

**EVERYDAY ENVIRONMENTALISMS IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE**

**ENDURING NATURE: EVERYDAY ENVIRONMENTALISMS  
IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE**

By DANA C. MOUNT, B.E.S, M.A.

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AUTHOR: Dana C Mount, B.E.S, M.A. (McMaster University) SUPERVISOR

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation draws on a broad range of postcolonial literature in order to explore literary representations of environmentalism in the global South. Although this project draws heavily on the particular environmental histories of different nations and geographic regions, I am also interested in areas of overlap. In this study I do two interrelated and simultaneous things that I hope will refine postcolonial ecocriticism. The first involves a broadening of the definition of “environment,” informed by the environmental justice movement, in ways that make it more applicable to people's lived lives. This expanded definition of the environment includes those spaces where people live and work. Such a redefinition, I argue, is a crucial counter-measure to ecocriticism's Anglo-American focus, where traditional American environmental values of conservation, preservation and the cult of the wilderness prevail. The second intervention involves using ecocriticism alongside this expanded notion of the environment to unearth the everyday environmentalisms at work in postcolonial literature that may go unnoticed using traditional ecocritical approaches. I argue that this everyday approach successfully side-steps some of the common hurdles in postcolonial ecocriticism. These hurdles include debates over the origins of environmentalism, questions about the link between affluence and environmentally friendly attitudes, and the contentious space of animals in postcolonial thought and literature. By beginning with an examination of the ways in which people interact with their own local environments, I have the chance to explore environmental thought and action on the ground and can begin theorizing there. What is revealed through these analyses is that this expanded definition of environmentalism and this new ecocritical approach open the door to viewing environmentality as a common and foundational feature of postcolonial literature. My chapters explore various facets of these everyday environmentalisms, including ecofeminist perspectives, anthropocentric versus biocentric representations of the environment, urban spaces, and finally the idea of going back to the land. The issues that I explore throughout these chapters include legacies of colonialism, globalization, racism and speceism, ecological/ecocritical imperialism, and postcoloniality.

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## Introduction

### *Conference Proceedings*

At a recent gathering of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), South African writer Zakes Mda delivered the keynote address (Mda “Imagination”). He began by entertaining the audience with a reading from his novel *The Whale Caller*, a moving story of a man, a woman, and the whale that came between them. In the speech that followed, Mda used a literary and cultural lens to explore the problematic place of environmentalism in Black South African politics. He discussed the prominent historic place of nature in indigenous-language Black South African stories and writing, such as the Sesotho-language Lesotho tales he himself had been raised on. It was a literary tradition that taught him that places, such as rivers and hills, were the store-houses of stories. Lesotho stories, he explained, had always been stories about the land. The narratives integrated their natural settings and paid attention to the animals that populated the areas as well. It is fitting, then, that Mda would discuss these intersections at a conference on ecocriticism—the study of representations of nature and environment in literature. Whereas languages that were better at conveying locally-generated environmental feeling and thought had once been a conduit of environmental perception, this changed when English became the dominant language.<sup>1</sup> Along with the new language came new perspectives on the human-environment relationship, such as the development of game parks and the economic pressures that drove male migration to cities, all of which began to alienate Black South Africans from the land. Mda explained that as he saw it, today in South Africa, environmental protection has become associated with whiteness, and is therefore the type of policy that Black politicians seek to

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<sup>1</sup> The link between language and environmental thought is an important area of investigation. This project’s emphasis is on the relationship between the language of fiction and the production of environmental discourse within the field of postcolonialism in particular. The implications for the relationship between language and the environment are much broader, however. For an analysis of the language of international water policy, see Mount and Bielak.



distance themselves from. Mda underscored the point, made previously by those working in the environmental justice movement (see, for example, Agyeman and Bullard), that the problem is not that communities of colour do not care about the environment, but that the dominant environmental discourse, and likewise the scope of ecocriticism, does not properly encompass the concerns of their communities. Mda's story illustrates several important facts about the state of ecocriticism. Firstly, Mda's recollections gesture towards the long and varied history of global environmental literature, a history that Western and African ecocritics are only beginning to explore. The second fact is that much of this global environmental literature exists in other languages, and may be in circulation only as oral literature, thus making it inaccessible to many of those working in ecocriticism today.<sup>2</sup> The final lesson which Mda's story reveals came by way of an audience question. One attendee asked if Mda's comments on the environmental undercurrents in nineteenth-century Lesotho literature would be available for publication. The questioner was interested in Mda's tales of environmentality in early African literature because, in her estimation, so few of "us" encounter African ecocriticism in our daily work. The division between "us" and the presumed "them" turns us towards the place of *postcolonial* ecocriticism, which is the study of the representation of nature and the environment in dialogue with postcolonialism.

Her question raises a very important fact about the place of postcolonial environments in the Western academy. Many involved in the study and teaching of nature writing and environmental literature continue to see literatures and environmentalisms from the global South as outside of, and perhaps secondary to, the mainstream. There is openness to the ideas of expanding this view, as the eager question demonstrates, but the fact remains that the global South is repeatedly constructed as an exotic new arrival on the scene of environmental

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<sup>2</sup> Ursula Heise has called monolingualism one of ecocriticism's "most serious intellectual limitations" ("Hitchhiker" 513)

consciousness. To return to the question of language, it is also important to note that non-English language texts continue to be marginalized in postcolonial and ecocritical studies by critics whose default language of academic inquiry is English. Admittedly, my project continues in this vein but it does so with a framework that I hope can accommodate non-English texts by virtue of the fact that it is focused on the very small scale of the everyday and can therefore adapt itself to the vocabularies employed by any people within their everyday environments. I am interested in the potential of postcolonial ecocriticism to give voice to these complex environmental conversations that, I argue, have long been taking place on the pages of postcolonial literature. In order to underscore this idea that environmental thought has long been an undercurrent in the literatures of the global South, my dissertation reconsiders what counts as the subject of environmental criticism by drawing on notions of an everyday environmentalism. Within this framework, I read for nature with a very small “n,” examining the place of household plants and pests alongside polluted rivers and stolen commons. Forwarding a concept of nature which is realistic (that is to say, not romantic) but which is also capacious enough to allow for an appreciation of and communion with nature, my project marries environmental justice principles with a belief in the affective attachment to place. I understand nature, following Kate Soper and Andrew Biro, as something existing both within and outside of the human realm; in the words of Biro, I seek to speak about “nature and ‘nature’ at once” (8). Biro’s study of the concept of human alienation from nature in Rousseau, Marx, Adorno and Marcuse reveals that projects of emancipation must involve the emancipation of nature, and thus Biro argues for a concept of nature that is deeply embedded in the social—what he refers to as a “denaturalized” nature that “does not rely on an abstract, reified, ‘anti-social’ conception of nature” (212). Although my project is primarily one of literary analysis, I approach the texts from a range of methodological and disciplinary perspectives, namely postcolonialism and ecocriticism, but also ecofeminism, globalization

studies and theories of the everyday. By tracing the development of postcolonial ecocriticism, this introduction positions the field as a staunchly interdisciplinary one and signals my own intervention at the level of the everyday.

***Postcolonial Ecocriticism: A First Wave***

Almost since ecocriticism began to develop as a field within (and about) the US, there have been efforts to draw critical attention to the intersections between literature, culture, and the environment in literatures of the global South, as well as minority American literatures. Early examples of expanding the subject of ecocriticism include work by Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy in their collection *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, and Pedagogy*. Their anthology showcased works by Kamala Platt and Stacy Alaimo that explored the links between feminism and environmentalisms in Chicana and Native American literature. Murphy's later *Literature of Nature: an International Sourcebook* was typical of the call to move "beyond" the established bounds (white, Western American, Anglophone) of ecocriticism to include more diverse voices and perspectives. The expansionist, inclusive approach was a crucial manoeuvre which paved the way for further studies and which no doubt sparked interest, but it failed to consider whether ecocriticism was theoretically and politically versatile enough to accommodate such an expansion. Basically, the question had not been asked about what it meant to apply the terms of ecocriticism to texts outside of the largely white, Western (primarily US) tradition where it had its roots. By what means (and to what ends) could concepts such as "wilderness" be translated to different cultural and physical locations? How would distinctions between the urban and the rural play out in places where slums, rather than suburbs, sat at the boundaries of cities? How might we reconcile the more rigid American boundaries between work and leisure—central to the formulation of the Great Outdoors as a place of play—with cultures who structure their lives and societies along different lines? And perhaps most importantly, how do we ethically

account for the outsourcing of environmental “bads” (such as ship-breaking) from the West to the global South as a result of powerful environmental lobbying?

In my effort to trace the development of the field of postcolonial ecocriticism, I would like to draw attention to what I see as two distinct waves which, although they can be differentiated chronologically, admittedly did come in rapid succession. I am less interested in the chronological distinctions and more interested in the approach to reading postcolonial ecocriticism. The first-wave, which came after Murphy’s *International Sourcebook* in time and approach, went beyond the concept of simply expanding the reach of ecocriticism to non-Western texts and began interrogating what it meant, politically and culturally, to read nature writing and environmental literature by minority or postcolonial writers. These critics were grappling with the question of whether these overlapping fields were actually intellectually compatible. The second-wave of postcolonial ecocritics reflects a different starting point than the first-wave writing. In the last three or four years, postcolonial ecocriticism has reflected a greater sense of confidence as a field. The barriers defined by Rob Nixon, which I will discuss shortly, no longer define the limitations of this area of criticism. Current thinkers have benefited from the debates of the First Wave and can now begin their work from the premise that ecocriticism and postcolonialism are not antagonistic, but are dialogic instead.

Christine Gerhardt puts African-American ecocriticism in dialogue with issues of postcoloniality in her “The Greening of African-American Landscapes: Where Ecocriticism Meets Post-Colonial Theory.” Gerhardt argues that postcolonial and ecocritical approaches were well-suited to ask important questions about the nature of “race” of each other. As she explains, “[o]n the one hand, post-colonial theory provides very specific critical tools that help to explore the ways in which black literature addresses intersections between racial oppression and the

exploitation of nature,” while on the other hand “a post-colonial perspective draws attention to the ways in which the questions typically asked by ecocriticism need to be rephrased ... particularly with regard to discussions of nature and race that do not participate in the very mechanisms of exclusion they are trying to dismantle” (516).

Graham Huggan, in a seminal article on postcolonial ecocriticism, was also concerned with problems of exclusion within environmentalist discourse. Huggan took seriously the concern, as many in the first-wave did, that the green movement “[ran] the risk of turning itself into another, late-capitalist form of ‘ecological imperialism’” (702, citing Crosby and Curtin’s terminology). Huggan set his discussion about postcolonial ecocriticism within the context of the Western academy, asking realistic questions about the level of institutional support and institutional capacity to do the work of engaging with postcolonial concerns. His response is to begin from the starting point of non-Western scholars. Rather than spend his time deliberating over the limitations of applying Thoreau to Achebe, Huggan engages with the writings of Vandana Shiva and Arundhati Roy. Overall, Huggan’s article is hopeful, and although he acknowledges the intellectual hurdles in interlacing the two fields, with an eye to addressing social and ecological justice, he “reaffirm[s] the potential of the environmental imagination to envision alternative worlds” (720).

Another article which came to define the first-wave of postcolonial criticism is Rob Nixon’s “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism,” which is best known for the hurdles it describes, rather than the hope it projects. By recalling the failure to recognize the work of Ken Saro-Wiwa as environmental activism, Nixon outlines four ways in which postcolonialism and ecocriticism may be fundamentally disjunctive. First, he contrasts the postcolonial commitment to hybridity against the place of purity in environmental discourse. Second, he notes the discord

between displacement in postcolonial theory versus the commitment to place in environmental studies. Third, he comments that the postcolonial foregrounds the cosmopolitan and transnational whereas ecocriticism has established itself as a national, even parochial, discipline. Finally, Nixon points to a difference in temporal scale. Whereas postcolonialism is actively engaged with History and histories, in ecocriticism the “pursuit of timeless, solitary moments of communion with nature” is paramount (qtd. in Ashcroft et al, 235). Nixon’s article was able to synthesize many of the disconnections that those in postcolonial ecocriticism were already articulating. Cheryl Lousley, for example, had put voice to Nixon’s second point in a 2001 article. If nature writers understand that “the solution to ecological crisis involves ‘coming home’ to nature” (Lousley 318), then what solutions could be found in the postcolonial context, where home was often a contested, or even unlocatable place?

In a special 2007 issue of *ISLE*, Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey took on the task of assembling a cluster of articles around postcolonial ecocriticism. In his own “Editor’s Note,” Scott Slovic prefaces the issue with the tentative plea: “Some might find the yoking together of ecocriticism and postcolonialism a bit of a stretch, but I hope this issue of *ISLE* ... will help to show the value and necessity of this combination of perspectives” (vi). It is clear from Slovic’s comments that by the end of 2007 there was still a hesitancy surrounding this burgeoning field. In order to lend this intersection legitimacy, then, many scholars attempted a revisionist reading of postcolonial ecocriticism, arguing that there was nothing particularly new about postcolonial environmentalisms. In the spirit of Graham Huggan’s earlier pronouncement that “postcolonial criticism has effectively renewed, rather than belatedly discovered, its commitment to the environment” (702), they sought to demonstrate that the ecocritical intervention into postcolonial studies represented a continuation, rather than an intervention, of environmentality in postcolonial thought and art. DeLoughrey and Cilano drew from a number of sources, namely Ramachandra

Guha and ecofeminist work, to point to an existing foundation for culturally-conscious postcolonial ecocriticism. “Postcolonial topics,” they argued,

should not be viewed as entirely *new directions* in the field of ecocriticism as much as they represent *increased visibility* to a western-based audience who is rethinking the limitations of US national frameworks that had occluded other perspectives. To suggest that *postcolonial* ecocriticism is *new* is to give a normative status to ecocriticism’s institutional origins without questioning the limitations of its foundational methodologies and focus.” (73)

In his “Ecoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses,” William Slaymaker takes up the task of questioning these limitations. His response to ecocriticism is a form of resistance. “Black African writers,” he argues, “take nature seriously in their creative and academic writing, but many have resisted or neglected the paradigms that inform much of global ecocriticism” (685). It is therefore not the subject of ecocriticism that Slaymaker objects to, (that is to say, nature and the environment in literature), it is the possibility that ecocriticism represents another dominant form of reductive, essentializing Western scholarship that will ultimately represent African nature for and to outsiders. He cautions that “Ecolit and ecocrit are imperial paradigms of cultural fetishism that misrepresent the varied landscapes of sub-Saharan Africa. These misaligned icons of the natural other are invasive and invalid and should be resisted or ignored” (686). His hesitancy in embracing ecocriticism reflects the uneasy reception of Western scholarship amongst those conscious of the negative legacies of hegemonic Western thought described by postcolonial thinkers such as Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, and Vandana Shiva. Given the devastating effect of early imperialist and later development paradigms on the environments of the global South (see Richard Grove, Alfred Crosby, and Wolfgang Sachs) it is understandable, too, that there may be suspicion about ecocriticism as a wolf in green clothing.

Reviewing Slaymaker's article several years later, Greg Garrard fails to acknowledge any basis for Slaymaker's hesitation, calling his article "a confused rejection of environmentalism as, possibly, a neo-colonial imposition, suspect especially because of the enthusiasm of white South Africans for it" (*Ecocriticism* 29). Indeed, Slaymaker's article does seem to be trying to maintain two positions at once: resisting the very idea of an African ecocriticism, and lamenting the fact that black Africans are being poorly represented in African ecocritical scholarship. I point to Garrard's response not to question the value of Slaymaker's argument itself, but rather because I think Garrard's reaction to the article offers clues about the reception of the postcolonial voice in ecocriticism. In short, it is not clear which writer, Slaymaker or Garrard, is being more defensive here. Garrard's review of Slaymaker too easily dismisses Slaymaker's concerns about the possibility that ecocriticism and environmentalism may not be neutral areas of inquiry. His point that Slaymaker is suspicious of ecocriticism and environmentalism simply because they have been dominated by white South Africans (instead of Black South Africans) seriously downplays genuine concerns about intellectual autonomy in postcolonial spaces, not to mention the historical affiliation in South Africa between colonialism and conservation (see Koch for a historical analysis of the clash between "poachers," animals and government in South Africa).

Slaymaker discusses the historical legacy of environmentalism briefly when he cites a 1989 speech given by South African poet and member of the African National Congress (ANC) Mongane Wally Serote: "His argument is that the lack of freedom and development among nonwhites in South Africa has created a hostile natural environment as well as a hostile political one. The land has become uninhabitable, and the natural resources are no longer available to the majority of the people who live on the land" (690). The physical dislocation from and dispossession of the land experienced by Blacks during colonialism and later in the Apartheid era



has impacted the environmental imagination.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the arrival of a pre-packaged, American-derivative approach to analysing the place of nature in literature may very well be experienced as another form of dislocation and dispossession. Slaymaker spends much of the article tracing evidence of Black African environmental literary studies—it is clear that he sees a future for environmental literary studies in Africa, but for him it may not exist under the banner of established ecocriticism. Garrard’s visible impatience at Slaymaker’s “rejection of environmentalism” is evidence that there may very well be something pushy about Western academia that rightly gives pause to those working to construct autonomous, yet interconnected, scholarship.

Byron Caminero-Santangelo’s “Different Shades of Green: Ecocriticism and African Literature” and Anthony Vital’s “Situating Ecology in Recent South African Fiction: J.M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals* and Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*” take a different approach to African ecocriticism. Each describes a path away from the American dominance of the field. Caminero-Santangelo links environmentally-oriented African writing specifically to a politics of decolonization, a politics that could be overlooked if reading from a strictly early ecocritical perspective. He is clearly concerned about the a-political nature of much ecocriticism which he sees as antithetical to a postcolonial reading. Anthony Vital also advocates a specifically South African ecocriticism that responds to the particular changes in South African attitudes and policies towards the environment following the country’s release from Apartheid.

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<sup>3</sup> The language used to describe differently racialized groups in South Africa has important political meanings. Here I have adopted the language “Black” following Helene Strauss and other South African scholars. As Strauss explains, “[t]he term ‘Black’ with a capitalised ‘B’ [is] a resistant political identity. This identity derives from the Constitution of the South African Students Organisation (SASO), the founding body of the Black Consciousness Movement, formulated in response to apartheid racial labeling and discrimination. Used as such, the term ‘Black’ includes those historically categorised as Indian, coloured and African. Each of these categories is used, ultimately, with full awareness of the contested histories within which they came into signification, of heterogeneities of Blackness that operate within and beyond their confines, and of the creative and resistant ways in which imposed labels have been and continue to be renegotiated” (24).

Ursula Heise, in “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to Ecocriticism,” describes some of the challenges that North American critics encountered when trying to read literature from outside of the American tradition; what this tended to reveal was the fact that how we think about nature and the environment is deeply informed by our learned cultural knowledge. Ecocriticism revealed itself as *Anglo-American* ecocriticism. Heise acknowledges that some of these challenges were institutional, and, I would add, spoke to the whiteness of the American and British academics engaged with ecocriticism. For example, Heise admits that there is a communication path between British and American academics that does not readily extend much beyond the borders of the Anglophone world, due to problems of language and habits. This suggests, of course, that the habits of American and British academics were primarily rooted in Anglophone culture. It may be accurate to say that US and British scholarship may be primarily written in English, but there needs to be some acknowledgement of a different network of paths connecting non-English speaking scholars. Another of Heise’s examples of the challenges speaks to the root of ecocriticism’s problem, which she frames in terms of the difficulties of assimilation:

But greater inclusiveness also brought more challenges, since not all minority literatures proved as *easy* to assimilate into ecocritical concerns as Native American texts, many of whose authors had long been active in the environmental movement. African American literature, for example, as Michael Bennett and others have shown, is difficult to address with standard ecocritical vocabulary, since African American authors tend to associate rural life and sometimes even wild places with memories of slavery and persecution rather than with peaceful refuge (see Wallace and Armbruster). (Heise *Hitchhiker* 508, my emphasis).

The history of African American persecution does not make that literature “difficult”; instead it reveals the unwieldiness of a rigid, class and “race”-specific concept of the environment. Heise’s use of the terminology of assimilation seems, unintentionally, to reproduce the framework of centre and margin in which the literature of African Americans is categorized as deviating and deviant.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's editorial in *Interventions*, "Green Postcolonialism," went a long way to addressing the roots of Western environmental assumptions and the "difficulty" that these pose when reading postcolonial literature by bringing environmental history and colonial legacies in conversation with ecocriticism. Weaving together the works of many making similar comments (Buell, Plumwood, and Head, for instance), Huggan and Tiffin managed to ask questions about the categories of nature, culture, human and non-human all together. "The very definition of 'humanity' indeed," they argued, "depended – and still depends – on the presence of the *non*-human, the uncivilized, the savage, the animal (see, for example, Derrida 1999)" (6). Their critique thus not only points to the specific origins of a particular environmental worldview, but anchors it in a postcolonial critique of power. Huggan and Tiffin see postcolonialism and ecocriticism coming together on this front: speaking truth to power. "Green postcolonialism, however," they write, "is not just critical; it is also celebratory. Both postcolonialism and ecocriticism are, at least in part, utopian discourses aimed at providing *conceptual* possibilities for a *material* transformation of the world" (10). They argue that the concept of justice is the engine behind this desire for transformation. In defining the concept of justice at work in postcolonial environmental literature, they state: "no social justice without environmental justice; and without social justice – for *all* ecological beings – no justice at all" (10).

### ***Enter Posthumanism***

At the same time that this first wave of postcolonial ecocriticism was asking questions about the imperialist, Euro-American tendencies of mainstream environmental studies, another conversation was challenging, from a different angle, the assumptions of the environmental humanities. Here I would like to turn to a brief discussion of posthumanism, an influential thread

in postmodern thought that, in the words of Louise Westling, “shows promise in helping us to move beyond the problem of anthropocentrism, or human-centered elitism, that has haunted ecocriticism since its beginnings” (26). Westling notes a number of postmodern thinkers whose work has contributed to posthumanism, including Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Donna Haraway, and Cary Wolfe. For the purposes of ecocriticism, the works of Derrida, Haraway and Wolfe are perhaps most interesting, as their work is directly engaged with fields such as animal studies which already overlap with ecocriticism and environmental studies. A more recent contribution to environmentally-oriented posthumanist thought comes by way of an influential article written by Dipesh Chakrabarty that outlines the impact of the “Al Gore Effect”—that is to say, a recognition of the human role in climate change—on the study of history.<sup>4</sup> As I will explore below, this concept represents a new paradigm for reading environmental literature. Explorations of the posthuman both question and challenge the category of the human. It asks, for example, whether the human is really a separate category from animal, or from nature. Investigations into the posthuman reveal the dirty underpinnings of our carefully crafted role as beings autonomous from the world we are a part of. This shift in thinking is the mark of posthumanist thought.

Haraway’s contributions to the re-conceptualization of the human/animal divide cannot be overstated. From her early work on primatology to her essays on dogs and her famous “Cyborg Manifesto,” Haraway has been crafting a theory of kinship between human and non-human animals that takes into account dynamics of power and that forwards a broad concept of social justice. Haraway’s focus on primates was inspired by their unique position as beings “which western scientific and popular stories conceived to be on the border between nature and culture”

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<sup>4</sup> The “Al Gore Effect” is a term used by Grant Jacobsen to describe a temporary upswing in the purchase of voluntary carbon offsets in areas where Al Gore’s movie about climate change, ‘An Inconvenient Truth’ was screened. Here I use this term more loosely to comment on the greater attention given to climate change in popular culture as well as in the arts and humanities following the popularity of Gore’s film.

(*Primate* 143). By insisting on reading primate studies through the lens of feminist critique and inquiry, Haraway reveals the complex projection of contemporary western social norms onto the lives of monkeys and apes. She notes, for example, how the theme of the patriarchal nuclear family unreflectively dominates Diane Fossey's portrayals of primate social structures in a way that denies histories of conflict: "The gorillas have personality and nuclear family, the two key elements of the bourgeois self represented simply as 'man.' History enters Fossey's book only as a disrupting force in the Garden, through murderous poachers, selfish graduate students, and mendacious politicians" (147). Haraway shows us that our ways of looking are not neutral, and yet, she is not dismissive of science itself. Haraway's vision of the posthuman involves an embrace of the permeable boundaries between culture, nature and technology that at the same time grapples with the painful clashing of these constructs.

Wolfe focuses more on the political human rather than the scientific mode itself. He sees the liberal humanist figure as impeding our connections with animals: "'the human' is achieved by escaping or repressing not just its animal origins in nature, the biological, the evolutionary, but more generally by transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment altogether" (xv). Despite what science-fiction-produced images of virtual life the term "posthuman" may evoke, Wolfe describes the field as something much more complex, and much more connected to projects of reimagining our place in the world, and within our environments. His vision of the posthuman recalls some elements of the human as a biological, social animal with language systems and technological skills. More interesting, however, for our purposes, is the following comment about the period we find ourselves in:

posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points towards the necessity of new paradigms (but also thrusts them on us), a new mode of

thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon. (xv)

It is not enough to begin and end with the idea of “decentering” the human, however, nor is it as simple as denying the centrality of the human “*tout court*” (xvi). He argues for the need to reflect on how our ways of thinking, or philosophical and ethical frameworks, contribute to the centering of the human in the first place (xvi). Wolfe’s work, thus, has postcolonial implications in that this manner of self-reflection has been critical to the work of exposing the racist and ethnocentric assumptions wrapped up in the humanist project.

In Chapters One and Two in this dissertation, stories about human emotional and practical relationships with animals are explored in ways that ask questions about our concept of community. In Chapter Four, the relationship between race, gender and animality is explored through the metaphor of the hunted. All three of these chapters invoke posthumanism in their deference to animal subjects and their willingness to wade into discussions about what contributes to the ongoing categorization of the animal as different from the human. What may prove more difficult, however, is to generate such feeling between humans and the inanimate world. Here I am not talking about landscape or place, even, for there is a great deal of literature attesting to our emotional attachment to place, or *topophilia* as Yi Fu Tuan calls it.<sup>5</sup> What I am talking about here is the abstract idea of the inanimate and whether there are ways of theorizing an interactive relationship with it. This is something that environmentalists have long been considering (see Christopher Stone, Julie Cruickshank, and Karen Warren’s “The Power and Promise”). In what might be the great irony of climate change, the fact of human-induced global warming may be the event which finally brings us closer, philosophically at least, to the earth. At least, this is the argument that Dipesh Chakrabarty attempts to make.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Tuan, *topophilia* is “the affective bond between people and place or setting” (4). He adds, too, that although *topophilia* is “diffuse as concept,” it is “vivid and concrete as personal experience” (4).

Chakrabarty's essay "The Climate of History: Four Theses" introduces the idea of the Anthropocene, a "new" geological epoch that reflects the severe post-industrial impact of the human on the planet, to a cultural studies audience. The essay is an attempt to read culture through the lens of climate science. What is unique for Chakrabarty about this approach is that climate science advances a new concept of time that is both long and short. To comparatively measure climate change, one must think in terms of geological time. To understand the source of climate change, one must think in terms of human time. The Anthropocene is a useful way to reconcile these times because it situates the human story within the long view of geological history; humans are assigned to an epoch. Rather, rightly stated, humans have created an epoch due to our unintended impact on the earth's temperatures. Central to Chakrabarty's argument, however, is that because the concept of the Anthropocene puts into play this longer view of history (one which pre-dates the human, at least when it comes to providing comparative temperature analysis) we need to replace the category of the "human" with that of the "species." According to Chakrabarty: "Species thinking ... is connected to the enterprise of deep history" (213).

Chakrabarty's proposal to employ the term "species" in place of "human" consciously wades into long and ongoing debates about what it means to *be* human, or what it means to be accepted into another's definition of the human, debates that have been important territory of postcolonial theorists, among others. Postcolonial theorists such as Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have brought attention to the ways in which the category of humanity is frequently split along so-called racial categories, represented for hundreds of years in Europe by the division between the colonisers and the colonised. These long-standing, divisive and racist hierarchies are precisely the types of differences that Chakrabarty's theory attempts to resolve by appealing to the concept of a unifying species as a basis for unity. What are the

implications for adopting such a theory? Does such a manoeuvre undo, erase, or overlook, these differences, or can the argument be made, as Chakrabarty does, that the term harmonizes difference? In his view the hope for humanity is determined by our ability to recognize our unity as a shared species in the face of enormous environmental changes.

Despite Chakrabarty's attempt to offer a hopeful prediction for future harmony under the rallying cause of adapting to climate change, his argument glosses over too many material differences in an attempt to project harmony. Namely, Chakrabarty attempts to make the argument that "[u]nlike in the crisis of capitalism, there are no lifeboats here for the rich and the privileged (witness the drought in Australia or recent fires in the wealthy neighborhoods of California...)" (221). Perhaps Chakrabarty is taking a longer view of the future than I am, but it certainly seems as though for the time being people in wealthy, well-connected countries or communities will certainly have advantages when it comes to dealing with the impacts of climate change. It is not enough to say that drought in Australia is proof that the West faces equal risk than the global South when it comes to climate change. The West—or certain parts of it—faces the *same* risk, but its ability to react and to restore quality of life will be considerably different. Studies show that low-lying countries such as the Maldives, areas of Sri Lanka, and other island nations, will be the first and hardest hit by rising sea-levels. Amartya Sen has repeatedly shown that governance and governing structures have as much, or more, to do with deaths due to famine than actual availability of food.<sup>6</sup> Sen's simple claim that "The direct penalties of a famine are borne only by the suffering public and not the ruling government. The rulers never die" (343) speaks to the insulating effect of sovereign rule for those holding political power, but it can also be applied more loosely to describe the way economically and politically advantaged countries

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<sup>6</sup> See Sen's *The Idea of Justice*, where he takes up the failure of economic management and governance in the 1943 Bengali famine.



will be largely insulated from famines. One thinks, for example, of the high subsidies and economic diversification available to US farmers as extremely successful buffers against famine (see Shiva *Earth Democracy* 77-78). Sen's argument undermines Chakrabarty's insistence that climate change will affect us all equally, and suggests that those living in countries with more democratically organized government will be better equipped to navigate the effects of drought. This in no way takes away from the hardship faced by those in Australia who suffer drought, or those in California who have lost their homes, but we have to wonder how much hardship it will take in order to create a level playing field upon which radically disjointed (and yet enmeshed) groups of humans will come together as a species, as in Chakrabarty's vision.

### ***The Second Wave***

Currently, the field of postcolonial ecocriticism is finding its maturity in this question of the category of the human. Beginning, as I have pointed out, from the notion that the postcolonial and the ecological can mutually inform each other, second-wave critics have been able to interrogate culture and environment from a rich position. Chakrabarty's essay highlights some of the important threads in the debate. Postcolonial discourse often centres around power differences amongst the groups of people variously positioned in relation to the category of the human. Environmental discourse, on the other hand, centres around the perennial Western divide between Human and Animal. At bottom, both of these discussions reveal a deep anxiety surrounding the category of the human; exclusive conditions of belonging are one way of bolstering uncertain standards.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin wade into these treacherous waters in their latest book on postcolonial ecocriticism. They write that it is necessary to interrogate "the category of the human itself and. . . the ways in which the construction of ourselves *against* nature – with the

hierarchisation of life-forms which that construction implies – has been and remains complicit in colonialist and racist exploitation from the time of imperial conquest to the present day” (6). They see this constructed antagonism between the human and the non-human as central to racist imperial power. They thus argue that postcolonial ecocriticism must be especially driven towards dismantling the “species boundary” (7) in order to fight oppression at all of its sources. Their work is framed by large goals such as the end of oppression and it is on this scale primarily that they engage their discourse on animals. “[H]uman liberation,” they write, “will never be fully achieved without challenging the historical conditions under which human societies have constructed themselves in hierarchical relation to other societies, *both human and nonhuman*, and without imagining new ways in which these societies, understood as being ecologically connected, can be creatively transformed” (22). What they are outlining is certainly a posthumanist project, one that makes as its goal not the transcending of the human so much as the need for the human to recall—again and again—its relative place in the nonhuman world.

Huggan and Tiffin attempt to tackle a difficult problem in their book, which is the place of politics in postcolonial ecocriticism. If the first-wave of postcolonial ecocriticism showed especial concern for showcasing the ideologies of postcolonial environmental writing, writers of the second wave, unburdened by the need to justify the field itself, can explore the role of writing in the environmental and cultural project, which can sometimes be overlooked by a heavy-handed political analysis. Huggan and Tiffin try to position their work somewhere in-between:

The primary function of much of this literature has been that of global consciousness-raising in a wide variety of (post) colonial contexts in which the twin demands of social and environmental justice are conspicuously displayed. However, to label such writing as either ‘advocacy’ or ‘activism’ risks underestimating its aesthetic complexities – one of several points where postcolonial criticism meets ecocriticism, which is similarly attentive to the negotiations between political imperative and aesthetic play. As already argued in the introduction to this book, postcolonial ecocriticism is that form of criticism

which appreciates the enduring *non*-instrumentality of environmental writing, as well as gauging its continuing usefulness in mobilising individual and collective support. (33)

Thus their first chapter, “Development,” reads Ken Saro-Wiwa and Arundhati Roy, two polemic writer-activists, alongside a large selection of Oceanic literary writers who indirectly make similar critiques about the limits of autonomy and harm to the environment posed by globalisation and corrupt national governments. Their chapter does certainly give space for the examination of the aesthetic processes of the texts, but there is still a sense that the only texts worth this examination are those which align with the political priorities of ecocriticism. “It is one of the tasks of postcolonial ecocriticism,” they write, “to bring to light these alternative knowledges and knowledge-systems, which often underpin postcolonised communities’ sense of their own cultural identities and entitlements, and which represent the ontological basis for their politically contested claims to belong” (78). It is my sense that the task of postcolonial ecocriticism is not only to analyze texts that already reflect some form of environmental consciousness, but that it is also to do the more difficult task of analyzing texts that take a more ambiguous position towards environmentalism. It is these texts which do not readily fall in-line with mainstream environmental views that urgently need study, for they are a part of the myriad voices that will decide which paths we take in terms of environmental (ir)responsibility.

Rather than focusing on the hurdles to a postcolonial ecocriticism, Pablo Mukherjee, in *Postcolonial Environment: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel* is inspired by what he views as an important political project. Mukherjee views the two fields as fundamentally connected through the systems they struggle against, namely late capitalism. Mukherjee notes that although postcolonialism and ecocriticism are both “fundamentally concerned with the environments and cultures of capitalist modernity, it seems ... there has been nothing like the degree and intensity of cross-fertilization that they potentially offer each other and in many ways

my plea that they do so is the impulse of this book” (17). Mukherjee makes it his project to put a name to the thing people are avoiding: that there is a strong current of historical materialism underlying the eco-socialism that postcolonial ecocritics are talking about. His work connects with other Marxist postcolonial thinkers like Neil Lazarus and Benita Perry and offers an excellent starting point for an environmental reading of Marx. “Indeed,” he writes,

we might say that the sustained focus that both eco- and postcolonial criticism has trained on the ‘social’ has already prepared them for a thorough re-engagement with materialist concepts. Eco- and postcolonial criticism have been discovering how to cross-fertilize each other through an ongoing dialogue, and a stronger materialist re-articulation of their positions should make this exchange about culture and society even more fruitful. (Mukherjee 73)

For Mukherjee, the roots of social and environmental justice are visibly linked through the decolonization struggles of the late twentieth-century; he writes that “if the scholars who shaped the literary and cultural theories of postcolonialism from the mid-1970s were paying any attention at all to the voices of anti-colonial resistance ... they could not have missed the importance placed on the issues of land, water, forests, crops, rivers, the sea” (46). Mukherjee’s approach suggests that there is less need to quibble about the theoretical possibilities of linking the postcolonial with the ecological than there is to simply look at the content of the struggles in the postcolonial world to see that they are simultaneously ecopostcolonialist.

Laura Wright’s *“Wilderness into Civilized Shapes”*: *Reading the Postcolonial Environment* is a somewhat of a departure from the type of eco-socialism that Mukherjee advocates. Wright begins her thinking from the same starting point as Huggan and Tiffin—trying to think past the self-other dualism that has constructed the Western understanding of nature as something apart from the human. In her words, “the very idea of what constitutes ‘nature’ is an imaginary Western construction based on an Aristotelian system of binary thinking that differentiates humans from and privileges them above the so-called natural world” (5). In

critiquing these binary systems, lists of dualisms are often used to illustrate the dichotomies between, say, man/woman, culture/nature, mind/body, etc. Wright takes issue, however, with the way such discussions employ the binary of “coloniser/colonised,” not because it is a category that does not fit within that hierarchical logic, but because often the discussion does not go any farther:

While the acknowledgment of this binarism is useful in terms of an exploration of the interconnectedness of the nature/culture and colonized/colonizing schema, the studies cited above tend to pay lip service to the third world by using binary rhetoric to point out the similarities between the othering of nature and the othering of non-Western peoples without examining conceptions of nature that do not originate in the West and without examining environmental issues that are unique to populations in formerly colonized cultures. (8)

Wright is certain that the picture of environmental crisis and environmental concern in the non-West is “vastly different” from the situation in the West and that it warrants independent study (20). Such an emphasis on the notion of a West/non-West divide, of course, risks vastly oversimplifying both categories and ignoring linguistic and cultural questions. She is careful to situate this claim within the realm of the imaginary, of the literary arts, and “not as evidence of anthropological truths about various peoples and cultures” (14). Her work often situates the environmental within the realm of the social in ways that feel anthropological, however. Her analysis of Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*, for example, involves a reading of the myth and meaning of Uhamiri, the Lake Goddess, within Igbo culture and especially within a community of Igbo women. In this way, Wright’s concept of the social is vastly different from that of Mukherjee. One gets a sense that Wright feels a need to excuse her socio-cultural approach to postcolonial ecocriticism, stating again and again that she is not a scientist and that she is “first and foremost, a student of imaginative literature whose primary mode of inquiry is postcolonial studies” (2). This apology, I think, speaks to a dominant set of expectations within postcolonial ecocriticism that

scholarship be aligned with the protest side of the social and environmental justice nexus that emerged in the struggle to define postcolonial ecocriticism against traditional ecocriticism during the first-wave.

DeLoughrey and Handley's latest collaboration, *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, begins with a passage from Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in which he states that "[f]or a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity" (Fanon, qtd. in Handley and DeLoughrey *Postcolonial*, 3). Their introduction embodies this notion of "the land as a primary site of postcolonial recuperation, sustainability and dignity" (3) by refusing to separate postcolonial and environmental histories. Heavily drawing, as they did in their previous collaboration, on the work of Caribbean writers Wilson Harris and Edouard Glissant, DeLoughrey and Handley invoke history, landscape, the concept of "tidalectics," and an "aesthetics of the earth" (28) to read literature as a lens through which to view "landscape (and seascape) as a participant in this historical process rather than a bystander to human experience" (4). They are wary, however, about the dangers of certain historical categories that threaten to flatten the complex historicity of postcolonial ecologies. "Certainly," they write

postcolonial ecology must engage the complexity of global environmental knowledges, traditions, and histories in a way that moves far beyond the discourses of modernization theory on the one hand, which relegates the global south to a space of natural poverty, and the discourse of colonial exploitation on the other, which relegates the global south to a place without agency, bereft of complicity or resistance. (DeLoughrey et al 19)

The solution to this trap may in fact be found in the intersection of postcolonialism and ecocriticism. Among the many overlaps that DeLoughrey and Handley identify between ecocriticism and postcolonialism, most notable is their concern with the representation of alterity. "[P]ostcolonial ecocriticism," they write, "importantly theorizes the question of who can 'speak

for nature’ or speak for the subaltern subject in a narrative mode that does not privilege dualist thought or naturalize the hierarchy between the human and the nonhuman” (25). Separately, ecocritical and postcolonial approaches have their own highly-developed critiques of narratives which naturalize social and cultural hierarchies. Together, as DeLoughrey and Handley suggest, these critiques provide a strong theoretical basis for approaching current environmental issues from a just, non-hierarchical manner. In addition, this intersection can be instrumental in combating the naturalization of poverty and helplessness in the global South.

### ***Mapping Ahead***

This is an exciting and extremely productive time in postcolonial ecocriticism. It is also an important time to assess where we are and where we can go with this momentum. I want to draw attention to three stumbling blocks that limit our explorations of the literary expression of postcolonial environmentalisms. The first is what I call the paradox of origins. In this case, two contradictory views are projected about the origins of environmental commitment in the non-Western world. On the one hand, postcolonial environmentalists are seen as “more genuine” (as discussed above in the case of the Ecological Indian). On the other hand, postcolonial subjects are seen to have “come lately” to environmental consciousness, having been exposed to it as a Western influence. The second hurdle is the misconception that environmentalism is a luxurious concern that only the economically and politically comfortable can afford to indulge in. Although Guha and Martinez-Alier developed their work carefully to combat this myth with many examples that show the contrary, the contrast between what they termed “empty-belly” and “full-stomach” (xxi) environmentalisms needs to be better developed to continue to depict environmental concern as a fundamental postcolonial issue. Lastly, an issue that urgently needs to be resolved is the place of animals in postcolonial ecocriticism. The practice of extending focus

beyond the human can lead to a concern that urgent human needs will be cast aside in favour of protecting species and habitats—issues which are current sources of conflict throughout the global South. Underneath all of these specific concerns run two strong currents of reluctance in each field. To put it very generally, ecocritics fear that postcolonial politics will divert attention away from ecological issues. An example of this can be found in Greg Garrard’s annual review of the field of ecocriticism wherein he reviews Lisa Perfetti’s “The Postcolonial Land that Needs to Be Loved: Caribbean Nature and the Garden in Simone Schwartz-Bart’s *Pluie et Vent sur Têlumée Miracle*.” He determines Perfetti’s article, which explores the relationship between forced/necessary plantation labour and feelings of self-loathing in franco-Caribbean subjects, is not properly ecocritical. He judges that the article has, in fact, “more postcolonial than ecological significance” (32). On the side of postcolonialism, the hesitation (which we have already covered to some extent) surrounding adopting an ecocritical perspective lies with the charge of ecoimperialism. The fear is that Western-defined ecological interests will override postcolonial interests—a concern which, I think, has its culmination in the tensions surrounding the competition between human and animal rights in a postcolonial context.

