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Anthropocene Fiction: Empathy, Kinship, and the Troubled Waters at the End of the World

Megan Mandell Stowe
University of South Florida

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by

Megan Mandell Stowe

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Co-Major Professor: Gurleen Grewal, Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Ylce Irizarry, Ph.D.
Nhu Le, Ph.D.
John Lennon, Ph.D.
Ulluminar Salim, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

For my students. You continue to be my greatest teachers.

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ABSTRACT

Anthropocene literature features characters and environments grappling with the devastation of climate change. Donna Haraway's term *Chthulucene* narrows this category further by exposing the tentacular connections between overpopulation, dependence on material goods, species loss, and other facets of global warming—such as water as a resource. Three novels of the Chthulucene exhibit these connections, centering on the importance of water to both ecologies and personal identity. In *Parable of the Sower*, *Solar Storms*, and *Lagoon*, place attachment brings ecology and identity together by forging a stewardship between person and location, often resulting in efforts to defend and preserve a place.

In Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), protagonist Lauren Olamina navigates a burning and destroyed California to build Earthseed, a collaborative community situated in diversity and resource sharing that serves as a model for how to survive climate change. Lauren's Hyperempathy Syndrome makes her feel what others around her feel, such as pain, and illustrates how empathy—for humans and nonhuman nature alike—can create positive change. Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1994) depicts the environmental threat of hydrodams to Indigenous communities along the border between the U.S. and Canada. With this threat looming, 17-year-old Angel Jensen shares a water journey with women of her ancestral lands that strengthens her attachment to nonhuman nature and bolsters her courage to resist the dam project. In Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014), humans join animals, plants, monsters, and aliens in a fight against the forces of planetary destruction. Set in Lagos, a bustling epicenter of oil production and social upheaval, this Africanfuturist novel prioritizes non-Western, nonhuman voices while representing the ocean, with all its substances and fluidity, as a symbol for climate change.

Ultimately, these novels send a hopeful message for fighting climate change and for thriving amidst the effects we are already witnessing. The authors of these climate narratives share a common project in examining the role of empathy in climate resilience. Adaptability proves key to each of these novels' messages: Earthseed materializes only after Lauren sees her walled neighborhood burn; Angel becomes a leader in the struggle against damming after leaving her home in Oklahoma and adopting the ecological philosophies of her foremothers; Adaora, Agu, and Anthony of *Lagoon* must grapple with the newly arrived aliens' demands and the transformations of their individual abilities. In each novel, adaptability, change, and hope are intertwined. The positive messages of each novel lend themselves well to applications in the classroom. Students can learn from the power of adaptability in the Chthulucene to improve their own communities and ecosystems around the globe.

INTRODUCTION: EMPATHY AND KINSHIP IN ANTHROPOCENE FICTION

In the spring of 2014, I took a class at the University of South Florida with Dr. Gurleen Grewal called "Environmental Literature." The course asked students to think beyond typical representations of the environment and to critique assumptions about our place in the world. The assigned readings revealed how literary "place," or the meaningful attachment to a physical location, becomes imbued with very real political, social, and environmental crises. This course inspired me to contemplate the environmental literary imagination and its implications for social justice movements. My final assignment for Dr. Grewal, unlike so much of my previous academic writing, was a work of creative nonfiction. In it, I wove together the fabric of a childhood marred by violence, disease, and poverty – showing how families living in section-8 housing in some of the poorest neighborhoods of New York's wealthy Long Island are disproportionately affected by incarceration, lack of access to healthcare and education, food insecurity, lead poisoning, toxic water, chronic disease, and, especially, cancer.

A Nassau County Community Health Assessment underscores the growing concern over Long Island's toxic water supplies (the U.S. Navy and Northrop Grumman alone used over 100 L.I. sites as chemical dumping grounds for many years), high incidents of lead poisoning, and disproportionate number of chronic illnesses such as Type 2 Diabetes in some lower socioeconomic areas in Nassau County.[1] One of these is Hempstead, the town in which I grew

[1] According to Nassau County's department of Health assessment report for 2014-2017. The report covers Elmont, Freeport, Westbury, Hempstead, Glen Cove, Inwood, Long Beach, Roosevelt, and Uniondale. It also highlights the larger proportion of minorities in the selected communities, showing links between low socio-economic status, minority populations, younger populations, and higher incidents of chronic illness, injury, and communicable disease among other trends in what is overall the 12th wealthiest county in the country.

up, and where my mother, at 46 years old, would become one of thousands of women affected by the inordinately high breast cancer mortality rates in Long Island's many impoverished communities. Was my mother's death in 1992 partially linked to Hempstead's environmental toxicity? If it was not a direct result of the toxic water supply, certainly there were multiple layers of correlation among social and environmental factors, in her case and in the over 18,000 annual cases of cancer on Long Island. Environmental problems and projects leave lasting marks, and more often than not, they affect communities that cannot defend themselves against well-funded, powerful organizations. These communities suffer what Rob Nixon terms *slow violence*, or harm to people, animals, and land that is rendered over long periods of time and therefore becomes invisible. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Nixon explains, "Politically and emotionally, different kinds of disaster possess unequal heft. Falling bodies, burning towers…tsunamis…have a visceral…power that tales of slow violence [like increasing cancer rates], unfolding over years, decades, even centuries, cannot match" (3). Environmental toxicity wreaked slow violence upon my family and the loved ones of so many others. My dissertation seeks to unveil forms of slow violence in the Anthropocene as depicted through Anthropocene literature, especially focusing on the authors' appeals to environmental and social justice for marginalized communities who often bear the brunt of ecological damage.

Rachel Carson's exposure of DDT use in *Silent Spring*, the catastrophe at Love Canal (which is still leaking poison), current pipeline endeavors in the U.S. and Canada, international hydrodam projects, and Scott Pruitt's rejection of scientific evidence that a common agricultural chemical causes brain damage are some recent events demonstrating the intersections between class, race, gender, and the environment and the political and economic authorities endangering

the biosphere.[2] It is due in large part to the global and personal environmental issues raised above that I chose to write my dissertation on representations of the Anthropocene in literature and how those representations shape reality. We live in a moment of environmental crisis that suffers from an ongoing debate about not just the nature of its causes, but in some circles including that of American politics, whether or not there is a crisis occurring at all. While scientific discourse serves a critical role in educating global citizens, there has historically been a disconnect between this discourse community and the general public. Literature, on the other hand, can intervene by providing a story about the Anthropocene and its inherent issues – one that may motivate the public to connect more readily as environmental stewards, or at the very least become more environmentally aware.

My dissertation focuses on literary representations of communities most likely to be impacted earlier and more severely by the current ecological crisis than other certain geographies depicted in more well-known works. I consider how some 20th century and contemporary transnational novels react against environmental oppression, domination, and exploitation, especially where it affects already over-burdened and marginalized communities such as Black American, Native American, and postcolonial populations. This project shows that Butler, Hogan, and Okorafor, authors of climate narratives, share the common project goals of highlighting the value of empathy and kinship to imagine better futures in the Anthropocene. I

[2] At this particular cultural moment, it is more important than ever to increase awareness and critical discussion of these links. Several unnerving factors serve as a partial impetus for this dissertation, including large-scale cuts to the EPA and other environmentally conscious agencies, including even National Parks Services. More threateningly, the Trump administration in the U.S., as well as a few international political figures, have used their platforms to disavow the scientific community at large in regards to climate change, calling it a "hoax," and attempting to roll back Obama-era limits on carbon emissions. The political motives in these cases serve to benefit major corporations and will continue to cause ecological devastation, affecting both human and non-human nature.

examine these three novels chronologically in order of their publications, beginning with Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), then Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1994), and finally Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014). Each of these novels highlights social and ecological injustices throughout the emergence of the Anthropocene by imagining place-making that questions traditional Western hierarchies such as nature/culture, male/female, and science/spirituality and offer dynamic approaches to environmental justice through empathy and kinship with humans and other-than-humans. The texts studied in my project deserve attention in this historical juncture, when problems of ecological justice—such as heightened flooding due to climate change—and problems of ecological racism are exacerbated by political, cultural, and religious schisms.

Anthropocene Fiction

In 2000, atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen proposed the term "Anthropocene" to mark the current geological epoch in which humankind's impact on the environment has become visible. Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, who coined the term in the 1980s, suggest that the Anthropocene begins as the 1800s end—with the Industrial Revolution, which helped to make human influence on geology and ecology more noticeable. Some scientists contest this start date, arguing that the visibility of anthropogenic impacts may have grown during the last two centuries, but it remains unclear for how long and to what extent human influence has been acting on the environment. Therefore, the term Anthropocene has not yet been formally adopted in reference to a specific geological time but is currently used informally to indicate the present scientific, ecological, and cultural moment.

One major claim of the Anthropocene is that human activity has produced global warming, referred to as Anthropogenic Climate Change. Despite climate change skepticism,

there remains a global scientific consensus that climate change has already begun and that it stems from certain human practices. Many critics and activists see a direct link between capitalism and climate change. In *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, Naomi Klein explores the connection between neoliberal market fundamentalism and the climate crisis. Similarly, Donna Haraway uses the term 'Capitalocene' to describe "growth that depends on resourcing the earth for the kind of expansion and extraction that result in profit, which is, in turn, distributed unequally" (O'Neill-Butler n.p.). Of course, the scale of global capitalism makes the resultant effects of climate change – species loss, climate refugees, limited access to food and water, toxicity, and more – difficult to treat from social, political, and economic standpoints. Climate justice forms yet another layer in the fabric of global and local inequalities driven in part by the projects of imperialism and late-stage capitalism.

Redressing global climate injustice faces an additional challenge in those reluctant to adopt lifestyle changes, such as limiting emissions, traveling less frequently, or recycling; moreover, global industries emphasize personal responsibility for consumers while lobbying for continued deregulation for businesses. In an article for a special edition of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature and the Environment* (ISLE) on Climate Change, Patrick D. Murphy notes, "recent large-scale studies of climate change, the politics around it, and the need to move to a different economic model for the world here at the end of growth all address an increasingly inescapable conclusion: the problem is not one of [financial] means but one of recognition, acceptance, and will to act" ("Pessimism" 149). If solving problems of the Anthropocene and climate change does not hinge on financial circumstances, as many government entities suggest, but on understanding and acceptance, how might literature intervene to promote these values?

Ecocritics are increasingly concerned with this question as the body of Anthropocene literature grows. The ecocritical turn in literature emerged alongside the environmental justice movement in the 1980's from a longstanding set of philosophies and politics that included Marxism, feminism, unions, and labor practices, and animal rights. Its tenets are twofold: the first comes from its activist nature where social justice would seek the equitable distribution of resources as well as the equitable disposal of them. The second highlights the social sciences' commitment to legal and policy change in the protection of people and resources. The movement usurped a problematic issue in early environmentalism, namely that most representatives of those movements were white male elites who tended to overlook the effects of environmental issues on marginalized communities, including women and people of color. In the mid 1990's this issue was beginning to be bridged in large part by the inclusion of women and especially black communities in the environmental justice movement.

Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* is one of the most compelling works to emerge from this instance. It relates the generational violence enacted on impoverished communities through decades-long systemic abuse of the land inhabited by people with very little voice or political power. The book emphasizes ideas important to transnational understandings of politics, environment, and power including Guha's telling look at "full stomach environmentalism" versus "empty belly environmentalism." That is to say, that for impoverished communities and nations, the realities of environmentalism stem from the real risks to human health that must be managed regularly rather than to some environmentalists' abilities to be single-issue advocates based on a more abstract envisioning of environmental problems and based on their relative wealth. One of the critiques of the social justice movement is that it is still too difficult for impoverished people to find the time to fight these issues or to

afford legal representation. Narratives that make visible these often-obscured issues that relate directly to the Anthropocene have become central to literary studies and ecocriticism.

Presently, ecocriticism's turn toward social justice movements is opening up even more avenues for analyzing the hierarchies, attitudes, and representations of racial, wealth, and gender disparities in literature. In turn, literature as activism is a growing field that seeks to use these analyses to enact social change by bridging the gap from climate science to a non-scientific audience. In *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*, Adam Trexler links Anthropocene Fiction to the scientific argument that "the present period of Earth's history should be known as the Anthropocene…[since] human activity has so altered the history of the Earth [during this period] that it has become necessary to declare a new epoch to signify the change" (Trexler 1). He also asserts that "*Anthropocene* is anticipatory, indicating humanity's probable impacts on geophysical and biological systems for millennia to come" (Trexler 1). In using the word 'Anthropocene' as a referent for 'Climate Change,' Trexler "emphasizes the emergence of [the Anthropocene] from a scientific theory (contained in models and brains) to a geological process reflected in the atmosphere, oceans, ecosystems, and societies" (Trexler 4).

I also use the term Anthropocene Fiction in my analysis of the novels, emphasizing Trexler's idea of a literature that depicts Earth as changing due to the impact of human interaction with the planet. However, I argue that 'Climate Change novels' is too limited a term for properly contextualizing the three works I discuss. Climate change acts as a backdrop, at least, for each of the novels, and in some its representation is more robust, but 'Climate Change' is not limited to one specific problem. Melting ice, climate refugees, global fossil fuel economies, poisonous water, hydrodam projects, food deserts, and species loss are all related to the geological, economic, political, cultural, and social processes associated with anthropogenic

climate change. Thus, I use 'Anthropocene Fiction' to denote the myriad ways in which novels of this period reflect these varied crises.

Expanding upon Trexler's argument, I believe literary studies is an ideal place for examining the challenges of the Anthropocene. A range of texts can represent Anthropocene Fiction, including documentary, nonfiction writing, science- and speculative-fiction. Some texts that Dan Bloom, who coined the term Cli-Fi (Climate Fiction), and Trexler have identified are Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife*, Frank Herbert's *Dune*, Ursula LeGuin's *The Lathe of Heaven*, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, and Dora Lessing's *Mara and Dann*. "Interpreting such texts," Trexler declares, "can be understood as a way of describing the patterning of enormous cultural transformations…[and] can describe these patterns without reducing their complexity to a monovocal account" (5). He does not suggest that the Anthropocene novel acts as a cultural mirror, but "as specific artifacts in wider networks of meaning" (5).

Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement, Climate Change and the Unthinkable* also highlights an urgency for writers to assume the mantle of representing Climate Change, and for literary critics and journals to take the matter more seriously. Both authors describe the frequency with which depictions of the Anthropocene in science fiction, often apocalyptic, are dismissed or derided as mere genre fiction. But science fiction and literary fiction—the two do not have to be mutually exclusive, and indeed are not in many cases—have been responding to an increasing ecological strain for decades, at least, and provide representations of community response as models for resolving some of the Anthropocene's problems.

One of those problems is that "slow violence" lacks spectacle in media that relies on catastrophic images and languages to drive ratings, and thus becomes less covered. In literature,

literary apocalypse can both frame the business of science writing within a more intimate context for the reader, or perhaps alienate them. Additionally, for decades, science fiction and other literary representations of climate change were relegated to categories of genre fiction, though that has changed significantly in the last decade. Ghosh asks, "what is it about climate change that the mention of it should lead to banishment from the preserves of serious fiction? And what does this tell us about culture writ large and its patterns of evasion?" (*GD* 5). Perhaps the answer involves Patrick Murphy's notion of 'recognition.' Anthropocene literature, especially apocalyptic novels, calls us to recognize the unsavory truths that we are complicit in causing ecological disaster and that fixing these catastrophes can seem impossible, leaving many readers overwhelmed. Science fiction has been criticized for this very reason; although with some debate as theories of narratology offer differing accounts of how readers respond to literature.[3]

While I am less interested, for the purposes of my dissertation, in narrative theory, I believe Anthropocene literature can, as Ghosh suggests, advocate for "transcend[ing] the isolation in which humanity was entrapped in the time of its derangement…to rediscover their kinship with other human beings…[through] expression in a transformed and renewed art" in their representations of communal resistance to anthropogenic ecological problems (*GD* 162). This is an important move in getting readers to understand the nature of the intervention of literature to social justice. As Cheryl Hall notes in her article "What Will it Mean to be Green? Envisioning Positive Possibilities Without Dismissing Loss, "changes in how people think and feel about a situation depend in turn on changes in the frameworks they use to interpret that situation and the stories they tell each other about it," and the climate change narratives I discuss can provide such framing (Hall 126). Two of the novels I analyze are categorized as science

[3] See, for instance, Suzanne Keen's "Theory of Narrative Empathy," especially *empathic inaccuracy* and the term *falsity*, which suggests a disconnect between a reader's empathy towards characters or situations in a novel and their willingness to act on that empathy politically or even compassionately.

fiction – Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*. Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* is tied to Butler's and Okorafor's novels in its renderings of marginalized communities suffering disproportionately from the effects of global environmental degradation. As Frederick Buell maintains, Anthropocene fiction "exercise[s] as much inventiveness as possible in depicting materialized disasters and also in materializing the as yet unrealized semiotic possibilities of climate change risks and social disruptions… climate change fiction holds out the promise of being both metaphorically usable and quite literally validated," ("Global Warming" 266).

Ecocriticism and the Anthropocene

American ecocriticism has long functioned as a political project concerned with the intersections among environment, culture, and the literary interventions therein. First-wave ecocriticism from the 1970s to the 1990s focused on defining and describing a tradition of nature writing, though works such as Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* and Gary Snyder's *Turtle Island*, which explicitly advocated for cultural shifts away from Anthropocentrism. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm outline the beginnings of ecocriticism from its early iterations on nature writing through second-wave developments that include social justice issues, ecology, and literature in their germinal 1994 work *The Ecocriticism Reader*. Since then, the field has evolved to deal more critically with matters of race, class, gender, and sexuality, as Lawrence Buell explains in his 2005 book *The Future of Environmental Criticism*. Second-wave ecocritics, such as Buell, argued that environmental studies should include both traditional notions of nature along with urban spaces. This shift allowed for greater attention to

topics such as toxic waste, Indigenous land rights, and ecological racism, key issues represented in all three novels I discuss in this dissertation.[4]

Stacey Alaimo's *Bodily Natures* (2010), Timothy Morton's "The Mesh" and *Humankind: Solidarity with Non-Human People* (2017) and Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016) offer new foundations for ecocritical treatment of Anthropocene problems, such as material attachments, species loss, pollution, and overpopulation. Their work addresses the implicit connection between all living and non-living things; oil, fossils, humans, animals, oxygen, and bacteria operate in an enmeshed, "tentacular" existence that extends beyond the individual. Alaimo, Haraway and Morton oppose a hierarchical approach to nature that places humans at the center of ecology. This materialist move views nature as a biosphere rather than through an anthropocentric lens.

Other ecocritical and political scholars and critics, such as Teresa Shewry, Jane Bennet, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Ana Tsing, Serenella Iovino, Serpil Oppermann, Karen Barad, and Greta Gaard, have emphasized the interconnectedness between people, animals, insects, and other members of the biosphere (including DNA and viruses) with permeable boundaries. Ecocriticism, especially its current turn toward eliminating the dichotomies between human/nature and nature/culture, inform my readings of *The Parable of the Sower, Solar Storms,* and *Lagoon*. In her compelling book *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions*, Kimberly Ruffin asserts that Anthropocene fiction can "increase the cross-cultural, transnational dialogue and action necessary to address environmental crisis" (11). Indeed, literature of the Anthropocene invites new frameworks for interpretation that can inspire us to rethink our

[4] Including works such as Kimberly Ruffins' *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions* (2010) and Jennifer James' "Ecomelancholia: Slavery, War, and Black Ecological Imaginings" (2011).

understanding of and impacts on the natural world, on dispossessed communities, and on other-than-humans.

Environmental Place

Timothy Cresswell defines place as "central to forms of struggle and resistance," recognizing the "often mentioned 'power of place'" in constructing identity and belonging (*Introduction* 2-3). Space and place theories contribute largely to ecocriticism as a multidisciplinary study, especially to the importance of "place imagination." In my analyses of *Parable of the Sower*, *Solar Storms*, and *Lagoon*, I discuss how place attachment and place identity shape the characters' responses to Anthropocene crises, particularly in light of certain threats to cultural and historical relationships with land. Lawrence Buell notes, "the more a site feels like a place, the more fervently it is so cherished, the greater potential concern at its violation, or even the possibility of violation" (*Writing* 56).

This connection to place is not strictly limited to physical locations; attachment can be achieved through literary representations of place as a means of awakening environmental concern for unvisited areas. This idea can help bridge the divide between Buell's emphasis on the regional and local, along with Lucy Lippard's in *Lure of the Local* and Manzo and Devine-Wright's *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods and Applications*, as well as Ursula K. Heise's call for "ecocosmopolitanism" as a way to extend environmental concern from the local to the global in *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet.* Heise argues, "in spite of significant differences in social outlook, certain features recur across a wide variety of environmentalist perspectives that emphasize a sense of place as a basic prerequisite for environmental awareness and activism. Many of them…associate spatial closeness, cognitive understanding, emotional attachment, and

an ethic of responsibility and 'care'" (Heise 33). She ultimately refutes the notion that place is necessary to foster environmental awareness, critiquing what she calls an "excessive investment in the local" in favor of adopting a more global eco-awareness that does not simply extend the local as global, but one that considers "how we might be able to develop cultural forms of identity and belonging that are commensurate with the rapid growth in political, economic, and social interconnectedness that has characterized the last few decades" (Heise 10; 6).

While I agree with Heise that "the increasing connectedness of societies around the globe entails the emergence of new forms of culture that are not anchored in place," I believe these new entanglements would ultimately prove unsuccessful for environmental awareness without some sense of place, particularly for communities who have already been dispossessed by imperialism and settler colonization (Heise 10). For example, my chapter on Okorafor's *Lagoon* demonstrates how technology may contribute to place awareness and attachment through facilitating a shared empathy across geographic, racial, and species boundaries – but how that technology has developed and is used is unique to Lagos and attached to place identity. Fostering global perspectives and common citizenship across geopolitical boundaries can generate place-based solutions for ecological issues facing individual communities yet on a global scale, but must also not doubly dispossess communities that have already been marginalized by obscuring their histories with their lands.

For this reason, I strive to contextualize place-based ecocriticism by combining local and global ecocritical perspectives in my reading of each novel while also considering the dimensions of race, class, gender, spirituality, and politics. Additionally, because space and place theories are multidisciplinary, I rely on findings in anthropology, sociology, narratology, phenomenology, and geography. Geographer D.W. Meinig's "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions

of the Same Scene," for example, helps to frame my discussion of human/water relationships in the three novels. Interpreting the landscape for meaning, Meinig states, is to be "concerned not with the elements but with the essence, with the organizing ideas we use to make sense out of what we see" (1). The potential of water to alter landscapes, and thus habitat and community, is uniquely important during the Anthropocene, where biota endure threats from sea level rise as much as from pervasive technologies, such as pipelines and dams. Furthermore, bodies of water exist on a scale and depth that many humans cannot connect with, especially for those who do not live near a body of water, either by degree of geographic location or the extent to which they might use it for leisure or as a resource. In *Parable of the Sower*, the lack of clean drinking water and water to grow food or to fight increasing fires forces people to reimagine communal living, while in *Solar Storms*, water is a cultural, historical, and territorial relative that is threatened by neocolonial hydrodam projects.

Specific sites of water may be viewed by local and global communities in various and competing ways, including water as nature, as habitat, as a system of scientific processes, as a problem to solve (industrial pollution or flooding, for example), as potential wealth, as an ideology, in terms of historical significance, in terms of aesthetics, or even as place. This becomes especially critical to the transnational spaces represented by Hogan and Okorafor, since Native treaties, global corporations, and other-than-human lives complicate spatial borders. Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* encourages thinking about water as a place of "intimate immensity," which I use to parse out human connections to water in *Solar Storms* and *Lagoon.* Bachelard provides an account of traditional Western views central to European and American phenomenologies, and my chapter will demonstrate how Hogan novel critiques or extends his

framework, making visible how tribal nations and the losses sustained by Indigenous communities cannot and should not be contained by Western philosophies and values.

I also acknowledge that scholars such as Greg Garrard rightly critique the idea of the "Ecological Indian," who in American dominant thought is supposed to have an intrinsic relationship with nature, both spiritually and emotionally, and who is believed to be a "natural conservationist" despite evidence to the contrary. However, I want to be careful not to elide the very real cultural practices of Indigenous peoples as connected to place and land. The persistence of the Ecological Indian is certainly overly represented in American thought, but it would be too radical to discount Native communities' connections to the earth completely, particularly since many tribal communities continue to rely on spiritual representations of the land as a mechanism to preserve tribal history and cultural practices – especially those at risk of being erased by settler-colonists' alternative histories.

The intersections between these two modes of thinking are evident in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*, which I will address in chapter 2. Both her novel and Okorafor's *Lagoon* portray water and land as deeply rooted in spiritual associations with the home while emphasizing its necessity as a resource and marker of historical and cultural trauma. Additionally, Lippard's *Lure of the Local* uses art to explore the many forms of place that affect our lives. Her work incorporates topics of community, landscape, perceptions of nature, and land use to explore political and social implications of space and place in contemporary society. Lippard's approach is useful in determining how local place imagination either aides or deters environmental stewardship and community participation. As an extension, Doreen Massey's *Space, Place, and Gender* supplies a feminist critique of place theories, arguing that place is not static or enclosed

but rather a social construct, a hybrid geography that represents and encompasses the multiple and is contested. Economy and social structures are driving forces in the production of space.

