Ecologies of Infrastructure in Contemporary Postcolonial Literatures

by

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Dedication

For my mother, Dr. Joanne Swift,

whose unconditional love and extraordinary strength make all things possible.

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Abstract

Ecologies of Infrastructure in Contemporary Postcolonial Literatures synthesizes

postcolonial literary studies, the environmental humanities, and science and technology studies

(STS) to examine how built infrastructural systems in the Global South link the historical spatial

logics of colonialism with contemporary environmental issues. Typically, postcolonial literary

critics have studied explicit, thematic depictions of ecological crises to understand colonialism's

impact on environments. By turning from the thematic to the ambient, my project considers how

infrastructures contribute significantly to the environmental worlds literary characters inhabit,

while also evading attention within the rhythms and banalities of daily life. Throughout my

chapters, I explore systems like roads, oil and water pipelines, and nuclear weaponry that are

unlikely subjects for narrative. I ground my analysis in the following questions: How does

literature imagine the everyday encounters between postcolonial subjects and infrastructures, and

what do these teach us about colonialism's enduring legacies? How do literary texts animate

infrastructures as agentic rather than inert systems, shaping but also shaped by human and non-

human forces? And in using infrastructure to move beyond spectacular crisis narratives, how do

postcolonial writers reframe what "counts" as matters of environmental concern?

In pursuing these questions, I first read *for* infrastructure, exploring how infrastructures

are represented thematically in postcolonial novels, and what a critical attention to infrastructure

adds to existing conversations about postcolonial environmental issues. Next, I argue for reading

as infrastructure, suggesting that literary genres are themselves infrastructural forms which help

us read for ambience and, in doing so, situate novels within broader political, social, and ethical

relations. Each of my chapters triangulates a shared postcolonial location, infrastructural system, and literary genre, comparing contemporary West African and South Asian Anglophone novels by Ben Okri, Helon Habila, Mohsin Hamid, Indra Sinha, and Kamila Shamsie, among others. By exploring these authors' interpretations of magical realism, petro-fiction, the picaresque, and the sentimental, I take the genre's affordances as my starting point to question how the form's conventions deepen our understanding—or challenge our perceptions—of the social and political ecologies that infrastructures facilitate, create, and support in the postcolonial sites where they are implemented. Just as STS scholars examine how everyday people extrapolate national identity and belonging from infrastructure, I explore how genres provide a path through literary interpretation to consider how infrastructures shape conditions of contemporary postcolonial political and social life—namely, in terms of temporality, citizenship, knowledge, and feeling. Ultimately, *Ecologies of Infrastructure* offers a history of the environmental present. My dissertation uses contemporary literary texts to make legible how the legacies of colonial development remain materially, ecologically, and discursively present in the infrastructures that shape everyday postcolonial life.

Introduction: Narrativizing Infrastructure in Postcolonial Ecocriticism

In his 2021 collection of essays, *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*, Amitav Ghosh explores a fiction at the heart of our contemporary geological age: the transformation of the non-human environment, such as weather events or natural resources, from vibrant and powerful phenomena into inert, passive "background." Noting that things like apples, trees, and flowers play pivotal roles in ancient stories ranging from the Garden of Eden to the *Mahabharata*, Ghosh marvels how Western modes of storytelling have rewritten humans' relationships to nature. He remarks:

> What all these [ancient] stories have in common is that they see humanity as being so closely entangled with the products of the Earth that the past cannot be remembered without them. In modern scholarly histories, on the other hand, cloves, nutmegs, mace, tobacco, sugar cane, and so on are all resources or commodities, and their fate depends entirely on humans; in other words, *they are inert and have no world- or history-making powers of their own*. (*Nutmeg's Curse* 91, emphasis added)

The "resources" and "commodities" Ghosh lists here are, of course, central components in the history of empire. As his analysis of the eponymous nutmeg demonstrates, Western empires hailing from the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, and the United Kingdom pursued imperial power through resource control, establishing colonies throughout the Global South to extract their raw materials to fuel various trades and industries. Crops such as tobacco and sugar cane were not the only commodities rendered inert in the service of empire. Indigenous populations were

naturalized as part of the landscape as well, justifying the global trade in slaves, coolies, and indentured servants as a project which mined the environment "properly"—in other words, which extracted all use value and ignored any agentic capabilities that did not work towards the enrichment of the imperial center. This centuries-long fiction of environmental inertness is thus central to the project of empire itself. Although non-human animals, plants, and environmental phenomena obviously possess agencies of their own—a fact at the heart of many indigenous communities' relations to the lands they inhabit—empires rely on narratives of inertness to justify conquest of both people and place. The stories imperial powers tell about environments and their inhabitants have been told and retold until they become regarded as true because, under this hegemonic epistemology, neither the indigenous peoples nor the environments they inhabit possess any "world- or history-making powers of their own."

Reversing these fictions of environmental and indigenous inertness is a central challenge of the Anthropocene, the name given to our current geological era in which humans have consumed fossil fuels and industrialized the environment to such extremes that our collective activity has irrevocably altered the planet's geological composition. As Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, the Anthropocene produces a methodological paradox, especially within the humanities. At this moment in history, humans have acquired "geological agency" while for centuries, as Ghosh chronicles, they have all but denied such agency exists in the non-human world (Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History" 208). As a result, historical methods are ill-equipped to respond to this paradox because they, too, are inflected with an anthropocentric bias that makes it impossible to "experience ourselves as a species" (220). While we can know such a fact intellectually, we cannot perceive it phenomenologically. The Anthropocene, fueled by fictions

of environmental inertness, presents an existential challenge to both human life and humanistic modes of inquiry.

While Ghosh appears here to grapple with empire's impact on the environment for the first time, postcolonial ecocritics have been responding to the methodological and phenomenological challenges of the Anthropocene for some time by reevaluating the role of narratives in interpreting and understanding humans' entanglement with the non-human world. In her 2019 monograph *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey argues that "A humanities-based approach to the concept of the Anthropocene calls attention to the ways in which stories are told and to how crises are narrated or visualized" (8). Importantly, DeLoughrey's emphasis on narratives employs the broadest sense of the term—narratives that are literary, historical, and cultural. Rather than study the Anthropocene in terms of "the *novelty* of crisis" as scientists do, DeLoughrey advocates for attentiveness "to the historical *continuity* of dispossession and disaster caused by empire" (2). The Anthropocene did not happen by chance or by uncontrollable biophysical processes; as Ghosh makes clear, the Anthropocene and its attendant crises have been shaped by centuries of imperial extractivism and environmental degradation. Taking a leaf from Chakrabarty's own oeuvre,[1] DeLoughrey argues that postcolonial studies is thus uniquely suited to "provincialize the Anthropocene" by grounding our analysis in specific postcolonial locations facing environmental crises and using that space's historical, political, and social contexts to guide our analysis of the narratives produced there (2). While the Anthropocene may affect "all" of humanity as a species, it has disproportionately impacted formerly colonized communities in the Global South, whose perspectives have been

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[1] DeLoughrey here references Chakrabarty's definitive work *Provincializing Europe*, in which he argues for troubling the grand narratives of modernity and capitalism which center European hegemony. Rob Nixon also adopts the phrase in his argument to "provincialize American environmentalism," which I will discuss further below.

sorely lacking from much scholarship on the Anthropocene. Postcolonial ecocriticism, then, responds to Chakrabarty's crisis of phenomenological perception by advocating for more thorough literary representations of environmental crisis throughout the Global South. The field recenters the very communities and cultures who were rendered inert and without world-making powers by imperial regimes, prioritizing their modes of ecological interdependence and relation as instructive for repairing the damage caused by imperial narratives of environmental inertness.

To return to Ghosh's observations in *The Nutmeg's Curse*, what role do contemporary postcolonial literary narratives play in correcting phenomenological and representational shortcomings regarding non/human agency and the Anthropocene? If such agency figured prominently in ancient or premodern narratives, how can it be recentered in contemporary narratives to help humans better understand and respond to their rapidly changing environments within the Anthropocene? Ghosh's oeuvre has long been invested in such questions, ranging from his depictions of precarious fishing communities in the Sundarbans who grapple with rising sea levels in *The Hungry Tide*, to the agentic capacity of opium to launch transnational imperial wars and facilitate transformative relationships across caste and race in the *Ibis* trilogy. While these novels center the non-human agencies of tides, tigers, and poppy seeds, they all contain what Ghosh has diagnosed as a fatal flaw within the modern novel: its rigid adherence to verisimilitude and probability, which descends from nineteenth-century realism. In a statement that ignores most postcolonial innovations to the novel form, including magical realist or folkloric influences, or postmodern narration and plotting, Ghosh argues that "the novel [was] midwifed into existence around the world through the banishing of the improbable and the insertion of the everyday" (*The Great Derangement* 23). In other words, plots advance through realistic phenomena; action is resolved within the "predictabilities of nature, space, and time"

(Thomas et al. 944). Probability in narrative thus presumes a probability and stability in the biophysical world as well. In this way, the fictions of environmental inertness at the heart of the imperial project infuse one of the most dominant literary forms, framing the novel's emphasis on psychological interiority rather than a more capacious attention to the non-human world.

However, the challenge of the Anthropocene is that the biophysical world is no longer predictable, producing an intractable crisis of both phenomenological perception and literary representation. As Ghosh writes, weather events that were previously thought to be "highly improbable occurrences" are now "overwhelmingly, urgently, astoundingly real" (*Great Derangement* 36-37). Hurricanes in both Mumbai and Houston submerge roads and highways underwater; freak ice storms in Texas knock out the privatized electrical grid; smoke from wildfires infiltrates air conditioning systems in California and displaces human and animal populations in Greece and Australia on a now-seasonal basis. As the consequences of the Anthropocene materialize in real time, they not only reverse the fictions of environmental inertness, but threaten the very infrastructural systems imposed on these spaces to make them more "productive" and beneficial to human life. Roads, electrical grids, oil and water pipelines, air conditioning, power plants—all are uniquely vulnerable to climate change, as it becomes clear that these systems, too, are no longer inert but possess agentic capacities of their own. What, then, would it look like for a novel to draw our attention toward these entanglements of biophysical and built environments in order to embrace the improbable agency of the non-human world in the Anthropocene era?

Ghosh, naturally, sets out to answer this question for himself in his 2019 novel, *Gun Island*, a sweeping retelling of the Bengali legend of the Gun Merchant reimagined in the context of contemporary climate migration. The novel chronicles the adventures of Dr. Dinanath "Deen"

Datta, a rare book dealer who prides himself on his secularism, cosmopolitanism, and intellectualism. In other words, he is a staunch believer in the probability and stability of the modern world, and thus a mouthpiece for Ghosh's arguments about the improbability of climate change from *The Great Derangement*. As Deen pursues answers to the mysterious seventeenth-century legend of the Gun Merchant—a Venetian trader who builds a shrine to Manasa Devi, goddess of snakes, in the Sundarbans—the novel stages a series of "improbable intersections between past and present" (*Gun Island* 201). Deen travels from the Sundarbans to Brooklyn and Los Angeles, and then finally to Venice, where he meets the Bengali immigrant community, many of whom have fled increasingly dire environmental conditions and arrived in Venice through overland routes that had not been used since the era of the spice trade. In addition to the parallels Ghosh draws between seventeenth-century traders and contemporary climate migrants, Deen faces a series of increasingly inexplicable encounters with the non-human world as he is drawn further into the Gun Merchant's story. On Deen's first trip to the Sundarbans, a king cobra attacks his guide, Tipu[2]; a poisonous spider drops from the ceiling in Deen's Venetian apartment; dolphins beach themselves in mass die-offs; and an academic conference in California is evacuated due to wildfires. Despite his insistence that "nothing was outside the range of the probable," scientific explanations for these simultaneous phenomena are wearing thin, as is Deen's sense that he remains tethered to a recognizable reality (*Gun Island* 201).

In probing these questions of the improbable, however, Ghosh not only packs his narrative with various extreme environmental phenomena. He also stages a series of quasi-

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[2] Tipu first appears in Ghosh's earlier novel, *The Hungry Tide*. He is the son of Fokir, a fisherman in the Sundarbans, who serves as a guide to Piya, an Indian-American marine biologist who comes to the Sundarbans to study the Irawaddy dolphins, an endangered species of freshwater dolphin. At the end of *The Hungry Tide*, Fokir dies protecting Piya during a cyclone. In *Gun Island*, Ghosh describes how Piya has been providing for Tipu financially in the 10+ years since his father's death, out of guilt for her role in his passing.

Socratic dialogues between Deen, the rational skeptic, and Cinta Schiavon, a historian of early modern Venice, who repeatedly reminds Deen of the transcendent powers of storytelling. In one exchange, Cinta chides Deen for his narrowly "modern" understanding of storytelling:

> In the seventeenth century, no one would ever have said of something that it was "just a story" as we moderns do. At that time people recognized that stories could tap into dimensions that were beyond the ordinary, beyond the human even...Only through stories can invisible or inarticulate or silent beings speak to us; it is they who allow the past to reach out to us. (*Gun Island* 141)

It is easy to imagine this conversation as one Ghosh had himself in the aftermath of *The Great Derangement*'s publication, if not with a trusted colleague then certainly with the many printed critiques of his argument that determined his focus on realist literature to be extremely limited. As Stef Craps and Rick Crownshaw write, the definition of "serious" literature that Ghosh puts forth is "nebulous," leading them to conclude that "he may be looking in the wrong places, and sometimes in the wrong times" for literary examples that can adequately represent or respond to the scale of climate crisis (1). By and large, though, Ghosh's literary experiment in *Gun Island* to create a multiscalar novel about climate change is a successful one. He leverages the story of the Gun Merchant to compare our current climate crisis with the similarly turbulent circumstances of the Little Ice Age and, in doing so, paints a stunning portrait of global climate migration among humans and non-humans alike. Ultimately, Ghosh affirms the resilience of these migrants to take ownership of their climate-changed circumstances and find community and kinship in the unlikeliest of places, such as the Bengali community in Venice.

What strikes me about *Gun Island* is not how consciously Ghosh wants to prove his own thesis from *The Great Derangement* wrong. Rather, in writing this sweeping, global story about

contemporary climate migration, his protagonists Deen, Piya, and Cinta—all of whom have significant connections to the West—take an exorbitant number of flights between the United States, Europe, and South Asia. To cite a few examples:

- Cinta and Deen reenter each other's lives to pore over the mysteries of the Gun Merchant when she is delayed in an airport "because of some flood somewhere" (26).

- Deen witnesses the enormous scale of a California wildfire on a flight from Brooklyn to Los Angeles, amid hallucinations that the king cobra from the Sundarbans is following him into the air (127-129).

- After receiving a strange anonymous message, Piya "juggl[es] a few flights" from Berlin to Kolkata, arriving in the Sundarbans just in time to prevent a mass beaching of river dolphins (193).

- Later in the novel, Piya promises to fly at a moment's notice from Berlin to Venice to help search for Tipu and his friend Rafi because "it's a short flight" (203).

- At the novel's end, when Tipu and other Bengali migrants successfully cross the Mediterranean amid several freakish weather events, Deen remarks that he and his friends can meet the migrants on time because "luckily no flights had been cancelled" (271).

Indeed, it is extremely unlikely that the global connections and kinships Ghosh celebrates in *Gun Island* could occur at all without air travel infrastructures, like the networks of airports, air traffic control communications, and flight schedules that are implicitly supporting the globe-trotting actions described above. While flights facilitate the characters' interactions and epiphanies, it is

curious that, in a novel so self-consciously and thematically invested in climate change, the carbon footprint of its protagonists' travels remains unremarked upon and virtually unnoticed.

How does our understanding of *Gun Island* change when we shift focus from the novel's stated theme to the backgrounded, infrastructural elements of the story that, in fact, make such thematizing possible? *Gun Island* is not "about" air travel, but it is about climate migration. At the novel's end, Deen rhapsodizes that the climate migrants' journeys out of devastated environments from the Global South to the Global North mirror his own travels: "[the migrants] had launched their own journeys, just as I had before them; as with me, their travels had been completely enabled by their own networks" (*Gun Island* 304). While Deen emphasizes the migrants' agency in taking control of their own futures by leaving their homes, in no way does his journey out of Kolkata by way of American academia compare to the migrants' harrowing overland and sea journeys toward Europe. Indeed, one of the central conflicts in Rafi's story is that he is in severe debt to a *scafista*, or trafficker, who has information on Tipu's whereabouts after he and Rafi were separated during an attack on migrants crossing the mountains between Iran and Turkey. Deen's global migrations, by contrast, feature business class plane tickets and an American passport. The emissions of the transcontinental and transoceanic flights he takes contribute, in some way, to the environmental conditions that cause those like Rafi and Tipu to leave their homes permanently.[3] Deen's and the migrants' movements through the world, though crossing over similar geographic territory, are in fact worlds apart.

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[3] Of course, I do not mean to imply that the impacts of climate change can be reduced to one person's actions. Jennifer Wenzel and Stephanie LeMenager both address the paradoxical pleasures of "loving oil" because of what it makes possible, like air travel, despite the role it plays in global environmental degradation. However, I find it important to draw out this material discrepancy between Deen's relatively fluid travel experiences throughout his lifetime and the harrowing journeys undertaken by the climate migrants in *Gun Island*.

My brief reading of *Gun Island* here demonstrates how to read beyond thematic environmental concerns—whether of climate change, extreme weather events, or other precarious elements of life in the Anthropocene—for the more ambient infrastructures that not only make such thematizing possible at the level of narrative, but shape the built environments of the very geographical locations depicted in postcolonial literary texts. Reading beyond theme— or in Jennifer Wenzel's pithy summation, "the nature bits" (*Disposition* 12)—in contemporary postcolonial environmental literature helps to perform the structural analyses required to apprehend the multiscalar consequences of climate change. As Chakarabarty reminds us, the central challenge the Anthropocene poses for humanities methodologies is that humans cannot experience themselves phenomenologically as a species acting with agency on such a scale so as to transform the geological contents of the planet itself. For historians like Chakrabarty, this means disrupting the assumption that "our past, present, and future are connected by a certain continuity of human experience" (197). For literary critics, this requires looking beyond the avowed interests of a text like *Gun Island* to read for the infrastructures that are materially, if not thematically, present but which nonetheless impact the environmental and fictional realities depicted there.

Throughout *Ecologies of Infrastructure in Contemporary Postcolonial Literatures*, I pursue such a method by exploring the following questions: How does literature imagine the everyday encounters between postcolonial subjects and infrastructures, and what do these teach us about colonialism's enduring legacies? How do literary texts animate infrastructures as agentic rather than inert systems, shaping but also shaped by human and non-human forces? And in using infrastructure to move beyond spectacular crisis narratives, how do postcolonial writers reframe what "counts" as matters of environmental concern? In what follows, I frame my arrival

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at these questions by contextualizing infrastructure as an object of literary study. By turning our

attention from the biophysical to the built environment, postcolonial ecocritics can deepen our

understandings of the roles literature can play in interpreting and renegotiating what it means to

inhabit contemporary environments shaped by the infrastructural logics of colonial regimes past

and present.

Postcolonial Ecocriticism: "An Aesthetics Committed to Politics"

Although the entanglements of empire and environment appear obvious in the works of

Ghosh, DeLoughrey, and Chakrabarty, postcolonial and environmental literary studies have only

recently entered into scholarly conversation with each other. Both schools of criticism emerged

in the mid-1960s, but proceeded along vastly different intellectual genealogies and priorities

until their recent merging. While postcolonial studies emerged from the waves of decolonization

in Africa, South Asia, and the Caribbean in the aftermath of World War II, environmental studies

tracked more closely with the American environmentalist movement, which is typically

recognized as beginning with the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Although

Carson's invective takes aim at corporations championing the virtues of pesticides and other

chemical agents, her work is easily adapted into a longer-standing American environmental

tradition of wilderness conservation and protection that elides postcolonial studies' emphases on

difference and hybridity in favor of a vision of "pure" untouched land.[4] This distinction between

purity and hybridity is one of four "mutually constitutive silences" that Rob Nixon has identified

between environmental and postcolonial literary studies (236). The additional silences include

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[4] This tradition was shaped in turn by racist and eugenicist practices that determined which bodies were considered appropriate for "pure" wilderness spaces, and which ones—like those of Native Americans—needed to be eradicated from the landscape so it could be admired appropriately. For more on the "invented" history of the American wilderness, see Cronon.

tensions between place and rootedness versus diaspora and displacement; environmentalism's connection to nationalist discourses versus postcolonialism's advocacy for cosmopolitanism and transnationalism; and, finally, the transcendence of time supposedly experienced in nature versus an emphasis on recovering marginalized histories (236). In identifying these gaps, Nixon feels that postcolonial and environmental studies can be brought into conversation productively by "provincializing American environmentalism," echoing Chakrabarty to refer to ecocriticism's long-standing tendency to overlook or exclude environmentalist traditions and struggles when they attempt to critique the Global North. Remedying the silences between postcolonial and environmental studies thus requires reckoning with the imperialist roles that Britain and the United States have played in producing environmental issues in the Global South (80).

Postcolonial ecocriticism consolidated as a subfield in the 2010s, working in the wake of Nixon's helpful mapping of these critical impasses to find productive alliances between postcolonial and environmental concerns. Two scholarly works—an anthology, *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011) by Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley, and a monograph, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2010)—lay the conceptual groundwork to bring this subfield into existence. Though they draw on slightly different literary archives, both DeLoughrey and Handley and Huggan and Tiffin define postcolonial ecocriticism as a field that is simultaneously invested in global forces and conditions—i.e., flows of capital and trade, planetary climate conditions, migration patterns—as well as local or regional histories of violence, colonialism, and environmental degradation. They recognize the "historical embeddedness of ecology in the European imperial enterprise" (Huggan, Tiffin 3) and as such make it clear that postcolonial

studies does not arrive belatedly to questions of the environment, regardless of what recent academic trends may suggest.

To move beyond the scholarly impasses that Nixon identifies, both sets of authors concur that a historical materialist perspective is needed to examine how historical forces connected to empire irrevocably shape postcolonial environments and cultural production in those spaces. Environmental criticism is no longer permitted to be "apolitical" or ahistorical (Huggan, Tiffin 11). Rather, these fields emphasize the particular nuances between place, history, culture, and environment across global and local scales "without reducing difference and without instituting old structural hierarchies" (DeLoughrey, Handley 25). At the same time, as DeLoughrey and Handley write, "The ecocritical interrogation of anthropocentrism offers the persistent reminder that human political and social inequities cannot be successfully and sustainably resolved without some engagement with the more-than-human world and with deep time" (25). In other words, it is not merely environmental studies that needs to be rendered more precise and politically conscious. Postcolonial studies, too, can devote more sustained attention to ethical relations with the non-human animal and biophysical world, working toward what Ursula Heise calls "multispecies justice" (*Imagining Extinction* 6).

Broadening postcolonial methods to consider the non-human makes clear how logics of racism and speciesism are justified and emboldened by colonial hegemony, and helps frame current environmental catastrophes in the Anthropocene as part of colonialism's ongoing endurance, especially as these effects are unevenly distributed throughout the Global South. DeLoughrey and Handley's and Huggan and Tiffin's comprehensive introductions to postcolonial ecocriticism introduce numerous other frameworks for the field's scope, ranging from identifying alternative intellectual genealogies of environmental thought to theorizing

human-animal relations through "zoocriticism." For my purposes here, I want to reflect at length on two central features of postcolonial ecocriticism as a field of literary study: its preoccupation with scale, and its methodological emphasis on thematic environmental representation. These elements inform my project's investments in reading postcolonial novels both for their multiscalar affordances and their insights into infrastructural systems beyond theme itself.

Scale

As discussed above, postcolonial ecocriticism is primarily invested in negotiating the relationships between local and global scales to understand how, for example, resource extraction or monocropping in one colonized location contributes to broader global phenomena, such as plantation slavery or nuclear militarization. By constantly negotiating between the global and the local, postcolonial ecocriticism puts pressure on the concept of a "sense of place," or a "utopian" commitment to the local that characterizes much of American environmental traditions (Heise, *Sense of Place* 8). When connecting the notion of a sense of place to a text like J.M. Coetzee's *White Writing*, as Huggan and Tiffin do, it becomes clear that a valorization of the local via attachment to place elides narratives of settler colonialism and ethno-nationalism. In Coetzee's text, for example, he traces how the pastoral genre in South African literature celebrates the settler who works and improves the land while simultaneously erasing African indigenous presence from the landscape. Africans are characterized as "idle" despite the backbreaking work they are forced to perform for white settler colonialists, while it is the white South Africans who "humanize" the harsh landscape through "hand and plow" (Coetzee 7).

Postcolonial ecocriticism makes clear that there is no such thing as a "postcolonial sense of place" to parallel an "American sense of place" because each postcolonial location retains nuanced cultural, political, and historical ties to the environment. For this reason, many critics

who have followed in the wake of DeLoughrey and Handley's and Huggan and Tiffin's collections tend to limit their studies to singular geographical regions, such as Africa, South Asia, or the Caribbean in order to demonstrate the deep and diverse connections that can be made within national or regional spaces.[5] Byron Caminero-Santangelo's 2014 monograph *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology* exemplifies this approach by organizing his study of African literature and environmental activism regionally. In doing so, he advances a methodology that he calls "postcolonial regional particularism," which emphasizes how bioregional relationships to place do not map onto the artificial national borders drawn under colonial regimes. More often than not, however, postcolonial studies analyzes place through the study of diaspora and displacement, which, as Nixon identifies, tends to appear antithetical to ecocritical discourses of place. In Stuart Hall's foundational essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," for example, identity is not forged out of years-long attachments to a singular place, but is instead constantly in motion: "always in process, and always constituted within, and not outside, representation" (234). For the diasporic postcolonial subject, many places contribute to one's identity formation; in Hall's case, that includes his childhood in Jamaica as well as his adulthood and education in England. However, while Hall's migrations were voluntary, many throughout the history of global imperialism were forced, whether through slavery, indentured servitude, or migration. In this context, the constant movements of diasporic populations not only call out the gross privilege implied by a sense of place that stays in place, but also offer new opportunities for hybridity and difference that are never experienced by those who prioritize settler colonialist concepts of rootedness.

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[5] On Africa, see James, and Iheka 2018 and 2021. On South Asia, see U. Mukherjee, and Rahman. On the Caribbean, see DeLoughrey et al., and Nair. On the Pacific Islands, see Najita, and DeLoughrey.

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My project takes these debates on place a step further by considering how infrastructures complicate the kinds of environmental attachments that can form in the wake of spatial transformation. Each of my chapters traces how infrastructures transform the biophysical environment, whether through slum clearances that pave the way for superhighways, oil pipelines that inevitably leak and pollute the water supply, water infrastructures that distribute resources unevenly, or nuclear military escalations that threaten to erase entire regions from existence. When infrastructures intersect with environmental degradation, as I discuss most explicitly in Chapters 2 and 3, many communities who have inhabited those regions for generations are forced to remain in place. Rootedness is not a fantasy of settler conquest, but a kind of paralysis for those who cannot afford to relocate, and who must reimagine how to inhabit increasingly toxic spaces. At the same time, rootedness can also signal a refusal to leave lands that retain deep ethnic ties, despite the fact that they are rapidly caught up in other geopolitical conflicts. This is the case with Kashmir, which, as I discuss in Chapter 4, becomes caught in the crossfires of India's and Pakistan's nuclearization, as well as Palestine, which informs Ariella Azoulay's concept of citizenship as I invoke it in Chapter 2. By attending to infrastructure as a transformational agent, my project thus extends current discussions on spatial scales in postcolonial ecocriticism beyond the binaries of local/global and rootedness/diaspora.

Postcolonial ecocriticism additionally takes care to consider temporal scales of environmental degradation. The most well-known contribution in this regard is Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. By now a well-known and oft-cited definition, Nixon conceptualizes "slow violence" as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is not typically viewed as violence at all" (2). Nixon redirects critical attention from

explosive and spectacular modes of violence to those that are "incremental and accretive," occurring across a range of temporal scales that often intersect with the quotidian and the mundane. *Slow Violence* is primarily preoccupied with temporalities of belatedness—how to respond to harm already done, whose origins cannot be pinpointed to an exact cause—and futurity—what the future will look like based on the uncertain environmental realities that will emerge and that are already embedded in the natural world. In my project, I return repeatedly to the ways in which infrastructure entangles temporalities of futurity and belatedness, both in terms of imagining what is possible beyond current infrastructural deficiencies, as well as what improvements could have been made to make life in postcolonial spaces more livable.

Thematic Representation

Postcolonial ecocritical methodologies reflect Nixon's belief that "imaginative writing can help make the unapparent appear" (15). Indeed, Huggan and Tiffin conceptualize postcolonial ecocriticism itself as "a particular way of reading," one that is "as much affective as analytical…and morally attuned to the continuing abuses of authority that operate in humanity's name" (13). Critics working in this field tend to approach literary texts in three ways: by collecting examples of postcolonial literature that are thematically or politically invested in environmental issues; by rereading canonical postcolonial texts and drawing out their relevance for environmental concerns; and by examining how attention to environmental phenomena in literature can reshape or redirect commonly rehearsed debates surrounding identity, difference, and nationalism in postcolonial studies. Laura Wright adopts the first two approaches in *Wilderness into Civilized Shapes: Reading the Postcolonial Environment* (2010). Reading trans-geographically, Wright puts texts such as Zakes Mda's *Heart of Redness* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* into conversation. Whereas Mda's novel, which connects the Xhosa

cattle killings of 1857 to contemporary ethnic conflicts, is thematically invested in human-animal and agricultural relationships, Ngũgĩ's *Petals of Blood* is typically analyzed in terms of its disillusionment of the Kenyan state post-independence. By rereading this canonical text in terms of the plant Theng'eta, which economically transforms the village of Ilmorog into a tourist destination, and juxtaposing the novel with Mda's, Wright's analysis exposes how indigenous oral traditions become commodified and linked to environmentally-damaging Western developments in postcolonial spaces. More recently, Shazia Rahman's ecofeminist readings of Pakistani literature in *Place and Postcolonial Ecofeminism* helps reorient debates surrounding religious nationalism. She writes, "When we foreground place and the environment in Pakistani women's texts, we find alternate discourses of belonging to the land that resist patriarchal religious nationalism. Thus, my book...challenges stereotypes of Pakistan as an Islamic fundamentalist state and of Pakistani women as mere victims of a patriarchal society" (3). Her readings of Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, which I take up in Chapter 4, reads the characters' repeated migrations and displacements alongside the motifs of birds, arguing that "Shamsie uses animalization to connect U.S., Japanese, and Afghan nationalist violence, all of which involves discrimination and racism" (148). In doing so, Rahman demonstrates how the novel's engagements with the non-human offer a new framework for understanding the diasporic movements Shamsie's characters face throughout the novel.

Postcolonial ecocritical methodologies also put pressure on the role and authority of the critic herself. DeLoughrey and Handley note Chakrabarty's concern over "how our evolution in deep time renders our knowledge contingent," thus placing the hermeneutics of suspicion—a standby in postcolonial studies—in a precarious position (29). Although the hermeneutics of suspicion remains useful for explicating the psychological and cultural consequences of

colonialism in literary texts, the critic's certainty as the sole authority in interpreting texts becomes questionable in light of Chakrabarty's claim that humans are fundamentally unable to perceive their role as geological agents. Within this context, DeLoughrey and Handley write that "a more contingent, collective, and cautious hermeneutics becomes necessary, one that emphasizes the importance of our agency and accepts the limits of what we can know—contra Hegel—about universal human experience" (29). Cajetan Iheka takes up this interest in a new critical hermeneutics by engaging more thoroughly with new materialism, which conceptualizes agency as distributed among humans and non-humans and readily accepts the influence of non-human agency upon human activity. In 2018's *Naturalizing Africa*, Iheka theorizes an "aesthetics of proximity," grounded in African indigenous traditions, that corrects postcolonial studies' anthropocentric biases by focusing on the connections and interdependencies that have always characterized the ecological relationships between humans and non-humans in African indigenous cultures. As Iheka notes, the human/non-human binary does not exist in many African epistemologies; rather, African traditions recognize sameness and shared reliance on ecosystems as a starting point for environmental ethics. Iheka's approach also allows the environmental components of literary texts to speak for themselves. The critic thus plays an accessory role in illuminating what has always been embedded in postcolonial narratives of environmental relation.

Through these emphases on spatial and temporal scales, and by employing a variety of methodologies, postcolonial ecocriticism has produced a robust range of literary scholarship and renewed attention to postcolonial literature's avowed commitments to environmental justice in the short span of about fifteen years. Despite Huggan and Tiffin's claim that postcolonial ecocriticism is fundamentally a method, rather than "a specific corpus of literary and other

cultural texts" (13), a canon of sorts has emerged in the syllabi and publications characterizing the field, and my project is no exception. Within this canon, environmental activists, like Wangari Maathai, Arundhati Roy, and Ken Saro-Wiwa—whom Nixon has dubbed "writer-activists"—are placed in conversation with postcolonial literary texts like Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, all of which avowedly state their interest in environmental concerns. Such voices are crucial for establishing postcolonial ecocriticism's foundation as a field, and for drawing attention to environmental crises such as oil pollution, corporate toxification, habitat destruction, and rising sea levels. However, in thinking critically about postcolonial studies' anthropocentric biases, I am curious about how postcolonial ecocritics decide what "counts" as the environment and, therefore, what arises to our critical attention in the first place. What remains beyond our critical purview when we emphasize the biophysical environment so explicitly?

Jennifer Wenzel pursues a similar question in her 2020 monograph *The Disposition of Nature: Environmental Crisis and World Narrative*. She describes her reading practice as "reading for the planet," which examines "subtle aspects of environmental imagining that are occluded when one reads thematically—for the nature bits" (13). Rather than rely solely on a text's "salient" representations of environmental crisis, Wenzel turns her attention to literary features that extend beyond the diegetic world of the narrative, including form, rhetorical address, and circulation in the marketplace. In doing so, she aims to correct an error in logic that both she and Stephanie LeMenager find throughout environmental humanities work: the idea that "*seeing* is *knowing* and that *knowing* is a catalyst for *caring, acknowledging* or *acting* to rectify suffering or injustice" (*Disposition* 15, emphasis in original). Noting that the impulse to make visible is a vestige of the Enlightenment, Wenzel challenges the idea that environmental injustice

can be solved by bringing these crimes to light. Rather, her methodology instead advocates for "thinking in terms of *legibility* and *intelligibility*…The salient question is not whether environmental injustice can be seen, but under what conditions it can be *read*, understood, and apprehended" (*Disposition* 15). While Wenzel may be engaged in a bit of wordplay here, I find her shift toward legibility a useful antidote to Chakrabarty's concerns about phenomenological perception that I discussed above. If, as Chakrabarty claims, humans cannot perceive themselves to be geological agents acting upon the planet as a species, then literary fiction—the product of human imagination—must similarly struggle to represent the multiscalar challenges of life in the Anthropocene. However, when the emphasis becomes not so much on "seeing" evidence of climate change or environmental degradation but rather on perceiving or apprehending it by other means, literature becomes a tool to unlock other phenomenological capacities beyond sight. Literature can make legible what has been intended to remain imperceptible.

By characterizing postcolonial ecocriticism as a method preoccupied with legibility rather than visibility, Wenzel broadens the field's scope to consider ecological as well as explicitly environmental phenomena in postcolonial spaces. In doing so, she creates space for one of my project's primary methodological interventions: reading texts that are not necessarily "about" infrastructure, but which still inform our understanding of how built environments operate. I juxtapose texts that are avowedly interested in infrastructure—like the eponymous road of Ben Okri's trilogy, oil in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, and the nuclear bombs that produce Kamila Shamsie's titular *Burnt Shadows*—with those in which infrastructure is more marginal—like the overwhelming smell of diesel fuel in Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief*, the constant discussions of poisoned water in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, and the transformation of Kashmir into a nuclear pawn in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*. By expanding my

purview beyond the thematic, I aim to demonstrate infrastructure's pervasiveness as both a material system that shapes environments and a discursive force that "does not always work within the frames of human time and political interest" (DeLoughrey, Handley 4). As I will go on to show, literary infrastructures like genre operate as the extra-diegetic forms that Wenzel identifies to guide literary critics toward other modes of "reading for the planet." Pairing literary infrastructures with material ones, I offer a comparative global study of the built environments in West Africa and South Asia to help us understand not only how infrastructures retain the trace of colonial spatial logics, but also operate beyond "the frames of human time and political interest."

