Slow Violence, Neoliberalism, and the Environmental Picaresque

It is only right, to my mind, that things so remarkable, which happen to have remained unheard and unseen until now, should be brought to the attention of many and not lie buried in the sepulcher of oblivion.

—Anonymous, *Lazarillo de Tormes*

A quarter century ago, Raymond Williams called for more novels that attend to “the close living substance” of the local while simultaneously tracing the “occluded relationships”—the vast transnational economic pressures, the labor and commodity dynamics—that invisibly shape the local.¹ To hazard such novels poses imaginative challenges of a kind that writers content to create what Williams termed “enclosed fictions” need never face, among them the challenge of rendering visible occluded, sprawling webs of interconnectedness. In our age of expanding and accelerating globalization, this particular imaginative difficulty has been cast primarily in spatial terms, as exemplified by John Berger’s pronouncement, famously cited in Edward Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies*: “Prophecy now involves a geographical rather than a historical projection; it is space and not time that hides consequences from us. To prophesy today it is only necessary to know men [and women] as they are throughout the world in all their inequality.”²
Yet the legitimate urgency of spatial prophecy should not, in turn, distract us from the critical task—especially for environmental writers—of finding imaginative forms that expose the temporal dissociations that permeate the age of neoliberal globalization. To this end, Animal’s People, Indra Sinha’s fictional reworking of the Bhopal disaster, offers a powerful instance of a writer dramatizing the occluded relationships of transnational space together with time’s occlusions. Sinha’s novel stands (to adapt Williams’s phrase) as a work of “militant particularism,” yet it discloses through that radical particularity temporal and spatial webs of violence on a vast scale. Sinha’s approach to the aftermath of the catastrophic gas leak at Union Carbide’s Bhopal factory in December 1984 throws into relief a political violence both intimate and distant, unfolding over time and space on a variety of scales, from the cellular to the transnational, the corporeal to the global corporate. Animal’s People can be read as a novel of risk relocation, not just in Susan Cutter’s spatial sense but across time as well, for the transnational off-loading of risk from a privileged community to an impoverished one changes the temporal topography of fear in the long term.

The power of Animal’s People flows largely from Sinha’s single-handed invention of the environmental picaresque. By creatively adapting picaresque conventions to our age, Sinha probes the underbelly of neoliberal globalization from the vantage point of an indigent social outcast. His novel gives focus to three of the defining characteristics of the contemporary neoliberal order: first, the widening chasm—within and between nations—that separates the megarich from the destitute; second, the attendant burden of unsustainable ecological degradation that impacts the health and livelihood of the poor most directly; and third, the way powerful transnational corporations exploit under cover of a free market ideology the lopsided universe of deregulation, whereby laws and loopholes are selectively applied in a marketplace a lot freer for some societies and classes than for others.

A neoliberal ideology that erodes national sovereignty and turns answerability into a bewildering transnational maze makes it easier for global corporations like Union Carbide to sustain an evasive geopolitics of deferral in matters of environmental injury, remediation, and redress. Thus, among the many merits of Sinha’s novel is the way it gives imaginative
definition to the occluded relationships that result both from slow violence and from the geographies of concealment in a neoliberal age.

Slow Violence, Chernobyl, and Environmental Time

Maintaining a media focus on slow violence poses acute challenges, not only because it is spectacle deficient, but also because the fallout’s impact may range from the cellular to the transnational and (depending on the specific character of the chemical or radiological hazard) may stretch beyond the horizon of imaginable time. The contested science of damage further compounds the challenge, as varied scientific methodologies may be mobilized to demonstrate or discount etiologies, creating rival regimes of truth, manipulable by political and economic interests. Moreover, the official dimensions of the contaminated zone may shrink or dilate depending on which political forces and which research methodologies achieve the upper hand. What emerges, then, is a contest over the administration of difference between those who gain official recognition as sufferers and those dismissed as nonsufferers because their narratives of injury are deemed to fail the prevailing politico-scientific logic of causation; or for that matter, because they lack the political contacts to gain admission to the inner circle of certified sufferers and thus to potential compensation. These unstable, complex procedures—and hierarchies—of toxic recognition may create novel forms of biological citizenship, as in the long aftermaths of the 1984 Bhopal disaster and the 1986 Chernobyl explosion.5

The varieties of biological citizenship that emerged in the aftermaths of Bhopal and Chernobyl were distinct in certain ways, as were the media responses. Chernobyl received far more sustained attention in the Western media for several reasons. First, because of Chernobyl’s proximity to Western Europe, it was perceived as an ongoing transnational threat to “us” rather than a purely national threat that could be imaginatively contained as an Indian problem, over there among the faceless poor of the third world. Moreover, during the rise of Reagan’s and Thatcher’s neoliberal orders, Chernobyl could be directly assimilated to the violent threat that communism posed to the West, a threat that increased calls for heightened militarization and, ironically, for further corporate and environmental deregulation in the name of free-market forces. Bhopal, by contrast,
was easier to dissociate from narratives of global violence dominated by a communist/anticommunist plotline, thus obscuring the free-market double standards that allowed Western companies to operate with violent, fatal impunity in the global South. Indeed, Warren Anderson (then Union Carbide’s chairman), company lawyers, and most of America’s corporate media argued in concert that blame for the disaster was local not transnational in character, ignoring the fact that in the run up to the disaster, the parent company had slashed safety procedures and supervisory staff in an effort to staunch hemorrhaging profits.6

In reading Animal’s People as, among other things, an exposé of these neoliberal double standards, we can recognize Khaupfur as both specific and nonspecific, a fictional stand-in for Bhopal, but also a synecdoche for a web of poisoned communities spread out across the global South: “The book could have been set anywhere where the chemical industry has destroyed people’s lives,” Sinha observes. “I had considered calling the city Receio and setting it in Brazil. It could just as easily have been set in Central or South America, West Africa or the Philippines.”7

Chernobyl occurred three years before the Soviet Union’s dissolution in 1989, which was also the year John Williamson coined the term “the Washington Consensus” to describe the prevailing ideology that united the World Bank, the IMF, and the U.S. Treasury Department around the pre-conditions for “development aid” to nations in the global South.8 The developmentalist, neoliberal ideology of the Washington Consensus became a crucial foreign policy wing of what George Soros would term “market fundamentalism,” a broad crusade that would continue to gather force amid the postcommunist ideological uncertainty through demands for deregulation, privatization, and the hacking back of government social programs and safety nets. It was in this neoliberal context that, ultimately, the ailing survivors of both Bhopal and Chernobyl would find themselves sinking or swimming.

From a temporal perspective, the Chernobyl disaster of April 26, 1986, was distinguished by an initial catastrophic security lapse followed by a series of time lapses. The initial catastrophe was spectacular but, in media terms, deferred: eighteen days passed before Mikhail Gorbachev appeared on TV to acknowledge the explosion.9 Had the Soviet government dispensed nonradioactive iodine pills during that lost time, it could
have averted the epidemic of thyroid cancers that only began, en masse, four years later at the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a Ukraine that was officially independent yet bound in environmental, epidemiological, and consequently economic terms to the Soviet-era nuclear disaster.

The different timelines of mutation—international, intranational, intergenerational, bureaucratic, and somatic—are dizzying even to attempt to map. The prevailing winds carried the radiation plume north over Belarus, across eastern, western, and northern Europe, and beyond. Over time, through toxic drift, the national epicenter of the catastrophe would shift so that Belarus, not Ukraine, would become the country most pervasively polluted. In both countries, radiochemical poisoning coursed through air, water, soil, crops, meat, and mother’s milk at divergent speeds. Some symptoms manifested themselves relatively quickly, others appeared most dramatically among children born a decade or more after the disaster struck. The stratified slow violence of the fallout was compounded by the tardiness of the Soviet authorities, whose reflex response was foot-dragging, equivocation, and denial.

Adriana Petryna’s anthropological work on post-Soviet Ukraine persuasively demonstrates the complex entanglements between environmental fallout and the socioeconomic fallout of being classified as a sufferer or nonsufferer. Compensation for Chernobyl injuries that rendered a citizen an official sufferer might be a mere $5 per month. But after Washington Consensus-style market liberalization was imposed on Ukraine in 1992, hyperinflation and mass unemployment followed, creating a sudden chasm between economic survivors and economic casualties. In this neoliberal context, official recognition as a Chernobyl sufferer-survivor—and the modest government compensation that ensued—could make the difference between subsistence and starvation for a whole family. The onus of proof fell on Ukrainians to develop, over time, an intimate expertise that was both bodily and bureaucratic. Which symptoms counted and which were discounted by the state? What work history in which officially recognized affected areas (and for how long) would strengthen one’s claim for the imprimatur of sufferer? Which doctors, lawyers, and bureaucrats could accelerate one’s efforts to enter that inner circle? How could one meet such influential people? Did they need to be bribed?
The ground rules for being counted and discounted kept changing. Even the boundaries of the pollution zones were unstable, shrinking and dilating through a mixture of bureaucratic caprice, economic expediency, and slippery science. So the system required energetic, up-to-date pro-activism on the part of Ukraine’s biocitizens as they scrambled to avoid plummeting into economic free fall. A key survival strategy was to fit their life stories, their self-narrations, into the limited generic narratives of suffering that possessed a state mandate from which a small stream of compensation might flow. New categories of identity emerged that—in other societies, in other times—might have remained confined to the domain of private medical records. Instead, a Ukrainian might introduce herself, position herself publicly, by announcing, “I am a mother of a child who is a sufferer. I am an evacuee from Zone Two. My husband is a Chernobyl worker, Category One.”

Foreign Burdens: Chernobyl, Bhopal, and Animal’s People

Within ten days of the Chernobyl explosion, the Soviet authorities had mobilized thousands of Ukrainian coal miners to help with remediation work at the disaster site. One of them, Dmytro, who labored at the site for a month, was later afflicted with pulmonary, cerebral, and cardiac disorders and found to have chromosomal aberrations. In an interview, he portrayed his body’s radiation load as a “foreign burden.” He was referring—as his interviewer notes—to the sense of harboring an alien, unnatural, and disquieting force within.

But the miner’s choice of phrase deserves a second parsing, one directly pertinent to my reading of Animal’s People. Dmytro had been saddled, I would argue, with a “foreign burden” not just in a somatic but in a geotemporal sense as well: his post–Soviet Ukrainian body remained under occupation by a Soviet-era catastrophe. For in the case of Chernobyl, not only did the radiological toxicity travel across the national border, but (as the Soviet Union fragmented) the national border traveled across the toxicity. The Ukrainian body politic, though politically autonomous, remained environmentally and epidemiologically dominated by the “foreign burden” of a ghosted country, by a Soviet past that (as Faulkner would have it) was not even past. Through the workings of slow violence across environmental
time, Ukraine’s sovereignty was compromised. If the Ukrainian body politic at large was afflicted with the burden of involuntary macro memory, mutagenic chromosomes at the micro level sustained a Soviet heritage that prompted Dmytro (and many compatriots) to refuse to reproduce for fear of a future burdened by an afflicted Ukrainian child.

The concept of the foreign burden offers a productive prism through which to approach Sinha’s novelistic response to the Union Carbide disaster when, one early December night, a cloud of methyl isocyanate gas (in combination with other toxins) leaked from the company’s pesticide factory in Bhopal. Estimates of those killed immediately vary wildly, from 4,000 to 15,000 people. In the years that followed, scores of thousands of deaths and life-threatening disabilities were linked to exposure to the gas cloud. By some estimates, 100,000 residents continue to be afflicted.\(^{15}\)

Although Animal’s People is set twenty years after the disaster, the novel dramatizes the illusion of the singular event: from a narrative perspective, the events—like the poisons themselves—are suspended in medias res, in a state of environmental, epidemiological, political, and legal irresolution. If the unfolding of slow violence across environmental time is typically managed through powerful strategies of distantiation, in Sinha’s novel those distancing strategies depend primarily, in geographical terms, on transnational corporate distance and, in temporal terms, on both the slow emergence of morbidity and on legal procrastination, which provide prevaricative cover for the CEOs who wish to exploit time to defuse the claims of the afflicted. Khaufpur (Sinha’s fictional Bhopal) is the “world capital of fucked lungs”; it is also a place of interminable trials—bodily and legal.\(^{16}\)

For twenty years the immiserated people of Khaufpur have been trying to bring the American CEOs of the corporation responsible—named simply as the “Kampani”—to stand trial in India. Thirteen judges have come and gone in successive trials, but the spectral Kampani bosses keep failing to materialize, maintaining their oceanic distance from a city infiltrated and haunted by Kampani poisons. Playing for time, the Kampani resorts to legal chicanery, political bribery, and backroom deals with India’s Minister for Poison Affairs and his colleagues. What emerges, then, is a contest between the tenacity of corporeal memory and the corrosive power, over time and space, of corporate amnesia emboldened by a neoliberal regime of deregulation.
If Chernobyl’s “foreign burden” is an inheritance from an evaporated empire, we may read Khaufpur’s burden rather differently as the weight of absentee corporate colonialism, whereby transnational companies internalize profits and externalize risks, particularly in impoverished regions of the global South. However, as a novelist, Sinha cannot afford to be this explicitly polemical. An observation by the Irish writer Eavan Boland is pertinent to the novelistic challenges Sinha must negotiate: “If the voice of a character in a fiction speaks too clearly with the anger and hindsight of an ethical view of history, then the voice may be made louder by argument but grow less convincing through being less imagined. Then both humanity and history can be sentimentalized.”

