and amendments. These can render the land more vulnerable to resource exploitation, neoliberal agendas and tools of exclusion: as the narrator remarks in *The Swan Book*, ‘Native Title stories [...] ended up as laws to include or exclude families’ (p. 134). Similarly, the Intervention (described in more detail in the previous chapter) gave the government the power to ‘lease townships on Aboriginal Land for ninety-nine years, a land grab that would effectively end Indigenous control forever’,⁹⁹ temporarily suspending the Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act. Another key issue is that the legislation necessarily seeks to translate complex Indigenous epistemological structures into Western legal frameworks, which are often fundamentally incompatible with each other. As Deborah Bird Rose has stated, in many instances ‘Aboriginal law controls access to knowledge’, whereas ‘Anglo-Australian law requires an open inquiry’.¹⁰⁰

For example, within many Indigenous Australian cultures, there are certain sites of spiritual and practical importance for men and women. There are also certain traditions, celebrations or practices (often associated with particular sites) that are divided by gender. These traditions, sometimes colloquially called ‘men’s business’ and ‘women’s business’, are often kept separate and secret from one another.¹⁰¹ This is important in terms of protecting certain spaces, because historically, when sites of particular significance to Indigenous women have needed protection against threats (such as infrastructure building or mining) it is tantamount to breaking Law to discuss the true importance of the sites in front of men. Therefore, courtrooms pose a particular problem. Because of these complexities, it follows that ‘women often have been overlooked in a land management system that has tended to assume that men are the primary spokespersons for cultural issues’,¹⁰² which is in turn ‘a feedback effect such that women’s marginal position under colonisation is often construed to

⁹⁹ Jeff McMullen, ‘Rolling Thunder: Voices Against Oppression’, in *The Intervention: An Anthology*, ed. by Rosie Scott and Anita Heiss (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2016), pp. 107–27 (p. 121).

¹⁰⁰ Deborah Bird Rose, ‘Does Cultural Survival Have a Gender? Indigenous Women and Human Rights in Australia’, in *Gender, Planning and Human Rights*, ed. by Tovi Fenster (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 140–52 (p. 147).

¹⁰¹ Bronwyn Fredericks, Mick Adams and Odette Best, ‘Indigenous, Gendered Health Perspectives’, in *Yatdjuligin: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nursing and Midwifery Care*, ed. by Odette Best and Bronwyn Fredericks, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 67–82 (p. 68).

¹⁰² Laurajane Smith, ‘Empty Gestures? Heritage and the Politics of Recognition’, in *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights*, ed. by Helaine Silverman and D. Fairchild Ruggles (New York: Springer, 2007), pp. 159–71 (p. 168).

be representative of the pre-colonial past'.¹⁰³ Not only are Indigenous women often excluded from conversations over their rights to access and manage land, but their silence on such issues — sometimes governed by their adherence to their Law — is misconstrued, and viewed as a symptom of the women's oppression at the hands of Aboriginal men. However, the reverse is usually true: as Deborah Bird Rose has noted, in the Northern Territory in particular, 'separation of men's and women's sacred domains ensures sites of power and autonomy such that men cannot dominate women and vice versa'.¹⁰⁴ This is especially relevant to Wright's own people, the Waanyi. The Waanyi Women's History Project was implemented by a group of Waanyi women elders to protect their sacred sites, as 'much of the information about the sites is knowledge that cannot be imparted to men, and the women were concerned that their sites [...] were not known by the park managers and thus inadvertently in danger'.¹⁰⁵ The project ensured that new ways of communicating knowledge without breaking Law were explored and implemented, in order to protect and care for the sites appropriately.

In the context of Wright's possible knowledge of this project, or at least of other similar debates in Waanyi history, *The Swan Book* portrays women's knowledge of spatiality, and the maintenance of this spatial knowledge, as a private domain. It is a mode of resistance against both gendered and colonial domination. This is perceptible through Oblivia's connection to spaces that others cannot access: in times of emotional or spiritual turbulence, she returns to the tree in which she was found, via the songlines. Early on in the text, we learn that she 'believed there was a secret route back to the tree — she believed there had to be a secret route that had brought the swans up to the top of the country' (p. 72), and when she is threatened physically by Warren Finch, as he holds her, 'she escapes with a flood of thoughts running back along the song-lines to the swamp, and the language inside her goes bolting down the tree with all the swans in the swamp following her' (p. 172). Her return to this space, and her maintenance of the songline connection that allows her to go there, enables her to retain autonomy against both colonial forces that seek to control her access to country, and against sexual oppression by men. As a child, Oblivia is raped by a 'gang of petrol-sniffing children' (p. 93), and following this, she is found in the tree by Aunty Bella Donna of the Champions (p. 11). Oblivia 'slept for a very long time among the tree's huge woven roots' (p. 7), and wrote on these roots in a language 'dredged from the soup of primordial memory in these ancient lands' (p. 7), which described the story of trees around the swamp. Originally, these trees lived 'next to a deepwater lake fed by an old spring-spirit relative, until they had all

¹⁰³ Rose, 'Does Cultural Survival Have a Gender?', p. 145.

¹⁰⁴ Rose, 'Does Cultural Survival Have a Gender?', p. 145.

¹⁰⁵ Smith, 'Empty Gestures?', p. 168.

slowly died' (p. 8). Here, Wright describes Oblivia's deep knowledge of the spatiality of the swamp throughout history, until the 'massive sand storms' (p. 8) of climate change altered the climate and ecosystems. This segment of the narrative reveals the increasing absence of nonhuman life in the swamp, which is gradually filled with military waste and pollution. The text also describes how, when the memory of the rape consumes her after she has been captured by Finch (p. 198), she 'crawled away towards her memory of the tree' and 'falls back into the safe darkness to hide' (p. 199). Here, the tree acts as an escape in her mind from the physical situation of her capture, from the gendered violence that she has experienced, and from particular moments in time that continue to threaten her.

Indigenous spatial knowledge and Law, however, is also used against Oblivia in *The Swan Book*. Warren Finch utilises his knowledge of Aboriginal traditions and the land in order to achieve financial gain and power, subscribing to the neoliberal ideals imposed on Aboriginal land by the Australian government (both within the novel and in our contemporary political climate).¹⁰⁶ This is evident in his approach to his forced marriage with Oblivia. As a boy, he is told by his elders that he has been betrothed to her since birth. He therefore reads his historical betrothal as his birth right, which is validated by his people (p. 93). As the indirect free narrative shifts towards Finch earlier in the text, we are told that 'he simply wanted what was his to claim from an agreement made between families' (p. 151). When he is met with resistance from the Aboriginal Council at the Swan Lake swamp, where Oblivia lives, 'he casually restated what he wanted, with a smile: *The law is the law*' (p. 151, original italics). Finch interprets the Law as something that permits him to exploit another for his own personal gain, as it is implied that he only wants to marry Oblivia in order to perform a kind of authentic Indigeneity that would help him reach success and power. Early in the narrative, when Finch goes to Swan Lake in order to take Oblivia, we learn that 'Warren claimed to be one of those people who used the voice given to him by the spiritual ancestors of the land for its only useful purpose, to uplift Aboriginal thought to its rightful place' (p. 130). This is contradicted later: his hypocrisy is revealed as he parades Oblivia around at their wedding in front of '*very important benefactors*' (p. 224), '*important business people*' who '*give money to his work*' (p. 223), most of which derives from '*the laundered profits of exploiting natural resources*' (p. 224). Here, he tells Oblivia that she is '*supposed to be a trophy wife*' (p. 227). Rather than pursuing their marriage in order to fulfil traditional Law, then, Finch is using Oblivia in order to secure his image as '*the most powerful man in the country*' (p. 224, all original italics), and to participate in (and benefit from) resource exploitation from the land, contributing to the very climate change and pollution that had ruined the ecosystem of Oblivia's swamp. We are told that

¹⁰⁶ McMullen, 'Rolling Thunder: Voices Against Oppression', p. 121.

‘Warren Finch’s name was saturated in the hot and humid air of climate change’ (p. 123), and Wright informs the reader that:

Warren Finch’s Aboriginal Government Nation [...] had grown prosperous with flukes of luck here and there called mining, and saying yes, yes, yes to anything on offer — a bit of assimilation, a bit of integration, a bit of giving up your own sovereignty, a bit of closing the gap — and was always paraded as Australia’s international triumph. (pp. 115–16)

In light of these scenes, it becomes clear that Warren Finch represents not an autonomous Indigenous government, informed by the traditions of Law and Indigenous conceptualisations of country and space, but a neoliberal government assuming an Indigenous identity to implement policies that maintain the status quo, and continue to force Indigenous people to give up sovereignty and assimilate into white settler Australian culture. In response to this, Oblivia’s knowledge of and access to alternative sacred sites maintain a level of autonomy in her interaction with country. Simultaneously, this knowledge rejects the Euclidean discourses of static and measurable space that are deployed by Western geographical mapping techniques, as she travels to an inaccessible and unplottable area (the physical tree is destroyed early on in the novel by the military).

As mentioned briefly above, Oblivia’s silence is also a crucial part of this autonomy. Although her muteness could be read as a lingering effect of the trauma of her rape and kidnapping, I suggest reading her silence as a resistance against male domination of space. By maintaining her private space in the tree, and with it her connection with the country and its nonhuman inhabitants (the black swans), Oblivia’s muteness can be read as a defiance of both the legal spatial frameworks that would have her declare potentially sacred female traditions, and the men (and masculine structures) who attempt to control and restrict her movements within different spaces. By rejecting the hegemonic structures that judge the value of country — in *The Swan Book*, these structures are the military and interventionist government — Oblivia’s silence is at once ‘passive’, in Wright’s own words, but is ‘a weapon as well’.¹⁰⁷ Rather than rectifying the ‘form of violence’¹⁰⁸ entailed within the erasure of Indigenous women from public hearings on land ownership, Oblivia is ‘taking flight into another way of thinking to deal with trouble. [...] She’s quite a strong character, a sovereign person of her own mind and her own existence’.¹⁰⁹ It is important to note that Wright does not obscure the effects of Oblivia’s

¹⁰⁷ Sullivan, ‘Interview: Alexis Wright’, para. 14 of 20.

¹⁰⁸ Rose, ‘Does Cultural Survival Have a Gender?’, p. 148.

¹⁰⁹ Sullivan, ‘Interview: Alexis Wright’, para. 14 of 20.

past trauma: the text does not imply that Finch's actions have no effect on her. When Finch arrives at Oblivia's home on board a rusted ship hull in the middle of the lake, in order to take her away, this does have a profound effect on Oblivia's capacity to access the tree:

Warren Finch's gaze was like [...] A wall of ice in the way of running! [...] in the midst of trying to grab a story to save herself, the reality of swans called from outside in the sea of blackness around the hull. They reminded her that the tree was destroyed, there was nowhere to run. [...] Already, he possessed her life. (p. 155)

This example demonstrates, then, in a similar way to Wright's discourse of temporality in *Carpentaria*, that Indigenous conceptualisations of space are under threat from various sources. In this case, the threat originates from the neoliberal political discourse of Warren Finch, and his deployment of his Indigenous identity for power over the land in times of drastic climate change, and over Oblivia. Although Finch is Indigenous himself, he appears to take on the neoliberal view that Indigenous knowledge systems are complex and therefore too difficult to reconcile with Australian society, preferring instead that they (and their associated land) be dispersed or segregated in order for the status quo to be maintained (as I discuss further in the following section). After Oblivia is removed from the tree by Bella Donna, Wright explains that 'the tree was destroyed by the Army on the premise that this nexus of dangerous beliefs had to be broken, to close the gap between Aboriginal people and white people' (p. 79). 'Closing the gap' is in fact a real-life government strategy that aims to reduce the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and white Australians in terms of health, life expectancy, and level of education (among other things).¹¹⁰ Significantly, the phrase is also inherently spatial, implying the existence of a physical distance between two polarised communities: one that must be eliminated. By drawing attention to the inherent violence embedded within this idea, here Wright satirises the deployment of this discourse to violent ends. Through these quotations, governmental forces are revealed to be imposing a discourse of war, violence and threat on to the land and its inhabitants, one that has profound consequences for the world of the novel (as I will discuss in more detail in the next section).

Oblivia's silence, then, rejects both Western legal spatial frameworks and male domination of sacred female space. It also, as Wright suggests, renders her 'passive' in some situations, unable to vocalise her struggle for autonomy. However, I argue that her silence also

¹¹⁰ Malcom Turnbull, 'Prime Minister's Introduction' to *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2018*, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Government of Australia <<https://closingthegap.pmc.gov.au/prime-ministers-introduction>> [accessed 4 December 2018].

has significant resonance in the context of *The Swan Book's* climate-changing world. In a different way to *Gold Fame Citrus* (which represents the increasing absences brought about by climate change through the Amargosa), Oblivia's silence can be read as a direct response to the increasing absence of relationships with — and understandings of — country. As these understandings and relationships break down, or are altered drastically through climate change, Oblivia refuses to communicate with the perpetrators of environmental violence, and rejects participation in the human-to-human mode of communication, like politics and law, which govern the world, and govern her life. Instead, she chooses to invest her ability to communicate in her psychological connection with the black swans, consequently strengthening her bonds with the nonhuman world.

Discourses of (Dis)possession: Government and the Militarisation of Space

Similarly to the critical approach it takes to Australian legal frameworks and neoliberal appropriation of Indigenous identity, *The Swan Book* registers conflict between Indigenous spatialities and how the government and military view space as something to be possessed, controlled, populated or depopulated according to financial and political manoeuvring. From the outset of the text, it is made clear that different spaces are heavily contested and politicised. For example, the very beginning of the novel narrates the ecological transformation of Swan Lake. It begins as an ecosystem made up of ancient trees and a 'deepwater lake', which are sustained by 'an old spring-spirit relative' (p. 8) and hosts 'eels, freshwater mussels, turtles and other aquatic life' (p. 9). The 'ancestral people' (p. 8) living on the lake were isolated from the rest of the country, and sang 'praise to the ancient spirits for the season' (p. 9), implying a reciprocal relationship with the land and a close spiritual connection with their country.¹¹¹ Wright's 'all times' perspective features here, forgoing a linear narrative chronology and abandoning clear temporal markers, but we learn that the Australian army then arrives at the lake, and dumps huge mounds of waste collected from the ocean (pp. 8–9), churning up 'dead ancient things' (p. 10) in the sediment. Just like the 'all times' perspective recalls the narrative style of *Carpentaria*, the presence of waste in the novel alludes to Desperance and the Pricklebush mob, who live on a rubbish dump. The arrival of the army prompts the 'ancestral people' to leave in fear: 'they had heard stories — bad stories about what happened to anyone who went back there' (p. 10). When the people eventually return, they are informed that their Native Title to the land has been erased due to their departure (p. 10), and that the

¹¹¹ It is not clear who the 'ancestral people' are here, but in the context of this scene in the novel I read this phrase as referring to people living in the text's contemporary time, who have ancestral connections to the lake, and who live according to a traditional Indigenous epistemology until the army arrives.

lake 'no longer belonged to them' (p. 10). Describing the 'centuries of illegal occupation' (p. 10) of Australia by settlers, Wright acknowledges the continuation of colonialism through the sustained policing of Indigenous access to certain spaces. Ultimately, Swan Lake becomes a 'swamp' (p. 12), a 'secret locality for Defence Force scheduled training manoeuvres' (p. 12) and finally a 'detention camp' (p. 40) for 'un-assimilables' (p. 55): primarily Indigenous people who do not conform with 'the decent people of mainstream civilization' (p. 52). More and more people are relocated to the swamp and 'segregated' (p. 52), and sandstorms continue to plague the swamp, causing silt to build up and threaten the homes of the swamp people (p. 53). The intensification of 'unpredictable' weather events (p. 53) and climate change-induced drought prompts a 'new ceremony of swamp dreaming' (p. 54), in which 'lamenting ceremonies' (p. 54) are performed as the dust covers the highways. Oblivia realises that 'soon, no one would have any idea about how to reach this part of the world' (p. 54). The Indigenous people's response to the dissolution of the ancient swamp into obscurity via the sandstorms — a musical lamentation of the loss of sovereignty and the significance of the lake as it becomes a swamp — reaffirms their connection with, and attention to, the country. Even though the people in the detention camp are a mix of 'locals' (p. 115) and other Aboriginal people detained and brought to the camp on buses from across the country (p. 49), creating new ceremonies for the country becomes part of their resistance against their internment, which is a result of the government grading Indigenous people on 'whether anything could be done for them. Upper scale — if they could actually be educated. Lower scale — just needed some *dying pillow* place to die' (p. 49, original emphasis). Revisiting Ashcroft's 'horizontal sublime', this resistance also responds to the possibility that the land may transform into the terrifying wide, depopulated, space that was depicted by early colonial perspectives on Australian landscapes. With these practices, the swamp people reaffirm the presence of human and nonhuman culture in these landscapes, even within the mutable dimensions of climate-changing spaces. In performing the songs and ceremonies that call the country, the Dreaming, and its Law into being, the people of the swamp can retain sovereignty over their culture, and can affirm their own history of the changing landscape: as the ceremonies are performed, 'children played with sovereign minds, just by standing out in the wind to fill their cups with dust given to them by their ancestors' (p. 54).

The music and 'listening' (p. 54) that the swamp people perform work to form a resistance against the obscuring of Indigenous history (in terms of colonisation, and the literal obscuring of the swamp via the climate change-induced storms). They are also a way of reaffirming identity and creating new cultural narratives in response to environmental change. It is evident here that the discourse of societal assimilation enforced and promoted by the

army and governmental policies — for example the ‘National Aboriginal Relocation Policy’ that Wright references — (p. 52) is aesthetically mirrored by the materiality of climate change and its resulting weather events within *The Swan Book*. As Upstone has remarked, ‘in the colonial appropriation of space it is identity that risks being lost, as the imposition of an absolute threatens to oppress all it subsumes’.¹¹² Just as the government and army seek to eliminate the identities of the camp’s occupants through displacing them from their land and disregarding the differences between Indigenous peoples, the sandstorms threaten to physically subsume the traditional significance of the lake and its surroundings. This is visible too in the way the army responds to the stories and traditions of the camp’s inhabitants. As well as imposing physical control over the movement of its citizens, the government seeks to curtail their spiritual relationships to country through other means. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the army destroys the ancient tree in which Oblivia is found, damaging a sacred site of importance to the Indigenous population. Upon learning of this, the swamp people remark that ‘it made us strong and gave us hope that tree. The kinspeople of the tree had believed this since time immemorial’ (p. 79), and even more significantly:

They were too speechless to talk about a loss that was so great, it made them feel unhinged from their own bodies, unmoored, vulnerable, separated from eternity. They had been cut off. [...] The reciprocal bond of responsibility that existed between themselves and the ancestors had always strengthened them. This is what held all times together. (p. 79)

Here, the governmental forces enact a brutal separation of the population from their stories about the land: ‘those stories scattered into the winds were still about, but where, that was the problem now’ (p. 79). The dislocation from history, stories and the ancestors, in the name of ‘closing the gap’ between white and Aboriginal people, has significant consequences for the characters. The ‘unmoor[ing]’ of the people, and their sensation of dislocation from time and space — ‘they called themselves damned people walking around like strangers on their own country’ (p. 79) — articulates the chaos and disorder imposed upon the land by neocolonial practices and the changing climate. These forces are enabled and intensified by the government and military operations in the area (p. 12), but they are ultimately consolidated by Warren Finch in his decision to literally blow up the swamp with bombs (p. 230). We are informed that Oblivia ‘had only seen men around the swamp using their physical powers to destroy’ (p. 230), implying that this is a gendered power play as well as a political and

¹¹² Upstone, p. 6.

individualistic one. Although Finch believes that '*places like that cannot exist*' (p. 231, original italics), which suggests that his actions come from a place of altruism, his disregard for Oblivia's home reveals that his solution to the myriad problems at the swamp is a singular, uncomplicated one: to obliterate and destroy. Instead of returning the land rights to the people, reinvigorating and cleaning up the land, and installing infrastructure that would allow the swamp's occupants some semblance of autonomy, Finch forcibly evacuates the land, and literally dissolves the structure of the space itself. We learn that the occupants '*had two choices*', which were '*being moved into the nearest town where they would have to learn to live just like everyone else. Or, being returned to homelands where their real laws and government exist*' (p. 231, original italics). It remains that, even under Finch's Aboriginal Government, the people do not have the right to self-determination.

Finch's explosion of the swamp can also be read in tandem with the government's structural approach to Indigenous knowledge systems throughout the novel. The destruction of the lake and the sacred tree also resonates with the observation that 'contemporary neocolonial power relations work precisely through chaos', providing an opportunity 'to further capitalist exploitation, which thrives on destabilised political and economic relations'.¹¹³ This kind of exploitation — which operates in a similar way to Klein's disaster capitalism, which I discuss further in the following chapter — undoubtedly takes place in *The Swan Book*, as we have seen through the discussion of Finch's political ambitions and practices. It is also particularly relevant in terms of the military exploitation of the area of Swan Lake. Similarly to the motif of dissolution that we see in *Gold Fame Citrus*, in *The Swan Book*, the stories of Indigenous country and history, and the songlines and Dreaming that link these concepts, are scattered and dispersed by the destruction of the sacred tree. The network of reciprocity that binds these epistemologies together is systematically dismantled by the colonial notions of land ownership and possession, and the neocolonial values of assimilation and neoliberal 'closing the gap', that are superimposed on to country. Rather than taking heed of the relational, responsive understanding of country and land caretaking that the original people of Swan Lake lived by, the government and military exploit the chaos of climate change and environmental disaster in order to take control of the land and its populations. Fundamentally, these two destructive events in the novel — the destruction of the sacred tree and of the swamp itself — articulate a fundamental opposition between Indigenous notions of space and the way that space is narrated by military and government structures. The incompatibility is clear: the military discourse of space in a climate-changed environment is predicated on notions of ownership, homogeneity, and human control. Indigenous spatial

¹¹³ Upstone, p. 8.

frameworks — like country — understand space as a reciprocal custodianship, with material consequences for those misusing or disrespecting country. Within *The Swan Book*, Wright articulates the damage that occurs as a result of imposing incompatible spatial understandings on a country that has been misused and disrespected, through pollution, mining, destruction, and climate change. The chaos in which neocolonial powers thrive — in this case, the unpredictable and disruptive weather events and altered climate patterns of a climate changed Australia — provides the perfect conditions for the military to impose a discourse of spatial ownership and control, under the guise of paternalistic protection. As the previous discussion has shown, this discourse operates through physical control and violence, via language such as ‘closing the gap’, policies such as the ‘National Aboriginal Relocation Program’ and its notion of ‘un-assimilables’ (p. 55), and the legal exclusion of the swamp inhabitants from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (p. 48).