The Infrastructural Turn in Science and Technology Studies (STS)

While it might seem an unlikely subject for literary study, infrastructure has recently taken hold in both cultural anthropology and science and technology studies (STS) as an exciting new topic for sociocultural analysis. First defined at length in Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star's book, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences* (1999)—a methodological touchstone in STS—infrastructure has come into focus for its unique manifestations of temporality and agency, so much so that recent scholarship in these fields has come to be known as the "infrastructural turn." Like postcolonial ecocritics seeking to draw attention to environmental crisis as it is produced by ongoing imperial violence, scholars in critical infrastructure studies are similarly preoccupied with questions of perception and knowledge. Unlike Wenzel's shift from visibility to legibility that I discussed above, STS perspectives on infrastructure still tend to frame its debates in terms of infrastructure's hypervisibility—how it

hides in plain sight—as well as its invisibility—how it "works" on people to shape their everyday lives and experiences.[6]

     Importantly, whereas the limits of perception pose an epistemological challenge to humanities methods in Chakrabarty's account of the Anthropocene, such limitations are already embedded in STS methodologies. Indeed, they are often the starting point for understanding that all knowledge is constructed and inherently limited. According to Bowker and Star:

> Sociologists of science invited us to look at the process of producing something
> that looked like what the positivists alleged science to be. We got to see the Janus
> face of science as both constructed and realist…By the very nature of the method,
> however, we also shared the actors' blindness. The actors being followed did not
> themselves *see* what was excluded: they constructed a world in which that
> exclusion could occur. (48, emphasis in original)

The "actors" in question here refer to Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, in which all things entangled in a network—human and non-human—are endowed with agentic capacities that impact other actors in the network. Bowker and Star's critique is notable for two reasons. First, it emphasizes a core tenet of STS scholarship: that all knowledge is situated. As Donna Haraway outlines in her foundational 1988 essay, no one critic, scientist, or theorist can make any reliable claim toward "objective" knowledge because knowledge is produced and recirculates within the same systems as the critics/theorists. Second, the above critique announces the preoccupation with visibility as connected to knowledge itself. While I ultimately find this connection between

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[6] Because Wenzel's shift from visibility to legibility refers to the environmental humanities rather than critical infrastructure studies per se, she does not address the reliance on the visibility/invisibility framework in STS. Notably, Brian Larkin calls for the STS field to move beyond visibility/invisibility to conceptualize infrastructure in future work. Rahul Mukherjee's theorization of "radiance" regarding cell phone towers and nuclear reactors in India offers one new direction in response to Larkin's call. My own framing of infrastructure as "ambience" offers an additional one, as I discuss below.

visibility and knowledge limiting, as does Wenzel, critical infrastructure studies has emerged out of these dual priorities—pursuing knowledge as situated and thus inherently partial, and understanding how infrastructures operate beyond the thresholds of perception in built environments. Ultimately, my project synthesizes Wenzel's shift toward legibility with STS's emphasis on situated knowledges by characterizing infrastructure not as visible or invisible, but as ambient: operating just beyond the thresholds of perception, while still shaping built environments and the modes of life that are possible there.

Bowker and Star's use of the visibility/invisibility binary dates their argument to the early years of the Internet and other digital media. Indeed, their interest in infrastructure refers to communication and information networks rather than the built environment itself. In their assessment, infrastructure is not solely rendered invisible through its installation underground or along electrical grids at great heights. Rather, infrastructure surfaces as the enactment of standards, like the standard size of an envelope or thickness of a credit card. Bowker and Star are thus interested in how "Systems of classification (and of standardization) form a juncture of social organization, moral order, and layers of technical integration" (33). They examine how information is organized and made public through infrastructures that are so ingrained in daily life that we do not stop to notice how these standards and classificatory systems came to be, nor what logics or power structures they may impose on the world around us. To break these habits in our perception that have rendered infrastructures illegible, Bowker and Star recommend a method called "infrastructural inversion," which assumes the ubiquity of infrastructural standards and argues that such standards implement material effects in the world (39). Such materiality is, of course, political; they write: "Someone, somewhere, must decide and argue

over the minutiae of classifying and standardizing" (44). Thus, even when infrastructures function as they were designed, they materialize the modes of power that informed their creation.

Bowker and Star's early work on infrastructure serves as the foundation for two aligned yet ultimately distinct strains of scholarship: critical studies of communication and information infrastructure, including digital media[7]; and critical studies of infrastructure as part of the built environment, including pipelines, electrical grids, and roads. While STS informs both, communication and media studies have taken up the former, broadly speaking, while anthropology and environmental studies have taken up the latter. Brian Larkin's 2013 essay, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," synthesizes both strains by offering a state-of-the-field of scholarship on infrastructure studies. His oft-cited definition declares that infrastructure is "the ambient environment of everyday life," concerning not only "things" but "the relation between things" (328-329). While Larkin reiterates how infrastructure's material and temporal unruliness makes it a compelling object for STS, he also emphasizes that infrastructure's aesthetic form—its "poetics"—is just as important for understanding infrastructure's ontology as its technical elements. Form concerns not only how infrastructures work, technically, but how they signify cultural meaning. For example, Larkin notes how certain elements of the built environment, like electricity and running water, signify concepts of modernity, progress, and citizenship that have their roots in the Enlightenment. To achieve Enlightenment ideals of "a world in movement and open to change…[with] the free circulation of goods, ideas, and people," material infrastructural networks are necessary (333). As such, "Roads and railways are not just technical objects then but also operate on the level of fantasy and desire. They encode the dreams of individuals and societies and are the vehicles whereby those fantasies are transmitted and

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[7] On media and information infrastructures, see Larkin 2008, Peters, and Parikka.

made emotionally real" (333). In offering a survey of critical infrastructure scholarship, Larkin also implores the field in both media studies and anthropology to move beyond a preoccupation with the visibility/invisibility binary. Rather than assume infrastructures are only visible when they break down, Larkin encourages critics to consider what modes of power are enforced when infrastructures function properly instead. As I will go on to show, I respond to Larkin's call by considering how infrastructures operate via ambience, neither visible nor invisible, yet still shaping the mundane rhythms of daily life all the same.

Although Larkin's essay equally informs developments in media studies and environmental anthropology, for my purposes in this project I am interested in how the infrastructural turn impacts sociocultural analyses of the built environment in anthropology and STS. Following the publication of Larkin's survey, a series of ethnographic studies of infrastructure emerged from 2014-2018, covering a range of systems and geographies from the water infrastructure in Mumbai to the global supply chain. By and large, the infrastructural turn in anthropology is characterized by ethnographies that perform a deep, localized study of a geographic site, its inhabitants, and an infrastructural system that structures daily life there.[8] As Nicole Starosielski writes, critical infrastructure studies requires a specific attention both to the materiality of the system itself and the unique historical, political, and social contexts of the places through which they pass. Writing on global fiber optic cable networks, many of which pass under the Pacific Ocean, Starosielski notes that "Analyses of twenty-first-century media culture have been characterized by a cultural imagination of dematerialization: immaterial information flows appear to make the environments they extend through fluid and matter less"

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[8] In addition to the works I discuss below, see Hecht 2012, Adunbi, Bjorkman, and Fredericks. It is interesting to note that Iheka's most recent book, *African Ecomedia,* aims to bridge the gap between postcolonial ecocriticism and critical media infrastructure studies. My project offers a similar synthesis between postcolonial ecocriticism and infrastructures of the built environment.

(6). Paying attention to infrastructure's materiality requires paying attention to the social as well.

In *The Promise of Infrastructure*, Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta, and Hannah Appel write that

"ethnographic attention to infrastructure...forces us to rethink governance and citizenship not at a

distance, but pressing into the flesh, through questions of intimacy and proximity" (22).

Anthropologists like Anand, Gupta, and Appel are primarily interested in how infrastructures

facilitate, challenge, and create social formations, especially those concerning citizenship and

belonging. Below, I will briefly trace three trends from the infrastructural turn that I find relevant

and well-aligned with postcolonial ecocriticism's priorities: validating the scales of the mundane

and the quotidian; conceptualizing temporality as capacious, non-linear, and thus continuous

between the colonial past and postcolonial present; and drawing specific connections between

ecological and social relations. In drawing these parallels, I hope to demonstrate through my

project how to merge politics and poetics in literary studies of infrastructure.

Validating the Mundane

Just as Bowker and Star highlight the banality of classification, down to standard

envelope sizes, the scales of the mundane and the quotidian are key to critical infrastructure

studies scholarship. Throughout the various ethnographies comprising the infrastructural turn,

anthropologists are keenly interested in how infrastructure shapes the experiences of everyday

life. For example, in Nikhil Anand's examinations of Mumbai's water infrastructure in

Hydraulic Citizenship (2017), he traces how the timing of water allocations throughout the

settlement of Jogeshwari enables women to align their "washing chores" with social activities

(111). Anand notes that the delivery of water in the morning allows women to wash clothing and

dishes outside, due to more pleasant temperatures, signaling that they have the privacy of bathing

indoors separately at a later time. Water infrastructure intersects with daily household rituals to

construct washing outside as "a demonstration not of dirty laundry but of good moral character" (112). In Antina von Schnitzler's account of water infrastructures in Johannesburg, however, she examines how water meters impose a payment structure that transforms access to water based on class, an experience she terms "living prepaid" (6). Schnitzler articulates the following connection between income cycles and prepaid water bills: "Living prepaid mirrors life in a moment in which income has become precarious, where reliance on a regular monthly wage is the exception rather than the norm" (6). As such, the normalization of prepaid meters throughout Johannesburg's townships reflects an infrastructural reality "in which access to services is unstable and where the threat of automatic disconnection due to nonpayment is always present" (6).

Schnitzler's analysis of the banality of water meter billing cycles indexes both the racialized histories of Johannesburg's townships, especially during the apartheid era, and contemporary environmental crises surrounding water access in South Africa. As such, the scale of the mundane provides insight into "techno-politics," a core concept in STS which Schnitzler defines as "the ways in which political actions are embedded within technical forms and, conversely, the ways in which the technical shapes political questions" (10). While techno-politics can be analyzed through any number of scientific objects of study, infrastructure allows insights into "smaller and more intimate domains and involves the shaping of subjectivities, practices, and dispositions," not unlike the social codes surrounding public versus private washing that Anand describes above (Schnitzler 10). In this way, critical infrastructure studies' emphasis on the quotidian and the mundane contributes toward postcolonial ecocriticism's investments in everyday, non-spectacular environmental crises and dispersed impacts of environmental violence.

Capacious Temporalities

Anand's and Schnitzler's examples additionally illustrate the entanglements between infrastructure and temporality, a common concern among anthropologists working within the infrastructural turn. Indeed, in Anand's co-edited volume with Appel and Gupta, the co-authored introduction argues primarily for infrastructure's temporal capaciousness. They write, "Infrastructures configure time, enable certain kinds of social time while disabling others, and make some temporalities possible while foreclosing alternatives" (15). While they take up Larkin's understanding of infrastructures as unruly and entangling multiple conflicting temporalities, the authors are especially interested in what infrastructure signifies about the future. In Gupta's stand-alone essay in the volume, he writes that "infrastructure is almost always built to exceed present needs: it is built in anticipation of a not-yet-achieved future" (63). The eponymous "promise" of infrastructure in their volume's title is similarly future-oriented, though the authors cite Ann Laura Stoler to remind readers that such a future can promise both visions of progress and development, or ruinous images of abandonment and decay (19).

For my purposes, I am interested in two argumentative threads regarding infrastructure and temporality. The first concerns not the relationship between the present and future, but the relationship between the colonial past and the postcolonial present. Though not exclusively a colonialist phenomenon, infrastructural transformation was a significant component of the colonial project. In Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, for example, he opens with contrasting images of the settler town and the native town. Whereas the native sector is "a shanty town…a famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light," the settler's town is characterized by its modern infrastructures: "The colonist's sector is a sector built to last, all stone and steel. It's a sector of lights and paved roads, where the trash cans constantly overflow

with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed-of leftovers" (4-5). To return once more to Anand's analysis of Mumbai, the water infrastructures which govern washing rituals and social moral codes in contemporary Jogeshwari consist of the same pipelines and pumps installed during the nineteenth century, when Mumbai was under British rule. Anand writes that these colonial infrastructures, implemented in India and elsewhere throughout the British empire, "were not only productive of liberal expertise but also enabled a series of constitutive divisions necessary for the operation of liberal rationalities in everyday life" (7). These "divisions" include the technical from the political, the natural from the material or social, and the private from the public—all false binaries that critical fields like STS and postcolonial ecocriticism work to undo.

Infrastructure not only entangles human time-scales of the past, present, and future, but also offers an object and method for thinking beyond the human—precisely the scalar challenge that Chakrabarty, Ghosh, DeLoughrey, and other postcolonial ecocritics have identified as a priority. Although created by humans, infrastructure itself is inhuman, breaking the binary logic that still pervades ecocritical approaches to "human and non-human environments." According to Anand, Gupta, and Appel, infrastructure decenters the human from anthropological analysis to consider "other timescales, times that are not scaled (down) to human life, and only draw meaning from those lives" (9). Infrastructure is thus historically placed in time, in terms of the moment of its creation, and is also curiously untimely, capable of existing (albeit in ruins) long after human use of the systems has ceased.[9]

Entangling the Ecological and the Social

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[9] The mention of ruined infrastructures here echoes Michelle Cliff's invocation of "ruinate" in her 1987 novel *No Telephone to Heaven*. Ruinate is a Jamaican term referring to the rainforest reclaiming lands that were once cleared for agricultural or plantation use. In the Caribbean context, ruinate served as a term of resistance to colonial infrastructures like the plantation, and in Cliff's novel, rebel groups meet and coordinate in the overgrown forests. In Chapter 1, I read Ben Okri's theorizations of recursion as a potential response to infrastructural ruin and decay.

In recognizing that infrastructure offers ways of thinking beyond the human, I want to consider a final conceptual thread: entangling the ecological and the social. As Larkin's essay discusses, critical infrastructure studies shares many theoretical alignments with actor-network theory, which understands agency to be distributed throughout a network to both human and non-human actants. By making infrastructure the object of study, non-human entities are not merely agentic participants in the social; they are the very foundation of the social itself. As such, analyzing infrastructure enables anthropologists to ask new questions about ongoing problems regarding citizenship, belonging, personhood, and publics. In his study of cell phone towers and nuclear reactors in India—what he terms "radiant infrastructures"—Rahul Mukherjee introduces the concept of "environmental publics" to illustrate this expanded, ecological notion of the social. He writes that "Environmental publics consist of both the stakeholders and the wider public that the stakeholders are trying to woo" (18-19). Key to these publics is "radiance" itself—that is, the impact of radiation from both cell phone antennas and nuclear reactors on Indian communities.

Additionally, while Anand and Schnitzler both analyze local water infrastructures in terms of national citizenship, Deborah Cowen expands the concept globally in her analysis of the supply chain and logistics industry. She writes, "Questions of (logistics) space are also profoundly questions of citizenship. If national territoriality gave literal legal shape to modern formal citizenship, what are the implications of its recasting for political belonging and subjectivity?" (Cowen 12). In other words, infrastructure shapes the very concepts we have for understanding human identity, making it a timely and provocative object of study for humanities inquiries as well. Throughout my chapters, I draw connections between built infrastructures like roads, pipelines, and nuclear weapons to concepts like temporality, citizenship, knowledge, and

feeling. In doing so, I aim to explore not only how to read for infrastructure at the margins of literary texts, but to better understand how texts function infrastructurally—to facilitate connections across social, political, and geographical divides.

Reading and/as Infrastructure

Ultimately, my interest in analyzing infrastructure through literary methods stems from postcolonial ecocriticism's and critical infrastructure studies' shared investment in "an aesthetics committed to politics" (Cilano, DeLoughrey 79). Cilano and DeLoughrey's early definition of postcolonial ecocriticism echoes Larkin's description of infrastructure as both political and poetic: infrastructure is just as interesting due to its formal properties as its technical ones. For this reason, throughout my project, I repeatedly turn to the formal qualities of literary works, in addition to their thematic ones, to consider how form functions infrastructurally to reveal new dimensions to postcolonial texts. Because "discussing infrastructure is a categorical act" (330), as Larkin suggests, I argue that genre functions as a kind of literary infrastructure, offering up literary conventions as points of departure for the kinds of extra-diegetic analysis Wenzel claims is so necessary for postcolonial ecocriticism to move beyond thematic representation.

Genres are key mediators between the social and the aesthetic because they provide textual forms to apply to various social situations and rhetorical contexts. In rhetorical theory, Carolyn Miller argues that "genre study is valuable not because it might permit the creation of some kind of taxonomy, but because it emphasizes some social and historical aspects of rhetoric that other perspectives do not" (151). In characterizing genre as an infrastructure, however, it is useful to consider how genres endure across time, accreting new meanings depending on their particular articulations while still retaining the traces of their historical origins. Fredric Jameson advances this theory of genre in *The Political Unconscious*. Defining what he calls "the ideology

of form," Jameson writes, "it has become possible to grasp such formal processes as *sedimented content* in their own right, as carrying ideological messages of their own, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works...the simplest and most accessible demonstration of this reversal may be found in the area of literary genre" (99, emphasis added). In other words, the literary text's genre or form articulates its politics just as much as, or even more so than its thematic content. As such, genres are "social contracts between a writer and a specific public" which always carry the historical trace of their moment of origin (Jameson 106).

Jameson's notion of "sedimented content" suggests a rigidity to genre as a literary category, and the method of critical interpretation he advances in *The Political Unconscious* often privileges attention to class struggle over a text's aesthetic elements. To recuperate an attention to the aesthetic as well as the political, Yogita Goyal reminds readers that genres are also mobile forms that can shift and take on new resonances as they travel. In her recent book *Runaway Genres*, Goyal examines contemporary iterations of the nineteenth-century slave narrative. Goyal studies five genres that emerge from the slave narrative and examines how these work in contemporary African American and African diasporic texts.[10] She writes that "Searching for the imprint of historical genres like the slave narrative clears a path to return history to the conversation, enabling formalist and historicist approaches to work in tandem" (4). Thinking through genres across both place and time allows Goyal to re-recognize what is familiar about slave narratives, while also extending the genre's relevance to contemporary issues of race, power, and inequality. Just as built infrastructures adapt to particular environments or exceed the functions for which they were designed, so too can genres discover new modes of social critique as they recur throughout literary and historical periods.

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[10] These genres include sentimentalism, the gothic, satire, surrogation, and revisionism.

Goyal's emphasis on re-encountering the familiar through genre's social expectations and habits of attention is another key characteristic in framing genre as an infrastructure. Approaching genre from anthropology rather than literary studies, Karin Barber notes that genres cultivate specific habits of attention that in turn shape literary and cultural criticism. She writes, "genre conventions suggest a particular perspective on the world. A strong version of this is that genre frames our perception of reality and *enables* us to see" (*Anthropology* 41). What Barber terms "enablement," Caroline Levine refers to as the "affordances" of genre. In characterizing literary and social forms as mutually constitutive, Levine writes that "Rather than asking what artists intend or even what forms do, we can ask instead what potentialities lie latent—though not always obvious—in aesthetic and social arrangements" (6).[11] In both Barber's and Levine's accounts, then, genre is more than merely a historical artifact or rigid taxonomy. It is iterative and responsive to the situation at hand, and plays a significant role in shaping critical perceptions within that context. Generic affordances thus enable new kinds of attention—attention that I claim is necessary when reading beyond theme and for the more ambient elements of a literary narrative, such as infrastructure.[12]

My use of "ambience" throughout this project considers infrastructure's relationship to both the biophysical environment and the limitations of human perception. Rather than

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[11] Shortly after its publication, Levine's *Forms* was the subject of an extended debate in the "Theories and Methodologies" forum of *PMLA* (vol. 132, no. 5, 2017). While some of the respondents found her work engaging and exciting for the recently dubbed field of "New Formalism," the majority of the essays vehemently criticized *Forms* for its ahistoricity and surface-level application of concepts from the social sciences to literary studies.

[12] Very recently, literary critics have begun to turn their attention to infrastructure and are using genre as the heuristic to do so. In her 2020 monograph *Infrastructures of Apocalypse,* Jessica Hurley uses the genre of apocalypse to think through nuclear infrastructures' impacts on temporalities of futurity. Apocalypse becomes not only a category of stories about end times, but also "a *formal authority* that transfigures the present" (20). Similarly, Rebecca Evans engages with the gothic genre in her contribution to a 2021 *American Literature* special issue on "The Infrastructures of Emergency." Analyzing the afterlives of plantation infrastructures in contemporary African American literature, Evans examines what she terms "genre frictions," in which "formal shifts between realism and the gothic…[act as] a literary strategy for integrating difficult knowledge into everyday life" (452-3). Generic experimentation between the realist and the gothic thus "demonstrates how literary strategies can be leveraged to represent the eerie agency of infrastructure" in contemporary racialized ecologies (Evans 447).

characterize infrastructure as either visible or invisible, I frame it in terms of ambience—contributing significantly to the environmental worlds the characters inhabit, while also escaping attention within the rhythms and banalities of daily life. Rhetorician Thomas Rickert theorizes ambience as having "an interactive role to what we typically see as setting or context, foregrounding what is customarily background to rhetorical work and thereby making it material, complex, vital, and, in its own way, active" (xv). I find this notion of interactivity crucial because infrastructures "act" agentially, whether or not humans notice them. Keller Easterling reminds us that, while we tend to think of infrastructures as "static objects," they are in fact always "*doing something*" (14, emphasis in original). She describes this activity as infrastructure's "disposition": "the character or propensity of an organization that results from all its activity. It is the medium, not the message...not the object form, but the active form" (21).

Ecologies of Infrastructure conceptualizes infrastructures of the built environment as both the "object form" and the "active form." In my readings throughout the following chapters, I first read *for* infrastructure, exploring how infrastructures are represented thematically in postcolonial novels, and what a critical attention to infrastructure adds to existing conversations about postcolonial environmental issues. Each chapter takes up a unique infrastructural system: roads and urban planning in Lagos; oil drilling in Nigeria; water infrastructures in urban South Asia; and nuclear weaponization in India and Pakistan. While many of these systems were implemented well after independence from British colonialism, these infrastructures make legible how political, religious, and social tensions which originated in the colonial period take on new resonances and forms in contemporary West African and South Asian communities. Next, I argue for reading *as* infrastructure, suggesting that genres are themselves infrastructural forms which help us read for ambience and, in doing so, situate novels within broader political,

social, and ethical relations. I claim that reading acts infrastructurally in three ways: to deepen our knowledge of authors' locations, whether in academic institutions or in literary genealogies; to connect readers to authors and characters across geographical distances; and to consider what we owe to one another ethically by virtue of these newfound connections across material and literary infrastructures.

Further, by recognizing genres as "active forms," I am careful not to impose these categories on literary texts where they do not belong. Rather, I follow the advice of P.N. Medvedev and Mikhail Bakhtin, as cited by Karin Barber: "It's not that you take a look at reality and then try to fit the material into a generic form: rather, '*A particular aspect of reality can only be understood in connection with the particular means of representing it*'" (131 qtd. *Anthropology* 41, emphasis added). Each of my chapters triangulates a shared postcolonial location, infrastructural system, and literary genre. I take the genre's affordances as my starting point to question how the conventions of the form deepen our understanding—or challenge our perceptions—of the social and political ecologies that infrastructures facilitate, create, and support in the postcolonial sites where they are implemented. Just as STS scholars examine how everyday people extrapolate national identity and belonging from infrastructure, I explore how genres provide a path through literary interpretation to consider how infrastructures shape conditions of contemporary postcolonial political and social life—namely, in terms of temporality, citizenship, knowledge, and feeling.

Ultimately, I find genre a useful starting point for reading for infrastructure's ambience because doing so provides a third option through literary criticism's highly contested "method wars," which have dominated methodological debates for the past ten years. Ambience is so fascinating to me because it is neither surface nor depth. It is simply *there*, at the margins of

perception—and this includes narrative perception as well, as my reading of the flights in *Gun Island* demonstrates. In this vein, I follow Patricia Yaeger, who finds infrastructure compelling because of "its play of surface and depth (subways, water mains) [and] of hypervisibility (bridges) and invisibility (the electrical grid)" (16). And while "it is tempting to imagine that the deep structures of city texts might mirror the deep structures of cities…infrastructure's role in literature is unpredictable and varied" (Yaeger 16). As my interlocutors from postcolonial ecocriticism and STS remind us, the critic's perception in the age of the Anthropocene is always-already limited. From this starting point, she is neither probing the depths of the text for something only she as the critic can find, nor is she refusing to extend her analysis to the political and cultural contexts infrastructures entangle. Rather, she is paying attention to infrastructure where it surfaces, and using the text's own clues to ask political and social questions about the world being depicted, including what it can teach us about the environmental realities of infrastructure in an increasingly precarious world.

The Structure of the Project

Throughout this project, I draw on West African and South Asian Anglophone novels written after 1989, a temporal marker that forms the boundary of my definition of the contemporary for geopolitical, environmental, and literary reasons. The end of the Cold War in 1989 marked a definitive shift in global geopolitics away from political economies governed by nation-states and toward a more globalized marketplace. Indeed, this historical moment marks the transition toward what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri term "Empire," a "new form of global sovereignty" that is decentralized and flows easily across marketplaces and systems of trade (xi-xii). Whereas conventional definitions of imperialism envision "an extension of the sovereignty of the European nation-states beyond their own boundaries," Empire "progressively

incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers" (xii).[13] Hardt and

Negri's definition of Empire is significant for understanding how infrastructure shapes

postcolonial spaces. For many of the infrastructural systems I examine throughout this project,

infrastructure is held up as a developmentalist ideal—a symbol of progress and technology that

will usher the postcolonial nation into the modern era. In other words, infrastructure is not

always a vestige of the imperial past, governing contemporary spaces through historically

imperialist logics. Rather, the impulses for development, improvement, and modernity emerge

from within the postcolonial state itself—impulses that are supported by the very economic and

political networks that govern a decentralized, globalized world in the wake of the Cold War.

At the same time, Ghosh writes that 1989 signals the start of a second Great Acceleration,

the term John Robert MacNeill has given to the period since the end of World War II. This

period saw rapid increases in industrialization, fossil fuel usage, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Writing that the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change are "cognate phenomena," Ghosh

claims that both of these events "are effects of the ever-increasing acceleration in production,

extraction, consumption, and environmental degradation that has occurred in the decades after

the Second World War, and especially after 1989" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 133). If Empire has changed

in the last 33 years, then so too has our understanding of environmental crisis.

These dual contexts of Empire and the so-called second Great Acceleration add further

resonances to Debjani Ganguly's theorizations of the contemporary world novel in her 2016

monograph, *This Thing Called the World*, in which she identifies 1989 as a significant historical

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[13] Hardt and Negri envision power consolidating in the United States in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries, but are adamant that "The United States does not, and indeed no nation-state can today, form the center of an imperialist project" (xiv). However, *Empire* is published the year prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks and the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, both of which cast doubt on their argument for the impossibility of imperialism resurfacing in recognizable forms.

threshold that directly impacts and transforms the novel's representational capabilities as a literary form. She argues that three intersecting phenomena enact this transformation: the end of the Cold War's impact on geopolitics; expanded modes of connection made possible through digital technologies; and a new understanding of humanitarianism made possible by the immediacy of suffering in everyday life through digital media (1). Echoing Hardt and Negri's concept of deterritorialization, Ganguly writes that the novel is now tasked with moving "beyond national and regional configurations, which have traditionally marked both its conditions of possibility and its limits" (2).[14] Post-1989, the novel—as a spatially and temporally capacious literary form—offers "an opportunity to demonstrate ways of literary world-making that are apposite for our times but not reducible to the space-time continuum generated by the speculative flows of late capitalism" (24).

Although my project is perhaps not as geographically expansive as Ganguly's, throughout my chapters I explore the "world-making" powers of infrastructure in West African and South Asian literatures. While these regions serve as the homelands for prominent postcolonial writers and thinkers, including Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Salman Rushdie, both spaces were also shaped significantly by British imperial infrastructural projects, such as railroads, bridges, and roadways. Indeed, in Thomas Metcalf's *Imperial Connections*, he traces how the British developed legal codes, administrative procedures, and transportation infrastructures in India during the Raj, and then later applied these same processes as a blueprint to their colonies in Africa as their imperial power expanded in the late nineteenth century. While

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[14] It is important to note that, for Ganguly, visuality has a significant role to play in her understanding of the contemporary world novel. She writes that the nature of war post-Cold War has become increasingly spectacular and hypervisualized, culminating in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Digital media contributes to this excessive visual saturation, supporting Ganguly's notion that the contemporary novel is imbued with a new visual sensibility (4). I do think there is a difference between visibility (the subject of much of my discussion here) and visuality. I will return to this discussion in Chapter 2.

the infrastructures I examine are of course particular to the West African and South Asian spaces where they were built, it is important to conceive of colonial history as an interconnected project, not an isolated one (Metcalf 6).

My first two chapters concern West African literatures. Widely regarded as the foundational example of African magical realist literature, Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991-1995) trilogy juxtaposes indigenous Yoruba cosmologies of the road with temporalities of colonial urban planning. Chapter 1, "Durabilities of Development: Transforming Urban Space and Time in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* Trilogy" explores how *The Famished Road* trilogy positions infrastructure as transgressing temporal and spatial boundaries between the colonial past and postcolonial present—a problematic that Ann Laura Stoler has termed "imperial durabilities." Stoler is preoccupied with how imperial formations transform and adapt seamlessly into contemporary social and political environments, thus evading critical attention. Under the auspice of magical realism, Okri's trilogy invites us to consider the relationship between infrastructure, temporality, and aesthetic representation as a concern both for the moment of Nigerian independence and for the lingering durabilities of colonialism that impact the contemporary postcolonial city. I emphasize two characteristics of magical realism as especially apt for attending to imperial durabilities: the genre's emphasis on normalizing the supernatural, and its depiction of non-linear temporalities. My readings demonstrate how *The Famished Road* trilogy depicts the ways in which normalization is co-opted to enforce colonial modes of infrastructural development, while also disrupting those spatial impositions by turning to indigenous cosmologies of the road itself. The chapter concludes by reflecting on recursion as a dialectical outcome to these tensions between normalization and disruption. I read recursion as an empowering relationship to time, one that offers a decolonial alternative to "official"

historical narratives as set down in the colonial archive. Ultimately, my chapter argues for magical realism's revelatory capacities to parse out the material transformations of colonial power through "official" spatial logics of uneven development, and to celebrate indigenous narratives' enduring power to interpret infrastructural changes in the postcolonial city.

Chapter 2, "Democratizing Oil Citizenship: Mass Media, Petro-Fiction, and Spectator Ethics" brings together Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010) and Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007/2014) as examples of petro-fiction, or literature about oil. The Nigerian oil industry's "boom and bust" in the 1970s initiated an era of corruption and environmental devastation for the Niger Delta's minority indigenous groups. In this context, literary critics have puzzled over how to represent oil, especially in light of Ghosh's 1992 declaration that there is no literary form equipped for such a task. Building on the work of Wenzel and LeMenager, I read Habila's and Cole's novels as rejoinders to Ghosh's assertion of an intractable crisis of legibility. Habila illuminates oil's ontology precisely by thematizing its slipperiness, as his journalist-protagonist Rufus struggles with his limited powers to amplify marginalized groups' stories on a global stage. Whereas oil saturates Habila's novel, it operates at the margins of Cole's hybrid image-text. Experimenting with blog-like vignettes and street photography, Cole's narrator documents the subtle ways in which access to oil infrastructures and their by-products create various class stratifications in Lagos, thousands of miles from where the oil is drilled. My chapter argues that, through their multi-modal infusions of journalism and photography, Habila's and Cole's novels illustrate how citizenship in Nigeria is defined by access to oil and its infrastructures. The novels characterize such access in terms of autonomous control over the substance's extraction and distribution, as well as the financial freedom to purchase copious amounts of oil in its commodity forms, like diesel or petrol. Drawing on Ariella Azoulay's

formulation of citizenship as an ethical obligation to "watch" and not look away, I argue that *Oil on Water* and *Every Day is for the Thief* expand petro-fiction's purview to function as literary infrastructures facilitating global connections which mandate non-local readers to consider the ethical imperatives involved in engaging with oil narratives responsibly.

My third and fourth chapters turn to South Asian literatures. Chapter 3, "Poisoned Shareholders: Embodied Knowledge and Epistemologies of the Picaresque," pairs Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) with Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007). Both *Animal's People*, a reimagining of the Bhopal disaster 19 years after the event, and *Filthy Rich*, a satirical self-help book chronicling the rise and fall of an urban water entrepreneur, depict water infrastructures as sites of environmental harm and corporate negligence. Through their shared genre of the picaresque, Sinha and Hamid advance alternative epistemologies of infrastructures by representing the embodied consequences of water toxicity in grotesque detail. Drawing on recent archival research, I compare the acts of corporate negligence in the novels to that of Dow Chemical in Midland, MI in order to theorize an identity of the "shareholder"—a figure who becomes legible to the corporation through financial allegiance to them. I argue that, in these novels, the *picaro* adopts the position of "shareholder" by using their compromised embodied knowledge to make legible what the corporation refuses to acknowledge about the environmental impacts of its operations. In addition to the picaresque's emphasis on scatology, I also explore the genre's anti-development ethos and its use of allegory to make the "place" of the corporation portable. By collapsing the distance between the picaresque narrator and reader, the novels establish a collective of shareholders who demand new infrastructures, both literary and material, as solutions to the entangled crises of knowledge, embodied violence, and environmental degradation that the corporation engenders.

Chapter 4, "Toward an Ethics of Repair: Mourning amid Mutually Assured Destruction," moves from the regional to the global by reading Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) alongside Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005). Though rendered much less explicitly than the infrastructures in my previous chapters, I examine how the 1998 nuclear tests between India and Pakistan impact, on the one hand, the recurrence of nuclear violence and, on the other, the transformation of Kashmir into the crucible for its neighbors' nuclearization. Nuclear development in India and Pakistan was a state-sanctioned project that repeatedly turned to rationality, objectivity, and forward progress as the ideals driving science in postcolonial South Asia, despite the fact that nuclear war in the subcontinent would almost certainly bring about mutually assured destruction. In this context, I read *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* as sentimental novels that turn their gazes backward to the past. They press pause on infrastructural development's relentless forward motion to understand how entangled histories of violence in South Asia—namely, the aftermath of Partition and the rise of international Terrorism—emerge simultaneously alongside the history of nuclear weaponization. Drawing on recent work in critical melancholia studies, I interpret Shamsie's and Rushdie's sentimental novels as works of mourning that enable a critically reflective engagement with the past, while also seeking to understand relationality in terms of our shared vulnerability to the Other, as Judith Butler frames it. Through sentimental tropes, including the love plot and the desire for belonging, Shamsie's and Rushdie's characters mourn for worlds lost, as well as for futures deferred in the wake of nuclear violence. By emphasizing not so much what nuclear infrastructures *do*, but how they make people *feel*, *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* imagine an ethics of repair, restoring what Butler calls "grievability" to those populations who have been, and continue to be, marked disposable by those in power.

By expanding the geographical scale of my project from the local to the regional to the global, I offer the first comparative, book-length literary study of postcolonial infrastructures and their environmental impacts. In bringing the infrastructural turn to bear on literary studies, I aim to demonstrate how STS methods raise the stakes for defamiliarization in literary fiction. Reading for infrastructure—and reading itself as infrastructure—ultimately offers new methods for interpreting and understanding how power operates in the most mundane forms. Rather than sitting back and "becoming better surprised by what we see," to paraphrase Jane Bennett (5), critical infrastructure studies demands that we leverage our newfound understandings of powerful systems that remain out of sight or beyond the thresholds of perception into transformational change, especially when infrastructures have never before been so vulnerable to the consequences of the Anthropocene. At the same time, however, a literary approach to infrastructure helps us celebrate the ways in which literature's imaginative capacities exceed what is knowable. Rather than concern ourselves with the limitations of phenomenological perception, as does Chakrabarty, or the failures of literary representation, as does Ghosh, literature and literary criticism aim for persistence, rather than perfection. In this vein, a postcolonial ecocritical analysis of infrastructure enables literature to reveal what has thus far escaped our attention, and to make legible what was intended to disappear.