Postcolonial Ecocritique

In *The Great Derangement*, Amitav Ghosh extends his critique of the Anthropocene beyond what many, including Naomi Klein in *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*; *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, have identified as the root cause of climate change – capitalism – to include empire and imperialism. Recognizing where capitalism and empire/imperialism meet at the juncture of the Anthropocene is vital, he maintains, because non-Western countries are "conceptually critical to every aspect of global warming: its causes, its philosophical and historical implications, and the possibility of a global response to it…. Yet, strangely, these implications are rarely reckoned with – and this may be because the discourse around the Anthropocene, and climate matters generally, remains largely Eurocentric" (*GD* 87). My chapter on Okorafor's *Lagoon* demonstrates how Nigeria, and Lagos in particular, is a critical site for exploring literary engagement with the Anthropocene. If capitalism and empire/imperialism are "dual aspects of a singular reality" in the Anthropocene, then literature must look toward postcolonial ecologies to respond appropriately in a global context (*GD* 87). Many nations that have been colonized, as in the case of Nigeria, have suffered more from climate change, and will continue to do so, than the countries primarily responsible for causing it.

Postcolonial ecocriticism studies the history of colonial violence enacted on colonized lands, seeing both humans and non-human nature as colonized subjects. Imperialism has altered physical and cultural landscapes of colonized places. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley

define postcolonial ecology as reflecting a "complex epistemology that recuperates the alterity of both history *and* nature, without reducing either to the other" (4). This is especially important to postcolonial ecocriticism in the Anthropocene, when climate change has impacted physical lands and spawned economic and social patterns that transform cultural ties to place. *Lagoon* represents several of these changing elements, including modified ocean animal behavior as a result of toxicity due to oil spills, an economy completely tied to oil extraction from which Nigerian citizens do not benefit financially or ecologically, and Western religious practices that fail to legitimize Indigenous cosmologies. The Anthropocene poses certain challenges when discussing place and people in a postcolonial framework. For instance, according to Dipesh Chakrabarty, "global warming leaves us with the challenge of having to think of human agency over multiple and incommensurable scales at once" ("Postcolonial Studies" 170). *Lagoon*, though, demonstrates how to incorporate change as an act of kinship and indicates a more global capacity to do so.

Anthropocene literature seeks to overcome the enormous "scale on which scientists invite us to imagine human agency" by providing a story (in place of data stretched over a long time) to make humans care about the environment ("Postcolonial Studies" 176). Applying postcolonial ecocriticism to the Anthropocene faces an additional obstacle. Chakrabarty suggests that as humans have moved from ontological subject to "geophysical force" with our entry into the Anthropocene, "we have also developed a form of collective existence that has no ontological dimension. Our thinking about ourselves now stretches our capacity for interpretive understanding … A geophysical force is neither a subject nor an object {but} the capacity to move things" ("Postcolonial Studies" 177). Many find it difficult to imagine humans as a force enacting violence on a planetary scale, which partially accounts for the degree of climate

skepticism in the West. These dimensions of human agency also problematize notions of blame and climate justice. If humans are responsible for global warming, and thus its consequences (such as sea-level rise), how do we reach a collective agreement about mitigating these issues? Who is responsible for helping, and what does that help look like? Science cannot decide this alone. Chakrabarty notes, "climate change is ultimately about politics. Hence its openness as much to science and technology as to rhetoric, art, and media, and arguments and conflicts conducted through a variety of means" ("Postcolonial Studies" 180).

In response to these questions, my dissertation examines *Lagoon* as a postcolonial novel of the Anthropocene that re-stories Lagos and its inhabitants, both human and other-than-human. Okorafor depicts a place that is constantly in motion—an "assemblage" that moves beyond a static history of colonization and nationalistic action—and demonstrates the capacity for engaged, empathic, and community-driven answers to climate change. While I analyze each novel in terms of place, my examination of *Lagoon* situates Anthropocene literature within a global context by considering the global *as* local through a study of literary place. Place theory in Anthropocene literature, especially viewed within a Postcolonial framework, reveals the complex legal, historical, and cultural boundaries of land. Lagos's fluid boundaries change with the tides of sea and politics; Okorafor explores the long-term and large-scale implications of those changing borders for both nature and culture. As boundaries become more porous in the Anthropocene, postcolonial narratives must be considered in terms of the effects of these changes across the nature/culture divide and in terms of viewing communities of species as networks in nature rather than separate aspects of nature. *Lagoon* encourages us to develop an eco-consciousness that perceives humans, animals, and land as part of the same natural system. As Rob Nixon indicates, segregation of humans from other-than-humans has long been

implicated in the violent separation of humans from humans. In terms of postcolonial ecologies in the Anthropocene, *Lagoon* also works to envision a transnational response to Anthropocene problems—celebrating belonging within diverse communities across global narratives, including Ghana and Chicago, rather than limiting the idea of community to one local reference. This movement echoes that of the people, animals, and geographies of both the novel and the Anthropocene as a whole, for Okorafor questions the very notion of physical rootedness in a particular place, but rather showing the interconnectedness of place across permeable boundaries.

Re-storying Place in the Anthropocene Novel

Anthropocene narratives draw from and critique contemporary ideas in science, politics, culture, and environmentalism to draft proposals for communal ecological problem-solving. They suggest ways in which humans might address the crises of anthropogenic climate change and related matters of social justice through empathy—by transcending the focus on a single heroine's inner journey outward to more complex communities of humans and other-than-human nature. Anthropocene fiction extrapolates the local (self, family, home, neighborhood, state, place) across distributed networks (humans, animals, country, world, universe). While some scholars believe there has been too much emphasis on the local in environmentalism, literary place-making can play a vital role in grounding larger frameworks for Anthropocene thinking. For example, bodies of water viewed as a 'resource' by outside communities can come to signify 'place' through the practice of "re-storying" the gaps in their traditional histories (Cerulean and Ripple 4).

In *The Wild Heart of Florida: Florida Writer's on Florida's Wildlands*, Susan Cerulean and Jeff Ripple suggest re-storying as a method of "reestablishing the old oral and written tradition of story we seem to have forsaken with our connection to the land" (Ripple and Cerulean xix). In my dissertation, I use the term to parse out how each novel re-stories our ecological crisis from the perspectives of people who have been disenfranchised and dispossessed. Since the focus of my dissertation is on ecological framing and eco-activism, I do not apply the primary assertions or arguments of other fields in which these three novels may be explored. This includes African American and Black Studies, Indigenous Studies, and a more comprehensive application of Post-colonial studies. Rather, I unite these fields in my analyses as shaped by the process of re-storying emerging from these scholarly traditions and through an ecocritical lens. Place attachment and place theories help to situate these narratives within this context.

The stories we tell, and who gets to tell them, are critical to framing issues and consequences related to climate change and the Anthropocene. Cheryl Hall argues that there is a "need to find ways to encourage citizens in the United States to reconsider our thoughts, feelings, and views about the significance of our current relationship to the rest of nature, the consequences of this relationship, and the necessity to change or ways of life. However, to reconsider thoughts, feelings, and views about complex issues usually means to tell a different story about them" (Hall 128). Place attachment proves key to articulating how each novel re-stories the Anthropocene differently from other media. In Chapter One, I explore Butler's interrogation of empathy against the problems of human-induced climate change. Butler's protagonist, Lauren Olamina, contracts Hyperempathy Syndrome as a result of her mother's drug

use during pregnancy. The condition leaves Lauren vulnerable to the feelings of others, most notably pain.

Butler's message of hope centers on Earthseed, a model for communal living that celebrates diversity and thrives on anti-capitalist resource sharing. Lauren promotes Earthseed after her walled community succumbs to fire in a scene symbolic of the wild fires and extreme drought ravaging California and other areas. These environmental crises are a direct byproduct of climate change, as are the other disasters and injustices Lauren witnesses during her journey north to create the Earthseed community. Earthseed relies on place attachment and a deep understanding of the land to thrive. Lauren turns to books, such as Indigenous writings, to plant, garden, make soap, and live sustainably with the environment. *Parable of the Sower* celebrates the often-marginalized voices in ecocriticism and environmental writings, prioritizing the experiences of a young Black woman surrounded by ecological catastrophe.

In Chapter Two, I situate Hogan's *Solar Storms* within Anthropocene fiction to show how Angel Jensen's place attachment transforms her personal identity and fights the environmental threats around her. The novel portrays the James Bay Project, beginning in 1971, when Hydro-Quebec constructed a hydrodam on the U.S. – Canada border. The dam harmed the surrounding Cree and Inuit peoples' way of life and even changed local climates. Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* informs my reading of Angel's transformation in the face of ecological destruction, ultimately showing how the land itself becomes her home and challenging traditional Western conceptions of the built house as home. As in *Parable of the Sower*, Angel's attachment to land interrogates some common Western dualities, such as nature/human civilized/savage, and science/spirituality. Angel travels to the land of her ancestors, Adam's Rib, and joins her foremothers on a search for her abused and abusive mother, Hannah Wing. After

Hannah's death, the women experience a transformative water journey that renews their connection to the land and serves as a model for how readers might also reexamine their relationship with non-human nature. Angel then fights against the dam project and becomes a leader in her community, much like Lauren Olamina serves in a leadership role at Earthseed and Ayodele and Adaora act as changemakers in *Lagoon* while promoting an ecological way forward.

CHAPTER ONE:

"'THIS IS OUR PLACE NO MATTER WHAT':

EMPATHY AND COMMUNITY IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S *PARABLE OF THE SOWER*"

"If hyperempathy syndrome were a more common complaint, people couldn't do such things. They could kill if they had to, and bear the pain of it or be destroyed by it...A biological conscience is better than no conscience at all." - Lauren Olamina, *Parable of the Sower*

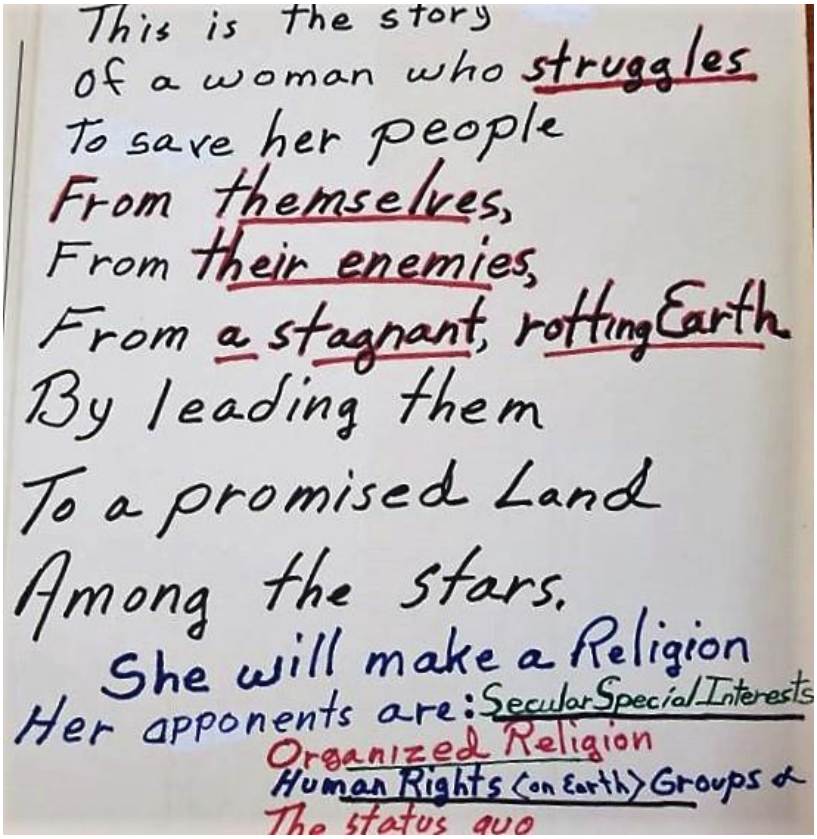


Figure 1. Octavia E. Butler Papers, Box 86(17). The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA

Introduction

Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* illustrates Butler's interrogation of empathy against the problems of human-induced climate change. While Fig. 1 above may suggest Butler viewed Lauren Olamina's story as a sort of ecotopia, reading the novel or Butler's intentions as such actually limits the more critical aspect of the novel's model for resilience. Rather than focus on moving humanity to other worlds via space travel (many scholars have already discussed the novel's techno-topic impulses), a more meaningful way to engage with the novel is to look at the ways in which Lauren Olamina develops coalition building among people across difference. By discussing the intersections among Anthropocene fiction, identity, and place, I demonstrate how climate narratives can promote empathy and climate activism.

Climate crisis is often framed as a distant future disaster in popular narratives and films; thus, the public does not necessarily view climate changes as immediately relevant. Many people perceive climate change as a scientific process beyond their understanding, leading them to ignore or challenge its validity. As Cheryl Hall argues, "frames and stories matter because they are important in shaping how people understand the world around them and what needs to be done with it…Since addressing environmental problems such as climate change and species loss will require popular support, environmentalists need to pay attention to what kinds of frames and stories will facilitate that support and what kinds will not" (129). Literature that uncovers the long history of political, economic, and cultural factors contributing to ecological crisis has the potential to render the urgency of climate change more visible to the general public. More importantly, literature foregrounding the impact of climate crisis on human communities can promote empathy and environmental activism, ultimately modeling community resilience. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* is the first example of the study's overall argument: authors of

climate narratives share a common project in examining the role of empathy in climate resilience.

Despite climate change skepticism, there remains a global scientific consensus that climate change has already begun and that it stems from certain human practices. In his essay "the Climate of History: Four Theses," Dipesh Chakrabarty explains the Anthropocene as an era in which "humans have become geological agents, changing the most basic processes of the earth" (206). A robust category of Anthropocene narratives should prioritize depictions of these events, even if they are tangentially related to climate change. Moreover, "interpreting such texts can be understood as a way of describing the patterning of enormous cultural transformations…[and] can describe these patterns without reducing their complexity to a monovocal account," which I argue is critical to literary depictions of climate change because of the continuous impulse to view climate change issues through a Eurocentric lens (Trexler 5). Misconceptions about specific long-term effects of human impacts on the earth have influenced our understanding of this proposed geological epoch. In defining Anthropocene Fiction as literature that represents humans as geological agents impacting the environment, we can apply what Rob Nixon's concept of "slow-violence" to Anthropogenic climate change – the gradual and often invisible processes that contribute to long-term, large-scale damage. *Parable of the Sower*, and the other novels I discuss in chapters 2 and 3, contribute to a richer, more varied account of typically marginalized voices in environmentalism, ecology, and ecocriticism.

Intersections between race and nature in ecocriticism were largely overlooked by the first wave of ecocritics such as Raymond Williams, Carolyn Merchant (in her early work), and Lynn White, Jr, who tended to focus on texts surrounding nature writing and the wilderness. Later, second wave ecocritics opened up the field to expand to include concepts of the environment that

included nature and the urban and allowed for greater concern to issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Ecocritics are increasingly concerned with the questions posed by climate literature as the body of Anthropocene literature grows. Ecocritical Scholar Ashton Nicholl's book, *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism: Toward an Urbanatural Roosting* highlighted the need to eliminate boundaries between nature and the city, allowing for a greater focus on city environments as a part of nature, and also emphasizing the need to think of humans as part of the urban environment rather than perpetuating the divide between nature and culture. An important development from this second wave uncovering of issues in racial equality concerning the environment was the new focus on modern and contemporary texts as well as the looking back to older texts for evidence of representations of racial minority groups. In my dissertation, I do not outline the historical legacy of racism, as multiethnic literary studies has already accomplished this and moved beyond it. This chapter instead combines archival research, traditional textual analysis of the novel, and a discussion on how literary studies can intervene in the climate crisis by re-storying typical representations of the Anthropocene[6] to include such visions as Butler's, which centers environmental racism, gender, and class as foregrounded in Anthropogenic climate change.

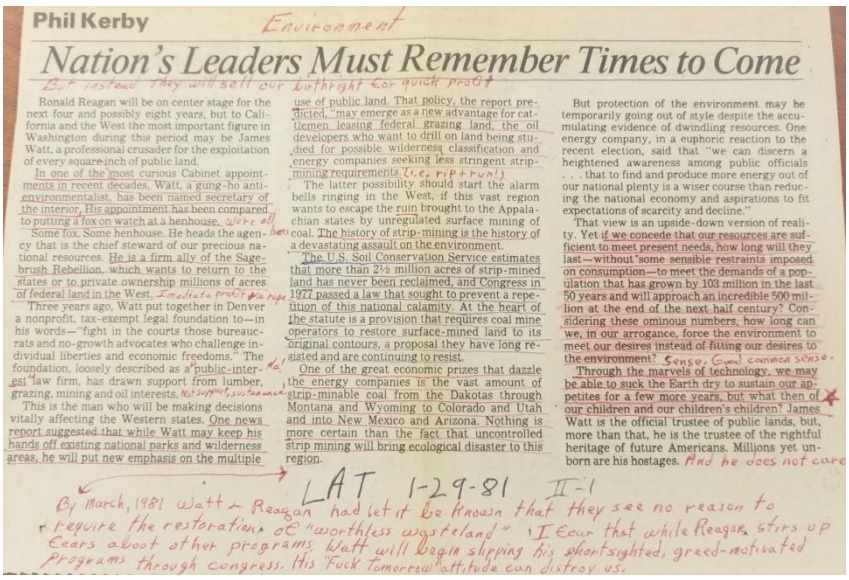
Amitav Ghosh's recent *The Great Derangement, Climate Change and the Unthinkable* also highlights an urgency for writers to assume the mantle of representing Climate Change, and for literary critics and journals to take the matter more seriously. Both authors describe the frequency with which depictions of the Anthropocene in science fiction, often apocalyptic, are dismissed or derided as mere 'genre fiction.' But science fiction and literary fiction have been

[6] Proposed by scientists as the recent geological time period in which humans have significantly impacted Earth's geology and ecosystems, including Anthropogenic Climate Change. The term's usage and proposed dates for the beginning of the geological epoch vary, with the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS) scheduled to review a formal proposal by 2021 for adopting and defining the epoch as starting in the mid-twentieth century, according to the Anthropocene Working Group of the ICS.

responding to an increasing ecological strain for decades, at least, and provide representations of community response as models for resolving some of the Anthropocene's problems—including what *not* to do. While Butler is typically situated as a genre writer, she realized "early science fiction tended to reproduce predictable race and gender hierarchies," and her work makes tremendous progress toward rectifying this disparity. "Her fiction features recognizable science fiction tropes…yet, she complicates the genre by consistently including black women as empowered characters whose social position challenges American racial stereotypes" as well as those reflected in some representations of gender, sexuality, and class (Callahan n.p.). *Parable of the Sower* is set in a 2024 that mimics much of the news Butler read from the 1970s to the 1990s. Butler's fictional California has been ravaged by Anthropogenic climate change and is dominated by scarcity, violence, and extreme wealth inequality.

Parable of the Sower (1993) highlights social and ecological injustices as a byproduct of neoliberal culture, which has contributed to the emergence of the Anthropocene. The novel also imagines place-making that questions traditional Western hierarchies such as nature/culture, male/female, and science/spirituality and offer dynamic approaches to environmental justice. This Anthropocene narrative draws from and critiques contemporary ideas in science, politics, culture, and environmentalism to draft proposals for communal ecological problem-solving. *Parable of the Sower* suggests ways in which humans might address the crises of anthropogenic climate change and related matters of social justice through empathy—by transcending the focus on a single heroine's inner journey outward to more complex communities of humans and non-human nature.

Sowing the Seeds of Empathy



Phil Kerby

Environment

Nation's Leaders Must Remember Times to Come

But instead they will sell our birthright for quick profit

Ronald Reagan will be on center stage for the next four and possibly eight years, but to California and the West the most important figure in Washington during this period may be James Watt, a professional crusader for the exploitation of every square inch of public land.

In one of the most curious Cabinet appointments in recent decades, Watt, a gung-ho anti-environmentalist, has been named secretary of the interior. His appointment has been compared to putting a fox on watch at a henhouse. We're all

Some fox. Some henhouse. He heads the agency that is the chief steward of our precious national resources. He is a firm ally of the Sagebrush Rebellion, which wants to return to the states or to private ownership millions of acres of federal land in the West. Immediate profit is the

Three years ago, Watt put together in Denver a nonprofit, tax-exempt legal foundation to—in his words—"fight in the courts those bureaucrats and no-growth advocates who challenge individual liberties and economic freedoms." The foundation, loosely described as a "public-interest" law firm, has drawn support from lumber, grazing, mining and oil interests. Not surprisingly.

This is the man who will be making decisions vitally affecting the Western states. One news report suggested that while Watt may keep his hands off existing national parks and wilderness areas, he will put new emphasis on the multiple use of public land. That policy, the report predicted, "may emerge as a new advantage for cattlemen leasing federal grazing land, the oil developers who want to drill on land being studied for possible wilderness classification and energy companies seeking less stringent strip-mining requirements." (i.e. rip & run!)

The latter possibility should start the alarm bells ringing in the West, if this vast region wants to escape the ruin brought to the Appalachian states by unregulated surface mining of coal. The history of strip-mining is the history of a devastating assault on the environment.

The U.S. Soil Conservation Service estimates that more than 2½ million acres of strip-mined land has never been reclaimed, and Congress in 1977 passed a law that sought to prevent a repetition of this national calamity. At the heart of the statute is a provision that requires coal mine operators to restore surface-mined land to its original contours, a proposal they have long resisted and are continuing to resist.

One of the great economic prizes that dazzle the energy companies is the vast amount of strip-minable coal from the Dakotas through Montana and Wyoming to Colorado and Utah and into New Mexico and Arizona. Nothing is more certain than the fact that uncontrolled strip mining will bring ecological disaster to this region.

But protection of the environment may be temporarily going out of style despite the accumulating evidence of dwindling resources. One energy company, in a euphoric reaction to the recent election, said that "we can discern a heightened awareness among public officials . . . that to find and produce more energy out of our national plenty is a wiser course than reducing the national economy and aspirations to fit expectations of scarcity and decline."

That view is an upside-down version of reality. Yet if we concede that our resources are sufficient to meet present needs, how long will they last—without some sensible restraints imposed on consumption—to meet the demands of a population that has grown by 103 million in the last 50 years and will approach an incredible 500 million at the end of the next half century? Considering these ominous numbers, how long can we, in our arrogance, force the environment to meet our desires instead of fitting our desires to the environment? Sense. Good common sense.

Through the marvels of technology, we may be able to suck the Earth dry to sustain our appetites for a few more years, but what then of our children and our children's children? James Watt is the official trustee of public lands, but, more than that, he is the trustee of the rightful heritage of future Americans. Millions yet unborn are his hostages. And he does not care

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By March, 1981 Watt + Reagan had let it be known that they see no reason to require the restoration of "worthless wasteland" I fear that while Reagan stirs up fears about other programs, Watt will begin slipping his shortsighted, greed-motivated programs through congress. This "Fuck tomorrow" attitude can destroy us.

