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## Eco-Traffic: Globalization, Materiality, and Subalternity in Asia-Pacific Literature

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/17490127>

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ECO-TRAFFIC: GLOBALIZATION, MATERIALITY, AND SUBALTERNITY IN ASIA-  
PACIFIC LITERATURE

by

DAVID ST. JOHN

Under the Direction of Randy Malamud, PhD and Jay Rajiva, PhD

ABSTRACT

This project implicates globalization – the spreading of capital, neoliberalism, and Western totalitarianism – as a primary contributor to the continuing subalternity of colonized cultures and environments in the Global South. Under the guise of shrinking the world or spreading freedom, globalization has resulted in profound material consequences to biomes attempting political decolonization. Where postcolonial theory demands that attention be paid to anthropological difference, be it social, political, economic, or gendered, some ecocritical scholars of the Anthropocene wish to decenter the human from an era in which they – as a species – have emerged as a hazardous geologic force. This project offers “traffic” as a literal and metaphorical framework for the meshing of human subalternity within the material biomes of the Asia-Pacific region, as captured in literature. Examining texts from India, Sri Lanka,

Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States reveals multiple traffics within globalization that intertwine the subaltern subject within their environs: the mapping and zoning of cities, the congestion of foreign-made automobiles and persons within cities, and the historical and current trade of illegal narcotics and humans. The dissertation actively contributes to a developing subset of ecocriticism that recognizes the subaltern in the intra-action of environmental entities, showing that each animal, plant, object and person has its own vibrancy, its own directionality, which leads to congestion and accidents, but often to new pathways.

INDEX WORDS: Postcolonial literature, Ecocriticism, Subaltern studies, Literary studies,  
Globalization, New Materialism

ECO-TRAFFIC: GLOBALIZATION, MATERIALITY, AND SUBALTERNITY IN ASIA-  
PACIFIC LITERATURE

by

DAVID ST. JOHN

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2020

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ECO-TRAFFIC: GLOBALIZATION, MATERIALITY, AND SUBALTERNITY IN ASIA-  
PACIFIC LITERATURE

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May 2020

## DEDICATION

This dissertation simply would not have been possible without the emotional and financial support of my sister and her husband. I have been privileged throughout my life with a loving family and I could not be more thankful for her emotional and physical labor over the five years of my PhD program. Thanks, Becky and Sloan.

In addition to family, I must thank the following friends for their inspiration and enduring support: Sharon Bandy, Morgan Capps, Tia Capps, Jill Clark, Halley Corapi, Samantha and Brad Eaton, Kelsy Holliday-Schiavon, Lorin Jones, Ethan Key, Alexie McPherson, and Donnie Sackey.

The dissertation is dedicated to the memory of the environmental activist Chut Wutty.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My research and writing have been drastically enriched and improved thanks to a Dissertation Travel grant from the Georgia State University library, which allowed me to travel to Hong Kong in the summer of 2019 and conduct a week of primary research at the University of Hong Kong and the Po Leung Kuk museum. I am thankful to the scholars and writers I met there.

The Department of English at Georgia State University has proven to be a vital catalyst for my intellectual growth. I am most thankful to the members of my dissertation committee, Randy Malamud, Jay Rajiva, and Renee Schatteman, who have shown enthusiasm for the project from the beginning and have kept it “on track” with constructive criticism. I must also give a special acknowledgement to Audrey Goodman, who suggested I submit a paper I had written in her U.S. - Mexico Border Literature course to a Western Literature Association-sponsored panel at ASLE 2017, kick-starting an intellectual deep dive into the intricacies of ecocriticism. Lynèe Gaillet, Mary Hocks, Chris Kocela, Marilynn Richtarik, Paul Schmidt, and Malinda Snow have all become trusted partners and critics.

In addition to the faculty, I am thankful to my comrades in the graduate program of English, who have all blessed me with their friendship and their astonishing breadth of knowledge: Christine Anlicker, Roger Austin, Joanmarie Bañez, Emma Baughman, Nora, Bonner, Brittney Byrom, Stephanie Graves, Meagan Malone, Jenn Olive, Brianny Paulino, Joshua Privett, Jessica Rose, and Jay Shelat.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION: SHIFTING LANES BETWEEN GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTS AND COLONIAL POLITICS.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: AT THE INTERSECTION OF (AUTO)POIESIS AND (AUTO)MOBILITY: LOCATING THE SUBALTERN HUMAN WITHIN THE AUTOMOTIVE ECOLOGIES OF <i>THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS</i>.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: ONE CHINA, COUNTLESS BEINGS: THE TRAFFICKED CITIES OF HONG KONG AND TAIPEI IN <i>ATLAS</i> AND <i>THE OLD CAPITAL</i> .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: HYDRO-COLONIAL DISASTER: ASIAN-AMERICAN LITERARY TRAFFIC.....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: DERANGED AND DEVOURED: AMITAV GHOSH'S PLUNDERED ANTHROPOCENE .....</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>CONCLUSION: YOU HAVE ARRIVED AT YOUR DESTINATION.....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>178</b>

## INTRODUCTION: SHIFTING LANES BETWEEN GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTS AND COLONIAL POLITICS

In our need for more and more rapid replacement of the worldly things around us, we can no longer afford to use them, to respect and preserve their inherent durability; we must consume, devour, as it were, our houses and furniture and cars as though they were the ‘good things’ of nature which spoil uselessly if they are not drawn swiftly into the never-ending cycle of man’s metabolism with nature.

Hannah Arendt, from *The Human Condition* (125-26)

I shall seek to demonstrate here that *world literature has functioned from the very beginning as a border regime*, a system for the regulation of movement, rather than as a set of literary relations beyond or without borders. Put somewhat differently, we might say that the cultural sphere now generally identified as world literature, far from being a seamless and traversable space, has in fact been from the beginning a regime of *enforced* mobility and therefore of *immobility* as well.

Aamir Mufti, from *Forget English!* (author’s emphasis 9)

This dissertation is about how literature engages with ongoing socio-political and environmental issues in the Asia-Pacific region. My geographic scope encompasses former British colonies like India, where past and current crises in caste inequality are interlinked with concerns over industrial development, as well as regions like Hong Kong and Taiwan, where cultural unrest over national disenfranchisement and sovereignty rises alongside the material devastation of local environments. Writers from these places consistently, though in fashions different and unique from one another, link subalternity with resource extraction and environmental justice. In this way, the ongoing climate crisis facing humanity can be understood as a series of infractions enacted upon particular communities by agents of global capitalism. My approach examines novels, poems, and visual art from the Asia-Pacific region that position the relationship between culture and place as a kind of “traffic” between the global capital and the local ecosystems of marginalized communities that systematically flows, speeding up and slowing down, stalling, shifting, subverting the limits and boundaries of culture and nation, while

transporting the wills and attentions of human and more-than-human lifeforms. I hope to restore some critical agency to the human casualties of global capital while still allowing for materialist, relational, models of environments. Within the context of the Anthropocene, my focus on traffic provides a unique model for scholars seeking to address relationships between the global climate crisis and uneven economic development without falling into traps of overdetermined thinking or reification.

Such an approach, in part, asks literary and cultural scholars to critically interact with signifiers of geographic and class mobility. Consider the bicycle: at the most rudimentary level, the bicycle represents personal mobility, regional transport, and traffic between pedestrians and other cyclists. It is also a simple mechanical system of wheels, frames, spokes, levers, and seats. Vehicles are themselves autonomous systems of parts within larger networks of traffic patterns, pedestrians, roads, buildings, lights, signs, natural land features and non-human animals. And again, these traffic systems are part of a still larger international system of political traffic, in which questions of personal identity and national culture conflict. This layered, multidirectional application of traffic occupies much of the work of Chinese visual artist and documentary filmmaker Ai Weiwei. In April of 2011, Weiwei was removed from a Beijing to Hong Kong flight, imprisoned for 81 days, and had his passport stripped from him for vocalizing dissent towards governmental practices. This wrongful arrest led Taipei's Fine Arts Museum to hold an exhibit for him, entitled "Absent" (Willis 82). Highlighting the artist's non-presence, the exhibit displayed work emblematic of Weiwei's political critiques of government control and beautiful depictions of urban environments. The centerpiece, "Forever Bicycles," was an immersive sculpture consisting of more than 1,000 bicycles suspended and affixed in such a way that

viewers are optically drawn in and bodily enmeshed within a structure of spokes, wheels, and frames (“Ai Weiwei”).

In “Forever Bicycles,” the bicycle provides a visual cue for understanding the importance of humans in systems of local and international traffic, and how larger socio-political systems, in this case the prohibitions against dissent in communist China, can result in the exclusion of individuals from such systems. Weiwei’s piece is pleasing not only for the optical effect of thousands of circles layered together in three-dimensional space, but also for how its structure urges onlookers to consider both the ubiquitous presence of the bicycle and the notable absence of its riders. Weiwei stages the bicycles in order for onlookers to enmesh themselves within the exhibit, becoming a focus of the piece, with the wheels and frames drawing attention to their fixed point. “Forever Bicycles” asks its viewers to consider the conjoined histories of bicycles with humans, how the former led to the latter having greater mobility and fluidity within their environment.

A more recent example of Weiwei’s engagement with the global traffic between environments and politics is his 2017 documentary *Human Flow*. Weiwei blends typical documentary filmmaking with an art gallery aesthetic, sometimes eschewing interviews for simple direct shots of refugees, in both staged and natural environments. The film follows the displacement and diaspora of refugees from areas across the globe: from Iraqis and Afghans forced to migrate due to the U.S.’s military incursions to Rohingya peoples fleeing ethnic cleansing in Myanmar to Bangladesh, itself a country facing both political and climatic unrest. While Weiwei focuses on the human face of migrants, he also attends to the vehicles and other modes of transport that mobilize them, including rafts, cars, ships, trains, buses, and helicopters, along with bicycles. Nearly every shot of the documentary features a vehicle of some kind, the

exceptions being those that emphasize the arduous act of walking endless kilometers through white deserts, gray highways, and rocky fields in Northern Greece. Weiwei explicitly links the lived environments of people with the mobility of vehicles through his scenes set at Idomeni refugee camp in Greece, a tent city sprouted up alongside the rails of a train station, with people surviving in the hollow shells of abandoned boxcars.

In both “Forever Bicycles” and *Human Flows*, Weiwei mobilizes iconography of traffic – from bicycles to human bodies themselves – to illustrate how political unrest is carefully and critically intertwined with lived environments in the Anthropocene. Originally introduced by anthropologists Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer to convey the far-reaching geologic effects of human activity, environmentalists and ecocritics like Jeremy Davis have since disputed the term’s accuracy. Accepting the reality of the Anthropocene, according to Davis, is not synonymous with affirming human superiority over non-humans or suggesting the current moment displays humans as a uniform, equitable whole. Rather, Davies believes living in the Anthropocene is to see the accelerated and unprecedented damage inflicted by humans within “a web of relationships between human beings, non-human animals, plants, metals, and so on” (7). Through the development of steam engines, automobiles, aerospace engineering, air conditioning, oil extraction, and other forms of technology that prolong human life at the cost of natural resources, humans have contributed to the rise of harmful elements in the environment. The “Great Acceleration” of the Anthropocene – a time of unfettered human progression that has greatly increased the pace of environmental degradation – is a time of traffic, when humans expanded their carbon usage alongside their mobility.

Within this contemporary understanding of the Anthropocentric age, Weiwei’s artwork is one of many texts from the Asia-Pacific region that argue for a trafficked relationship between

the human individual, their environment, and oppressive political systems. My purposes throughout this project are to explain the material and critical benefits of analyzing traffic in the Asia-Pacific region and to counteract human erasure in material ecocritical theory. Chief among my foundational assumptions is the belief that analyzing persons and places as being merely in relationship with one another is inadequate in the face of global capital. To be subaltern, or a refugee, or a member of an otherwise disenfranchised community is to find one's connection with place severed in such a way that agency within a series of relations is stripped. These individuals not only navigate their immediate environments but also carry with them their colonized or eradicated homelands. While humans and ideologies "flow," they also slide, halt, careen, and crash. Through detailed analyses of literature that relate humans to their environments through the lens of traffic, I generate new and productive readings of novels, poetry, art and other writings from India, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan.

By focusing on the singular concept "traffic," I partly emulate the work performed by the contributors and editors of *Veer Ecology*, a 2018 anthology that sought to expand the range of thinking about the environment in literature through proposing new verbs for productive, "outside the box" approaches. In the anthology, editor Jeffrey Jerome Cohen employs the word "drown" to play with the biblical story of Noah and the Epic of Gilgamesh, ultimately concluding that these mythical frameworks have ill-prepared people to envision immanent ecocatastrophe. Meanwhile, Catriona Sandilands mobilizes the verb "vegetate" to re-think the traditional divisions between animal, vegetable, and mineral, arguing that animals are vegetal "in the realms of nutrition, grown and decay: in other words, in our growing, eating, thirsting, reproducing, senescing, decaying and composting bodies" (21). Like these scholars, I believe that discourses of ecocriticism, the Anthropocene, and global capitalism can be enhanced

through an etymological dive into traffic, both in its verbal and noun forms. In extrapolating this terminology through a book-length manuscript, my scope extends beyond the articles in *Veer Ecology* towards developing a more comprehensive model of traffic-focused ecocriticism.

My critical methodology is indebted to, yet differs from, two closely related scholarly fields: postcolonial ecocriticism and globalization studies. Both are critical offshoots of postcolonial theory and environmental literary criticism, methodologies that have undergone mutations and evolutions since their development in the latter half of the twentieth century. In order to properly explain how this study examines traffic as a means of resuscitating the human subject in the midst of global capitalist hegemony, I first need to trace how these two fields developed through debates over the subaltern subject. This introduction begins by examining the development of postcolonial theory and ecocriticism through readings of a select scenes from Salman Rushdie's novel, *Midnight's Children* – a canonical text in postcolonial literature that also conveys its colonial critique through a trafficked voice that bridges person, place, and history. Following this, I narrow my focus to a discussion of how traffic operates in discussions of globalization and the Anthropocene, before concluding the introduction with summaries of the following chapters.

## POSTCOLONIAL BICYCLES: A TOUR OF THE THEORY

Salman Rushdie's "Best of the Booker"-winning novel *Midnight's Children* documents, through a magical reimagining of history, the cessation of British Imperialism in India and its partitioning into India and Pakistan. Scholars have praised Rushdie for a kinetic contextualization of national and cultural history through the human body. Rushdie's style, which jumps through time and space with meta-textually interjected colonial commentary, has

also been lauded as presenting a wholly unique voice, capable of expressing the thoughts, desires, and experiences of those who suffered under both imperialism and partition. Through the voice and the body of his protagonist and narrator, Saleem Sinai, Rushdie illustrates how national identity is both pluralistic and fragmented. The voices of India's children telepathically occupy Saleem's mind, even as his body itself gradually breaks apart, reflecting the violence of partition and the tumult of Indira Gandhi's leadership.

Throughout the novel, both Saleem's age and his bodily features productively interact with the real history of India so that he is more than merely a reflection of history: he is an actual arbiter of change. Rushdie intersperses Saleem's narrative with commentary on Indian historiography. In one passage, Rushdie explains how language itself became fragmented and regionalized:

India had been divided anew, into fourteen states and six centrally-administered 'territories.' But the boundaries of these states were not formed by rivers, or mountains, or any natural features of the terrain; they were, instead, walls of words. Language divided us: Kerala was for speakers of Malayalam, the only palindromically-named tongue on earth; in Karnataka you were supposed to speak Kanarese; and the amputated state of Madras – known today as Tamil Nadu – enclosed the *aficionados* of Tamil. (216)

Rushdie quickly provides a fairly comprehensive account of the division of India into states and territories in 1955. At the same time, he juxtaposes such commentary with a narrative that takes place during actual events from that time period. Saleem witnesses a “parade so long it took two days to pass ... a demonstration so immense, so intense in its passions, that it made all previous marches vanish from the mind as if they had never occurred” (217). This is the parade of the

Samyukta Maharashtra Samitri, an organization demanding separation from the state of Bombay. Rushdie charts a path for literature to not only represent history, but to participate actively in it through the actions of his characters, who move through the streets of Bombay through traffic systems that are themselves colonial.

For Saleem Sinai, bicycles are more than modes of transport – they are signifiers of power and objects of desire. At the time of the Samyukta Maharashtra Samitri march, young Saleem has an infatuation with Evie Burns, an American tomboy with a penchant for riding the bicycle and for exploiting Saleem’s affections. Saleem’s association of Evie with a bicycle is such that he admits that it was “impossible to picture Evie Burns without also conjuring up a bicycle” (208). More than merely characterizing her sporty behavior, Evie’s skill on a bicycle distances her from local gendered norms and paints her as an agent of Western dominance. Rushdie explains that Evie’s “conquest of suffering confirmed her sovereignty over us all” and that “gravity was her slave” (208-09). In this situation, where Saleem’s affection for Evie, a white American girl, manifests itself through the metaphorical vehicle of the bicycle, Rushdie portrays a relationship laden with social, racial, and political complexities.

Thus, Rushdie’s representation of the bicycle is “postcolonial.” What is commonly referred to as “postcolonial theory” by literary scholars springs from structuralist and post-structuralist thoughts about language and discourses related to colonial impacts on nation and subject. To put it even more simply, the field analyzes the psychoanalytical, socio-cultural, financial, sexual, and, indeed, environmental impacts of the spreading of one dominant power upon a dominated power. In this way, the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory derives from deconstructionist practices that question fixed notions of identity, agency, race, and power in light of colonial hegemony and imperialist violence. Postcolonial authors and theorists resist

the continued dominance of Western ideology and examine literatures throughout these colonial regions for how they interrogate power. In this there is a great amount of variation in critical approaches: some writers focus on region, others genre; some lean towards one end or the other of a psychoanalytic/material spectrum.

The field has faced criticism over the “post” in its name, which seemingly indicates the denouement of colonialism or its cessation. What is important to remember, however, is that colonial violence is both material *and* ideological, affecting the bodies and ecosystems of territories while also destabilizing the minds, identities and financial systems of these areas. For scholars operating in this theoretical field, colonialism is not concerned only in the immediate activity of imposed sovereignty but also with its ideological and material effects. In the words of Ania Loomba, “modern colonialism did more than extract tribute, goods, and wealth from the countries that it conquered – it restructured the economies of the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonized and colonial countries” (21). This re-structuring ensures that the newly independent nation engaged in the process of decolonizing must remain somewhat dependent upon the colonial apparatus. Colonial hegemony is perpetuated by new, locally-elected or appointed government officials, resulting in continued power inequalities. Because there is no “after” to colonialism, scholars like Walter D. Mignolo have preferred *decolonial* scholarship, focusing on the persistence of precolonial traditions throughout and after the interruption of Western ideologies. Still other scholars have taken up aggressive *anticolonial* readings of texts that aggressively confront what Franz Fanon terms a “Manichaean compartmentalization” of the colonial subject as a lesser being. Fanon, an Algerian activist and psychoanalytical theorist,

argues that the “colonized world is a compartmentalized world” (3) characterized by systems of power and binary moral dualisms.

I agree with these scholars in understanding colonialism as a global pestilence with no fixed beginning or end that enacts material violence upon ecosystems and psychological warfare on colonial subjects. All of these various theoretical approaches enable scholars to interrogate the violence of settler-colonialism, the displacement of Indigenous and tribal peoples, the enslavement of local peoples by foreign invaders, the genocidal decimation of those individuals and communities, and the psychological warfare of mastery. More than this, theorists also critique how power inequalities function as a form of financial control, actions that comprise a form of non-local occupation. Other theorists focus on neocolonialism – what Loomba describes as when “the economic (and social) relations of dependency and control ensure both captive labour as well as markets for European industry as well as goods” (27).

While the origins of postcolonial theory are multi-faceted and beyond the scope of this introduction, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* lays the foundation for a critical methodology that examines the particular manner in which postcolonial thought can interact with environmental degradation. Said explains how Western institutions controlled and disseminated knowledge of the “near East” through the academic field of “Orientalism.” This process was itself an act of colonial power: studying, researching, and formulating the lived experiences of non-western subjects into an academic field of study. The violence of Orientalism is masking the reducing, flattening, and fixing of cultures, peoples, and traditions under the guise of knowledge and inquisition. In attempts to “know” these cultures, orientalist scholars further “other” these peoples and perpetuate compartmentalization. In this way, colonizers exert power over other nations, regions, and races without having to physically travel. Orientalism, according to Said,

turns the East into a stage affixed to the West in which histories and traditions are known only in terms of their relation to the West. Thus, Said importantly illustrates how colonialism is both material and epistemic, affecting not only the lived environments of colonial subjects but also how the colonizers and colonized conceive of themselves and their cultures.

Though Said devotes much of *Orientalism* to the logic of colonizers and Western scholars applied to a broadly construed “East,” other critics have followed Said’s approach to attend to the muted or silenced voices of the colonized. The historian Dipesh Chakrabarty relies on Said’s description of colonization as a discourse between communities and individuals with inequitable levels of power to describe what he calls the dominant master narrative of Europe, history, and academia. His work seeks to unearth and amplify the voices of the “subaltern” subject. Originally a militaristic term denoting a subordinate officer, the term now can refer to any colonized subject or, within the context of Indian history, to the difference between the elite and the non-elite (Loomba 194). As another sub-discipline within postcolonial theory, subaltern studies examines the voices and writings of authors who are both socially and politically outside colonial power structures and interpellated within them.

Gayatri Spivak explains the difficulty in locating the subaltern voice without mistranslating or ventriloquizing it into the dominant language of the colonizer. Because the West has a stranglehold on literature, political discourse, and academic standards, the subaltern must adopt these voices in order to be heard. Spivak has presented this conflict through the figures of the “native informant” and the “reformed colonial subject,” that uses the language of the colonizers in order to dismantle hegemony. Spivak argues that the nation-state undermines and boxes in discourses that are invested in local mythology and non-western civilization. Like Said, Spivak has also criticized the practices of linguistic and economic “worlding,” wherein

studies of “Third World” nations results in a “culturalist dominant that seems altogether bent to foster the consideration of the old Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact literary heritage waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in English /French/German/Dutch translation” (114). Whether or not the subaltern can speak is not only a question of material oppression and physical silencing, but also a crisis of hegemonic knowledge and cultural indoctrination.

Thus, ideology limits the subaltern’s ability to speak and express their identities within discourses controlled by hegemonic powers and other colonial subjects. Homi Bhabha considers this difference in terms of mimicry, a metaphorical construct that describes the adaption of the colonized subject or culture in mirroring their oppressors’ actions and culture. Mimicry occurs through linguistic evolutions, the adoption of religious beliefs, new dietary habits, and “common-sense” interactions with local environments and agricultural methods. While often a strategic necessity for the colonized, mimicry is also always beneficial for the colonizer, a “double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what [he has] described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object” (123). This double-bind results in repeated misrecognitions, highlighting the otherness of the other party, even in mimicry. The “almost, but not quite” quality of mimicry is also evident in Bhabha’s explanations of hybridity, which discusses the mixing and blending of cultures in colonial and decolonial locations. For Bhabha, to be hybrid is to break down cultural binaries, insisting on a plurality of identities, with even oppositional identities being hybrid themselves. However, to be hybrid is also to be shut out of a history and a tradition separate from colonial interruption.

Spivak, Bhabha, and Said's work is germane to the relationship between Saleem and Evie Burns in *Midnight's Children*. Absent any theoretical grounding, Rushdie's scenes with Evie possess a type of precocious charm; reading the passages with orientalism, mimicry, subalternity, and hybridity in mind demonstrate the psychoanalytic consequences of hegemony. This is evident if we study Evie on her bicycle in more detail:

... gravity was her slave, speed her element, and we knew that a power had come among us, a witch on wheels, and the flowers of the hedgerows threw her petals, the dust of the circus-ring stood up in clouds of ovation, because the circus-ring had found its mistress, too: it was the canvas beneath the brush of her whirling wheels. (209)

In addition to the already cited reference to "sovereignty," Rushdie employs the words "slave," "mistress," and the metaphorical figurations of stage and canvas to describe the streets of Bombay as a territory for white colonials to master. In an attempt to impress Evie, Saleem collides with his friend Sonny, an event that contributes to the development of Saleem's telepathic power, which allows him to hear the voices of those children born on the evening of India's independence. I argue that the bicycle here, as signifier of not only mobility but Western dominance, is itself a signifier of an instrumentalized subaltern society. Saleem's life is testament to the history of a postcolonial India that nevertheless suffered the impacts of colonialism through its independence.

This reading of history in *Midnight's Children* aligns with what Dipesh Chakrabarty has called the problematization of Indians within a European master narrative. Chakrabarty argues that within the academic discipline of history, Europe "remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian,' 'Chinese,' 'Kenyan,' and so on" (27). The

study of history itself is subordinate to the rule of the West. In regards to Rushdie, Chakrabarty points out that though the novel possesses an intertextuality that is doubled in terms of the West and India, only the Western references are teased out and explained. Though Saleem theoretically gains agency and mobility through the bicycle, it is only for the end goal of impressing an English authority and a desire for praise and recognition. As Chakrabarty concludes, “subaltern histories are therefore constructed within a particular kind of historicized memory, one that remembers history itself as an imperious code that accompanied the civilizing process that the European Enlightenment inaugurated in the eighteenth century as a world-historical task” (93).

Yet, as foundational as Chakrabarty’s scholarship in postcolonial theory and Indian history has been, he has also confessed to being at a loss when it comes to writing about the Anthropocene and environmental degradation. In an article in which he outlined “four theses” for climate change and history, Chakrabarty admitted that his “readings in theories of globalization, Marxist analysis of capital, subaltern studies, and postcolonial criticism over the last twenty-five years have not prepared him for the task of analyzing the planetary crisis of climate change” (2009 199). If Chakrabarty’s knowledge stems from experience in historiography and postcolonial theory, how can he envision the future of the Anthropocene, in which globalization and global warming have both altered the fundamental capacity of the human, elevating them from animal to geologic force? He concludes that theory and history must stretch beyond their initial subject matter to acknowledge both natural and human history, arguing that humans are now more than they were (2009 206).

For Chakrabarty, climate change seems to be both an issue of inequal capitalist development and a species-wide concern. He asks:

does not the talk of species or mankind simply serve to hide the reality of capitalist production and the logic of imperial – formal, informal, or machinic in a Deleuzian sense – domination that it fosters? (2011 216)

At the same time, Chakrabarty acknowledges that:

the current crisis has brought into view certain other conditions for the existence of life in the human form that have no intrinsic connection to the logics of capitalist, nationalist, or socialist identities. They are connected rather to the history of life on this planet, the way different life-forms connect to one another, and the way mass extinction of one species could spell danger for another. (2011 217)

This dilemma is at the crux of numerous debates in the fields of both postcolonial theory and ecocriticism that wrestle with the degree to which the current environmental crisis is a direct result of globalization as an extension of imperialism. Chakrabarty's assertions call for scholars to envision models that allow for slippage between critiques of global capital and defenses of non-human agency. Since the publication of his four theses and his subsequent scholarly sequels, a growing number of environmental scholars have sought to follow his lead in bridging the gap between postcolonial and ecocritical readings of texts. These readings avoid erasure of political and cultural difference when analyzing issues such as global climate change, addressing logics of capital, race, and gender alongside the materiality of lived environments. The following section illustrates where and how Chakrabarty's call situates itself within the evolution of ecocritical discourse, a theoretical field that has itself vacillated between deep engagement with non-human scientific processes and allowing for socio-political inequities.

## ENVIRONMENTAL INTERVENTIONS: ECOCRITICISM AND COLONIALISM

Ecocriticism is a critical discourse that, in the words of Cheryll Glotfelty, “takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature” (xix). Environmental criticism, from the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 to the publication of *Veer Ecology* in 2018, has become an increasingly diverse and intersectional field. In 2019, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, commonly referred to as “ASLE,” held its bi-annual conference on the campus of the University of California in Davis, where the field’s diversity was on full display, representing diverse fields such as ecocriticism, environmental justice, Indigenous environmentalisms, animal studies, vegetarian/vegan studies, and new materialism, to name only a few.<sup>1</sup> On the campus of UC Davis and across the United States, the bicycle is seen as a clean alternative to automotive traffic – a means of transport that is better for both people and the environment.

In literature, bicycles can also be ecocritical signifiers, as evinced again by passages from *Midnight’s Children* that relate both Evie and Saleem to their environments. While Evie performs tricks on her bicycle, causing the “flowers of the hedgerows to throw their petals” (209), she demonstrates mastery over both the infatuated subaltern – Saleem – but also the environment he inhabits: a city she should not be in were it not for imperialism. An ecocritical reading of *Midnight’s Children* – of which there are several already published – might focus on the representations of biological non-human life in the text, or it might conduct an in-depth analysis of Saleem’s nose and the smells of the text, or it might focus on the process of pickling,

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<sup>1</sup> Known for its sustainability and strength in the agricultural sciences, UC Davis is also one of the most bicycle friendly campuses in the United States. Bicycles are a part of the culture of UC Davis, where frames, wheels, and spokes cascade down the walls of buildings and pile up. Like mechanical snowflakes, they adorn the walls of campus dormitories, providing a unique, if arguably kitschy, form of decoration. Like the artwork of Ai Weiwei, the campus uses the bicycle to symbolize the movement of individuals within larger systems. The bicycle is a signifier of UC Davis’s commitment to cultivating a clean and healthy campus for its students, faculty, and visitors as well as the numerous plant and animal species that also reside on campus.

the environmental significance of hydrophobia, or any of a multitude of other readings. The fact is that to read the environment within literature is more complex than to simply analyze pastoral or natural imagery for significance; it is to explore the relationship between text, person, and place.

Ecocriticism's growing plethora of subfields and its popularity as an academic discipline attest to the importance of finding new models that relate to the lives of subaltern individuals. Providing new models is something that Lawrence Buell claims ecocriticism has always done throughout its changes. Though it has been readily adaptable to changing political conditions, Buell argues that "As literary ecodiscourse becomes more widely practiced, more globally networked, more interdisciplinary and thus even more pluriform, the participants must become more increasingly aware of speaking from some position within or around the movement rather than for it" (viii). Even as the "first-wave" of eco-criticism examined representations of the relationship between non-human and non-human interests, early efforts in this field were often characterized as being overtly sycophantic towards figures of American Transcendentalism and British Romanticism. At the same time, early eco-critics by and large were concerned with defending and admiring so-called "nature writers" like Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Wendell Berry. This resulted in charges of widespread patriarchal exclusion and white privilege in the field and prompted divergent evolutions in the field. With the development of subsequent "waves," ecocritical scholars have consistently expanded their foci. As of 2020, ecocriticism is a widely respected methodological lens applied texts regardless of their foregrounded subject matter, and the field itself is comprised of people of multiple races, genders, nationalities and social classes.

Springing from first-wave ecocriticism, “ecofeminism” strives to be more inclusive of critiquing socio-political concerns in discussions of environmental representation. Major players within second-wave ecocriticism, ecofeminists like Charlene Spretnak associated the cultural and political marginalization of women with spiritual kinship and ecological wellness. For these scholars, patriarchal dominance extends over women’s bodies and environmental responsibility alike, damaging global ecosystems. Spretnak writes that “we need to find our way out of the technocratic alienation and nihilism surrounding us by cultivating and honoring our direct connections with nature” (13) but notes also that practitioners must work “to organize around the concrete issues of suffering and exploitation” (14). Ecofeminism represents a major broadening of the study of nature and its representations, allowing writers to simultaneously address issues of sexuality, gender, and identity while also writing the material world.

In addition to ecofeminism, the subfield of postcolonial ecocriticism also shifted the focus of environmental writers towards the semiotic study of socio-political difference. This brand of environmentally focused postcolonialism is seen a necessary corrective to the belief that postcolonial theory had itself become reified. In the words of Ursula Heise, “hybridity, diaspora, and marginality turned into quasi-essentialist categories themselves” (5). Writers like Heise and Graham Huggan must avoid further overdetermining the third-world, painting its people as victims only. The local environments and lived relationships with the land and sea provide means of persistence, resistance and recovery in the wake of colonial interruption. Vandana Shiva documents how colonial science created systems that mass-produced cash crops at the expense of local, existing, biotic life. For postcolonial ecocritics, the environmental issues of colonization do not *reflect* economic or racial exploitation, but are evidence of inequitable power relationships. Colonial apparatus is crucial in creating environmental conditions that maintain

racial and class distinctions. Incorporating postcolonial approaches into ecocriticism is a necessity for scholars, as Huggan argues, “it seems necessary to reaffirm the potential of the environmental imagination to envision alternative worlds, both within and beyond the realm of everyday human experience, which might reinvigorate the continuing global struggle for social and ecological justice” (720).

We can apply ecocritical readings to Rushdie’s novel in ways that support, rather than detract, from earlier postcolonial analyses. These dual threads of postcolonial theory and ecocriticism intersect as Saleem’s bicycle careens through first the mind of Evie Burns and then through the material streets of Bombay in *Midnight’s Children*. Rushdie delves into the literal consciousness of a white American, where Marathi language marches jostle with American pop songs and Evie’s memories hold a bloody knife. This mental incursion prompts Evie to send Saleem’s bike headlong into the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti, “past Bank Box Laundry, past Noor Ville, and Laxmi Vilas, AAAAA and down into the mouth of the march, heads feet bodies, the waves of the march parting as I arrive, yelling blue murder, crashing into history on a runaway, young-girl's bike” (218). Personal identity disassociates into bodily materiality, as Rushdie uses language of aquatic dissolution to describe the swell of Saleem’s incursion, a unification of his mental interiority, the political ideology of hegemonic partition, and the material environment of urban Bombay.

In this dissertation I intend not to merely apply a postcolonial ecocritical lens to texts, but to refine this approach in light of further developments of ecocriticism. While the second wave provides a tidy method for reading the intersecting doctrines of colonialism and environmental extraction, recent waves of ecocriticism continue to attend to semiotic concerns and also return to the material, perhaps to the detriment of the human subject. Following the second wave of

ecocriticism, the field expanded further still to encompass novel approaches to incorporating the more-than-human and the global human. Pippa Marland describes the third and fourth waves of ecocriticism as “eco-cosmopolitanism” and “material ecocriticism” (854-55). The former, spearheaded largely by Heise herself, is a way of reading environmental literature in terms of “an ecologically inflected world citizenship” (qtd. in Marland 854). Meanwhile, material ecocriticism and “new materialism” is an interdisciplinary effort to shift the focus of critical study away from human agencies to the agencies of non-human lifeforms and objects. The humanities, steeped in the “Western tradition,” has historically privileged language, discourse, values and other schools of thought; new materialists, as their name suggest, are more concerned with matter itself. These scholars attempt to break down the binary opposition between inner self and outer world by asserting that physical objects themselves affect and influence reality and identity. For these critics, the fundamental “givens” of Western Humanities – among them Cartesian dualism and Newtonian physics – privilege the self over the environment.