As I have explained earlier in this chapter, Western spatial discourses are not necessarily fundamentally in opposition to Indigenous spatialities. To reinforce this binary would, among other things, be to ignore the many layers of cultural influences on the Australian landscape that originate from non-Western and non-Indigenous standpoints. However, in this scenario, which is set amongst the multiple crises of climate change, the militarisation of the land pursues an ideology that is in direct conflict with notions of country. The swamp people’s belief that ‘country never leaves its people’ (p. 26) is met with violent reactions from the military and governmental constructions of space, which systematically work to sever people from country in various ways (as explored above). The tensions of this epistemological gulf — the irreconcilability of these two spatial understandings — are represented in different physical interactions with space (for example the mining and explosions in contrast with Oblivia’s nurturing of the swans). Wright also examines the nature of this disjuncture through a satirical approach to interventionist governmental policy, for example, her frequent satirical allusions to ‘closing the gap’. The campaign is revealed to be a thinly veiled attempt to encourage Indigenous people to assimilate into white settler culture, and conform to the measurements of success that are used by the Australian government and other white characters in the novel, like Bella Donna. She advocates ‘moving forward as the way to become re-empowered’, and for Indigenous people to ‘lear[n] “lifestyle” and understand the value of ‘aesthetically pleasing houses and gardens’ (p. 34). Similarly, for the white ‘controller’ (p. 136) of the camp, Mr Weisenheimer (the satirical name he is given refers to a smug or arrogant person who enjoys displaying their intelligence), the inhabitants of the camp do ‘not share the dream of Australianness. This was the reason why they had to be in servitude’ (p. 138). For the people themselves, forced assimilation and the detention camp are

just more ways of having ‘their lives classified and reassigned yet again’ by those in power (p. 49). In other parts of the text, Wright references Closing the Gap as a capitulation by Warren Finch’s Aboriginal Government Nation in order to consolidate their power, even when it meant ‘giving up your own sovereignty’ (p. 116).

The sceptical and satirical view Wright takes on this particular policy and its implementers exposes the underlying chasm of understanding between the white settler governmental structure, and certain Indigenous cultures. Where the Closing the Gap initiative seeks to figuratively and literally eliminate this chasm, Wright reveals its hypocrisy, as the initiative is realised through enforced assimilation and cultural homogenisation among Indigenous people, rather than allowing true self-determination and Indigenous rights to their traditional lands. Another consequence of this textual manoeuvre is its exposure of colonial attempts to erase Indigenous spiritual connections with country, thereby allowing further exploitation and misuse of the land, and consolidating its transformation from living ecosystems into monocultures (such as the grass owls and rats mentioned in the previous section) or spaces nearly devoid of life (the polluted swamp, with the exception of the lost swans).

Conclusion

The phrase ‘dust had a way of displacing destiny’ (p. 13), taken from the beginning of *The Swan Book*, is an enlightening one. It has equal significance in the contexts of both novels, as both consider the implications of dust as a consequence of climatic change: something that obscures, unsettles and disorients human and nonhuman biophysical life. It also articulates the fundamental relationship between space and time, both in the lexical proximity of ‘displacing’ (a spatial term) to ‘destiny’ (a temporal one), but also in the way it constitutes the spatial phenomenon (dust in transit) as something that can affect human temporalities and narratives. Most importantly, it registers the idea of ‘dust’ as a spatial effect of climate change-induced desertification, in its capacity to transform human and nonhuman relationships with, and perception of, landscape and space. Here, Wright remarks upon how dust — a consequence of the dismantling of ecosystems, extinction, and a breakdown of the very land itself into its constituent particles — can thwart human expectations of the future, disorienting deterministic human timelines that conceive of the future as an irrevocable ‘destiny’. Representations of the disruption of a determined future, and along with it the displacement and dislocation of humans and nonhumans, is perceptible in both texts. In *Gold Fame Citrus*, Luz’s life, so heavily documented by the media and imbued with meaning and predictions about the future of a climate-changed California, is cut short by the unpredictable chaos of the Amargosa. Similarly, Oblivia’s destiny — in terms of her supposed childhood betrothal to Finch

and her intended life as Australia's First Lady — is also re-routed through her liberation via the swans and the understanding that she shares with them, which allows her to make her way back North.

As well as its significance as a driver of the plot in both texts, the concept of 'dust' has significant metaphorical import in the context of *The Swan Book*. Its recurrence throughout the novel reinforces this: in a passage that describes Warren Finch and his affinity (or lack thereof) with his country and family, we learn that his relatives 'could see that [his] feelings were nothing more than weightless dust, particles of responsibility from their own Brolga plains he had scattered across the globe' (p. 134). Alluding to the inherent connection between individual identity and country (and by extension, between society and space) that is fundamental to some traditional Indigenous spatialities, Wright uses the imagery of dust and dispersal to articulate the dismantling of Indigenous tradition and practice that Finch enables through his commitment to individualism and neoliberal ideals. When positioned alongside Finch's advocacy of Indigenous assimilation into settler culture when he destroys the swamp, the metaphor of the dust reveals and consolidates the multiple links between neoliberal ideology, climate change, and spatiality. The people of the swamp, collected and grouped together by government forces, must now conform to white Australian culture, or be dispersed on Finch's orders (p. 231). The same passage of text resonates with recent conceptualisations of the Anthropocene: the image of Finch dispersing traces or particles across the globe invokes not only the CO₂ emissions imbricated in his travel, but the literal redistribution of earth. The following sentence from the text articulates this:

Warren Finch's life could be simplified in an instant, by sitting in the seat of an aeroplane soaring through the thermals over his own homelands, flying him off to those cities and towns located thousands of kilometres away from them. (p. 134)

The bird's eye spatial perspective that is employed here constructs an image of the Earth seen from a distance. The bird's eye perspective is something that I interrogate in greater detail in the following chapter through a discussion of the degradation narrative in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), but in this passage, this technique serves to reflect Finch's loss of empathy. From his position in the air, nuances in the landscape, and any differentiated markers of its Indigenous inhabitants, are indiscernible. The micro and macro effects of climate change on culture, society and nonhuman existence are invisible to Finch as he flies towards the horizon, which is flattened (and the landscape rendered more featureless) by the distance between him and the earth. The dwindling of nonhuman populations, the racial and governmental politics, and the chaos of the inverted weather and climate patterns are

obscured by Finch's position of privilege in the aeroplane, both physically and metaphorically. His access to free and unfettered movement allows him to avoid any uncomfortable contact with the landscape in traversing it, whilst retaining a pivotal role in its management. It also simultaneously allows him to avoid confronting the social inequalities and environmental damage that he is personally exacerbating. Ultimately, *The Swan Book* exposes the fallacies of neoliberal spatial discourse through these key quotations, revealing its part in actively transforming the Australian landscape into something resembling the colonial 'horizontal sublime', an empty and terrifying vista that erases Indigenous history and culture from the space it represents. The vast and featureless chaos of the horizontal sublime disrupts the practices of maintaining relationships between humanity, country and its nonhuman inhabitants as the traditions and bonds which connect them are severed by environmental exploitation and the effects of climate change. However, as exemplified by the scene in which the new ceremony of swamp dreaming is performed as the desertification intensifies (p. 54), the swamp people actively create space among this chaos for new modes of collective resistance against the dust, and by proxy, against the dispersal and assimilation of Indigenous communities and cultures into white settler culture. The final scenes of the novel, which see Oblivia — or perhaps her spirit — back in the swamp holding the last of the swans (which she names 'Stranger', p. 331), consolidate this final struggle for autonomy. The dust storms and drought that ravage what is left of the swamp at Swan Lake are personified as a woman spirit (p. 330), which tells Oblivia '*don't drop the swan [...] You have to carry the swan*' (p. 331, original italics). If we read this as a metaphorical imperative from the country to continue the swan's story along with her own, and as Wright retelling the narrative of climate change through an Indigenous rather than techno-scientific perspective (as she does in her poem 'Hey Ancestor'), Oblivia continues to fulfil this imperative even beyond her own life. As the final page of the novel describes, visitors to the swamp country hear her walking the swamp — remaining as a teenage girl — screaming '*kayi, kayi kala-wurru nganyi, your country is calling out for you*' (p. 334, original italics). Here, Oblivia retains a sovereignty over the swamp through her 'big story', despite the dispersal of Indigenous people and the 'buried song, stories, feelings' in their colonised 'traditional land' (p. 334).

The Swan Book critiques the climate change-induced return to colonial featureless and depopulated spaces, and reveals the ways in which the government, the military and legal spatial discourses disguise ever-intensifying environmental degradation. The prevailing narrative of *Gold Fame Citrus*, however, is perhaps more explicitly concerned with the notion of over-exposure. Here, I return to the ending of the novel, with Luz stepping into the unstoppable flash flood. Instead of masking the absence of nonhuman (and human) life in the

changed space of the US Southwest, Watkins makes every effort to continually expose the reader to this absence of refuge — which culminates in the revelation of Levi's lies and Luz and Ray's expulsion from the camp — and the loss of constitutive agency within the Amargosa. Throughout the text, there are constant reminders of, and references to, the previous existence of nonhuman life and ecosystems and their subsequent disappearance. These include, among other things, the books on Mulholland, Lewis and Clark, and Muir, as well as the dead forest of yuccas, and the desiccated bodies of sea creatures in the particulate make-up of the Amargosa. In this climate-changed space, the materiality of the earth has broken apart from any system known to humanity in its dissolution. The Amargosa exists independently of human understanding, as a collection of unrelated particles, with no discernible rules governing its existence and resistant to any system of measurement or prediction imposed upon it. At the start of Book Two, in the section of narrative that pulls back from Luz and Ig's journey and considers the origins of the Amargosa from a distanced perspective, Watkins lists the experts who tried to comprehend the formation of the dune sea: 'climatologists, geologists, volcanologists, soil experts, agriculturists, horticulturists, conservationists [...] all assigned to determine why a process that ought to have taken five hundred thousand years had happened in fifty. [...] All of them failed' (p. 117). This indirectly references the incomprehensibility of climate change, and the problems of scale that we encounter when trying to process its numerous, multi-faceted implications. The Amargosa is the ultimate 'no analogue' space, as we are informed that 'no complete map of the Amargosa Dune Sea exists' as any partial map constructed is 'etched almost immediately into obsolescence by the ever-shifting sands' (p. 121), and no one has ever 'circumnavigated' it, 'ventured into its interior' or 'crossed it' (p. 122). The impossibility of these feats are consolidated by its constant movement and 'exponential' growth (p. 121).

Significantly, these passages of text indicate the rupture that the Amargosa represents in space and time from the version of California that we know in our contemporary moment. The Amargosa's unpredictability, specifically in terms of its unimpeded movement across the US and its resistance to established geological timeframes and scientific theories, mark it out as an ever-present, permanent end in itself. It functions as a conclusion to the discourses that upheld the value of the wilderness of the Southwest, in one way or another. It does not have a future trajectory, apart from the possibility of further accumulation of dead material, which (conversely) entails an increasing absence of life, and increasing dissolution. Its composition, specifically its extremely high salinity, prevents any hopeful possibility of growth or reproduction: even the techno-solutions posited early in the novel are closed off, like the 'desal plant classified as defunct but [...] in truth had never been funct' (p. 22).

Not only is the environment of the dune sea out of human control, then, it is out of the control of the very ecosystems, climates and seasonal patterns that once governed all life in the area. The negentropic creative process — the constitutive agency of life that advances, retreats and changes unevenly across time and space — is at an end. The Amargosa's movements are unpredictable and unrelenting, and most importantly, unresponsive to all human, nonhuman life and ecosystems, as demonstrated by the futile attempts to plant indigenous grassland (p. 116) and tree lines (p. 117) in order to halt its progression. As Watkins writes, 'still came the dune, rolling over the grasses like so many swaths of peach-fuzz, the world's most invasive species no species at all' (p. 116). In an abject reversal of modern new materialist rhetoric, the Amargosa is a dead network: the intra-active relationships between its constituent parts have been broken apart by human exploitation, and they cannot be reconnected. The space is rendered totally void of life, so much so that the collaborative processes that created the space are reduced to a single process of material gathering and ungathering as it rolls across the Southwest. The reader bears witness to the loss of constitutive agency as the novel reaches its end, in which the Amargosa truly becomes the vacant space that some Western conceptualisations of spatiality would imagine. Through the process of narratives such as the settler discourse of wilderness discussed earlier in this chapter, and the denial that shapes cultural responses to the environmental change in the text, the dune sea becomes an uncreative surface, without the ability to reconstruct differentiated landscapes and ecosystems. The over-exposure of the narrative reinforces this, and the reader has no choice but to constantly be confronted by the Amargosa's openness and vacancy, and its absence of any refuge spaces for the recuperation of life. Luz is at the crux of this: her lifelong exposure to sexual abuse and abandonment becomes heightened in the climate changed spaces she lives in, in which she cannot fulfil any of the gendered personas that are assigned to her, such as mother, model, or the public persona of redemption and fertility that Levi wants her to adopt. In taking her own life, Luz exempts herself from these roles.

In *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, feminist scholar Donna Haraway remarks that in order to radically alter our position within the environment and amongst nonhumans, we must avoid the "'game over" attitude' that she so often perceives in response to the 'horrors of the Anthropocene and Capitalocene', and must instead confront and stay with the 'trouble'.¹¹⁴ It may seem that *Gold Fame Citrus* does the exact opposite, in its conclusion in death and its spatio-temporal configuration of stasis and absence of life. On the

¹¹⁴ Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 3.

contrary, I argue that the novel plays a significant part in 'staying with the trouble' in its overt examination of the narrative rhetoric and discourses on spatiality that generated the Amargosa. The novel's ending, though seemingly hopeless, articulates at an individual and societal level the consequences of damaging constructions of spatiality, and offers a narrative that counteracts the denialist imagining of a Gaia-like reconstitution of ecosystems in the wake of human-induced environmental disaster. 'Staying with the trouble' of hegemonic discourses on climate changed spaces can therefore function as a feminist ecocritical strategy: ultimately, both texts in this chapter confront and deconstruct the implicit and explicit manoeuvres of different spatial discourses, satirising the language, symbols and narratives through which they operate. The novels enact a close examination of how certain discourses on climate changing spaces can work to consolidate colonial, capitalist and patriarchal centres of power, and further entrench systemic social and gender inequalities through segregation, boundary-making, and depletion of ecosystems. This both stays with the multiple and interlocking 'trouble[d]' discourses, and exposes how they can interlock and sustain the constant obfuscation and denial of the systems and relations of power that underlie climate change as a phenomenon. Through the notion of absence, both Watkins and Wright expose the lack of refuge for biophysical life in the vast new spaces created by climate change, reveal the breakdown in complex and creative relationships between different forms of life, and challenge the ways that hegemonic forces seek to obscure and invalidate human responses to these effects. Although they are informed by different and multiple literary traditions, *Gold Fame Citrus* and *The Swan Book* both offer perspectives that acknowledge the problematic colonial and patriarchal ideals that laid the foundation for hegemonic Western spatialities, via formal and stylistic innovations that interrogate and deconstruct these damaging epistemologies. In their constant transitions across space and time, and their depictions of direct human engagement with the literal disintegration of space, these two texts proffer a helpful foundation from which we can move to the next chapter: a consideration of migration across the climate-changed worlds of Maggie Gee's *The Ice People* and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*.

Chapter 3 – Moving Targets: Migration, Climate Change, and Neoliberalism

Introduction: Contemporary Discourses on Climate Change and Migration

During the 1980s and into the 1990s, when Octavia Butler and Maggie Gee were writing their novels *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *The Ice People* (1998), speculation on the possible displacement effects of climate change was becoming more widespread. In political spheres, like the United Nations Earth Summit in 1992,¹ some identifiable discourses on climate change-induced migration began to emerge. Political positions on climate change-induced migration were being formulated amidst a growing political and scientific awareness of anthropogenic climate change and its possible global ramifications for modern societies. Speculative scenarios in the media of climate change-induced migration envisioned chaos, disruption and resource competition in destination countries, which inevitably filtered into public consciousness throughout the 1990s and beyond.² Along with the circulation of political discourses on climate change and migration during this time, these forecasts had the effect — especially within the US and Western Europe — of reinforcing public suspicion of, and animosity towards, migrants.³ The two texts I will discuss in this chapter both engage with, and satirically critique, the primarily negative discourses on climate change and migration that were established during these decades.

As Andrew Baldwin, Chris Methmann and Delf Rothe have remarked, ‘the origins of climate change-induced migration discourse go back to the 1980s, when concerned scientists and environmental activists argued that unchecked environmental and climate change could lead to mass displacement’.⁴ This notion of impending mass migration did not escape public notice, and featured in fiction and film in the decades that followed. Climate fiction novels, particularly those written and published in the last few decades, frequently depict the movement of people across countries and continents. Some imagine lone journeys across

¹ See Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, 13-14 June 1992 (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: United Nations, 1992) <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_CONF.151_26_Rev.I_Vol.%20I_Agenda.pdf> [accessed 14 May 2019].

² Mike Berry and others, ‘Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries: Project Report’ (Geneva: United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2015) <<https://www.unhcr.org/56bb369c9.pdf>> [accessed 14 May 2019], p. 15.

³ Berry and others, pp. 14–15.

⁴ Andrew Baldwin, Chris Methmann and Delf Rothe, ‘Securitising “Climate Refugees”’: The Futurology of Climate-Induced Migration’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 2 (2014), 121–30 (p. 121).

desolate landscapes, such as Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006); others portray scientific expeditions across altered landscapes, as in J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962). However, the novels I will discuss in the following chapter offer a series of complex perspectives on migration in climate-changed settings. I argue here that Maggie Gee's *The Ice People* (1998) and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) work to establish the relationship between climate change and migration primarily as a 'relation of power rather than as a hard fact waiting to be discovered, or an empirically observable phenomenon'.⁵ Examining discursive representations of migration and climate change as expressions of hegemonic power structures, rather than as an inevitable and ungovernable result of environmental degradation, facilitates the texts' dismantling of neoliberalism (which was gaining political ground throughout the period in which the novels were written and published).

Although there are differences in the two novels' form and narrative structure, they both satirise and complicate common tropes of climate fiction, such as the intrepid heroic male explorer, and Western scientists or new technology saving the planet. They also critique contemporary discourses on climate change and migration that are mobilised by politics and the media. These include archaic colonialist and masculinist individualist discourses, narratives of securitisation and militarisation, and ecomaternalist discourses, as well as social policies that exacerbate inequality. As Charles A. Knight has attested, these features are key to building an incisive satirical approach: 'the satirist operates not only by representing the satiric victim but by imitating a conventional genre'.⁶ Whilst I do not suggest that Gee or Butler intended to imitate the climate fiction genre (which was not fully established at the time these novels were published) there are features in each text that are traceable throughout the genealogy of speculative and climate fictions (such as the tropes listed above). The incorporation of these tropes, I argue, allows the authors' satirical critiques of climate discourses to be delivered in a subtle and incisive manner. Knight has also noted that, due to the satiric writer's precarious position within society, 'for most of western history, women have not been part of the main stream of satiric writers [...] most satire by women takes the form of satiric fiction'.⁷ These two novels would appear, at first glance, to conform to this tradition. However, I argue that the novels are not 'satiric fiction' per se, in that they cannot be solely defined in terms of a consistent satirical tone or hyperbolic reflection of contemporary society. Rather, in *The Ice*

⁵ Andrew Baldwin and Giovanni Bettini, 'Introduction: Life Adrift', in *Life Adrift: Climate, Migration, Critique*, ed. by Andrew Baldwin and Giovanni Bettini (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), pp. 1–26 (p. 2).

⁶ Knight, p. 3.

⁷ Knight, p. 7.

People and Parable of the Sower, Gee and Butler deploy a satirical rhetoric at key moments, which reinforces the critical power of the texts. This rhetoric is constructed through the way the texts imitate and complicate typical tropes of climate and science fictions, such as masculinist, techno-scientific, and colonialist discourses. It is also reinforced through the authors' literary negotiations of social injustice, gender inequality, and racial discrimination. *The Ice People* exposes the latent fallacies and hypocrisies in contemporary approaches to — and discourses of — climate change and migration. Here, Maggie Gee imagines a scenario in which a short period of global warming is a prelude to the next Ice Age, which descends rapidly. British society is ill-adapted to this drastic and accelerated cooling, and the consequences for the Global North are dire. The novel follows the life of the narrator Saul from the year 2025 onwards, as he attempts to come to terms with his changing surroundings, and his volatile relationship with his wife Sarah amidst the heightened tension between men and women, and falling fertility rates. If satire often treats 'novelistic characters' as 'examples of broader problems',⁸ this is evident through Gee's characterisation of Saul and his position within society. Through his perspective, Gee dismantles the heteronormative narratives of the male elite, which dominate public responses to climate change. Instead, Gee lays out an alternative future for Europe and the UK, and satirises both masculinist and ecomaternalist discourses by tracking the ways in which they complicate and exacerbate the poverty and social inequality engendered by anthropogenic climate change. With this framework in mind, my analysis of *The Ice People* identifies several key strands of discourse on climate change (or global warming, as this term was more commonly used in the 1980s and 1990s)⁹ and migration as depicted in the novel, and investigates how Gee's satire deconstructs these. Here, I identify persistent and damaging ideologies that continue to inform contemporary discourses on anthropogenic climate change, and which also contribute to increasing social inequalities in the literary world of the novel.

In *Parable of the Sower*, through the prioritisation of the voices and stories of women of colour, Octavia Butler consciously utilises and evolves science fiction tropes in order to critique the systems of neoliberal governmentality that validate the racialisation of the figure of the climate migrant. This novel, like *The Ice People*, is speculative in orientation, set between the years 2024 and 2027. Its plot follows 17-year-old Lauren Olamina, a young black woman who leads a community of migrants north up the west coast of America, following the destruction of her walled community and the death of her family. She survives the destruction

⁸ Knight, p. 204.

⁹ Tom Bristow and Thomas H. Ford, 'Climates of History, Cultures of Climate', in *A Cultural History of Climate Change*, ed. by Tom Bristow and Thomas H. Ford (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1–14 (p. 4).

of her hometown with the help of a gun and a getaway bag, having anticipated this catastrophe due to her refusal to stay ‘anchored in the past’ like her elders.¹⁰ It becomes apparent that her instinct to survive is bolstered by her spirituality and belief in God as change itself: she starts a new religion, Earthseed, and gathers followers in order to begin a new settlement. Throughout the narrative, Butler depicts the consequences of the hegemonic power of corporations and weakened governments in a future California, and documents the subsequent re-introduction of slave labour as a way for displaced people to attain security and food. Lauren’s narration and commentary on the state of her contemporary society interrogate and expose the racism inherent within contemporary neoliberal discourses on climate change and migration.

Andrew Baldwin has written at length on the subject of climate change, migration, and the racialisation of the climate migrant figure in contemporary climate change discourse.¹¹ In reality, a precise description of the nature of the climate change migrant is impossible due to the problematic nature of the term itself. The titles of ‘climate migrant’, or ‘climate refugee’, or the phrase ‘climate-induced migration’, imply illogically that the climate itself is the oppressor, when the causes of migration are always complex and multifactorial, and cannot be reduced to a singular impetus.¹² Cultural references to the figure of the climate migrant persist, however, in a manifestation of what Mike Hulme has called ‘climate reductionism’.¹³ This is a ‘form of analysis or prediction’ — or, I would argue, a discourse — that isolates climate from other variables that may contribute to a phenomenon, and frames it as the most important singular determining factor.¹⁴ This practice is evident in many of the discourses on climate change and migration that I discuss over the course of this chapter, but particularly in the figuration of the climate migrant or refugee, which is often racialized. *The Ice People* realises this framing of the migrant as a racial Other, in that it depicts homeless refugees and

¹⁰ Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (London: The Women’s Press, 1995), p. 53. All further page references to this work will be given in parentheses after the quotation in the text.