Because novels about slow violence suffer from a drama deficit, they risk resorting to sentimentality and political moralizing as substitutes for arresting spectacle and narrative tension. For these reasons some critics, like Anthony Lane, have gone so far as to assert that “eco-drama . . . is a contradiction in terms.”

Sinha astutely negotiates this ethical and dramatic minefield without compromising his novel’s political energies. He does so by devising a narrator who is at best ambivalent toward the pursuit of justice, yet whose physical form serves as a bodily shorthand for Khaufpur’s transnational plight. Through a literal twist of fate—a toxic corkscrewing of his spine—Animal morphed at the age of six from an upright boy into a creature reduced to going around on all fours. When four-footed Animal (now nineteen) transports an ailing child on his back, his posture is precisely that of a beast of burden. Thus the symbolic economy of Animal’s body affords Sinha an implicit yet unforgettable image of a body politic literally bent double beneath the weight of the poisoned city’s foreign load.

By making an occluded economic relationship physically manifest through his narrator’s body, Sinha thus ingeniously resolves the dilemma that Williams posed: how to give a novel a local materiality while exposing the web of transnational forces that permeate and shape the local. In the process, Sinha engages a temporal question that Williams did not specifically address: how do you dramatize the costs of uneven development when their delayed effects are intimate but their genesis is far-off in time?

*Animal’s People* stages a simultaneous inquiry into the border zones between human and animal and the economic boundaries between rich and poor, the ever-deepening, dehumanizing chasm that divides those
who can act with impunity and those who have no choice but to inhabit intimately, over the long term, the physical and environmental fallout of actions undertaken by distant, shadowy economic overlords. What does it mean, the novel asks, to belong to the same species—in biological, existential, ethical, and economic terms?

Figure 2 Photograph of “Animal” sculpture. Reproduced by permission of the artist and photographer, Eleanor Stride.
Orphaned when the Kampani explosion killed both his parents, Animal has little truck with the niceties of belonging. His familial isolation, physical difference, and moral disgust at human inhumanity combine to set him apart. Despite his singularity, however, Animal also serves as a symbolic condensation of the vast army of the economically orphaned, abandoned to their fate by the merciless logic of the neoliberal marketplace.

Animal is a foundling who has morphed into a posthuman changeling, a one-of-a-kind creature spawned by a kind of chemical autochthony. Marooned in the present, Animal views himself as a four-footed species without precedent or the prospect of progeny, the alpha and omega of his kind. We can read him as a new beginning, which (in keeping with the novel’s apocalyptic tenor) doubles as the end of time.

Animal has forgotten his childhood human name: it’s as remote, as inaccessible as his city’s culturally rich, prelapsarian, pretoxic past. From the moment children at the orphanage taunt him for walking like an animal, he embraces the name of his alienation and abasement, scoffing at those, like Zafar (the slum’s chief anti-Kampani activist), who suggest that he is not a beast just an “especially abled” human. The catastrophe that has befallen Khaufpur, imposing on the city a radically changed culture of nature, has in the process converted Animal into a figure who insists, “I’ve no choice but to be unnatural.”

His refusal of the natural is redolent of the stance adopted by Chernobyl’s self-declared “biorobots” who, through hazardous exposure, inhabited a related gray zone between the human and the posthuman. Four months after the initial Chernobyl explosion, the Soviet authorities sent in robots to remove radioactive debris; when off-the-charts radiation levels rendered the robots dysfunctional, young men were conscripted to replace them. The men recognized they were being treated not as human employees but as “biological resources to be used and thrown out . . . slated for bio-robotic death.” As the Ukrainian director of the Ministry of Health declared, “no one has ever defined the value of a human here.” In this context, it is understandable that the young men would insist on their indeterminate status, not as human citizens, but as biorobots destined for the scrap heap of expendable parts. Like Animal, whose humanity was subject to a hostile foreign takeover, the biorobots exemplified the dissolution of the boundaries of their humanity through the slow, corrosive violence of environmental catastrophe.
Animal joins a long line of picaros: canny, scheming social outliers governed by unruly appetites, potty-mouthed and scatalogically obsessed, often orphaned outcasts who, drawn from polite society’s vast impoverished margins, survive by parasitism and by their wits. The picaro is the abject from which the body and the body politic cannot part. Stigmatized as aberrant and filthy, the picaro embodies everything the socially remote privileged classes, with their ornate rhetoric and social etiquette, seek to contain, repress, and eject. But the picaro keeps resurfacing as a discomfiting reminder of the limits to the social barriers and the studied amnesia that elite society strives to uphold. Julia Kristeva’s formulation of the abject thus offers a productive analytic frame for Animal’s People, a picaresque novel about the dissociative rituals of a neoliberal transnationalism determined to disown, across time and space, the toxic repercussions innate to its practices, repercussions that will return to haunt it.

Sinha’s poisoned picaro embodies—at a somatic and a transnational level—the conditions under which, in Kristeva’s terms, “the subject finds the impossible within.” The unsettling confrontation with the abject entails facing “those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal.” This confrontation with stray territory results in repeated efforts to cast out the threatening traces of animalism from the culture. If we associate abjection with the rupturing of systemic order and sealed identity from within, then Sinha has created in his picaresque Animal a potent compression of disturbing, porous ambiguity, a figure whose leakiness confounds the borders between the human and the nonhuman as well as the borders between the national and the foreign. His presence exposes the limits of disownership: he is an irrepresible, abject reminder of that from which the Kampani—however far off it may seem—can never fully part.

Since the Spanish Golden Age, the picaresque has posed questions about the class and gender politics of crime, contrasting the narrator’s peccadilloes with the weightier crimes that society’s overlords commit and from which they are structurally exonerated. This passion for interrogating the hypocrisies of criminality—above all, the inequitable definitions of crime—makes the picaresque a promising fit with the priorities of the environmental...
justice movement. Sinha, in repurposing the picaresque, brings into brilliant focus the environmental, epidemiological, and economic fallout of the terrors that transnational neoliberal lawlessness dispenses in cahoots with corrupt, legally immune local politicians.

The picaresque emerged between 1550 and 1559 in the Spanish Golden Age as a countergenre, a reminder that, for all the infusion into Spain of transatlantic imperial wealth, the great majority of Spaniards remained deeply poor. The genre—most famously in *Lazarillo de Tormes*—was countergeneric in tone as well, rich in bawdy street argot that clattered, in subversive counterpoint, against Spanish as imperial language and against the attendant ascendency of classical literary forms. The picaresque thus inserted itself into a historical moment when a chasm was opening between the exalted, gluttonous classes with their linguistic refinements and perfumed pretensions and the indigent masses for whom life was an hourly scramble for survival. As in our own age of ballooning CEO golden parachutes soaring above a planet of the slums, the picaro achieves a particular potency as a marginal literary figure, a seldom-heard voice, who belongs nonetheless to the statistical majority. His or her existence depends on quick-witted improvisation coupled to expedient parasitism. As such, the picaro survives, in Michel Serres’s fine phrase, as a “tactician of the quotidian.”

Within the genre’s comedic arc, the picaro typically pursues a quest of upward mobility; in Animal’s case that quest becomes an elaborate pun subverting any ethical correlation between moral and physical erectness. He is witheringly dismissive of the artistry with which humans—most notably those in power—perform spectacles of rectitude. From his vantage point on humanity, Homo looks neither *sapiens* nor *erectus*, but a morally debased species whose uprightness is mostly posturing. Animal’s bent posture, by contrast, embodies a crushing neoliberal, transnational economic relationship and also marks him as a literal “lowlife,” a social and anatomical outlier whose physical form externalizes the slow violence, the unhurried metastases coursing through the community. His penumbral human/posthuman identity places a constant strain on the idea of limits (environmental, economic, ethical, and biological). In refusing the tainted designation “human,” Animal remains for most of the novel defiantly otherwise. What one witnesses, then, is Sinha adaptively carrying
forward what Giancarlo Maiorino has termed “the antihumanist core of the picaresque.”

Together, the antihumanist and parodic strains that permeate the picaresque help Sinha ward off three threats to the dynamism of fictional eco-drama: predictability, sentimentality, and a political outrage or self-righteousness that supplants depth of character. Animal, like most picaros, is not expressly political; he positions himself at an angle to Khaupfur’s environmental justice movement and for much of the novel is more troubled by his tenacious virginity than by the toxic tenacity of his environment. Yet, as a product of that environment and as a denizen of the community of the poisoned abject, Animal poses profound questions about the limits and value of the human. He does so, however, not from some concern with abstract justice but from inside the highly unpredictable business of holding body and soul together at street level.

Paradoxically, Animal appears as unique but not exceptional: in his singularity he serves as a synecdoche for the spectrum of mutations to which Khaupfuris have been subjected over time, ranging from the celebrated singer with now-ravaged lungs to the chatty Kha-in-a-jar, a double-headed bottled fetus that envies Animal his external, unbottled freedoms. Unmistakably hypervisible, Animal is also by turns undetectable, passing beneath human eye level in a crowd, allowing him to slip porously, in the picaresque manner, between different social strata.

But there are spatial limits to how far he can venture in his infiltrations and exposes. In a masterstroke, Sinha’s deploys Animal’s physical form as not just a consequence but a condensation of occluded transnational economic relations. His picaro is literally outlandish, his twisted body the physical manifestation of extraterritorial, offshore capitalist practices. The novel tracks the economics of a transnational regime of contamination by posing questions about the limits to bodily integrity, in both the individual and the nation-state. The Kampani’s factory is located yet dislocated, inside India geographically yet elusively afloat, outside the reach (or at least the application) of Indian law. A novel narrated by a human animal—“a beastly boy”—bent out of shape by his foreign load simultaneously questions other forms of mutability, not least the plasticity of ownership, how foreign corporate practices inside India can be owned (for short-term profit) and disowned (for long-term consequences to environmental and human health). To return
this dissociative economic logic to a somatic language, we come to see the Kampani as both incorporated and unincorporated into the national body. The Kampani is so compendious, so omnipresent in its effects yet so visibly absent that, at one point, Zafar (leader of Khaupur’s campaign for justice) declares the Kampani’s faceless power to be eternal. In that despairing moment, we’re given a fused nightmare of neoliberal corporate immunity and corporate immortality.

The picaresque proves uncannily effective at dramatizing another critical dimension to the environmentalism of the urban poor—their relationship to time. Like the picaro, the environmentally embattled slum dwellers are hell-bent on immediate survival, improvising from day to day, from hour to hour. Their temporal element is “now o’clock,” their lives subject to the fickle tyranny of the eternal today. Yet collectively, the city’s environmentally afflicted are bound in complex ways to past and future through the metamorphoses wrought by toxicity, the pursuit of social justice, and their collective relationship to apocalyptic time. The environmental picaresque of Animal’s People pivots on two apocalypses: the horrors of “that night” when the interminable narrative of poisoning began and the certainty that over the long haul, as the activist Zafar insists, the poor possess “the power of zero.” Global geopolitics may in the short term be skewed against them, but time is on their side: the Kampani has everything to fear from those with nothing to lose. Animal insists as much in the novel’s closing lines: “All things pass, but the poor remain. We are the people of the Apokalis. Tomorrow there will be more of us.” Animal’s final words uncannily echo the end of Planet of the Slums, Mike Davis’s powerful account of the contemporary neoliberal shantytown world from which, implicitly, the contemporary picaro emerges. “If the empire can deploy Orwellian technologies of repression,” Davis warns, “its outcasts have the gods of chaos on their side.”

