"New Ways of Telling True Stories": Reflections on Ecological Solidarities across Post/Colonial Worlds

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> The time has come for new ways of telling true stories beyond civilizational first principles. […] No longer relegated to whispers in the night, such stories might be simultaneously true and fabulous. How else can we account for the fact that anything is alive in the mess we have made? (Tsing vii)

Thus prompts Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing in the prologue to her 2015 study *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, which begins by delineating the ways in which the current anthropogenic moment, one that has set into motion large-scale climate and environmental crises, needs to grapple with its own blind spots and aporias. For as we live in a world made and unmade by *anthropos*, experiencing it both in shared and fundamentally uneven ways, we need to continue interrogating this figure in its assumed universality. Cognizant of its strategic exclusions and inclusions, Heather Davis and Métis scholar Zoe Todd posit that the anthropocene "betrays itself in its name: in its reassertion of universality, it implicitly aligns itself with the colonial era" (763). Hence, as Tsing goes on to suggest, conversant with scholarship in Black and Indigenous studies, we need to keep inquiring into and beyond civilizational first principles, the "white supremacist, colonial, and capitalist logics instantiated in the origins of the Anthropocene" (Davis and Todd 763). Such logics of control and extraction continue to posit nature "as a backdrop and resource for the moral intentionality of Man, who could tame and master Nature" (Tsing vii)—deadly logics which underpin ongoing destruction, dispossession and extinctions of human and more-than-human communities.

In her theorizations on humanity, her problematization of the human as a universal category and the specificities of the *homo economicus* and its long histories, Sylvia Wynter has proposed the year 1452 as a possible starting point for the anthropocene; this is a positioning that marks the beginnings of the plantation system as enslaved African people were forced by Portuguese planters to work the sugarcane fields on

Madeira, off the northwest coast of Africa, thus "initiating the 'sugarslave' complex—– a massive replantation of ecologies and forced relocation of people" and establishing a legal precedent for Columbus' later arrival to the Caribbean in 1492 (Yusoff 33; drawing on Wynter "1492: A New World View" and "Columbus and the Poetics of the Propter Nos"). It also reveals colonial and imperial desires as wholly violent and traumatic. The destruction of nature through terraforming, deforestation and the import of foreign animal and plant species, the murder of Indigenous peoples, and the subjugation of enslaved Africans converged here in an extractive, capitalist project that would forever alter the fate of the planet and its ecologies, and irreversibly uproot and destroy numerous human communities (settler colonialism is one, perhaps very explicit mode of this, but there are other forms of coloniality that similarly enact ecological violence, such as exploitation and trade colonialism or prison colonies). In Kathryn Yusoff's words in *A Billion Black Anthropocenes Or None*: "Coloniality cuts across both flesh and earth in the economies of valuation it established [...]. Indigenous genocide and removal from land and enslavement are prerequisites for power becoming operationalized in premodernity" (32-33). By thinking with and through the ecologies and geographies endangered by the colonial project, and by recognizing the anthropocene not only as dating from the beginning of the colonial period but as reaching into our presents and futures, we can acknowledge, with Davis and Todd, "the problem of colonialism as responsible for contemporary environmental crisis." "If the Anthropocene is already here," they ask, "the question then becomes, what can we do with it as a conceptual apparatus that may serve to undermine the conditions that it names?" (763).

The violence of different forms, technologies and modalities of coloniality is all-pervasive—–and yet scholars like Davis, Todd, Wynter and Yusoff, among many others across resistant and reparative genealogies of thought and critique, offer alternative ways of thinking about the world. They have shown that the ecological spaces adjacent to and implicated in the genocidal, ecocidal plantation complex, for example the garden or the plot (planted, grown and harvested by enslaved Black communities), could be an "area of escape from the plantation, [...] an area of experience which reinvented and therefore perpetuated an alternative world view, alternative consciousness to that of the plantation" (Wynter *Black Metamorphosis*, 53). Scholarship on Maroon communities and practices of marronage has outlined the resistant eco-social practices of fugitive enslaved people escaping the plantation (Ferdinand 2022; Winston 2021 and 2023), creating solidarity networks but also often contested relations with Indigenous populations who were, in fact, the very first to face settler violence against their human and more-thanhuman communities. So when, as Yusoff argues, "the end of the world has already happened for some subjects" (22), when the unthinkable and the unbearable has already

passed and needs to be borne, many communities search for, imagine and activate other ways of being in, and relating to, the world. As Robyn Maynard writes of the intertwined world-making projects of abolition and decolonization, Indigenous, Brown and Black people "have been building liveable worlds all along, despite and against forces aligned to steal our light, and […] we will continue to do so no matter what comes our way" (28).