¹¹ See Andrew Baldwin, ‘Premediation and White Affect: Climate Change and Migration in Critical Perspective’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 41 (2016), 78–90; Andrew Baldwin, ‘Racialisation and the Figure of the Climate Change Migrant’, *Environment and Planning A*, 45 (2013), 1474–90.

¹² Dug Cubie, ‘In-situ Adaptation: Non-migration as a Coping Strategy for Vulnerable Persons’, in *Climate Change, Migration and Human Rights: Law and Policy Perspectives*, ed. by Dimitra Manou and others (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 99–114 (p. 102).

¹³ Mike Hulme, ‘Reducing the Future to Climate: A Story of Climate Reductionism and Determinism’, *Osiris*, 26 (2011), 245–66 (p. 245).

¹⁴ Hulme, p. 247.

migrants as ‘Outsiders’ and ‘Wanderers’.¹⁵ In contrast with *Parable of the Sower*, in which a migrant perspective frames the entire narrative, the migrants within *The Ice People* (excluding Saul himself) are only ever referenced within the novel, and not engaged with directly. They are considered by the protagonists to be mass faceless groups, their identities solely defined by their exclusion from the higher echelons of society. Gee exposes the fallacy of Othering the migrant in her depiction of Saul, who rejects the negative associations that usually accompany the figure of the ‘migrant’ by representing his own migration journey as an epic battle, in which he is the stereotypical masculine hero. Aligning these two premises — the Othering of the homeless migrants and the privileged Western male migrant as an intrepid explorer — uncovers the latent hypocrisies in Western climate change migration discourses. In *Parable of the Sower*, the migrants are not those in the position of social or financial privilege. Instead, the plot follows the migrants themselves, who are of diverse racial and social class backgrounds. Butler therefore challenges contemporary discourses on climate change migrations prevalent during the 1990s, and pursues a more diverse and representative narrative of migration. Rather than continuing along previously established SF routes, Butler depicts a migration journey that is concerned not only with survival, but with establishing social justice and an anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal system of societal organisation.

This is achieved primarily through using Butler’s latent anticipation of what Baldwin terms ‘white affect’, which is identifiable in contemporary discourses on climate change and migration. White affect is a cultural response to imagined futures of climate change and migration, and can be characterised by ‘an anxiety of loss when confronted by an ungovernable excess’,¹⁶ or in other words, the fear of social and political instability brought on by an unmanageable influx of migrant Others (who are presented as an inevitable result of climate change). White affect is implicit and explicit in different modes of cultural production, and is both implicitly racializing and orientalisating. In Baldwin’s view, this ‘affective condition of “whiteness”’ is therefore ‘a concept that can help us identify the presence of race in a discourse that otherwise renders race invisible’.¹⁷ As an example of white affect in contemporary cultural production, Baldwin references a photography exhibition in London, named ‘Postcards from the Future’ (2010).¹⁸ The exhibition presented futuristic images of the

¹⁵ Maggie Gee, *The Ice People* (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1998), p. 77; p. 151. All further page references to this work will be cited in parentheses after the quotation in the main body of the text.

¹⁶ Baldwin, ‘Premediation and White Affect’, pp. 78, 82.

¹⁷ Baldwin, ‘Premediation and White Affect’, pp. 78, 80.

¹⁸ See Stephanie Ostroff, ‘London: Postcards from the Future’, *National Geographic Online*, 7 October 2010 <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/intelligent-travel/2010/10/07/london_futures/> [accessed 24 May 2019].

city altered drastically by climate change and subsequent migration scenarios, with images of Jaipur monkeys roaming London, and Parliament Square as a rice paddy field. As Baldwin attests, the photographs represent a ‘form of racialisation specific to the cultural context of climate change’, and construct images of a ‘Third World’ version of London. Here, the ‘discourse is racial while shorn of any explicit reference to race’.¹⁹ The images articulate white affect through the threat of a destabilising migrant invasion — one of the prevailing tropes of neoliberal and conservative discourses on climate change and migration — through the transformation of a Western locus of power. This veiled phenomenon is also present within much contemporary speculative and climate fiction: there is, undeniably, a ‘current cultural fascination in advanced liberal democracies with climate change futures and impacts’.²⁰ Yet proportionally few novels that depict climate-changed futures investigate the politics of race and migration that would — presumably — accompany such radical upheaval. Instead, where representations of future climate change and migration appear in contemporary cultural production, these rest on images of a hypothetical influx of foreign migrants into Western cities.²¹ In these scenes, Western countries undergo an imagined potential transformation into an ungovernable, chaotic future that ‘the monstrous, future-conditional climate change migrant threatens to overwhelm’.²² This scenario is visible in *The Ice People*, although Gee presents these images and events in a satirical fashion, targeting the political ideals, systems of government and societal inequalities that instigate and perpetuate these supposedly destabilising events. The climate migrant, then, is often figured in contemporary climate change discourse (and in fiction) as a ‘threat to social order’, perpetuated by narratives that insist on the potential for migrants to ‘catalyse political violence’ or ‘usurp [...] resources’.²³ These figurations carry an implicit racial bias. As Betsy Hartmann writes:

¹⁹ Baldwin, ‘Premediation and White Affect’, pp. 78–79.

²⁰ Baldwin, ‘Premediation and White Affect’, p. 78.

²¹ See, for example, the *Postcards from the Future* series discussed above, or German artist Hermann Josef Hack’s art installation *Climate Refugee Camp*, which on Saturday 4 July 2009 saw hundreds of small refugee tents placed in Hanover Train Station. See Hermann Josef Hack, ‘Climate Refugee Camp Hanover in front of Central Station’, *Hermann Josef Hack Website*, 6 July 2009 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20110719040127/http://www.hermann-josef-hack.de/enid/2034bbfb0ddddd028dfd1cea74969d5,d2251461727469636c655f6964092d09373534/3o.html>> [accessed 24 May 2019].

²² Baldwin, ‘Premediation and White Affect’, p. 81.

²³ Baldwin, ‘Premediation and White Affect’, p. 80.

It is worth considering whether the term climate refugees would have been used for [Hurricane] Katrina's victims if they were majority white [...] We are taught to fear not so much global warming as the dark people it will set loose.²⁴

In *Parable of the Sower*, however, Butler offers a contrasting narrative that works to undermine these (and other) typical discourses of climate change migration and climate migrants. For example, as Baldwin has identified, heterogeneity is one feature of the climate change migrant that is perceived to be a threat to the neoliberal state order, which covertly prioritises white supremacy. Neoliberal governing bodies implicitly frame heterogeneity as the loss of white privilege. This perpetuates white affect through the idea of 'black ascendancy qua the welfare state',²⁵ which supposedly entails the loss of white privilege. This discourse therefore allows neoliberal governmentality to justify further dismantling state welfare. In her novel, Butler exposes this latent anxiety in the neoliberal politics of her speculative California, undermining it by framing her narrative through the perspective of the migrants themselves.

It will become evident through the following, more detailed analysis of each novel in turn that both authors engage explicitly with their real-world contexts — both within Europe and globally — thus identifying detrimental contemporary discourses on climate change and migration, and expounding upon the speculative scenarios that might follow, should they remain unchallenged. Ultimately, each section of this chapter details the ways in which *The Ice People* and *Parable of the Sower* demonstrate that the links between climate change and migration are not inherent and therefore immobile, but are instead constructed and sustained through unequal power dynamics. This chapter demonstrates that migration, in the context of climate change, is not a disruption to a previously stable equilibrium, as the hegemonic discourses I address here would contend, but is instead a product of existing social inequalities that are intensified through neoliberal and capitalist practices.

The Ice People (1998)

Colonial Discourses of Migration from Victorian to Contemporary Literature

The Ice People draws on a long genealogy of literature in its depictions of human migration. It takes inspiration from the genre of travel writing and adventure fiction in its allusions to

²⁴ Betsy Hartmann, 'From Climate Refugees to Climate Conflict: Who is Taking the Heat for Global Warming?', in *Climate Change and Sustainable Development: New Challenges for Poverty Reduction*, ed. by M. Salih (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishers, 2009), pp. 142–55 (p. 151).

²⁵ Baldwin, 'Premediation and White Affect', pp. 84–85.

histories of exploration, journeying and colonisation, and epic or Biblical narratives. In this novel, one of the key discourses on climate change and migration is an archaic colonialist discourse. Gee transforms this discourse from its origins in Biblical, epic, and Victorian traditions of adventure, romance and chivalry, into an insidious patriarchal reclamation (and racist idealisation) of the migrant journey. The historical trajectory of this discourse is traceable in literature from the past few centuries that explores journeying, adventure, migration, and/or Western colonisation. Victorian narratives, for example H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) and *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), and Herman Melville's *Typee* (1846), tend to uphold a single — and usually white, Western — male character as the intrepid and heroic protagonist. They also draw on many of the foundational Western adventure narratives, from epic Classical tales (the *Aeneid*, *Iliad*, and *Odyssey*) to Biblical stories (Exodus, Abraham). The protagonist travels to a supposedly unchartered and uninhabited territory in order to map, conquer, or traverse it for financial or intellectual gain, or in the name of colonial expansion. This reflected pre-First World War public sentiment and cultural production, in which 'the whole notion of heroic adventure was most closely bound up with the excitement of empire-building'.²⁶ These Victorian texts utilise the accepted narrative of the romantic adventure, often reinforcing the logic of imperial expansion and maintaining accepted social, racial and gendered hierarchies. The violent realities of colonisation are frequently reframed as the necessary duties of the white man, an idea clearly articulated in Kipling's poem 'The White Man's Burden' (1899).²⁷ The role of the intrepid explorer is occupied exclusively by white men in these texts, occasionally with 'native' servants or guides through the supposed wilderness. Female characters are often absent completely: as Richard Phillips writes, the 'geography of adventure' is an 'all-male spac[e]'.²⁸ Femininity is rarely a positive presence, and mostly features in feminised descriptions of colonial landscapes, in which it is 'banished to literally or metaphorically distant, remote corners' or symbolic of a 'fickle [...] cold and treacherous' nature.²⁹ Where women do appear in colonial adventure or romance tales — for example in Rider Haggard's *She* — they serve as plot devices, superficial mythical objects of male desire and fear, or both. As Peterson and Rutherford have famously noted, a 'double colonization' of women occurs in such male-

²⁶ Lee Horsley, *Fictions of Power in English Literature: 1900–1950* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 20.

²⁷ Horsley, p. 20.

²⁸ Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 60.

²⁹ Phillips, pp. 62–3.

focused narratives of colonialism that depict ‘explorers, [...] freedom fighters, bushrangers, missionaries’,³⁰ as they are dually oppressed by patriarchal and colonial power structures.

This colonial discourse has also persisted within science fiction, through the trope of quasi-colonial space adventure narratives. As John Rieder has documented, colonialism is ‘part of the genre’s texture, a persistent, important component of its displaced references to history, its engagement in ideological production, and its construction of the possible and the imaginable’.³¹ Although more recently there has emerged a ‘body’ of distinctly ‘postcolonial science fiction’,³² celebrated author Ursula K. Le Guin has noted that SF is capable of producing ‘the White Man’s Burden all over again’.³³ During the twentieth century, these tropes were reimagined more frequently within the framework of man’s exploration of worlds beyond Earth, in a subgenre of science fiction often referred to as the space opera.³⁴ During the 1930s, in particular, these narratives were ‘typically uncritical fantasies of imperial expansion’.³⁵ This type of science fiction also imagined disruptions in global climate patterns: as Rieder has noted, ‘migratory colonization under the pressure of climate change is a commonplace of 1930s American magazine science fiction’, which depict, for example, humans relocating to other planets as the sun cools.³⁶ As a more distinct climate fiction genre began to emerge during the latter half of the twentieth century, however, as writers such as J. G. Ballard in *The Drowned World* (1962) harnessed the journeying trope in the context of global climatic change. In this novel, a group of scientists traverse the newly tropical world in order to map the new life that inhabits their environment. Biblical rhetoric is recalled often here, with one character seeing himself as a ‘second Adam searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn Sun’.³⁷ Later novels still, such as Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), recall the trope of the heroic male traveller. In *The Road*, the male protagonist (accompanied by his son) journeys across an inhospitable landscape, encountering barbarism and cannibals along the way and

³⁰ Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford, eds, *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women’s Writing* (Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1986), p. 9.

³¹ John Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), p. 15.

³² Jessica Langer, *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 155.

³³ Ursula K. Le Guin, ‘American SF and the Other’, in *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, ed. by Susan Woods (New York: Putnam, 1979), pp. 97–100 (p. 98).

³⁴ Michael Levy, ‘Fiction, 1980-1992’, in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Mark Bould and others (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 153–62 (p. 154).

³⁵ Mark Bould and others, ‘Introduction’, *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. xix–xxii (p. xxi).

³⁶ Rieder, p. 163.

³⁷ J. G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (London: Fourth Estate, 1962), p. 175.

battling for survival. In these two literary examples, explicit colonialist tensions are obscured, yet a kind of colonial masculinist discourse can still be identified in the texts. By rehashing similar narratives of Western men conducting epic journeys across damaged or unruly landscapes that are populated with unknown Others, patriarchal colonial logic is reproduced and echoed in more subtle ways.

In *The Ice People*, these new formulations of patriarchal colonialist discourses — which draw on some negative tropes of the Biblical and epic traditions, but repackage them in different contexts — are investigated, challenged, and satirised. In contrast to other novels discussed in this thesis, *The Ice People's* narrator and protagonist is a privileged Western male scientist, who believes that technology has the power to solve his society's worsening problems (global warming, rising infertility and hostility between men and women). He also has enough wealth, education and agency to facilitate his escape from the increasingly uninhabitable climatic conditions in the United Kingdom, where he was born and raised. This draws some stark comparisons in the novel between the legacy of the colonial exploration narrative, and the reversal of privilege that leads to a mass migration event from the global North to the global South. Partially as a result of the novel's inheritance of these literary traditions, the human drama takes centre stage in *The Ice People*. However, the figure of the human itself (particularly the human in possession of financial, racial and/or gendered privileges), and the human discourses that reinforce damaging narratives of environmental change, become Gee's satirical targets. If 'novels [...] imitate other forms of written discourse',³⁸ *The Ice People* — in its satirical form — imitates the discursive tropes of colonialist adventure to expose their fallacies, inconsistencies and inequalities. Through Saul's narration, Gee engages with discourses of colonial exploration via the migration journey through the mock-heroic mode of satire. Roger B. Salomon has argued that the mock-heroic is 'saturated in the mystique of a particular heroic vision' — in this instance, the colonial adventure narrative — whilst being 'totally aware of the distance of this vision from the practical possibilities of their own time and place'.³⁹ As I examine further below, it is this ironic distance that dismantles the supposed hegemony of the patriarchal and colonial adventure narrative.

Set in the early 21st century, *The Ice People* depicts a world in which human-induced global warming triggers an Ice Age that quickly descends across Europe (or Euro, as it is referred to in the novel). The principal character, Saul, documents his life from childhood to adulthood. He recalls his relationships and the birth of his son Luke, the collapse of European

³⁸ Knight, p. 203.

³⁹ Roger B. Salomon, *Desperate Storytelling: Post-Romantic Elaborations of the Mock-Heroic Mode* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), p. 4.

civilisation as the Northern climate became uninhabitable, and finally his migration South across Euro with his son in order to reach Ghana in Africa. As Saul's father was half-Ghanaian, he believes he and his son will be allowed in to the country, whose borders are closed due to the massive influx of migrants (a reversal of fortune that upends the global North and South). The novel opens with the words 'I, Saul, Teller of Tales, Keeper of Doves, Slayer of Wolves, shall tell the story of my times' (p. 3). Saul's name, firstly, positions him in relation to the Bible. His opening words reinforce this: the reverent and self-important tone of Saul's declaration indicates that he views himself as a prophet, recording the events of his life for future generations of humans, the last of a long line of heroic men to be remembered. Gee places emphasis on this warped self-perception throughout the novel. When threatened by the idea of femininity (for instance, during a scene in which Saul is finds out that his son was given oestrogen pills to prevent his transition into male adulthood), Saul uses overblown phallogocentric language to reassert his own masculinity: 'I was a man, Esau, Moses, leading my tribe to the promised land, David fighting Goliath of the ice, I looked at myself, I swelled, I expanded' (p. 166). This exaggerated construct of masculinity is one of Gee's primary satirical targets. Saul consistently fails to live up to his own Messiah-like constructions of masculine strength, endurance and leadership: after kidnapping his son along with one of his female guardians, Briony, they begin their journey in a boat crossing the English Channel, and Saul frames this as his family, 'sailing off together on a Great Adventure. Daddy could do it. Daddy would' (p. 148). In this scene, however, Saul is unable to start the boat's engine, and explodes in anger. Briony does it instead, which both undermines Saul's heroic self-image, and reveals his childish inability to accept his own failings: he remarks 'I must have got the thing ready to go, because her languid turning of the starting handle made it cough into life straight away' (p. 149). As the characters continue their journey across Euro, Briony is shot and killed whilst protecting Saul and Luke from gunmen. Saul, who views her as 'helpless' in battle — despite the fact that she is the 'Weapons Officer' (p. 201) for the Wicca political party and therefore very adept at using a gun — is unable to fulfil his duty as he sees it, and cannot save her, instead choosing to drive away with Luke as she is shot. By framing the incident in these terms, Saul marginalises Briony's own agency and her decision to sacrifice herself. He also presents her death as a choice that he was forced to make between his son and a friend, rather than a failure on his own part to sustain his family unit and live up to his self-appointed position as defender and protector of the family, holding on to 'the thought' that his behaviour 'was somehow heroic' (p. 208). When Saul and Luke reach the southern coast of Spain, Luke abandons him, and Saul is left alone and vulnerable, stripped of the ability to fulfil the role of the masculine head of his nuclear family, on which he places so much emphasis. Here, Gee mocks Saul's pretensions to epic heroism on two levels: firstly through his intertextual allusions

(Moses, Esau, David and Goliath), and secondly through his inability to live up to this self-maintained construct. This dual approach emphasises the satirical distance between the heroic ideal and the character's capabilities, producing the tragicomic commentary that Salomon identifies as a key feature of mock-heroic writing, which combines a depiction of everyday experience and reality, with a sympathy towards the desire to live in accordance with 'absolute values'.⁴⁰ Gee's use of the mock-heroic also, however, reveals the implicit and explicit power relations (both individual and structural) that govern colonial adventure narratives and contemporary experiences of migration.

Saul continues his initial monologue with comments such as 'I have crossed the Pyrenees in deep snow, fought off the wolves side by side with my son' (p. 3), likening himself and his son Luke to gods (p. 4), and proclaiming that he himself is 'an ancestor' (p. 4) to the future generations of humans that will roam the changing continent. This heavy emphasis on lineage, familial ties and Biblical allusions bind Saul's migration journey with other historically important migration narratives. However, they also hark back to an archaic sense of patriarchal, even royal, governance and leadership: Saul's words imply a divine knowledge being passed on, from himself to the future generations. The first pages of the novel set this self-referential tone of heroic narcissism, which is later undercut with Saul's detailed recollections of his journey. For example, the reader learns here that Saul is speaking in 'half-dark by the fire' (p. 3) in a frozen landscape, watching a circle of 'wild children' (p. 3) huddled around, eating what is implied to be human flesh. Saul remarks that 'I'm not afraid to die [...] I have a son, who is now a god' (p. 3), whilst reciting to himself the accomplishments of his journey. In colonial contexts, the term 'wild' was used synonymously with 'savage' or 'native',⁴¹ implying a chaotic, primitive state of being. This opening scene, that depicts a literate outsider and a member of 'civilisation' surveying a cluster of 'wild' people, is a clear reference to colonial narratives of a Western explorer encountering a threatening native people portrayed as cannibalistic barbarians.⁴² This allusion reveals the gulf between the reality of drastic climate change, and how it is mediated by Saul's hyperbolic language. The opening scenes contrast Saul's self-perception with his actual vulnerability. Instead of becoming the revered elder of the wild children — as he envisages in the opening lines, which describes them as envious of his ability to write (p. 4) — he is at their mercy as they prepare to kill and eat him. He places utmost importance on his personal narrative — 'perhaps my story

⁴⁰ Salomon, p. 4.

⁴¹ Ter Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. xiii.

⁴² Etsuko Tatekani, *U.S. Women Writers and the Discourses of Colonialism, 1825–1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), p. 46.

will keep me alive. Perhaps they will let me finish my story' (p. 4) — even though most of the children can't read (p. 4). Gee makes reference here to Scheherazade (p. 10), the narrator of the tales in *One Thousand and One Nights*, who recounted stories orally so that her life would be spared. Saul positions himself in the place of a heroic and brave character from history, and disregards the vulnerability of his position. Here, Gee marks another ironic gap between Saul's self-perception and the reality of his situation, linking this to archaic tales of heroism and bravery, thus fulfilling the 'irony of perspective and the parody created by satiric borrowing', which are 'central qualities of the satiric frame of mind'.⁴³ Saul clings to the archaic connection between literacy, civilisation and privilege, hoping that his ability to inscribe his history will somehow preserve him, while ignoring the stark reality that anthropogenic climate change has facilitated. He has no power to wield in such adverse climatic conditions, and therefore can only confront the end of his lineage and legacy.

This scene draws on the tropes of colonial narratives, then, but reverses the conventional positions of power. Saul maintains his ego-centric self-perception throughout the novel: when his wife Sarah offers him books and films on alternative histories of journeying, migration, and black diaspora, Saul disregards them (p. 20), stating that 'I didn't want to be part of black history, I needed to be myself, her man' (p. 20). From here onwards, Saul rejects this framing of migration as a result of racist and colonial oppression, and instead positions himself within a genealogy of heroic feats of travel and adventure. In another manifestation of the mock-heroic mode, Saul's explicit rejection of black history, and his attempt to fulfil the role of the masculine saviour-coloniser, ironically ensures that he is eventually forced to occupy the role of the vulnerable and exploited refugee that he previously rejected. Instead of the missionary-saviour male hero, epically journeying across uncharted territories in order to reach a promised land and bring knowledge to primitive native peoples, Saul's journey across Euro to Ghana is curtailed after Luke abandons him in Spain. Saul ends up back in the UK at an airport terminal, freezing and starving to death, at risk of being murdered by the wild children, and unable to buy his freedom with his knowledge of history, literature or tales of his heroic feats. He is left alive for a while as he knows how to operate the domestic service robots left over from the time before the new Ice Age (these are called Doves). Eventually, however, his value is reduced to what his body can produce as fuel and sustenance, for both the Doves and potentially the wild children themselves (p. 241–44). There are stark parallels here between this narrative and one of the central tenets of colonisation and slavery. Colonisers value the bodies of the colonised as producers of fuel, in that they enable the production of valuable commodities, and the bodies of women are valued both as producers of more slaves, or as

⁴³ Knight, p. 6.

dehumanised vessels for male sexual gratification. This role reversal explicitly satirises this tradition, as Saul's intellect is worthless to the wild children, but his body can allow them to survive. This scenario transforms the identity of the would-be explorer into a powerless man, at the mercy of the climate and a hostile population: again, a role that he has explicitly rejected.