Reflecting on Hurricane Katrina, Michael Eric Dyson writes memorably of “the color of disaster” as integral to the “neoliberal neglect” that has plagues American politics for over twenty years. In keeping with Dyson’s stance, we can refuse the unsustainable divide between human disasters (like Bhopal and Chernobyl) and natural ones (like Katrina), dissociating ourselves, for example, from former president George W. Bush’s insistence that “the storm didn’t discriminate and neither will the recovery effort.”
Discrimination predates disaster: in failures to maintain protective infrastructures, failures at pre-emergency hazard mitigation, failures to maintain infrastructure, failures to organize evacuation plans for those who lack private transport, all of which make the poor and racial minorities disproportionately vulnerable to catastrophe. As investigative Indian reporters, writing for publications like the *Hindustan Times* and *Statesmen* were quick to reveal, the Union Carbide disaster was preceded by a long history of structural neglect and a reckless flouting of elementary safety measures.42

If we project Dyson’s national “color of disaster” onto a transnational screen, his phrase can be seen—like Animal’s apocalyptic final words—to point backward to global crimes of environmental racism (that treat certain communities as more expendable than others) and forward as a global portent. The poor of the world are the uncontrollable color of a future that cannot be held in check. Yet there is another way to read that future, as a wager—however idealistic—to those in power to embrace the project of more equitable risk distribution, within the nation and beyond. The South African writer Njabulo Ndebele puts this case most forcefully:

> We are all familiar with the global sanctity of the white body. Wherever the white body is violated in the world, severe retributions follow somehow for the perpetrators if they are non-white, regardless of the social status of the white body. The white body is inviolable, and that inviolability is in direct proportion to the vulnerability of the black body. This leads me to think that if South African whiteness is a beneficiary of the protectiveness assured by international whiteness, it has an opportunity to write a new chapter in world history. . . . Putting itself at risk, it will have to declare that it is home now, sharing in the vulnerability of other compatriot bodies. South African whiteness will declare that its dignity is inseparable from the dignity of black bodies.43

Three points are worth underscoring here. First, that international whiteness provides a second shield for national whiteness, a protective dynamic that has profound consequences for the way slow violence has unfolded across the global stage in a neoliberal age. Second, and relatedly, the internal distance between the inviolable body and the vulnerable body is widened
by being routed through international circuits of power. Third, implicit in Ndebele’s racial narrative of violation and retribution is the kind of environmental narrative that Sinha’s novel tells, whereby a corporate bastion of white power deploys a battery of distancing strategies (temporal, legalistic, geographical, scientific, and euphemistic) in the longue durée between the initial catastrophe and the aftermath. Through this battery of attritional, dissociative mechanisms, the transnational corporation strives to wear down the environmental justice campaigns that seek compensation, remediation, and restored health and dignity. Under cover of a variety of temporal orders, the company can hope that public memory and demands for restitution will slowly seep out of sight, vanishing into the sands of time.\(^4^4\)

Yet the open-ended politics of catastrophic procrastination do not operate in isolation within the corporate realm. What of the roles of the state and science? If Ndebele exhorts the state to “jealously and vigorously protect all bodies within its borders and beyond,” he acknowledges this has seldom been the case.\(^4^5\) In Khaufpur the Chief Minister and the Minister for Poison Affairs, their palms well greased with bribes, provide local cover for the American Kampani while going through the motions of taking seriously the concerns of exposed locals.

The role of science is more complex. In Khaufpur—as in Bhopal—the transnational corporation withheld from the afflicted community details about the chemical composition of the insecticides it was producing at the site, profoundly weakening remedial prospects by denying those exposed precise scientific information. Small wonder that, when an American doctor arrives to open a free clinic in Khaufpur, local activists mount a boycott, viewing her as an agent of tendentious Kampani science—science whose long-term remit is to generate a circular narrative that will confirm the larger narrative of corporate self-exculpation or, at the very least, oil the machinery of doubt. From this skeptical perspective, the scientific process, like the legal one, provides further temporal camouflage, ostensibly uncovering what happened while deferring and occluding any decisive, actionable narrative.

**Terror Time and Shadow Kingdoms**

Khaufpur, translated from the Urdu, means “city of terror.”\(^4^6\) The city’s poorest denizens inhabit a different terror time from the terror time projected
by the Kampani. When the slum-dwellers rise up nonviolently to protest the Kampani’s inaction, the Kampani, invoking the fallback international rhetoric of terrorism, demands that the protestors be tried in the very Indian courts the company itself has been evading. Back in America, the Kampani engages in corporate antiterrorist training exercises, staging mock abductions and executions of their employees by Khaufpuris “terrorists.”47 Khaufpuris, by contrast, face a clear and present danger of an environmental kind: an immanent and imminent terror, faceless yet physically intimate, percolating through the penumbral time of the aftermath that is also the suspended time of the illimitable in-between.

We all inhabit multiple temporal orders that often coexist in frictional states, shifting and sliding like tectonic plates. The predominance—and our awareness of—some temporal orders as opposed to others is shaped by where and how we live. We need to ask how directly, how forcefully a given community is impacted by the cycles of sun and moon; by ebbing and flowing tides; by shifts in the seasons, stars, and planets; by the arrivals and departures of migratory life; and by climate change in ways that are crosshatched with the migratory cycles of transnational capital, electoral cycles (local, national, and foreign), digital time, and the dictates of sweatshop time. Sinha hints at, for example, the unpredictable interface between digital and seasonal time when Animal discovers the “internest” on a computer.48 We can gloss his malapropism as fusing different ecologies of time: the “internest” is, after all, where images go to breed.

*Animal’s People* exposes the uneven timelines and multiple speeds of environmental terror: the initial toxic event that kills thousands instantly; the fatal fire that erupts years later, when the deserted but still-polluted factory reignites; the contaminants that continue to leach into the communal bloodstream; and the monsoon season that each year washes abandoned chemicals into the aquifers, repoisoning wells and producing new cycles of deferred casualties. Thus the initial airborne terror morphs into a waterborne terror that acquires its own seasonal rhythms of heightened risk.49

Ordinarily, rural subsistence communities—“ecosystem people”—are attuned (and vulnerable) to different ecologies of time from those that impact the lives of the urban poor.50 This is not to suggest that ecosystem people possess some romantic, timeless, organic bond to the pulse of nature, but rather to acknowledge that their often precarious conditions
of survival depend on different combinations of temporal awareness. However, both rural and urban communities share a vulnerability to the vagaries, the haunting uncertainties, of what Ulrich Beck depicts as a “shadow kingdom”:

Threats from civilization are bringing about a kind of new “shadow kingdom,” comparable to the realm of the gods and demons in antiquity, which is hidden behind the visible world and threatens human life on their Earth. People no longer correspond today with spirits residing in things but find themselves exposed to “radiation,” ingest “toxic levels,” and are pursued into their very dreams by the anxiety of a “nuclear holocaust” . . . . Dangerous, hostile substances lie concealed behind the harmless facades. Everything must be viewed with a double gaze, and can only be correctly understood and judged through this doubling. The world of the visible must be investigated, relativized with respect to a second reality, only existent in thought and concealed in the world.51

In Beck’s depiction this imperceptible shadow kingdom is spatially recessed behind “harmless façades.” But his spatial trope warrants a temporal gloss as well: beyond the optical façade of immediate peril, what demons lurk in the penumbral realms of the longue durée? What forces distract or discourage us from maintaining the double gaze across time? And what forces—imaginative, scientific, and activist—can help extend the temporal horizons of our gaze not just retrospectively but prospectively as well? How, in other words, do we subject that shadow kingdom to a temporal optic that might allow us to see—and foresee—the lineaments of slow terror behind the façade of sudden spectacle?

We need to question here Beck’s assumption that “people no longer correspond today with spirits residing in things,” in other words, that the divine and demonic shadow kingdom “of antiquity” has been superseded by the modern shadow kingdom of toxic and radiological hazards. This sequential narrative of threat does not adequately convey the persistent vitality of the numinous within modernity. For the majority of our planet’s people (and this is something Sinha brings to life) the two kingdoms of toxic threat and
spiritual threat interpenetrate and blend, creating a hybrid world of technonuminous fears.

Sinha and Carson: Leakages and Corporate Evaporations

*Animal’s People* gives focus to the environmental politics of permeation and duration. Leakages suffuse the novel: gas leakages and category leakages, porous national borders and permeable fetal membranes, the living who are semidead and the dead who are living specters. What, the novel asks across a variety of fronts, are the boundaries of identity? Where do identities part or merge? How much change must an entity (an individual, a community, a corporation) undergo before it can assume the name of categorical difference, drawing a line across time?

On the subject of porous identities, it is worth noting one aspect of the Union Carbide story that Sinha, for whatever reasons, declined to enfold into his novel. In 2001, Union Carbide disappeared through that act of corporate necromancy known as the merger. Dow Chemical bought out Union Carbide, and so the name indelibly associated with disaster evaporated, further confounding the quest in Bhopal for environmental justice, compensation, remediation, and redress. Dow Chemical deployed this nominal vanishing act, this corporate shape-shifting, as a rationale for disclaiming responsibility for a disaster committed by a corporation that no longer exists. If with Chernobyl the environmental fallout outlasted the empire responsible, with Union Carbide the fallout outlasted the transnational company responsible. Thus Soviet imperial fracture and American corporate merger both effectively circumvented or off-loaded historical culpability for the continued slow violence of delayed effects.

The evaporation of Union Carbide exemplifies the gap between the relative immobility of environmentally afflicted populations and the mobility (in time and space) afforded transnational corporations. What the extinct company leaves behind is ongoing proof of the excellent durability of its products; as Animal notes sardonically, the Kampani clearly concocted “wonderful poisons . . . so good it’s impossible to get rid of them, after all these years they’re still doing their work.” The factory may have been abandoned, but the invisible poisons remain dynamic, industrious, and alive—full-time workers around the clock. The far less resilient biota, however,
express themselves primarily through the sensuality of absence: “Listen, how quiet,” Animal observes as he wanders the factory grounds. “No bird song. No hoppers in the grass. No bee hum. Insects can’t survive here.” Sinha’s rhetorical strategy here—his summoning of ecological carnage through negative presence—echoes “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” which Rachel Carson chose as the epigraph to *Silent Spring*: “The sedge is wither’d from the lake, / And no birds sing.” Sinha’s rhetoric calls to mind, too, Carson’s use of negative presence in the controversial “Fable for Tomorrow” that launches *Silent Spring*, where she evokes the plight of a devastated community. In a once harmonious American heartland town (dubbed Green Meadows in an early draft of *Silent Spring*), “[t]here was a strange stillness. The birds, for example—where had they gone? . . . The hens brooded, but no chicks hatched. . . . The apple trees were coming into bloom but no bees droned among the blossoms, so there was no pollination and there would be no fruit.”

Both Carson and Sinha give the absence wrought by toxicity a sensory density; in so doing they strike a complex temporal note, through blended elegy and apocalypse, lamentation and premonition, inducing in us a double gaze backward in time to loss and forward to yet unrealized threats. Through this double gaze they restage environmental time, asserting its broad parameters against the myopic, fevered immediacy that governs the society of the catastrophe-as-spectacle.

The blighted community Carson depicts in “A Fable for Tomorrow” did not exist in its entirety, although all the component disasters Carson fed into her composite, fictionalized portrait had occurred at some point somewhere in America. By clustering these scattered microdisasters into a single imaginary community, she sought to counter the dissociative thinking encouraged by the temporal and spatial dispersion of environmental violence, acts that in isolation would pass beneath the radar of newsworthiness.

Like Carson, Sinha has clearly grappled with the imaginative dilemmas posed by the diffusion of slow violence across environmental time. But his response is differently inflected, given that all the disasters he summons to mind had indeed been concentrated in a single community. The problem he tackled, moreover, was one Carson never addressed directly: how some afflicted communities are afforded more visibility—and more access to remediation—than others through the mechanisms of globalization,
environmental racism, and class discrimination. This discriminatory distribution of environmental visibility—intranationally and transnationally—lies at the heart of Sinha’s fictional endeavor.

Almost half a century earlier, Carson had protested that the scattershot victims of “herbicides” and “pesticides” ought to be recognized as victims of indiscriminate “biocides” instead. Sinha develops this idea of biocidal risk in terms redolent of Carson: one old Indian woman, bent double by the poisons, upbraids the Kampani lawyer thus: “you told us you were making medicine for the fields. You were making poisons to kill insects, but you killed us instead. I would like to ask, was there ever much difference, to you?” Yet Sinha departs from Carson in representing “pesticides” as both indiscriminate and discriminatory: their killing power exceeds their targeted task of eliminating troublesome insects, but they do discriminate in the unadvertised sense of saddling the local and global poor with the highest burden of risk. Thus, by implication, the biocidal assault on human life is unevenly universal.

Extraordinary Events, Ordinary Forgettings

Looking back at Chernobyl, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Bhopal, Petryna laments how “many persons who have survived these large-scale technological disasters have been caught in a long-term and vicious bureaucratic cycle in which they carry the burden of proof of their physical damage while experiencing the risk of being delegitimated in legal, welfare, and medical institutional contexts.” Such people, the illiterate poor above all, are thrust into a labyrinth of self-fashioning as they seek to fit their bodily stories to the story lines that dangle hope of recognition (possibly, though elusively), even recompense. In so doing, the poor face the double challenge of invisibility and amnesia: numerically, they may constitute the majority, but they remain on the margins in terms of visibility and official memory. From an environmental perspective, this marginality is perpetuated, in part, by what Davis terms “the dialectic of ordinary disaster,” whereby a calamity is incorporated into history and rendered forgettable and ordinary precisely because the burden of risk falls unequally on the unsheltered poor. Such disasters are readily dismissed from memory and policy planning by framing them as accidental, random, and unforeseeable acts of God, without regard for
the precautionary measures that might have prevented these catastrophes or have mitigated their effects.

At stake here is the role of neoliberal globalization in exacerbating both uneven economic development and the uneven development of official memory. What we witness is a kind of fatal bigotry that operates through the spatializing of time, by off-loading risk onto “backward” communities that are barely visible in the corporate media. Contemporary global politics, then, must be recognized “as a struggle for crude, material dominance, but also (threaded ever closer into that struggle) as a battle for the control over appearances.” That battle over spectacle becomes especially decisive for public memory—and for the foresight with which public policy can motivate and execute precautionary measures—when it comes to the attritional casualties claimed, as at Bhopal, by the forces of slow violence.