While I aim to return some of this focus away from the more-than-human and onto the socio-political concerns of postcolonial ecocriticism, I maintain affinity for some of the tenets of these new waves, especially the notion that all matter is storied matter. Heather Sullivan has proposed a novel re-examination of the ecology of color, arguing that while “it does not provide answers to problems of fracking pollution, for example, it does seek to shift our sense of our materiality and bodily natures so that we might all the more persuasively *see* how such anthropogenic damage inevitably and directly impacts us” (89). For some materialists, the human body is an essential component of their methodology: Diana Coole and Samantha Frost assert that “no adequate political theory can ignore the importance of bodies in situating empirical actors within a material environment of nature, other bodies, and the socioeconomic structures

that dictate where and how they find sustenance, satisfy their desires, or obtain the resources necessary for participating in political life” (19). However, in giving “materiality its due” (20), many in the field are quick to focus too much on human and non-human relationships over these communities in total.

Viewing environments as collectives of agencies and stories is essential for Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, who insist that “the emerging dynamics of matter and meaning, body and identity, being and knowing, nature and culture, *bios* and society are therefore to be examined and thought not in isolation from each other, but *through* one another, matter being an ongoing process of embodiment that involves and mutually determines cognitions, social constructions, scientific practices, and ethical attitudes” (author emphasis 5). For third and fourth wave critics, the environment is perpetually emerging, immanent, and vital. By eradicating the dualism between self and nature, these scholars envision a mesh of agencies that all influence each other. Adopting a more material understanding of environments allows for what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe as a rhizomatic approach that resists the “totalitarian root” of Nature.

The means by which environments mesh and merge with one another is through the agency of non-human and more than human actants – a term Bruno Latour utilizes to denote “an entity that modifies another entity” (237). As a quantum physicist, Karen Barad proposes that human and more-than-human actants “intra-act” with one another, not in causal or intentional means, but heterogeneously, at macro and micro – even quantum – levels. This deep engagement with environments at a cellular level is itself liberating from discourses that restrict nature from human society. Barad urges scholars to focus on matter using an epistemological lens of “agential realism,” arguing that “agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual

entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements" (33). She and others are not arguing that discursive issues are irrelevant or subordinate to material concerns, rather, they assert that these semiotic concerns are themselves part of the material world through relation. Barad explains that "discursive practices are ongoing agential intra-actions of the world through which specific determinacies (along with complementary indeterminacies) are enacted within the phenomena produced" (149). For Barad, matter is moving, always trafficking from one state to another, always intra-acting with other living and non-living agents in its surroundings.

Jane Bennett insists that viewing matter as dead or inert fuels political violence, and that having a more vital view of matter might deflate human oppression and ecological consumption (ix). For Bennett, reading matter as "vital" enables us to understand how "edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only impede or block the will and designs of humans but also act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories propensities, and tendencies of their own" (viii). Even as she acknowledges this reality, her approach opposes critical theory's goal of demystification. She argues that the process of demystification always "uncovers something human" and reduces "*political agency to human agency*" (xv). Bennett acknowledges that this understanding of vibrant matter opens itself up to critiques such as mine, that in distancing itself from human uniqueness, it instrumentalizes humans and demoralizes those who suffer more than others. She argues that vital materialism can "set up a kind of safety net for those humans who are now [...] made to suffer because they do not conform to a particular (Euro-American, bourgeois, theocentric, or other) model of personality" by raising "*the status of the materiality of which we are composed*" (12-13). Indeed, Bennett's own praxis does not fail to account for the human even as it locates the vibrancy of matter in electrical grids, food systems, stem cells, and metal.

The impetus to read subjects and environments as inextricable from one another is embodied in Stacy Alaimo's theory of transcorporeality. Knowing that "human and 'environment' can no longer be considered separate," Alaimo argues for critics to forge ethical considerations across "multiple, often global, networks" (16). She examines how human disruptions in environmental processes can negatively affect biomes and organisms within those biomes. Toxic disruptions, noise pollution, and chemical cleaners are all products of human activity, but these interruptions are transformed and changed by environmental response. Transcorporeality is a place-centered ontology that asserts bodies are not essentialist in terms of gender, race, or region, but are actively emergent through their ongoing relation with their surrounds. For Alaimo, bodies are not separate from other bodies, places, and objects, but are vitally entangled with them. Rather than bodies that are batted back and forth at the whim of an uncontrollable "Nature," she resists ideologies that fix bodies and environments as fixed entities separate from one another, saying bodies "encourage us to imagine ourselves in constant interchange with the environment, and paradoxically perhaps, to imagine an epistemological space that allows for both the unpredictable becomings of other creatures and the limits of human knowledge" (22).

Such a relationship between humans and their environment, in which cognition and understanding are inextricably bound to the body's enmeshment within place, flourishes in the pages of Rushdie's novel. After plunging into Evie's mind, Saleem awakens to his telepathic powers and begins communicating with the Midnight's Children Committee. He also uses his abilities to aid him in conducting surveillance on his mother while hiding in the boot of her car. From within the confines of the boot, Saleem enters the "part of [his] mother's mind which was in charge of driving operations," which affords him the ability to see and feel the environment

around them (245). The details Saleem recounts describe a city bursting with colonial past and its lingering effect in the present: “Breach candy Hospital and Mahalaxmi Temple, north along Hornby Vellard past Vallabhbai Patel Stadium and Haji Ali’s island tomb, north off what had once been (before the dream of the first William Methwold became a reality) the island of Bombay” (246). Past tenements and film studios, Saleem travels until arriving at the Pioneer Café, where, once again, a vehicle has brought him toward resistance. Here, Saleem finds not only the truth about his mother’s affair with her first husband, Nadir Khan, but also his involvement with the Communist Party. Attending to the importance of traffic in this scene shows the importance of non-human agents in controlling and diverting human mobility. Where earlier, a bicycle had propelled Saleem into a protest demonstration, here, a car enfolds Saleem into the ideological conflict that would go on to affect him personally and culturally.

Whether one invokes eco-cosmopolitanism, material ecocriticism, or other emerging subfields like object-oriented ontology, however, theoretical approaches that divert too much attention from the individual and communal human run the risk of eliding inequitable difference in favor of species-wide culpability in the Anthropocene. In short, ecocriticism and postcolonial theory must be read together in a more productive way than they have been currently. My intention is not to re-inscribe a human/non-human, natural/cultural dualism, but to suggest that factors like race, tribe, class, and caste must not be elided, even through lenses of relation. This approach must account for species-based discussions of human waste and production, while still allowing for variability between particular persons, non-human animals, and ecosystems. My intention here is not to paint material ecocriticism as a mis-step or misdirection in the development of ecocritical thought, but to argue that a closer alignment with postcolonial ecocriticism through traffic would provide a framework that allows for structure and spontaneity

simultaneously. I invoke traffic not to apply a universal cross-cultural tether, a monolithic lens to occlude difference, but to emphasize the local currents, particular landmarks, and historical contexts that give agency to both inhabitants and environments. These environments are complicated and altered by processes of globalization, pursuits of capital that have furthered economic inequality in areas around the world.

## GLOBAL HUMAN INEQUALITY IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

The previous sections have accounted for the developments of postcolonial theory and ecocriticism while still arguing for their shortcomings in tackling the mutually intertwined problems of socio-political inequality and environmental degradation due to neocapitalist globalization. To that end, what might be missing is a reconceptualization of the Anthropocene itself, a discourse that Donna Haraway calls “not simply wrong-headed and wrong-hearted in itself; it also saps our capacity for imagining and caring for other worlds” (50). While I prefer to retain the Anthropocene designation, others have latched onto calling it the Capitalocene, or even the Cthulucene, as Haraway calls it. Even as postcolonial writers give voice to those wronged by the imperialism of nations like England, France, and Spain, and even as ecocritics illuminate the devastation of human civilizations upon environments, scholars also must attend to the spreading of capital, influence, and cultures throughout the world. Globalization – the movement toward greater economic, political, and cultural integration across nations – is often associated with neoliberalism – an upholding of free-market economics and a promotion of consumerism (Leichenko and O’Brien, 10). Even as the subjects, corporations, and leaders of wealthy nations praise neoliberal ideals of shrinking the world or spreading free democracy, at its core, globalization remains a financially-driven enterprise for proliferating Western totalitarianism,

which results in profound material and mental consequences to nations and peoples in the Global South.

These consequences mirror the conditions of subalternity found in decolonizing nations: loss of tradition, forced diaspora, relinquishing of rights, impoverishment of the marginalized, and the establishment of neoliberal ideologies that substitute financial bottom-line in the place of local environmental health. Chakrabarty points to a critical divide between globalization scholars Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and Homi Bhabha. For Hardt and Negri, globalization is the violence of a new type of post-national “Empire,” where “the struggle against the slavery of belonging to a nation, an identity and a people, and thus the desertion from sovereignty and the limits it places on subjectivity” were “entirely positive developments.” Bhabha, in response, argues that this ideal “fixated on the *flowing*, borderless, global world – neglects to confront the facts that migrants, refugees, or nomads do not merely circulate” (qtd in Chakrabarty, 6). As shown by Weiwei in *Human Flow*, the traffic of humans is such that they often do not freely move and circulate; they also bottleneck, pile-up and strand. In addition to thinking of “traffic” as a metaphor for globalization and automobility, traffic is also a lens that actively engages with and interprets the depictions and material conditions of global capital.

There is no doubt that globalization is an inequitable and uneven process of Western expansion. Economic and sociologic scholars, as well as other experts from fields outside the humanities and the natural sciences, have found globalization to be a danger to low-income and disenfranchised communities around the world. For these scholars, the spread of capital and corporation is not only a spectre of colonialism, but also an agent of climate disaster. John Barnett, Richard Matthew, and Karen O’Brien argue that “global environmental change poses real risks to human security: it undermines access to basic needs such as productive soils, clean

water, and food; it puts at risk enshrined human, civil, and political human rights such as to the means of subsistence, property, and nationality” (3). Of course, the pursuit of enshrined ideals of “human security” rests on the notion of human equality; unfortunately, globalization and the Anthropocene has shown in stark relief the inequality present between developing and maldeveloped nations. Marija Isailovic finds that (quote appears on the following page)

developing countries account for only about 20 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions since 1751, but contain about 80 percent of the world’s population.

Least developed countries contributed less than 1 percent with their population amounting to about 800 million people. Still emissions from developing countries grew to over 40 per cent of the world’s total in [the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century]” (205).

Isailovic identifies how the recent rise in carbon emissions in “developing” nations proves that the inequitable maldevelopment of global capital has a significant deleterious effect on the environment. These economic and social conditions have, in turn, led to an increased critical focus on “modernity” and its implementation across economic and cultural lines in the Global South.

By reading the environment as systems of global traffic propagated by uneven development in decolonial environments, I practice what Rob Nixon calls an “environmentalism of the poor.” Nixon tasks environmentalists and literary scholars alike with re-examining the motivations that drive their efforts for conservation and advocacy. He sees the ineffectual perambulations of “rich-nation environmentalists” as largely superficial gestures that ignore the plight of impoverished peoples in the Global South (2). To measure globalization’s unnoticed impact upon the material ecosystems of developing nations, Nixon suggests the paradox of “slow

violence.” The insouciance shown by wealthy nations in the face of climate change prolongs the third world’s subalternity while furthering the capitalist goals of the elite. For Nixon, capitalist expansion and neoliberal environmentalism is a “violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). Unlike the sudden, swift, and immediately painful effects of physical assault or a drone strike, the consequences of globalization take time to appear, and, when they do manifest, occur sporadically rather than in total. The effects of climate change are not likely to result in a world-wide cataclysm, but will instead be felt over the long-term decimation of natural resources and biological diversity that will inevitably render particular regions of Earth uninhabitable. Because these consequences are not immediate nor uniform, individuals, corporations, and nations are able to easily deflect such concerns and continue their violence as normal.

Put simply, subaltern people stand to suffer the most from globalization’s planetary degradation, even as they are less likely to contribute to the problem. If the Anthropocene is an age characterized by extensive human involvement, then globalization is the means by which colonialism weaponizes the great acceleration against the subaltern. The casualties of slow violence are “light-weight” and “disposable,” forced into landscapes that have been coopted through a “bureaucratic, externalizing, and extraction-driven manner that is often pitilessly instrumental” (Nixon 13-17). Wielding a traffic-centered scholarly lens allows for slippage between postcolonial, material, and global theories of place-based writing. By thinking of the Anthropocene and climate change as a matter of global inequality, authors can, paradoxically, draw their readers and critics closer to the problem. In the words of Karen O’Brien and Robin Leichenko, “viewing climate change as an issue of equity may make global environmental change more relevant to many who now see it as a distant, ‘global’ problem” (170). However, if

Chakrabarty is correct in asserting that “reducing the problem of climate change to that of capitalism (folded into the histories of modern European expansion and empires) only blinds us to the nature of our present” (11), then logics of traffic allow us to cross these theoretical rifts.

In directing global traffic to literature, my methodology works toward a new understanding of “world” literature as imbricated within postcolonial theory and environmental realities. The study of world literature involves more than comparative analysis of language and culture, but consists of pointed criticisms of global neocolonialism and capital. I agree with the Warwick Research Collective’s assertion that modernity is “not something that happens – or even that happens *first* – in the west and to which others can subsequently gain access” but “takes the forms also of the development of underdevelopment, of maldevelopment and dependent development” (13). A traffic-centered approach allows us to measure global developments of intra-active processes: the relationships between automobility and individuals, of disenfranchised communities and their neighborhoods, of humans and other lifeforms forcibly transplanted from their homes.

Through this brief overview of postcolonial theory, ecocritical history, and globalization studies, I have carved a place for traffic-focused analyses of literary texts, even in passages that don’t necessarily focus on bicycles, cars, roads, cities or other clear-cut signifiers of traffic. This is seen in Rushdie’s description of the “fall” of Evie Burns. Following explosions at the Walkeshwar Reservoir, Bombay is overrun by cats. Felines take over the Methwold estate, interfering in the systemic assemblage of human and non-human lifeforms:

the two-storey hillock of Methwold’s Estate was invaded by an army of thirsting felines; cats swarming all over the circus-ring, cats climbing bougainvillea creepers and leaping into sitting-rooms, cats knocking over flower-vases to drink

the plant-stale water, cats bivouacked in bathrooms, slurping liquid out of water-closets, cats rampant in the kitchens of the palaces of William Methwold. (256)

In repeating the name of the estate's Imperialist founder at the beginning and end of this sentence, Rushdie linguistically mirrors the estate itself, founded with Imperialism at its center. Infused into this system is the unchecked presence of non-domesticated stray cats: a disruption of Imperialist order that Evie Burns takes it upon herself to dispel with her air rifle.

Standing in her way is Saleem's sister, the Brass Monkey, who defeats her in a battle and is sent back home by her father "to get a decent education away from these savages" (258). Following the battle, "Holding before my eyes the image of Monkey and Evie rolling in the dirt," Saleem understands that their battle was due to "a motive far deeper than the mere persecution of cats: they were fighting over me" (258). Rushdie's chapter envisions these two characters as the Alpha and the Omega, the local and the global. Through a study of diametric oppositions, local (animal, untamed, chaotic) and global (adored, skilled, and prone to a hidden violence) forces battle over the land that is Saleem Sinai. Though Rushdie's novel is structured to highlight these binaries, a methodology of eco-traffic allows scholars to understand the systemic crossing between local and global, animal and human. We can envision how globalization ferries the subaltern subject between polarities and, in so doing, mobilizes both people and environments. Neither Saleem nor the environmental landscapes of India are passive victims of Imperialism and globalization, but rather, they are important actants within traffic systems.<sup>2</sup>

This project operates within the chiasmus of postcolonial theory and ecocriticism, analyzing local and global traffic systems in order to frame human subalternity within the material biomes of the Asia-Pacific. Texts from and about this regions implicate globalization

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<sup>2</sup> Rushdie's personal views on globalization are complicated and controversial. See his interview with Anis Shivani for more about globalization, cultural relativism, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

with subalternity through the mapping and zoning of cities, the congestion of foreign-made automobiles and persons within cities, the transfer and transport of biological matter through neoliberal agricultural practices, the trade of illegal narcotics and humans, and the development and proliferation of weapons for the military industrial complex.

By analyzing traffic within the intersecting contexts of ecology and postcolonialism, I play upon the global permutations of the term itself. Traffic refers to congestion, automotive and otherwise, as a signifier of how material excess negatively impacts environments. The term also refers to systems put in place by modernizing governments that attempt to regulate and control the movements and agencies of their subjects. On a backed-up freeway or a busy street, cars contain passengers, who each have differing destinations. Non-human factors influence the directions and pathways of human agency, from the level of gasoline in a particular vehicle, the care and upkeep of road conditions, blockages and lane closures, the hunger, fatigue or intoxication of the driver, and the appearance of stray animals by the roadside. When to slow, when to accelerate, the distance between one actant and another, the limits of acceptable movement, when to halt completely. All of these actions, at personal, communal, and international levels are influenced and altered by globalization.

In the Asia-Pacific, a region beset with neoliberal ecotourism, trans-pacific trade agreements, labor outsourcing, human rights debates and the history of the slave trade, discussions of traffic intermingle with critiques of globalization. New technologies and ideologies spread from a wealthy Western center, and in the name of progress and modernity decolonizing nations face pressure to subject its peoples and environments to destructive practices. This project examines automobile traffic, urban infrastructure, trans-oceanic trade, and human trafficking. In turning to traffic as a critical lens, questions emerge that help explain the

role of globalization in postcolonial and ecocritical studies. How can a cloverleaf interchange signify the complications of the quaternary? How have roundabouts and city grids appeared in literature as emblematic of particular cultural beliefs? How have tolls and borders controlled wealth and development in certain regions?

## CHAPTER OUTLINES

Each chapter of this dissertation evinces a different application of ecological “traffic,” ordered roughly in terms of figurative magnitude. The readings address the rapid spread of global capital throughout the Asia-Pacific in order to posit an accurate model of how traffic enforces hegemonic wealth inequalities and perpetuates neocolonial sub-alternity. An appropriate beginning to such a task is to critique the ubiquitous definition of “traffic” as a form of mass transit congestion caused by a surplus of persons and automobiles and a deficiency of space. Chapter 1 consists of a historiographic analysis of the automotive industry in India and a detailed reading of how Arundhati Roy writes automobility in her novel *The God of Small Things*. I position the novel within the contexts of India’s astronomic economic growth, its booming population, and its growing culpability as a greenhouse gas emitter. By analyzing cars and other vehicles as ensconced within traffic frameworks, I question the validity of autopoietic and sympoietic models of systems theory. I also address how the looming erasure of the human driver – through autonomous vehicle technology – serves as a productive referent for the erasure of the subaltern in ecocriticism. To what degree is the car an actant, and to what extent does automobility further neoliberal capitalism and caste discrimination? How does subaltern inequality complicate models of the Anthropocene as a species-wide problem? Roy’s writing portrays decolonial environments where traffic emerges as an assemblage of moving parts, each

with their own trajectories and agencies. This chapter offers alternatives to blanket materialism that groups all humans together, arguing instead for a critique of globalization that incorporates both automobility and subalternity.

Analyzing the intersection of cars and caste allows for “eco-traffic” to confront the points of contact between the global and the local in a highly focalized context than in concepts like “vernacular/bureaucratic landscapes,” “eco-cosmopolitanism,” “bioregionalism” and “transcorporeality.” Furthermore, a broadening of eco-traffic also incorporates larger discussions of colonial ideology and historiography. Chapter 2 travels from India to East Asia, examining the portrayal of Taipei and Hong Kong, cities faced with the dual crises of ecological tumult and neocolonial oppression. This chapter analyzes the way colonial history directly impacts the colonial subject through material incursions into urban infrastructure. I examine how global urbanization presents new paradigms for viewing the relationship between nature and city. Rather than thinking of nature *within* or *without* cities, I consider cities *as* nature, where human and non-human life flourishes or suffers because and despite colonial infrastructure. Cities emerge as sites where questions of infrastructure, zoning, gentrification, and traffic complicate the relationships between communities and capital. My focus is on two novels not commonly read or studied in Western literary studies: *Atlas: The Diary of an Imaginary City* by Dung Kai-Cheung and *The Old Capital* by Chu T’ien-Hsin. These texts indicate how fights for national sovereignty and ecological sustainability are one and the same by confronting China’s “One China, Two Systems” policy through literature. By thinking of cities as both trafficked objects between colonial powers and sites of traffic themselves, Dung and Chu expose the relationship between environment and colonial de-subjectivity.

Chapter 3 continues to expand the scope of “traffic” through a focus on the transpacific relationship between the United States and Japan. I focus on texts by three Asian-American women: Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*, Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being*, and Lee Ann Roripaugh’s poetry collection *Tsunami vs. The Fukushima 50*. When read together, these authors create a pattern for analyzing Asian-American texts in terms of their connection between displaced subjects and hydrocolonial subjugation of the Pacific Ocean. Faced with personal and natural disasters, the characters of these texts nevertheless find ways to survive through managing the ecological traffic of the sea. Drawing together Japanese internment, the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, and the Fukushima Daichii nuclear power plant disaster, this chapter analyzes literary depictions of disaster and correlates them with globalist hydrocolonial hegemony. Traffic comes into play in analyzing the transpacific transfer of currency between global superpowers, and the radioactive detritus that comes with it.

In Chapter 4, the transpacific traffic of Japanese and American superpowers gives way to the trafficking of plants, narcotics, and humans from the Asia-Pacific to the rest of the world. This chapter tackles the racist underpinnings of the Anthropocene, focusing on how mindsets of mastery justified colonial enslavement, displacement, and commodification of people. Building on Amitav Ghosh’s claims in *The Great Derangement* that the Anthropocene is driven by capital and empire, this chapter examines those dual criteria through the representation of the trafficked human in his novels *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke*, and *Flood of Fire*, collectively known as the Ibis trilogy. Drawing from my primary research conducted on-site in Hong Kong’s Po Leung Kuk museum, the chapter wields an interdisciplinary approach to textual and sociological scholarship. For Ghosh the sea is setting and actor, a participant within the swashbuckling tale of human and narcotic trafficking. Rather than romanticize the sea, Ghosh attends to the materiality

of its surges and ripostes, its swelling and its stillness, figuring it as an engine driving Imperialism and capital. Monolithic images of the sea give way to networks of poppy seeds, caravels, and human bodies. This chapter underscores the inextricability of Asia-Pacific development with its history of slaves and opium, providing an entry point for critiques of globalization.

The conclusion, finally, takes a moment to briefly discuss the implications of eco-traffic in thinking about time, slow violence, human inequality, and encroaching global environmental disaster. Nuclear weapons and materials proliferate the globe, affecting not only international affairs and human security but also environmental stability. In 1984, Jacques Derrida expanded the scope of nuclear criticism to cover not only the division of atoms and the destruction of peoples, places, and things, but also the erasure of the linguistic archive: what he called the catachresis of history and the aporia of speed (21). Nuclear criticism overlaps with Anthropocene studies in its need to revise time. If nuclear criticism died with the “non-event” of nuclear war, this failure is due to the image’s false sense of finality. In other words, people have misconstrued the nuclear as a singular event rather than an ongoing process. This line of thinking is similar to the difficulty of envisioning climate change other than through singular catastrophic images: a fallen glacier, a drowning polar bear, a flooded city. Rather than through singular images of destruction, scholars who wish to engage with the nuclear and the climatic must instead direct their attention to the immanent and continuous trafficking of particles, materials, and bodies. The conclusion briefly takes up these questions of critical methodology through a reading of Cixin Liu’s science fiction trilogy *The Three-Body Problem*. The series usurps established science-fiction tropes by depicting a first contact story that is non-immediate; rather than aliens suddenly appearing in the sky with no warning, humans are made aware of an impending threat with

centuries of time to prepare. This framework mirrors the current state of scientists and civilians in the Anthropocene, who are fully aware of climate change's impending effects and are working to address its myriad consequences. These texts envision a new nuclear criticism that accounts for the relationship between globalization, trafficking, and climate change.

This dissertation contributes to both the fields of ecocriticism and postcolonial theory broadly, and to the field of "postcolonial ecocriticism" specifically. It puts literary depictions of the Asia-Pacific region in greater communication with their material counterparts through traffic as a signifier of its movement and vibrancy. It engages with burgeoning developments in the fields of automobility, urban ecology, and hydrocriticism to draw out their implications upon the subaltern subject. It attends to histories of racism in the formation and duration of the Anthropocene, a neglected area of study. Through close reading and textual analysis of literature from and about the Asia-Pacific, eco-traffic emphasizes the immanent, intra-active processes of non-human actants without short-changing the historical and continual subalternity of persons within the region. Eco-traffic enriches fields of material ecocriticism and postcolonial ecocriticism through clarification and magnification of the human without resorting to nature/human binaries or hierarchical thinking.

**CHAPTER ONE: AT THE INTERSECTION OF (AUTO)POIESIS AND  
(AUTO)MOBILITY: LOCATING THE SUBALTERN HUMAN WITHIN THE  
AUTOMOTIVE ECOLOGIES OF *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS***

The car in which we were returning was an old Ambassador. But it was not in a very good condition. Therefore, we thought we should try to reach Guwahati as soon as possible, before dark.

Mirajakar sahab was not afraid of wild animals, of tigers and wild bears. But he was afraid of militants. One of his close friends had been killed by militants in Punjab. On the way, he asked me: 'In this beautiful land of yours, filled with gay abandon, has militancy really come to an end?' I couldn't answer his question correctly.

Indira Goswami, from "The Journey" (52)

In Jhumpa Lahiri's "Interpreter of Maladies" (1999), the middle-aged Mr. Kapasi escorts the Das family, a young family of first-generation American-Indians, on a drive from the resort city of Puri to Konarak Sun Temple. Lahiri memorably examines themes of gender identity, work ethic, and familial responsibility through a transnational lens that compares the shared ennui of Mr. Kapasi and Mrs. Das, who, despite their differing positionality in relation to Indian nationality, are mutually dissatisfied with their personal lives. But Lahiri's short story is also memorable for the way in which Mr. Kapasi's car, a "bulky white Ambassador," becomes a vehicular setting for the intersection of American / Indian popular cultures, Muslim / Hindu belief systems, and human / more than human animal life (Lahiri 12). Aside from a central pedestrian sojourn into the Sun Temple, the bulk of the narrative takes place within the paneled confines of the car – a vehicle that metonymically refracts and extends human agency into the biological ecologies of the outer world. Lahiri's text invites readers to easily visualize Mr. Kapasi's hands turning the steering wheel as the Ambassador bounds across rocky paths and scenic vistas. We watch as the Das children peer through windows, and we glimpse Mr. Kapasi looking first at himself and then at Mrs. Das through the limited vantage of the rearview mirror.

We are there when monkeys disrupt their automotive journey, scamper into the road, onto the Ambassador, and disappear, only to menacingly return at the story's climax. Notably, Lahiri's tale molds itself into the material conditions of the car itself. At times, the car allows for sensory propulsion and wider access; at others, it inhibits passenger autonomy.

Lahiri's story should prompt readers to consider how automobiles function in the daily social lives of American and Indian subjects, implying that, like humans and animals, automobiles too have agential force within not only our fictional narratives, but also within our material conditions. Though invented, manufactured, and utilized by humans, the automobile, merely by existing, is a fundamental part of local ecologies, and their presence is enough to consider them actors alongside pedestrians, animals, insects, bridges, lakes, and rivers. Furthermore, Lahiri's story shows how cars can be settings of intercultural conflict. By juxtaposing the differing livelihoods of native and migratory Indian subjects, Lahiri further draws attention to the impact of cars, trafficked world-wide through capitalist globalization, upon postcolonial states and subjects.

Using the Ambassador as a metaphorical and literal vehicle, Lahiri cleverly underscores the troubling tenor of non-agency and non-identity for the disenfranchised person within postcolonial environments. As a tour guide, Mr. Kapasi proclaims to look forward to his driving job, despite the fact that such a position is much more servile and less traditionally prestigious than his other profession: a translator for a doctor's office (17). As the titular interpreter, Mr. Kapasi displays both intelligence and creativity and yet considers this job to be "a sign of his failings" (18). Meanwhile, as a driver, he is subject to the passive-voice subjugation of being "assigned to" foreign tourists, of waiting in the car while they witness various sites (13). In either job, Mr. Kapasi is a subaltern within a system, be it linguistic or automotive. Though the

automobile is routinely a cliché for freedom and independence, Mr. Kapasi gains neither of these as a driver. While Mr. Kapasi and Mrs. Das initially appear to be intrigued by one another, their interactions within the automotive space prove to be an insufficient bridge between the ideological divisions of place and history carried from their socio-political backgrounds.

"Interpreter of Maladies" questions epistemologies of subaltern progress and success by yoking together the agency of Mr. Kapasi with the mobility of his vehicle, which is unable to reconcile the marginalized driver with his individual passengers, much less society at large. Lahiri's first description of Mr. Kapasi hints at the potential offered by vehicles to let individuals glimpse persons, places, and things normally outside of their purview: "In the rearview mirror Mr. Kapasi watched as Mrs. Das emerged slowly from his bulky white Ambassador, dragging her shaved, largely bare legs across the back seat" (12). This leer is the first of many memorable instances of characters utilizing the mirrors and windows of cars to alter, mediate, or disguise their glances. Through the fragmented and obfuscated vessels of windows and mirrors, Mr. Kapasi repeatedly observes people, places and things, including Mrs. Das, the poor roads between Puri and Konarak, non-human animals gathered by the side of the road, and his own reflection. While the vehicle offers increased opportunities for exploration and personal mobility through geographic landscapes, it ultimately fails to extend the narrative of human anthropocentrism. Mr. Kapasi's climactic emergence from the car to save Bobby from a gang of hungry monkeys is therefore symbolic of his extricating himself from an automotive system. Ultimately, for Lahiri, these quick flashes of vehicular agency illustrate that the car is both mobilizing and immobilizing; while it promises individual freedom, it also limits the driver's autonomy. Thus, while this story might not foreground automotive traffic in a traditional sense, Lahiri is certainly addressing the link between personal autonomy and movement.

With its interwoven human, non-human, and non-organic characters, “Interpreter of Maladies” is a productive entry for a larger discussion about traffic, automobility, and their individualized application to postcolonial subjects in the Asia-Pacific. The story prompts its readers to question the presence of automobiles within natural and cultural systems. To what degree has the automotive industry – through fields as diverse yet interlinked as personal vehicular transport, automated resource mining, oil refinement, concrete road paving, and international trade – powered neocolonial capitalism, which in turn escalated the widespread environmental degradation of the Anthropocene? How has the implementation and development of automotive power plants and the mass production of the automobile emerged as the singular events that begin the Great Acceleration - the contemporary era in which human biomass and consumption of natural resources has rapidly increased.? One of the primary reason for *homo sapiens*’ emergence as a geologic force in the Anthropocene is the auto-industrial complex: the socio-political intersections of automotive corporations, urban development, local and national economies, and global manufacturing systems.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the systematic spread of this complex is responsible for perpetual worldwide increases in “traffic”: not only the social, infrastructural, environmental, and anthropological implications of widespread automotive use on roadways, but also the transnational commingling of persons, places and things through transport, trade, and communication.

Drawing from postcolonial theory, environmental criticism, and sociology, this chapter analyzes how the spread of automotive industry indicates the collision of the “first world” colliding with the “third,” with literature reflecting, refracting, and engaging with such violence.

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<sup>3</sup> Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence* is helpful here for detailing not only how the Anthropocene arose out of environmental degradation due to advanced industrialization but also through an acceleration of information, resulting in hastened attention spans and increased demand for immediacy (12).

In the first part of this chapter, I examine the presence of the automobile and the concept of "automobility" in post-colonial India through research into nation-wide trends in traffic patterns, car ownership, and personal income. I re-direct automobility from the realms of social and system theory to literary analysis, employing Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) as a site for study. Within the text, I examine roadways and automobiles as metaphors of globalization, neocolonial violence, and subaltern marginalization, entering into a discussion of utopian automation and forced modernization. From here, the chapter interrogates globalist forced automobility by applying pressure to the terms autopoiesis and sympoiesis, as put forth by critics like Hannes Bergthaller and Donna Haraway. I turn again to particular settings within *The God of Small Things* that function like systems, and, by putting these theories in conversation, reveal the place of the subaltern subject within agential networks of agencies. I end with a theoretical look into the future by investigating the encroaching technology of autonomous vehicles, arguing that this technology itself is the end result of global capitalism and subaltern erasure. Ultimately, while not completely self-regulating or self-producing, these environments are self-assemblages of moving parts, each with its own movement, intention, and agency. This chapter, therefore, gestures toward an alternative to a blanket materialist ideology that groups all humans together and instead highlights the agency of the subaltern within material environments.

#### URBAN AUTOMOTION AND GLOBAL MODERNITY IN INDIA

On the streets of Mumbai, car horns blare and people shout in Marathi, Hindi, English and other languages. People spill out of buses, bicycles pile up, and cars merge in and out of highways, crowded with people, animals, and other vehicles. The continual growth of the automotive industry in India mires its inhabitants within spaces crowded with carbon emissions,

pedestrians, personal automobiles, buses, rail-based vehicles, bicycles, cycle rickshaws, and scooters. This congestion contributes to the forced extraction of natural resources and accumulations of human, animal, and automotive waste in the region. While the negative effects of the automotive industry on the environments of developing nations are well documented, fewer studies exist that document how the automotive industry perpetuates caste-based hegemony in India. For residents of Mumbai, access to vehicular transport amounts to advancement within an urban infrastructure that, in the words of Ron Buliung, Annya Shimi, and Raktim Mitra, contributes to or is contained “within a much broader politics of forgetting the subaltern” (156). While the majority of Mumbai’s population live in and move through systems of congestion, pollution, and noise, automobility perpetuates class-based exclusion by affording the wealthy and the upper caste inequitable opportunities in the form of increased mobility.

One strategy taken by the Mumbai Transit Authority to facilitate this choreography of individual movements, inertias, and traffics of persons, animals and things is to liberally embrace the flyover, a road transport fixture that, like an overpass, provides a number of elevated lanes of traffic so drivers with a particular destination in mind can theoretically “fly over” the stagnant traffic beneath them. Rather ambitiously, the Mumbai Transit Authority embarked on a campaign to construct 50 of these elevated shortcuts to service the car-driving public of Mumbai (Buliung 156). As a metaphor, the flyover is adept at signifying the inequitable social conditions, stemming from its past as a British colony and as a caste society reliant upon vertical social hegemony, that plague India. Quite simply, those of a “higher” class are more likely to have access to the “higher,” cleaner, faster, more expedient road. While flyovers ease the traffic for a particular subset of persons – typically automobile-owning upper middle-class subjects – those who take public transportation or a form of non-motorized transport are sometimes restricted

access. While a majority of people live in and move through traffic systems of congestion, pollution, and noise, only a wealthy few (in comparison) get to experience the luxury above the chaos. Flyovers, along with its ancestor, the toll road, perpetuate class-based exclusion at the same time as they contribute to devaluing living conditions.