We learn at the end of the novel that Saul 'gave up hope of completing my voyage to Africa. Taking Luke back to [his grandfather] Samuel's land. Completing the circle I'd drawn in my head' (p. 232). This remark draws attention to Saul's failed imaginary journey, which invokes the idea of the human circle of life, returning to the origin of his bloodline. These cycles are in turn contrasted with the incomprehensible geological cycles of the planet: the novel is preceded by a series of quotations on the geological time frames of the Earth and its previous Ice Ages, taken from different media and scientific sources. As Pat Wheeler has emphasised, 'climate change [in the novel] is extrapolated into ice ages and glaciation, warmer and tropical interludes, and global flooding'.⁴⁴ The epigraphs consciously situate climate change and migration in a global context, from prehistoric eras to the contemporary. As one epigraph states, glacial conditions in a previous Ice Age could have 'occurred very suddenly and may have been important in stressing populations' (p. ix). It follows therefore that these rapid shifts would have contributed to human migration away from inhospitable conditions. This indirect allusion to a prehistoric state of transition and movement across continents — journeys which would likely have been deadly and traumatic — works to situate Saul's individual journey in the context of mass migrations across time. This comparison minimises the scale of his trauma: as an egotistical individual whose journey across Euro is eased by his privileged access to modern technology, wealth and status, Saul's suffering is trivialised by the histories of countless mass migrations across time. As Knight concludes in *The Literature of Satire*, 'the triad of words, ideas, and actuality operates as both object and vehicle of scrutiny [...]. Gaps in the relationships within the triad reveal the meaningless of language or the evil of the culture who uses it'.⁴⁵ In this case, the sharpness of Gee's satire arises from the lacuna between Saul's self-narrative and the actual events of the novel as they transpire. Simultaneously, the colonial adventure discourse embedded within Saul's narration marginalises and obscures the countless other migration journeys undertaken by populations in the global South to the North, a phenomenon referenced earlier in the novel's 'Tropical Time'. In Saul's framing of his journey as the heroic pinnacle of migration stories, and through

⁴⁴ Pat Wheeler, "'Another Generation Cometh': Apocalyptic Endings and New Beginnings in Science Fictional New London(s)", *Critical Survey*, 25.2 (2013), 57–70 (p. 68).

⁴⁵ Knight, p. 270.

positioning this narrative against geological timescales, Gee invites her readers to consider how, and why, much longer and denser histories of climate and migration are rendered invisible by the narrative of the individual male hero.⁴⁶

Climate Change, Migration and Masculinist Individualist Discourse

Gee consistently references the gulf between Saul's own anthropo- and andro-centric narrative of events — with his focus on human ancestry, lineage, and history — and the reality of his vulnerability to the changing climate throughout his journey. His narrative also draws upon a discourse of individualism that is deployed within policy literature on climate change in our contemporary time,⁴⁷ one that is also present in the 'last man' apocalyptic narrative in contemporary climate fiction (something I discuss in greater detail in the latter half of this chapter). The discourse that Gee alludes to here, which I term 'masculinist individualism', incorporates elements of both individualism and hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity, as a performance of gender identity, prioritises physical strength, emotional stoicism, and aggression or violence. These traits can be amplified in the face of external challenges to male hegemony:⁴⁸ in *The Ice People*, Saul views climate change, along with women and their political organisations, as a threat to his masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity also prioritises male survival and legacy. I argue that masculinist individualism, drawing on these tendencies, can be constructed — both in the novel and in other contexts — through the narrative framing of climate change as the ultimate war between humanity and the planet, the last battleground where each must fight alone for their survival against the Earth.

Masculinist individualism is evident in news articles from the time in which *The Ice People* was written and published. In a BBC News Special Report on global warming from 1998, former UK Environment Minister John Gummer described the Kyoto conference (1997) as a 'real start in the battle to combat global warming'.⁴⁹ BBC correspondent Alex Kirby also described world leaders as attempting to 'tackl[e] the threat' of climate change in his report on the world

⁴⁶ Although Baldwin and other critics have rejected the term 'climate-induced migration' as it implies a singular cause of migration (see my discussion in the introduction to this chapter), I have used it here to refer to prehistoric migration, as there would have been fewer complex political, social and global factors at work in motivating population movements, and therefore a changing climate may have been a more singular impetus.

⁴⁷ Jennifer Kent, *Community Action and Climate Change* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 28.

⁴⁸ James W. Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity: Formulation, Reformulation, and Amplification* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), pp. 131–32.

⁴⁹ John Gummer, 'The Battle for Global Solutions', *BBC News Online*, 6 November 1998 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special_report/1998/10/98/global_warming/208646.stm> [accessed 17 May 2019] (para. 3 of 22).

climate conference in Buenos Aires (1998),⁵⁰ and in a report on how climate change may affect the world's forests, describes a threatening 'advancing heat front' that will contribute to the 'suffer[ing]' of trees across the world,⁵¹ positioning them as victims of the brutality of the climate change phenomenon. Masculinist individualism is also still present in public discourse in the present day. Many contemporary newspapers, often ones with conservative political biases, employ versions of this discourse when reporting on the effects of climate change. A *Telegraph* article from 2016 entitled 'Winter Floods "Most Extreme" On Record' discusses the effects of Storm Desmond on parts of the UK in the winter of 2015. The discourse embedded within this piece consistently frames the flooding in terms of its impact on human activity, and avoids the implication of the anthropogenic impetus for these weather events. By using words like 'chaos', 'damage', and 'disruption', journalists employ the same rhetoric as that which would be used to describe an unanticipated attack. The storm here is notably positioned as the attacker, whilst humans are engaged in 'step[ping] up' their 'defences' and improving their 'resilience'.⁵² The writer here invokes a language of combat, competition and imagined violence: he utilises the rhetoric of hegemonic masculinity that is most often identifiable in military settings in order to evade any implication of human culpability.

Masculinist individualist discourse also frequently employs the rhetoric of individualism in the face of climate change. It is important to note that this is not the consumer-based individualist rhetoric purported by some branches of environmentalism (the notion that individual actions, such as buying 'greener' products can produce effective and widespread change). In this scenario, the term 'individualism' refers to the more general philosophy that each individual is responsible for their own success or failure, and that the interests of the individual should be prioritised over those of the community or state.⁵³ The primary driver of masculinist individualism in the novel is the premise that ultimately, every man must fight for his own survival, and protect his own (genes, power, and freedom). Here, the central tenets of neoliberal individualism, adapted from the consumer capitalism that is enmeshed in Western societies (such as the freedom of the individual, individual enterprise

⁵⁰ Alex Kirby, 'World Debates Global Warming', *BBC News Online*, 10 November 1998 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special_report/1998/10/98/global_warming/187699.stm> [accessed 17 May 2019] (para. 1 of 30).

⁵¹ Alex Kirby, 'Climate Threatens "Third of Forests"', *BBC News Online*, 5 November 1998 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special_report/1998/10/98/global_warming/204135.stm> [accessed 17 May 2019] (paras. 6 and 10 of 23).

⁵² John Bingham, 'Winter Floods Were "Most Extreme" on Record', *Telegraph Online*, 5 December 2016, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/05/winter-floods-extreme-record/>>, [accessed 9 January 2017] (paras. 2, 3, 7, 18 and 15 of 21).

⁵³ *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, ed. by Craig Calhoun and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 228.

and consumer sovereignty),⁵⁴ become practical methods to ensure individual human survival in this novel. As David Harvey writes, individualism has ‘become incorporated into the common-sense way we interpret, live in and understand the world’.⁵⁵ In *The Ice People*, this is most evident in the scene in which Saul takes his son from the all-female Wicca commune in order to travel to Ghana. He and his friends breach the commune with guns passed down to Saul from his father, Samuel. Although he was a ‘police enforcer’ (p. 123) who did not believe in ‘private security arrangements’ (p. 82), Samuel betrays his beliefs and passes the guns on to Saul ‘in case you need them. You’re *my son*’ (p. 123, original emphasis) in an attempt to secure and protect his lineage. In this scene, Samuel’s sense that ‘the sky would fall in’ (p. 123) — or in real terms, the threat of the changing climate and civil unrest — prompts the forgoing of his belief in state-led security. During the siege of the Wicca commune, Saul kills people with his father’s guns in order to preserve his own male bloodline, and to claim what he believes is his own and his right, in a scene that strongly recalls the rhetoric of American individualist — and libertarian — discourse. Saul sacrifices other innocent people, killing his friend Paul accidentally during the siege. Tellingly, when planning the kidnapping, Paul tells Saul how he was rejected by his violent father for being gay. In response to this, Saul inwardly remarks ‘it was only *my son* I cared about’ (p. 130, original emphasis), confessing that he ‘found Paul slightly boring’ (p. 130). In the enormous climatic upheaval envisaged in *The Ice People*, then, we see the destructive capabilities of this individualist ideology scaled down to the basic matter of human survival: in the context of an increasingly inhospitable climate, individualist mentalities pave the way for human extinction. Paul’s death could also be read not only as a casualty of Saul’s masculinist individualist mentality, but of the ‘reproductive futurism’ on which it feeds. As Lee Edelman has described, reproductive futurism is the notion that the social and political order is organised around and for the figure of the Child, within a heteronormative family-oriented framework.⁵⁶ Paul, as a gay man with no children, is an obvious candidate for sacrifice in Saul’s world: he embodies the ‘feminine’ (p. 60) qualities that Saul will not allow himself, and he cannot traditionally conform to the central tenets of the masculinist individualist framework that enlists the protection of one’s own genes above all else. Here, Saul exhibits an amalgamation of paternalistic and parochial worldviews: Adeline Johns-Putra has identified these attitudes as a type of parental care ethics that promotes only

⁵⁴ Michael A. Peters, *Poststructuralism, Marxism, and Neoliberalism: Between Theory and Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), p. 125.

⁵⁵ David Harvey, ‘Neo-liberalism as Creative Destruction’, *Geografiska Annaler*, 88 (2006), 145–58 (p. 145).

⁵⁶ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 1–4.

a singular 'genetic survivalism', at the cost of a wider concern over the future of the planet and all of its inhabitants.⁵⁷

The survival and continuation of the male lineage and knowledge, against a multitude of threats from the planet, is therefore the ultimate goal within the masculinist individualist discourse. This view of survival also entails the ultimate goal of returning to a heteronormative family unit, to continue man's legacy, and to maintain the subject's position of social privilege (or sense of heroism). Within the climate-changing world of *The Ice People*, Saul reduces women to their nurturing capabilities, their roles as mothers (subordinate to the head patriarch of the imagined family unit) and their capacity to act as a vehicle for the propagation of male genes. The inefficacy of this survivalist strategy is exposed, however, through Saul's eventual demise, and through Luke's abandonment of his father. Saul and his makeshift family, which is made up of himself, Luke, Briony, and one of the Dove domestic service robots named Dora, migrate south through Euro. As they do so, Saul attempts to place himself at the head of the group and focuses primarily on the survival of his son (by extension, a part of himself). Saul views his journey as a series of obstacles: only by conquering these can he prove himself as a true man and protector of his makeshift family unit. This idealisation of (and desire for) the heteronormative family unit is a trope of contemporary cultural production that deals with environmental change and migration, as Baldwin has recently noted.⁵⁸ The beginning of Saul's journey in a boat across the English Channel is especially illustrative of this. Saul reflects on their appearance, harking back to romantic adventure narratives: 'I had to take Briony along, and Dora, which maybe made everything [...] more oldfashioned, in a pleasant way. Myself, my son, the wife, the dog. Sailing off together on a Great Adventure. Daddy could do it. Daddy would' (p. 148). As well as harking back to the colonial migration tropes — as I have discussed in the previous section — Saul reinforces his position as the benefactor and protector of his lineage. He talks of his bloodline, specifically how the blood of Samuel (Luke's grandfather), would:

Save Luke's life. Opening the gates of Africa. Giving us the key to the last warm places, the retreating deserts where fruit would grow, the great grassy plains that had once been sand, the blueing hills, the returning streams, the sapling woods of the new green Sahara. (p. 157)

⁵⁷ Johns-Putra, *Climate Change and the Contemporary Novel*, pp. 59–60.

⁵⁸ Baldwin, 'Rearranging Desire', pp. 211–13.

The language used here is particularly telling. Gee chooses imagery of warmth, fertility, new growth, the ‘opening of gates’, indicating a drive to return to a caring and feminised environment in which humans can flourish and procreate. As Lindy Stiebel states, ‘Africa [...] is generally feminised in late Victorian adventure tales’,⁵⁹ and we see the recurrence of this trope in Saul’s romanticising of the continent. It is clear, from these idealisations, that Saul sees his patriarchal and masculine bloodline — from his grandfather and father, to himself, to his son — as the ‘key’ to survival in the changing, unpredictable, and explicitly feminised landscapes of the Earth. Opening the gates of Africa also has clear sexual overtones: here, the trope of Mother Africa is often invoked to produce an image of a fecund woman, conquered by the male invader.⁶⁰ The recalling of these images serves to demonstrate that colonialist discourses work in conjunction with masculinist individualist discourse in contexts of drastic environmental change. Gee articulates how the colonial discourse is overlaid, rather than eliminated, by the newer impulses to reclaim a sense of control over climate-changing environments, and by the impulse to survive above all else. As Saul’s language demonstrates, prolonging a male bloodline and thereby securing life beyond the end of humanity is his priority.

As the novel progresses, Gee increasingly exposes the fallacies of Saul’s masculinist and individualist idealism: by the end of the novel, his family unit is dismantled. Briony is killed in combat with suspected cannibals in the Pyrenees, whilst she is trying to help the family escape. Luke and Saul are then attacked by wolves, and on reaching Spain, Luke abandons Saul to live with the ‘*salvajes*’: the wild children roaming across Europe in packs (p. 126, original italics). Saul then travels back to the frozen UK to meet Sarah (Luke’s mother), and gets trapped in the airfield, with a pack of wild children who hoard the Dove domestic robots. The nature of Saul’s fear of the children is revealed by his remark that they have ‘no family, no history’ (p. 44). The children are unable to reproduce or aspire to the type of identity he values — one that is based on traditional gender roles and masculinist individualism — as they cannot learn or relate to his conceptions of family or history. Their existence outside of these structures destabilises his own identity.

Through the very principles on which Saul’s entire identity rests, like his warped sense of paternalism and survivalism, the economic and political individualism that is perpetuated by neoliberal rhetoric is adopted into personal narratives of climate change (and of migration in

⁵⁹ Lindy Stiebel, *Imagining Africa: Landscape in H. Rider Haggard’s African Romances* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 81.

⁶⁰ Susan Z. Andrade, ‘Feminist Criticism’, in *Encyclopedia of African Literature*, ed. by Simon Gikandi (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 264–69 (p. 267–68).

climate changing times in particular). As Jennifer Kent has recently noted, ‘the individualization of responsibility has become pervasive in Western discourse and government policy aligned with neoliberal thinking’,⁶¹ and in *The Ice People*, Gee demonstrates how these ideas can be internalised and subsequently bound up with archaic and oppressive ideologies of male supremacy, legacy and lineage. Gee therefore illustrates the ultimate consequences of masculinist individualist discourse: how its use within Western cultural production and the media might influence the general population and reinforce the kind of ‘primitive’ and ‘competitive’ individualist mentalities favoured by neoliberal doctrines.⁶² In Saul’s narration, it is clear that his internalisation of neoliberal individualist discourses, in conjunction with his colonial adventure hero complex and his paternalism, create a mutually-reinforcing web of doctrine and principles that he can only fail to fulfil. The political and social power dynamics that underpin his subscription to these discourses are revealed to be both farcical and fallible, and by the end of the text Saul is forced to occupy the role of the vulnerable and transitory migrant that he attempted to reject.

Securitisation, Militarisation, and Closing Borders

Saul’s journey also offers a critique of structural and political discourses of climate change and migration, as well as identity-based ones. In political policy discourse over the last two decades, climate change has been framed as a security issue, and is a focal point in many national security strategies.⁶³ As Nicole Detraz writes, ‘environment-security connections have begun to creep into policy discourse’, and ““environmental security” and “resource conflict” have been topics of discussion in policymaking bodies at various levels of the international system’.⁶⁴ These political concerns figure climate change as a threat to Western security on many levels, including in terms of resources and the enforcement of borders. Environmental security is also, as Detraz attests, an inherently gendered issue; ‘because issues like food insecurity and livelihood insecurity are not gender-neutral’, men and women experience these phenomena differently. The dominant political discourses on environmental security are formulated within patriarchal structures: ‘it is patriarchy that has conditioned security scholarship and policy-making in ways that marginalize the experiences and security of women’.⁶⁵ Similarly, militarisation — or as Cynthia Enloe puts it, ‘a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military *or* comes to depend

⁶¹ Kent, p. 156.

⁶² Peters, p. 19.

⁶³ Baldwin, Methmann and Rote, p. 122.

⁶⁴ Nicole Detraz, *Environmental Security and Gender* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 2.

⁶⁵ Detraz, p. 1; p. 5.

for its well-being on militaristic ideas' — is explicitly gendered.⁶⁶ It is consistently presented as the appropriate solution to patriarchal framings of security issues and the insecurity and instability caused by climate breakdown. However, as scholars in feminist security studies have attested, in policy discourse there has been a lack of attention to how the deployment of military forces itself can actually exacerbate social and political insecurity and intensify gendered violence of all kinds (for example 'wartime rape' and 'militarized prostitution').⁶⁷

In *The Ice People*, gendered discourses of security and militarisation in response to climate change inform and reinforce masculinist individualism. From the early parts of the narrative, the reader learns that the UK is becoming more isolationist. A 'Euroscept' (p. 147) group bombs the Eurotunnel, severing links to mainland Euro(pe). In the novel, the increasing public discourse on defence and borders is an indication of the accelerating divisions between European countries, nations, and people. Saul notes that there are frequent 'coastguard patrols' in the South to prevent people from 'emigrating' as the new Ice Age takes hold (p. 150), and earlier in Saul's childhood, immigration officers protect the symbolic white cliffs of Dover from 'scenes of dark people, sweating and furious, bullying the immigration officers [...] their black mouths open' (p. 7). This image is particularly relevant in terms of media discourse. Saul sees these images portrayed on his television as a boy, and even though his own father is black, the Othering of the migrants depicted here shapes a prejudice within him from this early age, one that hinders his ability to sympathise with them. He remarks that 'I started to hate these foreigners. There wasn't enough to share with them' (p. 7). These images, compiled and distributed by the media, work with the unstable climate and the subsequent political unrest to reinforce a pervasive sense of external threat, leading to the isolationist and nationalist sentiments that we see depicted in the novel. The 'threat' of external others at a national level is positioned against the threat of individual competition between humans for resources, and both of these are contextualised by the positioning of climate change as a global threat that could prompt mass human extinction. Here, Gee articulates the threat of destabilisation and conflict across multiple scales.

As the novel progresses, it is clear that the closing of British borders to external migrants, once strictly employed by the governments in Saul's childhood, morphs into a total isolationism as the ice descends: we learn that 'for decades politicians had been figureheads, with no money to spend and few legislative powers other than a veto on Euro laws. They

⁶⁶ Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 3.

⁶⁷ Detraz, p. 8. See also Megan MacKenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-Conflict Development* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); and Enloe, *Maneuvers*.

vetoed most of them on principle, and Euro didn't care' (p. 110). Significantly, Gee positions this remark next to a description of the internal migrants and refugees within Britain: 'there were the homeless — Outsiders, Wanderers, the urban homeless and their rural cousins, who had no contracts, no services [...] Our society was an amorphous pyramid, with the Speakers perched precariously on top' (p. 109).⁶⁸ Although the government guards against migrants from outside Britain, it is clear that the internal mechanisms of British society have ceased to function, with high unemployment and poverty in rural and urban areas. The figurative and literal division from Euro, catalysed by the effects of the unstable climate, and the increased securitisation and militarisation of Britain's borders buoyed up by token politicians, cannot prevent internal societal breakdown.

We learn also that Saul is frequently offered jobs from 'military and security firms' (p. 13), which tallies with the failing government's further moves away from state-funded public services towards 'private contracts' (p. 109). This kind of political response to disaster, uncertainty and insecurity has been named the 'shock doctrine' approach by Naomi Klein.⁶⁹ Klein argues that the aftermath of a shock — in response to global or national upheaval, such as an environmental disaster or a war — is often harnessed by neoliberal politicians to advance free-market economic and deregulatory policies. In turn, this allows for capitalist exploitation of such disasters or their aftermaths, leading to what she names 'disaster capitalism'.⁷⁰ As global temperatures drop after the initial period of warming, the new government harnesses the shock of drastic climate change, exploiting the population's 'misty, epic fear of the ice' and anxieties over the advent of new, powerful AI domestic robots, converting this apprehension into a 'source of power' (p. 110). Through a rhetoric of threat and fear, the government justifies a 'mammoth tax' for the general population in order to deal with the unprecedented cooling (p. 108). Gee invokes the notion of the shock doctrine in *The Ice People* to articulate the detrimental outcomes of neoliberal politics and capitalist exploitation of disaster: the inequality gap between those considered legitimate citizens and refugees in the text significantly widens as the novel draws on. The coastal areas of the UK become polluted and unsafe: 'now [the beach] was a place for the very poor, with great camps of Wanderers on the beaches in summer' (p. 151). Close to the end of the novel, when European society has all but disintegrated entirely, 'most of the central airports [were] taken over by Outsiders — children, or Wanderers, or the starving' (p. 234). Evidently, the final scene of the novel, which takes place in a defunct airport, acts as a satirical metaphor for the

⁶⁸ It is implied that 'Speakers' are politicians.

⁶⁹ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

⁷⁰ Naomi Klein, 'Disaster Capitalism: The New Economy of Catastrophe', *Harper's*, October 2007, pp. 47–58 (p. 49).

collapse of Western privilege, mobility, and globalisation: as Saul mentions early on in the novel, he and his generation ‘travelled everywhere, easily as swallows [...] on cheap, safe airlines that competed for our business’ (p. 10). This contrast is strengthened by the Saul’s migration journey later in the text, through Gee’s reversal of the familiar roles of the southern migrant attempting to reach Europe versus the ‘legitimate’ European citizen. As global temperatures steadily decrease, we learn that ‘a great movement of humans began, from north to south, from the poles to the equator’ (p. 120), and the reversal of roles between the primarily white and privileged Euro-dwellers and the racialized figure of the black migrant becomes reality. Saul describes people attempting to enter Africa, stating that ‘this time, it was all happening in reverse, the negative image of the long-forgotten photo. This time the desperate people were white. This time the people with the power were black’ (p. 121). Here, the same type of military force used against the people trying to enter the UK during the period of global warming preceding the new Ice Age is deployed against those previously in positions of power. The neoliberal policies of security, border control, and militarised defence are ironically adopted by other nations, to the detriment of the new wave of migrants from the North.