Chapter 1: Durabilities of Development: Transforming Urban Space and Time in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* Trilogy

In the beginning there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry. (Okri, *The Famished Road* 3)

At first glance, the opening lines of Ben Okri's 1991 novel *The Famished Road* establish a series of transformations with which to read the text, and its sequels, *Songs of Enchantment* (1995) and *Infinite Riches* (1998).[15] River becomes road, nature becomes culture, oral folktale becomes written narrative and, as we learn in the rest of the opening chapter, the spirit-child narrator, or *abiku*, Azaro becomes human. All of these dualities suggest a straightforward, linear passage from one ontology and temporality to another, which is reflected in many literary critics' readings of the novels. Interpretations have focused on "the interstitial space between the spirit world and the human world" (Highfield 142), the narrative balance between "the code of the real and that of the magical" (Quayson, "Magical Realism" 164), and the allegorical clash between the traditional forest and the eponymous road that "symbolizes the country's progression towards a modern and technological future" (Guignery 4). However, the "hunger" of the original river suggests that spatiality and temporality in *The Famished Road* trilogy are not as straightforward as they may seem. The direct, linear conversion of river into road, as it is written on the page, elides a major environmental transformation. To transform into a road, we might imagine how the river was drained, filled, reshaped, and paved over, evicting the multiple non-human ecologies teeming within and around it for the more singular purpose of traveling overtop it by

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[15] I will use the following abbreviations for the novels' in-text citations: *The Famished Road* (*FR*), *Songs of Enchantment* (*SE*), and *Infinite Riches* (*IR*).

foot or car. As such, the road may be a road on the surface, but Okri's brief opening lines point to the violence embedded in this transformation by emphasizing the river's persistent, still-present "hunger." Importantly, the road cannot recover its previous riverine form, but it can adapt and enact its "hunger" to the man-made infrastructures that have attempted to tame it. Read in this way, the first words of Okri's trilogy trouble both the singular temporality and apparent passivity of infrastructural development. The river's non-human agencies and energies cannot be overwritten in the name of modernization or progress; rather, they persist and adapt into the present moment.

By establishing the river's spatial and temporal plurality from its first page, *The Famished Road* trilogy also engages a question Ann Laura Stoler has raised about the relationship between the colonial past and postcolonial present: "How do colonial histories matter in the world today?" (3). Stoler's question is born out of her skepticism that such connections between past and present within the colonial context are self-evident. She contends that "The geopolitical and spatial distribution of inequalities cast across our world today are not simply mimetic versions of earlier imperial incarnations but *refashioned* and sometimes opaque and oblique *reworkings* of them," enduring across time "as if everywhere and nowhere at all" (4-5, emphasis added). In other words, Stoler is preoccupied with how imperial formations not only persist into the postcolonial present, but transform themselves to adapt seamlessly into contemporary social and political formations—not unlike Okri's road retaining the trace of its riverine qualities in a new physical form. Stoler terms these transformations "imperial durabilities," and notes that the greatest challenge in studying them is methodological. She claims that current modes of postcolonial scholarship are not well-suited to attend to "what endures in distorted, partial or derisive form" from colonial histories because the usual sources

for such scholarship (i.e., archives) keep us looking in the same spot and telling us the same stories (19). Rather, durabilities are so challenging because they both transpose colonial ideologies into new spaces, temporalities, and forms, while obscuring their more familiar or older modes. To better identify these dispersed legacies of colonial rule, and further complicate temporality beyond linear continuities between past and present, new attention must be paid to the forms in which imperial power endures.

The Famished Road trilogy is uniquely suited to respond to the problem of imperial durabilities because it is preoccupied with transformation in terms of environment, infrastructure, and genre. Widely regarded as "the most sophisticated expression of magical realism in African literature today" (Quayson "Magical Realism" 172),[16] the trilogy is narrated from the perspective of an *abiku*, or spirit-child, a figure from West African cosmology who lives and dies multiple times, and is constantly reborn to the same family. The narrator, Azaro, thus has the unique ability to "dissolve ontological boundaries" between the human and spirit worlds, accessing multiple converging temporalities as he freely travels the West African multiverse (James 170). Although it is difficult to summarize the trilogy's complex and often episodic plots, the novels are set on the eve of independence in an unnamed West African country, considered to be Nigeria given this is Okri's birthplace. Azaro's narrations concern his repeated attempts to

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[16] As discussed at length below, magical realism originates as a literary genre in the Latin American context. Labeling texts from other postcolonial regions as magical realist has been the subject of a heated debate over the last ~30 years, especially regarding texts that incorporate folkloric or indigenous traditions (Sangari 158, 166). The debate over *The Famished Road*'s generic status is no exception. Brenda Cooper's *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* is the first to argue that Okri's trilogy ushers in a new era of West African magical realism; critics such as Clare Barker, Cajetan Iheka, Kim Anderson Sasser, and Christopher Warnes follow suit. Other scholars place Okri's trilogy in a lineage of indigenous Yoruba literary traditions, invoking Karin Barber's framing of genres as rooted in localized speech forms (*Anthropology* 38-39). These critics include Ato Quayson, whose *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing* argues that Okri's work adopts distinctive elements of Yoruba oral practices, and Harry Garuba, who identifies a new genre of postcolonial writing called "animist realism." This genre shares many traits with magical realism, including a belief in the proximity and vibrancy of the spirit world. I will discuss the distinctions between animist realism and magical realism further below. For a reading of Okri as animist realism rather than magical realism, see Fyfe.

escape capture from the spirits who try to return him to the spirit world. In West African traditions, the *abiku* is a sadistic figure who torments his parents with his multiple births and deaths, and in some stories possesses a degree of "demonic willpower" (Wright 154). However, Azaro forms a deep attachment with his parents, especially his mother, and chooses to remain in the world of the living for as long as possible, hence his constant flights from spirits who try to capture and force him to die. Amid these episodic adventures, Azaro witnesses significant spatial transformations to his urban slum community, ranging from his encounters with construction sites to his sudden awareness of extensive deforestation, which has occurred to erect luxurious houses and neighborhoods in various parts of the city. Infrastructural development, especially with respect to the opening description of the eponymous road, thus emerges as one such "imperial durability" that entangles space, time, and form. Through its *abiku* narrator, *The Famished Road* trilogy examines the ongoing physical, environmental, and temporal transformations, rooted in colonial urban development, that impact the nascent Nigerian nation.

It is important to note that Okri himself does not find infrastructural development to be a totalizing phenomenon that erases indigenous connections to urban environments. In an interview with Jane Wilkinson, he states,

> Even though [colonialism] was there and took place and invaded the social structure, it's quite possible that it didn't invade our spiritual and aesthetic and mythic internal structures, the way in which we perceive the world...one would probably say that a true invasion takes place not when a society has been taken over by another society in terms of its infrastructure, but in terms of its mind and its dreams and its myths, and its perception of reality. (Wilkinson 86)

Here, Okri establishes a clear distinction between Nigeria's material infrastructure and its "spiritual, aesthetic, and mythic" structures. Although he concedes that infrastructural development throughout the country has left lingering spatial impacts in urban and rural locations alike, Okri argues that indigenous African cosmologies have been able to adapt to these physical changes, in part by insisting on another "perception of reality" than the one imposed by colonial regimes. This insistence on alterity is a key quality of magical realism. As Kumkum Sangari writes, the genre "tends to assert another *level* of factuality… a plane on which the notion of knowledge as provisional and of truth as historically circumscribed is not only *necessary* for understanding, but can in turn be made to *work* from positions of engagement within the local and contemporary" (161, emphasis in original). Under the auspice of magical realism, then, *The Famished Road* trilogy invites us to consider the relationship between infrastructure, temporality, and aesthetic representation as a concern both for the moment of Nigerian independence and for the lingering durabilities of colonialism that materially, discursively, and environmentally impact the contemporary postcolonial city.

Although Okri's interpretation of magical realism is grounded in a variety of African literary traditions, as I discuss below, magical realism possesses a robust, and at times, even controversial history in literary studies. As the genre intensified in popularity throughout the late twentieth century, critics such as Stephen Slemon and Jennifer Wenzel have cautioned that its commodification risks redrawing colonial binaries between "the West" and "the rest." Wenzel writes that "the magical might be anything unfamiliar to a European or American reader" ("Petro-Magic-Realism" 456). As such, magical realism becomes an easy way for Western readers to encounter "difference" without decentering their own hegemonic position and without investigating the "local histories behind specific textual practices" (Slemon 422). For these

reasons, Harry Garuba finds magical realism far too limiting to represent the range of epistemologies and cultural practices that abound in indigenous cultures throughout the Global South. He proposes an alternative "animist realism," a literary manifestation of what he terms an "animist unconscious" that endures throughout the colonial period and assimilates colonial technologies through an animist epistemology (267). Garuba locates the animist unconscious throughout various contemporary interpretations of Yoruba cosmologies, such as the association between Sango, the god of lightning, and the Nigerian national electricity corporation. However, he emphasizes that the animist unconscious can transcend localities and apply to any culture abiding by animist interpretations of the world. Because animism's core principle is to "locate" and "embody" gods and spirits in physical beings, Garuba argues that, as a literary mode, animist realism's primary contribution is to "accor[d] a physical, often animate material aspect to what others may consider an abstract idea" (274). Beyond mere metaphor, animist realism organizes literary forms through this particular realization of material agency and "subspeciates" into other literary genres and modes—one of which is magical realism (275).

On the one hand, Garuba's theorization of the animist unconscious appears to align well with Okri's insistence above that African spiritual, aesthetic, and mythic internal structures remained relatively undisturbed, despite the material transformations colonial developers imposed. Indeed, additional components of the animist unconscious—such as an awareness of non-linear temporalities detached from progress narratives and the ontological equivalence between the human and spirit worlds—support Garuba's claim that many of the traits we recognize as "magical realist" have in fact "derived from traditional animist claims" (275). However, my chapter retains an emphasis on magical realism for two reasons: my interest in infrastructure's ambience and my commitment to read genre as an infrastructure across literary

locations and genealogies. I take Garuba's point that animist realism materializes discursive concepts, especially those that are imposed from Western contexts, so that they can be interpreted and assimilated into an indigenous worldview. However, my project is interested in infrastructure not as an abstraction, but as ambience. I seek modes of attending to infrastructures—of the road, but also of oil, water, and nuclear power—that are materially present in the built environment, but may not always operate at the forefront of human perception and attention. As Sangari asserts, magical realism's insistence on another "level of factuality" helps to parse our attention to the material infrastructural world as we already inhabit it. Further, while magical realism's fetishizations of indigenous cultures have given literary critics pause, I am more interested in what postcolonial reinterpretations of the genre might teach us, rather than casting the entire genre aside in favor of a neologism like animist realism. In other words, by reading genres as literary infrastructures, I do not see them as static forms, carrying their problematic histories and associations from text to text. Rather, I am interested in how genres' particular implementations in specific cultural ecologies enriches our understanding of that genre's affordances and repairs its faults through innovations in literary forms.

With respect to infrastructure's role as an imperial durability in urban Nigeria, I find two of magical realism's characteristics especially fruitful for attending to ambience and repairing the genre's fetishizations of the local. These are the genre's emphasis on "normaliz[ing] the supernatural" and its unconventional, often non-linear representations of time (Warnes 3). One of magical realism's most important features is the equivalence it establishes between the magical and the mundane. In their field-defining anthology, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris frame this equivalence in terms of *ordinariness*. They write that, in magical realist texts, "the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it *is* an ordinary matter, an everyday

occurrence—admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism. Magic is no longer quixotic madness, but normative and normalizing" (3, emphasis in original). Often, this ordinariness helps emphasize the proximity between human and non-human worlds in indigenous epistemologies, as is the case in Okri's trilogy. Portraying the magical as ordinary often requires a specific representation of temporality as well. Brenda Cooper states that magical realist time is "hybrid" and non-linear; it mirrors neither history nor myth, but instead operates according to culturally specific logics (*Magical Realism* 33). For Parkinson Zamora and Faris, the equivalence between the magical and the real is often accomplished through an ontological logic of *disruption,* in which the magical incorporates itself into everyday life by constantly disrupting the temporal rhythms and habits of what we have come to think of as "realistic," linear time (3). Additionally, Parkinson Zamora and Faris write that, when framed as disruptive, "magic is often given as a cultural corrective, requiring readers to scrutinize accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality, motivation"—conventions that include the unusual representation of time (3). Thus, temporal disruptions between the magical and the real, which abound in *The Famished Road* trilogy, offer opportunities for political and cultural critique.

I am interested in how magical realism's characteristics of normalization and disruption reveal the ways in which colonial logics endure and transform in and through infrastructures of the road. Normalizing the magical as part of everyday life is rightly seen as an empowering practice, one that recognizes the fundamentally different experiences of "the real" between the colonizers and the colonized (Sangari 163). As Okri depicts numerous times throughout his novels, infrastructural development is frequently inscribed through the lens of the magical. Just as Azaro traverses the borders between human and spirit worlds, he also marks several episodes in which he "emerged in another reality, a strange world" where the lush forest has been

transformed into paved roads and housing complexes lit by electricity (*FR* 241). However, the impulse to normalize can be co-opted by colonial regimes themselves to cement their version of the real as the only possible way to understand the world. Okri demonstrates how this co-optation occurs by showing how Azaro's encounters with deforestation and development gradually become normalized as a feature of everyday life. Development's ubiquity and ability to fade into the background permits a lack of attention to the socio-environmental consequences of urbanization—namely, the gradual destruction of the forest and the increasingly squalid conditions in urban slums. My argument demonstrates how, throughout the trilogy, environmental degradation for the sake of infrastructural development becomes normalized and rendered ordinary through a lack of attention and inability to perceive changes in time and space. Such normalization materializes Stoler's durabilities in the sense that environmental degradation in the name of "progress" is a neocolonial ideal that endures from the colonial period into the postcolonial present, materially and discursively shaping postcolonial urban subjects.

These risks related to normalization and endurance indicate why it is crucial that magical realism also permits the disruption of linear, narrative time. Using disruption in this way, magical realism constantly works against the (neo)colonial tactics of normalizing development in the name of "progress," and provides strategies for resisting durabilities' ongoing power. Examples of disruption from Okri include the continuous arrival of spirits, who attempt to kidnap Azaro and return him to the spirit world, as well as the recurrent presence of indigenous folk stories in Azaro's narration, which signify attempts to interpret the changing environment through local epistemologies and perspectives. Even as Azaro and his community members normalize the attention they (do not) pay to environmental degradation, the trilogy's magical elements repeatedly disrupt narrative temporality, allowing "the future [to] burst in" (*SE* 138)

and "the time of myth" to die (*IR* 331). I read these narrative ruptures not as Okri's attempt to exoticize the indigenous or the fantastic, but instead as his desire to keep alive the indigenous narratives, places, and epistemologies whose invisibility is being rendered acceptable by the material restructuring of the urban environment through development.

In tracing the tensions between normalization and disruption, my analysis in this chapter proceeds in four sections. After a brief discussion of the African literary traditions informing Okri's invocation of magical realism, I examine historical accounts of Lagos' urban development, expansion, and redesign during the early twentieth century. At times inspired by sanitation concerns, ethnic conflicts, and changes in political status, Lagos's urban neighborhoods developed unevenly and haphazardly in both the colonial and postcolonial periods. After grounding my analysis in this historical context, I examine how the magical realist gesture of normalization is co-opted in Okri's representation of infrastructural development. Throughout Azaro's community, colonialist logics cultivate an indifference to infrastructure so that it fades into the background, performs its function as it was designed, and results in environmental degradation.

My chapter then turns to examples of disruption that attempt to counter these complacent habits of attention, both in Azaro's narration and in the increasingly unruly behaviors of road infrastructures themselves. Because Azaro's narration incorporates multiple indigenous narratives about the road itself, Okri's interpretation of magical realism ruptures through the veneer of colonial "reality" that wants to render infrastructure as linear, passive, and ordinary. Finally, I conclude the chapter by speculating on the trilogy's stance on futurity, and the future's relationship to the past vs. present tension that seems to dominate the novels. Drawing on the trilogy's repeated references to cyclical time, I read recursion as a dialectical outcome to these

tensions between normalization and disruption, arguing that it is an empowering relationship to time which reinforces the importance of indigenous epistemologies and their resistance to "official" narratives formed by colonial perspectives. Through these explorations on space, time, genre, and environment, my chapter argues for magical realism's revelatory capacities to parse out the material transformations of colonial power through "official" spatial logics of uneven development, and to celebrate indigenous narratives' enduring power to interpret infrastructural changes in the postcolonial city.

Okri's Magical Realism amid West African Literary Traditions

Identifying Okri as a magical realist writer is by no means a new claim. Why might it matter that he invokes magical realism to depict a range of infrastructural transformations throughout his trilogy? To answer this question, it is important to understand the African literary contexts in which he writes. With *The Famished Road*'s 1991 publication, Okri is often regarded as the founder of a uniquely West African branch of magical realism. The genre generally espouses two points of origin: one as a mode of aesthetic expression in response to European Impressionism, as coined by German art critic Franz Roh in 1925, and the other as an ontological reality shaped by the experience of living in the Americas, what Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier termed "*lo real maravilloso americano*" upon returning from Haiti in 1949 ("On the Marvelous Real" 84).[17] Because of Carpentier's contributions to the Latin American literature "boom" in

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[17] In the preface to his 1949 novella, *The Kingdom of this World*, and again in 1975, Carpentier characterizes magical realism in terms of "certain things that have occurred in America, certain characteristics of its landscape, certain elements that have nourished my work" ("The Baroque and the Marvelous Real" 102). Unlike the overzealous attempts of European Impressionists, Carpentier is awed by the authenticity of Latin American culture, imbued with both a history of conquest and an indigenous spirituality that resists colonization. However, many critics have noted that Carpentier characterizes Latin America's supposed uniqueness based on his comparisons to Europeans, whom he views as culturally in decline. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert takes issue with Carpentier's rewriting of the Haitian Revolution in *Kingdom*, noting that, despite the revolution serving as the foundational historical event for his theory, Carpentier elides the crucial roles of black revolutionary leaders, including Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jacques Dessalines (123). Additionally, in using Haitian spiritual traditions like Vodou as part of

the 1950s and 1960s, the genre has tended to be associated with the Global South. Thanks to the popularity of works by Gabriel García Márquez and Salman Rushdie, magical realism has also become a hallmark mode for postcolonial literature (Sangari 158).

In the West African context, Brenda Cooper claims that the seeds of magical realism are sown in D.O. Fagunwa's and Amos Tutuola's abilities to "[straddle] indigenous traditions and literary experiments" because both blend Yoruba folktales with European literary forms, like the short story and novel (*Magical Realism* 39). Both Cooper and Quayson note that Okri takes up a distinctive filiation with Fagunwa and Tutuola because of his frequent references to Yoruba folklore and West African oral traditions in *The Famished Road* trilogy. Importantly, this folkloric tradition recognizes how environments, including non-human spirit worlds, are teeming with agencies, energies, and lifeworlds of their own. Cajetan Iheka argues that Okri, like Tutuola and Fagunwa before him, demonstrates "how humans are intertwined with nonhuman forces" and how agency is distributed throughout environments rather than remaining the exclusive property of human beings (3-4). Their collective departures from anthropocentrism in their literary works are just one of the qualities that marks these authors as proto-magical realist (Iheka 26). Further, Quayson notes Okri's participation in this literary tradition as significant because of his ethnicity; unlike Fagunwa and Tutuola, who are Yoruba, Okri is Urhobo. Thus, by taking up these literary precedents, Okri "mediat[es] the dialogic and hybrid sense of indigenous resources from a national and not an ethnic position for contemporary uses" (Quayson, *Strategic* 13). In other words, Okri synthesizes West African "constellar concepts" like the *abiku* and transposes them out of an exclusively Yoruba context, using the genre of magical realism to form

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his inspiration for magical realism, Paravisini-Gebert claims Carpentier festishizes these practices in his pursuit of "a literature whose inspiration was to be found not in an autochthonous Caribbean tradition but in a more authentic version of literary Modernity than that proposed by European Surrealism" (118).

affinities across cultural boundaries and literary traditions in Nigeria[18] (Quayson, "Magical

Realism" 172). Okri's stylistic similarities to Fagunwa and Tutuola thus produce a *literary* rather

than an ethnic filiation, suggesting that Okri's interpretation of magical realism both makes West

African indigenous traditions legible to a wider audience and attempts to transcend traditionally

divisive cultural boundaries on a more local level.

At the same time, Okri's choice to write about "the road" places him in a complementary

tradition of African literature, one that is preoccupied with the legacies of colonial development

as various African nations approach independence. While Okri rarely acknowledges the

influences of other African writers on his work—and in some cases, outright denies it—

Ousmane Sembène, Wole Soyinka,[19] and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o offer conflicting perspectives on

infrastructural development as it intersects with decolonization and independence across the

continent (Wilkinson 82; Fulford 49).[20] Their literary works range from an empowering account

of railway technologies facilitating anti-colonial solidarity in Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood*

(1960), to dramatic meditations on road infrastructures as symbolic of existential crisis in

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[18] Wenzel argues that Okri deploys magical realism in his short stories, like "What the Tapster Saw," as a conscious participation in the production of a distinctively Nigerian national literature. However, she also claims he works against some of magical realism's tendencies to reify the West as "the real" because the "marvelous reality" he represents comes from Nigerian extractive industries implemented during the postcolonial period. She writes, "The modernity of Okri's petro-magic-realism obstructs the consumption of magical realist texts as nostalgic encounters with an exotic yet vanishing world" ("Petro-Magic-Realism" 458).

[19] Despite the divergences in literary traditions I trace here, it is important to note that Soyinka's translations of Fagunwa's Yoruba-language works introduced Fagunwa to an Anglophone audience (Iheka 26). Additionally, Fagunwa's protagonist in *Forest of a Thousand Demons* is named Akara Ogun, echoing Soyinka's preoccupation with Ogun, the Yoruba god of the road, which I discuss at length later in this chapter. These resonances among Yoruba writers working in different modes serve as an important reminder that genres are not taxonomically fixed categories, but are instead socially constructed and culturally responsive.

[20] Lindsey Green-Simms and Nicole Cesare identify Sembène's respective influences on Soyinka's and Ngũgĩ's later works. Green-Simms notes that Soyinka admired how Sembène depicted the railway in *God's Bits of Wood*. In a 1988 essay, Soyinka writes, "The railway is [thus] translated into the pulse of that community, even as it is manifested as the life-guaranteeing device for maximizing their productive potential" ("Cross Currents" 130). Green-Simms also argues that Soyinka believes infrastructure is a technology the people can manipulate through collective will, and that he adopts this notion into his later works focusing on Ogun, the Yoruba god of the road (78-79). Similarly, Cesare writes that Ngũgĩ finds a political peer in Sembène. He pays tribute to Sembène by having one of his characters read *God's Bits of Wood* towards the end of *Petals of Blood*. Cesare claims this intertextuality builds a metaphorical "Trans-African Road," the construction of which is a central conflict in *Petals* (47).

Soyinka's *The Road* (1965), to pessimistic fables of the road's corrupting influence on indigenous African environmental relationships in Ngũgĩ's *Petals of Blood* (1977). Unlike the proto-magical realist tradition of Fagunwa and Tutuola, however, Sembène's, Soyinka's, and Ngũgĩ's writings on infrastructure exemplify social realism, a genre that many cultural nationalist writers found useful because they believed "anticolonial resistance (an assertion of native subjectivity or agency, a recovery of lost history) ought to be transparently visible" (Andrade 183). By wearing their politics on their sleeve, so to speak, Sembène, Soyinka, and Ngũgĩ explicitly engage the impacts of colonial infrastructures on newly independent African spaces and reflect on the fates of postcolonial subjects who live alongside infrastructures that were not designed for them.[21]

While Okri borrows few, if any stylistic influences from the social realist traditions of Sembène, Soyinka, and Ngũgĩ, I do think he takes up their thematic interest in infrastructure as a matter of importance for the next generation of African writers. In an interview with Sarah Fulford, Okri admits he finds realism limiting, both narratively and epistemologically. He claims, "The future of the novel is the end of realism as we have known it. We have to find a new kind of harmony along different narrative lines" (Fulford 49). Okri's remarks on genre are significant, given his generational position as a post-independence Nigerian, born in 1959. Rather than bearing witness to decolonization and independence, like Tutuola and Soyinka, Okri and his peers observe the ongoing consequences of colonialism even after British rule nominally ends. Alexander Fyfe echoes this observation and writes that, while *The Famished Road* trilogy is recognizably set on the eve of Nigeria's independence in 1960, "the material environment in

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[21] This preoccupation with the exclusion of postcolonial subjects from infrastructural design resurfaces in Chapter 2, in which Helon Habila and Teju Cole—both writing in the realist mode of petro-fiction—document the ways in which oil infrastructures confer or deny citizenship to Nigerian citizens in both Lagos and the Niger Delta.

which Azaro lives—characterized by urban slum-dwelling, a preponderance of informal labor, and environmental degradation—is conspicuously reminiscent of the moment in which Okri was writing; that is, the late 1980s and early 1990s" (327-8). In other words, Okri sets his trilogy during a moment of great social, political, and economic promise for the new Nigerian nation, yet he writes from the position of knowing how those promises have already failed.

In this literary and national context, Okri thus writes at the intersection of two important African literary traditions. As Cooper and Quayson have demonstrated, on the one hand, *The Famished Road* trilogy's stylistic and generic choices pay homage to the local oral traditions and proto-magical realist strategies of Yoruba writers, including Fagunwa and Tutuola. On the other hand, Okri's thematic investments in the road places his trilogy in conversation with the social realist works by Sembène, Soyinka, and Ngũgĩ. This tradition recognizes infrastructure as a sign of colonial inheritance—or, in Stoler's terms, an imperial durability. As the so-called father of African magical realism, Okri in fact synthesizes multiple African literary traditions and transposes them into a new iteration of literature about the road, one that validates and utilizes indigenous storytelling methodologies rather than forsakes them for the clarity of political expression. Like its transformative opening image of the road-as-river, *The Famished Road* transforms social realism into magical realism, offering the genre as a new tool for literary critics to better apprehend how imperial durabilities operate throughout infrastructural systems.

Histories of the Road: Urban Development in Lagos

Although Okri is purposefully ambiguous about *The Famished Road* trilogy's setting, many critics have found Lagos a useful analogue due to similarities between the city's political and urban transformations during and after colonialism, and those developments as depicted in Okri's novels. Initially established as a trading post by the Portuguese in the late 15th century,

Lagos has expanded well beyond the initial port city to encompass a metropolitan area of over 450 square miles. Today, it is home to approximately 21 million people, making it the largest city in sub-Saharan Africa (Falola, Heaton 5). While numerous infrastructural systems have been implemented over the years as part of Lagos' expansion, the roads mentioned throughout Okri's trilogy are especially significant for understanding the specific organizational logics that were implemented to materialize colonial ideals of modernity and progress. While one of the main interventions of Okri's trilogy is to pluralize narratives and ontologies of the road, in this section, I discuss three types of urban development—segregation, slum clearances, and highways—to trace the "official" narratives of Lagos' roads as told through the colonial archive. As the city came under British control in 1861 and grew into one of the most prominent African cities by Nigeria's independence a century later, the organization, implementation, and maintenance of Lagos' roads determined which lifestyles were rendered "normal" and acceptable, and which ones were geospatially marginalized and hidden from view. Okri's project in *The Famished Road* trilogy, I suggest, is to recenter those marginalized groups and allow them to tell their own stories—and depict their own realities—on their own terms.

Often, Lagos' infrastructure is discussed in the context of development studies, most notably articulated by Arturo Escobar to describe the post-World War II project of modernizing the Global South through industrialization, urbanization, and adoption of new technologies. He writes that development concerns "how certain representations become dominant and shape indelibly the ways in which reality is imagined and acted upon" (Escobar 5). Further, as newly independent nations in the Global South strove to meet these modernizing standards, "the forms of power that have appeared act not so much by repression but by *normalization*: not by ignorance, but by controlled knowledge; not by humanitarian concern, but by the

bureaucratization of social action" (Escobar 53, emphasis added). In other words, many

postcolonial urban spaces, including Lagos, normalized the narrative that to be a "modern"

nation was to mimic the economic, social, and physical urban structures of their former

colonizers.[22] Building skyscrapers, clearing slums, and taking out loans from the World Bank all

acted in the service of "producing" the Third World in the image of the First (Escobar 4).

However, when analyzing this through Escobar's definitions, Lagos' development is unique on

two counts. First, while there was certainly an acceleration in development throughout the

Global South after decolonization took place, Lagos' urban spaces have been shaped just as

significantly by the colonial period itself, placing the city's spatial characteristics in a longer and

more complex history. Second, Lagos' development is almost always characterized as "uneven,"

owing largely to the haphazard and unplanned methods by which the city expanded. As

geographer Matthew Gandy writes, Lagos was developed through a logic of "incomplete

modernity," which relied on an unstable binary between "modern" and "traditional" to determine

how and where infrastructural developments would be implemented, even and especially within

the colonial period ("Planning" 374). Infrastructural development in Lagos, then, can be

analyzed as one kind of imperial durability, extending across temporalities and connecting the

colonial past to the postcolonial present in material, tangible forms.

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[22] In the context of nineteenth-century Europe, Patrick Joyce discusses urban development programs that aimed to produce what he terms "the moral city," in which public buildings' aesthetic appearances needed to reflect their social utility (153). Key to the city's affiliations as "moral" was the degree to which urban infrastructures, as non-human entities, were separated fully from the human. Infrastructural functions, whether to direct traffic, collect waste, or provide electricity, were valued to the extent that they were invisible "in order to induce humans to behave '*normally*'" (Joyce 71, emphasis added). Regarding the role of infrastructure in helping to implement both sanitary discourse and practice, Joyce writes, "It was the very imperceptibility of both [discourse and practice] that helped in their involvement in the process of *naturalization*, just as it was in the case of so much urban infrastructure, buried in sewers, pipes, and cables under the city or carried in insulated forms over and through it" (Joyce 71, emphasis added). These concerns over sanitation and morality in urban colonial Lagos will be discussed at length below.

Lagos' prominence as a West African port city is due to its central role in the transatlantic slave trade. Strategically positioned between the Atlantic Ocean and Lagos Lagoon, Lagos granted access both to oceanic and mainland trading routes. The *Oba*, or Yoruba king, of Lagos continued to participate in the slave trade long after it was abolished in the British Empire. In fact, Britain intervened in Lagos in 1851 to end the slave trade while still retaining control of its advantageous port (Bigon, *A History of Urban Planning* 50-51). Although this intervention formally transferred Lagos' administration from the Yoruba to the British, the *Oba* retained the power to designate specific territories on Lagos Island for British settlement. As such, during these early years of colonial rule, the British mapped their settlements onto pre-existing spatial hierarchies throughout the city, while the Yoruba retained control of their own territory in Isale Eko, on the northwest corner of the island (Bigon, *History* 53). Over the next 50 years, Lagos developed into increasingly segregated quarters, gradually resembling the "strongly-built" settlers' town divided from the native's town, "starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light," as Frantz Fanon so famously characterized it in *The Wretched of the Earth* (32). These quarters included the Marina, home to the British and other white Europeans; the Portuguese Town, or Popo Aguda, where Brazilian repatriates lived; and Olowogbowo, where liberated slaves from Sierra Leone, known as the Saro, took up residence (Olukoju).[23]

Although the British adapted to Lagos' spatial layout during the initial years of settlement, stereotypes of Isale Eko as underdeveloped, dirty, and unsafe became increasingly prevalent throughout the European community. Many of these stereotypes were attached directly to Lagos' lack of paved roads. Due to its proximity to the lagoon, the northwestern areas of

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[23] Interestingly, according to Bigon, the European area of the island was known in oral traditions as Ehin Igbeti, or "outside the fence" in Yoruba. This area was a burial ground for *abiku* children, who were "not entitled to ceremonious burial" in Yoruba tradition (*History* 48). This spatial resonance regarding British settlement on *abiku* burial grounds creates a striking connection to the *abiku* protagonist in Okri's trilogy.

Lagos—where Isale Eko was located—were built on marshlands or swamps, with poor drainage after heavy rains that exposed residents to malaria from mosquitoes. Combined with the Yoruba's "'freestyle' approach to urban space" and narrow pathways connecting compounds, the increasingly segregated and cramped urban layout in Isale Eko produced the idea that Africans were need of "civilized" reform (Bigon, "Sanitation" 254). In her recent monograph, *Histories of Dirt*, Stephanie Newell notes how European characterizations of Yoruba neighborhoods as unsanitary transferred onto African bodies themselves, creating a direct parallel between street infrastructures and Yoruba peoples as "dirty." She writes:

> By refusing to use designated municipal latrines in contexts of urban overcrowding, and in preferring to use "the bush" for defecation, Africans were continuously blamed by medical officials for creating conditions ripe for parasites, bacteria, and the "filth diseases"—tuberculosis, cholera, smallpox, typhoid, and bubonic plague—to spread rapidly from person to person. (21-2)

By the 1920s, all aspects of Yoruba life, from communal housing to building materials to defecation locations, came under what Newell terms "sanitary micromanagement" (20). Under this regime, numerous bureaucratic offices like the Lagos Housing Committee and the Mosquito Control Board created and imposed public health standards on indigenous communities (Gandy, "Planning" 376). Crucially, however, it was the British who in fact produced the urban conditions that made indigenous communities susceptible to disease through an overall lack of commitment to infrastructure in Yoruba sectors of the city. In various examples drawn from the colonial archive, Newell reports a complete lack of sewage and waste collection systems, faulty drains, and greater susceptibility to heatstroke and disease in corrugated iron and concrete buildings, which were the materials British officials had sanctioned for use in Isale Eko (26-27).

Despite insisting that infrastructures like paved roads and broad streets symbolized that "civilization" had come to Africa, British infrastructural projects in Lagos created and imposed categories of sanitation to justify the continued segregation and negligence of "dirty" Lagosians.[24]

Discourses of sanitation came to a zenith in 1924 with the outbreak of the bubonic plague, leading to one of the most significant infrastructural overhauls to Lagos' urban landscape: slum clearances. Although the plague broke out in Ghana, indigenous Lagosians were officially marked as a public health risk, in part because they largely defied quarantine orders, but also because of these long-standing cultural associations with their lifestyles and living quarters as unsanitary (Bigon, *History* 162-164). The discursive conversion of Isale Eko from the ancestral home of indigenous Lagosians into a "slum" is worth noting here. Unlike Mike Davis' oft-cited definition of slums as sprawling "communities on the periphery of Third World cities" in the wake of structural adjustment (37), slums here indicate an intentionally vague, catch-all term for overcrowded and morally bankrupt urban spaces (Bigon, *History* 171-2).[25] Though controversial in both British colonial and metropolitan contexts, slum clearances offered a strategy for the British to reclaim all of Lagos Island and redesign it in their own image of a what a modern, sanitary colonial capital ought to be. In 1928, the Lagos Executive Development Board (LEDB) was formed to lead slum clearance procedures. They systematically divided up locations throughout Isale Eko and, between 1930-1960, evicted and relocated thousands of

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[24] These associations between sanitation and ethnicity suggest that certain ethnic groups and regions were "deserving" of infrastructure, while others could justifiably be excluded from the social and spatial networks these infrastructures created. Such an association will be especially important in Chapter 2, in which the erasure of the Ogoni, a micro-minority inhabiting the oil-rich Niger Delta, within the Nigerian petro-state will be discussed.
[25] I return to a discussion of slums in the South Asian context in Chapter 3. Unlike Lagos, in which the British imposed the category of "slum" on the city's indigenous sector, South Asian urban slums merged the Indian caste system's hierarchies of "untouchables" and other cleanliness standards with British discourses of sanitation. The slum appears in South Asian Anglophone literature as both a location and condition to be "overcome," often through self-actualizing genres like the *bildungsroman*.

Lagosians to new, rapidly implemented resettlement locations on the mainland, effectively

cutting them off from the urban center. In their place, "new and larger buildings…[that] will

afford healthy homes…wider streets and more open spaces" were erected, building luxurious

colonial estates on the foundations of Yoruba settlements (Bigon, "Perceptions" 68).

Slum clearance and resettlement are thus culturally, environmentally, and socially violent

phenomena that disrupted centuries of indigenous relationships with the land and "undermined

long-established kin networks within the city" (Gandy, "Planning" 380). Further, resettlement

locations were characterized by an overwhelming lack of infrastructure, which produced worse

conditions than those neighborhoods on Lagos Island that were cleared. One of the most

prominent slums designated for clearance was Maroko, in which 300,000 people were relocated

in 1990 to make way for wealthy neighborhoods on Victoria Island (Agbola, Jinadu 279). When

inhabitants of Maroko were brought to a new settlement called Ilasan, "There were neither water

nor electricity supplies nor facilities on the housing estates and the whole environment was

waterlogged. Accounts from the residents confirmed that the two estates lacked toilets, hospitals,

markets, schools, and postal and other services at the time they moved in" (Agbola, Jinadu 280).