During this critical moment in history, when the Global South is anticipating the most damaging consequences of climate change, conservationists, critics, and creators alike should question the degree to which the global automotive industry has contributed to not only planet-wide climate change but also to the socio-political disenfranchisement of the subaltern Dalits, described by Kancha Ilaiah as the “people and caste who form the exploited and oppressed majority” in India. India’s automotive industry contributes to divisions within a country already known for its caste and class-based stratification. In recent years, ecocritical and postcolonial theorists have found common source material within the literature of such regions faced with the interrelated challenges of decolonization and environmental degradation. These fields intersect largely in shared critiques of neocolonialism, ecotourism and the environmental justice offenses committed by dominant powers. These theorists address the physical violence of genocide, imprisonment, and enslavement as well as the socio-political aftershocks of invasion and oppression, including the continued hegemony of hierarchical oppression through cultural systems. Rather than a singular ecocritical or postcolonial approach, a critique of the automotive industrial complex benefits from an interdisciplinary understanding of globalization as an inequitable deployment of capital across the globe.

And yet, many critiques of globalization and the Anthropocene overlook internal systems of oppression: in India particularly, the subordination of Dalit and Adivasi peoples. While the Indian automotive industry faces the uphill battle of competing with global

corporations, its consumers must contend with the history of caste oppression that continues to influence environmental policies that oppress the subaltern at an individual and communal level. The persecution of Dalits is wrought into the fibers of Indian environmental legislation, which redirects, reapportions, or restricts access to ecological resources to the detriment of its poorest classes. Caste compounds the difficulty of decolonization, as peoples outside the four major castes suffer persecution and dehumanization from not only the legacy of British imperialism, but also from within dominant post-partition Indian society. In “The Greater Common Good,” Roy takes on big dams, pointing out that despite how the first world has abandoned them for being expensive and ineffective, the Indian government has spent millions on them in the past fifty years, causing the displacement of fifty million people, 60 percent of whom are Adivasi or Dalit (2016, 114).

Whether “forgotten” or purposefully marginalized, these subaltern communities are excluded from modernization efforts largely because of the cultural dominance of Western models of modernity. The 50-flyover project and other initiatives that facilitate the mobility of the privileged at the expense of others prove that a Western European model of urbanicity has become a global standard. The extent of colonial violence is such that it persists long after occupation ceases. Ideologically, the economic dominance of the West ensures that if countries are to “modernize,” they have to, in the words of economist Walt W. Rostow, “catch up to the west” (cited in Green-Simms, 17). If the leading western superpowers of the twentieth century emphasized structuring cities around the presence and movement of automobiles, then logic dictates that any developing nation would have to do the same.<sup>4</sup> In the eyes of many de-colonial

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<sup>4</sup> Western automobility and urban infrastructure, of course, widened divides between class and race in the United States. The creation of suburbs, the demarcation of inner-city zoning, and the institution of highways all perpetuate a white middle-class “American Dream” that profoundly excludes the non-Caucasian, non-male American subject. .

nations, the urgency to modernize appeared to be, and truly was, essential for their continuing independence. In their attempts to become economically viable and financially solvent, many newly-independent nations are forced to imitate their former colonial invaders. Invariably, these developing nations found that westward modernity was not so easily transferable to their societies, due to a wide range of reasons: from geographical restrictions to cultural traditions, the implementation of automotive culture cannot be easily transferred. Despite this, scholars point out that what nations like India have had to accomplish is recreate the 1920's American industrial boom that followed the mass production of the Model T in a shorter amount of time, with less financial viability, at a more accelerated rate, and in a smaller space (Buliung et al 153).<sup>5</sup>

Thus, automation, while agential in improving the quality of life for individuals across the world through greater and quicker access to persons, employers, and health care providers, has also limited the upward social mobility of individuals from less privileged castes; these personal restrictions run parallel to the larger environmental and cultural consequences of the Anthropocene. The doubled-edged sword that is car culture proves that its reach extends across several discourses. As Alan Walks and Paul Tranter note, cars are not only isolated objects, but agential entities that maneuver through “social, cultural, political, economic, and physical context[s] characterized by many drivers, cars, destinations, established routes of varying capacities, other forms of transport and their users, and land uses of varying density, functional mix, and levels of spatial concentration” (129). By taking these contexts into account, the spreading of automobiles and car culture throughout the world reveals itself to be an effective method of forced westernization. As globalization propels the auto-industrial complex throughout the Asia-Pacific, automobiles bring both quality of life improvements and the

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<sup>5</sup> Green-Simms provides a thorough accounting of Fordism, the idea "that all societies would eventually achieve the level of production and consumerism as the West" (17).

perpetuation of economic inequality, subaltern marginalization, cultural loss, and environmental devastation.

While individual Asia-Pacific nations have varying levels of concern regarding automobiles, congestion, and pollution based on size and economy, I hone in on India in order to emphasize how colonial history and caste-based social structures have magnified its recent booms in population, GDP, and environmental pollutants. After the partitioning of British-controlled India in 1947 into India and Pakistan, India's population quadrupled over the course of decades to become the second most populous country in the world, second only to China (Chamie and Mirkin). This population boom occurred alongside the onset of the automotive industry and rapid industrialization, all of which contributing factors to India's current position as the third largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world and New Delhi's overtaking of Beijing as the smoggiest city in the world (Rossi). Indian environmental activist Sunita Narain rightly attributes the root cause of this ecological degradation to the colonial impact of globalization and the economic impetus to modernize. Calling for a de-colonial resistance to global deregulation, Narain argues "India and China today account for more than one-third of the world's population," Narain says, while simultaneously wondering "whether we are consuming one-third of the world's resources or contributing one-third of the muck and dirt in the atmosphere or the oceans" (Rossi). Narain rightly acknowledges the negative environmental impact of modernizing India, while pinpointing socio-political issues that complicate environmentalist arguments that try to paint it as a dominant polluter: the nation's traditional discrimination of the impoverished lower castes, its expanding middle class, and its reliance on non-automotive transport.

This basic framing of India's cultural and environmental history allows us to not only examine the material confluence of metallic cars, biological environments, and urban infrastructure but to also shed light on how the hegemonic power dynamics of caste and the outside interferences of globalization infuse themselves into the everyday living conditions of a nation's inhabitants. Through focused analysis of representations of automobiles and traffic, literature provides an ingress for critique and the proposal of alternative systems. Instead of indenturing postcolonial subjects to neocolonial systems, literature can offer visions of autonomy and independence. The following section locates traffic as the nexus for automobility and subalternity, arguing that *The God of Small Things* examines the interrelations between vehicles, humans and non-human animals within the systematic gridlock of caste in India. discussing these terms further in context of *The God of Small Things*.

#### AUTOMOBILITY AND SKY-BLUE SUBALTERNITY

Whether they be expeditious flyovers, high-speed highways, or unpaved streets, roads are a productive thoroughfare for understanding the relationship between a literary work's setting and its characters, whether they be a person, a more than human animal, or a machine. In "Interpreter of Maladies," Lahiri charts a linear pathway from anthropocentric modernity into an animalist history. Roy undertakes a more complex route in *The God of Small Things*, using setting and character to depict the trauma, both personal and collective, of touchables and untouchables in the Kerala region of post-partition India. Arranged along two non-sequential narratives set twenty-three years apart, we follow syncopated temporal crossings between the two narratives as Roy rhythmically unfolds the mysteries surrounding the "Terror," collectively the separation of twin protagonists, Rahel and Estha, the death of their mixed-race cousin,

Sophie Mol, and the brutal murder of Velutha, an untouchable friend to the children and lover to their mother. While the plot closely follows these and other human characters, Roy's narrative style immediately informs us that her focus is on both the human and the non-human, the characters and the setting, the big and the small things. Throughout the analeptic and the present narratives, Roy documents the material consequences of time unfolding on the landscape: streets become more crowded, rivers dry up, houses become hotels, and what was once clear and pristine becomes occluded and polluted. In this way, the city of Ayemenem undertakes its own journey, in which its rivers, streets, animals, and businesses arrive at India's present conditions of global tourism, neocolonial capitalism, and ultimately, western automobility.

Because Roy foregrounds such an environmental focus, new materialist and ecocritical scholars have written existing analyses of ecological power and non-human agency in *The God of Small Things*. Such findings view Ayemenem as a prime example of what Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann have termed a mesh of "material forms – bodies, things, elements, toxic substances, chemicals, organic and inorganic matter, landscapes, and biological entities – [that] intra-act with each other and with the human dimension, producing configurations of meanings and discourses that we can interpret as stories" (Iovino and Oppermann 7). Though never identifying as a material ecocritic, Aarthi Vadde's analysis of what she terms "the backwaters sphere" surveys the space of Ayemenem as an inter-special and transcorporeal "terrestrial" cosmos, wherein nonhuman actants provide alternatives to capitalist profit-based ideologies. Similarly, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee defends Roy's novel from criticisms that it obfuscates or elides socio-political realities of class, caste, and race through sexual transcendence by explicitly connecting environmental toxicity with postcolonial inequality. Mukherjee's key claim, that "for Arundhati Roy, there can be no separation between the political and the environmental" (17),

gives credence to a reading of *The God of Small Things* as a tableaux of vibrant networks of agential relations, places where the human is not hidden through setting, but identified.

While existing readings rightly turn attention to the viability of non-human agents like the river and the “History House,” no study has yet addressed the roles of automobiles in the novel, despite the fact that Roy repeatedly alludes to vehicles as important agents within the ecological network of Ayemenem. In fact, such a vehicle jump starts the action of the novel, which opens with four paragraphs of nearly pure description: A muggy summer climate invites the croak of yellow bullfrogs, the overgrowth of weeds, the flash of a drenched mongoose, and the damp of moss. Abruptly, Roy transitions away from this lushness with an exasperated sentence that declares the arrival of the novel’s primary vehicle: “But the skyblue Plymouth with the chrome tailfins was still parked outside, and inside, Baby Kochamma was still alive” (4). Cinematically, Roy narrows her focus to the Plymouth, which directly leads to a detailed description of a human, the first such passage of the novel. The repetition of “still” can denote not only the passage of time but also the frustration in having to tell this story. Unable to stay in the non-human peace of the opening passages, the narrator moves with some stubbornness into the human-centered narrative. If the opening paragraphs of biological description ominously foreshadow the lethality of the material environment, an environment that would claim the life of one Sophie Mol, the Plymouth is the harbinger for Baby Kochamma, the character whose manipulations would ultimately claim Velutha’s life. The Plymouth re-directs the point of view of the novel from a third-person omniscient to a third-person close, moving the narrative from the environmental to the human, allowing the reader access to sporadic interiority of various characters. By introducing the characters concomitantly with the Plymouth, Roy links automotive concepts with socio-political subalternity.

Here, my usage of the term “automobility” refers to not only the movement of an automotive but also to a sociological concept, defined by Alan Walks as

a complex, path-dependent, non-linear system with its own evolving coherent logic of movement, production, and consumption. This encourages a melding of the functions and practices of autonomous humans with machines, thus creating new social hybrid ‘car—drivers’ that are co-constituted by the roads, signs, cultural practices, and daily activities that bind them. (5)

Walks’s definition elides the humanity of the subject beneath societal systems. When he refers to the tripartite ideologies of movement, production, and consumption, Walks invokes the mechanisms that grow the automotive industry. As motor vehicles become ubiquitous, personal subjectivity is mechanized, and individuals are entangled with the socio-political systems of their surrounding environment. Under the doctrine of automobility, the car is essential for not only personal autonomy but also upward social mobility. In order to “pull yourself up by your bootstraps,” you must be able to drive. Rather than eliding the differences between the wealthy and the impoverished, automobility highlights them and enforces continuous subalternity. If automobility is essential for societal advancement and personal betterment, those who cannot afford personal transport and vehicular insurance, or those who are forced to live in particular areas, or those who are unable to access the 50 flyovers, are disadvantaged from the start. “One has little choice but to drive” states Walks, the car being “the literal iron cage of modernity” (6). In a rapidly advancing environment such as India, automobility is a dilemma at both the national and individual levels. At the national level, India feels a need to automate its urban infrastructure, providing flyovers and multi-lane highways at a rate that is too fast for its inhabitants and environment. At a personal level, individuals must own a car and drive in order

to succeed, while also accepting the increased expenditures that come along with owning an automobile. Moreover, in the case of the automobile industry, reliance upon foreign-made vehicles benefits a global, colonial, power while marking the Indian driver as a dependent subaltern. Walks succinctly frames this dilemma as the “Janus-faced duality of automobility – [the car] is constructed as both problem and solution to the issue of mobility in the contemporary city” (6). Ultimately, global automobility reveals itself as fundamentally neocolonial in that it attempts to transplant a profit-focused ideology into developing nations still in the process of emerging from colonial rule.<sup>6</sup>

Roy’s choice of the Plymouth as the family’s automobile of choice, therefore, is both an allusion to global colonialism and a historical identifier of neocolonialism at work in India. *Prima facie*, the name Plymouth hearkens to Plymouth Rock, the landing point of the Mayflower Pilgrims and itself a site of importance for the British colonial campaign against the indigenous peoples of North America. Roy’s decision to include the Plymouth as the Ipe family’s vehicle of choice is also a nod to the automaker’s success in India. According to Mike Sealey and David Zatz, between partition and the time of the novel’s setting, the Plymouth sedan became a most popular make of vehicle in India. Under the name “Premier Automobiles,” the American car manufacturer began producing Indian-made Plymouths in India starting in 1944. Premier was the largest producer of cars in India up until the early 1990’s, when the market was opened to imports (Sealey and Zatz). The sky-blue Plymouth is therefore an interruption in Indian autonomy in its persistent signifying of colonialism. The early success and proliferation of the

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<sup>6</sup> For more on automobility’s neocolonial influence in developing nations, see Green-Simms. Green-Simms tracks the influence of cars and car culture in the West African region to skillfully show the “conflicting, contradictory, and overlapping lived experiences” of persons shaped by automobility and the unique cultural, social, political and historical conditions of particular places (8).

brand speaks to the entrenchment of British imperialism and American popular culture within Indian society.

Steered by the hands of Chacko, Ammu's brother and de facto patriarch of the family, the Plymouth adeptly illustrates automobility's dual roles as both subaltern panacea and virus. For Chacko, the Plymouth is essential for personal transport, but also for increasing capital through the advertising of his pickling operation. With its bright blue color and oversized body, the Plymouth draws attention as a gauche signifier of the Ipe family's upper-caste status: they own a car, drive to the movies, and can even afford to gift their children pocket money. Compared to Dalit subjects like Velutha, Ammu and Chacko are wealthy and socially privileged. Yet the Plymouth also signifies that this relative opulence is not enough for the disenfranchised de-colonial subject: Chacko must resort to attaching a homemade sign advertising for "Paradise Pickles & Preserves" in an attempt for more recognition, wealth, and acceptability. In so doing, Chacko hopes to satisfy his aspirations as a former Rhodes Scholar and self-identified Anglophile, an Indian who must be an Englishman because he and his family are "pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away" (51). While his footsteps may have been erased, Chacko leaves behind the tread markings of the Plymouth as evidence of his willingness to participate within neocolonial hegemony and his attempts to ascend into an even further privileged culture: that of white Europeans. In Chacko, we find the opposite of stable, grounded, Plymouth Rock: we instead find a man who, despite his privileged position within India's caste system, is perpetually "unanchored on troubled seas, never be allowed ashore" (52). For Chacko, the Plymouth is evidence of his own colonized subjectivity: While allowing him to be materially mobile, the car

limits his upward economic opportunity; its desperate attempts at financial gain cruelly announce that the driver is not and never will be an Englishman.

Throughout *The God of Small Things*, Roy illustrates her awareness of how individual automobile ownership and the automotive industry itself have been both a blessing and a curse to India, as individuals and communities struggle to become what Walks termed hybrid “car-drivers.” Roy connects automobiles with both birth and death, gesturing toward the automobile’s capacity for not only changing one’s life for the better, but also ending it entirely. From the vantage of Rahel and Estha, Roy offers a utopic vision of automobility: “According to Estha, if they had been born on the bus, they’d have got free bus rides for the rest of their life” (6). Similarly, if a person is killed in a “zebra crosswalk,” Estha supposes that said person would have their funeral paid for by the government. For the children, vehicular birth equates to lifelong automobility, while a vehicular death is a lucky accident that rewards them with government renown. This misbelief about the relationship between humans and automobiles is not simply a figment of Estha’s flourishing imagination but is also an indication of the unavoidable failure of human traffic systems to fulfill their idyllic promise.

No scene better encapsulates the failure of governmental traffic than what occurs on the drive back to Ayemenem from the airport, with Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma in tow.

Near Ettumanoor they passed a dead temple elephant, electrocuted by a high tension wire that had fallen on the road. An engineer from the Ettumanoor municipality was supervising the disposal of the carcass. They had to be careful because the decision would serve as precedent for all future Government Pachyderm Carcass Disposals. Not a matter to be treated lightly. There was a fire engine and some confused firemen. The municipal officer had a file and was

shouting a lot. There was a *Joy Ice Cream* cart and a man selling peanuts in narrow cones of paper cleverly designed to hold not more than eight or nine nuts.

(146)

For Sophie and Margaret, such a spectacular introduction to India could take place only on its roadways, for it is only within its lanes that the East and West, the human and the animal, could collide so thoroughly. The detached, yet detailed, description lends the event a circus-like atmosphere: an orientalist stage upon which Indian traffic authorities wrestle with an elephant carcass. If this were a Forster novel, readers might be tempted to ascribe some nationalist symbolism to the elephant, but for Roy, what matters more is the materiality of the roadway and its functionality as a chaotic circus of agencies. Concessions are sold for maximum profit, while the ringmaster shouts to the human and non-human participants. If roads are a way for humans to dictate ownership over environments, then traffic and automobility show the imperfection of the human-driven system. Roy's pithy interjection in this scene - "Not a matter to be treated lightly" - is emblematic of the novel's recurring deconstruction of large versus small imagery. With her tongue firmly in cheek, Roy argues that this event will have societal and historical significance, while other traumas – Estha's rape and Velutha's death – are either brushed off or ignored. Anthropocentric systems – electrical workers, traffic authorities, and fire fighters - present as capable responses to disasters when in fact they more often than not merely disguise the issues.

The chapter ends with Roy taking the juxtaposition of large and small as a merging of human and non-human destruction. Roy describes how "Just outside Ayemenem they drove into a cabbage-green butterfly (or perhaps it drove into them)" (147). Ironically, both the elephant and the butterfly are metaphorical vehicles not only for the non-human, but for the insufficiency

of neocolonial globalization, vis a vis traffic. Though the statement speaks to the agency of both parties, subaltern human and non-human animal, only one is destroyed in the collision, despite whichever actant does the driving.

Even as the failure of anthropocentric systems results in environmental destruction and non-human animal slaughter, we must also recognize the precarious danger such systems place onto humans – whether they be drivers, pedestrians, or passengers. Estha’s idealistic belief that the government would pay for a funeral for a traffic victim ironically belies the fact that, within the text, a large number of characters die from accidents, and from without the text, actual Indian persons also die from car-related accidents in numbers disproportionate from other regions. According to George T. Martin, relying on data from the United Nations, World Health Organization, and the World Bank, in 2010, India suffered 231,027 road traffic deaths – almost 19 deaths per 100,000 people. This is despite the fact that the country owns only approximately 18 vehicles per 1,000 people (the United States, for reference, owns 797 and suffered 35,490 road traffic deaths) (31). In Roy’s narrative, the lethal risks of automobility operate from the margins of the text, where automobiles become agents of death silently assassinating minor characters: the Australian missionary Miss Mitten and Sophie Mol’s adoptive father Joe among them. In other places, Roy shows automobiles as indicators of socio-economic or racial clashes, as Rahel recounts her experience working at a gas station outside Washington, where she witnessed “men being shot through their car windows. And once, a man who had been stabbed, ejected from a moving car with a knife in his back” (21). Roy’s text illustrates that, in modernizing communities striving for automobility, cars, buses, and trains wield their own violence apart from their human operators.

This scene of devastation – a massive non-human animal dead by the roadside, surrounded by inefficient humans – underscores the point that studying traffic in India requires an understanding of not only automobiles, but of its peoples, cultures, and environments. The Plymouth's continued existence in both of Roy's narrative time periods, past and present, parallels the perpetuation of the subaltern and the prolonged violence of colonialism – both to humans and to environments. The Ipe family, though privileged, are forced onto paths that lead to separation, exile, and death. Characters of a lower caste, like Velutha, fare even worse under the control of European globalization and neocolonial automobility. In other passages from *The God of Small Things*, Roy offers scenes of protest, where both human characters and non-human settings resist the oppression of automotive and globalist systems. Through lenses of system theory and ecocriticism, automobility appears as an autopoietic reality: an ecologically destructive, self-replicating, capitalist engine. In response, literature imagines utopian alternatives through the systematic symbiosis of humans, more than human animals, and automotive objects.

#### AUTOPOIETIC ABUSES AND SYMPOIETIC SOLUTIONS

While the last section introduced automobility as an ideological force that extends colonial dominance from its historical past into the roads of its present, the true engine of automobility is systemic. Automobility has material consequences for the subaltern as well as linguistic, as we see upon adult Rahel's return to Ayemenem, when she finds a note, written by a child Estha, practicing his English literacy. This passage, quoted here in its entirety, sheds light on the perilous implementation of automobility in post-partition India and implies that language, subaltern identity, and traffic are all interconnected within systems of road traffic:

*When we walk on the road in the town, cautious Estha's story went, we should always walk on the pavement. If you go on the pavement there is no traffic to cause accidents, but on the main road there is so much dangerous traffic that they can easily knock you down and make you senseless or a criple. If you break your head or back-bone you will be very unfortunate. policemen can direct the traffic so that there won't be too many invalids to go to hospitil. When we get out of the bus we should do so only after asking the conductor or we will be injured and make the doctors have a busy time. The job of a driver is very fatle His family should be very angshios because the driver could easily be dead. (150)*

The original text features both the italics and the underlined words. The italics are to distinguish the text as something the character, Rahel, is reading. The underlines imply that Estha was learning various words connected to traffic and/or death. The conflagration of language-learning and behavior is nothing new, but Estha's usage of first person plural and second person pronouns suggests that this automotive wariness is not simply for his benefit, or for children only, but for people in general. Estha's passage speaks specifically to culturally ingrained conceptions of class and caste that extend beyond child safety. Estha's underlined misspelled vocabulary – *criple*, *fatle*, *angshios* - goes far in explaining not only what prompts Rahel to remark “morbid kid,” but also in illustrating how language and automobility restrict the subaltern subject through systematic regulation. Linguistically, Estha's childish sentence constructions always follow the same pattern: he pushes the vocabulary word to the end of the sentence so that each of the preceding words define, through context, the underlined term. These sentences also signify a system of traffic that similarly fixes persons and vehicles in particular roles and behaviors. People *must* walk on the *pavement*, or else they will be a *cripple*. Only

specialized persons – *conductors* – can negotiate with traffic. Other specialized persons – doctors, drivers, and police officers – have their own varying positionality in regards to the automotive system. Other people are left out entirely. Automobility, like language, works only when each of its components are in proper order.

Estha's childhood writings support the categorization of automobility as "autopoietic," a belief expressed by Walks. He states that automobility has the capacity to "self-organize and self-generate, due to the forces of propulsion automobility itself generates" (7). Moreover, such a system is not totally reliant upon individual automobiles, but is instead "co-constructed socially, spatially, culturally, and politically through the ways that dominant practices and affordances of the system are materialized, psychologically internalized, and political supported" (7). In *The God of Small Things*, we have already witnessed the material expression of automobility in the Plymouth, the internalized colonial oppression within Chacko, and the politically funded and constructed roadways that ensure humans and vehicles operate within their allotted spaces. Estha's writings detail how automobility not only places people into particular spaces based on a class system, but also governs their behavior so that the system is perpetuated. Behind the veil of safety and under the guise of technological progress, automobility directly affects the living conditions of both car-drivers and non-car-drivers, even as the latter group of persons are excluded and harmed by the system.

Using the writings of a child, the novel asks us to consider what happens to the individual components within an autopoietic system when its order is disrupted. Even as traffic authorities and global capitalism strives for autopoietic self-regulation or labor and consumables, Roy offers instances where the human and more than human lifeforms of Ayemenem interrupt such synchronicity, sabotaging the self-organizing and self-generating principles of governing

systems. What arises from such systematic stalling can then be conceived as a kind of sympoietic “re-starting” of automobility, a metaphorical merging of sentient and non-sentient life that does not excuse postcolonial marginalization of subaltern subjects but constructs its network around those individuals pushed to the margins by colonial hegemony. Roy’s text gives critics an opportunity to explore how these structural frames work with and against each other. In the novel, we find autopoietic systems actively perpetuating the socio-political marginalization of subaltern subjects as well as sympoietic images that productively connect environmental degradation with human oppression.

To embark into this debate between auto and sympoietic framings as they pertain to automobility is to scrutinize contemporary environmental scholarship. Sub-fields within the discipline, like new materialism and material ecocriticism, examine places in literature as sites of the enmeshment, entanglement and embeddedness of the human and the more than human animals, objects, and processes of the material world. These critics view ecosystems as sites where quantum intra-actions connect everyone and everything; however, some question if these theoretical models actually avoid rather than address the capitalist wasteland of the Anthropocene.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, this trend toward the de-centering of the human has left some wondering if we are not eliding socio-political realities of ethnic, racial, and sexual oppression and discrimination in favor of grouping all humanity together as a species. In response, Hannes Bergthaller wields systems theory to demarcate the “limits of agency” and utilizes the biological framework of autopoiesis to refer to “natural” systems that reproduce themselves within their environments. Bergthaller excavates inter-network anthropological structures within the intra-actions of environments to emphasize “that modern human society is divided into autopoietic

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<sup>7</sup>See my discussion on Chakrabarty and others in the introduction.

functional units (such as law, politics, science, religion and the economy), each of which ‘creates its own reality,’ and none of which ‘is in a position to control the operations of any of the others’” (Marland 846, Marland’s emphasis). Bergthaller warns us of the dangers that accompany erasing individual agencies in favor of a network. While the existences of humans, non-humans, and objects are certainly connected, material enmeshment cannot excuse the anthropocentric focus and capitalist drive of globalization, from which emerge diseased political, economic, and social systems in developing nations. In former colonial territories, rapid advances in technology have accelerated the spread of capitalism through automobility, tourism, and international traffic, which in turn has sped both anthropological and environmental violence. These are human-driven events that propel the more-than-human devastation of the Anthropocene. In the face of such massive instability, is it not irresponsible to refer to automobility as “self-regulating” and “self-sufficient?”

The term “autopoiesis” gained traction in the early 1970’s when biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela employed it to refer to living systems that “in their operations continuously produce their own constituents, their own components, which then participate in the same production processes” (Mingers, ix). Maturana and Varela's principal example is the human cell. Before this, Heidegger explored the etymology of autopoiesis to parse the aesthetics of natural versus human creation:

Physis also, the arising of something from out of itself, is a bringing forth, poiesis. Physis is indeed poiesis in the highest sense. For what presences by means of physis has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting open of a blossom into bloom, in itself (en heautoi). In contrast, what is brought forth by the artisan or the artist, e.g., the silver chalice, has the bursting open belonging to

bringing-forth, not in itself, but in another (en alli), in the craftsman or artist.  
(Heidegger 293)

Heidegger presents us with an unexpectedly simple binary that is not altogether helpful in explaining how scholars identify autopoiesis in material processes; however, Heidegger does clearly illustrate one of the key characteristics of autopoietic processes: that they are, to a degree, self-contained and self-producing. If *poiesis* is a bringing forth, and *heautoi* is in nature, then autopoiesis refers to processes and lifeforms within the environment that have a level of autonomy and independence.

What complicates this simple framing of autopoiesis as any self-producing, self-contained, system is Maturana and Varela's willingness to stretch and, in many ways, contradict these criteria. As explained by John Mingers, Maturana and Varela have no problem saying that humans themselves are autopoietic, despite the fact that humans cannot "produce" cells, energy, etc without the ingestion of sustenance from outside their bodies. If the human body is an autopoietic system it is one that exists in friction with its environment, rather than neatly separated. This liberal construing of autopoiesis's characteristics helps explain why Walks routinely describes traffic and automobility as autopoetic. For example, when a driver turns an engine key, the engine runs for only a little while, creating wasteful byproducts. The engine also has no efficacy without the outside interaction of other supposedly autopoietic systems, including the human operator, gasoline, and the overarching systems of urban planning. If automobility is an autopoietic system, it differs wildly from the autopoiesis of, for example, ants following a trail of pheromones.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>See Bergthaller, who uses the ant-pheromone metaphor as a productive model of naturally-occurring autopoiesis.

The danger of mislabeling of automobility as autopoietic is not merely linguistic; in fact, the violent environmental abuse and personal marginalization that automobility brings is a direct result of governments, corporations, and privileged peoples ignoring the consequences of “self-producing” systems. In the Anthropocene, human advancement, via concepts of spreading “civilization” and other ideologies across the world, has come at the cost of environmental degradation and continual states of poverty for economically deprived and culturally marginalized classes of peoples. This is evident in India, which is currently undergoing booms in population and national economy thanks in part to the introduction of industrial and cybernetic technologies. These technological advances are not autopoietic; rather than self-enclosed and self-sufficient within their environment, they are, if anything, unyielding in their expanse and unconcerned with boundaries. However, the tendency for Walks and others to think of automobility as an autopoietic system perpetuates the spread of these systems, allowing the spread of globalization to continue unchecked at the expense of local peoples and environments.

Roy recognizes the dangers of such a mindset – one that sees self-sufficiency and progress even as it destroys life and marginalizes communities – and offers several scenes of critique and resistance. In *The God of Small Things*, traffic emerges as a potential autopoietic system that is perpetually disrupted. I have already addressed a couple images of autopoietic crisis: the dead elephant by the side of the highway and the butterfly smashed against the windshield of the Plymouth. If the carcass of a dead elephant indicates the infeasibility of human-made systems to traffic life in the face of automobility, and if the butterfly shows the power inequalities between participants within such a system, then Roy’s depiction of the communist march signals a potential alternative framework to autopoietic systems.

While Roy portrays the communist demonstration as linear march across the Cochin highway, the scene also crosses the intersections of caste, class, ideology and geography. The march takes place early in the story, as the Ipe family – Chacko, Ammu, Estha, Rahel, and Baby Kochamma – take the Plymouth to Cochin in order to see *The Sound of Music*. On the way, the family are delayed in traffic by a swath of communist demonstrators, Velutha among them. Roy articulates the moment as one in which local untouchables sabotage the globalist weaponry of automobility; In their American car, en route to an American film with global resonance, in the midst of western-derived systems of mobility, the Ipe family are forced to confront the subaltern faces, objects, and identities that they had previously ignored and scorned. Before the family witnesses the actual marchers, they encounter impoverished vendors, selling both local produce and American corporate goods: “the Level Crossing Divinity conjured up beggars with bandages, men with trays selling pieces of fresh coconut, parippu vadas on banana leaves. And cold drinks. Coca-Cola, Fanta, Rosemilk” (59). By prefacing the Communist march with a depiction of global capitalism at work, Roy captures the struggle still faced by local subjects in the face of profit-seeking corporations.

Like the Das family in Lahiri’s “Interpreter of Maladies,” the Ipe family witnesses, from within the confines of a four-wheeled colonial signifier, the de-colonial resistance of the local against the global. Unlike in Lahiri, this resistance takes human form, in the figures of Communist demonstrators: “within minutes, the road was swamped by thousands of marching people. Automobile islands in a river of people” (Roy 63). The congregation of human bodies effectively halts traffic for several minutes. In taking their physical presence into the highway, the Communist marchers disrupt what should be an autopoietic system with the multiple agencies of individuals, massed together as one. If Estha’s writing exercise was an indication of

how automobility regulates and restricts subaltern language and behavior by enforcing neoliberal ideas of autonomy and class mobility, the communists, by disrupting traffic, do more than make themselves visible: they strike at a system that privileges car-driving classes over non-drivers and effectively undermine ideologies of individualism in favor of congregation. Rather than be fearful of traffic, the demonstrators assert their importance in the face of a system that ignores and excludes them.<sup>9</sup>

In the absence of mobility, the Plymouth takes on various zoomorphic tendencies. In separate instances the car is both “an angular blue animal waiting to be fed” and, with Rahel dangling out its window as a “loose, flailing horn, a “car-shaped herbivore” (68). Through conflating the capitalist refuge of the Plymouth with animalistic imagery of a zoo, as though our bourgeois Indian protagonists were safari-ing through communism, Roy merges and melds the autonomy of automobiles, humans, and non-human lifeforms. Rather than an autopoietic system, Roy presents us with something more akin to what Donna Haraway would term a sympoietic network.

For Haraway, no system is truly autopoietic: “Nothing makes itself; nothing is really auto-poietic or self-organizing. In the words of the Iñupiat computer “world game,” earthlings are Never Alone.” Instead, Haraway suggests that sympoiesis is “a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding” (M25).<sup>10</sup> Haraway’s application of sympoietic frameworks allows ecocritics and those invested in the material intra-actions of the world to view environments as systemic and entangled without worrying about autopoiesis’s restrictive claim of defined boundaries. Moreover, sympoiesis more accurately

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed analysis of how political protests like “Occupy Wall Street” directly engage with automobility, see Matt Talsma.

<sup>10</sup> This text has a unique structure with two sets of page numbers, preceded by the letter M or G.

highlights the individual participants and processes that exist within systems. In the words of Heather Swanson, Anna Tsing, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt, “symbiotic relations must be constantly renewed and negotiated within life’s entanglements” (M1). Sympoiesis denotes an unpredictability in self-creative processes and allows for mutations, evolutions, and shifts.

What Roy presents us with in the communist march scene is not an outright dismissal of autopoiesis, but what Haraway might term the “generative friction” of autopoiesis and sympoiesis acting upon one another.<sup>11</sup> This friction manifests in Roy’s text as a kind of biological resistance to autopoietic dominance: what was once mechanical takes on characteristics of biological life. Bodies emerge from car windows and resemble animal parts. Sky-blue Plymouths rust and fall into disrepair while grass grows around its flat tires. The automobile fights back, capturing a sparrow who “had found her way in through a hole in the windscreen, tempted by some seat-sponge for her nest. She never found her way out. No one noticed her panicked car-window appeals. She died on the backseat, with her legs in the air. Like a joke” (280). Here, Ammu is the anthropological referent of the sparrow, once again indicating a sympoietic system of relations between *holobionts* and *holobients*.<sup>12</sup> If automobility insists that humans evolve into “car-drivers,” then this is not a function of autopoiesis, but is a sympoietic evolution, like a car becoming an animal or a car becoming itself an ecosystem. Rather than thinking of automobility as a process that takes place separate from the human and non-humans that exist within it, automobility is a complex network of all living and non-living beings. As Roy puts it, “Real life was inside the van. Where real death was” (155). Automobility, therefore, emerges in Roy’s text as co-existing autopoietic and sympoietic frameworks that represent current environmental and postcolonial concerns of the Anthropocene. Conceiving of

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<sup>11</sup> Haraway, M24-M50.

<sup>12</sup> Haraway distinguishes between *holobionts* and *holobients* on M26.

automobility as both, rather than one or the other, provides a more efficient model of the material realities of the subaltern subject acting within the agential networks of urban environs: navigating around other cars, bicycles, scooters, pedestrians, and non-human animals.