The fundamental division between men and women that occurs in the novel — segregation, or ‘segging’ (p. 12) — illustrates the culture of opposition within Britain’s younger generations. This is mirrored by a growing sense of national and individual isolation, which intensifies as the threat of hostile temperatures increases. To further illustrate this division, and the hostile securitisation and militarisation that it promotes, Gee constructs two opposing dominant media organisations, which are completely divided in their concerns: ‘Euroscreen’ and ‘Nationscreen’ (p. 146). We learn that ‘the screens were completely polarised’ in their political biases (p. 146), as they are linked respectively to the two main political organisations, which are divided by gender. The ‘Manguard’ is a ‘coalition of male liberationists’ (p. 126) made up of male defectors from the National Army and security firms ‘that were really more like private armies’ (p. 146). They have ‘good links with Euroscreen’ (p. 146) whereas ‘Wicca World’ (p. 95), an alternate name for the Women of the World political party, gains control of the country through popular vote, after a divisive campaign. Wicca ‘dominated Nationscreen’ (p. 146), as these two opposing systems of government both attempt to fill a power vacuum after the collapse of organised government in the early 2020s (p. 11). As Saul describes, as the ice advanced and temperatures fell, ‘we were slowly dropping off [Euro], like a tied-off limb as the blood supply withered’ (p. 110), and ‘we needed leaders [...] someone like Winston Churchill [...] But all we had got was Wicca World’ (p. 110). Saul’s referral to Churchill

acknowledges that the country is in a state of war, but also functions as a way to further polarise the political parties along gendered battle lines.

Wicca and Manguard arm themselves against one another: Wicca houses its members together in an armed commune called the Cocoon (p. 98), and they explicitly limit contact with the outside world (especially men) and deploy 'security squads' to protect the enclave (p. 131). As the party rises to power throughout the new Ice Age, they appropriate and recreate the neoliberal and masculinist discourses of securitisation and militarisation, adopting the position of insularity, isolation and protectiveness against notions of 'outsiders' and the 'other'. As noted above, they favour the 'Nationscreen' to push their political agenda, and adopt the traditional patriarchal hierarchical military structure within their own organisation, taking on roles such as 'Weapons Officer' to protect themselves from their perceived 'enemies' (pp. 96–97). Any children of the women in Wicca, it becomes evident, live on the commune and are cut off from their fathers and from any people on the outside of the heavily guarded walls. Whilst they work to demonise stereotypically masculine traits in their propaganda and manifestos, such as physical strength and violence (p. 100–01), Wicca acquire weapons and militarise their operations under the guise of self-defence. Saul remarks that 'the Coastguards were loyal to Wicca' (p. 146), and help to secure their borders against invaders and police those who attempt to leave. Wicca wholeheartedly adhere to the established neoliberal discourse of securitisation and militarisation in the face of climate change and population movements. This demonstrates that, even when women gain control of the political and structural power in this climate-changing world, if this power is predicated on perpetuating rigid gender norms and a homogenous female identity, the underlying structures that reinforce and sustain this power remain unaltered. Instead, Wicca's adoption of the supposedly stabilising force of military action, and their closing of borders, exacerbates the radical inequalities across the nation, and further disrupts and fragments any societal cohesion that remains. Gee portrays the discourse of securitisation and militarisation as fundamentally patriarchal: regardless of who employs the discourse, and to what ends, it cannot be used to establish an equitable system of government or societal structure. It is frequently used to construct the idea of a sense of stability that is within reach, which Wicca attempt to achieve through their locking down of the nation, of their political headquarters, and finally of the individuals who dwell within their militarised enclaves. Gee uses this logic to satirise gender essentialism in all forms, exposing the hypocrisy in their rigid adherence to social constructions of gender. Here, the novel demonstrates that working under patriarchal conceptions of security that frame militarisation as a stabilising response to external threats can never be liberating or peace-making.

In the context of climate change and migration, Gee demonstrates that a reliance on gendered binaries (in terms of identity as well as politics), and the simultaneous upholding of neoliberal and patriarchal policies, can sustain other binary systems (for example the notion of the insider and the outsider). The novel exposes the fallacies inherent in increasing military responses to perceived destabilising forces such as migration, in their flawed assumption of a previously stable society (which is demonstrably not the case in *The Ice People*, as evidenced by Saul's documenting of social and political unrest from the 'Tropical Time' to the new Ice Age). Here, Gee works to outline the extent to which patriarchal framings of security issues can entrench societal inequality, and she exposes how supposedly liberating political framings of gender — like Wicca's political manifesto — fail ideologically when they are built within the confines of patriarchal discourses on appropriate responses to perceived externalised threats, such as climate change and migration.

Motherhood Environmentalist Discourse, Biopower and Migration

As I have shown through the preceding analysis, *The Ice People* is on many levels an investigation into performances of masculinity and femininity. This is particularly relevant in the context of climatic change and human migration, as the novel investigates how archaic gender roles affect how characters move through and engage with their surroundings. In the mid-section of the text, as Euro begins to cool drastically and societal and governmental breakdown accelerates, Gee's inquiry into discourses of gender, power and mobility becomes increasingly pronounced. She has acknowledged herself that 'I use the ice as a metaphor for the new coolness which I thought might characterize the relationship between the genders if fertility dropped below a certain point'.⁷¹ Rather than viewing the cooling climate solely as a metaphor for the breakdown in gender relations, however, in the following discussion I synthesise the context of 1990s EU policies on gender equality and migration with the discourses on gender that are satirised in the text. The following analysis discerns the ways in which the essentialist views of gender that Gee constructs in the novel interact with, bolster, and obscure exclusionary and harmful political discourses on migration in climate changing contexts.

Throughout the novel, there are allusions to the discourses of neoliberal governmentality that were increasingly influencing European Union policies on gender equality in the 1990s.⁷² Jemima Repo has traced the genealogy of gender equality policies implemented

⁷¹ Maggie Gee, 'Utopia and the Living Body: Drought, Flood, Terror and Engineering in the Garden of Earthly Delights' in *Trans/Forming Utopia: The 'small thin story'*, ed. by Elizabeth Russell, 2 vols (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), II, pp. 27–48 (p. 33).

⁷² Jemima Repo, *The Biopolitics of Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 134.

by the European Union in the 1990s and 2000s, noting that the explicitly biopolitical aims of these policies were to control human reproduction in order to counteract the declining fertility rates identified in the EU during this period, and to thereby ensure future economic security in terms of the labour workforce: as Repo puts it, ‘too many of Europe’s women were choosing careers over reproduction, causing fertility to fall and the private realm to slip into disorder’.⁷³ As a result, the reproductive potential (or infertility) of women’s bodies became the subject of economics and EU policy: gender equality policies around childcare and other incentives were introduced to theoretically prevent women from having to choose between having children and their career, with the consequence of women being viewed as a ‘squandered economic resource’ that needed to be harnessed.⁷⁴ Monetary value is imposed onto women’s bodies, and legislative power is deployed with the intention of influencing their (in)ability to procreate, under the guise of — and intertwined with — gender equality policy. A critique of this interference is clearly present in Gee’s satirical take on policy discourse.

For example, Gee depicts the potentially dangerous ramifications of government intervention into fertility rates. She also includes a critique of how ecofeminist ideologies prevalent in the 1990s could be appropriated by a government in order to render these interventions more culturally palatable. For example, Catriona Sandilands has explained how the neoconservative discourse of ‘motherhood environmentalism’⁷⁵ that became associated with the ecofeminist movement was unequivocally detrimental to the core ecofeminist aim of identifying and alleviating the oppression of women, nonhuman animals and other marginalised groups.⁷⁶ Sometimes referred to as ‘ecomaternalism’,⁷⁷ the term describes a type of discourse that encourages women to feel responsible for environmental damage and caretaking of the earth, in their capacity as mothers. As Johns-Putra writes, ‘the assumption at the heart of motherhood environmentalism is that core characteristics of womanhood parallel the core characteristics of “nature”’,⁷⁸ and it relies on the premise that women, via their nurturing capabilities, will therefore take better care of the Earth, because of their supposed natural affinity with the environment and for the sake of their children. This discourse is easily perceived in, for example, the targeted advertising of supposedly ‘green’ consumer goods

⁷³ Repo, p. 133, 138.

⁷⁴ Repo, p. 138.

⁷⁵ Sandilands, p. xiii.

⁷⁶ Sandilands, p. xvii.

⁷⁷ Adeline Johns-Putra, ‘Care, Gender, and the Climate-Changed Future: Maggie Gee’s *The Ice People*’, in *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*, ed. by Gerry Canavan and Kim Stanley Robinson (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), pp. 127–42 (p. 131).

⁷⁸ Johns-Putra, *Climate Change and the Contemporary Novel*, p. 83.

towards women.⁷⁹ This motherhood environmentalist framing of ecological care, then, shifts the responsibility for the rectifying of anthropogenic environmental damage to women, drawing parallels between the future health of the planet, and the future health of the next generation (what Johns-Putra calls the ‘parental rhetoric of posterity’),⁸⁰ but from a distinctly feminine perspective. Critics like Sandilands, in *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy* (1999) and Sherilyn Macgregor, in *Beyond Mothering Earth: Ecological Citizenship and the Politics of Care* (2006) have targeted the latent classism and racism within this underlying tenet of 1990s ecofeminism that ‘assert[s] a special role for women as environmental caretakers without considering their lives as political subjects or what it might mean for women in inegalitarian societies to bear such an enormous responsibility’.⁸¹

Johns-Putra has also discussed the inherent problems with this idea in as depicted in *The Ice People*, acknowledging that ‘the novel first critiques a very masculinist response to man-made global warming and then studies an ecomaternalist response to the Ice Age crisis’.⁸² The following analysis reveals the detrimental consequences of a pervasive ecomaternalist discourse in the climate-changing context of *The Ice People*. Patriarchal and capitalist institutions (such as the government) deploy these cultural feminist-derived essentialisms to pursue particular political aims, and the novel examines how they are adopted in contemporary political discourses on climate change and migration. I argue here that the ecomaternalist discourse in the novel legitimises a politics that enacts the physical exploitation of women’s bodies, as well as shifting the responsibility for climate change upon their shoulders and inscribing an in-built propensity towards environmental caretaking onto women. In challenging the discourses that perpetuate patriarchal gender roles, Gee exposes the underlying structure of binaries that reinforce other cultural dichotomies in the text: for example the categories of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’, which describes residents of the UK versus migrants, or people with a stable home versus people who are homeless and therefore constantly in transit.

In the beginning of the novel, Gee situates Saul’s description of the foreign, black migrants entering Britain next to his description of the performances of gender that were in fashion during his early adulthood:

⁷⁹ Sandilands, p. xii.

⁸⁰ Johns-Putra, *Climate Change and the Contemporary Novel*, p. 4.

⁸¹ Sherilyn Macgregor, *Beyond Mothering Earth: Ecological Citizenship and the Politics of Care* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), p. 3.

⁸² Johns-Putra, ‘Care, Gender and the Climate-Changed Future’, p. 136.

The fashion was for shaving, of heads and bodies [...] the fashion of the time was androgyny, so hair was suspect, for it signalled gender. And yet, though our clothes and hair denied it, a great gap had grown up between the sexes [...] (pp. 11–12)

The reader also learns of fertility problems becoming more prevalent among young people, as well as the threat of ‘mutant hivs’ (p. 12). Gee’s placement of these two recollections close to each other suggests an enforced boundary between the internal workings of British society — particularly within London, where Saul lives — and the rest of the world. Although Saul remarks on how his generation had cheap and easy mobility across Europe for tourism, it is also made clear that the external pressures of ‘three years of plague that closed the frontiers, a new kind of Ebola [...] blazing summers when viruses flourished and civil order couldn’t stand the strain’ (p. 11) swiftly altered their way of life. As these increasing pressures — which, as the quotation above demonstrates, are intensified by climate change — take effect on the population of Britain, conventional performances of masculine and feminine gender identities are rejected. This androgyny is partially instigated by the hot climate: ‘it lasted for decades, that egglike baldness. Perhaps it was a kind of streamlining, an attempt to keep cool at any cost’ (p. 11). The rejection of traditional gender presentation works to obscure the ‘great gap’ that is growing between the sexes, and masks the very real gender segregation that is being voluntarily adopted across all sectors of society in the text.

The tendency for men and women to socialise and live separately from each other is regarded as part of the fertility crisis sweeping Euro in the novel. The government — or what is left of it — is increasingly concerned about both the falling fertility rates and the collapse of heteronormative family units. In this early section of the novel, the government employs Sarah, Saul’s future wife, as a ‘Role Support Officer’ in the Learning Centre where Saul teaches. As Sarah explains to Saul, “‘the government’s decided that boys and girls have to be taught to get on together. It’s partly political, I’m afraid [...] Because the fertility figures are down again’ (p. 15). The aim, here, is to get men and women to ‘live together’ (p. 15) again and reinstate the traditional nuclear family. If we take into account the novel’s explicit focus on the fragmentation of Europe, this intervention into the population’s fertility in *The Ice People* can be read as an imagined progression of 1990s EU policy, which aimed to optimise fertility as birth rates declined.⁸³ Importantly, during the 90s, the EU perpetuated a ‘negative discourse of family breakdown’ in its policies.⁸⁴ With more women choosing careers over reproduction in this era, the EU gender equality policies and the governing powers within the novel react in

⁸³ Repo, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Repo, p. 151.

such a way that constructs women's bodies as responsible for a declining society: both publicly (in terms of the reproduction of labouring bodies to sustain the economy) and privately (in the domestic sphere of the heteronormative family unit). This is also especially relevant to biopolitical governmentality and migration: in 2001, the UN Department of Economics and Social Affairs published a report on migration as a possible solution to declining fertility rates, concluding that 'for the United Kingdom [...] and the European Union, the number of migrants needed to offset population decline is less than or comparable to recent past experience'.⁸⁵ However, this notion of replacement migration was seen as a threat by the European Commission, rather than a benefit.⁸⁶ This response may well have reflected and reinforced public anti-migration sentiment in the UK around the time that the novel was written.

Gee therefore uses the extreme scenario of gender segregation, and an imagined worsening of the fertility rates of the real-world 1990s context, to satirise the futility of placing the onus on women's bodies to sustain the economy. In the novel, the responsibility for fixing what is perceived as societal disintegration is placed on the shoulders of women and children, and this is seen as preferable to accepting unknown Others into society, in the form of migrants. This rhetoric of manipulation and blame is perpetuated by the men in the novel: Saul states that 'it wasn't easy to get women to have sex' (p. 12) due to the sexually transmitted diseases and gender segregation that had become rife. Saul's comment also suggests, however, that from a masculinist perspective, women alone are the barriers to rectifying the fertility crisis through their reluctance to consent to sex. This comment both denies the existence of women's sexual desires, and silences the real reason that the women of the novel do not want to live with men. For example, Sarah's job aims to improve relations between the sexes by advocating for traditional gender roles in schools. However, although the boys 'saw great advantages in the old roles', the girls are understandably resistant to regressing back to 'look[ing] after a man [...] They're not babies' (p. 22). By presenting these issues through Saul's sexist viewpoint, which fails to recognise the imparity of conservative gender roles, Gee satirises the discourses on gender and fertility that were being catalysed by the rise of neoliberal governmentality and biopower in this period. The government in the novel attempts to re-establish women as nurturing mothers and caretakers of the home, and rejects the threat of the supposedly destabilizing 'othered' migrants as a potential solution to the fertility

⁸⁵ United Nations. Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs: Population Division, *Replacement Migration: Is It a Solution to Declining and Ageing Populations?* (United Nations Publication: New York, 2001), p. 98.

⁸⁶ Repo, p. 153.

crisis. *The Ice People* therefore imagines the extent to which the biopolitical agendas that were enacted in the 1990s could entrench and consolidate further division between the sexes.

This allusion to the real-world context is deepened and complicated as the novel draws on. When Sarah is hired by the government, Gee emphasises Sarah's own femininity and her conformity to the more traditional, or 'twentieth-century' (p. 15) feminine look: she has long hair, which is unusual, and wears a 'pretty dress' (p. 14). She also describes herself as 'feminine' (p. 15), and Saul perceives her as 'helpful, maternal [...] *womanly*' (p. 19). She acknowledges, when Saul points it out, that this is part of the reason she was given the job (p. 15). Over the course of the novel, despite this biopolitical intervention, gender separatism gains political traction in tandem with the widening gap between 'Insiders' and 'Outsiders' (p. 77). Sarah becomes increasingly aware of the politics of her overtly feminine appearance: she begins to wear trousers and cuts her hair (p. 24). Her conversations with the girls she teaches reveals that she 'used to be scared of them because of their violence' (p. 23) and their rejection of traditional notions of femininity. She then begins to acknowledge that 'they're quite thoughtful, when you listen to them', remarking that 'I think they have a point about housework' (p. 23). As Saul recalls his life with Sarah over the course of the 2020s and 2030s, describing their issues with infertility and the eventual birth of their son through rounds of medical intervention, he relates how Sarah's initial subscription to the aims of the governmental intervention transforms into a fierce resistance, and the creation of a new political discourse that encourages an increasingly hostile separatism between men and women.

Sarah becomes more educated about the implications of adopting traditional gender roles, and instead of continuing her propagandist position within the government, she instead begins to devise and present television shows about gender. Her most successful endeavour is the TV show, 'Gendersense' (p. 26), which gives 'a voice to the different views of men and women [...] exploring the options for separate development' (p. 26). Eventually, Sarah becomes one of the leaders of Wicca. The polarisation of the two political movements in this strand of the novel could be read as a simple allegory for the animosity between genders in the domestic sphere. Embedded within Gee's critique of neoliberal governmentality and its intervention into fertility, however, there is a commentary on how the legacies of such governmental interventions may be adopted and manipulated into further unproductive and divisive discourses. Specifically, the way the previous government encouraged the portrayal of women as carers and nurturers in their education program, via their appropriation of motherhood environmentalism, is adopted and reinforced in the Wicca movement. Wicca takes these ideas to a new extreme, using them to justify its advocacy of segregation. Early

ecofeminist works such as Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978) and Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978) were informed by second-wave cultural feminism, and displayed similar leanings towards the idea of an innate female 'nature'. As Sandilands writes, there is a tension in these texts between the implication that 'women's identity is something to be achieved or at least uncovered, and the claim that motherhood and ecological knowledge are imprinted in the genes and presumably are readily [...] accessible to everyday consciousness'.⁸⁷ These ideas are adopted by Wicca in the novel: when Saul finds a draft Wicca manifesto in Sarah's desk, the party's principles are shown to be strikingly similar to the tenets of early ecofeminist work such as Daly's and Griffin's. They uphold women to be the sole givers of life through the 'Hidden Goddess' (p. 85) who 'gave suck' to all humans (p. 85), and in the Wicca TV ad campaign, women are depicted as having instinctive maternal and nurturing dispositions (p. 101), asserting that they are therefore innately suited to caring for the environment: '*we are of the Earth, and of Nature*' (p. 85, original emphasis). In Wicca's political discourse, these values are used to glorify an essentialised (and disconcertingly neoconservative) version of womanhood, in its marginalisation of women who cannot, or do not want to, give birth or have children. This vision also, importantly, puts women at the centre of 'revaluing nature' (p. 100): Wicca propaganda deploys the logic of motherhood environmentalism, advocating for a 'caring revolution' (p. 100), and 'nurturing the future [...] the future is green' (p. 100). Here, the gender essentialist leanings of early ecofeminist work are adopted and exploited by Wicca through a neoconservative discourse of motherhood environmentalism, which allows them to claim authority and knowledge of the state of the Earth, whilst pursuing their separatist agenda (p. 85). This ultimately harnesses and reproduces oppressive discourses that figure women (and men) as homogenous collectives, as opposed to individuals with disparate and heterogeneous impulses and desires. Their propaganda is also shown to be a tactic to maintain a central sense of unity and self among their gender identity, under the guise of caring for children and future generations. As Johns-Putra has remarked, the fallacy of gendered parental care ethics is also called into question here, as Wicca's worldview is covertly premised on 'the assertion of identity and maintenance of control'.⁸⁸

Another particularly revealing phrase in the manifesto is Saul's description of the movement as 'a ghastly amalgam of many things', including both a 'wacky female nature-worship' that is a satirical take on pagan ideas (pp. 84–85), and a description of a 'new biology' (p. 85). This new biology centres on the premise that there is a newly-discovered 'singlecelled

⁸⁷ Sandilands, p. 14.

⁸⁸ Johns-Putra, *Climate Change and the Contemporary Novel*, p. 79.

female bacterium' which 'had given up sex three thousand years ago' (p. 85). This is of course mediated through Saul's antagonistic perspective, but it also describes how Wicca draws influences from both science and religion to justify its promotion of a 'rigid, doctrinaire politics' (p. 85) of gender apartheid. Even more importantly, though, it appears that characters of all genders have internalised this idea of women as innately nurturing, and as having a special relationship with 'nature'. Saul's friend, Riswan, remarks to him that 'it's women's business, looking after children' (p. 48), regardless of the fact that so many other typically gendered traditions (getting married, for example, or men and women living together) have been shunned in the new century. Similarly, when Sarah cares for Saul's elderly parents as they are dying, Saul justifies his limited involvement in their care by stating that 'women are so much better with nursing' (p. 58). This essentialist claim, which arises from entrenched patriarchal worldviews and is reproduced by the biopolitical policies pursued by the government, is appropriated by the Wicca party when their commune that acts as party headquarters, and keeps the children under the care of the women, is weaponised and secured from the outside world. Men are banned from entering, and all the children are exclusively raised within the commune, with limited access to the outside world. We also learn, after Saul has stormed the commune and taken Luke with Briony to Europe, that Luke was taking hormone blockers in order to stop him going through puberty (p. 164). Here, Gee depicts a gender essentialism taken to its furthest limit: as Briony remarks, Wicca was 'so keen on being *natural*' (p. 164, original emphasis), yet they give all the young boys in their care hormones to prevent them from entering into male puberty, something which is 'against [their] principles' (p. 164). Wicca also exclude transgender women from their commune with 'terrifying ruthlessness' (p. 161), making the argument that men take hormones to infiltrate the safety of their Cocoon (p. 161).⁸⁹ Here, Gee exposes the simultaneous hypocrisy and fallacy in relying on the glorification and essentialism of the categories of 'woman' and 'nature'. Nature is bound so tightly to the notion of womanhood, motherhood, and femininity within Wicca's discourse that it is inherently exclusionary of other (or trans) genders. This essentialism becomes, as we learn later, a veil for their supposedly inclusive politics: their TV campaign shows a group of 'Outsiders', or migrants, being 'greeted and embraced on a fat woman's doorstep' (p. 101) in a hyperbolic embodiment of feminine maternal care. This is later undermined by Wicca's embracing of physical violence and exclusion, as they guard their enclaves against potential intruders and threats, and patrol the coasts (as discussed in the previous section). In this strand of the novel, Gee articulates the extent to which interventionist policies on fertility,

⁸⁹ This facet of Wicca's ideology also exemplifies the trans-exclusionary potential of a belief in essentialised womanhood, which anticipates contemporary debates between intersectional feminists and trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs).

which frame women contradictorily as innately nurturing and as the barriers to producing a new workforce, can be adopted by extremist groups in order to justify a separatist agenda.