The paradox of origins is not immediately obvious, but evidence of it can be found in current postcolonial ecocriticism. For example, this attitude of “belatedness” can be seen in Huggan and Tiffin’s dismissal of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* in favour of Barbara Gowdy’s *The White Bone*. Tiffin criticizes Achebe for having given voice to the people of Africa (Nigeria) without having also given voice to the animals of Africa. Here the favouring of Gowdy’s much more recent imaginative exploration of the lives of African elephants implies that environmental enlightenment comes from the outside in. If the metropole once traded in the cultural currency of Civilization, it is possible that this has been replaced with Environmental Awareness. The concept of “belatedness” is often buried under the concept of an environmentalism of the poor. As



Lisa Perfetti writes in her essay on Caribbean nature: “Scholarship on postcolonial Caribbean literature has largely ignored ecological questions in favor of social and cultural concerns considered more pressing for a region still suffering from the impacts of slavery and colonialism” (89). The implication of this claim is that environmentalism is a preoccupation available only to those groups of people who do not have to worry constantly about their daily needs, such as housing, food and safety. The idea of the Caribbean as a place “still suffering” indicates a sort of temporal lag by which only the West has moved on towards more advanced concerns. However, Perfetti recognizes this conceptual trap when she writes that she hopes “to show that the fiction of the Caribbean can help us to expand our definition of environmental literature” (89). Here she begins to suggest that it is the category of environmental literature—not the Caribbean itself—that is lagging behind. William Slaymaker’s important essay “Ecoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses,” which was one of the first to address an African ecocriticism, represents the temporal lag through the concept of the echo in his article’s title. The “echo” of the title does not refer to belatedness in environmental attitudes in African writers and activists, but instead in the critical attention to environmental themes in African literature. Slaymaker argues that this lapse is due to a majority perception that “ecolit and ecocrit [sic] are imperial paradigms of cultural fetishism that misrepresent the varied landscapes of sub-Saharan Africa” (686). Without fully explaining how such paradigms are *not* forces of imperialism, Slaymaker quickly moves into the defensive, pointing out that there is “growing interest in ecocriticism and literature of the environment among some writers” (685). The tone of his essay speaks to the anxieties over the origins of environmental thought, oscillating between four contradictory positions: condemning certain environmental attitudes as decadent; applauding African critics’ resistance to the neo-imperial force of mainstream ecocriticism; decrying ecocriticism for ignoring African literature; and, lastly, proving that African literature has

environmental value. This ambivalence, about the desirability of being recognized as an important strand in the conversation about environmental thought and literature vs. standing outside and contesting its terms, highlights the predicament of postcolonial scholars: complicating the professional and intellectual imperative to stake a claim in a recognized field is a legitimate concern that postcolonial literature is being appropriated by a critical fad from the ever-devouring-North.

A second and related problem is the fallacy that there can be no environmental awareness on an "empty-belly" (Guha and Martinez-Alier xxi). What links both of these problems is the definition of environmentalism. If established Western standards of nature and environmentalism are used as a yardstick, then postcolonial literature may indeed be playing catch-up, however, if the definition itself is challenged and radically altered, a different picture of environmentalism emerges, one that may be able to provide more ideas and inspiration for dealing with a broader scope of environmental problems. Guha and Martinez-Alier declared a difference between perspectives: "The environmentalisms of the poor, we argue, originate in social conflicts over access to and control over natural resources: conflicts between peasants and industry over forest produce, for example, or between rural and urban populations over water and energy" (xxi). They drew this distinction in order to raise attention about the different *sources* and *priorities* of the many varieties of environmentalism, and to claim a space for postcolonial environmental activism. Their book focuses on instances of conflict between the government and the economically impoverished in India, demonstrating instances of solidarity in which people organized to protect their land rights or access to land or water ways. In defining environmental activism as a struggle—often in the form of protest—against large-scale environmental degradation that takes advantage of a perceived lack of powerlessness in certain populations,

Guha and Martinez-Alier prove that “to be poor is very often a very good reason to be green” (xxii).

One unfortunate outcome of such a framework, though, is that environmentalism in the global South is often defined *solely and primarily* as a political issue, rather than as a personal, experiential one (I am not trying to de-politicize the personal here, I only use the language to emphasize the different orientations of each type of environmentalism). Although it is not the intention of Guha and Martinez-Alier, the idea that the experience of poverty can not also channel an environmental consciousness has the unintended effect of privileging certain environments over others; namely, well-maintained or well-preserved spaces are privileged over messier, degraded or neglected environments where people living in states of poverty often find themselves and where access to sublime nature can be hard to come by, but aesthetic, affective and spiritual relationships flourish along with more pragmatic, combative forms of engagement. From the perspective of literary criticism, and ecocriticism in particular, this privileging of certain environments has meant that the domains that privilege affect, aesthetics, and love, which are presumed to be precluded from relationships with degraded environments, however politically worthy they are deemed to be. An expanded concept of nature is called for, then, that can account for myriad lived experiences. The emphasis on eco-socialism in much postcolonial ecocriticism (for example Pablo Mukherjee, Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers) is a very important and relevant focus, except where it obscures other, less obviously political expressions of environmental thought or even love. DeLoughrey and Handley do much to change this bias by embracing Edouard Glissant’s concept of “an aesthetics of the earth” as a way to open up discussions about what I see as lived environments:

Glissant raises the spectre of the reader’s incredulity, asking “an aesthetics of the earth? In the half-starved dust of Africa? In the mud of flooded Asia? ...In city

sewers? ...In mud huts crowning gold mines?” (151). His questions anticipate ecocritical challenges to whether “an environmentalism of the poor” might provide both an aesthetics and a politics that we might draw from as a model of postcolonial ecology. (28)

A third hurdle to advancing postcolonial ecocriticism is about knowing where to situate animals in the contested intersections of postcolonialism and ecocriticism. Postcolonialism faces charges of anthropocentrism from the environmentalist camps, a claim which flourishes in the absence of animals, read then as a failure to account for other beings on the earth. Mainstream ecocriticism likewise faces charges of ecocentrism from the postcolonial camps, a claim which reads any focus on animal others as a diversion of attention and resources from pressing human crises. It is easy to see, then, how animals may fall through the cracks of this disjuncture.

Like the field of postcolonial ecocriticism itself, postcolonial animal or species studies is a growing area of analysis. Jopi Nyman’s *Postcolonial Animal Tales from Kipling to Coetzee* reads classic animal stories, like those of Jack London, from a postcolonial perspective, arguing that animals often served as a vehicle for exploring issues of race and racism in colonial literature. Nyman is interested in what animal stories tell us about the discursive creation of the human subject. “Rather than allegories,” he writes, “animal stories are part of the discursive construction of such issues as family, race and nation” (3). Nyman is particularly interested in the ways in which stories about animals were used to create or bolster colonial justifications for Western imperialism based on concepts of social Darwinism. In this way, Nyman’s work can be seen as contributing to an ongoing postcolonial critique of *animalization*, which Neel Ahuja, in his “Postcolonial Critique in a Multispecies World,” describes as “the organized subjection of racialized groups through animal figures. Animalization involves contextual comparisons between animals (as laborers, food, ‘pests,’ or ‘wildlife’) and the bodies or behaviors of racialized subjects” (557). Like Ahuja, Huggan and Tiffin take animals seriously in their postcolonial work.

They see postcolonialism as “well positioned to offer insight” into the lives of animals, given that “[p]ostcolonialism’s major theoretical concerns: otherness, racism and miscegenations, language, translation, the trope of cannibalism, voice and the problems of speaking of and for others – to name just a few – offer immediate entry points for a re-theorising of the place of animals in relation to human societies” (135). In the section on “Zoocriticism” in their latest book, they show how “serious consideration of the status of animal seems to be fundamentally compromised by the human, often western, deployment of animals and the animalistic to destroy or marginalise other human societies” (135). In this sense, then, Huggan and Tiffin are interested in not only the effects of animalization on human society, but its effects on the lives and status of animals themselves.

Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers make a telling comment about the place of animals in their introduction to the first book-length study of African ecocriticism. In surveying the previous literature on African ecocriticism, they refer to a special issue of *Safundi* and note that “all of the critical analysis is about white writers, and much of it focuses on issues of animals and animal rights” (13). Although the issue professes to question “the margins created by hierarchical dichotomies that divide the human and animal, spaces of home and waste, city and country, nature and culture, and wilderness and history,” (14) it nevertheless repeats this false division when they dismiss the animal concerns of white writers. This misrepresentation demonstrates two common limitations to our environmental imaginations. The first involves the category of the animal. It can be assumed that when Caminero-Santangelo and Myers speak somewhat dismissively of the focus on animals in the *Safundi* collection they are talking about megafauna, not the sheep, cows, or the goats that the Massai keep, nor the mosquitoes that bring malaria. The colonial eye on Africa was trained on its prized game animals—the lions, hart-beests, and elephants rather than on the wart-hogs, guinea fowl or termites. It is arguable that

Caminero-Santangelo and Myers were voicing their objection to the classist motivations behind the representation of African megafauna in postcolonial ecocriticism, rather than objecting to a focus on animal issues themselves.

The second limit to our animal imagination is the fact that animals continue to be conceived of, in the dominant Western tradition, as beings that lie outside the human sphere. In this case, I am not only referring to the philosophical divide between the human/non-human animal, but rather the idea, common particularly in urban-dominated cultures, that (undomestic) animals only exist in wilderness spaces. This is, of course, related to the species bias within the category of non-human animals: lions do, of course, tend to live (if not in human-built enclosures) in what are considered wilderness spaces/parks.<sup>7</sup> If these are the animals that we imagine when we imagine “animals,” then it follows that we envision animals outside of the human sphere, as lions are not living alongside humans as closely as, say, goats, dogs or chickens are. In order to develop a postcolonial ecocriticism that does try to reconceive of the colonial view of animals, then, we need to avoid falling into the trap of writing animals outside of the ordinary. But, as Caminero-Santangelo and Myers admit, “breaking from colonial narratives and especially their epistemological underpinnings has not been easy” (14). They argue that in order to “move beyond the legacies of colonial environmental discourses and practices in Africa, we are going to need to think much more about environment at the margins, where the margin is the interstitial space of those inherited binary divides” (15). On this issue of marginality my work departs somewhat from Caminero-Santangelo and Myers. Although I agree with the philosophical and practical goal of challenging the divide between human and non-human animal, my work in this project has a simpler goal, and that is to take a closer look at the complex co-existence of humans and animals.

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<sup>7</sup> The history of conservation in Africa has often involved the forced or coerced removal of Black Africans from spaces designated for wilderness preservation. Jacklyn Cock and David Fig write that “[e]nvironmental racism took many extreme forms in apartheid South Africa,” including “the expulsion of black South Africans from lands later used to create national parks” (131).

I have identified these three sticking points—the question of origins, the affluent-environmentalist myth, and the contested place of animals—as conceptual knots which need to be untied, or at least loosened, in order to form a productive postcolonial ecological critique which responsibly addresses environmental and social justice for people and animals. One way to address the difficulty of representing postcolonial environmentalism may be to pay closer attention to practices and expressions of everyday environmentalisms.

***Intervention: The Everyday***

Everyday environmentalisms are the ways that people relate to and think about their environments in the course of their day-to-day lives. If, as the environmental justice movement has established, the “environment” is where we work and live, as well as those “faraway” wilderness places, then how we inhabit our personal environments says as much about our environmental values and worldviews as does our subscription to wilderness causes. Activities that could clearly fall under this category include gardening, littering, pest-control, cleaning one’s gutters, resting or labouring in a city park, snow removal, and any other activity that involves environmental management or appreciation in the course of one’s daily life. To be clear, I think that it is important to pay attention to these smaller-scale practices in addition to giving adequate attention to the analysis and theorizing of large-scale, bold displays of organization or activism surrounding environmental issues in the global South. Throughout my project, then, my emphasis tends to be on local issues and experiences of local environments that are better framed by the concept of the everyday than those global environmental issues. This is not to say that the two scales can be separated, only that I will focus on the interplay of these realms as they exist at the level of the individual.<sup>8</sup> My approach in this dissertation consists of a framework derived from

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<sup>8</sup> As Pablo Escobar explains: “While it is evident that ‘local’ economies and culture are not outside the

the environmental justice understanding of the environment, and influenced by the work of cultural theorists in the field of the everyday, namely de Certeau, and Ganguly, from whom I have borrowed a sense of scale and an attention to agency.

Focusing on everyday environmentalisms is a way to ensure that our working concept of environmental action is attentive to the representation of personal experience, rather than being a foreign-defined concept that is imposed in the process of writing about environmentalisms in the global South from a desk within the West (as this project is doing). As a counter measure to the dominant discourse of ecocritical analysis, everyday environmentalism provides a specific intervention that examines environmental attitudes as they are practiced on the ground. I hesitate to use the phrase “from the ground-up” here because I make no pretence that this form of analysis more authentically represents the perspectives or voices of subjects in the global South. I am cautious of the self-indulgent trap that Rita Felski describes when she writes that the study of everyday life “beckons us with the beguiling allure of the ‘really real’,” adding that “discussions of everyday life are indelibly marked by the peculiar anxieties and obsessions of intellectuals” (607). Despite its inability to represent an un-mediated authenticity (if there even were such a thing), I think that the practice of paying attention to lives in their everyday milieu can reveal information about relationships that are useful for theorizing global environmental awareness. At the very least, I argue that this approach adds to our awareness of the diverse ordinary environmental realities of people in the global South by examining reality through the lens of everyday experience. I do not see the study of everyday environmentalism as being only applicable to the global South. By contrast, I think that we need to be more attuned to people’s habitual interactions with their environment in all spheres. I do, however, see this approach as

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scope of capital and modernity, it also needs to be newly acknowledged that the former are not produced exclusively by the latter” (n.p.).



having a strategic importance as a means to combat the exoticization of postcolonial environments in particular (a fact addressed in texts such as *Beyond Sun and Sand*, and *Postcolonial Ecology and Tourism*).

My approach is naturally guided by work on everyday life in Cultural Studies, but, importantly, it grows first and foremost out of postcolonial literature itself. The theories of the everyday life, with their provenance in twentieth-century French surrealism (Lefebvre) and British/Welsh treatises on working-class culture (Orwell, Williams), are a way of structuring the attention to the everyday that is active in postcolonial literature as a project of voicing excluded experiences. Of course, theories of everyday life have been both celebratory and critical of daily life in modern times. De Certeau, whose approach I draw on, focuses on the possibility for subjects to recuperate their agency through making small changes in the everyday. As Ben Highmore states in his *Everyday Life: A Reader*, however, theorists such as LeFebvre are interested in the realm of the everyday for the way it problematically limits and determines people's potential as humans through a series of repetitive actions that demand little from the actors. Highmore points out, however, that there is more to the everyday than simply this dull "marking time" (8), there is also the process "making strange" (12) that is revealed through studying the everyday. It is this combination of boredom and mystery that Highmore argues best expresses the potential of the everyday as an object of study. The first task is to make visible the ordinary, a site which "has suffered from inattention" (22) according to Highmore. The second task is to take a critical approach to what occurs at the level of the ordinary through the process of defamiliarization. An implication of the everyday from a postcolonial perspective is that everyday life theory can serve a *dual* function of making familiar what has been deemed exotic (i.e. the lives of working class or non-white, non-urban, people), and also highlighting the strangeness in

what we deem to be ordinary (e.g. in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, Lucy keeps wondering about her employer Mariah's "commonsense" take on the world).

James Procter begins his article on the postcolonial everyday by framing the now-familiar question about postcolonialism's relevance within the terms of the everyday itself. Procter asks whether, post-9/11, postcolonial studies itself has not become tired and redundant; thus, "everyday" (62). To answer his own question, Procter responds that, if anything, postcolonialism has been about a "departure from the everyday" (62). Procter seems to suggest that postcolonialism—by broadcasting the voice of the other—is already actively participating in the process of defamiliarization that studies of the everyday are engaged in: "If postcolonial studies has proved itself particularly alert to the uncanny play of the *unheimlich*, it is essentially more at home with difference than indifference, ambivalence than routine; the extraordinary as opposed to the mundane; resistance rather than boredom" (62).

Felski's language about the banality and overlooked-ness of everyday existence could also be re-read as a comment on the task of representing subalterneity: "The everyday must be rescued from oblivion by being transformed; the all too prosaic must be made to reveal its hidden subversive poetry" (608). It is this need to discursively rescue the everyday lives of the Congolese from unjust representation that Edward Said discusses in his "Resistance, Opposition and Representation," where he writes about the responsibility of postcolonial writers to carry forward their pasts – made invisible through the literary erasures of, in this case, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Speaking of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Tayeb Salih's recuperations of life on African rivers, Said writes that:

The post-imperial writers of the Third World therefore bear their past within them – as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices, as potentially revised visions of the past tending towards a post-colonial future, as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly

silent native speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance, from the colonist.” (qtd. in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 96)

Clearly, Said is not saying that the Western dismissal of life in Africa was simply on the basis of its prosaic qualities; rather, Said reads violence into the erasure of the people living on the banks of the Congo River. Conrad’s literary dismissal, on the other hand, does suggest the view that everyday life in the non-Western world is simultaneously too banal *and* too exotic to be included in the supposedly more meaningful life of “civilisation.” Felski finds cultural theorists guilty of this slip as well, writing that “[t]heorists of everyday life often write as if certain social groups – women, the working class – can stand for nothing but everydayness, are eternally mired in the immanence of the quotidian. This perception strikes me as grievously misplaced; the experience of moving between the registers of the everyday and the extraordinary is surely shared by all human beings, not just some” (614).

In trying to claim, as I am, that the subaltern subject is the everyday subject the problem of ordinariness gets in the way. On the one hand, the subaltern is viewed by the colonizer as too consumed by dreary everydayness to be worthy of interest (such as the figure of the invisible nanny in Ann Laura Stoler’s study of family and race in Dutch Indonesia), and on the other hand the subaltern is marked by an exoticism that makes the everyday almost entirely inaccessible (see, for example, Anne McClintock’s analysis of the public spectacle of the so-called Hottentot Venus). In their introduction to a special issue on the postcolonial everyday, Chris Prentice and Vijay Devadas complicate the postcolonial everyday even further by suggesting that these two categories (the ordinary and the out-of-the ordinary) operate at the same time. They note that within the everyday, this otherness creates states of exception (to use Ganguly’s phrase):

Some of us are more subject than others to official intervention in raising our children; routine grocery shopping confronts us with the lure of the exotic, of difference, and excitement in the marketing strategies surrounding daily consumer items; and although newspapers, television and on-line media are part

of our everyday information landscape, some of us find ourselves represented within them as routine exceptions to the rule of law and state sovereignty, to social order – indeed to ‘national identity.’ (12-3)

Their repeated use of the term “some of us” is meant to invoke subjects who are visibly in their minority, which makes them majorly visible within the realm of the everyday. The confrontation between the ordinary and the extraordinary is here embodied in the homogeneous representation of the ideal or assumed consumer as reflected back to the non-ideal, un-assumed consumer. In this sense, the experience of the everyday is qualitatively different for differently racialized subjects as they are both called to be a part of the everyday while at the same time lacking representation within it.<sup>9</sup> When we talk in both general and concrete terms about “the everyday,” then, it is necessary to ask, as Prentice and Devandas do (following Procter), “whose everyday?” (13).

There is already some movement towards theorizing an everyday environmentalism as a means of counteracting the dominant focus on large-scale environmental projects. The root of this concept, for instance, has already been articulated by the environmental justice movement which insisted that the definition of the environment must also include the places where we live and work (see Bullard, Agyeman, and Platt). There is evidence, too, that this theoretical shift may be gaining ground in mainstream ecocriticism as well. A recent article in *ISLE* by Scott Hess makes the argument for studying everyday environmentalism as a remedy to the clinging and cloying Romantic definitions of nature that seem so difficult to shake. The everyday environment are those places that we inhabit daily—they are the most local places in that sense—but everyday environmentalism also asks us to make a shift in how we think through nature in these places: “‘Everyday nature’ in this sense,” Hess writes, “is not just a location, but rather a kind of

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<sup>9</sup> I began to witness this myself when searching for images to accompany my lectures in a course on North American Indigenous Literatures. Appeals to google image searches yielded no images of Indigenous women doing the practices of everyday life, except where those practices involved ritual deemed exotic by outside viewers, such as dancing or crafting.

attention, or better yet, a way of defining our identities and values through local relationship rather than through imaginative escape” (91). Hess’s argument has resonance with the environmental movement, and certainly with an eco-materialist approach, even if he does not define his concept that way. He writes that “[e]ven when people write about . . . these more ordinary, inhabited places, they tend to define “nature” in terms of transcendent aesthetic or spiritual experience, in ways that connect nature to the autonomous individual self and set it apart from social and economic relationships” (93). Postcolonial theory, with its eye trained on social and economic relationships that shape and inform our relative places in the world, makes a likely ally for this kind of everyday environmentalism. I argue that a focus on the banal, everyday experience of the environment is required in order to best understand the range of environmentalisms in the global South.

With this approach I hope to steer the conversation away from the question of origins (i.e. whether environmentalism is a paradigm imported from the West), and to understand environmental awareness as an ongoing, everyday occurrence that people across the globe are engaged in, often without knowing it or naming it. By encompassing the experiences of a greater range of people than those associated with major environmental movements, this approach sheds light on the fact that environmental awareness around the world may look different than its Western observers expect it to. This lens also provides a way to examine the environmental attitudes of those without the means—or inclination—to participate in organized environmentalism (although, it must be said that many economically impoverished people continue to organize, in India for instance, on environmental causes). In this way I carry forward Martinez-Alier and Guha’s notion of “environmentalisms of the poor” but the difference is that I do not understand the poor as operating solely within this domain of survival, or instrumental, environmentalism as they suggest. By focusing on a broader range of experiences, the everyday

allows us to explore instances of environmental engagement – such as gardening or tending to animals – that may be overlooked in a traditional ecocritical perspective. Bringing attention to animals as part of the daily lives of people, rather than as beings that are fundamentally separate or even alien, could make a useful contribution to work on “zoocriticism” by Tiffin and Huggan. Within the broader range of experiences represented through the everyday, of course, are negative environmental values as well. Not every encounter with a garden is a “positive” one; sometimes it may involve an application of pesticide, or staring at a drought-ridden plot. In order to fully understand environmental attitudes, I argue that we need to make room for people’s negative, ambiguous, and ambivalent views of their local environments as well; this difference is key to challenging prevailing ecocritical ideals of nature itself.

Literature, and the novel in particular, offers an ideal site for the investigation of the everyday. In adapting her own work on Indian film and music, Keya Ganguly reflects on the power of cultural products to represent the everyday:

At this point, one might ask how Williams’s literary-sociological analysis of the industrial novel in Wales has any bearing on the everyday life of middle-class Indian immigrants. The answer lies in a conceptual refinement embedded in the idea of structures of feeling. To wit, although experience does not guarantee truth, underground motivations, underlying worldviews, and unstated relations find symptomatic release in it. Novels embody a form of this ‘expressive causality’; they exemplify one mediation of experience, though for me the point is that other practices do as well. (*State* 67)

Ganguly’s work offers an interesting entry point into a specifically postcolonial environmental everydayness. Ganguly roots her work in the everyday in the tradition of Williams’s close attention to community life as expressions of identity and culture. Particularly, she is interested in Williams’s focus on labour and the industrial landscape, which she terms the “industrial pastoral” (*States* 67). “What I find productive,” Ganguly writes,

is the way Williams rejoins pastoral themes of landscape, place, and labor to the constitution of experience. That said, it must be added that he compacts, even implodes, the tension—or what is more properly thought of as antimony—between subjective consciousness and objective conceptualization of self-interest and social character. (68)

Ganguly alludes to the danger—especially present in postcolonial and ecocritical criticism—of an uncritical endorsement of the truth and/or value of the messages communicated in our chosen bodies of work. There is a need, then, to employ a balanced approach that is both recuperative and critical. Environmental literature, combining as it does the traditional novelistic focus on character and daily life with a heightened awareness of the meaning of place, offers a unique locus for a study of the everyday environment and the richness of everyday experience. In this dissertation, I begin to weave together these different levels of investigation, bearing in mind the risks of taking the everyday as an unmediated truth. I pay close attention to the everyday environmentalisms represented in postcolonial literature, and I read them alongside theoretical projects of postcolonialism, environmentalism, and specifically postcolonial environmentalisms.

### ***Mapping the Project***

The four chapters of my dissertation cover a number of connecting themes which are central to my approach to postcolonial ecocriticism. Namely, these involve the application of an everyday environmental perspective and a concern for environmental justice, which together help ground and de-exoticize readings of the postcolonial environment. Certain of these themes will be highlighted in each chapter, as illustrated below, but taken overall they present a picture of everyday postcolonial environmentalisms at work in the literatures of the global South. I have selected a diverse set of texts that represent many sites of postcolonial cultural production, from the Caribbean to South Africa, and which cover half a century of literary activity. Since the very beginning of this project, my aim has been to unearth the environmentalisms already at play in

postcolonial texts as a means of ensuring that ecological worldviews become a regular part of postcolonial thought. Due to this impetus, I was interested in studying a number of texts from a number of different places in order to present as clear a picture as possible of the environmental undercurrent throughout postcolonial literature. For this reason, my chapters are organized around themes and approaches to reading rather than national literatures. Although I do argue that the texts under study do count as environmentally-oriented literature according to Buell's description of the genre, what is more important here is that my own reading of the texts is an environmental one.

The first chapter, "Bend Like the Grass: Sustainability in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*," employs the concept of the everyday to challenge conventional ecocritical approaches in two ways. The everyday here counteracts two separate, yet inter-related stereotypes. The first misconception, discussed above, suggests that environmental consciousness is a modern import from the West. Here, the everyday lens allows us to see how environmental awareness, and appreciation, is integrated into everyday existence. The second stereotype, which is the inverse of the first; it says that rural women of the global South are natural ecologists. Although this chapter does use the concept of everyday environmentalism to show that the heroine is in fact someone with great ties to the land, and great concern for the environment, I also show that her everyday life is a platform for her growing political consciousness as well, thus dispelling the myth of her passivity. This chapter revisits Markandaya's early postcolonial classic by reading it as a possible ecofeminist text through an analysis of the main character's daily negotiations of her rural lifestyle and a rapidly industrializing, post-Independence India. Markandaya's novel about a peasant farmer and her daily struggles has fallen out of favour, perhaps due to the often dismissive reading of Rukmani, the heroine, as a passive female character, a position which this chapter challenges using de Certeau's concept of tactics and power. Given the troubled history



history of ecofeminist thinking about women in the global South, this chapter interrogates whether or not such an approach is still useful in analyzing postcolonial literature. I argue that due to the important role of nature in configuring Rukmani's place-in-the-world, an ecofeminist analysis is helpful for understanding the connections between nature, community, labour and the self. Rukmani's ultimate decision to return to the land is read not as a retreat, but rather as a thoughtful response to urbanization.

The second chapter, "Jungle Tales: Narrating the Sundarbans in Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie," asks how everyday postcolonial environmentalism articulates different affective human-natural interactions. I explore the importance of storytelling as a mode of coping with and making sense of living in a challenging environment – in this case the Sundarbans, a massive, sporadically populated mangrove forest situated between Bangladesh and India that forms the setting for Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and part of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. This is a fascinating setting because it showcases an important and oft-cited source of friction between postcolonialists and environmentalists: the claim that Western-backed environmental programs often place wilderness preservation and animal protection above the rights of human habitation. Rushdie's text offers an incomplete picture of the Sundarbans, reducing the place to a stage for allegorical drama rather than respecting the history of the forest and the people living there. Ghosh's novel, on the other hand, records this history in detail, telling the story of the Bengali refugees forced violently out of the Sundarbans under the guise of protecting the endangered Royal Bengal tiger habitat. The conflict between the people and the tigers cannot be understood so simply, however. As Annu Jalais and Pablo Mukherjee show, the people of the Sundarbans continue to feel camaraderie with the local tigers, whom they distinguish as ontologically different from the tigers gracing the posters and imaginations of the WWF. This camaraderie is

based on the shared experience of living in a harsh environment, and it is this experience that is explored by the people through story, myth, and theatre.

The third chapter, “Urban Citizenship and Environmental Decay in Rohinton Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey* and Earl Lovelace’s *The Dragon Can’t Dance*,” focuses on the challenge of reading environmentalism in urban texts. Now that more than half of the world’s people live in urban centers, any theory of everyday environmentalism must be able to engage with what nature and the environment mean to people who spend their lives in cities. This chapter focuses on two neglected city environments pockmarked by garbage, overflowing sewers and pests. Within these disenfranchised neighbourhoods, however, small rituals persist which demonstrate an ongoing ethic of care and community that bonds the human with the nonhuman world. Here I show that urban environmentalisms of the poor, may in fact be about need and survival, but that need and survival also have spiritual, emotional and aesthetic components that should not be ignored. Having established the presence of environmental goods, I then turn to examine the environmental “bads” in the texts. Here the gap between the romanticized, exoticized concept of nature in the global South and the repetitive, everyday realities of impoverished urban living is highlighted. I examine how these frustrations lead to social organizing for improved environmental health. By the end of both texts, the situations of the community are little improved, but strong statements have been made about the importance of environmental conditions to the social justice cause.

The final chapter, “Land Mined: Back to the Land in Nadine Gordimer’s *The Pickup* and Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*,” investigates the search for belonging by two cosmopolitan characters – a moneyed, white South African named Julie, and a well-connected, pale-complexioned African-Caribbean named Clare. Julie’s wealth and privileged citizenship and

Clare's education and her ability to "pass"—or rather, the tendency for others to *read* her as white—provides both characters with advantageous means to social and geographic mobility. Despite this access to privilege, both women experience a sense of displacement (one a case of malaise, the other a response to relentless racism) and, as I will show, attempt to resolve these crises by forming an attachment to marginalized places through habitation. In these novels, the everyday presents itself as a quest of transformation. Each character desires to transform herself into a more centred person by cultivating an attachment to place, which she forms through the development of daily attention and habit. In reclaiming her grandmother's land, Clare seeks to reclaim her grandmother's habit of marking time through the land. For Julie, the practice of walking through the desert is a way in which she seeks to establish herself as a part of the place. Hers is a deliberate construction of a new everyday. Neither character would describe her quest as an environmental one, even though the theme of land is central to the formation of their new identities. These are not idyllic back-to-the-land stories. In both novels, our assumptions about the neutrality and innocence of nature are disrupted through the presence of para-military activity on their adopted plots. This chapter closes by asking whether any sort of return to the land is viable in the (terrorized) 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I have focused on the literature of former British-colonized countries in order to draw some clear parallels about the legacies of exploration and colonization on the environmental histories of the Indian subcontinent, Africa, and the Caribbean. As well, as an Anglophone with only a rudimentary level of French, for this project I have chosen to read texts written in English, and not those in translation. In every instance I try to situate the literature and my analysis in the context of these legacies and the reality of globalization as it plays out today. My interest, as I have stated, is in exploring the representation of interactions between people who may not identify themselves as environmentalists and their immediate local environments. I am of the

belief that how we think and act about our personal environs can be an important source for learning more about how to mobilize ourselves towards greater ecological and social justice. Throughout the project “the everyday” will at times be used to invoke the specific strand of Cultural Studies, and at other times it will be used more generally to depict the pattern of our lives as we rise and go about our days in our own specific places.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Bend Like the Grass: Sustainability in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve***

In Kamala Markandaya's 1954 novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, the heroine, Rukmani, is forced onto the threshold of a rapidly changing India marked by the centralization of power, increased economic activity, and urbanization. Unlike her neighbours, who "threw the past away with both hands that they might be the readier to grasp the present," Rukmani "stood by in pain, envying such easy reconciliation" (29). *Nectar in a Sieve* chronicles Rukmani's attempt to retrieve and recuperate those elements of her rural life that she feels most deeply about, namely her sense of community and connection with the land. Markandaya's text, I argue, defies some key stereotypes that this project aims to confront, as outlined in the introduction. Published in the mid-twentieth century, prior to the rise of mainstream environmentalism in North America, *Nectar in a Sieve* resists the belated environmentalist stereotype, in which postcolonial literature is understood to have come only recently to environmentalism. The text demonstrates a complex environmental perspective, embodied by Rukmani's commitment to her rural lifestyle, and informed by her assumed agency. What is unique about this perspective is that it simultaneously illustrates Martinez-Alier and Guha's concepts of Northern and Southern environmentalisms, wherein the former is concerned with the protection and preservation of nature and the latter is concerned with environmental destruction insofar as it threatens livelihoods. Rukmani's engagement with these different levels of environmentalism, I argue, is best expressed through the lens of ecofeminism, which, through its attention to the body and labour, enables us to read Rukmani's everyday practices as environmentally-driven. This lens also helps confront the stereotype of the romantic

primitive—an active stereotype in some problematic early ecofeminist writings—in which the native is part of an unsullied nature. In the second half of this chapter, I read Rukmani's actions through the lens of de Certeau's work on the everyday in order to re-examine Rukmani's relationship with the white doctor, Kenny. This relationship, I argue, can be read as a tactical negotiation of modernity in a way that shows Rukmani does not conform to that stereotype of docile passivity.

Her struggle to maintain dignity and control over her life reflects some of the complex ways in which rural women of the global South negotiate modernity. By emphasizing Rukmani's movement towards becoming an active agent in these negotiations, I reverse the standard critical reading of this character as a stereotypically passive peasant woman. This standard reading is especially flawed, I argue, in light of the under-studied relationship between Rukmani and Kenny, the white doctor in the novel. It is through her discussions with Kenny that Rukmani sharpens her social critique and develops her own perspective on India's future. Here I analyze Rukmani's actions and practices in light of de Certeau's writings on the everyday, arguing that her awakened agency is a form of "making do." Most importantly, though, I see in Rukmani's character the opportunity to revisit ecofeminist theorizing about the relationship between rural women of the global South—and India in particular—and the environment.

Rukmani and her husband are rice farmers and her relationship with nature, like his, is thus mediated through their labour. Through the act of gardening Rukmani develops the type of closeness with the land represented in early ecofeminist writing on the body and spirituality. At the same time, her acute dependence on the land for survival reveals a vulnerability that troubles the celebration of this closeness. In the end, however, Rukmani does favour this precarious direct relationship with nature over the alienation of city life. Through her adoption of a young boy, the

novel ultimately forwards a land-based community ethic that emphasizes connection with the more-than-human world.

### ***Indian Environmentalisms***

Since this project is dedicated to both providing a general postcolonial response to ecocriticism as well as responses informed by the local, it is important to provide some context about the environmental discourse in each of the areas under study. Indian environmentalisms are arguably the most prominent on the international scene, and have had the greatest influence on the development of a critique to mainstream or Western environmentalisms. There are several prominent actors who have helped bring Indian environmentalism to the fore, and a cursory look at the work of three of them, Ramachandra Guha, Arundhati Roy, and Vandana Shiva, will also serve to highlight some of the main concerns of Indian environmentalism.

Environmental historian and sociologist Ramachandra Guha has made many important contributions to Indian environmentalism, including developing its profile abroad. An example of the latter is his public exchange with Western deep ecologist Arne Naess in which he criticized deep ecology for being Westernern-centric and for ignoring the needs of people in the non-global South. Some of his influential books include *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (1989); *Ecology and Equity: the Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* and *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (1992), both co-written with Madhav Gadgil; and *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* (1997), co-authored with Juan Martinez-Alier. Guha's work, which covers colonialism, Independence and the development eras, is keenly interested in the impact of environmental change and deterioration on the diverse populations of India. To this end, in *Ecology and Equity*, he and

Gadgil forward a structural framework of analysis that posits relationship-to-the-environment as a primary mode or organization for Indian society. They find that there are three groups: the majority of this still-rural nation are ‘ecological peoples’ who “depend on the natural environments of their own locality to meet most of their material needs” (3); others are “ecological refugees,” displaced by projects such as dams and mines, who have so “little that they can freely pick up from the natural world, but not much money to buy the commodities that the shops are brimming with either” (4); and finally, in the slim minority, are the elite landowners, entrepreneurs and urban professionals who have the luxury of access to cheap and plentiful food and water—by “[d]evouring everything produced all over the earth, they might be termed *omnivores*” (4). This system reflects Guha’s commitment to crafting an environmental and social analysis that speaks to the specificities of the Indian situation (which he himself acknowledges is perhaps too diverse and complex to even be codified).

Apart from the problem of deforestation, one of the most well-known of India’s environmental issues is the large-scale dam project in the Narmada Valley, the Sardar Sarovar Dam. The project has received both massive funding for the numbers of communities it claims it will serve, as well as massive criticism for the enormous number of people it will displace. Guha is part of the organization opposing the dam, *Narmada Bachao Andolan*, as is another prominent Indian environmental activist and writer, Arundhati Roy.<sup>10</sup> Roy, famous for her 1997 Booker prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things*, soon went on to writing about the environmental policies of India, taking aim at the major decision-making bodies, including the Indian government, the World Bank, and the political structure itself, all of which she argues are ignoring the plight of India’s millions of hungry and impoverished. Her articles, originally

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, however, they have both criticized the other’s approach to environmentalism in the press. See Guha “The Arun Shourie” and Roy “Scimitars in the Sun.”



published for the public, as were many of Guha's articles, in India's *The Outlook* magazine, are now gathered together in a collection entitled *The Cost of Living*.

Perhaps India's internationally best-known environmentalist is Vandana Shiva. Shiva began by writing on issues of forestry, maldevelopment and the mistakes of the Green Revolution from an ecofeminist perspective (in *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, and later, with Maria Mies, *Ecofeminism*), and has since turned her attention towards issues of intellectual property rights with regards to native seeds (*Biopiracy, Soil not Oil*), water needs and uses (*Water Wars*) and questions of environment and representation (*India Divided*). Shiva's critique of development practices, on people as well as on the environment, have always been about the need to respect the approaches to ecology, including epistemologies of the environment, that are being practiced on the ground by Indian peasants, and women in particular. She has been an important voice in raising the concept of local knowledges into higher esteem. For example, Shiva founded the group *Navdanya* which is encouraging small farmers to preserve and recuperate heritage seeds which are at risk due to monoculture farming and attempts by big agribusiness to seek patent rights (and thus control the use and distribution of) seed. Employing the technological discourse familiar to agribusiness, Shiva is able to describe women farmers as already occupying the roles as seed experts, seed breeders, seed selectors. She champions them as the "biodiversity conservers of the world" in a clear attempt to legitimate their existing knowledge through a familiar and Western-validated language. It is Shiva's brand of peasant-driven, communal environmentalism with an emphasis on women's labour that resonates best with Markandaya's text.

***Rukmani, Her Garden, and Ecofeminism***

To understand Rukmani's relationship with the land and her environment, it is important to focus first on the beginning of the novel. This is because *Nectar in a Sieve* is structured in much the same way as another early postcolonial novel, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, where the slow pace and predictable pattern of rural village life is suddenly and irrevocably altered by a disruption brought on by outside forces. Of her early married days Rukmani recalls: "While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for?" (8). The easy rhythm of her narration, and in particular the way she links the beauty of the fields with the beauty her husband saw in her, reflects a harmoniousness and fullness of life that sets the tone for the contrasts to follow. Markandaya's novel, like Achebe's, bears witness to the first arrival of white missionaries and officials, and the presence of both religious (Sikhs and Muslims) and racial foreigners is an important element of the text. Rather than emphasizing this theme of first-contact, however, Markandaya's novel portrays the eruption of large-scale industrialization that marked Nehru's postcolonial policies of development. Interestingly, Rukmani bears these changes much better than Okonkwo, in Achebe's novel, does.

The text establishes its environmental voice through the daily labours of Rukmani and her family as well as through Rukmani's sensitive voice. *Nectar in a Sieve* begins with the young Rukmani's marriage to Nathan, a tenant farmer. When they relocate to Nathan's village far from Rukmani's family home, he is eager to prove himself. He holds up a handful of grain and promises that with "Such harvests as this, you shall not want for anything" (6). With this turn towards the future Markandaya successfully buries the suspicion—in her characters—that things are falling apart. The promise of a bright future is represented in the able body of her husband, as well as the paddy that runs through his lands. A symbiotic relationship is thus established, in

theory at least, between the farmers/producers and nature. The farm soon becomes the centre of their lives, and Rukmani finds her passion in tending the land.

Susheela Rao locates Rukmani's special relationship with nature in her "heightened awareness of nature's beauty" (42) as well as her connection to the rhythms of the seasons. Rao points to many passages in which Rukmani comments on the aesthetic and atmospheric beauty of the landscape. However, I think an analysis of her connection to nature needs to go deeper. If we look in particular at the depictions of Rukmani's work in the garden, we can see that this practice links her with the land through her body and her labour—a theme which will become more clear below in light of Vandana Shiva's work on labour as agency in peasant women. Stacy Alaimo's *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* also offers a useful perspective on the relationship between the body and nature. Alaimo's concept of "trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (2). Her idea is to theorize the body as a permeable space, and the environment as a permeating one, in a way that makes us reconceive of the borders between the two. This "profound shift in subjectivity" (20), takes us beyond the simple concept of connectivity and replaces it with one of corporeality. If the body is open to its environment, as Alaimo explores in her study of chemical sensitivities, then the body is also an environmental site in itself. In Markandaya's text, the body begins as a metaphoric site for Rukmani's maturation, and through the course of the novel, comes to represent the fight for environmental justice.

The garden has a special place in her life and is closely associated with her coming-of-age. Being as young as she is, having married at twelve, Rukmani experiences her own physical, emotional, sexual and psychological development through her work in the garden and the growth

of her vegetables: “I was young and fanciful then,” she recounts, “and it seemed to me not that they grew as I did, unconsciously, but that each of the dry, hard pellets I held in my palm had within it the very secret of life itself, curled tightly within, under leaf after protective leaf” (13). Her first planting of pumpkins is a particularly moving process for her. In the passage describing the pumpkins what is most striking is not the mere satisfaction or pride she feels, but the *pleasure* that the growth provokes in her:

Pumpkins began to form, which, fattening on soil and sun and water, swelled daily larger and larger and ripened to yellow and red, until at last they were ready to eat, and I cut one and took it in. When Nathan saw it he was full of admiration...

“One would have thought you had never seen a pumpkin before,” I said, though pleased with him and myself, keeping my eyes down.

“Not from our land,” said Nathan. “Therefore it is precious, and you, Ruku, are indeed a clever woman.”

I tried not to show my pride. I tried to be offhand. I put the pumpkin away. But pleasure was making my pulse beat; the blood, unbidden, came hot and surging to my face. (10)

There are several things worth noting about this passage. The first is the frank and open manner in which Markandaya describes Rukmani’s delight here. The sensuousness and overtones of sexuality, indicated by her blushing and experiencing “pleasure,” are one of the qualities that make *Nectar in a Sieve* such a remarkable book for its time. In the introduction to the novel Indira Ganesan remarks on her own experience of encountering Indian women’s sexuality in Markandaya’s novel as something totally alien to the picture of Indianness fed to her during her Indian-American girlhood: “At seventeen, I believed all Indian women to be modest and old-fashioned, like my mother” (vii). Although the pumpkin scene uses sexual pleasure as metaphor for nature-pleasure, in other places the text uses nature as a metaphor for sex. In these scenes Rukmani comes closer to the overt sexuality of Kunthi by expressing not only pleasure but

something nearing desire. In the only description of amorousness between Rukmani and Nathan, she recalls her “senses opening like a flower to his urgency” (57), a description which directly echoes the green leaves of her plants “unfurling” under her own “eager gaze” (13). The reliance on nature symbolism here does not naturalize sex itself so much as it does relationships of pleasure and connectedness. This metaphoric reversal serves to reinforce the idea that the fecundity of nature is linked to Rukmani’s sexual maturation. This embodiment of nature is one of the forces that ultimately connects her to her land and that determines her commitment to it later in the text.