These "liveable worlds," grounded in kinship, sustainability and ecological ethics, emerge, for example, in the ways Potawatomi scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer shares her people's tradition of conceiving vegetal and animal entities as persons, families and teachers whose "gifts" are to be respected, appreciated and reciprocated (2013). This sense of intimacy resonates with Mohawk and Anishinaabe scholar Vanessa Watts's understanding of Indigenous peoples as "extensions of the very land [they] walk upon," such that they have "an obligation to maintain communication with it" (23). Concomitantly, Indigenous scholars from Oceania have emphasized an identity shaping-process of kinship and belonging substantiated by relations with the Pacific Ocean that is closely entwined with seafaring navigational practices connecting islands through multiple waterways (Hau'ofa). Terrestrial and aqueous place-based relations, as well as relations with other more-than-human entities, have enabled Indigenous peoples' survival despite settler colonial violence. Similar strategies of survival and belonging were shared by the many Maroons escaping enslavement via maritime or terrestrial routes throughout the Black Atlantic, where land and ocean become "an archive, an ever-present, ever-reformulating record of the unimaginable," as Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley writes (193-194; see also Dunnavant 2021). Linking these distinct yet also frequently interlocking responses to colonialism by Black, Brown and Indigenous folks via uneven ecologies sheds light on instances where insurgent epistemologies and ontologies become visible, sometimes in alignment, sometimes in conflict.

In the context of these alliances and collisions among the wreckage, Tsing insists that we focus on "what manages to live despite capitalism" (viii). The mushroom at the end of the world, for her, is the matsutake mushroom which was the first living organism to grow from the landscape around Hiroshima, destroyed by an atomic bomb in 1945. This nuclear destruction is just one terrifying instance of how an elite group of humans carelessly put other human and more-than-human environments on the line. But the mushroom that grows inside, and, crucially, out of, such destruction, can lead us to query normative and teleological conceptions of past, present and future: "Matsutake's willingness to emerge in blasted landscapes allows us to explore the ruin that has become our collective home" (3). The mushroom that comes into existence at the moment nature has collapsed, and life has failed, leads to modes of thinking and being that prompt us to sit with the unworlding of our world–

—modes practised and theorized by the thinkers and communities evoked in this introduction.

Taking up these teachings, our special issue asks what can be created, enacted and imagined from within and despite environmental destruction and ecocide. What relationships, assemblages and collaborations between humans and more-than-humans emerge when we accept that the future has already arrived for so many communities who have had, and continue, to live with and through environmental catastrophe? As Amit R. Baishya and Priya Kumar argue succinctly in their forum on *Planetary Solidarities*, to attend to "a different sense of collectivity from below—one that concretely emerges from a 'shared sense of catastrophe' and here survival encompasses multiple, unexpected symbioses between human and nonhuman" (312), should be the responsibility of those who, like the writers in this special issue, respond to "new ways of telling true stories beyond civilizational first principles," the stories that live and survive *despite* (Tsing vii). Such an approach is not interested in simple recipes for repair or restoration and foregrounds instead the messiness, accidents and interdependencies of multiple pasts, presents and yet-to-comes. Solidarity is necessarily entangled with small and large gestures of refusal and resistance, just as much as it is with attempts of living with disaster and hope simultaneously. In conceiving and compiling a special issue on post/colonial ecological solidarity, we are cognizant of the need to approach the practice of solidarity with nuance. As Eve Tuck (Unangax̂) and K. Wayne Yang suggest, "solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict" (3). This points to a way of looking at the possibilities of solidarity as contingent and difficult practices, neither uniform nor given.

Emerging from a multi-disciplinary conversation across a two-part panel on ecological solidarity, vulnerability and resistance, convened at the 2022 Annual Conference of the Association for Anglophone Postcolonial Studies at Goethe University Frankfurt, the contributors to this special issue bring together various perspectives from postcolonial studies, Indigenous modes of thinking and being, de- and anti-colonial approaches, critical race theory, Black studies and gender studies in order to bear upon environmental and ecological questions and quandaries. All of us are early career academics at varying stages and occupy, despite the precarious structures underlying and informing our work, various positions of epistemic privilege and power—and thus epistemic violence. All of us are currently based in environmentally privileged countries in the global north: our daily actions make us complicit with the destruction of the planet and its human and more-than-human communities. Many of us are also residents in the diaspora which means that the privilege of our daily lives comes at the cost of the communities that raised us; this stretches the work of solidarity unbearably. Even in our very role as literary scholars,

we are enmeshed in unsustainable processes: the paper produced for printed books, the carbon footprint of their shipping and even the very "ink that creates the words on the page [...], words that direct [the] imagination and activate [the] senses" are material elements of literature and have material repercussions (LeMenager 64). Our scholarly and activist practices will inevitably entail gaps, blind spots and misreadings; these factors that shape our collective already speak to the fact that we need to be cautious with our understanding of ecological solidarity. At the same time, within this patchwork of inevitable gaps and misunderstandings, there are the things that have bound us together beyond a single panel at a conference. We have stayed with each other out of a commitment to practise care and support within our collegial communities. Learning together, too, is a practice of solidarity.