As Gee's satire of ecomaternalist discourses demonstrates, the Wicca line of thought is unproductive and oppressive, in that it perpetuates gender binaries and discredits those who refuse to conform to its principles. Its propaganda reinforces perceived essential gender traits (for example that men are more prone to outbursts of violence, and that women are instinctively maternal and nurturing), and demonises both performances of masculinity and male homosexuality (pp. 100–01). According to Wicca logic, the only acceptable man is one who takes on stereotypically feminine traits, as demonstrated by the propaganda which states 'not all men were bad' (p. 101), and depicts a feminised image of Michelangelo's *David*, and one of Jesus surrounded by women, 'with big kind eyes and flowing hair' (p. 101). This propagandist media discourse on gender within the context of the changing climate is also explicitly linked to internal migration within Britain, as the Wicca movement is framed in terms of inclusivity. The end of the campaign attempts to communicate this message of inclusion and equality, as Saul describes: 'Outsiders (who had votes) could be Insiders (shots of laughing actors playing Outsiders, not dirty and thin, as the real ones were, but brown and happy)' (p. 101). Predictably, as Britain plunges into a new Ice Age, Wicca World fails to prepare adequately or follow through on their election campaign promises: instead, the poorest sectors of society inevitably suffer more as the cold sets in. Richer members of the population (like Saul) have the means to pay to escape the ice and head south, but the migrants — the 'Wanderers' and 'Outsiders' — and the 'starving' perish as social organisation disintegrates, seeking shelter in airports (p. 234) while others can still afford housing (p. 109). By tracing the influences of both the neoliberal government policy interventions into fertility, and the motherhood environmentalist rhetoric that was bolstered by some early ecofeminist thought, Gee seeks to expose the fallibility of the discourses and ideologies that the Wicca government draws upon.

Through Gee's satirical critiques of explicitly gendered contemporary discourses on climate change and migration, it is possible to perceive how prevailing and damaging framings of the effects of drastic climatic change in Britain can reinforce social inequalities on every level, from individual experiences of gender to overarching structures of government. The novel expounds upon these discourses on climate change-induced migration, following them to a series of speculative conclusions, whilst investigating their origins and their machinations at multiple levels and scales. The critical power of the text lies in its ability to trace the far-reaching nature of these discourses and how they are ingrained, structurally and individually. However, one of the most significant facets of the novel is the fact that it exemplifies how we

might perceive masculinist, colonialist, security and ecomaternal discourses not as separate but interlocking strands of detrimental political and cultural thought, but as uneven layers of narrative that reinforce, disrupt, and interfere with, each other. In this novel, these layers actively build a text that functions satirically in its self-reflexive criticism of contemporary political approaches to climate change and migration.

Parable of the Sower (1993)

Parable of the Sower, Postcolonial Science Fiction and the Speculative

There are many points of contact between *The Ice People* and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, particularly in their perspectives on migration, and their engagement with discourses produced through the catalyst of extreme environmental conditions and societal unrest. Both novels are set in the 2020s: the near-future setting offers a conceivable location for the escalation of extreme responses to environmental change, taking forward predictions circulating in the 1990s into future speculative scenarios. Both texts employ a traceable critique of neoliberal influences in both policy and cultural reactions to climate change and migration, and both use a self-conscious satirical form in order to expose the fault lines within these. Similarly to Gee's approach in *The Ice People*, Butler's novel formally breaks down oppressive discourses on climate change and migration through satirical critique, and through allusions to the other genres, narratives and tropes (for example science fiction, historical slave narratives, and the 'last man' trope). However, *Parable of the Sower* diverges from Gee's novel in that it not only produces a critique of the myths and fallacies within these literary tropes, but constructs discourses of active resistance against hegemonic narratives through alternative framings of climate change-induced migration. The novel explicitly shirks many of the normative trends of the SF genre and narratives of slavery, instead offering contradictory notions of the migrant figure, the community leader and the 'last man'.

In the following analysis, I examine Butler's critique of neoliberal discourses that advocate for deregulation of 'environmental' and 'worker protection laws', as well as the abandonment of minimum wage (p. 26), biopolitical governance of migration, aggressive free market economics, and a decrease in state intervention in economic affairs. My feminist ecocritical approach reveals how Butler challenges the implicitly racist and sexist contemporary political and cultural discourses on climate change and migration that rely on oppressive neoliberal and neoconservative logic. Through identifying the methods and specific targets of her satirical commentaries, I demonstrate that *Parable of the Sower* presents an alternative framing of climate change and migration that refutes the prevailing political discourses on the matter from the 1990s.

Through both the form and content of her novel, Butler recalls classic science fiction narratives from a range of different traditions. *Parable of the Sower* can be read as a manifestation of a typical SF/cyberpunk narrative, as it documents an ideological and resource-based war between all-powerful corporations, and a system of resistance against these structures (in this novel, the locus of this resistance is the Earthseed community that protagonist Lauren creates).⁹⁰ Crucially, though, in this novel Butler redirects the focus of many typical science fiction narratives, which, as we have seen, often recall colonialist logic and depict heroic feats of white male protagonists, particularly in ‘scientific romances of the nineteenth century’ and the ‘science fictional novels of imperial Britain’.⁹¹ In *Parable*, the central driving force of the text is instead black female consciousness, creativity, resilience, and leadership. Rather than a simplistic inversion of typical SF tropes, Butler describes a diverse and heterogeneous community of characters, with an emphasis on minority groups and women, who have historically been excluded from most science fiction narratives,⁹² and from the dominant masculinist responses to climate change discussed previously in the chapter. In order to prioritise the experiences of these typically marginalised groups, Butler harnesses the critical strengths of the SF genre — for example its generic propensity towards challenging authoritarian centres of power — in depicting the consequences of unregulated privatisation for the most vulnerable communities in her contemporary society.

Significantly, there are both direct and indirect allusions to the history of African-American slavery throughout the novel. As Marlene Allen has noted, ‘Butler insistently incorporates a readily identifiable African American history in her writings even in those texts that are set in the future or on other planets’.⁹³ These allusions are apparent in the migration journey from south to north that Lauren and her followers must undertake in order to find food, shelter and habitable land. They are also present in the more explicit ways that the lowest social classes in the novel are exploited, and forced to perform slave labour for powerful corporations. Butler positions her references to the colonisation of Africa, and the ensuing enslavement of African and African American people, against the backdrop of an altered California in the year 2025. Re-situating past atrocities into a speculative future

⁹⁰ Carlen Lavigne, *Cyberpunk Women, Feminism and Science Fiction: A Critical Study* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2013), p. 43. For examples of these narratives in SF, see Frank Herbert’s *Dune* saga (1965–1985), the novels of William Gibson, Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy (2005–2013), and Ken MacLeod’s *Corporation Wars* trilogy (2016–17).

⁹¹ Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), p. 4.

⁹² Marlene D. Allen, ‘Octavia Butler’s “Parable” Novels and the “Boomerang” of African American History’, *Callaloo*, 32 (2009), 1353–65 (p. 1359).

⁹³ Allen, p. 1354.

foregrounds her critique of ‘the social science of economics by highlighting twentieth century capitalism’s dehumanization of the vulnerable just as antebellum slavery exploited African Americans’,⁹⁴ and demonstrates her observance of SF conventions in the novel’s potential interpretation as a warning to contemporary society. Indeed, we might read the novel — and its sequel *Parable of the Talents* (1998) — primarily as pedagogical narratives that warn Western society of its own self-destructive potential. However, reducing *Parable of the Sower* solely to its metaphorical or pedagogical potential forecloses any in-depth investigation of the critical and satirical power of the text, its effective interventions into the SF genre, its interactions with contemporary discourses on climate change, or its explorations of economic neocolonisation. As Knight has observed, ‘the functions of satire are inquiry and provocation rather than moral instruction and punishment’.⁹⁵ Therefore, rather than reducing the novel to a neatly-packaged ‘parable’ — to quote Butler’s perhaps ironic choice in title — in this section I turn my attention to the text’s direct challenging of hegemonic contemporary discourses, and creation of new narratives that resist against these.

Parable of the Sower might be identified as postcolonial science fiction, if we apply Jessica Langer’s definition to the novel. I argue that the text certainly negotiates the ‘generic conventions’ of science fiction in order to:

[e]xplore the ways in which Western scientific discourse, both in terms of technology and in terms of culture [...] has interacted with colonialism and the cultural production of colonized peoples. It also foregrounds the concept that indigenous and other colonized systems of knowledge are not only valid but are, at times, more scientifically sound than is Western scientific thought.⁹⁶

This is evident in how the novel resituates a historical colonial narrative of slavery and forced migration into a speculative futuristic scenario, under the threat of climate change. As Madhu Dubey has identified, in *Parable of the Sower*, Butler ‘activates memory traces of the historical past in order to make legible the strange new lineaments of an emerging political-economic order.’⁹⁷ Dubey also notes that Butler represents the slaves within the novel as racially, economically, and socially diverse, ‘prompt[ing] readers to identify the distinguishing features of the current order of inequality’.⁹⁸ However, rather than simply ‘recall[ing] antebellum

⁹⁴ Allen, p. 1359.

⁹⁵ Knight, p. 5.

⁹⁶ Langer, p. 9.

⁹⁷ Madhu Dubey, ‘Speculative Fictions of Slavery’, *American Literature*, 82 (2010), 779–805 (p. 799).

⁹⁸ Dubey, p. 800.

slavery narratives'⁹⁹ with new, more diverse targets of oppression, *Parable of the Sower* rejects the confining of the experiences of African Americans, women, and other marginalised groups to their histories of exploitation. Baldwin writes that 'the climate-change migrant is commonly figured as a victim of or vulnerable to climate change [...]. In this version of the migrant-as-victim thesis, climate-change-induced migration is framed as a problem resolvable through better law.'¹⁰⁰ Butler's own framing of the 'climate migrant' figure resists this pitfall. In depicting a racially diverse community migrating north in order to implement its own system of self-governance and self-sufficiency, Butler works against the homogenisation of experience that can arise from a narrative defined by the subjugation and suffering of its protagonists, rather than their own political voices and activities. In *Parable*, Butler expands beyond a 'form of contemporary narrativity of slavery' that Ashraf Rushdy has named the 'neo-slave narrative',¹⁰¹ which describes a modern literary trope of escaping oppression in order to reach liberty.¹⁰² Instead, Butler depicts a community made up of people from heterogeneous cultural and social origins, who are held together through their collective future as a community, rather than solely through their shared oppression.

Economic Neocolonisation and Migration

Under the constant threat of climate instability and environmental degradation in this novel, resources and government systems in *Parable of the Sower* become privatised in every respect. Water becomes a commodity rather than a public right, with commercial water stations becoming the only safe place to obtain clean water (p. 185), as desertification of the state intensifies. The poorer sectors of society can only obtain water through illegal peddlers, and it is often laced with 'chemical residues' (p. 185). Corporations become entangled in the failing neoliberal government as temperatures rise and climate-related disasters abound. Through their interactions and communications with the public within the novel, it is possible to identify an emerging political discourse that is increasingly reminiscent of colonial power. This can be contrasted with the colonialist discourses present within *The Ice People*, where the propagation of colonial myths occurs through masculinist narratives of adventure heroism in the face of the drastically changing planet. In *Parable of the Sower*, it is not only individuals or political organisations who propagate discourses of exclusion and separatism when confronted by climate instability on a grand scale. In the novel, corporations become the new centre of

⁹⁹ Dubey, p. 801.

¹⁰⁰ Baldwin, 'Racialisation and the Figure of the Climate Change Migrant', p. 1475.

¹⁰¹ Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 3.

¹⁰² Bernard W. Bell, *The Afro-American Novel and its Tradition* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p. 289.

imperialist power, with their ability to capitalise on resources (human and ‘natural’) as they are discovered. Their actions therefore consequently displace human bodies across the parts of the US under corporate control, inciting mass migration and producing vast numbers of refugees.

In order to manage and exploit the bodies of the communities within the novel for production and monetary gain, the corporate powers in the novel — primarily ‘KSF’, a multinational company (p. 109) — create entire towns functioning essentially as centres of production. The workers are not paid, and instead must work for their board and lodging, often whilst performing harsh physical labour, ensuring that the enclosed towns produce a profit. In a time in which food and water are scarce and expensive, vulnerable people take up work in these establishments in order to ensure survival. Those who refuse, however, have no choice but to search for land that can be cultivated to produce food, as the monopoly on produce is held by the vast corporations that own the slave towns. It is possible that Butler’s depiction of forced labour camps as a response to mass displacement of peoples may have been influenced by narratives of the Sudanese civil war, which took place during the late 1980s and early 1990s (she has previously discussed her use of Nubian history and language in her other novels).¹⁰³ The root causes of the war have been attributed to many different factors, including climate change-induced drought,¹⁰⁴ alongside detrimental agricultural policies and social inequality.¹⁰⁵ As Betsy Hartmann has described, as a result of the war, Nuba farmers were displaced from their lands in the mountainous region of northern Sudan and forced into so-called peace villages, ‘where they became a source of captive labour for mechanised farms’.¹⁰⁶ In these camps, as well as being exploited for labour, slaves — especially women — were sexually abused and exploited.¹⁰⁷ Butler draws parallels between these types of contemporary issues and the world of *Parable of the Sower*. A combination of climate change with ill-advised political and economic policies, for example the failing implementation of corporate towns (p. 109) and the total privatisation of natural resources (such as water, solar and wind energy, p. 110), contributes to migration as people move north in search of jobs, readily accessible water, and food (p. 131). Butler also articulates the vulnerability of the

¹⁰³ Kenan, p. 499.

¹⁰⁴ See Stephan Faris, ‘The Real Roots of Darfur’, *Atlantic Monthly Online*, April 2007 <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/04/the-real-roots-of-darfur/305701/>> [accessed 22 May 2019].

¹⁰⁵ Betsy Hartmann, ‘Rethinking Climate Refugees and Climate Conflict: Rhetoric, Reality and the Politics of Policy Discourse’, *Journal of International Development*, 22 (2010), 233–46 (p. 236).

¹⁰⁶ Hartmann, ‘Rethinking Climate Refugees’, p. 236.

¹⁰⁷ Samuel Totten, *Genocide by Attrition: The Nuba Mountains of Sudan* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2012), p. 9.

people in transit: when Lauren and her group reach the freeway to head north, the people journeying are 'filthy', with little to no food and water, some are 'ill' and collapse on the road (pp. 161–62). There are also 'thieves' and 'predators' in the crowd (p. 162), and Lauren dresses as a man, which is supposedly 'safer' (p. 157). Through these constructions of the migration journey, and through indirect allusions to the real-world context in which she was writing, Butler illustrates the fallacy of 1990s discourses on migration that reinforce what Hartmann has called the 'degradation narrative' surrounding environmental refugees and migrants.¹⁰⁸ A term I will explore more thoroughly in the next section, the degradation narrative refers to a political discourse that frames mass migration in non-Western countries as something prompted by environmental degradation caused by overpopulation and over-consumption.

In this novel, those in power deploy a similar discourse of personal security, in the context of climate change, to the discourses depicted in *The Ice People*. The individualist notion of survival and protection of one's own is harnessed by corporations, in order to draw people in to the supposedly safe enclosed slave labour towns, for capital gain and security for the elite. Butler takes a different tack to Gee, however, in her decision to prioritise representing the threat of total privatisation and unmitigated loss of basic human rights in her depiction of a formerly prosperous Western society. Although both authors depict a privileged country dismantling itself through neoliberal policies and securitisation as a response to climate change, Butler makes an explicit effort to negotiate the intersections between race, gender and social class when examining the effects that these policies may have on American society. What unites Butler's diverse group of characters is their attempts to resist the economic neocolonisation enforced by the major corporations in the novel who possess monopolies on fuel, water and other resources. It also becomes evident that the neocolonisation of the bodies of vulnerable members of society is permitted through the acceleration and intensification of neoliberal ideologies and governmental policies. As the strength of the corporations in the novel grows, governmental power diminishes: the new President, Donner, suspends what he names the 'overly restrictive' laws protecting workers' rights, the environment and minimum wage (p. 26). This allows corporations to legally implement privatised forced labour towns, which guarantee food, water and shelter at the expense of the workers' liberty, as the towns become the only system of security available to the public (pp. 110–11). These forced labour systems are biopolitical without being subject to any governmental intervention, as the free market economics gaining ground in the 1990s becomes the overriding governing force in the novel. By taking primary control of the

¹⁰⁸ Hartmann, 'Rethinking Climate Refugees', p. 234.

resources of the land, as well as of the bodily resources of its inhabitants, the corporations of the novel control the movement and stasis of both individuals and communities at large.

This economic neocolonisation — a term I use here to describe a new kind of colonisation that arises through economic control of its subjects, in service of economic gain rather than political or ideological goals — is not only enacted through bodily exploitation and monopoly over natural resources. The company that owns the coastal town of Olivar, for example, ‘intends to dominate farming and the selling of water and solar and wind energy’ (p. 110) through locking citizens of the state into cycles of inescapable debt. The KSF corporation employs individuals to serve particular functions within the town, for example working as nurses or teachers (p. 111) and offers ‘security, a guaranteed food supply, jobs’ (p. 110) and resistance against the rising sea levels ‘in their battle with the Pacific’ (p. 110). However, the workers are not paid enough to live, and therefore their bodies become owned, as they are forced to remain in the town to repay their debts. As Lauren remarks, ‘that’s an old company-town trick—get people into debt, hang on to them, and work them harder. Debt slavery’ (p. 111). In this context, slavery has been modernised and implemented in a covert fashion, in order to serve the imperial and financial aims of specific corporations, rather than the expansionist colonisation and slavery historically enacted by imperial centres in Europe. As Robert Butler remarks in his analysis of *Parable of the Sower*, ‘slavery has been universalized to include all ethnic and racial groups in all regions of the country. All America has become a massive plantation, a gigantic ghetto’.¹⁰⁹ Here, Butler draws attention to another significant feature of the economic neocolonisation of the new world imagined in *Parable of the Sower*. In the section of the novel that describes KSF’s takeover of the town of Olivar, Butler specifically writes, through Lauren’s first-person narration, that ‘Olivar is a lot richer than we are [...] [it] needs special help. It’s an upper middle class, white, literate community of people who once had a lot of weight to throw around’ (p. 109). The people who live and work there, and who voted for the company takeover of the town, are ‘educated people’ (p. 110). Although Lauren’s brother Marcus remarks that ‘“Olivar doesn’t sound like slavery [...] Those rich people would never let themselves be slaves”’, Lauren’s father replies ‘“Not now,” [...] “not at first.”’ (p. 111). As Butler remarks above, then, slavery in this novel is no longer based solely on a logic of racial and gendered subordination. The financially driven neocolonisation model implemented by the corporations does not discriminate in its exploitation of citizens, instead concentrating its

¹⁰⁹ Robert Butler, ‘Twenty-First Century Journeys in Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*’, in *Contemporary African American Fiction: The Open Journey*, ed. by Robert Butler (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1998), pp. 133–43 (p. 136).

efforts on controlling the movement and flow of bodies across the country, ensuring the entrapment of whole communities in order to maintain a steady profit.

The recalling and development of this particular discourse within science fiction is referenced at several points in the novel: Lauren's father notes that Olivar's corporation-run model 'sounds half antebellum revival and half science fiction' (p. 112) and Lauren also attests that 'Cities controlled by big companies are old hat in science fiction' (p. 114). Although she acknowledges her own usage of this generic device in metatextual references such as these, Butler deploys the trope of corporation towns specifically in order to critique contemporary discourses on climate change and migration. She achieves this by framing the corporate takeover of Olivar as a move that took advantage of the environmental damage occurring as a result of the 'sea level[s] rising' (p. 109), which caused the land around it to 'crumble into the ocean' (p. 109). The crisis of Olivar is explicitly described by Lauren as a result of the 'influx of salt water from one direction and desperate poor people from another', who she refers to as 'desperate refugees' (p. 109). The supposed solution to these external threats — which in this case is seen as 'the people of KSF' and their privatisation of the town (p. 109) — is intended to mitigate these disasters by its implementation of a desalination plant and secure borders, and deployment of defences against the sea. This, however, is an example of Butler's satirical commentary on the inefficacy of a neoliberal discourse on climate change that reduces its complex and interconnected effects to a singular problem (such as rising sea levels). There is an indirect allusion, here, to the Anglo-Saxon legend of King Canute, who demonstrates humility in demonstrating to his followers that he cannot halt the tide, illustrating that his status as king cannot grant him omnipotence. Similarly to Gee's satirical allusion to Scheherazade in *The Ice People*, both satirical targets within the novels (Saul and the KSF corporation) fail to understand the moral message of the tales that they recall. In this instance, Butler's satire arises from how she exposes the fallacy of believing that power and wealth can secure an individual or corporation against unstoppable forces.

This is a tactic frequently used by satirical modes such as the mock-heroic (also deployed by Gee in her depiction of Saul, as discussed previously).¹¹⁰ Butler alludes here to other hubristic myths, thereby reinforcing her contemporary critique of neoliberal discourses on climate change. The neoliberal discourses of economic colonisation within the novel are perpetuated by the corporations, and internalised by the inhabitants of Olivar, who vote in favour of the corporate takeover in their desire for security and stability. Economic neocolonisation suggests that climate change can be contained and managed through

¹¹⁰ Ritchie Robertson, *Mock-Epic Poetry from Pope to Heine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 6.

deregulation, securitisation, free market economics, and biopolitical governance of the movements and migrations of the population. In the face of violence, poverty and societal unrest, freedom is sacrificed for a semblance of political order as more people attempt to join the corporate cities. As Baldwin attests:

As a form of rule, neoliberalism seeks to govern life using market rationality, especially intersubjective competition. Those who accommodate themselves to this rationality are said to live freely, whereas those who do not are simply left to fend for themselves, die or be killed.¹¹¹

As the novel progresses, the reader is shown in greater detail how the general population is faring outside these corporate cities, and the fallacy of this neoliberal approach to mitigating climate change and migration becomes increasingly apparent. As more people migrate in search of food, water and necessities, the threat to the bounded walls of the contained cities increases, and as Lauren's gated community falls, Butler makes the implicit suggestion that the others are doomed to a similar fate.

The 'Climate Change Migrant' and Implicit Racialisation

Writing in the context of a warming planet — both inside and outside the confines of the text — Butler investigates the implications of the racialisation of the climate change migrant. Similarly to *The Ice People*, *Parable of the Sower* considers a world in which climate change provides the impetus for human bodies to become increasingly vulnerable to exploitation from capitalist and neoliberal systems, particularly the bodies of people of colour, women, children, animals and those living in abject poverty.

Butler's representation of a racially and socially heterogeneous group of people who accompany Lauren on her migration journey recalls Baldwin's notion of the 'white affect' response to the figure of the climate migrant, which is characterised by an 'anxiety of loss when confronted by an ungovernable excess'.¹¹² Within the implicit and explicit discourses of white affect, the climate migrant figure's potential for heterogeneity foregrounds a threat to white hegemony.¹¹³ Lauren's original fellow travellers, Harry and Zahra, are white and black respectively (p. 157), and throughout their journey north, more travellers join the group: people of Latino, black, and mixed ethnic origins, as well as a mix of genders, sexualities and social classes. Butler represents the heterogeneity of climate migrants whilst alluding to persisting racial tensions and divisions, which still exist among the general population: Zahra

¹¹¹ Baldwin, 'Premediation and White Affect', p. 79.

¹¹² Baldwin, 'Premediation and White Affect', p. 82.