Drawing a connection between Rukmani’s sexuality and her ability to grow produce may seem like a dated return to the theorizing of women’s spirituality in early ecofeminist writings, but Alaimo’s concept of trans-corporeality offers a way of theorizing the bodily connection anew. Much of the early ecofeminist writing was part of an important attempt to purge Western thinking of the rigid patriarchal binaries that maintained the oppression of both women and non-human nature through the historic associations of women with nature and as therefore inferior to men (see, for example, Karen J. Warren and Susan Griffin). The combined effect of these hierarchies was a denial of women’s direct experiences in, through and as nature – something which Markandaya’s text certainly attempts to recuperate. One vision of liberation to emerge from this field involved embracing this woman-nature connection, which was often described in spiritual terms and very much rooted in bodily experience (Tong 260). This valorization of the embodied experience can be seen, for example, in the way Starhawk uses the birth metaphor as a way of trying to alter Western value systems (175). These early writings have since come under serious criticism. Of particular concern is the critique that white Western academic feminists constructed harmful romantic stereotypes about women of the global South in their search for ecological idols. As an example, Noel Sturgeon points to how “The Chipko movement [became] a symbolic

center of a discourse about Third World women that paints them as ‘natural environmentalists’ or ‘ultimate ecofeminists,’ reducing them to an idealized peasant woman who is integrated into ‘nature’ through her daily lived activities” (127). Although I appreciate Sturgeon’s scepticism here, I posit the idea that a critical evaluation of these “daily lived activities” through the lens of everyday life theory could act as a corrective to the problem of essentializing.

Given this history of oversimplifying rural women’s relationships with nature, I have been especially sceptical about my own analysis of Rukmani and felt it was important to frame her commitment to the land in relation to larger socio-political and inter-personal frameworks. The amount of critique levelled at ecofeminism, however, has meant that the field has undergone many cycles of self-reflection and today it continues to be an important “strategic discourse,” to use Sturgeon’s words (139), in larger conversations about feminism, environmentalism and social change. Whereas the emphasis on life, and in particular the female body as the giver or sustainer of life, was a common theme in early ecofeminist writings. Current ecofeminist theory, such as Alaimo’s, roots the connection between the subject, the body, and the environment in their shared exposure to harm, however, rather than in their capacity of life. Influenced by Ulrich Beck’s idea about risk society, Alaimo is more interested in accounts of survival, what she terms “material memoirs” (86), than she is in fictionalized accounts of searching for community or communion with nature. I argue that Markandaya’s text, with its dual focus on the aesthetic-spiritual connection with nature and the realities of material poverty and dispossession, offers an opportunity to rejoin these two threads of analysis.

Shiva’s work on the impact of maldevelopment on rural peasants, and women in particular, adds another important dimension to this discussion of women, bodies and nature. Shiva foregrounds the question of labour, which from an environmental justice standpoint is one

of the most important sites for the trans-corporeal exchange between environmental bads and our bodies. In Shiva's *Staying Alive*, she expresses a particularly negative view of the application of Western science and technology on the processes of nature, a stance echoed by another prominent ecofeminist, Carolyn Merchant, in *The Death of Nature*. In protest to this harmful Western-scientific approach, which seeks knowledge through division and reduction, Shiva advocates a holistic approach that recognizes nature as a creative force. For Shiva this creative force is also a feminine one, based on the Hindu concept of *prakriti*, or life-force. Shiva sees the promise of ecological stewardship in the daily practices of women like Rukmani. It would thus be easy to read this novel as a simple expression of Shiva's pronouncements about the potential of rural women of the global South to act as stewards of the land. However, as stated above, this representation itself risks being reductionist and essentialist. According to Niamh Moore, Shiva continues to be what Sturgeon has called ecofeminism's "straw-woman" (137) for critiques of the woman-nature connection.<sup>11</sup> In her own attempt to articulate an anti-racist ecofeminism, Noel Sturgeon points out that in the search for a salve for the perceived Western alienation from nature, ecofeminists have inappropriately borrowed from and appropriated the identities of non-Western women, including Indigenous women, historic, pre-patriarchal European women and, especially, Indian women. Moreover, by denying Western science and technology altogether, such a stance denies the fact that so-called progress and modernization represent changes that some rural women of the global South (for example, Rukmani's neighbour Kunthi) may in fact be enthusiastic about.

There is much, however, that can still be recuperated from Shiva's portrayal of Indian women farmers and peasants, especially in relation to Rukmani's relationship with the land, is Shiva's emphasis on labour. Shiva's statement that "women and nature are associated *not in*

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<sup>11</sup> For a critique of the woman-nature connection, see Janet Biehl.

*passivity but in creativity and in the maintenance of life*” (*Staying Alive* 47, emphasis in the original), could be read as an essentialist comment on women’s reproductive capacities; however, when taken alongside Shiva’s interviews with women living and working in the Himalayan forests, it is clear that the “active maintenance of life” refers to the social and sometimes domestic labour of the women instead. In these interviews it is clear that the women define freedom as the ability *to* work (in a relatively unalienated way), as opposed to, say, freedom *from* work.

According to one interviewee, the three most important things in life are “freedom and forests and food” (249). “Our freedom to work in the forests and to farm,” she says “is very important” (249).

Another woman claims that their *shakti*, or strength,

comes to us from these forests and grasslands, we watch them grow, year in and year out through their internal *shakti* and we derive our strength from it. ... we eat food from our own fields. All this gives us not just nourishment for the body but a moral strength, that we are our own masters, we control and produce our own wealth. ... Our power is nature’s power. (250)

These are clearly descriptions of the kind of creative, productive and non-alienating forms of work lauded by Marx as necessary to the expression of a full humanity. Hooks has called this “humanizing labour” (133). It is this commitment to a certain mode of rural labour, and this belief in the value of labour to themselves that motivated the women to advocate on behalf of the forests against deforestation. I argue that this same commitment moves Rukmani. The satisfaction and pleasure she gets from nature is not defined by leisure or recreation, as William Cronon argues is more typical of the Western/North American expression of environmentalism (78), but rather through work and production. This focus on labour and labouring is not unique to postcolonial environmentalisms, of course, but it is a key feature of them, especially where that labour is subsistence or for survival. In *This Fissured Land*, in fact, Gadgil and Guha point to the forced transition from subsistence to commercial natural resource use to be a major source of ecological friction between the Indian and the British governance of Indian forests and lands. Whereas



contemporary postcolonial literature often depicts life within a capitalist mode of resource use, the emphasis on labouring closer to the land often persists—at least in those environmentally-oriented texts. Rukmani describes work and fulfilment in the same breath: “The sowing of seed disciplines the body and the sprouting of the seed uplifts the spirit, but there is nothing to equal the rich satisfaction of a gathered harvest, when the grain is set before you in shining mounds and your hands are whitened with the dust of good rice” (102). It is clear that her perspective on labour is becoming outmoded when her sons mastermind a strike at the tannery where they work. Their discourse on rights, labour and power is foreign to Rukmani: “I do not know what reply to make—[my sons] are strangers. Nathan says we do not understand, we must not interfere: he takes my hand and draws me away” (64). Her experience of working the land structures her ideas of labour relations and she is unable—at this point, at least—to divorce the worker from the work she does. For this reason she cannot grasp the idea that her sons would take a contradictory stand towards their work.

What is striking about Markandaya’s novel, from a postcolonial ecocritical perspective, is the ways in which her text first offers, and then resists, the pastoral. As in all of the texts under study, there is a resistance to depicting nature as simply a sacred mother-figure or a blighted power. Instead, tones of ambivalence and ambiguity mix with an appreciation or love for one’s surroundings. The descriptions of the farm, for example, evoke ideas of an unspoiled, fecund, provincial landscape that is at peace with, and always nostalgic for, its even more harmonious past—all features which Lawrence Buell variously associates with the pastoral. On the other hand, the text is not shy about the downsides of country life. The following description of the storm-ravaged farm defies the idea that the rural countryside is a place of refuge: “Uprooted trees sprawled their branches in ghastly fashion over streets and houses, flattening them and the bodies of men and women indiscriminately” (41). This tension between the pastoral and the anti-pastoral

is, according to Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, a common theme in postcolonial writing. They discuss some of the complexities of the postcolonial pastoral in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, where they write that it “affords a useful opportunity to open up the tension between ownership and belonging in a variety of colonial and postcolonial contexts: contexts marked, for the most part, by a direct or indirect engagement with often devastating experiences of dispossession and loss” (85). Markandaya’s novel reflects on this loss directly through the land-grabbing machinations of the tannery as well as the simple fact of reliance on unpredictable natural patterns, such as flood and drought.

When *Nectar in a Sieve* is read in the context of the post-Independence Indian “hunger-novel,” the necessity of politicizing the environment becomes clear. For although there is much to celebrate in the way Rukmani understands and values the world around her, the unrelenting cycles of flood and drought are a reminder of the material reality of living on the land. It is this dire reality that Indian and Indian diasporic writers like Markandaya have sought to expose. S.Z.H. Abidi writes that “[a]fter the Independence the novelists were free from the moral obligation of voicing the political aspirations of their people in throwing away the foreign yoke and the national freedom had brought their revolutionary activities to a standstill. Naturally enough, they diverted their attention to the internal problems of India” (5). These problems included the fact of hunger and near-starvation for millions of peasants. Uma Parameswaran agrees that it is primarily hunger and the subsequent will to live that drive the plot and theme of Markandaya’s text (56, 57). The novel focuses on the debasements brought on by hunger: starvation, prostitution, emigration, the splitting-up of families, cheating, blackmailing, and so on. Rukmani’s family’s absolute dependence on nature is so severe as to be pitiable for most of the novel. Her survival is so often tested and tried by rains and droughts that the reader cannot help but despair at what she calls the “mighty impotence of [the] human endeavour” (42). It is this struggle that leads Parameswaran to

argue that “[i]n *Nectar in a Sieve* [nature] is neither the all-intimidating protagonist found in early Canadian or Australian literature nor a mere backdrop, but a character, as it were, in the action” (56). To say, however, that “Nature” is a character risks reducing the complexity of the representation of nature in the novel into one single force, capable of acting, in Parameswaran’s words, as either “saviour/tyrant” (56). At the same time, to suggest that nature is a character in the novel does open up the possibility of developing relationships with other characters in the novel, and is thus a useful way of imagining the role of nature in this text.

Rukmani herself, in what Rao calls the most important passage in the novel, describes nature thus: “Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid; but look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, and it has you by the throat” (39). There is a sense in this passage that Rukmani is trying to come to terms with her own role in this very meaningful yet strangely ambivalent relationship. Although in this passage she appears to speak from a position of power, throughout most of the novel she seems to accept her position at the mercy of nature. She expresses fear and hope, but rarely anger. For the greater part of the novel she and her family are undernourished and over-worked. In one prosperous season following a year of brutal drought, she depicts the conflicting feelings that arise as they watch over their crop: “Indeed, it did our hearts good to see the paddy ripen. We watched it as a dog watches a bone, jealously, lest it be snatched away; or as a mother her child, with pride and affection. And most of all with fear” (93). Amongst the many emotions that nature evokes for Rukmani, this passage highlights a palpable sense of the loss of control over nature that, although it does not dominate Rukmani’s life, does threaten to take it all away. The family is hungry; their youngest dies of starvation while outside the harvest ripens, ever so slowly—“indifferent to [their] need” (71). It is almost as painful to watch the death of her son as it is to watch Rukmani’s apparently passive acceptance of

her situation. Barely roused to anger, she apparently accepts the situation as part of her way of living: “This is one of the truths of our existence as those who live by the land know,” she writes, “that sometimes we eat and sometimes we starve. . . . Still, while there was land there was hope” (132). The land offers the opportunity for self-sufficiency—it does not guarantee it.

### ***Changing Relations: the Tannery***

In his *Postcolonial Romanticism: Landscape and the Possibilities of Inheritance*, Roy Osamu Kamada reformulates what the romantic or pastoral landscape looks like in postcolonial literature. What he calls “postcolonial romanticism” (3) echoes strongly with my reading of Markandaya in this novel, although with the distinct difference that I wish to emphasize the *unromantic* nature of the writing, and Kamada wishes to instead alter the meaning of “romantic” to suit what he rightly sees as the “historically materialist” (3) foundations of such writing. Speaking of Derek Walcott’s work, Kamada writes that nature is both traumatic and sublime. His emphasis on the political natures of postcolonial nature echoes my larger comment about the insistence on an environmental justice approach. As Kamada writes:

The landscapes that [postcolonial authors] write about is necessarily politicized; their own subjectivities are intimately implicated in both the natural beauty as well as the traumatic history of the place; they confront and engage to varying degrees the history of their postcolonial geographies, the history of diaspora, of slavery, of the capitalist commodification of the landscape, and the devastating consequences this history has on the individual. (3)

In Markandaya’s work, her politicization of nature is seen primarily in two instances: Rukmani’s embodied relationship with the land and the commodification of nature by way of the tannery. For Rukmani, the first crime of the tannery is that it is built on the *maidan*, an open field shared by all. “They had invaded our village with clatter and din,” she recollects, “had taken from us the *maidan* where our children played, and had made the bazaar prices too high for us” (4).

Here Markandaya is, intentionally or not, echoing a pattern of the division and privatization of land that has been the hallmark of industrial development throughout colonizing and colonized worlds. Shiva and Mies demonstrate that the loss of the commons is a symptom of neocolonialism in the postcolonial context, arguing that “colonialism and capitalism transformed the land and soil from being a source of life and a commons from which people draw sustenance, into private property to be bought and sold and conquered; development continued colonialism’s unfinished task” (105). The intrusion of industrialization brings with it the commodification of land and bodies. Without this free space, and with the imposing presence of male strangers in the town, Rukmani keeps her young daughter Ira close to her. Indeed, the arrival of the tannery marked “the end of [her] daughter’s carefree days ... She had been used to come and go with her brothers, and they went whither they wished” (29-30). Rukmani’s daughter was not the only one whose freedom was disrupted by the presence of the tannery. Rukmani noticed the way the animals avoided the village now, too. “At one time,” she recounts, “there had been kingfishers here, flashing between the young shoots for our fish; and paddy birds; and sometimes, in the shallower reaches of the river, flamingos, striding with ungainly precision among the water reeds, with plumage of a glory not of this earth. Now birds came no more, for the tannery lay close” (69). The significance of the tannery also lies in its consumption of animals. In addition to disturbing the local wildlife, the main function of the tannery is to transform animals into leather for consumer goods. Rukmani describes it as a sort of mass (post)killing machine:

Not a month went by but somebody’s land was swallowed up, another building appeared. Day and night the tanning went on. A never-ending line of carts brought the raw material in—thousands of skins, goat, calf, lizard and snake skins—and took them away again tanned, dyed and finished. It seemed impossible that markets could be found for such quantities—or that so many animals existed—but so it was, incredibly. (47)

Rukmani appears to object to the speciesist nature of this industry that profits from the slaughter of non-human animals. When taken alongside Rukmani's fears for her daughter's safety, Markandaya's novel becomes an exemplar of the feminist theorizing of Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan, among others, who have worked to highlight the connections between the subordination of women and the subordination of animals, often in terms of direct physical harm suffered at the hands of men.

Of course, when Rukmani's son is killed by the guards at the tannery, it becomes clear that Markandaya's critique is not only about gender; class and caste vulnerabilities are also her concerns. Despite what may look like a growing lower-middle class because of the wage-work that the tannery offers, Markandaya shows that its real effect is to exacerbate the existing gaps between variously positioned people, making the vulnerable even more so. These vulnerabilities have the effect of making living off the land even more difficult at the same time as they alienate people from the land. This shift is evident in the local marketplace. Rukmani had always sold her vegetables—those nice enough to fetch a price, “leaving the spoilt or bruised vegetables for ourselves” (22)—to Old Granny to trade in the market, but with the rising prices of goods the petty moneylenders had begun to seize greater control of the buying and selling trade, able to pay growers like Rukmani a little more for their goods. Yet, as Rukmani astutely points out, the benefit was outweighed by the higher costs of goods. “No sugar or dhal or ghee,” she explains, “have we tasted since they came, and should have none so long as they remain” (28). Despite their hunger, Rukmani remains fixed on the idea of acting according to caste dictates. When her son says he will work in the tannery to earn money to buy the food they desperately need, she admonishes him: “You are not of the caste of tanners. What will our relations say?” (51). Her prejudices are further revealed when she discusses the wives of the high-ranking Muslim men who run the factory under its white owner. She is unable to see past their differences, calling the

women “a queer lot” and expressing pity for the way their veiled lives “deprived [them] of the ordinary pleasures of knowing warm sun and cool breeze upon their skin” (48). On one occasion one of the women calls Rukmani into her home to buy produce from her. Rukmani’s observation that “Her fingers, fair and slender, were laden with jewelled rings, any one of which would have fed us for a year” (48), is invested with the multi-layered ways in which class, caste and religious difference are exacerbated by the tannery; or, that the tannery, by bringing those of different class, castes, and religions into one place, at least, showcases the existing hierarchies and power differentials between the groups.

The end result of the tannery’s existence, however, is the displacement of vulnerable groups such as the small farmers who do not even own the land they farm. Eventually, after too many bad seasons, and after her sons have all been lured off the land by paid work, she and her husband can no longer pay their dues; the landowner sells the land to the tannery, thus confirming Rukmani’s fears that “the tannery would eventually be our undoing. [For] it had spread like weeds ... strangling whatever life grew in its way” (18).<sup>12</sup> Still, even in the heat of her disappointment, she cannot sustain this rage. The same acceptance with which she put up with starvation drives her to concede that “whatever extraneous influence the tannery might have exercised, the calamities of the land belong to it alone, born of wind and rain and weather” (132). She has once again suppressed her anger in favour of tolerance.

Rukmani’s philosophy of acceptance mimics nature’s disinterest in her own fate, revealing again an unromantic view of nature as a benign power. She may have cursed the “cruel, blue skies” when they refused to give rain, but at bottom she knew this was an impersonal act on

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<sup>12</sup> The reference to “weeds,” of course, reveals that the narrator, here adopting Rukmani’s point of view, has not shed her cultural perspective on nature, which makes distinctions between desirable and non-desirable nature. The weed metaphor does not take into account that weeds are weeds because we have characterized them in a specific way with respect to our use of the environment.

the part of the skies, that they were “indifferent” to her need, rather than spiteful towards it. Rukmani takes this same approach to the social world, acknowledging its injustice, but never being roused out of her tolerance. Of her hungry children, she says, “their faces faded; the two younger ones began crying listlessly from hunger and disappointment. I had no words to comfort them” (42). When the landowner’s man comes to collect the dues following the drought from which no harvest was produced, Nathan tries in vain to plead with the man that they have nothing to give; Rukmani merely says that he is just doing his job. This is the aspect of Rukmani’s character that most critics focus on when they call her a “typical Indian woman. . . . an upholder of Indian tradition” (Abidi 94). In this reading Rukmani embodies values stereotypically associated with Hinduism and Hindu women in particular, including a philosophy of fatalism, acceptance, cautious optimism, and a devotion to family (Jha). Rekha Jha remarks that in contrast to Western cosmologies, Indian values often come across as conservative (58). Indeed, Rukmani does express a keen dislike and distrust of the changes being wrought in the name of modernization. Yet what may at first be perceived as a static conservatism reveals itself instead to be a tactic of negotiation, encapsulated by Nathan’s advice to “bend like the grass, that you do not break” (28). This metaphor, from which the title of this chapter is derived, speaks both to Rukmani’s ability to adapt and to the important place of nature in the lives of the characters, informing as it does this central metaphor. Diverting from the standard literary interpretation of Rukmani’s character as traditional, I focus instead on the ways in which she can be seen to interact with and even embody modernity. Here I build on Uma Parameswaran’s work of trying to reintroduce Kamala Markandaya back into the postcolonial canon from a new perspective. To this end, I will examine the relationship between Rukmani and Kenny. Her intellectual affair with the worldly white doctor reveals a different dimension of her character and represents one of the important steps she makes in assuming agency over the conditions of her own life.



***Rukmani versus Kenny: Negotiating Modernity***

Rukmani develops into a stronger, more assertive character through her interactions with Kenny. Although their discourse is primarily about the character of Indian people and the shape of Indian society, the tactics that she develops through her relationship with Kenny ultimately enable her to achieve her original vision of maintaining her life on the land. Thus, although in this section I focus on Rukmani's negotiations of gender issues, I argue that these same techniques are later employed by her to reconnect with her everyday environmentalisms. Her boldness in this relationship can be read as a gesture to something larger than the local, an indication that she is not a victim of modernity but is rather in dialogue with it. I am particularly interested in avenues of power adopted by Rukmani to make this change. De Certeau's writings about the politics of everyday life, particularly his essay "Making Do': Uses and Tactics," offers a useful perspective. De Certeau is interested in the way in which people, through their repetitive, daily experiences, actively navigate the immense and nearly flattening systems of authoritative power that govern the world in which they operate. According to de Certeau, these systems of power, or strategies, do not render subjects powerless. Instead, he writes that people "make do" in these strategic spaces by employing what he calls tactics: the manoeuvres of the weak. To put it differently, tactics are the avenues of power accessible to the ostensibly powerless—people like Rukmani. One of de Certeau's more interesting examples of a tactic is taken from the French, *la perruque*, also known as poaching. This is the practice of workers using work time, or spare workplace resources, for their own creative production. "It is different from absenteeism," he writes, "in that the worker is officially on the job. *La perruque* may be as simple a matter as a secretary's writing a love letter on 'company time' or as complex as a cabinetmaker's 'borrowing' a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room" (25). His theories of everyday resistance have great

potential for resonance within postcolonial theory. Here, I use his concept of “tactics” and “making do” to help us transform our understanding of Rukmani. She is participating in everyday resistance through her relationship with the doctor Kennington. Here she comes into relation with a representative of the colonial power—the foreign white doctor—she tries to enter into a somewhat egalitarian, or at least human, relationship with him. She sees herself reflected in his eye as a stupid peasant, but this neither frightens nor dissuades her. Instead she continues to determinedly be herself.

Kenny first enters Rukmani’s life when he helps to ease the death of her ailing mother, and Rukmani later consults him for treatment. At first she is intimidated by Kenny; because of his foreignness but also because of his gruff manner and his impatience with her cultural customs. But very quickly she becomes used to his presence, and comes to appreciate him for his honest yet compassionate bedside manner as he tends to her dying mother. Over time their relationship grows, and it is clear that theirs is a different sort of friendship than he has with other villagers. Perhaps it is due to the fact of Rukmani’s literacy; she was taught to read and write by her father, and she values these skills very highly. This prized education may be what gave Rukmani the confidence and initial encouragement to relate to Kenny on a different level. Theirs is not a romantic relationship, but is instead what I might call an intellectual affair. Rukmani seems to enjoy conversations with Kenny that she never engages in with her husband, who can neither read nor write and who shows little interest in the world beyond their village. She and Kenny are both adversaries and collaborators. They share secrets that Nathan does not know and would not necessarily understand – such as the fact that he helped her and her daughter overcome their infertility.

It is perhaps on this point of their collaboration that I can most easily demonstrate my argument for Rukmani as an active negotiator. When Rukmani finds that she is having trouble conceiving after the birth of her first child, she and her mother visit the temple regularly to make offerings and pray for a child, all to no avail. When Kenny learns of her difficulties, he offers to treat her. His intervention makes it possible for her to have many more children. However, fearing that Nathan would be upset that she had put herself “in the hands of a foreigner” (21), Rukmani never tells her husband about this. By seeking out his help and concealing it from her husband, Rukmani is exploiting gaps in the system; she is subverting what she understands to be the limiting patriarchal control over her life by taking charge of her body—that most immediate of environments—in accessing the medical services she needs to create the family that she wants. The doctor’s visit says much about Rukmani’s relationship to the strategies of the local patriarchy—namely, that she is willing and prepared to circumvent its control where it does not suit her needs. The doctor’s visit has meaning outside the visit itself. In addition to resisting the constraints of the local patriarchy, Rukmani’s visit to the doctor, as an assertion of her own agency over her body, is also a way of undermining Kenny’s perception of Indian peasants as “meek, suffering fools” (43). This is the “metaphorical shift” that makes the visit a “sign of something other than itself.”

As an adversary, Kenny acts as a pessimist to Rukmani’s complacent optimism (often read as fatalism from the outside). At the end of a particularly bad drought Rukmani insists that she has a little rice stored away that will last “until times are better”; the doctor lashes out by responding “Times will not be better for many months. Meanwhile you will suffer and die.... Why do you not demand—cry out for help—do something?” (44). Kenny believes that his worldliness gives him the ability to see the larger picture and to pass judgement on the attitudes of the peasants he treats. At times his diatribes against the Indian people verge on racist and are at the

least paternalistic (such as when he says “I can only take you people ... in small doses” (70)). It must be said, though, that his frustration at the plight of the Indian peasants often reflects that of the (white, Western) reader: his frustration, for example, over Rukmani’s fatalistic attitude and her refusal to demand more from the State, especially as her family suffers from severe malnourishment, reflects the reader’s desire for a particular kind of heroine—one who will fight blindly to succeed; Markandaya resists this easy characterization of Rukmani, though, by positioning her instead as neither victim nor hero (much in the same way that Markandaya allows Rukmani to be a product of her times, with all the class and religious prejudices that entails). The author also anticipates the reactions of the Western reader by including such a character as Kenny in her novel. In this way, she is creating a strategy for deflecting specific objectives to her novel.

Although Rukmani and Kenny have markedly different perspectives and priorities, it is just as clear that there exists a closeness between them. For her own part, Rukmani can often be found reaching out to the doctor, or longing for his presence as she does at the birthday celebration of her first son. On one occasion, when she hears that the doctor has returned after one of his long absences, she goes to welcome him, as others have done, with a garland of marigolds and some limes. Finding herself alone with him her curiosity finally overtakes her shyness and she begins to ask about his home-life, whether he has a wife and family back in England and so on. When she presses him about why his wife does not accompany him, they enter into a debate about gender roles and the concept of duty: she says it was his wife’s duty to follow him to India: “a woman’s place is with her husband” (106). He responds to say that she simplifies everything, because her knowledge of the world is so limited. At first, then, he seems as dismissive of her as ever. But she finally speaks back to him, defending her own intellectual standing, saying that her knowledge is “Limited, yes ... Yet not wholly without understanding” (106). At this act of self-

defence she notes a change in him: “For the first time since I had known him I saw a spark of admiration in his eyes” (106).

This encounter is thus a turning point, not only in their relationship but in Rukmani’s ability to speak up for herself. When she is cast adrift in the city, she relies on these newly developed skills to set herself up, first as a letter-writer and then, with the help of a street-wise boy, as a stone-breaker in a quarry. This ability to “make-do” sets her apart from other characters, like her neighbour Kunthi. Although at first Rukmani envies her neighbour’s ability to “[throw] away the past with both hands that they might be the readier to grasp the present” (29), it becomes clear through the novel that blindly changing with the times is not necessarily the best response. Kunthi, for example, ends up working in the sex trade to service the town men that the new tannery brings to their village—this is not the path Rukmani would have wanted to choose.

By the end of the novel Rukmani has nearly lost nearly everything. After being evicted from their land, she and Nathan head to the city in hopes of living with one of their sons who had left the farm in search of work years ago; they never do find him. Immersed in the chaos of the city, they feel alienated. They are suddenly without a home, a community, or means. Rukmani then makes two significant responses to this downturn in her life. The first, her decision to return to the land, can best be understood in the framework of de Certeau’s tactics, but the second, her decision to adopt a homeless boy, takes us back to ecofeminism through her commitment to an expanded notion of community.

By rejecting the aimlessness and anonymity of the city in favour of the hard life on the land, Rukmani reverses one of the greatest narratives of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—the rural exodus towards urbanization. This move is perhaps her cleverest tactic of all. De Certeau writes that “a tactic is determined by the *absence of power* just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of

power” (38). If we understand urbanization and industrialization as strategies—that is, ways of organizing people and resources and space that therefore produce power—then turning her back on property, paid labour, and the city becomes a way of embracing her own *absence of power*. To return to Achebe’s Okonkwo, we might say that by rigidly ignoring his own absence of power in the new order of things, he was unable to see the gaps in the system that he could exploit (not to his own immediate gain maybe, but to some form of advantage). This is precisely what I argue Rukmani did, and what her relationship with the white doctor helped pave the way for. She “manoeuvred” her way through the various limiting practices of power until she found a space for herself in its undercurrent; and for her this space was back on the land she had never owned to begin with.

By reconverting the rural into a place where she can be comfortable, she exemplifies the idea of resistance as “escaping without leaving.” That is to say that the grid of strategies cannot be exited, but it can be subverted through “trickery,” through manoeuvres. Ian Buchanan focuses on this phrase of de Certeau’s (this “escaping without leaving”) as a means to explain how the colonized is never in a state of fixed powerlessness vis-à-vis the colonizer, but is rather in a position to exercise power (again, within the gaps opened up by the strategic or institutional power). Buchanan goes farther to show that the “weak,” here the colonized, are actually the ones who “define the limits of strategy, and inform its modes of operation in a fundamental sense, thus forcing the strategic to respond to the tactical” (paragraph 21). By extension, Rukmani’s position becomes not only one of an agent of her own will (as I at first suggested), but as a force that the postcolonial state must respond to—something which the novel itself does not suggest. Although Buchanan seems to suggest that this power to shape the strategic forces can be seen at the level of the individual, his own examples tend towards the collective (saying, for instance, that “prisoners determine the level of security required at a particular [penal] institution” (21)). If it is difficult to

see Rukmani's impact on the postcolonial state, we can at least see her impact on the broader community.

In the city, Rukmani and Nathan find that they are forced to compete with many other newcomers. Changes in agricultural economy were forcing people off the land and into the cities in droves. Many of these people ended up, like Rukmani and Nathan, living on charity in the city's temples. If hunger and fear marked the country life it also marred life in the city. Resources were few and with each new arrival the tension in the temple grew: "A few [of the residents] were antagonistic and openly so ... they saw their share of food shrinking with each additional mouth" (165). Ever industrious, Rukmani sets up a stand as a letter-writer and reader, but competition is stiff, and the prejudice against a female letter-writer means she earns very little money. When Puli, the young boy who acted as their guide when they first arrived in the city, enquires about her wages, he tells them they could be making more working in the quarry. This type of piece-meal, hard physical labour not only signifies their lack of social position, it is also quite the opposite of the way they laboured on the land that they were forced to leave. Moreover, the quarry, like the tannery, represents a direct assault on nature which is, again, in opposition to the productive work of their organic farm. Although the job provides income and some sense of direction, it is hazardous and highly stressful, for they have to be on constant watch for dynamite blast warnings. The strain is too much for Nathan and he dies in the street one rainy day after work.

Rukmani's care for Puli can be read in the context of this sense of communion with her fellow creatures. The connections between her affection for Puli and her care of animals are made clear in the novel through a few key references. First, Rukmani remarks that the children living on the street behave "like animals" around food (152). Such a comparison between children on the street and animality is another sign that Rukmani's ecological lens can be highly problematic at

times (as when she referred to the Tannery as a “weed”). The relationship between the language of animality and the oppression and mistreatment of humans has been well-documented (see Chapter Four on women and animals). There is an undertone of the problematic civilizing-gesture in Rukmani’s remark about the children’s state. Nevertheless, at the same time she is also expressing an element of concern. The child himself draws on similar discourse, announcing that he “is called Puli [tiger] after the king of animals, and I am leader of our pack” (153). As a lost newcomer to the city, Rukmani feels connected to this wandering child who survives not only his loneliness, but his disability due to leprosy. Rukmani admires Puli’s bravado and his refusal to be the pitied. Together, by pooling their resources and their labour, Rukmani eventually saves enough money to return to her village, for “with each passing day my longing for the land grew” (166). She recognizes the futility of this move, knowing that they “left because we had nothing to live on, and if I went back it was only because there was nothing here either” (175). By deciding to go back home to the land that had deserted her, Rukmani reverses the fate of rural migrants everywhere. She chooses not to accept the jarring cityscape as her fate.

Rukmani does not go alone, though. Knowing that eventually leprosy would rob Puli of his independence, she asks him to come with her. Reflecting on his sad fate, she muses that “there *is* a limit to the achievement of human courage” (176, my emphasis), but in her there seems to be no end in sight. Rukmani extends the limited conception of care to her non-biological family and even to the non-human animals in her life. She takes Puli back home with her and although in truth she knows she has little to offer the boy, by bringing him to live near her old farm she is sharing the greatest wealth she has ever known—the nearness to the land; “life to my starving spirit” (186). Her son and daughter welcome them back onto their small plot of leased land and the reader is left to imagine the difficult continuation of their efforts to support themselves both through and against the new order of things.



### ***Conclusion***

Rukmani's devotion to nature is always tempered by the reality of crop failure and starvation. This is everyday environmentalism in its messy form, where nature is simultaneously a comfort, a site of devotion, and the source of frustration and misery. From breaking stones in the quarry to waiting out the monsoons, Rukmani confronts nature in its rawness throughout the course of her regular life. In this chapter I privileged the concepts of labour and daily negotiations as a way of comprehending Rukmani's ability to endure nature in this form. By focusing on labour as an important aspect of her relationship with the land, and by contrasting it with her sons' strike and her employment in the quarry, I highlighted the inseparability of reproductive labour from other forms of labour. It also became clear that it is necessary to situate Rukmani's experiences of/on the land alongside other aspects of her character, suggesting that an ecofeminist analysis can be productive as long as it is used, as Sturgeon suggests, as a "feminist intervention" rather than "a set of new, independent theoretical arguments" (145). In leaving the garden to focus on her relationship with Kenny, for instance, another side of Rukmani's character was revealed. Her ability to advocate on her own behalf, and on behalf of the Indian people, in the face of Kenny's pessimism was an important complement to the experiential work on the farm and in the garden. Her final (re)turn towards the local must be read, then, as an active, positive choice and not a retreat to the relative safety of her village. Her negotiations with Kenny can be read in reverse as practice for this last chapter when her determination would be most needed. What is striking about this last transformation, though, is that in many ways her life at the end resembles very much her life at the beginning of the novel. In this sense, then, the novel privileges a concept of transformation that emphasizes recuperation over linear progression. Rukmani's journey is an example of 'making do' in the face of industrial, social, political and economic changes. Her

decision to return to the land, and her desire to share that life with those she cares about constitutes her response to these changes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Telling Jungle Stories: The Sundarbans in Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie**

This chapter explores the interactivity of cultural and natural forces that emerge through stories about the Sundarbans, a sparsely populated tropical mangrove forest bordering India and Bangladesh. Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* first brought the Sundarbans to my attention. Ghosh's richly layered description of the land, the people, and the animals of the Sundarbans revealed a unique environment hobbled by economic problems and charged with mythology. Research into the source of Ghosh's knowledge of the Sundarbans led to the work of anthropologist Annu Jalais, whose book *Forest of Tigers* was far from complete when she conversed with Ghosh about the complex and sometimes troubled socio-cultural histories of the place. What both Jalais and Ghosh highlight is the fact that the culture of the Sundarbans constructs a set of very specific, locally-based environmental ethics. What makes postcolonial environmental literature different (from, say, US nature writers or even postcolonial author Salman Rushdie, as we will see), is that it shows nature and culture as co-constitutive in sometimes hybrid and sometimes combative ways. In this chapter I want to draw attention to the process of narrating the environment in ways that refuse a comfortable refuge to Western readers engaged in a literary form of ecotourism. This refusal is an important thread throughout this project, where author Gordimer (Chapter Four) simultaneously offer us a comfortable environmental escape at the same time as they undermine the idea of an escape altogether. For his

part, Amitav Ghosh depicts the Sundarbans not as an exotic jungle, but instead as a place where the human presence is keenly and actively reconstructed again and again in the practice of their everyday lives, much in the way the local people must rebuild the berms which keep the tides from eroding their land. In the Sundarbans, the lingering sense of risk brought on by the harsh everyday environment requires a belief in an environmental order of things in which the people themselves firmly know their place. The residents collectively achieve this belief through the repeated telling and performing of the story of the goddess Bonbibi, saviour of the pure-hearted and the only protection against tigers. The legend of Bonbibi, which looms so large over the ecological heart of the Sundarbans, is a story so specifically located within place, I ask whether such locally-derived narratives, and the environmental ethics they represent, can be successfully translated to outside audiences. In particular, I am interested in analyzing how different storytelling genres, magical realism, realism, and folk-theatre, shapes the way a place gets told. Alex Loftus, writing about place of urban artistic intervention, writes that such projects demonstrate “the way in which everyday environments have become both a subject of and, importantly, a means of, artistic production” (326). Loftus’ work on the intersection between the production of art, and the “reworking of socio-nature” (326) relationships reinforces what is essential to this project, which is the belief in the literary form itself as an intervention into (and a creator of) environmental thought. More importantly, Loftus’ use of the term “everyday environment” in describing the site of this environmental-artistic production supports the idea that the everyday itself—that space of the mundane and the mysterious—is gaining attention as a useful site for theorizing environmental action. Although my entire project engages with story through literary criticism, in this chapter I concentrate more deeply on storytelling as it relates to knowledge and knowledge production. This chapter focuses on representations of the Sundarbans as a place where human culture, history, and settlement collide and coexist in creative ways with

the nonhuman world. I am interested in the way Ghosh's novel aligns the marginalized people of the Sundarbans with the land in a way that helps us theorize subaltern ecologies.

Recent interest in the world's coastal regions (as a result of their vulnerability to the effects of climate change) has contributed to a proliferation of writing on tidal zones; a side-effect of the Anthropocene, then, is that the massive mangrove forest shared by India and Bangladesh has become a legitimate subject in its own right. Of course, for the people living in the Sundarbans, the jungle has always been the subject of stories. The subaltern histories of the Sundarbans are slowly beginning to be told in the academic literature on postcolonial, Indian and environmental studies. Once of interest mostly to naturalists and development workers, new scholarship on the Sundarbans distinguishes itself through its depiction of a region inflected with ecological richness, human patterns of settlement and migration, struggles for power, and a place alive with myth and religion. The famous home of the Royal Bengal Tiger is being recast as home to marginalized peoples, failed imperialist projects as well as rare and essential environmental features. Many of these themes come together powerfully in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, a novel which aims to unearth these histories and enter them into the context of a globalized India. Ghosh's novel is perhaps the best-known example of postcolonial environmental literature to date for its blatant interest in confronting the reader with the ongoing, sometimes violent and always political tensions between the preservation of "nature" and the support of human culture/habitation. Alongside Ghosh's piece of decidedly environmental writing, at Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, demonstrates a more typically anthropocentric preoccupation with a jungle environment's unknowable, other-worldly qualities. The Sundarbans play a short but significant role in Rushdie's novel, acting mostly as a catalyst for the human drama.

### ***Writing People into the Landscape***

Essays and monographs on the Sundarbans often begin in the same way: a lush description of the environment which emphasizes the natural form or ecology that slowly gives way to an introduction of the human/social and political elements (see, for example, Banerjee, Garnier, and Sarkar). This is noteworthy because these same authors are often critical of the false divisions between human and environment, and are moreover critically aware of the construction of wilderness as a culturally-specific concept. And yet each begins with a description of place that commits the erasure of the social. Even Jalais's *Forest of Tigers*, which is probably the best example of the kind of work that does sensitive place-based cultural studies alongside environmental studies, opens with these lines:

The Sundarbans, literally 'beautiful forest' in Bengali, is an immense archipelago situated between the vast Indian Ocean to the south and the fertile plains of Bengal to the north. It is animated by two opposing flows of water: fresh water coursing all the way down from the Himalayas towards the Bay of Bengal and salt water streaming up with the tide from the Indian Ocean into the Bengali hinterland. (1)

There are several possible ways to account for these types of introductions. The first is that the region does remain largely unknown to those not living near it or studying it, and therefore a geographic description offers many important details to help one situate the place and to imagine what it looks like. Although many people have heard of the Royal Bengal (or "Man-eating") tiger, it is likely that they know little about its specific habitat within India, let alone Bangladesh. It is therefore necessary to introduce the region and it makes logical sense to begin with the physical description of the unique features of the ecosystem. A second factor may be that writers, despite their critical stance, are still moved by the desire to represent wilderness spaces as essentially uninhabited; the habitation of wilderness spaces is therefore secondary to their primary role as non-human realms. This drive to represent such places as primarily devoid of humans is a trope of the discourse of environmental protection, where the absence of (or at least limited

presence of) humans may be considered a basic requirement for garnering the support of conservationists. According to such conventions, any description of the place needs to underscore its credentials as somewhere worth protecting. Of course, there is also something to be said for decentring the human by drawing a reader's attention to a larger geological timeline in which humans do not even feature. Stephanie Posthumus' work on Michel Serres' writings on science, nature, culture and the human bring to light his unique philosophies on the place of science in relation to narrative. For Serres, pre-human earth history may not contain the human, but our ability to think about such a history is part of our present cultural climate. Given these reflections, a description of the Sundarbans that eschews the human presence cannot as easily be read as a lack.

Annu Jalais's extensive work in the Sundarbans is devoted to bringing to light the way in which political, social and ecological narratives are intimately connected. Ghosh acknowledges that Jalais's research was central to the development of his own knowledge and expertise in the area. Much of the work in this chapter, which explores the role of stories and story-telling in the production of everyday environmentalisms, draws simultaneously on Jalais and Ghosh. One of the driving forces behind Jalais's work was to tell the story of the "forgotten history of migrations and settlements and of hard-won reclamation of land from the 'hungry tide'" (3). It was Jalais's opinion that the people of the Sundarbans, and their histories, had been hidden in the great shadow of the world-famous Royal Bengal Tiger. In this attitude, we can see the presence of a lingering sense of competition between human and animal. For her own part, Jalais was interested in the ways in which local islanders imagined their relationship with the land and the animals, and whether a sense of competition or equality reigned. Her findings, which echo through Ghosh's text, reveal complex relationships borne of local ecological and mythological knowledge in which the people see themselves as both adversaries and kin to the animals of the Sundarbans. In

examining this paradoxical relationship, let us first turn to the legend of the goddess Bonbibi, a story that is frequently told and staged in the Sundarbans, and one which demonstrates the power of storytelling in transmitting ecological values.

Writers of fiction may represent environments such as the Sundarbans as distinctly non-human spaces for different reasons. In the case of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the Sundarbans exists as a symbolic space that operates chiefly for the purposes of allowing a character the space and time needed to develop and mature, after which the protagonist, and the author, will desert the un-space of the jungle and return to those places that matter: places with humans. *Midnight's Children* is a good example of the habit of writing the forest (notably called the "jungle" in Rushdie's text) as a place where humans are outsiders and interlopers. So exaggerated is the jungle's non-human properties in this text that it comes across as something of a caricature of a real forest. Such results may be expected when dealing with a magic realist novel such as Rushdie's. The point here is not that just that the magical or mythical elements reinforce the nature/culture divide, however, but rather that nature is entirely subordinated to culture: the forest is used only as a prop in the human drama. Rushdie's anthropocentric representation of the forest makes a fascinating counter-point to Ghosh's more balanced representation of the same space.