Ironically, many of the "unsanitary" conditions that initially worried colonial officials were

rampant in these resettlement areas, including poor drainage, overcrowding, lack of waste

disposal, and poorly developed roads. These resettlement programs reveal how narratives of

sanitation and safety concerns are paradoxically mobilized to improve infrastructural and

geospatial conditions in wealthy regions of Lagos, while at the same time producing an

overwhelming lack of infrastructural support in indigenous locations. For my purposes

examining urban road infrastructures in *The Famished Road* trilogy, it is significant that two

major slum clearance programs intersect with Okri's subject matter. A wave of slum clearances

on the eve of independence from 1957-1959 marked the transition of LEDB from colonial to postcolonial leadership, while the Maroko slum clearance in 1990 overlaps with *The Famished Road*'s publication. Lagos' streets, then, feature prominently in colonial histories of urban development, and illustrate the material and discursive ways in which colonial logics shape urban spaces over time.

Before turning to Okri's treatment of roads, slums, and urban development in his trilogy, I want to examine a final example of Lagos' roads that operates differently from the colonial critiques of sanitation and overcrowding. Just as slum clearances were central to the project of making the city appear modern, Lagos' elaborate highway systems, built between the 1960s-1980s, demonstrate how even spectacular infrastructures still work in the service of colonial violence. As Escobar's definition explained, many postcolonial nations embarked on development projects after independence, and Nigeria was no exception. Three National Development Plans outlined a series of infrastructural improvements throughout the country, and identified highways as a particular need in Lagos (Omezi 278). Historian Giles Omezi claims that these infrastructural developments "produce[d] a social space inscribed and reinforced by an iconography of modernity which more or less fused concepts of modernization into the consciousness of the people" (285). Developers used "the modernist city vision of the early twentieth century" as its model to connect Lagos' city center to its sprawling urban periphery, as well as link the city to "extraction nodes" like the oil-rich Niger Delta, whose exports were responsible for Nigeria's economic wealth during the 1970s oil boom (Omezi 285). Omezi's account emphasizes the simultaneous material, social, and cultural transformations that accompanied economic development. Just as British colonizers eradicated slums to produce the appearance of a "sanitary" colonial city, so too did postcolonial leaders use this same model of

the "modernist city" to argue for Lagos' place among the developed metropolitan centers of the Global North.

Tellingly, a German architectural firm, Julius Berger AG, won a bid to design and implement the highway system in Lagos. Rem Koolhaas, an architect and urban planner, notes that Berger's designs were unusually complex. Although he built several bridges that provided crucial connections between Lagos Island and the mainland, the intricate highways "produc[ed] a false vernacular propaganda showing contemporary infrastructure as integral to African life" (Koolhaas 181). In other words, the symbolism of urban and national unity that Nigerian leadership sought remained exactly that—hollow symbols indexing modernity and technological prowess without reflecting the true infrastructural conditions on the ground. Despite a surface-level appearance of "highways, motorways, and incredibly complex intersections—a model of '70s smoothness," these highways proved to be wildly insufficient for Lagos' population and are responsible today for the city's infamous traffic jams, or "go-slows" (Koolhaas 181). Gandy elaborates that, in order for Berger's highway systems to be built, "old working-class areas were flattened to make way for the concrete network of bridges, viaducts, flyovers, and cloverleafs" ("Learning from Lagos" 44). Indeed, as Nigeria's revenue fell sharply after the end of the oil boom in the late 1970s, many other infrastructural projects were left unfinished or abandoned, reproducing a new type of uneven development in the postcolonial context.

In reading "official" colonial histories of Lagos' urban development, infrastructural projects often proceed from a top-down approach, with little perspective of indigenous Lagosians emerging from the colonial archive. Numerous historians, including Bigon and Newell, mark this as a problem, but admit that there are limited opportunities to examine African perspectives on infrastructural change in Nigeria prior to independence. In thinking about Okri's moment of

writing and the relevance of infrastructure to his trilogy, I want to emphasize that, in recent years, alternative analyses of infrastructure aim to bring the indigenous perspective more clearly into view. Although writing about Johannesburg rather than Lagos, AbdouMaliq Simone introduces the concept of "people as infrastructure," in which urban residents form spontaneous, unlikely alliances across ethnic and national identities to improve access to economic resources.[26] For Simone, resistance to built infrastructures in Johannesburg is characterized by multiplicity, reinforcing claims by Bigon and Newell that infrastructures and their inscription into colonial archives are never as totalizing and universal as they may seem. In the case of Lagos' highways, for example, street vendors take advantage of the go-slows to sell their wares directly to drivers immobilized in traffic. Where infrastructural design "fails" in its original intention, Lagosians are still able to improvise and make use of the highways for their own purposes (Quayson, *Oxford Street* 243). Such improvisation provides a clear example of resistance against the processes of normalization that are central to development's insistence on Global South cities imitating the designs and practices of the Global North. In my readings of *The Famished Road* trilogy, I analyze these tensions between material and discursive practices of normalization, and indigenous resistance to them, as they are enacted through the genre of magical realism. In the aftermath of colonial urban planning, and in the midst of postcolonial development, it is important to understand how habits of attention which normalize development have been able to endure across time.

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[26] Historians Antina von Schnitzler and Emma Park importantly expand Simone's concept under the rubric of "techno-politics," which refers to "the ways in which political actions are embedded within technical forms and, conversely, the ways in which the technical shapes political questions" (Schnitzler 10). In their respective studies of prepaid water meters in South Africa and media infrastructures in Kenya, Schnitzler and Park explore the quotidian interconnections between mundane technologies and questions of citizenship and belonging. Park is interested in how "people are asked to *act infrastructurally,*" which intends to avoid "naturaliz[ing] the material conditions under which people as infrastructures emerges as a phenomenon" (24, emphasis in original). She and Schnitzler instead parse out the particular material conditions that bring people and infrastructures together in postcolonial Kenya and post-apartheid South Africa, respectively.

Normalizing Inattention

In her foundational study of global magical realist literatures, Faris discusses how the genre normalizes the magical through characters' affective responses to seemingly supernatural or fantastic phenomena. She writes that "ordinary people react to magical events in recognizable and sometimes also in disturbing ways," noting that, in many cases, "the magic grows almost imperceptibly out of the real, and *the narrator registers no surprise*, with the result that the element of surprise is redirected onto the history we are about to witness" (13-14, emphasis added). Rendering the magical as ordinary is a strategic, decolonizing gesture in magical realism. By celebrating the plurality of worlds and proximity of non-human creatures, the genre exposes how "the real is historically structured to make invisible the foreign locus of power" (Sangari 163). Okri's choice to make Azaro an *abiku* reflects this restructuring of what counts as "the real" because the *abiku* renders familiar the presence of "otherworldly activities" to explain everyday phenomena in West African life (Iheka 17).

Although normalizing the magical helps to decenter Eurocentric notions of what counts as the "real," this gesture risks being co-opted and subverted when infrastructures, imbued with colonial logics, are designed to operate as normal, banal functions of everyday life. As anthropologist Akhil Gupta writes, large-scale infrastructural projects tend to be contested as they are being built, whether over concerns about environmental impact or financial resources. But after they are completed, "controversy usually deserts them: they are forgotten precisely because they are functioning *normally*. They appear to disappear when they do what they were supposed to be doing in moving people, commodities, water, electricity, gas, or oil" (Gupta 73, emphasis added). In using magical realism to represent road infrastructures in his trilogy, Okri highlights a serious limitation surrounding the practice of normalization. In this section, I explore

how normalization can become co-opted by colonial regimes seeking to preserve their power through ambient infrastructures. In a direct inversion of Faris' claim above, Azaro gradually reacts to infrastructural development with less and less surprise, suggesting that development is rendered normal even as it degrades the surrounding environment. Magical realism's subversive potential thus risks collapsing under the very logics it attempts to expose.

In *The Famished Road*, Azaro has a tendency to wander off, satisfying an urge he describes as "itchy feet" to travel the road away from his neighborhood and into the forest.[27] Azaro's wanderings are a key mechanism for blending both the magical and the realistic throughout the novel, in part because Azaro's attention span drifts and he loses his points of reference for either the human or spirit worlds. While these wanderings importantly indicate the "fractious intimacy" that always exists between these worlds (Iheka 30), they also transport Azaro directly to the construction sites that are developing the roads in his neighborhood. Azaro's first encounter with road construction comes early in the novel, when he wanders through the city's marketplace and starts to follow a group of spirits who pique his interest. He follows them to a clearing in the forest, which he realizes "was the beginning of an expressway. Building companies had levelled the trees. In places the earth was red. We passed a tree that had been felled. Red liquid dripped from its stump as if the tree had been a murdered giant whose blood wouldn't stop flowing" (*FR* 16). Here we see the full effects of environmental violence in the bleeding tree stumps and fleeing spirits, marking a contrast from the novel's opening lines in which the river's transformation into a road is elided. To implement this new road, which connotes speed and progress as an "expressway," trees must be "murdered," and the evidence of

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[27] Numerous literary critics, including Jens Elze and Stacey Balkan, read Azaro's wanderings as a hallmark of the picaresque genre, which features episodic rather than linear narratives. I return to a longer discussion of the picaresque in South Asian Anglophone literatures, and use *The Famished Road* trilogy as a point of comparison, in Chapter 3.

their death is still present at the scene. Azaro's first reaction to this encounter with infrastructural development is one of fear. He "shut [his] eyes in horror" upon seeing a "gash in the earth" next to the tree, and when a giant turtle appears to inform Azaro that he is in "the stomach of the road," Azaro responds by crying himself to sleep (*FR* 16-17). Azaro's horror heightens his perceptions of his location, and when his parents later reprimand him for carelessly wandering off, he heeds their warning to stay closer to home.

Although this first experience with road construction was a frightening one, Azaro's subsequent encounters with development are much more subdued throughout the rest of *The Famished Road*. At various moments, Azaro grows bored, bemoans the mundaneness of life in his neighborhood, and seeks to satisfy his itchy feet by wandering off. In three key scenes, these wanderings lead him to construction sites, and in each case, Azaro grows more and more nonchalant in viewing significant modifications to his urban environment. After befriending Madame Koto, a local woman who owns a bar frequented by many spirits, beggars, and otherworldly creatures, Azaro grows bored of visiting her bar each day. Taking advantage of her absence one afternoon, he wanders away, making the following observations about the surrounding area.

> Steadily, over days and months, the paths had been widening. Bushes were being burnt, tall grasses cleared, tree stumps uprooted. The area was changing. Places that were thick with bush and low trees were now becoming open spaces of soft river-sand. In the distance, I could hear the sounds of dredging, of engines, of road builders, forest clearers, and workmen chanting as they strained their muscles. Each day the area seemed different…The world was changing and I went on wandering as if everything would always be the same. (*FR* 104)

Notably, all of Azaro's observations about the surrounding environment are framed as gradual, slow, and ongoing. Change has occurred "steadily;" the paths "had been widening;" bush and trees "were now becoming" the smooth, flat, open areas that signal slum clearances and reclaimed swamps from historical accounts of Lagos' development. The passive verb construction of all of these changes is additionally interesting, as the arbiters of these changes—presumably, the workmen—are never seen directly. When Azaro hears their activity from a distance, he frames this through their inhuman apparatuses before considering the workers themselves: "engines," "road builders" and "forest clearers" metonymically signal both the construction workers and the ideological forces of development and urbanization that they represent. As a result, this passive language and slow temporality mimics Azaro's "wandering" through his community. Physically and temporally distant from the construction sites, Azaro encounters the results of the developers' labor only after it has been completed, and never makes an explicit connection between infrastructural development and environmental degradation.[28]

The absence of explicit causality between development and degradation is consistent with Azaro's subsequent wanderings through construction zones. Azaro's itchy feet bring him back to the clearing in the forest several times, to the point where it becomes his favorite place to play. His habitual presence in the forest, however, reduces his attention to the ongoing construction. Okri writes, "In the afternoons the forest wasn't frightening, though I often heard strange drums and singing and trees groaning before they fell. I heard the axes and drills in the distances. And

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[28] I want to acknowledge that, while Azaro and his community initially enact a relatively passive response to infrastructural development, this is not the case in other African literatures of the road. Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood* sees railway infrastructures as empowering, as depicted through the character of Bakayoko, a charismatic engineer who becomes the face and voice of the strike. In several passages, Bakayoko describes an embodied and psychological fusion with the machine that enables him to envision "a whole new breed of men" (33). Similarly, many of Ngũgĩ's characters in *Petals of Blood* are excited about Ilmorog's inclusion in the Trans-Africa Road and buy in to narratives of modernization and progress. In the collective voice of the community, Ngũgĩ writes, "We of Ilmorog: the road gave us a new town and catapulted us into modern times. New Ilmorog. New Jerusalem" (263).

every day the forest thinned a little. The trees I got to know so well were cut down and only their stumps, dripping sap, remained" (*FR* 143). The image of the "bleeding" tree stump that first horrified Azaro now barely warrants his attention. As we saw in the previous episode, the labor of the construction workers is again described metonymically and passively—"strange drums," "axes," and "drills" transform the environment, obscuring the connections between environment, infrastructure, and the actual developers working in the service of neocolonialist logics of progress. Even as he realizes on some level that the forest is shrinking, Azaro remains content to wander and play "as if everything would always be the same," separating his emotional attachment to the forest from the reality of the disappearing natural environment.

This lack of critical attention to substantial urban redevelopment is true not only for Azaro's experiences; it extends to his entire community as well. Remarking how the hot summer stifles his wanderings, Azaro and his neighbors suffer through slow, humid afternoons, in which it seems that "Time did not move at all" (*FR* 269). From the vantage point of his house, surrounded by other children playing, Azaro observes, "Time moved slower than the hot air. In the distance, from the forest, came the unending crack of axes on trees. The sound became as familiar as the woodpeckers or the drumming of rain on cocoyam leaves. The noise of machines also became familiar, drilling an insistent beat on the sleep-inducing afternoons" (*FR* 270). Azaro's repetition of "familiar" here completes the gradual changes he has been witnessing at various points in the forest. The workers, still represented via their disembodied activities, have now become part of the background of everyday life, literally lulling the community to sleep with their ambient construction noises. Ironically, the comparisons Azaro makes to other ambient sounds—woodpeckers and rain on cocoyam leaves—are very likely the victims of infrastructural development, as plant and wildlife habitats dwindle as development progresses. The same

cognitive dissonance that Azaro expresses regarding construction and its consequences thus extends to his inability to recognize how the very metaphors he incorporates into his narration are placed at risk from urban development. These slow, gradual processes related to wandering, ambience, and lack of attention are crucial for understanding how infrastructural violence operates. By becoming so routinely visible and audible as to become ambient, the construction workers are normalized into Azaro's narrative itself. This normalization indicates how colonial violence remains durable under the disguise of infrastructural development, rendering magical realism's celebration of plural ontologies indistinguishable from the colonial real.[29]

In her readings of Azaro's wanderings, Eleni Coundouriotis terms these normalizing habits and lack of attention as signs of "forgetfulness." She claims that, rather than displaying Azaro's youth or his irresponsibility as a narrator, forgetfulness indicates Okri's investment in problems of history and memory that are unique to Nigeria's postcolonial formation ("Landscapes of Forgetfulness" 46). She writes, "Degradation seeks forgetfulness. It is a numbness, a coping mechanism in the daily struggle of existence… Forgetfulness engulfs the political consciousness of the people even as the relics of their political history remain visible around them" ("Forgetfulness" 46; *Claiming History* 149). In two separate studies of *The Famished Road*, Coundouriotis situates forgetfulness as a condition of life in the slums, where extreme poverty has made even the most basic aspects of daily life difficult. Azaro's father, Dad, works several odd jobs, including as a hard laborer, while Mum supplements their income by selling wares in the streets. They are constantly concerned about food and making payments to their predatory landlord, who repeatedly threatens them with eviction. Azaro's family's situation

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[29] Although my analysis in Chapter 2 departs from this line of argument, many scholars working on petro-fiction have recently made similar arguments about oil's "energy unconscious" in both everyday life and literary production. Like Azaro's gradual loss of critical attention, oil in modern culture is "everywhere felt but nowhere seen," making it particularly difficult to represent in literature (Macdonald 7).

is indicative of the poverty that is widespread in his community. As a result, it is difficult for them to pay attention to the connections among unusual events that occur in their community, such as the infestation of rats or the distribution of poisoned milk by one of the political parties.

In Coundouriotis' reading, Azaro is actually one of the few characters who does make these connections due to his role as narrator (*Claiming History* 158). Indeed, in *Songs of Enchantment* and *Infinite Riches*, Azaro records his community's gradual awareness of their own forgetfulness by framing his narration in the first-person plural. In one of the sequels, the community laments, "*We were unprepared* for an era twisted out of natural proportions, unprepared when our road began to speak in the bizarre languages of violence and transformations" (*SE* 3, emphasis added). In another, it says, "we humans *didn't notice* the great trees dying, crying out as they fell in the agonized voices of slain benign giants. At first the falling trees, crashing down on their mortally wounded colleagues*, didn't alter the stories of our lives*" (*IR* 84, emphasis added). Okri takes care in these lines to infuse the road and trees with human qualities, noting the "bizarre" and "agonized" changes in language and voice as the environment is transformed for the sake of development. Once again, he exposes these transformations as violent, drawn out, and painful, rather than the tidy, linear progression of river-into-road that opened his trilogy. As these refrains repeat in Okri's sequels, it becomes clear that the cognitive dissonance Azaro displays between development and its environmental consequences has extended to the entire community. So long as the distractions of poverty, corruption, and other "daily dramas" persist, infrastructural development is able to endure unchallenged and unhindered (*IR* 84). Because development emphasizes linear temporalities of progress and modernization, it is clear that, as Coundouriotis writes, "the surrender to linear temporality threatens historical memory" (*Claiming History* 150). Juxtaposing the environment's

"agony" alongside the community's disinterest demonstrates the deep wounds caused by development, and shows how the co-optation of magical realism by neocolonial logics poses a real threat to the environment as a whole. Azaro's community laments their lack of attention to infrastructural development until it is too late. However, it is worth asking, what kinds of communities and socialities have been formed through this process of "not-noticing"?

To begin to answer this question, I argue that it is important to recognize how infrastructure, especially systems like roads, shapes postcolonial subjects belatedly.[30] This shaping comes not from colonial or neocolonial elites, but through processes of inattention and diversion, whether that comes in the form of social challenges like poverty or corruption, or the habits of attention that are cultivated through daily practices like Azaro's wandering. The problem of belatedness is endemic to what Rob Nixon has termed "slow violence," in which he characterizes violence not as spectacular, but as "delayed," "dispersed," "attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). Slow violence shapes its subjects through intimate, mundane aspects of daily life, similar to the phenomenon Antina von Schnitzler describes in her ethnography of prepaid water meters in South Africa. Framing her study through the lens of "techno-politics," or "the ways in which political actions are embedded within technical forms," Schnitzler argues that a banal device like the water meter invites larger questions regarding subjectivity and citizenship (10). When thinking about the gradual, attritional, and quotidian processes of urban development in *The Famished Road* trilogy, it is clear that Azaro's community realizes too late that their own livelihoods are at risk from the seemingly distant forms of environmental degradation, which have become the background noise to everyday life.

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[30] I return to this idea of belatedness versus violence that has "not yet" come to pass as an opening for ethics in Chapter 4.

At the same time as infrastructural development spatially reshapes Azaro's community, the slum residents are also subject to a more literal re-writing of their own histories, reinforcing Coundouriotis' concerns about the problem of history and forgetfulness in Okri's work. One of the most-studied characters from *Infinite Riches* is the Governor-General, the outgoing English colonial supervisor whose days in the newly independent colony are numbered. Several critics, including Bill Ashcroft, Erin James, and Sara Upstone, have focused on the Governor-General because he is the most specific reference to colonialism and Nigerian independence throughout *The Famished Road* trilogy. Just as Azaro's narrative point of view shifts from first-person singular to first-person plural as the trilogy progresses, the interludes with the Governor-General indicate another shift to a third-person limited perspective, providing insight into his behaviors during the last few weeks of colonial rule. In the passages I will analyze below, the Governor-General's actions directly reference the historical modes of urban planning and development that reshaped Lagos through colonialist logics of sanitation and modernization. The Governor-General rewrites the history of the African colony as his final act of official imperial power. In doing so, he takes hold of the normalizing logics which reify the colonial real spatially, through infrastructural changes, and epistemologically, through historical narrative itself.

As independence grows nearer, Azaro begins to access the Governor-General's point of view through his dreams, which is how Azaro learns about the Governor's plans to rewrite the colony's history before he officially leaves office. Taking care to destroy "incriminating documents" that provide a more accurate picture of colonial practices in Nigeria, the Governor-General prepares his historical account for his successors (*IR* 125). Azaro narrates:

> He rewrote the space in which I slept. He rewrote the long silences of the country which were really passionate dreams. He rewrote the seas and the wind, the

atmospheric conditions and the humidity. He rewrote the seasons, and made them

limited and unlyrical. He reinvented the geography of the nation and the whole

continent. He redrew the continent's size on the world map, made it smaller, made

it odder. He changed the names of places which were older than the places

themselves. He redesigned the phonality of African names, softened the

consonants, flattened the vowels. In altering the sound of the names he altered

their meaning and affected the destiny of the named...The renamed things lost

their ancient weight in our memory. (*IR* 125-126)

By reifying the colonial real in his historical narrative, the Governor-General's project evinces

several key parallels to the practices of infrastructural development as they have been enacted

throughout Nigeria's colonial and postcolonial history. Each of the Governor's actions is a

repetition of one that has already been completed by indigenous peoples—rewriting, reinventing,

redrawing, redesigning, and renaming. By emphasizing this repetition at the sentence level, Okri

renders the Governor's actions excessive, as they are clearly not in the service of those who have

long inhabited these spaces and lived these histories. The Governor's attention to space,

especially the country's representation on the world map, echo the fact that Nigeria "is in the

most literal sense an invented nation," whose borders were drawn not out of sensitivity to

existing boundaries between ethnic groups, but to demarcate a space of maximum efficiency for

imperial rulers (Coundouriotis, *Claiming History* 146).[31] Recalling how infrastructural

development occurred in Lagos, British colonizers gradually imposed Western standards of

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[31] Coundouriotis' phrase echoes V.Y. Mudimbe's foundational work, *The Invention of Africa*, in which he argues that the eponymous phenomenon occurred as a series of discursive formations throughout centuries of colonial activity. Ultimately, Africa is "invented" as an object of academic inquiry through what Mudimbe terms epistemological ethnocentrism, or "the belief that scientifically there is nothing to be learned from 'them' unless it is already 'ours' or comes from 'us'" (15).

sanitation and modernization onto the Yoruba settlements on Isale Eko, to the point where the

entire original settlement was cleared and relocated after being designated a "slum." Just as the

British demarcated, regulated, and reassigned African territories in Lagos, so too does the

Governor-General ignore indigenous spatial, phonetic, and environmental realities in Nigeria and

instead transforms them according to his own design. Lagos was deemed worthy of being a

colonial capital once its facades matched those in European metropoles. On the eve of its

independence, Nigeria becomes legible as a nation only after it has been reshaped according to

Western geographical and linguistic standards, thus establishing the stakes for Okri's use of

magical realism to reveal what has been obscured.

In her reading of the Governor-General's multiple acts of rewriting, Sara Upstone argues

that the scale of Azaro's city is conflated with that of the nation, at once collapsing but also

expanding the impact of colonial violence. She writes, "For Azaro and those around him, the city

is the wider world, an unnamed archetype of all conquered places, a space in which the issues of

colonialism are played out, mirrored, often *without an awareness* on the part of the city's

inhabitants that this is their cause, or that they hold this wider significance" (149, emphasis

added). Upstone's reading is crucial for understanding how infrastructural development both

proceeds unnoticed among the city's residents and also structures reality across numerous

colonized spaces. The Governor-General's acts of rewriting are not unique to the Nigerian

colonial context; rather, spatial redistribution and what Bill Ashcroft identifies as "the function

of naming" are characteristic of the British empire's global reach (87).[32] By inscribing Nigeria

into a specific geospatial configuration, and making this legible through imperial tools like maps,

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[32] As Ken Saro-Wiwa notes in *Genocide in Nigeria*, the British created arbitrary national and provincial boundaries that paid no attention to centuries-old borders among Nigeria's 300 ethnic groups (19). Saro-Wiwa argues that such indifference to indigenous territory paved the way for the Ogoni's marginalization by both transnational oil corporations and the Nigerian government, a conflict addressed at length in Chapter 2.

the Governor-General binds the country's history even closer to the British empire rather than giving it a fresh start through its independence. Importantly, as Upstone notes, these rewritings proceed unnoticed by the majority of the colonized people, until, as Azaro has already shown us, it is too late to alter them.

While the Governor-General's account of Nigerian space echoes the colonial history of Lagos' urban development, his actions are also especially significant for Nigeria's orientation in time, especially on the eve of its independence. Ashcroft notes that "colonial history offers a particular rewriting of history because it re-invents beginnings" (88), and the Governor-General's rewriting is no exception.

> The Governor-General made our history begin with the arrival of his people on our shores...He deprived us of history, of civilization and, unintentionally, deprived us of humanity…[He] rewrote time (made his longer, made ours shorter), as he rendered invisible our accomplishments, rewrote the meaning and beauty of our customs, as he abolished the world of spirits, diminished our feats of memory, turned our philosophies into crude superstitions, our rituals into childish dances, our religions into animal worship and animistic trances…As he rewrote our past, he altered our present. (*IR* 126-128)

These actions are just a sample of the numerous conflations, erasures, and simplifications that Azaro reports as he witnesses the Governor-General reduce the complexities of West African cultural, environmental, and social histories. By compressing Nigerian history to coincide only with colonization, the Governor-General enacts a denial of coevalness, a move theorized by Johannes Fabian as a hallmark of colonial encounters that justifies conquest on the basis of the colonizers appearing more "advanced" than the colonized (35). Importantly, the Governor-

General's reorientation in time holds significant consequences for the ways in which Okri invokes magical realism. By imposing a linear temporality through colonial authority onto his accounts, the Governor "abolished the world of spirits" and ridiculed indigenous "rituals" and "religions." According to Christopher Warnes, one of Okri's primary interventions throughout *The Famished Road* trilogy is to depict a "faith-based magical realism," one that is deeply rooted in indigenous ontologies and normalizes the proximity of the human and spirit worlds to each other (129). Indeed, Warnes writes that Okri's "central narrative intention" is "to relativize acts of perception in order to make space for non-Western and alternative sets of cultural modalities" (141). By disavowing alternative ontologies through his imposition of linear time, the Governor-General co-opts normalization as a recolonizing gesture and disavows the project of magical realism itself. The only legitimate narrative is the one provided by colonialism. Just as the paved roads and European facades are literally drawn over muddy streets and compound-style housing in Isale Eko, so too does the Governor's historical narrative attempt to erase evidence of indigenous ontologies that are so crucial to Okri's invocation of magical realism in the trilogy.

These explicit references to colonialism's impacts on indigenous notions of space and time signify the serious harm that is caused when normalization is co-opted from its empowering role in magical realism to its more sinister purpose of reifying colonialist logics. As the Governor-General's activities demonstrate, normalization produces gaps in attention that enable colonial power to endure even across the moment of national independence. The forgetfulness that literary critics have identified in *The Famished Road* trilogy thus reveals Stoler's primary concern regarding the study of imperial durabilities. If the Governor-General's narrative goes unchallenged, postcolonial scholars will continue to turn to stories like his in the archive. Returning to the same narratives espousing the same perspectives will make it impossible to

break out of colonial frameworks. Stoler's desire for stronger decolonial methods to critique imperial durabilities is aligned with magical realism's overall project to decolonize the hegemony of the colonial real. To recuperate magical realism's decolonizing potential, my next section turns to the genre's alternative representation of time—namely, its emphasis on disruption, which works against the complacency that is so crucial to development's progress. Whereas normalization risks co-optation in official narratives of infrastructural development, disruption validates alternative modes of understanding infrastructure, including the agency of built environments themselves to disturb the official functions they were intended to perform.

Disrupting Coloniality

As Iheka, Quayson, and other literary critics have noted, *The Famished Road* trilogy represents the proximity between human and spirit worlds—a key belief in Yoruba and other West African cosmologies—through various types of narrative disruptions. Often, these are expressed through Azaro's realization that he has "suddenly" found himself in another world (*FR* 162). Quayson describes the novels' structures as "episodic," noting that "there is a constant *interruption* of the chronological sequence to enter into the esoteric realm" (*Strategic* 127-128, emphasis added). These ruptures, however, do more than merely demonstrate human-spirit proximity as a reality of West African epistemology. They are an important intervention for understanding how infrastructural development also unfolds in unconventional, unruly, and non-linear temporalities. A key characteristic of infrastructure is that it can exceed the functions for which it was intended, either on its own terms as "flaky" and "unruly," or in collaboration with creative interlocutors, like the Lagos salesmen who take advantage of go-slows to sell their wares (Anand 13; Larkin 329). Following Faris' assertion that magical realism "disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity" (23), in this section I argue that Okri deploys narrative

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ruptures to represent infrastructure as it is understood through indigenous epistemologies. Here, infrastructure is recognized not as a static, singular object inherited wholesale from colonial regimes, but as unpredictable and agentic systems in their own right. Okri's interpretation of magical realism thus depicts road infrastructures as systems that can materially and metaphorically disrupt the colonial real.

Long regarded as an important liminal zone by readers of Okri's trilogy, the forest is a key site where narrative ruptures regarding infrastructural development take place (Cooper, *Magical Realism* 68; Highfield 142-144). While it was often used as evidence of Africa's "uncivilized" nature in British colonial accounts, the forest and its counterpart, the bush, are in fact highly symbolic and historically loaded spaces in African literary traditions across the continent. In Kenya, the forest is practically synonymous with Kikuyu resistance to British landowners, serving as a safe haven and organizing space for participants in the Mau insurgency (1952-1960) (Nicholls 184-185). In Ngũgĩ's post-Mau Mau novel *Petals of Blood*, [33] the forest signals a temporal and psychological condition rather than a place; the landscape of the forest and the experience of the colonized are tied together. The notion of the forest as a condition travels across the continent to West African depictions of "the bush" as well. While the bush figures prominently in Yoruba folktales, Tutuola's novels *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* introduce the forest's significance to Anglophone readers (Iheka 26-27). Teeming with multiple species, fantastic creatures, and terrifying spirits, Tutuola's bush directly precedes Okri's forest, which serves "as a repository of indigenous custom" (Cooper,

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[33] *Petals of Blood* follows the intertwining stories of four characters who move to Ilmorog, a rural village, shortly after Kenyan independence. In addition to tracing their intersecting relationships, *Petals* depicts the transformation of Ilmorog from a neglected outpost to a key tourist and commercial site along the Trans-Africa Road. Through Ngũgĩ's use of social realism, infrastructural development is largely represented as a corrupting and commodifying force, alienating Kenyan laborers from their ancestral ties to their environments.

"Landscapes" 291). The forest, in Cooper's words, "welds with the road," enjoining the symbolism of development and progress to indigenous understandings of travel, risk, and proximity to multiple non-human realms ("Landscapes" 284). Okri's forest thus acts as a portal between spaces of distributed agency and multispecies presence on the one hand, and histories of colonial infrastructural development on the other.

While Azaro's wandering through the forest earlier signaled a lack of attention to development, in this section, I suggest that it can also function as a method for disrupting development, in part because of the rapidity with which Azaro can travel between multiple worlds. In an extended scene from *The Famished Road*, Okri describes the consequences of Azaro's wanderings through the language of rupture:

> Intoxicated with the alcoholic fumes of sun on earth *I broke through* a remote
> section of the forest, where sunbirds clustered in baobab branches, and I *emerged*
> in another reality, a strange world, a path which had completed its transition into a
> road. The surface of the road was uneven with bumps. The smell of melting
> tarmac was heady and I saw the mirage of a trailer, quivering in its frightening
> speed, *coursing* down the road towards me. The mirage *shot right through* the
> road construction machines that stood at the intersection…Workers stood around
> the hulks of machinery, abusing those who were working…They shouted slogans
> at the white engineers. I did not see any white engineers. It might have been the
> sun. (241, emphasis added)

Unlike the distanced, ambient encounters with urban development that characterized the previous section, here Azaro's wanderings bring him directly to the sources of road construction. Whereas before Azaro only barely registered the sounds of construction and deforestation as background

noise, here his experiences are more visceral. The sun's heat "intoxicates" him; the newness and strangeness of the forest-world confuse him; the smell of the tarmac is "heady." Although the tractor-trailer he encounters is described as a "mirage," the fear he feels in seeing the machine rush at him is sudden and intense. The vivid depictions of the road as bumpy and uneven suggest that, within the narrative, magical realism blends the "real" of the human world, in which a mirage has a scientific explanation, with the equally real and material "spirit world." The inclusion of laborers is also significant here. As discussed previously, Azaro had struggled to connect the sounds and tools of development with construction workers and engineers themselves, suggesting that development proceeded in the background with no one to be held accountable for its environmental and social consequences. Here, the connections between labor, spatial transformation, and environmental degradation are made explicit.

This is not Azaro's only sudden encounter in the forest, however. A few sentences later, time ruptures again, and Azaro "emerged" into another world in which houses, paths, and roads are built in an organizational pattern that is completely foreign, both to the forest and to Azaro's own community. The new structures "surrounded the forest in tightening circles, unpainted churches and the whitewashed walls of mosques sprang up where the forest was thickest…The world of trees and wild bushes was being thinned" (*FR* 242). Echoing the British's rejections of indigenous building materials in favor of European facades, this scene of development physically remakes urban communities in the image and design of colonial cityscapes, even as independence approaches. Importantly, however, Azaro describes this vision as taking place in the "future present" (*FR* 242), suggesting that infrastructural development has not yet reached its full conclusion. By placing this scene in the future present, Okri reminds us that infrastructural development is much more temporally capacious than official colonial histories of urban

planning would lead us to believe. As Gupta writes, infrastructure is better thought of as a

process, one imbued with what he calls a "politics of anticipation" (62-63). In other words,

"infrastructure is almost always built to exceed present needs: it is built in anticipation of a not-

yet-achieved future…For this reason, perhaps more than most social phenomena, infrastructure

makes clear how the future configures the present" (Gupta 63). Gupta's argument is especially

relevant given Okri's temporal position in relation to the setting of his trilogy. Writing from the

historical position in the late 1980s, when the promises of independence and new infrastructures

have arguably failed, Okri could easily characterize Azaro's urban environments of the 1950s

and 1960s as already indicating signs of that failure.[34] By turning to narrative ruptures through

the genre of magical realism, however, Okri provides an opportunity for understanding a new

temporality of infrastructure: the future present, in which development's path is not yet fully

determined and open for both local intervention and interpretation.

Okri continues to combine alternative temporalities and indigenous modes of

interpretation by emphasizing the plural narratives of the road that circulate throughout West

African literary traditions. Okri's trilogy is frequently mentioned in conversation with Wole

Soyinka's 1965 play, *The Road,* because the play anticipates the title of Okri's trilogy through

the phrase, "the road waits, famished."[35] Although Okri has explicitly denied using Soyinka's

works as inspiration for his trilogy (Wilkinson 82), the image of the famished road, lying in wait

to prey on unsuspecting travelers, imbues the road with a subjectivity and agency that we have

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[34] Indeed, both Fyfe and James follow this line of thought in their respective readings of the trilogy (Fyfe 327-328; James 170).

[35] *The Road*'s central conflict concerns a driver, Kotonu, and his survivor's guilt over having narrowly avoided a devastating road accident in Lagos. Kotonu's internal struggle is complemented by his fellow drivers' struggles to find steady work in the increasingly stratified Nigerian economy after independence, amplifying the physical and economic risks of living amid precarious, unevenly developed infrastructures. Kotonu's partner Samson refers to this precarity when he states: "May we never walk when the road waits, famished" (60). This line repeats in Soyinka's later poems "Death in the Dawn": "May you never walk / When the road waits, famished" (*ll*. 24-25 *Idanre* 6) and "Idanre": "Fated lives ride on the wheels of death when / The road waits, famished" (*Idanre* 64).

not yet considered in the narratives of development discussed thus far. In official colonial narratives, the road functions as a passive "gift" that the British bestow to "uncivilized" Africans. It functions exactly as it is designed, to quote Ngũgĩ, to transform "wilderness into civilized shapes and forms" (*Petals of Blood* 68). By contrast, *The Famished Road* trilogy instead synthesizes the existential realism of Soyinka's play with the proto-magical realist traits of writers like Fagunwa and Tutuola, characterizing the road as reactive rather than passive, and resisting the geospatial effects of development on its own terms.