Ecological solidarities can be generative and embrace shared vulnerabilities, they can be sustainable and oriented towards the nonanthropocentric, as we outline above. But solidarity means different things depending on one's own position in the world. This is important to bear in mind in order not to falsely romanticize a "living with" more-than-human and human others as solidarity cannot come from a position of arrogance, or else it will be corrupted. While it has become a standard move of ecocritical scholarship to acknowledge the ways in which we live in an entangled world, the question that often remains is: "What comes after entanglement?" Eva Haifa Giraud rightly posits that "simply acknowledging that human and more-than-human worlds are entangled is not enough in itself to respond to problems born of anthropogenic activity" (7). Entanglement cannot mean a flattening of differences, just as much as solidarity practices cannot ignore the geographical, political or ecological specificities of situated struggles and vulnerabilities. The articles collected in this special issue ask if solidarity, when pushed against preconceived notions of community or made to work against toxic (infra)structures, might offer at least a reckoning—–a way of thinking entanglement and relationality at and beyond the end of the world.

Spanning a wide range of geographical sites of post/colonial encounters, from the east coast of Africa to Canada, from the Marshall Islands to Nigeria, from the Bay of Bengal to the Caribbean, the articles in *Ecological Solidarities across Post/Colonial Worlds* consider how art and literature may be able to reimagine inhabitable pasts, presents and futures. It is important to us to pay attention to oceanic relations, cross-continental alliances and space-time-worlds that converge and diverge along multiple routes: as a guiding light for this wide range, we refer to Tiffany Lethabo King's work on the hemisphere, which rethinks the Black Atlantic by "exceed[ing] conventional Black diasporic analytics and spaces" as a "landscape in which the practice of enslaving Black people and making them fungible and accumulable symbols of spatial expansion happens alongside and in relationship to Indigenous genocide" (11). Interweaving

different terrestrial and aquatic spaces, following historic and contemporary currents between the world's oceans and attending to the layered landscapes of colonial violence, the articles in this issue suggest ways to not only theorize post/colonial ecological encounters within contexts of ecological violence, crisis and collapse, but also how to grasp the potentials of ecological un/worlding within and alongside a plethora of spaces: shoals, wetlands, mountains, bays, plains, archipelagos, glaciers, deserts and deltas.

Pursuing a variety of literary genres and creative formations (from poetry to novels to visual art to autofiction), we agree with María Alonso Alonso and María Jesús Cabarcos Traseira who posit in their own considerations of literature and the environment that "the study of […] literary imaginings presents itself as more pertinent than ever, as it dwells upon fundamental questions of self, agency and accountability" (147). Drawing on concepts of composting, weaving, dreaming and more, the contributions collected in this special issue foreground Black, Brown, Indigenous and post- and decolonial thinkers and writers— formulating literature and art as transformative praxes that materially and discursively (re)shape the anthropocene. Attuned to these possibilities, the special issue is divided into two sections: the first addresses climate vulnerabilities and the second homes in on multi-species encounters.

The first section begins with an experimental essay titled "Reading at Scale: Wetland Futures and Deep Time in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*" by Baldeep Kaur and opens up a generative space that allows us to ponder the limitations, but also the possibilities, of doing this work from a perspective of ecologically attuned literary and cultural studies. In engaging discussions of the relevance of literary writing and criticism to ecological crises, Kaur moves the horizon of inquiry beyond asking whether literature is a viable response or counter-strategy to the climate crisis. They illustrate the role of literary writing, such as *Oil on Water*, in understanding the strands that bind climate change to other escalating changes, some of which reach into deep time or into the intricate fabrics of human social formations. Conversant with Jennifer Wenzel's "reading for the planet," this critical reflective piece sets the stage for the special issue, as it grapples with the question of how the literary may figure as part of an environmentalist praxis of solidarity.