***Rushdie's Jungle: Entirely Other***

In *Midnight's Children*, the Sundarbans is represented as a fearsome and mythic refuge from the frenzy of the Indo-Pakistani war. *Midnight's Children* tells the story of Saleem Sinai who was born on the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947—the very moment of India's independence from Britain. From the moment of his symbolic birth, celebrated in the media by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Saleem's destiny is tied to that of India. Born with all the

promise of the newly independent nation, he and India will suffer growing pains together. Rushdie's novel allegorizes the story of India's tumultuous early decades, covering such formative episodes as Partition, the war with Pakistan and the Emergency. Shot through this historical fiction is a colourful streak of the supernatural. Sinai and the other "children of midnight" all possess unique powers, such as Sinai's ability to communicate with others telepathically. These powers do not save him from the tumult, however, and Sinai finds himself and his family moving here and there to avoid strife. At one point, he enlists in the army and finds himself the leader of a rag-tag group of young recruits. Having lost his memory, he experiences a strong sense of disorientation, not to mention a dislike of fighting, and leads his crew into the Sundarbans, promising them a short-cut but knowing truly that he's leading them nowhere in particular. They enter a forest imbued with beautiful, enchanting, torturing spirits and poisonous transparent snakes. Within the story itself, the chapter entitled "In the Sundarbans" functions as a sort of "level" on the quest of Sinai's maturation and redemption from history. The ritual escape into the forest, as in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, becomes a charmed stage on which reality is first made unintelligible and is then restored.

In order to create this stage that is set apart from reality, Rushdie symbolically cuts the space off both spatially and temporally. What we have in Rushdie's novel is the denial of the history and geographical connectivity of the Sundarbans which amounts to the creation of a subaltern space. The text thus attempts to remove the forest from the everyday, a fact which contributes to the exoticization of the postcolonial environment. James Ferguson, discussing the process of writing Africa out of narratives of modernity, has argued that "[t]he effect of this powerful narrative was to transform a *spatialized* global hierarchy into a *temporalized* (putative) historical sequence. Poor countries (and by implication, the poor people who lived in them) were not simply at the bottom, they were at the beginning)" (178). Rushdie's novel itself, with its



spectacular epic style, is writing India firmly into the narrative of modernity and even brushing up against the postmodern. But *Midnight's Children* seems content to leave the Sundarbans out of this contemporary timeline altogether.

In his postmodern nationalist project the Sundarbans is not only a blank jungle space but it functions more like a vortex or a black hole, transporting those who dare trespass its swampy borders into another world, one which is pointedly removed from time and almost detached spatially from either India or Bangladesh. Deane Curtin argues that the parcelling of wilderness into separate zones is a distinctly American tradition (3), but what we see in Rushdie is that it is perhaps a modern, cosmopolitan trend, rather than a distinctly American one. Curtin claims that America is guilty of a “cultural amnesia” through the erasure of Indigenous histories from wilderness spaces. This type of forgetting, or ignoring, the cultural histories of wilderness places was crucial to the project of re-constructing those spaces as blank (read *terra nullius*), and therefore available for ownership, settlement, and exploitation. By describing Saleem’s voyage into the jungle as a form of desertion from the Army and the conflict, but more importantly from reality, Rushdie marks the Sundarbans as an escape from the realm of the social and the governable:

I’m bound to say that he, the Buddha, finally incapable of continuing in the submissive performance of his duty, took to his heels and fled. Infected by the soul-chewing maggots of pessimism futility shame [sic], he deserted, into the historyless anonymity of rain-forests, dragging three children in his wake. (414)

In order to project this sense of temporal dislocation, Rushdie relies on the trope of history: “the jungle which is so thick that history has hardly ever found the way in” (413). A place without a history is a place without sensible, sensical, recordable time. This is “the time-shifting sorcery of the forest” (423). Overall, the effect of the Sundarbans is one of disorientation. In a novel as laden with fantastical elements as this one, one might ask where the text can turn to

create a still greater sense of the extraordinary. Rushdie finds this in the constructed alterity of the jungle. As we learn from Saleem: “the jungle, like all refuges, was entirely other—was both less and more—than he had expected” (414). Curtin’s “cultural amnesia” also describes that imagined distance between speakers in the “First World” from those in the “Third” described by Ferguson. The denial of spatial connectivity is an extension of our erasure of history. They are both predicated on an imagined atomised view of nation-states as independent and borders as solid and deterministic. Both of these refusals are in contrast to the cycles of connectivity outlined by ecology and theories of globalization.

Spatially, the jungle “closes behind them like a tomb” (415), cutting them off from the outside world. The “incomprehensibly labyrinthine salt-water channels overtowered by the cathedral-arching trees” disorient the characters who become lost and unable to locate the point of entry back out into the non-jungle world. Once inside, the landscape of the jungle morphs into supernatural proportions: “there could be no doubt that the jungle was gaining in size, power and ferocity” (415). These geographic sleights of hand exaggerate and draw attention to the disconnect between what is represented as the real world, those places where humans are abundant and highly concentrated, and the wilderness, those places cut-off from the real world which are dominated, in this case, by animals and spirits. In order to make this disconnect complete, Rushdie shows that not only is the forest removed in space, but also in time.

On the one hand, in applying this ecocritical analysis, I am tempted to criticize Rushdie wholesale for this portrayal of the Sundarbans as a non-space. His use of the jungle as a fearful, unknowable backdrop for the metamorphosis/rehabilitation of Saleem and his comrades echoes the anthropocentric treatment of the nonhuman world that contributes to our devalorization of nonhuman spaces. On the other hand, as a reader I enjoyed the fact that he wove in local

folklore—Bonbibi, the goddesses, the temple—and I am interested in the way he presents the forest as an animated space. One might even say that by setting up the forest as a mythical space, Rushdie is arguing for the jungle's own autonomy. However, given the limited attention to the forest in the novel as a whole, and the fact that it serves a purely instrumental value in the text, it is more accurate to say that Rushdie's Sundarbans is a mere prop. Nevertheless, it is a fascinating one: spirited snakes, leeches, goddesses and monkeys populate the forest which is described as a sentient being in and of itself. The following scene describes the ways in which the forest first comes to know, and then proceeds to react to, Saleem and the others for the atrocities of war they have committed.

Blood trickled down legs and on to the forest floor; the jungle sucked it in, and knew what they were like; once again Ayooba Shaheed Farooq found their ears filled with the lamentations of families from whose bosom they had torn what once, centuries ago, they had termed 'undesirable elements'; they rushed wildly forward into the jungle to escape from the accusing, pain-filled voices of their victims; and at night the ghostly monkeys gathered in the trees and sang the words of 'Our Golden Bengal.' (416)

The forest persists to not only torment the young men with haunting memories of their misdeeds, it also contrives to lure them into its leafy folds by taunting them with desire. They encounter a Hindu temple in the forest, over which a statue of Kali presides. In that same area, they awake to find four beautiful women, with whom they cavort. Eventually, however, they notice that they are "becoming transparent" (422) like the snakes and insects of the jungle: "In their alarm they understood that this was the last and worst of the jungle's tricks, that by giving them their heart's desire it was fooling them into using up their dreams, so that as their dream-life seeped out of them they became as hollow and translucent as glass" (422). The madness and brief delights of the jungle begin to come into perspective as Saleem regains his memory, and his fellow soldiers, forced to relive their childhood traumas and obsessions, emerge adult once more,

restored after too much time at war. “In the aftermath of the Sundarbans,” Saleem narrates, “my old life was waiting to reclaim me. I should have known: no escape from past acquaintance. What you were is forever who you are” (423).

As a narrative technique, then, the sojourn into the jungle allows for a reprieve from “normal” space/time in order to achieve something, a maturation or initiation in this case, unattainable within the normal conditions of reality. Within the text, the time in the jungle functions as a necessary escape from conflict, much in the way the forest functions in Amos Tutuola’s *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, where the dreamscape of the bush functions as a metaphor both for the madness of war, and of the journey to escape from that madness. In literature, the forest and the jungle have long been represented as liminal non-places that reflect an interior, psychic landscape more so than a realist one. Another useful comparison for our study of postcolonial literature, however, might be the hunt for Kurtz in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Central to Rushdie’s depiction of the Sundarbans is the concept of the “logic of the jungle” (414), which is to say its illogicality. There is indeed at least a sideways reference to *Heart of Darkness* in Rushdie’s Sundarbans chapter, as both texts invoke the fear of the jungle seizing control over the human. The immersion into such a landscape is perceived as threatening the stability of the human subject, who becomes disoriented and emerges altered. Succumbing to the “insanity of the jungle” (419) in Rushdie thus shares elements of the fear of “going native” in the derogatory colonial lexicon.

*Midnight’s Children* can hardly be said to be perpetuating racism against the Indian people, as Conrad has been charged with in his *Heart of Darkness* (“Image” Achebe). However, by representing the Sundarbans, a place with deep histories and long human presence (and an even longer animal one) as a historyless, detached space, Rushdie participates in the violence of

erasure. By animating the space with spirits and spirited animals, on the other hand, he does contribute to the idea of nature as a subject in itself, and even possibly as a sentient entity. To conclude, then, Rushdie's novel offers inspiring ideas about the realm of the more-than-human as an active element; however, the text does little to forward a subaltern history of the marginalized Sundarbans. This analysis of Rushdie's texts offers interesting insight into the ways in which an ecocritical and a postcolonial reading can sometimes pull a text in two different directions.

***Ghosh's Jungle: Doorway to India***

Unlike Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh does not present a singular narrative of the Sundarbans. He does not reduce the jungle to an exclusively mythic existence in the way that Rushdie's intense, myopic prose did, but neither does Ghosh deny its rich mythic folklore, either. Early on in the text the reader is confronted with his or her own expectations of jungle literature. Standing in Canning, the character Kanai Dutt, a successful, charming "metropolitan" translator whose outside perspective often stands in for our own (Western[ized] educated readership), calls to mind his first travels there as a child. Upon landing in bustling Canning, the last big port before the Sundarbans begin, Kanai recalls his uncle's response to his own surprised expression many years ago: "What did you expect?" his uncle asked, "A jungle? ... It's only in films, you know, that jungles are empty of people. Here there are places that are as crowded as any Kolkata bazaar. And on some of the rivers you'll find more boats than there are trucks on the Grand Trunk Road" (15). Contrary to Rushdie's novel, this scene legitimizes the forest as a site of the everyday, showing that it is a place where people work, live, and boat. Because Ghosh's novel itself is deliberately structured around characters with disparate views, the Sundarbans as a place gets repeated through these various perspectives, thus providing the reader with a fuller sense of place. The narration itself is distinctly different from Rushdie's: ecological realism versus magical realism. From the story's protagonist, Piyali (Piya) Roy, a Bengali-born, American-raised cetologist, we

are told about the Sundarbans as habitat to the rare Irrawaddy dolphin. Piya's tools of observation, binoculars, a clip board and GPS device, are symbolic of the Western Scientific tradition. Kanai, a highly-educated, worldly translator with family connections in the islands, teaches about the islands through his memories of time spent there as a child. In many ways, his memories act as another mode of relating the vast historical knowledge of his uncle, Nirmal. Through Kanai's excellent memory, for example, we learn the story of Sir Daniel Hamilton, a British man who experimented with a brief yet remarkable equitable society on the islands in the early twentieth century. From Nirmal's journals, passed on to Kanai, we learn about the folklore of the place as well as one of the most violent episodes in the island's history: the Morichjhapi massacre of 1979. Ghosh's decision to write about this massacre, which pit Bengali refugees against the Indian West Bengal government as well as the Royal Bengal Tiger, is key to reading his novel as part of the project of writing a subaltern environmental history. The element that best distinguishes Ghosh's novel, however, and what makes it such a useful contribution to the field of environmental literature, is the way Ghosh captures and weaves together so many different perspectives. This section of the chapter introduces the complementary versions of stories told about these repeating islands in Ghosh's text.

Ghosh's realist descriptions of the Sundarbans are rooted in the geographer's studied eye. Ghosh's story may feature local folklore and myth, but he relies on observations that are meant to appear "objective" (in the sense that scientific perspectives may be thought to be) for his representation of the islands of the Sundarbans, focusing on the ecological features of the intertidal zones. The initial description of the island of Lusibari, for instance, is so reliant on a geographical perspective that one has to possess a keen spatial sense in order to construct and maintain the image of the place in one's mind. Lusibari, we learn,

was about a mile and a quarter long from end to end, and was shaped somewhat like a conch shell. It was the most southerly of the inhabited islands of the tide country – in the thirty miles of mangrove that separated it from the open sea, there was no other settlement to be found. Although there were many other islands nearby, Lusibari was cut off from these by four encircling rivers. Of these rivers two were of medium size, while the third was so modest as almost to melt into the mud at low tide. But the pointed end of the island – the narrowest spiral of the conch – jutted into a river that was one of the mightiest in the tide country, the Raimangal. (31)

The description of the Raimangal that follows is equally detailed and attempts to faithfully recreate the landscape and, more importantly, the place as an active ecosystem full of movement and significant features. This detailed replication of the space, or mimesis, emphasizes a narrative voice (Piya's) that is informed by scientific realism. The narration thus serves to naturalize her biologist's perspective.

As a biologist, Piya is a suitable protagonist for the purported ecologic authenticity of the narration—a paradigm which will later be problematized through the character of Fokir. Her objective eye and her rational approach to her work and the dolphins she studies are crucial for setting up her eventual transformation by the end of the text. Ghosh frequently applies the jargon of the scientist at work to convey the idea that Piya is but an instrument herself, a well-trained product of the Western knowledge-production complex. Piya does not simply *look* for dolphins, she “scans the water” with “the binoculars fitted to her eyes” (35). In these moments of looking, which can last for hours upon hours, Piya is said to be “on effort” (35). This robotic term describes periods during which her senses of sight and space are taken over by highly precise scientific equipment. When one of her research subjects, an Irrawaddy dolphin, surfaces near the boat, she needed “only to extend her arm to get a reading on the GPS monitor. She recorded the figures with a sense of triumph” (95). Her instruments translate experience into data; the kind of

data that has meaning in the pages of international peer-reviewed journals, and not the kind of data that can be comprehended by those, like Fokir, working daily in the Sundarbans.

Piya's specialized scientific equipment thus signifies her distance from the local; here, the instruments represent artificial intermediaries in a text that valorizes the material and the natural. At the end of the novel, when Piya finally looks at her surroundings and sees the Sundarbans as a place in itself, rather than as a background for her subjects, the significance of her as an emblem of detached Western knowledge becomes clearer. In Mukherjee's words, "The kind of ethical response such a novel demands from its global, cosmopolitan readers, is modeled for us by Ghosh in the transformation of Piya's character" (130). As Alexa Weik says about Piya, "[c]learly, this is an eco-cosmopolitan who has learned her lesson" (136). Although Mukherjee and Weik focus on Piya as a symbol for the cosmopolitan (Mukherjee views her transformation as an overcoming of cosmopolitanism towards a localism, whereas Weik sees her as achieving the position of, in Ursula Heise's term, the eco-cosmopolitan), I want to emphasize that she also very strongly represents a particular kind of cosmopolitan, one which is firmly rooted in her training in the scientific method. The fact that she is so steeped in that form of specialized knowledge sets her apart in exaggerated fashion from the "global, cosmopolitan readers" that Mukherjee has identified as Ghosh's audience. If we, the readers, are participating in literary tourism through our consumption of this text, then it is worth noting the ways in which Piya differs from the tourists we think we are. Piya shows a scientist's presumed disinterest in the lore of the local, whereas we, the readers of postcolonial fiction, share a social scientist's appetite for difference (see, for example, Graham Huggan in *Marketing the Exotic*). This means that rather than blindly sympathizing with Piya, as Mukherjee's comment seems to suggest, the curious reader can critique Piya's perhaps unnatural detachment and anticipate her transformation towards a localism; a move which produces an even more satisfying resolution for the reader.



If Piya's description of place is disappointingly detached, there are a number of other characters in Ghosh's novel willing to provide more humanistic accounts of the Sundarbans. Much lush description, intoned with local legend, is provided by Nirmal in his journals. In recounting the legend of Lord Shiva, who once used his long hair to prevent the splitting of the Indian land—thus forming the river Ganges which bears the shape of Shiva's long braid, Nirmal says that what is not recounted in that legend is the point where the braid unfurls at its ends, forming the trailing rivers that distinguish the archipelago of the Sundarbans. This revisionist telling redeems the Sundarbans from the fact that a legend about India's greatest river ignores the very mouth of that river. It is through Nirmal, too, that we learn of the eccentric Sir Daniel's attempts to establish a vibrant, isolated yet equitable society in the Sundarbans in the early 1900s. Sir Daniel—a real historical figure who did indeed form a new utopic settlement in the Sundarbans—was an independently wealthy Scotsman who wanted to make his own mark on the world. According to the text, he purchased land in the Sundarbans and welcomed settlers. They could get land for free, as long as they left their ethnic, class, and religious prejudices behind; Sir Daniel envisioned the Sundarbans as a blank canvas on which to draw a new, equitable society. One of the important elements that the narrative about Sir Daniel brings to the text is to reimagining the Sundarbans, through his eyes, as *the* place to be, and as a place central to Indian history and geography:

But if people lived here once, why shouldn't they again? This is, after all, no remote and lonely frontier – this is India's doormat, the threshold of a teeming subcontinent. Everyone who has ever taken the eastern route into the Gangetic heartland has had to pass through it – the Arakanese, the Khmer, the Javanese, the Dutch, the Malays, the Chinese, the Portuguese, the English. It is common knowledge that almost every island in the tide country has been inhabited at some time or another. But to look at them you would never know: the specialty of mangroves is that they do not recolonize land; they erase time. Every generation creates its own population of ghosts. (43)

This foreboding talk of ghosts sets the stage to understanding the Sundarbans as a place where utopias can be imagined, but also a place where they can be torn down.

The story of the Morichjhapi, massacre, told through Nirmal's found journals, does the work of putting the humans into the landscape, but also reminds us of how they were violently removed. Following such turbulent events as Independence, Partition, and the secession of Bangladesh from East Pakistan, there was a surge of Bengali refugees fleeing the Muslim-majority Bangladesh for the Hindu-majority India. After experiencing the difficulties of the resettlement camps in the mountainous states of Chhattisgarh and Odissa, the refugees found a welcome from the Left Front political party in the state of West Bengal. With the Sundarbans as their destination, the refugees came by the thousands. After they came to power, however, the Left Front government turned against the refugees, seeking to evict them from the lands they had only recently begun settling and farming. What followed in 1979 is known as the Morichjhapi massacre, named after the island that the government police chose to make an example of. Police surrounded the island, cutting it off from trade and thus food, and intimidated and harassed the locals. This lasted for weeks, after which the starving people were attacked and killed by the police forces. The government used the rationale of the tiger refuge as an excuse for forcibly removing the refugees. The island, Morichjhapi, fell within the bounds of the tiger-protected zone and therefore settlement was not permitted. According to Jalais's research, it is felt by many, and is certainly portrayed so in Ghosh's novel, that the government exploited the tiger issue as an excuse to carry out the work they intended to do all along, which was to rid the state of these errant, lower-caste refugees. In Ghosh's novel, the history of the Morichjhapi massacre brings to light the potentially violent clash between animal and human settlement as a political, and not only an ecological, issue.

More than simply telling the story of Morichjhapi, however, Nirmal's journals provide another layer of storytelling or documentation that has significance for the theorization of everyday environmentalisms. Ben Highmore sees the documentation of the everyday, in the form of "diaries, photographs, observations and so on" (24), as crucial to the creation of an archive of the everyday. Such records are central to recording the experience and fact of everyday life from a subject's point of view. Nirmal's journal which documented the siege of Morichjhapi could thus be considered archival material in the everyday lives of those inhabiting the Sundarbans in the 1970s (while bearing in mind, of course, that the journal itself is a fictional construction written by Ghosh). Highmore uses the example of the diary, or the personal document, as a way to ask questions about the difference between particularity and totality when it comes to the scale of the everyday. One reason I was drawn to theories of everyday life for this project was because it was a framework that gave me permission to focus on the individual as a locus of experience. As Highmore admits, the everyday is most often focused on the "microscopic levels" rather than the "macroscopic levels of totality (culture, society and so on)" (24). Rather than accepting these independent categories, Highmore stresses their interconnectivity. Much in the way thinkers such as Escobar and Heise have insisted on focusing on the linkages between the local and the global (as ways of justifying both as realms of study), Highmore insists on the idea that the everyday "refuses to remain simply at the microscopic scale" (25). In fact, he suggests that the scholarly interest in the everyday itself reflects a longing for the grand narratives of the past: "*everyday life might be the name for the desire of totality in postmodern times*" (25). Such a discussion raises questions about the role of narrative in the documenting of everyday life versus non-fictional accounts. Ghosh's text, itself a work of fiction, plays with several forms of documentation or storytelling to communicate the experiences of those living in the Sundarbans. Nirmal's journals are a record of the people as recorded by a local elite who is also a self-proclaimed Marxist.

Postcolonial studies, influenced by Spivak's work with Subaltern Studies, is deeply invested in the politics of whose stories get told and by whom. Although such a project is not equivalent to the work of everyday life theorists, there are some important overlaps between the two fields when it comes to the idea of capturing the experiences that macro theories tend to overlook. Any authenticity that Nirmal's journal purports to have as a document of marginalized people in a marginalized environment is complicated by his role as an outsider and his different class position. Can he faithfully tell the story of the people of Morichjhapi? Such a question is then naturally extended to the position of the postcolonial author in general: can they tell the story of marginalized people and marginalized environments? A related question, of course, is whether the narrative form, and the conventions of the novel in particular, allows for a faithful or authentic documentation of the everyday. What the novel can do, as I have said before, is to "rescue the everyday from oblivion" (Highmore 25) through the act of storytelling, a form which is deliberately focused on the microscopic scale. Debates about authenticity are less important than the practice of representation itself. By which I mean, the truthfulness of Nirmal's fictional journal is not as significant as the fact that the story of Morichjhapi is being told in a form which draws attention to the everyday experiences of those people whose stories might not get circulated beyond their own circles of communication otherwise.

### ***Animals in the Text***

Although most critics have hailed Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* for its sophisticated and complex portrayal of environmental politics in the postcolonial world, Helen Tiffin takes issue with Ghosh's failure to extract tigers from their seemingly doomed position as pawns in the fight between environmental policy and the rights of marginalized people. Without going so far as to call the novel anthropocentric—a charge which I think would be difficult to sustain—she is clear

in her position that the treatment of animals in the text, or tigers in particular, undermines the overall environmental message which other critics have lauded. She writes:

In his novels, Ghosh frequently draws attention to the absurdities and tragedies of borders; yet in *The Hungry Tide* the most crucial shadow line – that between animals and human – remains undisputed throughout. Instead, the tortured tiger becomes a scapegoat for the past-and-present sufferings of the refugees and is implicitly presented as being expendable in individual, if not collective, terms. Moreover, the novel gives us to understand that previous violence against the refugees has been perpetrated by Bengali politicians *in the name of the tiger*, which makes it difficult to come to any other conclusion than that the tiger is being turned into a sacrificial symbol of violence itself. (190)

Tiffin suggests that in the limited terms of contemporary global environmental discourse, there is no way to account for the needs of the tiger without becoming mired in the human rights conundrum and thus Ghosh assigned dolphins to Piya instead as a safe animal whose existence does not conflict with the ongoing habitation of the Sundarbans by humans. Tiffin writes that Piya's choice to dedicate herself to the study of the dolphin and to establish herself in the Sundarbans "is only possible because the local people have no particular issue with the dolphins; the much more intractable problem of tiger sanctuary is thus displaced by the relatively easy 'dolphin solution'" (188).

Alexa Weik agrees that there is a need to re-frame the issue in the Sundarbans. She writes:

As often occurs in such situations, there is a false dichotomy at work here, this is not, in fact, a case of 'tree owls vs. people,' as anti-environmentalists in the United States often like to put the issue, but rather one of many situations where the marginalized are just that—marginalized. Their needs remain on the margins of the equation, and so discussion does not range around how to balance the various needs of an ecosystem that always already includes human beings, but rather revolves around how to protect a species threatened by extinction from the depredations of the careless poor. (Weik 132)

The image of the Royal Bengal tiger as a species deserving of special protection has symbolically moved the tiger out of the local and into the international arena. Project Tiger was begun in 1973 under then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as a conservation effort to protect India's tiger population, which was under threat. Today there are 27 tiger reserves covering over 1% of India's territory (*Project Tiger*). The Royal Bengal tiger has since become an icon, both for tourism within India and as a cause-célèbre of the World Wildlife Federation and the global conservation movement more generally.

Jalais has found that the islanders do not separate the fate of the tigers from their own, and that, in fact, they believe they share a destiny and connection with the tigers based on their shared habitation of a very difficult environment. She explains:

The reason why the Sundarbans forest fishers believe they are tied in a web of 'relatedness' with tigers, is because they have the same symbolic mother in Bonbibi, because they divide the forest products between themselves and tigers, and because ultimately they share the same harsh environment, which turns them all into irritable beings. (74)

The challenge of surviving and prospering in the dynamic environment of the Sundarbans cannot easily be overstated. The tides change the landscape throughout the day and across time whole islands are rendered inaccessible, are destroyed, or suddenly appear out of nowhere. The brackishness of the tidal water threatens efforts at farming and makes the search for potable water a daily chore. The islanders are constantly repairing their *badh*'s, the dykes they build to surround their villages in order to protect them from flooding. In addition to these quotidian risks, however, there are also cyclones to contend with. Although mangroves are particularly resilient to storms, this is only true in their capacity to protect the mainland; the mangrove islands themselves can be and are severely damaged by the cyclonic action, as witnessed in the culminating action in Ghosh's novel, which ends up taking the life of Fokir, who applies his knowledge of cyclone

survival to protect Piya at his own expense (an ending which many critics, myself included, have a difficult time resolving, a point to which I will return).

According to Jalais, the inhabitants of the Sundarbans conceptually divide the Royal Bengal Tiger into two separate categories, the *local* tiger and the *cosmopolitan* tiger. The local tiger is that creeping, hungry creature that they live with everyday—the one they trade stories about and who shares their home; the cosmopolitan tiger, on the other hand, is the image of their tiger as adopted by the Indian Government, the international community, and the Western-backed environmental movement. According to Jalais, this psychic divide demonstrates how even “representations ... of wild animals are ultimately linked to power” (9). In this case, the divide reveals the power differential between those who participate in the construction and perpetuation of the global, cosmopolitan tiger, and those who live along side the wild tiger. The cosmopolitan tiger, like Kanai, capitalizes on its ability to communicate across cultures and to circulate among the more elite global circles. The cosmopolitan tiger is linked to the Sundarbans but also to a global imagination which puts it in a category with other beloved cosmopolitan animals such as the whale, the polar bear, the seal, the elephant, etc. The image of the Tiger as an endangered species is often associated with the work of the WWF, an agency with a popular reputation for, among other activities, promoting the well-being of the so-called charismatic megafauna. Such a tiger is only tangentially linked to local peoples and local cultures, unlike the local tiger, who has close relations with the local community in ways that threaten the glossy image of its cosmopolitan cousin. The significance to the people of the Sundarbans is that they see the fate and the everyday life of the local tiger as co-terminus with themselves. Again, it is their shared endurance of a difficult habitat that brings the people a sense of communion with this animal that is also a predator to them and a competitor for food (where it attacks livestock). To emphasize the depth of impact that a lived environment has, consider that for the people of the Sundarbans there

exists a rarely discussed third category of tigers: “the zoo tiger...who islanders claim is ‘dried up’ and have become ‘like gods’ or ‘mere shadows of their former selves’ because they are cut off from the fresh food of the forest and the daily battle with the tough milieu of the Sundarbans” (Jalais 74).

In this analysis of environmentally-oriented postcolonial literature, I am interested in cultural representations of animals, and so this concept of the dual tiger, one belonging to the people and one belonging to some foreign body, is so fascinating because of the way it lays bear the processes by which we construct animal subjects. The fact that the people of the Sundarbans are able to sustain two separate ideas of the same animal is perhaps not surprising. What Ghosh does, however, is to provide us with in his novel is a single stage on which we can observe the myriad ways in which animals are conceptualised. His novel outlines instances in which these competing concepts clash, and, perhaps more importantly, he attempts to project a hope that there are ways that these concepts can converge to create better ways of relating to and with animals. Here Ghosh extends and complicates Jalais’s argument. Her privileging of local over cosmopolitan realities suggests that they actually can be distinguished; that there *is* or can be identified a region outside global flows (climatic, cultural, etc). Ghosh’s novel accords the Sundarbans their ecological integrity and complexity, but stresses the porous borders between insides and outsides—of things, places, and cultures. Thus this novel is not simply ecological in contrast to Rushdie’s cosmopolitan vision; it highlights the inseparability of global and local realities and the consequent need for a grounded, environmentally and historically conscious cosmopolitanism, encompassing humans and non-humans and their habitats

The novel’s pivot point for the development of better relationships with animals can be found in the friendship between Piya and Fokir, a local fisherman she hires as a guide for her



research expeditions. Although they do not speak any common language, they connect through their passion for and dedication to observing wildlife. Fokir and Piya are framed as different versions of the same thing: ecologists, one in the Western science tradition, and one in the tradition of indigenous knowledge. Throughout most of the book, they are portrayed in a sort of wordless harmony with each other. A jealous Kanai probes their unspoken communication: ““And all that while you couldn’t understand a word he was saying, could you?”” to which Piya responds with a “nod of acknowledgment[,] ‘But you know what? There was so much in common between us it didn’t matter’” (222). On this sense of idealism Christopher Rollason comments that “[w]hat is involved here is an essentialist world-view, based on unexamined notions of a common humanity, that may be seen as either enticingly utopian or dangerously naïve” (3). Rollason’s comments here summarize the tension in the critical reception, and indeed in the experience of reading, Ghosh’s text. On the one hand, he offers an “enticing” worldless collaboration fraught with delightful romantic tension, and on the other hand we could view Piya as someone recklessly unaware of her own position and the dangers (real and symbolic) that she presents to the community and those she meets. Despite her belief in her commonality with Fokir (a belief which it seems readers are invited to participate in), there are two moments in the text which destabilizes this harmony. The first is an encounter with a tiger, and the second involves a devastating cyclone.

When a tiger wanders into a village at night, drawn by the sounds of a buffalo giving birth, the common ground between Piya and Fokir is tested and a difference in their perspectives on animals is revealed. The tiger follows the sounds to the animal’s pen, where it proceeds to climb on top of the straw structure, and claw its way in through the roof. Once inside, the awakened villagers seize on their opportunity for revenge against the animal that they are sure had killed two of their people and countless heads of livestock. From the outside of the battle, with the

tiger trapped inside the hut, it is clear that the people will “win”: “When the tiger tried to [escape], it got entangled in the lines and fell back into the pen. It was struggling to free itself when one of the boys thrust a sharpened bamboo pole through a window and blinded it” (241). Rendered sightless and injured, the tiger tries in vain to fight back but the villagers are too many and the circumstances are set against the animal. When the people begin to touch their torches to the straw pen it is clear that their revenge will prevail. Piya, however, will not accept this outcome, she “shook her head as if to wake herself from a nightmare: the scene was so incomprehensible” (241). Kanai refuses to help her at the same time as he tries to help her understand where the villagers are coming from on this issue: ““Piya, you have to understand—that animal’s been preying on this village for years. It’s killed two people and any number of cows and goats—”” (242). Frustrated with his attempts to justify what she feels is without grounds—“You can’t take revenge on an animal”(242)—Piya turns to Fokir instead, believing that he will make things right. As Kanai is only too pleased to point out, however, Fokir is “in the front ranks of the crowd, helping a man sharpen a bamboo pole” (243). Upon seeing her in the midst of the dangerous melee (which may actually count as a fourth time he saves her life), he drags her beyond the fray saying through Kanai’s translation that she “shouldn’t be so upset” (244).

This tidy division crumbles when she is witness to the villagers mauling, terrorizing and ultimately killing a tiger, however. Many critics have focused on this instance as evidence of the gap between rich and poor environmentalisms. Rajenda Kaur, for one, calls the scene “a climactic moment of self-discovery that illuminates the gap between the indigenous Fokir and Piya, the cosmopolitan marine biologist” (131). Kaur sees this moment as pivotal towards Piya’s maturation from “a blinkered conservation biologist focused only on studying the Oracella to a more progressive environmentalist” (132) but only because she comes face to face with the fact that “[f]or Fokir, a spiritual relationship with the environment goes hand in hand with the battle to

survive, even if it means killing an animal which might be on the endangered species list of the World Wildlife Fund”<sup>13</sup> (131). Mukherjee also notes that the scene is indicative of their different postcolonial positions, citing the islanders’ memories of the 1979 Morichjhapi massacre and the long-standing pressure from the supposedly supportive West Bengal Left Front government to aid Bangladeshi refugees (118). Piya’s initial reaction to the killing is one of indignant outrage, sadness, fear (of the human capacity for violence) and pity (for the tiger, and possibly for her own impotence in the face of this violence). The emotional connection that was demonstrably absent for the dolphins—also an endangered species—is very apparent in the case of the tiger. This dent in her armour is not shown as a mark of her emotional weakness, but rather as evidence of her naïveté, which belies her cosmopolitan stance. She is not depicted as overly emotional but as wrong in her assumption that she and Fokir share identical, or even compatible, environmental ethics. The tiger scene gives us a glimpse, like the often-cited glimmer of her earring, of the emotion/vulnerability concealed within Piya’s deliberately crafted scientific persona.

At this moment a discord is revealed of which Piya had previously been ignorant. Although she and Fokir share respect and knowledge of the dolphin, the tiger is another case entirely. This scene is an instance in which Piya realizes that her everyday life is different from that of Fokir. Her privileged, outsider position, which she had been made to forget through her positive relationship with Fokir, is suddenly revealed in their opposing reactions to the death and torment of the tiger whom, according to common knowledge, came to the village to die (any tiger who makes its way to a village is said to be prepared to die). Their common interest in dolphins had obscured the fact that Fokir’s everyday life, his ways of interacting with the local non-human

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<sup>13</sup> The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF, formerly the World Wildlife Fund) is an international NGO with a broad-ranging conservation mandate.

animals, may in fact be different and more complex than Piya imagined. Without thought, she assumed that her values were either universal or at least transferrable.

What does this discord say about the possibility for cross-cultural animal or environmental protection? This question is especially pertinent to projects that try to find common grounds and common cause between mainstream environmentalism and local or indigenous environmentalisms. In some instances the values of the two parties may fundamentally conflict and collide with the deeply held values of the other. From the perspective of mainstream environmentalist activism, the potential for this conflict and the manner in which it is handled is especially a concern in situations where environmentalism itself faces charges of neo-imperialism in the global South. There needs to be a genuine attempt to acknowledge and respect the perspectives that may contradict the dominant environmentalist approach.

On the surface, it does appear as if the novel offers the celebration of a North-South collaboration. On the other hand, something in the final dramatic episode reveals a more pessimistic conclusion. As seen from their first interaction, wherein Piya holds up a card with a picture of a dolphin and Fokir “glanced from the card to her face and raised a hand to point upriver. The gesture was so quick and matter-of-fact that for a moment she thought he had misunderstood” (40). When it becomes clear that he had fully understood the meaning of the card and, better still, knew the location of the dolphins, Piya develops a strong sense of trust and admiration towards Fokir, for he is able to understand and even anticipate her needs. This pattern of communicating non-verbally, however, means that as a character Fokir is very deeply grounded in his body in a way that problematically naturalizes his relationship with his local environment, making his knowledge appear more instinctual than acquired—a difference which threatens to undermine the value of his knowledge. In the scenes in which only the two of them

appear, Piya is pictured as asking questions to which Fokir responds with silent gestures; in scenes that involve Fokir and Kanai, it is important to note that Fokir's speech is heard, a difference which may indicate that Fokir's silence is meant to highlight Piya's inability to comprehend, rather than Fokir's inability to express. Nevertheless, in the scenes that contain only the two of them Fokir's wordlessness is reminiscent of the muteness of the African characters in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, to return to a familiar example. To inquire about a sound in the jungle, for instance, Piya asks out loud "What is it?" and in addition she "mimes the question with raised eyebrows and a turn of her hand" (130). In response "[h]e gave her a smile but made no direct answer, only pointing vaguely across the water" (130). The contrast between Piya's voiced curiosity and Fokir's silent knowledge renders him mysterious and leaves her curiosity to hang over the exchange as the dominant presence. It is this mysterious knowledge of the place that Piya comes to rely on, as in the scene in which they encounter a crocodile.

[Fokir] happened to look up just as Piya was lowering her depth sounder into the water. His eyes flared and he uttered a shout that made her freeze, with her wrist still submerged beneath the surface. Pulling his oars into the boat, Fokir threw himself at Piya, diving forward, snatching wildly at her wrist. Piya fell over backward and her arm snapped out of the water, catapulting the depth sounder over the boat.

Suddenly the water boiled over and a pair of huge jaws came shooting out of the river, breaking the surface exactly where Piya's wrist had been a moment before. (144)

This incident is the second of three times in the novel when Fokir saves Piya's life. It is clear from these three episodes that at critical moments Piya finds herself very dependent on Fokir's knowledge of the dangers of the place, and his ability to act swiftly and rationally in these moments. The third rescue involves a cyclone that appears towards the end of the novel. As we will see, it is this scene in particular that shows the heavy burden that the intrepid outsider places on her local hosts. In seeking shelter from the high winds and the massive swells, Piya uses

Fokir's body itself as a mode of protection against the storm; tying himself and Piya to the upper branches of a tree, he sits on the outside to better shelter her. In terms of speaking through his body, we can read the cyclone scene as the ultimate act of expression, ending in self-sacrifice.

The stronger the gale blew, the more closely her body became attuned to the buffers between which she was sandwiched: the tree in front and Fokir behind. ... This meant that Piya and Fokir, sitting astride the branch, were facing in the direction of the wind, taking advantage of the 'shadow' created by the tree's trunk. But for this lucky circumstance, Piya knew, they would have been pulverized by the objects the gale was hurtling at them. (314-15)

At the end of the novel, there is a holism—the two of them tied to a tree, their bodies breathing in synch with one another. Their nearness is best described in the narrator's words by the thinnest of borders: "Everywhere their bodies met, their skin was joined by a thin membrane of sweat" (315). Despite this apparent oneness, however, there was one significant difference between their selves; because Fokir sat on the outside, the exposed side, his body was made more vulnerable when the winds changed and the storm hurtled objects against Fokir's back, eventually killing him. After some time passes, Piya is recovering from the ordeal and decides to gather funds and dedicate her life and research to the study of the Irrawaddy dolphin with a commitment to incorporating traditional ecological knowledge—specifically that gained from Fokir about the habits and location of the mammals. A new, locally-rooted science emerges as a blend of social and environmental justice; all is good except for one thing: Fokir is dead.

Victor Li writes that Fokir's death represents the fact that the "ideal subaltern" (288, borrowing Spivak's utopian sense of the word), is a dead subaltern, and that only in death can that concept exist without the messiness of reality. The characters of Fokir and his mother Kusum, are two Dalit figures who "[b]oth capture the interest of well-meaning metropolitan characters like Nirmal, Kanai, Piya, and, by extension, the interest of the novel's readers. Kusum and Fokir are seen as subalterns who choose not to surrender their way of life through assimilation into a

hegemonic modernity” (288). As I noted above, Fokir’s knowledge is portrayed as “natural and mystical,” derived from an “instinctive” knowledge of the world, which Li argues is evidenced through the highly professional occupations held by the cosmopolitan characters of the text, “Nirmal the schoolmaster, Kanai the professional translator, and Piya the cetologist” (288). Li points to the fact that, as other critics have noted, the novel attempts to bridge or surpass this gulf through Piya’s appreciation for Fokir’s immense knowledge: “What were originally dismissed as subaltern illiteracy, superstition and silence are reinterpreted as alternative ways of being that not only mark the limits of our knowledge but also offer us other forms of knowledge from which we have much to learn” (289). This evolving respect turns into a form of idealization which Li argues forms a larger pattern in postcolonial text that he claims involves a “sacrificial logic” (290) in which the subaltern is killed off so that he or she can be symbolically resurrected or memorialized through the (benevolent) form of the cosmopolitan character. This process of necroidealization, he argues, is at work in *The Hungry Tide* during the cyclone scene wherein the bodily closeness of Fokir and Piya creates a fusion of the two characters; after Fokir’s death, this intimate closeness results in Piya bearing the imprint of Fokir, in whose name she dedicates her new research lab. “What we have in the novel,” Li writes, “is a ‘last of the Mohicans’ scenario in which the ‘authentic’ subaltern dies so that the idea of subalternity may live on in a non-subaltern future” (290). Li’s argument, then, is that while subaltern *knowledge* itself may be valued by the Western or professional classes, the subaltern subject himself is still considered an illegitimate host for any kind of valued knowledge. To apply Li’s critique more broadly, we might say that a dangerous pitfall of sharing indigenous knowledge is the risk of losing sight of the people who hold and create that knowledge. In order to understand the impact that disconnecting the knowledge from its people might have, it is useful to return to the third category of tiger identified by Jalais amongst the people of the Sundarbans: the zoo tiger. This tiger is considered a hollow replica of

the real tiger because it has been removed from its habitat and forced to live in a simulated environment somewhere that isn't home. The tiger removed from its home is a poor facsimile of the tiger in its home. Likewise, we could argue that the subaltern knowledge (as Li terms it) is situated knowledge (as Haraway calls it) which makes sense from and within place. According to such a reading, Piya's apparently caring and careful gesture of dedicating her centre to Fokir and incorporating the knowledge she learnt from him is akin to putting a tiger in a zoo.

### ***Performing the Legend of Bonbibi***

The everyday tiger, or the local tiger in Jalais's terms, is both a physical presence and a mythologized being, who features prominently in the local folklore in the personage of Dokkhin Rai, the demon tiger and devourer of people. More powerful than Dokkhin Rai, however, is Bonbibi, the goddess of the forest and protectress of the forest workers. Bonbibi is respected with shrines and statues placed throughout the forest and the people who gather honey or firewood in the dense jungle perform rituals to ensure her blessing. The struggle between Bonbibi and Dokkhin Rai is more than "all the usual stuff" about "Gods, saints, animals [and] demons" (85) as Nirmal, the non-believer, derisively states, instead it is what I call an eco-myth, an educational tale designed to instill and uphold key ecological messages and to promote place-specific ecological values. Ashley Dawson writes that "Like other indigenous cosmogonies, in other words, the myth of Bon Bibi is a kind of regulatory social and ecological fiction for the residents of the Sundarbans archipelago" (Dawson 243). What is important about this eco-myth is its telling. The legend is performed frequently on stage in the Sundarbans, and the story becomes a play-within-a-story in *The Hungry Tide*. The legend demonstrates the role of storytelling in the transmission of local ecological knowledge. Bonbibi's story teaches about need for humans to recognize the forest as a place in its own right that belongs primarily to its animal inhabitants and whose products, namely honey and timber, must be harvested in accordance with local need and



not for the accumulation of profit. Through its frequent repetition as a street-level theatrical performance in the Sundarbans, “The Glory of Bonbibi,” the eco-myth is an example of popular local knowledge as embodied through the enactment on stage. Here I use the term “popular” to connote the play’s popularity with local audiences, but also to highlight the fact that Bonbibi maintains an important role in people’s everyday lives, making the goddess something of an icon of pop culture in the Sundarbans. By emphasizing the contemporariness and relevancy of Bonbibi I mean to write against the sense of belonging-to-the-past that the term “traditional knowledge” (a close cousin to Indigenous knowledge) conjures. In this section I want to explore in particular the ways in which this legend itself is an oral document which actively constructs, through repetition, the particular environmental code of ethics that frames life in the Sundarbans. This act of repetition and transmission, I argue, maintains the relevance of the legend, and of the figure of Bonbibi, and projects them into the future.