By viewing the intra-actions of humans and automobiles in Roy's text through autopoietic and sympoietic ideas, we unearth profound ethical implications and foreshadow potential abuses for the human and more than human lifeforms in contemporary India. In a later scene in the novel, Roy describes the movements of people in Cochin station. This passage, like others, highlights Roy's stylistic tendency to deconstruct descriptive paragraphs into a type of free verse of associated images. Rahel holds Ammu's hand, a "mosquito on a leash. A Refugee Stick Insect in Bata sandals" while surrounded by a crowd of people "Scurrying hurrying buying selling luggage trundling porter paying children shitting people spitting coming going begging bargaining reservation checking" (284). The station is a structure devoted to automobility, but Roy describes it largely by describing the people within it, and the filth generated by their biological processes. Rather than an autopoietic system, tightly controlled and orderly, the Cochin terminus reveals an excess of anthropological poverty including "gaunt children, blond with malnutrition, selling smutty magazines and food they couldn't afford to eat themselves," and "hollow people. Homeless. Hungry. Still touched by last year's famine" (285). Instead of addressing economic inequality, automobility highlights how commerce, capitalism, and class difference persist in decolonial nations.

Such a network of anthropological, automotive, and economic agents showcases the dialectic of autopoietic and sympoietic models of automobility. By understanding both of these models, Roy is able to defend the importance of more-than human life and ecological biomes while simultaneously recognizing the socio-political marginalization of the subaltern human. The

union of these two systems manifests in the character of Velutha himself, the titular God of small things, who both makes and is made up of his environment. This environment is not only the biological life of Ayemenem, but the mechanical: the “sourmetal smells – like steel bus rails and the smell of the bus conductor’s hands from holding them” (207). Such an understanding of the God of Small Things illuminates an early description of Velutha that places the mechanical and the biological together in his human embodiment: “Barebodied. A coil of insulated electrical wire was looped over one shoulder. He wore his printed dark-blue-and-black mundu loosely folded up above his knees. On his back, his lucky leaf from the birthmark tree (that made the monsoons come on time)” (166). Velutha’s apotheosis is Roy’s strategy of linking the subaltern body and the subaltern biome. As two byproducts of automobility from separate castes, Ammu and Velutha’s relationship does not reduce socio-political concerns to matters that can be solved through sex but mobilizes them, makes them visible. When Ammu is first attracted to Velutha, this attraction is itself a journey, characterized by Velutha’s automotive body, “polished with a high-wax body polish” and his smile “the only piece of baggage he had carried with him from boyhood into manhood” (167). Understanding Velutha as a manifestation of the sym-poietic environment – one that traffics in automobiles, pedestrians, workers, animals, and plants – allows for us to acknowledge material ecocriticism’s emphasis on non-human agency as not an avoidance of anthropocentric violence and political marginalization, but as an opening up of critical possibility.

The novel’s final chapter analeptically leaps into the earlier narrative in order to depict the consummation of Ammu and Velutha’s relationship. Roy depicts their union as not only between two bodies, but between human and environment. As Velutha rises from the river, Ammu sees that “the world that they stood in was his. That he belonged to it. That it belonged to

him. The water. The mud. The trees. The fish” (316). Such description foregrounds the intra-actions taking place between non-human agencies within particular biomes. The narration moves outward, away from its human protagonists and toward the outer world. However, Roy does not suggest abandoning or ignoring the human in favor of the non-human, but emphasizes the human’s role and responsibility to work with their environment. Roy underscores in Velutha “how his labor had shaped him. How the wood he fashioned had fashioned him. Each plank he planed, each nail he drove, each thing he made had molded him” (316). While the chapter does present a de-centering of the human in favor of the environment, this de-centering leads to a cross-cultural epiphany in Ammu, where “fear is derailed and Biology [takes] over” (318). Once again, Roy not only critiques the caste system but also interrupts systems of automobility that marginalize subaltern subjects. Furthermore, she makes it clear that to focus on the agency of material non-human animals and objects is not to ignore the human, but to emphasize their importance. Ammu and Velutha at the close of *The God of Small Things* represent the “generative friction” between humans and non-humans, personal autonomy and cultural mobility, and autopoietic and sympoietic systems.

## CONCLUSION: AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES, GARDEN HIGHWAYS, AND THE FUTURE OF AUTOMOBILITY

Even as Roy presents roadways and train stations as agential systems of mobility and place, she never excludes or buries the human subject within these non-human networks. Within *The God of Small Things*, she vocalizes language that indemnifies the material consequences of mislabeling traffic as autopoietic and identifies the importance of understanding place as constantly moving interrelated actants. Roy continues to follow these threads in her more recent

novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), which directly indicts automobility as a root cause of Delhi's traffic congestion and population resettlement. In a passage that echoes the Communist march and the sea of people in *The God of Small Things*, Roy details how "All day long the roads were choked with traffic. The newly dispossessed, who lived in the cracks and fissures of the city emerged and swarmed around the sleek, climate-controlled cars, selling cloth dusters, mobile phone chargers, model jumbo jets, business magazines..." (104). For a paragraph, Roy continues cataloguing the objects sold and marketed by the Delhi disenfranchised, tackling tourism ("country houses in Provence"), nationalism (flags that read "My India is Great"), and mass-produced spirituality (yoga classes and spirituality manuals) (104). Once again, Roy offers us a picture of traffic that is more than simply automotive, but automobile: a network of machines, people, and animals, moving alongside and up against one another, channeling differences in caste, financial class, and religious sect. Even the flyover – the elevated roadway of privilege - makes an appearance as a road "impossible to pee on... wide as a field, with twenty lanes of cars whizzing over it and towers of steel and glass growing on either side of it" (415). Beneath the flyover, Roy finds a "different" world, an "unpaved, unlaned, unlit, unregulated, wild and dangerous one, in which buses, trucks, bullocks, rickshaws, cycles, handcards and pedestrians jostled for survival" (415). In this later novel, Roy once again grapples with what is seen and unseen in Indian culture and what is large versus what is small in cultural consciousness. The two Delhi's - one elevated and regulated, the other subaltern and wild – reflect not only the two faces of automobility but the multiple versions of people and places documented in *The God of Small Things*.

Both *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* offer pictures of India in particular time periods, allowing us to follow automobility's introduction to the region

by Western powers, its rise alongside global capitalism, and its current sprawl. In the immediate future, India looks to capitalize even further on trends developed by the automotive industry that push the dispossessed to the margins. One of these trends, often marketed as an environmentally friendly, cost efficient, and time saving alternative to the present automotive state, is the autonomous vehicle: the self-driving car. If a purely autopoietic conception of automobility in *The God of Small Things* disregards or attacks the subaltern in favor of colonial interest, then the development and spread of the autonomous vehicle looks to only widen these divides. Through the constructed narratives of safety, convenience, and leisure, automotive corporations stand to increase their earnings while depriving agency from their customers. This looming erasure of the human driver, like the erasure of the human subaltern in ecocriticism, perpetuates neoliberal capitalism while hiding behind a shield of environmental activism. If autopoiesis demarcates the “limits of agency” and sympoiesis emphasizes the value of human work in environmental systems, then the self-driving car deprives human drivers of their agency while simultaneously enforcing hegemonic power dynamics.

If the autonomous vehicle possesses an artificial intelligence, then cars in the future stand to be an even more agential force. With its increased autonomy, developers are already asking questions about the ethics surrounding their programming and deployment. Even though the technology is nascent, student engineers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are forecasting ethical dilemmas through their website, [moralmachine.mit.edu](http://moralmachine.mit.edu). The site asks its visitors to play a game that tests “human perspective on moral decisions made by machine intelligence.” While somewhat simplistic, the site illustrates how programmers of autonomous vehicles will be asked to think of life forms based on age, gender, income, and species. The game consists of ten decisions in which the player is asked to choose the lesser of two evils. In

one example, two images are shown: one where the self-driving car, suffering from a sudden brake malfunction, either runs headfirst into a barricade, killing its passengers (a mother, father, and child) or the other, where the self-driving car avoids the barricade by running down a separate family crossing the street. In another example, the car must choose between mowing down a group of friendly animals or a single old man near death. The game tallies up your decisions at the end of the exercise to produce something like a personality assessment: noting whether the player is predisposed to spare the driver at the expense of other families, whether the player privileges the lives of women and children at the expense of men, or whether the player considers the lives of animals to be of equal value to humans.

Like Rahel re-reading Estha's childhood writing excerpt, our first inclination after playing such a game might be to remark, "How morbid." However, such an exercise illustrates the potential discrimination that could accompany the AI programming, model development and mass-production of the autonomous car. While the eliminating the driver's responsibility might seem to be a step toward a post-racial system of automobility, the entanglement of race with economic and political status increases, rather than diminishes, the potential for marginalization. For example, those drivers who are financially unable to afford an autonomous car in an autonomous city will only suffer an additional layer of exclusion. Like the flyovers in Mumbai, these autonomous roads and vehicles will service only a privileged elite.

Along with the potential discriminatory practices of AI programming, development and proliferation of the autonomous vehicle stands to further enmesh its passengers within the widening network of corporate globalization. Through targeted advertising and brand-restricted roadways, the freedom and autonomy commonly associated with automobile ownership will be replaced with sponsorships. Certainly, self-driving cars offer a vision of increased personal

productivity; without having to focus on the road or on driving, passengers are afforded the freedom to work on other things. However, in transferring their automotive agency to an artificial intelligence, these passengers also fully surrender themselves to corporate whims. While they ride in a Chrysler car, they will be shown advertisements for Chrysler's business partners. When stopping for gas, priority will be given to particular gas stations, and when parking, they will park in Chrysler-specific garages. For an additional fee, passengers can access priority parking spaces and specific autonomous fast lanes. Certainly, these are presently dystopian visions of capitalism run amuck; still, increased corporatization of automobility is feasible, given the current political climate surrounding topics that directly affect so-called free markets, like net neutrality. Furthermore, in order to simply make autonomous cars a reality, corporations will have to invest heavily in government infrastructure, from road construction, to traffic authorities, to charging stations. Again, these considerations are approached entirely from a Western perspective; transferring such a process to the Asia-Pacific will result in a profound increase in environmental degradation for a region that has already suffered.<sup>13</sup>

While autonomous vehicles are decades away from mass production, much less ubiquity, residents of Mumbai are already unearthing forms of resistance to an age of automobility that excludes human agency. If automobility is both problem and solution to Indian sub-alternity, an on-ramp to a blockaded highway, then those directly affected by the automotive industry must find space to flourish in its shadows. For instance, beneath the Tulpule flyover in Mumbai, residents have constructed the city's first "under-the-flyover" garden. A group of concerned

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<sup>13</sup> My apocalyptic visions of unchecked automobility might seem like inventions from a scholar with too much time on his hands, however, the situations described here were relayed to me in an interview with an automotive engineer employed by BMW. He wishes to remain nameless. Furthermore, some of these questions about the logistics of autonomous vehicles are from inward and outward facing documents. The Daimler and Benz corporations – the manufacturers of Chryslers and Mercedes makes – sponsored the publication of *Autonomous Driving* in 2015, a critical anthology containing articles about the “ethical, social, legal, psychological, or transport-related aspects of this process” of transitioning to a new self-driving automotive paradigm. (Maurer)

citizens, under the title of "One Matunga" transformed the once derelict sub-alleyway into a 600-meter long green space (Singh). Designed to resemble the Narmada River, this space, borne from the combined efforts of multiple communities, reinforces "traffic" as a productive metaphor for the networked agencies of not only cars, but persons, animals, and ideologies. The garden is the material artifice of the intersection between the environmental and the subaltern, depicted by Roy through passages of protest and enmeshment. While acknowledging the economic windfall of the automotive industry, Roy reveals the environmental and anthropological harm generated by the resulting traffic. Roy's writing offers a productive model for how critics can responsibly note the validity of non-human agencies while not excusing, eliding, or erasing the importance of historical social and political inequalities. Seeing the relationship between the subaltern and place as the trafficking of multiple persons, animals, objects, and ideologies, allows for scholarship that opens a space for the non-human, while not silencing the subaltern voice.

**CHAPTER TWO: ONE CHINA, COUNTLESS BEINGS: THE TRAFFICKED CITIES  
OF HONG KONG AND TAIPEI IN *ATLAS* AND *THE OLD CAPITAL***

That's it! Writers who create the way we do are just like that, always thinking, always searching as we drag a magnet behind us, walking alone through cities and the wilderness, down every block and around every corner of a long life. (20)  
Chu T'ien Hsin, "Death in Venice"

In Hong Kong-based author Shih Shu-Ching's novel *City of the Queen*, a woman is faced with an ethical decision emblematic of the cultural and ideological division between the colonial government of Hong Kong and the Chinese inhabitants of the region.<sup>14</sup> Set in the period directly after the ceding of Hong Kong to the British Empire, the novel recounts the history of the city concurrently with the life experience of Huang Deyun, who, having come across an opportunity to return to her hometown of Dongguan, from which she was forcibly kidnapped and sold into prostitution at the age of 13, debates between fleeing the city or staying.<sup>15</sup> Pregnant after an affair with an English sanitation officer, she joins a crowd of migrating disenfranchised Chinese laborers, fleeing the area due to a plague ironically caused by the massively unsafe sanitation conditions in the city. At the coast, she is shocked that Peddler's Wharf – the trading post where she arrived as a girl – is gone, replaced by laborers engaged in the process of land reclamation: a "battle between man and nature, driving back the ocean inch by inch" (86). Rather than discovering a passage off the island, she finds humans engaged in the opposite: laying down the foundations for generations of families to establish permanent homes. Suddenly, a blast of cannon fire knocks Deyun off of her feet, into the yellow mud. Upon witnessing the sight of

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<sup>14</sup> "Hong Kong" as a geographic entity is made up of the main "Hong Kong Island" and the smaller islands of Lantau, Cheung Chao, and Lamma, as well as a small area of the mainland continent consisting of what was once the walled city of Kowloon and the "New Territories," cities built within the last three decades to make room for people displaced by metro Hong Kong's precipitous growth.

<sup>15</sup> Dongguan, located in the Pearl River estuary of South China, is itself a city infamous for its sex industry and its importance as a port in the opium wars.

workers laboring on the coast and ships blasting away hills and rock formations to create homes, Deyun destroys a packet of herbs, meant for aborting her child, and resolves to “build a home on this reclaimed land for them both” (87). Shih’s pun on “reclaiming” allows her to frame Deyun’s decision as a heroic act of personal agency, while also alluding to the detrimental consequences of land reclamation – the process of moving soil from midland to the coast – on the environment. Even as Deyun resolves to seize control of the land for her and her future family, Shih implies that her actions are dooming Deyun and her family to a cycle of perpetual colonial violence inflicted upon the people and environments of British-occupied Hong Kong.

Shih’s *City of the Queen*, a trilogy of novels, published in Hong Kong and Taiwan in 1993, 95, and 97, translated and collected for publication in the United States in the singular volume in 2005, attempts to cast the history of Hong Kong using the lived experiences of Huang Deyun and her descendants as a mold, pairing the upward mobility of the family with the rise of the British port turned Chinese territory over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Interspersed among Deyun’s family narrative are reenactments of major events in Hong Kong’s history; Shih’s 700-page epic begins with the 1839 opium ban and ends on the eve of the 1997 handover and makes passing references to plagues, natural disasters, and numerous migrations and fluctuations in the population.<sup>16</sup> From refugee to prostitute to pawnshop owner, Deyun’s social ascendancy metaphorically parallels Hong Kong’s evolution from a sparsely inhabited island to colonial tourist destination and commercial metropolis. A victim of human trafficking as a child, Deyun is subsequently trafficked further still, from one job and abusive relationship to another.

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<sup>16</sup> Scott M. Faul has taken the English translators to task for the massive edits and cuts made for the English language *City of the Queen*. In the case of Shih’s novel, I find Faul’s criticisms convincing, which is one reason why I do not subject the novel to deeper analysis. However, I stop short at asserting that translated texts cannot be the subject of analysis in their own right. Whether or not a translation can be perfect, or an acceptable stand-in, or a unique work in its own right, I believe questions of readership and access trump these concerns. In the paper, I attribute the reading to the authors themselves, rather than the translators.

Yet Deyun's steadfast commitment to Hong Kong rather than Dongguan indicates that people who live in Hong Kong desire for its own identity and history, apart from that of its two predominant colonial parents: Britain and China. Shih's decision to set the ending of the trilogy on the eve of the handover, with Deyun's descendants occupying high-ranking positions in city government, education, and the arts, assumes that such an independent history is possible, despite the tumult of colonial transition perpetually occurring throughout the region.

By following the social ascendancy of a Chinese family into and out of British imperialism, the novel provides an accurate accounting of the historical context for Hong Kong's current struggle for identity – a definable “Hong Kongese” that accumulates the island's complex transnational culture. Over the course of Shih's novel – spanning the latter half of the nineteenth century into the latter half of the twentieth - readers witness how Hong Kong grows, modulates, regulates, and ultimately marginalizes its own native population and local ecosystems in favor of creating comfortable habitats for its colonial outsiders. Shih exposes readers to how famous sites and neighborhoods such as Victoria Peak and Happy Valley came to be established and named, and she documents how British colonials passed legislation prohibiting Chinese residents from habitation above a certain sea level.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Shih characterizes how particular areas shifted their culture depending on whether or not colonials were present. If only Chinese or Filipino people were in the area, they were slums. If a colonial were to visit, the residents would adopt the appearance of a “miniature China.” Employing the most obvious orientalist tropes, these plucky workers, soldiers, or slaves put on a show for visiting colonials. In Shih's words, “behind a gilded screen was hidden a China that indulged westerners’

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<sup>17</sup> The Peak District Reservation Ordinance of 1904 essentially argued that areas above a certain sea level – privy to cleaner air and cooler temperatures – were available only to non-Chinese (not to mention the large number of Filipino and Indonesian migrants). This legislation was a violation of both environmental and human rights, as those living at the lower elevations were far more likely to contract the plague. The bill was repealed in 1946.

imagination: imitations of old paintings of mountains and rivers hung on the wall, vases in famille rose from the town of Jingde stood in the corners [...] This concocted China had nothing to do with Deyun” (13). Like Salman Rushdie’s vision of Mumbai in *Midnight’s Children*, the Hong Kong presented by Shih’s accounting is merely a part of a larger picture, a hole cut out in cloth, an image in an occluded spyglass. Here, as in so many other foundational postcolonial texts, the violence of colonialism is not only immediate, but structural, enabling foreign systems to divide and compartmentalize cities into areas of authenticity and palatability, where neighborhoods cannibalize themselves in attempts to appeal to Imperialist officials and tourists.

While Shih’s text argues that Hong Kong fits this mold of other colonial cities, the fact remains that colonialism in the region has been overlooked by the field of postcolonial literary criticism. One linguistic explanation for this neglect stems from the colony’s historical acceptance of congenial terms such as “rental” or “lease” to refer to its colonial occupation. The most offensive term repeatedly used to soften Hong Kong’s history of colonial violence is undoubtedly “handover” itself, which obscures the political unrest of the predominantly Chinese inhabitants during the 1997 transition from Britain to Chinese rule. In fact, life in colonial Hong Kong was far from orderly or utopian thanks in large part to the limited ecology of the small island itself. Shih explains how residents struggled to purchase and maintain land ownership, while “geographical limitations placed upon the natural environment meant a scarcity of new land” (249). Under English rule, people who had lived in the region for generations paid for the land without actually owning it: “they only enjoyed the right to use it. They were, in fact, renting the land from the British Crown, and there was even an expiration date” (249). Shih’s fictional historiography accounts for how climate and geography worked in tandem with colonial hegemony to form the unique conditions of Hong Kong’s postcolonial urbanism: where the city

and its residents are forced to perpetually forecast into the future and plan for the next transitional handover.

For scholars, interrogating the lingering damage of British Imperialism and the encroaching effects of Chinese rule on the Hong Kong subject is a matter of examining how literature documents urban infrastructure in relation to the ecological disenfranchisement of its inhabitants. Shih's language is the most critical when she details the loss of history through the demolition of buildings, the redirection of streets, and the shifting of architectural styles. Shih's decolonial critique operates by meticulously recording how colonialism erected these orientalist miniatures, from the Repulse Bay Hotel to "Happy Valley" and "the Golden Jubilee," to appropriate not only the landscape but also the living identities of its inhabitants. In the novel, during the late twentieth century post-handover transition period to becoming a Chinese territory as opposed to British, these characters feel surprise at the loss they feel. Shih describes the leveling of the city at its foundations, from the "bricks at the Hong Hom Station" to old hotels "attended by guests wearing clothes from the 1920s and 1930s and dancing to jazz music," and its replacement by a "new Hong Kong" of skyscrapers, space museums and low-income public housing on the outskirts of town (290). By detailing the urban changes of the city, Shih gestures toward the physical and mental disorientation felt by a population engaged in the arduous work of what could be called trans-colonization – of one occupied territory being passed from one mainland to another. Even as Deyun's family occupies a position of privilege at the end of the novel, this triumph comes at the cost of never having a real history of their own, and therefore feeling disengaged from their environment.

While Shih's text creates an opening for a potentially productive new model of the relationship between urbanism, colonialism, and communal abjection, she adheres too strongly to

conventional storytelling and historical mimesis. She liberally embraces tropes from a rote “rags-to-riches” story; the journey of a kidnapped child to prostitute to matriarch is actually too neat a parallel for Hong Kong’s development. Hong Kong is already overdetermined as an East/West point of contact, and this novel does little to complicate the cliché. As I have explored in prior chapters, colonial cities in the region, from Ayemenem to Hong Kong to Taipei are not made up of simply Indian, Chinese, or British binaries, nor are they fully functioning cultural hybrids. These environments consist of multiple cultures, identities, and lifeworlds trafficking with, against, and counter to one another. If the goal of *City of the Queen* is to focus on the lived experience of one character during the reign of British Imperialism, then it succeeds; however, to find stronger examples of how these metropolitan cities exhibit unique responses to their colonial past, other works are required.

Even if the narrative arc of Shih’s text is ultimately banal, the lack of English language scholarship surrounding such a monumental trilogy represents a gap in the field of postcolonial studies. As authors from India, Sri Lanka, and other Southeast Asian English-speaking former colonies receive a sizable share of critical attention from European and American literature departments, texts from Hong Kong and Taiwan are comparatively overlooked or relegated to other academic disciplines. While recent scholarship has sought to remedy this void, a sizable number of texts and authors have been neglected by Western critics due to a lack of willing publishers and scarce availability of translators. This lack is particularly troubling given the potential of literature from Hong Kong and Taipei to inform critiques of neocolonial globalization and capitalism’s consequences on Asian-Pacific environments and people. If these colonial metropolises are sites of unchecked automobility and carbon usage, then the cities

themselves are also trafficked sites: places that move and shift between a colonial past and a global future, just as their cultures transition from one nation to the next.

This chapter re-examines and re-assesses the dominant positioning of these cities as colonial port towns and cosmopolitan metropolitan utopias. Using the logic of mainland China's "One China, Two Systems" against it, I place Hong Kong and Taipei's unique relationship with the PRC in the context of theoretical critiques of urbanization that take into account environmental degradation and personal subjugation. In these two major cities in the Sinosphere, "One China, Two Systems" is indicative of how the trafficking of language, governments, and environments can lead to unanchored, displaced identities and environmental misuse. After carving a niche in the theory for the trafficked city, I examine how the city appears in contemporary literature from the region, which illustrates not only the existence of this trafficking, but also how its influence promotes non-traditional ways of writing history. Where Shih writes history in a largely conventional, even popular voice that juxtaposes Hong Kong's linear progress from colonial territory to global center of capital alongside the personal rise of a family name from slave to legislator, much of the literature from these territories is much more experimental. The first section examines *Atlas: The Archaeology of an Imaginary City* by Hong Kong author Dung Kai-Cheung for the way he employs theoretical place-based frameworks that link historiography with contemporary infractions of encroaching global capitalism in the region. In the second section, I shift geographically to *The Old Capital* by Taiwanese author Chu T'ien-hsin to show the necessity of "trafficked city" as a model for Taipei, whose colonial history perpetually defamiliarizes the city to its inhabitants and routinely disregards other forms of biological life. The chapter concludes by drawing connections between these novels' approach to environmental havens like parks and public squares, showing how these novels advocate for

an ethical urban infrastructure that modulates traffic for the benefit of individual sovereignty and cultural identity. In so doing, I mobilize urban theory to detail how the postcolonial city, or rather, city-state, is instrumental in showing how the city's regulation of people and objects – its *traffic*, is itself a form of colonial control, one that persists despite decolonizing efforts and territorial handovers.

#### “ONE CHINA, TWO SYSTEMS” AND THE NEED FOR NEW THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR WORLD CITIES

In Ursula Heise's 2019 plenary address for the biennial Association for the Study of Literature and Environment Conference, titled “Planet of Cities: Multispecies Environments and Narrative Futures,” Heise explained how global urbanization has resulted in a number of new paradigms for viewing the relationship between nature and the city: most notably Urban Ecology. Much ecocritical thinking has evolved from thinking of nature *in* cities and nature *for* cities to a current model where cities *are* nature. Heise discusses how non-human life flourishes not in spite of human made infrastructure but because of it. Her work urges ecocritical to imagine what urban futures emerge from literature, for both humans and non-humans.

Currently a “Special Administrative Region” of the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong's prior status as a British colony is enmeshed firmly into its infrastructure, as its left-hand traffic roads are day-to-day reminders of British imperialism. In this way, Hong Kong is one of 75 former colonies, including India, Kenya, and Singapore, whose fundamental traffic is antipodal to its neighboring countries. Drivers from the mainland entering Hong Kong must quickly accommodate themselves to the shifting lanes, which results in an immediate disorientation of place. At every street corner, pedestrians and drivers are reminded to look right

or left in order to avert disaster, though the sheer number of people makes this difficult. As of 2006, three of Hong Kong's major points of entry from the mainland – Lok Ma Chau, Man Kam To, and Sha Tau Kok – account for the passage of about half a million passengers per day (“Cross-Boundary”). To facilitate this rapid transfer of persons, China has in the intervening years undertaken initiatives to smooth the transition from mainland to island territory, including the construction of the world's largest sea-crossing bridge, the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao bridge, 55 kilometers long, complete with two artificial islands and a 6.7-kilometer tunnel (He). This hustle and bustle of automobiles and individuals, combined with skyscrapers of tiny hexagonal apartments, has led to the usurpation of Hong Kong's long-held nickname of “Pearl of the Orient” by the new metaphor of “the Beehive.” Conceiving of the relationship between the mainland and Hong Kong through images of bridges, congestion, and motor traffic, helps us visualize how China's contentious governing principle – “One China, Two Systems” – exacerbates an already confusing everyday life for a postcolonial subject and furthers the damage done to the natural environment.

Coined by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980's, “One China, Two Systems” refers to the PRC's ideological reconciling of its communist mainland and the global capital of its colonial territories. By labelling these places, namely Hong Kong and Macau, as “special administrative regions,” China retains national sovereignty while allowing for local governmental authority. While under the umbrella of the mainland, Hong Kong manufactures its own currency, maintains its own roads, and collects taxes under its own jurisdiction. For more than a few people, this form of government represents the “best of both worlds.” With the militaristic backing of China and the opportunity of financial freedom, many residents of Hong Kong enjoy personal incomes and life expectancies as high as the numerous skyscrapers surrounding Victoria Harbour.

However, other citizens live at the mercy of “One China, Two Systems,” as dueling colonial histories weave themselves in and out of the daily experiences of people living in areas of income inequality and urban congestion. Scholar and poet Tammy Lai-Hing Ho summarizes in “How the Narratives of Hong Kong are Written with China in Sight,” a 22-point short manifesto that sardonically critiques China for its over-control, praising China’s “generosity” for not running them over in tanks and claiming that “Hong Kong is unhappy because it wants happiness too much.”<sup>18</sup>

The lane-shifting traffic from mainland China to Hong Kong is just one simple example of how the local history of Hong Kong, as a city, creates a material, environmental, objection to national history. “One China Two Systems” causes further friction between the mainland and the former British colony in other areas pertaining to environmental justice. In a 2017 study, Robert Gottlieb and Simon Ng found a fraught relationship between Hong Kong and Guangdong Province over the price and quality of water from the Dongjiang River, which supplies 80 percent of Hong Kong’s water supply. Gottlieb found that, despite disputes over cross-boundary air quality, energy, and food supplies, “the governments have made only a few joint efforts to address their issues.” Despite close proximity, shared governmental authority, and rampant cross-boundary traffic between China and Hong Kong, there remains profound ideological and environmental dissent between the two territories. However, by focusing attention on the traffic within cities like Hong Kong and Taipei, a profound connection between environment and individual emerges.

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<sup>18</sup>The full text of “How the narratives of Hong Kong are Written with China in Sight” is found on [radiuslit.org](http://radiuslit.org). Among the other statements Lai-Ming makes are: “China, non-light of my life, non-fire of my loins” and “Keep the ‘country’, remove the plural marker in ‘systems’ and replace ‘two’ by ‘one’, then you are truly beginning to read the story of Hong Kong (one and one is always one).”

In this chapter I employ the term “traffic” to signify not only the Sinospheric metropolis’s systems of automobility—the flow, direction, and agency of cars, buses, and trains – but to also refer to the city’s urban infrastructure – the arrangement of its roads in relation to residential neighborhoods, hospitals, and government offices. If automobility is a consequence of global neocapitalism, as the previous chapter has suggested, this chapter asserts that automobility cannot exist without the city. As the burden to modernize, or “westernize,” affects cities in the Asia-Pacific in how they emphasize car ownership and automotive transport, the cities themselves also directly impact the colonized subject. The ambiguity of “One China, Two Systems” as a governing principle necessitates a rethinking of existing models of the postcolonial city that flatten it into anti-agrarian cityscapes or minimized mimics of the parent colony. If the Western-driven history of urbanism used literature and philosophy to justify a movement from the farm to the city, masking its invasions through guises of prosperity and civilization, then the current era of globalization spotlights transitory cities that attempt to be both colonial and independent, ultimately failing at the latter.

“One China, Two Systems” is an ideological cornerstone of China’s ownership claim of a territory that is undergoing what Jeremy Taylor sees as a forced “Sinicization” of its history. In line with the writing of Dung and Chu, Taylor argues that recent attempts to rewrite the history of Hong Kong are both aiding and resisting attempts by the PRC government to assert that Hong Kong has “always been Chinese” (45). By distinguishing between “big city” Hong Kong and “Chinese” Hong Kong, Taylor argues that “obsessive” dedication to national categorizations of history overlooks the past, current, and future lived experiences of people at a city or national level (47). Indeed, the drive for history to fit into neat categories of national identity can be read as itself colonial; as pointed out by Helena Wu and Andrea Riemenschneider, Hong Kong “not

only has to steer away from the road to self-driven decolonization and democratization, but [it] is also subject to a series of state-led Sinicization processes, which are in line with the PRC's growing power with respect to world economy as well as politics" (1075). In cities with complicated colonial and indigenous histories, like Hong Kong and Taipei, the desire for China to claim these lands as their own Special Administrative Regions is both an erasure of a city's complex culture and theft of its commerce. Rather than embracing the multi-cultural heritage of Hong Kong as a global port, China's rule has instead imposed forced homogenization, political assimilation, and ideological flattening.

This battle between Hong Kong, the island city, and Hong Kong, the colony, represents the larger critical conversation surrounding post-national approaches to history. By shifting history's locus from nation to city, these scholars circumvent the problem Taylor identifies - the overlooking of local histories camouflaged in the national - and highlight the multiple subject-oriented histories within localities. This post-national turn is in part a response to the critical dialogue between Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, whose writings about cities and place laid the groundwork for contemporary theories that relate history with urbanism. In "Of Other Spaces," written in 1967 but not published until 1984, Foucault asserts that humanity and its history lives within a "heterogenous space": a "set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable upon one another" (3). Foucault coins these places "heterotopias," linking the real and the unreal experience simultaneously, in the same way that mirrors depict both reality and an abstract representation. If Foucault is correct in his assertion that "the great obsession of the nineteenth century was [...] history" then conceiving of places as heterotopic is an attempt to rid oneself of this obsessive devotion to

national structure and instead commit oneself to a study of the relationship between time, place, and persons (1).

One key aspect of Foucault's concept of heterotopia that appears in the writings of Dung and Chu is an understanding of places as non-essentialized, malleable spaces that are actively created and shaped by the actions and movements of its people. Rather than fixed locations and cultures, these places are destabilized by the material and ideological consequences of colonialism. If Foucault defines a heterotopia as another place between real and ideal, then the postcolonial Sinospheric metropolis is one of these "practiced" places, "produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities" (117; emphasis in original). In other words, people give places their meaning, and therefore colonialism's assault on the individual is also an assault on the location.

While Foucault finds heterotopias in the particular, everyday places of cities (everything from brothels to boarding houses), Lefebvre explores this concept at a city-wide scale, asserting that "urban space as a whole was heterotopic" until the influence of the bourgeoisie and the evolution of communal spaces from villages to class-based metropolises. By broadening his scope from institutions to cities at large, Lefebvre is able to talk more in depth regarding how the rise of the urban center brings lesser cognition of "traditional mankind" in favor of "the reconsidered and restructured being of an urban society" (74). Lefebvre argues that society has shifted from agrarian villages toward mercantile cities before arriving at its current place: the global city. It is this last step he argues that is most to blame for segregation by "class, by neighborhood, by profession, by age, by ethnicity, by sex" (92). While Lefebvre hails from an continental philosophical tradition, and his advancement of urban civilization is therefore

somewhat skewed in reference to the development of Chinese civilization, his writing accurately predicts the manner in which globalization has stratified nations across the world into inequitable hierarchies of wealthy and impoverished.

For the purposes of interrogating the PRC's bi-systematic approach to governing Hong Kong, Lefebvre makes an important conclusion about how world cities result from industrial capitalism. Neil Smith identifies a strong causal relationship between industrialization and globalization in Lefebvre's work, explaining that "the true global cities of the twenty-first century may well be those large metropolises that are simultaneously emerging as production motors not of national economies but of the global economy" (xx). This reading draws from Lefebvre's image of globalization as an "attack from above" in which "national development" is subject to development in general via capitalist ideologies of progress, industry, and mobility (94). In this light, the success of cities like Hong Kong and Taipei is not surprising; because of their history of colonial transience, they are less rooted to monolithic nationalism and are better suited for the kinetic surge of global capitalism.

Both Lefebvre and Foucault, by merging theoretical ontological discussions of place with pragmatic material examinations of actual location, directly influence the contemporary critical conversation about post-national histories. Recent theorists have found that to be post-national is to not only undermine the flattening of regions through orientalist homogeneity, but to also provide the cues for more complex understandings of how cities traffic in places, persons, and environments. Where Lefebvre directly critiques large cities as poisonous to nature, "nothing but vice, pollution, and disease (mental, social, moral)," then these new critics have attempted to focus on the vitality of these areas. To be post-national is to believe, as Kazi Ashraf and Jyoti Puri assert, that while humans may live in cities, cities live in them as well (60). These critics

prompt a reconsideration of cities as merely places of "unmanaged growth, migration, and struggle" (59). While there is no denying that overpopulation, industrialization, and income inequality ensure that cities are sites of hardship for human and non-human lifeforms, they are also sites that allow for resistance to national approaches through the trafficking of their very own cultural complexity. That being said, to be post-national is something of a struggle in places like Hong Kong and Taiwan, whose geographical proximity to China and the extent of that nation's power overwhelm urban histories.