Figure 2. Octavia E. Butler Papers, Box 87(29). The Huntington Library, San Marino, California

Protagonist Lauren Olamina inherits Hyperempathy Syndrome as a result of her mother's drug use during pregnancy. Lauren's hyperempathy informs her way of seeing the world, and she often remarks on humanity's inability to connect with others. In response, Lauren develops a new belief system she calls "Earthseed." After losing her family and home, Lauren and a few neighbors travel north to build a more sustainable and collaborative way of living. They gain followers along their journey and offer an intimate account of the extreme social disorder caused by climate change. For Lauren Olamina, Earthseed is both a renewal of and significant departure from her father's religion, Christianity. It rejects situating religion in ecclesiastical buildings; rejects dogma. More than anything, she rejects a religious framework that discourages critical thinking. As a sower of the seeds of a new religion, Lauren recognizes that not everyone who hears her message will be receptive of it, but that by teaching change, flexibility, and empathy she has the potential to reach enough followers that her ideas become implanted in cultural memory and that those ideas will outlive her. Earthseed is more adaptable than Christianity in its

belief that "God is change," that "everything you touch, you change," and "everything you change changes you" (Butler 3). By its very name it suggests a relationship to the Earth and humans as part of an ecological system rather than existing outside of it in dialectic opposition.[7]

The novel signifies a departure from typical nature writing in that it begins to emphasize how cultural change, including politics, economy, and identity groups are a natural part of an ecological system. There cannot be an ecology that does not account for how humans shape the environment, including built environments. Several artifacts I studied during my archival research at the Huntington Library reveal how policy, environmentalism, and the news influenced Butler's writing (Figure 2). While fictional, the novel reflects ecological problems Butler witnessed in her own time. A self-described "political junkie," Butler annotated copies of the national and international news stories she used for research for her book. She also took extensive notes on the environmental injustices produced by oil culture, a depletion of natural resources for short-term profit, and especially deregulation coupled with the abuse of workers by major corporations and conservative political policies.[8]

Butler's attention to the news inspired and informed her understanding of ecological devastation. The novel urges readers to consider how contemporary news about environmental change, social injustice, and political policy occlude our perception of local and global geographies as connected places dependent on conservation and protection. The novel also imagines place-making that questions Hegelian hierarchies such as nature/culture, male/female,

[7] In her chapter "Animal Nature: Finding Ecotheology," Kimberly Ruffin outlines Butler's ecotheology as blending scientific and religious thought to produce sustainable ecologies through education and adaptability.
[8] Figure 2 illustrates Butler's anxieties surrounding Raegan's and Watt's shortsighted policies to increase production of natural resources in favor of economic gain rather than a "common sense" approach to begin limiting consumption. The long-term environmental impact of unmitigated resource extraction is both central to the message of the novel and representative of the climate impacts we are suffering today.

and science/spirituality, thereby suggesting dynamic ways of thinking about environmental justice. Butler's work is especially salient in this particular cultural moment, when matters of

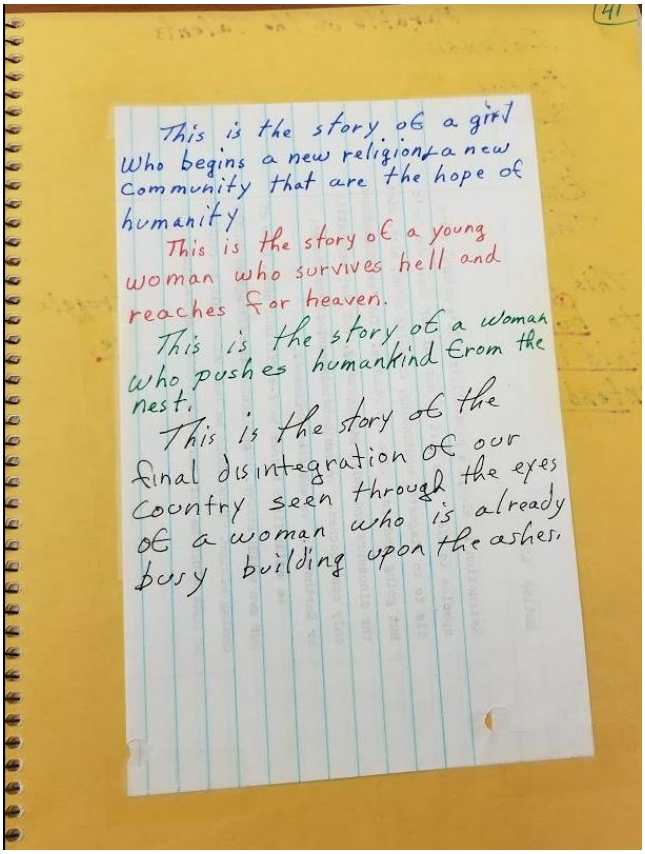
ecological justice—such as heightened flooding due to sea level rise—and problems of ecological racism are exacerbated by political, cultural, and religious schisms. One thing to note especially is that Butler is responding to an erasure of Black American experience in the American environmental movement – one that frequently "overlook[s] the nation in displacement, genocide, and enslavement and the subsequent racial disparities in environmental experience," as outlined by Kimberly Ruffin in her 2010 book *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions* (Ruffin 5). By centering the voice of a young Black woman in the narrative of *Parable of the Sower*, Butler challenges ideas of an environmentalism that tends to focus on the experiences of white, male individuals in "wilderness."

Anthropocene narratives such as *Parable of the Sower* draw from and critique contemporary ideas in science, politics, culture, and environmentalism to offer proposals for more hopeful, community-based ecological problem solving. Figure 3 shows Butler's outline of her framework for the novel. Lauren Olamina's tale intends to illustrate how a new religion, one based on intersectionality and accepting change, can provide hope for humanity in a world broken by climate change and its structural and personal consequences. Her note that "This is the story of the final disintegration of our country seen through the eyes of a woman who is already busy building upon the ashes" reflects my reading of the Anthropocene novel as a vehicle for radical hope.[9] Though most of the newspaper clippings Butler collected of environmental issues are catastrophic, the novel also offers a view of community beyond "peasants in the valleys;

[9] Rebecca Solnit makes a strong case for radical hope, or "hope in the dark" when faced with the devastation of climate change and political and social discord: "Hope doesn't mean denying these realities. It means facing them and addressing them by remembering what else the twenty-first century has brought, including the movements, heroes, and shifts in consciousness that address these things now" (2016).

rebels in the hills; and the rich, the tiny true middle class and the beggars in cities" (Octavia E. Butler Papers).

Novels such as Butler's have been responding to increasing ecological strain for decades, and can offer representations of community response as models for working through some of the



Anthropocene's challenges—including what *not* to do. *Parable of the Sower* can be read as an "imaginative heuristic for exploring today's omnipresent, fundamental, multiple risk space," in the face of ecological disaster (Buell 277). The novel "critiques two classic pathways to modern utopia…the application of bureaucratic rationality to socioeconomic problems of the state; and the constitution of communities of 'them' and 'us' through the politics of race," where either regulatory laws will save us from ecological degradation, or place blame on communities who

have already been dispossessed through the practices of Western colonialism (Phillips 300). Butler's novel rejects both ideas, instead creating space for characters to have more individual agency[10] in building purposely inclusive, communal societies formed for protection, bonding, and resource sharing; what adrienne maree brown refers to as part of an "Emergent Strategy": "Emergence emphasizes critical connections over critical mass building authentic relationships, listening with all the senses of the body and mind…[it] notices the ways small actions and connections create complex systems, patterns that become ecosystems and societies," that counter colonial and capitalist demands (brown 171). Lauren Olamina's role as teacher, and thus reader and researcher shape a grassroots activism for small, interdependent communities that are models for larger-scale movements based on community resilience rooted in mutual aid.

Butler's vision includes a deeper understanding of and connection to the land as both ecological process and as "home" and empathy within communities of difference. These traits prove difficult to maintain in the face of the novel's large-scale ecological collapse, but they also reveal the resilience evident in radical hope to perpetuate family networks from social contracts with the Other, or what Haraway calls "making kin, not babies" in the Chthulucene. This stems directly from Lauren's ability to hyperempathize. Here, I highlight the value of an Ecofeminist reading of the text as a way to interrogate the role of empathic connection between and across humans and non-human nature. The novel's focus on water, blood, and disease, as seen in the transmission of Hyperempathy syndrome, for example, emphasizes the fluid connections between humans and other life in our ecological system[11]. *Parable of the Sower* examines how

[10] In Cognitive Theory, agency is achieved through capability to influence one's own functioning and the course of events by one's intentional actions, through anticipating outcomes based on planning and self-regulation.

[11] Haraway best explains the importance of the value in understanding Earth as an interconnected multispecies network, as well as her opposition to the term "Anthropocene," in Chapter 4 of *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. She states, "Right now, the earth is full of refugees, human and not, without refuge…Maybe, but only maybe, and only with intense commitment and collaborative work and play with other

tentacular[12] connections to others, including those from various gendered, racial, economic, and biotic backgrounds within the biosphere, can promote survival in unexpected ways and within a changing environmental system.

I began by using the term "Anthropocene Fiction" in my discussion of *Parable of the Sower* because it is the most recent and therefore more familiar terminology of literature that interacts with issues of climate change in the field of ecocriticism. "Anthropocene Fiction" or "Climate Change novel," however, are at times too burdened by their precise uses in the field for properly contextualizing Butler's work or other writings that uncover problematic aspects of policy, economy, and marginalization contributing to global climate change—for example, as in the works of Hogan and Okorafor in Chapters 2 and 3 of my dissertation. Certainly, climate change acts as a backdrop, at least, for the novel, but the terms "Anthropocene" and "Climate Change" are capacious, broad terms that require unpacking. Climate refugees, toxic water, flooding, species loss, and the legalities of land rights are all issues stemming from the geological, economic, political, cultural, and social processes associated with anthropogenic Climate Change.

Adopting Haraway's definition of "tentacular" illustrates the scope of the Anthropocene/Climate Change/Cli-Fi novel by emphasizing the hidden practices at the core of Anthropogenic Climate Change that are often not discussed. Moreover, what is missing from both of these terms is an aspect of hopefulness that can be connected to and shaped by empathic reading of literary climate narratives. Heidi Maibom's recent book *Empathy* explores how "high level empathic engagement" is "central to literature… [and that] understanding how we are

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terrans, flourishing for rich multispecies assemblages that include people will be possible. I am calling all this the Chthulucene—past, present, and to come" (100-101)

[12] For Haraway, tentacular suggests attachments and detachments, or entanglements that "weave paths and consequences, but not determinisms…material-semiotic worlds…nets and networking…life lived along the lines, not at points, not at spheres" (31-2).

moved by [it] is central to understanding [its] power…[its] potential in educating our emotional range…our understanding of others…and our affective openness to other people," which is critical to the potential of reading climate narratives to enhance our empathy and moral attitudes towards other humans and the other-than-human.

My analysis of *Parable of the Sower* demonstrates how empathy for the characters in Lauren Olamina's community and beyond can extend beyond the page and provide insight into our current ecological dilemma. The expense and absence of water, as well as the toxicity of the surrounding bodies of water in the novel compels Lauren to seek a new future where literal growth—of food and of community—is possible, particularly for people living at the margins of poverty and racial othering. This is especially important in Butler's work, as marginalized communities, including Black and Latino families, poor Whites, and minoritized children are more likely to experience problems connected to the Anthropocene due to resource scarcity and equitable access, reflecting the reality of today's world. Characters in the novel reflect on their individual and communal actions towards the goal of survival by starting the first Earthseed community at Acorn and achieve that goal by pooling knowledge, resources, and skills resulting in communal self-actualization.

The most important of tentacular connections, though, is Lauren's reliance on books and writing. She learns how to connect to soil and survival through reading texts such as Indigenous plant books, books on livestock-raising, soap making, the Bible, first aid, and writing her own "Earthseed: The Books of the Living." She encourages reading and critical thinking even when people disagree with her or refuse to believe the world is in as bad shape as she predicts. In essence, she creates a new community from the pages of ancestral and historical knowledge. Acorn itself is a reference to Indigenous bread made from wild acorns, as well as the metaphor of

planting a seed that will grow into something much greater and lasting. In doing so, the novel reflects what Maibom describes as a "sentimental education," wherein literature "can bring us closer to the truth, widen our horizons, and teach us to be better people...It does so by showing us new ways of thinking, feeling, acting, and living…and given the central role empathy appears to play in morality, aesthetically provoked empathy may even improve our moral agency," creating an antidote to climate change skepticism or apathy (Maibom 120-21).

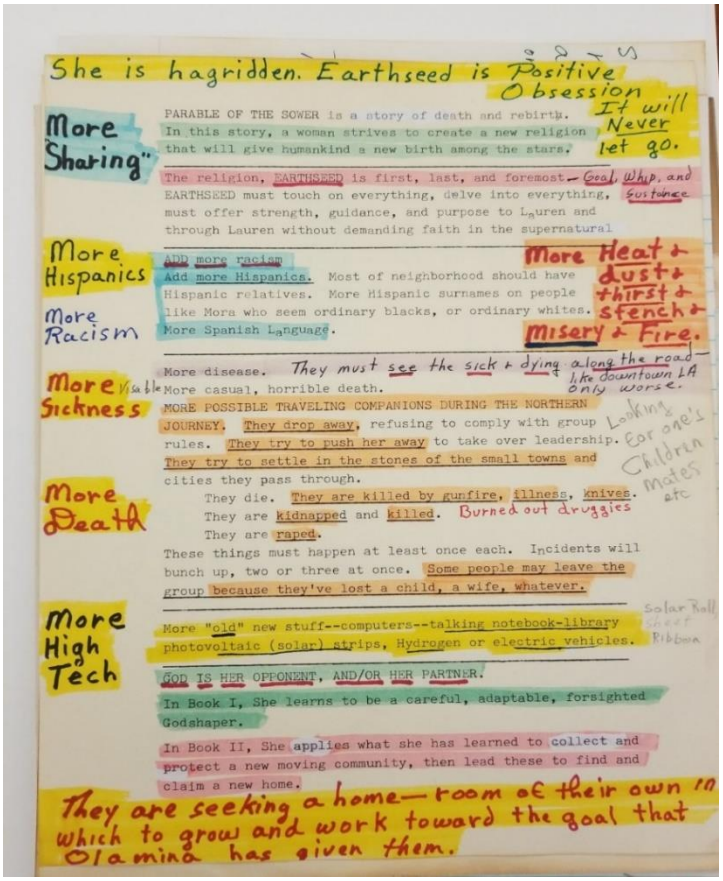


Figure 1. Octavia E. Butler Papers, Box 85(28). The Huntington Library, San Marino, California

Building Community at the End of the World

Butler begins *Parable of the Sower* by describing a deteriorated California suffering several consequences of global climate change—a toxic water supply, a dramatic rise in poverty rates, lack of access to water and electricity, and increasing violence. The society depicted remains unable to envision a future outside the old paradigm—one that overused resources to support the growth of wealth at the expense of a fragile ecosystem. In her introduction to *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, Naomi Klein explains how even "large parts of the climate movement wasted precious decades trying to fit the square peg of climate crisis into the round hole of deregulated capitalism, forever touting ways for the problem to be solved by the market itself" (Klein 20). The result of that has led us to the "fundamental imperative at the heart of our economic model: grow or die" (Klein 21). The pervasiveness of unfettered capitalism is evident in the conflict between Lauren and her elders behind their walled community.

Lauren Olamina's family and neighbors, once protected within the walls of their gated community from the chaos of an America in collapse, do not survive long in the ensuing violence of Los Angeles. Poverty and resource scarcity are two of the most obvious tenets of this collapse - consequences of neoliberal practices of the Anthropocene depicted in *Parable of the Sower*. In chapter One, Lauren recalls a conversation with her stepmother (Cory) in which she tells Lauren about the blaze of city lights that used to be: "Lights, progress, growth, all those things we're too hot and too poor to bother with anymore" (Butler 5). Lauren responds, gazing at the full brightness of the stars overhead:

Lauren: "There are city lights now… They don't hide the stars."

Cory: “There aren’t anywhere near as many as there were. Kids today have no idea what a blaze of light cities used to be - and not that long ago”

Lauren: “I’d rather have the stars…”

Cory: “The stars are free.’ She shrugs. ‘I’d rather have the city lights back myself, the sooner the better. But we can afford the stars’” (Butler 6).

This early scene establishes two important cultural critiques the novel offers. One is that many people facing the problems of climate change struggle to mourn irreversible losses. Cory and others, both inside and outside Lauren’s gated community, fail to imagine how humanity can survive without using resources excessively because they know no alternative. Environmental exploitation has been standard practice thus far; it is partially responsible for the conditions in Butler’s California. Resorting to the same or similar expectations for energy consumption would hurt the environment and people further, but Lauren’s stepmother anticipates one day going back to the way things were prior to large-scale ecological degradation. Lauren’s later interactions with her father and neighbors during her baptism ceremony confirm that Cory is not the only one who indulges in nostalgia and believes things will “go back” – clean, potable water that would be used, though no one could afford it, Lazor wire and security bars around the church, fresh white dresses, and the risk of walking to the church grounds rather than creating church at home (Butler 13).

The second claim the novel makes is that poverty and environmental degradation are interminably linked. The expense of maintaining city lights, access to water and municipal services, including police and fire protection, severely affects the quality of life for the working poor. Property ownership and water prices have skyrocketed so dramatically that even upper middle-class families cannot afford food and water, medical and police services, mortgages, or

even shoes and other simple necessities. These dire circumstances reflect both Butler's vision of the future in 2024 and many in present-day California—including the increased activity of wildfires, the influx of high-end gated communities that gentrify poor areas, and the decades-long drought.

The folly, then, of Lauren Olamina's father risking the expense of the water required for baptism, not to mention the practical waste of resources needed for drinking water and growing food, illustrates the imprudence of how much of Western society has approached the question of climate change and the utilization of resources. Lauren explains,

> The alternative was to be baptized in the bathtub at home. That would have been cheaper and safer and fine with me. I said so but no one paid attention to me. To the adults, going outside [of their walled community] to a real church was like stepping back to the good old days when there were churches all over the place and too many lights and gasoline was for fueling cars and trucks instead of torching things. (Butler 8)

These two scenes taken together strike me as richly significant within Maibom's framework of empathy. For readers to empathize with the notions of how class and ideology negatively impact Lauren's perceptions of eco-catastrophe even as her step-mother remains nostalgic for the things that helped cause the climate change, the reader must put themselves into Lauren's shoes – which is not a passive act, according to Maibom. In empathizing with Lauren's character, Maibom stresses "we put aside our own beliefs and desires and insert those (indicated by the author) of the fictional character and feed them to our 'planning processer,'" which begins an active process of high-level simulation-reading of empathy (Maibom116). The result of this interaction with the text results in "experience[ing] our own fresh emotions in the circumstances

of the character's action and their effects," instigating a cognitive response that empathically engages us with the literature" (Maibom 116).

The members of Lauren's walled community cannot envision a better future outside of the myth that Earth contains almost limitless resources and prosperity is measured by unfettered use of them for material projects, even when water costs more than food, commercial water stations are dangerous, and water peddlers who typically cannot read poison themselves and others with chemically-laden containers. Within this paradigm is perhaps the most devastating effect of the scale of ecological crisis and its contribution to cultural norms in the Anthropocene novel: a disregard for the humanity of the Other in search of salvation for the individual. While en route to the church to baptize Lauren and several additional children in the neighborhood, the group encounters three dead men on the sidewalk, one of them headless, and a naked young woman, dazed and stumbling along the street. No one stops to help her because the scene has become so common and because helping strangers is dangerous, since "[Cory] and my father stopped to help an injured woman once, and the guys who had injured her jumped out from behind a wall and almost killed them," as Lauren explains (Butler 10).

Whereas the group heading to church for baptism rites can ignore the woman, whom Lauren speculates had been "raped so much that she was crazy...or just high on drugs," Lauren's hyperempathy syndrome situates the suffering of the Other in her own body and forces her to connect physically and emotionally with them (Butler 9). This communal sharing of pain—a recognition of oneself in the Other—marks the starting point for Lauren's commitment to building the Earthseed community, and for the reader in exploring the embodied simulation of Lauren's experience. Rather than give in to nostalgia for "the good old days or… how great it's

going to be when the country gets back on its feet and good times come back," Lauren builds a new community from the ashes of her pain and that of others (Butler 8).

From the beginning of the novel, Lauren is obviously alienated: from her mother by death, from her father by shame, from her brothers and Cory by blood, from her community by difference—including both her ideology and her hyperempathy syndrome. But she is also inextricably connected through the social imaginary of embodied feelings of pain as she watches fellow humans suffer, as well as the physical attachment of her body to "a different kind of hydrological cycle" (Neimanis, 3). Lauren's experience with empathy, pain, and pleasure began in the womb—a watery vessel that serves to reject discrete individualism—where Lauren inherited and became an assemblage of blood, water, DNA, Paracetco, and "animal, vegetable, and other planetary bodies that materially course through us, replenish us, and draw upon our own bodies as wells" (Neimanis 3). Her mother's womb supplies "a posthuman watery gestationality that enters our bodies into complex relations of gift, theft, and debt with all other watery life" (Neimanis 3). This tentacular assemblage of matter mimics how Lauren sees her environment.

Earthseed, the religious and philosophical idea that "all that you touch, you Change, and all that you Change Changes you" is not merely an idea, but an embodied set of practices of interaction amongst people, soil, water, seeds, trees, books, bread, blood, fire, and home (Butler 1). Lauren's body is "liminal, indeterminable space that disrupts the opposition between nature and culture, object and subject by its participation in a wider ecological and psychological exchange of matter and imagination as she tries to cement a system of ethics for living in an unstable world, one that will grow and yield a resilient community" (Alaimo 51). But this community cannot be realized without the contributions of many hands, seeds, soil, water, and

sweat. In this way, Lauren demonstrates the kind of "adaptive and relational leadership model" scholar-activist adrienne maree brown proposes as a "way for human beings to practice being in right relationship to our home and each other, to practice complexity, and grow a compelling future together through relatively simple actions" (brown 23). These simple actions, for Lauren, are reading, listening, teaching – starting with just a few members of community and sharing in their skills and wisdom – then repeating these practices regularly so as to develop reliance on each other for survival (see Fig. 5).

Element	Nature of Element
Fractal	The Relationship Between Small and Large
Adaptative	How We Change
Interdependence and Decentralization	Who We Are and How We Share
Non-linear and Iterative	The Pace and Pathways of Change
Resilience and Transformative Justice	How We Recover and Transform

Figure 5. "Elements of Emergent Strategy" (brown 48)

Some scholars have argued that *Parable of the Sower* relies too heavily on the SF trope of technology as savior, though Ayana Jamieson, Moya Bailey, adrienne maree brown, Stacey Alaimo, and others have recognized and championed the importance of the body and embodied nature in Butler's works, such as this one and *Wild Seed*. *Parable of the Talents* treats at length Lauren's preparation and commitment to moving humans off Earth and into outer space for a fresh start. However, Butler prioritizes embodiment and feeling in *Parable of the Sower* (and even in *Talents*) more than she ultimately gets credit for. In *Imagining the Future of Climate Change*, Shelley Streeby notes, "Butler often used the language of symbiosis to think about human and non-human animals' future on the planet" hoping we could "become mutualists –

symbionts who truly partner the Earth, benefitting it as it benefits us," (Streeby 70). Lauren's hyperempathy in *Parable of the Sower* is one way Butler imagines this symbiosis during climate change. Early in the novel, Lauren reminisces on the history of her hyperempathy syndrome and shared bleeding as a child as she cycles past poor neighborhoods on the way to the church baptism. "A lot of the houses were trashed - burned, vandalized, infested with drugs or druggies, or squatted in by homeless families with their filthy, gaunt, half-naked children… I feel sorry for the little ones, but the ones my age and older make me nervous" (Butler 10). This nervousness may stem partially from the understanding that desperate people resort to violence, but it is primarily due to her embodied sense of their pain.

Lauren explains that her brother, Keith, would pretend to hurt or bleed to force her into sharing his pain, and sometimes make her bleed through her skin. "If I don't look too long at old injuries, they don't hurt me too much," she explains (citation). Butler writes, "There was a naked little boy whose skin was a mass of big red sores; a man with a huge scab over the stump where his right hand used to be; a little girl, naked, maybe seven years old with blood running down her bare thighs. A woman with a swollen, bloody, beaten face" (Butler 13). Each time she witnesses someone in pain, Lauren suffers deeply as if it were her own. To complicate her condition further, her father and Cory believe (or want to believe) that the hyperempathy is controllable and that she could somehow suppress it.

Lauren inherited her hyperempathy syndrome from her mother, who used a drug called Paracetco, which, in the novel, was commonly prescribed to help people get smarter, stay awake longer, and work harder. It's an inherited disease, passed down genetically, and one her father is ashamed to discuss. A preacher, university dean, and, like Lauren's mother, a professor, he views his first wife's drug addiction as an unspeakable part of family business. Therefore, he polices

Lauren's body, devaluing and concealing her experience. He impedes Lauren's capacity to be present in her own body without feeling shame or fear, and he coaxes her to hide her own pain—partially for her safety, but also to maintain his reputation. Rather than empathize with her or the people for whom she feels pain, he largely ignores anyone outside of their own walled development and ignores what, for Lauren, might be viewed as epigenetic generational trauma.

It falls upon Lauren to save herself and others from the physical and psychological trauma of an apocalyptic environment. Jim Miller indicates that Butler "outlines the impact of class polarizations on a local, national, and international level, while also paying careful attention to the ways in which the equally important elements of race and gender oppression intersect with class realities" (Miller 349). Lauren views community resilience as integral to Earthseed, dependent on the web of connections among people, land, and place. If God is Change, "a victim of God may, through learning adaptation, become a partner of God, a victim of God may, through forethought and planning, become a shaper of God" (Butler 32). Adapting to a changing neoliberal political system spurred by human abuse, one in which "a right-wing utopianism generates dystopian spaces of disaster, neglect, and everyday misery" requires us to reconsider the ways we rely on and cultivate and change nature as part of an ecological system (Streeby 73).

This reconsidering must view humans as central to that system rather than apart from it. One of the ways Lauren's walled community already fulfills this is through community farming. Sustaining the community depends on access to water, raising small animals, and tending gardens for growing food for consumption and bartering. The world Butler depicts does not allow most people to afford the rising costs of fresh vegetables and fruit due to limited access and the additional cost of water when not pooling resources within the community. Much like in the food deserts we see across low-access communities in the U.S., the novel calls for a return to

sustainable family farming. At the same time, Robledo's efforts are still not satisfactory for survival. Income inequality still exists among neighbors in the community, and each family is more concerned with the individual family's ability to survive than creating a truly sustainable collective.

Lauren takes the community's gardening practices a step further when she outlines her vision to Joanne for a more resilient society after the fire set by little Amy Dunn that destroys property and neighborhood crops. With Cholera and measles spreading, large-scale pollution of potable water, surging super-storms, and the appearance of a new drug that makes people want to set fires, Lauren foresees an increase in violence, crime, and the oncoming destruction of walled communities precipitated by political inaction:

> [President] Donner's just a kind of human bannister… like a symbol of the past for us to hold on to as we're pushed into the future… But having him there, the latest in a two-and-a-half-century-long line of American Presidents make people feel that the country, the culture that they grew up with is still here - that we'll get through these bad times and back to normal… Our adults haven't been wiped out by a plague so they're still anchored in the past, waiting for the good old days to come back. (Butler 57)

The novel situates the tendency of slow violence to obscure the larger picture of damage being done nationally and globally. These changes also fragment people's understanding of developments across communities that are not geographically or culturally connected. Lauren's empathic ability to feel for others extends across species, as demonstrated when she is forced to kill a dog and endures shared pain. This capacity enables an intimate connection to the changing environment and a deeper understanding of the trauma of others. For her, *feeling* is a type of listening, and she takes that listening as an instruction to Change. Lauren decides that in order for

humans to survive, they need to produce environmental and cultural change by learning about the land: “native and naturalized plants and their uses,” and place-making: “log-cabin building, livestock raising, plant cultivation, soap-making - that kind of thing” (Butler 58). Lauren thus challenges her followers to carve a path through social and ecological devastation by forming community with the land itself by reading it and learning from it.