The story of Bonbibi deserves repeating, briefly, in order to highlight both the moral of the story and its origins as the product of the unique social history of the region. Known variously as Bonbibi, Bon Bibi, Bonobibi, Bonabibi, and Bon devi, the goddess represents one of several intersections of Hinduism and Islam that can be found in Indian religion and culture, especially in areas that border India and Pakistan or Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan). The reader experiences this rare intermingling through the reaction of Piya, who notes that in their incantations at the shrine of Bonbibi she recognizes the word “Allah” mixed in with the sounds of her Hindu mother’s *pūja* (152). As a young girl in Medina, the legend goes, Bonbibi (abandoned by her mother who could not afford to keep the girl, but kept her twin brother Shah Jonholi, and was raised instead by deer in the forest) was called on by Allah to travel to the tide country in order to free it from the grips of the demon-tiger Dokkhin Rai. Once an ordinary Brahmin living in the forest, the greedy Dokkhin Rai eventually started devouring humans whom

he saw as encroaching on *his* territory and pilfering *his* forest products (namely honey and timber)—at which point he assumed the form of a tiger. Thus the legend sets out the typical forces of good (the innocent Bonbibi, once victimized by the sad fortune of her family, with whom she later reunites) and evil (the greedy, selfish and territorial Dokkhin Rai), as well as establishing themes of Hindus versus Muslims and humans versus nature.

Interestingly, however, the legend does not unfold in a predictable manner. Goodness does not reign over the evil. Two key episodes determine the compromise that will ultimately determine the shape and meaning of the Sundarbans environmental ethic. Bonbibi, sent to free the land of the demon-tiger, is prepared to fight Dokkhin Rai when suddenly his mother, Naryana, intervenes, saying that only a woman should fight a woman. Bonbibi and Naryana fight until the latter senses she is losing, at which point she calls Bonbibi “friend” and the fighting ceases. The second episode involves another nested story which, according to Jalais, always follows Bonbibi’s tale. This is the story of Dukhe, a young boy betrayed by his uncle. Dukhe is collecting honey in the forest with his uncle when Dokkhin Rai offers the uncle unheard of masses of honey and wealth in exchange for abandoning the little boy to him. The uncle eventually agrees and leaves Dukhe for dead but the young boy remembers his mother’s words—that Bonbibi is the saviour and the protectress of the pure-hearted. Note here how the forces of the forest have been divided into the categories of protectress (female) and violent consumer (male). The division is something of an interesting departure from the Western concept of Mother Nature who is (herself divided into nurturer and hysteric) singularly responsible for both the earth’s bounty and its destruction.

Val Plumwood notes that in the dominant Western environmental narrative:

The blame for our plight should be allocated in the usual place, to the symbolically-female, nature side of the hyperseparated and warring pair, reason versus nature. It is fundamentally nature ... which has led us astray. And it is reason intensified that will be our hero and saviour, in the form of more science,

new technology, a still more constrained market, rational restraints of numbers and consumption, or all of these together. (6)

In the tale of Bonbibi, however, the hero and saviour are not divided along the lines of rationalism and naturalism. Both Dokkhin Rai and Bonbibi represent nature and their compromise represents not the domination or overcoming of nature, but a fearful respect of transgressing the contract and bond they establish with one another. When Dukhe, the pure-intentioned boy, calls on the benevolent Bonbibi, she saves him and sends her brother to fight Dokkhin Rai. After a long and complicated struggle, Dokkhin submits by calling Bonbibi “mother,” a familiarity which he knows will appease her. In return she calls him “son” and in this way the good force is eternally and familiarly linked to the evil. The story does not end there, however. So far the legend has established Bonbibi as a force of good and as a saviour, and has showed Dokkhin’s avarice but also his capability for negotiation and even rationality. The last episode of the tale cements the story as an example of eco-myth, however.

The final part of the story explains the process of negotiation between Dokkhin Rai and Bonbibi as to the governance of the forest. It is during this discussion that the rules about human rights and responsibilities towards the forest are determined as part of the peace treaty, as it were, between the demon tiger and the goddess, on behalf of the people. Annu Jalais describes the negotiation thus:

Dokkhin Rai started to argue that, if humans were given a free reign, there would be no forest left. So, to be fair, and to ensure that Dokkhin Rai and his retinue of tigers and spirits end being a threat to humans, and humans stop being a threat to non-humans, Bonbibi elicited promises from Dukhe, Dokkhin Rai and the Gazi that they were all to treat each other as ‘brothers’. ... Following the recitation of Dukhe’s story, the islanders often explained that Bonbibi had left them the injunctions that they were to enter the forest only with a ‘pure heart/mind’ (*pobitro mon*) and ‘empty hands’ (*khali hate*). The islanders explained that they had to identify completely with Dukhe, whose unfailing belief in Bonbibi saved him, and consider the forest as being only for those who are poor and for those

who have no intention of taking more than what they need to survive. This is the ‘agreement’ between non-humans and humans that permits them both to depend on the forest and yet respect each others’ needs. (72-3)

The legend of Bonbibi thus establishes a contract between the tigers and the humans which hinges on the ecologically respectful treatment of the forest. The principle of harvesting based on need determines the interaction between the people of the Sundarbans and the forest itself. Jalais reads the figure of Bonbibi as a sort of supreme forest manager; her tale establishes guidelines for appropriate conduct, the ethos of conservation, and the spirit of co-operation that extends even into the realm of economic organization. Fisherpeople “always invoke the story of Bonbibi as a prelude to the subject of their economic forays into the forest—as a sort of economic ‘agreement’ about the equitable sharing of food and resources between humans and tigers” (Jalais 70). And as with any contract, there are consequences for breaking its terms. Before looking at the failure of humans to keep up their end of the bargain, however, I want to focus a little more closely on the way the Bonbibi story is told and passed on in the tide-country.

### ***Limits to Understanding***

As the prime guide for appropriate forest behaviour, then, the legend is widely regarded and her story is part of the everyday life in the Sundarbans. The transmission of Bonbibi’s tale, mostly through folk media such as theatre, is an important element in reinforcing the dominance of this local worldview. Here I want to draw on a point made by Asha Kasbekar about the way language can be a barrier to transmitting theatre within India. Kasbekar’s comments, I argue, raise questions about cross-cultural communication more generally:

With sixteen major languages and hundreds of dialects in India, there are indeed hundreds of theaters in India. Also, since most of the languages and dialects are not entirely understood outside their particular province or region, there has been little or no communication among the various theatres. . . . Consequently, the theaters in India are often specifically related to the cultural inheritance of particular communities. A play set in Bengal, for instance, may not be fully

understood by an urban audience in Tamil Nadu, while the contemporary resonances of a Marathi play may elude an audience in Rajasthan. (38)

The diversity that Kasbekar points to within India itself is, of course, an important reminder of the heterogeneity and vastness of the country. Kasbekar's comments on the ability to translate the meaning of folk theatre within the Indian context points, I think, to the difficulty in transmitting local knowledge more generally, which can be so contingent on having knowledge and familiarity with the place and language it emerges from. More specifically, however, it challenges how critics who are not from the Sundarbans approach reading Bonbibi's story. Although we are invited to read the tale through Ghosh's novel, it is important to at least consider questions of translation and the limits to understanding.

Translation is an important theme in Ghosh's work, from the simple business of Kanai's work as an interpreter, to the fact that Piya and Fokir speak without the aid of a translator. When it comes to sharing these local legends, though, an important question is whether and in what ways such localisms can be translated for a global audience who is consuming the story in a manner it is not usually circulated: in print. In *The Hungry Tide*, the story is told through a play when the young Kanai sees it performed by "a troupe of travelling actors" (101) on the island of Lusibari. Kanai's ignorance of the tale is a marker of his outsider status. When his friend Kusum learns that Kanai does not know the story she asks, "[t]hen on whom do you call when you're afraid?" (101). By staging Kusum's escape on the same night as the Bonbibi play, the novel underscores the many dangers of tide-country life (not all of which stem from nature), a fact which emphasizes the local faith in heroes such as Bonbibi. Whether or not the depth of this faith can be understood by the urban Kanai is another matter.

By including the dramatization of "The Glory of Bonbibi" in his text, Ghosh has transmitted the story well beyond its usual bounds and has translated it into novel form, as it were.

The elliptical pattern of nested stories helps position the different narratives in ways that suggest their equal standings. In this way, the form of Ghosh's novel does attempt to reflect the ethical basis of his work, which, I argue, supports the proliferation of ways of knowing. Jens Martin Gurr argues that when it comes to evaluating environmentally-oriented texts, ecocritics are guilty of focusing on "ethical orientation at the expense of literary form" (71). Drawing on the work of structuralists, Gurr is interested in the way *The Hungry Tide* "emplots" our experiences. The obvious connections between the structuralist use of the word "emplotment" and its geographical suggestiveness is not lost on Gurr, who takes the notion of emplotment here to mean:

A close narrative engagement with an ecosystem [which] structures the text in such a way that fundamental topographical features of an ecosystem are structurally replicated in the surface structure of the text. This also applies vice versa, of course: There is also a semanticization of the form, in the sense that patterns of emplotment have repercussions on the representation of an ecosystem. (73-4)

By referring to Ghosh's novel's separate parts, titled "Ebb" and "Flood," Gurr argues that the novel structurally emplots the unique features of the tide country, which is that constant indistinction between land and water: "the two strands of action are treated in chapters alternating between the sub-plots, with focalization changing back and forth between Piya and Kanai" (75). His idea that the physical world can be so accurately projected onto the written text (mimesis) undermines the novel's own stance on translation, which stresses its limitations. Gurr's reading too easily parallels fictional and physical worlds. Kanai, for example, a professional translator and interpreter, cannot and does not attempt to translate a song that Fokir sings, claiming that the meter is too complicated (225, 291). If the rhythm of Fokir's legends are too complex for translation, it raises questions about Gurr's claims that the rhythm of the tide countries (a simple ebb and flow, as he seems to suggest) can be translated into a novel structure that oscillates between two characters, Piya and Kanai. That said Gurr's article is perhaps over-stretching a connection between form and content— a delicate line which he himself struggles with:

This landscape, so fundamentally both land and water, is in many ways really the key protagonist of the novel. It would be misleading to argue that the human-interest story around the characters is merely a Trojan horse to slip in an essay on the ecology of the Sundarban region in the guise of a novel. In many ways, however, even the protagonists are subordinated to the structuring principle of ebb and flood, land and water. . . .human beings here to a considerable extent function as an illustration of features of the ecosystem rather than the other way around. (74)

Although Gurr is clearly playing down the human element in order to make an argument for attention to structure and ecology, as Jalais and others have pointed out, the novel is very much about the ongoing history of human settlement and interaction in the region. As I argue in this project, and I think the novel and recent scholarship (Jalais and Sarkar) demonstrate: there is no useful separation between the human and the ecological to be made.

Whereas critics such as Rollason and Li have noted the theme of transcultural communication within the novel, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee argues that Ghosh (along with other Indian diasporic writers, namely Arundhati Roy) engages with this issue at the level of the text itself. In Mukherjee's words, Ghosh and Roy are

concerned with the same problem: how can the story of the postcolonial ruling elite's complicity in the devastation of their subject and their environment be told in an elitist language and cultural form, the postcolonial English novel? And both writers appear to have come up with the same answer: to transform the novel itself by incorporating into it elements of the local, vernacular cultural forms, thereby rendering it 'improper' according to normative and prescriptive understandings of what a novel should be. (121)

Mukherjee specifically draws our attention to the performing of *The Glory of Bon Bibi* as the mobilization "of local cultural forms" (122), citing its representation in *Jatra*, a form of popular Bengali theatre. *Jatra* is easily distinguishable from the classical *Sanskrit* theatre in a number of ways. Kasbekar explains that "[t]he *jatra* of Bengal provides an interesting example of a traditional theater whose origins lay in religious entertainment but became increasingly secular over the course of its history" (44), by incorporating elements from popular cinema including

*filmi* music and bold, colourful lighting (Mukherjee 125). Whereas the *Sanskrit* theatre relies on highly developed forms of subtle and structured gestures to convey plot and emotion, *jatras* draw on a mixture of song and dance (Kasbekar). The energy of this story-telling form dispenses with concerns over realism or even mainstream conventions about representation (Mukherjee 125, Kasbekar). Kanai's ability to believe in the play is not hindered by the failure of the production to conceal its mechanisms: "The terror he had felt when the demon charged Dukhey was real and immediate, even though there was nothing convincing about the tiger and it could be plainly seen that the animal was only a man, dressed in a painted sheet and a mask" (105). Neither is Kanai put off when the actress playing Bonbibi has to be called from her *paan* break to rejoin the scene. The power of *jatra*, then, does not rely on the trappings of realism nor on the representation of indigenous characters as basely naïve or credulous.

*Jatra* is a "loose, flexible form of narrative, where an evening's performance included several episodes from different religious sources. An evening's performance might begin with the traditional invocation to the gods, followed by an episode from Krishna's life" (Kasbekar 44). Indeed, this well describes the coupling of Bonbibi's defeat of Dokkhin Rai with the tale of young Dukhe as well as the story's general ad-mixture of Hindu and Islamic figures. What is notable about the play in Ghosh's novel is its ability to challenge the cosmopolitan tastes of Kanai:

Kanai had expected to be bored by this rustic entertainment: in Calcutta he was accustomed to going to theatres like the Academy of Fine Arts and cinemas like the Globe. But much to his surprise, he was utterly absorbed and even after the show had ended was unable to erase some of the scenes from his mind. (105)

Ghosh's contrasting of these three cultural forms, and Kanai's appreciation of the "rustic," supports Mukherjee's claim about the text's deliberate incorporation of the local into the form of the postcolonial novel: "Thematically, as Kanai's memories of watching the *Bonbibi* performance ... show, *Jatra* songs and narratives are used in the novel to show the existence of a popular folk epistemology and aesthetics that disputes dominant ideas of knowledge, history and writing"



(127). The power of folk media, or folk theatre has long been recognized and harnessed as a means of popular education. The presence of the play adds to the polyvocal nature of the text and furthers its attempts to consider all forms of cultural representation—all ways of knowing—as worthwhile.

The Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) was established in 1943 as a tool to rally the population around the government's opposition to the British in the Second World War (a position they later reversed after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union) (Kasbekar 62,3). Interestingly, the Communist Party of India (CPI) seized on the informal song-and-dance styles of the local theatres as an ideal propaganda and educational tool for reaching a non-literate, rural public: "The model that IPTA adopted for the presentation of its plays was that of the folk and popular theaters, such as that *jatra*, *tamasha*, *kathakala*, *burrakatha*, and the *jarigan*, that flourished in the rural areas of India" (Kasbekar 63). The success of the IPTA to motivate the people, already excited by the prospect of Independence, could not be maintained amid the political chaos and in-fighting of post-Independence (63), but the politicization of local theatre forms had been established. The government would again return to this concept of populist theatre as a political tool in the 1950s, in a move that would pre-date the use of folk media or folk theatre as a development tool by NGOs:

In the 1950s, state government agencies decided to use local forms of theater as vehicles for their various social and health-care messages. However, when the directors of the programs wrote out the scripts, they were astounded to discover that none of the traditional actors could read. Instead, the actors asked to be told the kernel of the plot and the general gist of the message, delivering the scenarios in their own words (Abrams 1974). (Kasbekar 68)

What is interesting about the performance of Bonbibi's play is that, unlike the statist co-option of folk media for educational purposes, this socio-ecological tale comes out of the people's own belief system. There is, however, an important distinction between theatre that is community-

based and that which is community-led. Community-based theatre, he argued, could easily be attained through the participation (often as poorly paid actors) of locals. Community-led theatre would be those arts which involved locals in the conception and delivery of the productions. Although the Bonbibi play is performed by *jatra* artists from Calcutta or Bangladesh, it involves the legends that already populate the region, and its ethic is entirely theirs. The book *Climate Refugees* shows a photo of officials and a professor assisting in on-the-ground climate change education in the Sundarbans, and above them is a related image of a play being performed that prepares the local residents for the effects of climate change. The image is an indicator that folk media (both community-led and community-based) remains an important source of communication and education; a familiar form capable of transmitting new narratives.

***Conclusion: Changing Tides***

Although the cult of Bonbibi remains strong, especially amongst the forest-workers, Jalais's research indicates that the goddess Kali is beginning to play a more important role in the region as well. This indicates the way in which a shift in everyday life can produce new environmentalisms. Jalais notes that this division largely occurs between forest-workers and the shrimp-seed harvesters. Shrimp-seed harvesting is a growing industry in the Sundarbans, especially among women, as the work can be done on the edges of the villages and no boat and little start-up money is required. It is also expected that with the effects of climate change, prawn-seed collecting will become an increasingly important industry because salination is expected to ruin much of the crop-land on which paddy is currently farmed (Jalais; *Mystic*). Because they aren't going *into* the forests, the shrimp-seed collectors do not require the protection of Bonbibi in the same way as honey, wood-collectors, or even fishermen do, because crocodiles, not tigers, are their main concern. The younger, largely female groups of prawn-seed collectors, many of whom

have come in from mainland Bangladesh or from “up country,” are beginning to transform the local knowledge in ways that better reflect their own experiences by selecting a different, more urban deity (urban in relation to BonBibi, who is rooted in rural tide-country, and thus may be viewed as belonging to past needs or past identities, as un-modern). A resident of the Sundarbans explains it thus:

You know, gods are like government ministers, they have different departments divided between them and Bonbibi has been ascribed the forest. So just as we have to flatter relevant government officials, forest workers have to flatter Bonbibi, school teachers Saraswati, and prawn seed collectors, like those engaged in violent jobs such as highway robbers, policemen, taxi-drivers or poachers, Kali. (qtd. in Jalais 119)

Kali thus represents a new sector of labour which is ushering in the need for an expansion of the religious traditions of the area and which could alter the foundations of traditional knowledge.

This changing of dominant goddesses is a good reminder that locally-specific environmentalisms are not also static environmentalisms. Just as the practices of people change according to labour opportunities, social fabric, and political organization, so too do people’s attitudes and priorities about the environment change. As the daily lives of the people of the Sundarbans change, so too do the stories they tell themselves about their place: We are modern workers, we labour near our homes and not in the tiger zones; Kali, not Bonbibi, will represent us.

This analysis of novels, stories and plays about the Sundarbans reveals a place alive with locally-derived ecological knowledge that is being reproduced through local and transnational cultural production. While the local stories and theatre demonstrate the negotiations that take place as people continually learn to live in a hostile, at times predatory environment, the transnational texts, written by diasporic Indian authors, represent the larger tensions that I explore in this dissertation. Through my analysis I show that both Rushdie and Ghosh’s novels reveal

something of the clash between Western-style environmentalisms and postcolonial environmentalisms. Rushdie's text engages with the jungle only so far as it serves the human plot of the story and in so doing it obfuscates the stories of the place itself, and the humans and animals that make their home there. Although his is a largely anthropocentric representation of the Sundarbans, Rushdie's animated jungle does make a significant contribution to environmentalist thought insofar as it suggests that the place has an energy and life of its own, however much that life seems designed to serve the needs of the outsiders who visit there.

Ghosh's text self-consciously interacts with both Northern and Southern environmentalisms in the characters of Piya and Fokir. The novel delivers an unsettling resolution between the two camps, however, as Fokir is asked to sacrifice his own life for that of Piya, who has the means and connections necessary to capitalize on his knowledge. The way in which Fokir is subsumed by Piya leaves major questions about the ability to cross boundaries to create ecological cooperation and collaboration. This could also be read as symbolic of the writer's position as he chooses to write in English rather than in a local language (the latter being "sacrificed" in favour of the former). To some extent, translation then requires the writer to sacrifice some elements of the local in order to reach a wider global audience. The tale of Bonbibi, which looms large over the ecological epistemologies of the Sundarbans, also raises questions about the possibility for cross-cultural work. By exploring the limits of translation, my analysis of the Bonbibi tale and performance points to the way place-based environmentalisms pose a challenge because of their specificity. Ghosh's text, however, shows that transnational environmental literature can act as a vehicle for translating and transmitting these local environmentalisms through the frame of postcolonial literature. This sweeping exploration of stories and story-telling in the Sundarbans is anchored in the idea of how to represent the experience of daily life in a hostile environment that

is both marginalized politically but which is simultaneously in the international spotlight when it comes to species preservation.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Urban Citizenship and Environmental Decay in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance***

The question of how to read nature in an urban setting is complex. On the one hand the artifice of the city helps distance us from those elements of nature that can be bothersome to daily human life, such as the cold and the rain, large carnivorous animals, and uncertain food stocks (although accessibility to these available stocks even within a city is highly uneven). On the other hand, the artifice of the city is really just a construction that transforms, rather than eliminates, our distance from these elements, and in some cases even renders us more vulnerable. These early days of the twenty-first century are an interesting time to contemplate these issues, for at the same time that concern for the environment has become a global preoccupation, the earth's population (which has just reached seven billion) is for the first time more urban than rural (Roberts, Ravetz and George, see also UN "World Urbanization Prospects"). In short, the city is our everyday environment.

Mike Davis summarizes the changing global balance between the urban and the rural when he writes that "rural people no longer have to migrate to the city: it migrates to them" (9). In the global South especially, cities are expanding faster than anticipated. Topping the list of most populated cities (as of 2010), is Tokyo, followed by Delhi, Mumbai, Sao Paulo, each of which is home to over 20 million inhabitants, Ciudad Mexico, and then New York/Newark, both home to 19 million (UN *World Urbanization Prospects*). The urban eclipse of the rural, as Davis points out, has occurred even more rapidly than the Club of Rome famously predicted in their 1972

*Limits of Growth* (qtd. in Davis 1). Saskia Sassen argues that it is the well-networked global cities, and not the established nation-states that dominated the early and mid twentieth century, that are the key strategic sites of power and exchange today and in the future. Interestingly, however, the size of the city is not the sole indicator of its strategic place in global systems of capital or political decision-making. Sassen's choice of focus on New York, London, and Tokyo reflects the fact that a city's international profile and its ability to participate competitively—or rather, dominantly—in global markets is not determined by size alone but by a number of other factors including the stability of the state itself, its governance, its history of aid in the form of international loans, legacies of colonialism, to name only a few factors of relevance here. Many of the large cities of the global South are faced with the fact that urban population growth is often an unplanned (though no longer unpredictable) phenomenon for which the city officials and infrastructure are ill-prepared. Davis stresses, in fact, that many of the cities of the global South are notable for the way their growth is not matching their industrial development as it did in some of the first cities to rapidly urbanize/industrialize, such as London (16). In the case of places like Lima and Kinshasa (both projected to top 10 million by 2020), industrial growth has actually declined as the cities expand (Davis 16). Migrating citizens are not relying on governments to provide the conditions for expansion and are creating often precarious dwellings and communities of their own on the blurred margins of already under-serviced centres. The conditions of these massive slums are not new—Davis compares them, not to the London of Dickens necessarily, but to the less industrialized Dublin of Victorian times (16). This twist of references—from London to Dublin—suggests an altogether different set of trajectories which leads us to ask whether Lima could ever come to substitute for “London”, “Tokyo”, or “New York” in a future edition of Sassen's *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*.

By acting as a concentrated hub for commerce and immigration, the city makes visible the connections that link one place on the globe with so many others. In this way our gleaming blue marble seems at once small and manageable (in the sense of McLuhan's language of the "global village") as well as endlessly providing (since the markets of the "global cities" are constantly refreshed and the new residents keep on arriving). The post-Fordist city that dominates the North and is on the rise in the South may be marked by its fluidity and its adaptability to the flows of global markets, but it is nevertheless a stratified place. Of course, we are used to thinking about cities in terms of class and ethnic divisions—being familiar with the concept of ghettos, slums and gated communities—but many are beginning to ask what these divisions look like in environmental terms. "What becomes of the human urban environment, in such a fluid and fuzzy system?" ask Roberts, Ravetz and George, to which they respond: "It seems that physical environments are increasingly segregated and privatized, so that the wealthier will buy their way into environmental quality, bypassing the risk and insecurity represented by other social groups" (65). This is especially evident in the cities of the global South where "perhaps the majority of residents ... live without adequate income and access to some form of stable assets, shelter, and safety nets. They live without access to clean water, sanitation, and power, and enjoy highly limited protection of rights, law, and political voice" (Simone 17).

Although Abdoumalique Simone is careful to note that there are many similarities between cities across the globe, he also wants to make it clear that the legacy of colonialism has shaped the cities of the global South in specific ways. The colonial city, as Simone describes it, was never fully integrated into the colonized state in a way that could be successfully drawn on in postcolonial times: "Colonial authorities rarely invested in the planning and governance of cities under their jurisdiction as coherent entities, because they were primarily interested in the extraction of resources and the affordable control and mobilization of urban labor" (18). This



legacy of the city as a resource for the colonizer made it all the more easy for “political regimes [to] enforce their power by making life as precarious as possible for a significant part of urban populations” (Simone 19). An example of the special nature of colonial cities can be found in the Caribbean, where: “[i]n contrast to most of the world, where cities develop from a rural background, historical circumstances have meant that in the Caribbean, urban areas developed prior to the rural hinterland” (Jaffe 4). Plantation economies “were quickly developed from the urban centres of military defence and administrative control in a process that could be termed ‘ruralization’” (Jaffe 4). Rivke Jaffe also notes that while these centres were designed to be defensive ports, “the internal structure of cities was based on inner defence strategies. Taking into account the possibility of revolts and riots of slaves and later the subjugated working classes, colonial planners sought to enforce a distinct social and class separation within the city” (5).

The ongoing boundaries between groups of people within cities are an important theme in postcolonial literature. In this chapter my aim is to bring these sorts of postcolonial conversations about the city into dialogue with environmental thought about the urban. Although there have been significant movements towards developing both an urban ecocriticism and a postcolonial ecocriticism (see my Introduction for a review of the current literature), my study is unique in looking at environmentally-oriented postcolonial urban literature. My aim in this chapter is to develop ways of talking about postcolonial urban literature that bring a text’s environmentality to the fore. This is to say that, following my focus on everyday environmentalisms, I am interested in seeing what ideas about environmental engagement are at work, on a variety of scales, in the novels under study. That said, I think it is crucial to do this in a way that does not override the other concerns of the texts, especially where those concerns are related to issues of social justice. To this end, I look to the environmental justice movement as a model for thinking through

environmental and social justice together. My reading of Lovelace and Mistry suggests these texts as possible examples of environmental justice literature.

In my analysis, I read for a larger environmental justice message, while at the same time carrying forward some elements from traditional ecocriticism which are important to retain, such as attention to the personal and emotional connections to the environment. The resulting picture depicts the frustration of inner-city residents subject to risky environmental conditions and the possibility that these same features, combined with their appreciation of place, might bring neighbours together for this common cause.

### ***Urban Ecocriticism: A Literature Review***

To date, ecocriticism has paid scant attention to the plight or possibility of urban environmentalism, favouring instead texts that profile wilderness or rural experiences. Such a focus forwards the misconception that the city is an inappropriate place for reflecting on or constructing one's relationship with nature. As a challenge to the wilderness and rural focus of much ecocriticism, Michael Bennett asks this provocative question: "But what happens when ecocriticism crosses the Mississippi or heads for a night on the town? Once it's seen New York, how can you keep it down on the farm (or pine barren or desert ecosystem)?" (31). Bennett's question reflects the growing attention to urban issues in ecocriticism, but it also reveals the American bias of much of the work. To extend Bennett's important call we might ask a similar question: What happens when ecocriticism crosses the Atlantic and heads for a night on the town in Accra? Once it's seen Mumbai, how can you keep it down in the USA? This brief survey of urban ecocriticism will demonstrate that although this field is doing important and necessary work, the scholarship itself largely lacks attention to the postcolonial and issues of environmental justice.

According to Michael Bennett, the historic origins of ecocriticism, rooted in Western American literature, is one of the reasons that urban texts have largely been excluded from ecocritical consideration. He argues that the American West looms large in the American environmental imagination (to borrow Buell's term), and that the mountains, prairies and parks of the West (think Yosemite and Yellowstone) have come to define nature with a capital "N." Ecocriticism, with its search for the authentic nature experience, replicated this regionalism. Strong institutional support for ecocriticism within Western universities, such as Nevada and Utah, as well as within Western professional associations (Bennett 37, 38) has also contributed to this bias. This question of which settings are conducive to the development of an ecological consciousness is an idea that will return again and again, especially as we ask questions about the meanings of nature in urban settings.

Bennett is among the growing cast of voices that wants to change this narrow perception of what counts as legitimate spaces for experiencing "nature" or "the environment" to include urban sites. Along with David Teague, Bennett is the editor of the first collection of ecocriticism specifically focused on the urban. Their anthology, entitled, *The Nature of Cities*, brings together some of the top American ecocritics such as Kathleen Wallace and Michael Branch, and includes those, like Terrell Dixon, who are also important figures in the environmental justice movement. It includes a wide range of ways of interpreting urban ecocriticism, including revisionist readings of authors such as Audre Lorde, the reading of cities *as* texts, and the role of the "urban wilderness" in American ghetto cinema.

Lawrence Buell has also engaged with questions of the urban in ecocriticism. Buell's *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the US and Beyond*, seeks to "put 'green' and 'brown' landscapes, the landscapes of exurbia and industrialization, in

conversation with one other [sic]" (7). Buell applies a broad and interdisciplinary perspective to this project, all the while maintaining a historic, rather than theoretical, approach. For instance, Buell revisits Katharine Lee Bates's enduringly popular poem "America the Beautiful" in order to expose it as a palimpsest of wilderness and urban realities. Although at first glance, he writes, the poem appears to be guilty of the "felony of reducing all America to a beautiful landscape painting" (10), he insists that the poem does allude to the urban. He argues that the lines, "Where alabaster cities gleam/ Undimmed by human tears," "obliquely suggest the slums" (10) which marked the edge of the "White City," the site of the 1893 Columbian Exposition. Such revisionist readings point to a desire within the field of urban ecocriticism to validate itself by insisting on the presence of the urban even within apparently un-urban texts.

Once urban ecocritics have succeeded in drawing attention to the urban in environmental texts (or, rather, have drawn attention to the environment in urban texts), the next hurdle is to argue that a sense of place—which is so central to nature writing—can also be achieved or nurtured through urban experiences. Buell, for his part, is interested in the ways British and American modernist writers evoked the city. In the urban-set works of Virginia Woolf and William Carlos Williams, for example, Buell finds that the authors have not left out nature completely. He notes an ecopoetics within their works that is infused with the rhythms of ecology and which reflects the bioregional attitudes of the times. And yet, despite this sensitivity, Buell also finds amongst urban authors a sense that people within the city are limited by these overly-constructed (and yet often woefully poorly planned) places. Taking a look at the contemporary situation, instead, Bennett is particularly interested in the ways in which cities like Los Angeles are being called into placeness through the works of Edward Soja, Frederic Jameson, and science fiction author Philip K. Dick. Bennett admits that "[t]hese are not the usual suspects when one lines up nature writers and ecocritics, but their work speaks to an experience of urban

environments more germane to the lives of the majority of the inhabitants of the Western states, who live in cities and suburbs, than the most eloquent testimonials to one man or woman's encounter with the wilderness" (5). We could add other examples, as well, of pairings of writers who bring a sense of placeness to cities, such as Michel de Certeau's re-visioning of New York City in "Walking in the City" alongside Don DeLillo's gridlock suspense novel *Cosmopolis*. The work of renowned urban thinker Jane Jacobs, who made a strong case for the neighbourhood and the walkable city in her life's work, might also be an inspiring resource for helping to remind the ecocritical circle that cities are also places that matter (environmentally speaking). William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* has perhaps done more than any other book in drawing the city into a discussion of the environment, in its classical American sense. Cronon's study of the commodity flows in and out of Chicago—tracing connections between the City and the Country—succeeds in showing the two spheres as co-constitutive. By portraying the Frontier as a place that relied on peripheral cities like Chicago, Cronon helps redefine the rural and the wilderness as projects much in the same way (some) urban centres can be seen.

In terms of reconfiguring how we think about the nature-culture divide, especially where it echoes the difference between the urban and wilderness, Ashton Nichols' term "urbanature" (which he says rhymes with "furniture"), offers perhaps the most succinct language that attempts to collapse the imaginative disjuncture between the city and its oppositional space, "nature." "The concept this word describes," he writes, "says that nature and urban life are not as distinct as we have long supposed" (347). More than even simply being less distinct than we may have imagined, Nichols takes this logic to its extreme end by suggesting that there is no way to either be fully in or fully out of nature. In a sense this echoes Bennett's claim that we cannot—and must stop trying to—fully imagine ourselves outside of the human. Nichols adds a twist, however, by

saying that we are likewise never outside the realm of nature. He writes: “We are not *out* of nature in the streets of Beijing any more than we are *in* nature above tree-line in the Himalayas. . . . Nothing we do can take us out of nature. There is nowhere for us to go” (348). Provocative statements such as these really begin to beg the question of just what *is* nature, then, especially since most of us have a very different sense of what it feels like to be in the middle of a city like Beijing and what it might feel like to be standing on the side of a mountain in the Himalayas. For Nichols this difference lies in the concept of ‘wildness,’ which he argues is theoretically and practically distinguishable from the concept of “wilderness.”

To explain this difference Nichols turns to one of the great figures of American environmentalism, Henry D. Thoreau, and reminds us that his cabin on Walden was not in the far-off wilderness, but was located near a town where he often went for dinner. Thoreau, he argues, didn’t want us to escape our city lives, but rather to “*wild* our own minds, to turn away from our emphasis on society toward the wilderness that is within us” (350). “What he meant, clearly,” writes Nichols, “was that Walden was a state of mind as much as it was a physical place,” and, further, that he wanted people to take this Walden state of mind wherever they went (349). On the other hand, this *wildness* appears to have had a very grounded meaning as well, one which seems less easily reconciled with Nichols’s idea of urbanature. Thoreau’s moment of epiphany, after all, does occur in the “wilderness” proper, and now we are no longer speaking of his Massachusetts hermitage, either. No, his moment occurs on Mount Katahdin when he is suddenly roused by the sensation of *contact* between his body and the body of earth: “At this moment,” Nichols writes, “the comfortably domestic world of Walden is threatened by an existentialist sense of the starkly material reality around us. Our environment suddenly appears as it is: a vast, titanic, uncaring mass of objects which render even the simplest questions of identity and awareness (‘Who are we?’ ‘Where are we?’) at once moot and almost mute” (352). This instance

of *wildness* is so clearly grounded in Thoreau's experience of the mountain-as-nature that it seems incommensurable with what Nichols is trying to argue about the applicability of Thoreau to the urban realm. Could we imagine a similar experience being had from the observation deck of the CN Tower? Perhaps not. Although Nichols wants to suggest that his Thoreau-influenced "urbanature" is about eliminating the concept of a separate wilderness sphere, his examples drawn from Thoreau do not necessarily support this non-dualistic conceptualization of nature.

Breyan Strickler dispenses almost entirely with the question of where nature is properly located, and opts for another entry point into discussions of urban ecocriticism. In her "The Pathologization of Environmental Discourse: Melding Disability Studies and Ecocriticism in Urban Grunge Novels," Strickler makes a number of points that could help shape a postcolonial, or even just internationally-oriented, urban ecocriticism. Strickler is interested in the connections between the dirt and filth of the city, and its relation to feelings of social anxiety or liberty. Strickler's thesis is that within the American context, as Buell, following Ulrich Beck, has written, there is an overwhelming fear of being dangerously reconnected with all that has been rejected as waste—a fear which promotes the idea of separate spaces for 'pure' wilderness, middle-class human habitation, and waste. Within the Australian context (and here she, perhaps controversially, identifies Australia and not the US, with postcolonialism), Strickler argues that cleanliness is associated with the elite/colonial rule, and thus to embrace filth is to reject the oppression of the (post)colonial. She therefore argues that there is less worry about the contamination of the urban by the natural, and vice-versa, in Australian literature. To support these claims, Strickler draws on the public discourses of American and Australian professional environmental associations. In American environmentalist discourse, she argues, human development is portrayed as an "incursion" into nature that must be addressed with the language of combat. Alternatively, she writes that Australian environmentalism, although also somewhat

upholding the urban/non-urban division, does not see this difference as a source of necessary confrontation. Based on her readings of the Mudrooroo Narogin's *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the End of the World* and Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, Strickler makes the following distinction: "in [Australian] grunge fiction, the characters 'embrace the ambiguous' (Brooks 98), while those in [American] toxic fiction are threatened by the ambiguous" (114).

Strickler's argument that attitudes towards environmental decay or destruction are multiple and place-specific opens new possibilities for ecocriticism to explore and confront the sometimes challenging conditions of urban environments. Her work draws attention to the fact that urban ecocriticism cannot simply be about blurring the boundaries between urban, rural, and wilderness spaces, but instead must involve examining the unique experiences of living within a cityscape. The urban draws people and their environments closely together through the mediator of culture (the rural, too, does this, however the highly visible built environment makes this fact more easily apparent in a city). Ecocriticism would do well to take a closer look at this intersection in which so many of us dwell and from which so much important environmental activism has grown. It is a site where the social and the environmental coexist in often uncomfortable, sometimes inspiring, ways.

### ***Environmental Justice as an Ecocritical Approach***

There are two primary reasons why environmental justice makes sense as a framework for approaching urban environmentally-oriented literature. The first is that the environmental justice movement has had considerable success in defining and addressing environmental concerns *within* urban centres. Secondly, the environmental justice commitment to combating environmental racism makes it a possible ally of postcolonialism, and might even lend the "political" edge to environmentalism that Cilano and DeLoughrey argue postcolonialists have felt was missing from the green movement. There is often a misconception that the environment only



ranks as a concern amongst white, middle class, non-rural citizens of wealthy nations (see Ingleton, qtd. in Guha and Martinez-Alier). Andil Gosine and Cheryl Teckumsingh point out that this is an unfair, and unfounded, representation, and that in actual fact environmental issues are important concerns of people and communities of colour. The 17 principles of the environmental justice movement were, in fact, established at The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C., in 1991. The conference represented diverse voices from the fourth-world, with representatives from “all fifty states including Alaska and Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Chile, Mexico, and as far away as the Marshall Islands” (Bullard “Twenty-first” 152). The environmental justice movement, and more so the principle of social change that it draws on, has had enormous resonance throughout the postcolonial world. As Ruchi Anand writes:

Just as the environmental justice movement in the US was a response to the failure of mainstream policy makers to address issues of social justice for low-income minority communities, there has been tremendous opposition to many international global agreements and efforts because they do not adequately reflect the interests of countries of the South. (15)

The movement also resonates with the works of long-time environmental activists like Vandana Shiva, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Arundhati Roy and Ramachandra Guha, who situate their work within the larger political realms of globalization and postcolonialism. At the level of grassroots activism as well, the social focus of environmental justice speaks directly to the immediate environmental concerns of people living in poor environmental conditions. This is where, I argue, environmental justice has the greatest valence as a way to understand representations of environmentalism (where they may not have previously been interpreted as such) in postcolonial literature. There are currently many books that provide a detailed account of the movement, and it is not my aim to replicate their work (see, for example, Bullard, *Quest*; Sandler and Pezzullo; Schlosberg; Dobson; Ruchi; and McDonald). I would like instead to highlight a few key elements of environmental justice that I think make it especially relevant to the postcolonial context; towards this end I will

be looking at the movement's international scope as well as its political foundations, which suit it to doing work in a postcolonial, globalized context.

The US environmental justice movement is a grassroots response to the fact that, as Andrew Dobson writes, “poor people live in poor environments,” meaning that economically or racially marginalized people are more likely to be living in at-risk environments (17). In fact, it was originally a response to a trend noted by some African American communities that they were being affected by environmental racism, or the targeting of racialized communities for the location of environmental hazards. Their fears were confirmed by a 1989 report commissioned by the Church of Christ which concluded that race, more than economics, was the determining factor in where toxic waste dumps were being sited in the US<sup>14</sup>. It was also at that time, the late 1980s, that black communities in the Southern US, including Louisiana's “Cancer Alley,” began to protest against plans for more petro-chemical plants in their already beleaguered neighbourhoods. As Dorceta E. Taylor has summarily noted then, the US is a place where there does exist an environmental justice paradigm, supported by a strong history of activism—bolstered by the tradition of civil rights struggles, vast scholarship, and important legal backing. By the early 1990s, it was found that three in every five African Americans were living near a former toxic waste dump site (Bullard, “Unequal Protection,” 309). The movement is not limited to toxic waste, though. Residents of inner city and rural areas have been galvanized around issues such as access to public transit, concerns over the effects of lead paint in social housing stock, and the right to clean air. Citizens who have risen to the fore of the movement are overwhelmingly people

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<sup>14</sup> Such a pattern of neglect is certainly not isolated to the US. In *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Paul Gilroy references a leaked memo written by Lawrence Summers when he was chief economist for the World Bank, in which he wrote “I think the logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that. . . .I've always thought that under-populated countries in Africa are vastly UNDER-polluted. . . .” (qtd. in Gilroy, *Melancholia* 10). Gilroy points to a racial and geographical hierarchy of “biopolitical status” (10) that gives permission to those in power to make toxic the environments of those with less political and economic power.

who would not have labelled themselves activists in any sense before their involvement in these local issues. One such group, the Mothers of East L.A. (MELA) represent the municipally neglected east side of Los Angeles. They originally came together to oppose a prison being built in their residential neighbourhood and later went on to fight a toxic-waste incinerator, and an oil pipeline. They continue to fight for the health and welfare of their economically impoverished Latina/o community (see Platt; Pulido). An important question that keeps arising as I try to map out urban environmentalism is just *who* are we talking about when we talk about urban residents. On the one hand, we use “inner city” to speak to those racially and economically marginalized people who have not traditionally been involved in environmentalism, such as MELA, and who are the ones likely to suffer the disproportionate environmental “bads.” On the other hand, however, mainstream environmentalism as we know it has largely been a project of middle-class urbanites whose ecological hearts lie in the wilderness lands outside the city. Emma Mawdsley raises these important questions about the attempt to define Indian middle-classes. Her own efforts to define urban middle-class environmental attitudes in India are predicated on foregrounding the diversity, heterogeneity and situatedness of such terms as “middle-class” and “environment.” Likewise, in this paper I try to acknowledge the various meanings and manifestations of urban environmentalisms in the settings presented by the two novels.