Ultimately, recognizing this impetus to view place and identity in terms of city, rather than country, is essential for resisting the oppressive discourse of "One China, Two Systems" and recognizing the complex ecologies of Asia-Pacific cities like Hong Kong and Taipei, whose global economic success distances these places even from the traditional heritage of China. Furthermore, due to their complex colonial histories and their dense, transnational populace, these cities function, often unfairly, as cultural synecdoche for the region. The bright lights and high fashion of Wanchai threaten to not only overwhelm the influence of Beijing, but also erase the lived experience of the average Hong Kong citizen. Meanwhile, outside the shadows of Taipei's skyscrapers live the remaining two-thirds of Taiwan's population, who each hail from a different cultural background, some claiming indigenous Taiwanese ancestry, while some wax nostalgic for Japanese and Chinese occupation. Many would welcome Chinese governmental sovereignty, while still as many others vehemently oppose the prospect.

Whether it be "heterotopia," "world city," or postnational, these configurations, while instructive, are imperfect models for the lived experience of the human and non-human biomes of Hong Kong and Taipei, as evinced by the writings of Dung and Hsin, who depict characters within settings that are more than "in-between" or "global" – they are transitory and trafficked.

Building off of Lefebvre's assertion that the urban is "a highly complex field of tensions, a virtuality, a possible-impossible that attracts the accomplished, an ever-renewed and ever-demanding presence-absence," (40) I assert that a hermeneutics of Hong Kong and Taiwanese identity must mirror the transient nature of places that are materially and ideologically "handed over" from one nation to another, and governed under laws that consider them both sovereign and subject. For all of their commercial success and metropolitan excess, Dung and Chu write their cities as perpetually moving, vanishing and reappearing through archives and memories. In the following section, I explain how these authors task their narrators and characters with navigating the intersections of history and place, often finding and losing agency through the material conditions of their lived environments. In this way, conceiving of these cities as trafficked enables readers a greater understanding of the connection between colonial disidentification and environmental degradation in Sinospheric metropolises.

#### MAPPING THE TRAFFIC OF PEOPLE AND ANIMALS IN HONG KONG: DUNG KAI-CHEUNG'S *ATLAS*

Thus far, I have argued that the currently dominant modes of interrogating world cities through urban ecology, postcolonial theory, and national history are not apt lenses for the cities of Hong Kong and Taipei, cities that are complicated by their unique geographic and ideological proximity to mainland China. Instead, I proffer that these cities are trafficked sites in perpetual flux. Traffic denotes mobility, movement, and change, but to an equal if not more prevalent degree it indicates stagnation and congestion. This dichotomy is perfectly manifested by Hong Kong, whose unique geographical conditions situate it as part island and part mainland. A 2017 map drawn by a Hong Kong based think tank called the Civic Exchange found that the region

possessed the least amount of open space compared to similar cities in the Asia Pacific, such as Tokyo, Singapore, and Shanghai. Even worse, within the city itself, citizens of affluent areas enjoyed “ten times as much open space” as residents of Wan Chai or other residential areas on the island (Tong). A quick glance at the map itself makes this fact clear. Unlike many other maps of the area, the vantage point is farther away, allowing for a wider view of Hong Kong beyond the island and Kowloon. Furthermore, unlike maps designed to showcase the commercial and ecotourist opportunities in the area, this one leaves off tourist sites like Tsim Tsa Tsui and Central to emphasize overlooked residential areas. This type of map indicates that Hong Kong is undergoing a similar if not even more accelerated rate of growth in the current era of globalization, exacerbating the pangs of overcrowding, income inequality, and pollution.

In *Atlas: The Archaeology of an Imaginary City*, Dung Kai-Cheung also attempts to critique Hong Kong’s contemporary problems through the reading of maps – though Dung’s maps are fictional, literary, and buried under a century of transnational traffic. Adopting the point of view of a contemporary archeologist engaged in deep cartographical research, Dung’s text is a novella in the loosest sense. Rather than plot, Dung relies upon the speaker’s deepening development of a working model of history for a city that never existed – Victoria – presumably a metaphor for the utopian Imperialist vision.<sup>19</sup> Abandoning dialogue entirely, Dung utilizes a detached and formal narration style – characteristic of historical analysis and philosophical meditation. Through four sections - “Theory,” “The City,” “Streets,” and “Time,” – Dung foregrounds critical methodology against a fictional backdrop, occasionally interspersing short, lyrical, narratives into the predominantly analytical text. Possessing the casual impenetrability of

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<sup>19</sup> While the text is ostensibly a fictional analysis of a fictional place – Victoria – Dung provides so much overlap between real and mythological places that it is nonproductive to read Victoria as anything but colonial Hong Kong. My analysis will sometimes refer to Dung’s speaker analyzing Hong Kong and at other times, Victoria. Dung does this in order to differentiate between particular areas of Hong Kong island and the surrounding region.

a prose poem, these sections bring to mind Italo Calvino and Jorge Luis Borges's magical approach to writing place, in which a location is described not through appearance, but through its lore. However, this lyricism generates a productive tension when placed alongside passages that describe the layout of streets and neighborhoods in a realistic and historically accurate way.

Together with detailed descriptions of streets, angles, and zones, the structure of *Atlas* itself is a metatextual gesture towards Dung's model of Hong Kong as a city perpetually in transit. By placing short chapters, some overtly analytical and mimetic and some metaphysical and lyrical, against one another, Dung illustrates how the material conditions of Hong Kong and the identities of its people also vacillate between a firm Chinese foundation and a fluctuating transnationalism derived from its colonial past. In his preface, Dung asserts that "the miracle of Hong Kong is that it has always been evolving," (xi) so any attempts to fix it or essentialize its history ironically come up short – resulting in that history itself becoming a fiction. Through maps, the speaker is not attempting to recreate the conditions of how things actually were, but to explain why this imaginary place is not and was not ever real. By studying these places as "transtopias," "fated to suffer transformation and transference [...] like comets that travel unceasingly, circling over and over again, forever in the act of transit, never arriving at their destinations" (33) Dung provides a lens for viewing contemporary Hong Kong as itself forever traveling, never arriving at a purely Chinese, British, or Hong Kongese teleology. These chapters avoid confirming its symbols and places as historical fact, underscoring the notion that Hong Kong is a "place with transit itself as the destination" (33).

While Dung is hesitant to ascribe "real world" significance to the allusions and allegories presented in these chapters, readers can identify pleas against the marginalization of indigenous cultures and the destruction of the material world. Dung's methodology, outlined in "Theory,"

draws heavily from existing postcolonial and decolonial scholarship. This opening section engages in cartographical ekphrasis, where Dung describes the appearance and functions of various maps while simultaneously critiquing them, and mapmaking itself. Without fail, the speaker always connects the maps to their colonial contexts, pinpointing particular details as examples of how colonists misshape, misrepresent, and misspell these territories. Maps are, according to the narrator, “not just a depiction, record, or symbol of power, but the actual execution of power itself” (16). In the chapter “Extraterritoriality,” the speaker examines a map named “The Coast of South China” from 1850, created by a Chinese mapmaker. This map is notable, Dung’s narrator asserts, because of the fact that the island of Hong Kong, recently ceded to the British, has been omitted from the map entirely. This action “signifies a refusal to accept any sovereign authority or even a complete repudiation of the existence of sovereignty itself” (17). Dung’s text, even as it disguises and obfuscates its social importance through layers of detachment and metaphor, decolonizes and destabilizes essentialized visions of Hong Kong.

Even as the narrator consistently employs the distant analytical voice of an objective observer, Dung nevertheless achieves emotional resonance in this first section through the cataloguing of place names on maps – a practice that illustrates the complex answer to what is and is not Victoria. Looking at a map entitled “Macao Roads,” Dung’s speaker feels nostalgia for a place he’s never been:

Going further, Hung Kong (empty harbor), Tai Dam (big mouthful), Kow Lung (leaning on), Lai Yee Mun (gate of the little rascal), Fai Dau Mun (gate of the quick knife), Kap See Mum (gate of timeliness), Lan Ma (blocking the horse), Lan Tau (broken head) and Tai Bo Hoi (taking big strides) all become possible

names (and as such possible places) on the “Macao Roads” of my memories and longings. (4)

The English translations, interspersed between the pinyin pronunciations of various places surrounding Hong Kong, create a kind of sprung rhythm that slows down the pace of the reader - forcing them to linger in one place yet also perpetually moving on to the next location. The translations themselves cultivate tension between the big and the small, the quick and the slow. Through an emphasis on movement, Dung’s text embodies the statement of his narrator, that “On maps, places become transferable objects” (33). Through the transposition of places onto paper, and the poeticized naming of these places, Dung explores how the characteristics of the material world are evoked in maps. The beauty here lies in the rapid-fire movement from one place to another and the rhythm of language and images.

While Dung’s theoretical foci do invoke the writings of other scholars, he applies them uniquely to fit the postcolonial and ecological circumstances of Hong Kong. Dung and fellow translator, Bonnie S. MacDougall, cite Foucault in their introduction, deeming Victoria a heterotopia. However, in order to craft an accurate theory of place that accounts for Hong Kong’s soft colonialism – a term I use to signify that it was historically never an independent nation and that it has undergone relatively peaceful transitions of power – Dung also incorporates terminology that directs the traffic of heterotopic ontology: displacement, misplacement, antiplacement, and nonplacement. These concepts not only account for a teleological theory of history, but also reinforce the contemporary material and ideological consequences of Hong Kong’s traffic. For example, Dung’s narrator tracks the gradual displacement of the island of Chek Chue on maps from the sixteenth to nineteenth century, noting how it decreases in size and prominence on each latter iteration, until it gradually disappears entirely. This phenomenon

causes Dung's speaker to claim "a place is never itself but is forever displaced by another" (10). Keeping the contemporary context of "One China, Two Systems" in mind, this transitory understanding of place holds particular relevance, as Hong Kong itself is now threatened to be overtaken by the mainland.

After the introductory theory section, Dung's attention shifts from developing philosophical models of concepts to representing material conditions during Victoria's history. Within these later sections, Dung underscores the connections between personal agency and ecological sustainability that require understanding Hong Kong's urbanism as one of transition or traffic. The chapter "The Curse of Tai Ping Shan" shows how British policies of Chinese segregation led to long-lasting consequences of death and ecological toxicity. When the British build Blake Gardens – a plant and animal reserve named after one of Hong Kong's original colonial invaders - they do so directly adjacent to the neighborhood of Tai Ping Shan, the location of a plague outbreak in 1894, caused by the Imperial government's neglect of the impoverished Chinese neighborhoods (76).<sup>20</sup> While Dung asserts that the "sad history of Tai Ping Shan was buried under the flowers and birdsong of Blake Garden," this history is revived through the non-human agency of parrots living within the garden's transplanted Banyan trees (77). Skillfully playing with postcolonial theories of "parroting" and mimicry, Dung reveals that after several generations these birds, a colonial invasive species, are still squawking "Tai Ping! Tai Ping!" prompting Dung to admit he does not know these utterances are "curses or blessings" (78). Rather than a parrot that can only mimic the language of its masters, these parrots serve as perpetual reminders of a history that colonialism attempted, but failed, to erase. If Tai Ping Shan's residents have found a type of resurrection through these parrots, this image is doubly

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<sup>20</sup> Most likely the same plague outbreak that Huang Deyun witnessed people fleeing from in *City of the Queen*.

important due to the bird's flight capability, which allows it to resist the Imperialist Peak Reservation Ordinance, which prohibiting Chinese residents from living in areas more than 788 feet above sea level.

While the Chinese Hong Kong residents are victims in the preceding example, in other chapters Dung presents them as agents working in tandem with colonists to exploit the local environment. In the chapter "Sugar Street," Dung creates a myth to explain the closing of a Hong Kong mint and its repurposing as a sugar factory. He recounts how workers were initially surprised that pouring molten silver into the casting molds resulted only in white sugar, but that eventually, British colonists came to prize the sugar for its quality, eventually developing a dependency on the sweetener akin to its real opium addiction. This was initially a boon to the Chinese workers who "every day they would pour the raw materials for refining white sugar into the machines, while what emerged at the other end was a steady stream of sparkling sweet silver coins" (92). Eventually, however, the mint is destroyed in a typhoon, an ecological disaster that magnifies, rather than demolishes, colonial interruption, because afterward, all the fish taste "oversweet and fatty," prompting one historian to remark "that's how it goes: feed them sugar and you feed them shit" (93). The metaphorical pairing of sugar and silver reinforces the British exploitation of its colonies for its natural resources while also underscoring its utilization of slave labor for basic amenities. In the same way that the parrots of Tai Ping Shan persist to tell the lost history of a plague-ridden neighborhood, the tainted fish in this chapter expose the biological harm endemic to colonialism. The fact that people are both exploiters and exploited speaks to the importance of place itself and the agency of the environment to direct and influence city life.

In both of the above examples, the geography and biology of Hong Kong itself is trafficked between Chinese and British peoples and the beyond-human life in the region. The dirt

of the city shifts in power and significance whether or not it is in the hands of the Chinese, the British, and it is yet something else again on its own, divorced from nationality. Thinking of place in terms of traffic encourages readers never to essentialize the land, its peoples, or its non-human life. In the final section, Dung makes it clear that the land itself is more than setting: it is a moveable place that ferries and directs the agencies of animals, plants, and humans. Moving into the twentieth century, the narrator of *Atlas* examines plans for “Chek Lap Kok Airport,” the name of the actual international airport in Hong Kong. Dung describes Hong Kong not as “a place with a seaport and an airport” but “Hong Kong *as* a seaport and airport” – an important distinction, considering the chapter goes on to assert the mobility of the land itself (129, my emphasis). According to Dung, the airport was meant to be “an emergency contingency strategy to cope with major catastrophes such as nuclear accidents, earthquakes, epidemics, or alien invasions” (130). This chapter is Dung’s most upfront metaphor of Hong Kong as itself a moving place, with the plan for Chek Lap Kok airport being to “separate a section of the surface of Hong Kong Island from the earth’s crust and install a huge propeller on it, converting it into a mobile port” (130). While the idea of a section of land lifting into the sky is fanciful and slightly comedic, so too is the reality of a series of bridges 55 kilometers long, linking the islands of Hong Kong and Macao to the mainland. In portraying the actual soil of Hong Kong itself as moving, Dung alludes to the island’s widespread abuse of land reclamation and questions its relationship with China. In the words of his narrator, “mobility had all along been the central concept in the contingency strategy, because in a city that lacked the ability to defend itself in every respect, escape was the only way out in the event of disaster” (130). Whether this disaster is ecological or political, or an intertwining of the two, Hong Kong is at the mercy of China, despite China’s proclamations of two separate systems and individualized autonomy.

Ultimately, traffic is an apt framing of Hong Kong's urbanism largely because it is still in the process of being handed over. While it is currently a special administrative region of China, Hong Kong already has a date scheduled to shift out of this arrangement and into a new, fully PRC-assimilated government. While "One China, Two Systems" strives for the best of sovereignty and territoriality simultaneously, it also makes its citizenry tenants once again, residing on land that isn't legally theirs. Using the perspective of a researcher who sees the past, present, and future as relative supports Dung's figuration of Hong Kong's destabilized identity not as one of hybridity, but as the current accumulation of colonialism and globalization.

#### LOST VILLAGES AND AN ALWAYS CHANGING TAIPEI: CHU T'IEN-HSIN'S *THE OLD CAPITAL*

In the previous section, Dung Kai-Cheung's novella, *Atlas*, illustrated how literature from and about Hong Kong adapted particular structural styles and natural imagery to emphasize the unique colonial history of the region and its biological diversity necessitate a new model of writing the postcolonial city. Travelling to the northeast, I turn my attention now to Taiwan's capital city of Taipei to argue further for the importance of understanding urban life as a series of trafficked identities and life forms. While Taiwan differs from Hong Kong significantly in that the nation currently maintains a tenuous grasp on its independence, the country has a similarly complicated recent colonial history, possessing architecture and cultural ideologies derived from Dutch, Chinese, and Japanese occupiers. Furthermore, the current diplomatic stalemate between Taiwan and China – in which the latter considers the former a rogue territory – invokes the specter of "One China, Two Systems" in the daily news cycle. Taipei, like Hong Kong, is a

teeming metropolis of post-national histories, citizens detached from nation and culture, and disputes over land and biological life.

The history of Taiwan and its relationship with China can both be framed in the light of Taiwan's elections of December 2018. These mid-term elections illustrate the difference between the dominant political parties in Taiwan and their approaches to communist China. China has, in recent years, taken strides in loosening governmental restrictions on the free market, resulting in a boost to its global economy. Even as China presents an outward-facing democratic embrace of personal freedom and economic capitalism, for its residents, the nation retains regimented control. This extends to the Republic of China, or Taiwan, which China claims as one of its provinces. Taiwan disputes their claim and maintains its own government and independence. The results of the December elections illustrate the complex feelings many Taiwanese have about establishing a close relationship with China, either through maintaining independence but developing business ties, or through integration. While Taiwan largely rejects the mainland's cross-strait advances in terms of control, economically, China has taken steps to making cross-strait trade an economic necessity. In 2018, the Kuomintang (KMT) – whose policies are economically at least pro-China - soundly beat the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), – a sign that much of the Taiwanese workforce seeks the financial stability that comes with appeasing the demands of the PRC over a perceived struggle for maintaining independence amid a threat of sanctions or war. Taiwanese identity is thus inextricably linked to Chinese nationalism, even as the country holds a fragile independence after a long history of colonial domination.

Set in contemporary Taipei, Chu T'ien-hsin's *The Old Capital* wields theoretical and intertextual urban analysis through various first-person perspectives. Chu's narrators are student writers exploring complicated sexual orientations, young professionals seeking peace in bars,

and ex-pats returning to Taiwan seeking forgotten memories. Like *Atlas, The Old Capital*, is structured atypically, but where the former broke its ideas into fifty short chapters, the latter takes the opposite approach. The English translation of the novel is comprised of four lengthy short stories and the titular novella, which is 107 pages long with no chapter or section breaks. Though originally published separately, the collection of the stories and novella feels natural, as all five works are tethered by thematic throughlines of history, memory, loss, and above all, environmental change.

For Chu and other Taipei residents, reminders of colonial occupation pepper the landscape. For example, two Chinese friends might arrange to meet at a vista where transplanted Japanese trees stand outside a building with mansard roofs. These fictional scenes capture the reality of Taipei, whose identity encompasses times of Chinese, Dutch, and Japanese occupation while also wrestling with the contemporary global milieu of the Sinosphere: Japanese style coffee shops stand next to traditional Chinese bathhouses, while global brands like Gucci, Burberry, and Uniqlo give its fashion districts a Santa Monican air. The multinational environments of Taipei appear and disappear within Chu's text, which feature places constantly displaced as the city is constantly interrupted. My analysis focuses on the longest story, "Hungarian Water," and the novella, which both feature Chu utilizing rhetoric of traffic and transit to form a hermeneutics of contemporary Taiwanese identity that relies upon the loss and change of material environments. Because Taipei has been taken, traded, forcefully occupied, and subject to martial law all within the past hundred years, Chu's narrators are migrants and refugees, even as they reside in their home countries.

Existing English-language criticism of *The Old Capital*, of which there is little, rightfully describes Chu's methodology as one that interrogates personal identity through the contexts of

time and space. Chaoyang Liao reads *The Old Capital* as a postmodern exercise in reconciling past and present by slowing down the contemporary moment of globalism through a return to nationhood (60). Meanwhile, Jen-yi Hsu and Chien-hsin Tsai both examine the act of walking in the novella as a means of extracting a destabilized identity from place, the former employing Derrida's hauntological framework and the latter Foucault's definitions of heterotopias. However, none of these readings adequately account for the contemporary movement and livelihood of the place itself – far from being a ghost town, Taipei teems with a monotonous kind of vibrancy in the story and novella. Considering Taipei as trafficked, allows us to understand Chu's account of Taiwan's unmoored history while simultaneously drawing attention to the continuing movements and energy of the island in relation to China and neocolonial globalization.

In the short story "Hungarian Water," Chu plays with postcolonial tropes as she simultaneously subverts them in order to show their insufficiency in accounting for Taipei's unique circumstances. In much the same way that Dung vocalizes the colonized subject through a parrot, Chu invokes the sense of smell as a way of engaging with postcolonial theory while distinguishing her region from that of other writers, like Rushdie, who have famously utilized scent. While Rushdie's Saleem Sinai famously inhales a string in a laundry hamper to attain telepathic powers to connect with multiple children across India, hyper senses of smell establish only one meaningful connection in "Hungarian Water": the friendship between the narrator and a person known only as "A." Smell becomes a pathway for these characters restoring their memories of their forgotten hometowns – the smell of citronella on the narrator's clothes not only gives him a new nickname, "Citronella," but also conjures memories of particular persons, places and events, lost through time, ecological change, and colonial displacement. Rather than

through maps or names, places are determined to be real through the stories that people tell and their ability to recall them. For example, after smelling a particular type of grass, Citronella remembers children boasting about leaving for “Nanshijiao” and “Shazangli” while acknowledging “We couldn’t have said where these new places were” (90). For A and Citronella, places are only abstract concepts unless they are able to tell stories about them. What brings these forgotten people and place back from the void is the smell of various forms of biological life, underscoring the necessity of remembering local ecologies, even as the region shuttles toward globalization.

In “Hungarian Water,” Chu attempts to remember past villages and past versions of Taipei, even as these places are erased through factors both natural and political. A and Citronella have separate goals: the former wishes to recall the name of a prior lover, while the latter wants to remember the details and specifics surrounding his hometown, a rural village left abandoned after a flood. For both characters, their personal aims signify Chu’s larger critiques of rapid urbanization through an intertwining of plant and human death. The narrator describes the exodus from the village as both “anarchic hedonism” and a “panicky flight,” prompting looting of people’s gardens, “where we’d once risked our lives to steal grapes and longans [...] Yet we weren’t willing to let the fruit ripen, preferring, as before, to pick it when it was still green, and no bigger than peas, so sour that more of our saliva fell out of our mouths than went into our stomachs” (95). Though Citronella is able to recount his eating of fruits and vegetables with vivid detail, the memories of the village itself and other events are occluded.

In fact, perhaps most troublingly, he is unable to definitively state whether a particular memory is true: the murder of a man by him and his friend, “X X Liu.” Like the memory of his village, the memory of Liu emerges following the scent of plant life - the narrator squeezes a

grape in his hand into pulp and thinks “why I’d absorbed its odor, with its positive charge, or why it wouldn’t leave me . . . Did we kill a man or didn’t we?” (97). This question is, frustratingly, never answered; however, Citronella’s search for this answer does prompt him to think about the establishment of Taiwan during the Cultural Revolution. He thinks about how “many of [the Chinese] probably emigrated to Taiwan with the Nationalist government, and, for one reason or another, landed in Nanshijiao, Shanzangli, or Neihu, and may even have ended up being slaughtered” (102). Though Citronella is ultimately unable to firmly remember Liu or the man they killed, his search for answers does allow him to finally ascribe significance to the “new villages” he and his friends eventually fled towards. These places, once abstract concepts, are now real. “Hungarian Water” ends with Citronella making one last attempt to make his home village itself real, by publishing a classified ad calling for his classmates to reconnect at the bus stop where they last saw one another (110).

The violence of Sinospheric colonialism that Chu documents here is the erasure of places and persons through the traffic and movement associated with rapid urbanization. If “Hungarian Water” portrays two Taipei residents trying to recover the memory and spirit of their rural hometowns, then the novella takes up the task of interrogating the loss of memory and life within the city itself. While scent is no longer the key sensory image that connects environment and existence, place and ecology are nevertheless important aspects of Chu’s longer critique of colonial urbanism. The story of *The Old Capital* is something of a homecoming, but once again, Chu provides a uniquely Taiwanese twist on the genre. In the diegetic present, the narrator resides in Taipei, having spent her entire life there. She travels to Japan to reunite with a childhood friend – again, named simply “A,” – who ends up cancelling. After walking around Kyoto for a bit, she returns to Taipei, but does so under the guise of a Japanese tourist. She

follows a map dotted with former Japanese places of interest, along with renamed streets, temples, and other Taiwanese landmarks. While walking through Tansui, a borough of Taipei, she takes up the task of investigating the city forensically, as though the past versions of Taipei are missing victims. In this way, readings like Hsu's and Tsai's accurately show how the movement of persons through their urban or rural surroundings is an essential aspect of Taiwanese identity formation.

However, this forensic examination of place fails for Chu's narrator - she is unable to pin down not only her memories of places but also their current iterations. She describes this feeling of misrecognition as though

All of a sudden you couldn't recall what it had been before. Like an eyewitness who, after going to the police to report a dead body, returns to the scene only to see there was no body, no blood stains, everything normal, you told your future husband in a sobbing voice that the place was never like this or like this, that it should be like that and like that. (174)

Like the missing memory of the homeless man in "Hungarian Water," memory of place, for the narrator, is equally as untrustworthy. Chu's narrator ties together the trauma of lost places with interpersonal relationships, a key theme in her story, which is not only an examination of place but also an exploration of the narrator's sexual orientation. Just as her sense of place is unmoored, competing between unfamiliar visions of past and present, so too are her ambivalent feelings for her family and "A."

If "Hungarian Water" used scent as a catalyst for the construction of an environmentally-ethical decolonial urbanism, then *The Old Capital* relies upon the generated memories of particular types of architecture and infrastructure. The novella opens with Chu's speaker

meditating on her childhood in Taipei, on the cusp of the rapid boom in industry and infrastructure that would dominate the latter half of the twentieth century. Utilizing the anaphoric refrain of “back then,” the speaker hearkens to times “before commercial real estate had led to an unrestrained opening of new roads, a building boom, and land speculation,” when “bodily fluids and tears were as fresh and clear as the dew on flowers” (111). From the outset of the novella, Chu explains that Taipei’s material conditions of urbanization have had a direct influence upon personal identity, and not the other way around. Furthermore, the novella’s atypical structure, written exclusively in second person and in past tense, even as the plot traverses three separate time periods, is itself a discombobulating framework, encouraging its readers to get lost within its trappings. Chu’s adherence to the indirect you in particular contributes to the labyrinthine nature of the text: Is Chu’s “you” referring reflexively to the narrator? Is she asking readers to place themselves in hypothetical situations, or is this passage meant to be read as a specific memory of the speaker’s?

Chu’s style, while confusing, is also an effective tool for her to critique the colonial and global systems that Taipei finds itself trapped within. Rather than viewing Taipei’s sudden post-independence emergence as a world city as progress, Chu characterizes the development of streets within the city as itself colonial. With a final “back then,” Chu describes how

North Gate had yet to be tyrannized by an overpass, so you could walk past it casually, feeling like one of your ancestors heading out of town a century before. You’d walk past the railway office and board the bus at Izuchi-machi, I-chome and within a quarter of an hour you’d arrive at Dadu Road, which, fifteen years later, would be famous for motorbike racing. (113)

This passage illustrates the importance of reading *The Old Capital* as both postcolonial, transnational, and ecocritical, as all three of these theoretical frameworks run alongside each other here. North Gate, one of Taipei's surviving remnants from the Qing dynasty, struggles against the debilitating advances of automobility and colonial history, evinced by a tyrannical overpass and Japanese names for transit stations. The stark contrast between the peaceful, holistic connection between walking casually in the past and the frenetic energy of motorbike racing in the present argues that the present culture's fascination with speed and noise results in a loss of history.

For Chu's narrator, navigating the tension between a colonial past and globalist future means coming to terms with a perpetually shifting places and the resulting lack of familiarity. In a series of rhetorical questions, she asks:

Wouldn't a city, no matter what it's called (usually something related to prosperity, progress, or, occasionally, hope and happiness), be in essence a city of strangers if it had no intention of retaining the traces of people who had lived there? Why would anyone want to cherish, treasure, maintain, and identify with an unfamiliar city? (157)

While industry and automobility – through the paving of roads and zoning of districts – are ostensibly for easing transport from one area to another, Chu's speaker views these actions as alienating. Familiarity denotes a sense of passing time, of growing comfortable within ones surroundings, and of becoming acclimated. Rapid development, coupled with a debated relationship with China, prevent this type of familiarity from being reached. When Chu deconstructs the linguistic etymology of Chinese place names, she focuses readers attentions on

the difference between the concepts of places and their lived realities. Though historically these places share names with prosperity, progress has brought them little hope or happiness.

Ultimately, the traffic systems of Taipei are predominant factors in how the city perpetually changes, resulting in a fundamental alteration of sensory experience for its inhabitants. As the speaker shuttles between Taipei and Kyoto and past and present, the only consistency comes from the uncertainty of the time period and the place: Japanese place names brush up against Chinese streets and vice versa, while the text itself intermittently includes intertextual passages from Yasunori Kawabata's 1962 novel, also titled *The Old Capital*. Reality is shaped and altered by the traffic of the city, which results in scenes that inhabitants witness on an everyday basis feeling unfamiliar: "For instance, when you took the MRT, which you vowed to never take, you sat in a three-story high train that lopped off the sight of most of the disgustingly ugly, old, five-story apartment buildings, and seemed to have returned to an age when there were only single-story houses" (151). As Chu's speaker rides Taipei's public transit, her vantage of her surroundings is not only altered or blocked, but also accelerated in such a way that these places are prevented from ever settling in her mind. Indeed, the speaker is shocked to realize on her commute that a grove of "century-old nightshade trees, 30 foot maple trees on which sparrows and emerald eyes perched year round" had been "replaced by a gigantic billboard, selling upscale housing at 100,000 NT per square foot" (152). In a city where a growing population threatens to overwhelm what little urban space remains, congestion and traffic result in an environment utterly inconducive to familiarity.

Chu opens *The Old Capital* by asking, "Is it possible that none of our memories count?" and spends the next hundred and odd pages answering this question through a freewheeling analysis of Taipei's evolution, not only through the altered lenses of childhood and adulthood,

but through the shifting architectures of colonial rule. She ends the novella by asking another question: “What is this place?” and answers it immediately with a wail – a pure sound absent of language that communicates the trauma of the trafficked city. Separated by ellipsis, the final fragment of the novella, “A shimmering ocean, a beautiful island, the essential site of our sage kings and wise elders’ destiny,” is an apocalyptic wiping of the slate (217). Here, Chu is not advocating a return to agrarian life, what Lefebvre would term a pre-mercantile society, but is appealing instead to simplicity as a way of slowing down the city into a still island. However, it is also a reminder of the island’s inescapability from its settler-colonial past, as Chu’s words here echo those of the initial settlers of the land, “Ilha Formosa!” (beautiful island) and of China, which wishes to claim Taipei’s history as its own.

#### ‘NO PLACE FOR HUMANS’ – THE FUTURE OF PARKS AND ANIMAL SANCTUARIES IN THE SINOSPHERIC METROPOLIS

In my examination of *Atlas* and *The Old Capital*, models of Hong Kong and Taipei have emerged in which the postcolonial metropolis’s rapid urbanization and industrialization have rendered historical conceptions of nationhood and identity moot. Rather than cultivate cultures or identities of their own, these cities are forced into either the gravitational arcs of Chinese governance or western globalization. Both these forces result in not only a destabilization of the native resident’s personal identity but also a degradation of local environments. These verdant biomes are in danger of being lost to global forces of traffic and profit; however, both Dung and Chu find possibilities of respite and resistance through public spaces. In both texts, natural environments provide breathing room for both the disenfranchised subject and the non-human life in the area. If material ecocriticism is in danger of ignoring or overlooking particular

marginalized peoples in favor of the agency of objects and more than human life, then this literature works toward reconciling them. The public domain – which includes parks, nature preserves, and town squares, emerge as interstitial spaces in which humans, plants, and animals anchor themselves in a perpetually swirling maelstrom of death.

In the eyes of Dung’s backward-looking archaeologist, Hong Kong’s *Jung-fong Gai*, or “Public Square Street” in English, as a historical meeting place and market where itinerant street performers relaxed, read fortunes, sang and told stories within the center of the city. This square takes on frightening Escher-like qualities, in which a square street surrounds a center with no entrance or exit. The inhabitants here gradually lose their distinguishing features, known “only by their laundry,” yet Dung stops short of saying they lose their individuality. Rather, the public square becomes a place that is paradoxically also private. Dung ends the chapter by describing diametrically opposed interpretations of a place as being rife with agoraphobia and claustrophobia and as a world where these conditions could not exist at all (117). This fictionalized account of a public square evinces the reality of Hong Kong’s public spaces in the twenty-first century, wherein tourism and congestion make being alone an impossibility, yet the frantic nature of the city’s traffic prohibits the formation of meaningful connections.

A similar appreciation for parks and public open spaces is vocalized by Chu, who ironically finds humanity in these places that are comparatively less populated by humans. According to Chu’s narrator in *The Old Capital*, Taiwan was described as “no place for humans” as early as 1697, an assessment she confirms journeying through Taipei’s streets as a Japanese tourist, noting the disorienting layouts of streets, the stifling oppression of overpasses and skyscrapers, and the omnipresent sickening pollution (143). Indeed, both “Hungarian Water” and *The Old Capital* present situations in which marginalized subjects – the homeless, disabled, and

otherwise disenfranchised – seek refuge from a society in which they are in danger of being murdered, erased, and otherwise forgotten. In this way, the individual mystery of the murdered homeless person in “Hungarian Water” is indicative of the larger question of how to house and provide for low-income residents within the inequitable power structures of Sinospheric metropolises. As Chu’s narrator searches for scents to restore his memories of the disenfranchised, he is faced with present visions of the poor and mentally disturbed forced to live in alleyways and parks.

While public parks are considered last resorts for individuals unable to provide for themselves within cities that neglect and exclude them, these natural spaces also function as destinations for those worn down by the transitory nature of colonial urbanism. Prior to the novella’s concluding lines, the speaker of *The Old Capital* ends her journey by leaving her tourist map on the bus and walking to a park. To call the setting itself a character is something of a cliché, but in this final walk the city itself emerges as both obstacle and pathway towards resolution. Adopting a meticulously detailed style of language, Chu’s speaker documents her path through the city, down numerous streets, passing shops, schools, theaters, and rivers. As the novella speeds toward its wailing conclusion, it becomes increasingly intertextual, as passages from Kawabata’s novel become more and more pronounced, blending time and ethnicity. The narrator eventually arrives at a spot she remembers from her youth, where the mulberry and bamboo from her memory has been replaced with Chinese hibiscuses and banyan trees and a group of men and women lounge, or play basketball, or read. Here, in this relative stillness, Chu’s speaker is finally able to release her accumulated trauma and separate herself from the city, if only momentarily.

This mutual focus on parks should not be taken as a simple plea for more green spaces and “slow living,” but as a necessity for Hong Kong and Taipei to combat the encroaching large-scale crises of the Anthropocene. These cities, geographically located along coasts near or along the equator, both risk being underwater or otherwise non-habitable in the coming years. While neither text is explicitly concerned with global climate change, massive emissions or extinction, both Dung and Chu allude to natural environmental calamity. If Dung’s approach leads readers to think of an alternate version of colonial Hong Kong as a lost city, then contemporary Hong Kong’s current precarious political and environmental situations foreshadow potential loss. While Chu conceptualizes loss of history and culture as a meditation on memory, this loss is also happening on a macro-scale environmentally. For both authors, thinking of cities as trafficked objects between global powers or mobile contingency plans indicates anxiety over the future of the region.