¹¹³ Baldwin, 'Premediation and White Affect', p. 84.

comments that in the world outside the walled communities, ‘mixed couples catch hell whether people think they’re gay or straight’ (p. 157). Similarly, racial and class inequalities are highlighted in the differences between the towns of Robledo and Olivar. Lauren’s gated hometown community, Robledo, is — before its invasion and destruction — described as ‘too big, too poor, too black, and too Hispanic to be of interest to anyone’ (p. 110). In contrast, Olivar is a ‘small and well-to-do’ Californian coastal town, with ‘upper middle class, white, literate’ inhabitants (p. 109). In addition, as Olivar transforms into a company town, it draws in applicants, who eventually become indebted slaves, by promoting its discourse of stability, order, comfort and security, which implies — deploying a discourse of white affect — a ‘pre-discursive sense of the normal’ within its borders, but one that is perpetually at risk from outsiders.¹¹⁴

Whilst acknowledging these enduring social inequalities, Butler draws attention to the alternative realities of migration, offering a contrasting narrative to the implicitly racialized one perpetuated by neoliberal climate change migration discourses, which frame migrants as futuristic, heterogeneous and unpredictable entities that threaten contemporary societal organisation. At one notable point in the text, Lauren and her companions begin their journey north through California. Whilst regarding the scene of migrants walking on the freeway, Lauren remarks:

I found the experience both fascinating and frightening [...] the freeway crowd is a heterogeneous mass—black and white, Asian and Latin, whole families are on the move with babies on backs or perched atop carts, wagons or bicycle baskets, sometimes along with an old or handicapped person. (p. 161)

Here, Butler both articulates the scale of the body of people and communicates the extent of societal transformation that has led to this change, whilst also representing the social and racial diversity of the migrants. Lauren identifies specific faces in the crowd, and remarks on their features and attributes: a passing cop, a woman who collapses from exhaustion, and some young men who remind Lauren of her dead brother (p. 161). Butler also represents heterogeneous bodily abilities, genders and ages in the migrant caravan, which both resists the grouping of all migrants into a faceless mass, and also reinforces their humanity and vulnerability. Although the experience is overwhelming for Lauren, she is positioned within the crowd rather than separated from it. Her narration offers an individual perspective on the scene, from a position of continual movement, rather than a static point of observation. Here,

¹¹⁴ Baldwin, ‘Premediation and White Affect’, p. 84.

Butler explicitly rejects the white affect that is latent within some contemporary cultural responses to climate change and migration, which can 'orien[t] the viewer to a future in which the guarantee of white supremacy lies in its capacity to contain the excess of migration within the parameters of an orderly well-managed adaptation'.¹¹⁵ Lauren's initial fear does not stem from a belief in her own superiority and privilege, or from the sense of an ungovernable external threat by the river of people, even though she has been forced to leave her relatively privileged life in her once-secure walled community and join the mass migration. Instead, her apprehension arises from the understanding that she is one part of the autonomous and diverse group. Unlike the epic journeys of novels such as *The Ice People* and McCarthy's *The Road*, in which a clear rhetorical division is made between the protagonist's family unit and the other travellers and migrants they encounter along the way, Lauren and her community recognise that they are constitutive of the migration phenomenon. Rather than seeking stasis away from the transient people, Lauren consciously welcomes more members into her group along the way, precluding the white affect that would seek affirmation in the containment of the excess of migration.

As noted above, Lauren also recognises that there are dangerous individuals within the crowd of moving people: 'the ones who bothered me most weren't carrying much. Some weren't carrying anything except weapons. Predators' (p. 162). This is in direct opposition to the notion of external threat that is perpetuated through the construction of the climate migrant figure as a future-located, indeterminate, and chaotic threat to the civil order of society. For Lauren, these potentially violent people are not abstract or future-located, but identifiable and in the minority. Crucially, the reader is shown that these predators are not in and of themselves a destabilising threat to a neoliberal order, as the prevalent discourse on climate change and migration would suggest, purely because the order itself is shown to be already inherently unstable, violent and unpredictable. Violence against the general population has already been legitimised and used by the corporations across the country, who trap workers into debt cycles until their bodies become corporate property. In a climate-changing context, then, methods of prediction, security and the creation of boundaries — tactics that are deployed within neoliberal discourses in order to create an illusion of stability — are fundamentally unsustainable. Even the supposedly stable corporation town like Olivar, as we have seen, cannot 'protect itself from the encroaching sea, the crumbling earth, the crumbling economy, or the desperate refugees' forever (p. 109).

¹¹⁵ Baldwin, 'Premediation and White Affect', p. 84.

With this strand of the narrative, Butler forecloses the application of a racialized discourse to the river of migrants. Lauren's standpoint from within the midst of the throng serves to articulate the people's diversity in terms of race, gender, ability and social background. Lauren's view does not allow a singular descriptor, narrative, or affective response to be relevant or applicable. Pre-empting the white affect underlying contemporary climate change discourses that Baldwin examines, Butler deconstructs the latent external threats that are imagined in futuristic representations of migration in climate-changed scenarios, and locates the tangible threats as already extant within the neoliberal order of Western societies, emerging particularly visibly and violently in times of crisis, rather than framing migration as a threatening invasion of abstract and heterogeneous Others.

The Degradation Narrative: Racial Neoliberalism and the Last Man

In this section, I engage with several interlinked discourses that can be identified in contemporary responses to — or representations of — climate change and migration. I argue that in *Parable of the Sower*, Butler engages with and resists the degradation narrative, the wider concept of racial neoliberalism, and the trope of the 'last man'. The novel deconstructs and challenges the ways that these discourses sustain each other. In short, contemporary representations of the 'last man' can implicitly suggest that the environment has been depleted and overpopulated, primarily by women of colour and people in the Global South via the degradation narrative. In this trope, a final, civilised man is left to carry forward his history and knowledge in a last attempt to continue his legacy and tell his story to future generations. *Parable of the Sower*, however, both writes back against this trope and produces a new discourse borne of Butler's attention to gender, racial and social inequity.

In light of my discussion of a masculinist individualist discourse in *The Ice People*, it is easy to identify where Butler's novel diverges from typical SF — and indeed climate fiction — traditions, in that female narratives are prioritised. *Parable of the Sower* is especially significant in that Lauren's journey not only draws attention to the discrepancies between male and female experiences of migration, but also offers a contrasting narrative to the 'last man' trope in many contemporary cli-fi novels (a notion discussed further in the introduction to this thesis). Popularised by Romantic 'interest in solitary figures' as well as Mary Shelley's post-apocalyptic novel *The Last Man* (1826),¹¹⁶ this trope utilises the idea of the last man on earth living through an apocalyptic event, often travelling alone, confronting the end of human

¹¹⁶ Anne McWhir, 'Introduction', in Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, ed. by Anne McWhir (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1996), pp. xiii–xxxvi (p. xiii).

life on earth. The ‘Last Man’ narrative is traceable throughout the 20th century: as Dawid W. de Villiers writes:

Variations on (and alternative versions of) the figure may be discerned in [...] works by writers and thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Olaf Stapledon, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Richard Routley and Francis Fukuyama, as well as in popular works like Richard Matheson’s *I am Legend* (1954).¹¹⁷

The narrative has also been carried into many contemporary post-apocalyptic and climate fiction narratives (such as McCarthy’s *The Road*, Peter Heller’s *The Dog Stars*, and Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*). As Anne McWhir has acknowledged, the last man trope ‘has comic as well as tragic possibilities’,¹¹⁸ and although it is not an inherently masculinist concept in itself, it can present a narrative of apocalyptic events that situate male legacy in a place of utmost importance.

The last man trope can be used as a way to allocate the important task of the continuation of the human race, and of human history, solely to a lone male figure. In many other contemporary climate fiction and SF apocalyptic scenarios, as discussed previously, the saving of the human world and its legacy is ensured by Western male scientists (for example Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Science in the Capital* series, Ian McEwan’s *Solar*, or Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy). As Tom Moylan has pointed out, in *Parable*, Lauren’s diary functions as a ‘theological and political manifesto’, and as an incentive to mobilise against the corporate governing forces.¹¹⁹ The rousing and affective power of the prose in her Earthseed writings provides the foundations on which her community is established. The creative aphorisms that frame each chapter of her diary include phrases like ‘Embrace diversity. Unite– or be divided’ (p. 191) and ‘all successful life is adaptable [...]. Interconnected, and Fecund. Understand this. Shape God’ (p. 115). Lauren shares these readings with her growing community (p. 196), and by the end of the novel, uses them to consolidate the establishment of an Earthseed community called Acorn (pp. 298–99). These verses therefore emphasise the potential agency of the reader (within the context of the novel) to shape their own future, and their allusions to the interconnectedness of all life function as both didactic moral messages advocating for care and empathy, and as a way of building community. Rather than reaffirming the significance of the legacy of the lone ‘last man’, Butler emphasises Lauren’s capability to band different

¹¹⁷ Dawid W. de Villiers, ‘Catastrophic Turns: Romanticism, History and “the Last Man”’, *English Studies in Africa*, 58.2 (2015), 26–40 (p. 28).

¹¹⁸ McWhir, p. xiii.

¹¹⁹ Moylan, p. 227.

people together through a common aim. Lauren's diary is in direct contrast to Saul's self-aggrandizing narration in *The Ice People*, which actively seeks and speaks to a future reader, in order to ensure a record of his heroism and adventure. Lauren's diary, however, is not a relic to extend her voice and legacy into the future, as a testament to her own wisdom, but a way of incorporating diverse individuals into a democratic, heterogeneous and multi-faceted political and theological resistance.

Christa Grewe-Volpp has noted that 'it is on the open road, a traditionally white male space, where [Lauren's] survival strategies are put to the test [...] where to keep moving is indeed disturbing inherited notions of gender'.¹²⁰ It is therefore significant that one of Lauren's particular abilities is 'hyperempathy' syndrome (p. 10), which is the involuntary ability to share others' pain and pleasure. In a quasi-satirical exaggeration of a stereotypically feminine trait, Lauren's greater emotional capacity to empathise contributes to her success as a leader, in a heightened contrast with the rationality and intellect that are associated with the trope of the 'last man'. When the community find a toddler whose mother is killed in a gunfight on their journey, they collectively decide to take him in and look after him. Lauren states that 'taking care of other people can be a good cure for nightmares' (p. 235), and it is through her recognition of the mutual benefits of care — which is enabled by her ability to share pain and happiness — that she encourages compassion and loyalty within her community, qualities that ensure the group's collective survival when they are threatened. As well as pre-empting dangerous situations and learning how to use weapons, the community's emotions and reciprocal trust are crucial for their continued existence.

In this way, Butler's narratives of migration diversify and complicate traditional depictions of journeying and migrating in dystopian or post-apocalyptic scenarios, in terms of both race and gender. Butler engages directly with these issues, presenting various 'identity categories as fluid and coextensive',¹²¹ acknowledging the intermeshed oppressions that subjugate differing genders, races and classes unevenly, and projecting how these may be exaggerated or heightened in the context of climate change, migration and destabilisation. As mentioned above, Lauren chooses to dress as a boy during her journey for her own safety. Although there are violent depictions of sexual assault and rape against people of all genders throughout the novel, Butler draws specific attention to the fact that men travelling on the road north still retain some privilege through their appearance, and that women migrants are

¹²⁰ Christa Grewe-Volpp, 'Keep Moving: Place and Gender in a Post-Apocalyptic Environment', in *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, ed. by Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok and Serpil Oppermann (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 221–34 (p. 225).

¹²¹ Therí A. Pickens, 'Octavia Butler and the Aesthetics of the Novel', *Hypatia*, 30 (2015), 167–80 (p. 173).

therefore under greater threat. Through this specific confrontation of different oppressions facing migrants in her speculative narrative, Butler weaves a pre-emptive discourse of intersectionality throughout her novel, which counteracts the 'last man' trope and its accompanying heteropatriarchal discourses. As Anna Carastathis has noted, intersectionality's liberating potential can function most productively when it is used to 'reveal and contest categorical exclusions that are deeply entrenched in our perceptual, cognitive, and political lives'.¹²² In *Parable of the Sower*, Butler employs this logic to demonstrate the continuation of contemporary tendencies towards migrant racialisation and their accompanying oppressive legislature and cultural marginalisation, as well as the intensification of these dangers for female migrants.

The novel's commentary on gender and the 'last man' is also thrown into sharper relief when compared with the contextual US policy discourses on climate change and migration that reached a zenith during the 1990s, when *Parable of the Sower* was first published. Betsy Hartmann has offered a detailed summary and analysis of these discourses in her work,¹²³ paying specific attention to the political scientist Thomas Homer-Dixon's dissemination of the degradation narrative.¹²⁴ In his book *Environment, Scarcity and Violence* (1999), Homer-Dixon argues that overpopulation, depletion of resources and an inability of communities to adapt to environmental change is the driving force of climate-induced migration and related violent conflict.¹²⁵ He writes that, when rural populations move onto marginal lands, 'they cause environmental damage and become chronically poor. Eventually they may be the source of persistent upheaval, or they may migrate yet again, helping to stimulate ethnic conflicts or urban unrest elsewhere'.¹²⁶ Hartmann identifies how this particular discourse, which propagated the myth of climate change migrants as third-world peasants who had depleted their own resources through overpopulation, became prevalent in political circles in the 1990s and was disseminated through discourses on US national security.¹²⁷ The degradation narrative ensured a political and ideological response to climate change migration; one that depicted climate change migrants as the instigators of political and social unrest in their destinations due to stretched resources and population increases. Crucially, Hartmann emphasises how this

¹²² Anna Carastathis, *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), p. 12.

¹²³ See Hartmann, 'From Climate Refugees to Climate Conflict'; and Hartmann, 'Rethinking Climate Refugees'.

¹²⁴ Hartmann, 'Rethinking Climate Refugees', p. 236.

¹²⁵ Thomas Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity and Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 5, p. 135, p. 155.

¹²⁶ Homer-Dixon, p. 155.

¹²⁷ Hartmann, 'Rethinking Climate Refugees', p. 236.

narrative of degradation was deployed by many different ‘political actors’ — especially Western ones — in order to justify ‘more rigid immigration controls’.¹²⁸

I contend that the ‘last man’ discourse, as it features primarily in contemporary cultural production, contributes towards the establishment of a new dimension of the degradation narrative. Building on the original 1990s discourse, the contemporary representation of the ‘last man’ trope usually depicts a catastrophic event (or series of events), prioritising the character of a male survivor who had the prescience — or the privilege — that allowed him to anticipate the disaster(s). As Florian Mussgnug explains, ‘male fantasies of regenerative violence and of a return to “primitive” virility play a central role in last man literature, as does the idea of procreation as a male duty towards the species’.¹²⁹ Embedded within this narrative, then, is the idea that the survivor is deserving of his position (is even destined to occupy it), and of the task of continuing the human race, or recording its history for whomever, or whatever, may inherit the planet in the future. The last man discourse therefore figures the last man himself as the only one with the power to figuratively regenerate the degraded planet. He has the knowledge and capability to restore human control over the landscape, and repopulate it with descendants who have been given the knowledge and hindsight that the planet’s original destroyers did not.

There is an explicit sexism embedded within both the ‘last man’ and degradation discourses that interacts with the more problematic threads of antinatalist discourses, which place the blame for climate change and environmental degradation on the fertility of third-world women.¹³⁰ These discourses suggest that global warming is not the primary cause of environmental degradation, and that it is not capitalist consumer culture that has accelerated climate change to unsafe levels. Instead, the primary cause is implied to be overpopulation in the global South. This antinatalism can be perceived in UK MP (now Prime Minister) Boris Johnson’s 2007 article for the *Telegraph*. In this piece, entitled ‘Global Over-Population is the Real Issue’, he writes that humanity’s ‘single biggest challenge is not global warming. That is a

¹²⁸ Hartmann, ‘Rethinking Climate Refugees’, p. 236.

¹²⁹ Florian Mussgnug, ‘Naturalizing Apocalypse: Last Men and Other Animals’, *Comparative Critical Studies*, 9 (2012), 333–47 (p. 334).

¹³⁰ Nicole Seymour, ‘Down with People: Queer Tendencies and Troubling Racial Politics in Antinatalist Discourse’, in *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, ed. by Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok and Serpil Oppermann (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 203–18 (p. 208).

secondary challenge. The primary challenge facing our species is the reproduction of our species itself'.¹³¹ He continues:

As someone who has now been travelling around the world for decades, I see this change, and I feel it. You can smell it in the traffic jams of the Middle East. You can see it as you fly over Africa at night, and you see mile after mile of fires burning red in the dark, as the scrub is removed to make way for human beings.¹³²

Johnson ignores his own hypocrisy and privilege in referring to his decades of world travel, and fails to recognise the myopia of his vantage point of the earth through the window of a private jet. He also fails to acknowledge the considerable CO2 emissions entailed in these years of flying across the globe. Instead, in this context, he frames the overpopulation issue in implicitly racist terms in his allusions to the Middle East and Africa, continuing with a description of Mexico City as 'a vast checkerboard of smog-bound, low-rise dwellings stretching from one horizon to the other [...] a horrifying vision of habitations multiplying and replicating like bacilli in a Petri dish',¹³³ and citing the 'insatiable Chinese desire for meat' whilst neglecting to mention European or American meat consumption, and instead positioning British farmers as the victims of higher animal feed prices.¹³⁴ These examples all contribute to a political discourse that reinforces notions of overpopulation by dehumanising non-white inhabitants of developing countries, and supports a deeply racist framing of people of colour as uncontrollable and inhuman infestations of pests. Using this rhetoric to make an extremely tenuous connection to the politics of UK immigration, Johnson asks the question 'do we want the south-east of Britain, already the most densely populated major country in Europe, to resemble a giant suburbia?'.¹³⁵ Here, Johnson connects the problem of overpopulation — or to use Johnson's inherently sexist term, 'global motherhood'¹³⁶ — to the threat of outside immigration to the UK. In this article, Johnson alludes both directly and indirectly to the central tenets of Homer-Dixon's degradation narrative, which (as demonstrated above) blames communities in the global south for occupying, overpopulating and degrading natural environments, which prompts violence, unrest and further migration. As Hartmann has warned, the degradation narrative is employed in this case in order to pursue particular

¹³¹ Boris Johnson, 'Global Over-Population is the Real Issue', *Telegraph Online*, 25 October 2007, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643551/Global-over-population-is-the-real-issue.html>> , [accessed 5 April 2017] (para. 3 of 22).

¹³² Johnson, para. 5 of 22.

¹³³ Johnson, para. 7 of 22.

¹³⁴ Johnson, para. 17, 18 of 22.

¹³⁵ Johnson, para. 19 of 22.

¹³⁶ Johnson, para. 12 of 22.

neoliberal political goals in relation to immigration (for example, the closing of borders or heavy restrictions on international movement).

Johnson's article also exemplifies how Western political responses to climate change and migration — of which the degradation narrative is one — can both feed into, and feed on, problematic antinatalist discourses. Although Hartmann has effectively critiqued the racial biases of the degradation narrative in her work, she does not fully engage with the gender politics that are also entrenched within it. In examining the connections between the degradation narrative and certain strands of antinatalism, the sexism within both becomes increasingly apparent. Antinatalist discourses broadly maintain that climate change and CO2 emissions are problems brought about by human overpopulation of the earth, and therefore that the problem can be resolved through fewer, or no, new births. However, many strands of the discourse 'routinely end up targeting the poor and people of colour, *regardless of whether or not those populations are the intended target*'.¹³⁷ The consequence of this, of course, is that women of colour living in poverty primarily shoulder the blame for over-reproducing, and thereby instigating the unrest, environmental degradation and mass migration embroiled that supposedly occurs as a result of this over-population. As Nicole Seymour has identified in her contribution to *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, many 'antinatalists are [...] unconcerned with the material experiences of women and people of color'.¹³⁸ The blame for environmental degradation, then, is laid at the door of poor, lower-class women of colour, and the notion that overpopulation is the most significant issue at stake in times of global climate change is strengthened by these discourses. Again, Baldwin's notion of white affect comes into play at the point of convergence between political discourses of migration, degradation and antinatalism within contemporary Western cultural responses to climate change. The threats of instability, of Othered migrants encroaching on Western borders, and of women of colour overpopulating and degrading Western land, are harnessed and deployed to justify neoliberal political ends, such as stricter immigration controls. It is easy to identify the racial neoliberalism at work in these discourses (and particularly within Johnson's *Telegraph* article). As David Theo Goldberg has discussed at length, racial neoliberalism — that is 'racism [which] is sustained under conditions of neoliberalism through a vocabulary that makes no reference to race'¹³⁹ — 'can be read as a response to this concern about the impending impotence of whiteness'.¹⁴⁰ Whilst Johnson makes no explicit reference to race in his article, as I have

¹³⁷ Seymour, p. 208, original emphasis.

¹³⁸ Seymour, p. 210.

¹³⁹ Baldwin, 'Premediation and White Affect', p. 84.

¹⁴⁰ David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 337.

demonstrated, the vocabulary he uses to position blame for overpopulation and the ‘secondary issue’ of climate change is inherently and explicitly racial and racist. It is undeniable that white affect, as part of a racial neoliberal response to climate change and migration, informs and reinforces oppressive political and cultural discourses on the subject, particularly those produced within hegemonic Euro-American centres of power.

Butler’s narrative in *Parable of the Sower* is in direct contrast to and resistance against these political discourses, which locate the blame for degradation and migration within disadvantaged populations. In *Parable*, there are two main factors that are shown to have instigated mass migration and social breakdown. The first was anthropogenic climate change through overconsumption: when Lauren is speaking to her stepmother Cory in the novel’s opening pages, Cory remembers how the stars used to be hidden by ‘lights, progress, growth, all those things we’re too hot and poor to bother with anymore’ (p. 5), and we learn that ‘people have changed the climate of the world. Now they’re waiting for the old days to come back’ (pp. 53–54). The second major instigator for migration and social unrest, rather than the over-reproduction of women of colour, is identified as the neoliberal system of corporate monopoly.