Since the urban is unabashedly a human-built, human-inhabited environment, it *is* true that at first environmentalism, and its wilderness preservation imperative, might seem out of place. Environmental justice advocates locate environmentalism where they live, however, rather than in some faraway exurban place. One major contribution of environmental justice organizations, in fact, has been to make the environment “discursively different,” “so that the dominant wilderness, greening, and natural resource focus now includes urban disinvestment, racism, homes, jobs, neighbourhoods, and communities” (Agyeman 2). Turning our attention

towards the urban as a site of environmental concern often requires a massive reorienting of what Buell calls the “environmental imagination.” Some argue, however, that the “environment” in environmental justice is actually a misnomer. Andrew Dobson writes that “the environmental justice movement seems, stubbornly, to be much more about human justice than about the natural environment—or, rather, it is only about the natural inasmuch as it (the natural environment) can be seen in terms of human justice” (24). Dobson’s comments reflect the ongoing rift between social ecology (most often associated with Murray Bookchin) and deep ecology (most often associated with Arne Naess and George Sessions) in the environmental movement. While I agree with Dobson that the movement has been primarily about human justice, critics such as Vandana Shiva have clearly shown the synergistic relationship between human and environmental justice. Shiva’s emphasis on women farmers as the bearers of local ecological knowledge, for example, shows a unique balance between anthropocentrism and biocentrism. So while I agree that the issue of human health lends immediacy to the cause, and this often means environmental issues need to be framed as social justice issues, what worries me about characterizations such as Dobson’s is that they risk reinforcing the idea that those fighting for environmental justice (that is, largely racialized urban or poor rural populations) are without a particularly environmental consciousness. This is worrisome because it reinforces stereotype that people without economic means and people of racialized minorities are lacking, through culture or circumstance, the enlightened planetary consciousness to inform environmentalism. Although environmental justice advocates themselves may not be overly concerned with whether or not they are perceived as environmentalists within their own rights, since their focus and energies are on addressing immediate community needs, it is important to recognize and acknowledge the environmental angle of environmental justice. A key message of the movement is that we cannot pretend that social problems do not have an environmental dimension, and vice-verse.

Although the environmental justice is typically thought of as an American movement it is also active, both as theory and practice, outside the US and in the global South. According to J. Timmons Roberts, one important reason for looking beyond the US is that the movement appears to have lost some of its momentum there, and could actually benefit from the rejuvenated, greater scale of the movement in places like Brazil and India. Andrew Dobson points out some interesting differences between just how the environment is theorized around the world: “In the ‘developed’ world,” he writes, “we find ourselves drawn to make the distinction between environmentalism and environmental justice because of the place that concern for the environment ‘for its own sake’, for example, has in green politics, and the associated (but not necessarily connected) thought that issues of national and international distributive justice may have only a tangential bearing on such concern” (18). That is to say that in the historic preoccupation with overwhelmingly national land and species preservation, environmentalists of the global North have been less concerned with those factors that produce international and local environmental injustices. Environmentalisms of the South, however, have long been preoccupied by just such systems. Productive links can be made between the global environmental justice movement and antiglobalization work. In what might be called the greening of the (anti)globalization movement, international environmental justice organizations respond to what they see as “global patterns of inequality in environmental exposure where the world’s poorest, often nonwhite regions face a triple threat” (Dobson 286). Dobson explains that this “triple threat” includes: the fact of dwindling resources in the “have” countries, resulting in the expansion of resource extraction to what he calls the “peripheries” (286); an increase in the energy- and pollution-intensive production stages; and the enormous manufacturing boom in China and other countries, “resulting in some severe exposure of workers and downstream and downwind communities” (286). On the one hand, then, there is this strong and broad threat to environments in the global South due to

“the restructuring of the world economy” (286), and on the other hand, compounding this situation, is the vulnerability factor: “‘Third World’ people are less able to predict, prepare for, respond to, and cope with industrial exposures and cataclysmic disasters, including those caused by climate change” (286).

Globalization might also prove to be a source for transnational organizing. An important example is the Porto Alegre Manifesto born out of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2004, which called for an “alternative development model that stresses energy conservation and democratic control of natural resources” (Schlosberg 82). Globalization, then, can be understood both as a factor in contributing to environmental injustice and as a catalyst for raising awareness about it. Schlosberg articulates it well when he writes that:

Certainly, at the center of the recent protests against global financial and trade institutions, against the globalization of the food system, and for climate justice and indigenous rights, is the issue of equity; economic or distributive injustice is a key and constant rallying cry. The most basic critique of the currently favored neoliberal model of globalization and development is that it increases and exacerbates inequity, both between the North and the South and between elites and the impoverished in southern nations. (82)

All of this points to a growing sense that environmental concerns are now embedded in the language of the critique of globalization, a trend that points to the entrenchment of environmentalism globally as well as the heightened awareness that although environmental problems may affect us all, already vulnerable populations and communities are subject to a greater share of these and other problems.

### *Caribbean Environmentalisms*

In Chapter One, I paired my reading of Markandaya’s novel with an exploration of some of the

key players and themes in the scholarship on Indian environmental thought. Controversial big-dam projects, such as that in the Narmada valley, have drawn interest in the Indian environmentalist causes. This process of providing regional context to environmental debates is fundamental to ensuring that postcolonial ecocriticism remains sensitive and responsive to knowledge about the local. This chapter compares the work of Indian-Canadian author Rohinton Mistry with a text by Trinidadian writer Earl Lovelace. Here I would like to provide a brief summary of some of the work being done on Caribbean environmentalisms in order to help situate my reading of Lovelace. In contrast to literature on Indian environmentalisms, there appears to be only a small yet steady scholarly interest in Anglo Caribbean environmentalisms. Three important contributions to this field include *Beyond Sun and Sand: Caribbean Environmentalisms*, edited by Sherrie L. Baver and Barbara Deutsch Lynch, “*What is the Earthly Paradise?*”: *Ecocritical Responses to the Caribbean*, edited by Chris Campbell and Erin Somerville, and *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*, edited by Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renee K. Gosson, and George B. Handley.

Discourse about the Caribbean environment tends to come from an economic development perspective, rather than a philosophical one. Indeed, much of the literature on the subject of the Caribbean environment comes out of the world’s “development” bodies such as the UN (for example, see *Caribbean Environment Outlook*, a joint publication between UNEP and CARICOM). In *Beyond Sun and Sand*, Francine Jàcome explains that global economic practices, such as structural adjustment policies, continue to have direct impacts on the Caribbean environment in a way that makes economics an unavoidable factor in regional environmentalisms (17). Because of this situation, Jàcome articulates the following as the goals, broadly defined, of Caribbean environmentalisms: “the need for a model of economic development—sustainable in some cases—that gives serious consideration to environmental problems, and the importance of

international cooperation” (23). The Caribbean’s position in a globalized economy is at the forefront of much discussion of the region’s environmental politics (see Romero and West; McGregor, Dodman, and Barker).

According to Shona N. Jackson, neither strictly political nor economic arenas can provide the foundation for successful, emancipatory environmentalisms: “a vision of ecological sustainability in the Caribbean,” she writes, “cannot come from political discourse. Such a relation to the land and how we must inhabit it has so far only begun to emerge in Caribbean literary discourse, which seeks to push forth an idea of humanity as coextensive with nature” (96). DeLoughrey, Gosson and Handley point to four main ways in which literary discourse is pushing the Caribbean landscape in important directions, many of which have to push hard against the lingering tides of colonial legacy. The first of these is the way in which Caribbean texts reveal the impacts of colonial and plantation economies on the local environments. The second form of subversion is through re-visiting and re-writing myths of the islands’ Edenic origins. Another point of interest for Caribbean writers seems to be in making connections between paradigms of purity vs. creolity in both the natural and the human world. Lastly, DeLoughrey et al point to the ways in which a “Caribbean aesthetics might usefully articulate a means to preserve sustainability in the wake of tourism and globalization” (2).

The idea of the Caribbean islands as sites of paradise has historically played a very formative role in the way the traveller, especially, has viewed the region. Environmental historian Richard Grove explains that there has been a long history of the literal search for Edenic spaces. He notes that this may have taken the form of, say, the building of botanical gardens in Cairo as far back as the 11<sup>th</sup> century but that the idea was certainly cemented in the fantasy of the West Indies during the early maritime expeditions by Columbus (23). Their status as geographically



small islands made them more easily digested by the imagination, and more easily contained by exploration and the like, all of which enhanced the idea of the islands as gardens and even possibly as Gardens in the mythical-biblical sense. Explorers Columbus and Pire, for example, were motivated by the idea that a genuine Eden lay within the Americas or Asia and that it was possible to discover these places of “perpetual spring” (215). This notion of the problematic overlay of Eden onto the landscapes of the Caribbean are echoed as well by Cilano and DeLoughrey, DeLoughrey et al, Tiffin (*Five Emus*), and O’Brien (“Garden”), each of whom focuses not on the development of the myth of Eden but on the postcolonial process of writing against this entrenched formula.

Grove’s thesis, then, departs from other standard critiques of the impact of colonialist thinking on the environment. Whereas, in Groves’s words, “[s]ome would argue that [the scientists and explorers] brought about a new and essentially masculine discourse inherently hostile to a ‘natural’, ‘sustainable’ and more deeply rooted feminine discourse,” he argues instead that given the turn in thinking at the time, “the growing interest in mechanistic analysis and comparison actually enabled rational and measured observations of environmental changes, as well as encouraging an organised conservationist response” (51). Grove substantiates this last claim by citing critiques of deforestation at the time, suggesting that Columbus, among others, were beginning to make linkages between the commercially-driven deforestation of the islands and the changing rainfall patterns (76). Grove, therefore, controversially sees the development of the ecological sciences as nurtured by attempts to simultaneously exploit and manage colonial lands. Measured observations and organized conservationist responses are certainly not the picture painted by another environmental historian, Alfred Crosby, whose book *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* details a history of misguided invasive flora and fauna, deforestation, plantations, hunting, and transplantations. According to

Crosby, far from being careful observers of the changes they wrought on the new ecosystems, colonizers perpetrated the casual spread of weeds and livestock and the deliberate over-culling of native animals in ways that forever shaped the landscapes of the “neo-Europe’s” (3). The paradox between the fact that the Caribbean landscapes were dramatically changed by colonisation and the persisting idea of those same places as “paradise”—a term that connotes the untouched and origin—is stark.

The response of Caribbean writers and environmentalists has been to distance themselves from the idea that the islands embody Eden, or at least to challenge this idea by revealing what might be considered the flip side of paradise, as indicated by the titles of two of the collections mentioned above. This challenge is, as many have pointed out, most keenly felt in Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place*, where she occupies the mind’s eye of an imagined tourist and seeks to reveal the contrast between the sandy beaches of the tourist resorts and the pot-holed roads that the residents themselves use. The tourist industry is reliant on reading the Caribbean as a boozy Eden, and thus does damage twice. It does so first by perpetuating this myopic view of the Caribbean as an unreal place, which creates a barrier to thinking about the need for real political, economic and environmental improvement. Secondly, the tourist industry as it exists has created much damage to the Caribbean environments in the form of water use, waste, and land appropriation. In an interview in the DeLoughrey collection, Derek Walcott, an important figure in the articulation of a Caribbean environmentalism, expressed the impact of the Hilton’s Jalousie Hotel resort in St. Lucia as not only an appropriation of land at its most basic level, but as an effacement or tarnishing of a sacred space. He likens the building of that hotel, nestled between St. Lucia’s defining twin mountains, the Pitons, as equivalent to erecting a McDonald’s on the iconic bluffs of Utah that form the cultural heart of the American ideal of the frontier, and that grace so many Louis L’Amour covers (DeLoughrey et al 128).

***The Novels: A Tree Grows in the City***

In response to the overpowering image of Eden, Lovelace inverts the concept of the sacred as he writes about a temple of garbage in a Trinidadian slum. Lovelace's novel, like Mistry's, is a study of local power and autonomy in the face of decaying urban conditions. The actions of the main characters in both texts recall Rukmani's negotiations of her own changing environment in *Nectar in a Sieve*. These three texts best exemplify the way the everyday can produce both regularity and innovation, as the characters adapt to and react to their environs. The fact that neither of these novels, or authors, is expressly considered "environmental," is key to my point in this section, as well as to this project as a whole. I want to emphasize the point that I have been building towards throughout the project, which is that environmentalism may indeed look different in postcolonial setting than how it has come to be defined, narrowly perhaps, in the West. Nevertheless, environmental concern is an important, recurring theme in postcolonial arts and culture. Such concern, I argue, is best observed at the micro level of the everyday, where the individual subject encounters his or her own space and must create their life in that place. The interplay between this individual level and larger social, political, and ecological spheres is not unimportant, but rather it helps contextualize the spaces in which these individuals operate.

Having provided a brief look at both environmental justice and the varieties of environmentalism at work in India and the Caribbean, I will now show how Lovelace and Mistry both dialogue with these themes within the framework of more typical postcolonial concerns, including questions of autonomy and community rights following independence. What is shown here, then, is that environmental concerns—especially as defined through the framework of environmental justice—are postcolonial concerns. It is important to note that these concerns are not simply theoretical concerns applied to the experiences of people living in the global South.

Rather, as these texts demonstrate, the intersection between social, environmental, and the postcolonial is a site that people inhabit in their daily lives. The conditions of (non-elite) urban existence in the postcolonial world bring these elements together in a tightly woven manner, making it difficult to ignore their interlocking nature. This reading is designed to highlight three elements that contribute to an overall understanding of postcolonial everyday environmentalisms. The first task is a simple one; to reframe urban issues as environmental issues. For this, the work of the environmental justice movement is key. Here I focus on the environmental ills of these inner-city and ex-urban environments, notably involving water quality, sanitation, housing and infrastructure. Secondly, I argue that these environmental conditions are important catalysts which spur the citizens to organize and struggle against the state, thus linking the environmental struggle to that of the marginalized in the postcolonial state. Lastly, I want to emphasize that alongside these specifically political concerns, urban citizens are also engaged in the creation and maintenance of their own communal, aesthetic, and spiritual relationships with the non-human world.

Lovelace's novel opens with a rich description of the setting—Calvary Hill, Port of Spain. Lovelace's description of place is as unique in its imagery as it is in its use of language. Merle Hodge writes that through his "creative use of the language environment in which he writes, Lovelace has made an unparalleled contribution to the development of the West Indian literary voice" (nap.). Hodge further argues that the power of Lovelace's literary voice is not just in his use of language, but rather that his language is "shaped by ways of seeing (narrative as well as philosophical perspectives)" (nap.). This link between the style of language, notably the use of Creole forms of speech rather than simply Standard English forms, and ways of thinking is central to reading this text as a source for local environmental knowledge. The novel itself—not just dialogue, but the narration, too—is steeped in the local vernacular and thus the perspective on

place and environment that we are presented with is reflective of a way of thinking that was generated through that place. From a postcolonial perspective, the decision to invoke the Creole voice, or, rather, to permit the Creole voice to be heard and printed, is an important political choice. Edward Kamau Braithwaite has called for the development of a “nation language” that represents the “submerged” Caribbean voice which has “always been there” but was actively suppressed by a colonial education system (282). Lovelace unearths this voice and what emerges appears as an unmediated, immediate description (achieved through a mix of the present-tense, second-person voice, and stream-of-consciousness) of a Port of Spain shanty town that mimics the experience of being there:

This is the hill, Calvary Hill, where the sun set on starvation and rise on potholed roads, thrones for stray dogs that you could play banjo on their rib bones, holding garbage piled high like a cathedral spire, sparkling with flies buzzing like torpedoes; and if you want to pass from your yard to the road you have to be a high-jumper to jump over the gutter full up with dirty water, and hold your nose. Is noise whole day. Laughter is not laughter; it is a groan coming from the bosom of these houses – no – not houses, shacks that leap out of the red dirt and stone, thin like smoke, fragile like kite paper, balancing on their rickety pillars as broomsticks on the edge of a juggler’s nose. (1)

The result is that Lovelace’s image of Calvary Hill is of a place at once chaotic and distinct. The piles of garbage are not just masses of trash, but are “piled high like a cathedral spire” (1); likewise, the shacks are not simply rows and rows of indistinguishable sub-standard buildings, but are delicately described as “fragile like kite paper” and perched absurdly like “broomsticks on the edge of a juggler’s nose” (1). Lovelace’s finely-hewn yet spontaneous-seeming similes demonstrate that non-Standard English is richly evocative and capable of precise expression. His portrait of poverty implicates three of the senses in an attempt to communicate the all-encompassing experience of living in the Port of Spain slum. Lovelace takes on a strong moratoria voice here by replacing characters with the second-person (e.g. “if you want to pass

from your yard to the road” (1), a technique which here has the effect of foregrounding the setting, and thus nullifying the idea of the background almost entirely. It is clear from the outset, then, that the city itself is an important feature of the novel, and it will play an important part in plot as well as the text’s overall effect. De Certeau’s vision of a city includes an orderly place when viewed from above, but in which “ordinary practitioners of the city live ‘down below,’” making use “of spaces that cannot be seen” (*Practices* 93). In Calvary Hill, where you must “be a high-jumper to jump over the gutter full up with dirty water” (1) just to get to your home, it is much more difficult to distinguish between the “ordinary practitioners of the city” and the “planned and readable city” (93). The shantytown is an informal space. This is not to say that it is not also highly organized, but it is a place “expelled from the formal world economy” (Davis, 14). To walk through Lovelace’s Calvary Hill is to exist almost fully “down below.”

In this space, nature abounds in the form of sunsets, dogs, flies, water, and red dirt and stone. These natural features, however, are almost all positioned to hinder the residents of Calvary Hill. The water is dirty gutter water, indicating poor or nonexistent sewage treatment. The hungry stray dogs, on their “thrones,” seem to be controlling the neighbourhood. The whole place buzzes with flies and noise. And yet, within this description there is also a strong sense of identity, or even ownership. The opening, declarative line “this is the hill,” repeated twice in the first page, not only lends authority to the narrator, but also binds together the description of the place with its identity. The point of this connection is not to say that the place necessarily defines or determines the people, but to show instead that even these undesirable elements of place, these environmental “bads” help to make up places that people form attachments to. This is perhaps particularly true in cities such as Port of Spain where macho status is related to perceived toughness of respective neighbourhoods. This theme often emerges in the discussions of the steel bands which were originally organized and competed according to neighbourhood: “this was his

territory,” Fisheye reflects at one point, “[t]his was slum, street corner territory, and it burned him to see [boys from the affluent neighbourhoods] entering it so casually” (55). Recalling Strickler, it is clear, then, that such an attachment to grunge does appear to help define these neighbourhoods against colonial power and, I would add, the authority of local elites. Feeling simultaneously rejected by those in power and desirous of their recognition (typical of the colonizer/colonized relationship according to Memmi), the men of Calvary Hill assume a defiant position of attachment to their piece of the hill, no matter how uncomfortable life there is. Their sense of autonomy is predicated on either assuming the position of trying to change the conditions themselves, as they will do, or else by accepting them for what they are. Either way, the goal is to attain a sense of control.

Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan offer another theory about the appearance of so many environmental “bads” in postcolonial literature. This has to do with the complex relationship between postcolonial literature and the form of the pastoral. Although Huggan and Tiffin note several reasons why the pastoral ought not to be “amenable” to postcolonial literature; they find that the genre maintains an important influence nevertheless, especially in its ability to project a future green utopia (83). Some of the drawbacks of the pastoral form include its adherence to and perpetuation of “highly codified relations between socially differentiated people: relations mediated, but also mystified, by supposedly universal cultural attitudes to land” (84). Seen as a vehicle for the “legitimation” (83) of “the dominant order” and “the symbolic management – which sometimes means the silencing – of less privileged social groups” (84), the limitations of the pastoral as an expression of decolonization or postcolonial critique is evident. Greg Garrard speaks to the response by the colonized to the violence of the pastoral when he writes that:

colonised peoples in Australia and South Africa ... have a similar ambivalence towards ‘settler pastoral’, while Francophone African writers developed the

‘indigene pastoral’ of the Négritude movement. For African Americans, the meanings of pastoral are different again, reflecting the historical experience of plantation slavery and, later, rural lynching. (*Ecocriticism* 55)

This analysis of the place of the pastoral in the postcolonial environmental imagination draws attention to the violence of narratives which unself-consciously wrote marginalized people out of the landscapes. Huggan and Tiffin, however, argue that the pastoral is entirely ignorant of social struggles as they are related to the land. They note that the pastoral can take an ironic form where the “myth of pastoral fulfillment” lives under the pressure of questions about land ownership and management (85). “Pastoral, in this last sense,” they write, “is a spectral form, always aware of the suppressed violence that helped make its peaceful visions possible, and always engaged with the very histories from which it appears to want to escape” (85). It is with these ironies in mind that Huggan and Tiffin trace what they sometimes call the “antipastoral” in postcolonial literature (namely white South African, Australian and Caribbean). Two examples of the antipastoral include the degenerated garden (the garden being both a symbol of Eden and organized nature) and the degenerated farm (a common theme in the South African *plaasroman*, a genre explicitly linked to the antipastoral through Coetzee’s critical writings). They also imply that simply *writing* the non-Western landscape is a form of anti-pastoral, because the genre itself, as pointed out by writers such as Jamaica Kincaid, did not have the language to represent the flora and fauna of the non-temperate zones. Although I am focusing on the use of their term “antipastoral,” it is important to note that Huggan and Tiffin see postcolonial literature as existing within a much broader relationship to the pastoral than that term alone suggests. They write: “The evidence suggests that pastoral will continue to be of interest to postcolonial writers, whether they are attacking its reactionary tendencies or are reworking it into more socially and/or environmentally progressive forms. Pastoral’s radical potential is often dismissed and its idealizations derided” (120). For the purpose of studying environmentally-oriented urban postcolonial literature in



particular, where the urban is unquestionably a non-pastoral site, I am interested in the disjuncture between the pastoral ideal and the antipastoral in urban literature. The history of the pastoral and its ideals are an important context for reading Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, a novel that contains a precarious garden in the middle of a degenerating city and an unstable state. It is the utopic ideal of calm, green pastures, rather than the rich mess of the gritty downtown (as in the urban grunge), that is held sacred in this novel.

Whereas Lovelace's text focuses on a crumbling neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city, Mistry's novel has a much tighter focus: that of the dilapidated downtown Bombay compound where Gustad Noble and his family live. The overwhelming feature of the compound is the great black wall on its edge which Gustad both loves and loathes. The wall serves to contain the compound and to provide privacy for its residents, a function for which he is grateful. On the other hand, the wall represents everything that's wrong with the neighbourhood: people use the wall as (in Gustad's words) "a wholesale public latrine" (16). The wall is marked by flies, mosquitoes and a "horrible stink" (16), all of which contaminate the living space of the Khodadad residents. Overall, however, Gustad recognizes the usefulness of the wall in defining their community against the chaos of the city outside. Early in the novel Gustad learns that the municipality—portrayed as the neighbourhood's insufferable foe—intends to widen the road out front of the building and Gustad responds with anger:

The bloody bastards were out of their minds. What was the need to widen the road. He measured the ground with hurried strides. The compound would shrink to less than half its present width, and the black stone wall would loom like a mountain before the ground floor tenants. More a prison camp than a building, all cooped up like sheep or chickens. (16)

The mosquitoes become one of the main nuisances for Gustad's family, exacerbating the already high stress of their lives to past the breaking point. The mosquitoes are symbolic of the inescapable deteriorating conditions of the neighbourhood. They are also, however, persistent

material manifestations of the conditions themselves. They fill the air and physically make homelife bothersome. This is the stuff of the everyday. The repetition of the mosquitoes' descent into the family home at dusk is a dreaded, if familiar, pattern: "Darius returned from cricket practice just before dinner-time, and so did the mosquitoes" (122). The predictability of this pattern combined with the nature of mosquitoes as common, unremarkable creatures paints a picture of everyday postcolonial environmentalisms as attitudes that are cultivated in reaction to highly specific local conditions that repeat themselves in daily lives.

Another important repeated feature of the postcolonial urban Bombay environment involves the collecting of water. As the novel opens with Gustad performing his prayers, we see his wife Dilnavaz performing another ritual: filling pots with water before the city shuts it off for the day. The problems extend beyond Khodadad Building as well, and include "overflowing sewers, broken water-pipes, pot-holed pavement, rodent invasions, bribe-extracting public servants, uncontrolled hills of garbage, open manholes, shattered street-lights – in short...the general decay and corruption of cogs that turned the wheels of city life"(312). The local doctor, Dr. Paymaster, describes the situation thus: "Does the municipality listen? Yes. Does it do anything? No. For months and years now. Problems wherever you look" (305). The scene involving Dilnavaz, however, provides an intimate look into everyday environmentalisms. The process of water collection, repeated each morning before the children wake and paralleled with her husband's prayers, is a good example of the way literature helps give voice to those everyday experiences that may get overlooked in other areas of theory. In this case, the daily practice involves the collection and treatment of water. Her care and agony over the quality of the water combined with the fact of the quotidian nature of the act create an example of everyday environmentalism. Dilnavaz is not trying to improve environmental conditions on a large scale, rather, she is working hard as a manager of her immediate environment. The following passage

shows her anguish over the responsibility of this role: “The earthen pot was full to the brim. Dilnavaz measured six drops of the crimson solution. It never stopped nagging her that they did not boil the water. But Gustad said that straining and adding potassium permanganate was precaution enough” (12). When their youngest daughter contracts a severe virus later in the novel, Dilnavaz’s fears about the water seem to be confirmed.

Despite all of these problems, Mistry’s novel also makes space to look at the therapeutic aspects of nature’s presence in the city. This is an important feature, as it encourages us to expand our concept of urban environmentalism beyond something purely utilitarian. In the opening paragraph where the presence of the neem tree helps to establish a feeling of calm in the midst of the chaos: “The hour was approaching six, and up in the compound’s solitary tree the sparrows began to call. Gustad listened to their chirping every morning while reciting his *kusti* prayers. There was something reassuring about it” (1). The neem tree (which, through Shiva’s advocacy work has itself become an emblem of Indian environmentalism) forms the ecological heart of the novel, and Gustad’s garden is an extension of that space. His garden acts as an oasis of peace and calm, and we learn that he takes “such joy” in tending his rose and vinca plants every morning (16): “He went to the two bushes growing in the small patch of dusty earth under his window, opposite the black stone wall, and performed his daily bit of gardening. There were scraps of paper tangled in the leaves. Every morning he tended both bushes, although the vinca was the only one he had planted – the mint had begun to sprout of its own accord one day” (15). This, too, is the stuff of the everyday.

The aesthetic and personal significance of the garden is connected, if not totally reducible to, its use value. The plants in the garden—especially the wild *subjo* mint—provide medicines for the residents of the building. Everyday, for example, the daughter-in-law of Khodadad Building’s

most elderly resident comes to collect fresh mint to wear around his neck to control his hypertension. The neem tree, too, provides for the residents:

For children in Khodadad Building, cuttings from its soothing branches had stroked the itchy rashes and papules of measles and chicken-pox. For Gustad, neem leaves (pulped into a dark drink by Dilnavaz with her mortar and pestle) had kept his bowel from knotting up [after his accident]. For servants, hawkers, beggars passing through, neem twigs served as toothbrush and toothpaste rolled into one. Year after year, the tree gave unstintingly of itself to whoever wanted. (30)

As well—though it is not specifically mentioned in the novel—urban trees and gardens act as important carbon sinks, shade-providers, and habitats for urban wildlife like birds.

And so we have this tiny little plot of nature (albeit of the highly-constructed, highly-designed variety) which provides a number of important functions in this little Bombay neighbourhood. The garden acts as a sort of anchor in the compound, being something the neighbours can draw from and protect communally. The neem tree especially is often referenced as a point of pride in the compound, symbolizing—for Gustad, at least—the building’s collective identity.

Whereas *Such a Long Journey* shows the positive aspects of nature functioning as a refuge and provides a template for an improved neighbourhood, *The Dragon Can’t Dance* makes similar comments but offers fewer models of what the community might become. Nevertheless, the references to “positive” nature in *The Dragon Can’t Dance* also offer insights into the place of nature within the city, and build on the thesis forwarded by some that one can develop, if not an environmental consciousness, then at least a relationship with nature, within a city setting. Further, from a postcolonial perspective, the novel demonstrates that a flight from nature, the rural exodus that is a theme in so many postcolonial works (as well as later nineteenth century Western European and North American texts), cannot be overlooked as one of the defining

features of an urban identity, thus establishing a number of important boundaries: between paid work and work on the land; between dependence on landowners and independence from them; between hard labour and what might be termed soft labour; and between a life perceived as simple and isolated versus one perceived as cosmopolitan. The memory of slavery and of indentured work informs these boundaries and means, in some ways, that nature, especially as related to labour, is a thing to turn from in the new independent states. We see this tension at work in *The Dragon Can't Dance*, especially through the character Pariag, who has recently come from the country to the city and Aldrick, who carries the memory of the futile land his grandfather finally abandoned to bring his family to the hopeful city. And although there is also a strong history of nature acting as the place for escape (notably the mountain regions of the Caribbean—see, for example, Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*; this is a theme I will explore in-depth in Chapter Four), Lovelace keeps his focus for a solution to the injustices of the city firmly within its bounds. He is not among the Caribbean authors who “[seek] nature as an ally” (DeLoughrey et al. 3). To summarize, we might say that Lovelace's novel expresses fearful ambivalence towards nature, perhaps reflecting a perspective of blaming nature for the social problems of the Caribbean, as DeLoughrey et al. have noted authors such as Naipul have done. Although it will become clear that the environmental “bads” are factors driving the will to change the Calvary Hill neighbourhood, there is a less sure sense of what to aspire to, as even the environmental “goods” seem less stable and less reliable in the shanty-town conditions.

Take, for example, the Governor Plum Tree, a feature as iconic to Calvary Hill as the neem tree is to Khodadad Building. Whereas the neem tree is a spiritual and communal centre which provides goods to the community, the Governor Plum is described almost as another character desperate to assert itself in its place, and fearful about giving away too much of itself: the tree “has battled its way up through the red dirt and stands now, its roots spread out like claws,

gripping the earth, its leaves rust red and green, a bouquet in this desert place: a tree bearing fruit that never ripens for Miss Olive's seven, and the area's other children" (2). Other instances of trees in the novel help round out this idea of the tumultuous relationship between the people of Calvary Hill and nature. Philo, the local calypsonian, recalls two trees in the schoolyard when he was a child, "a downes tree and a tamarind tree. The downes tree provided fruit for the children, the tamarind tree provided, apart from fruit, whips" (219), which the children were made to cut lengths of for their own lashings. Aldrick, famous for playing the dragon at Carnival, recounts with a mixture of comfort and hurt that "because there was in the yard where they lived a wild-senna tree, when everything else ran out he would always have wild-senna tea" (122). His poverty and hunger were hard to disguise when one day he opened his lunchbag only to find a solitary bottle of this tea, sweetened with condensed milk, "with one captured leaf of wild-senna afloat in the bottle" (122). Like the tamarind tree, then, the wild-senna tree also both satisfied, and left unsatisfied, its human users. This perhaps captures both sides of nature in the Caribbean cultural imagination. And the Governor Plum Tree, too, presents this admixture of usefulness and frustration from the human perspective. When Aldrick returns from prison, the Alice Street Yard on Calvary Hill is described once more by the narrator. This time, again, the tree is a central focus of the description as it, along with the communal water-pipe, act as anchors for the neighbourhood: "Sylvia turned from the stand-pipe to the tub below the governor plum tree, enduring still in the yard, shelter for the washtub, pole for the clothesline, bearing still its little green berries that seemed to disappear before they turned the purple of ripeness" (184). The tree's barren fruit might be read variously as signalling its own failure to thrive in the "desert" of the Hill, as its hesitancy to give up any more of itself to the neighbourhood, or, simply, as a food source for birds who gather the berries before they're ripe enough for the humans. Regardless of

this interpretation, it is clear that the tree is a dominant feature in the neighbourhood even if it can't provide to food it promises.

The residents themselves seem to show equal equanimity to the plants themselves. Cleothilda maintains some ferns and flowers in wire pots on her porch, and she can often be seen tending to them (2, 9, 16). This attention and care can be related to her own status as the Queen of the Carnival and the preening and care-of-self that this role requires. Her attention to outward appearance is often seen as one of her faults, however, as it comes at the cost of real care for others. That her care for plants is of a fleeting, superficial nature can be seen in the way she approaches the wild hibiscus. When she notices that it has begun to flower, “for a few days at least, begin to favour the blossoming tree with a few cups of water, as if she first needed from it the fact of its blooming to justify wetting the earth around its parched and gasping roots” (184). Her attitude reflects a general hostility to human and nonhuman life in the slums—the hostility of the environment, the built environment, the government, and, at times, the people themselves. Despite this hostility there is still a shared sense amongst the human community that life is something that ought to be fostered. For example, in Aldrick's own crisis over his place in the world, and whether or not he ought to continue as the rebellious drifter who drew on the legacy of resistance to slavery by “making a religion of laziness and neglect and stupidity and waste” (2), he recalls with dread an uncle who “lived for fifteen years on the Hill in an old house, a shack, never planting a flower, discouraging any effort to beautify or repair the broken-down house” (123). The impulse to beautify and aestheticize the landscape is apparent here in its absence. The uncle's neglect of place is a mark of his oppression. His casual attitude to life and his lonely demise is expressed most keenly in his disinterest in the quality of his surroundings, here exemplified, through repetition, by his neglect of both nature and the built form: “He died there, with the old house falling down about him. Fifteen years, and not a flower planted nor a fence

mended” (123). Flowers represent not only pride of place, but they also represent “nature in the city.” The uncle’s decision to neither plant flowers nor mend fences—presumably literal and metaphorical ones—is indicative of his inability to tend to his home.

The uncle’s disinterest in his local environment, read by Aldrick as indicative of a lack of commitment to life and community, also more plainly reflects what I referred to before as the flight from nature. Both Aldrick and Pariag have strong memories of the rural homesteads they left. Aldrick was just a boy when his grandmother finally convinced his grandfather to leave the country for the sake of the children, persuading him that there was no future for the children on those “five acres of mountain and stone that had exhausted its substance, if it ever had any, years before he bought it” (29). The grandfather’s commitment to the land is not described as a passion for, or closeness to, nature in any way. Instead he is likened to a man waiting for a lover

who had written fifty years before promising that she was coming, and who after fifty years he still kept waiting for, no longer really expecting her to turn up, but continuing to wait in that kind of active martyred hopelessness that seems a hope, reproaching her with his very patience and waiting for every minute of the fifty years, so that if she ever came he could say: I kept my part of the bargain; and if she never came his waiting would be a monument to his faith. (29)

She never did come; and the land continued to deteriorate: “the avocados were the smallest they had ever been, growing smaller from year to year, and the cocoa field, riddled with witches broom and black pod, was so diseased that no amount of pruning or cutlassing or mulching could rehabilitate” (30). The gendering of the landscape as an indifferent female draws attention to the way the novel constructs masculinity as a pursuit which requires active and persistent commitment. The outside world, here likened to a courted woman, is indifferent to the attempts of Trinidadian men to assert themselves. For Aldrick’s grandfather on the farm, the promise of the land was never fulfilled, and never fulfilling. In the city, too, “manness ... had no chance to flower under the foreman, among labourers and cocoa and immortelle,” they soon found that the



city only repeated different forms of difficult, belittling and sporadic labour (31). The choice of the word “flower” draws a comparison between the men of the island and the natural resources of the place, suggesting the exploitation of both in their inability to flourish. Such a comparison is an interesting reversal of the more common trope of girls “blossoming” into women, as we saw with Rukamni in Markandaya’s text. Historically, the land has been theorized as female (see Kolodny) for a number of reasons, including its vulnerability to exploitation. By applying the metaphor of flowering to the oppression of Trinidadian males, Lovelace implicitly draws on histories of gender discrimination to draw attention to the racial discrimination of black men in the islands.

Like Aldrick’s father, Pariag comes to the city from the country as a young man eager to assert and express himself. His experience is typical of the rural exodus but is, as we will see, exacerbated by the fact of his being ethnically Indian, and the cities being Creole. “This Hill,” the narrator explains, “is home for thousands [sic]. They leave the country estates – Manzanilla, Sangre Grande, Cocal, Cedros – where they work the cocoa and coconuts for next to nothing for too long, and come to town to stay at a cousin or uncle or aunt or friend until they get their own place” (69). Note, again, Lovelace’s creative use of Creole forms of English, such as “thousands.” Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues that this type of “signifyin(g)” is a distinctive linguistic device used by African American writers to challenge and stretch the limits of English. The use of the form “thousands” here further identifies the class and status of the country refugees by interpolating them through the Creole speech. Pariag has ambitions of becoming “more than a little country Indian cutting sugarcane in the day, cutting grass for the cattle in the evening” (69), in the shadows of his indentured grandfather. He has faith that he could rise above his regional and ethnic origins since “this Trinidad was itself a new land” (70), a comment that likely referred to the newness of Trinidad and Tobago’s independence, which was won in 1962, the novel being

published in 1979. If Pariag felt that the rural life, with pressure from his family, was stifling, he soon found it impossible to integrate into the hopelessly guarded Calvary Hill community.

“Maybe is not because I Indian ... Maybe the Creole people just fuck-up” (139): this is the conclusion Pariag comes to towards the end of the novel when all of his attempts to fit into the Calvary Hill community backfire. After several failed attempts to get noticed, Pariag decides that he will buy a bicycle from which to sell his channa and homemade doubles. He believes that the bicycle is his greatest idea yet, and is convinced that he will finally achieve recognition, for “[t]hey must see me when I riding down the street. Eh? Eh?” (84). What Pariag has failed to understand is that although the neighbourhood is in disrepair, its citizens in precarious financial situations, they are nevertheless very guarded about what kind of changes should be implemented within their Yard and who ought to instigate these changes. Perhaps this could be seen as a limitation of the everyday—that where it tends to reproduce itself thoughtlessly, it can create more walls than chinks. It is for this reason that they consider Pariag’s bicycle—ever the Indian, ever the outsider—an affront to their communal poverty which they held dear. Cleothilda describes it thus: “Twenty years I live here ... And if was one thing you could depend on was the equalness of everybody” (95). Miss Olive, the more reasonable of the two, also calls Pariag a “show off” (95) because of his bicycle. Dubois explains their disdain of Pariag’s bicycle as an assault on the Creole’s values of dispossession: “Attached to a vision of society inherited from the past but totally anachronistic in the real world, they cannot but reject individual material success for it overthrows the ancient values and hierarchies that, while unjust and cruel, are at least comfortable” (my translation, 47). They conspire to teach Pariag a lesson and his bicycle is sadly beaten one day, leaving Pariag crestfallen and bitter (a state in which the residents find him much more agreeable, and after which they finally begin to welcome him into their fray). As for

Aldrick, the onetime guardian of all that was sacred on the Hill, in his growing reflective state he admits to himself that “he wasn’t so sure that to buy a bicycle was such a sacrilege” (97).

And so although Cleothilda and Miss Olive try to goad Aldrick into taking action against Pariag, Aldrick has become interested instead in larger goals of social transformation which, I argue, are related to the environment in many ways. Dominique Dubois’s perspective on the major themes of the novel helps to illustrate Aldrick’s emerging political stance. According to Dubois’s words, the text is about “the birth of an urban proletariat issuing from rising unemployment and the [dethroning] of [negligent] American neo-colonialism” (my translation, 41), as well as the “emergence of racial tensions born from the rural exodus” (my translation, 41). Indeed, the novel does depict a period of transition in Trinidadian society as it moves from a rural agronomy to an urbanized island with a booming casual working class who are quickly developing middle class material aspirations. There are two reasons these goals do not sit well with Aldrick: on the one hand, the individualism of the new social class goes against the community-through-shared-poverty that long bonded the citizenry, and of which the perpetually unemployed Aldrick was the prime example. The second reason is that he feels the changes are being wrought from the outside in, rather than the other way around. His vision of the revolution begins, not with corporate sponsors for the steel bands (who demanded “good behaviour” in exchange), but from the most oppressed citizens.

It is for these reasons that Aldrick and eight other “bad Johns” decide to recommit themselves to the brand of rebellion that represented the values of old. Fisheye acquires a gun and their “pose of rebellion” is suddenly taken to another level (150). They kidnap two police officers, apprehend their vehicle, and drive to the main square in town, a symbolic place “where politicians gave their speeches, and where, every day, groups of men would be assembled discussing politics

and religion” (165). It is here that they begin calling themselves “[t]he People’s Liberation Army, Shanty Town, Hill, Slum Army with guns and jeep coming into the city seeking power” (167). With the megaphone in hand, Aldrick calls out to “[m]ake no peace with shanty towns, dog shit, piss. We have to live as people, people. We have to rise. Rise up. But how do you rise up when your brothers are making peace for a few dollars?” (171). His call for solidarity and action from within reflects his disappointment that what he viewed as the communal strength of the community (shared poverty, shared slum conditions) can be so easily compromised by the promise of individual upward mobility. His vision of urban grunge and the liberation from social norms it provided was suddenly colliding with this new vision of a people who should no longer tolerate the slum conditions and the racial and class oppression that they signified. This difficult position reflects a tenuous transition from slum identity to an awareness of the effects of environmental injustice and, perhaps more importantly—though not unconnected—social segregation and oppression.

Compared with *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, Mistry’s text is much more explicit about the injustice of urban environmental conditions as a rallying point for the citizenry. Putting these novels side by side, however, highlights the possibility for creatively reading elements of environmental justice into a broad range of urban postcolonial texts. The possibility for ecocriticism within literary studies lies not only in the work of those who call themselves ecocritics, but in the incorporation of environmentally-aware readings into mainstream postcolonial studies as well.

Bearing in mind the conception of environmentalism within the environmental justice framework, we can begin to see how Mistry’s novel presents a politics of local urban activism that follows principles of environmental justice. After establishing the litany of environmental

“bads” in the Khodadad Building neighbourhood, *Such a Long Journey* illustrates three responses to these problems that demonstrate the way ordinary citizens are politicized through their desire to improve local environmental conditions (for a sense of such grass-roots organizing in Latin America and South Asia, see Guha and Martinez-Alier). The first project is launched in opposition to the City’s proposal to widen the road in front of Khodadad building, which would eliminate the wall and send the city’s chaos crashing into the compound. It would also shrink the available communal space. This project is initiated by the landlord and largely involves a petition signed by the building’s residents attesting to the “hardships” they would suffer if the compound was shrunk (90). The second project is aimed at transforming the wall from its function as a latrine into something transcendent. This is the most creative form of activism in the novel. Gustad enlists the help of a street artist and offers the black wall as a canvass. The artist covers the wall in a mural of deities representing all of India’s religions—Gustad’s plan works and eventually people come to worship at the wall instead of to urinate there. Passersby leave incense and garlands of flowers, thus transforming the once-revolting wall into a source of beauty and inspiration. Gustad is eminently proud of this project, he says “this wall is the kind of miracle I like to see, useful and genuine ... A stinking, filthy disgrace has become a beautiful, fragrant place which makes everyone feel good” (289). The third project builds on the growing frustration of the larger neighbourhood over the state of disrepair of the city infrastructure, particularly the sewers. Having achieved no gains through the regular democratic channels, the citizens organize a *morcha* (or a collective demanding action, a front), with Dr. Paymaster and the local Paan-walla leading the pack.