Due to the looming threats of climatic catastrophe, Hong Kong and Taipei have called for more conservation and city-wide adjustments to infrastructure. Taiwan in particular has a vibrant environmental activist community dedicated to a preservation of life and culture in the face of political upheaval and global climate change, both of which are accelerated due to neocolonial forces in the region. The last thirty years have seen a number of youth-oriented resistance movements sprout up in the halls of city legislatures and government roadways – a number of them botanically named: Wild Lily, Wild Strawberries, and, most notably, Sunflower. In 2014, thousands of Taiwanese students took to the streets and occupied Taipei government buildings in protest against Chinese overreach and in support of Taiwanese sovereignty. In the wake of this movement artists and authors from Taiwan have tapped into the spirit of the

Sunflower to advocate against urban acceleration and rapid industrialization.<sup>21</sup> In the absence of parks and town squares, these activists defend not only national sovereignty by flooding crowded streets and city halls, but also personal autonomy and environmental sustainability. The students, young professionals, and concerned citizens that participate in Sunflower and other protests know that fighting against global capitalism and Chinese occupation is essential for the continued well-being of their local regions. Indeed, in the cases of Taipei and Hong Kong, the colonial underpinnings of “One China, Two Systems” ensure that the fights for national independence and environmental responsibility are one and the same.

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<sup>21</sup> Catherine Diamond examines two recent Taiwanese plays that incorporate the ethics of the Sunflower resistance into scenarios where small agrarian groups struggle to maintain their livelihood in the face of Taiwan opening itself more to Chinese authority.

## CHAPTER THREE: HYDRO-COLONIAL DISASTER: ASIAN-AMERICAN

### LITERARY TRAFFIC

Now small fowl flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago. (588)

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*.

Nuclear Power: Energy for a Brighter Future!

Signs located in Fukushima Prefecture, and a political slogan in the 1980's.

The sky was cloudy but dry on March 3, 2011, at the exact moment when the Pacific swelled over the safety walls in Miyako Harbor, located in Iwate Prefecture, Japan. The dual expanses of the sky and the ocean figure prominently in a 15-minute long unedited video showing the moments leading up to and immediately after the initial flooding. Filmed by a group of people gathered on a nearby roof, the video captures the nightmarish paradox of a typhoon. Despite being in a space where the sky stretched, empty and clear above them, and despite being in a place where the landscape is relatively spartan save for the ocean, the video nevertheless carries with it a sense of encroaching doom. Outside, the uncontrollable water gives the impression of a tight space. Panic builds in their voices as the cell phone camera pans, following a lifeless parade of unmanned fishing boats moving past them at a frightening speed. On the right side of the video lies the ocean; to the left, a mass of cars and buildings, separated only by a two-lane road that runs alongside the retaining wall. The onlookers yell at cars driving by, telling them to watch out, to go faster, to get away. One of these cars drives toward the right side of the camera, only to slow, likely in an attempt to comprehend the sheer amount of water barely being held back less than 20 yards from them. The car quickly speeds away. Less than a minute later, the water crests and spills over the safety barriers, which tear like tissue paper, flooding the

street, lifting parked cars and street objects. Buildings themselves are uprooted and lifted away by swirling waves.

This video is one of many that capture the Tohoku earthquake, the resultant tsunami, and the flooding of the Fukushima Daichii Nuclear Power Station, collectively known as the 3/11 disaster. That morning, a magnitude .9 earthquake reverberated in the waters off the coast of the Tohoku region in Japan. The quake's tremendous seismic activity created a series of up to 45-foot waves that assaulted the shores of Sanriku and Fukushima Prefecture. The quake and tsunami also disrupted the electric power of the nuclear station, which triggered nuclear failsafe protocols. These precautionary measures were rendered ineffective by the sheer amount of water flooding into the plant from the Pacific Ocean. The 3/11 cataclysm claimed the lives of over fifteen thousand people, with thousands more still missing. The consequential nuclear fallout at the plant has been blamed for one cancer-related casualty and the leakage of a sizable amount of radionuclides - iodine, cesium, and tellurium – into the waters of what was once a prominent commercial fishing region (Lochbaum 156).

While other nuclear catastrophes, including Chernobyl and Three Mile Island, have been critically viewed as imbricated in the cold war politics of U.S. and Soviet relations, the critical approach to 3/11 and the Fukushima emergency has been grounded in the global politics of climate change. In the case of 3/11, a natural disaster directly caused a nuclear calamity; however, scholars of the Anthropocene urge that we regard what once were considered “acts of God” or “freak occurrences” as byproducts of humanity's actions. For example, Matanle, Littler, and Slay argue that the devastation from the tsunami exemplifies Japan's inability or unwillingness to adjust to rising seawater levels directly resulting from global warming. The

losses of life, land, and energy resulting from 3/11 proved to many that climate change was indeed leading to stronger and more prevalent storms.

For those living near or on coastal and oceanic waterways, there has been a paradigm shift in how they conceive of disasters. What was once considered to be beyond the realm of human control is now reconceived as occurrences firmly rooted in the consequences of human behavior. The contemporary spread of globalization involves rampant unchecked resource extraction and accelerated carbon usage, activities that directly lead to ozone deterioration and rising water levels, which in turn lead to a greater potential for climatic disasters. Yet even as scholars reconsider human causality for so-called natural disasters, living in the Anthropocene also prompts us to reconsider how humans interact with the ocean itself. Fukushima is unique among nuclear disasters in its global visibility; videos like the one discussed above appear copiously on video streaming sites, garnering millions of hits world-wide. The proliferation of smart phones and streaming video allowed people far removed from the danger of 3/11 to witness the power of the ocean and its devastation in real time through both mainstream news media sites and user-generated video platforms. Recordings of the tsunami destroying homes and reactors prompt viewers to leave comments in a range of languages - lingering testaments to the disaster's impact online and around the world. For literary critics, the videos, poems, novels, and other artifacts that emerged after 3/11 are texts that urge new models for understanding not only the representation of oceanic environments, but also the bodies of victimized human and aquatic animals submerged in those waters, and the trafficking of global power that placed them there.

While this project has, to this point, largely focused on Indian and East Asian authors, I now turn to three Japanese-American women writers, Karen Tei Yamashita, Ruth Ozeki, and Lori Ann Roripaugh, to attend to voices operating within systems of North American

globalization and migratory politics that contribute to climatic change and oceanic environmental disaster. These writers create characters who are survivors of war, internment, sexual violence and displacement. In their depictions of Japanese migration and diaspora, the ocean figures prominently as both a biological and political space. A key similarity among all three of these authors is an understanding of the ocean as more than a biological ecosystem and a literary symbol. Yamashita, Ozeki and Roripaugh's depictions of the ocean draw attention to its agential capability; while the Pacific serves as a bridge between Japan and the United States in all of their texts, the ocean also serves as a separation, a force that traffics in disaster and global colonialism.

Applying a traffic-oriented lens to these texts highlights the influences of global capitalism and Imperialism in separating Japanese and Japanese-American subjects from their homelands and families. Previous chapters have examined automobility and urban ecology as evidence for a traffic-focused ecocriticism; this chapter explores how international trans-oceanic traffic contributes to a deterioration of the ocean and disaster for particular communities. Here, I employ "Traffic" as a verb that denotes exchanges of consumer waste and nuclear detritus alongside dialogues of wealth and power across the Pacific Ocean. As one of the largest engines of capitalist globalization, the United States spreads influence and power in order to forcibly mold the identities of other countries; this is perhaps nowhere more clearly illustrated than in post-war Japan, whose current culture is shaped by a history of forced demilitarization, American occupation, Hiroshima and Nagasaki deaths, nuclear fallout, and a climate of earthquakes, typhoons, and tsunamis.

I begin with a critical overview of new interventions in studies of the ocean and literature. Drawing from scholars such as Stacy Alaimo, Laura Winkiel, Isabel Hofmeyr, and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, I trace the interconnections of oceanic studies in literary, scientific, and

political discourses to develop my own reading of the ocean as a vector for transnational traffic, which results in ecological and cultural disaster. I argue that, for Japanese-American authors, the Pacific Ocean draws together biopolitical power and migratory bodies with the environmental degradation of the Anthropocene. To support this assertion, I turn my attention to two novels by Japanese-American authors that link the bodies of the ocean and humans through imagery of swirling traffic. The first, Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, captures the violence of Japanese-American internment and the fallout of the United States' bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki within the bodies of its displaced characters, both stranded in systems of automotive and oceanic traffic. This violent embodiment is further evidenced in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*, where the gyres of the Pacific traffic radioactive detritus and a teenage girl's diary, both of which detail the brutal abjection of the Japanese-American woman through oceanic separation. Both Yamashita and Ozeki embrace the speculative mode in order to craft narratives that stretch reality in order to depict the unreal truths of climate change and nuclear fallout. I conclude by tracing these speculative logics in the writing of Lee Ann Roripaugh's poetry collection *Tsunami vs. The Fukushima 50*, emphasizing how she views the ocean as an engine for global traffic. Taken together, these authors demand justice for the displaced and decimated Japanese and Japanese-American subject.

#### NEW OCEAN VIEWS: COLONIALISM, GLOBALIZATION, AND THE PACIFIC

Historically, poets, writers, and philosophers have characterized the ocean as a sublime force, a beautiful image whose size defies human comprehension, and a representation of human potential to master its world. For many authors, the ocean is also tied directly to the smaller bodies that live within its depths. In "Miracles," Walt Whitman famously describes the ocean as

a “continual miracle; the fishes that swim, the rocks, the motion of the waves, the ships with men in them” (327). Rebecca Solnit makes a similar observation a century later when she claims that “the sea is a body in a thousand ways that don’t add up, because adding is too stable a transaction for that flux... the sea always this body turned inside out and opened to the sky, the body always a sea folded in on itself, a nautical chart folded into a paper cup” (380). Today, scholars can appreciate these metaphors for how they contextualize human relationships with their environment and help readers conceive its scope. Recent researchers have taken an interdisciplinary approach to literary depictions of the ocean, arguing that authors and critics must resist rendering the ocean inert through overdetermined symbology. These critics discuss the importance of the ocean as not only an icon, but also as a material ecosystem and a site of scientific inquiry. This approach – ecocritical but also political – incorporates the cultural significance of the ocean in particular cultures with a transnational understanding of race, economics and power at a given time. In the words of Stacy Alaimo, critics must “evoke evolutionary kinship across vast temporal and oceanic expanses,” but also avoid the pitfall of these studies being “dismissed as ancient history if they do not open out onto the present moment, acknowledging how human bodies participate in global networks of harm” (189).

In search of countermodels to essentialized conceptions of the ocean as a romantic symbol or a natural haven free of human influence, a wide range of theorists offer frameworks shaped by socio-political interactions. Addressing the Anthropocentric present, critics recognize the ocean as sublime, but also as a disaster area. Ongoing oceanic catastrophes include but are not limited to the rising sea levels resulting from global warming, an overall loss of biodiversity stemming from mass extinctions, rising levels of acidification, over-fishing, and an island of 80,000 tons of floating plastic called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (DeLoughrey 2019).

Michelle Huang describes this blight as “a slowly rotating mass of marine debris and trash” accumulated by the currents of the North Pacific gyre. Huang and DeLoughrey are two of the more prominent scholars working with literary depictions of worsening environmental conditions, escalating naval operations by global world powers, the flotsam and jetsam of oceanic industry. By examining art, ecological accounts, poems and stories, scholars amplify the voices of those directly affected by the waves and swells of water, including non-human marine life, coastal and deep-water fishermen, and Indigenous peoples closely tied to the sea.

In 2019, *English Language Notes* devoted a special issue to pursuing an emergent field of ocean studies that draws from new materialist figurations of the environment and critiques of globalization. In the introduction, Laura Winkiel describes the importance of this approach, noting that while the “oceanic turn” has been under way for some time now, contemporary circumstances demand that we account for the way “humans have polluted the seas with heavy metals, nuclear waste, and plastics, with the result that human bodies, along with marine and terrestrial animals, carry profound, often life-threatening, toxic burdens that are assumed unevenly across the globe” (1). This truth forms the basis for the special issue’s title, “Hydro-Criticism.” By directing attention to the ocean, the issue’s contributors offer new ontologies of the sea and of the human condition as reflected in the waters. Rather than reify the ocean into its cliché representations, these critics imbricate water into their geophysical and cultural dimensions, generating new literary perspectives. Contributors to the issue extend the boundaries of the ocean into feminist, poetic, and postcolonial area of inquiry.

While the ocean has long been a key site of violence in postcolonial and ecocritical approaches to literature, Isabel Hofmeyr suggests that the work of decolonizing the ocean itself has yet to be thoroughly enacted. Hofmeyr’s contribution to the special issue develops a practice

of “hydro-colonialism” – a methodology that examines these unevenly assumed oceanic burdens in terms of empire. Hofmeyr argues that shifting “the intellectual center of gravity away from a purely land-focused one [...] makes visible relations of power that have been shaped around water and its colonial appropriations” (13). If postcolonial theory has long concerned itself with how imperial seizures of land and arbitrary demarcations of space have destabilized local populations, rendering them powerless, then hydro-colonialism demonstrates how the ocean is both a colonized space and a vector for imperial power. Hydro-colonialism encompasses issues of inequitable water access and quality, environmentally damaging water control structures, and transoceanic militaristic and economic crossings. Furthermore, it considers how nations might exploit the effects of arctic melt and sea routes that were once ice. This theoretical framework challenges the global influence of Pacific superpowers like China, the United States, and Japan through international trade agreements, histories of war and aggression, and the legacies of the atomic bomb and nuclear power.

In the same issue, critic Elizabeth DeLoughrey charts a pathway to what she terms a “critical ocean studies” that examines the ocean as a living network of political and cultural agencies. Looking at the ocean as “wet matter,” enables DeLoughrey to examine the ongoing international naval conflicts and militarization of the world’s oceans (22). DeLoughrey’s efforts underscore the reality of oceanic ecologies that contain not only biological life, but also steel oil rigs, undetonated mines, salvage vessels, aircraft carriers, submarines, naval bases, and the carbon and nuclear waste of these forces. The Earth’s oceans are not only sites of negotiation between human and non-human lifeforms, but a geopolitical arena where transoceanic gyres traffic in international militarism, neocolonial capitalism, and biopolitical violence.

In a second article, written outside the special issue, DeLoughrey describes oceanic gyres as “thousands of miles in diameter, vortexes that are largely out of sight for most humans, and thus demand a kind of visual logic for representation” (2019). For her, the gyres offer a way for scholars to explain how literary depiction of the ocean account for these human and animal political entanglements in ways that science cannot. DeLoughrey takes on the most famous literary gyres, found in the opening lines of William Butler Yeats’ “The Second Coming.” In her reading, the gyre is a signifier of the poem’s themes of death and rebirth, an “unstoppable, terrifying dynamic force” (DeLoughrey). Yeats’ obsession with the gyre as a cyclical pattern to history pairs well with DeLoughrey’s description of oceanic gyres as systems of multiple interactions, that work with and against each other, ebbing and flowing in opposite directions to create waves of traffic between nations. As Huang points out, the gyre is a means of transfer and mobility within the ocean, joining distinct nations while also accumulating their waste in a “trash vortex.” She reminds us that referring to gyres as distinct objects is metaphorically instructive but inaccurate: gyres are a “confluence of currents from which plastic particulates and other flotsam and jetsam are continually escaping” (101).

Like DeLoughrey, Hofmeyr, Huang, and, indeed, Yeats, I am drawn to the metaphor of the gyre as a vehicle for discussing how global political systems cause anthropocentric and biological disasters to effect predominantly non-white bodies. More than that, I am interested in exploring how the material reality of the ocean contributes to these disasters, questioning the degree to which human activity has shaped the ocean. By analyzing literary representations of the ocean and its gyres, I analyze the spirals, cyclones, storms of the Pacific for their capacity to sever and their ability to bio-politically separate the human body from nation, identity, and home. I assert that the ocean functions as both a setting for hydro-colonialism and a vector

through which dominant nations enforce sovereignty over oppressed individuals. By framing the sea as a system of biopolitical traffic, I argue that the ocean is not only a medium for marine life, soil particulate, human waste, industrial runoff, and massive quantities of garbage, but also a viscous pathway for ideologies of bodily oppression and control. Through reading literary figurations of oceanic disaster, I explore how female Asian bodies are forced into systems of power that render them dismembered and docile. In novels like *Tropic of Orange* and *A Tale for the Time Being*, the Asian-American body spirals from one act of biopolitical violence to another, caught in the oceanic pull of Pacific traffic.

#### CLOVERLEAFS, THE SEPARATED BODY, AND *TROPIC OF ORANGE*

Unlike in *The God of Small Things*, *Atlas*, or *The Old Capital*, traffic in Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997) operates not from the margins of the text but from its center, foregrounding automobility and city infrastructure as primary themes in the plot. Summarizing the novel's plot is difficult, as Yamashita interweaves seven main characters, seven narrative voices, and multiple reality-defying storylines, including a man whose skin pulls the literal Tropic of Cancer northward as he journeys from Mexico to North America. Ultimately, *Tropic of Orange* is a novel about the liminality of place, notably Los Angeles, and the urban ecology of traffic. Throughout this project, I have stressed how "traffic" allows for multiple definitions and connotations of the term to play off of one another. For Yamashita, traffic shapes Los Angeles into an assemblage of human and non-human agencies: a survivor of Japanese internment conducts automobile traffic as if it were a symphony, a car accident on a freeway results in an inescapable pile-up that creates a new, vehicular society, and the last orange in existence is *trafficked* from the United States to Mexico and back again. For Yamashita, Los Angeles's

liminality allows the ocean and desert to meet, rendering climate change a phenomenon that has “less to do with weather and more to do with disaster” (36). Disaster themes and Los Angeles traffic neatly dovetail with Yamashita’s anti-globalization stance, put forth in the novel through repeated invocations of transnational identity and practical environmental conservation. These themes are illuminated through an understanding of the Pacific Ocean as a vector for hydro-colonial power and a separator of Japanese-American identity.

While the novel is set entirely on land, Yamashita emphasizes the intertwined violent histories of the migratory human body and the ocean through the image of the spiral. The most visible occurrence of such imagery in *Tropic of Orange* is a cloverleaf overpass. At one point in the novel, the character of Gabriel, lost and disoriented within Mexico City, describes traffic as “a damn cloverleaf ... this nauseating sense of moving constantly to no good purpose” (194). Cloverleaf bypasses are meant to facilitate orderly movement and progression through complex interchanges, but as Gabriel’s experience attests, this goal is met often at the sacrifice of personal agency. Ideally, the road pattern allows for two intersecting highways to meet but not collide. No matter which direction on which highway, traffic can flow into the other highway by merging left onto a loop. Whether Yamashita intends it or not, this channeling of pedestrian and automotive traffic also provides an apt metaphor for the gyroscopic movements of the Pacific Ocean. The loops of the cloverleaf, like the gyre, serves as a powerful signifier of how the Pacific diaspora is not a series of linear journeys but axes of intersection, in which people, animals, and objects loop into, around, and between nations. Gabriel’s disorientation reshapes the binary figuration of international relations into a series of spirals, whirlpools, and storms. By connecting traffic to the lived conditions of people in littoral environments, Yamashita confronts the transcorporeal separations of transoceanic diaspora and border crossing.

Scholarship on *Tropic of Orange* has praised Yamashita's transnational methodology, her focus on environmental justice, and her nuanced analysis of Japanese-American identity. Critics such as Julie Sze and Chiyo Crawford have provided detailed analyses of Manzanar Murakami and his granddaughter Emi, the two Japanese-American protagonists in the novel, taking Emi's *femme fatale* archetype and her death at the novel's conclusion as proof of a sexualized and racialized violence enacted upon the female Asian body by global capitalism. Sze explains how the text emphasizes labor and transportation as central to the environmental justice narrative that positions women's bodies as the "means through which new processes of global production and consumption operate" (35). Furthermore, Sze also attends to traffic as it pertains to work in the novel, focusing explicitly on the violence suffered by Rafaela and Emi as a signifier of global capital's enslavement of young Asian women into service positions. Chiyo Crawford adds a generational lens to this argument by positioning Emi as representative of a third-generation *sansei* whose "myopic" adherence to the capitalist present prevents her from acknowledging the history of Japanese discrimination. I agree that Emi navigates global biopolitical systems that directly harm Asian women in particular; however, Crawford's conclusion that Emi possesses a "limited environmental consciousness that lacks appreciation for the historical interconnections between race and environment" overlooks Emi's knowledge of the connection between the Asian-American body and the disaster of trans-Pacific displacement (97). I argue instead that both Manzanar and Emi utilize different pathways in navigating the biopolitical violence of trans-Pacific traffic and the environmental history of hydro-colonial conquest.

Although the text foregrounds imagery of land-based and automotive traffic, such as roads, cars, highways, and overpasses, the oceanic spiral shapes Manzanar's narrative. He hearkens to the ocean as a key signifier of his destabilized Asian-American identity, enraptured

in perpetual movement and an obfuscation of history. Named after a Japanese-American internment camp, Manzanar's most notable characteristic – his supernatural ability to hear traffic and “conduct” it as if it were a musical symphony – tethers his body to automotive disaster and oceanic calamity. In the chapters written from his perspective, Yamashita plays with the cliché of the symphonic conductor, weaving and looping his arms to guide the ocean of noise unfolding before him. Manzanar's gestures do not control traffic, but rather shapes and repurposes its excess. Yamashita describes him as a “recycler” who uses the “residue” of sounds; sounds like the whooshing of cars to replicate the ocean roar (56). In a novel explicitly focused on environmental preservation, Yamashita's choice of “recycler” is a particularly powerful statement about the connection between traffic, individuals, and coastal ecosystems. Despite its proximity to the Pacific Ocean, Yamashita's Los Angeles is almost completely landlocked, and it is only through the Asian-American body and its fine-tuning of automobility that its aqueous presence emerges. In this way, the automotive ecosystem of the novel echoes the traffic of the ocean itself.

The Pacific emerges within Manzanar's imagination, further connecting the ocean to the body of the disenfranchised Japanese-American. When a car collides with a motorbike, resulting in a massive traffic standstill, what results is the creation of a new environmental biome in the highway wreckage. When traffic halts, Manzanar's mind retreats to the ocean in order to meditate on misuse, excess, and waste; he pictures “the great Pacific stretching along its great rim, brimming over long coastal shores from one hemisphere to the other” and concludes that the ocean is both “strange end and beginning: the very last point West and after that it was all East” (170). Manzanar's reference to the “rim” of the Pacific invokes not only the geographic shape of the area, but the circular, spiraling reach of international relations and the hydro-colonial effects

of trans-Pacific exchange. What was once a swirling mass of agencies is now “inky waves with their moonlit spume stuttering against the shore ... garbage jettisoned back prohibiting further progress” (170). As with Mexico City’s cloverleaf, traffic grinds to a halt in a pointed critique of consumerist culture and waste, connecting Los Angeles’s automotive traffic with the ocean’s global pollution.

By presenting this Pacific vision through Manzanar’s eyes, Yamashita directly ties the ocean and refuse to the history of Japanese-American relations. Because Manzanar is a survivor of internment, Yamashita’s figuration of the ocean is not only environmental, but political. While Manzanar views the ocean from a distance, his innate connection with traffic positions him as an insider to how bodies are interpellated into biopolitical systems of power: global capitalism, trans-Pacific diaspora, and hydro-colonial occupation. This political understanding of the ocean is corroborated when, later in the novel, Manzanar witnesses a massive convergence of citizens, the entire population of Los Angeles, cramming their bodies through escalators and turnstiles, getting into their cars, entering the freeway, revving their engines. Manzanar asserts that he could see and hear them, “their moving mouths speaking out of sync, as in a Toho Film production of Godzilla... a babel he understood” (207). Yamashita’s reference to Toho films and Godzilla in particular links Manzanar’s body to environmental and oceanic disaster, as reified in Japanese popular culture.

More than a giant lizard, Godzilla is a *kaiju*, a monster from a particular film genre that represents nuclear disaster through destructive creatures. Yamashita refers to Godzilla, as a creature, to tie together nuclear and oceanic disasters and also to invoke the film genre’s notoriously inaccurate English dubbing. The early *kaiju* films, when released in English, featured mouths that moved with no sound, utterances that failed to correspond to their associated

speaker's gesticulations, and scores of mispronunciations. Yamashita gestures toward the silencing of Japanese and Japanese-Americans through English over-dubbing, as well as the legacy of nuclear destruction Americans wreaked upon Japanese people and ecologies. Just as Godzilla emerges from the ocean, a giant creature rising out of the depths of a sea polluted and decimated by colonial interruptions of nuclear war, Manzanar emerges from a sea of vehicles, a reminder of the legacy of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Japanese internment. This double mediation of Japanese and Japanese-American identity through film and disaster serves as the basis for Yamashita's figuration of hydro-colonial traffic's deleterious effects on both individuals and environments.

Although Manzanar is old enough to have lived during the second World War and internment, his granddaughter, Emi, must navigate the lingering legacy of these disasters and their contemporary resonance. Like Manzanar, Emi is adept at swerving through traffic, wielding it to her advantage. When Yamashita introduces Emi, the character is making a Bloody Mary in an Italian restaurant – an innocuous enough action that alludes to the oceanic traffic systems that pull together transnational identity. Yamashita describes Emi as having:

...squeezed the lime, dumped it in, shook in the Tabasco, more black pepper and stirred the whole mess with the celery stick, licking her fingers, watching him, watching the waiters, watching the cocktail hostess walk away, watching the entire clientele in the restaurant, taking hold of the situation as if she had produced it herself. (18)

Emi's first appearance establishes a closer connection between her and the spiral and portrays her as a vivid watcher of people. Emi's gaze indicates her desire for visibility as an individual apart from a multicultural erasure of Japanese-American identity through hydro-colonial

conquest. When Emi later claims to “hate being multicultural,” she does so not to decry diversity, but to criticize how the cultural diversity renders people “invisible” (128). Considering the overlooked histories of violence, diaspora, and death that are involved in the process of transoceanic crossings to America for Japanese immigrants, Emi’s anti-multicultural stance is as much an indictment of Pacific rim politics as it is a criticism of American culture and Japanese-American invisibility.

Emi’s outspoken nature and her upfront sexuality speak to her desire to have dominion over her own body, which is interpellated into systems of biopolitical power and hydro-colonial capital. As a television executive, she is one of the over-dubbed Japanese characters in *kaiju* films, forced to speak the language of the hydro-colonial oppressor as the ocean looms behind her. Her main project in the novel is to curate and promote “disaster movie week” for her television station. These titles include *Angel Beach*, *Inferno in the Tower*, *The Northridge Quake*, *Canyon Fires*, *Airport III*, *Bomb Threat at the Pacific Exchange*, *Burn Baby Burn*, and *The Day After*. Like Manzanar, who understands the language of traffic through the voice of a Japanese *kaiju* film, Emi makes her living through watching disasters and showing them to others. Yamashita further evinces this voyeuristic quality of Emi through a focus on her eye, symbolized through a macabre coffee mug she gives to Gabriel, “an eyeball floated by means of a ceramic post in the middle of a black liquid” adorned with a message, “Here’s looking at you, kid” (114). Emi is both an all-seeing eye and an eye of a storm, the swirling gyre at the center of disaster. While Emi can see, size up, and otherwise connect with people and areas around her, her body is seemingly inextricable from a discourse of disaster.

Yamashita’s novel features a subplot about a human organ – a child’s heart – trafficked across international boundaries. Inside its cooler, the organ is “a baby heart in its own baby sea”

(216). While Yamashita foregrounds automotive traffic in *Tropic of Orange*, the novel pushes forward with the strength of this oceanic subtext. In *Manzanar and Emi*, Yamashita links the Japanese-American body with climatic disaster, challenging the hydro-colonial processes that erase history and continue to pollute the Earth. These disasters dismember the body into eyes, hearts and other organs. Manzanar and Emi, separated and stranded from each other throughout the entire novel, are reunited only at the moment of Emi's death. The "infant heart had triggered the full range of memories. Slowly his head rose above the foam and floating kelp. He walked from the rim and looked back at the waves of natural and human garbage thrown back again and again. Everything would churn itself into tiny bits of sand" (255). Tragically, Manzanar emerges from his oceanic trance too late to reunite with Emi. At this point, readers, like Manzanar, "have seen enough" (255) of how hydro-colonial practices of globalization separate Japanese-Americans from their families and history.

#### VISUALIZING SEPARATION: OCEANIC IMAGININGS IN *A TALE FOR THE TIME BEING*

While the previous section overviewed the ocean in relation to the biopolitical violence enacted upon Asian-American characters' bodies, this section directs greater attention to the ocean as a place of fallout in post-disaster narratives. If *Tropic of Orange* shows how oceanic traffic equates Japanese-American (in)visibility with disaster, then Ruth Ozeki's novel *A Tale for the Time Being* engages with specific disasters – including both the large-scale cataclysms of 3/11 and the intimate emergency of suicidal ideation – to magnify the role of hydro-colonial traffic in destabilizing and separating people. Ozeki's ocean serves an important strategic purpose. The gyres of the Pacific deliver a teenage girl's journal across space and time into the

hands of a writer living in the Pacific Northwest. The novel follows the journal's dual narratives – recounting a family's departure from the United States and subsequent relocation to Tokyo – and the writer's efforts to discover if the family is still alive and well after 3/11. Unlike Yamashita, Ozeki foregrounds the Pacific Ocean as a site of political, racial, and environmental violence by highlighting its importance in World War II, Fukushima, and Japanese-American relations. Ozeki's Pacific is more than a setting or a metaphor: it is a site of littoral traffic that connects people across the world, even as it also separates individuals from their homelands. It is very much a space that features, in Karen Barad's words, “nuclear time, decay time, dead time, atomic clock time, doomsday clock time – a superposition of dispersed times cut together-apart – swirling around with the radioactivity” (G107).

Oceanic narrativity maintains the temporal gap between the dual protagonists' stories and allows her readers' imaginations to envision two stranded worlds bridged by literature. As the novel ebbs and flows between the separate diegetic narratives, Ozeki asks her readers to consider the socio-political histories of both Japan and the United States in creating a colonized Pacific. Because *A Tale for the Time Being* challenges patriarchal and exploitative practices by equating them with disaster in the Anthropocene, Ozeki's novel offers new approaches to critical ocean studies that implement, rather than overlook, national and cultural activities. For Ozeki, the large-scale and intimate traumatic events of *A Tale for the Time Being* reconcile the debate about individual versus species culpability in the Anthropocene. The novel illustrates how disasters are not isolated incidents, but rather, patterns of global traffic that result in both individual deaths and species-wide extinctions. As the novel progresses and the two narratives begin to merge, she Ozeki illustrates the global reach of oceanic devastation. By attending to oceanic gyres and

hydro-colonial practices, the novel identifies how international war, global capitalism, and nuclear fallout inflect the trans-Pacific relationship between Japan and the United States.

*A Tale for the Time Being* interweaves two narratives separated by time, location, and speaker. Ozeki alternates between the voices of Naoko Yasutani (“Nao”), a Japanese schoolgirl living in Tokyo, and Ruth, a writer living in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>22</sup> Nao’s narrative takes the form of a diary that Ruth finds on the beach, presumably having washed ashore alongside the waste of other homes destroyed in the Tohoku earthquake and subsequent Fukushima disaster. As Ruth reads the journal, more of Nao’s story is revealed: how she set out to write the life-story of her great-grandmother Jiko, a Buddhist nun, but was distracted by rampant bullying at school and her father’s depression and suicidal ideation. The act of reading Nao’s journal raises questions for Ruth about the nature of writing, memory, and time. Ozeki’s structure hypnotically weaves together the life experiences of the two women by subverting restrictions of time and space through writing itself. In both narratives, the ocean serves as both setting and as a symbol of the two character’s separation from each other and others.

Much of the existing scholarship about Ozeki’s novel praises its transnational methodology, which allows her to intertwine feminist themes with global power structures. For example, Rachel Stein, writing about Ozeki’s earlier novel *All Over Creation*, places the writer at the intersection of environmental justice, specifically in the sector of agro-business, and sexual politics (177). Other scholars have identified Ozeki’s recurring depictions of the female body and feminine environments in *A Tale for the Time Being*. Marlo Starr writes that Ozeki “puts forward an alternative model of feminism through its depiction of Ruth and Nao’s transnational relationship” (100), arguing that she is Haraway-esque in the way literature links Ruth and Nao

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<sup>22</sup> From here, “Ozeki” is used to discuss the author while “Ruth” is used to refer to the character.

across time, distance, and bodies. Chris D. Jimenez adopts a similar transnational approach that unearths Japan and the Pacific Northwest's "mutual nuclear histories in addition to their shared interest in the affective connections" made possible through literary exchange (265). Finally, Sue Lovell provides a structural analysis of the novel that lays bare Ozeki's Posthumanist narratology. All three of these critical readings discuss the expanses between Ruth and Nao, and between Ozeki and the reader, but none addresses the role of Japan and North America as Pacific rim superpowers. Neither Japan nor the Pacific Northwest, despite their rendering in the text as remote areas, are geographically or economically isolated. These nations – through war, globalization, and capitalism – have made the Pacific into a hydro-colonial network of biopolitical violence, nuclear fallout, and engines of global climate change.

My critical approach differs slightly from these scholars in that I do not seek to create linkages between a transnational methodology and Asian-American literature as a genre. Rather, I agree with Michelle Huang in arguing that Asian-American novels and poetry can and should move beyond "nation-states and peoples" as the critical components of textual analysis (96). This does not mean that scholars ignore history and questions of identity, but it does argue for frameworks that embrace non-human relationships. In Huang's reading of the novel, she employs what she calls "ecologies of entanglement" to analyze "networks of circulation that diffuse the boundaries of the human by foregrounding the relationships between us and the world with which we interact" (98). Where Huang sees the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and the gyre as mobilizing cultural amnesia and material refuse, I attend to the gyre's role in the novel as a emblematic of climatic and personal disaster.

Ozeki juxtaposes the larger disasters of Japanese-American hydro-colonialism – World War II, the atomic bombs, Japanese occupation, and 3/11 - with the personal tragedies of Nao

and her father, Haruki, who are both struggling with entrenched shame and suicidal thoughts. All of these disasters are entangled within the network that is the Pacific Ocean. At one point, Nao describes herself a “little wave person, floating around on the stormy sea of life” (42). Later, Jiko instructs Nao to “fight” with a wave, which results in her enjoying the struggle and daydreaming about being eaten by sharks and dissolving into the ocean. These scenes have led Starr to conclude that part of what makes Nao a strong feminist character is that she is not “a coherent entity with firm boundaries” but “an individual wave in the ocean, simultaneously dual and nondual, never apart from the ocean, connected and fluid, and yet maintaining her own shape and agency” (121). While this reading establishes the strong connection between the Japanese body and the ocean, it overlooks the hegemonic power structures that render subjects like Nao destabilized. Beyond enmeshment, Ozeki’s novel speaks to the trans-Pacific traffic of bodies and political ideology. Ozeki reminds readers that, while Ruth and Nao are connected through the journal and the ocean itself, hydro-colonial interruption in the Pacific leads to separation of families, identities and ecosystems.