Like Okri's invocation of "the future present" above, these plural narratives of the famished road complicate understandings of the road's temporality. As my introductory section briefly discussed, *The Famished Road* opens with one of these indigenous narratives: the belief that the road was once a river, and because of these environmental origins, it is always hungry (*FR* 3). While this story is essential for establishing the trilogy's key themes, it also serves as a reference point for interpreting a variety of socio-environmental phenomena that befall Azaro and his community throughout all three novels. At various points, Azaro refers to the road's origin story through metaphors, observations, and conversations with his parents. In *Songs of Enchantment*, for example, Dad makes two references to this story: once when experiencing a series of visions as a result of his blindness ("The road is like a river. It won't keep still. It keeps moving. Where is it going, eh?" [226]) and once when Mum and Azaro tease him that his storytelling is too hard to follow ("A story is not a car. It is a road, and before that it was a river, a river that never ends" [266]). In *Infinite Riches,* Azaro reflects on the changing cityscape by referencing the origin story as well: "I followed Mum down the roads which keep growing the more human beings dream of places to go. The roads which led to bridges. The bridges which led to highways. The highways built on reclaimed rivers, whose goddesses sue constantly at the

higher courts of justice for the annexing of their ancient territories" (21). The frequency and ease

with which Azaro refers to the road's origin story indicates how this knowledge about the road-

as-river is commonplace and part of everyday language in Azaro's community. Further, the

language of these references depicts the road as unruly, in motion, and mediated by spirits and

"goddesses," not unlike Ogun, the Yoruba god of the road who is also associated with creativity,

technology, and transition (Green-Simms 60). Just as Soyinka's works recognize the instability

inherent in new technologies like highways and cars, so too is Azaro aware of how this

instability is explained in Yoruba environmental cosmologies. By punctuating the narratives with

these references, Okri invites the reader into this epistemological framework, using the ruptures

of magical realism to produce "a multiplicity of tales converging and diverging," and

emphasizing plurality as an indigenous mode of understanding the world (Phillips 169).

Key to these notions of multiplicity and plurality is the fact that Okri introduces a second

origin story of "the famished road," which is referenced just as frequently as the river-as-road

story. This second narrative stars a cruel and eternally hungry giant known as the King of the

Road. As Dad tells Azaro, the King of the Road turns his attention and appetite toward humans

"when the Forest started to get smaller because of Man, [and] when the giant couldn't find

enough animals to eat" (*FR* 258). Though the King's insatiability is in part related to human

activity, which shrinks the forest, his hunger exponentially increases other forms of

environmental crisis, including famine, drought, and disease (*FR* 259). At a certain point, the

King's hunger can no longer be satisfied with human flesh, and he devours his own body until

"he had become part of all the roads in this world. He is still hungry and he will always be

hungry. That is why there are so many accidents in the world" (*FR* 260-1). For Cooper and

Quayson, the story of the King of the Road is a regional *ur*-text, appearing frequently as a motif

in many Yoruba poems and songs (Quayson, *Strategic* 122). Crucially, as Cooper observes, this "famished road" is *not* the colonial road of progress, technology, and modernization; rather, "at the outset of the novel this road passes through the ancient world of the spirits and is conceptualized within traditional mythology" (*Magical Realism* 69). Like many folktales, the story of the King of the Road serves as a crucial method for prescribing behaviors to keep people safe and for interpreting changes to the local environment, especially in the context of infrastructural development and road construction.

At the end of his story, Dad explains the common practice of leaving small offerings of food for the King of the Road before beginning a journey, and reminds Azaro that "you must be very careful how you wander about in this world" (*FR* 261). If we recall the risks wandering poses to Azaro's lack of attention to infrastructural development, the story of the King of the Road here takes on a new significance. The road, I suggest, is not only a modern symbol of technological progress, but is also a local symbol of environmental precarity—importantly, a precarity that would exist regardless of the developments imposed by urban planning. This understanding of precarity without privileging colonization is key to Soyinka's dramatization of "the accident" in *The Road*. Informed in part by his lived experiences witnessing and reporting on fatal accidents throughout Nigeria's treacherous highways from the 1970s-1980s, Soyinka imbues his play with the notion that human life is fragile and subject to the unpredictable natures of cars, roads, and accidents (Gibbs 470-471). Contingency is a condition of life in Nigeria, whether that involves risks related to traveling on the road, or, as Okri emphasizes, the marvelous and sometimes terrifying proximity between human and spirit worlds. As such, Dad's story collapses the neocolonial insatiable desire for progress with the King's insatiable and self-consuming hunger for food, trees, and flesh. In doing so, development becomes one of many

possible risks that could befall West Africans living in proximity to the road, especially those, like Azaro, who have a tendency to wander and not pay attention to their surroundings. Respect for the road itself—its hunger, its unevenness, and its danger—decenters human agency in this infrastructural relationship. In doing so, it also decenters colonial development as a monolithic event, and disrupts the teleological narrative that infrastructures "civilize" and "improve" African environments. As the next scene from Okri's trilogy indicates, the famished road satiates its hunger not with African slum-dwellers, but with white engineers.

During the rainy season, Azaro's slum floods, a historical consequence of Lagos' uneven urban development (Gandy 372). In this moment, Azaro's narration combines both the narrative of the road-as-river and the story of the King of the Road to interpret this devastating flood. Azaro represents the flood as an apocalyptic event, echoing the catastrophes that befell people subject to the King of the Road's hunger: "Children howled. Women wailed. It could have been the end of the world" (*FR* 286). In relating this event, however, Azaro draws on both narratives of the road: "The road became *what it used to be*, a stream of primeval mud, a river. I waded in the origins of the road till I came to the red bungalow of the old man who was said to have been blinded by an angel" (*FR* 286, emphasis added). Attempting to escape the flood, Azaro runs to the edge of the forest, where workers are laying electric cables into the ground. While the "origins of the road" overtake the slums, the King of the Road resurfaces here:

> Floodwaters from the forest poured underneath us…The white man shouted, his
> binoculars flew into the air, and I saw him slide away from view. He slid down
> slowly into the pit, as a stream of water washed him away…They dug up his
> helmet, his binoculars, his eyeglasses, a boot, some of his papers, but his body

was not found…The pit that had helped create the road had swallowed all of them. (*FR* 288)

Although Azaro does not invoke the King of the Road as explicitly as the river origin story, both myths inform his narration of this episode. While these two events could easily be explained through the historical perspectives I discussed previously—Lagos' lack of drainage systems and propensity to form sinkholes, for example—Azaro instead centers indigenous epistemologies that prioritize the road's agentic and reactive hunger, power, and timelessness, rather than its rigid function in the neocolonial state. The road itself takes revenge, satiating its hunger by devouring the white engineers who attempt to transform it under the guise of "improving" its unruliness. By invoking these narratives and perceiving the road as animate, Azaro works directly against concepts of infrastructural development as linear, straightforward, and complete. As Anand, Gupta, and Appel remind us, infrastructures ought to be conceptualized as "unfolding over many different moments with uneven temporalities" rather than fixing time and space in a given environment (17). Using local narratives to interpret environmental phenomena thus dramatizes neocolonial violence, but without privileging neocolonial voices.

A final example of magical realism's ability to disrupt linear narratives that favor colonialist development occurs in *Infinite Riches*, when Azaro introduces an old woman who lives in the forest. Never named, the old woman works at a loom, weaving tapestries that document the "true secret history" of Azaro and his people while the Governor-General attempts to reshape Nigerian history through a colonialist lens (*IR* 128). Again, we see how the choice to recuperate indigenous narratives from "official" Western ones leads to alternative understandings of temporality:

The old woman in the forest pressed on with the weaving of our true secret

history, a history that was frightening and wondrous, bloody and comic,

labyrinthine, circular, always turning, always surprising, with events becoming

signs, and signs becoming reality…with this language of signs and symbols, of

angles and colors and forms, she recorded legends and moments of history lost to

her people…She recorded stories and myths and philosophical disquisitions on

the relativities of African Time and Space, how Time is both finite and infinite,

how Time curves, how Time also dances, how Space is negative, how Space is

always populated, how Space is the home of invisible beings, and the true

destination of death. (*IR* 128-130)

Given the influence of oral modes of storytelling on Okri's work, the old woman's tapestry

serves as a significant act of documentation from an indigenous point of view. In the pages from

which this passage was excerpted, Okri chronicles twelve examples of what the woman

"recorded," ranging from jokes and riddles, to the languages of animals and plants, to poems and

songs that have been lost from memory. Unlike the Governor-General's grossly reductive

account, the old woman's tapestry expands the records of her people's history to consider all

types of relations among humans, non-humans, environments, and cultural forms. Further, she

recognizes that time, according to West African cosmology, is far from linear. Like the mythic

and folkloric temporalities invoked in the stories of the road, temporality here is "curved" and

"dances," rejecting the *telos* of colonial development. Importantly, the old woman's account

does not record some alternative world in which the horrors of colonization never took place.

Rather, as Upstone writes, her tapestry "encourages movement away from strategies of realism

that may simply describe and maintain dominant values, towards the suggestion of possibilities

outside representation of the status quo" (154-5). In other words, these "possibilities" fulfill the project of magical realism in disrupting the hegemony of the colonial real. Like the narratives of the road, the old woman's tapestry acknowledges the "frightening" and "bloody" episodes in Nigeria's history without losing sight of the indigenous perspectives that have always given shape to these lands and stories.

The old woman's tapestry is more than just an alternative historical record that validates and materializes indigenous conceptions of temporality. Her work is dependent on the sanctity of the forest, and, like Azaro's urban community, she is also threatened by the environmental and social violences of infrastructural development. Okri writes, "She saw that in cutting the forest down the community had come to her, had surrounded her; and that after all those years in the middle of the forest alone, she would soon be in the middle of a ghetto, unable to escape" (*IR* 131). Key to this statement is the fact that the old woman is not necessarily human; she begins to weave the tapestry after flying to the moon, and can understand the languages of animals, plants, and other non-human creatures. While Okri does not label her as one of the spirits who tries to recapture Azaro, her concern of being surrounded by the "ghetto" is, in my reading, less an aversion to joining Azaro's community than it is a genuine fear of losing the magical space of the forest to support and sustain her. Despite serving as a counter-narrative to the Governor-General, the histories that the old woman records are as much at risk of "clearance" from infrastructural development as the indigenous urban settlements themselves.

In considering the purchase of Okri's interpretation of magical realism, Warnes writes that *The Famished Road* trilogy ultimately aligns with a key tenet from Carpentier's theory of *lo real maravilloso*: "Faith in the presence of the marvelous was required, but also in the capacity of literature to reveal it" (144). Throughout this section, I have demonstrated how magical

realism's revelatory powers operate through various examples of narrative disruptions—ones that seek to jolt Azaro out of his complacent wanderings, that punctuate the narrative with frequent references to the road-as-river, and that turn to plural indigenous narratives to provide insight into alternative temporalities of infrastructural development. Like the original "hungry" characteristics of the river that persist through time and into the present moment, these magical realist ruptures offer strategies to recognize how infrastructures have agencies, temporalities, and ontologies of their own, which often exceed various attempts to narrativize them. As the old woman in the forest reminds us, narratives are always plural; the story of colonial development is but one of many shaping the histories, subjectivities, and ecologies of West African peoples and places. If, as James writes, "narratives literally make the nation" throughout the trilogy (175), it is crucial to understand the multiple temporalities and epistemologies that inform indigenous as well as colonial narratives of Nigerian development.

Recursive Futures

Thus far, this chapter has historicized infrastructural development in colonial and postcolonial Lagos, and examined how development endures across temporal boundaries through a lack of critical attention to its material, environmental effects. By co-opting magical realism's emphasis on normalization, colonial development benefits from these complacent attention spans, which gradually familiarize Azaro and his community with road construction and deforestation to the point that they misrecognize its violent environmental impacts. Okri's interpretation of magical realism counteracts this co-optation by disrupting linear time and redirecting attention to infrastructural development through multiple indigenous narratives of the road. These indigenous perspectives are crucial for recovering alternative modes of inhabiting and relating to urban environments, modes that have long preceded the colonial encounter itself.

How, then, does *The Famished Road* trilogy resolve these tensions between normalization and disruption? And if infrastructures like the road are fundamentally future-oriented, what models of futurity does the trilogy offer us?

To answer these questions, I turn again to Stoler. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Stoler's project is broadly concerned with understanding how colonial histories matter in the present. Her intervention is largely a methodological one, arguing that existing analytical paradigms for studying colonial history fall into two categories: continuity and rupture—or, as I have characterized them in this chapter, normalization and disruption. Stoler finds neither paradigm satisfactory because they are limited in their abilities to attend to multiple overlapping temporalities that structure the lived experiences of those whose histories have come into contact with colonialism. She writes that "new genealogies of imperial governance" must be able to consider "what is *past but not over*; how the articulation of past and present may *recede and resurface*; how colonial relations are disparately and partially absorbed into social relations and ecological disparities and are productive of very distinct dispositions toward how—and, indeed, whether those histories matter today" (14, 25-26, emphasis added). In other words, new methods are required to attend to the traces of colonial power that persist across time and transform into the present moment, resurfacing in new forms that postcolonial critics might not recognize as important for their scholarly work. In many ways, Stoler's vision of a new analytical paradigm echoes the temporal convergences that occur in *The Famished Road* trilogy regarding the relationship of the river to the road. As Okri's opening lines indicate, the river's original trace remains despite what has been imposed over it; recalling Patrick Joyce's definition of the palimpsestic city, "[its] present forms become more effectively the archive of [its] past forms" (9). Despite the linear histories and spatialities that official colonial narratives and infrastructural

projects impose, Okri's trilogy shows how multiple other temporalities, spatialities, and ontologies exist and converge when incorporating West African cosmologies into aesthetic representation.

I invoke Stoler here because she and Okri offer the same answer for resolving the tension between continuity and rupture—conceptualizing history not as a linear, equal relationship between past and present, but as *recursion*. In Stoler's words, "This sort of history is marked by the uneven, unsettled, contingent quality of histories that *fold back in on themselves* and, in that refolding, reveal new surfaces, and new planes. Recursion opens to novel contingent possibilities" (26, emphasis in original). Crucially, Stoler argues that recursion is not the same as repetition. Postcolonial societies are not doomed to repeat the pasts of their colonial predecessors, but they are nonetheless shaped by this ongoing relationship to colonial history (27). Because it emphasizes contingency and openness, Stoler sees recursion as an empowering analytic, one that recognizes how those living in the presents shaped by the imperial past can "move in and around the constraints imposed—the visions failed and the desperate, indignant, and defiant acts that duress can produce" (35). Like the improvisational responses to Lagos' unwieldy urban infrastructure, such as people selling goods to drivers sitting in stalled traffic, *The Famished Road* trilogy is similarly invested in the kinds of flexibility and defiance to colonial norms that Stoler identifies, especially in its visions of the future as understood through recursion.

Okri theorizes recursion most prominently through his use of the *abiku*. As discussed previously, the *abiku* is a child who is born and dies several times, tormenting their parents with their unpredictable departures to the spirit world. However, whereas most families of *abiku* children try to force them to remain alive, Azaro attempts to evade spirits who want to capture

him and return him to the spirit world, as he does not want his death to upset his mother (McCabe 47). Azaro's agency to determine which worlds he inhabits thus transforms the notion of the *abiku* itself from a mischievous, even spiteful vagrant into a thoughtful wanderer who is able to fuse multiple worlds through the chronotope of the road. Towards the end of the novel, Azaro spends time with Ade, another *abiku*, who delivers a kind of prophecy about what the post-independence future might look like. Ade states, "Our country is an *abiku* country. Like the spirit-child, it keeps coming and going. One day it will decide to remain. It will become strong. I won't see it" (*FR* 478). Many literary critics have found Ade's pronouncement to be a pessimistic one. Clare Barker argues that the *abiku*'s cycles of births and deaths reflect "the recursive interchanges of state power among the elite" (181), while Kim Anderson Sasser claims that recursive temporality "redirects the responsibility for Nigeria's maturation onto the Nigerian people themselves," suggesting that the future of the nation lies within individual rather than collective responsibility (85).

However, when thinking through the multiple competing narratives of national, historical, and infrastructural development we have encountered throughout the trilogy, I think Ade's prophecy can be an empowering statement. If the country is an *abiku* country, its present moment is continuously shaped by its past, in an ongoing relationship that is never determinative nor fixed. And, as we have seen in the numerous historical narratives under discussion in this chapter—the colonial archives of urban development, the Governor-General's reductive historical narrative, and the old woman in the forest's expansive tapestry—the past itself is not singular. Magical realism is of course open to this possibility of plural histories; after all, Carpentier was inspired by the layering of histories and ontologies in the Americas as offering more authentic connections to place, time, and history itself. Okri, then, transforms the genre of

magical realism by theorizing recursion through the *abiku*, a figure who wanders freely across spatial and temporal boundaries, entangling the human world with the spirit world, and the present with the past. As such, the *abiku* invites a continuous return to the past and a commitment to understanding that new insights can be gained from each return. Recursion here enacts Dad's project of "redreaming the world with more light" (*SE* 280)—opening up new potentials for political and ethical action, rather than foreclosing them. The *abiku* country is thus not locked in an unending cycle, but engaged in an ethical project to better understand the past to improve social, political, and environmental conditions in the present.

Recursion also offers an important temporal framework for understanding how infrastructures function as imperial durabilities; in other words, how their material, discursive, and ecological effects resurface and recur in different forms across time. Returning once more to Gupta's argument, he argues that infrastructures, especially spectacular projects like highways and urban development, must be conceptualized as ongoing processes rather than teleological systems always in need of completion. He writes:

> We should think of the end [of infrastructure] as potentially open. This is as much an empirical point as it is a philosophical one, for we often hear about projects that are begun but never finished. Infrastructure projects can be delayed for small or long periods of time before they are completed, or they can be suspended by being abandoned, or they can be reversed by active destruction. (71)

By detaching infrastructure from the telos of completion, Gupta argues that these systems can be more responsive to the material conditions of the communities with whose lives they intersect.

Okri's magical realist depiction of the road as both a mythic reference and a sign of colonial progress shares Gupta's temporal priorities. In one scene from *The Famished Road*,

Azaro encounters a valley full of spirits who are hard at work constructing a road. One of the spirits explains that these spirit-workers have been building the road for over 2,000 years, with very little progress to show for it.

> The moment [the road] is finished all of them will perish…they will have nothing to do, nothing to dream for, and no need for a future. They will perish of completeness…That is why, when they have build a long section of it, or forgotten the words of their prophet and begun to think they have completed it…the road goes mad and twists and destroys itself or the people become distorted in spirit and start to turn the road into other things, or the workers go insane, the people start wars, revolts cripple everything and a thousand things distract them and wreck what they have built and a new generation comes along and begins again from the wreckage. (*FR* 329-330)

We might be tempted to read the spirit's account in the same pessimistic vein as Ade's prophecy. Such a reading suggests a frustrating return to work already completed, a lack of forward progress, and an inability to recognize that work is being duplicated and labor wasted. However, such a reading also attaches futurity to visible signs of progress, repeating the same colonialist logics of development that rendered indigenous Lagosians "unsanitary" because their habits of urban living did not mimic Western standards. Rather, what interests me in this scene is how normalization and disruption—our two organizing rubrics from magical realism—collapse into each other. Previously, we noted that a lack of critical attention to development allowed it to proceed unhindered; the "forgetfulness" that plagued Azaro and his community was a dangerous example of how development became normalized. Here, that same lack of attention precipitates disruption. When the spirits "forget the words of their prophet," the road becomes not an agent of

its own destruction, but one of renewal. The road here echoes the story of the King of the Road, whose insatiable hunger causes him to eat himself, but in doing so, gives birth to new stories and applications of the fable to the risks Nigerians face in their everyday lives. By refusing to be incorporated into teleological, colonialist narratives of development and progress, the road instead valorizes recursion as a continuous process of making and unmaking. With each destruction, a new generation steps in to take up the charge and construct new portions of the road from the wreckage. Building the road through a commitment to recursion, then, understands that "completion is a form of death," socially, environmentally, and, in Okri's case, even spiritually (Gupta 73). Through the recursive cycles of damage, regrowth, and reclaiming the task at hand, the road-builders, like the *abiku* nation, work toward a future that is open-ended rather than teleological, emergent rather than prescribed.

Told from the perspective of the *abiku* child, *The Famished Road* trilogy is "an alternative national myth," one that "yields itself to multiplicity and plural ontologies—an environment that can be both living and spirit *at the same time and in the same space*" (James 188, 191, emphasis in original). Key to these multiple, plural ontologies is a more capacious understanding of spatiality and temporality as they are enacted through infrastructural development, whether expressed in the original trace of the river that endures into the more "modern" road, the Yoruba settlements that formed the foundations of Lagos Island, or the indigenous narratives and perspectives that repeatedly write back to the imposed official histories of the colonial archive. Through a renewed sense of the multiple converging temporalities that pervade the trilogy, Okri's own positionality to his work is also worth revisiting. Rather than envisioning the eve of independence as a moment already imbued with failure, Okri's theorization of recursion represents these narratives as his own act of return, his own attempt to

rebuild the road of Nigeria's colonial past from a renewed understanding of his postcolonial present. His invocation of magical realism, then, offers a kind of revisionist history, one in which the future of the Nigerian nation is still being written through West African cosmologies, histories of urban development, and the material realities of environmental degradation. Imagining recursion as the starting point, rather than a frustrating end, for interpreting the impact of infrastructural development on West African political and social relations thus introduces a new temporal dimension to postcolonial ecocriticism's investments in the durabilities of imperial power.

Ultimately, this chapter has demonstrated how the genre of magical realism functions as a kind of metaphoric infrastructure, one that affords Okri's characters the ability to resist imperialist logics imposed through physical infrastructures of the road. In other words, magical realist narratives' alternative accounts of imperial and environmental histories enable infrastructures to work for those for whom they were not designed. A similar struggle between imperialist logics and the everyday lives of Nigerians continues in Chapter 2, which takes up the politically and economically fraught histories of oil infrastructures. As Chapter 2 explores, Nigerians are not only forced to live under the geospatial logics of oil pipelines, stations, and rigs in the Delta, but they are also excluded from the economic, social, and political privileges that oil infrastructures provide to the nation writ large. Whereas Okri preserves indigenous epistemologies of the road by invoking magical realism to validate non-Western temporalities, Helon Habila and Teju Cole respectively wrestle with oil's material and discursive capacities to confer or deny citizenship in contemporary Nigeria. Like Okri, they turn to literary modes in order to reclaim citizenship on their own terms, while at the same time leveraging their positions as Anglophone African writers to promote increased engagement from their non-local readers.

Chapter 2: Democratizing Oil Citizenship: Mass Media, Petro-Fiction, and Spectator Ethics in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* [36]

In American photojournalist Ed Kashi's photo-essay *Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta* (2008), the political, economic, and environmental dispossessions of the ethnic minorities living in the Niger Delta are brought into full view. Initially commissioned as an assignment for *National Geographic, Black Gold* juxtaposes 100 images with poetry, historical overviews, and personal essays by Nigerian activists and authors to emphasize the catastrophic impact of half a century's worth of oil extraction on Delta social and cultural life. In each of Kashi's images, oil appears in a new shape or form, whether as crude oil sticking to the bodies of Shell workers or pipelines criss-crossing a village. The 38th image in his series offers yet another view of oil's physical manifestations. In the image reproduced in Figure 1, two women and a man sit mid-conversation in a narrow boat, traveling down a creek in the Delta. The man's fingers skim the top of the river, as he and the woman in the pink dress gaze attentively at the speaking woman in blue. There are a few bags placed at the speaking woman's feet, but judging by the lack of cargo, the travelers seem to be taking a routine trip via the creek rather than undertaking a major journey. Diagonally from the boat, a pipeline rises above the water, partially obstructing the spectator's view of five thatched houses on the riverbank. Just

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[36] Early ideas from my reading of *Oil on Water* first appeared in my article "Local Collisions: *Oil on Water, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, and the Politics of Form*" (2020). I am grateful to the editors and publishers of *African Literature Today* for generously allowing the reprinting of those ideas in this chapter.

behind the pipeline, three figures stand outside one of the houses. They are blurry, but they also appear to be talking or greeting each other as they walk past.

Figure 1: Photograph by Ed Kashi, from Curse of the Black Gold *(92-93)*

Unlike many of Kashi's images in the collection, the Delta inhabitants are not the focal point of this photo, nor is the massive pipeline, despite how its metallic colors, size, and structure provide an industrialized contrast to the simpler houses it obscures. The subject of Kashi's photo is the thin, rainbow-colored line that divides the foregrounded figures in the boat from the pipeline and houses on the riverbank. This discoloration is not a trick of the light, casting a rainbow prism on the water—it is oil, on the surface of the water. The line of oil extends beyond the photograph's frame in both directions, presumably along the entire length of the river. Below the speaking woman, rainbow discolorations can again be seen, framing all three travelers' reflections in the river in halos of oil. These brief visual cues to oil's physical presence raise numerous questions about the river as both a social and environmental space. In addition to everyday travel, what other daily practices take place in this oil-saturated river? Do the figures in the background depend on this river for bathing, washing clothes, drinking, and cooking? Do

their children play in the polluted waters, or skim their hands across the water's surface when traveling by boat, as the man does? How does oil impact the fish, plants, and other non-human life forms in this riverine ecology? Is the protruding pipeline seen here to blame for these oil leakages, or does the source of the spill take us further up the river, and out of the photograph's frame? If the pipeline didn't rise above the water, and if oil couldn't be detected on the surface, would we still know that both of them are there?

In tracing oil through the environmental and social spaces captured by Kashi's image, I enact Ariella Azoulay's method of "watching" photographs from her 2008 book, *The Civil Contract of Photography*. First embarking on her project while living in the midst of the second Palestinian intifada, Azoulay revisits the debates surrounding disaster photography and the apparent paralysis it causes to viewers encountering these images at a distance (16).[37] Rather than rehashing the debates of whether to look at or turn away from "photographs of injury" (14), Azoulay presents watching as an imaginative method that reconstructs the photographed event by speculating on the moments prior to and after the image itself. Reconstructing the encounter, especially in these images of disaster or war, becomes for Azoulay "a civic skill, not an exercise in aesthetic appreciation" (14). Such a skill is necessary for recognizing how photography creates a civic space in which the very notion of citizenship is up for debate. In Azoulay's formulation,

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[37] Azoulay refers primarily to Susan Sontag's and John Berger's definitive comments on photography's singular, iconic functions. Responding to Sontag's argument from *On Photography* that images of disaster "transfix" and "anesthetize" viewers (20), Berger claims that "photographs in themselves do not narrate. Photographs preserve instant appearances" (51). Further, Berger claims that photographs designated for public use are stripped from their context as they circulate throughout media platforms, allowing a singular image to construct collective public memory and understanding of a spectacular or disastrous event (55). These arguments have shaped visual culture criticism on disaster photography in the decades since. Jay Prosser, writing the introduction to *Picturing Atrocity*, echoes Berger's claims about photography's iconicity. He notes that such images provide "A still moment freezing the instant, the photograph as a document allows a symbol to stand for the whole" (8). However, visual rhetoric scholar Wendy B. Hesford casts a more critical eye on disaster photography. In *Spectacular Rhetorics*, Hesford investigates the "human right spectacle," arguing this visual schema emerges from strategic "social and rhetorical processes of incorporation and recognition" that attach spectacular images to human rights discourses (7).

the civic space of photography enables the realization that "citizenship is not merely a status, a good, or a piece of private property…but rather a tool of struggle, or an obligation to others to struggle against injuries inflicted on those others, citizen and noncitizen alike—others who are governed along with the spectator" (14). Azoulay theorizes this civic space in the context of Palestine, in which those denied citizenship under the Israeli sovereign state can find both recognition and solidarity from non-local spectators within the photographic encounter itself. While they have not been stripped of their formal citizenship nor rendered stateless under the same political rubric as the Palestinians, the Delta peoples have been stripped of their lands, livelihoods, and sense of place due to sixty years of oil extraction. At the same time, they receive no share of the oil industry's profits, which earns over 80 percent of Nigerian revenues, and their methods of economic subsistence, such as agriculture, have been decimated due to oil and natural gas pollution (Watts, "Resource Curse" 50). With only empty promises coming from transnational oil corporations and the Nigerian government to remediate widespread environmental degradation, the Delta peoples appear to be Nigerian citizens in name only. Kashi's photographs, then, offer a provocative example for questioning how access to oil constitutes citizenship in Nigeria, and what modes of citizenship might be recuperated through representational media like photographs for constituencies like the Delta peoples, who have been disenfranchised by the petro-state.

By emphasizing watching as a civic duty, Azoulay also responds to a long-unanswered question about what photography mobilizes. Susan Sontag's foundational book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, like the majority of her oeuvre, grapples with the problem of "image fatigue"—that, at a certain point, viewers are so inundated with images of suffering that they become immune to their horrifying effects. Sontag argues that relying on images to shock, surprise, or

guilt viewers into action is an unsustainable practice, as the translation of compassion into action is rarely guaranteed (101-2). More recently, ecocritics have adapted Sontag's concerns to literary representations of environmental injustice. As discussed briefly in my Introduction, Stephanie LeMenager and Jennifer Wenzel both discuss the problematic formulation of "media → empathy → action," troubling the notion that merely making a problem visible through literary or visual productions is the same as taking active steps to solve it (LeMenager 17). Building on LeMenager's formulation, Wenzel argues for a shift from *visibility* to *legibility*, writing, "the salient question is not whether environmental injustice can be seen, but under what conditions it can be *read*, understood, and apprehended" (*Disposition* 15). Unlike scholars of infrastructure from STS, who are primarily preoccupied with infrastructure's hypervisibility or invisibility as it shapes daily life, Wenzel seeks alternative modes of reading for the environment that do not depend solely on the phenomenology of sight.

Azoulay's methodology of watching photographs—that is, using the photograph to understand citizenship as rooted in an ethical obligation to the other—offers a tangible strategy for the new modes of ecocritical reading that Wenzel and LeMenager advocate. Moving beyond the paralyzing positions of empathy, pity, or compassion, Azoulay instead argues for civic duty as the political and ethical imperative that organizes engagements with photographed subjects (85). Importantly, watching photographs helps us distinguish visibility from visuality; in other words, we can attend to the photograph for what it makes legible to us about the social and political conditions beyond the photographed moment rather than what is only explicitly visible to the viewer. By watching Kashi's photograph, oil's material and discursive forms become legible simultaneously. Oil's materiality takes on precise forms in both the slick surface of the water and the substance pumping through the pipeline. The forms we cannot "see"—the

conversation among the people in the boat or on the riverbank, the daily practices centering on the oil-polluted river, the disenfranchisement of Delta inhabitants who do not share oil's profits—are still apprehensible within the photograph, if not explicitly visible. The image invites us to follow the rainbow-tinged oil spill outside the photographic frame and to trace the pipeline below the water's surface. Beyond the moment captured here, the image also requires us to understand how the commoditized forms of oil we purchase and consume originate in this polluted river, literally dividing Delta communities, placing people like those in the boat at enormous environmental and economic risk, and disenfranchising ethnic minorities from their rights as citizens.

While Kashi's image enacts one such example of Azoulay's civil contract of photography, Wenzel and LeMenager are ultimately interested in literature's capacity to make environmental justice apprehensible, especially for readers who encounter these issues from a geographical distance. As "petro-fiction," or literature about oil, consolidates as a genre, and as more Nigerian writers take up the problem of the Delta's environmental degradation, what role might literature play in imagining how Nigerian citizenship is determined by access to and control over oil? What imaginative resolutions or alternatives to traditional citizenship can contemporary writers offer in light of the inescapable grasp oil holds on modern global cultures and societies? This chapter explores these questions by bringing together two contemporary Nigerian novels—Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010) and Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007/2014)[38]—that, at first glance, offer opposing portrayals of the oil conflict. *Oil on Water* follows two Port Harcourt-based journalists, Rufus and Zaq, through the Delta in search of a British woman kidnapped by militant rebels. Their meandering journey through the Delta's

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[38] Unless otherwise noted in the text, all citations, images, and readings of *Every Day is for the Thief* refer to the 2014 edition.

creeks brings them into contact with the various local constituencies harmed by 60 years of oil extraction. Whereas oil saturates Habila's novel, it operates at the margins of Cole's book, a hybrid image-text and memoir of an unnamed narrator's return to Lagos after a 15-year absence. Though never depicted as explicitly as the oil-choked rivers in Habila's text, oil in *Thief* appears much as it does in Kashi's image—at the margins of perception, yet still undeniably present, and providing the impetus for the novel's plot points, such as fuel shortages and access to generators during blackouts.

Taken together, Habila's and Cole's novels illustrate how citizenship in Nigeria is defined by access to oil and its infrastructures—access that is determined by autonomous control over the substance's extraction and distribution, or by the financial freedom to purchase copious amounts of oil in its commodity forms, like diesel or petrol. Typically, citizenship is understood as the means by which an individual is made legible to the state, and has access to federal rights and privileges, such as the right to vote, travel across borders, and earn a living, among others. In Nigeria, however, citizenship is inherently competitive, prioritizing ethnic groups' welfare over that of the individual. Citizens do not come together of their own volition to form a collective nation; rather, ethnic groups—who have been forced into this national arrangement through colonial-drawn borders—compete for access to the best political and economic resources (Isumonah 667). When 80 percent of the nation's wealth comes from oil, participating in the oil industry, if not controlling it outright, constitutes the contemporary Nigerian concept of citizenship. Habila's and Cole's novels expose how oil's current systems of extraction and distribution thus leave the majority of Nigerian citizens marginalized, albeit on a spectrum of class status and ethnic privilege. Their texts collaboratively envision how daily life is shaped by access to oil, and how modes of participation in a civic space need to be altered, if not utterly

transformed, when that access is foreclosed. Throughout this chapter, I argue that *Oil on Water* and *Thief* are both invested in democratizing oil citizenship, which entails making participation in the oil economy more egalitarian and making oil infrastructures work for all of its peoples, even if they were not designed with them in mind.

Although they are literary texts, *Oil on Water* and *Every Day is for the Thief* are also deeply informed by photographic practices, making them appropriate examples for exploring how Azoulay's notion of civic space applies to the mass media forms that everyday Nigerians read and engage. Drawing on Habila's background as a journalist, *Oil on Water* stages an incisive critique of the Nigerian print media and the newspaper industry. Habila's protagonists are Rufus, a young journalist fresh out of school and seeking to prove himself, and Zaq, a world-weary reporter who clouds his memories of writing during the hostile Abacha dictatorship with excessive amounts of alcohol. Despite numerous readings of the novel which critique his journalist-protagonists' idealism,[39] Habila's engagement with journalism indexes the rich history of newspaper writing and publishing across the African continent. Prominent anticolonial leaders, including Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta, began their careers as newspapermen, cultivating their public personas through repeated engagements with readers in print. According to Derek Peterson and Emma Hunter, African newspapers were crucial sources of information and solidarity-building as anticolonial movements gained strength. Prior to the consolidation of news media under many national regimes post-independence, "The newspaper was essential reading, incumbent on any thinking person, an aspect of their *civic duty*. It claimed to *mediate the relationship* between rulers and ruled" (Peterson, Hunter 15, emphasis added). In other words, newspapers have historically provided a civic space for negotiating the nuances of

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[39] See Caminero-Santangelo, "Witnessing the Nature of Violence;" Wenzel, "Behind the Headlines;" and Medovoi.

citizenship and civic duty, akin to what Azoulay envisions for photography. Although set in an increasingly privatized media landscape, *Oil on Water* threads together this earlier, liberatory era of African journalism with Rufus' and Zaq's work in the Niger Delta.