This is followed by an article by Alisa Preusser on "Poetic Reconfigurations and Reclamations of the Wasteland in Craig Santos Perez's *Habitat Threshold*," which carefully analyzes how CHamoru writer Craig Santos Perez's poetry negotiates both literature's complicity in processes of wastelanding and its capacity to intervene in the discursive production of Oceania as a wasteland. Focusing on the 2020 collection *Habitat Threshold*, Preusser argues that the poems' spatial strategies, including the use of italics, bold print, erasures and blank space in the *mise-en-page*, bear the potential to refigure and reclaim the colonial

cultural imaginary of the wasteland in ways that call the reader into anticolonial forms of "uneasy" ecological solidarity (Tuck and Yang 3): the poems' spatial poetics invite readers to both refuse various wastelanding discourses——of desecration, of pollutability and of *terra* and *aqua nullius*, among others——and to affirm Indigenous sovereign relations to lands and waters.

Similarly attuned to the complexities of uneasy and sometimes impossible solidarity on Indigenous lands, Trang Dang's article on "Colonial Exploitation and Indigenous Resistance in Sheila Watt-Cloutier and Cherie Dimaline" pairs Watt-Cloutier's memoir *The Right to Be Cold: One Woman's Story of Protecting Her Culture, the Arctic, and the Whole Planet* (2015) and Dimaline's young adult speculative fiction *The Marrow Thieves* (2017). These two texts, Dang suggests, interrogate the ongoing colonial exploitation of Indigenous peoples and their lands and offer revelatory stories about their attempts to mitigate the havoc caused by this exploitation. By putting *The Right to Be Cold* in conversation with *The Marrow Thieves*, Dang foregrounds how both texts offer a medium to examine, communicate and accentuate the intertwinement of oppression against nonhumans and against historically marginalized human populations, showing climate change to be a human rights issue. This enables critical reflection on how to untwine this intertwinement, as WattCloutier and Dimaline draw attention to Indigenous peoples' powerful survival strategies——in their dreams, traditions, languages, and kinships——– that help them resist and fight against social and environmental injustices.

The section on climate vulnerabilities concludes with a contribution by Peri Sipahi titled "'not yet / under water': Rejecting Victimhood and Weaving Solidarity in Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's EcoPoetics." This article focuses on strategies of rejecting nuclear and climate victimhood discourses through poetic practices of weaving that establish transindigenous as well as planetary relations of solidarity in JetñilKijiner's poetry collection *Iep Jāltok* and the video poem "Rise" (2018). These poetic works, Sipahi argues, expose the discursive continuations of violent nuclear Pacific histories in the present anthropogenic climate crisis. To attend to both nuclear and climate violence, the article puts Michael Rothberg's theorization of the implicated subject and Rob Nixon's notion of slow violence into productive conversation to investigate the victimizing structures targeting Indigenous communities of Oceania and to illuminate the transindigenous relationalities performed by Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna. The complex and complicated solidarities expressed in these works contribute to a refusal of victimhood, expanding Tongan philosopher Epeli Hau'ofa's theorization of Oceanic kinship by evoking imageries of water and stone as well as poetic practices of weaving. As Sipahi reveals, such planetary relations of solidarity distinctly include implicated subjects of nuclear and climate

violence against the Marshall Islands. Jetñil-Kijiner's weaving poetics not only upset the binary of perpetrator and victim, but they also work across multiple solidarities and implicated positionings, conversant with the other authors and artists discussed throughout this first section.

The special issue's second section on multi-species encounters opens with an article by Apala Bhowmick on "The Mechanics of Authoritarian Power and Interspecies Violence in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*: A Canine Reading." As Bhowmick expertly outlines, in Ahmadou Kourouma's novel human animals, nonhuman creatures, geological spaces, mythologies and elemental beings coexist, mired in a complex network of power relations within the continent of Africa. Among the author's many strategies to fabricate such a multispecies world, this article foregrounds two specific ones: the characterization of the hunter-dictator, Koyaga, and the various visceral entanglements shared between humans and canine creatures in the text, with added emphasis on the figure of lycaons used as guard dogs, employed for purposes of combat by authoritarian agents in the land. By utilizing arguments by Frantz Fanon, Wendy Woodward, and Achille Mbembe, Bhowmick's canine reading explicates upon how animality, alongside human-animal entanglements, resides on a network of hierarchical relations under the administrative rubric of a totalitarian state.