As in Yamashita’s writing, Ozeki’s novel features the gyre as a signifier of this oceanic separation. Ozeki first mentions the gyre when Ruth’s husband, Oliver, explains the unlikelihood of a lunch box from Japan traversing the ocean to arrive at the Pacific Northwest. For Oliver, the lunch box’s arrival is a portent of environmental cataclysm “happening sooner than anyone expected” (14). As an environmental-artist, Oliver’s anxiety over the unexpectedly quick pace of global climate change emerges while discussing how gyres carve out oceanic pathways that traffic in children’s lunch boxes, the literature of foreign countries, human remains from Fukushima, and non-endemic species of birds, like the “Jungle Crow.” Oliver surmises that the crow “rode over on some flotsam,” and that it’s “part of the drift” (55). This theorizing links

biological life, non-endemic to the ocean, with the movement of the ocean itself, not only to show the networked qualities of the ocean, but to illustrate how its gyrosopic physics extend onto land by gathering life and separating it from place. If Nao is a “wave person,” she is not a utopian being but a displaced person who is subject to its hydro-colonial traffic. Ozeki’s ocean swirls with gyres that incorporate through disintegration and unite through separation.

Nao’s unique relationship with the ocean – in which she is both one with the sea and yet separated from place and time – prompts readers to consider global devastation at an epochal scale. Ozeki’s novel concerns itself with reshaping debates about environmental degradation in the Anthropocene by placing disasters within cyclical contexts. For example, Oliver’s current project – dubbed the “Neo-Eocene” – is Yeats’ “Second Coming” in an era of global climate change. Oliver looks far into the future in order to plant a “climate-change forest” that will benefit the world generations from now, once this current era has ended. The project also suggests a divorcing of personal subjectivity from time, a “collaboration with time and place, whose outcome neither he nor any of his contemporaries would ever live to witness” (61). Oliver turns his attention away from the “now,” forecasting into a future that has cycled back to a previous, pre-Anthropocene era. This wave-like figuration of history is signified in the text’s criticism of hydro-colonial practices of occupation, trans-Pacific trade, and nuclear power. Nao and Ruth’s personal losses, along with the large-scale disasters of 9/11 and 3/11, coalesce in Ozeki’s model of time as a vast, incomprehensible expanse – like the ocean - in which cycles of oppression and extinction are repeatedly enacted by colonial powers.

*A Tale for the Time Being* emphasizes Japanese and European colonialism as a contributor to the Anthropocene and contemporary cultures of shame and violence. Before discussing the 3/11 disaster, Ruth prefaces her remarks by noting the history of Miyagi

prefecture: the land once belonged to Indigenous Emishi people before their violent defeat at the hands of Japanese imperialists in the eighth century (141). By referring to Japan's colonial past, Ozeki directly connects the 3/11 disaster with Imperialism and tribal extinction. She parallels the colonial history of Miyagi prefecture with the Imperial history of Ruth's island to further tie the ocean to process of national expansion and trans-Pacific traffic, processes that come to a head in the construction and subsequent failure of Fukushima Daichii power plant. Ozeki juxtaposes oceanic gyres with the man-made gyres of the plant: the pumps, gears, and valves that make up the nuclear cooling failsafes that, for days, shuttled and cycled water into exposed reactor cores. Ruth concludes that living in that area, much less building a power plant in that location, is hubris brought about by government ideologies of safe nuclear power and national prosperity. Indeed, Lochbaum supports this conclusion, noting that despite the tragedy of 3/11 Japan has adopted policies that envision a future of safe nuclear power, ideologies that appear foolish, short-sighted, and cruel to survivors.

In their haste to efforts to achieve sustainable nuclear power, Japan has inequitably harmed coastal and oceanic environments. Reading from a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency, Ruth goes into great detail about how Fukushima directed the water and nuclear particulate through an "intricate system of pumps and drains, surge tanks and feed-water lines, intakes and injection lines, suppression pools and pits, flow rates and leakage paths, trenches and tunnels and flooded basements" (196). Despite these man-made systems of aqueous traffic management, Ruth laments that the accident still resulted in damaging leaks of radioactive iodine-131 and cesium 137. This prompts her to claim that "information is a lot like water; it's hard to hold on to, and hard to keep from leaking away" (197). Ozeki touches on the Japanese government's silence and opacity in the days, weeks, and months after the Fukushima disaster,

when officials downplayed the extent of the devastation. Information, like the ocean itself, is not only hard to keep from leaking, but is beyond human control. Attempts to colonize the ocean through the development of nuclear power plants, trans-Pacific trade routes, factory fisheries, and other incursions only lead to harm people of the lower classes and their immediate environments. Ozeki directly ties this nuclear environmentalism of the poor to oceanic disasters, themselves exacerbated in the Anthropocene.

For Ozeki, this brand of oceanic environmentalism is not restricted to the current era, but is, like the ocean itself, cyclical. Directly after Ruth's description of the Fukushima fallout, her mind leaps to a discussion of mythical catfish, like the *jishin namazu*, the "earthquake catfish," and the *yonaoshi namazu*, or "World-Rectifying Catfish." (198). The latter is viewed by the working class as a benevolent force, who targeted the rich during "a period characterized by a weak, ineffective government and a powerful business class, as well as extreme and anomalous weather patterns, crop failures, famine, hoarding, urban riots, and mass religious pilgrimages, which often ended in mob violence" (199). Ozeki's model of hydro-colonialism is therefore not a new intervention in oceanic studies, but an unearthed symbol from Japanese lore that she beckons to the surface for a modern era. The ocean is the site of climatic disaster as well as social change. When Ozeki describes Nao as a wave person, whose name is literally signified as a fish in the text, she is not simply tying her into an assemblage of oceanic and littoral lifeforms, but she is also gesturing toward her status as a person at the mercy of tumultuous political and social circumstances.

Given the complex interrelations between governments, corporations, communities and individuals, Ozeki's novel illustrates how the Pacific Ocean is more than a body of water; it is a network of lifeforms, a vector for colonial conquest, a site of disaster, and an agent of traffic all

at once. Ozeki reminds her readers that trans-oceanic traffic doesn't blend everything together into a beneficial network; it separates. At one point in the novel, just as it seems that the narrative worlds of Nao and Ruth are catching up to one another and merging, Ruth's narration asks, "What does separation look like? A wall? A wave? A body of water? A ripple of light or a shimmer of subatomic particles, parting? What does it feel like to push through?" (346). These questions speak to the relationship between people separated by oceans and time, and are perhaps best answered by Nao and her ancestor Haruki #1. Perpetually ostracized and bullied by her peers for her body and her identity, Nao dreams of battling waves, being eaten by sharks, and dissolving into the ocean. She writes a journal, ostensibly not about her but about Jiko, and hides it under the guise of Marcel Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time*. But readers are led to believe that the act of writing, for Nao, is an act of reaching out, of establishing identity, of continuing to live. Similarly, Nao's great uncle Haruki #1 writes a secret journal in which he asserts his individuality through defying his orders as a kamikaze pilot in World War II. Haruki #1 chooses to end his life by flying his plane into the ocean in order to avoid murdering people whom he could never hate. For Nao and Haruki #1, fighting the sea is an assertion of self-hood and a confrontation of a hydro-colonial history.

*A Tale for the Time Being* confronts climatic and nuclear disasters as connected by a Pacific Ocean affected by hydro-colonial incursions. After all, the novel is about time, beings, "time-beings," and superpowers, or as Jiko calls them, *supapawas*. These superpowers are not literal, but they are in fact *littoral*. Ozeki's tale focuses on Nao and Ruth, but also on the Japanese and American environments in which they find themselves. While Ozeki's novel depicts personal trauma and devastation, it also confronts global disasters of nuclear waste,

climate change, and militarism. In this way, the novel is a tale for the present time, but also one that looks toward the past, while anticipating its impact upon an environmentally fraught future.

#### NO RETURN: RADIOACTIVE PASTS AND THE FUTURE OF LITERATURE

By forcing us to read trafficked and dispossessed Japanese and Japanese-American bodies through a Pacific lens, both *Tropic of Orange* and *A Tale for the Time Being* challenge readers to re-imagine their attachments to an ocean that is imbricated into colonial hegemony. The multiple perspectives and narrative voices plot a course for incorporating human and non-human life, nuclear fallout, and global superpowers into depictions of the ocean and coastal biomes in literature. In *Tropic of Orange*, survivors of Japanese internment and their descendants grapple with a hydro-colonial transnationalism that inextricably links the body with climatic and nuclear disasters. This focus extends into *A Tale for the Time Being*, where trans-oceanic traffic separates, rather than unites, Japanese and American subjects, as evinced by situating the Fukushima nuclear disaster within contexts of colonialism and the Anthropocene. Both novels highlight the trauma of trans-Pacific migration on Japanese-Americans, separated from their history in part through hydro-colonial contamination of the ocean. These novels gesture toward a new way of reading the ocean in Asian-American literature as an environmental traffic pattern that ultimately divides subjects from a past they can no longer remember and a land they can no longer return.

While Yamashita and Ozeki depict this socio-political separation through fiction, recent poetry offers a conclusive indictment of oceanic colonization and nuclear power. Lee Ann Roripaugh's 2019 poetry collection *Tsunami vs. The Fukushima 50* is one of the few American texts to engage explicitly with the 3/11 disaster, by addressing its trauma within the contexts

mixed-race heritage, diaspora, and transnational identity. Roripaugh's poetry, like that of other Japanese-American poets like David Mura, Kimiko Hahn, and Garrett Hongo, approaches the complex maneuverings of mixed Asian-American identity alongside the importance of place – places that are under perpetual threat of environmental deterioration due to capitalist and colonial power structures. Like Yamashita, Roripaugh references *kaiju*, but she does so alongside American icons from Marvel Comics, like Galactus, Hulk, Sandman and others. Her allusions to science fiction and comic books speak to a transnational network of the nuclear in both Japanese and American popular culture. Roripaugh's poems juxtapose speculative irradiated subjects with material post-fallout environments, providing a lingering testament to the Fukushima disaster and its cross-Pacific traffic.

Within the poems, the Pacific gyres continue to spiral and swirl with waves, storms, climate change, oceanic life, nuclear radiation and human bodies. In “miki endo as flint marko (aka sandman),” Roripaugh visualizes a human body literally dissipating within a tide of severed limbs, assaulted by the “terrible siren / swirling around in a loud howl / inside me, but now scattered” (24). Written from the perspective of Miki Endo, a government worker who died providing voice warnings and alerts during the Tohoku typhoon, the poem connects her body with that of Marvel's “the Sandman” character, a crook exposed to radiation who gained the power to dissolve his body. The poem springs forward along this whirling imagery of creation through unmaking: a “rock garden's spiral and whorl” is “erased by the brooms of monks” only to reappear in the oceanic detritus shells and barnacles. For Roripaugh, the spiral operates subatomically, breaking down the self as if it were made of sand, and recorporealizing it within the “clicked ticking of the geiger counter” and the “hibernating tsunami siren” (25). In this poem, the Pacific Ocean is an expanse separating Japan and the United States, but also a swirling

engine that facilitates the biopolitical crossings of bodies. Roripaugh combines ocean's natural imagery with the mechanical apparatus of Japan's emergency infrastructure in order not only to mourn the event itself, but also to make the case for characterizing post-3/11 Japan as a haunted and irradiated site.

Roripaugh's attempt to represent in literary form the radioactivity of oceans and humans post 3/11 also underlies the poem "mothra flies again." The speaker finds herself unable to reconcile the immediate trauma of the event with their inability to return to a place and time prior to disaster. Deftly weaving together factual evidence of irradiation with popular representations of unchecked nuclear fallout in science fiction and comics, "mothra flies again" encapsulates the feeling of disassociation with reality resulting from the emergency. The speaker questions "how can we ever go back there?" and "*what if? what if? what if?*" (17). In other poems like "tsunami goes to canada," the speaker, displaced from her Japanese homeland, juxtaposes her love of Canada and her separation from Japanese culture through interspersing natural geographic features with Japanese signifiers, like when she admits to being "smitten at the mountains" while also feeling the desire to "fall like that / a silvery levering of pachinko balls" (7). Ultimately, Roripaugh's speaker is unable to return not only due to environmental disaster, but also due to the personal shame of finding a new home in Canada.

Along with their oceanic focus, all of the texts discussed in this chapter also deal with themes of shame, silence, and separation. The Asian-American body has historically and textually been a marker of disaster; testament to this is the increase in measured xenophobia in the wake of the Covid-19 virus, a tragedy that speaks not only to the importance of environmental regulation but also to the presence of persistent racism. As the novels, and Roripaugh's poetry attests, hydro-colonial practices have deleterious consequences on not only

the coasts and waterscapes, but also on people, particularly Japanese and Japanese-American communities. Roripaugh's Japanese/American exchanges in culture, displacement, and literal radioactive material are forms of trans-Pacific traffic that gesture toward new ecocritical models for reading Asian-American texts. A focus on hydro-colonial Pacific traffic asks readers to rediscover the particular movements of the ocean, that which swirls, unites, and separates, so that they may imagine a future where the past and present survive oceanic and nuclear disaster, rather than submit and submerge.

**CHAPTER FOUR: DERANGED AND DEVOURED: AMITAV GHOSH'S  
PLUNDERED ANTHROPOCENE**

We know less of the sexual life of little girls than of little boys; the sexual life of grown-up women, too, is still a 'dark continent' for psychology.  
Sigmund Freud, from *The Question of Lay Analysis*, (34-35)

Located at 66 Leighton Road in Causeway Bay, nearly equidistant between Hong Kong's own "Times Square" and the Happy Valley horse racetracks, the Po Leung Kuk museum and school stands as a visual and ideological reminder of the island city's history as a British colony. The museum's architecture is impressive, if not anachronistic: the building boasts a main gate, with upturned green shingles, a colonial-style courtyard, and a main pagoda with an open-air skywell. Around this traditional architecture, global modernity has erected glass skyscrapers, western outlet stores, and stories-high electronic billboards. Inside, visitors walk through hallways lined with countless faces: photographs of its members, donors, and former students. Free pamphlets in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English recount its origins as an anti-kidnapping task force, organized by concerned community members during the early years of British occupation. During a time of rampant abduction and human trafficking, concerned Chinese inhabitants of the colony began the Po Leung Kuk – a group devoted to identifying kidnapping, rehabilitating and reuniting victims with their families, and otherwise eliminating the practice of human trafficking. According to archival records, during much of the latter half of the nineteenth century there were thousands of cases of human trafficking per year, mostly women and children from Indonesia or the Philippines. These people were often sold into prostitution or forced into arranged marriages, where they would be abused by wealthy white or Chinese clientele.

Documents from the Po Leung Kuk archives reveal the intertwined legacies of human trafficking and environmental degradation. An early donation request asks supporters to tend to their growing efforts to curb human enslavement as if it were a garden, relying heavily on environmental imagery of draught and harvest to describe its work:

The granary is empty and the hungry still crowd round waiting for its opening.  
The fountain is dry and the drawers of water still clamour for the digging of wells  
[...] Fill your pens, and open your purses. Let us have large subscriptions, like  
timely rain falling on the parched trees. Let the funds flow in like full streams that  
fill the rivers and the sea. Sow liberally and you will reap liberally. (53)<sup>23</sup>

Because this pamphlet was written in both Chinese and English at the time of its initial distribution, the writer likely employs agricultural imagery to appeal to the wealthy English elite and their Chinese contacts in Hong Kong. Additionally, the style of the pamphlet blends allusions to both Christian and Buddhist parables; however, even more than this spiritual appeal, the writers rely upon environmental issues like harvest, draught, and conservation to stress the importance of preventing the kidnapping and selling of young children and women. This rhetoric appeals to donor emotions by insinuating that these victims could be irrevocably lost, like crops cut down before they could mature, but also to their own sense of place through allusions to actual ecological conditions in Hong Kong. At the same time as the Po Leung Kuk sought donations, the city was experiencing severe growing pains as it transitioned from rocky island to bustling port city. Other notes from the Po Leung Kuk archives detail some of these pains, which include crowded living conditions, lack of food and water, fires, and the 1894 plague outbreak.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The document's only date is Kwang-su, 17<sup>th</sup> year, 4<sup>th</sup> moon. This means the document was written during the 17<sup>th</sup> year of Emperor Guangxu, or approximately 1892.

<sup>24</sup> Many of these documents can be found at the Po Leung Kuk archives or in the records of Tung Wah hospital, with whom Po Leung Kuk worked closely.

As a community organization established and managed by predominantly local Chinese citizens, Po Leung Kuk emerges within the history of Hong Kong as an early resistance group to British imperialism. While never violent or confrontational to British citizens themselves, the group's commitment to undermining human trafficking and to supporting displaced women and children were both essential in resisting the ecological and socio-political violations of British imperials, the consequences of which persist into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The need for Po Leung Kuk is magnified through the context of Imperialism, which led to not only human trafficking but to the unprecedented urbanization and rampant industrialization that began on Hong Kong island and in Kowloon following the signing of the Treaty of Nanking in 1842. Quickly shifting from a sparsely inhabited area to a global trade center, Hong Kong's evolution attests to the way ideologies of global capital commodify environments and individuals in the name of profit.<sup>25</sup> Po Leung Kuk's records remind us that Hong Kong's current self-marketing scheme as "Asia's World City" is built on the forced labor of Chinese, Filipino, and Indonesian laborers and unwilling enlistment of Indian subaltern soldiers under the British flag during the early years of British occupation and the heights of the opium trade: an era that arguably lasted the century from 1840 through the trauma of Japanese occupation during the second Sino-Japanese war in 1937.

Po Leung Kuk's missive illustrates the damage inflicted by Imperialism upon the natural environment and the colonized human simultaneously. By hearkening to familiar agrarian imagery, Po Leung Kuk directly relates practices of resource extraction, land reclamation, and the drug trade with that of human trafficking, forced labor, and enslavement. The document supports a reading of Hong Kong as a nexus for global trade of humans and narcotics, a colony

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<sup>25</sup> See "香港統計月刊 Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics" for population records as of June 2019.

in which white councilmen initially refused to confer protected status to the organization. Where children were deprived of homes due to their appearance, and non-Chinese Asian adults faced rampant discrimination. Po Leung Kuk's records reveal that human trafficking, while usually financially motivated, was also largely a racial crime in which a high percentage of displaced and disenfranchised communities, including indigenous Hong Kong tribes like the Hakka, are forcibly commodified and abused. The cultural conditions of Hong Kong were built on a foundation of racism and colonial mastery, a bedrock that fed the growth of the drug trade, slavery, and human trafficking.

Resisting and reversing mastery has long been a subject of Subaltern and Postcolonial Studies. However, mastery extends beyond these fields into the cultural, material, political, and environmental conditions of Hong Kong more than twenty years after the 1997 handover to China. Hong Kong's 2019 protests against the proposed bill allowing Chinese extradition attests to the colonizer's desire to assert mastery over the colonized body, and to the colonized's attempts to free themselves from legacies of war and slavery. These ongoing protests, in which Hong Kong police have used rubber bullets and tear gas to dispel crowds that occupied major thoroughfares, public plazas, and the airport, illustrate the degree to which human autonomy, and racist interpretations of said humans, remains a complex and present issue in not only Hong Kong but throughout East Asia. Though the protesters aren't vocally protesting environmental degradation or racism, for small island territories like Hong Kong and Taiwan that are rapidly industrializing in response to global capital and Chinese economic dominance, a protest for national sovereignty is in many ways a protest for environmental responsibility and racial diversity. Hong Kongers are protesting not only extradition, but also the surviving ideologies of mastery, of the forced enslavement and movement of bodies.

In prior chapters, I have applied the framework of “traffic” to material and postcolonial ecocriticism, showing how close attention to the beyond-human realm can inform, rather than overlook, disenfranchised or subaltern peoples. Such an approach explains how China’s “One China, Two Systems” policy is a colonial overreach that seeks to elide Hong Kong’s history by assimilating a complex network of ethnicities, races, and languages under the banner of the mainland. Examining traffic has also led to a critique of the maldevelopment of Indian automobility and the biopolitics of ecological disaster in Trans-pacific Asian-American literature. This chapter builds on the arguments laid out in these prior arguments to assert that the Anthropocene exists not because of the existence of humans in a general, species-wide sense, but through their illicit global traffickings of narcotics and human bodies. To make this argument, I focus predominantly on the work of a solitary author, Amitav Ghosh, who has critiqued the inequalities of the Anthropocene in the novels that make up the *Ibis* trilogy and in the essays that make up *The Great Derangement* (2016). I begin with a discussion of the racial origins of the Anthropocene by drawing upon contemporary theorists like Francois Verges, Laura Pulido, Julietta Singh, and Ghosh himself to describe how racism and the concept of mastery have proven foundational to the Anthropocene. I then describe how mastery informs the acts of drug and human trafficking in the novels, demonstrating how acts of anticolonial counter-mastery result in unsatisfactory results for characters seeking to free themselves from the yoke of colonialism. I conclude by drawing connections between Ghosh’s non-fiction and fiction, identifying how Ghosh frames literature as a venue to communicate alternatives to a perpetuation of mastery throughout the Anthropocene that threatens to undo cultures and environments through the forces of climate change.

## THE RACIAL CAPITALOCENE: MASTERY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING AS FOUNDATIONAL TO THE ANTHROPOCENE

Between India, Singapore, and Hong Kong, British imperialism created a global network of resource extraction and human enslavement that revolved around the production and trade of opium. Through mastery over the poppy plant, traders also exerted mastery over racialized bodies from Calcutta to the Pearl River Delta and Hong Kong island. All of these forms of traffic bleed into the global inequities of the Anthropocene. While some scholars have increasingly favored acknowledging global inequities in capital as opposed to species-wide culpability, proposing the term “capitalocene” as a more accurate identifier of the current era of anthropological destruction, less attention has been directed toward the role of race as catalyst for the Anthropocene. Scholars of the Anthropocene point to various historical events as the possible beginning of the “great acceleration”: the invention of the steam engine, mass decolonization following World War II, and the apex of the Atlantic slave trade. All of these potential catalysts attest to the significance of the global spread of industrialization and capitalist ideologies, but many scholars have overlooked that these events also exist within racial contexts characterized by inequality and disenfranchisement based on skin color or ethnicity.

My claims resonate with those made by Laura Pulido in “Racism and the Anthropocene,” notably that racism is the primary motivation and justification for colonization’s cultural and financial interventions in regions. While race is often viewed as a primary factor in discussions of individualized cases of environmental justice, Pulido’s argument is one of only a few that take discussions of race in the context of global climate change. Pulido specifically examines the history of slavery as a catalyst for contemporary global inequality. She asserts that wealthy nations’ indifference to the environmental or anthropological plight of the Global South is itself a

racist inaction. Pulido's "racism of indifference" indicts those who cling to the belief that "the geography of wealth and power was somehow nonracial" (116). In Pulido's view, the hesitancy of wealthy nations to engage in profound change in order to address climate change is not only due to economic concerns, but also to an undercurrent of racism that refuses to care about brown bodies directly affected by global warming. Acknowledging the reality of a capitalist world-system that prizes the self at the expense of the other, Pulido counters that "sentencing millions to die requires more explanation ... such a powerful act requires an equally powerful ideology... and that is racism" (121). Geographically, wealthy nations like the United States, the United Kingdom, and China worry little about climate change not only because they have the finances and land area to deal with resource disappearance and coastal degradation, but also because of racist indifference towards peoples of different skin color.

While Pulido sees the macrocosm of white indifference as a contemporary indicator of the Anthropocene's racist history, Francois Verges's writing has focused on the oceanic flows of African trade across the globe. Even as the Anthropocene refers to a non-local, planetary, temporal age, Verges believes scholars can trace its origins to Africa. She makes the case for reconceptualizing the Anthropocene as a "racial capitalocene," noting that debates about the genesis of the era must include colonialist expansion and the slave trade:

To unpack the different levels of racialized environment we need to go back the long sixteenth century, the era of Western "discoveries," of the first colonial empires, of genocides, of the slave trade and slavery, the modern world mobilized the work of commodified human beings and uncommodified extra-human nature in order to advance labor productivity within commodity production. (80)

For Verges, the forced transport and migrations of humans across oceans and borders is evidence of the Anthropocene's racial origins, arguing that this human movement prefaced "a massive transfer of plants, animals, diseases, soil, techniques, and manufactured goods from Europe" (80). Verges accurately illustrates how the history of the Anthropocene is an entanglement of human and non-human factors while still pointing toward racism as the primary drive of global capitalism.

In addition to the propagation of humans, plants, and objects across the world, slavery also directly inflected the production and dissemination of knowledge. Verges attempts to re-orient Western perspectives and the globe by focusing on latitudinal directions of trade, like south/south interchanges. For example, Verges focuses on the economic interchange between Africa and South Asia as a way to avoid "being locked in the territorialization imposed by imperialism and postcolonial nationalism" (2003 242). Such an approach charges postcolonial critics to avoid attempts to retrieve a "glorious past" pre-colonization or pre-slavery, but to explore "the endless working and reworking of the practices of borrowing, imitating, and appropriation from civilizations" (251). By attending to racism and slavery as intrinsic factors in the foundation of the Anthropocene, Verges brings together discussions of anticolonialism, decolonization, and the environments of postcolonial literatures.

By foregrounding discussions of race, Verges and Pulido remind ecocritics and postcolonial scholars that discussions of the Anthropocene not avoid discussions of the actual people within these regions. These discussions of the Anthropocene's racial origins overlap with Julietta Singh's critique of mastery in postcolonial theory. In *Unthinking Mastery*, Singh argues that postcolonial and anticolonial thought has not done enough to prevent the separate itself from the doctrine of mastery. While indebted to early anticolonial figures like Mohandas K. Gahdhi

and Frantz Fanon, Singh argues they did not do enough to question their own “entanglements with mastery” (2). Rather than dethrone one hegemonic power only to replace it with new tyranny, Singh calls for new ways of decolonization that undo, rather than transfer, mastery. Her work ambitiously tries to subvert the master/slave dialectic model in favor of approaches that usurp the human entirely. Indeed, Singh concedes that a level of “dehumanism” must occur in order to avoid re-mastery, though she never completely abandons the human in favor of the non-human, drawing equally from new materialist, queer, feminist, and subaltern theory to support her findings.

Singh’s approach attempts to usurp the dialectical model of mastery that has allowed colonial hegemony to continue through neocolonialism and global capitalism. For Singh, “drives toward mastery inform and underlie the major crises of our times – acts of intrahuman violence across the globe, the radical disparities in resources and rights between the Global North and the Global South, innumerable forms of human and nonhuman extinction, and escalating threats of ecological disaster” (3). By linking anthropological and ecological mastery with global inequality, Singh argues for a brand of decolonial thought that finds new ways of relating to one another and to our environments. Rather than employ rhetoric of conquest, supremacy, and commodification, Singh urges readers toward texts that reconsider the ways humans exist and move within environments that have been historically “mastered,” and therefore racialized and objectified.

This discussion of race, mastery, and the Anthropocene helps explain how the history of the Asia-Pacific has been shaped by disputes over bodily autonomy and land ownership. In his recent work, Amitav Ghosh has attempted to write this history within the context of the political and environmental entanglements of the Anthropocene. *The Great Derangement* (2017)

discusses how authors write about climate change and explains why the topic has only been rarely broached in fiction until relatively recently.<sup>26</sup> He admits that climate change features only “obliquely” in his fiction, but also claims that, by writing about cultures of racism and human trafficking, he is affirming that “the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture and thus of the imagination” (9). Originally a series of lectures delivered at the University of Chicago, the text explains how histories of imperialism and capitalism are linked with the cultural evolution of poetry, art, and other humanistic disciplines. Ghosh’s title refers not only to a potentially catastrophic future, but also to the various “modes of concealment” employed by cultures to disguise important discussions about geologic change and race.

While fiction conceals its anxieties over the Anthropocene, Ghosh argues that historiography also conceals the role of power in narratives about trade and global industrialization. Ghosh’s discussion of history forces readers to examine the climate crisis through the lenses of capital and empire, arguing that a singular focus on either or a species-wide approach elide the complexity of the era. While many scholars have pointed to the era of mass decolonization in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a marker of the “great acceleration” of carbon emissions, Ghosh’s approach is unique in that he reaches even farther back to the height of the East India Company and British imperialism in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Asia. For Ghosh, the First Opium War was more than a battle over ideologies of free trade and markets, but a harbinger of global carbon economics. He argues that “carbon emissions were, from very early on, closely correlated to power in all its aspects: this continues to be a major, although unacknowledged, factor in the politics of contemporary global warming” (2016, 109). Speaking in detail about the war specifically, he argues that the most obvious lesson of the Opium War was that “capitalist trade

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<sup>26</sup> With few exceptions, these texts have largely been categorized as science fiction rather than “serious” fiction.

and industry cannot thrive without access to military and political power” (2016, 109). Ironically, Ghosh concludes that this exertion of power – the subjugation of the economies of China and India at the hands of the British specifically – was ultimately helpful in delaying inevitable climate crisis by slowing down the industrialization of these nations. So while humans – as a species – perhaps bought themselves a little bit of extra time, it comes again at the expense of global equality.

While Ghosh concedes that all humans should bear some brunt of the responsibility of the climate crisis, this species-wide indictment is meant to be understood as an accumulation of inequal contributions over the totality of human experience (2016, 115). The importance of social, religious, caste, language and gender differences emerge in the Anthropocene within what he terms “the politics of the armed lifeboat” (2016, 144). If the current era is one of crisis, in which only a select few are likely to survive, some are going to be purposefully excluded from rescue while others will simply be too late to realize the danger. Ghosh makes it clear that the majority of these survivors are wealthy humans from the Global North, while communities in the Global South, suffering from poverty and unequal development, fall victim to “systems that were set up by brute force to ensure that poor nations remained always at a disadvantage in terms of both wealth and power” (2016, 110). The “derangement” of the current age is the means by which capitalism and empire, in spreading free market ideology, conceal the suffering and death of millions of people in Asia, Africa, and other nations. Like Pulido’s racism of indifference, Ghosh’s derangement explains the logic by which individuals in certain regions resign others to die to climate change.

Notably missing from much of *The Great Derangement* is a dedicated incorporation of race in the history of the Anthropocene. However, if Ghosh’s non-fiction avoids broaching the

topic of race while still addressing the concept of mastery, his fiction more than makes up for this oversight. The following sections articulate how Ghosh's novels answer the call of Pulido and Verges to reveal racial violence as a concealed consequence of a deranged Anthropocene. Ghosh describes how ideologies of mastery undergird the illicit trades of narcotics and humans, that the brown body undergirds every facet of white mastery: the color of the skin of the sailor, the farm laborer, the addict. Ghosh's fiction calls for an examination of mastery in its countless guises develops a model that resists mastery's role as an agent of unchecked extractive capitalism that harms the earth as it inflicts violence upon its people. Ghosh offers characters who seek to become masters themselves, only for these attempts to mire themselves further within colonial hegemony. Instead, Ghosh urges the development of a framework that embraces unknowability, mystery, and transition, what I term a plundered assemblage of humans and non-human lifeforms that traffic with and against each other.

#### 'FLOWERS AND OPIUM, OPIUM AND FLOWERS': BOTANICAL MASTERY AND HUMAN ENCHANTMENT

Ghosh's commitment to writing race into the narrative of the Anthropocene is pronounced in his novels *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015), collectively known as the Ibis trilogy. Over the span of 1500+ pages, Ghosh illustrates how human oppression and environmental degradation are intertwined in the first opium war. Equal parts swashbuckling adventure, historical romance, and postcolonial literature, Ghosh's Ibis trilogy features a wide cast of characters navigating wide-ranging conflicts, from human enslavement to caste violence to environmental endangerment. Though the three novels progress chronologically, characters move in and out of the narrative, and each novel is its own self-

sufficient narrative. This unique approach to epic allows Ghosh to craft stand-alone tales about the effects of British imperialism, exploitative drug practices, and large-scale uprooting and diaspora that, when read and understood together, implicate these actions in a racial reading of the Anthropocene.

In her 2012 ACLA Presidential Address, Francoise Lionnet called *Sea of Poppies* a salutary destabilization of the myths associated with Indian Ocean slave narratives and their long-standing symbolic consequences (448). Lionnet praises the trilogy for its ability to “show how historic proximities created new hybrid cultures, structured mentalities and transformed languages” (453). I would add to these plaudits a propensity to seek out what Singh calls an alternative to mastery in anticolonial thinking. Ghosh’s characters – from the richest to the poorest - are kidnapped, bought, and sold, victim to what he terms “the disinterested touch of mastery” (2008, 282). The sea asserts mastery over the ships that traverse it, while the ships assert mastery over the sailors that helm it. British traders and opium sellers claim mastery over the poppy, only for opium to assert its dominance over the human through addiction and disease. Humans seek mastery over their own bodies, only to fail. Even as Ghosh deploys these plants, animals, and objects as literary symbols, he also contextualizes them in scientific and political realities, making explicit connections between the trafficked human and the commodified earth. The most significant of these symbols is the poppy.

In *Sea of Poppies*, *Papaver somniferum* – the scientific name of the poppy plant - exerts mastery over its human farmers, traders, and addicts as they simultaneously attempt to assert their own mastery over the plant. This opening novel introduces readers to characters they will follow throughout the three texts: the French ex-patriate botanist Paulette Lambert, the mixed-race American sailor Zachary Reid, the monk-turned-accountant Baboo Nob Kissin, and the

Indian refugee Deeti Singh. Initially living in Ghazipur and married to a former soldier turned opium addict, Deeti quickly realizes the plant's power to corrupt on a global scale as it pacifies at a personal level. After micro-dosing her mother-in-law with small, repeated traces of the drug, she witnesses in her a complete personality change that causes Deeti to wonder:

For if a little bit of this gum could give her such power over the life, the character, the very soul of this elderly woman, then with more of it at her disposal, why should she not be able to seize kingdoms and control multitudes? And surely this could not be the only such substance upon the earth? (2008, 37)

Ghosh begins his re-telling of the Opium Wars here, in India, with a small indication of how the drug's narcotic properties soothe and numb its users. Yet even this small action portends larger, global significance for Deeti. Ghosh foreshadows how the encroaching conflict over opium will spread from the fields of India to the dens of the Pearl River Delta and Hong Kong island. In so doing, Ghosh illustrates how the trafficking of flowers whose sap only flows for "a day or two" can dramatically impact environments and nations across the globe (2008, 5). The Indian poppy germinates in fields outside Ghazipur, travels to wealthy traders in Calcutta, and then sails to plantations on Mauritius, and to ports as far from China as Baltimore, all to make profits for wealthy Englishmen. Deeti's insight indicates her intelligence in seeing how the poppy seed – transformed into opium – spreads globally to enslave its users even as it enriches its human "masters," an identity she only briefly contemplates for herself.