We have seen, in recent years, some excellent analytical books about the plight of the international urban underclass by Davis, Jeremy Seabrook, and Jan Breman, among others. However, the kind of visibility such books afford is very different from the visibility offered by a picaresque novel. For even the most eloquent social scientific accounts of the underclass, like social scientific accounts of environmental disaster, veer toward the anonymously collective and the statistical. Such accounts thus tend to be in the same gesture humanizing and dehumanizing, animating and silencing.

The dilemma of how to represent the underclass, the infrahombres, stands at the heart of the picaresque tradition. Like GraceLand, Chris Abani’s superb picaresque novel about ingenious desperation in a Lagos shantytown, Animal’s People stages a disaggregated irruption of a vivid individual life. Animal, speaking his life story into the Jarnalis’s tape recorder, is all charismatic voice: his street-level testimony does not start from the generalized hungers of the wretched of the earth, but from the devouring hunger in an individual belly. If the novel gradually enfolds a wider community—Animal’s people—it does so by maintaining at its emotional center Animal, the cracked voiced soloist, who breaks through the gilded imperial veneer of neoliberalism to announce himself in his disreputable vernacular. His is the antivoice to the new, ornate, chivalric discourse of neoliberal “free trade” and “development.”

Through Animal’s immersed voice, Sinha is able to return to questions that have powered the picaresque from its beginnings. What does it mean to
be reduced to living in subhuman, bestial conditions? What chasms divide and what ties bind the wealthy and the destitute, the human and the animal? What does it mean, in the fused imperial language of temporal and spatial dismissal, to be written off as “backward”?63

In Animal’s day-to-day meanderings, the impulse for survival trumps the dream of collective justice. Yet through his somatized foreign burden—and through the intrepid, blighted lives around him—Sinha exhumes from the forces of amnesia not just the memory of a long-ago disaster but the present and future force of that disaster’s embodied, ongoing percolations. The infrahombres—those who must eke out an existence amidst such percolations—are, the novel insists, also of this earth. Through his invention of the environmental picaresque, Sinha summons to the imaginative surface of the novel the underclass’s underreported lives, redeeming their diverse quirks and hopes and quotidian terrors from what, almost half a millennium ago, Lazaro recognized as “the sepulcher of oblivion.”64
Notes

Preface


3. Said’s relationship to postcolonial studies was an uneasy one, given that he viewed his work as more anti-imperial than postcolonial—particularly when the latter field became increasingly associated with poststructuralist methodologies. That said, Said is widely viewed as a foundational figure for postcolonial studies.


5. Ibid., 1.

6. Ibid., 20.

From their different vantage points, Murray Boochkin and Andrew Ross were also prescient figures in this dismantling.

8. Guha discusses the emergence of these terms in several places. See, for example, How Much Should a Person Consume? 214, 233; and Guha, Environmentalism: A Global History (New York: Longman, 2000), 98–124. A particularly decisive text for deepening and applying some of these core terms is Joan Martinez-Alier’s The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of the Ecological Conflicts and Valuation (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2003).


Introduction


4. The term “West” is inevitably shorthand. The environmentalism of the poor within North America and Europe, although not the focus of this book, helped goad affluent environmentalists in the global North to diversify their vision of what counts as environmentalism and to recognize—in the present and retrospectively—third-world-generated activism as a vital force and potential ally in the global resource wars. That said, as I indicate in my penultimate chapter on the ecological threats posed by so-called precision warfare, it is often very difficult to articulate as a single narrative of risk the threat slow violence poses to the health of troops conscripted from the rich-nation poor and the threat to the even more impoverished people who inhabit war zones long term, war zones that are overwhelmingly located in the global South. The very difficulty of integrating such conjoined (if unequal) threats is symptomatic of the layered invisibility that defines slow violence. The poor, of course, are hardly restricted to the global South, but they are dramatically, disproportionately concentrated there.

6. Arundhati Roy has expressed some unease toward the very notion of the writer-activist. Yet her concerns—that the term makes activist writers sound exceptional, that it risks institutionalizing them as experts, and risks narrowing our perception of both writers and activists—need to be taken with a grain of salt, as an exercise in self-protectiveness and false modesty, given her ineluctably institutionalized role in the media as professional (albeit dissident professional) go-between. The fact is only a tiny minority of writers assume an overtly activist public role and that minority—especially when they shuttle between the novel or poetry on the one hand and engaged nonfiction on the other—are routinely skittish, insisting on their imaginative autonomy from ideological obligation while also declaring their political commitments. Such balancing acts between avowal and disavowal surface in the writings of Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Carolyn Forche, Joseph Brodsky, Paul Muldoon, Mahmoud Darwish, and Nadine Gordimer to name but a few. For Roy’s take on writer-activism, see The Algebra of Infinite Justice (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 186–187.


10. If historically Fanon was in no position to write about the slow violence of inequitably distributed environmental threats, he was, of course, alive to the psychological seepage of colonial values that could sustain neocolonialism. Furthermore, in “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” he is attuned to the slow violence that results from colonial “pacification,” the psychological effects far outlasting specific acts of discernible violence. See ibid., 249–316.


22. This is not the place for a full assessment of Galtung’s prodigious writings about peace and violence. At a later point in his thinking, for instance, Galtung complicated his theory of structural violence by introducing the notion of cultural violence.


25. Ibid., 173.

26. In an indicative convergence of the tectonic shifts in geological thinking about speed and media technologies of speed, one notes that Crutzen first advanced his idea of the Anthropocene Age on his blog rather than going through the slower medium of a peer-reviewed academic journal (“The Anthropocene,” http://www.mpch-mainz.mpg.de/~air/anthropocene/).


35. Leopold’s address at the June 1934 dedication of the University of Wisconsin Arboretum, quoted in Scott Russell Sanders, “Speaking for the Land: Aldo Leopold as a Writer,” author’s personal Web site, http://www.scottrussellsanders.com/SRS%20entries/SRS_on_Leopold.htm. Leopold was inconsistent on this point, sometimes emphasizing an ethics of sensory immediacy grounded in local knowledge and sometimes emphasizing an intergenerational ethics less rooted in the moment or in a visible locale.
38. Here I am invoking John Brinckerhoff Jackson’s distinction outlined in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984). For a fine, nuanced interpretation of Jackson’s insights in the context of American Indian literatures, see Joni Adamson, *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001), 90–92. The term “landscape” is of course a contentious one that has a vexed aesthetic and political history. It has been critiqued for implying an external stance toward the land rather than an immersion in place.
41. Although some of my conclusions about the viability of neoliberalism as an analytic tool are antithetical to hers, my thinking here was informed by a lecture by Karen Bakker, “The Limits of Neoliberal Nature” (Yi-Fu Tuan Lecture, University of Wisconsin, October 23, 2009).
42. Michael Pollan’s *The Botany of Desire* (New York: Random House, 2001) mounts the argument that certain plants (species of apples, marijuana, and potatoes among them) have used humans to their advantage.

[287]


47. We should distinguish categorically between an attentiveness to deep time environmental changes and the hokiness of deep ecology, a movement permeated by misanthropy and at best indifferent, at worst hostile, to the environmentalism of the poor.


49. I completed my undergraduate degree—as a double major in English literature and African languages—without ever being required to read a single work of nonfiction, which was roundly disparaged as nonliterary. The days when professors viewed the novel and poetry as the imagination’s soaring peaks and nonfiction as the valley of the shadow of death may be over, but nonfiction is still widely treated in literature departments as at best a subsidiary form.

50. I am aware that so-called biographical criticism has fallen out of favor. Yet it seems to me that biographical context often remains invaluable, especially (though not exclusively) when one is considering nonfiction.

51. Neither of Gordimer’s immigrant parents went to university, and she herself never completed a degree.

52. Tambu is not given a last name in the novel.


54. Ibid., 58.


56. Wai Chee Dimock remains the finest literary scholar on the subject of the unexpected imaginative connection that speaks across geographical and historical divides.


60. Within the general ecocritical indifference to social scientific scholarship, the most notable exception is the work on risk by the German sociologist, Ulrich Beck, which is receiving increasing attention. Among contemporary ecocritics, Pablo Mukherjee stands out as someone who has drawn creatively on disciplines that bridge the humanities and social sciences, most notably cultural geography and cultural anthropology.

61. Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather (New York: Routledge, 1995), 63. If ambivalence, irony, rupture, and hybridity are so pervasive, McClintock asks, how do the dominant powers become dominant in the first place; and how is power won and lost? What guarantees that some forms of power become dominant while others are subverted? Are the internal fissures in form and discourse just waiting to rupture from within, or is it the role of the critic (in an act of extreme professional self-regard) to facilitate such ruptures?


64. In the final chapter of this book, I elaborate on the implications of the belated engagement between postcolonial and ecocriticism, an engagement that has recently been energized from a variety of quarters.


nuclear colonialism. For a rich engagement with transnational environmental literatures, see also *Postcolonial Ecologies*, ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).


72. Clearly, the problems of transnational answerability are not unique to the United States, but (until China’s recent ascent) have assumed their most consequential form in relation to U.S. and Soviet military and economic foreign policy during the post–World War II era.


75. Anne McClintock, Ella Shohat, and Fernando Coronil, in particular, have put forward cogent arguments for the limitations of the term.


77. For an economical, yet textured account of this alliance of doubt purveyors, see especially George Monbiot, *Heat. How to Stop the Planet From Burning* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2007), 20-42.


79. This memo was put out by the tobacco company Brown and Williamson. As Monbiot documents, the tobacco industry and the oil majors have worked with the same public relations firm to generate similar strategies for disseminating doubt about the scientific consensus on, respectively, the health risks of smoking and the human causes of climate change. See anon, “Smoking and Health Proposal,” Brown and Williamson document no. 680561778-1786 at http://legacy
80. Fanon, 38.
83. For a brilliant inquiry into the neglected field of public works in postcolonial literature, see Michael Rubenstein, *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010). Although his focus is Irish Modernism, Rubenstein’s rich conceptual insights can be productively adapted to postcolonial literary studies at large.
85. Although the historical focus of Munif’s novels *Cities of Salt* and *The Trench* stretches as far back as the 1930s, his perspective on the fallout from Saudi-U.S. petro-relations remains inflected by the geopolitics of the early to mid-1980s, when Munif was writing those two volumes of his oil quintet.
86. Sinha came to activism relatively late. He was (in his own words) an “accidental activist” whose commitments were triggered by two ad campaigns he devised for Amnesty International. Those campaigns raised funds for communities afflicted by two epochal acts of violence against the poor: Saddam Hussein’s 1988 gas attacks on the Kurds and Union Carbide’s 1984 gassing of Bhopal as a result of cost-cutting infrastructural neglect. Arguably, Sinha’s professional training in the image world of advertising left him better equipped than most writer-activists of his generation to adapt his skills to the digital era.

1. Slow Violence, Neoliberalism, and the Environmental Picaresque

3. Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989), 115. Sinha has insisted that although *Animal’s People* is fictional, every major event that happens in the novel occurred in Bhopal.

4. Like a number of picaresque novels, *Animal’s People* simulates orality, in this case the technological orality of a series of tapes the narrator makes for a foreign “Jarnalis” in an effort to record (but retain command over) his story. Sinha also adapts another widespread feature of the picaresque, the readerly aside, addressed here to the anonymous “Eyes,” suggestive of reader-as-voyeuristic-outsider. This strategy concentrates a core dilemma that the protagonist shares with Khaufpur’s poor: a desire to be recognized by the world at large, to break free from invisibility, but a horror at the dehumanizing vertical dynamics of pity that such recognition typically entails.

5. In Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (New York: Penguin, 1998) we witness a shift toward a different mode of biological citizenship in the wake of an “airborne toxic event” (117). When Jack Gladney, a professor of Hitler studies, attempts to assess his survival prospects, a health technician responds with a battery of ambiguous computerized statistics: “It’s what we call a massive data-base tally. Gladney, J. A. K. I punch in the name, the substance, the exposure time and then I tap into your computer history. Your genetics, your personals, your medicals, your psychologicals, your police-and-hospitals. It comes back pulsing stars. This doesn’t mean anything is going to happen to you as such, at least not today or tomorrow. It just means you are the sum total of your data” (ibid., 141). Ironically, the toxic invasion of Gladney’s body occasions a second invasion, of his privacy by the state. His sense of self is technologized—statistically expanded and humanly reduced—without him gaining, in exchange, any greater surety as to his survival prospects.


11. According to Petryna, by 2001, 50 percent of Ukraine’s population was living below the poverty line (Life Exposed, 93).
12. Petryna notes that “present-day processes of recompense . . . were entangled with new patterns of inequality that themselves presented the most immediate issues of social injustice. The very framing of ‘injury’ now entailed the social and health costs associated with state and market transformations and emerging inequalities” (Life Exposed, 218).
13. Ibid., 78.
14. Ibid., 35.
16. Indra Sinha, Animal’s People (London: Simon, 2007), 230. The forces playing for time include both Union Carbide leaders and certain high-ranking Indian government officials who are leery of alienating a prominent global corporation that they hope will continue to invest in India.
19. Sinha had been struggling to find a satisfying voice and perspective for his novel “when a friend showed me some photographs from Bhopal. There was one of a young lad of about 19 who was on all fours because his back was so badly twisted, but he had a sort of cheeky look about him. And just seeing that, it was as if the character of Animal just leapt fully fledged into my head” (“The Accidental Activist,” 11).
21. Ibid., 78.
23. Ibid., 30.
24. Ibid., 3.
25. As Animal notes: “I was born a few days before that night, which no one wants to remember, but nobody can forget” (Sinha, Animal’s People, 1). A preoccupation with making visible that which has been kept invisible and suppressed—not least the afflicted, forgotten poor themselves—recurs in the picaresque from the genre’s beginnings.
28. Ibid., 12.