In the novel, one of the patriarchs of Lauren’s community, Richard Moss, creates his own religion, an amalgamated version of ‘Old Testament and historical West African practices’ (p. 36) that asserts ‘God wants men to be patriarchs and protectors of women, and fathers of as many children as possible’ (p. 36). We learn that he has three wives (p. 35) and lots of children, and as he is an ‘engineer for one of the big commercial water companies [...] he can afford to pick up beautiful, young homeless women and live with them in polygynous relationships’ (p. 36). Significantly, then, it is the privileged male patriarch — a representative of a corporation that monopolises natural resources — who coerces women into reproducing by offering them reprieve from a life of poverty and homelessness. Here, Butler clearly identifies the centre of oppressive power, which lies in the partnership between the patriarchal value system at work in Moss’s religion, and the power and status bestowed by the hegemonic corporations, rather than in the fertility of disadvantaged women. In a context where societal structures are under immense pressure from climate change-induced migration and environmental degradation, impulses towards the bodily control of vulnerable women and children are heightened and legitimised through the dual power system of the neoliberal free-market monopoly of vital resources, and the regressive use of religious justification for the subjugation of women. In *Parable*, homeless migrant women who do not live in a gated community are subsumed into the neoliberal social order through Moss. This functions as a fictional recreation of Baldwin’s neoliberal order: ‘Those who accommodate themselves to

[neoliberal] rationality are said to live freely, whereas those who do not are simply left to fend for themselves, die or be killed'.¹⁴¹

Although Butler satirises the latent hypocrisy and arrogance in Moss's use of religion to achieve his desires, she depicts Lauren's use of religion in a wholly different way. Butler reinforces the fundamental differences between Lauren's 'Earthseed' religion, of which verses frame the chapters of the novel, and the regressive Judaeo-Christian elements of both Richard Moss's — and Lauren's father's — faiths. This is done primarily through the obvious temporal disconnect between the two religions. We learn that the elders of the community are, in Lauren's words, 'anchored in the past, waiting for the good old days to come back' (p. 54). However, Butler takes care to reinforce the notion that Earthseed relies on the recognition that God is change (p. 73), and that change is the only certainty in life. This is exemplified by Lauren's statement that 'I'll use these verses to pry them loose from the rotting past, and maybe push them into saving themselves and building a future that makes sense' (p. 73). This links into the contemporary discourses on climate change and migration, as we learn that Lauren's goal, as she migrates northwards to create her Earthseed community, is to dismantle the sense of comfort that arises from stability. Lauren's emphasis on constant change, transition and adaptation as strategies for responding to climate change reveals the inconsistencies within racial neoliberal discourse and white affect. These discourses contend that privileged societies confront a future of dangerously insecure borders, and a cultural otherness encroaching on (and diminishing) Western and white hegemonic power structures. Here, it is easy to perceive how:

The affective condition of white loss, of the threat of heterogeneity and perceived disorder symbolised by black ascendancy qua the welfare state [...] allows racial neoliberalism to materialise as both a sociological condition and a form of biopolitical rule.¹⁴²

Racial neoliberalism relies on a false construction of past stability, security, and stasis, which Lauren's parents and other elders in her community subscribe to, in their reluctance to prepare for possible catastrophic future events such as mass migration. In contrast, Lauren's religion, Earthseed, counteracts the fear of societal destabilisation by climate-induced migration, and challenges the racial neoliberalist discourse invoked by the 'threat' of heterogeneity that accompanies it. In emphasising the certainty of change, Lauren grounds her faith in fundamental tenets of physics. She asserts that God is entropy — in other words, the

¹⁴¹ Baldwin, 'Premediation and White Affect', p. 79.

¹⁴² Baldwin, 'Premediation and White Affect', p. 85.

dispersal of energy over time, for example heat dissipating towards coldness (p. 200) — a concept crucial to the laws of physics. This forms the basis of her epistemological view of the world, in contrast to finding faith in ‘mythology or mysticism or magic’ (p. 200). By denying migration as a destabilising force — as society is fundamentally unstable in itself in the novel — Butler offers an alternative anti-racist and anti-sexist discourse to contemporary discourses on climate change and migration. Instead of ‘equat[ing] the human migration effects of climate change with the radical disruption of routine everyday life’,¹⁴³ as many cultural artefacts representing climate change futures do, Butler equates migration *with* the quotidian, the fundamental, and the predictable.

Butler dismantles the framing of climate change-induced migration as an unknown, future-conditional and mutable threat that needs to be contained, and which poses a threat to an existing well-ordered society. This is done primarily through the fundamental lack of order and stasis in the societies of Butler’s futuristic California. Early in the novel, Butler refers to the cholera epidemic that is sweeping the southern states of the US through its unsanitary water supplies, a measles outbreak that has hit New York, and the constant tornadoes that are ravaging the South (p. 51). Similarly, the drug addiction that takes hold of California — ‘pyro’ (p. 133) — incites its users to start fires, and appears to remove their ability to make rational or moral judgements. In these particular examples, direct emphasis is placed upon the widespread chaos, death and destruction that takes place at a bodily level, which reinforces the inherent mutability of the novel’s contemporary society at multiple scales. Additionally, through the collapse of Lauren’s walled community, the waning power of the state, and the constant earthquakes — more macro physical reminders of the instability of the land across which the migrants travel — Butler reinforces the idea that change is the only constant, and adaptability to new scenarios and environments is paramount for survival. In continually referring to the constant transitory states of the earth itself as well as its people, Butler refutes the idea of adaptation and containment that rests on the notion of a pre-existing stability and security that is under threat from impending chaos. This rejection of stability and determinacy can be linked to Anna Tsing’s use of ‘precarity’, or the notion of being vulnerable to others.¹⁴⁴ By conducting social analysis through an understanding that precarity is ‘the condition of our time’, rather than relying on false notions of ‘progress’, Tsing suggests that the possibilities of life, in this state of indeterminacy, can be identified.¹⁴⁵ It is through this very understanding of permanent change and vulnerability — or as Lauren puts it, change as God (p. 298) — that the

¹⁴³ Baldwin, ‘Premediation and White Affect’, p. 86.

¹⁴⁴ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, p. 20.

¹⁴⁵ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, p. 20.

protagonist devises the goals and structures of her new community. Butler also describes how the weakened government and state powers attempt to biopolitically manage migration across 'hostile' state lines and country borders by upping security and militarisation (similarly to policies in *The Ice People*), and by 'shutting themselves off from one another' (p. 298). Butler here reveals how, ironically, the tactics that are intended to control migration and enforce some level of stasis only increase the fracturing of the country as a whole, breaking down the remnants of the previous federal American system into further chaotic segments, accelerating their internal conflicts.

In summary, then, *Parable of the Sower* actively challenges and dismantles prevalent political and cultural discourses that hold implicit and explicit racial biases, exposing the fallacies that maintain them and the systems that uphold their values. The novel rejects the neo-slave narrative form that looks back to antebellum slavery, instead placing the narrative in a space of possibility and transformation, and exposes the racial neoliberalism that perpetuates white affect, the degradation narrative, and an antinatalism that blames women of colour for environmental destruction. As illustrated through the preceding analysis, this is performed through Butler's constant invocation of instability, through both the form and content of the novel: Lauren's narrative perspective is defined by its constant movement and rejection of stasis, which is reinforced by her adherence to the 'God is change' component of her religion.

Parable of the Sower contrasts with *The Ice People* in terms of how its critique of discourse operates formally. In *The Ice People*, the events of the novel are mediated through a satirical recreation of colonial and heteropatriarchal discourse, or in other words, Saul's self-aggrandizing allusions to colonial adventure. In *Parable*, Butler instead offers alternative discursive framings of climate change-induced migration, which arise from her engagement with neoliberal politics and her prescient setting of a climate-changed US. Rather than satirically recreating colonial discourses, as Gee does in *The Ice People*, Butler's new discourses actively deconstruct some of the most pervasive and hegemonic narratives on climate change and migration from the 1990s to our contemporary moment. Similarly to *The Ice People*, however, Butler acknowledges in the novel the potential for interference between the different types of discourse on climate change and migration, and the way they operate. For example, the reconstruction of slave narratives is a part of SF convention. Along with the neoliberal economic neocolonisation of the working population and the racialized figuration of the climate change migrant, these discourses and tropes all function within — and sustain — each other. *Parable of the Sower's* representation of a new migratory community strengthened by its rejection of stasis, anticipation of change and its diversity allows for these

interlocking issues to be addressed and dismantled. Crucially, however, it is Lauren's narrative perspective that best articulates this critique. The novel's sharp focus on the points at which gender, class, racial and environmental issues intersect lends Butler's new discourses on migration and climate change a critical and discursive power. Above all, the novel's recognition of the importance of diversity and change within these counteracts the dominant narrative framings that perpetuate social inequality and further environmental degradation.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, these two novels both offer perspectives on climate change and migration that challenge hegemonic political and cultural discourses of their times. In particular, both texts allude to their corresponding real-world contexts, carrying forward and engaging with the prevalent damaging framings of climate change and migration found in the media and political spheres at the time they were written. They articulate speculative consequences for societies that do not openly acknowledge or critique these discourses, whilst using contrasting narrative perspectives in order to reveal the hypocrisies and inequalities on which they are built and maintained.

As I have shown through this analysis, Gee and Butler enact these critiques and exposures using subtly different approaches. As shown through my discussion of *The Ice People*, this text's satirical engagement with discourses on climate change and migration works to primarily dismantle their colonial, patriarchal, and neoliberal foundations. However, new discourses which could counteract or challenge these hegemonic framings of climate change-induced migration are conspicuously absent in *The Ice People*. Instead, the archaic foundations of the discourses alluded to in the text are questioned through satire, and via Saul's hyperbolic self-representation and perspective on the social and environmental issues at stake. This satirical approach exposes the novel's deconstruction of the binaries and hierarchies on which *The Ice People's* contemporary society relies in order to function. Gee articulates the fundamental instability of the dichotomous categories of insider/outsider, explorer/migrant, civilised/native, man/woman, and human/nonhuman, using Saul's fallible narration as an individual representation of how wider, more nebulous discourses can transcend the political sphere and affect self-perception and personal choice, reinforcing and propagating neoliberal individualism.

In *Parable of the Sower*, Butler foregrounds the negative consequences of neoliberal governmentality from the perspective of the migrant in transit. The novel exposes the potential for multiple discourses of neoliberalism — primarily the implicit racialisation of the climate change migrant — to lay the foundations for the legalisation of slavery, for corporate

monopoly of natural resources, and mass displacement of whole communities. In addition to these focal issues, Butler foregrounds a resistance to these discourses, presciently identifying the danger in communities placing cultural capital on false ideas of stasis and stability, through Lauren's perspective as a young woman of colour, and a community leader. As Serpil Oppermann has stated recently in her article 'Introducing Migrant Ecologies in an (Un)Bordered World', it is necessary to:

formulate a new understanding of stability in the face of worldly ambiguities that may, however, require adopting a seemingly contradictory stance, in which migrations are unmasked for this stability even if tensions and risks may frustrate critical attempts to systematize such a vision.¹⁴⁶

I propose that just such a new understanding of stability is latent within *Parable of the Sower*. Lauren rejects her elders' attempts to achieve stability and security through reliance on the borders of her gated community, because in the enclosed towns of her contemporary California, a patriarchal and hierarchical societal structure is maintained through strict control of women's movements and a compliance with the neoliberal systems of power. Instead, Lauren and her Earthseed community achieve an equilibrium — if a vulnerable one — through reliance on the concept of change as the only stabilising actor within their society. Through recognising and accepting the culturally and racially heterogeneous community held together by Lauren's religion, Butler demonstrates an emergent climate change-induced migration discourse of adaptability. As Claire Colebrook states, 'it is from movement and migration that relative stabilities are formed',¹⁴⁷ and *Parable of the Sower* offers, through its emphasis on constant movement and change, a form of recovery from the potential trauma of migration in climate-changing and socially fragmented contexts. As Tsing suggests, the recognition of the precarity of our contemporary world order resists the capitalist narrative of constant progress and growth.¹⁴⁸ Ultimately, this allows for new types of relational and reciprocal community-building that refute the 'unselfconscious privilege' — or in other words, the individualism — which imagines that humans survive alone.¹⁴⁹

As Greta Gaard has pointed out, harnessing different strands of contemporary ecocritical thought is necessary 'to illuminate the strengths and shortcomings of literary

¹⁴⁶ Serpil Oppermann, 'Introducing Migrant Ecologies in an (Un)Bordered World', *ISLE*, 24 (2017), 243–56 (p. 254).

¹⁴⁷ Colebrook, 'Transcendental Migration', p. 117.

¹⁴⁸ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, p. 20.

¹⁴⁹ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, p. 29.

narratives that present the problem of climate change from a (masculinist) technological-scientific perspective'.¹⁵⁰ In this chapter I have therefore integrated trans-disciplinary critical approaches from across the Environmental Humanities with both textual criticism and a feminist ecocritical approach. Rather than only critically appraising narratives that frame climate change as a problem to be solved by a masculinist, technological-scientific perspective, however, texts such as *The Ice People* and *Parable of the Sower* allow literary criticism to operate in a radically different way. Instead, these novels present masculinist and techno-scientific perspectives as the central problem in climate-changing scenarios. Through critically examining novels such as these, it is possible to identify a multitude of alternative discourses that both actively work against these perspectives and framings, and offer satirical deconstructions of them. This chapter has therefore paid close attention to the capitalist exploitation of resources (which leads, in both novels, to drastic anthropogenic climate change) and the subsequent imperative to perpetuate oppressive discourses in order to maintain positions of power and privilege for the elites in society. A feminist ecocritical directive encourages recognition of the intricacies of hegemonic masculinist, individualist and neoliberal discourses on climate change and migration in *The Ice People*, as well as of the emergent discourses of resistance in *Parable of the Sower*. Consequently, this approach allows me to outline and emphasise the importance of a diversity of narratives which confront the pervasive and damaging discourses on migration, such as implicit racialisation or erasure, which have the potential to be exacerbated by climate change and the threats it poses to those in positions of power and privilege.

¹⁵⁰ Greta Gaard, 'From Cli-fi to Critical Ecofeminism', pp. 169–70.

Conclusion

The last two novels in this thesis, *The Ice People* and *Parable of the Sower*, bring us close to our present moment. Both of these novels imagine life on Earth in the 2020s, speculating on the possible runaway effects of climate change, but they originate from the 1980s and 1990s: decades in which climate change was less of a pressing concern for the general public. Although the establishment of the UNFCCC in 1992 recognised global warming as a potentially harmful process, many of the hegemonic discourses surrounding climate change had not yet made their way into public discussion, and were yet to be consolidated by the mass media and instant communication that accompanied the rise of the Internet. With remarkable prescience, these novels imagined a future in which previously wealthy Western societies had broken down almost entirely, through a movement towards populist and neoliberal politics, and an intensification of environmentally exploitative practices. As we rapidly approach the decade depicted in these two novels, our current moment fulfils many of the scenarios that they have imagined. In the US, an openly racist and misogynist climate denier, Donald Trump, holds the Presidency. His administration has effectively dismantled the Environmental Protection Agency, has made concessions for the fossil fuel industry, and provided tax cuts for the super-rich. The UK — which is on the brink of severing itself from the European Union, a process depicted in *The Ice People* — has appointed a new Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, whose views (as demonstrated in the previous chapter) are similarly aligned to the implicitly racist and neoliberal attitudes of the governments in both of these texts. Both of these men subscribe to, and reproduce, the problematic discourses critiqued over the course of this thesis, frequently displaying the overt misogyny, white supremacy, and anthropocentrism that underpins them. At this point in history, a feminist ecocriticism that challenges the foundations of hegemonic climate discourses is essential. The injustices of climate change — human and nonhuman — are not simply side-effects of the wider process of global warming. Instead, they are central to how public discourses and policies surrounding climate change are constructed and deployed: they shape our very understandings of how we come into contact with climate change, at an individual level as well as a societal one. Most significantly, these discourses translate into ‘language-in-action’: how we engage with and respond to issues of climate change in our daily lives. The internalisation and reproduction of hegemonic discourses, as our current political climate only serves to demonstrate, can have devastating consequences.

The feminist ecocritical approach I take in this thesis stays with the troubling ideologies that feed into, and are disseminated by, hegemonic climate discourses. This methodology has also revealed the ways these texts are alert to the power dynamics that

uphold these ideologies, and the ways in which they can be challenged. The novels I have discussed resist the familiar and popular narratives of climate breakdown, and address the social and environmental complexities embedded within climate change discourse. Instead, each text reveals something new about the ways climate change is (or has been) narrated across the last few decades. As the rhetorical techniques and ideologies that shape climate discourses are exposed in these novels, we can discern the ways that hegemonic discourses might obscure the more complex implications of climate change that lie beneath their outwardly stated concerns and goals. Similarly, a feminist ecocritical approach identifies these authors' discourses of resistance — such as the 'all times' temporality of *Carpentaria* or the new migration narrative offered by Butler in *Parable of the Sower* — which counteract hegemonic discourses of climate change. It also examines the roots of this resistance, and the cultural differences or creative agencies that form new understandings of the climate crisis. As my analysis has shown, this can occur through formal innovation, resistance against established literary traditions, and satire of the enduring legacies of Western colonialism and patriarchy. Most significantly, these new discourses are formed through epistemologies that view spatiality, temporality and migration as different human (and nonhuman) experiences to the popular narratives offered in Western media and popular culture.

An attention to the roots of contemporary climate discourses, and a challenging of the ideologies that sustain them, is necessary to counteract the exacerbation of social and environmental injustices. The current political trends across Europe and the US demonstrate that this kind of work is more urgent than ever. Equally important is the feminist impetus to interrogate current academic buzzwords — such as the Anthropocene — in order to examine their potential associations with cultural and intellectual exclusivity. The wealth of different critical dimensions from across the Environmental Humanities that I have incorporated into this thesis has helped to shape my conclusion that diversity — in approaching texts, authors, and scholarly work — is vital in deconstructing hegemonic discursive positions on climate change. It is especially important to encourage understandings of climate change that originate from outside a Western, and exclusively scientific, framework. It is imperative to recognise, particularly within studies of literature and climate change, that Western marginalisation of intellectual and cultural diversity harks back to the colonial and imperial ideologies that helped to set climate change in motion. The texts in this thesis resist this marginalisation, and exemplify the heterogeneity of different ecological, social and political worldviews that allocate meaning to climate change as a set of inter-related processes. In representing the diversity of experiences of climate change, these novels expose the fallacy of attempting to apply a singular discursive and comprehensive framework to climate change and

its effects, and instead recognise and attest to the multiple forms of nonhuman and human vulnerability that is engendered by the runaway consequences of anthropogenic climate change.

This recognition of human fallibility and vulnerability operates counter to the narratives of human agency, power and hegemony that dominate much contemporary discourse surrounding climate change. Rather than attempting to speak from a space outside the human, these authors refocus human experience as a part of a shifting and permanently transitory state of the planet. Claire Colebrook writes that, rather than seeing climate change as a major destabilising phenomenon of our contemporary time, and as something that represents the loss of human control over its own attempts to shape nature, 'it would be more accurate to see the production of "nature" and "climate" *and* the epoch of stability as violent interruptions of a life that is migratory and in constant search of refuge'.¹ This is a provocative claim: there is no doubt that, for many people across the globe, life is being (and will be) altered unequivocally by climate change. In many cases, new and devastating effects of climate change will come as a disruption to long-established cultural and historical relationships with the environment. However, Colebrook's argument is valuable in its suggestion that, in climate-changing times, the idea of an ahistorical global stability — which carries with it associations of supposedly developed civilisations maintaining a world order — must be challenged. If the West in particular must adapt and change its behaviours in order to live ethically, discourse on climate change cannot sustain the idea that there is a previous, stable time-space to which we can return. It is paramount that we acknowledge human and nonhuman vulnerability to the effects of climate change, and recognise that the idea of returning to a nostalgic and stable past is a myth. Each of these novels, then, represents an understanding that a quest for supremacy over 'nature' — as represented in a range of discourses discussed in this thesis, such as the colonial and spatialities of *Gold Fame Citrus* and *The Swan Book* — produces and exacerbates human and nonhuman vulnerability to climate and environmental change. Each text I analyse exposes and dismantles this supremacy and its basis in anthropocentrism, patriarchy, and capitalism, and reveals the fundamental inconsistencies and instabilities within these hegemonic systems. Rather than illustrating speculative scenarios in which a stable and equitable world is disrupted by the onset of climate change, the novels depict worlds that are already fraught with the ingrained inequalities and injustices of broken political and economic structures that precede drastic climate changes.

¹ Colebrook, 'Transcendental Migration', p. 116, original emphasis.

These conclusions provoke a set of further questions surrounding climate change and literature, which could act as a starting point for future developments of the research conducted in this thesis. Critical work on climate fiction, ecocriticism, and the environment in literature has — as I note in the introduction to this thesis — become a large and wide-ranging field of scholarship. However, as I have detailed elsewhere, the creation of the climate fiction canon — reinforced by publishing houses and critical attention alike — maintains a focus on western-authored texts that can become exclusionary and self-perpetuating. An unequivocal and sustained concern with the racial and gendered politics of climate discourse is unusual, particularly in book-length critical works. As I have discussed above, this approach is now more crucial than ever: as new hegemonic discourses are constructed and disseminated within our current political climate, a focus on social and environmental justice issues remains paramount. This thesis begins to redress these less-populated areas of study, and upholds the significance of these power dynamics in analysing climate discourse in literature. However, there are additional avenues of research to pursue. If women's fiction can offer a set of vantage points from which the hegemony of Western and patriarchal discourses on climate change are seen to suppress alternative perspectives and create a singular narrative of climate breakdown, can further groupings of texts and authors can be made in order to render more perspectives accessible? The English language itself, as a method of communicating narrative, could be viewed as limiting: other cultural and linguistic traditions produce knowledge and discourse about climate change that transcends the European literary and scientific traditions entirely. Although texts like *Carpentaria* and *The Swan Book* originate from narrative conventions that defy and exceed the Euro-American literary establishment, what forms, styles and practices do texts that are not mediated by the English language employ, and to what effect? Can — or should — these texts assist in debunking the clichés and limiting narrative tropes that reformulate regressive understandings of climate change? What are the limits of English-language focused literary criticism when faced with the global phenomenon of climate change?

The work performed throughout this thesis, particularly in the final chapter, also lays the foundations for more extensive research into the phenomenon of whiteness across a wider range of climate change literature. Throughout this thesis, I have challenged and interrogated different facets of social privilege (such as whiteness, hegemonic masculinity, and social class) and investigated how these privileges operate in structures of climate discourse. However, whiteness, in particular, is often under-examined and under-acknowledged. Scholars such as Sara Ahmed have theorised whiteness in terms of phenomenology, attesting that it is 'lived as a background to experience', and operates as an 'ongoing and unfinished history,

which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they “take up” space’.² My final chapter discusses Baldwin’s notion of white affect, via its capacity to racialize climate discourse on migration. Further work could be performed here in terms of investigating how whiteness, as an invisible privilege,³ operates in literary representations of climate change. If, as Ahmed suggests, scholarship that articulates ‘happy stories of diversity’ is encouraged in order to perform the appearance of altruism in academic (and other) institutions, the ‘unhappy stories of racism’ can remain marginalised and obscured.⁴ As well as working against these structures, and amplifying marginalised voices in the context of scholarship within the environmental humanities, adequate attention needs to be paid to the frequently invisible ways in which whiteness operates in relation to climate change. The intersections of privilege and oppression in climate change discourses require further deconstruction in scholarly work on climate change and literature, along different junctures that include gender, social class, race, and anthropocentrism. Performing this kind of analysis can also be strengthened by a feminist ecocritical methodology, similar to the one I have employed throughout this thesis. An approach that takes into consideration the overlaps and conflicts within academic, political and public discussions on climate change is necessary to expose the contradictions and biases in these conversations.

This thesis advocates for a sustained ecocritical attention to literary texts that fall outside the typical categorisations of climate fiction, and implement innovative formal and stylistic techniques in their narratives of climate change. Crucially, I also argue for a continued critical return to the dynamics of power within discourses of climate change in contemporary fiction. This must include a focus on texts that narrate not the exceptionality and heroism of the human, but the complexities of human vulnerability and culpability in the context of climate change, and its multitudinous consequences for life on Earth. Only through a concentrated analysis of diverse narratives of climate change, which takes into account social, political, and environmental histories as well as speculative futures, can literary criticism make an informed and globally relevant contribution to the production of cultural knowledge on climate change, narrative and discourse.

² Sara Ahmed, ‘A Phenomenology of Whiteness’, *Feminist Theory*, 8 (2007), 149–68 (p. 150).

³ Ahmed, p. 149.

⁴ Ahmed, p. 164.

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