Significantly, the initial scene in which Lauren openly and passionately shares her ideas for survival with another person occurs during the first rains in years. She feels overwhelmed and dazzled by the water. The imagery in this section includes bountiful references to rabbits, avocadoes, trees, ripe fruit, bean salads, wet humans, and wet and fertile ground juxtaposed with the untimely, accidental shooting death of three-year old Amy Dunn. This inversion of fertility set against the destruction of life offers a stark reminder for Lauren that rain and life are short-lived in a community she perceives as an “island surrounded by sharks - except sharks don’t bother you unless you go in the water. But our land sharks are on their way in. It’s just a matter of how long it takes for them to get hungry enough” (Butler 50). By comparing the street poor to sharks breaking through the boundaries of the walled community, Lauren imbues place with a sense of natural environmental order, then inverts that order with the unnatural hierarchy of people forced to violently attack outside of their boundaries in order to survive—a desperate response to the lack of resources available.

That the final break-in of their walled community results in a devastating fire symbolizes the violent erasure of this wet, fertile soil in which crops and in which children could grow and flourish. Without the ability to cope beyond their immediate survival, humans create/are limited by poverty, scarcity, drugs, and greed. But even beyond that, these passages highlight how individualistic ways of living are insufficient for surviving the Anthropocene. Lacking a shared

sense of responsibility for the biotic whole puts the entire system at risk. A better way to sustain communities would be to create kinship relationships beyond the boundaries of the wall, beyond class markers, beyond blood ties in a collective community.

Making Place and Creating Kinship in the Anthropocene

In "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," Jean and John Comaroff note, "the politics of consumerism, human rights, and entitlement, have been shown to coincide with puzzling new patterns of exclusion, patterns that inflect older lines of gender, sexuality, race, and class in ways both strange and familiar" (292). Examining literary representations of these patterns ecocritically seeks to uncover the impacts of increased production, consumption, and waste brought about by late capitalism. The imposition of unfettered capitalism across the globe significantly impacts communities of color and low-socioeconomic populations earlier and more frequently than their wealthier, mostly white, counterparts. In a global capitalist framework, progress often relies on environmental degradation, including hydro-dam construction, fossil fuel extraction, and chemical dumping, which occur more frequently in communities of color, though they make up a smaller percentage of the population in places like the U.S. and contribute less to global warming than nations who developed earlier due to their employment of colonization and slavery. These patterns form a marker of Anthropocene Fiction.

One of the primary issues with representations of violence produced by climate change in literature and other media, and the response to those representations by some scholars, is two-fold: 1) that the otherwise "slow violence" of environmental crisis becomes *too* apocalyptic, potentially inducing reactions of stasis in an overwhelmingly failing environment, and 2) that the focus of the Anthropocene story becomes the damage *itself.* Studying the apocalyptic rhetoric of

disaster narratives often perpetuates the myth that damage is the singular, defining story of a particular marginalized community. The effect of this narration is that the damage story becomes the default story by which everyone views that community. Indigenous communities become representations of poverty and alcoholism. Black communities become metaphors for incarceration and welfare. Poor communities become symbols of social and moral regression. Eve Tuck's 2009 open letter, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," calls on researchers to go beyond the "possible hidden costs of a research strategy that frames entire communities as depleted" (Tuck 409). For example, while Western scholars typically read dystopian fiction as narratives of a dying society/planet, Anthropocene novels such as *Parable of the Sower* imagine both present and future reparatively[13] through their depictions of communal place-making as a site for empathic connection between humans, and between humans and non-human nature.

Jennifer James's article on "Ecomelancholia" makes a critical contribution to understanding intersections between race and nature in the Anthropocene. James connects Black American experiences with nature to the cultural memory of trauma stemming from slavery. According to James, Black ecological imagination is usually discounted from environmental movements that want to preserve the aesthetic beauty of the American landscape – or nature writing about the restorative properties of being in the wilderness. The cultural memory of slavery is inscribed in that landscape, including trees as symbols of lynching, but often Black experience in nature is not central to ecocritical interrogation. In Chapter 14 of *Parable of the*

[13] From Eve Sedgewick's "Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading," which offers a "reparative," pleasure-seeking and ameliorative model to reading crisis rather than structuring pain and oppression as central to its solutions. "Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments… she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to realize the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently than the way it did" (146).

Sower, the juxtaposition of trees burning along with Lauren's community against her wish at the end of the novel to plant a grove of oak trees for Bankole's murdered sister and family signals a shift in Lauren's creation of environmental place. The new community, aptly named Acorn, has been intentionally seeded with members of Earthseed who constitute political, racial, and economic difference. This includes Lauren and Bankole's age gap, children being cared for by the entire community regardless of biological kinship, a couple with hyperempathy syndrome, and the pooling of resources and sharing of work among people from different racial backgrounds, diverse sexualities, and economic status (the 300 acres of land belongs to Bankole). The group buries the bodies of their dead on land owned by a Black family and plants new trees from wild acorns, symbolizing new growth and a spiritual and physical rebirth of community.

Diana Leong foregrounds black contributions to the field, contrary to the tendency of many ecocritics noting, "Black thought has long challenged the enforced description of Africans and their descendants as non-human objects of science, as specimens for study and experimentation, as commodities for market exchange, as *things*. In fact, from at least the 16th century onward, black bodies provided crucial raw material for the development of natural history, the natural sciences, and the life philosophies in Enlightenment thought" (Leong 3). *Parable of the Sower* exposes critical issues of racial segregation and neoslavery that continue to plague the Anthropocene, partly as byproducts of colonialism and late capitalist practices that commodify minoritized bodies through exploitative labor. These oppressive practices emerge in certain illustrations of Lauren's dad and brother, as well as the company-owned cities running desalination plants and offering armed protection for low-wage domestic work to serve the company's upper class white residents. Their wages can only be spent in the company store and

are garnished for rent on company-owned apartments, keeping families in servitude to their employers, who now control all the water and power sources in the Pacific. Butler's novel thus departs from earlier Climate Fiction by seeking to expose "the manifold facets of climate injustice and calls attention to the close intertwining of environmental problems with issues of race, class, gender, and ability… to remind readers of the disproportionate effects climatic transformations have" (Mehnert 183).

In *Parable of the Sower*, water shortages and rising sea levels have pushed marginalized communities closer to disaster than their wealthier, white counterparts in varying ways – including physical violence, economic despair, and the dismantling of their communities. In *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Kathryn Yusoff points out that "Race is tied most noticeably to fossil narratives and racialized processes of extraction, but it is also resident in modes of racial discourse in relation to ideas of property, possession, and land use" (21). As the sea encroaches on L.A. in the novel, many of the "somewhat richer and less geologically active communities [get help] – dikes, seawalls, evacuation assistance" (Butler 119). But Lauren's father understands that their community will not receive special help because "Robledo's too big, too poor, too black, and too Hispanic to be of interest to anyone – and it has no coastline. What it does have is street poor, body dumps, and a memory of once being well off – shade trees, big houses, hills, and canyons" (Butler 120).

Geographically, even once middle class black and Latino neighborhoods were historically separated from wealthier whites who could afford to buy and build property on the coast, and likely as a consequence of white flight. Now, the crumbling economy of a climate-ravaged California has created conditions such that middle class incomes can no longer sustain families, and even wealthier white communities like Olivar, once a beachy, resort-like

community will fall prey to becoming a company town. Privatization, the natural conclusion of runaway capitalism, will control water, land, and people – commodifying people as workers for company towns, like KSF, which profits off debt slavery. Kagimoto, Stamm, and Frampton, a multi-national company owned by Japan, Germany, and Canada have essentially purchased the wealthy, white coastal town of Olivar in exchange for providing jobs, food, and security as well as meager salaries to the educated workforce who can no longer afford to wage battle against the Pacific Ocean alone.

By expanding the community's desalination plant and building more, "the company intends to dominate farming and the selling of water, solar, and wind energy… And there's all that formerly public land that they now control. They mean to own great water, power, and agricultural industries in an area that most people have given up on" (Butler 119). Privatization of the land may seem like a sort of hope to many in the insular Olivar – and even to Cory who believes the family "could be safe in Olivar. The kids could go to a real school and later get jobs with the company. After all, where could they go from here except outside?" (Butler 121). But historically, company towns have depended on that kind of desperation to succeed at their aims: the profitability of the company, not the protections of its workers. This is one more example of Lauren Olamina's family and neighbors who cannot see a future beyond the current crisis, unless it looks like an example of the past, though it be a broken model. Through Earthseed, Lauren believes it does not have to be this way.

Each chapter of *Parable of the Sower* begins with a verse from Lauren's *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*. Many of them point to the nature of God as change, infinitely malleable, and adaptive. In Earthseed, people exist to shape God and to be shaped by God, and Butler links behavior to consequences of God-shaping. So, it is important that Chapter 14 begins with the

following verse: “In order to rise/From its own ashes/A Phoenix/First/Must/Burn” (Butler 153). The chapter opens with the burning of Lauren’s neighborhood by Pyro addicts, the “houses, the trees, the people: Burning…Everything was chaos. People running, screaming, shooting. The gate had been destroyed. [The] attackers had driven an ancient truck through it. They must have stolen a truck just to crash through [the] gate” (ibid). In this one moment of chaos, Lauren and her neighbors lose everything the wall has been keeping safe. Most of the members of the community are killed by fire, gunshot, rape, or trampling. The “Paints,” or people addicted to the drug “Pyro,” find watching fires burn “better than sex” under the drug’s influence (citation). They shave off all their hair and paint their skin green, blue, red, or yellow and set fires to wealthy neighborhoods to kill the rich.

Although Lauren’s neighborhood is not wealthy by comparison, they do have access at least to food, shelter, and water, which emphasizes the stark class divisions that the street poor suffer. As her brother Keith said they had “never been rich, but to the desperate [they] looked rich” (Butler 163). Both the drug-induced frenzy of the Paints and the suffering of the people in Lauren’s neighborhood can be viewed as a collective grief in the face of eco catastrophe. Panu Pikhala notes in “Eco-Anxiety, Tragedy, and Hope: Psychological and Spiritual Dimensions of Climate Change” "grief studies have shown that if grief is not given its due place, problems result for both the psychic life of individuals and the well-being of social groups. Individuals may resort to maladaptive behavior such as psychic numbing or the use of addictive substances as an effort to run away from complicated grief” (Pikhala 550). Their neighborhood gate is a symbol of exclusion, of the barriers the street poor face when attempting to merely survive. While this doesn’t justify the violence of the Pyro addicts, it does contextualize why people with less access to necessities, much less upward mobility, would target people in higher social and

economic positions, particularly during a climate crisis where jobs, food and water and shelter are even more difficult to come by. It is significant, too, that the drug of choice in this society is one that facilitates a drive for fire and burning, as the global temperatures rise and heat and drought become more inescapable. It is one way to numb the pressures of watching California burn to the ground and feeling the hopelessness of the government's lack of accountability or global action to impede the crisis.

For Lauren, however, this is a crucial turning point in creating the possibility for change. The burning of her community and the loss of her family and Curtis force her to move out of the confines of the wall—out of the framework of the life her parents and elder neighbors have built. Moving out leaves Lauren free to build her life around a more flexible framework by gathering kin to create a new kind of family, more adaptable to the climate crisis and the effects of a crumbling physical, social, and economic landscape. In fact, part of the reason Lauren survives while others do not is that her "self-administered training had worked" (Butler 161). Armed with the knowledge of survival she has read about and prepared for, she will now walk into the world and put that information into praxis as she teaches others and learns from them. The fact that she is a young, Black woman whose voice will change the world through her teaching and writing – and that she does so across racial, gender, and economic divides – is one of the major ways hope is expressed through the novel.

Lauren's Hyperempathy Syndrome puts her at risk, both from sharing the pain of another and from being seen as weak from outsiders who do not share her ability. It also, though, makes her much more attuned to the human condition. She experiences the pain and joy of others firsthand, which means she becomes accountable for the actions she takes and responsive when others are in danger. She cannot hit a man, even in self-defense as she does early on the trek

north in Chapter 16, without physically suffering the consequences of the pain she inflicts. So, every action must be carefully considered and weighed because she knows what the effects will be. She feels the effects of any losses she sees – including the tragedy of her community members in the neighborhood: the death of little Amy Dunn, the murderous spree of the Paints, even the death of the dog she shoots as it approaches Travis and Gloria's baby near her camp.

This is especially important because empathy is often critiqued as "emotional," as "failing the very standards of reason and impartiality that are assumed to form the basis of 'good judgment'" according to Sara Ahmed. In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, she explains the "cultural politic of emotion are deeply bound up with gendered histories of imperialism and capitalism, in which violence against the bodies of subaltern women is both granted and taken for granted in the making of worlds" (Ahmed 179). Lauren wields her Hyperempathy as a tool to disrupt the silencing of Black women, becoming more open to sharing and writing and speaking as she grows in her understanding of self and place. Her hyperempathy makes her suffer, but it is also a driving force in her understanding that everyone else is also in pain and this understanding helps her to unite people against the real forces that denigrate their living conditions: policy, poverty, social division. Lauren's hyperempathy is also limiting, of course. If she can only feel deeply for the pain and joy she witnesses directly (or hears explained in some cases), it would be difficult for her to extend that empathy, perhaps, to communities outside her personal awareness. But her Hyperempathy Syndrome is bookended by her voracious reading on the one hand and her writing and teaching on the other. The novel makes it clear, in this way, that empathy is not enough to build resilience: it requires seeking knowledge beyond your personal experience, and it requires action.

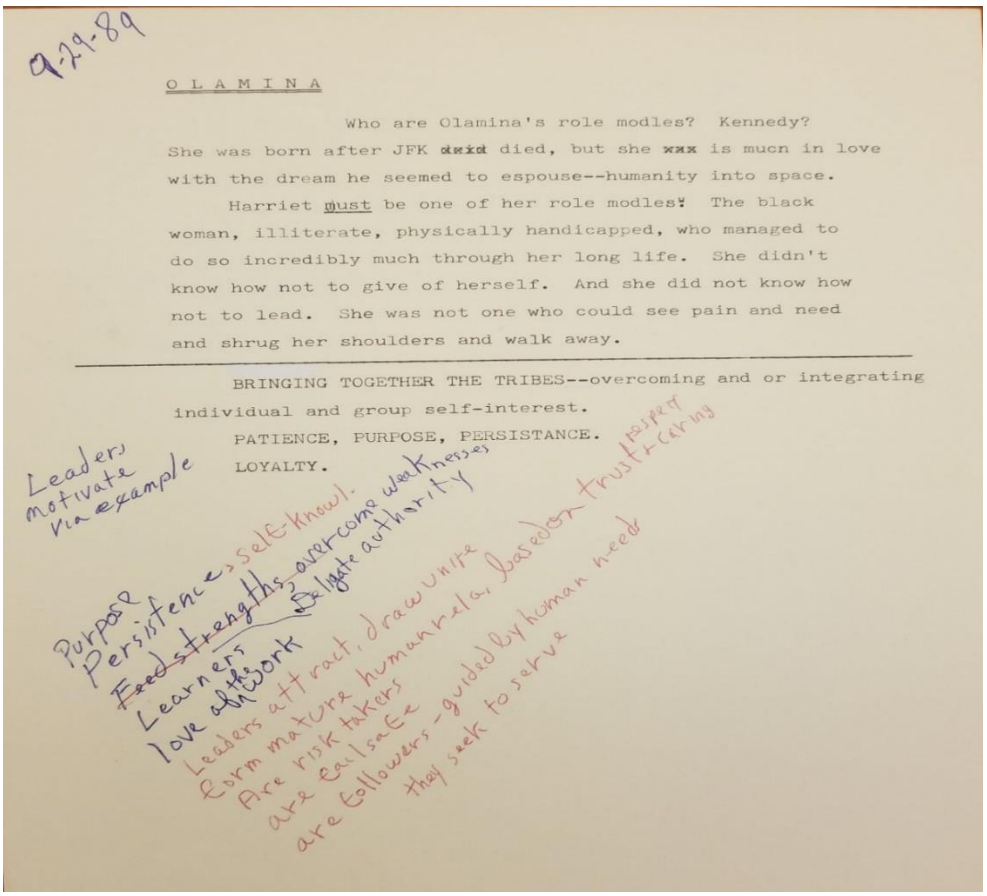
Lauren begins in earnest to share her Earthseed writings once she; Zahra and Harry; Travis, Natividad, and Domingo are on the road. Harry frames her Earthseed verses as "poetry" and she elects to read "soft, non-preachy verses, good for road-weary minds and bodies" (Butler 213). Lauren's rhetorical positioning of her religion as literature, without attempting to sound like a preacher, makes the arguments she lays out more digestible to her audience. That she can read and write in itself gives her authority, as many people are not able to. Both Zahra and Natividad express surprise that she can, and Lauren is surprised at Travis' knowledge of the idea of entropy.

The reader discovers his mother stole books from her rich employer to teach Travis to read, a nod to the historical legacy of slavery, where slaves "sneaked around and educated themselves as best they could, sometimes suffering whipping, sale, or mutilation for their efforts" (Butler 218). Ownership of knowledge in the novel is a right of the people who can afford it, which ultimately means well-off white people as younger generations of the poor and marginalized grow older in a political and economic system that puts them to work earlier and in more menial jobs, like Travis' position as handyman/gardener, his mother's position as cook, and Natividad's role as maid. Sharing the knowledge and skill of reading and writing helps the group to build kinship and ultimately become a family they can all contribute to and rely on.

Moreover, the debates the burgeoning family has about the nature of Earthseed, God, and ideas helps them to piece together a guiding framework that is inclusive and adaptable, one that can shape God as well as be shaped. For Lauren, Earthseed combines understanding and empathy with action: "There's comfort in realizing everything and everyone yields to God. There is power in knowing God can be focused, diverted, shaped by anyone at all. But there's no power in having strength and brains, and yet waiting for God to fix things" (Butler 220). The Earthseed

verses serve as a call to action to care about other people, to "create Earthseed communities and shape God together. 'God is Trickster, Teacher, Chaos, Clay'. We decide which aspect we embrace – and how to deal with the others" (Butler 221).

Conclusion



9-29-89

O L A M I N A

Who are Olamina's role modles? Kennedy? She was born after JFK died, but she is mucn in love with the dream he seemed to espouse--humanity into space.

Harriet must be one of her role modles! The black woman, illiterate, physically handicapped, who managed to do so incredibly much through her long life. She didn't know how not to give of herself. And she did not know how not to lead. She was not one who could see pain and need and shrug her shoulders and walk away.

BRINGING TOGETHER THE TRIBES--overcoming and or integrating individual and group self-interest.

PATIENCE, PURPOSE, PERSISTANCE.

LOYALTY.

Leaders motivate via example

Purpose

Persistence, self-knowl.

Feed strengths, overcome weaknesses

Delegate authority

Learners

love of the work

Leaders attract, draw unite

form mature human rel., based on trust + caring respect

Are risk takers

are followers - guided by human need

they seek to serve

Figure 6. Octavia E. Butler Papers, Box 85(28). The Huntington Library, San Marino, California

Parable of the Sower illustrates the effects of social and environmental injustice in the Anthropocene and celebrates the survival of Black people and the long history of Black women leaders. Figure 5 shows Butler's notes on modeling Lauren Olamina's character on Harriet

Tubman, who could not "see pain and need and walk away" (Butler, The Huntington Library). This historical tie is crucial in developing a more intersectional view in ecofeminisms. As Donna Haraway notes,

> Feminists of our time have been leaders in unraveling the supposed natural necessity of ties between sex and gender, race and sex, race and nation, class and race, gender and morphology, sex and reproduction, and reproduction and composing persons… If there is to be multispecies ecojustice, *which can also embrace diverse human people*, it is high time that feminists exercise leadership in imagination, theory, and action to unravel the ties of both genealogy and kin, and kin and species. (102, emphasis mine).

Butler's emphasis in *Parable of the Sower* on forming kinship *amongst diverse peoples*—including race, income level, gender and sexuality, disability, geography, and age—highlights the possibility of species survival during an era of change – particularly when Black women are recognized as leaders. Although we may mourn past ways and conveniences of living, we can create a more robust and connected society through inclusion and an ethic of care for people and land built on deliberate and empathic place-making that prioritizes marginalized voices. While the ultimate goal of Earthseed—to "take root among the stars" may not be feasible, or even desirable considering the implications of colonization and the trope of leaving the earth behind to start a new life where we end up continuing the same problems and divisions humans always have, the lead up to that is where the real hope lies (Butler 222). As Zahra notes when she is beginning to convert to Earthseed, "I don't care about no outer space. You can keep that part of it. But if you want to put together some kind of community where people look out for each other and don't have to take to being pushed around, I'm with you" (Butler 223). Creating a place for kinfolk and building community values that protect and nourish can be the objective rather than

the holding pattern for large-scale exodus. As Lauren and the Earthseed group do at the end of the novel, communities can acknowledge the death of their people, of their old ways of living, and plant acorns in their memory that will grow and flourish in the soil they once walked on; they can be "a harvest of survivors" (Butler 295).

Novels themselves already accomplish a type of place-making, in that they re-story a particular locale by inflecting a place with values and narrating the lived experience of characters interacting with it. In *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative*, Alexa Weik von Mossner summarizes recent findings in both psychology and climatology which suggest, as psychologist Seymour Epstein points out, that "humans apprehend reality, including risk and benefit, by employing two modes of processing information: the deliberate, logical, evidence-based rational system'...and the 'experiential system' which encodes reality in images , metaphors, and narratives associated with feelings, with affect" (von Mossner 140). Von Mossner underscores how "our embodied simulation of speculative future environments in ecodystopian narratives [such as Butler's] as well as the emotions cued by such narratives [may] engage their audiences...in some cases [to] promote more sustainable lifestyles" (von Mossner 40). In short, embodying Lauren Olamina's experience of place as she works to repair her community may, through the discourse of emotion and presentation of a relatable but also distinctly apocalyptic California, encourage the reader to more fully process the present eco-catastrophe and engage in "an enlightening triangulation between an individual reader's limited perspective, the estranged revision of the alternative world on the pages of a given text, and the actually existing society" (von Mossner 152). *Parable of the Sower* re-stories the Anthropocene as an era of radical hope. As Solnit notes,

> it's important to say what hope is not: it is not the belief that everything was, is, or will be fine. The evidence is all around us of tremendous suffering and tremendous destruction. The hope I'm interested in is about broad perspectives with specific possibilities, ones that invite or demand that we act. It's also not a sunny everything-is-getting-better narrative, though it may be a counter to the everything-is-getting-worse narrative. You could call it an account of complexities and uncertainties, with openings. (xiii)

This means things will go wrong, there will be injustices, and advances in ecological and social justice will not occur overnight. But as Cheryl Hall notes, "living more sustainably will inevitably entail both sacrifice and rewards – just as living unsustainably inevitably entails both sacrifice and reward" (Hall 126). Some of the seeds planted by sowers may "fall by the wayside" but we hope that, through teaching and reading, most "fall on good ground, and spring up, and bear fruit an hundredfold" (Butler 329). By interrogating and teaching Anthropocene novels, we see that our planet does not have to exist solely as a damage story, but that literature may be used to inspire hope and resilience in the face of ecological despair.

In Chapter Two, I discuss how this is accomplished in Hogan's portrayal of empathy and kinship as models for thriving in the face of larger-scale hydrodam projects that threaten Indigenous communities in Canada. As in Butler's work, a young woman, Angel Jensen, becomes a leader within her community. She helps her foremothers look towards a hopeful future by re-storying her connection to their ancestral lands and through accessing cultural memory, ultimately creating a place for herself and for her relatives through her activism.

CHAPTER TWO:

RE-STORYING PLACE: SETTLER-COLONIZATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN LINDA HOGAN'S *SOLAR STORMS*

"Bush called them the Reverse People. Backward. Even now they destroyed all that could save them, the plants, the water. And Dora-Rouge said 'they were the ones who invented hell.' For us, hell was cleared forests and killed animals. But for them, hell was the world in all its plentitude"

- Angel Jensen, *Solar Storms*

Introduction

Linda Hogan's (Chickasaw) novel *Solar Storms*, published two years after Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, explores the impacts of Anthropogenic climate change and settler-colonization on Indigenous communities. *Solar Storms* illustrates how colonization threatens Indigenous communities by treating the environment as a resource to benefit the settler state. Hogan's work centers the importance of place for preserving cultural memory and place attachment for Indigenous peoples. The events of the novel were inspired by the James Bay Project, Hydro-Quebec's 1971 controversial hydrodam construction on the U.S.-Canada border. This hydrodam is one of the largest in the world, and it severely impacted the surrounding regional Cree and Inuit communities' lives by diverting water, displacing people, compelling animal migration, and changing local climates. Hogan's central Indigenous characters resist this form of ecocide, protesting the dam project as part of their long journey through the wilderness, where land and rivers enable the re-storying[14] of Indigenous survival.