Cole's novel engages with photography in the context of newer media forms, such as blogs and social media, which have become more accessible throughout the African continent in recent years due to widespread mobile phone usage (Abubakar 140). *Thief* began as a month-long blogging "experiment" written during Cole's own return to Lagos in 2006 (Hemon). The first edition of the novel was published solely in Nigeria in 2007, accompanied by several small black-and-white images interspersed throughout the text. Seven years later, after the success of Cole's internationally acclaimed "debut" novel, *Open City* (2011), he republished *Thief* with an entirely new set of black-and-white photos, now formatted as full-page or two-page spreads. This new set of images reflects changes in Cole's photographic practice following a bout with "Big Blind Spot Syndrome," a medical condition that produced sudden-onset blindness in his left eye (Paulson). After his recovery in 2011, Cole recalls that "My photography got a bit more meditative and mysterious. I began to pay attention to the ordinary in a more focused way…Having eye trouble made the ordinary glorious" (Paulson).[40]

Cole's renewed interest in the ordinary took him away from his extensive formal training in art history and recommitted him to increasingly accessible media forms, reflecting how Africans, especially Nigerians, are using new media to circulate stories that would previously have been censored by state outlets. Media studies scholar Tawana Kupe notes that, as globalization extended into Africa in the early 2000s, state control of media outlets began to

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[40] Both the medical condition and his renewed commitment to the ordinary served as inspiration for Cole's 2015 image-text *Blind Spot* (Paulson). Cole's literary experiments on social media, especially Twitter, are also well-documented. Inspired by Twitter's 140-character constraints, Cole initiated the collaboratively authored story "Hafiz" and wrote a 2013 thread entitled "Seven short stories about drones."

loosen, as new online outlets for communication and exchange emerged (143). Abdullahi

Abubakar concurs, writing that greater choice in media consumption and interpretation has led to

"a change in power relations between media and their audiences" (158), especially as social

media users trend toward younger demographics.[41] Cole's attraction to new media's ability to

provide "an instantaneous public" thus places his photographic experiments in a more

democratized context when reading the 2014 version of *Every Day is for the Thief* (Paulson).

Threading together Azoulay's civic space of photography, the ecocritical impetus to

make oil legible in new ways, and Habila's and Cole's investments in widely accessible media

forms, my argument in this chapter thus makes two claims. First, *Oil on Water* and *Every Day is*

for the Thief invoke mass media technologies, such as print journalism, blogs, and social media

photography, to create new literary spaces for participating in and negotiating Nigerian

citizenship when economic and political avenues to the oil industry are foreclosed. They

specifically engage numerous constituencies who have been disenfranchised by the Nigerian oil

economy. In the Delta, these include displaced indigenous clans, disillusioned militant rebels,

and journalists themselves; in Lagos, these include everyday residents whose daily practices are

affected by the reliance upon an informal economy, the affordability of diesel fuel, and oil

shortages. Second, by using their platforms as Anglophone African writers living and working in

American universities, Habila and Cole extend invitations into these participatory spaces of

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[41] Social media also places photography's functions in a new context, as evidenced by the recent #ENDSARS movement, which swept through Twitter in late October and early November 2020. Protesting against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), young Nigerian activists organized mass demonstrations across the country, and even took over the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos (Adichie). As word spread that Nigerian soldiers fired into crowds of non-violent protestors, video and photo evidence soon circulated through social media channels, achieving an unprecedented level of attention from non-local audiences. Reflecting on the violent October protests in *The New York Times*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie writes that the protests were unique in three ways: "the protesters insisted on not having a central leadership, it was social rather than traditional media that documented the protests, and, in a country with firm class divisions, the protests cut across class." Adichie's assessment indicates how social media democratizes access to and visibility of state corruption and violence.

citizenship to non-local spectators.[42] Despite the nuances of everyday Nigerian life that Habila

and Cole capture in their respective works, it is extremely likely that the majority of their readers

do not live in Nigeria, nor will they ever experience first-hand the oil-clogged waters of the Delta

or the car-clogged highways of Lagos. In this way, Habila's and Cole's novels function as

literary infrastructures. They facilitate connections across distances to bring non-local readers

into Azoulay's civic space, where these readers are called on to enact the civic duty of

"watching" these stories and to consider the ethical imperatives involved in engaging with oil

narratives responsibly.

After a brief historical overview of oil drilling in Nigeria, in which I juxtapose Azoulay's

definition of citizenship with those articulated by the Delta's ethnic minorities, my chapter

proceeds in two sections. The first, "Oil Citizenship and the Informal Economy," examines how

groups disenfranchised by oil seek to restore their economic rights by seizing control of the

informal economy. As discussed in Chapter 1, Lagosians enact the informal economy by

improvising opportunities to sell goods to motorists stuck in traffic, or, like Azaro's mother,

peddling wares in the marketplace; in this context, I explore how it operates adjacently to the

international oil trade. Here, I examine how Habila and Cole take seriously the ways in which the

Nigerian petro-state has failed its citizens, leading them to adopt morally questionable, and even

violent, practices to seize back the wealth that has been denied to them. In their respective

depictions of Delta insurgents kidnapping innocent people for ransom and a large network of

Lagos-based e-mail scammers, Habila and Cole explore how mass media technologies like

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[42] It is worth noting that both Cole and Habila are affiliated with creative writing programs at U.S. universities—
Harvard and George Mason, respectively. Their locations in these institutions place them in a unique relationship to
the American publishing industry, as many emerging writers build connections with publishers, editors, and literary
agents through MFA and other academic creative writing programs. I will consider how their institutional locations
intersect with their political and generational affiliations to other African writers in this chapter's conclusion.

journalism and e-mail offer opportunities to seize oil's methods of circulation, but ultimately do not provide satisfying avenues for restoring economic rights of citizenship. The second, "Repurposing Mass Media Technologies," examines how Habila and Cole utilize mass media forms to create new spaces for conceptualizing and articulating citizenship within their novels themselves. I analyze how Habila uses journalistic strategies to amplify the voices of those most marginalized by petro-violence, and read Cole's image-text pairings to consider how daily urban practices are shaped by an obsession over lack of access to oil. My chapter concludes by considering how, in Azoulay's terms, "the spectator is called to take part" in these civic spaces, if not to remedy these spectacular modes of violence, then to account for their own behaviors that make them complicit in this global oil culture as well (129).

A Note on Petro-Fiction

Before I introduce the historical context of oil drilling in Nigeria, I want to explain how my argument reads *Oil on Water* and *Every Day is for the Thief* as examples of "petro-fiction," or literature about oil, but also departs from dominant trends in that field. In 1992, Amitav Ghosh coined the term "petro-fiction" in his book review of Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt*. Comparing the American "Oil Encounter" to the spice trade, Ghosh laments the dearth of literature on oil as opposed to the abundance of representations of this earlier commodity boom (29). Ghosh does concede that writing the Great American Oil Novel is "inconceivable" because it would require wrestling with the United States' problematic political interventions in the Middle East to acquire oil wealth. However, aside from the political context, Ghosh notes that the difficulty of representing oil accurately "tends to trip fiction into incoherence," leading him to conclude that "we do not yet possess the form that can give the Oil Encounter a literary

expression" (30-31).[43] Because oil's ontology is so complex, and because it entangles a variety of material and discursive forms, Ghosh argues it is too difficult to represent within the temporal and epistemological constraints of literary narrative.

In the years since Ghosh published his sweeping claim, literary critics have responded by identifying a canon of "oil novels" and theorizing how petro-fiction can help readers interpret the worlds they inhabit as made possible by oil itself. Graeme Macdonald and Imre Szeman respond in kind to Ghosh, both to assuage his representational anxieties and to point to a body of oil literature that he overlooks in his review. While these critics identify texts like Upton Sinclair's *Oil!,* Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* as recognizable examples of texts concerned with oil and fuel, their general consensus is that petro-fiction ought to encompass much more than the explicit presence of oil itself. Szeman and Macdonald are interested in how energy sources like oil are required to produce literature itself, powering the machines to assemble books and fueling the trucks and airplanes that distribute copies to booksellers. Oil becomes legible not so much in the themes of a literary work, but in the material conditions that enable this work to exist in the first place. Macdonald frames this argument as the relationship between energy "in" fiction, i.e., thematic representation, and energy "of" fiction, i.e., how texts are objects that are also imbricated in the fossil fuel industry (8). By this logic, Szeman observes, "*any and all* examples of cultural expression in the era of oil" fall under the rubric of petro-fiction, regardless of the specificities of its thematic representations, because oil has held such a hegemonic presence in modern life (283). As such, the advent of petro-fiction as

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[43] As discussed in my Introduction, Ghosh makes a variant of this claim nearly 25 years later in his assessment of climate change and literature in *The Great Derangement*. He claims that "serious," realist fiction—the purview of the modern novel—is unable to represent climate disasters satisfactorily because these events' unprecedented destructive power would appear to be improbable, thus violating the realist novel's cornerstone characteristics (23).

a genre signals both a shift in how literary thematics are prioritized and an opportunity to create a reading methodology that is sensitive to oil's inextricable entanglements with "social practice, cultural form and political expression" (Szeman 286).

While Macdonald and Szeman leave open the question of *how* to go about reading for oil when it is not thematically foregrounded, a second cohort of scholars theorize methodologies for petro-fiction by following Patricia Yaeger's call to think about oil in terms of an "energy unconscious" (309). Informing Szeman and Macdonald's interest in the "energy of fiction" and drawing on Fredric Jameson's "political unconscious," Yaeger's "energy unconscious" argues for reframing literary historical periodization according to the energy sources that made texts' productions possible. Such a reframing would remind literary critics that energy usage is not a new phenomenon and would also bring more critical attention to the environments and communities who unevenly fuel global energy supplies, like those in the Niger Delta. Within the last few years, two methodological approaches have emerged for applying the energy unconscious to petro-fiction. The first examines how oil's ontology impacts formal narrative elements, such as plot, narrative pacing, and point of view. Stephanie LeMenager and Shouhei Tanaka turn to narrative form in their respective readings of *Oil on Water* and novels by Karen Tei Yamashita, and search for literary conventions that mimic the material and social behaviors of oil. In LeMenager's reading of *Oil on Water*, she notes that the novel's temporally unruly and circular plot mimics the difficulty of making sense of oil. *Oil on Water*, in her view, is best read as a series of "associative logics" that allow the reader to follow Rufus' non-linear narration as oil pervades his memories and his sense-making role as a journalist-narrator (127-129). Similarly, Tanaka explores how Yamashita's narrative pacing speeds up or slows down according to her depictions of highway infrastructures in Los Angeles. When one character shifts

gears in their car, Tanaka argues this "parallels the novel's fast-paced chapter switches, stutters, and jumps across perspective, location, and time, such that automobility translates into erotics of sped-up emplotment" (206).

The second method deliberately pursues the energy unconscious' "blind spots" in contemporary literatures and questions what this absence tells us about energy cultures writ large. Roman Bartosch coins "the petroleum unconscious" as an offshoot of Yaeger's work. In his method, he interrogates Nigerian texts like Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* and Cole's *Open City* for their apparent celebrations of energy cultures, as their cosmopolitan characters take multiple transatlantic flights per year (126). Although Bartosch does not go so far as to "diagnose" texts as engaging with oil or not, Amy Riddle's application of the energy unconscious critiques most prior examples of petro-fiction for their failures to engage with oil's commodity form. Departing from LeMenager and Tanaka, Riddle rejects mimeticism between oil's materiality and narrative elements. She argues that petro-fiction naturalizes oil, making it appear as an intrinsic part of the physical environment rather than a commodity that has been produced and exploited under specific socio-historical and economic conditions. In fact, Riddle goes on to say that, in texts like *Oil on Water*, "the more oil is *described* in a work, the more it disappears" (65, emphasis in original); the energy unconscious thus produces an erasure of social commodification via oil's hypervisibility.[44] She argues instead that texts which properly engage oil's "social uses," like Munif's *Cities of Salt*, are the true examples of petro-fiction (66). In citing the same textual example as Ghosh, it appears Riddle's argument has brought Ghosh's full circle. Whereas Ghosh's complaint was that oil is not visible enough in literary texts, Riddle argues that petro-fiction in fact functions best when oil cannot be seen at all.

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[44] Riddle's argument here parallels Christopher Jones' critique of the energy humanities' excessive focus on oil at the expense of other energy sources, a phenomenon he terms "petromyopia" (1).

My argument in this chapter shares this question with current debates on petro-fiction and the energy unconscious: how do we redirect critical attention to energies and infrastructures that are already present in our environments, but are escaping notice? Like the thin, rainbow-tinted line curving across the center of Kashi's photograph, I am interested in how *Oil on Water* and *Every Day is for the Thief* cultivate a more critical consciousness among their non-local readers to recognize oil and its material, discursive, and social functions not only in the lives of Habila's and Cole's characters, but also in their own. As Macdonald writes, petro-fiction is certainly invested in thematic issues surrounding oil, "but it's also about *the world* a specific fuel creates and maintains…from sequestered pipelines and petro-guerrillas to compromised forms of democracy" (19, emphasis added). My analysis is ultimately invested in this world of oil, and my readings of Habila and Cole explore how oil governs both Nigerian citizens and non-local readers, drawing transnational connections by constituting the lives and habits of those in the Global North just as much as those for whom oil is an everyday, tangible reality.

In that vein, I depart from extending the methods of the energy unconscious that rely on exposure for exposure's sake. While my argument in Chapter 1 argued in favor of magical realism's ability to expose the normalizing logics of infrastructural development, I find the demand for petro-fiction to expose "unconscious" oil cultures at odds with the ways in which Habila and Cole depict Nigerian environments as already and irrevocably shaped by oil. Further, Bartosch admits his method is invested in shock and surprise, writing that the critic's exposé of oil's absences in a literary text will "shock" readers "into recognizing this habituation of perception" (Levine qtd. Bartosch 129). Depending on these affects invokes Azoulay's critique of Sontag; we are still waiting on something in the war photograph to shock or move the viewer into an ethical stance, when in fact there is a responsibility at play to engage in ethical

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spectatorship regardless of how the viewer "feels" about it (Azoulay 85, 122).[45] While it is important to interrogate the absence of oil in literary texts, especially those produced in and depicting Global North petro-cultures, I am ultimately interested in what Habila's and Cole's texts *are* doing productively rather than what they omit. And what *Oil on Water* and *Every Day is for the Thief* are doing is providing civic spaces for those disenfranchised by oil, and calling on non-local spectators to participate in these spaces as well. In doing so, they move petro-fiction beyond the goal of "*knowing* oil better" (Macdonald 8, emphasis in original). Rather, they respond to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's crucial questions: "What does knowledge *do*?" and "*How*, in short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its causes and effects?" (124). Habila's and Cole's investments in mass media technologies like journalism, blogs, and social media photography theorize "what knowledge does" in the context of Nigerian petro-cultures. *Oil on Water* and *Every Day is for the Thief* jointly determine new socialities of oil both in Nigeria and among their non-local readers. They extend invitations to think critically about what it means to be an "oil citizen" and to approach oil through an ethical civic duty to the humans, non-humans, and built/natural environments that oil unites.

Failures of Oil Citizenship in Postcolonial Nigeria

Oil drilling is contemporaneous with Nigeria's independence from British colonialism in 1960, making oil's production, consumption, circulation, and environmental degradation a uniquely postcolonial problem. As numerous historians have noted, oil drilling began in 1958 when Shell-BP discovered oil in the Delta town of Oloibiri (Watts, "Sweet and Sour" 36). After

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[45] When I turn to nuclear infrastructures in Chapter 4, I reverse this argument by examining South Asian sentimental responses—specifically Arundhati Roy's hysterical prose in "The End of Imagination"—as the only appropriate response to nuclear catastrophe and mutually assured destruction. Whereas my argument in this chapter considers how citizenship provides a path to ethics, Chapter 4 grounds ethics in shared feeling itself, specifically the realization that nuclear infrastructures materialize shared vulnerability, whether in South Asia or elsewhere.

a brief interlude during the Biafran War (1967-1970), [46] the Nigerian oil industry emerged in earnest in the 1970s. Nigeria's oil boom came about as a result of the embargo on exports from Arab nations in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to the United States and its allies, as a result of the U.S.' support of Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur war (Adunbi 48). Although this triggered the "oil crisis" for many Western nations, it created an opportunity for non-Arab countries like Nigeria to introduce their product to markets in the Global North with less competition, resulting in higher revenues for those exporting countries, many of which were located in the Global South. It is hard to overstate the wide-ranging cultural, economic, social, and political shifts that oil initiated in Nigeria. Less than 10 years after oil was discovered, 300 miles of pipelines had been constructed throughout the Delta, and production averaged 275,000 barrels per day (Watts, "Sweet" 36). By the early 1970s, oil exports accounted for 80 percent of national revenue (Apter 27).

Beyond these astonishing economic figures, however, oil also provided a cohesive cultural and social identity to Nigerians, whose loyalties tended to lie with their ethnic group rather than the new nation itself. According to political scientists Victor Adefemi Isumonah, citizenship in Nigeria aligns closely with "ethnic justice," which "assumes that respect for group rights is a guarantee for individual rights by equating ethnic group rights with social justice" (667). In other words, citizenship is not a universal right of those born in or naturalized to Nigeria, but rather a competitive set of resources and privileges, often characterized by "oil revenues…whether oil is exploited in their homeland or not" (Isumonah 667). Such competition

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[46] The Biafran War (1967-1970), also known as the Nigerian Civil War, was a failed attempt to create a separate state controlled by the Igbo ethnic majority in southeastern Nigeria. Many ethnic minorities, including the Ogoni, were unwillingly brought into the conflict because their territories overlapped with the new Biafran borders. Ken Saro-Wiwa argues that the Igbo leaders' desire to control Delta oilfields served as a "hidden agenda" to the civil war (28). Saro-Wiwa chronicles how Ogoni casualties during the war, as well as their abandonment by Igbo leaders after the failed secession, constitute the ongoing "genocide" against the Ogoni people.

across ethnic groups has its roots in Nigeria's creation during the colonial period in the early twentieth century, when the colony was arbitrarily divided and consolidated into three regions based on the majority ethnic group in each area—the North (Hausa-Fulani), the East (Igbo), and the West (Yoruba)—with little regard for the cultural nuances or territorial affiliations among Nigeria's 300-plus ethnic groups (Omezi 279). Although Nigerian identity and citizenship tends to cohere around the oil industry, oil is paradoxically scarce throughout the country, revealing how decades of political corruption have diverted revenues and profits away from Nigeria's citizens and into the pockets of ruling elites. As Fernando Coronil first argued in his study of Venezuela's oil boom, oil produces "fabulous fictions" of wealth that position the state "as powerful magicians who pull social reality, from public institutions to cosmogonies, out of a hat" (2). The "magic" of oil is, of course, an illusion that consolidates power with the state while citizens enjoy the sudden, yet often temporary benefits of oil wealth. Throughout historical accounts of oil in Nigeria, such corruption manifests through the language of failure. According to geographer Michael Watts, Nigerians are on the whole poorer today than they were at the time of independence, leading him to conclude that such rampant economic mismanagement indicates that "Nigeria has become a model failure" ("Sweet" 44). Such characterizations pervade accounts of both Lagos and the Niger Delta as spaces that ought to have flourished in the wake of the oil boom, but have in fact been abandoned by the corrupt political elite.

According to Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, the aftermath of the Biafran War created the conditions to revise federal revenue allocations of oil profits (24). With Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon and several other military leaders installed as the new heads of state, the government devised a series of decrees in 1969 that established precedents to allow the government to claim upwards of 50 percent of oil revenues rather than distributing these funds

among the producing regions (25). By 1985, local governments received only 10 percent of revenues (27). This skewed economic system only compounded ongoing environmental degradation. Watts reports that the Delta averages about 300 oil spills per year, while natural gas flares produce "35 million tons of carbon dioxide and 12 million tons of methane," marking a significant contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions ("Petro-Violence" 196). Due to this excessive pollution, formerly thriving villages and towns throughout the Delta have gradually been emptied of their populations. As Watts writes of Oloibiri, the first site marked for drilling in 1958, "it is now a wretched backwater, a sort of rural slum home to barely 1,000 souls who might as well live in another century. No running water, no electricity, no roads, and no functioning primary school" ("Sweet" 37). Watts' sketch of Oloibiri's infrastructural collapse is indicative of how Delta peoples and places were abandoned both by oil corporations and the Nigerian government itself. Whereas oil made new infrastructures, like the highway systems discussed in Chapter 1, possible in urban spaces like Lagos, it destroyed them in the Niger Delta.

These dual economic and environmental failures on behalf of the Nigerian government have produced a keen awareness among Delta inhabitants that citizenship in the petro-state is determined by access to and control over oil. The Ogoni are perhaps the most recognizable of the Delta's "micro-minorities," due to the iconic activism—and martyrdom—of Ken Saro-Wiwa (Nixon 106). A television writer turned environmental activist, Saro-Wiwa became increasingly involved with the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In 1991, Saro-Wiwa and MOSOP authored the Ogoni Bill of Rights, a document presented to the Nigerian federal government declaring the Ogoni's rights to economic and political self-determination. Throughout the document, MOSOP details the historical violations of the Ogoni's trust and notes that Nigerian independence in 1960 merely continued

the colonial control of Ogoni lands and resources that existed under British rule. In outlining

their demands for political, economic, and cultural autonomy, the Ogoni Bill of Rights invokes

the rhetoric of citizenship for two specific purposes. In one sense, the Ogoni equate economic

access to oil revenues as a sign of their full inclusion in the Nigerian nation-state. As Wenzel

observes, the Delta minorities "know what they are being excluded from… Desires for inclusion

in modernity are not merely 'consumerist' desires, but also desires for consumption and for the

infrastructural prerogatives of citizenship" (*Disposition* 82-83). The Ogoni do not necessarily

want oil drilling to stop so that they can restore the environment to its pre-drilling state. Rather,

they want to enhance their access to oil infrastructures to better participate in the modes of

modernity and citizenship that have been denied to them, marking a noticeable contrast to the

ways in which Okri's *Famished Road* trilogy resisted the infrastructural logics of "modernity"

imposed on slum communities through neocolonial urban planning.

The second invocation of citizenship envisions a more abstract and even universal

understanding of basic human rights, referring to "the restoration of inalienable rights," the

creation of "a democratic Nigeria," and the establishment of "a realistic society of equals"

(MOSOP 2). By staking their claims on visions of inclusion, democracy, and equality, the Ogoni

reveal how they are currently Nigerian citizens in name only. They are governed under the

authority of the Nigerian state but, as a micro-minority, they do not possess the same privileged

rights as majority ethnic groups, such as the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa-Fulani. Azoulay argues

that these realities of citizenship—the fact of being governed, and the ability of the state to

divide the governed into privileged and non-privileged groups—obscure the more powerful

relations of citizens' political and ethical duties to each other, rather than to the sovereign power

or the state itself (17). In the context of Nigeria, however, citizenship indexes not so much where

your passport is from or which elections you can vote in. Rather, it determines what kind of life is livable under the conditions of the oil economy. Thus, citizenship here takes on an ethical dimension: how do Nigerians live in relation to one another when citizenship is constructed through a highly controlled and artificially scarce resource? Whereas Azoulay proposes the photographic encounter as a space for parsing these ethical questions, the Ogoni use their written document to imagine an alternative space of civic duty—a public sphere in which their demands are recognized as valid and require an ethical response from their fellow citizens.

Ken Saro-Wiwa's execution in 1995 came as a serious blow to Ogoni morale and to Delta peoples' struggles for political and economic autonomy more broadly. Oil spills and gas flares continued to poison the Delta environments, making the agricultural and subsistence economies even scarcer than before. In the absence of a widespread non-violent protest strategy, and as economic hardships grew more dire, opposition to the oil corporations' and military's strongholds in the Delta became increasingly violent. Beginning in the aftermath of the corrupt 2003 elections and continuing through negotiations for a 2009 amnesty package, numerous armed insurgent groups emerged to attempt to reclaim the oil wealth they believed had been stolen from them. These rebels bombed oil tankers, pipelines, and facilities throughout the Delta, and began kidnapping innocent people from the streets of Port Harcourt and holding them for ransom (Adunbi xiv).[47] While many groups were informal and dispersed throughout the region, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) consolidated in 2005 and quickly became known worldwide for their guerrilla attacks on oil infrastructures. Through

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[47] I return to the topic of insurgency and terrorism in Chapter 4 through my discussions of the entangled histories of nuclear weaponization and Islamic fundamentalism in South Asia, and specifically in Kashmir. While the insurgent groups in South Asia are not as explicitly motivated by environmental degradation as those in the Niger Delta, both Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* depict the decline of agrarian communities in Afghanistan and Kashmir as a result of sectarian violence and land mines.

bombings and physical takeovers, MEND targeted oil pipelines and stations in attacks known as "shutting in," halting the production of up to 900,000 barrels per day, and supported "oil bunkering," or illegally selling harvested oil (Kashi 25). Kashi chronicles his pursuit of MEND in an interlude in *Curse of the Black Gold*. He reproduces a series of e-mails he exchanged with MEND's elusive leader, Jomo Gbomo, in 2006. Although the two never meet, their e-mails reveal how quickly violence escalates among the rebels and the Nigerian military, which detained Kashi and his fixer for four days (26-27). As Habila's *Oil on Water* will show, inhabitants of the Delta are quite literally caught in their crossfire, leading one to question who— or what—the rebels are invested in protecting.

Political anthropologist Omolade Adunbi coins the concept of "oil citizenship" to explore this very question. In an extensive ethnography comprising over seven years of fieldwork, Adunbi interviews numerous members of the Delta's ethnic minorities, including the Ijaws, Ìlàjẹs, and Ikwerres, to understand their relationship to the oil-producing creeks as both social and environmental spaces. Throughout his fieldwork, Adunbi notes a common understanding of oil as an "ancestral promise" (6). This concept holds two meanings: first, it signifies the return of the ancestors, who were sold into slavery, in the physical form of crude oil. Second, the ancestors reward their loyal descendants, who have maintained their connections to the lands from which their ancestors were stolen, by transforming oil into a valuable resource (Adunbi 16). The Delta's ethnic minorities thus read the state's decades-long theft of oil not merely as a denial of economic autonomy, as Saro-Wiwa and MOSOP argued, but a direct assault on the gift of their ancestral promise. Insurgency becomes a viable method for restoring what rightfully belongs to the Delta peoples by virtue of their ancestry and their connection to the Delta's lands.

At first glance, MEND's reclamation of the oil-polluted creeks seems to produce a vibrant self-articulation of citizenship, one that offers a similar space for agency as Azoulay's civic space of photography. She writes, "becoming a citizen in the citizenry of photography entails seeking, by means of photography, to rehabilitate one's citizenship or that of someone else who has been stripped of it" (110). Here, citizenship is not conferred by the state but negotiated among participants in the photographic encounter. However, whereas Azoulay's formulation of the civil contract defines citizenship as a mutual, ethical obligation to the photographed other, Adunbi's oil citizenship recognizes the ethnic groups' complicity with oil corporations, as they ultimately justify violence to recuperate economic wealth. In such a framework, militant violence perpetuates environmental degradation by producing more oil spills and antagonizing the government rather than working toward an actionable solution (Iheka 86). Seeking citizenship while extending ecological violence thus produces something akin to mutually assured destruction—the subject of my discussion of nuclear infrastructures in Chapter 4—as both indigenous groups and their local environments continue to suffer while responding to the oil corporations' stronghold with spectacular modes of violence.

By the time the global oil prices fell in 1981, the economic and political failures that comprised the reality of life in the Delta would come to characterize Lagos itself. Just four years earlier, in 1977, Lagos served as the site of the Second Festival of Black and African Arts and Culture (FESTAC), a celebration of Nigerian culture that displayed its overnight oil wealth through a series of spectacular performances (Apter 5). FESTAC provided Nigeria the opportunity to announce its arrival as a modern state, free from the burdens of its colonial past, and celebrate its culture under the banner of oil wealth. The festival simultaneously performed Nigerian national unity, smoothed over ethnic tensions and hierarchies, and concealed the

inequalities of the oil economy itself. However, these celebrations were short-lived, as Lagos gradually failed to live up to the government's "dual vision" as "a rebellion from the colonial past" and a symbol of "the power and stability of the new Nigeria" (Immerwahr 171). Because Lagos had become Nigeria's commercial center during the oil boom, migrants from rural areas of the country came to the city in search of jobs, lured by the false promises of oil wealth. As discussed in Chapter 1, Lagos' housing units were already severely segregated and unevenly developed as part of the legacy of colonial urban planning, and as such could not handle the sudden surge in population. Migrants were forced into expanding slum areas, many of which lacked the basic infrastructural needs that were also missing from Delta villages (Immerwahr 176). Here, an important parallel emerges between Lagos and the Delta—namely, the exclusion of wide swaths of the Nigerian population from the fruits of the oil economy despite promises from the government to the contrary. Just as the Delta insurgents take matters into their own hands, so too do the disenfranchised Lagosians learn to manipulate oil's "informal economy"— the modes of exchange adjacent to the transnational oil trade that attempt to reroute oil wealth back to the people who have been denied access to its profits.

Oil Citizenship and the Informal Economy

If, according to Wenzel, the Nigerian nation is imagined through oil, then the question of citizenship comes under pressure when so many constituencies are denied access, either to a share of this resource's profits or to the commodity form itself. In what follows, I examine how *Oil on Water* and *Every Day is for the Thief* depict the ways in which inhabitants of both the Delta and Lagos attempt to seize control of oil's modes of circulation in order to reassert their claims to oil citizenship. Both the Delta insurgents in *Oil on Water* and the 419 scam e-mailers in *Thief* seek to leverage mass media technologies to target distributive components of oil

infrastructures, such as pipelines, gas stations, and the financial networks that allow oil to flow northward, literally. By attacking the material means by which oil circulates throughout Nigeria and beyond, both the militants and scammers demonstrate a keen understanding both of how oil infrastructures function and how, as Wenzel writes, they have been strategically excluded from those functions. Both the insurgents and e-mail scammers rely on oil's informal economy to reroute oil wealth back to the people and restore the ancestral promise that is rightfully theirs. However, Habila and Cole reveal that attacking oil infrastructures through the informal economy only restores economic autonomy to a certain extent, as the broader, "formal" economy still remains in place. By critiquing the informal economy as an insufficient means to restore oil citizenship, Habila and Cole raise questions about what a more egalitarian space of oil citizenship might look like, and what kinds of literary and media forms can assist in imagining those spaces.

Militants, Media, and Oil Citizenship in <u>Oil on Water</u>

Most readings of *Oil on Water* identify the insurgents, Nigerian military, and the oil corporations as the primary actors (re)producing violence throughout the Delta. Violence is provoked in large part due to a complex bribery scheme, in which money flows from the oil corporations to the military, compensating them for ambushing insurgents or retaliating against a pipeline attack (Habila, *OOW* 38). Alternately, the insurgents receive a series of ransoms to resolve the kidnappings, bribing corporations for a temporary stay in violent attacks until the ransom runs out and the insurgents again target pipelines or oil rigs to start the cycle all over again. Thus, by destroying, or threatening to destroy, oil's modes of circulation, the insurgents' "livelihood" consists solely of ransoms or bribes, siphoning off a small share of the oil corporations' massive wealth which they view to be their rightful inheritance (*OOW* 7). These

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parasitical relationships between corporations and insurgents extend to the Nigerian print media as well. As part of their campaigns to extort oil corporations, the insurgents depend on press coverage from journalists like Rufus and Zaq to report on their kidnapped hostages, like Isabel Floode. In this section, I read *Oil on Water* through Adunbi's lens of oil citizenship, not to connect Habila's representations of insurgents with ancestral promise, but to explain how a critique of insurgent violence is inseparable from a critique of Nigerian print media. I focus on the parasitical relationship between the insurgents' desire for publicity and the newspapers' willingness to cover the same, spectacle-driven stories to boost sales and subscriptions. Habila's critique of this relationship, I argue, reveals how journalistic witnessing in and of itself is not an intrinsic good. As Wenzel and LeMenager state, making environmental injustice visible does not guarantee movement toward a viable solution. Later in this chapter, I go on to show how Habila infuses his narrative with a journalistic ethos to amplify the voices of those constituencies most severely marginalized by oil extraction. In doing so, *Oil on Water* demonstrates how the novel extends Azoulay's mandate for civic responsibility by revitalizing journalism as an ethical practice.

Habila describes the press' role in the cycles of petro-violence as feeding into the kidnappers' "eager[ness] for publicity," dutifully appearing when an invitation is extended, listening to the rebels' "long speeches about the environment and their reasons for taking up arms," and bringing the ransom order back to the city (*OOW* 54). The problem here is the journalists' willingness to act as "pawns," in Wenzel's assessment ("Headlines" 13). Indeed, Isabel's husband, James approaches the *Daily Star*, where Zaq works, because he is advised that the quickest way to resolve her kidnapping is to hire journalists. Despite the risks involved in brokering a ransom agreement, the exclusive access to the kidnapping story is too good for many

journalists to pass up. In the words of Zaq's editor, Beke, "How often does the oil company come knocking on your door, asking for a favor? We're talking petrodollars here, and a major scoop! Come on. I can imagine the headlines already. This will be the making of us. Our circulation will hit the roof" (*OOW* 36). The oil corporations thus control their own press coverage, in addition to bribes to the military and ransoms to insurgents. It is important to note that these financial relationships construct a secondary economy of oil, one that is adjacent to the "official" trade among nations. Contrary to Amy Riddle's claim that there is "an absent representation of oil as a commodity" in *Oil on Water* (57), oil wealth shapes the toxic social relations and power dynamics among the corporations, military, insurgents, and press. However, unlike the primary economy in which oil's commodity forms exist as gasoline, diesel, and other consumable goods, here oil circulates in an informal economy, in which the corporations' petrodollars keep the insurgents reliant on their violent methods for survival and determine which journalists can access these spectacular episodes. Oil corporations' massive financial influence thus reinforces the insurgents' unequal access to oil, and also effectively privatizes local Nigerian media outlets by shaping the stories the press can and will tell.

Habila draws attention to the privatization of local media in two ways—by emphasizing the role of spectacular or gruesome photography in boosting newspapers' circulations, and by explaining how Rufus is complicit in the speed-obsessed media cycle as well. During the first few days of their search for Isabel, Rufus, Zaq, and a handful of reporters from Lagos wander through the Delta's circuitous creeks and mangrove forests. Although this journey allows them to witness the extensive oil pollution first-hand, the journalists' attention is not piqued until they encounter the aftermath of a gun battle on a small island. Drawn to the island by the sight of a burning boat, the journalists, including Rufus, process the scene entirely through their cameras.

Habila describes how they jump out of their boat and wade through the water, cameras in hand, "clicking away" (*OOW* 75). Within minutes of their arrival, the journalists find a subject worthy of a front-page photograph:

> One of the men gave a shout from behind a tree, and when we went to him we found the journalists in an excited huddle, cameras flashing. A body in a torn blue shirt. It was half covered by bamboo leaves so that the stomach was only partially visible, but even that was too much. Undigested food mixed with blood covered the grass around the corpse, flies hovered and descended, oblivious to the clicking cameras and the sound of retching going on all around. (*OOW* 77)

Here the impulse to photograph is juxtaposed with the journalists' own horror in processing the violent aftermath of the gunfight. The issue at hand is not so much whether the journalists are wrong to photograph such gruesome evidence of petro-violence; as Sontag writes, violence has always served as a primary justification for what counts as news, referencing the cliché, "If it bleeds, it leads" (*Regarding* 18). Rather, I find this scene so striking because the journalists' purpose in capturing these images of a deceased insurgent elides the broader political context of petro-violence in the Delta. These images are taken in the service of a privatized media. James Floode has hired all of the journalists, and their editors have signed off on this assignment. By funding the journalists' endeavors, the oil corporations have effectively hired them as mercenaries, ensuring that any published story or image will conceal the histories of exploitation and extraction that have led this gunfight to take place as a last resort for insurgents' claims to citizenship in the petro-state. In other words, by privatizing the media, oil corporations seek to hinder the process of "watching" photographs—the ability to reconstruct the socio-political context surrounding the photograph itself (Azoulay 16). Instead, the captured photograph

becomes iconic, allowing the spectacular moment of gun violence to represent the entirety of the insurgents' conflict and "vault[ing]" Isabel's kidnapping "back to the front page once again" to boost sales for a few days before attention recedes once more (*OOW* 98).