In keeping with the picaresque fixation with sharp twists of fate, the novel achieves a comic resolution through marriage and sudden wealth, as Animal reveals that he has amassed enough secret savings to buy another member of the underclass, the prostitute Anjali, from her pimp and marry her.

*Animal's People* blends the picaresque with, among other genres, the zombie story, which is set in motion by the novel’s opening words—“I was once human. So I’m told”—and culminating in Animal’s drug-addled wanderings among hallucinations of the living dead. This calls to mind the Chernobyl worker who depicts himself as one of the “living dead”: “Our memory is gone. You forget everything—we walk like corpses” (Sinha, *Animal's People*, 1, 3).

Maiorino, “Picaresque Econopoetics,” xi.

Animal refuses, to the end, a surgical resolution to his penumbral, buckled status. He has his rationales. But by implication, at least, he has seen enough of humanity not to mistake an upright posture for a stance of moral rectitude. Sinha’s strategy here is reminiscent of Günter Grass’s in *The Tin Drum*, where his magic realist narrator of historical catastrophe, Oskar Matzerath, opts out of the “progress” narrative of childhood to adulthood and clings in protest to his diminutive stature. Both books somatize the antihumanist strains that permeate them: Animal’s and Oskar’s bodies give physical testament to a conviction that, paradoxically, inhumanity ranks high among humanity’s defining characteristics.


Ibid., 185.

Ibid., 1, 214. Animal’s Catholic adoptive mother (who after the disaster can only speak and comprehend French) also develops a tendency to babble apocalyptic portents that draw heavily on the Book of Revelation.

Ibid., 366.


41. Quoted in Jacob Weinberg, “An Imperfect Storm,” Slate, September 7, 2005, 3. Here Dyson’s argument is reminiscent of the case Mike Davis makes in Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World. See also Naomi Klein’s closely argued contention that “the idea of exploiting crisis and disaster has been the modus operandi of fundamentalist capitalism.” The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism (New York: Metropolitan, 2007), 9. “By the time Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, and the nexus of Republican politicians, think tanks and land developers started talking about ‘clean sheets’ and exciting opportunities, it was clear that this was now the preferred method of advancing corporate goals: using moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering” (ibid., 8).

42. See, for example, K. Gopalakrishnan, “Unskilled Worker Had Cleaned Tank,” Hindustan Times, December 5, 1984, 1; and Archana Kumar, “Sirens Called Them to Death,” Hindustan Times, December 5, 1984, 1.

43. Njabulo Ndebele, Fine Lines from the Box: Further Thoughts about Our Country (Roggebaai, South Africa: Umuzi, 2007), 137.

44. Environmental racism is alive and well in India, entangled as it is with discriminatory traditions of caste, class, gender, religion, and aboriginality. Arundhati Roy has been particularly vocal on this matter. See Roy in conversation with David Barsamian in The Checkbook and the Cruise Missile: Conversations with Arundhati Roy (Cambridge, MA: South End, 2004), 125–127.

45. See Ndebele, Fine Lines, 137. In contemporary South Africa this failure notoriously manifested itself in the Mbeki government’s calamitous mixture of equivocation and denial regarding the causes of HIV/AIDS. One outraged commentator condemned the resultant mass deaths as “genocide by sloth.”


47. Sinha, Animal’s People, 283.

48. Ibid., 92.

49. The character Shambhu is “a twice-victim of the Kampani. He had breathed the poisons of that night, plus the wells in his neighborhood were full of poisons leaked from the factory” (Sinha, Animal’s People, 147). Sinha’s account of this second, delayed hazard transmitted through well water recalls Rachel Carson’s elegiac evocation of the poisoning of formerly pristine wells: “many man-made chemicals act in much the same way as radiation; they lie long in the soil, and enter into living organisms, passing from one to another. Or they may travel mysteriously by underground streams, emerging to combine, through the alchemy of air and sunlight, into new forms, which kill vegetation, sicken cattle, and work unknown harm on those who drink from once pure wells.” Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, (1962; repr., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 23–24.


52. Animal gives focus to these category leakages when he reflects on his beating at the hands of the police: “Neither Christian am I nor Hindu nor Muslim, not Brahmin nor Sufi nor saint, neither man am I nor beast. I don’t know what is being beaten here. If they kill me what will die?” (Sinha, *Animal’s People*, 313).

53. Key figures within the Indian government were complicit in this sleight of hand, as they were reluctant to alienate a global powerhouse like Dow and hoped it would continue to invest in India.


55. Ibid., 185.


57. Ibid., 8.


62. The authenticity or realism of his animalized urchin voice is of no relevance here. Sinha’s novel is such a patently hybrid mix of picaresque, magic realist, social realist, gothic, zombie, and apocalyptic narrative strategies that questions of authenticity evaporate. It is the subversive charisma and page-turning urgency of Animal’s voice that matter, not whether real urchins speak like that in Bhopal (which, after all, is an inspiration for but hardly identical to Khaufpur).

63. Witness Nisha’s tirade against the Kampani: “My father’s precious justice is of no use, our government’s of no use, appeals to humanity are no use, because these people are not human, they’re animals” (Sinha, *Animal’s People*, 332). On hearing this, Animal balks at Nisha’s speciesism, which he reads as insulting to animals by debasing them to the level of humans.


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2. Fast-forward Fossil

1. For the title to this chapter, I am indebted to Ellen Driscoll’s 2009 exhibit “Fast-forward Fossil,” a floor-sized environmental sculpture composed of recycled
plastic milk cartons that the artist harvested from dumps. Amalgamating features from three oil-drilling sites—the Niger Delta, the Alberta tar sands, and the North Sea—the exhibit creates a composite, subsiding landscape littered with abandoned oil derricks, sink holes, shattered trees, teetering houses, a gallows, and some empty cages. I read the salvaged plasticity of Driscoll’s disposable landscape as the artist’s way of giving imaginative shape to the slow violence of hydrocarbon time, past and future. The translucence of the recycled milk cartons—their material ghostliness—gives the sculpture an eerie, suspended quality that feels both elegiac and premonitory. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q38bGDNWKQw


3. Antony Anghie, Sovereignty, Imperialism and the Making of International Law (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 114–137. I am grateful to Adom Getachew for alerting me to Anghie’s work and for encouraging me to clarify this point.


10. Despite some expansive excursions into the Russian Revolution and World War I, Sinclair’s oil novel does not engage the international ties that have come to dominate the story of petroleum and, above all, the fraught bonds between the United States and the Middle East. The reasons for this silence are obvious: Sinclair published Oil! before any American petroleum corporation had signed a
concessionary agreement with a Gulf sheik and before the State of Israel existed. Arguably the most ambitious U.S. oil novel since Sinclair’s is Linda Hogan’s Mean Spirit (New York: Ivy Books, 1991). Set during the 1920s conflict over oil-rich Osage tribal lands in Oklahoma, Mean Spirit is informed by many of the “resource curse” concerns that animate the writings of both Munif and Saro-Wiwa.

11. Abdelrahman Munif’s name sometimes also appears as Abd al-Rahman Munif. For consistency, I have deployed the former throughout, as it is the version of his name used in Peter Theroux’s English translation.


22. Interview in Banipal, October 1998, quoted in Hafez, “An Arabian Master,” 47. The 1967 defeat reverberated for Munif, as for many Arabs, with the [298]

24. Although Munif’s books would be banned in Saudi Arabia (and elsewhere in the region), the Saudis revoked his citizenship on political grounds some years before he turned to writing.
25. Many of his essays were infused with political polemic; others, however, addressed his great cultural passions, not least for the extensive traditions of Arab visual art, music, and architecture.
27. Ibid., 4.
29. Indeed, the foreign oil-hunters try to camouflage their quest as a search for further water, but the locals are water-wise enough to suspect a ruse because the Americans are looking in the wrong places.
33. Ibid., 9.
37. Ibid., 86.
38. Ibid., 98.
39. Ibid., 106
40. Robert Vitalis provides the most detailed, incisive account of the Jim Crow practices of American oil corporations in Saudi Arabia. See *America’s Kingdom*, 88–120.
Here I am in accord with Ghosh ("Petrofictions"), Hafez ("An Arabian Master"), and McLarney ("Empire of the Machine") who all remark upon Munif’s overly romantic pursuit of a prior authenticity.


See, for example, Munif’s account of how “the people of this immense, harsh desert were born, lived and died in a grim natural cycle” (*Cities of Salt*, 161).

Ghosh is especially insightful on Munif’s failure to give definition or interiority to the foreign workers, Asian and Middle Eastern, who are lured to Harran. See Ghosh, "Petrofictions," 34.


Munif, *Cities of Salt*, 10.


In conversation, June 10, 2007.

Munif is imaginatively seeking to enter into the mindsets of Bedouin characters who, for religious and imperial historical reasons, remain profoundly suspicious of the motives of foreigners. Munif himself has long been on record as an opponent of what he calls political Islam, whether embodied by the Ayatollah Khomeini or by the politicized Islamic movements that America frequently helped foment and fund during the cold war as a perceived counterweight to communism.

Whatever Updike’s strengths as a writer, he didn’t possess any instinct for transnational imaginings, as evidenced by what is inarguably his most feeble novel, *The Terrorist*.

Munif’s sense of how easily place and history can be irreparably fractured calls to mind sentiments that Czeslow Milosz voices in *The Captive Mind*. As a Pole, through historical hardship, Milosz learned that what he calls the “natural” social and environmental order can be irreversibly undone at high speed.
On arriving in the United States, he was startled by the widespread American assumption that the world they inhabited would “naturally” continue more or less the same. Milosz read this assumption as an imaginative shortcoming born of historical amnesia and geographical isolation. See Milosz, The Captive Mind, trans. Jane Zielonko (New York: Penguin, 1980), 25–30.

58. I am grateful to Samer Alatout for elucidating this meaning of ‘al-Tih in conversation, June 6, 2009.


61. Patrick Flynn, “What It Means to Work for ARAMCO,” manuscript from 1984, box 11, folder 32, William E. Mulligan Papers, Special Collections Division, Lauinger Library, Georgetown University, Washington, DC. Quoted in Vitalis, America’s Kingdom, xi. Wallace Stegner, more ambiguous about his role as cheerleader for American corporate expansionism, nonetheless buys into a glossy magazine Orientalism: “This was Arabia as a romantic imagination might have created it; nights so mellow that they lay out under the scatter of dry bright stars, and heard the silence beyond their fire as if the whole desert hung listening. Physically, it might have been Arizona or New Mexico, with its flat crestlines, its dry clarity of air its silence. But it felt more mysterious than that; and the faces of soldiers and guide and interpreter, dark, bearded, gleaming in teeth and eye as they spoke or laughed, corroborated Hamilton’s sense that this was authentic Arabia, hardly touched by the West.” Wallace Stegner, Discovery! The Search for Arabian Oil (1971; repr., Portola St. Vista, CA: Selwa Press, 2007), 15.


65. Munif, Cities of Salt, 140–141.

66. Of course, the predominantly oral Bedouin community will have encountered writing before. However, what distinguishes the Americans is the way they write and how their writing is ritually enfolded into the customary shape of their strange days.