Climate narratives, especially when prioritizing Indigenous and other underrepresented

[14] See definition of Ripple's and Cerulean's "Re-storying" in the Introduction of this dissertation.

voices, can explicate the intersections or relationships among settler-colonization and climate change. According to ecologist Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi), Indigenous climate studies "often reflect the memories and knowledges that arise from Indigenous peoples' living heritages as societies with stories, lessons, and long histories of having to be well-organized to adapt to seasonal and inter-annual environmental changes. At the same time, our societies have been heavily disrupted by colonialism, capitalism, and industrialization" (153-4). Thus, an Indigenous approach to climate science "offers critical, decolonizing approaches to how to address climate change" (Powys Whyte 153-4). Many works of Indigenous literatures, such as *Solar Storms*, should be read as commentary on the Anthropocene's environmental crisis that suggests ways to redress anthropogenic Climate Change. As Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) notes in his literary manifesto *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, "[Indigenous] literatures are just one more vital way we have countered [the] forces of [colonial] erasure and given shape to our own ways of being in the world…They help us bridge the gap of human imagination between one another, between other human communities, and between us and other-than-human beings" (xix). Indigenous literature responds to climate change by affirming Indigenous presence and practices, and are of "vital significance…to healthy decolonization efforts and just expressions of community resurgence" (Heath Justice xx).

This chapter discusses place studies and Indigenous decolonialism to illustrate how Hogan's novel models imaginative place-making and recognizes the historical oppression of Indigenous communities on their lands. I argue that Hogan encourages empathic bonding with Indigenous communities and natural spaces through representations of community activism and resilience, and through making vivid Indigenous epistemologies in relation to land and waterscapes, plants and animals. Ultimately, *Solar Storms* challenges Western approaches to

ecological and social problems by linking family, history, and the complicated notion of 'progress' to the health of our planet.

Hogan invites readers to engage empathetically with place in the novel. She imagines humans and non-human nature as a web of exchange rather than the post-Enlightenment Western binary. As Manzo and Devine-Wright observe, in literary studies of place, attachments to location often generate efforts to preserve and defend that place. Climate narratives create a sense of place and belonging within the context of the discourse of place, which may spur readers to social action. Hogan's portrayal of spatial, historical, and biotic interconnectedness in *Solar Storms* can more readily affect real-world change. The ecological mindset Hogan cultivates can inspire efforts to defend specific threatened places and to rally against practices damaging the planet as a whole. Readers encounter the ethical consequences of human engagement with and *as* nature, to view the environment as a network that includes and centers Indigenous people. Rice states, "we cannot force change in people's discourse habits…we can create alternative places for speaking and writing differently about problems" (198). Indigenous climate narratives such as Hogan's provide one such place for speaking and writing differently about ecological justice.

Manzo and Devine-Wright argue, "developing a more dynamic perspective on place attachment can help to better understand… how place attachments are embedded in and reflect the politics of place change, notable acts of resistance" (175). In *Parable of the Sower*, part of Lauren Olamina's act of resistance includes reading Indigenous texts about food, land, and animals in her area of California as a way to survive. When she tries to share her knowledge with neighbors, the adults reject Indigenous history of the land, viewing it as unimportant and even dangerous. Indigenous knowledges are excluded as ways of knowing instead of central tenets in

the development of the land occupied by the United States. *Solar Storms* demonstrates how settler colonization has attempted to erase Indigenous ties to their physical environments, inhibiting place-attachment by restricting Indigenous cultural memory, and thus denigrating it. This erasure impedes tribal communities' sustainability because of the structural powers of the colonist state. The Western perception of land as a "natural resource" rather than "land as home"[15] creates barriers to protecting water, animals, and plant life on which Indigenous communities depend - as do we all. Hogan parallels the fractured Tribal communities with the fractured land, both victims of political and environmental distress inflicted by the settler colonist state of Quebec. *Solar Storms*, however, models possibilities for resistance to Western industrial hegemonies. Indigenous environmental advocacy shapes the personal identities of many characters in the novel based on their interactions with, history of, and associations with the land.

It is especially important to emphasize stories by Indigenous authors in Canada at a time when, as Quynh Nu Le indicates "[public] apologies, which emerge out of the movement for redress and reconciliation can thus be seen as central to the contemporary image production of Canada as a reformed, and renewed, nation… that demonstrates liberal values of civil progress through their investment in state-sanctioned multiculturalism" that continue to eschew meaningful change (Le 61). The settler-state's narrative production of Canada as nationally remorseful and a "peacekeeping and peacemaking nation" Le continues, "hinges on funneling settler, non-Native communities of color, and Indigenous community sentiments into temporally instantiated narratives of state rupture and national healing... that works to foreclose other transformative feelings and collectivities" (Le 61). This reifies the colonial structure by centering

[15] D.W. Meinig's *The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene* outlines the varied ways in which we make meaning from viewing the landscape from narrow professional circles.

the settler state as the great unifier against a horrid past that no longer exists while continuing to ignore Indigenous sovereignties. The portrayal of a "colonizing apocalypse"[16] in *Solar Storms* demonstrates the necessity of centering Indigenous voices in response to global Climate Change. Hogan's novel begins by challenging the concept of land ownership. Her critique is evident in the depiction of sagging, drooping buildings and electrical poles swallowed by the land, soon after their installation by the settler colonists. The imagery of contemporary technologies being reclaimed by the land constitutes an apocalyptic vison of the present normally seen in Western science fictional representations of the *future* in Anthropocene narratives. For Whyte, "such [science fiction] narratives can erase certain populations, such as Indigenous peoples, who approach climate change having already been through transformations of their societies induced by colonial violence…Some Indigenous perspectives on climate change can situate the present as already dystopian" (224). This is especially the case in novels such as *Solar Storms*, which depict ecological and cultural crises within Indigenous communities following actual events, such as hydrodam construction.

Hydro-Quebec's goal to re-route water from Cree lands so that "Quebec would emerge with a new identity… as an energy powerhouse," would disrupt the fishing, hunting, and trapping traditions of about 6,000 Cree and 5,000 Inuit peoples (Wall n.p.). They planned this in 1971 without consulting with the Cree and Inuit communities who lived there and whose lives would be forever changed by the project. The Cree and Inuit communities' understandings of place led to the opposition of this change through collective action.[17] In this context, "multiple

[16] Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) explains in his introduction to *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* that 1492 began a continuing colonizing apocalypse for Indigenous peoples that has resulted in framing them as deficient with the intention of eradicating Indigenous communities through policy, law, customs, and stories positing them as lacking - displacing Indigenous stories of hope, complexity, and possibility.

[17] The 1975 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA), the first major comprehensive land claim agreement in Canada, was a direct result of Inuit and Cree partnership to gain recognized rights and benefits from Quebec's government.

and diverse place meanings are rhetorically propagated by [the settler state] to legitimate 'development,'" emphasizing settler concepts of the land as economy over Indigenous rights to their territories (Manzo and Devine-Wright 174). Whereas such propaganda fragments and disconnects us, Indigenous climate narratives can "recognize and respect our interdependencies" (Heath Justice 5). These narratives supply "the full context that's necessary for healthy or effective action" (Heath Justice 5). In four sections, this chapter illustrates how *Solar Storms* represents empathy and kinship as ways to combat environmental and cultural crises in the Anthropocene. First, in "Land as Home," I demonstrate how Hogan constructs landscape as home, connecting the human and other-than-human through an empathic connection with the land. Then, in "Reading Place in *Solar Storms*," I discuss the tensions between built homes and landscape *as* home as sites for healing and ecological justice. The section "Dam(n)ing the Land" deconstructs the colonial justifications of ecocide and shows how the characters in *Solar Storms* ultimately re-story and re-center Indigenous climate narratives. The chapter closes with "Reading the Possibility of a Better Future," where I argue reading *Solar Storms* as an Indigenous Climate narrative offers a model for envisioning more robust and hopeful ways of living in the Anthropocene.

Land as Home in *Solar Storms*

Solar Storms, set in 1972, tells a coming-of-age story about 17-year-old Angel Jensen who returns to her ancestral lands on the border of Minnesota and Canada after several years in the Oklahoma foster system. Angel journeys to her birthplace, Adam's Rib, to reunite with her grandmother Agnes, great-grandmother Dora-Rouge, and Bush, a close family friend who served as Angel's mother figure. The four generations of Indigenous women from Cree and

Anishinaabe lineage are descendants of Tribal communities who remained on their land after French fur trappers over-hunted and then vacated the area. Hannah Wing, Angel's estranged mother, physically and emotionally scars and abandons her daughter during childhood. At a crucial turning point in the novel, Angel, Agnes, Dora-Rouge, and Bush set out for Dora-Rouge's homeland, where they believe Hannah lives. During this weeks' long trip, the women must rely on their abilities to read and connect with the land as they canoe through its water systems. Their search for Hannah generates an unexpected confrontation with their communal trauma, renews their identification with the land, and connects them with other tribal communities in their fight against the hydro-dam project. Construction on the mega dam occurs in Holy String Town, Dora-Rouge's birthplace, and will change life drastically for Indigenous communities, animals, and plant-life dependent on the river's ecosystems for survival. Angel finds her place within the community on her ancestral lands and Agnes, Dora-Rouge, and Bush undergo personal transformations while grappling with the shifting dynamics of their homes and kinship to one another and the land.

Angel's journey begins on her return to the north country, where "elders said… the land and water had joined together in an ancient pact, now broken" (Hogan 21). Like Adam's Rib and the solitary Fur Island where Bush lives, Angel's kinship with her relatives experienced a history of settler-colonial violence that disrupted familial relationships, such as the creation of Roman-Catholic run residential schools.[18] While women in *Solar Storms* did not directly experience the trauma of Canadian residential schools, Hannah Wing and Angel were both similarly removed from their families, and they were forced to live with white families in the foster system. Hannah

[18] In June 2021, BBC News reported the finding of over 751 unmarked graves at the Marieval School, former residential school in Saskatchewan. Residential schools operated between 1863 and 1998. Marieval was funded by the Canadian government, and one of hundreds of such schools made compulsory and "run by religious authorities during the 19th and 20th Centuries with the aim of assimilating indigenous youth."

suffers brutal abuse, which she then perpetuates onto Angel. Angel returns to her great grandmother Agnes Iron after being apart from her mother for over a decade, "with the hope of finding something not yet known to [her], not yet dreamed or loved" (Hogan 23). As Angel and Agnes reconnect with each other, and Angel begins to inhabit this place of her childhood, they hear that the hydrodam project will further damage the already scarred lands. Angel's attachment to Adam's Rib and to her elders grows, and she begins to empathize with the place named Poison she had been sorry to come home to, with its "weary houses…strung along…in a line…all of them…dark and brown and dreary" (Hogan 24). The houses serve as physical reminders of the intergenerational trauma inhabited by the people who dwell in them. Angel's growing love and concern for the people, houses, and history of her ancestral lands signifies her acceptance of this land as home.

Solar Storms depicts many real forms of environmental exploitation, thus offering a compelling appeal to ecological justice in the Anthropocene. Scholarship on Indigenous texts centers the possibility of reading place-based narratives as empathic literature that challenges Western representations of Indigenous experience. For example, Laura Virginia Castor's work on place in *Solar Storms* briefly references Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* to establish houses and bodies as grounds for inquiry in the novel. Bachelard's premise lends itself to a critique of human identity in relation to larger outside spaces, even though his focus centers spaces of the home.[19] Rather than relying on typical descriptions of the house, Bachelard's theories reflect a need to see deeper into the way one's relationship to space develops as a result

[19] The *Poetics of Space* is a work that largely attends to proving that "imagination augments the value of reality" when considering the lived experience of architecture (Bachelard 3). This accounts for what Bachelard says is the authority of the house to serve as "one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories, and dreams of mankind" (6).

of the way one inhabits the space of the home. Bachelard poses the house as a living, imagining being that constantly shifts as if under the influence of past and present memories, as well as daydreams, creating future versions of the dreamed house. Much of this experience relies on a person's memory and imagination, or the way one might root him or herself in a space. For example, it is not enough to simply describe what a childhood home looked like, but how one poetically recollects themselves. Bachelard's work can be useful and also dissonant in enabling articulations of Indigenous relationships to land. His theory on "intimate immensity" echoes a spiritual connection to home that can be expanded to Angel's experiences of outside spaces in *Solar Storms*. He also provides an account of the types of traditional Western views on space and place that Hogan critiques in the novel. Since part of my argument is framed around a rejection of Western dichotomies, Bachelard will be useful here in determining how Hogan critiques the idea of "home" as a built house, and why.

In *Solar Storms*, Hogan constructs landscape *as* home, where connections among characters and landscape parallel the types of experiences Bachelard theorizes as the relationship between "man" and his house. The Indigenous communities Hogan depicts have long practiced subsistence living and interdependence with plants, animals, water, and land in their territories, treating the environment as one cultivates a house. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Goenpul) notes, "Our sovereignty is embodied, it is ontological (our being), epistemological (our way of knowing), and it is grounded within complex relations derived from the intersubstantiation of ancestral beings, humans, and land. [It] is carried by the body and differs from Western constructions of sovereignty which are predicated on the social contract model, the idea of a unified supreme authority, territorial integrity, and individual rights" (Moreton-Robinson 2). Nature in *Solar Storms* becomes a substitute for the home, a key element in encouraging

characters to fight social and environmental injustice. Castor adapts Bachelard to illustrate that "the narrative of *Solar Storms* might be thought of as a journey the reader makes toward a more complex understanding of place" (7). By portraying humans as part of the ecosystem, Hogan challenges the egocentric, Western view of nature as a resource. Hogan encourages readers to see home as more than a house so that we, too, may equate the planet's healing with our own. This ecological mindset and immersion in nature ultimately heal Angel. Hogan reflects a push for more of humanity to resist industrialization at the expense of the environment.

Reading Place in *Solar Storms*

Bachelard declares, "Every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination; that is to say, it is the germ of a room, or of a house" (136). Intimate spaces such as attics, basements, rooms, and corners, and the objects filling them, all play a key role in shaping the self through an internalized experience *of* the house itself. Bachelard extends Jung's explanation of the levels of a house in relation to the mental structure of the individual, arguing the house itself is "a tool for analysis of the human soul" (xxxvii). Intimate spaces, then, are not living spaces but rather, lived spaces. It may seem counterproductive to begin with Bachelard here, but as Glen Coulthard notes in "Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity," parsing the "falsely universalizing, urban, white, heterosexist, masculinist, class-reductionist, and state-centric character that informs…" Western theoretical movements such as Bachelard's aid in "*learning* from past theoretical traditions and movements while *challenging* the ways in which these traditions can stubbornly foreclose the possibility of forging racial solidarities in the present" (Coulthard and Simpson 252). Bachelard's French ancestry and early work in the

philosophy of science was a precursor to and influence on Althusser, Sartre, Bourdieu, and Latour. It shaped a great deal of Western scientific philosophy as well as theories of space and place. By interrogating the Western tradition, we can see how, as Coulthard explains, "In the context of Indigenous peoples' struggles in Canada and elsewhere, this has historically resulted in not only a very shallow solidarity with respect to Indigenous claims and struggles… but more often than not a call on Indigenous peoples to forcefully align their interests and identities in ways that contribute to [their] own dispossession and erasure," (Coulthard and Simpson 252). In Solar Storms, Hogan traces Angel's and her mother's struggle to recover from that erasure as they either embrace or deny Indigenous epistemologies that can heal their fractured identities.

To Bachelard, "imagination augments the values of reality" in contemplating the home as "our corner of the world" (4). He believes "all inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home" (5). Entering natural space means instantly inhabiting it. Moreover, natural spaces can be inhabited by memory: "I know, for instance, that my grandfather got lost in a certain wood. I was told this and I have not forgotten it. It happened in a past before I was born. My oldest memories, therefore, are a hundred years old, or perhaps a bit more. This, then, is my ancestral forest. All the rest is fiction" (Bachelard 188-9). These "daydreams of infinity" offer a springboard for exploring how ancestral memories, especially in a novel with the themes of ancestry and interconnectedness at its core, reformulate bodily ties to the land (Bachelard 189). In Bachelard's assertion, he claims the land as *his* ancestral forest. This notion of inhabiting natural spaces depends partly on intention, as one must seek out a connection with the land and want to protect it. For Bachelard, though, the fact that he "owns" the ancestral forest is the fundamental difference between Western values and Indigenous values as construed by Solar Storms. Hogan is critiquing just such ownership of a place by an individual, and restorying the landscape

through recognition of cultural histories that are being erased by the hydro dam corporation.

Angel and her elders enter the landscape with the intention of *knowing* the land, allowing them to experience it as a place of belonging, rather than claiming to own it. For Angel, images, memories, and daydreams give the subject an account of what she sees, but also what is within her or her intimate experience as related to natural space, especially when confronted with the openness of outside space. Angel's encounters with distinct houses cultivate her hardened interior landscape: "One of the houses I lived in sloped as if it would fall off the very face of the earth. Another was upright, staunch, and Puritan. There was a house with cement stairs leading to the front door, tangled brambles all around it. There was one I loved...but so far in my life, I had never lighted anywhere long enough to call it home" (Hogan 26). Angel has never formed an intimacy with these houses, in large part because she feels no ancestral connection to them. She discusses the houses in the way Bachelard says intimacy with the home cannot be approached. First, she uses basic description, then her language changes to poetic interpretation. Even when she imagines what living in the land of her ancestry might be like, she notes, "And then I would remember things that had never quite shaped themselves whole. And there was a fire-red room of anger I inhabited permanently, with walls that couldn't shelter or contain my quiet rages. Now I could feel another room being built...I was entering silence more deeply than I had entered anything before" (Hogan 27).

Angel discovers her connection to place as she imagines how its history will shape her body and mind. She participates in building the kind of ancestral forest Bachelard remembers from his childhood. Angel daydreams of the new house she builds as part of her return to her homeland. This connection between daydreams of home and Angel's self-transformation suggests, as Bachelard states, "great images have both a history and a prehistory; they are always

a blend of memory and legend...we discover that its roots plunge well beyond the history that is fixed in our memories" (33). Angel insists, "I'd told myself before arriving, before constructing and inhabiting that new room, that whatever happened, whatever truth uncovered, I would not run this time, not from these people" (Hogan 27). She thus foreshadows the rooms to be built in conjunction with her experience of the new home.

Angel describes Dora-Rouge and Agnes's house as "boxlike...dark brown and square with nothing to distinguish it from the others except for a torn screen and a large, red-covered chair," sparse and broken (Hogan 27). Its architecture indicates "like other squat places, it was designed and built by Christian-minded, sky-worshipping people who did not want to look out windows at the threatening miles of frozen lake on one side of them and, on the other, at the dense, dark forest with its wolves" (Hogan 27). Her waking dream accesses the memory of her people's displacement by European settlers who saw Adam's Rib as a binary, either devoid of life or full of threatening nature. Fierce winters prompted white settlers to barricade inside houses designed to protect themselves against the elements. In contrast, Angel's many grandmothers view their homes and bodies as part of the landscape's ecosystem, surviving by patching their houses with "work-worn hands" and inhabiting the "loneliness" of the icy landscape (Hogan 28). The Fat-Eater's dependence on hunting and fishing, guided by a spiritual relationship with the land, makes the design of these settler colonial houses particularly restricting. The houses separate members of the Tribal community from the land and animals they need for survival. The house resists their cultural beliefs; its construction forces them to inhabit its space. Angel's fire-red room of anger manifests early in this space of limitation. Later, her deepening silence and awareness of self, land, and history emerge through the openness of surrounding lakes, inspiring her personal growth and a reassessment of her family's home.

The women find Hannah near death at her home. Angel describes the house as "shabby… unpainted, with tar paper over some of the walls. The door of her house had no lock. Where a lock had been was broken wood" (Hogan 242). Though Hannah does not seem to suffer any direct impacts from the threatened landscape, the timing of her death and the description of her house suggest otherwise. For Bachelard, a door is significant: "Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains. It has the sharpness of the dialectics of yes and no, which decides everything" (211-12). The splintered door represents a fluid passage between inside and outside space; it does not offer a safe barrier against trespassers, including death. Like Hannah's body, the battered door remains vulnerable to the whims of outsiders who enter.

Angel enters the house first, which changes her experience of her mother. She finds the house spare, old, and cold, "like Hannah's body...having the same little or nothing to offer" (Hogan 243). But as wind and shadows surround the house, death inhabits Hannah's body. It fills the space of her body and expels the wild spirits living inside her. Angel recounts, "What possessed her was now gone. It was now ordinary as air in a room, no more than dust…It was death, finally that allowed me to know my mother, her body, the house of lament and sacrifice that it was" (Hogan 250). While Hannah's body undergoes a physical transformation, Angel experiences a homecoming to her mother, which allows her to finally forgive her. Castor rightly notes the significance of this moment in the healing of Angel's trauma; complementing the earlier journey she takes with her grandmothers and Bush to result in a powerful illustration of empathy and communion with both kin and the land. This empathy more fully heals Angel *and* exemplifies Hogan's drive for ecological justice.

Dam(n)ing the Land

Indigenous resistance in the novel reflects the centuries-long fight against imperial seizure of Indigenous lands and water. Glen Coulthard explains, "Attacking the relationality of Indigenous political orders through the strategic targeting of Indigenous peoples' relationship to land has been a site of intense white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, serving as a mechanism to submit Indigenous lands and labor to the demands of capitalist accumulation and state-formation" (Coulthard and Simpson 254). As in *Solar Storms*, Water Protectors protested at Standing Rock during the 2016 resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline. They organized against what Winona LaDuke calls a "technological and geological experiment" to remake the land to benefit settler-colonial economies (49). In "Fighting for Our Lives: #NoDAPL in Historical Context," Nick Estes (Kul Wicasa) describes the movement to "protect water and land from inevitable spoliation in the name of profit" by governments and corporations as a defensive war (119). Estes traces the usurpation of Native water rights in the United States and Canada leading up to Oceti Sakowin resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline: "The work started in 1971 was done neither with regard to nor in consultation with the Cree communities in the region" (Waskaganish First Nation 1). Angel's fight against the hydrodam occurs as a result of reconnecting to her ancestral home. The long-term effects of the mega dam project would significantly impact First Nations' traditional practices in hunting, trapping, fishing in addition to altering the entire ecosystem[20]. In addition to hydro-dam projects, this type of temperate[21]

[20] The documentary film *People of a Feather* (2012) outlines scientific inquiry and findings that "Although the hydro-electric mega project on the Grand River in James Bay is quite distant from the community of Sanikiluaq, the massive plumes of fresh water release have changed the environment say the residents. They say it's changing ice conditions and disrupting the cycles of the wildlife, both land and sea, that they depend upon" (Montgomery, 1).
[21] Anya Zilberstein's *A Temperate Empire: Making Climate Change in Early America* explores how early Americans remade local climates "more temperate, uniform, and equal" to suit their goals of expansion, "an eighteenth-century forecast of permanent, global warming they wholeheartedly welcomed" (3).

colonialism permeates *Solar Storms* in the form of French fur trappers, mining, and complex land disputes between the U.S. and Canada.

Solar Storms consistently emphasizes how settler colonists view the land primarily as an extractable resource. Dora-Rouge and Angel recognize this settler mentality as a self-imposed "forgetting" of how to live in the world. For the settler-colonists, Dora-Rouge explains "[they"] called this world dangerous…they had trapped themselves inside their own destruction of it" (Hogan 180). Hogan distinguishes Indigenous communities from the white dam builders in their relationships with the land. She writes, "Their legacy, [Angel] began to understand, had been the removal of spirit from everything, from animals, trees, fishhooks, and hammers, all the things the Indians had as allies" (Hogan 180). In their fight against the hydro-dam builders, Hogan's characters model Glen Coulthard's concept of *grounded normativity,* which explicitly contrasts the settler-states epistemological view of the land. According to Coulthard, this ethical framework

> houses and reproduces the practices and procedures, based on deep reciprocity, that are inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place. Grounded normativity teaches us how to live our lives in relation to other people and nonhuman life forms in a profoundly nonauthoritarian, nondominating, nonexploitive manner. Grounded normativity teaches us how to be in respectful diplomatic relationships with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations with whom we might share territorial responsibilities or common political or economic interests. Our relationship to the land itself generates the processes, practices, and knowledges that inform our political systems, and through which we practice solidarity. (Coulthard and Simpson 254)

Because the dam workers cannot relate to or understand the land as an equal being, they attempt to subdue it rather than form symbiotic connections with it. This same lack of understanding prompts colonizers to see Indigenous cultures as ignorant or backward, or as "past tense presences…spectral, implied, and felt…lamentable casualties of national progress," excusing colonial stripping of Indigenous territories for profit (Byrd 21). For example, entire Indigenous communities in the novel depend on sustainable fishing for survival, but the whitefish breeding grounds have been paved over by dam developers. Settler-colonizers justify hydrodams and other ecological projects as necessary economic drivers, prioritizing capitalist economies over Indigenous ones. This justification emphasizes their complete unwillingness to recognize either Indigenous nations or the land itself as inextricably linked to human and global survival.