We continue our engagement with the multi-branched relations of dependency and solidarity with Christina Slopek-Hauff's contribution on "'Making Generative Oddkin': Female Bodies as a Site of Connectivity in Edwidge Danticat's *Claire of the Sea Light*." As Slopek-Hauff outlines, today as in colonial times, the Caribbean bears the brunt of so-called Global North nations' consumption of planetary and archipelagic resources and ecosystems, global warming currently hitting 'the West' less hard than the Caribbean (Paravisini-Gebert 278). Given this uneven impact of the colonial anthropocene, this article sits with Donna Haraway's rally cry to "mak[e] generative oddkin" (3), which posits interspecies solidarity as a way to respond to planetary precarity. This article zooms in on connectivity as ecological solidarity in Edwidge Danticat's *Claire of the Sea Light*. Bringing together central ideas from the fields of postcolonial studies, ecocriticism and material feminism, the article explores how the novel portrays and opens up solidary relations across species and which capacities it attributes to the female body as an agent of kinship-making, allowing for very different, ambiguous affiliations. Productively aligning female characters with other humans and the non-human other, *Claire of the Sealight*, Slopek-Hauff argues, thus makes room for multispecies worldings.

In Arunima Bhattacharya's article on "Beyond the Developmental Narrative of Postcolonial Nation-Time: The Materialities of Water and Geological Faultlines in Shubhangi Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing*", we move from the Caribbean to the Indian Ocean, and ultimately to a more

planetary scale of inter- and cross-species relationality. Bhattacharya explores how *Latitudes of Longing* breaks out of the developmental narrative of nation-time into an exploration of the impressions of deeptime in which events impact on human consciousness on a planetary scale. Focusing on the geological framework that structures the novel, this contribution teases out the underlying connections across the bio-region of South and Southeast Asia, fraught with political and military violence, and links them to Swarup's affective story-worlds. This geo-ecological reading of the novel highlights the act of storytelling as a means of discovering empathy with what is seemingly an invisible presence of the "more-thanhuman." In keeping with this special issue's theme, Bhattacharya shifts our view of ecological solidarity as going beyond the idea of an event horizon imagined as catastrophe and destruction, and moves towards conceiving solidarity as deep geological and historical connection.

Jennifer Leetsch, in her article on "Oceanic Kinship and Coastal Ecologies: More-than-Human Encounters in Cristina Ali Farah's 'A Dhow Crosses the Sea,'" examines the representation of Somalia's coast and its ecological crisis in a recent short story by a Somali-Italian writer. Here, imaginaries of the ocean and the coast are activated as a major domain of struggle between the fraught and fractured nation-state of Somalia, its deep historical entanglements in the Indian Ocean and on the Horn of Africa, and its colonial and migratory pasts and presents. With its pronounced focus on cross-oceanic kinship networks and affective, communal ties, Leetsch argues that "A Dhow Crosses the Sea" can be read as a plea for a precariously balanced kinship, as an account of the inextricable link between humanity and non-human actors, which in Ali Farah's short story become increasingly interrelated and interdependent. By connecting contemporary ecological vulnerabilities to toxic and extractive colonial legacies, and by bringing to light how the failing ecosystem of Somalia's coast is contingent on the country's deep historical entanglements with other nations, the multi-modal text of "A Dhow Crosses the Sea" mobilizes a narrative of Black ecological solidarity that takes into account not only simple one-way routes from Somalia to Italy, but instead a global web of criss-crossed relations between humans, animals, and nature.

The special issue closes the same way it opened: with an exploratory and reflective coda on how to understand post/colonial ecological solidarities. This essay acts as a companion piece, a closing embrace, to Baldeep Kaur's opening overture. Here, Hannah NelsonTeutsch offers an approach she calls "Scrappy Reading; Or, Reading the Breakdown in a Small Place." Eschewing a standard scholarly approach, this article moves intimately with and through Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* in order to consider the radical potential of ecological and other breakdowns to transform postcolonial environmental relations. Drawing on disability studies and discard studies to nuance conceptions of breakdown critical to the postcolonial environmental humanities, this text makes its way to a small place, where waste and

wasted life come together—a place where the contributions of this special issue might meet in precarious yet hopeful solidarity.

Tangling a plethora of textualities, ecologies and geographies, all articles in this special issue ponder the (im)possibilities of living despite and beyond the historical effects of colonialism, slavery and economic dispossession, as well as in community with local and planetary insurgencies articulated against the destruction wreaked by neoliberal capitalism and the extractive logics of empire. We consider ways of approaching the thorny question of post/colonial ecological solidarity and how literary and creative works imagine life otherwise, beyond catastrophe and destruction, by way of Black and Indigenous ontoepistemologies. To return to the quote by Anna Tsing with which we opened this introduction, the time has come for new ways of telling true and fabulous and messy stories, and the time has come for us to listen.

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