67. Munif, Cities of Salt, 45.

69. Munif, Cities of Salt, 545.
73. Upton Sinclair, Oil! (1927; repr., New York: Penguin, 2007), 527. Despite their many differences, Munif, like Sinclair, was a great observer of the technologies of power—and of crowd power and worker insurrections.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
82. Stegner, Discovery. The fifteen-year delay between Stegner’s submission of the book and its publication is attributable to concerns within Aramaco that it might upset relations with the House of Saud. That said, Discovery is, for the most part, hell-bent on defending both the idea of American exceptionalism and the honorable role the American oil corporation played in Saudi uplift.
83. Ibid., xvi.
84. Ibid., xxix, xxx, xxvi.
85. Ibid., xvii.
88. Munif also laments the absence of fundamental rights in Saudi Arabia and, above all, the third-class status of Saudi women that he argues has profound repercussions for Saudi dignity and belonging.
3. Pipedreams

6. Saro-Wiwa repeatedly uses the terms “recolonization” and “indigenous colonialism” to describe relations between Nigerian regimes that have favored the three major ethnic groups and violently suppressed the rights and claims of extreme minorities like the Ogoni. See, for example, *Genocide in Nigeria*, 20; and *Nigeria: The Brink of Disaster* (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Saros, 1991), 71.
12. Even that figure exaggerates the amount they have received, for most of the 1.5 percent has been unilaterally “borrowed” by the powerful states where the Yoruba, the Igbo, and the Hausa-Fulani are in the majority.
20. Oamen Enaholo, quoted ibid., 79.
22. Saro-Wiwa argues that the African writer ought to be *l’homme engage* in *A Month and a Day*, 81.
26. This is not, of course, to suggest that all Saro-Wiwa’s multigenre output was overtly instrumental, just that a considerable body of his writing, particularly his nonfiction, was expressly so. See, for example, his insistence that “literature in a critical situation such as Nigeria’s cannot be divorced from politics. Indeed, literature must serve society by steeping itself in politics, by intervention. . . . [Writers] must play an interventionist role . . . The writer must be *l’homme engage*: the intellectual man of action.” Quoted in Charles R. Larson, ed., *Under African Skies* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 210.
27. The traditions of socialism were never as prominent in Anglophone West Africa as they were in Southern and East Africa, not least because West Africa was more shallowly colonized than Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique, and Angola. West Africa was thus spared the ravaging anticolonial wars in which the goals of decolonization and socialism typically converged.
33. Ibid., 88.
35. Saro-Wiwa, A Month and a Day, 79.
36. Ibid., 94.
37. Ibid., 183.
38. Ibid., 73.
40. A Month and a Day, 165.
42. For Saro-Wiwa’s insistence that corporate racism and Nigerian domestic colonialism are equally at fault, see Without Walls. He also makes this case in both Genocide in Nigeria (8, 82) and A Month and a Day (18, 73, 186–188).
44. Saro-Wiwa, A Month and a Day, 170.
47. Saro-Wiwa, Genocide in Nigeria, 82.
49. The Igbo dream of creating an independent secessionist nation called Biafra would not have been viable without the sea of oil beneath the Niger Delta, which they included in their projected Biafra. The prospect of losing that oil wealth intensified the ferocity of the Hausa-Yoruba response to the secessionists.
50. Saro-Wiwa, A Month and a Day, 187.
52. Saro-Wiwa, Genocide in Nigeria, 7. The neocolonial rapport between the Nigerian leadership and the oil companies may be illustrated by the case of Philip Asiodu, a Nigerian director of Chevron. Asiodu has reassured investors, “Given the small size and population of the oil-producing areas, it is not cynical to
observe that even if the resentments of oil producing states continue, they cannot threaten the stability of the country nor affect its continued economic development” (quoted in Saro-Wiwa, Genocide in Nigeria, 87). Before becoming a director of Chevron, Asiodu had held a prominent post in Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Mines and Power. Nor is he the only such crossover figure: the Abacha regime and the transnationals held the delta micro-minorities in similar contempt, treating them principally as impediments to personal fortune.

54. Saro-Wiwa, A Month and a Day, 188.
55. See, for example, his interview on Without Walls in which he called for economic sanctions and Nigeria’s expulsion from the United Nations. He argued that “[t]he military governments of Nigeria have sat on other Nigerians in a way that is just as evil as what was done in South Africa.”
56. General Sani Abacha and his military regime annulled the democratic elections of November 1993 and imprisoned president-elect Mashood Abiola and other internal opposition leaders on trumped up charges of treason. In July 1995, former president Olusegun Obasanjo and forty other opponents of the regime were convicted and sentenced to death. After an international outcry, these sentences were commuted to life in July 1995. Four months later, another of Abacha’s kangaroo courts condemned Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight to hang.
57. Mandela’s stance echoed that of his first deputy, Thabo Mbeki, who had visited Nigeria in July 1995, and failing to dissuade Abacha from his hardline course had nonetheless concluded that “[w]e need a more equal relationship. Western countries must accept the capacity of African countries to set an African agenda.” Quoted in “Too Gentle Giant,” Economist, November 18, 1995, 42.
58. “Pretoria Blunders as Nigeria Burns,” Mail and Guardian (Johannesburg), November 11, 1995, 3
64. Piqued by South African condemnations of Nigeria after Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight were executed, Abacha barred the national soccer team (and African champions at the time), the Eagles, from participating in the African Cup
of Nations in South Africa. The symbolic import of this competition, contested by fifty-two African nations, can scarcely be overestimated: throughout Africa it is the premier event on the sporting calendar. The Eagles’ inability to defend their title (and South Africa’s ensuing victory) became a deep source of national mourning in Nigeria and the surest mark of the country’s growing isolation.

65. This ad was placed by the Philippine government in *Fortune* in 1975. Quoted in Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 159.


67. Quoted in Rankin, “Primitive,” 16.

68. Ibid.


80. Ibid.


83. Ibid., 148.

84. Ibid., 180.

89. Ibid., 163.
94. Ibid., 44.

4. Slow Violence, Gender, and the Environmentalism of the Poor

5. Ibid.
6. The insistence that shock and awe was the beginning of a war unprecedented in its humanitarian precision was heard across the political spectrum. Donald Rumsfeld, most memorably, insisted that the futuristic weaponry the United States deployed in the war exhibited “a degree of precision that no one dreamt of in a prior conflict,” resulting in bombings that were morally exemplary: “The care that goes into it, the humanity that goes into it, to see that military targets are destroyed, to be sure, but that it’s done in a way, and in a manner, and in a direction and with a weapon that is appropriate to that very particularized target. . . . I think that will be the case when ground truth is achieved” (United States Department of Defense, “DoD News Briefing—Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers,” March 21, 2003).
18. The time frame here is crucial. With the help of international donors, Maathai put in place a system whereby each woman was paid a modest amount not for planting a tree, but for keeping it alive for six months. If it were still growing at that point, she would be remunerated. Thus the focus of the group’s activities was not the single act of planting but maintaining growth over time. The literature on desertification is complex and conflicted, largely around questions of the scale and source of the problem as well as the quality of the research. Given the fraught debates over the implications of desertification, I have avoided the term, preferring simply to reference the slow violence of soil erosion and deforestation. For two useful accounts of the spread of positions on this issue, see Jeremy Swift, “Desertification: Narratives, Winners and Losers,” in *The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment*, ed. Melissa Leach and Robin Mearns (Oxford: James Currey, 1996); and William M. Adams, “When Nature Won’t Stay Still: Conservation, Equilibrium and Control,” in *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-Colonial Era*, ed. William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan (London: Earthscan, 2003).
23. A major precursor to the conflict over Karura had occurred in 1989. The regime had been steadily appropriating and privatizing parts of Nairobi’s Uhuru Park, which Maathai has likened to New York’s Central Park and London’s Hyde Park as a vital green space, a space for leisure and for political gatherings.
Maathai learned that the ruling party was to erect a sixty-story skyscraper for new party headquarters and a media center in Uhuru Park, battle was joined. Green Belt activists spearheaded a successful movement to turn back the regime’s efforts to privatize public land under the deceptively spectacular iconography of national development. The regime would not forgive Maathai for humiliating them in this manner.


28. The Mau Mau uprising was far from being an undivided revolt: numerous fault lines opened up at times, not least between educated nationalist leaders and the predominantly peasant forest fighters.


30. In many Kenyan novels about the Mau Mau period, the forest fighters are depicted with a cloying if understandable romanticism. On the complex and varied legacies of colonial cultures of nature, one notes Maathai’s admiration for the Men of the Trees, an organization founded in Kenya in the 1920s that brought together British and Kikuyu leaders to promote tree planting (Maathai, *Unbowed*, 131).

31. Although the initial resistance came from the Green Belt Movement, the resistance spread to the streets of Nairobi, where it was taken up by a broad swath of the population, particularly students, both female and male.

32. Maathai, *Unbowed*, 120.


35. Fiona Mackenzie, “Contested Ground,” 27. Mackenzie, like Beinart, stresses that there were among colonial officiandom some dissenting voices who recognized the value and applicability of local agricultural and environmental knowledge.


39. An important distinction should be made between the routes that Carson and Maathai took to their writing and their activism. Carson was a lifelong writer who remade herself as an activist late in life, after she traded her lyrical voice (which she’d honed as a celebrant of marine life) for the voice of elegy and apocalypse in *Silent Spring*. Maathai’s trajectory was in the opposite direction: an activist all her adult life, she became a writer of testimony only in her later years.


44. Quoted ibid., 409.


47. This misogyny, together with the regime’s authoritarian intolerance of dissent, had profound professional and financial repercussions for Maathai. In 1982, after teaching at the University of Nairobi for sixteen years, she decided to run for parliament. To do so, she was told she had to resign from her job at the university. She was then promptly informed by the electoral committee that she was disqualified (on a trumped up technicality) from running for parliament. So, twelve hours after resigning as chair of the university’s Department of Veterinary Anatomy, Maathai asked for her job back. Under pressure from the regime, the university refused to reemploy her and, moreover, denied her
all pension and health benefits. Maathai, a forty-one-year-old single mother with no safety net, was thrown out onto the streets. One notes that, in 2005, shortly after Maathai was awarded the Nobel Prize, the very university that had treated her so appallingly tried to cash in on her international fame by awarding her an honorary doctorate in science.


50. Maathai, Unbowed, 110.

51. Ibid., 111. For a more elaborate account of the burden of traditionalism placed on women in the context of a Janus-faced modernity, see Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (New York: Routledge, 1995), 294–300.

52. Maathai, Unbowed, 115, 196. There are echoes between the nativist arguments mounted against Maathai by President Moi and the arguments of her ex-husband, Mwangi, who testified in court that he was divorcing her because she was un governable: “[T]oo educated, too strong, too successful, too stubborn, and too hard to control” (quoted in Unbowed, 146).


54. Maathai, Unbowed, 44–46.

55. Maathai, Unbowed, 4.

56. Quoted in Patrick E. Tyler, “In Wartime, Critics Question Peace Prize for Environmentalism,” New York Times, October 10, 2004, A5. Morten Hoeglund, a member of Norway’s Progress Party, concurred with Hagen, arguing that “the committee should have focused on more important matters, such as weapons of mass destruction” (quoted in Selva, “Wangari Maathai,” 9).

57. Quoted in Patrick E. Tyler, “Peace Prize Goes to Environmentalism in Kenya,” New York Times, October 9, 2004, A5. See, for example, Maathai’s insistence that through a focus on reforestation and environmental resource management, “we might preempt many conflicts over the access and control of resources” (Unbowed, xvi).

58. In Kenya, which boasts some forty ethnicities, the sources of ethnic tension are complex, but have often been especially explosive along the fault lines between pastoralists and farmers where resources are overstressed. Divisive politicians have manipulated these tensions to their advantage, for instance, during the violence that beset the Rift Valley, Nyanza, and Western provinces in the early 1990s and, more broadly, during the aftermath of the disputed national elections of 2007. The slow violence of resource depletion, a mistrust of government, and
political leaders who play the ethnic card can easily kindle an atmosphere of terror that fuels social unrest.


5. Unimagined Communities

3. On the basis of a country report by the World Commission on Dams, Arundhati Roy puts the figure for India’s dam-displaced at 56 million, while Patrick McCully argues that—prior to the Three Gorges project—Chinese dams alone may have displaced 60 million. See David Barsamian and Arundhati Roy, The Checkbook and the Cruise Missile (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2004), 25.
6. In Savage Dreams, Solnit commits herself to repopulating those places of cultural and imaginative evacuation. Her restorative ambitions are both temporal and spatial: she gives back to these deserts an environmental and cultural memory as well as connecting them globally, by tracing the cold-war links between Nevada and Kazakhstan. These links include new forms of imaginative awareness generated by a transnational protest movement.
7. Solnit, Savage Dreams, 154.
8. Across the world, the people who are reconstituted as uninhabitants seldom belong to large or powerful ethnic groups. This is true of all the desert nuclear test sites internationally: in the Nevada Test Site; in the deserts of Kazakhstan,
Pakistan, and India; in the Central Desert in Australia; the French test sites in preindependence Algeria; in western China; and in Southern Africa’s Kalahari Desert. In all these areas, the people who are strategically recast as virtual uninhabitants are micro-minorities from marginalized ethnic groups. They are also very often nomads, people who traditionally have had to learn to live, through movement, within the limits of the land.


10. Ibid., 74–76.


12. Ibid., 240.


17. Ibid., 106.


19. Roy, *Cost of Living*, ix. The Narmada Valley project has since been surpassed—both in the scale of its engineering and the scale of environmental calamity—by the Three Gorges Dam.

20. If the advent of the nuclear age has inspired a long tradition of activist polemic—from John Hersey, Jonathan Schell, Rebecca Solnit, and Rachel Carson to Kobo Abe, E. P. Thompson, and Martin Amis—the rise of the megadam has prompted a much more modest literature, largely associated (as I’ve suggested) with the wilderness ethic of the American West and, more recently, the Three Gorges Dam in China.


27. McCully estimates that 40 percent of oustees are Adivasis.
29. Regarding the rationalizing of irrational rivers, Maxim Gorky observed that Soviet dam builders sought to make “mad rivers sane” (quoted in McCully, Silenced Rivers, 17). The discourse of insanity is an insistent one, attached by megadam proponents to “wild” rivers and by opponents to the impact of damming on floodplains, deltas, and rates of flow and silting that result in longer and more catastrophic floods. Janet Abramovitz, for example, depicts the predictable 1993 floods of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers as a direct result of overdamming, providing “a dramatic and costly lesson on the effects of treating the natural flow of rivers as a pathological condition.” Abramovitz, Imperiled Waters, Impoverished Future: The Decline of Freshwater Ecosystems. (Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute, 1996), 27
32. See especially McCully, Silenced Rivers, 239ff.
35. Decades later Hoover still had the power to terrorize the Soviets into playing catch-up.
39. See, for example, her critique of “a corporate globalization [that] has increased the distance between the people who take decisions and the people who have
to suffer those decisions” (Barsamian and Roy, *The Checkbook and the Cruise Missile*, 73).