Hogan describes Indigenous people who are scarred, inhabited, tired, vacant, drowned, and/or dead. The state of their bodies mirrors various traumas experienced by the land and animals as they undergo violent commodification by corporations and governments. As Angel explains near the end of *Solar Storms*, "the people were in pain…It was a murder of the soul that was taking place [in the Fat-Eater's territory]. Murder with no consequences to the killers" (Hogan 226). The dam builders, police, soldiers, and corporations involved in the project ignore that rerouting the water poses significant risks to the environment and to the people of Sovereign Nations. In fact, "if anything they were rewarded" as evidenced by their ability to continue the project and earn capital for removing Indigenous people from their homes (Hogan 226). Angel states that the men who sought control over the land to build the hydroelectric dam did so from their "desire to guide the waters, narrow them down into the thin black electrical wires that traversed the world. They wanted to control water, the rise and fall of it, the direction of its ancient life. They wanted its power" (Hogan 268). Controlling the water lends control over the

population, incorporating the Tribal communities into the 'progress' of the developed world without their consent.

Indigenous territories have historically been claimed by settler governments through eminent domain or broken treaties. Removal has forced Native peoples into low socio-economic circumstances and erased rights to land they have historically inhabited, despite treaties with settler governments. Both land and people have been co-opted to produce materials benefitting their oppressors. Angel arrives to find Holy String Town, the site of the hydrodam project and Dora-Rouge's homeland, unrecognizable. Hogan explains, "the animals were no longer there, nor were the people or clans, the landmarks, not even the enormous sturgeons they called giants; and not the water they once swam in. Most of the trees had become nothing more than large mounds of sawdust" (225). The government and corporations have enacted violence on the whole ecosystem.

Like the white corporate employees who have no connection to the land, Hannah cannot function in harmony with the natural environment, or its people, or, ultimately, herself. Hannah's mixed-blood status and her early separation from her family speak to an embodied landlessness, which Angel notes throughout the novel. Spirits not belonging to her infest Hannah's body—a muddling of her white guardians' ideas, physical and sexual abuse, and violent exploitation that betray her roots to the land, people, and animals with whom she should share kinship. Her custodians' and lovers' physical and sexual exploitation leaves scars like tributaries on her skin, mapping Hannah's displaced body as one might mark a map of conquered land. Hannah's scars demonstrate the physical and emotional toll of settler states' control of water as inscribed on Indigenous bodies. Hannah Wing is the product of a blending of Anglo and Native cultures and cannot escape the pressures of the collisions of those two cultures. In her struggle to rectify her

displacement, she scars her body in a reflection of the scarred land that is being violently drained of its water for use by urban populations far away. The fracturing of her psyche, as well as the fracturing of her community as a direct result of the commodification of the land by the settler state legal system which does not recognize Indigenous sovereignty mimics the fracturing of the land itself. Her daughter Angel is only able to overcome that fracturing when she experiences a spiritual connection with the land during her boat trip with Dora Rouge. She must literally find herself in the woods where she becomes lost, and on the water. She must come to recognize her face in the face of the rock cliff, and make a spiritual leap in a dream state outside of time in the wilderness to be able to make her own psyche whole rather than to perpetuate the traumatic loss of her mother and the mothers before her, including the idea of "mother earth" as a protective, restorative force. Though she literally emerges from a river early in the novel, Hannah's confusion about her "place" in her own land leads her to commit crimes against it, such as killing a dog for pleasure, abandoning her children, and passing on the legacy of her scars to Angel, biting and burning her. Angel's healing is complicated by her relationship with her mother. However, she remains hopeful as she repairs her own relationship to her ancestral lands.

Reflecting on the shared scars and history between Angel and her mother, literary scholar Irene Vernon writes, "in narrating Angel's traumatic past and search for wholeness, Hogan reveals an *intergenerational trauma*, the idea that if trauma among a population is not addressed, the consequences can continue into subsequent generations, becoming more severe with each passing" (35). Indeed, Hannah herself was a product of the legacy of colonization her own mother, Loretta, suffered. Agnes explains, "the curse on that poor girl's life came from watching the desperate people of her tribe die… when she was still a girl, she'd been taken and used by men who fed her and beat her and forced her. That was how one day she became the one who

hurt others. It was passed down. I could almost hear their voices when she talked, babbling behind hers, men's voices, speaking English" (Hogan 39). Thus, Angel endures intergenerational trauma from various sources: her own displacement, Hannah's and Loretta's victimization, and the devastating impacts of colonialism on all her ancestors, including on their lands. Angel's journey in the novel offers several opportunities for healing from this trauma and ending the progression of severe consequences noted by Vernon. Hannah's death provides the first of these, and later in the novel, Angel's adoption of her newborn sister Aurora breaks the long cycle of trauma.

Both Lauren Olamina of Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* and Angel of *Solar Storms* struggle to belong as leaders within their communities. Hogan underscores the role of empathy in creating positive social change in a land that had been historically "dammed" and "damned" by settler colonists. Angel must begin this change by reconciling her displacement within an estranged ancestral home before she can effectively join her community's movement against hydroelectric dams. Community intervention largely depends on self-identification as a member of that community, which cannot occur if individuals do not feel connected to a place, as is Angel's case in the beginning of the novel. Lucy Lippard suggests, "for many, displacement is the factor that defines a colonized or expropriated place. And even if we can locate ourselves, we haven't necessarily examined our place in, or our actual relationship to, that place" (9). Achieving place attachment through their explorations of the land allows Angel, Bush, Dora-Rouge, and Agnes to re-story their surroundings.

Dreaming the Way Home – Plants, Water, Memory

After realizing the need for people to help protest the hydrodam project, Angel, Bush,

Agnes, and Dora-Rouge journey northward through the lakes and forests leading to the Fat-Eaters' territory. Bush leaves her home on the remote Fur Island, inhabited only by herself, spiders, and the bones of animals she reconstructs. The other women prepare for a long sojourn from which they do not expect Dora-Rouge to return. The remote, icy landscape of the Minnesota/Canada border reflects an immense freedom and spirituality that the intervening government systems, bent on technological progress, cannot provide. The mostly unaltered landscape enables Angel and her foremothers to nurture their connection with other-than-human nature and dwell as members of the ecosystem, not exploiters of its resources. Hogan presents this image of place, where humans thrive and transform in entanglement with the earth as an alternative to the imperial domination of nature. Moreover, the women's' travels mark a contrast to Bachelard's theory of space and place. In her book chapter "Land as Pedagogy, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) explains how Indigenous "'theory' is generated and regenerated continually through embodied practice and within each family, community and generation of people. It is woven with kinetics, spiritual presence, and emotion. It is contextual and relational. It is intimate and personal with individuals themselves holding the responsibilities for finding and generating meaning within their own lives (Simpson 151).

Solar Storms incorporates a circular narrative that contrasts Western narratives. As the women travel deeper into the wilderness, Hogan's prosaic descriptions evolve into a poetic experience of place. Hogan relies on oral traditions to foster a sense of self based on place in several instances: Bush's remembering of the events of Angel's childhood, Dora-Rouge's alliance with Tulik due to shared language and history, the failure of local or national newspapers to warn Indigenous peoples of the coming changes to their lands, and Angel's inheritance of plant dreaming. Even the kayaking trip itself, in which time slippage happens

frequently and where Western maps fail to provide accurate directions, is inscribed with the importance of storytelling and circular understandings of nature and history. Angel recalls, "As we traveled, we entered time and began to trouble it, to pester it apart into some kind of change. On the short nights we sat by firelight and looked at the moon's long face on water" (Hogan 168). Angel's healing echoes the potential for environmental healing. She experiences empathy for land and people when the vastness of the landscape enables her to connect back to her ancestral roots. At this point in the novel, she acknowledges, "I came alive… Cell by cell, all of us were taken in by water and land… plants began to cross my restless sleep in abundance… a first sharp leaf came up from the rich ground of my sleeping, opened upward from the place in my body that knew absolute truth… I knew how they breathed at night and that they were linked to us in this breath. It was the oldest bond of survival" (Hogan 170). On their journey, all four women merge with their environmental heritage, a legacy that blurs the divide between human and nature as Hogan resists forms of colonial violence through her characters' experience of nature as a network of exchange and renewal.

I read Angel's plant-dreaming, where she merges with water and land, similarly to Bachelard's concept of "daydreams of grandeur" in *The Poetics of Space*. Angel's plant-dreaming begins by encountering an object, in this case healing plants, and fleeing from it into the space of *elsewhere*. Once the daydream separates from the image of an object, it can freely create an original contemplation. Angel loses three days' time in the waterways during her search for the medicine required to heal Agnes. Bachelard explains that removing the original contemplation from the binding structure of the house as the formative image to suggest natural surroundings might promote one "to the dignity of the admiring being" by "transcending the world seen as it is, or as it was, before we started dreaming" (184). Angel's plant dreams become

moments of transcendence where she reaches across time and space to her ancestors and in connection with the earth.

Angel becomes connected to her ancestors by embodying the awe and the vastness of natural spaces. Bachelard theorizes daydreams can entail a connection between a subject and the land that substitutes for the connection between subject and the built home. Angel's depictions of natural warmth and reflections from the moon and stars replace the glaring kitchen lights and frosted windowpanes she centered in previous chapters. She illustrates the openness and intimacy of the island with a sense of reverence that does not accompany her descriptions of the houses in Oklahoma. In fact, this knowing of the land unravels time for Angel and the others, allowing her to inherit the ability to dream plants she has never seen, as her grandmothers did. She goes beyond the image of the plants she dreams and internalizes the immensity of nature and circular time evident in the landscape, and embodied. Hogan subverts Western linear time and centers Indigenous history occurring in the present.

Bachelard proclaims, "For our house is our corner of the world...it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (4). For Hogan, landscape constitutes the true universe and the true house, which marks another departure from Bachelard's construction of time. Angel encounters nature as home on her journey to recover the medicinal plants she needs to help Agnes: "Maybe the roots of dreaming are in the soil of dailiness, or in the heart, or in another place without words, but when they come together and grow, they are like the seeds of hydrogen and the seeds of oxygen that together create ocean, lake, and ice" (Hogan 171). Plant dreaming provides a shelter for Angel's development, so that the seeds of her ancestral forest bear real, tangible connections to her past.

Her relationship with the Earth is renewed through the exploration of Indigenous knowledges accessed through place and people. Kyle Powys Whyte asserts, "Indigenous knowledges, in the simplest terms, refer to systems of monitoring, recording, communicating, and learning about the relationships among humans, nonhuman plants and animals, and ecosystems that are required for any society to survive and flourish" (157). In discovering her ability for what Dora-Rouge calls plant-dreaming, Angel strengthens her relationship to both her people and the land. Ecological information is encoded in Angel's cultural memory. She remembers her ancestors' knowledge of plants and ability to travel through the shifting waterways through ancestral dreams, explaining, "I'd have never thought there might be people who found their ways by dreaming. The old world dawning new in me was something like the way a human eye righted what was upside down, turned over an image and saw true" (Hogan 189). The land performs work Bachelard reserves for the constructed house. Where houses have failed Angel, the land offers safety and opportunities for self-expression and ancestral connection. The land links Angel with her history and provides hope for the future, one that she will continue to fight for at the end of her journey, and one that offers a model for resilience in the face of climate change: renewing our relationship with the land as place, the land as *home*.

Traveling through the waterways, Angel and her grandmothers re-story the histories of those rivers through a poetic experience of place. They call out the traditional names of the rock cliffs and islands—names that do not appear on Bush's Western map—notice plants used in traditional medicines, re-inhabit, and become inhabited by the waterscape. Angel describes paddling through "the wide shining spaces of [her] dreams" (Hogan 166). She imagines the future that that the women are recreating as they travel, listening to the land and becoming part of it. This intimate experience with ecology is in direct contrast to the developers building the

dam, who view water as a commodity. Angel and her family, though, connect and count themselves, historically and presently, as members of the biosphere. The landscape opens up before her and she observes, "I heard our own deep-pitched songs that were the songs of land speaking through its keepers…I heard the old ones in the songs of wolves. It made me think we were undoing the routes of explorers, taking apart the advance of commerce, narrowing down and distilling the truth out of history" (Hogan 176). Through her witnessing, she repairs the history of human, nonhuman, and animal binaries imposed by Western thought on her community. To recognize the historical significance of the land – to name what has happened – constitutes the first step in redressing the history of violence. Angel recognizes herself in the history of the waterscape and places herself within the future of "[her] people, as [she] would come to call them" (Hogan 37). She begins her transformation from Angel Jensen to Angel Iron. She becomes herself through the ceremony of naming, reclaiming her Indigenous roots. Though Adam's Rib is the site of the original violence inflicted on her by her mother, she later comes back to the scarred land after her journey to the Fat-Eaters with a new sense of hope.

Each of the women experience place and space differently during the journey, emerging with a stronger sense of kinship among themselves, within, and with all living things. Bush's experience takes her outside her own solitude and grief. Bush "opened up like the lilies that flowered on some of the islands, at first tentative and delicate and finally with resolve" (Hogan 37). Back on Fur Island, she lived alone on her small house and never really fit into the larger community. During the journey, she becomes intimate with the landscape, finally taking down the borders she created to protect herself from grief and betrayal. Angel "was uncontained as she had previously been contained by skin, house, island, and water" (Hogan 37). Bush starts to heal from the devastating loss of Angel as a young child and from the wounds created by Hannah.

Angel watches as Bush's eyes "soften" and she "dance[s] a slow dance... talk[s] to the land" (Hogan 178).

Angel describes the women as "full" and powerful" and "wearing the face of the world" as they travel in the watery forests of their ancestors en route to save their relatives – the water, land, people, and animals (Hogan 178). Agnes begins to sing again, and talks "in the old language," remembering her ancestors and her language, while Dora-Rouge reads things in the water seeing "what couldn't be seen by [others] as the land and the soundless mists passed by" (Hogan 178). In these moments, as the women call out place names in Indigenous languages and find paintings made by their spirit ancestors on cliff walls, they cement their connection to the history of this region and of the earth. They re-story the settler colonist narrative that this land was found empty. Angel finds unity with the landscape and across time to an era when she was fish or wolverine. Hogan writes, "the canoes were our bodies, our skin...all of it was storied land, land where deities walked, where people traveled desiring to be one with infinite space" (178). At this transformative juncture, the women are most powerful. They find community in each other, and Angel realizes she believes in them and loves them.

The novel links the topography of the forest and the women's ancestry to the changing physical, mental, and spiritual revolutions occurring in each of them. For Angel, her journey helps her find love and belief in a future, especially through her ancestral dreams. She finds hope in the knowing of her ancestors, in dreaming them, and in the healing plants that are her grandmothers' legacies. Understanding that water and memory are linked in a constant renewal, she notes "a human is alive water," like tributaries that carry the memory of beginnings and of home (Hogan 351). Angel contemplates, "older creatures are remembered in the blood…Maybe earth itself is just now starting to form" (Hogan 351). Their intimacy with other-than-human

nature allows the women to explore the depths of their identities, the vastness of consciousness that only the open spaces of the wild can foster. As Bachelard notes, "The house is physically inscribed within us. It is a group of organic habits" (14). The women's journey inscribes a new set of organic habits within them, and they extend the protective nature of Adam's Rib to the surrounding landscape. As the land changes, so too do the women. Having fled the many houses containing them in the past, the women experience a transcendence of physical being. They become related by their experience of this sprawling space, emerging from the duality of inside/outside spaces, using the house as a starting point where the women are bound to embody the structure of their surroundings. Instead of developing agency through a poetic rendering of the house, they shed the skin of the house and gain the freedom to embrace the land itself, once again, as home.

Reading the Possibility of a Better Future

In his book chapter "How Do We Become Good Ancestors," Daniel Heath Justice explores the ways in which Indigenous literature creates space for kinship and for seeing possibility. He notes how Indigenous bodies and Indigenous stories are historically and presently targeted by settler colonists, resulting in violence and erasure. He also describes how the continued presence of both the People and their stories – their lived experience in all its complexity – "offer hope of something better" (102). It might seem antithetical to some readers to call *Solar Storms* a novel of hope. We know from the story's ending and from the reality of the James Bay project that many Indigenous people lost their homes, families, and lives to the colonial project. The hydrodam radically altered the lives of human and other-than-human people, including drowning plants and animals in some places, and drying up animal and plant

habitats and hunting and fishing grounds in others. Heath Justice observes, however, "the stories we tell and share make possible new, better relationships that honour the best of what we had while undoing the worst of what we've been given… the stories that will make a difference aren't the easy ones" (102). *Solar Storms*' hopefulness stems from its ability to take the messy, complicated, traumatic histories of Angel and her ancestors and create a "narrative of reclamation and renewal" [22].

Hogan's depiction of Angel during and after the protest suggests that renewal of the land is possible. Angel notes "in time it would be angry land. It would try to put an end to the plans for dams and drowned rivers…would break loose and rage over the ground, tearing out dams and bridges, the construction all broken by the blue, cold roaring of ice no one was able to control" (Hogan 224). The protesters in the novel may have been only partially successful at stopping the dam's construction, but their resistance and their renewed kinship are acts that offer the possibility of a better future. Angel describes renewal of the land as akin to renewal of the protesters' willingness to fight, saying "the Indian people would be happy with the damage, with the fact that water would do what it wanted and in its own way. What water didn't accomplish, they would" (Hogan 224).

When Angel, Bush, and Dora Rouge finally arrive at Holy String Town after their kayaking journey, they are shocked by the devastation. The islands nearest the outpost became mudflats as their lakes were diverted, rotting fish and vegetation cover the land, and a moose trapped in the mire sinks to its death while they try, in vain, to help it escape. The town itself is overrun by machines and workers sent to mine the land for any resources available, including

[22] In *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction: The New Memory of Latinidad*, Irizarry establishes reclamation as one of four dominant categories of narrative that decenter stories of arrival and integration into the Anglo-American world. She discusses Latinx literature in her book, but I see several intersections among anti-colonial Latinx literatures and Indigenous literatures. Both Irizarry and Justice allow for the creation of new memory – possibilities of hope within communities whose voices were historically marginalized.

trees and precious metals, prior to the scheduled flooding of the land. All of the healing plants were destroyed, and most people turned to alcohol and drugs to numb the horror of these conditions. Angel notices "the devastation and ruin that fell over the land had fallen over the people, too. Most were too broken to fight the building of the dams, the moving of waters, and that perhaps had been the intention all along" (Hogan 226). It is clear to her, though, that Dora Rouge is already thinking of ways to intervene – to bring back hope through kinship and connection. Angel could "see Dora Rouge thinking: how do conquered people get back their lives?" and the answer is in joining the protests (Hogan 226).

Dora Rouge believes that protesting is a form of hope, since "those who protested were the ones who believed they could still survive as a people" (Hogan 226). She meets Tulik, a distant relative of hers, who remembers her as a young woman. Tulik and Bush find a shared sense of justice and they all begin to rebuild the foundations of kinship, moving in with him and his daughter Auntie. Together, He and Bush enter a community of protesters willing to fight for their relatives and for their other-than-human relations against the dam and its corporate builder BEEVCO. In a meeting with the contractors, it becomes clear that the decision to move forward with the dam had already been made. The white contractors refer to the protesters as though they have no history or present connectedness to what the men consider civilization, calling them "remnants of the past" and explaining he wants to "bring them into the twentieth century" (Hogan 280). As a result, Angel's anger spurs her and others to become more invested in fighting the dam. She notes, "for my people our problem has always been this: that the only possibility of survival has been resistance. Not to strike back has meant certain loss and death. To strike back has also meant loss and death, only with a fighting chance. To fight has meant that we can respect ourselves, we Beautiful People. Now we believed in ourselves once again" (Hogan 325).

The protesters' sense of autonomy grows as tribal nations increasingly arrive to join the cause. The Nomadic People, who appear in between hunts, contribute an especially important reflection. They tell Angel, "There are stories for everything… but not for this. We needed a story for what was happening to us now, as if a story would guide us" (Hogan 302). The stories being reported widely centered the perspective of the Canadian government and the corporation, calling the protesters "occupiers" and referring to them as the enemy (Hogan 302). *The Greater River News*, and other papers, radio, and television broadcasts, as well as government documents such as the dam proposal itself, all failed to recognize or value Indigenous people or their rights to their own lands and lives. Like the maps that failed Bush earlier during the kayaking journey, Indigenous people were excluded from and erased from history and from the present. Printed words were weapons, and ones that were reinscribed and upheld by courts.

During the year after Angel escapes the violence and fracturing at the protest site, she testifies regularly in the court case against the dam construction, familiarizing herself with legal terms, historical maps, and petitions. As literary scholar Geoffrey Stacks observes, even Angel's scars take on a new significance as she navigates through the legal process. He states "Hogan casts mapping as a type of scarring on the face of the earth. But, more importantly, as Angel learns to co-opt the power of writing and mapping and transforms them into weapons with which to fight the government's dams, her face becomes a sign of healing instead of violence" (Stacks 162). This illustrates what Stacks calls the "possibility of a defiant cartography, one that is historically rooted in indigenous culture, narrative in nature, and connected to the land and therefore able to resist rather than assist colonization" (162). During the court battle, Angel notes the way that even then, despite grass roots organizing and increased attention to the American Indian Movement, people view her community as lacking. She declares, "To others we were

such insignificant people. In their minds we were only a remnant of the past. They romanticized this past in fantasy… but they despised our real human presence…but now we were present. Alive, a force to be reckoned with" (Hogan 343). Significantly, the Fat-Eaters take the name "The Beautiful People" once again, rejecting the name given to them by settler colonists. Angel states, "even with a few dissenters we were a field of rich soil growing" (Hogan 314). Hogan paints a new beginning for Angel and her relatives, one that offers the possibility for them to create their own futures, preserve and continue Indigenous communities and ways of being in the world, even in the face of a climate in crisis.

Conclusion

Daniel Heath Justice believes that Indigenous literatures are "dedicated to possibilities beyond the impoverished imaginations of those who would long ago have seen Indigenous peoples disappear… so many visions of love made manifest in words… this is how we learn to live together. We love…. We love the world enough to fight for it – and one another" (180). The same can be said of Black literatures. Indeed, Heath Justice references Octavia Butler's famous speech on "why science fiction matters to Black people and their struggle for justice and liberation" as a precursor this conclusion in his book (150). Butler's and Hogan's novels present models for how living together in the Anthropocene can be accomplished through empathy and kinship.

In Chapter One, I discussed the effects of social and environmental injustice on communities, and how *Parable of the Sower* celebrates the survival of Black people, and especially Black women leaders. I emphasize how Butler portrays how Lauren works across race, gender, ability, age, sexuality, and geography to encourage kinship bonds that will help

species survive in the Anthropocene. In *Solar Storms*, Hogan shows how Angel also reaches out across these lines to establish how Indigenous climate narratives matter in addressing ecological injustice. The novel highlights the roles of women in community with themselves, other people, and other-than-human nature, including animals and water. Hogan underscores the importance of storytelling, much like Butler's focus on Lauren Olamina's spreading the message of Earthseed proves crucial in building community and creating change in the book. The two novels share young protagonists who insist that things can get better. Lauren Olamina and Angel Iron both reach back through time and look forward to building a world in which they have autonomy over their bodies, lives, and their lands.

In Chapter Three, I show how Naijamerican[23] author Nnedi Okorafor's novel *Lagoon* furthers our understanding of human and other-than-human relationships in the face of global climate change. Okorafor sets her novel in Nigeria and asks what might the future look like if humans had alien technology that eliminated dependency on oil. Like Butler and Hogan, Okorafor is interested in empathy and kinship, though both empathy and kinship in her novel look quite different. In *Lagoon*, Okorafor also addresses the effects of colonization on Nigeria while conveying connection to Nigerian cultural history, traditions, and spirituality. Many of the characters speak Igbo or Nigerian pidgin English. The characters themselves become hybrids, and as in Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, change and transformation are key elements in surviving the Anthropocene. Taken together, these three novels give us a glimpse of how kinship and empathy can help us live and work together to fight climate change in all our parts of the world.

[23] In her 2016 Blog post, "Naijamerican Eyes on Lagos," Dr. Okorafor explains that she prefers the term Naijamerican to Nigerian-American, as the newer hybridized term implies a deeper intimacy with Nigeria than the hyphenated term.

CHAPTER THREE: EMPATHY, CLIMATE, AND THE OTHER-THAN-HUMAN IN NNEDI OKORAFOR'S LAGOON

'"The winds of change are blowing. We are change. You will see. …We come to bring you together and refuel your future,' Ayodele said. 'Your land is full of a fuel that is tearing you apart. We do not seek your oil or your other resources…we are here to nurture your world…So, what will you do?'"

"Water is life. *Aman Iman.*"

- Nnedi Okorafor, *Lagoon*

Introduction

One major tenet of postcolonial writing is that it highlights a "decentering" of the traditional Western narrative of superiority over colonized people and attempts to rewrite that Eurocentric narrative by giving voice to the marginalized. Others "write back" to the center by recreating the English narrative from the perspective of the colonized. Nnedi Okorafor's Africanfuturist novel *Lagoon* (2014) moves beyond writing back to the center as it examines the impact of Anthropogenic climate change in Nigeria. In "Proximity and Intra-action in Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*," Carissa Ma explains Okorafor's departure from typical SF tropes to incorporate both "science fiction and indigenous cosmologies derived from West African traditions," linking *Lagoon* to novels such as Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and Hogan's *Solar Storms* (Ma 62). Departing from Afrofuturism, Okorafor establishes *Lagoon* as Africanfuturism, which decenters the West rather than responding to it or creating a counternarrative.