Rufus' and Zaq's contrasting approaches to the gunfight scene also indicate Rufus' initial complicity with the privatized media cycle. Although Rufus idolizes Zaq's heroic past as a freedom-fighting journalist who faced persecution under the Abacha regime, he is also determined to "make it" as a journalist in Port Harcourt. As Rufus naively observes, his goal as a journalist is "to be a witness for posterity," whereas Zaq's more seasoned and cynical perspective on journalism has long given up such aphorisms (*OOW* 60). Zaq processes the scene by refusing to take photographs, not even bringing a camera with him. Instead, he takes notes and puzzles over gun cartridges to attempt to recreate the militants' attack on the insurgents. Meanwhile, Rufus' relationship to photography is slightly different than his colleagues. He looks down on their frenzied attempts "to get a better and even better shot of the dead bodies" (78) and later remarks how many of the journalists rely solely on the "garish" images to sell papers (98). Rufus' story on the gunfight, however, "captured more attention than the other reports, perhaps because I had referenced and quoted Zaq a lot in my piece, and also because, due to my training, I knew how to use pictures more effectively than the other reporters" (99). Rufus' images supplement his story, providing "the shrill urgency and tragedy" that he omits in his writing, allowing the images to speak for themselves while he reports the facts of the situation elsewhere (99). Habila does not provide further detail about what Rufus' "close-ups" contain, but it is interesting to speculate on Rufus' ethical position in relation to his photographed and reported material, especially when this story provides him with short-term professional attention and accolades (99). Even if his photographs are not as spectacular as his colleagues', they still

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circulate within the same privatized media sphere. Further, Rufus' success is only contingent upon his continued ability to produce content for the paper, regardless of whether that content helps resolve Isabel's kidnapping. In staging his critique of the media's role in perpetuating petro-violence, Habila's novel raises the following questions: to what extent is Rufus even aware of his complicit role even as he narrates his experiences to the reader? And what might the purchase of local journalism be amid such an extensively privatized media landscape?

Despite the extent to which the oil corporations have privatized the media, the insurgents still desire press coverage to highlight how power remains concentrated in the corporations and government, thus leaving the insurgents disenfranchised from oil citizenship. In the novel's final pages, Rufus comes face-to-face at last with the Professor, the elusive leader of the kidnappers who have captured Isabel. At this point in the plot, Rufus has been fired from his job at *The Reporter*, ironically because he has been away from Port Harcourt for too long and has not produced any new stories. Despite the apparent loss of his platform, Rufus still listens to the Professor's plea for media coverage, which includes reporting on the insurgents' latest attack on an oil depot, and their plans to escalate violence to previously unseen levels:

> We are not the barbarians the government propagandists say we are. We are for the people. Everything we do is for the people, what will we gain if we terrorize them?...That is why I am letting you go, so you can write the truth…Write only the truth. Tell them about the flares you see at night and the oil on the water. And the soldiers forcing us to escalate the violence every day. Tell them how we are hounded daily in our own land. Where do they want us to go, tell me, where? Tell them we are going nowhere. This land belongs to us. (*OOW* 234)

The Professor's speech gives direct voice to the insurgents' platform, connecting their financial dispossession with the environmental degradation caused by the oil corporations. Importantly though, as Byron Caminero-Santangelo points out, the Professor refuses to take credit for his own role in exacerbating environmental and political violence, a sharp disconnect from the previous page in which he details his group's plans to blow up an oil rig. Caminero-Santangelo writes that the Professor relies on "naturalizing rhetoric" to depict the rebels "as the embodiment of a place that is intrinsically in opposition to petrocapitalism and its effects" ("Witnessing" 232). However, such rhetoric elides the reality that the rebels "remain reliant on oil wealth, instrumentalize and objectify 'the people' they claim to represent, and contribute to the ecological devastation of 'the land'" ("Witnessing" 232). In effect, by relying on local journalists' press coverage, as the Professor's speech indicates, the insurgents perpetuate the cycles of petro-violence and make mutually assured destruction more likely rather than use their violent methods to advocate for real change. To return once more to Riddle's argument, she claims that *Oil on Water* naturalizes oil as a social and environmental phenomenon at the expense of recognizing oil's powerful function as a commodity. While I do not think Riddle's claim applies to the entire novel, her argument provides interesting insight into the rebels' complicated position. Their choice to naturalize their role as defenders of the land and Delta peoples clouds their own participation in oil's commodification within an informal economy. By relying on bribes and ransoms siphoned off from corporations, and by feeding into privatized media networks, the Professor and his followers demonstrate how violent modes of protest may be a last resort to claim oil citizenship, but they will not be liberatory ones. Instead, the informal economy allows power to remain concentrated in the corporations and government, failing to achieve the goal of making oil infrastructures work for all peoples.

I find it interesting that, in navigating his ethical obligation to bear witness and report "the Truth" of the insurgents' violence, Rufus chooses *not* to publish the Professor's story in an established journalistic outlet. Leerom Medovoi reads Rufus' lack of journalistic output at the end of *Oil on Water* as a failure of the novel's capacity to provide a "politically efficacious" solution to the Delta's socio-environmental crisis (23). While I agree with Medovoi that *Oil on Water* does not go so far as to imagine "another political ecology altogether, one no longer organized in the service of a global fossil-fuel based regime of accumulation" (23), I read Rufus' turning away from publishing as an ethical refusal to perpetuate the cycles of petro-violence that this section has discussed. As we saw in my reading of *Infinite Riches*, the Governor-General's (re)writing of Nigerian history frames both writing and witnessing as violent acts, functioning as an imperial durability to conceal the truth of the colonial project. Platform and context are both incredibly salient concerns for Rufus and, by extension, Habila. In turning away from an industry so deeply tied to oil revenues, however, Rufus turns *toward* the literary. It is the novel's account that remains, reflecting how, as Sule Egya writes, the narrative adopts the "confrontational" and "militant" tactics of the insurgents for more effective political ends (95). By choosing the novel as his platform, Habila makes legible the ways in which oil pervades contemporary local journalism's privatized landscape, converting attempts to participate and negotiate civic identity into monetized transactions that continue to fuel the oil corporations' power. As my next section will show, Rufus applies his journalistic ethos to uplift the voices of those most severely marginalized by oil, whose accounts appear neither in local newspapers' specialized interests, nor in global media's accounts of the Delta.

419 Scams and the Informal Economy in <u>*Every Day is for the Thief*</u>

While the informal economy in the Delta keeps power concentrated in the hands of transnational corporations and the Nigerian government, in Lagos it is a widely accepted fact of life, ranging from street vendors selling black-market goods to money laundering, fraud, and widespread bribery throughout most civic institutions (Immerwahr 166; Watts, "Sweet" 44). As discussed in Chapter 1, Lagos' uneven urban development produced sharp class disparities, as poorer groups and migrants were repeatedly relocated into slums far from the enclave-esque metropolitan center. In such a stratified economic environment, improvisational practices emerge as modes of survival, including peddlers selling wares to drivers stopped in traffic, or merchants setting up stalls beneath the spectacular highway overpasses that were built in celebration of oil wealth (Koolhaas 179). As we saw in *The Famished Road* trilogy, Azaro's mother participates in this informal economy as a peddler herself, selling wares in the marketplaces or along the streets where Azaro often wanders away from her.

Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* presents the informal economy through similar lenses of survival and improvisation. However, it is the informal economy's supposedly immoral nature that initially shocks Cole's unnamed narrator, who chronicles his return to Lagos after a 15-year absence in New York. Literary critics including Yvonne Kappel, Katherine Hallemeier, and Birgit Neumann typically read the narrator as a reincarnation of the disgruntled colonial traveler, encountering a foreign landscape and critiquing all he sees as different and inefficient when compared with the comforts of home. The narrator, however, holds a more complex identity, at once the objective observer, viewing Lagos with fresh eyes, and a native informant, taking the reader through streets and neighborhoods he knows intimately. This position allows him to make a moral judgment on the informal economy—"No one else seems to worry, as I do, that the money demanded by someone whose finger hovers over the trigger of an AK-47 is less a

tip than a ransom" (Cole 17)—while at the same time recognizing that such morality is precisely

what marks him as foreign. He notes that bribery, extortion, and ransoms are "seen either as a

mild irritant or as an opportunity. It is a way of getting things done, neither more nor less than

what money is there for" (Cole 17). Whereas Habila's insurgents siphon wealth from oil

corporations as a last resort, Cole's everyday bribers and scammers adopt these morally

questionable practices to attempt to gain access to citizenship—in other words, to make oil

infrastructures work for themselves, despite being excluded from their designs and

implementations.[48]

The most extreme of these informal schemes—and the one most similar to the insurgents'

oil bunkering—is the "419 scam," which refers to the Nigerian criminal code that penalizes the

impersonation of officials for personal gain (Apter 12). As both Andrew Apter and Peter Ribic

note, the 419 scam is a method by which Lagosians can attempt to recover the promises of oil's

abundance. In a typical 419 scam, a person impersonates a politician, corporate head, or oil

magnate and sends a message, via fax or e-mail, asking for assistance moving a large sum of

money to a new account. Before the transfer can take place, however, the sender requests an

"advance fee" to assist the processing. If successful, the sender can be in possession of thousands

of dollars before the recipient realizes what has taken place (Ribic 425). According to Apter, the

419 scams "illustrate how the seeing-is-believing of the oil boom gave way to the visual

deceptions of the oil bust, a social world not of objects and things but of smoke and mirrors, a

business culture of worthless currency, false facades, and empty value forms" (235-6). As such,

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[48] The bribes and extortions of the Lagosian informal economy could be described as a kind of violence, turning daily interactions into competitions for resources, albeit of a much milder form than that which occurs in the Delta. However, I want to note here that the bribes and scams more closely echo the actions of the *picaro*, who I will discuss further at length in Chapter 3. Similarly standing up to corporate power, the *picaro* schemes ways of diverting wealth back to the people themselves. Illustrating this notion, the chapter in which Mohsin Hamid's nameless Protagonist in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* starts up his fraudulent water bottle scheme is titled "Work for Yourself."

these scams quickly became a colloquial expression for life in the wake of the oil bust, during

which the value of the naira plummeted, and the political dealings of self-appointed dictators like

Ibrahim Babangida normalized corruption at the highest levels of government.[49] Here, we can

see a parallel to the Delta rebels: just as the insurgents targeted material sites of oil's distribution,

like pipelines and rigs, so too do the 419 scammers reroute the financial flow of oil wealth away

from oil corporations and back toward the people.

Cole's narrator encounters the 419 e-mail scams in Internet cafes, a new addition to the

Lagos cityscape in his absence. Despite numerous warnings promising severe punishment to

those using the computers for illegal activities, nearly everyone in the café is creating a 419

scam. The narrator's curious choice of words when describing his encounter with the 419 scam

marks an interesting convergence of colonialist tropes and his own position as a diasporic subject

returning home. Upon seeing the 419 in action, he states, "I have stumbled onto the origin of the

world-famous digital flotsam. I feel as though I have discovered the source of the Nile or the

Niger" (26). Here, the colonial discovery of "the source" of a coveted resource converges with

the quotidian practices of Lagos' informal economy. However, the narrator has not stumbled

upon the "source" of a cultural truth, but, in fact, to the source of oil underlying the very

substance of the 419 scams. Scammers impersonate the "Chairman of the National Office for

Petroleum Resources," as well as "the heirs of fictional magnates" and "the widows of oil

barons" (Cole 27). While the narrator is annoyed at the obviousness of these lies, I am struck by

how narratives of oil are immediately available and widely popular within this particular niche of

Lagos' informal economy. To recover the oil wealth that ought to be the provenance of the entire

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[49] Apter notes that protests of the 1993 Nigerian elections invoked the 419 scam, with one poster declaring "IBB = 419," with IBB referring to Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (243).

nation, 419 scammers impersonate the very powers that render them marginalized and require them to rely on these scams for survival.

In Ribic's reading of this scene, he is struck not by the repeated references to oil, but by the scam's nature as "work that is not quite work, writing that is not quite writing" (429). Such partiality echoes Apter's invocation of colonial mimicry, in which he describes the scams as "the secondary playing of the fool against the fool" (Apter 235). As such, Ribic argues that the scammers pose a serious problem for narrative coherence. The novel's central representational problem is that Lagos "now permits the visitor…only snapshots and vignettes: parts whose contradictions may be identified and interpreted individually, but which refuse to cohere" (429). While Ribic seems to share the narrator's frustration in his inability to create a coherent narrative out of this new Lagos, I find this contingency crucial for understanding how the 419 scammers possess a keen awareness of their disenfranchisement in the petro-state, and how those they target in their scams may have some responsibility in that disenfranchisement. Unlike the insurgents' reliance on spectacular press coverage in the hopes of attracting global attention, 419 scammers use e-mail to address these non-local spectators directly. In doing so, they attempt to create their own participatory spaces of citizenship through new media. They bring themselves face-to-face, digitally speaking, with wealthy, non-local consumers, recognizing them as fellow participants in the global oil trade, and thus gaining access to the abstract, transnational financial networks flowing into Nigeria's oil economy.

However, Cole's narrator does remark that, more often than not, these scams fail, as savvy readers know to delete scam e-mails rather than take them seriously. In this way, we might see a similar roadblock arise as that which we encountered in the Delta. Like the affective impulses of empathy or pity that Azoulay critiques, the scammers rely on a logic of "looking"

from non-local spectators, hoping that the e-mails will shock or surprise their recipients into unwittingly sending money to everyday people rather than oil corporations. Indeed, even as Cole's narrator dismisses the e-mail scams as yet another of Lagos' failures, he remarks that the informal economy never changes: "Precisely because everyone takes a shortcut, nothing works and, for this reason, the only way to get anything done is to take another shortcut" (19). It appears, then, that seizing modes of oil's circulation in both the Delta and Lagos results in replicating modes of petro-violence, whether by continuing to destroy ancestral environments and displace indigenous groups, or leaving marginalized populations disenfranchised from oil wealth. In their attempts to gain access to oil wealth and, by extension, citizenship, the Delta insurgents and 419 e-mail scammers remain entrenched in an immovably corrupt and unequal economic system.

What, then, do Habila and Cole offer to their characters and readers as an alternative? My next section takes up this question by considering how Habila's and Cole's engagements with mass media technologies illustrate "the ethical value of an assault by images"—or, in their cases, by journalistic reportage and blog posts (Sontag, *Regarding* 116). As Sontag writes, mass media photographs are nothing more "than an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine the rationalizations for mass suffering offered by established powers" (116). Having seen how their respective characters try to escape such suffering to no avail, my next section analyzes how Habila's and Cole's invocations of everyday mass media genres create alternative literary spaces where citizenship can be renegotiated outside of competition for resources. While access to and control over oil remains a persistent preoccupation, Habila and Cole respectively shift focus from trying to "resolve" the crisis of unequal access to oil infrastructures and toward amplifying the voices of those marginalized within and by their own nation.

Repurposing Mass Media Technologies

Journalism in <u>Oil on Water</u>

As discussed above, Habila's primary critique of Nigerian print media in *Oil on Water* emphasizes its increasing privatization and co-optation into the oil corporation's monopoly over the Delta's resources. Despite Rufus' attempts to use photography strategically and report responsibly from the Delta, he is cast aside by his newspaper when he fails to produce new content for the paper mere days after his acclaimed coverage of the island gunfight. I have argued that, although he has lost official access to his media platform, Rufus' decision not to publish the Professor's arguments for "Truth" constitutes an ethical refusal to contribute further to the cycles of press coverage and petro-violence in the Delta. What do we make of his extensive encounters with various constituencies throughout the Delta who are literally caught in the crossfire between the military and the insurgents? What purpose do these constituencies' testimonies serve now that we know they will not appear in a newspaper anytime soon? In this section, I argue that Habila infuses Rufus' journalistic ethos into his narration in *Oil on Water*. I trace three examples of Rufus ceding direct narrative control to members of multiple Delta constituencies who have been erased from both corrupt local journalism and global media reports. As Ogaga Okuyade writes, Habila's choice to focus on these marginalized groups "not only gives [the local people] a voice, but…also re-humanizes them by rewriting history from the perspective of the displaced and oppressed" (231). By foregrounding the voices of displaced indigenous groups, a doctor ignored by humanitarian organizations, and a wrongly accused servant, Habila repurposes journalism's abilities to negotiate and understand what it means to be a citizen of a petro-state. His novel offers a literary infrastructure for reconceptualizing

citizenship beyond the confines of the oil industry and, in doing so, attempts to redirect attention from non-local spectators who are reading *Oil on Water* from the Global North.

Rufus' extensive conversations with marginalized peoples in the Delta offer noticeably different engagements from either local or global media sources. As I discussed above, newspapers based in Port Harcourt often conduct their reporting in the service of oil corporations, focusing repeatedly on violent conflicts between the military and insurgents at the expense of a more nuanced critique of the financial and political forces that have pushed the insurgents to the brink. Global media sources similarly characterize the Delta in broad strokes and create near-permanent descriptions of Nigeria as irreparably corrupt. Habila depicts this through a BBC News report playing in the background during Rufus' visit to James Floode, in which he updates James about the status of the mission to rescue Isabel. The BBC report discusses Isabel's kidnapping in detail before transitioning to "a long, rote-like voice-over about poverty in Nigeria, and how corruption sustained that poverty, and how oil was the main source of revenue, and how, because the country was so corrupt, only a few had access to that wealth" (*OOW* 102-3). After listening to the report, James comments, "You people could easily become the Japan of Africa, the USA of Africa, but the corruption is incredible" (103). Here, the global visibility of a BBC News report is given to Isabel rather than the multiple local constituencies facing the violent conditions in the Delta on a daily basis. Despite the horrid conditions of her kidnapping, Isabel receives the platform that many local groups—such as the displaced indigenous clan led by Chief Ibiram, or the Doctor struggling to publish toxicity reports—long to have. Instead, these constituencies are homogenized under the label of "corruption," a narrative that James affirms in his commentary. While corruption certainly contributes to local poverty

and ongoing pollution, these media narratives refuse to complicate their understanding of the Delta's inhabitants and keeps these groups marginalized and invisible on a global stage.[50]

Habila responds to both these local and global failures of journalistic coverage by offering his novel to attempt what reportage cannot—to amplify the voices of those most severely marginalized by petro-violence without pressure from special interest groups. The first instance of the novel amplifying marginalized voices comes when Rufus and Zaq meet Chief Ibiram, the leader of a clan who has been forced off their ancestral lands. Relating his people's history to Rufus, Chief Ibiram describes how the oil executives, partnering with government soldiers, arrested the clan's previous chief for refusing their offer to buy the village, and then subsequently evicted the people after the chief's mysterious death in prison. Rufus synthesizes the majority of Ibiram's testimony, much as he would if he were writing the story for a newspaper article. However, the narrative portrayal of this testimony retains authentic elements of Ibiram's voice. As Caminero-Santangelo points out, Ibiram's people refuse payment from the oil companies because of their commitment to "an ethic of care for the land" ("Witnessing" 232). Habila writes, "though they may not be rich, the land had been good to them…What kind of custodians of the land would they be if they sold it off?" (43). Unlike the insurgents' motivations for economic restitution, this awareness of an indigenous environmental ethics indicates a new

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[50] Sandy Cioffi's documentary *Sweet Crude* notes a similar reliance among global media networks to rely on pre-established tropes to understand insurgency in the Delta. In one scene, Cioffi recalls how she was hired by *ABC News* to facilitate an interview between the news network and MEND participants, whom she had met previously while filming the documentary. Cioffi is able to convince a man named Paul to participate in the interview, and they both believe this is an opportunity to shed a global light on the environmental crisis in the Delta. However, Brian Ross, the *ABC News* correspondent, inscribes MEND's activities as terrorism, repeatedly interrogating Paul if MEND is currently holding hostages or why they would need to buy weapons if they are not a terrorist group. Conversely, in a fascinating scene from Uwem Akpan's novella "Luxurious Hearses," an increasingly disgruntled group of southern Nigerians fleeing persecution in the north refuse to believe stories of a massacre until it is reported by foreign news outlets. Akpan's characters shout "We want cable TV *o*!" and "When Abacha hanged Saro-Wiwa because of our oil, we saw it first on foreign TV!" (315), indicating that local news outlets are *too* biased to report stories accurately.

relationality to the Delta itself. The formal intersections between the novel and Rufus'

journalistic ethos are clear here, as the above quote occurs in Rufus' synthesis, but directly

expresses Ibiram's environmental ethic at the level of narrative itself.

In the chapter's final paragraph, Ibiram's first-person voice takes over the narration,

again discussing his refusal to accept payment for the land. Habila writes:

> We didn't take their money. The money would be a curse on them, for taking our
>
> land, and for killing our chief. We left, we headed northwards, we've lived in five
>
> different places now, but always we've had to move. We are looking for a place
>
> where we can live in peace. But it is hard. So your question, are we happy here? I
>
> say how can we be happy when we are mere wanderers without a home? (*OOW*
>
> 45)

By ending the chapter with Ibiram's haunted, unanswered question, Habila makes two

interventions. First, he makes legible the connection between the abandoned villages he and Zaq

encounter at the beginning of the novel with the displacement of Ibiram's people. The

inhabitants of the empty villages containing "squat dwellings," a "ripe and flagrant stench," and

ubiquitous "oil slick[s]" are not depersonalized ghosts, but Ibiram and his people themselves

(*OOW* 10). Just as Kashi's photograph places the oil-polluted water in direct juxtaposition with

the everyday travelers in the canoe, so too does Habila emphasize how Ibiram's community has

been forced to adapt their lifestyles to an increasingly toxic environment. Second, the rhetorical

openness of Ibiram's question implies that there is no satisfactory answer to this situation from

journalists alone. Not only does Zaq's question seem short-sighted given the profound loss of the

clan's social, cultural, and environmental home, but it also indicates that there is no easy solution

to the ongoing thefts of land, life, and oil in the Delta (Okuyade 227). However, while Rufus

does not publish Ibiram's story within the confines of the narrative itself, Habila's novel does bear witness to Ibiram and his people, demonstrating how the formal amplification of local testimonies expands the representation of Delta peoples beyond monolithic narratives of corruption and poverty.

Later in the novel, Habila again stages a journalistic encounter between Rufus and Dr. Dagogo-Mark, the personal physician of a soldier known as the Major. Unlike Ibiram's testimony, which blended Rufus' synthesis with Ibiram's voice, the Doctor speaks almost entirely in the first person. He discusses the slow obsession with oil in the local villages, and describes how, less than a year after oil drilling began, the community's health began to decline. The Doctor makes three distinct efforts to publicize the toxicity results of the village's water supply and blood levels, both of which have become contaminated. After being ignored by the oil workers and their manager, he seeks attention from bigger platforms:

> [W]hen people started dying, I took blood samples and recorded the toxins in them, and this time I sent my results to the government. They thanked me and dumped the results in some filing cabinet. More people died and I sent my results to NGOs and international organizations, which published them in international journals and urged the government to do something about the flares, but nothing happened. More people fell sick, a lot died. (*OOW* 153)

Each of the Doctor's attempts to create awareness about the toxicity and pollution in the Delta is met with resistance from the government. Here, we can see how the oil corporation's monopoly on the informal economy extends both to the government's ability to silence individuals and to discredit internationally recognized research supported by humanitarian organizations. The fallout from these decisions is both environmental and social. As the landscape becomes further

polluted and more villagers die, the Doctor notices how life in the town can no longer sustain itself, again transforming the village into one of the many deserted settlements that Rufus and Zaq encounter early in the novel. Because of the government's decisions—motivated by petro-dollars and enforced by the military—local human lives and non-human environments remain at risk. Once again, informed by Rufus' journalistic ethos, the text formally amplifies the Doctor's testimony and offers him a similar opportunity as Chief Ibiram—to circulate his story not within the privatized and corporation-controlled media landscape, but within the broader transnational reaches of the Anglophone novel.

One final example of Rufus' amplification comes near the novel's end in his conversation with Salomon, Isabel's driver. Salomon's account spans over ten pages and is the longest first-person story that Rufus collects in the Delta. Salomon is the accused architect of Isabel's kidnapping and is easily conscripted into the dominant narratives of Nigerians as greedy, oil-addicted, and corrupt. Although he lives in Port Harcourt and does not suffer the same loss of environment or credibility as Chief Ibiram or the Doctor, Salomon's story—and his motivation for kidnapping Isabel—is intensely personal. The idea for the kidnapping came about after Salomon learned that James Floode had an affair with and impregnated Salomon's fiancée, Koko. However, when retelling his story to Rufus, Salomon connects James' personal affront with the oil industry's pervasiveness. As an employee of the oil corporations, James' wealth comes from oil, bolstering his apparent possessiveness of everything and everyone surrounding him, including Koko. Intending only to stage a fake kidnapping of Isabel until he collects the ransom, Salomon muses, "the money wasn't even coming out of [James'] pocket: the oil company always pays the ransom, and…if you thought about it carefully, you'd realize that the money came from *our oil*, so we would be getting back what was ours in the first place" (*OOW*

145

221, emphasis added). Salomon rationalises Isabel's kidnapping as reparation not only for his own humiliation, but for the decades of neo-colonial oil theft that has devastated the Delta region. It is only after Isabel is taken captive that the plot for reparations goes awry. Each of Salomon's partners attempt to raise her ransom price and extend her captivity until the Professor intercepts them, dragging them into the ongoing conflicts with the Nigerian military and placing all of their lives at risk.

At the heart of the kidnapping that has motivated Rufus' journey through the Delta is yet another iteration of the insurgents' logic to reclaim oil wealth by any means necessary. Despite his personal intentions, Salomon is thus complicit in the unending cycle of media-military-corporate violence that ensnare the Delta's various constituencies. However, as the star villain in the media's kidnapping narrative, the "truth" of his story remains obscured until he has the chance to speak to Rufus. Petty as his intentions may seem, a personal slight against a man's fiancée demonstrates how the scales of petro-violence extend from the spectacular gun fights in the Delta's creeks to the intimacies of the neo-colonial domestic sphere.[51] In using his journalistic ethos to amplify Salomon's story at the level of *Oil on Water*'s narrative, Rufus thus faces serious ethical questions: what does it mean to tell *this* Delta story alongside those of Chief Ibiram and the Doctor, whose very livelihoods and ancestral lands have been threatened by the petro-violence Salomon appears to perpetuate? And how does Salomon's complicity in these violent systems also work against his own livelihood, in some way?

By including Salomon's testimony alongside the other Delta constituencies, Habila, through Rufus' narration, models the kind of ethical engagement envisioned in Azoulay's theory

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[51] In Chapter 4, I discuss similar swings in scale from the domestic and personal, to the global and world-historical. In Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*, for example, Shalimar's revenge against his wife, Boonyi, is an intensely personal quest, yet is nonetheless one that brings him into contact with various insurgent groups and which occurs alongside the South Asian region's rapid nuclearization.

of civic space. Although his modes are journalism and the novel, and not photography per se, Habila believes that journalism offers the unique opportunity to parse through the ethically complex stakes of reporting on oil extraction in the Delta. He expresses this opportunity most clearly in his first novel, *Waiting for an Angel*, which chronicles the challenges journalists faced under the autocratic Babangida and Abacha regimes. Despite the relentless attacks against the press, which included letter bombs, arson, and personal harassment, the protagonist's mentor sums up the core value of journalism in an autocratic state: "You see, every oppressor knows that wherever one word is joined to another word to form a sentence, there'll be revolt. That is our work, the media: to refuse to be silenced, to encourage legitimate criticism wherever we find it" (Habila, *WFA* 198). In *Oil on Water*, Rufus' particular mode of witnessing embodies this ideal: he collects these marginalized perspectives and makes them legible to non-local readers who otherwise would not be able to access them. By extending this opportunity to Ibiram, the Doctor, and Salomon, Rufus enables them to take back control of their own narratives and ensures the Delta's minority constituencies will be heard through the novel itself.

Such an egalitarian opportunity to speak and be heard—to create the civic space that Azoulay envisions, but within the pages of a novel—might sound too good to be true. However, Ali Erritouni characterizes Habila's impulse to envision a social alternative to autocracy in *Waiting for an Angel* as his "utopian impulse," and I find such a characterization useful for *Oil on Water* as well (145). Noting that Habila turns away from revolution as a social corrective throughout his *oeuvre*, Erritouni writes that Habila assigns "the responsibility of articulating utopian visions for their society…to ordinary people" (156-7). *Oil on Water* emphasizes that the ordinariness and banality of the Delta constituents' experiences—their displacement, their endurance of toxic ecosystems, their silencing, and even their personal slights—are precisely the

reason why these perspectives need to be amplified and heard. There is nothing spectacular about Ibiram's, the Doctor's, or Salomon's stories, save for the extraordinary modes of violence, dispossession, and displacement they have been able to endure. Thus, by amplifying their stories through the Anglophone novel, Rufus mediates a civic space constructed by and for Delta peoples, extending the egalitarian space that Azoulay envisions for photography to the Delta via contemporary journalistic methods.

Image-Text Collaborations in <u>Every Day is for the Thief</u>

Whereas Habila's *Oil on Water* relies on the slightly older mode of print journalism to amplify the Delta's environmental crisis, Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* is instead immersed in new media forms. As discussed in my introduction, Cole has been drawn to blogs and social media in recent years because they provide "an instantaneous public," offering a stronger sense of immediacy with his readers (Paulson). However, by updating the black-and-white images for the 2014 edition of the novel while keeping the original 2007 text the same, Cole addresses two such publics at once. The 2007 text is itself Cole's repurposed blog, in which he wrote one post per day chronicling his month-long return to Lagos (Hemon). Published by Cassava Republic Press in Abuja, the 2007 edition of *Thief* is written directly for and circulates among Nigerian readerships. In 2014, however, Cole republishes the novel through Random House, capitalizing on the success of 2011's *Open City* and accessing a distinctly more cosmopolitan readership through his new publisher. Connor Ryan notes that numerous paratextual changes—such as the removal of the author's note insisting on the novel's fictitiousness—signal that the 2014 text "changes how it addresses its readers…since circuits of literary circulation construct their own readership" (178). While Cole's global platform is a significant component of his address to non-Nigerian readers, I am particularly interested in how

the original 2007 text works in tandem with the new 2014 images, which feature "back alleys, side streets, a tarp hanging over a shack"—or in the words of his interviewer, Steve Paulson, "[not] the usual tourist photos we see." How do these banal photos and daily blogged observations of ordinary life index the mundane challenges and encounters among oil, infrastructure, and Lagos' lower-middle-class citizens for both local and non-local spectators?

In what follows, I answer this question by thinking seriously about Cole's readers. As Camille Isaacs argues, blogs are a challenging form of new media because the creator "has little control over who views/reads the blog…but with significant agency resting with the *reader*, not the blogger" (179, emphasis added). Because it was published solely in Nigeria, the 2007 text served to bring together readers from different classes, ethnic groups, and educational backgrounds who—as the novel depicts—would otherwise be siloed off from each other in Lagos' increasingly stratified economic landscape. By keeping this text intact, Cole seeks additional engagement from non-local readers, addressing them in the same language as his Nigerian ones. The images, however, supplement this address because they extend Azoulay's ethical invitation to participate in photography's civic space. While Cole's photographs do not depict the "injuries" of environmental degradation, as Kashi's do, they highlight Lagos' infrastructures in strategic ways. Although Ryan worries that the 2014 images "pin down the meaning of the text" (183), I read them as providing precise visual insights into the everyday lives of Lagos' middle-classes. Unlike Okri's fantastic descriptions of spirits chasing Azaro in and out of rat-infested tenement houses, or Adichie's dramatizations of Lagos society's luxurious upper echelons in *Americanah*, Cole's Lagos takes seriously the quotidian challenges of middle-class Lagosians to survive in an increasingly unequal and stratified economic landscape.[52]

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[52] Interestingly, in his April 2014 review of *Thief* for *The Guardian*, Habila criticized Cole's extensive focus on Lagos' middle class, writing, "One wishes, sometimes, that the storyteller would take a detour from the well-trodden

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At the heart of this survival, as I have argued, is access to oil. Many of Cole's narrator's conversations with his family and friends revolve in some way around oil, such as how to obtain it, where to buy it, or when they will run out of it. Additionally, Cole's images reference oil infrastructures explicitly, whether through photos of cars speeding along a highway or diesel-generator-powered lights illuminating a cityscape. The photos thus capture oil infrastructures functioning largely as they were intended to. What Cole's written text thus reveals is how this "functioning" still produces class stratifications, which in turn prevents all Lagosians from participating in oil citizenship equally. In what follows, I discuss two image-text pairs that emphasize the degrees to which oil organizes and shapes social practices in Lagos. By pairing Cole's vignettes with images of infrastructure, I analyze how Cole's narrative and photographic choices invite non-local spectators to engage with a different iteration of oil citizenship, and to grapple with the ethics of their own participation in this citizenship from their locations worlds away.

Unlike *Oil on Water*, *Thief's* depictions of oil are subtle and often feature oil's various commodity forms rather than the crude oil and pipelines that impacted life in the Delta. Diesel is especially valuable because the city's electrical grid is unstable. Many middle-and-upper class families rely on backup generators, fueled by diesel, to retain electricity in the likely event of a blackout. The sudden loss of electricity is one of the "nocturnal rituals" that Cole's narrator had forgotten in his absence from Lagos, but it greets him upon his return (19). The generators' smell, noise, and general irritation characterize the narrator's early vignettes, as he struggles to adapt to these infrastructural interruptions. He writes:

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middle-class avenues, the museums and art centres, and shine his prospector's torchlight on the backstreets and hovels and tenement houses written about elsewhere by Ben Okri and Cyprian Ekwensi."

My first few nights in Lagos, I actually enjoy the power cuts. [My cousin]

Muyiwa and I take bets about whether electricity will see us past 10:00 pm on a

given night. It rarely does…The hardest thing to deal with, after weeks of

constant power cuts, is the noise of the generators…There are three loud diesel

generators in the compound. When they all come on, as they do nightly, I can feel

my mind fraying. I don't experience the real privilege that it is for these three

families to have the generators in a city where so many sit in darkness. The noise,

the dark gray plumes of the diesel smoke are foremost in my mind: the moment

there is a power cut, my evening is finished. The neighbors downstairs watch

South African sitcoms at top volume. My bedroom, near the generator house, is

filled with din. It is impossible to hear myself think. (Cole 66-67)

Right away, we see how the blackouts, as a failure of infrastructure, create an opportunity for the

narrator to bond with his cousin by betting on whether or not the electricity will last past a

certain time. Up until this point, Muyiwa has served as the narrator's local informant who

explains unfamiliar phenomena, like the 419 scammers. Betting on the blackouts demonstrates

how infrastructure creates a sense of belonging between the narrator and his cousin, as they joke

and complain about their shared city's flawed electrical grid through the social ritual of the bet.

While the narrator frames the blackout as an inconvenience, the diesel fuel's presence in the loud

generators becomes the more prominent concern in the passage. Cole's explicit attention to detail

renders the diesel smoke thick; the "dark gray plumes" are everywhere, keeping the narrator

awake while functioning as a background element in his neighbors' evening. However, the

narrator's physical discomfort occurs in part because his aunt and uncle cannot afford to keep

their generator running throughout the night. As a result, there is no noise of his own generator to

drown out the neighbors', and the narrator is forced to lie awake, physically and socially isolated

from those neighbors who enjoy the pleasures of continued access to electricity. Although the

narrator's relatives all inhabit the same building and region of Lagos, the neighbors' access to

diesel fuel marks their "real privilege." This in turn provides the small creature comforts, like

having a fan running through the night or watching late-night television, that Macdonald argues

are evidence of "the sheer pervasiveness of oil in contemporary social infrastructures" in modern

oil cultures (2).

Curiously, the diesel generators also impact the narrator's photographic practices. After

detailing his sleepless night, the narrator notes that such a cacophonous environment makes it

difficult for him to write. He laments, "There is a disconnect between the wealth of stories

available here and the rarity of creative refuge…The best I can manage is to take a few

photographs. For the rest of the month, I neither read nor write" (68). Katherine Hallemeier reads

this remark as evidence of the narrator's frustrations with Lagos, claiming the city's unruliness

disturbs the "literary cosmopolitanism" he holds as his cultural ideal (240). While it is true that

the narrator may be unable to produce literary writings, we know—by virtue of the fact that the

book exists—that Lagos does inspire the more informal, associative, and even "confessional"

writings of blog posts and social media (Darroch 137).[53] Indeed, Cole intends to apply a similar

associative logic to his photographs' placements throughout the text. In his interview with

Paulson, he describes how "Images are specific about what was seen but not about what it

means. When you put them together, you have the opportunity either to explain, which is usually

not what I'm doing, or to create a kind of poetry. So you put the semantics of text together with

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[53] There is a significant amount of literary criticism on the role of blogs in Adichie's *Americanah.* For readings that interpret the protagonist Ifemelu's blog as an agentic space for determining identity, see Darroch and Hislop. For a critique of the blogosphere as entangled with hegemonic capitalist structures, see Isaacs.

the description of the image and they meet at an interesting angle." Despite his narrator's complaint that he only "manages" to take photographs, the black-and-white images interspersed throughout *Thief* comprise a secondary narrative to the blog-like vignettes, one that I read is intentionally directed to non-local readers.