40. Roy, *Power Politics*, 32

41. Ibid, 32.


44. McCully, *Silenced Rivers*, 174. In *The Cost of Living*, Roy acknowledges McCully’s incomparable book as “the rock on which this work stands.”

45. Roy, *Cost of Living*, 123.


6. Stranger in the Eco-village

1. My use of the term postapartheid in this chapter comes with all the familiar caveats. The nation’s democratic turn on April 27, 1994 was a critical marker in South African history. But “surely,” Njabulo Ndebele correctly insists, “the death of apartheid is a social process not an event.” (*Fine Lines from the Box: Further Thoughts About Our Country* (Roggebaai, South Africa: Umuzi, 2007), 93). That process is uneven and ongoing. This chapter is, in part, an attempt to explore from the angle of environmental justice the limits and pacing of that systemic transformation.


3. Taxidermy is located at the complex crossroads of Enlightenment science, colonial trophy hunting, and hypermasculine interior design. Taxidermal time is, in multiple senses, suspended time: the mounted corpses are frozen in animated
positions, usually (for predators) with fangs exposed. The period reference is anachronistic as is the craft itself, which projects a musty, neo-Victorian aura of white male risk-management.

4. African culture, of whatever ethnicity, was present only in the interior atmospherics: the reed baskets and masks that afforded the game lodge lobby a decorative indigeneity.

5. The Eastern Cape is primarily a Xhosa region. It has very few Zulu inhabitants. But Kleinhans understood that Zulu had greater international recognition value, in the push for African authenticity, than Xhosa. Besides, Zulu was easier for foreigners to pronounce.


7. The cultural histories of game lodges dedicated to game viewing, private reserves where hunting is part of the experience, and national parks are all differently inflected. Although a full accounting of those differences is beyond the scope of this chapter, performances of the eco-archaic and racialized ecologies of looking remain, I believe, a constitutive element in all those varied spaces.


11. One of the most notorious of these forced removals in the name of conservation involved the Makuleke when the Kruger National Park was extended northward. Another controversial case involved the Tonga, who were moved twice: in 1924 to make way for the Ndumo Game Reserve, then again in the 1990s to create a corridor that would give elephants greater freedom of movement and access to water which, accordingly, became more difficult for the Tonga to access. Martha Honey, Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise? (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1999), 367. For a broader, international perspective on conservation refugees, see especially Ramachandra Guha, Environmentalism: A Global History (New York: Longman, 2000); and Mark Dowie, Conservation Refugees (Boston: MIT Press, 2009).


22. South African Eden, James Stevenson-Hamilton’s influential memoir on his Kruger Park years appeared in 1937, the same year as Karen Blixen’s Out of Africa. Both books invoked an elegiac, Edenic rhetoric to help mobilize a megafauna-centered conservationist movement whose legacy continues to shape the contemporary economic and cultural landscapes of South African and Kenya. Stevenson-Hamilton, a Scottish immigrant (and the Kruger Park’s first warden), was arguably as pivotal a figure, through his actions and writings, in the shaping of South African conservation as that other Scottish immigrant conservationist, John Muir, was in the United States.


25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 164.

27. Baldwin’s position here bears comparison with Jordan’s reflections on “The Native Show on the Patio” performed at the Sheraton British Colonial. Her
racial and gender identification with the Bahamian women who perform in the “Native Show,” who serve her, or hawk trinkets on the street is compromised by the structures of the tourist industry: “We are not particularly women anymore; we are parties to a transaction designed to set us against each other” (Jordan, “Report from the Bahamas,” 321).

28. This is not to suggest that the relationship between local white ideologies and foreign ones always dovetail. Ndebele mentions, for instance, an American family who remark on the oddity of cross-dressing as “leisure colonialists.” Ndebele, “Game Lodges and Leisure Colonialists,” 12.


31. Ibid., 173.

32. Clearly, the postapartheid redistribution of political, economic, and cultural power remains profoundly uneven.

33. Ibid., 175.

34. The routine comparison of Kruger with Israel reaffirms the park’s status, particularly in Afrikaner cultures of nature, as a place of spiritual pilgrimage, a chosen people’s chosen land. Kruger Park was officially established under the 1926 National Parks Act, although it was then much smaller than its current size.

35. The status of the Kruger Park as an overdetermined buffer zone was intensified by the ascent to power of Marxist guerillas in 1975, an event that marked the end of Portuguese colonial control of Mozambique and served, in addition, as a partial revolutionary inspiration for the Soweto uprising the following year. During the ensuing Mozambican civil war, the apartheid regime deemed Mozambique (which served as a base for ANC guerillas) a terrorist state. The South African regime, with strong backing from the Reagan administration, funded, trained, harbored, and armed forces opposing the Mozambican government. By the late 1980s, the civil war had displaced 2 million of Mozambique’s 14 million people and killed 100,000 of them.

36. Gordimer’s compelling essay on the Kruger Park-Mozambique border zone, “The Ingot and the Stick,” seems to have passed under the critical radar. It goes unmentioned both in Stephen Clingman’s extensive critical work on Gordimer and in Ronald Roberts’s 750-page biography of her.


38. Ibid., 31.

39. After the discovery of gold in 1877, white immigration to the Transvaal surged. The resultant rapid ascent of industrialization and urbanization in turn fed the rise of commercial agriculture. White mining magnates and white farmers were thrust into competition with each other for scarce black labor. Waves
of legislation were passed with the intent of making rural survival more precarious for black subsistence communities, thereby forcing increasing numbers into capitalist wage-labor on the mines and farms. The 1913 Land Act was particularly devastating, barring blacks from buying or leasing land from whites except in the designated native reserves. From a white ruling-class perspective, this land squeeze had the double advantage of forcing blacks into wage labor and removing a source of agricultural competition. For a more textured history of these developments, see William Beinart, *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock, and the Environment 1770–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, a fuller accounting of the rise of game reserves in relation to colonial cultures of labor and leisure would engage J. M. Coetzee’s reflections on idleness in *White Writing* (1988; rpt. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) and Syed Hussein Alata’s *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (New York: Routledge, 1977).

40. This poacher-conservationist dyad helps explain an erratic policy toward human habitation inside the Kruger National Park. After initially barring Africans from the park in the early twentieth century, the white authorities allowed about 3,000 Africans to reside there, but charged them rent (Carruthers, *Kruger National Park*, 81). This rent provided a revenue stream and ensured that those residents would be forced to sell their labor for menial amounts. Black bodies—of African renters and, later, prison gangs—were dragooned into erecting fences, building roads and camps, and catching poachers. The invention and maintenance of a wild, Edenic purity is, after all, a labor-intensive business.

41. Relevant here is Johannes Fabian’s account of the two primary colonial responses to the bodily contest over land: forced removal (whether through genocide or deportation) or manipulating “the other variable—Time. With the help of various devices of sequencing and distancing one assigns to the conquered populations a different Time.” Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 29–30.

42. Carruthers, *Kruger National Park*, 86.


44. For a suggestive history of the way the Grand Canyon was marketed to American tourists as a destination associated with the religious archaic, the sublime, and patriotic spiritual elevation, see Stephen J. Pyne, *How the Canyon Became Grand* (New York: Viking, 1998).


[320]
46. “The principle of the agreements has never changed. Gold and other mining interests in South Africa are granted large-scale labour recruiting of Mozambican men in return for a portion of the men’s wages to be paid in gold, to Portugal during colonial times, later to independent Mozambique.” Ibid., 56.

47. Ibid., 61.


49. Ibid., 273.

50. Ibid., 271, 277.

51. Ibid., 271.


53. In a broader theoretical context, Liisa Malkki’s work on the pathologizing of refugees as “unnatural” has a particular resonance here. See her Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

54. The girl’s ethnicity goes unmentioned, but the story contains plenty of geographical and linguistic indications that she is Shangaan. (The Shangaan’s ethnic self-designation has varied historically and geographically. Shangaan are frequently called Tsonga in South Africa.)


56. Before Zimbabwe’s descent into chaos shrunk the ambitions of the project, a three-nation transfrontier park was in the works, joining Kruger to national parks in Mozambique and Zimbabwe and thereby affording the prospect of greater freedom of movement for humans (exclusive subspecies, tourist) and other mammalian herds. The project has been dogged by controversy, not least because it would entail further involuntary removals (notably in Mozambique) and the economic benefits to local inhabitants have been at best hazily sketched out. The status of this transfrontier park, dubbed an African “super park,” remains uncertain, although the corridor linking Mozambique and Kruger appears to be going ahead.

57. From the Kruger Park’s colonial beginnings, the “gate guards” were historically Shangaan. As David Bunn notes, these uniformed guards “dramatize[d] two orders of time and racial identity—one that of the ‘improved’ native and the other that of the customary, ethnic collective—that [could not] easily coexist outside the boundaries of the reserve.” Bunn, “Relocations: Landscape Theory, South African Landscape Practice, and the Transmission of Political Value,” Pretexts 4 (1993): 53.

58. For a thoughtful contrastive analysis of the treatment of white tourists and African immigrants, see Kathryn Mathers and Loren B. Landau, “Tourists

[321]


60. For instance, the range of endemics in the vast Kruger National Park cannot compare with that of a seldom-visited, much smaller reserve on the Namaqualand coast that is biodiversity rich but megafauna poor. One notes also how, in a creative attempt to legitimate and market its expansion, the Greater Addo National Park has pitched itself as the only park in the world to boast the Big Seven (adding the southern right whale and the great white shark to the conventional lion, elephant, rhino, buffalo, and leopard) while also boasting that it has the greatest variety of biomes of any South African national park.

61. Tsing, Friction, 1.


7. Ecologies of the Aftermath


2. Ibid.

3. By (among others) Robert Hughes on the back cover of Martyr’s Day.


5. Ibid.


8. Ibid.


10. The best account of the role the Gulf War played in exorcising Vietnam syndrome is to be found in Andrew J. Bacevich, The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

12. Mike Kelly, *Martyr’s Day: Chronicle of a Small War*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), xiii. In the foreword to the 2001 edition of *Martyr’s Day*, Kelly qualifies his surgical metaphor, but only by arguing, like many hawks, for a spurious connection between Saddam Hussein and the 9/11 attacks. Desert Storm, Kelly now insists, was a war of mistaken brevity, as the United States’ failure to topple Saddam had opened the way for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

13. For Kelly there are two levels of surgery in the “theatre” of the war: the local, surgical strikes—the small, precise incisions—within the larger clinical performance of the surgical war itself.

14. See also, for example, Fred Smoler on the Iraq War of 2003: “Why were civilian casualties so low? In part because of the self-restraint—with a few exceptions—shown by Coalition troops and in part due to a technological revolution, the use of precision-guided munitions, particularly GPS-guided munitions, in unprecedented quantities.” Smoler, “Cakewalk: Getting It Wrong—U.S. Military Might and Myths,” *Dissent* 47 (Summer 2003): 39.

15. Tashiro, *Discounted Casualties*.

16. Military usages of surgical metaphors are not unique to the Gulf War, of course. Consider, for instance, the American general who during the 2003 Iraq War declared that “we need to make a decision on when the cancer of Fallujah needs to be cut out.” Quoted in Eliot Weinberger, *What I Heard About Iraq* (London: Verso, 2005), 9. However, what is particularly acute in Kelly’s book is his representation of the entire war as surgical in its efficient, healing, and ethical brevity.


18. Showalter argues that “hysteria not only survives in the 1990s, it is more contagious than in the past. Infectious epidemics of hysteria spread by stories circulated through self-help books, articles in newspapers and magazines, TV talk shows and series, films, the Internet, even literary criticism.” *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 5.


20. As one anonymous commentator notes on Amazon.com: “had Showalter’s book been written at the turn of the [nineteenth] century, she would have included multiple sclerosis (once known as ‘faker’s disease’) among her list of ‘hysterias.’”


23. Ibid.


30. For an incomparably astute analysis of language as an instrument of warfare, see Mary Louise Pratt, “Harm’s Way: Language and the Contemporary Arts of War,” PMLA 124 (2009), 1515-1531.


32. Ibid.


35. Ibid.


37. Quoted in Johnson, “Is the Pentagon Giving Our Soldiers Cancer?” 87. Naughton’s reference here to tungsten is pointed: the German military had banned depleted uranium from its arsenal on account of the radioactive and chemical risks it posed, replacing DU with tungsten, a high-density (and more expensive) metal that proved effective both as a penetrator and in the armoring of tanks.

38. Doug Rokke, interview by Rob Nixon, July 7, 2005. If four years after the war Rokke had 432 micrograms of uranium per liter of urine, after eight years that figure had dropped to 42 micrograms. But as Rokke pointed out, that drop didn’t mean his body had eliminated the rest but rather that, over time, much of that uranium had become sequestered in his soft organs and bones.
39. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
47. Bonham et al., Human Cost of the War in Iraq, 22.
49. Ibid.
52. Quoted in Weinberger, What I Heard About Iraq, 3.
53. The other most vocal defendant of cluster bombs has been Russia during the war in Chechnya.