The novel is set in Lagos, the world's fifth most populous city, hailed as "one of the most polluted places on Earth," yet one of the most vibrant and promising cities of the future (Dixon n.p.). Both effluence and promise stem from the same foundation: oil. Okorafor depicts Lagos as an energetic epicenter of change where humans, animals, plants, monsters, and aliens all come together to reimagine their mutual futures. The novel opens with the destruction of an oil pipeline contaminating the lagoon momentarily before extraterrestrial visitors land, cleanse the water, and accelerate the evolution of the sea creatures. As the site of first contact, the lagoon, and more broadly Lagos, acts as a place of transformation, first for its inhabitants, then its visitors, and finally, the world.

The story unfolds through the experiences of three strangers who have more in common than they initially realize. Through their partnership with the alien ambassador Ayodele, they drive the transformation of Lagos from an oil-based economy to the world leader in alternative energy, setting the stage for global change. Critics have noted *Lagoon*'s contributions to "Petrofiction," or narratives that deal with the histories and effects of oil culture. Crude petroleum and petroleum gas are Nigeria's major exports, comprising a combined 84.3% of its GDP. As in "Anthropocene," the term Petrofiction can sometimes inadvertently obscure issues of gender, class, and power brought about by material exchanges in Postcolonial climate narratives. On the other hand, ecofeminism, the lens through which I read this novel, has sometimes suffered from being a theory-movement with few discernable boundaries. Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy write in their introduction to *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*,

> Ecofeminism is a practical movement for social change arising out of the struggles of women, their families, and their communities. These struggles are waged against the 'maldevelopment' and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies,

> multinational corporations, and global capitalism… Ecofeminism is not a single master theory and its practitioners have different articulations of their social practice. (2)

Transnational/postcolonial ecofeminisms, for example, critique global capitalism's impact on the environment, marginalized communities, and on the poor and Indigenous. *Lagoon* critiques the Nation-State's collusions with global capital in its emphasis on the oil economy's disruption of place and environment. Since 1992, Carolyn Merchant's *Radical Ecology* (reprinted in 2005) has explained how the early 20th century disposition towards feminizing the land into dichotomies—on the one hand, the earth was a kind and beneficent mother who provided for her children, on the other, a wild and uncontrollable feminine that must be subdued—was used as justification for stripping resources during the advent of modernity, which required raw materials for projects of war and industry. That project continues today as neocolonial pursuits of fossil fuels displace people and other-than-humans in the name of profit, all the while contributing to global climate change.

Certainly, this has been the case as part of the West's imperializing rush to secure oil, mostly from countries in the Global South, as in the case of Nigeria. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon emphasizes how oil corporations in Ogoniland (part of what is now called Nigeria) "transformed the Niger Delta into a Bermuda Triangle for human rights" (105). Detailing the trial of Ken Saro-Wiwa, Ogoni author and environmental activist who was executed by the Nigerian government in 1995, Nixon describes the "recolonization" of Nigeria by cooperation between oil companies and the Abacha regime. More than 2,000 Ogoni people were killed "through direct murder or burning of villages" and "Ogoni air had been fouled by the flaring of natural gas, their croplands scarred by oil spills, their drinking and fishing waters poisoned" (Nixon 107). Just a few years earlier, Merchant drew on the emergent

philosophy of "ecofeminisme" established by French writer Francois d'Eaubonne to call upon women for an ecological revolution in response to what d'Eaubonne saw as increasingly severe ecological problems brought about by male dominant culture. While some ecofeminist ethics, such as "ethic of care" or "Mother Earth rhetoric," have been critiqued as forwarding essentialist ideas (such as that women are natural nurturers), ecofeminism has nonetheless persisted in its attempt to eliminate or at least complicate the various power dynamics inherent in Western dualisms, like male/female, nature/culture, mind/body, and self/other. This critique is increasingly important in the Anthropocene, when these dualisms present a challenge to conservation legislation, human/animal rights issues, and mitigating climate change.

Ecofeminism is evolving to meet those challenges in the form of adopting a "Posthuman" lens. In their book chapter "Contemporary Ecofeminism and Confucian Cosmology," Taine Duncan and Nicholas Brasovan suggest that Ecofeminism has transformed in the last few decades to forward a "philosophical and ecological worldview where the reality of matter, material interaction, vitality and energy takes precedence" and where "'posthumanism' implies both a rejection of the autonomous subjects of humanist (Kantian) philosophy, and a rejection of the inherited anthropocentrism of modernity" (1). In this chapter, I explore how this material turn in ecocriticism helps foster Okorafor's vision for a more tentacular view of society. *Lagoon's* focus on the other-than-human decenters humans from the climate narrative, shifting the perspective from Anthropocene to Chthulucene. Acknowledging the connections among human-animal-other provides a more robust framework for creating positive change in the Chthulucene.

Context

Shell Nigeria is now the largest crude petroleum exporter in Nigeria and is primarily responsible for polluting the Niger Delta, spilling almost 452,000 barrels of oil there between 1998 and 2009 alone. The company is entrenched in ongoing complex legal battles in Nigeria and has settled financially with others in the region as a "humanitarian gesture," without admitting fault (Mouawad, 2009). Shell continues to export about 50% of the Niger Delta's crude oil without providing financial compensation for environmental degradation to air, water, and soil to communities who live in or near extraction sites. In May of 2021, a Dutch court ruled that Royal Dutch Shell is responsible for greenhouse gas emissions caused by its oil production and the resulting downstream use of their products by consumers. Oil production and use are some of the most powerful drivers of climate change. In *Lagoon*, Okorafor positions Lagos as the site for a major global shift in fossil fuel consciousness. She accomplishes this through a first-contact narrative that "renegotiates canonical categories of race and species" to subvert Western perceptions of racial hierarchies and species boundaries (Rahn 84). As such, the novel decenters humans and partners them with other-than-humans as symbiotic agents of change who practice empathy and kinship as an antidote to anthropogenic climate change.

Lagoon begins from the perspectives of two other-than-human characters. The first, Udide Okwanka, or the Supreme Spider Artist, sets up the frame narrative through the eyes of a Nigerian God who shapes the world through storytelling. Okwanka's introduction skewers the colonists, mocking their lack of creativity in naming Lagos for the lagoon they encountered and highlighting their failure to consult with those already living there. Beyond decentering the colonial perspective, this brief prologue highlights the significance of other-than-humans and the centrality of African cosmologies to the narrative. The spider references the world as a place

"masked by millions of names, guises, and shifting stories," alluding to the tension between contrasting narratives and which ones get privileged (Okorafor n.p.). Storytelling is vital to the creation and maintaining of the world, but as Okwanka notes, these stories grow more complicated, suggesting the need for a more complex solution that will be realized by the end of the novel.

Act I introduces the second voice, a swordfish intent on destroying a poisonous underwater oil pipeline, the site of economic, biotic, and cultural exchange at the heart of Okorafor's novel. The swordfish is a thinking, feeling entity angry at the humans who have "brought the noise and made the world bleed black ooze that left poison rainbows on the water's surface" (Okorafor 3). From the first few sentences of the novel, *Lagoon* emphasizes the relationships among humans, water, other-than-human animals, and extractive capitalism. The swordfish is "on a mission" to destroy the oil pipeline that "looks like a giant dead snake," something she has done before and will do again, if she must, to protect her waters – even if it kills her (Okorafor 3). She is willing to sacrifice herself to prevent further environmental degradation.

Interestingly, the swordfish breaks up spurts of intense rhetoric with a warm revelation that these waters make her happy, though she was not born there and migrates regularly. "Everyone knows" these are her waters, and she has some ancestral memories of this being the birthplace of one of her parents (Okorafor 3). She models place attachment to these waters off the coast of Lagos, exhibiting fierce protection over the place she calls home. She is a cosmopolitan traveler, and she realizes the interconnectedness of these waters and others, the relationships among species-land-water-oil. This representation of other-than-humans

recognizing place and fighting against climate change is critical to understanding how we can co-create new futures that imagine better ways of living for the entire biosphere.

Aliens land off the coast of Lagos, making first contact with the swordfish and granting her wish to become larger and stronger so she can protect her waters. The aliens can reshape matter and do so to purify the ocean for sea creatures and plants, erasing decades of damage caused by oil spills. Ayodele, the alien ambassador, then calls three humans to Bar Beach, the site of the alien landing, and unveils the special abilities the three were born with during an underwater meeting. Adaora is a marine biologist who can breathe underwater. Anthony, a Ghanaian hip hop artist, is given a voice that can be heard and understood by all at great distances. Agu is a soldier who has superhuman strength. Together, the four of them work to bring positive change to Lagos and to the world itself.

The aliens who come to Lagos bearing solutions to the city's and the world's dependence on fossil fuels merge with humans and the other-than-human and awaken Nigerian Gods and Goddesses who enlist in the fight. This combination of art, science, and folklore guiding the novel's narrative constitutes, as environmental humanities scholar Melody Jue notes, "a practice of resistance against western paradigms of scientific practice that are centered around the control and domination of nature," extending agency to non-Western subjects and to the other-than human, who are often overlooked in global discussions of climate change survival (Jue 174). Science fiction in general, but especially SF centered on global Indigenous and Black communities, is critical to thinking through solutions for survival in the Anthropocene because of its unique ability to engage with plural subjectivities, as seen in Okorafor's work. *Lagoon* prioritizes voices, histories, and subjects who force readers to rethink traditional Western hierarchies. Instead, as literary scholar Judith Rahn observes, Okorafor creates a literary form

"more appropriate to reflect and engage with changing political, social, and economic advances" that go beyond typical representations of global climate change by steeping the narrative within Nigeria's culture, language, and landscape, and also by disrupting the assumption that humans are naturally superior than other-than-humans (Rahn 87).

Chapters One and Two of my dissertation emphasize Butler's and Hogan's characters' resistance to ecocide through forming empathic kinship relationships with other people and with the land. This is especially salient in the characters of Angel and her mother Hannah, where their stories are connected not just by flesh and blood, but by stories and histories long before they were born and far off into the future. I argue that Afrofuturism, in the case of *Parable of the Sower* and Africanfuturism, in the case of *Lagoon*, share that aspect of Indigenous literature re-storying present experience by incorporating histories of trauma and engaging with them to transform the future into something new and better. Okorafor's characters in *Lagoon*, whether animal, plant, or other, are shaped by the histories of colonialism and capitalism, but also by Igbo tradition and folklore, African cosmologies, and varying religious and cultural beliefs. The novel re-stories the neocolonial project of oil extraction in Nigeria by destroying the oil pipeline and rebalancing the ocean, valorizing Lagos as the city of the future, and critiquing the dominant Western values of colonization and Christianity that usurp Nigerian cosmologies. Moreover, Okorafor decenters humans from the narrative, emphasizing kinship among all, rather than placing humans at the top of a hierarchy in nature. Together, they create a new future as the novel's characters accept change and become something more through the dissolution of binaries.

Life in the Water/Water is Life – Human and Other than Human

Lagoon highlights material connections between humans, other-than-humans, and non-living things. In doing so, it participates in Posthuman ecofeminism, which joins science studies to ecofeminism to emphasize the material connections among humans and non-humans in the biosphere. This follows earlier critical work in Science Studies, especially Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*, Donna Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, and the work of Anna Tsing, but also marks a specific transition for ecofeminism where feminist New Materialists have contributed greatly to literary environmental criticism. Serenella Iovino, Serpil Oppermann, Greta Gaard, Patrick Murphy, Stacy Alaimo, Elizabeth Povinelli, Karen Barad and Astrida Neimanis are but a few of the voices working at these intersections. Iovino and Oppermann's *Material Ecocriticism* and Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* shift from an anthropocentric view of human experiences of things to the active participation of nonhuman forces in events. Elizabeth Povinelli's *Economies of Abandonment* and Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* link politics and material matter to ethics and agency within communities, an underlying theme in literature of the Anthropocene. Stacy Alaimo's concept of "trans-corporeality,"[24] or "movement across bodies and nature" is a significant step in ecofeminism that transcends Morton's concept of "The Mesh"[25] to accentuate ecocriticism's insights into environmental health and justice, two key issues in Okorafor's *Lagoon*.

[24] See Alaimo's *Bodily Natures*, where she explains that "trans" indicates movement across bodies which "opens up a mobile space that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents and other actors" (2).

[25] In "The Mesh," Morton calls for Ecocriticism to move beyond essentialist tendencies by adopting Deconstructionist methods, which I believe is critical. I suggest Alaimo does this and more by providing for the movement among entangled actors that moves Ecofeminism from an ethic of care to an interrelated partnership.

Posthuman ecofeminism combines feminist ecocriticism with concepts of materiality to allow for a more robust understanding that "Ecofeminism is based not only on the recognition of connections between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women across patriarchal societies. It is also based on the recognition that these two forms of domination are bound up with class exploitation, racism, colonialism, and neocolonialism" that moves among material networks between human and non-human nature (Gaard and Murphy 3). One of the most critical of those material networks in *Lagoon* is water—acting as bodies, boundary, resource, and even as place. In a chapter entitled "Hydrofeminism: Or, on Becoming a Body of Water," Astrida Neimanis asks what thinking of the self as a body of water might offer to feminism. Combining ecology and feminism allows us to imagine how materials such as water play a role in shaping ourselves as well as in showing the myriad ways in which identity shapes the environment. Neimanis asserts, "Even while in constant motion, water is also a planetary archive of meaning and matter. To drink a glass of water is to ingest the ghosts of bodies that haunt that water. Just as the deep oceans harbor particulate records of former geological eras, water retains our more anthropomorphic secrets…Our distant and more immediate pasts are returned to us in both trickles and floods" (Neimanis 98).

Neimanis makes a valuable contribution here about the ways in which oppressions, histories, bodies, and environments are linked in a network that is impossible to separate. This chapter will examine how these networks might be represented in ways that may encourage new types of responses to Anthropocene problems, like rising sea levels, displaced people, toxic water, and animal species habitat loss, not to mention the violence that surrounds these issues. Because *Lagoon* imagines that non-humans and humans are linked through porous materials,

boundaries become complicated and survival on Earth requires that we think through issues as a collective rather than strictly through human eyes.

Lagoon is divided into three acts: Welcome, Awakening, and Symbiosis. Act I contains a prologue entitled "Moom," where Other-than-human actors in stories show their full participation in the global sphere, which help us to navigate solutions that are not solely anthropocentric. In fact, as the aliens purify the waters for the sea creatures, it becomes toxic to humans. This does not mean humans cannot participate in the changing world. It means that humans cannot put themselves at the center of the solutions—the character in the novel must adapt to the needs of other-than-humans, rather than forcing others to adapt or die. *Lagoon* highlights symbiotic entanglements such as this throughout the novel, which demonstrate how empathy and kinship with the other-than-human can bring about positive change in a climate-changed world.

"Moom" was originally a short story which became the basis for *Lagoon*. In *Nnedi's Wahala Zone Blog*, Okorafor describes her swordfish as another "citizen" of the world who would "be of interest" to aliens making first contact (Okorafor n.p.). Her idea partially stems from an article she read about swordfish attacking an Angolan oil pipeline, and her desire to commemorate these "environmentalist swordfish" (Okorafor n.p.). Beginning the novel from the swordfish's perspective forces the reader to attune to the ocean and ocean-life as a prime site for exploring the advent and effects of climate change. As in *Parable of the Sower* and *Solar Storms*, *Lagoon* links the health and safety of water to the ability of Earth citizens to not just survive in the Anthropocene, but to thrive. Yet, *Lagoon* takes this idea a step further to incorporate a more inclusive biotic picture of the affected world. Butler focuses very little on animal welfare in *Parable of the Sower*; and while Hogan includes the stories and histories of how settler-colonists

disrupt ecosystems of animal and plant species especially, *Lagoon* gives other-than-humans a voice of their own. In this first chapter, the swordfish "remembers her last form, a yellow monkey" who had loved to swim, who believes the "water has always called to her" and who imagines her next life beyond this form (Okorafor 2).

She also recalls a life where she was able to live on both land and water. These remembrances of other lives position the swordfish as an ancestor, providing "guidance for thinking about nonhuman others in ways that risk but ironically resist domesticating or romanticizing the other by focusing attention on the lives, the knowledge, the arts, the values, and the beliefs of people who dwell among these species" (Steinwand 185). Adaora represents a link to the swordfish through her understanding and practice of marine biology, though she will not come to fully empathize with them until Ayodele helps her become one later in the novel. Ayodele serves the swordfish and other sea creatures by asking them what they want and granting their desires. In this way, the novel asks the reader to empathize with the meaningfulness of the swordfish's life beyond merely viewing it as thing, creature, or resource, but as a citizen of the world with unique needs, capabilities, and desires that upend Western hierarchies of Man/Nature and allow for other narratives to emerge and be heard. This also helps to mark the difference between alien as invader and alien as "guest." Rather than colonize Lagos, the aliens ask its inhabitants what they want and need, and then help them achieve those goals rather than impose their will on Lagos.

After the swordfish impales the pipeline and is overwhelmed by the "bitter-sweet tasting poison" harvested by Shell, she is the first to benefit from the "clean, sweet, sweet, *sweet*…sweetest water she's ever breathed!", an alien juxtaposition against the foul, poisoned water created by the oil corporation (Okorafor 3). An enormous gathering of unique sea creatures

surrounds a shifting, colorful mass like a coral reef radiating light and clean energy that the swordfish sees as "wilder" and "more alive" than even her previous beautiful reef home—a "paradise" for sea creatures whose light "embraces" them and heals them from missing tentacles and other maladies, likely caused by humans (Okorafor 4-5). The aliens, seen as golden orbs of light, ask the swordfish and others what they want and then transform them into larger creatures, more able to defend and protect themselves.

The "New People" have "gentle movements" that are "soothing and non-threatening," and the water is "so clean that it will cure the worst human illnesses and cause a hundred more illnesses not yet known to humankind" (Okorafor 4). This watery vision sets the scene for the complicated nature of change during the Anthropocene. The swordfish embraces the changes to her body, but also refers to herself as a "monster," and while most of the animals benefit from the alien energy, many die upon the sudden impact of the alien ship landing in the water—especially small animals. In *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment,* Jonathan Steinwand argues that the recent "cetacean turn in postcolonial literature invites us to attend to the survivance strategies that provide localized challenges to environmental universalism, correctives to the sentimentalizing tendencies of environmentalism and the caution that a sustainable future must avoid imperialist nostalgia" (185).

I argue that this goes beyond merely cetacean beings, but any kind of other-than-human in climate narratives. The swordfish, in this case, might be considered the antithesis of the common polar bear climate meme, where an emaciated bear and her cub struggle to find food on a disappearing ice shelf. In *Lagoon,* animals do not need to be cute, helpless, or sentimentalized to be worth protecting; they do not need to be anthropomorphized to warrant finding solutions for their threatened wellbeing. This represents a shift in the way we think about climate change

narratives and who gets to have a say—the swordfish has agency to make changes to her environment and to what humans can accomplish within it. She thus disrupts the hierarchies imposed by traditional Western thought.

In addition to recognizing the swordfish and other sea creatures as crucial to *Lagoon's* climate narrative, the novel emphasizes the importance of water to sustaining a thriving ecosystem. The aliens make first contact with sea creatures, but the setting of that meeting is equally significant. The aliens avoid contact with humans until they have set things right in the ocean, eliminating the sludge and poisonous ecosystem humans have created. It is clear that ocean life can only thrive in healthy waters since the ocean is literally their home. The expectation is clear, too, that humans need clean water to survive. However, as it does for the swordfish, the ocean also signifies meaning in a more phenomenological sense for humans. Adaora, Anthony, and Agu approach Bar Beach, looking for comfort at the water's edge after each undergoing traumatizing events. Adaora recalls the healing aspect of proximity to Bar Beach over the course of her life. She has just had a fight with her husband Chris and needs closeness to the beach to escape their violent interaction. The presence of "wood, rusty nails, broken glass or sharp stones" cannot override "her need to feel the cool sand between her toes at this moment…Despite its trash, there was still something sacred about Bar Beach" and her body needed to be in its place to feel comforted (Okorafor 8).

As she walks barefoot, Adaora reflects on the many instances when the beach has provided her and her family both a place to celebrate and a refuge from reality: a place to celebrate the first truly democratic election in Nigeria's history, a place to grieve after the 1993 military coup, a place to be thankful she was able to finish her biology PhD, a place to reflect on her friend having to sleep with her biology professor to earn a passing grade, a place to mourn

her father's death along with thirty others during a robbery on the Lagos-Benin Expressway. And now, somewhere to go after her husband, for the first time in ten years, has hit her, fueled by the religious fervor of Father Oke.

The pull of the water for Adaora and the others establishes Bar Beach as more than just a material gathering spot, but an imaginary—an idea. Adaora describes the beach as "a perfect sample of Nigerian society. It was a place of mixing. The ocean mixed with the land, and the wealthy mixed with the poor. Bar beach attracted drug dealers, squatters, various accents and languages, seagulls, garbage, biting flies, tourists, all kinds of religious zealots, hawkers, prostitutes, johns, water-loving children, and their careless parents" (Okorafor 7). This mixing reflects how water can be read in the Anthropocene. The ocean carries waste, sweat, oil, people, animals, histories, and more. It is a complex material that is in constant flux, and one that travels through the Anthropocene mixing materiality and history from shore to global shore—touching other-than-human, human, and land and merging them together in its particulate. Water is continually changing and exchanging its materiality, and it continuously changes its meaning. For Adaora, the water is a respite from the mundane problems of human society, but her imagination of water also encapsulates and codifies her memories so that water tells her personal history alongside that of others.

At the beginning of *Lagoon,* Okorafor's narrator observes that Lagos "takes its name from the Portuguese word for 'Lagoon.' The Portuguese first landed on Lagos Island in the year 1472. Apparently, they could not come up with a more creative name. Nor did they think to ask one of the natives for suggestions" (Okorafor n.p.). Adaora's understanding of water lives alongside the history of colonialism of the city, the present global network of exchange from people, sea-life, boats, and poisons, and her memories near water throughout her life. The

connections among them inform how Lagos is seen as place, home, identity by its inhabitants and by others. Neimanis points out that Anthropocene water can amplify colonialism since

> The issue of human difference in terms of anthropogenically induced change is of course both one of responsibility (which processes and modes of being, anchored in which situated communities, are exacerbating these changes?) and one of vulnerability and resistance (who is incited to forge new ways of being and becoming? who is bearing the brunt?). While social location (class, gender, age) is clearly salient here, global flows of colonial power are equally relevant. Indeed, the Anthropocene may also index an important mutation in forms of colonial power, where colonizers need not physically occupy a place with their discrete bodies for the environmental effects of (neo)colonial power to be felt. (163)

The presence of the oil pipelines off the coasts of Nigeria exemplifies how this invisible colonialism shapes Lagos, and why the novel's focus on water is so crucial. Royal Dutch Shell need not be physically/bodily present in Nigeria for the corporation to exact power and influence over the country, its people, animals, and environment. Nigeria's economy is hyper dependent on its relationship to oil extraction, but its citizens—whether human or other-than-human—suffer long-term environmental damage because of it. *Aman Iman*, or "water is life," is uttered throughout the novel by various characters, including Adaora. In the Anthropocene, the complexity of "water is life" goes beyond merely thinking of water as a necessary commodity for survival, but also thinking through water to how it represents shifting, plural meanings that come to story the climate change narrative, and who benefits from those interactions.

In the novel, water is the focal point for change. Sea creatures are citizens, and the aliens' stories on Earth begin in water. Water acts as an agent of change through the aliens as they

physically manipulate its properties, cleaning it, and using it to transform Adaora, Agu, and Anthony. As the three meet up on the beach, they hear the loud *Moom* of the alien ship. A giant "fist of water" emerges from the massive waves to grab the three of them and pull them down into the ocean where they experience an oceanic baptism (Okorafor 11). Ayodele, the alien ambassador who first chooses the name "Miri," the Igbo word for water, uses an unknown technology to help the three humans transform through an empathic connection with the aliens underwater. They become connected to the aliens, who want to save the earth via this empathic technology. Anthony remembers some of the underwater scene, the presence of the coral reef, music, and the aliens calling him "brother" and "reminding him of home" (Okorafor 20). The feelings of interconnectedness the group senses among aliens, water, and each other helps to make water less abstract and more central to human and other-than-human interactions in the novel. The fluidity of water becomes an example for the fluidity necessary for positive change in the Anthropocene. Adaora, Agu, and Anthony become new beings inhabited by the changed water and alien technology. Alongside their newly discovered gifts, their empathic connections to each other and to place will help them improve and protect Lagos, while demonstrating its capability to be a world leader for positive change.

One of the ways in which Okorafor's novel draws attention to the impacts of change in the Anthropocene is to emphasize its materiality. In thinking through the substances of oil and water, Okorafor connects physical bodies, alien matter, technologies, and physical environments to demonstrate how neocolonial power acts on the body and how that can be disrupted. Since, as ecocritic Stacey Alaimo maintains, "human bodies, human health, and human rights are interconnected with material, often toxic flows of particular places," the result is a "recognition that one's bodily substance is vitally connected to the broader environment," in this case

positioning Lagos itself as an agent of change (Alaimo 62-63). Oil and water, communication technologies, cars and roads and even monsters all play a part in *Lagoon's* representation of material climate change and its bodily nature.