Ghosh foregrounds opium's dominance over humans within the interior of drug factories. After being notified that her husband – himself an opium addict - became ill at the factory, Deeti journeys there to take him home. Inside the mixing room, Deeti witnesses the production of opium and the struggles of its producers, a host of "dark, legless torsos circling around an

around, like some enslaved tribe of demons [...] their eyes were vacant, glazed, and yet somehow they managed to keep moving, as slow as ants in honey, tramping, treading” (2008, 92). What is most haunting for Deeti is not this scene of men circling, waist-deep in opium, suffering from the effects of prolonged contact with the drug, but the presence of the “white overseers patrolling the walkways” (2008, 93). Ghosh presents readers with the human face of opium in order to depict the toils not only of addicts, but of laborers as well. The “whiteness” of skin here does not necessarily mean that these individuals were light skinned or Caucasian. In this case, Ghosh is likely drawing a connection between those forced to wade into the opium pools, covering their skin with black mud, and those who aren’t. By literally enmeshing the bodies of humans within the mud of opium, Ghosh explicit connects the drug trade with the forced labor of humans. Deeti’s subsequent exile from her community and her joining a group of *girmityas* to work in a labor camp on Mauritius further underscore Ghosh’s entanglement between poppy seed and human body.

By the end of this first novel, the initial power dynamic between Deeti and the poppy has reversed. No longer considering the poppy as something that could be wielded to seize kingdoms, she instead finds herself at its mercy. While anticipating the Ibis’s imminent arrival at Mauritius, Deeti notices a stray poppy seed caught in her thumbnail that causes her to realize that she and her fellow refugees have most likely sold their freedom for lives of servitude. She thinks, “it was not the planet above that governed her life: it was this miniscule orb -- at once bountiful and all-devouring, merciful and destructive, sustaining and vengeful” (Ghosh 2008 439). By juxtaposing the seed and the star, Deeti ties together the cosmic and the agricultural in a way that profoundly reflects the unchecked power of globalization in the Anthropocene. Mastery over this plant results in the indenture of laborers by race, as well as contributing indirectly to regional and

global changes in population redistribution, crop transplantation, maritime devastation, coastal dissolution, and ecosystem disruption.

In *River of Smoke*, the poppy continues to be a material danger to humans, notably when a storm at sea causes the trader Bahram Singh to slip and fall into his cargo hold, where crates of opium have shattered, resulting in a drug-induced haze that sidelines him for days. However, Ghosh expands his botanical scope to parallel the global trade of *Papaver somniferum* with the trafficking of other plants, notably the Camellia leaves commonly brewed into tea. Paulette, the French heroine of *Sea of Poppies*, returns to join Fitcher Penrose on a quest for the mythical Golden Camellia, claimed to “turn white hairs into black, restore the suppleness of aged joints, and serve as a cure for ailments of the lungs” (2011, 116).<sup>27</sup> Worth noting is how Ghosh positions Paulette’s love of gardening and knowledge of botany between two competing influences. Her father possesses the religious fervor of a deep ecologist, who “had believed that in trying to comprehend the inner vitality of each species, human beings could transcend the mundane world and its artificial divisions” (2011 74). Meanwhile Fitcher, while being “more a part of the natural order than her father,” simultaneously is more straightforward “in his determination to extract a living from the world” (2011 75). Ghosh’s diction intentionally alludes to terminology routinely employed by ecocritics: the transcendent unknowability of nature gives way to its commodification within socio-political systems, a transition that leads to forced extraction. While Fitcher’s mission is to find the Golden Camellia, Paulette’s arc in *River of Smoke* is predominantly ideological, as she searches for an ethical way to practice fieldwork in the Asian-Pacific.

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<sup>27</sup> This plant could be *Camellia chrysantha* or *Camellia nitidissima*, two rare, endangered varieties known for their golden leaves. Ghosh does not provide enough textual evidence to identify the plant as anything more than mythical.

Kanika Batra connects Fitcher and Paulette's search with her approach of "city botany," which redirects conceptions of the environment away from "Orientalist notions of 'pure' uncultivated nature" toward an approach that "points to the interrelations between the past and the present, the natural and the built" (330). She rightly points out that the plant's existence is hidden from foreigners to keep it safe within the urban ecology of its local city. However, Batra does not account for the widespread trade of other plants between European traders and Chinese botanists that occurs in *River of Smoke*, which indicate the interlinked yokes of ecological and colonial mastery. Where Batra views the Chinese withholding of the golden camellia as an action of Chinese empowerment, I view the exchange as an effort to assert racial mastery over human bodies.

The power of humans to master plants and, in turn, master others, is seen in Ghosh's many passages devoted to gardens and gardening in *River of Smoke*. In these passages, Ghosh uses the same language of disorientation he earlier ascribed to addicts suffering from opium addiction to describe the power of those searching for and trading in rare plants. Paulette is shocked to discover that all of the plant species found by British colonialists in China were not discovered by an idyllic botanist performing fieldwork, but through purchases at designated nurseries. While Paulette is disheartened after learning of the commodification of plants, Fitcher confesses to feeling awed and disoriented within these gardens, surrounded by massive numbers of flowers, "mazed, like a sheet in a storm" (2011, 194). If Paulette's father felt elevated spiritual significance from plants, then Fitcher is equally entranced by the sway of the botanical marketplace, already entangled within the world-system of the British and Chinese trade markets.

This market for flowers will grow more and more synonymous with the opium trade as Fitcher and Paulette continue their quest to find the Golden Camellia by reaching out to Robin Chinnery, a distant relative of Paulette's living in Canton (Guangzhou). The passages of *River of Smoke* narrated by Robin detail his interactions with artists, gardeners, and the wealthy elite who view a well-kept garden as a class marker. Robin concludes that the motivations behind these gardens are the same as those of an opium user: "it seemed to me exceedingly *peculiar* that a man should love flowers as well as opium – and yet I see now that there is no contradiction in this, for are they not perhaps both a means to a kind of intoxication? Could it not even be said that one might lead inevitably to the other?" (470). The acts of gardening, of documenting rare plants, of using and selling opium are all unique but related exercises in humans attempting to assert their mastery over the natural world. The double-edged sword of "to intoxicate" and "to be intoxicated by" reflect the dangers of this focus on mastery in colonial and transnational interactions. Just as a mastery over the environment can lead to the production of cash crops such as poppies or camellias, so also can it lead to the enslavement of users through addiction, the forced labor of humans to cultivate the land, and the mastery of others through control over their resources.

In one of his final letters, Robin expresses his desire to memorialize the Cantonese gardeners:

Were it in my power I would enjoy upon every gardener in the world that they remember, when they plant these blooms, that all of them came to their gardens by the grace of this one city – the crowded, noisome, noisy, voluptuous place we call Canton [...] But when all the rest is forgotten the flowers will remain, will

they not, Puggly dear? The flowers of Canton are immortal and will bloom for ever. (502)

Robin's communique comes at the cusp of the novel's conclusion and the beginning of the first opium war, after 20,000 chests of the drugs were seized by newly appointed Commissioner Lin and destroyed at Humen. Readers are thus aware by the end of the novel that these flowers are largely forgotten, as are their caretakers. As Robin himself stated earlier, a gardener is but a type of servant. Ultimately, Robin might be completely erroneous in what he determines will be forgotten through history. Rather than the flowers lasting, the drawings themselves, "a bastard art, neither sufficiently Chinese nor European, and thus likely to be displeasing to many" (2011 502) is what will persist. If global trade of plants and humans is what began the Anthropocene, an era marked by extinction and extraction, unfortunately all that may be left of these flowers and people are representations and simulacrum.

#### THE WHITE "BLACKBIRDER": ZACHARY REID AND THE IBIS

While Ghosh argues against mastery through the contexts of agriculture and narcotics, he also explains how slavery and colonialism resulted from racist ideologies that sought to master other humans. Ghosh's anti-mastery sentiment is reflected in the ship that tethers the three novels together. The Ibis takes its name from a bird known for its long bill. These birds come in a variety of colors, but the ship itself is a "blackbirder" – a slave ship now being repurposed for the transport of laborers and narcotics (2008, 11). In *Sea of Poppies*, the ship's interior bears witness to its history as a vessel that imprisoned and trafficked human bodies, with cells like cattle pens but a smell that "was not that of cows, horses, or goats; it was more a human odour, compounded of sweat, urine, excrement and vomit; the smell had leached so deep into the timbers as to have

become ineradicable” (2008, 140). The Ibis’s past as a slave trader and repurposing as an opium ship is evidence of racism’s direct influence in neocolonial expansion. If global capitalism is in part a continuation of hegemony that is no longer marked by physical occupation of space, it does so as a direct consequence of the forced trafficking of human bodies. Like Pulido and Verges, Ghosh assures readers that slavery did not end with abolition, and that its racist practice is a large contributor to the economic and cultural inequalities of the Anthropocene.

Ghosh lists the Atlantic slave trade, colonial occupation in India, and the trafficking of opium as all actions that attempt to paradoxically spread ideals of freedom while simultaneously arresting human bodies. The importance of Democracy and the free market, the saving of savage souls through Christianity, and humanmastery over nature are all colonialist ideologies espoused by Benjamin Burnham, the major English trader throughout the Ibis trilogy. While Burnham is described as flagrantly racist and hypocritical, he also shows no hesitance in explaining the underlying logic of British imperialism to anyone who will listen. Claiming that the inviolable principle on which [colonial] authority is based is that “like must be with like,” Burnham argues that Imperialism in India succeeds because Britain served as “guarantors of the order of castes” (469). Rather than limit his criticism to British interruption, Ghosh connects the external occupying force of colonialism to the internal division of caste. Burnham’s argument alludes to how, by preserving caste, imperialism presented a familiar construction of cultural mastery that allowed for the re-enactment of subalternity. Indian castes retain mastery while simultaneously allowing British Imperialism and East Asian trading to perpetuate violence through racism, resource extraction, drug addiction, and human commodification.

These dynamics of mastery are embodied in the character of Zachary Reid, a mixed-race shipwright from Baltimore and major character in the trilogy’s first and final novels. In *Sea of*

*Poppies*, Ghosh introduces Reid as the second mate aboard the *Ibis*, tasked with escorting Deeti and the rest of the *girmityas* to Mauritius. Although heroic in many respects, Reid performs these acts of bravery while hiding his mixed racial heritage from everyone he encounters. Ghosh does not share much about Reid's pre-*Ibis* past, but he does explain that he left the country after witnessing a brutal assault on a fellow freedman named "Freddie Douglass" in Baltimore.<sup>28</sup> Reid takes his ability to pass as white to the sea, which he envisions as a place where his heritage would matter less. However, when Reid meets Burnham and learns that his first job will be the transport of human laborers, he finds himself caught between the racial polarities of Burnham's whiteness and the brown-skinned lascars who sail the ship. When Burnham claims that the American slavery was "the greatest exercise in freedom since God led he children of Israel out of Egypt" (2008, 78) Reid inwardly coils, but stays silent in fear of revealing his race. For the lascars, led by Serang Ali, Reid is a "free Mariner" - "almost one of themselves, while yet being endowed with the power to undertake an impersonation that was unthinkable for any of them" (2008, 49). Not quite ever settling on where his allegiances lie, Reid attempts to play both sides as a hybrid of both races, being able to shift and trade power dynamics at his choosing, all while forgetting that his name on the ship's register is check-marked "black."

Even as Reid envisions the ocean as a place to escape from racialized dichotomies, his ability to pass as white makes him a target for those seeking to assert mastery over racial communities. Reid's biracial background grants him access to Serang Ali's inner circle of lascars – made up of sailors from India, Senegal, and other colonial nations – and to the private conversations of the captain and first mate. Unfortunately, Reid's actions as a Free Mariner are not evidence of his ability to live within two racialized worlds equally. Instead, Reid's degrees

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<sup>28</sup> This is not only a clear reference to the writer, Frederick Douglass, but an eerie foreshadowing of the death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore in 2015 while in police custody.

of whiteness and blackness become traits for others to master and appropriate. Reid learns that the watch given to him by Serang Ali once belonged to a British sailor named Adam Danby, known as the ‘White Ladrone’ for the way he served as a spy for pirates in the South China Sea. Suspecting that Serang Ali seeks to use him for the same purpose, but he is “saved from the coward’s course” of turning him in when the captain offers him the opportunity to smoke opium with him. Reid presumes that the “fumes had given him a clearer vision of the world” and that they “allowed him to look into parts of himself where he had never ventured before” (2008, 426). What the captain truly offers, however, is the chance for Reid to shift his loyalties back to his white superiors. The fact that this offering takes the form of opium – black mud derived from the seeds of a white flower – underscores Ghosh’s assertion that the opium trade was not only about money, but control.

Despite Reid’s disavowal of his African heritage and his tentative alignment with forces of racism and colonialism, he is still rather heroic in *Sea of Poppies*, providing an opportunity for Deeti’s husband and others to flee the ship. When he returns in *Flood of Fire*, however, he emerges as even more prone to white mastery. Having spent months in a jail cell in Mauritius, Reid eventually finds his way back to Calcutta, where he enters into an affair with Burnham’s wife. On its surface, Reid and Mrs. Burnham’s affair initially reads as a humorous critique of religious anti-masturbation literature; in one scene, for example, Mrs. Burnham mistakes Reid’s polishing of an underwater pin as public masturbation, which prompts her to send him a tract entitled “Onania: Or the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution” (60). Mrs. Burnham demonizes the natural responses of Reid’s body, claiming that it is out of his control. Her seduction of Reid relies upon this breaking down of Reid’s autonomy and agency and his willingness to seek her aid.

As the affair continues, the racial underpinnings of Mrs. Burnham's attraction emerge, revealing that Mrs. Burnham seeks Reid to not only master his bodily fluids and urges, but also to sublimate his blackness. While the novel does not reveal at this point that Mrs. Burnham actually knows Reid's racial history, she employs racialized language that implies she has an idea. In an act of colonial mastery over a mixed-race body, Mrs. Burnham sleeps with Reid in order to "conquer the primitive inside him" (245). Under the guise of helping Reid assert mastery over his own body, Mrs. Burnham ultimately asserts her mastery over him. Ghosh describes their sexual relationship using the language of colonialism and conquest, stating that Mrs. Burnham aims for superiority over a "continent of darkness and degradation" inside him (90) and that in order for Reid to survive in this "age of progress," he must "destroy everything that is backward" inside him (245). More than a commentary on infidelity, romance, or tawdriness, the affair between Mrs. Burnham and Reid explores racial power dynamics and the commodification of bodies within the logics of British Imperialism.

To read their affair in terms of mastery is to identify anticolonial counter-mastery at work through Reid's subsequent submersion in the opium trade. Following the dissolution of the affair, Reid increasingly acts more like Burnham himself. Reid substitutes the opium trade for the carnal lust he once felt for Mrs. Burnham, and he ascends further up the ranks of opium traders, claiming that "it was as if his hoarded essence had at last found the true object of its desire" (275). In this light, both Reid's affair and his embrace of the opium trade are attempts at countermastery that result in Reid simply repeating the colonial violence of Mr. Burnham's imperialist logic. Reid stuffs the holds of the *Ibis* with opium rather than people, and while the ship no longer engages directly in the work of slavery it furthers hegemonic power structures as

it advances “free market” forces that oppress China. Reid embraces the beliefs of Charles Fraser, which describes free trade as an elemental force:

It was futile to try to hinder the flow of a substance for which there was so great a hunger. Individuals and nations could no more control this commodity than they could hold back the ocean’s tides: it was like a natural phenomenon – a flood. Its flow was governed by abstract laws like those that Mr. Newton had applied to the movements of the planets. These laws ensured that supply would match demand as surely as water always seeks its own level. (375)

While Fraser attempts to compare the free market to an uncontrollable force, he forgets the repeated acts of mastery colonialism exerts on so-called “natural phenomena” – the razing of landscapes, tilling of fields, demarcations of territory and draining of resources – and on humans trafficked or turned into addicts thanks to their product. By this point, Ghosh has trained his readers to recognize rhetoric that links mastery of the environment and of individuals. Fraser’s cavalier attitude – that nature, like the economy, will eventually reach an equilibrium, disregards the material issues that result from unchecked resource extraction of human trafficking. Reid abandons his heroic potential in favor of the promise of wealth, ultimately becoming a participant in the wrong side of the culminating battles of the first opium war.

The villainous development of Reid’s character in *Flood of Fire* demonstrates the potential for mastery to corrupt, not only in a Hegelian master-slave dynamic, but through forms of anti-colonial counter-mastery. Furthermore, Reid’s disavowal of his bi-racial history in favor of bodily mastery and global capitalism proves the importance of race and human trafficking in the formative years of the Anthropocene. By engaging in an affair with Burnham’s wife, he willfully concedes to her assertions of a “dark continent” inside him that must be purged, and by

adopting Burnham's occupation and Fraser's ideology, he chooses to re-enact the racialized violence he initially sought to flee.

#### THE GREAT DEVOURING: BABOO NOB KISSIN AND THE LIMITS OF MASTERY

Where Paulette's search for the golden camellia alludes to the human consequences of environmental mastery and Reid's inability to escape from imperialist control speaks to the trap of human mastery, Ghosh does present what Singh terms "new alternatives" to mastery. One of these possible alternatives is gleaned through Ghosh's punning on the term "mastery" itself. The *Ibis* trilogy is a playground for linguists, as Ghosh excavates long-buried nautical terms alongside historically accurate dialects, including the term "mystery" – most often applied to Reid by Mrs. Burnham. In an appendix to *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh explains that "mystery," "maistri," and "mistri" are all derivations of the Portuguese *mestre*, and that the usage of "mystery" to denote the mastery of a trade of craft deepens "our sense of awe when we refer to the 'Fashioner of All Things' as the 'Divine Mystery'" (2008, 535). The pun also works within the context of Reid's race; Ghosh compares the contemporary connotation of "mystery" as a secret with the historical context of Reid's ability as a sailor and craftsman. Rather than seek mastery, Ghosh suggests that mystery is preferable.

Another alternative to mastery can be found in the character of Baboo Nob Kissin, who conclusively links the trafficked bodies of Zachary Reid and others to global-wide destruction. Kissin first appears in *Sea of Poppies* as Burnham's accountant and self-described devotee of the Krishna. He is one of the only characters in the trilogy to view the *Ibis*'s register and learn of Reid's "hidden blackness." This fact leads Kissin to decree Reid an agent of the Kaliyuga - the epoch in which the world ends. Kissin eschews bodily mastery quite literally, in that he considers

himself the vessel for a spirit, Taramony, his deceased aunt and spiritual guide. Taramony promises that there will come a day in which her spirit manifests in his, and he will cease to be Kissin and become her reincarnation. And indeed, after this revelation Kissin begins to perform his gender differently, embracing culturally feminine norms of dress and speaking. My intention in examining Kissin is not to read the character in terms of hybridity or transgender studies, but to read his multiple opposing embodiments – the male and female, the sacred and the profane, the living and the dead – as counter to the perpetuation of colonial mastery of both animals and plants through human and drug trafficking.

Kissin's potential as a harbinger for a new form of anticolonialism further develops Ghosh's theme of choosing mystery over mastery. Convinced that he and Reid share a destiny as proclaimers of the Krishna – one having changed from male to female, the other from black to white – Kissin stresses the importance of having certainty in the uncertain:

Does an envelope know what is contained in the letter that is folded inside it? Is a sheet of paper aware of what is written upon it? No, the signs were contained in the transformation that had been wrought during the voyage: it was the very fact of the world's changeability that proved the presence of divine illusion, of Sri Krishna's leela. (2008, 163)

Rather than seek out another way to define mastery, Kissin's character embraces what he does not know. The purpose of this belief in the unknowable is not to completely surrender his agency in service of a higher power, but to deconstruct current structures in order to build a new future. Ironically, Kissin stresses the importance of the voyage and of changeability in search of a model of anti-mastery – an ontological framework that undermines colonial mindsets of conquest, enslavement, and human trafficking.

In Reid, Kissin sees the agent that will ultimately bring about the end of the world. By the end of *Flood of Fire*, Kissin has witnessed Reid's transformation from mixed-race sailor to English colonial opium trader, occasionally advising him along the way. During the novel's climactic depiction of the battle of Humen, the two witness the destruction of the *Nemesis*, prompting Kissin to remark "inside that vessel burns the ire that will awaken the demons of greed that are hidden in all human beings. That is why the English have come to China and to Hindustan these two lands are so populous that if their greed is aroused they can consume the whole world. Today that great devouring has begun" (2015, 509). If the great derangement applies to the ways fiction erases, conceals, or alters the stories of climate change and globalization, then the great devouring speaks to how colonial pursuits of mastery – whether the mastered be poppy seeds, tea leaves, or African and Asian brown bodies – lead only to unchecked resource extraction and environmental degradation. This devastation occurs inequitably, disproportionately affecting the poor and the non-white peoples of the global south.

Kissin's prominence throughout the narrative of the Ibis trilogy supports Ghosh's conclusion in *The Great Derangement* that if any progress is to be made in overcoming the climate crisis it is most likely to come through the efforts of religious organizations. According to Ghosh, "it is impossible to see any way out of this crisis without an acceptance of limits and limitations, and this in turn is, I think, intimately related to the idea of the sacred, however one may wish to conceive of it" (2016, 161). If mastery is the wrongful demarcation of limits upon others and the willing crossing of another culture's boundaries by another, then certainly a greater understanding of the autonomy of individual bodies is essential in discussions of what is sacred. In the cases of Paulette, Reid, and Kissin, all are to varying degrees implicated in the

racial and class-based violence of their homelands, which further entangles them within the forced commodification of peoples and environments.

When read within this context of mastery, the Ibis trilogy ultimately proposes an alternative to this framework through appeals to mystery, spirituality, and transition. Ghosh utilizes the context of the opium war to position characters from various backgrounds within a network of trade, piracy, and conflict. Pursuing mastery ultimately leads to unsatisfactory resolutions for both Paulette and Reid, the former not obtaining the golden camellia and the latter not fully achieving autonomy apart from Burnham. Rather than perpetuate the violence of mastery, Ghosh's novels describe a form of anticolonial resistance that encourages relation over dominance and cosmopolitanism over isolation. In Ghosh's narrative, where people and environments are plundered and sold, he stresses the importance of an ethical understanding of limitations. In order to "unthink" mastery, Ghosh encourages us to identify its limits.

To close, I turn away from Ghosh's novels and direct my attention to the summer of 2019 protests in Hong Kong. Mastery is at the heart of Hong Kong inhabitants' concerns that the Chinese government is overstepping into their lives. Of the many actions that protesters took, one is particularly emblematic of the link between colonial mastery, bodily autonomy and environmental sustainability. On August 23, 2019, more than two hundred thousand residents joined hands to form a "human chain" of protesters, spanning more than 30 miles across Hong Kong. This peaceful demonstration, along with the other protests that occupy spaces of commerce and transport, illustrates not only the desire for Hong Kong to maintain its way of life, but also the right to prevent the seizure of their bodies by China. The human chain gestures to not only the region's history of mastery, but the potential for free, autonomous, bodies to resist its perpetuation. By bonding their hands together and weaving their bodies through the streets,

alleys, trails, and sidewalks of Hong Kong, they also link their pursuit of bodily freedom to their environment.

The persistent, daily protests in Hong Kong in the summer of 2019 were not an isolated reaction to a single extradition bill, but a movement against numerous consequences of colonial mastery that are only now emerging. These consequences foreground their ideological and political natures, but they are also environmental. Timothy Choy has argued that “environmentalism” in Hong Kong has had to resist stigmatization as a “western word,” a concept inapplicable to a Hong Konger’s way of life. However, these protests are also material proof of Choy’s assertion that the “environmental politics in Hong Kong are inevitably entangled in questions of cultural difference” (4). Choy uses the terms “specificity,” “example,” and “comparison” to do more than document or expose the real environmental concerns of Hong Kong, but to create a transnational lens for viewing them. Hong Kong is often overdetermined as an East/West connector, a trade city that bridges cultures. These protests vocalize Hong Kong’s identity as not Chinese and not American, but as Hong Kong itself, an autonomous region facing concerns about not only human extradition, but also the future of repeated land reclamation projects that destabilize coastal wetlands and eradicate ocean life. In the words of Jason Eng Hun Lee, though it is “tempting to read Hong Kong as perpetually combative to China, multiple global cultural and economic entanglements complicate this model” (308). Hong Kong’s reality as a global city propagates devastation that is ideologically beholden to ideals of mastery, not only Chinese and American belief systems.

Hong Kong’s continuing protests demonstrate the ways in which bodily autonomy, racial disenfranchisement, and indigenous sovereignty are wrapped in the environmental politics of growing land out of sea and crowding the skyline with hive-like apartment buildings. The actions

of these protesters show that City Hall's lip service – through neoliberal buzzwords like greening and sustainability – is not enough. It must answer the call of its citizens to reject the sovereignty of outside nations and respect the ties between the bodies of these activists and the region itself. Relying upon racially-driven doctrines of mastery, British imperialists changed the cultural character of the island as well as its actual geography. As Hong Kongers continue to fight for individual autonomy and local sovereignty, they do so also in hopes of environmental survival.

## CONCLUSION: YOU HAVE ARRIVED AT YOUR DESTINATION

More than four decades later, in her last moments, Ye Wenjie would recall the influence *Silent Spring* had on her life.

The book dealt only with a limited subject: the negative environmental effects of excessive pesticide use. But the perspective taken by the author shook Ye to the core. The use of pesticides had seemed to Ye just a normal, proper – or, at least, neutral – act, but Carson’s book allowed Ye to see that, from Nature’s perspective, their use was indistinguishable from the Cultural Revolution, and equally destructive to our world. If this was so, then how many other acts of humankind that had seemed normal or even righteous were, in reality, evil?

As she continued to mull over these thoughts, a deduction made her shudder: *Is it possible that the relationship between humanity and evil is similar to the relationship between the ocean and an iceberg floating on its surface? Both the ocean and the iceberg are made of the same material. That the iceberg seems separate is only because it is in a different form. In reality, it is but a part of the vast ocean...*

*It was impossible to expect a moral awakening from humankind itself, just like it was impossible to expect humans to lift off the earth by pulling up on their own hair. To achieve moral awakening required a force outside the human race. (27)*

Cixin Liu, from *The Three Body Problem*

I view the above passage from Cixin Liu’s novel *The Three-Body Problem* as both a terminus to a traffic-focused methodology linking human inequality and environmental degradation and an origin for further interrogation of new materialist approaches to literary study. Isolated from the context of Liu’s story, the passage embodies a typical “doomer” mindset toward living in the Anthropocene.<sup>29</sup> In the doomer origin story, intelligent individuals discover or are exposed to the harsh realities of global climate change and conclude, after much deliberation and discussion, that the situation is hopeless – that humans are fractured from one another and enmeshed within capitalist consumerism to such a point that meeting any scientific

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<sup>29</sup> An example of a “doomer” perspective on climate change is Jonathan Franzen’s controversial article for *The New Yorker*, “What if we Stopped Pretending?” which encourages readers to move beyond “preventing” or “fixing” climate change to living with it. See also Kate Knibbs, who analyzes “doomer” perspectives within the literary sub-genre of “climate fiction” or “cli-fi.”

milestones to ameliorate or weaken climate change is literally impossible. In this case, Ye Wenjie, a survivor of China's Cultural Revolution and an astrophysicist, is partly inspired by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* to see humans as a pestilence on the Earth. Her disgust is so great that, upon intercepting a mysterious solar transmission warning people to not respond lest they face alien invasion, she responds anyway, writing back "*Come here! I will help you conquer this world. Our civilization is no longer capable of solving its own problems. We need your force to intervene*" (2014: 276). Ye's decision further dooms the Earth by miring it within an interplanetary struggle that spans millennia.

Yet *The Three-Body Problem* and its sequels, *The Dark Forest* and *Death's End*, are poor examples of "doomer" literature in that humanity, despite many failures and world-endings, does survive, persist, and even occasionally thrive over the scope of its long narrative. Liu offers a unique take on the "first contact" trope in science fiction; rather than detailing the sudden disastrous appearance of alien lifeforms on an ignorant planet, Liu's trilogy questions what might happen should humanity receive advance warning of an invasion centuries into the future. The protagonists face the challenge of mobilizing humanity to care about a calamity that will not directly befall them or their descendants, which forces them to reconsider their understanding of planetary disaster, measuring of time, and the superiority of human life. These are central questions asked of civilizations facing not only alien invasion, but also cultural upheaval due to planetary ecological devastation and extreme climate change.

In thoughtfully imagining the future and representing its particular concerns, science fiction has once again provided a template for living in the contemporary. Like Ursula Heise argues, the speculative does more than imagine, it complicates the romantic tropes of literature by providing essential context to the current and immanent climate (20). Though Liu claims that

he does not “use [his] fiction as a disguised way to criticize the reality of the present,” I nevertheless follow a socially and environmentally conscious throughline in his work (2014: 393). Even as Liu skillfully masters the technical jargon of “hard sci-fi,” he concurrently is adept at depicting nuanced relationships between the human condition and environmental degradation. Ye Wenjie is inspired to doom the human race not only due to a reading of *Silent Spring*, but also to experiencing the trauma of the Cultural Revolution, a period of widespread starvation, poverty, and violent massacres. Not surprisingly, in the post-script to *The Three-Body Problem*, Liu cites both childhood hunger – a product of the Cultural Revolution - and the Great Flood of August 1975 – an environmental disaster - as inspirations to his work (2014: 393).

One can read Liu’s trilogy as both a science-fiction tale inspired by the past and as a means to envision new ways of positioning humanity within the world through radical paradigmatic shifts in traditional models of time. The quantum eco-traffic of *The Three-Body Problem* and its sequels measures not the presence of cars, cities, or ships, but the scalar leaps between local environments and planetary bodies. We follow the gigantic yet infinitely small distance between atoms, and we juxtapose this realm with the expanse of light years. Characters embody computerized avatars, in which planets are birthed and die across millenia enfolded within the virtual spaces created by tiny microchips. The climactic battles between humanity and their alien invaders are not waged by spaceships above the earth’s atmosphere but through weapons that, once activated, spell immediate destruction but take hundreds of years to hit their mark. For this temporal and scalar conflict, Liu fittingly employs the natural metaphor of a hunter in a dark forest, in which “any life that exposes its own existence will be swiftly wiped out” (2015, 484). If humanity’s reckless policing and destruction of the environment through rampant pesticide use was the beginning of its end, then the hunting metaphor supports a reading

of Liu's trilogy as not only a forecast into the future, but a contemporary examination of mankind's current relationship to place.

Thus, the beauty of science fiction is the ability for authors to wield futuristic imagination as a form of resistance against the violence of the present. As Liu claims, "Reality brands each of us with its indelible mark. Every era puts invisible shackles on those who have lived through it, and I can only dance in my chains" (2014, 394). As nuclear power and the traffic of war and weaponry proliferates across the globe, Liu finds ways to refigure these realities in ways that hearken to what Jacques Derrida called "the aporia of speed" (21). The Anthropocene overlaps, not coincidentally, with the nuclear age, a time in which "a gap of a few seconds may decide, irreversibly, the fate of what is still now and then called humanity – plus the fate of a few other species" (20). Liu dances with this destructive reality by taking steps to repurpose the nuclear as a vehicle for temporal and astrophysical traffic. In Liu's imagination, the nuclear reserves on planet Earth become a propulsion engine for intergalactic travel and data simulation in the event of a solar explosion (2016: 410). Though Liu's trilogy often traffics in death, destruction, and lost time, all three novels in the series end with intimate scenes of reconciliation, where friends, family members, and lovers begin rebuilding in the wake of political and environmental disaster.

With traffic comes speed. As Derrida puts it, "*in the beginning there will have been speed, which is always taking on speed*" (author italics 22). There is a speed in not only nuclear armament, but in thinking about industrial growth, capitalist expansion, and ecological devastation. There is speed in the Great Acceleration, in the realization that, though the Earth has existed for billions of years, humans have only been emitting carbon into its atmosphere for the last century, and only been affecting its environments for the last few centuries. The absence of congestion is itself a kind of traffic, and there is a sense that we are hurtling toward our

destination, our doom, as quickly as our planet hurtles around a cruel sun. Thus, I turn to Liu and science fiction here at the conclusion of this dissertation to stress the importance of not only imagining the implications of eco-traffic, but to begin plotting its structural implementation in various fields.

Following literary traffic will eventually lead one to a destination, the way a GPS directs its user to a location they have never been before. This destination might be the ecological ruin of a particular locale, or it might be the systemic subjugation of people based on race, caste, or tribal affiliation. Far too often, the destination involves settler colonialism and the arbitrary demarcation of land. However, to concentrate on literary traffic is also to reject linear journeys, and instead attend to the linked agencies of peoples, bodies, and environments all moving concurrently towards their own destinations. To think about traffic is to think about the congestion of urban environments and the problems that entails, of mobility and accessibility, of human rights and pandemics. Traffic helps us envision life as not only a journey with a destination, but a vibrant network of others with similar or branching trajectories that sometimes cross, sometimes delay, and often collide.

The novels and poems that I have previously addressed, as well as the works I derive my epigraphs from, all engage with traffic in vastly different ways, but I believe all of them envision a destination that is not doomed. The controversial ending to Roy's *The God of Small Things* is an attempt at recovery that highlights the potential for the subaltern to mobilize despite suffering within systems of forced automobility. This transcorporeal identification between person and place extends into Dung's *Atlas* and Chu's *The Old Capital*, novels that play with form in an attempt to build literary cities that accurately depict the survival of individuals who live within the dual systems of colonial control and pseudo-independence, sometimes thriving. The violence

of colonialism extends not only into urban environments, but oceanic ones as well, as Yamashita, Ozeki and Roripaugh's works attest, but even as the hydro-colonial traffic of globalization overwhelms their characters and voices, they each make an indelible mark on both Asian and American cultures. The historical fiction of Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy gives voice and representation to races and identities long erased in Western historiography, allowing readers a possibility of reparation for legacies of human enslavement and trafficking. In all of these works, these findings are only available to those wielding an analytical methodology that attends to both the human and the non-human. As the previous chapters attest, eco-traffic is not always a perfect 50:50 ratio between humans and animals – between beings and their environments – but a malleable, adaptable lens for unearthing globalization's means of destruction: the forced subalternity of castes, the racist capture and enslavement of peoples, and the psychoanalytic disorientation of individuals.

Implicitly or explicitly, these literary works demonstrate the importance of understanding the Anthropocene as not only a time when humans have impacted the natural geologic processes of the planet, but as an era marked by global practices of colonialism and neocolonialism. Unlike the more explicitly ecocritical or postcolonial readings traditionally applied to these texts, a focus on eco-traffic more accurately models not only the free-wheeling individual agencies of life forms within particular places, but the systemic constraints levied on these regions due to anthropocentric inequities in power and wealth. Though the casts of many of these works suffer and even perish due to these violent climates, none of the works put forth an inescapable doomed future. Rather, all strive for faithful aesthetic representation of material realities and histories in hopes of conveying how their urban and oceanic regions are comprised of multiple human and non-human cultures. Therefore, they, and this dissertation, participate in a search for ontologies

and stories that emphasize ethical connections between humans and their environments. Such connections are essential in conceiving of the global climate crisis not as the end of the planet's destination, but as an ongoing event that is as navigable as it is approachable.

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