These three projects literally collide at the end of the novel. The wall is finished: it now serves an important spiritual function in the community. The municipal workers, however, are waiting—with their trucks and their surveying equipment—to tear it down. The petition has failed

and Khodadad building's compound will be severed by a new road, eroding its sense of identity within and apart from the larger city. Further down the street hundreds of thousands have gathered to join what is supposed to be a non-violent march, led by Dr. Paymaster, "to alleviate the miseries of the neighbourhood" (312). As in most environmental justice campaigns, we see the involvement of citizens who were otherwise un-accustomed to political activism mobilizing to make a stand for the conditions of their local urban environment. The area's famous brothel, the House of Cages, is closed for what seems like the first day ever, so that the women workers can participate in the march. They, like Dr. Paymaster, seem to be representing themselves simultaneously as workers and citizens, and are therefore protesting working conditions alongside the standards of living. The crowds have devised a simple yet effective protest: they will march, in their work wear, to the Municipal Offices where they will dump four cartloads of "oozing, slimy samples of sludge and filth from overflowing gutters" (314).

When the protestors pass in front of Khodadad Building, however, they pause to pray in front of the wall. At that moment the municipal workers announce that the now-sacred wall will be torn down that morning. Outrage ensues—like the incessant buzzing of the mosquitoes the Municipal worker's announcement pushes the crowd past the breaking point. A fight breaks out and Khodadad Building's most vulnerable tenant—the mentally-challenged Tehmul who adored Gustad—is caught in the middle of it. A brick strikes him and he dies, tragically. The loss of such a helpless and uninvolved character highlights the perversity of this sudden violence. As he falls, so too does another important emblem of the community: the neem tree. The novel ends as one of the Municipal workers brings his cross-saw to the trunk of the beloved tree.

***Conclusion: A Little Fertile Hope***

At the close of both novels, the situations of the community are little improved. The Khodadad residents have not succeeded in stopping the redevelopment, or effected any change (yet) from the municipal government in the area of water quality or sewage treatment. For the people of Calvary Hill, it seems that the hopes for strong community leadership may have been misplaced. In Sylvia's words to Aldrick, however, it is clear that even if their fight was treated as little more than a farce by the state (who nevertheless incarcerated the men), the fact that someone stood up for their underserviced community did make a difference:

“You spend a long time in prison for that stupidity. It didn't do nothing for nobody. The government started to fix the streets up here, and they give some fellars work on a Project, then they stop. Why you all do that?”

“It just happen,” he said.

“Some people was glad though.”

“They was glad?” (188)

As Aldrick repeats Sylvia's words the reader can imagine a hopefulness in Aldrick's tone. He seems pleased that his effort, however inert in the end, was recognized by the people of the Hill. That the government responded with a futile make-work “Project” is not surprising given the track record of neglect seen throughout the novel, but the fact that they did respond is indicative of the power of the community to mobilize some change at that level. The motivating factors that roused Aldrick and Gustad were not solely environmental in the strictest, or out-dated, sense of the term, but there can be no doubt that their living conditions were important catalysts in this transition. And if we understand the environment to be those places where we live and work, as the environmental justice movement has enabled us to do, we can read living conditions as environmental ones. This is the intersection of the environment, the everyday, and the postcolonial city. It is environmental action and re-action on a small scale; action which, were it not for attention to the scale of the personal and the daily, might be lost in a traditional ecocritical

analysis. In this chapter, as in this dissertation as a whole, however, I have been careful not to abandon the traditional nature-focus of ecocriticism, as I am also interested in the ways in which a connection with nature continues to be central to people's experiences of their environments, even (perhaps especially) in the middle of a shanty-town. These commitments to the aesthetic, emotional, and personal relationships with the local environment need to be seen as co-existent with the more clearly political projects of social and environmental justice. Much in the way the neem tree and the wild senna fulfilled both utilitarian and symbolic roles in the lives of the community members, so too do the local environments create conditions for the development of love of place and the expression of environmental action. This chapter has shown the city to be a place capable of nurturing multifaceted environmental understanding.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Land-Mined: Back to the Land in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*

Throughout this project, my emphasis on the everyday environment has continually privileged the local as a site of postcolonial environmental expression. The everyday demands that we interrogate our immediate environments. This reflective turn is an important contribution to postcolonial ecocriticism. Chapter One is deliberately rooted in place. In my work on Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* I stress the narrative's circularity—its trajectory from rural home to the city and back once more—in order to point out the way Rukmani's sense of community and self is rooted in the ground where she laboured to make her home and family. Her ability to make sense of the world, and moreover her ability to contribute to that world, hinges on her connection to the land she farms, and the surrounding environment that challenges and delights her. In that chapter, more so than in any other, the local is actually contrasted favourably against what is seen as the degenerate machinations of the cosmopolitan. Chapter Two focuses on one very particular ecological/human place, the Sundarbans, and tries to tell its stories. In that chapter, then, we have one place multiplied by its narratives, an approach which has the effect of both expanding and sharpening our sense of the place. Piya, the token cosmopolitan character, is enriched by her time spent in a more enclosed, local space—this rootedness is portrayed as the antidote to her blurry identity as an English-speaking American of Bangladeshi parentage. Chapter Three continues in this vein by focusing on the experience of two very small and insular communities, the communities of Calvary Hill and Khodadad Building. These neglected places grow to foster environmentalisms through people's everyday interactions with the goods and bads of their immediate environments. The politicization of these marginalized urban communities is borne out

of environmental factors which are controlled directly, in many ways, by local municipal politics, but also very much by the state of the nation; the environments reflect a failure of governance and signal instances of environmental injustice. In each chapter, then, the local—subtly linked to the global—has been privileged as a site of environmental consciousness-raising.

This chapter explores the tensions between the local and the global through the lens of a return to the land. According to Keya Ganguly, an important element of the postcolonial everyday, is those imprints made by experiences and histories of dislocation and migration (6). Ganguly argues that there has been an over-emphasis on mobility within postcolonial studies, and that “[c]ulturalist explanations that favor the liminality of subaltern experience seem to be the current trend” (4). The consequence of such a focus has meant that the mundane experience of stasis (of staying-put, for however long) has been overlooked. She warns that such a perspective has only served to reify the postcolonial subject as *other*. This final chapter explores these global links more closely by examining two texts that feature cosmopolitan characters who turn away from the city towards ‘natural’ places in problematic ways. Specifically, the chapter investigates the search for belonging by two cosmopolitan characters – the moneyed, white South African Julie in Nadine Gordimer’s *The Pickup*, and the well-connected, pale-complexioned African-Caribbean Clare in Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*. Both women experience a sense of displacement (one a case of malaise, the other a response to relentless racism) and, as I will show, attempt to resolve these crises by forming an attachment to places (to marginalized places, in fact). Here I use the term marginalized places as a way to describe those places perceived to be, or treated as, not destinations in and of themselves. In the case of these texts, rural Jamaica and Ibrahim’s village on the edge of the desert were places which the main characters initially perceived to be secondary to the global cities which they desired to inhabit. A question these novels explore is whether any sort of return to the land is viable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and whether it

is a viable option for two decidedly cosmopolitan characters. Although both texts suggest that such a return is not simple, the authors explore these questions in different ways.

Both texts describe the stress between the strong attraction to returning to the land and the obstacles to the return as a clean solution to the characters' displacement. In *The Pickup*, the text leaves it ambiguous as to whether Julie is truly at home or just playing at "Home" when she chooses to settle in an unidentified Middle Eastern country. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, the attempt to stage a revolution from Clare's grandmother's old farm repeats histories of blood on the land in ways that seem resigned to the fact of violence in decolonization. That these two globally-oriented novels both attempt to settle back into place forms an interesting response to Ursula Heise's call to develop a "planetary consciousness" as a source for environmentalism. To imagine a global ecological consciousness is one thing, but in these texts at least, the drive to associate the self with *place* appears to be a theme of constant return.

In neither case, however, is this return to the land a revisitation of the pastoral. Instead the land is highly politicized in each context, and in the case of Cliff we might even say that the land is radicalized, terrorized. This chapter considers under what circumstances a "return" to the land might happen. Specifically, I ask whether Cliff and Gordimer's radical female characters are asserting themselves through land only as symbols of their desire to access power or permanence in otherwise dull or troubled lives. I argue that both Cliff and Gordimer present slippery female characters that resist our attempts to know them. This ambiguity renders the ends of both novels difficult to decipher: do the characters achieve the independence or redemption they crave, or are they merely deluding themselves? Central to the texts' abilities to present these complex, open-ended questions is the way in which the land is represented as a contested space. The land to which these two characters make a (re)turn is not the idyllic, welcoming natural place that one

might envision, but is rather a militarized, armed zone. In the case of Cliff, Clare facilitates the militarization by joining a paramilitary independence project. In the case of the Gordimer text, however, Julie is simply selectively naïve about the fact that the rice paddy oasis she idolizes is little more than a front for a small arms dealership. In this way I suggest that both texts are critiquing the naivety of the simplistic cosmopolitan desire for a return to nature by revealing that “nature” is not a simple space at all.

In some of the earliest work on African ecocriticism, Patrick D. Murphy challenged the idea of nature’s innocence in terms of the everyday lives of people living in conflict areas. He wrote that: “War and environment are, however, a far cry from the literature that emphasizes solitary individuals spending a long, slow, meditative day at the ocean watching the comings and goings of creatures all smaller than one’s hand” (*Farther* 68). This reminder of nature’s occasional role as military ground challenges the idea that everyday nature is a *simple*, untroubled or ahistorical site. Moreover, Murphy’s words draw attention to the question of difference when it comes to reading postcolonial literature, African literature in this case, from the perspective of a critical lens developed in the west. His suggestion that someone in a conflict zone would have no time to spend a meditative day at the ocean is both an important point and an oversight. As I demonstrate throughout this project, even in the most challenging environments, there is often evidence of care and community towards the nonhuman world. Murphy’s dichotomous statement reflects a one-sided view of African literature. In order to gain a fuller picture, one would have to consider not only what environmental perspective is lacking in African environmental literature, but also what perspectives can be gained. The following is a brief account of some of the work being done in African ecocriticism today.

### ***Ecocriticism: Africa and South Africa***

In the first monograph to be published on ecocriticism and African literature, Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers offer an explanation for why African literature (and specifically black African literature) has been ignored by ecocritics. They argue that “[i]f only first-wave [ecocriticism] criteria are applied, there has certainly been little ecocritical writing from Africa. African writers have primarily addressed pressing political and social issues in colonial and postcolonial Africa” (7). What I take from this statement is the idea that environmentalism may *look* different in different contexts. The “first-wave” to which they refer is a category borrowed from Lawrence Buell that describes what they call the “environmentalism of the affluent” (4), meaning scholarship which focused on nature writing and wilderness/species preservation issues.<sup>15</sup>

This is not to say that wilderness preservation is not an important dimension of African environmental issues. Much like the cosmopolitan tiger, however, the cosmopolitan game-park has a very different set of interests than the rural villages bordering the parks in which marginalized peoples may live. This long and important history of parks-creation in Africa is one reason that Caminero-Santangelo and Myers argue that it is necessary to have specific regional focuses within postcolonialism in order to address colonialism’s varied legacies on the environment and so as not to “suppr[ess] differences” among nations, continents, and other geographical groupings (10). Of the conservation movement, they write:

Conservation policy has often been determined by imperial representations of African environments and people, such as representations of the “true” Africa as a wilderness empty of people and of African environments threatened by local environmental practices. Enabled by such representations as well as the notion of African nature’s unique immensity and exoticism, colonial-style fortress

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<sup>15</sup> This set of waves is different than the one I identify in that my terms refer specifically to the emergence of postcolonial ecocriticism and here Santangelo and Myers are discussing ecocriticism in general.

conservation of megafauna (often with a band-aid of community conservation) is given particular prominence. (9)

This type of conservative protectionism, they argue, is not given prominence within the pages of postcolonial African literature. Instead, they note that “in terms of environmental representation, these writers are concerned with *lived environments*, the social implications of environmental change, and the relationships between representations of nature and power” (emphasis added, 7). It is these “lived environments,” these everyday environments, and the ways in which they rub up against the politics of postcolonialism and globalization, that concern me in this project.

I would add to the commentary of Caminero-Santangelo and Myers, however, the fact that for some, especially white South African writers, the “pressing political and social issues” of the day *are* in fact environmental issues; that is, they are issues about land rights and land distribution. This is evident in the scholarship on JM Coetzee’s writing, which continues to garner significant attention in the growing field of African ecocriticism. Coetzee arguably contributed to the field of early African ecocriticism himself with his critical study of the *plaasroman* genre of South African writing that is focused on the farm and homestead (*White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* published in 1988). James Graham calls his *White Writing* the “seminal text in the project of de-mythologising representations of ‘the land’ in white South African literature” (“Notes”, footnote 6, 180). Coetzee’s well-studied novels such as *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Disgrace* and *Life and Times of Michael K.* explicitly tackle the racial legacies of the land question in South Africa. In fact, in most books on the topic, Coetzee has become a central and consistent subject of ecocritical interest.

What is it about Coetzee’s writing that attracts so much critical interest? Certainly, his texts actively engage with their settings, which Patrick D. Murphy has said is one of the important hallmarks of environmental literature (*Farther Afield* 42). But more important than this reason

alone is the fact that the land is a defining element in South African culture, politics, and literature (see Graham), especially as the country tries to deal with post-apartheid land reform. Cheryl Walker, who headed the Land Claims Commission in South Africa for a time, writes about the struggle of redress in her *Land-Marked: Land Claims and Land Restitution in South Africa*. According to Walker, some 614,000 black South Africans were forcibly removed from their homes as part of an attempt to create racially homogenous spaces. In addition to these deliberate removals, the Commission estimates that “some 3.5 million black South Africans had been uprooted from their homes and relocated in furtherance of various aspects of the apartheid agenda between 1960 and 1982” (Walker 2). Three years after the establishment of the Commission to address these wrongs, Walker says that they received between 62,000-64,000 land claim forms. By the year 2000, only 13 claims had been fully settled while 1000 were under review. The slow pace of the restitutions was only part of the problem. Following her tenure, Walker remained dogged by larger, more abstract questions, namely, “What constituted ‘good-enough’ justice for the wrong-doings of the past?” (15).

Leonie Joubert, a South African scientist and journalist who, like Ramachandra Guha in India, also writes for the public in the mainstream press, has become an important voice in South African ecology circles. Her books on climate change and invasive species (*Scorched: South Africa's Changing Climate* and *Invaded: The Biological Invasion of South Africa*) marry an in-depth knowledge of the ecological sciences, a critical reading of politics, and a nature-writer's attention to detail. Her work adds to a growing body of work on South African environmentalisms that will no doubt become central to the project of developing a postcolonial ecocritical approach that is sensitive, and responsive to, local environments. In addition, a collection by David A. McDonald, *Environmental Justice in South Africa*, does for the South African environmental justice movement what Bullard's work has done for the USA, which is to say that the collection

deliberately draws connections between histories of racism, oppression, and the perpetuation of environmental crises by powerful groups at the expense of the marginalized. Moreover, however, the collection depicts the way an environmental lens can be used to better understand the “survival strategies” (7) of people living in degraded or polluted environments, such as those “who make a living from a waste dump” or those suffering “the tragedies of asbestosis and mercury poisoning” (7). Echoing what Mda discussed during his keynote speech (see Introduction), McDonald emphasizes the fact that environmentalism had to make the difficult but necessary transition in South Africa from what was essentially “an explicit tool of racially based oppression” (1) to a banner under which people’s everyday concerns and practices could be gathered and theorized. Again, this transition was dependent on the redefinition of the environment “to include the working and living space of black South Africans [that] it quickly became apparent that environmental initiatives were akin to other post-apartheid, democratic objectives” (2).

Given this backdrop, it is not surprising that so much South African writing has focused on land issues. Land reparations and redistribution questions are important political issues in many African countries, such as Kenya and Zimbabwe. Kenyan independence, for example, inspired calls for Black Kenyans to return to the land from the cities, and to mark themselves as owners and stewards of the land (Klopp). The physical and material occupation of the land, as well as its legal ownership, are not only symbols of national formation, but are also real signs of national power. As a white settler/invasor country, however, the South African land problem echoes strongly in the West where it raises uneasy questions about the distribution, occupation, and ownership of Indigenous lands the world over. Fundamental questions such as which groups have which types of claims over the land mix with more provocative questions such as the ability



to derive a sense of “home” in the place one was born or lives.<sup>16</sup> What interests me in this chapter is the fact that another of South Africa’s other internationally-acclaimed white writers, Nadine Gordimer, has made a gesture away from an exclusive preoccupation with the national and towards transnationalism in her 2001 novel *The Pickup*. In the end, however, the text once again turns to land and away from the metropolis, but significantly, this is towards a piece of land in an unnamed country. Gordimer’s heroine rejects the space of the nation in favour of the local, but, as this chapter will show, this is a qualified embrace, laced with ironies.

### ***Animal Outsiders and Prey***

I begin this analysis of Gordimer’s *The Pickup* and Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven* by comparing the two protagonists in terms of their sense of displacement. Interestingly, both texts employ animal metaphors in order to describe the characters as experiencing a sense of being out-of-place. Such experiences, I argue, act as catalysts for the characters’ search for belonging. The female protagonists are both described as animal-victims, a metaphor which both draws attention to their vulnerability and showcases their strengths. In Cliff’s novel the heroine, Clare, is described as an “albino gorilla moving through the underbrush. Hiding from the poachers who would claim her” (91); in the opening page of Gordimer’s text, the protagonist Julie is described as “prey” in a city of predators (3). Neither Clare nor Julie come across as victims in the texts; however their depiction as prey indicates that they are at risk. These animal metaphors are particularly jarring in the urban context, for although we are familiar with the trope of the city as jungle (see, for example Andrew Light), here the metaphor works to isolate the protagonist as not

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<sup>16</sup> Coetzee’s environmentally-oriented literature, and here I am thinking in particular about *Disgrace* and *Life and Times of Michael K*, represents these land issues in ways that are deeply invested in the national context. They are novels that look inward—a posture represented within the novels themselves with an inward turn towards the land. Lurie’s retreat to his daughter’s rural property, in *Disgrace*, is a literal turn away from the world. *Michael K* takes a strained refuge in the land, avoiding the world as he makes his way to and across the land. With the ongoing tensions in South Africa regarding land reform, it is no surprise that Coetzee’s texts take the questions of land, dwelling, and ownership as their focus.

only animal, but animal victim, which is a shift from the idea of the city as a place of dominant animals. Within the context of a postcolonial reading, however, we understand that their victimhood indicates the brutality of a system which not only marginalizes, but persecutes, others. These novels, Cliff's in particular, draw on a long history of imperial intervention in the form of "the Great White hunters" (see Neumann). As part and parcel of imperialism, the hunt is a metaphor for the violent marginalization of people and animals.<sup>17</sup>

The animal-victim metaphor "albino gorilla" aligns Clare with rare and endangered animals, a comparison which both naturalizes and problematizes her racial/spatial in-betweenness. When she moves with her family from Jamaica to the US (and specifically New York, the North American metropole), her father's vision of an equitable, meritocratic society is quickly dashed. The family has a hard time getting work, and fitting in. As they notice: "An education in colonial schools, Jesuit or otherwise, did not seem to go very far here" (74). In its place they find a land riddled with KKK and sweeping prejudices about all immigrants, especially blacks. The racism that they encounter in the US is brutally overt, embodied by gruesome and deliberate murders of African Americans. Roadside signs declare: "YOU ARE IN KLAN COUNTRY," (58) and "A MAN WAS LYNCHED YESTERSDAY" (54), to which Clare's mother sarcastically

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<sup>17</sup> In *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siecle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*, Leela Gandhi explores the links between racism and specieism. Rather than focusing on the negative aspects of these connections, Gandhi looks into communities that were able to transcend such categories of oppression during the Victorian age. Notably, Gandhi focuses on the reception that Mahatma Gandhi received from London's vegetarian community: "vegetarian kindness," she finds, could be viewed as "a temperamental or ideological receptivity to colonial strangers deterritorialized at the flawed heart of empire" (72). The ethical stance of these communities, who were radically re-imagining the supremacist foundations of Western society, is not dissimilar from the vision of contemporary thinkers such as Donna Haraway. As Leela Gandhi writes, Haraway finds that "rich anticolonial possibilities accrue from ethically informed reassessments of human-animal sociality" (74). The vegetarian position assumed theoretical links between the liberation of animals and the embrace of the colonial other. Although such connections were not without their problems, most notably, I would argue, the simplistic assumption that because Hindus were vegetarian they were also regarded as socially equal, Leela Gandhi points us to an emergent site of what has become an important strand in postcolonial ecocriticism: a critique of the connection between the hierarchization of peoples and nonhuman animals.

remarks “Hello, America” (54). Clare, like her father, is light-skinned and can often successfully “pass” as white. This does not mean that she is beyond suspicion, however. As the school principal tells Clare’s father at their initial meeting, “I do not want to be cruel, Mr. Savage, but we have no room for lies in our system. No place for in-betweens” (99). The adjective “albino” is a reference to the particular predicament brought on by Clare’s light skin tone. She is marked by a skin-tone which is both *from* nature, and is un-natural, in the sense that it sets her apart.

The albino gorilla moving through the underbrush. Hiding from the poachers who would claim her and crush her in a packing crate against the darker ones offended by her pelt. Make ashtrays of her hands, and a trophy of her head. She cowers in the bush fearing capture. Waiting for someone to come. Crouching. Not speaking for years. Not feeling much of anything, except a vague dread that she belongs nowhere. ... Her loss remains hidden—over time a fine moss covers her skin. ... She belongs in the hills. (91)

Instead of feeling like someone who can fit into both Caribbean and North American/British society, as her uncle and father think she should, Clare feels anxious about what she must conceal about herself in order to try to belong anywhere. Her position as someone in-between creates a “vague” feeling of “dread” that leaves her emotionally frustrated throughout much of the novel.

The abjectness of this depiction of the hunted gorilla links Clare to the fear of lynching and racial persecution in the US, and the fear of murder in Jamaica. In the US there is the risk that she is not white enough to escape detection and reprimand; in Jamaica the opposite is true. The (ironically-named) Savage family left Jamaica after the brutal murder of a wealthy lighter-skinned family in their sleep—killed in their sleep for reasons to do with dispossession and land rights. In particular, the literal objectification of the gorilla’s body parts into ashtrays and trophies in the house of the murdered family speaks to the constructed gap between the white Western subject and the non-white or animal Other. Such a gap acts as a moat, protecting a fragile construct of whiteness. The ironic aspect of this distancing of the other is the simultaneous desire for that other

represented through the hunt. For, as the idea of the trophy suggests, the hunt is not only about killing; it is also about apprehension and the acquisition and possession (through mutilation) of a desired object.

Like Clare, Gordimer's Julie is described as set-apart. Her victimization is fleeting, although her sense of dislocation grows as intense. The predatory scene described at the outset of this section functions as the opening of Gordimer's novel. In this scene, Julie suffers mechanical problems in her car in the middle of downtown traffic. The city scene is described using the language of a kill reminiscent of the Africa of *National Geographic* or colonial safari excursions in a way that frames Julie as a character caught up in the world around her. The naturalization of her surroundings undermines her projected image of a woman-in-control. The ability for Gordimer's narration to undermine her characters in this subtle manner is a hallmark of her writing, and is a technique that will have a strong impact on the interpretation of the novel's ending. If we revisit the novel's opening, however, we see that the text depicts "Clustered predators round a kill. It's a small car with a young woman inside it" (3). The transformation of the crowd from humans to predators is a signal that the whole city is alive—it is animated and even animalistic. This is the city as a jungle—a metaphor that Gordimer exploits to its extremes. Even the cars are beasts: "She feels hot gassy breath. Steel snouts and flashing teeth-grilles at her face" (6). Gordimer's invocation of the animalistic language treads perilously close to the much-maligned colonial literary representations of Black Africans as less-than-human. It has been many years, however, since Achebe (see "Image of Africa") took Joseph Conrad to task over his racist representations of the speechless African men in his (in)famous *Heart of Darkness*; Gordimer's use of language thus plays with these dangerous legacies which fuel(ed) both structural and personal racisms. That the "jungle" has been moved from the tropical forests of the Congo to the streets of a downtown South African metropolis suggests enormous geopolitical and

environmental changes over the past century; that the “jungle” is still used as a seemingly apt metaphor for the underclasses suggests that very little has changed indeed. In carrying-over the language of racism into the post-apartheid milieu, *The Pickup* reminds readers that post-apartheid does not equal post-racist or even post-race, and that the text will trace for us the new constellations of race (to borrow a term from Susan Giroux) in a globalized South Africa.

It is because she has interfered in the machinations of the city, namely the movement of traffic, that she suffers the jeers, honks, and shouts from her fellow drivers, who do not hesitate to deride her using sexist language. To further the analysis of the racist imagery of the jungle being demonstrated by Gordimer, we could also make links to the idea of the vulnerable white female amongst a sea of non-white-racialized men. Many have commented on the prevalence of the stereotype of the dangerous, sexually-determined black male (see, for example, Fanon *Black Skin, and hooks*) in the white imagination. Carole J. Adams draws some large conclusions in her *Pornography of Meat* where she links the battery of women and the battery of/consumption of animals, to the system of patriarchy. The dominance of these two groups is interlinked, as she depicts in her readings of cultural artefacts such as literature, art and media. The threat of being devoured by the bystanders represents not only the fear/perception of the supposed sexual vulnerability of white women especially, but it also makes a comment about the disposability of women, often threatened (especially in pornography, but also in situations of intimate partner abuse) with being treated like animals (Adams). The vulnerability of the white woman can be contrasted to the distinct animality of representations of black women, who are depicted not as the opposite of the animal (as in the white woman and Godzilla), but who are shown instead as related-to the animal; evoking the animal in its imagined sexual sense (Collins 140). Collins argues that both mainstream and pornographic depictions of black women as insatiable have their roots in slavery, where black women’s bodies—in all their capacities—were made available for

sale by white men (169). Analysed through these critiques of the intersections of violence-against-women, violence-against-animals, and the invocation of animality as an excuse for a violent sexuality, Gordimer's opening scene takes on a much more sinister feeling.

***Out-of-Place: Clare***

The racism that Clare experiences, both explicitly and implicitly, represents a failure of community, and in fact is a statement on the assault against community that racism, (neo)colonialism, and by extension through the metaphor, specieism, are guilty of. In addition to acting as a social critique, this displaced metaphor (there are, after all, no gorillas in the Caribbean) acts as a way of problematizing the stereotypical return to the land trope. A “pure” return would mean a return to precolonial Africa, to which Clare has no personal connection. Instead, all she can do is return to the always-already hybrid place of Jamaica, where the land is both nurturing parent and military staging ground. This animality is also used to describe her displacement in the colonial homeland. In England, Clare the gorilla is described using the distanced language of the zoologist describing the patterns and habits of an animal: “She moves. Emigrated, lone travel the zoologist would have recorded. Time passes. The longing for tribe surfaces—unmistakable. To create if not to find. She cannot shake it off. She remembers the jungle. The contours of wildness. The skills are deep within her” (91). At first, Clare denies these buried skills—this knowledge of the (home)land, “choosing London with the logic of the creole. This was the mother-country. ... Her place could be here” (109). With her uncle's financial support she is able to move to London where she studies art history. His moral support, however, makes her uncomfortable as it raises the inescapable question of her racial position and the burden of privilege that her lighter skin provides. Recalling his words she thinks: “You have a chance to leave that narrow little island [Jamaica]. ... by *chance* he meant light skin” (110).

For Clare, England is old, not real; it is pictures and histories that persist, come-to-life stories she recalls from *Schoolfriends*, a comic for schoolgirls that she and her friends devoured: “Images of a *real* girls’ school were to be found within” (134). She spends her time methodically visiting museums, “On sunny days,” we learn, “she tended to the British Museum, which was almost unbearably gloomy on rainy ones” (113). She takes in Art, Culture and History; London itself is a sort of museum for her, a tidy storehouse of the world’s treasures. Cliff’s text, which praises a different kind of knowledge, a lived-knowledge and a reflexive, independent knowledge, is thus making a quiet criticism of England as a place of book learning. When Clare enrolls in graduate humanities work, the reader is meant to interpret this as a turn away from the world. When Clare is selected as a student representative of the former colonies to meet the Queen, her response is predictably dismissive of this symbol of order and Empire. She reflects: “For whom did she feel more contempt? The old lady standing in front of her, smiling like a parakeet, or the people, her people, who believed in isolated incidents and random violence and the sanctity of the birdlike old lady?” (90). In response to the fact of coming face-to-face with an England that fails to inspire, Clare retreats and “burie[s] herself in books” (90).

Unfortunately, like America, Britain disappoints. The racism of Britain is quieter, at first, but her whiteness once again puts her in an uncomfortable position as she is made privy to racist comments that non-whites were not intended to hear, such as “I say, those nig-nogs are a witty lot” (138). Her one friend, Liz, is satirized in the text as an ignorant member of the educated classes. While witnessing a National Front march against immigrants, blacks and Asians, Liz demonstrates her naïveté and lack of awareness about racism when she dismisses Clare’s concern over the violent undertones of the march. The fact that she can’t understand why Clare is upset by the march not only reveals her ignorance about Clare’s racial history but it suggests more profoundly that racism is only a problem for those who may be the direct victims of it, leaving

white bystanders like Liz innocent. As a symbol of this growing gulf between Clare and England, we see her begin to empathize and identify with the damage done to the colonized under the smothering homogeneity of British culture.

In the end, then, it is not difficult to leave London. The promise of the metropolis, the ease of the fluid hybrid space (colonial past and multicultural present) provided a refuge, but not an outlet, for Clare. In one of her many letters to her friend, Harry/Harriet pleads with Clare to return: “Jamaica needs her children” (140). Harry/Harriet’s suggestion is that Jamaica, finally, is a place where Clare is actually needed, rather than a place that can merely tolerate her because to them she is an invisible black. With her boyfriend, Bobby, Clare leaves London for a tour of Europe and then finally a return to Jamaica. Of leaving she reflects: “Together they left London. She quit the institute as suddenly as she had entered it. Not a momentous decision, she told herself, not a-tall, a-tall; in fact, the place fell away from her easily—perhaps too easily, perhaps not” (143). In an earlier passage foretelling her decision to return, the narration adopts a zoological or anthropological voice in order to naturalize Clare’s sense of belonging or yearning for home. The idea of returning to Jamaica, and in particular her matrilineal land, is a very real way of connecting with her own “dark-pelted mother” (91), whose own blackness and pride in Jamaica steadfastly connected her with that place. “She belongs in these hills. And she knows this choice is irrevocable and she will never be the same. She is the woman who has reclaimed her grandmother’s land” (91).

***Out of Place: Julie***

The opening scene of Gordimer’s novel may be a chaotic one—and one that vaguely threatens violence—but its goal is to establish the city as a vibrant, if hostile, environment and to show Julie as a character well-trained in its negotiation. Unlike



*Nectar in a Sieve*'s Rukmani, Julie is not threatened by the city, nor does she immediately recognize its alienating forms. In fact, this scene of vulnerability actually serves to highlight Julie's mastery of the city, which, as Gordimer's novel reveals, is less of a personal trait than it is one granted to her by virtue of her class, racial, and immigration privilege. Instead of supporting Julie's feeling of vulnerability demonstrated by Julie in the opening scene, *The Pickup* presents her as relatively powerful in this powerless situation. Although she feels inept, relinquishing her car to the control of "[o]ne of the unemployed black men who beg by waving vehicles into parking bays" (3), she is also described as "expert" (3), at knowing how much to tip that same man. Her purchasing power quickly overcomes the failings of her car. Her experience of the situation is thus characterized by a feeling of helplessness, and yet we see that there are avenues of power available to her. This is an everyday that she can master.

Julie's awareness of her own privilege is achieved through her relationship with her partner, her "pickup", Abdu, whose name we later learn is actually Ibrahim Ibn Musa. Ibrahim's status as a non-white, non-citizen makes him vulnerable in very significant ways. The difference between the two partners highlights the question asked by Proctor in his study of the postcolonial everyday when he asks that we consider people's different experiences of the everyday. By shifting the narrative from Julie's home to Ibrahim's, the novel foregrounds the role of home and belonging in the experience of the everyday, revealing that the fact that the banality of the everyday can be easily disrupted by a change in scenery. Julie and Ibrahim exchange places as strangers in each other's countries. Privilege acts as a strong force in their respective experiences of this

strangeness, however. For Ibrahim, being a stranger in South Africa involves physically hiding and strongly guarding his views and identity for fear of being “outed” in any way. For Julie, the experience of being an outsider involves an exploration of her self, rather than a concealment of it. Julie described as “the one with the choices. The freedom of the world was hers” (115). Unlike Ibrahim, who toils in the underground economy, Julie is “the right kind of foreigner” (140). As I will show, the experience of being in a new physical environment is central to permitting this transformation. Julie’s ability to see herself as an agent of change in a seemingly unchanging landscape represents an ambiguous and highly problematic imposition of her power. Julie’s quick adaptation to her new environment, and her readiness to alter that place, reflects the power of her privilege to master the everyday wherever she is.<sup>18</sup>

Several times, the narrator fixates on Julie’s embodied response to the chaos of the city: “She throws up hands, palms open, in surrender” (3), an action referred to as “the gesture” (3) in the novel. The scene is depicted with significant formal detachment. After a description of the action, the narrator breaks the line and inserts blank space, representing a shift in tone and, more importantly, in point of view. We then witness a shift to the second-person perspective: “There. You’ve seen. The gesture. A woman in a traffic jam among those that are everyday in the city, any city. You won’t remember it, you won’t know who she is” (4). By inserting this commentary directed at the reader,

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<sup>18</sup> The ‘everyday’ is not typically seen as an event which can be ‘mastered’ as it is more often used to describe a reality of experience rather than an event. I use the idea of the mastery of the everyday to suggest the way in which Julie’s class, connections, citizenship and race provide her with a mobility which grants her access to various pathways that help circumvent, or at least successfully navigate, forces which dictate the shape of other peoples’ experiences of the everyday. Julie’s ability to easily obtain a visa for Ibrahim to the USA is a prime example of this.

Gordimer draws attention to this gesture of uncertainty which will begin to run as an undercurrent beneath Julie's confident exterior, much in the same way that her encounter with Ibrahim will eventually undermine her tidy knowledge of the world. This is the first indication that readers get that Julie is set on a course to discover what she herself does not know is missing. More importantly, the injection of this metanarrative gives us information about Gordimer's unique narratorial form: the reader and narrator are complicit here in knowing more than the character. This knowledge draws the reader into a position of power over Julie by permitting him or her access to knowledge about Julie that she herself does not know. Situating the reader thusly is important when it comes to the novel's ambiguous ending, when the reader is asked to pass judgement on Julie's motives.

Julie's gesture is a mixture of frustration, defensiveness, and assertion. It suggests her active participation in the life of the city. The first half of the book allows us to see Julie in the environment that she has come to master: the upwardly-mobile, cosmopolitan city, a signpost of the New South Africa. The question, as raised by Emma Hunt, is whether or not Gordimer's Johannesburg (for critics seem to agree that the unnamed South African city must surely be Johannesburg) retains the divisions of apartheid, or whether it bears the fresh look of a city transformed. Hunt finds the former to be true; that the scars of apartheid-era segregation are visible in the classism of the global city. She writes:

Still, in spite of an urban and national policy that courts global markets, and in spite of the proliferation of exclusive, homogenized spaces, we

cannot view Johannesburg as a city where globalization has simply been substituted for apartheid. The city has also seen a conflation of space as people move from the black townships into formerly white areas. Rural migrants and immigrants from the rest of Africa cannot compete with multinational corporations for control of the city. Yet the city has been altered as much by street culture, by Ethiopian and Senegalese immigrants, by hawkers, beggars, and buskers as by new forms of surveillance, by gated communities that emulate Tuscan villages and by air-conditioned shopping malls and casinos. The result is a city of paradoxical spaces, where the formal and the informal coexist in a proximity that would have dismayed apartheid urban planners. (Hunt 104)

Hunt's description of the city as a stratified space that contains both formal and informal patterns of use conjures de Certeau's "Walking in the City," wherein he discusses the experience of the city from the perspective of a city-user, rather than a city-planner. Ganguly has criticized theorists of the everyday, such as de Certeau, for the fact that they do not take into account the way that gender, race, sexuality, ability, class and other categorizations can affect the way we walk in the city. Hunt's insistence that immigrants to the city, as much as the presence of multinational corporations, have impacted the street level of the city is an important comment on the fact that all forces, although not equal, have impacts on the shape and experience of the city.

Julie and her friends see themselves as part of a liberated group of people who recognize these power differentials and who try to subvert them by reinventing themselves as people who reject the previous generation's hierarchies. Their hangout is the L.A. (EL-AY) Café, a conglomeration referred to in the novel as "The Table." The novel describes the café and Julie's friends in bohemian terms—as ambassadors for a casual multiculturalism that can see past the petty differences that divide us; an inclusive

space. “The Table” represented “all that the city had not been allowed to be by the laws and traditions of her parents’ generation. Breaking up in bars and cafes the inhibitions of the past has always been the work of the young, haphazard and selectively tolerant” (5). The group of friends is depicted as more of a family than a circle of friends, a fact which highlights, in Julie’s case at least, the desire to create one’s own family—“elected siblings” (23)—outside of the rigidly defined structures of racial and class inheritance. As someone with nothing to lose, Julie is free to choose her friends, and her heterogeneous group is a marker of her desire to make a statement about inclusivity. On a personal level, it is a marker of her openness as a human being, and her kindness as a friend; read on a socio-political level, however, we can see in her approach to friendship a pattern of self-congratulatory attempts at post-racism designed to signify a person’s social status as cool.

That is to say, in Julie’s middle-class circle it is trendy to shun social conventions of the past generation, and there is no greater symbol of the past, in the New South Africa, than racial intolerance. Their family is built on mutual support and their conversations become the forum for all of life’s greatest and smallest miseries. Above all else, they strive to practice a judgement-free environment. Their creed, we learn is “*whatever you do, love, whatever happens, hits you, mate, Bra, that’s all right with me*” (23). When Julie’s car was stuck in traffic, she went to the Table. When a friend at the Table announces he has AIDS, the news “isn’t going to be something they can’t deal with alternatively to the revulsion and mawkish sympathy of the Establishment, after all. They will always have the solution—of the spirit, if not the cure” (24). When Julie and Ibrahim learn that his illegal status has been discovered and the State is requesting that he leave

South Africa, Julie naturally wants to take their complaints to the Table for commiseration and the camaraderie that their company provided. For him, however, there is nothing natural about their arrangement, and he pleads with Julie to be alone that night, at least.

It is only through the voice of Ibrahim, in fact, who largely watches the antics of the Table in silence, that the novel disrupts Julie's self-narrative of liberal superiority with a critique from the disenfranchised (ironically, the very group which Julie feels most connected to). This dramatic shift in perspective undermines the idea that Julie's experiences are universal: reiterating Procter's question "whose everyday?". Ibrahim's voice critically reveals the class and cultural biases that colour Julie's life without her knowing. Through Ibrahim's disapproving reactions to the way "The Table" treats serious problems, Julie begins to become aware of these biases. For example, after the AIDS reveal is turned into a joke, "He, Abdu [Ibrahim], does not join them" in their laughter (24). Julie, concerned that he hadn't understood the humour, tries to explain, to which he responds "I know, I heard. Your friends—they laugh at everything" (24). From this comment, as with others that Ibrahim makes, it was "[d]ifficult to tell whether he was envying or accusing" (24). His ambiguity makes Julie uncomfortable. For where Julie sees a cohesive group, Ibrahim is privy to the artifice of the construction. He finds their attitude hollow and "careless," not nourishing (17). Ibrahim's reluctance to join in the "patronizing" condescension (11) of "The Table's" faux-friendship is not the only crack in the veneer of this judgment-free zone. In truth, as the narrator tells us, Julie's vision of the table as an egalitarian space was little more than a fantasy that only she could afford

to indulge in: “there’s always been an undercurrent of keen awareness of her father’s money The Table concealed from Julie” (87). This glimpse into her innocence reveals her naiveté about her place in the world, which itself is an outcome of her privilege.

The text foregrounds the relationship between place and power through its exploration of cross-cultural relationships. Julie and Ibrahim’s international journey, which takes them from her country to his, invites us to think about the ways in which place is not neutral. This concept is illustrated by a poem by South African poet William Plomer which serves as the epigraph of the novel, and is also given to Julie by a friend at “The Table.” The poem, “Another Country,” suggests that love, or love-making, can create a new space of possibility for such a coupling. Alternately, the poem speaks to the geo-political realities facing love in a globalized world, where connections between people can be easily made and thwarted by travel and immigration policy.

Let us go to another country  
 Not yours or mine  
 And start again.  
     To another country? Which?  
     One without fires, where fever  
     Lurks under leaves, and water  
     Is sold to those who thirst?  
     And carry dope or papers  
     In our shoes to save us starving?  
 Hope would be our passport,  
 The rest is understood  
 Just say the word. (81)

Such a romantic view of love and its possibilities is far from Ibrahim’s pragmatic view of the world. Although we learn early on that Julie is falling in love, Gordimer is careful to show that Ibrahim is “resisting that temptation” (28). For him, love is an emotion only the privileged can afford; it is an indulgence. Nevertheless, they are able to find their own escapes, where even the suspiciously utilitarian Ibrahim seems to relax. It is no coincidence that these spaces are outside of

the city, which Gordimer has already coded as a space where Julie holds more power. The place available to them is the veld; the only place where they can be equal. The countryside is where they went on weekends to escape the tyranny of Ibrahim's life under surveillance and the oppressive friendliness of "The Table." In the veld "they walked, lay watching the clouds, the swoop of birds, were amused, as lovers are, by the difference in their exchanged perceptions of what each took for granted" (34). Here, then, in the green space outside the city, their differences could be contemplated with less judgment. This concept of the escape to another country carries through in the novel.