In Act II, *Awakening*, the narrative begins with a tarantula crossing the Lagos-Benin Expressway (LBE), a major thoroughfare in Lagos made infamous by highway robberies turned into devastating mass deaths. It is notorious for poorly maintained roads "with potholes that will swallow your vehicle" and excessive traffic (Okorafor 18). Asphalt is, of course, petroleum-based, and the fossil fuel-dependent cars that perpetually inhabit the roads emit tons of carbon back into the atmosphere. Thus, as it is introduced, the road serves as a metaphor for climate change—especially as we note humans as the drivers, and humans and other-than-humans damaged by the road's myriad entanglements, including car crashes engendered by degraded roads or robberies brought on by the lack of resources.

However, the road functions on a different level as well. The spider is attempting to cross the expressway, grazing the asphalt with one sensitive leg that "can feel the soul of the great spider artist of the land, she who weaves all things into existence," reminding readers that the frame narrator is still working out plans in the background of the action (Okorafor 121). The spider pursues "a call for change" echoed in the sonic booms brought on by the aliens' arrival (Okorafor 122). The noise has given him great pleasure "down to the finest hairs on his body, the spinners in his abdomen… the vibration was glorious," the antithesis of the typical "average, expected uninspiring" noise of speeding cars down the LBE, which separates him from a food-rich forest (Okorafor 122). He is hit and killed by Adaora's passing car, signaling Ayodele that this road literally has a mind of its own.

In this moment, the death of the spider reveals to Ayodele that there are unseen creatures, beyond carbon-based life-forms, that have always inhabited Lagos. “This stretch of highway has named itself the Bone Collector. It mostly collects human bones and the bones of human vehicles,” but also of the animals and insects struck down by human drivers on this dangerous tract (Okorafor 122). The Bone Collector seems to terrorize and kill people and animals, even as it forces them to depend on the road for commerce and travel. But, the world that Okorafor creates in the novel is more expansive than including only recognizable creatures such as fish and bats in its concept of kinship. The road itself is a conscious being that participates in a cycle of nature that can seem violent but is chaotic. It is read as evil through the lens of a Western understanding of monstrosity, but what this section of the novel emphasizes is actually the misuse of the road by humans that disconnects them from the material reality of their kinship to it. Humans have not related to it in an appropriate way—respecting its contributions to society and its boundaries. The Bone Collector is not responsible for doing the killing, rather it corrects one of the issues sometimes seen in critiques of ecofeminism: the essentializing nature of woman/land to provide care and nurturance. Instead, the road as a symbol emphasizes that people and animals die. That it is natural, not bad, and is even renewal. The tarantula, the swordfish, and later the bat, all remember their past lives and forms and await their rebirth as new forms later, each feeding the earth and picking up the threads of their old stories to be woven anew in a later world.

The Bone Collector, or “Road Monster,” as it is called later in this act, can be read as a physical construct of neocolonialism because of the relationship humans have to it. In chapter 40, the next time we meet the monster, the Lagos-Benin Expressway is packed with travelers fleeing Lagos after a series of sonic booms, the rising waters permeating the streets, and the arrival from

the ocean of many more aliens. The world has just witnessed what is happening in Nigeria after people posted online videos of the moment Fisayo shoots a young mute boy on the road. Fisayo, hating herself for living in poverty and performing sex work to survive, shoots the young boy, who she believes to be an alien, "the child-witch of Satan. The worst of them all" in order to "save" Lagos from "devilry" (Okorafor 190). Fisayo was present when Adaora, Anthony, and Agu were taken by the ocean and returned with Ayodele. She believes that she is acting as an agent of God, of Jesus Christ who "had left her a weapon she could wield" to force people to repent (Okorafor 191). As I will discuss later in this chapter, it takes a rejection of this type of toxic thinking and an adoption of a more fluid sense of spirituality to repair the violence taking place in Lagos.

Science and Spirituality

While many examples of binary thinking in the novel stem from antagonists like Chris or Father Oke, Adaora also exhibits this inclination, particularly when attempting to align her scientific training in marine biology with everything she witnesses with Ayodele. From birth, her life has been defined by this binary. At the beginning of her encounter with Ayodele she does not trust what she sees until she can view Ayodele's skin under a slide and microscope. For Adaora, science is the only reliable way to know the world. She notes, "it had always been like this. When she was afraid, nervous, or uncomfortable, all she had to do was focus on the science to become balanced again," but this new scenario calls for some measure of accepting uncertainty (Okorafor 17). The first time she looks at Ayodele, "an unscientific thought occurs to her," though she is trying desperately to think analytically and rationally (Okorafor 17). She likens the "creepy" feeling she gets when gazing on Ayodele to that of looking at "a large black spider"

(Okorafor 17). She must bring Ayodele back to her lab at home in order to process what is happening. Though she can see for herself that Ayodele's skin particles are "tiny…metal-like balls…[that] aren't fixed together as our cells are," that vibrate and change into whatever kind of matter the alien desires, she ultimately cannot explain it using her concepts of scientific knowledge (Okorafor 17). She must embrace a belief and faith in the mysteries of the world that go beyond scientific thinking. This is complicated by the imposition of Western Christianity that does not align with alien visitation by shapeshifters.

The relationship between Adaora and Chris exemplifies the internal struggle Adaora experiences in encountering her changing identity: Adaora had "never been religious. She was a scientist. Her world was founded upon empirical evidence, on rigorous experimentation, on data. She was the thinker, and [Chris] was the one simply to have faith. That had been what kept them balanced" (Okorafor 158). But even for Chris, this binary thinking—pitting science against faith—was relatively new. He only converted to such an explicit rejection of spirituality when becoming born-again into Father Oke's church. In the past, Chris "consulted dibias, witch doctors, and babawelos when he felt he was at a crossroads. And this had always worked. It had made them rich. For Adaora, however, logic determined her actions. She went to church because she was expected to go, not because she believed" (Okorafor 158). Yet, as Adaora realizes the spiritual nature of how she, Agu, and Anthony were brought together with Ayodele, she admits to herself and to Chris, "You're right… about the world" (Okorafor 158). He smiles, thinking he has won her over to his view of God and Jesus controlling everything. She answers "no, no, not all the Christian stuff…but the *mystery*. Ayodele spoke of her people being catalysts of change. Wherever they go, they bring change" (158). As in Butler's concept of Earthseed, where "the only lasting truth is Change…God is change," Adaora accepts into her worldview a partnership

between science and spirituality that rejects Father Oke's version of faith and brings a sense of fluidity to both her newfound faith and her scientific framework (Butler 3).

Later, as the president meets with the elders, Adaora, Agu, and Anthony rest in a bubble at the bottom of the ocean. Adaora has just been transformed by Ayodele into a mermaid – the form Adaora desired in order to continue to study the ocean without suffering from its new toxicity to humans. She explains to her friends, "I was born with webbed feet and hands… And my legs were joined together by flesh…. They surgically separated my feet, toes, and legs. Still, from the moment that my mother first took me to the ocean, I could swim. No one ever taught me. I was… like a fish" (Okorafor 256). Her father used this to torment her during her childhood for poor grades, telling her "If it were the old days, they would have thrown [her] in the bush," emphasizing her perceived otherness – her difference (Okorafor 256). She was trained by his way of thinking to consider herself wrong, a feeling exacerbated in her adulthood by Chris's accusations of her being a marine witch. Now, though, as she has come to embrace the fact that she is "something new," able to breathe underwater with gills but use her lungs when on land, she can both shape and be shaped by her belief in mystery and knowledge of the world around her as parts of the same thing (Okorafor 254).

Breaking the Gender Binary

One of the hallmarks of Western colonization is the imposition of artificial gender binaries. Because there was no unified "Nigeria" prior to colonization, it is unlikely that the many tribes living within its artificially constructed colonial borders shared exact notions of European gender expectations and roles.In *Lagoon*, Father Oke embodies the Hegelian gender framework familiar to us now. This is most apparent in his influence on Chris, Adaora's

husband. Prior to meeting Oke, Chris was a wealthy accountant who travelled the world. He supported Adaora's work at the oceanography institute financially and emotionally, enlisting his colleagues to help build her an expensive personal lab she calls, "an act of the truest love" (Okorafor 21). She understands it as such because it represents complete support for her professional career at the cost of his own time, which is limited. This mutual support demonstrates a healthy relationship between partners, but that relationship quickly sours when Oke convinces Chris to be born again in Oke's church. Under Oke's influence, Chris retracts his support of Adaora, calling her lab "her witch's den" (Okorafor 21). No longer supportive, he becomes outright abusive, first emotionally and then physically, hitting her when she refused to obey his wish to skip a concert. From his pulpit, Father Oke condemns women as witches when they fail to meet his gendered expectations. He insists that Adaora must be a water witch because she does not submit to her husband's authority, and he rejects non-conforming expressions of gender when encountering the Black Nexus.

In Lagos, the prime example of a rejection of gender binaries is the Black Nexus, one of Nigeria's only LGBTQ student organizations. The novel introduces them through the eyes of Jacobs, a young man who runs with a local street gang but also secretly cross-dresses. Jacobs brings the Black Nexus a videorecording of Ayodele transforming from a young woman, to a "smoky, metallic-looking cloud," to a different, older woman (Okorafor 66). The novel describes the transformation as the first woman "turn[ing] inside herself" and then "turn[ing] inside out again" (Okorafor 66). The description highlights the interiority of the person and represents a new expression as turning that interior outward. Such a description echoes Jacobs' own behavior. While he hides his cross-dressing from most people he knows, he does not have to with the Black Nexus. Instead, he can dress in "his favorite long black dress and high heels" (Okorafor 7).

It is particularly important for him to dress this way when delivering the news of the alien visitor because he feels the need to do so "as *himself*" (Okorafor 64). Seeing Ayodele's physical transformation instills in him the need to express his true self because it's such an important moment that he can't obscure with men's clothes. His friends respond similarly, identifying the arrival of Ayodele as the impetus to come out of the shadows. After all, "[w]ho better to understand [their fluidity] than a shape-shifter" (Okorafor 67). With the aid of this shape-shifter, now is the time for revolution.

The makeup of the Black Nexus says more about their role in the narrative. Its executive members are Rome and Seven. Rome lives up to his namesake with patrician features, "tall, lean, and as statuesque as a runway model" (Okorafor 71). While he bears the name of a historical colonizing force, Rome rejects the more contemporary colonizing idea of gender binaries, "pass[ing] as a beautiful woman. Though he never outright said he was one, most people on campus just assumed" (Okorafor 65). The novel resists defining him as well, and it's in his fluidity that he finds identity. Seven, on the other hand, embodies African spiritualism. In the Igbo religion, seven is the number of times someone is reincarnated before finally being complete, suggesting she has found her completeness in her queer identity. The novel's description of Seven centers her in the Yoruba tradition, noting she has, "the curves of Osun, the Yoruba goddess" (Okorafor 65). In this tradition, Osun is "associated with water, purity, fertility, love, and sensuality" (Jeffries n.p.). Seven lives up the love and sensuality, expressing her sexual attraction to Jacobs' sister, Fisayo, with a lingering hug that makes Fisayo, who is not attracted to women, "want to giggle like a schoolgirl" (Okorafor 65). The association of a fertility goddess with same-sex attraction, which would usually complicate a concept like fertility, foreshadows a different sort of fertility that stems from Ayodele, which I will discuss at the end of this section.

When we next see the Black Nexus, they've come out in a celebratory procession, complete with confetti, a giant rainbow flag, and music. All are dressed to match their identities, but they share one accessory, "headbands with alien antennae bobbing from them" (Okorafor 91). Rome declares, "The Black Nexus has come down to earth" (Okorafor 85). Rome draws an explicit connection between the LGBTQ group and the alien visitors. More than that, he implies that their group is gracing Lagos with their presence. Just as the alien visitors arrived to nurture the world, so too does the Black Nexus offer the possibility of nurturing their community through the toxic gender binary that allows military men like Benson to feel entitled to rape a woman and religious leaders like Father Oke to beat women on camera in the name of faith.

Unfortunately, the group does not have the power of the aliens or a network of support. Jacobs, the one member who had not participated in the coming out, is present, but he chooses profit over his community, attempting to kidnap Ayodele for ransom rather than join with the only people who know and support him. He knows "he should have gone to them, supported them. Still, he didn't move, and he felt awful for it" (Okorafor 93). Even in a moment where he could finally be himself and aid those who had always accepted him, he is too embedded in a capitalist system to act on the opportunity. In the chaos that follows, people are shot, and while we don't learn who has died, this brief coming out for the Black Nexus ends here. Jacobs is the only member whose story continues but ends in tragedy when his gang discovers he cross-dresses. Having abandoned his true community, he is alone and vulnerable in that moment, and his childhood friend, who never knew his secret, kills him in a fit of disgust.

While the Black Nexus' revolution fails, its members scattered or dead, the larger revolution continues through Ayodele. As a shape-shifter, Ayodele resists any binary-based classification. Appearing at times as a woman and at times a man, she crosses more than gender lines, existing

also as a lizard and a monkey. She is all of these and none of them, her body comprised of microscopic metallic balls that allow her to reform at will. Her fluidity uniquely situates her resistance to colonization's binary systems, and because she can exist outside of those systems, she can usher in a new era for Lagos and the world through a new type of fertility.

Acting as an ambassador for her kind, Ayodele addresses humanity with the promise that her people bring change. Unlike a colonizer, who sees only use value in a people, she notes, "'*I have seen love, hate, greed, ambition, and obsession among you . . . I have seen compassion, hope, sadness, insecurity, art, intelligence, ingenuity, corruption, curiosity, and violence. This is life. We love life*'" (Okorafor 105-106). This is not a list that separates good qualities from bad. Indeed, Ayodele seems to make no judgment of any one characteristic. Instead, she recognizes the complexity of humans is what makes their existence life, and she celebrates that. This initial valuation comes at a cost, however, as soldiers attack Ayodele more than once. She retains her agency to respond as an individual, spending some time hating humans before accepting they aren't a monolith and committing to helping them despite their failings.

Her final contribution to Lagos is the giving of herself. Badly beaten, Ayodele tells Adaora that her people are a collective, saying, "'I am we, I am me'" (Okorafor 269). It is not just her physical form that defies binary thinking but her very consciousness. She continues, noting that humans need help in the world (on the outside), but they also need help within, so she, "will go within" and everyone she touches will "all be a bit . . . alien" (Okorafor 262). Her first transformation involved turning inside out; now, she reverses that action, moving inside of the humans as she dissipates into a fog that covers Lagos. Adaora's reaction to this joining is to immediately crave garden eggs, that "crunchy, cool fruit, sweet or bitter," which she had shared with Ayodele when she first arrived (Okorafor 269). It's not just Adaora who craves these, but

"[e]veryone in Lagos was craving garden eggs" (Okorafor 263). Ayodele's sacrifice creates a new hybrid of human and alien, shattering any vestige of binary thinking, and the experience of this hybridity is expressed in a craving for raw vegetables, which suggests a new harmony with other-than-humans. This outcome is only possible because of Ayodele's fluidity, and it demonstrates the necessity of moving beyond binaries in our own response to threats like climate change.

Conclusion: The Spider's Designs

Lagoon is a richly complex novel that highlights humanity's greatest flaw: "Human beings have a hard time relating to that which does not resemble them" (Okorafor 61). As we move into the Chthulucene, novels like *Lagoon* can help us connect with the world around us, materially, spiritually, and as kin. As in the work of Butler and Hogan, Okorafor provides examples for how we can work as partners with the earth to encourage empathic thinking and create kin—not solely among humans but across all differences. Being in kinship with ourselves and others means recognizing the value and contributions of kin in our networks, including localized and globalized place, and of being responsible to each other—belonging with and accountable to each other. *Lagoon* uncovers the material and spiritual connections we have and emphasizes their critical importance, even when they are chaotic.

One of the most important lessons Lagoon provides is that storytelling, or narrative, or writing, can help us create change—but we must couple that with action off the page, as well. As the resolution of the novel comes to pass, we return to Udide Okwanka, who, recognizing that the narrative (the world) has become so complicated, realizes that she can no longer simply watch and tell stories. She has to become involved on a material level, and so she pauses her

storytelling and leaves her web saying, "'*I will become part of the story. I will join my people*"
(Okorafor 285). Storytelling shapes the world, but material engagement saves it.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE PAGE: ECOFEMINISM AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

The authors I have discussed in my dissertation have all written fiction that critiques the ways in which we, as local and global communities, have attended to the needs of our planet. Octavia Butler, Linda Hogan, and Nnedi Okorafor write from positions of understanding how politics, money, and power come together to create ecological catastrophe. Their work frames the Anthropocene and climate narratives as a place for interrogating how the project of colonization, the displacement of non-Europeans, and resource extraction contribute to environmental and cultural crisis. But they also offer new ways of envisioning partnerships with others to mitigate the effects of eco-degradation. This networking can serve as the first step in what rhetorician Jenny Rice terms "inquiry as social action" in her book *Distant Publics*, which examines how to improve public interventions in the discourse of crises of place (Rice 163-196). Rice foregrounds individuals who have a strong concern for environmental issues facing their specific geographies but tend to disengage from the public debate over them. She describes readers who perceive and experience place as "subjects who are capable of imagining themselves as situated within many complex networks" (Rice 163).

Butler, Hogan, and Okorafor fictionalize real-life events in their works, relying on the reader to make connections from what is happening in our world to what the possibilities from their pages suggest a better one could look like. As a scholar, teacher, and advisor, I think it is critical to continue that work through practical application of what Anthropocene literature teaches me. In "Afterword: Ecofeminism through Literary Activism, Hybridity, Connections, and Caring," Anna Bedford explains "ecofeminism can never only be an academic discourse. Its

roots are in lived experiences, and harsh ones at that – in struggles for survival and care, for both human and nonhuman" (220). For ecofeminism to be a meaningful project, reading and writing must be an active process of "righting."[26] For me, this means producing scholarship and methods of teaching and advising that are interdisciplinary, non-hierarchical, and anti-racist—ones that emphasize the goals Bedford discusses in her chapter: activism, an ethic of care, and a commitment to decolonization of land and nature.

As I have been writing my dissertation, I have also been at work incorporating ecofeminist activism in my roles within the institution. At the University of South Florida, I am a full-time academic advisor for the Judy Genshaft Honors College, as well as program director for their living learning community. In these roles, I have a caseload of 384 engineering and pre-health students and 275 students in various majors in the LLC. In addition to helping students navigate academic and professional goals, I believe part of my role as an educator and as an advisor is to advocate for equity and social justice on campus and in the classroom. I have committed to building multidisciplinary partnerships across university offices, such as OMA, to increase advocacy for students from marginalized and minoritized backgrounds.

Twenty-eight percent of Honors College students identify as members of traditionally underrepresented student populations, and a larger number of students are supported by Pell grants. It is my responsibility to advocate for a safe and inclusive environment for all students, and especially those students who have not often been given a voice. Thus, my teaching and advising duties extend to working regularly with faculty and the Deans to develop inclusive programming, such as my *Critical Conversations* series, featuring author Nnedi Okorafor, that highlights the diverse needs of our students and celebrates the various cultural, ethnic, and other

[26] Theresa Burriss discusses Huggan's and Tiffin's "writing of imperial wrongs as the process of *righting* them" in *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices* (106).

plural identities of our students, staff, and faculty. In 2020, I raised $7,000 to host Nnedi Okorafor in a virtual format. I worked with several students, with the majority of the young scholars from BIPOC backgrounds, including two women from Nigeria. The students and I worked together to create a welcome atmosphere for students unfamiliar with Okorafor's work and for majors not connected to literature. The students led a 1.5-hour interview with Okorafor, discussing topics such as what it's like to be a writer of color, how Okorafor's dual identities as a Nigerian and as an American inform her worldview, and how literature can help change the world. In advance of the event, I formed a USF Honors book club spanning all three campuses and had the LLC sponsor over 100 copies of Okorafor's *Akata Witch* to garner interest in her work and create a more robust awareness of themes in non-Western literature. I worked alongside Liz Kicak in the USF Humanities institute to host an all-campus read of Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti*, which culminated in the virtual keynote visit with the author. Dean Adams was instrumental in supporting and funding these ventures, and allowed me to form a social justice committee from the three campuses to host several "Research for Social Change" events, an "Activism Beyond the Hashtag" event alongside Renea Ford, director of the Provost's Scholars Program and Kevin Lee (Honors, Biology and Chemistry); and "Artivism," an art and activism panel with Dr. Holly Singh and other faculty.

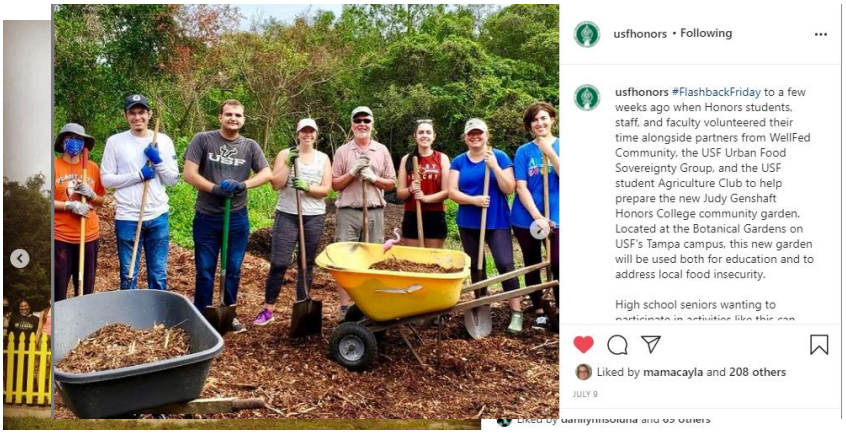
BIPOC students are underrepresented in the Honors College, where I work, and at USF as a whole. My goals to increase and support equity, diversity and inclusion for marginalized students are linked to the University's goals for meeting state metrics for preeminence and accreditation factors, allowing me to work towards equity at USF while working within the confines of the state university system and upholding my values. I value collaboration in praxis and emphasize advising as mentorship and teaching, and actively promote equity and inclusion

Figure 7. Beginning of the JGHC garden renovation

in every aspect of my influence on Honors College procedures and policies. My programming efforts increased BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ student representation and leadership in numerous events since I began advising in the Honors College in 2019—a fact that I am proud of and one that student leaders have remarked has been an important experience for them in the Honors College. I also chaired the Committee on Social Justice to help faculty and staff work through current events and come to a group understanding on how an anti-racist approach can help our students and ourselves become better community members and supportive of each other. Together, we read and discussed Ta Nehisi-Coates' *Between the World and Me,* Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, Robin DeAngelo's *White Fragility*, and watched Ava DuVernay's documentary *13th*.

Beyond this, I also strongly encourage students to find meaningful and fulfilling research and community service opportunities to begin the lifelong work of giving back and being an integrated member of local and global society. Global citizenship can begin at home, especially for students who are many times unaware of the circumstances surrounding their own communities. For instance, I worked with Dr. Christie Rinck (USF Humanities) in 2020-21 to establish a network of students from the JGHC to volunteer for the Better Together Alliance of Tampa Bay, aimed at eradicating homelessness in Tampa. My advisees have been seriously committed to the organization since then, forming a student organization for all USF students and turning their volunteering into internships. I also noticed an increased need during the pandemic for access to food. Temple Terrace is a food desert, and our own students on campus rely heavily on the Bulls Food Pantry, which relies on donations. With Dean Adams' permission,

I approached the USF Botanical Gardens in spring 2021 and asked to start a student-led vegetable garden initiative. Laurie Walker and David Moore (Directors) were excited, and I partnered with Dell De Chant, Dr. William Schanbacher, and Dr. Don Saunders (USF Religious Studies), the USF Student Agrarian Club (Kenzie Wookie), the JGHC Honors LLC, the JGHC College faculty, staff and students, Delta Tau Delta (Ryan Shargo, Honors student), and over 50 JGHC student volunteers from all majors to repair and rebuild a vacant plot for a USF Community Garden. We spent the spring and summer semester of 2021 preparing for fall, when 26 students (many of my own advises and my LLC students) would begin to grow food for donation to the Bulls Food Pantry with the permission and support of the pantry managers. The preparation we did in the 2020-21 academic year led to remarkable changes in students' ability to network with other USF campus and off-campus partners, including <u>WellFed Community</u> (Dhalia Bumbaca) and <u>AMRoC FabLab</u> (Terri Willingham), where many of our students now also volunteer, intern, and conduct research regularly. I also developed a syllabus for the garden students and our partners that focuses on food justice in the greater Tampa area and can be used as a template for



anyone at USF who wants to teach or grow in the garden. The syllabus incorporates excerpts from literature that relates to the themes I discuss in my dissertation, including Indigenous sovereignty and ways of looking at land and place.

Moreover, the student responses to this garden project have been overwhelmingly positive. Students created an executive board to ensure the long-term co-management of the garden. Kobe Phillips, Honors undergraduate and the President of the e-board now teaches the class and has established partnerships with other community gardens and non-profits for native plant renewal. The students also formed an organization at USF focused on the garden and encouraging all memebers of the USF community to particpate in the USF Student Urban Food Soveriegnty Alliance. Students are conducting original research on bees and other pollinators, medicinals, organic farming methods, healthy access to foods in residence halls, composting on campus, Indigenous garden practices (following the work of Robin Wall Kimmerer), and teaching other students about the relationships among climate and issues in environmental justice. My hope is that our students will be an informed and passionate group of advocates for a better world; that they will see, feel, and act with purpose to co-create a better future for us all. That they will bring these ideas and more out into to the world and teach others. From what I have seen so far, we will not be disappointed.

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