63. Quoted in Cahill, ed., *Clearing the Fields*, 192.


8. Environmentalism, Postcolonialism, and American Studies


No book illustrates the limitations of this approach more lucidly than The Idea of Wilderness, in which Oelschlaeger argues for the timeless, primal, universal value of wilderness. He roots his argument in ruminations on Paleolithic, Neolithic, and ancient Mediterranean notions of nature, then seeks to secure his case by analyzing an exclusively American canon of writers (Thoreau, Muir, Leopold, Jeffers, and Snyder prominent among them).


7. Ibid., 80.

8. Ibid., 79.


10. For an invaluable critique of the wilderness tradition of “purity,” see William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, ed. William Cronon (New York: Norton, 1996), 69–90. Since Cronon’s pathbreaking essay, other eco-critics and environmental writers have recognized how a fixation with wilderness is imaginatively distorting and politically costly. However, the legacy of the wilderness obsession remains a continued source of suspicion for writers and communities who in the past have felt alienated by that emphasis.


16. Ibid., 53.
17. Ibid.

18. On Abbey’s anti-immigrant environmentalism, which became more prominent in his later years, see Rick Scarce, *Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 92. For Austin’s anti-Semitism, see Tom Athanasiou, *Divided Planet: The Ecology of Rich and Poor* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996), 297. At the crossroads where environmentalism and immigration politics meet, we continue to encounter what Betsy Hartmann has called “the greening of hate.” To commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Earth Day in April 2010, the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), a driving force behind Arizona’s notorious Senate Bill 1070, issued a fifty-three-page report, “The Environmentalist’s Guide to a Sensible Immigration Policy.” As Andrew Ross recounts, FAIR—and allied groups like the Center for Immigration Studies—have actively sought to build a green anti-immigrant constituency, dividing the environmental movement. FAIR spin blames undocumented immigrants for everything from biodiversity loss and wilderness desecration to accelerating climate change and increased greenhouse emissions. A Center for Immigration Studies press release, urging more draconian enforcement in southern Arizona’s national forests deploys the standard coupling of immigration and impurity: “How long will these beautiful lands remain unspoiled if the border is not secured?” Andrew Ross, “Greenwashing Nativism, *The Nation*, August 16, 2010, 6.


34. Ibid., 195.


36. An early, important resource on environmental writing beyond the United States is Patrick Murphy’s Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998). Scott Slovic has sought to counter the complaint that “environmental literature is an exclusively Americanist preserve” by pointing, among other things, to the rise in international submissions to the premier journal in the field, ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment. This is, indeed, a promising development, but the subjects and authors of environmental literary criticism remain overwhelmingly American. The internationalizing of ecocriticism, moreover, should not simply involve additive diversification in a center-periphery fashion. As I’ve argued above, we need to address the way ecocriticism’s dominant models and intellectual priorities remain skewed by their American genesis. See Slovic, “Forum on Literatures of the Environment,” PMLA 114 (Oct. 1999), 1102.


38. Ibid., 357.

39. I am (to use a loaded word) a “naturalized” U.S. citizen who has lived in the Midwest for thirteen of my twenty-six American years. As such, I am sympathetic to some of Sanders’ regional prickliness: bicoastal and transatlantic condescension toward (and ignorance of) the Midwest remains tenacious.
One exception to the dearth of minority writers and public intellectuals domiciled in rural England has been V. S. Naipaul, for whom Wiltshire has served primarily as a launching pad for his international travels and as a hermitic place to write. Certainly, to judge from *The Enigma of Arrival* and Patrick French’s biography of him, Naipaul never entered into the kind of community-minded engagements that Sanders associates with staying put. Moreover, Naipaul has been a renter, not a rural landowner of the kind that Sanders, Leopold, and Berry extol.

For an eloquent and economical account of the relationship between wilderness thinking and Indian dispossession in the United States, see Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 95–96.


Ibid, 139.


Ibid., 16.

E. M. Forster, *Howard’s End* (1910; repr., New York, 1975). This is an illuminating novel to read alongside the Naipaul and the Kincaid. Although imperial spaces trouble the edges of *Howard’s End*, Forster anxiously seeks to screen out their implications by advancing a pastorally contained vision of English regeneration. In a key scene, the narrator stands on a Dorset hilltop gazing down at what he defines as a quintessential English vista. His angle of vision is akin to what Mary Louise Pratt, in an imperial context, calls the monarch-of-all-I-survey. In keeping with this tradition, Forster’s method is panoramic: he creates a verbal painting that allows him to symbolically consume all of England at a glance in
the surrogate, pastoral form of the Isle of Wight. Gazing steadfastly at the Isle of Wight “the imagination swells, spreads, and deepens, until it becomes geographical and encircles England” (102). This scene’s visual geometry, one might say, is one of panoramic bioregionalism.

In this passage, the Isle of Wight, with its grassy downs and chalky cliffs, becomes England’s epitome and the guardian “till the end of time” of the nation’s “purity.” This act of synecdoche shrinks England to a nonhybrid nation of hyperpastoral. Forster thus performs here a kind of political and spatial amnesia, using a visual act of geographical circumscription to generate a highly selective notion of nationhood. By having the Isle of Wight stand in for England, Forster excludes the working classes and the polluted cities of the nation’s industrial north, as well as London, with its expansive cosmopolitan matrices. Crucially, for my larger argument about postcolonial pastoral, Forster’s vision excises colonial space from the idea of England: Cyprus and Nigeria, flickering on the edges of the novel, have no visible relation to the Isle of Wight. In this manner, Forster deploys geographical synecdoche and panoramic pastoral to foreclose from the idea of England, people, places, and histories that unsettle the book’s project of selective national regeneration and redefinition.

54. Kincaid, My Garden, 142.
56. Ibid., 143.
57. Ibid., 137.
66. It was the African-American civil rights leader, Dr. Benjamin Chavis, who coined the term “environmental racism.” But he did so in 1981, long after the civil rights movement had crested.
67. Two critical texts that boosted the academic credibility of the environmental justice concerns of American minorities were Benjamin Chavis, Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States of America (Washington D.C.: Commission for Racial Justice, 1987) and Robert D. Bullard, Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality (1990; rpt. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000). However, the influence of these texts in American universities was centered in the social sciences and had at best a very limited impact on the conceptual or imaginative priorities of environmental literary studies in the United States.
68. Said himself was leery of the term “postcolonial.” However, the rise of anti-imperial and postcolonial literary studies were both largely catalyzed by Orientalism and, in any event, were often intimately entangled.
69. Said described environmentalism, for instance, as “the indulgence of spoiled tree huggers who lack a proper cause” (personal communique with author, June 7, 1994).
73. The South African refugee writer Bessie Head is a classic example of this historical turn. Head was a self-declared antifeminist who in the 1970s saw no resonance in Western feminism for the kinds of issues faced by the village women whom she lived with in Botswana. Yet Head’s fictional explorations of gender dynamics and women’s communal resistance have since turned her into a


77. Ibid.

78. Lorraine Anderson, Scott Slovic, and John P. O’Grady, eds., *Literature and the Environment: A Reader on Nature and Culture* (New York: Longman, 1999). Of the 104 essays and poems included by Anderson et al., 26 are by African-American, American Indian, Latina/o, or Asian-American writers. This marks a significant advance over the more typical spectrum of Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm’s influential *Ecocriticism Reader*, which found room for only two minority essays out of twenty-six.


81. The broader scheme of the second book also encourages Buell to discuss some urban European writers, notably Dickens, Woolf, and Joyce.


84. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak’s interview with Devi, Buell alludes briefly to Devi’s overarching concern for the plight of first peoples globally, including Native Americans. However, he doesn’t explore the implications of this for an American-centered environmentalism (ibid., 230).


86. Ogoniland belongs to the tropical belt that runs through the Amazon, West and Central Africa, Indonesia, and Papua and New Guinea, a zone that possesses the world’s most diverse, ethnically fractured populations (400 ethnicities in Nigeria, several thousand in New Guinea) as well as unusually rich natural resources (oil, precious minerals, and timber). It is in this strip that American, European, Japanese, and Chinese extraction industry multinationals,
frequently supported by authoritarian regimes, operate with maximum violence and impunity.

87. Pedagogically, an excellent place to start would be to read Saro-Wiwa’s prison diary, *A Month and a Day*, alongside both Wole Soyinka’s prefigurative early play *The Swamp Dwellers* and recent work by Nigerian environmental philosopher Koaawole Owolabi. For a resonant comparison one could turn to Joe Kane’s account in *Savages* of another contest between an equatorial micro-minority (Ecuador’s Huaorani Indians) and a petroleum multinational (Texaco).

88. For an excellent theoretical account of the conceptual limitations that result from a center-periphery model, see Timothy Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity,” in Timothy Mitchell, ed., *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 1–34. Mitchell’s critique focuses on Western-centered genealogies of modernity; however, many of his insights can be applied adaptively to ecocriticism.


90. http://www.poetryconnection.net/poets/Derek_Walcott/7728

91. New Zealand, Indian, South African, Australian, Californian, and Hawaiian scholars have been at the forefront of this new oceanic scholarship.


University of Virginia Press, 2010). Also directly pertinent in its transnational ambitions is Stephanie Lemeneger and Teresa Shewry, eds., Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century (New York: Routledge, 2011).

95. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment (London: Routledge, 2010); Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Laura Wright, Wilderness into Civilized Shapes. Reading the Postcolonial Environment (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010). Although Murphy doesn’t address postcolonial studies directly, there is also much of pertinence to transnational environmentalism in Patrick D. Murphy, Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).


**Epilogue**

6. Denmark’s claim was mounted through its colonial relationship to Greenland, which has since gained independence.
14. Ibid.

16. Ixtoc was a 150-foot-deep well, a fraction of the depth at which deepwater drilling routinely occurs today. But for the late 1970s that constituted innovative deepwater drilling, with all the technological challenges that entailed.


20. Ibid.


23. In 1981, three years before the disaster struck, a Bhopal-based reporter, Raajkumar Keswani, predicted that the Union Carbide factory was a disaster waiting to happen.

24. In June 2010, twenty-six years after the Bhopal Disaster, an Indian court finally convicted of negligence seven former executives of Union Carbide’s Indian subsidiary. The men received two-year jail sentences and were fined the equivalent of $2,100 each. No Americans were prosecuted. Lydia Polgreen and Hari Kumar, “Indian Court Convicts Seven in Bhopal Disaster,” New York Times, June 7, 2010, 9.

25. Ibid.


27. The hacked emails of climate scientists at the University of East Anglia were seized on by the right as evidence that climate change was a conspiratorial hoax. However, in the immediate aftermath of climategate, five independent investigations concluded that the science remained entirely sound. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/07/12/climategate-debunking-get_n_642980.html

28. In the ‘Trafigura case, the claimants’ out of court settlement (for 30 million pound sterling plus costs) following the WikiLeaks revelations was particularly significant for two reasons. First, the case successfully combined rich-nation
digital civil disobedience with more traditional grass roots activism mounted by the afflicted poor. Second, the settlement broke a double silence: the silencing of slow violence and the silencing of the British media who, in an extraordinary measure, had been hit with a “super-injunction” that barred them from covering the parliamentary debate over the suppressed scientific Minton report warning of the toxic implications of the Trafalgar contamination. The settlement was a classic instance of new media strategy, old media credibility, scientific testimony, legal resources, and grassroots activism among the poor combining to counter an assault on both the environmental and the information commons. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/oct/16/carter-ruck-abandon-minton-injunction


30. For two detailed accounts of the limits—in scale and efficacy—of the so-called Twitter revolution, see Annabelle Sreberny and Gholam Khiabany, Blogistan: The Internet and Politics in Iran (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010) and Evgeny Morozov, The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom (London: Allen Lane, 2010). James Harkin has rightly charged the technophile Andrew Sullivan with strategic naivete and “irrational exuberance” for proclaiming that Twitter was “the critical tool for organizing the resistance in Iran” and that “the Revolution will be twittered.” Harkin, “Cyber-Con,” London Review of Books, December 2, 2010, 20.

31. Malcolm Gladwell has famously accused wiki-activism of being hampered by low-risk “weak ties” and “horizontal associations,” in contrast to the civil rights movement, which transformed American society through high-risk, deeply committed, and vertically organized activism. Gladwell criticizes the digerati for “refusing to accept the fact there is a class of social problems for which there is no technological solution.” But, one might ask, do we always know in advance what class of social problems those are? While Gladwell’s dismissal of the unalloyed technophilia embodied by Clay Shirky and Andrew Sullivan is spot on, my own position is somewhat less skeptical than his. I believe that some fusion between old-style, high-risk, vertically organized strategies and wiki-activism can generate significant social change, even though such successful fusions, over the long term, can be challenging to sustain. See Gladwell, “Small Change,” http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell


33. For a lively, imaginative website that seeks to integrate activism pertaining to the environmental and the information commons, see http://www.onthecommons.org/