Julie is both explicitly and subtly warned against the differences between herself and Ibrahim, between her home and Ibrahim's country, by many. The garage owner who employs Ibrahim, for instance, reflects that "[a]s a white father of daughters himself, it was a shame to see what she was doing with this fellow from God knows where, nothing against him, but still" (31). When Ibrahim's lawyer, Mr. Motsamai (a friend of Julie's influential father), suggests that they are out of options, Julie reads in his expression harsh judgment: "A flush of resentment: *he's not for you*, that's what he's really saying: the famous lawyer is one of *them*, her father's people and their glossy [wives] comparing the purchase of Futures and Hedging Funds sitting here in his corporate palazzo, it doesn't help at all that he is black" (80). Whether real or imagined, Julie continually constructs social barriers to her union with Ibrahim that make deserting her home for his seem like the only way to prove people wrong. As for Julie's own father, he views her relationship with Ibrahim as another juvenile attempt to distance herself from him: "*I never thought the people you mix with worthy of you—don't smile, that's not to do with money or class*" (emphasis in the original 98). Finally, her father is frightened by the prospect of what life might be like for Julie in Ibrahim's



country. He threatens that her freedom will be taken from her as a woman. His parting words echo Plomer's poem darkly: "*What more can I say. You choose to go to hell in your own way*" (98). The idea that the 'new country' might not be the emancipatory place she dreamed of reflects a pessimism that Julie cannot embrace. Instead she leaves for the new country with all the optimism of a tourist.

***Into Place: Clare***

*Ruinate: "This distinctive Jamaican term is used to describe lands which were once cleared for agricultural purposes and have now lapsed back into ... 'bush.' An impressive variety of herbaceous shrubs and woody types of vegetation appears in succession, becoming thicker and taller over the years until 'high ruinate' forest may emerge. ...Ruinate of all forms is an all-too-frequent sign on the Jamaican landscape, despite population pressure on the land" (B. Floyd, Jamaica: An Island Microcosm, pp 20-21).*

Cliff's novel begins with this definition of the Jamaican term "ruinate," a term which depicts the ecological process of succession—the gradual redevelopment of an ecosystem—from a cultural point of view. The give and take between the human manipulation of the island and the forces of ecology (i.e. succession) evoked by the term "ruination" suggests several significant aspects of Cliff's portrayal of postcolonial Jamaica. Firstly, we can read the ruination symbolically as the people's struggle for control against several adversaries: the (post)colonial legacy; the history of slavery; the existing racial and class divisions; a non-responsive and corrupt local government; and the place of Jamaica in the world. The message here seems to be that if resistance against these adversaries ceases for any reason or at any moment, any gains will be rolled back. Secondly, the term ruinate suggests a turn away from the land on the part of its human inhabitants, as well as from the island; it is the effect of emigration, both to the cities and as part of a larger Jamaican diaspora. The description of Clare's farm confirms this fact:

The grandmother was long since dead, and the farm had been left by the family to the forest. To *ruination* the grandmother would have said. The family, but one,

were scattered through America and England and had begun new lives, some transplanted for more than twenty years, and no one wanted to return and reclaim the property—at least not until now. (8)

That last phrase, “at least not until now,” offers a glimpse into the third idea that ruination represents in the novel: the promise of emancipation. Clare aims to break the cycle of ruination—which suggests not only an abandonment of the land, but a dispossession of a people—by reclaiming the land for the cause of the people. In the previous chapter I touched on the links between territory and decolonization, referring to Fanon’s words about the centrality of land in providing bread and dignity. *No Telephone to Heaven* is a novel that exemplifies that connection. Clare, the protagonist, is a character who suffers from extreme feelings of displacement and the pains of hybridity. The only hope she has of resolving these tensions in her life is to return to her grandmother’s land and work to support a revolution.

What is so powerful about the place of environmentalism within this novel is that it is always politicized in the first instance. Slaymaker notes that black African representations of nature reflect an “intense interest in the local recapture of a violated nature” (684), which is certainly reflected in Cliff’s Caribbean text as well. In the case of this novel, the degradation of nature is cause for political commitment as a means of redress. The following is an excerpt from an interview between Clare and the revolutionaries she wants to help by offering use of her grandmother’s land. They are looking for evidence of her commitment to the cause of social justice in Jamaica (and are testing her decision to teach history to schoolchildren on the island); they are equally concerned with achieving environmental justice:

“You know then that the rivers run red...and the underground aquifers are colored...from the waste of the bauxite mines and the aluminum refineries? We do not speak of the past here, but present, future.”

“These things are connected.”

“Of course, but this is now ... immediate. Children drink from this water every day of their lives. Women wash in it. Men fish from it. Brew coffee. Clean tripe. Immerse believers. The waste leaches into the land. And people for miles around are covered with a fine dust which invades them. Do you have any idea of the power of such things ... for future generations ... for the future of your homeland?” (195)

For the revolutionaries, then, environmental problems brought on by mining are another example of “contamination from the outside” (195). Clare’s reply, that the present conditions are connected to the past, shows an understanding that current economic demands, which the mining supports, are linked to a history of asymmetrical international relations (i.e. colonialism and neo-colonialism).

This idea of a violently contaminated land culminates in the body of Clare’s boyfriend Bobby, an American Vietnam veteran who was responsible for spraying the notorious defoliant Agent Orange during the war. Although he is a perpetrator of that crime of war, he is depicted as a guilt-ridden, traumatized victim as well. It is clear throughout their relationship and their rocky tour through Europe that Bobby is unwell—his night terrors say as much. He has chemical wounds that refuse to heal despite Clare’s best nursing efforts. Eventually, he becomes consumed by his harrowing memories, unable to accept anything into his body out of fear of contamination: “He refused to eat, saying all food came from a drum with an orange stripe. It was too late, he told her. They were all tainted. Touched” (159). Indeed, his fear of contamination is confirmed when Clare becomes pregnant. “It doesn’t end with me,” he tells her, “[s]o if what you think is true turns out to be true, you better think abortion, honey. Unless you want a little Black baby with no eyes, no mouth, no nose, half a brain, harelip, missing private, or a double set like some fucking hyena, missing limbs... better think again, sweetness” (156). In the end, the decision is made for Clare by her body, which rejects the pregnancy early on. Bobby’s words, that he is “touched” (159), seem true. Bobby’s body, and later Clare’s, becomes the site of a toxic materiality (to draw

on work by Alaimo). The pervasiveness of pollution, and our proximity to it, means that the body itself has become a site of environmental crises. The pregnancy represents the bodily transfers of this pollution and reminds us of the “trans-corporeality” of environmental hazards (Alaimo 2). Clare experiences “a raging infection in her womb” (157) and is declared sterile. This level of infiltration—from Vietnamese forest to the body of a soldier to the womb of his girlfriend in Jamaica—speaks to the comment Cliff’s text is making about the level of environmental degradation that exists and its violent effects on the land and the people. The guerilla force that Clare joins shares in the recognition of this violence. In the pre-screening interview, Clare is asked to comment on a number of her beliefs, including her willingness to kill for a cause, such as the well-being of her children. The emphasis that the guerillas place on children (as pathways to the future of an autonomous Jamaica) reminds us of Clare’s infection and sterility. Her willingness to participate in the group, and to offer up her land for their use, suggests that her land provides for the future in the same way as children do—both represent the promise of a better country.

If the land is a child, though, it is an orphaned child, for it has been left for ruin and abandoned by the family. Interestingly, however, this reading of the land is predicated on an anthropocentric view of nature that privileges the concept of stewardship. An ecocentric view of ruinate might instead focus on the agency of the land and its regenerative capacities. Rather than dismissing the perspective of the text as a simple example of anthropocentrism, however, I think it is also worth pointing out that the idea of *ruinate* suggests that the relationship between landowners and their land is one of co-dependence, rather than mastery. Each is its own strong force. A local warns Clare of the power of the plot of land when she explains that “it all overgrown by now. Rat live there. None of the family want to business wid it. It possess itself” (105). This concept that the land possesses itself provides an interesting concept of wildness. The

idea of possession is slightly different from the concept of ownership, and the neighbour's comment suggests that they are indeed two very different things; that one can own a piece of land, as Clare's family does, but unless one is constantly tending to that land, ownership reverts back to the land itself. This is not to say that it is unowned land, as the concept "wilderness" suggests, but rather that control is reappropriated by the land itself. This pattern of ownership sets up something of a tug-of-war scenario between the land and the people in the tropical Caribbean where fallow land naturally regenerates quickly. Further, the idea of self-possession paints the land with a streak of autonomy that speaks back against histories of colonization.

Clare, fulfilling her mother's wish that someday she will make something of herself and help her people (103), is determined to re-possess that land. With Harry/Harriet she returned "to find her grandmother's place, now left to her, and visit the river and forest of her girlhood" (171).<sup>19</sup> Her return speaks to the way that, as Zakes Mda says, stories come from places ("Imagination). In both novels, place is always culturally-mediated; the land is entangled with the labour that sustains its human inhabitants, including the labour of storytelling. The story of Clare's girlhood is found in the slope of the land and the bushes growing there. After twenty years she confronts that past in the plantlife, noting changes to the landscape: "Clare found her way to the river, and they cut through. Through the deep green informed with red and yellow and purple, some growth she did not recognize. The strip of water moving over rocks and gathering into pools—narrower, shallower than she remembered" (172). Clare, who considers herself the "captive" daughter forced to live a false life in New York with her father, is relieved and overwhelmed to have a space that reconnects her with her mother. "I was blessed to have her

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<sup>19</sup> Harry/Harriet's transgendered status (she transitions from male-identified to female-identified in the course of the novel) is related to the text's overall critique of essentialisms, both biological and otherwise.

here,” she recalls, “Her passion of place. Her sense of the people. Here is her; leave it at that. But Clare did not speak this out loud; she could not trust her voice” (174).

It is in the memory and spirit of her mother that Clare donates this reclaimed land to the guerillas. The present-day narration of the novel takes place as Clare and the guerillas, Harriet included, prepare to violently disrupt a Hollywood movie being shot on location in their country. Angered by the domination of the island by ignorant white tourists, the group targets this film set for the way it feeds stereotypes of the Caribbean back to the tourists in a cycle of exploitation that they want stopped. Most of Cliff’s chapters are intercut (in a very filmic way, actually) with the image of the guerillas riding up the side of a mountain in their camouflage, preparing to stage their own protest. In this narrative, much is made of Clare’s racial position as a creole: “A light-skinned woman, daughter of landowners, native-born, slaves, emigres, Carib, Ashanti, English, has taken her place on this truck, alongside people who easily could have hated her” (5). The back of that pickup truck is meant to be a place of solidarity, then, where the goal of an unexploited, non-exploitative Jamaica trumps the racial hierarchies that have long alienated people from each other. As they ride up the mountainside, the text continues to use language that keeps their goals close to the earth. Consider how she describes this precarious solidarity that they created using the metaphor of mining: “They were making something new, approached not without difficulty, with the gravest opposition; the bitterness, the fury some held, could be strip-mined, no need to send the shaft deep at all” (5). Strip-mines are used where the minerals lie close to the earth’s surface and their scars are long and wide over the land. In another passage, using creole language, the text describes their attire in ways that emphasize their connection to the land. “Of course,” she writes of their camouflaged outfits, “it was never only a matter of appearance, symbol. Not at all. They were also dressed—a practical matter, a matter of survival—but it was all—the whole damned blasted t’ing—a matter of survival. They were dressed to blend with the country around them—

this dripping brown and green terrain” (5). Blending in with the country is clearly not just a matter of avoiding detection, but is instead another form of solidarity. People of different racial categories are united through becoming one with the land around them. Clare’s mother’s wish that she help her people is coming to fruition from the fertile soil of her own mother’s land. Her desire to return to the land is her only recourse to wholeness.

***Into Place: Julie***

The desert in Ibrahim’s town is a striking landscape for Julie, who has grown up summering in lush Cape Town. Much of her own reflections contrast her expectations (at times naïve, and Orientalist) against her experience of the place. There are no palm trees, she remarks, time and time again (150). If this space is Julie’s personal “Contact Zone,” to use Mary Louise Pratt’s term, then Gordimer is (as always) doing the work of acknowledging Julie’s own awareness of the historical politics of contact. Consider the following example: When Julie reflects that the desert has “no season of bloom and decay. Just the endless turn of night and day. Out of time” (172), her words suggest a platian anachronism that can be read as the temporal equivalent to the view that wilderness is spatially empty. To this she adds: “The desert is eternity” (172). But, lest we think that Julie has so easily fallen into the Orientalist trap of de-historicizing the Eastern landscape, the novel makes evident her own dismissal of such an assumption: Julie, quite self-consciously, distances herself from the stereotype of the British imperial traveller of Pratt’s study. She mocks the likes of T.E. Lawrence (of “Lawrence of Arabia” fame), and insists that their fetishization of the desert peoples—including the “condescending” adoption of the local dress, has: “Nothing to do with her; she wrapped herself in black robes only when it was necessary for protection against the wind” (198).

But Gordimer's use of Julie's de-orientalizing voice is controversial. Franz Meier, for one, has suggested that the novel itself brushes up against Orientalism in uncomfortable ways. For the most part, Meier admits that this is at times averted through the adoption of Julie's personal perspective, but overall he makes some salient critiques about the novel's continual objectification of the bodies of the Arab people, especially Ibrahim himself, who is often described in great physical detail (although Julie rarely is), and who gets referred to repeatedly as Julie's "lover," her "Oriental Prince." Leb dai, on the other hand, says the opposite: Gordimer's novel is "far from being an 'orientalist' text", he writes, "on the contrary it disrupts that idealistic image of the Other" (118). Here again, I suggest that the novel deliberately invites such a mixed response by presenting a large gap between Julie's self-perception (or lack thereof) and the narrator's commentary.

Like those (white) travellers who have come before, Julie is awestruck by the desert, by its vastness as well as its difference. In her new life there—which for her is the *real* life, having now reconceived of her Johannesburg times as "playing at reality" (164)—Julie rises at dawn to take walks before the heat and winds begin in earnest. As in *No Telephone to Heaven*, the text draws attention to the problematic alignment of land with reality. In Cliff's novel, the reality of the land is contrasted with Hollywood artifice (as in the final scene), but in a way that is cinematically narrated. In both novels, culture and history (including literature itself) confounds the idea of the land as unmediated, precolonial Eden. Julie's sudden disavowal of her former life as *unreal* is not a comment that the reader takes at its face value, for we are used to interpreting Julie's actions ironically. Still, it is hard to deny that something in Julie is fundamentally affected by the quietness of this new environment: "She takes a walk, just down the street, accompanied for a few minutes by one of those cowed dogs who know they are despised in this village. ... She has come to the sudden end of the street: there is the desert" (167). It is to this place here, on this



thin border between the village, small though it is, and the desert, that Julie returns again and again. “The sands are immobile,” the narratorial voice notes, and there is the sense of calm in Julie’s appreciation of the stillness. After a year passes there is a discernible shift in her attitude—the excitement and curiosity of her early days, when she was eager to see the capital, to take it all in—have been replaced by this stillness. In a passage describing her now ritual early morning walks, we see her shedding her past self: “even with [Ibrahim’s niece] she is alone in the sense of not being accompanied by what was always with her, part of herself, back wherever the past was” (198).

Although the desert is bringing things into focus for Julie, she still lacks something of a purpose. She has found a place in the family, at least, and has grown close to Ibrahim’s sister Maryam. The household and community operate along fairly strict gendered divisions of labour, and at first Julie is not invited to or even permitted to participate in the women’s activities. Although this means less work for her, it also excludes her from the only social network that could possibly be available to her—for there are no cafes here where she can indulge casually in friendly relationships with men and women with the freedom that the City permits. (And, of course, her inadmissibility into the “women’s sphere” is a good reminder that gender is not a stand-alone category, but is at all times mediated by other intersecting factors, here namely race, nationality, culture, religion, and education). Her invitation into the women’s spaces is also an invitation to participate, even in some small degree, in the everydayness of life in the desert town. She is no longer completely set-apart, as a tourist would be, separated from the banal routines of everyday life. However, her outsider status means that while she is invited into that sphere, it serves to restrict her less than it does the other women in the family.

Interestingly, Julie not frustrated, but is rather more curious about the limitations placed on her by her gender (which fits, again, into Abdu's claim that for Julie all of this is tantamount to the next big Adventure in her life of privilege). Like Esi, then, Julie does not turn away from the so-called traditional arrangements—Julie does not suddenly develop a reactionary appreciation for the mobility that her class and race afforded her gendered self in Johannesburg, but instead she begins to want to learn more about those spaces she can now inhabit: such as the kitchen, and the drawing rooms of neighbour women. But again, we as readers are not permitted the indulgence of romanticizing the so-called simpler times/places when/where social roles were clearer; for Ibrahim, Julie's involvement in the kitchen means little more than one more mouth to feed. He sees her desert adventure as a "burden" on the already diminished resources of his struggling family (122). Ibrahim's view of Julie as merely another consumer reflects Gordimer's Marxian perspective on land as economic base—and, by extension, the basis of colonial dispossession, and the violent rejection, in post-Apartheid South Africa, of migrant workers. Such an understanding appears to elude Julie, whose leftist views are defined primarily by identity politics.

Not fully satisfied by her role as meal-preparer and English teacher to the wealthier townswomen, Julie still yearns for something more. Her epiphany occurs one day in the desert, where her recurring "green dreams" finally begin to make sense. For weeks Julie had been repeatedly visited by a dream about vegetation—a dream that Ibrahim reads as a desire to go back home, where she lived in a house surrounded by trees and a lawn "cut by a black man" (173). But what these dreams are really foretelling is Julie's encounter with an oasis:

They did not come upon the destination suddenly. At the sides of their track there glinted what might be a fragment of tin catching the glare, a shard of broken glass shining. But then there was continuity in the shine: water, shallow threads of water. There were palms. At last. She had forgotten how she has visualized postcard palm trees, back there. (208)

The oasis is the site of a rice paddy, and it is here that Julie finds her purpose: she could start a farm. To be more specific, she could use her trust fund money to finance a farm, which could provide food for the community and financial stability for Ibrahim's family. Most importantly, for Julie, the rice paddy represents "a possibility" rooted in the here and now (211). Julie imagines this small agricultural project as an alternative to joining the global capitalist circuit which relies on the sort of migratory-labour that Ibrahim is all too ready to provide. It must be stressed that Julie's openness to the desert is constructed in opposition to Ibrahim's disdain for the place: he "avoided, ignored, shunned the desert. (*Are you crazy?*)" (173). Again, the novel self-censors: "he shuns the desert. It is the denial of everything he yearns for, for him. And if he should remember—the enthusiasms of some members of The Table—his next derision could be that her decision was a typical piece of sheltered middle-class Western romanticism. Like picking up a grease-monkey" (262). That this line ties her desire for "green" with her desire for him, a racialized "other" confirms that Said's concept of Orientalism animates environments as well as cultures and people themselves. This interpretation undermines Julie's project, and reads it as a frivolous (if not offensive) endeavour. Although the text warns of the easy elision between a lust for the human Other and for the environmental Other, it soon becomes clear that Julie is growing more attached to the environment than to her husband. Her obsession becomes something of a green affair. As Ibrahim continues to dissociate himself from the desert, and from his family, Julie grows disinterested in him, and devotes more of her attention, her very careful attention, it must be said, to the desert.

Julie's walks to the edge of the town where the desert begins marked the start of her growing ecological and platial consciousness. Her appreciation for the sparse landscape is a meditative process that takes her away from the human-built environment, but also serves to make the human life of the village seem all the more precious. The openness of the landscape certainly

provides both the time and the space for Julie to see/appreciate her social environment; in this way, the desert can be read through the concept of *place*, in the way that Arturo Escobar describes. He writes that we need to “recogniz[e] that place, body, and environment integrate with each other; that places gather things, thoughts, and memories in particular configurations” (143). In this way the desert is not simply a metonym for difference, but is a physical, psychic space that actually reconfigures the way Julie thinks about her place-in-the-world. The values of family and community begin to take shape for her against the silhouette of the shifting sands. More than this, though, Julie begins to see her own role as one of shaping the local environment.

However, her idea to finance a project of small-scale irrigation in order to provide rice to the community and money for the family brings up the uncomfortable question of motives again. Can Julie, who has made important strides to fit in (namely through participating in fasting for Ramadan), be read as a member of the local movement, touting community sustainability, or is her vision for the desert merely a token of “ecological imperialism” writ small? Her repeated line “I dreamed green” can be read as either indulgent or selfless. Is this woman who has never farmed before in any position to run a rice plantation—is Julie in any position to “help”? What knowledge of and commitment to place can this outsider really bring? Julie’s situation has implications far beyond the text. Her story echoes the fad of voluntourism, ecotourism, and other ecological practices of the highly mobile. Julie, I argue, represents the loaded promise of green behaviours in the globalized world as both personal and political solutions to the feeling of placelessness, such as those which Clare experiences in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Gordimer herself achieves this through the ironic tones in her novel. The novel’s tone thus makes it difficult to tell whether Julie has actually embraced a new subject position, or whether she is indeed just playing at life. Certainly, her immersion into the culture and the social circles, as well as her developed appreciation for the ecology of the place, suggest that she has begun to look at the town

from the bottom-up, but the text's constant undermining of Julie's intentions leaves us to wonder whether she can sustain this newfound position.

***No Safe Return: Violence on the Land***

The final critique of Julie's project lies in the fact that the rice plantation she visits is not the neutral agricultural project that she imagines, but is in fact a front for a small arms-dealing operation. When Julie is discussing the improbable plan with Ibrahim she states, defiantly, that the man whose rice paddy she saw "obviously makes money," to which Ibrahim replies, "Not rice money" (216). "He makes money alright," he retorts, "and do you know how? Do you? He is a smuggler, he calls it import-export, he's a go-between in arms sales for a crowd of cronies over the border" (216). At this revelation "she confronted herself" (216) with the fact that such dealings occur everywhere, that even among her father and his cronies more than just "Futures" were being traded. She speculates on whether some of the men may have been involved in "the sale of diamonds in Angola" (217). The corruption of Julie's green dream, linked theoretically here to the procurement of blood-diamonds, speaks to the co-option and corruption of nature through capitalism and militarism.<sup>20</sup> This realization shatters the myth that either the desert or the oasis is a place outside the scope of the world. The fact that the paddy is just a paper business for a violent trade instantly connects the desert to the world that Julie hoped she had escaped. Finally, the truth of the farm provides a jarring contrast with the beauty and pleasure that Julie experienced there: "the intoxication of green ... the twittering sensation of a great company of birds clinging, women into the green as they fled" (210). As usual, headstrong Julie is prepared to overlook this truth that Ibrahim provides her, saying "[i]f we had a concession it wouldn't have

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<sup>20</sup> For a comprehensive look at the impact of war on the environment, see *The Environmental Consequences of War: Legal, Economic, and Social Perspectives*, edited by Jay Austen and Carl Bruch. For an analysis of the interconnections between colonialism, capitalism, militarism and environment see Deane Curtin's *Environmental Ethics for a Postcolonial World*.

anything to do with all that. ... Just growing rice” (217). Despite her firm belief, Ibrahim’s words have sullied her dream and brought nature as an oasis under suspicion. It seems that the “new country” Julie envisioned may simply be a replication of the same old country in new forms. Her desire to create a new space that reflects her vision of nature as a site of rejuvenation *outside* of the everyday is a nothing more than a mirage. The site itself is instead deeply entrenched in the politics of the place and is firmly divorced from the idea of the pastoral as a place of paradise.

In Lovelace’s text the Calypso singers-turned revolutionaries hijack a van and drive through the city, armed, calling out slogans of emancipation. Despite their bravado the men are hungry, tired, and are without a strong sense of direction. They are unwilling to fire their arms and at times each wishes that the joyride as well as their confusion would end. Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*, however, depicts a much more organized and deliberate revolt. With the slogan “NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN” written on the side of the truck, the guerillas know there is no easy solution, “No miracles. None of them knew miracles. They must turn the damn thing upside down. Fight fire with fire. Burn. Yes, burn it down. Bu’n it dung, bredda. Catch a fire. Catch afire” (50). By linking the land with the sale of small-arms, both Cliff and Gordimer complicate the idea of a simple return to the land. In Gordimer’s text, Julie’s misreading of the rice paddy as a simple agricultural project reveals that she is still clueless about the machinations of power that held up the world in which she lives and succeeds with such ease. Apart from merely mocking Julie’s worldliness, however, the fact that the paddy was a front for arms-smuggling also taints the idea of a return to the land by implying that no land is neutral. There is no solace to be found in nature because nature has already been compromised.

In the final pages of the novel, Julie reverses the gesture she made at the beginning of the text, when she was caught in the traffic jam: “Her hands are up, palms open, fingers splayed,

holding him off. No. It's not that. I'm not going" (248). Whereas at the beginning of the text this gesture was meant to imply frustration and helplessness as Julie-the-prey was surrounded in the Cape Town traffic, here at the end of the novel the position of her hands means something entirely different: a gaining of control. This is the moment when Julie makes it clear that she will not be moving to America with her husband, but will instead stay on with his family in the desert to live out her dream of opening and running a rice concession. The family go along with the story that she is simply staying behind until he is settled in the US, at which point she will join him, but it is mostly clear that this is simply a fabrication to allay awkwardness. Franz Meier has commented about the "ambiguous ending" of the novel, noting that "Abdu's prospects in the States seem anything but promising and Julie's dream of a rice plantation in the desert is based on a camouflage enterprise for an arms-smuggling business. Gordimer would not be herself if her utopias did not show ironic twists" (n. p.). Trading on ambiguities throughout, the novel ultimately refuses to condone or condemn Julie's decision to remain in the desert and invest herself into the development of the local agricultural scene. The relocation of complex racial relations from post-apartheid South Africa to the Middle East reminds us that new configurations of racial power are formed with each new space we inhabit.

Clare's ultimate commitment to the land can be read as the opposite of Julie's. Where Julie is interested in a project to further her sense of purpose and belonging, Clare subsuming her *self* in order to free her island home. The novel makes it clear that Clare has gone beyond the point of no return when she narrates, from the truck, "Cyaan tu'n back now. Capture the I in I. Then say Bless me ..... I am about to kill one of your creatures. Some of your own children" (50). She is, as noted above, preparing to ambush the film crew in order to halt the exploitation of Jamaica in the Western cultural imaginary. This is not what the reader expected when Clare returned to Jamaica to reclaim her grandmother's land. Her experience living with Bobby, who

suffered from the traumas of war, did not make her turn from it, but rather drew her further towards violence as a means of meeting a violent world. Even in the symbolic re-birth that Clare undergoes as she returns to the land, the scene is imbued with conflict: “Clare slithered beneath her grandmother’s house, drawing her head through widows’ webs, pulling herself through the hard black leavings of rats, hands scraping against fragments of shells embedded in the ground, which signalled the explosive birth of the island” (199). In order to re-dress this "explosive birth" Clare and the guerillas use the land as a resource, "They had traded for the guns and ammunition the ganja they cultivated on an abandoned farm in the parish of St. Elizabeth. The farm, once belonging to the grandmother of one of the members of the band—the daughter of landowners, taking her place now in the truck back” (8). But none of this protects her. When, at the end of the novel, Clare’s group is targeted by the real military, she dies while hiding behind the ironically-named shrub called the bitterbush (208).

The land also plays an important part in another formative subplot of Cliff’s text. This is the story of Christopher (“de Watchman”). Christopher grew up in the slums of Kingston, called the Dungle. Descriptions of the Dungle are very reminiscent of descriptions of the Hill in Lovelace’s *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, there are people trying to make their lives amongst much garbage, stray dogs, and sometimes a very strong sense of community. Christopher, alone with only his grandmother, is not lucky enough to feel this sense of community very keenly. Soon after Christopher’s grandmother dies, a man named Charles appears looking for her to replace her sister, who had previously worked as a maid for the family. When Charles discovers that the grandmother has passed on, he takes Christopher instead. And thus Christopher is whisked away out of the Dungle into the cool, affluent hillsides: “In the air of the high-up country, with the riverwater and the fruit he could pick to eat, his cough eventually went away, his back straightened, and his life was spared” (42). For twelve years he works for the family in peace, but



he is tormented by the thought that his grandmother, who was very religious, was never properly buried. Christopher gets the idea that he needs a plot of land to bury her, and he emboldens himself to ask his employer, mas' Charles, for a small piece of his property. He reasons to himself: "His family, the people of his grandmother, work for the family of Mas' Charles long time now. Not too much to ask fe a lickle parcel fe him grandmother? Dis is de Christmas. He convinced himself he wouldn't be refused" (45).

Christopher's desperation at his dead grandmother's restlessness pathetically renders clear the divide between those with land and those without. Christopher's plight also demonstrates the important symbolic quality that land carries in cultures where people bury their dead. As a dispossessed, dislocated person, Christopher does not have access, or the means to acquire access to, dignity for his family memory. Although he has convinced himself that Charles will certainly concede some small corner of the lot, it is clear to the reader that land is a possession which the landed class will not easily let go of. Tension mounts in the story as Christopher enters Charles and his wife's bedroom on Christmas Eve to discuss this issue of land, saying to himself, "Cyaan hurt fe ask" (45).

Startled, Charles nevertheless listens to Christopher's request. Upon learning that the grandmother has been dead twelve years, he laughs at Christopher's naïveté at the thought that she could even be found. This reaction hurts and enrages Christopher who is convinced (1) that his grandmother's spirit is in limbo and (2) that his years of service have earned him at least this minor request, as unusual as it is. Christopher reacts with anger and incredulity: "How the man can ridicule him so? The fat brown man in the big fat bed wrapped in flowers grinned at him and shook his head at the ignorance of this stupid, stupid bwai. No wonder dis damn country don't amount to nothing" (47). It is at this point that he kills the husband and wife brutally with his

machete, spurred on by what he senses is his grandmother's approval (47). In return for their unwillingness to help him provide a place for his grandmother he vows, "No rest for them. No peace a-tall, a-tall. Dem would wander Stony Hill until dem drop" (48). All of Christopher's feelings about having grown up, in the Dungle, in the lowest ranks of the Jamaican social strata, come to be symbolized in his search for land. "All me did ask was a lickle piece of lan'"(48) he tells Mavis, the cook. Her tired, defeatist response, "What right wanna t'ink wanna have fe ask fe lan'?" (48), does more to push Christopher back down into his place at the bottom of the ladder than did Charles' mocking words, and he finishes by stabbing Mavis dozens of times.

### ***Conclusion***

Christopher's tragic search for land as a resting place for his grandmother speaks strongly about the links between place, home and community. What these two texts have shown is that these links are not always positive. Both novels undercut the trope of the homecoming by pairing it with violence in some way. Clare's dedication to the guerrilla cause came at the cost of her own life, and that of Christopher. Her sacrifice of her grandmother's plot of land brought about a new meaning of the term *ruination*, suggesting the defeat of the landowner and the disrespect of the land through violence itself. Clare's militant commitment to the project involved an in-depth interview and a strong personal investment. Julie, on the other hand, got involved with a project to farm a desert oasis with only minimal knowledge of the place. When her "green dream" turned out to be a front for an illegal operation involving the sale of firearms, the pretense that the desert is Julie's home falls apart.

More important than how these novels end, perhaps, is the fact that both of these characters made a deliberate turn towards the land in an attempt to conjure a sense of home and belonging as a reaction to living in global cities. In this chapter I was interested in tracing the ways in which Clare and Julie tried to create land-based change through personal projects. It was

this level, that of the micro, that the everyday perspective makes sense. What was central to this chapter was the idea that the postcolonial everyday must be in conversation with discourse on race, globalization and the environment. The two texts represent characters as deeply embedded in, and constructed by, politics of race, class, gender and geographical location. By colliding these various identities with the environmental projects that are also about the self and self-transformation, these texts demonstrate the political nature of environmentalisms in postcolonial literature.

## **CONCLUSION: Enduring Nature**

Throughout this project I have tried to construct a picture of what nature looks like in postcolonial literature, all the while deliberately pressing against the boundaries of what might be considered an environmental text. By extending my definition of nature to include those bits of everyday nature that make up people's immediate environments, I was able to show nature as a commonplace feature in postcolonial literature, and, more importantly, to show environmentalism as intimately connected to the postcolonial project. Each chapter portrayed the representation of banal nature through the experience of the characters in the texts. Chapter One focused on Rukmani's attempts to negotiate her changing environment by re-invoking her commitment to the land. She could see that nature was altered, that the birds would no longer come to the river in droves, but this compromised state of nature only made her cling more tightly. Through an analysis of her gardening, I was able to connect Rukmani to her land in a way that made sense of her final rejection of the city. Even in the face of Dr. Kenny's dismissiveness and the city's alienation, Rukmani felt a keen comradeship with the farm through her life and her body. Chapter Two contrasted two representations of a single environment. Salman Rushdie's *Sundarbans* was a place detached from reality and therefore had more to do with the concept of a sublime, removed nature than with a populated, connected place. Amitav Ghosh's *Sundarbans*, on the other hand, made the spectacular banal. Through the highly observant characters of Piya and Fokir, Ghosh renders the *Sundarbans* a knowable place. Fokir's traditional knowledge, taken together with the tale of Bonbibibi, gives us a glimpse into the construction of environmental ethics and attitudes as a response to a very particular lived environment. Moving from the jungle to the city, Chapter Three looks at the place of urbanism in ecocriticism, and postcolonial ecocriticism especially. Despite the fact that globalization is working in tandem with urbanization, ecocriticism has been slow to respond to this shift and remains largely focused on rural texts. Postcolonial studies has

long focused on the urban, but to the neglect of the ecological. In this chapter, through the characters of Aldrick, Pariag, Sylvia, Gustad, and Miss Cleothilda, I explore nature as a core feature of urban life. By focusing on nature as it appears in the city, in small garden plots, or in the form of buzzing insects, I maintain a focus on experienced, everyday nature and am able to put the characters in conversation with environmentalism in ways that a focus on grander examples of nature could not. As well, this focus provides a framework for exploring the often degraded environments of the inner-city or the shanty towns on the outskirts of town. Finally, Chapter Four explores the stories of two contemporary, cosmopolitan characters who believe that their sense of displacement can be achieved through a return to the land. Both Clare and Julie construct attachments to place as a process of subjective redefinition. In this chapter, the everyday is the process by which these characters come to know and explore their new environments. Their commitment to place can be read through the lens of the everyday, through the walks, farming, and labour that they experience or envision. In this final chapter, however, the invocation of violence on the land which forces us to reconsidered ideas of nature as a neutral or blank space. Once again, the environment, as theorized through postcolonial literature, is a highly politicized space. This concept of the environment as a politicized space is useful not only in literary studies, but could have important implications and applications for development projects, where success is so dependent on the mobilization of human capital. It is thus equally important to address the human-political element of an environmental project as it is the ecological.

Taken together my chapters have further complicated the divide between so-called empty-belly and full-stomach environmentalisms, proving there to be more overlap than the labels suggest. My main goal here was to begin to explore the ways in which postcolonial literature represents people living in poverty, or in impoverished environments, who continue to foster relationships with the environment around them, whether that be through caring for animals,

watering plants, or cleaning their neighbourhood. With the everyday as the lens of analysis, these small gestures of environmental-friendliness were not overlooked. The picture that emerged showed a sense of care and awareness at the local level that exists regardless of economic conditions. My efforts here were to write against the popular assumption that, as Slaymaker phrases it, “whites have more time, energy, and wealth for appreciating and aestheticizing nature and the environment” (685). At times, this care resembles a love for place, but at other times it seems a stretch to describe the feeling as one of love. Miss Cleothilda’s slightly resentful watering of the plants on her porch reveal something more complicated than a devotion to place. Rather, what I propose is that this type of care can be explained through the experiencing of a common bond—that of a hostile environment. Drawing on the relationship between the people of the Sundarbans and their empathetic relationship with the tigers, I argue that the same feeling connects people in other places with the nature that surrounds them. This analysis of the motivations for environmental care is a far different picture than Guha and Martinez-Allier presented in their *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*, which focused primarily on conflict between people living in poverty and environmental ills. What was important about Guha and Martinez-Alier’s book is the way they showed that economically disadvantaged, politically-disenfranchised people in India were actively demonstrating and organizing against environmental destruction that interfered with their ability to live their lives. By deliberately avoiding these larger-scale movements, my dissertation looks at the more personal attitudes that motivate attachment to place—attitudes that literature is particularly adept at conveying.

In a piece entitled "Postscript: After Nature," which concludes Huggan and Tiffin’s *Ecocriticism*, Ursula Heise argues that the future of postcolonial ecocriticism lies in an engagement with "the tensions between pan-humanist and posthumanist approaches to academic

research" (209). Heise makes much of the fact that we are already in a post-natural world, and points to the postcolonial speculative fiction of Margaret Atwood as an example of a "gleefully ironic version of a return to nature" (214). Relying on the liberatory writings of Merchant and Haraway, Heise sees in the death of nature and the triumph of the cyborg a much-needed critique of humanism. Heise defines post-humanism as "a point of view characterised by the assumption that embodiment is an historical accident rather than a biological necessity; for if the body is looked upon as no more than an original prosthesis, then its extension or replacement with other prostheses becomes the 'continuation of a process that began before we were born' (Hayles 1993: 3)" (207). Her definition lays bare assumptions about the human as a natural and essential category; once that category is challenged, as it has been by feminist and postcolonial thinkers, it becomes clear that the human's opposite (i.e. nature and animal), are also categories of being that need to be radically reconsidered. It is from these positions that Heise makes the call that ecocriticism should move in the direction of the post-natural. While I agree with the idea that the post-human presents an important critique of humanism's often Euro-anthropocentric streaks, my analysis of postcolonial environmental literature does not necessarily lead away from nature in the way that Heise describes.

What I have found in this broad examination of postcolonial environmental literature is an argument for re-grounding nature through the lens of the everyday. In this dissertation I have been interested in the personal, often affective connections between the human characters, the land, the garden, and the non-human animals that populate their lives. By focusing on the small, everyday acts such as gathering water from a spout in a yard in Calvary Hill allowed a different perspective. From the point of view of characters like Sylvia, who are not self-defined environmentalists in any sense, we are given a chance to ask what water-gathering represents in her daily life. The communal water-spout turns out to be an admixture of labour, desire,

community and poverty. It is this type of experience that I documented in this project. These personal everyday environmentalisms are an exploration of banal nature, and the way that nature continues to endure through modernization.

There are two adjustments to the concept of nature that I make throughout my project. The first is to unearth examples of more subtle nature that exist within our living environments. The water spout is not a dramatic waterfall, it is not even a lake; what it is, however, is a modern manifestation of the local body of water. The spout in *The Dragon Can't Dance* and the bathroom tap in *Such a Long Journey* are both examples of highly-processed nature being brought into, or near, the home. I am interested in the ways in which this sort of mediated nature continues to shape our modern lives, be it in the form of taps, gardens, or endangered species. This is nature that is “dead” in the way that Bill McKibben imagined it in *The End of Nature*, or Dipesh Chakrabarty in “Four Theses,” nature so mediated by human interference that it is more human-construction than it is “natural.” This brings us to the position of having to define nature, wherein I make my second adjustment. Following up on the pronouncements of those such as DeLoughrey and Handley, I agree that nature in the postcolonial context has always been tied up in human history and culture, but I want to add to this idea that nature is also *experienced* as part of the human fabric as well. Whereas the characters that I studied in this project did not engage with nature as if it was fundamentally altered, the characters did engage with nature in a way that suggests they are highly aware of the social and cultural contexts of nature. This resistance to separating nature from culture is the basis for what I see as the absence of romanticized nature in the postcolonial context. The concept of sublime nature, which is so popular in the Western imagination, fails to resonate with other ways of thinking about the differences between humans and nature.



The final example I would like to draw on comes from the poem “The Wild Bougainvillea” by Kamala Das. In it Das explores the dumpster-sized gap between nature we desire and nature that we discard. She writes:

It is a good world, and  
Packed with distractions. I walked through streets beside  
The sea, where the barges  
Float, their undersides rotting and the garbage  
Rot, and the dead fish rot,  
And, I smelt the smell of dying things and the  
Heavy smell of rotting

This verse begins with the statement that “it is a good world” and continues with a description of fish rotting in a port. These images are a sharp contrast to our expectation of the types of sights and smells that make up a “good world.” This contrast is a useful example for thinking about the ways in which we parse different elements of nature into different categories, and assign them values accordingly. I remind myself of lines from this poem as a way to keep my own expectations of nature and my immediate environment in-check. Such reminders are important in the process of de-romanticizing our relationship with nature (something which ecocriticism has to constantly be on guard against). Das’ poem is refreshing for the openness with which she discusses and even celebrates the dead fish side of nature; most of the works I studied in this dissertation did not go to such lengths. What they did do, however, was shed light on those sometimes unsavoury, bothersome aspects of everyday nature, such as flies, mosquitoes, floods and even tigers with an often nonjudgmental light. It is these qualities which I wanted to accentuate through the phrase “enduring nature.” In order to theorize our relationships with the environment we need to not only contemplate those aspects of it which nourish us, but also be honest about those which aggravate us. As we are enduring nature, it

continues to endure us, as well, blossoming in patches of cracked concrete and mutating as a result of pollutants. These are not the ideal conditions for the preservation—or perhaps even the continuation of—the natural world, but they are evidence of nature’s endurance nevertheless. It is precisely these sidelined expressions of nature that I think we need to make sure we're not ignoring when we're theorizing people's relationship to nature.

I began this dissertation with a reflection on the state-of-the-field and I would like to end it with another. Over the course of writing this project, other scholars have also been steadily at work on this intersection between postcolonialism and ecocriticism. Nearing the end of writing I found myself in the exciting (yet at times frustrating) position of working in a popular and burgeoning field. It is exciting because of the thoughtful and creative work being produced—work which I genuinely feel will help to reframe environmental issues in a more accessible and accountable manner. And frustrating because of the fact that one of the best new books to come out (DeLoughrey and Handley’s *Postcolonial Ecologies*) has for its epigraph what was once the working title of my dissertation: a quote by Frantz Fanon that eloquently demonstrates the links between social and environmental justice, particularly within the context of decolonization. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon wrote that “For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity” (9). With the recognition of these lines, it seemed as if the field of postcolonial ecocriticism was moving in exactly the direction I had been arguing for, which was to draw on the existing links between social and environmental justice concerns.

With this new emphasis established, however, I was free to think about what such an approach would actually look like. It was from this position that I began to articulate the concept of everyday environmentalisms as a way to think through the “varieties” of environmentalism in

postcolonial literature. I began by re-shaping the definition of the environment, and environmentalism, in ways that better reflected the expression of environmental concern in the pages of postcolonial literature. My focus was on the reality of (often unremarkable) daily experiences with the local environment, and on how people interacted with, and were shaped by, these environments. This redefinition, of course, is in the debt of environmental justice activists, who have done much to draw attention to the place of labour and living in environmental discourse. It is my theory that much of what was not being counted as environmentally-oriented in postcolonial texts should actually be counted as such.

These everyday environmentalisms became the lens through which I read postcolonial texts in this project, and the method by which I extracted environmental meaning from seemingly non-environmental literature. Texts that appeared on the surface to be about petty disputes between neighbours or the birth of Modern Indian were recalibrated by this lens to reveal insights about how we live in and with/against our environments. This lens may not be “green” as has traditionally been imagined. Perhaps, borrowing from the concept of a brownfield site, the lens is brown, transforming spaces of dis-use, under-use, or waste into places of potential.

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