Allegories of the Anthropocene
Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey
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Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey's *Allegories of the Anthropocene* brings together postcolonial and environmental critique in a new book-length study of creative responses to the Anthropocene, focusing on writers and artists of the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands as they construct "allegorical narratives of decline, fragmentation, and waste and the possibilities of adaptation and growth" (vii). DeLoughrey suggests that the discourse of the Anthropocene thus far has been dominated by perspectives of the global north and focused primarily on Euro-American (and white settler) literary forms and cultural productions. The book challenges this dominance by exploring postcolonial and indigenous perspectives on the historical facts of ecological "dispossession and disaster caused by empire" in the islands of the global south, that is, the places which were most hardly hit by the global climate crisis (2). Citing Walter Benjamin's argument that allegory is able to recreate time and space in relation to a given historical crisis, DeLoughrey suggests that the form is particularly well suited to articulate the historicity of the Anthropocene. The title of the book thus underlines her argument that allegory has been critically reinvigorated by Caribbean and Pacific writers and artists, both as they convey an apparent spatiotemporal breach between humans and the planet, and as they represent the relationships between a violent (colonial) past, its present consequences and anticipations of the future.

The introduction to the book traces a genealogy of allegory, highlighting its association with Benjamin's notion of nature-history, which anticipates the preoccupation with decline (in both history and nature) in Anthropocene discourse. The book's subsequent five chapters are grouped in five constellations that capture different dimensions of the Anthropocene. Eschewing a straightforward narrative progression, the author applies the allegorical practice of disjunction to the structure of the book itself, where chapters relate to each other like fragments, suggesting a deeper sense of the entanglements and connections between postcolonial history, environmental decline and cultural production. "Gardening Earth: Excavating Plantation Soil," the first chapter of the book, refigures the Anthropocene as the "Plantationocene" by looking back to ecological imperialism and plantation slavery in the Caribbean islands. The

chapter focuses on Erna Brodber's novel *The Rainmaker's Mistake* (2007), a work of climate fiction that excavates the Caribbean plantation history to connect the Anthropocene discourse with soil and the cruelty of the empire buried within it. DeLoughrey reads the novel as an allegorical narrative of the colonial split between humans and the earth "that is signified by the agricultural stratigraphy of the Anthropocene" (25).

The second chapter, "Planetarity: Militarized Radiations," considers creative responses by indigenous writers to the impact of radiation on both environment and humans in the Pacific Islands, which was caused by the military race for nuclear supremacy during the Cold War, and which is seen here as central to the emergence of the "planetarity" of the Anthropocene. Highlighting the decades-long program of nuclear testing in the twentieth century as one of the invisible determining factors of the Anthropocene, DeLoughrey analyzes the use of the heliotropic metaphor – first invoked by Robert Oppenheimer's description of the light and radiation created by nuclear tests as "the radiance of a thousand suns"– in the novels *Ocean Roads* (2006) and *Black Rainbow* (1992) by the Māori writer James George and the Samoan author Albert Wendt, as well as in the poetry of the Māori poet Hone Tuwhare and in the visual adaptation of his 1964 poem "No Ordinary Sun" by the Māori artist Ralph Hotere (77).

The third chapter, "Accelerations: Globalization and States of Waste," is devoted to the material consequences of globalization in the form of "technofossils" that have emerged as a result of the ubiquitous use of plastics and other easily disposable materials, constituting a kind of waste imperialism across the globe. DeLoughrey here brings together allegorical representations of material debris in works by the Caribbean artists and authors Tony Capellan, Kamau Brathwaite and Orlando Patterson, exploring the relations between this debris and the "wasted lives" of refugees and the poor, both of which are rendered visible as byproducts of globalization and the "Great Acceleration."

While the first three chapters deal with ecological ruins of the past, the fourth chapter, "Oceanic Futures: Interspecies Worldings," shifts the focus to the futurity of the planet through the study of oceans. Given that the most visible impact of climate change on earth is the sea-level rise, as DeLoughrey suggests, "our planetary future is becoming more oceanic" (136). In this chapter, the author moves away from anthropocentric scholarship in transoceanic studies and turns toward what she calls "critical ocean studies," adopting an interdisciplinary approach to the material existence of oceans and their nonhuman inhabitants, which figures the ocean as an "agent or embodied place, or as ontology itself" (134). Thinking through the implications of a planetary future dependent on oceans, DeLoughrey adopts the concept of "sea ontologies" in her reading of Māori author

Keri Hulme's *Stonefish* (2004), a collection of short stories and poems that evoke an indigenous perspective on space and multispecies adaptation in response to rising sea levels.

In the fifth chapter, "An Island is a World," DeLoughrey examines the concept of "island-as-world" in documentaries that explore the impact of climate change on the Pacific Islands, which she argues resemble "the ethnographic allegories examined by James Clifford" (170). These filmographic attempts at raising awareness about the ruin that the Anthropocene as "Capitalocene" has brought to these islands, atolls and indigenous societies and cultures are described as forms of "salvage environmentalism." Yet, despite drawing on empirical evidence of climate change, these documentaries often lack historical awareness and do not locate the islands within "deeper time and the larger world" (187). As a result, DeLoughrey argues that they tend to separate "the Pacific Islander from continental modernity and [to] mystif[y] the causal links between industrialized continents and sinking islands" (170).

In her concluding comments, DeLoughrey points out that despite the region's environmental vulnerability, "climate change is not the central subject of Pacific Island literary, cultural, and visual production, although external funding agencies certainly encourage the shaping of community issues to be placed in this frame" (192). I think this dearth of creative responses, similar to those in other places of the global south affected by climate change as suggested by Amitav Ghosh, might also be connected to the inability of prose fiction in accommodating "the weather events of this time" because of their "high degree of improbability" (35). I presume that allegory might well be a response to this crisis of imagination and can be adopted across the genres of literature and other creative practices. DeLoughrey contrasts this idea of a divide between climate change as a metropolitan issue and the local concerns of Pacific Islanders with a discussion of Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner's performance of her poem "Tell Me," which, she argues, "offers a far more complex allegory figuring the local and global in a 'tidalectic'" (192). Identifying the potency of allegory in telling what Bruno Latour calls a "common geostory," including stories of disjunction between humans and nature, and between colonial pasts and ecological futures, DeLoughrey usefully problematizes the current Anthropocene discourse and paves the way for a more decentred postcolonial ecocritical scholarship.

Works Cited

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable.* Penguin, 2016.