Taking up Cole on his offer to read his images associatively rather than linearly, I want to consider Figure 2 as an opportunity to extend my analysis of the class stratifications surrounding access to diesel and electricity. Figure 2 appears in the text about 20 pages after the passage quoted above. In the photo, we can see a series of buildings, interspersed with a few trees and two radio or cellular towers on opposite ends. Although we can see the tops of buildings and trees, this is not an aerial photo; the camera's perspective remains within the city itself. Further, there are no human subjects to focus on, nor is there a sense of urgency or tension that captivates the viewer. Without the context of the above passage, this photo would be utterly banal.
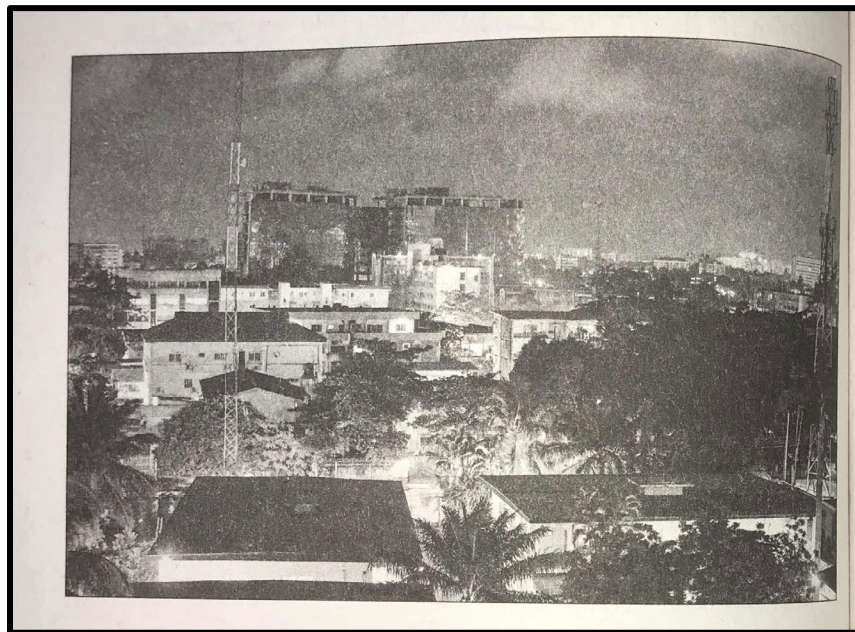
Figure 2: Photograph by Teju Cole, from <u>Every Day is for the Thief</u> *(88)*

However, if we "watch" this photo according to Azoulay's method and regard it as an invitation into a civic space, this image takes on new significance, especially when

conceptualizing citizenship in terms of access to oil. Although her theory depends in part on the

returned gaze of the photographed subject, Azoulay argues that photography provides a civic

space because it emphasizes "the fact that the photographed *people* were there" (16). By

watching the image and reconstructing the photographic encounter, the non-local spectator is

reminded that these people "are still present there at the time I'm watching them" (16). This

emphasis on human presence provides the ethical impetus for watching photographs as a civic

duty to restore citizenship to those who have otherwise been denied it. In watching Cole's

photograph here, the evidence of human presence comes from light, which illuminates a tree in

the foreground and divides the image in half—the lights of the city contrast with the dark patch

of trees on the right side. Additionally, the windows in a building immediately behind one of the

cell/radio towers are dark, providing further contrast to the light in the photo's foreground. This

photo clearly captures a moment in time, but given what we've just read about electricity in

Lagos, it is unclear what time of day the photo depicts. Is this the daytime, when the electrical

grid functions properly? Or is this the evening, and are the few bursts of light powered by

generators, filling the air with diesel fuels and producing a loud humming noise that keeps our

narrator awake? Despite the speculative nature of these questions, this photo expands the

narrator's first-person account of unequal access to diesel and electricity to the scale of the city

itself. While the narrator signals his awareness of his neighbor's economic privilege, this image

puts that privilege on full display. The juxtaposition of light and dark buildings could refer to any

number of innocent phenomena. But by reading this image alongside Cole's earlier vignette, we

come to understand that significant class disparities determining access to oil—and, by

extension, determining full participation in oil citizenship in Lagos—are a possible explanation

for the events depicted in this image.

Admittedly, Cole's images are challenging to read, in part because many of them are devoid of human presence, or feature extreme close-ups that render the images blurry or unfocused. Gabrielle Rippl writes that Cole's images "do not invite us into the picture; they keep us at a distance. When we gaze at such pictures, they remain mere surfaces without pictorial depth; instead of alluring the onlooker, she is thrown out of the picture" (478). It is tempting to read Cole's images as cold or unfeeling, thus replicating the narrator's defamiliarization in returning home, or to disregard their role in the narrative entirely because there are no captions or other explanatory notes to integrate them more fully into the text. However, I find Cole's images useful as touchstones that remind the non-local reader of the ubiquitous, yet often subtle presence of oil infrastructures in everyday life—not unlike the thin, rainbow-tinged line creeping across the center of Kashi's photograph that opened this chapter. What, then, do these images capture about infrastructure that would otherwise remain illegible to readers' perceptions?

While their placements throughout the text can seem non-homologous, reading the images as complementary to Cole's narratives of oil suggests that their placement near specific vignettes is more strategic than not. For example, although Figure 2 appears several pages after the episode with the generators, it immediately precedes a second episode in which a blackout interrupts the narrator's conversations with his childhood friend, Rotimi, sending the two of them on a city-wide search for diesel to replenish their generator. Prior to the blackout, the narrator and Rotimi were discussing oil and its derivatives, as Rotimi confirmed that working in the oil industry is the only way to make money in Nigeria (their conversation then turns to traffic—yet another derivation of oil). Although Rotimi is a doctor, he only earns the equivalent of $500 USD per month, while his friends in the oil industry earn nearly seven times as much. Once again, access to oil produces stratifications across social and economic classes.

When the narrator and Rotimi set out for diesel, they are confronted with yet another issue of access—city-wide oil shortages. They visit four filling stations, none of which have diesel. As the narrator observes, "Half the city runs on diesel generators, and Nigeria is one of the world's leading producers of crude oil. The shortages make no sense" (95). When they finally find an open station, the narrator is unwittingly scammed out of 600 naira. Despite Rotimi's efforts to speak in "a casual vernacular that erases the social distance between them," the woman at the pump takes advantage of "her power to help [them] out" (Cole 95). While the narrator is embarrassed and frustrated by his error, Rotimi laughs it off, reminding him, "that's just the way it is, man" (Cole 96). Here, access to oil not only determines material privileges, like the narrator's neighbors who can afford to watch sitcoms late into the night. Oil also provides both economic and social power. Rotimi needs to speak to the woman in a "casual vernacular" to enlist her help; if she turns them away, they will still be without the substance they need to carry on with their daily lives. However, just as Rotimi's income is impacted by the oil industries, so too is the woman's. The fact that Rotimi recognizes the "social distance between them" signals to the woman that, like the 419 scammers, she has the opportunity to reclaim some of the wealth they possess. This social encounter revolving around oil brings Lagos' class stratifications into stark relief. While the search for oil is not a matter of life and death, as it is in the Delta, it is a matter of survival. As the state consolidates oil for its own benefits, the people are left to fend for themselves, making social relations increasingly strained. Figure 2's strategic placement just prior to this episode thus serves as a reminder that access to oil is a constant problem in Lagos, and characterizes even casual social interactions as competitive opportunities to gain an economic advantage over the other.

However, this competition is not mutually agreed upon; it is a forced condition and a consequence of decades of government corruption that has repeatedly withheld oil wealth from the masses. Like in *Oil on Water*, government representatives and transnational corporations remain offstage in *Every Day is for the Thief*, absenting themselves from the increasingly difficult—and violent—conflicts that emerge among those seeking to participate more fully in the Nigerian petro-state. These conflicts come to a head in the Lagos marketplace, which is no longer an abstract concept in which the value of the naira fluctuates, but a physical space that is central to Lagosian life. The narrator begins his vignette noting the market's participatory affordances: "One goes to the market to *participate* in the world. As with all things that concern the world, being in the market requires caution. The market—as the essence of the city—is always alive with possibility and danger" (Cole 47, emphasis added). The "danger" he references appears to reflect the threats of breaking the marketplace's social order; namely, the threats posed by thieves.

During his visit to the market, the narrator visits the site where a recent thief, an eleven-year-old boy, was brutally killed. Although he did not witness the killing directly, his description of the thief's murder is the most outwardly violent scene in the novel, and offers the most explicit representation of oil in Lagos as well. A crowd converges on the boy and places a large car tire around his neck before dousing him with petrol, a public form of killing known in South African contexts as "necklacing," used often to murder black informants to the apartheid police (Smith 156). The narrator continues:

> The tire is flung around the boy. He is losing consciousness but revives with
> sudden panic when he is doused with petrol…The splashing liquid is lighter than
> water, it is fragrant, it drips off him, beads in his woolly hair. He glistens… And

then only the last thing, which is soon supplied. The fire catches with a loud gust,

and the crowd gasps and inches back. The boy dances furiously but, hemmed

down by the tire, quickly goes prone, and still. The most vivid moment in the

fire's life passes, and its color dulls and fizzes out. The crowd, chattering and

sighing, momentarily sated, melts away…Traffic quickly reconstitutes around the

charred pile. The air smells of rubber, meat, and exhaust. (Cole 61)

Cole's ekphrastic narration indulges the spectacularity of this violent scene, imitating the

photographers' lust in capturing the gory remains of gunfight victims in *Oil on Water*. Indeed,

given how elusive diesel fuel has proven to be in earlier vignettes, oil's presence in this scene is

visceral and disturbing. Before the fire is lit, oil encounters the boy's body in a similar way as the

narrator's first encounter with the generator's diesel fuel. It is "fragrant" and pervasive,

transforming the boy's body into a "glisten[ing]" figure, one that appears almost inhuman.

Echoing another scene from *Oil on Water* in which the Major douses his captives with petrol, the

marketplace mob advances the threat of pouring oil on bodies by killing the boy. The

transference of agency from crowd to fire is quick; as soon as the petrol catches, it imitates the

gas flares of the Niger Delta, pushing away the crowd and claiming the boy's life. This last

quality—the ability of oil to claim life—echoes in the narrator's account. He notes that the "most

vivid moment in the *fire's life* passes," suggesting that the crowd does not mourn the boy, but the

fleeting spectacle of the fire itself. What strikes me most about this scene is the ironic targeting

of this young boy as a "thief"—he has been accused of stealing a baby to sell on the black

market—when in fact Lagos is full of "thieves" grifting off of the informal economy. As we saw

with the 419 e-mailers and the woman at the pump, scams are the organizing rubric of most

urban social relations, leaving some characters, like Rotimi, resigned to the way of things, while

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others, like the narrator, are more paranoid about the legitimacy of their transactions. Why is this boy targeted and executed so violently when the ubiquity of "thieves" in Lagos is akin to oil itself—always present, but existing subtly, away from prominent view?

Karin Barber offers one potential answer to this question. In "Popular Reactions to the Petro-Naira," she observes how ordinary people responded to their country's sudden economic improvements in the 1970s oil boom when the majority of Nigerians "[have] had little to do with the actual production of oil" (435). In her study of two Yoruba plays performed by traveling theater companies, Barber notes the anxieties surrounding discussions of wealth, as exemplified by the character of the child-stealer, who exploits his victims to accumulate enormous wealth, violating the Yoruba value that all wealth is earned through hard work ("Petro-Naira" 434, 438). The traveling theater plays sensed that rapid accumulation of wealth posed a moral threat to Yoruba values. I am curious if the rabid anger of the mob against the young thief is not because he sought to steal a baby, but because he sought to circumvent the slow, grifting practices of the informal economy to achieve, in Wenzel's terms, "wealth without work" ("Petro-Magic-Realism" 451). In doing so, the young thief in fact mimics the true Nigerian thieves—the oil corporations and government leaders who have excluded their citizens from any substantive access to oil and the economic prosperity it affords. In murdering the thief so violently, the mob acts like the Delta insurgents, redirecting their anger and frustrations at those in power by killing one of their own.

In this context, how might we read the photographs that bookend Cole's chapter on the marketplace? Figure 3 appears just prior to the chapter, facing the chapter's first page. Like Figure 2, it is devoid of human subjects, depicting a series of shacks with electrical wires and poles in the background. A large puddle in the foreground reflects the buildings' facades, but

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otherwise, all is quiet and calm. By contrast, Figure 4 appears immediately after the chapter's

conclusion and contains the movement, speed, and spectacle that more accurately reflects the

thief's killing. In this image, a man in a white shirt runs through the street. He is framed by

another man driving alongside him, as well as a wall that presumably separates the highway from

another section of the city. Beyond the wall is a large cloud of smoke, which is lighter toward the

bottom of the cloud, suggesting a fire illuminates the smoke from below. Neither of these images

approaches the indulgent, spectacular descriptions of the marketplace's violence that we saw in

Cole's ekphrastic narration. In these photos, we must look for what they conceal about oil

infrastructures—or, at least, what they represent more subtly than the graphic passage above.
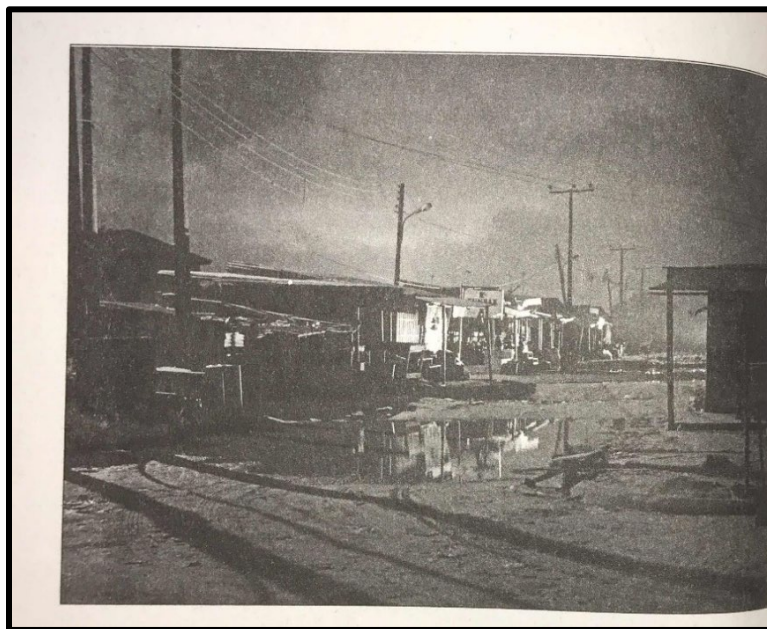
Figure 3: Photograph by Teju Cole, from <u>*Every Day is for the Thief*</u> *(56)*
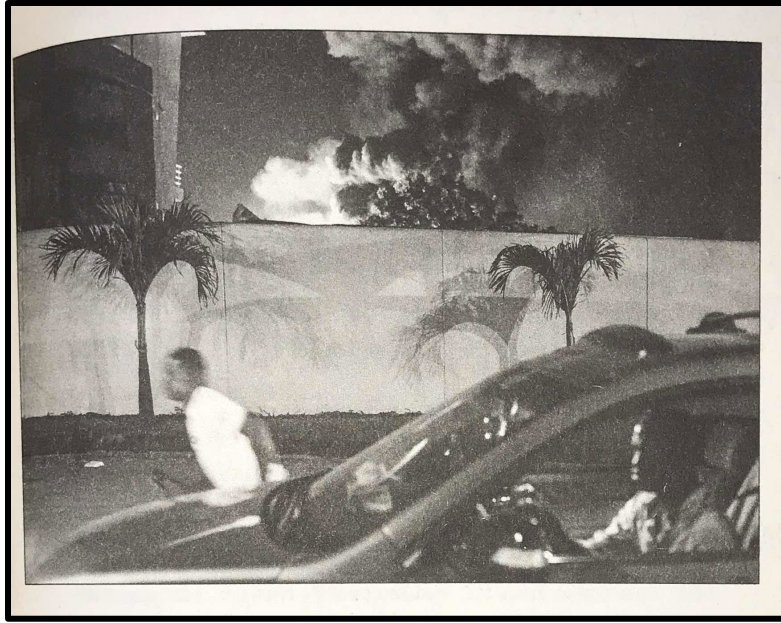
Figure 4: Photograph by Teju Cole, from <u>Every Day is for the Thief</u> *(63)*

Ryan, among other literary critics, notes that these images are the most narratively homologous in Cole's text, suggesting they intend to supplement the non-local reader's understanding of what they have just read. Indeed, we could read Figure 3 as the literal marketplace, a quieter version of the chaos the narrator goes on to depict. Like his return to the scene of the thief's killing, the empty market could serve as an absent present, a representation of "*what has been*" or what is about to take place (Barthes 85, emphasis in original). Similarly, the frenetic energy of Figure 4 suggests the pursuit of the thief and the ubiquitous presence of petrol, this time fueling the car in the image rather than the mob's rage. Like Ryan, I read these images as confirmations of the novel's textual content, not to "pin down" or eliminate creative interpretations of these photos, but to understand how they enact a civic space for negotiating Nigerian citizenship in terms of access to oil. In one sense, where oil is elusive or expensive in everyday life in Lagos, it is uniquely accessible and legible in these images. It exists in the car's fuel, the diesel correcting the electrical cables' eventual failures, and even, perhaps, as a source for the massive fire just beyond the wall. In another sense, the unnerving calm of the marketplace

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juxtaposed with the frenetic movements of the runner characterize opposing forms of petro-violence. Sometimes, violence is quiet and subtle, as Cole has shown with the 419 scammers and the woman at the pump routinely deceiving others to get ahead in the never-ending competition for oil-based resources. At other times, violence is explosive, like the mob attacking the young thief or, miles away in the Delta, the insurgents retaliating against the constant gas fires and oil spills that desecrate their ancestral lands. What is key to both modes of violence—and to Cole's images—is that they comprise everyday life in Nigeria. As the title literally states, every day is for the thief; the only difference in her fate is how quickly or subtly she can evade capture.

By making images of oil accessible, Cole brings into stark relief the reality that oil as a hegemonic cultural force continues to evade critique through deferral or redirection. The everyday emotions directed toward oil throughout the novel include the narrator's frustration, as well as Rotimi's disappointed yet good-natured dismissal of "the way things are." The politics of these everyday affects, however, enable oil corporations and government corruption to retain control over the oil industry. Interspersing these photographs throughout *Thief* thus ensures that oil remains both materially and discursively present within the world of the novel. Cole's image-text pairs reshape everyday genres like blogs and social media photographs into spaces where oil can be understood as a hindrance to citizenship, rather than the only avenue by which one can be legible to the Nigerian state. By bringing together Nigerian and non-local readers alike, Cole also creates an opportunity to question the social and cultural norms that have allowed these hindrances to proliferate unnoticed.

The Ethics of the Spectator

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* illustrate how citizenship in Nigeria is determined by access to oil.

Drawing on Ariella Azoulay's definition, citizenship is a "tool of struggle," not guaranteed by one's birth in a sovereign state, but constantly negotiated among groups of people who are all governed together (14). While Azoulay argues that photography provides the civic space necessary to negotiate conditions of citizenship, especially among those for whom the privileges of citizenship have been denied, Habila and Cole extend this civic space to mass media genres, like journalism and blog posts, and infuse those genres into their literary texts. As their novels depict, the majority of Nigerians are excluded from oil citizenship, ranging from the indigenous Delta peoples who are denied economic autonomy to the middle class Lagosians who struggle to find sufficient fuel to survive urban life. While some constituents, like the Delta insurgents and 419 scammers, turn to the informal economy to attempt to reroute oil wealth back to the people, Habila and Cole both suggest that such practices are insufficient to provide truly egalitarian access to oil, and by extension, citizenship itself. As such, their respective engagements with journalism, blog posts, and photography create new spaces for these marginalized groups of Nigerians to imagine alternative modes of citizenship beyond oil, blending the affordances of mass media technologies with the transnational platform of the Anglophone novel itself.

By way of conclusion, I want to consider how Habila and Cole use their global platforms as Anglophone African writers to issue an ethical mandate to their non-local readers—a mandate that is crucial to Azoulay's theory of photography's civic space as well. In Azoulay's formulation, the photograph is not merely a passive encounter between photographer and subject. Rather, in her words, "the spectator is called to take part" by watching the photograph, in which the spectator "must reconstruct what was there from both what is visible and what is not immediately manifest, but what can—in principle—*become* visible in the exact same photograph" (149). In other words, Azoulay asks spectators to watch both for what is salient and

what is ambient in the photographs they encounter. Importantly, for Azoulay, the spectator has an ethical obligation to participate; she must not wait to be motivated by sympathy, shock, or pity but must transform her observations into action by virtue of being governed under the terms of photography's civic space itself (154).[54]

In the context of *Oil on Water* and *Thief*, I suggest that such an ethical mandate exists for Habila's and Cole's non-local readers because they are themselves governed by the same oil which hinders Nigerian citizens' full participation in political, economic, and environmental autonomy. As Macdonald writes, "If we all 'live' in an extractive culture, regardless of our cognitive connections or geographic proximity to refineries, mineshafts and drill-zones, then our cultural production should reflect that, regardless of how abstract or distorted the projection" (8-9). As such, Habila and Cole are not merely creating fictional spaces for their characters to parse out their access to oil as citizenship. They are extending the ethical mandate imbued in their mass media technologies to their Anglophone readership through *literary* infrastructures, inviting these non-local spectators into these civic spaces to consider their ethical relationship to the oil—and peoples, and environments—on which they depend.

It is worth pausing to consider here how the imaginative and infrastructural capacities of literature are, quite frankly, insufficient to remediate the Delta's environmental crisis in any tangible way, especially when both Habila and Cole have shied away from taking up the mantle of activism, environmental or otherwise. Although he has not spoken at length about *Thief* to the same extent as *Open City*, Cole, like Habila, counts himself among African literature's third generation, born well after the independence movements of the 1960s and less interested than previous generations of writers in responding to colonialism as the defining condition of their

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[54] I will return to the question of the political efficacy of emotion in my discussions of sentimentality and nuclear infrastructures in Chapter 4.

existence (Adesanmi, Dunton 16). Habila, too, discusses his resistance to "being defined and classified by his subject matter" in his 2018 Presidential Address to the African Literature Association ("Future" 154). Balking at the label of "environmental activist" that has hounded him since *Oil on Water*'s publication, Habila imagines more for himself and his peers than to serve as the consciences of their nations.

As mentioned briefly in this chapter's introduction, both authors, though born in Nigeria, are not only located diasporically in the United States, but are also affiliated with academic creative writing programs at George Mason and Harvard, respectively. Unlike their literary predecessors, such as the social realists Ousmane Sembène and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o discussed in Chapter 1, and writer-activist Ken Saro-Wiwa here, Habila and Cole do not see their roles attached to explicit prescriptions for political action. They are temporally as well as institutionally distanced from the earlier generation of African writers' affiliations with anticolonial struggle. By virtue of their affiliations with academia and American publishing, they may be more reticent to take up these activist mantles and let their literary works speak for themselves. This is perhaps why the imaginative spaces Cole and Habila offer for renegotiating citizenship beyond oil are so heavily mediated. In amplifying the voices of Delta peoples or everyday Lagosians, Habila and Cole are completely in control of which stories are told, and how. Such mediation is ethically complex, but it is what the literary, and literary infrastructures, offer: circulating stories beyond their local context in the hope of broadening imaginations and revealing what has thus far escaped our attention.[55]

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[55] As I will discuss further at length in Chapter 3, Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, a fictionalized story of the Bhopal gas disaster, is also heavily mediated. Animal's first-person account only comes to its readers because a journalist offered Animal, a survivor of "that night," a tape recorder, transcribed the tapes Animal recorded, and assembled them into a narrative to be circulated and read elsewhere.

At the same time, however, Habila's and Cole's identifications with the new generation

of "Afropolitans—Taiye Selasi's neologism for young globe-trotting Africans at home in the

world—importantly offers them a different understanding of citizenship than their activist

predecessors. Neither Habila nor Cole are confined by conventional national boundaries in

determining their identities as writers or, for that matter, as citizens. Cole defines citizenship "in

the sense of being invested in what we owe each other. What do we do to protect each other's

rights? What do we do about people who break our mutual agreement?" (Paulson). Likewise,

Habila claims "your community is wherever you happen to be living, not only in Africa"

("Future" 159). These statements thus suggest that Habila and Cole understand their

transnational platforms not as an opportunity to be capitalized upon, but as a position to be

leveraged in their fiction. They embody the reality that, in Azoulay's civic space of photography,

citizenship is deterritorialized; the spectator is called to take part "as a member of the public who

demands to see" even if she is positioned "in some other place" (135).

Further, while it is true that neither *Oil on Water* nor *Thief* are explicit about what readers

should *do* with the information they read, the sheer amount of attention and critique both novels

have received since their publication suggests they are more successful in engaging non-local

readers than their privileged institutional locations might suggest.[56] Ryan remarks that, while the

2014 edition of *Thief* retains much of the same content, it is a wholly different text because it

addresses readers through the voice of the acclaimed author of *Open City*. He writes, "Nothing in

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[56] Critics have suggested that Habila and Cole create fictional stand-ins for Western readers within their texts, and many find this route too easy for an ethical resolution. Wenzel reads James and Isabel Floode as the substitutes for non-local readers ("Headlines" 13), while Caminero-Santangelo claims that, by relying on new iterations of British colonizers within the oil corporations, *Oil on Water* does not place sufficient pressure on the unique political relations between the U.S. and Nigeria ("Witnessing" 234). In *Thief*, the narrator serves as the foreign everyman, "perceiv[ing] his home country with Western eyes, drawing on Western concepts to make sense of Nigeria's present situation" (Kappel 72).

the Random House edition, save fine print in the front matter, would suggest to the reader that they are holding the author's first work, a Nigerian novel" (173). Similarly, after winning the 2001 Caine Prize in African writing, Habila quickly established himself as one of the most prominent voices of Anglophone African literature's third generation (Adesanmi, Dunton 11). Indeed, *Oil on Water* has emerged as the oil novel par excellence among postcolonial ecocritics, and petro-fiction critics. Habila and Cole thus extend the invitation to non-local spectators to participate in literary spaces where oil citizenship is reimagined and renegotiated. Through their adaptations of popular mass media technologies into the Anglophone novel form, they issue this invitation as an ethical mandate to watch and not to look away.

This invitation to reckon with the ethics of oil as citizenship is also a significant intervention for petro-fiction. By taking up questions of citizenship, access, class, and representation, *Oil on Water* and *Every Day is for the Thief* signify their awareness of how oil shapes worlds, whether these are local ones near sites of extraction or foreign ones benefiting from oil's global commodification. As Macdonald writes, "If literary form is always to some extent an abstraction of the social, then interpretive issues and critical formations of capacity, power and supply determine *all* worlds" (19, emphasis in original). Through their engagements with journalism, blogs, and photography, Habila and Cole thus provide new directions for thinking about petro-fiction's "worlds" based on the formal innovations and everyday genres that are readily available—rather than unconscious—in their texts. Whereas magical realism provided generic affordances to read the unruly temporalities of road infrastructures in Chapter 1, here a new set of representational techniques from mass media prove to be responsive to oil's material, discursive, and ecological ontologies, thus expanding the purview of what petro-fiction as a genre can explore.

While Habila and Cole issue a strong ethical mandate to their non-local spectators to reckon with their own participations, it is true that they merely extend the invitation rather than guarantee readers will respond. In my next chapter, I explore how two South Asian writers, Mohsin Hamid and Indra Sinha, refuse readers the opportunity to decline Habila's and Cole's invitations. Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* and Sinha's *Animal's People* deploy second-person addresses, hailing readers as "you" and "Eyes," respectively. Like the 419 scammers bringing themselves digitally face-to-face with non-local spectators, Hamid and Sinha directly mandate their readers' attentions. If Habila and Cole rely on the good nature of their readers to engage responsibly with the consequences of oil, Hamid and Sinha presume no such good nature exists, directing readers' gazes to the toxic realities of life amid poisoned water infrastructures in South Asia.

Chapter 3: Poisoned Shareholders: Embodied Knowledge and Epistemologies of the Picaresque in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* and Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*

On a cloudy spring day, sometime between 2001 and 2003,[57] two men stand smiling and holding protest posters on the lawn outside the Dow Chemical Company headquarters in Midland, Michigan. While one man in a green jacket grins at the camera, the other holds his arms aloft, mouth open as if he is cheering the words printed on his sign: "MI**D**LAND: BH**O**PAL IN SLO**W** MOTION" (Figure 5). In each line, three letters are bolded in red to spell "D.O.W.," linking the site of the protest in Midland with an earlier—and more well-known— environmental catastrophe caused by corporate negligence. The Bhopal gas disaster occurred on the nights of December 2-3, 1984, during which an extremely toxic chemical, methyl isocyanate (MIC), leaked from the pesticide factory belonging to a subsidiary of Union Carbide, located in central India. Thousands were killed instantly from exposure to the gas, and in the nearly 40 years since the disaster, countless more have endured reproductive, respiratory, and other health issues as a result of ongoing contamination. Despite Union Carbide paying a $470 million

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[57] I found this image as part of an archival indexing project with the Ecology Center of Ann Arbor in the summer of 2019. As a public history intern, I was tasked with creating a filing system for the Center's unprocessed materials, which had been housed at an offsite storage location for several years. This image was found with many others depicting a series of protests at Dow headquarters. Some of the images included date stamps; many others did not. I have determined the potential date range for this photo through conversations with Ecology Center staff, including Tracey Easthope, who was heavily involved in the Dow protests, as well as cross-referencing the images with the Ecology Center's newsletter, *From the Ground Up,* and the University of Michigan student newspaper, *The Michigan Daily.* Both publications reported on the Dow protests and included images of the same events or individuals between 2001 and 2003.

settlement to the Bhopal victims in 1989,[58] many environmental activists have argued that it is

this ongoing crisis of both soil and water pollution that poses the greatest threat to Bhopal.

Chemicals from the abandoned UC site continue to leach through poorly built and unmaintained

retention ponds, and there is no system in place to clean local groundwater, nor to pipe in clean

water reliably from outside the city. While it is true that Dow Chemical had no involvement in

Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL)'s repeated decisions to cut corners in the plant's safety

systems or their refusal to provide adequate training to its majority-Indian workforce, Dow

purchased all of Union Carbide's stock in 2001. This legal transaction allowed Union Carbide to

become a wholly-owned subsidiary and enabled the company to vanish effectively into thin air.

Thus, in the early 2000s, protesters such as those in Figure 5 swarmed the grounds of Dow

Chemical's headquarters seeking justice for Bhopal because there was no such location where

Union Carbide could be confronted directly.

Coincidentally, at the same time as Dow Chemical was buying up Union Carbide's stock

in 2001, news began to break of extensive dioxin contamination in the Tittabawassee River

watershed, just miles downstream from Dow's corporate headquarters in Midland. Routine

environmental testing performed by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

(MDEQ) revealed dioxin levels exceeded 900 parts per trillion (ppt), 10 times higher than the

state's "acceptable" level of 90 parts per trillion (T. Miller).[59] While dioxin's embodied effects

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[58] This settlement is highly controversial because of the legal arguments Union Carbide and the Indian government used to determine liability for the Bhopal disaster. Union Carbide's lawyers refused to litigate in the U.S. under the doctrine of *forum non conveniens*, or "inconvenient forum." This legal provision allows a court to dismiss a complaint if that complaint could be better argued or served in a different geographical location. Union Carbide argued that, because Bhopalis' way of life was so foreign to Americans, an American jury would be biased to rule in their favor. By the same token, the Indian government invoked *parens patrie*, which allows the government to take full responsibility for Bhopalis' welfare, in essence denying them the agency to articulate their own needs. For more on these legal principles and their connections to *Animal's People*, see Wenzel, *Disposition,* pp. 195-258, and Oh, "The Claims of Bodies."

[59] MDEQ is now known as the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE).

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Figure 5: Image of Dow Chemical Protesters, photographer unknown.
Source: Box 2-6, Folder: Dow-Bhopal Protests 2001-2003. Ecology Center Records, Ecology Center, Ann Arbor, MI. 25 July 2019.

are not felt as acutely as MIC, partly because it bioaccumulates in an environment, dioxin is an

extremely harmful carcinogen, produced when chlorinated products are burned.[60] In the

documentary *The Long Shadow*, produced by journalism master's student Steven Meador,

Midland residents reported their newfound uncertainty and fear of both their local environments

and embodied futures. Looking back on photos of their nephews frolicking in the swamps and

streams in their backyard, Wendy Domino stated, "I see a kid standing in water that I [now]

know is contaminated…If those kids grow up to have health problems, I'm going to blame

partially myself because they waded around in contaminated water in all that time" (Meador).

Wendy's "if" is key here. Dow's corporate negligence impacts not just present people and

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[60] Dow Chemical's long history of corporate pollution began in the 1890s when founder Herbert Dow drilled deep water wells to mine salt water for bromine (McKenna 7). Dow later became a leading producer of chlorinated materials, including mustard gas and other chemical weapons in the World Wars I and II, and later transitioned into pesticides by the mid-twentieth century (Easthope).

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environments, but future ones. The full consequences of dioxin contamination are delayed and dispersed into the future, illustrating once more Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence—that which is "low in instant spectacle, but high in long-term effects" (2, 10). While Dow contests the legitimacy of a legal battle over their responsibility to dioxin contamination, real people and their local environments suffer.

As local activist groups, such as the Saginaw Bay's Lone Tree Council and the Ecology Center of Ann Arbor, banded together to address growing concerns over dioxin contamination, they began to connect the Tittabawassee River's poisoning with other sites of corporate negligence, including Bhopal. This coalition of activists called for transnational solidarity for victims of corporate environmental pollution and demanded immediate accountability from Dow Chemical, as the new parent company of Union Carbide and as a corporate polluter in its own right. On May 8, 2003, this campaign came to a head when the poisoned constituents of both Bhopal and Midland converged in a demonstration at Dow headquarters while a shareholders' meeting took place inside. Bhopal activists, including Satinath Sarangi, Champa Devi Shukla, and Rashida Bee were conducting a 40-day tour of U.S. cities affected by Dow's pollution. As Figure 6 depicts below, the demonstration at Dow HQ was peaceful, bringing together members of the Lone Tree Council, Ecology Center, and the University of Michigan chapter of Students for Bhopal. In the image, the activists appear calm and focused; Sarangi and Shukla look off to the left while Bee's gaze is near the photographer's. The women hold up a photograph that appears to depict several skulls. There are also two bottles of water with labels wrapped around them at the edge of their blanket. Behind the activists are a series of banners and photos. Two young people wearing matching t-shirts hold a black banner that reads "Hungry for Justice. Fast to Hold Dow Accountable," referencing the fact that the survivors were on day eight of a twelve-

day hunger strike at the time of the protest. Behind them are three large images of a man covered in a blanket, a woman holding a broom, and a shirtless boy whose ribs are visible through his skin. Unlike the indirect gazes of the three Bhopali activists, the figures in the large images are staring directly at the camera.

Figure 6: Image of Satinath Sarangi, Rashida Bee, and Champa Devi Shukla, photographer unknown.
Source: Box 2-6, Folder: Dow-Bhopal Protests 2001-2003. Ecology Center Records, Ecology Center, Ann Arbor, MI. 25 July 2019.

Throughout this protest, the corporate-poisoned body functions as the burden of proof for perceiving the extent of harm committed by corporate polluters like Union Carbide and Dow Chemical. Unlike many iconic images of the Bhopal gas disaster's aftermath, in which corpses are strewn across the street, the representatives of Bhopal in this photo do not appear to have any physical markers of their exposure to the gas. In this respect, they appear similar to the Midland protestors, who bear no outward signs of what bodily consequences, if any, will befall their community from dioxin exposure. Further, by incorporating larger-than-life images of their fellow survivors, the emphasis is not on the sheer number of Bhopalis who have perished, but is

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instead on those who remain living despite the extraordinary challenges they have faced for justice.

By centering their paradoxical bodies—those poisoned by Dow's toxic load but outwardly appearing "normal"—I argue that the Midland and Bhopal protestors position themselves as "shareholders" of the corporation as well. Typically, shareholders are co-owners of a corporation. By purchasing shares of a company's stock, shareholders reap the benefit of the corporation's financial success. In turn, corporations are, theoretically, beholden to represent shareholders' interests; those who own larger shares of a corporation tend to wield more influence. At Dow Chemical, any shareholder has the right to a seat at the table at company-wide meetings. Michigan activists, including Tracey Easthope and Michelle Hurd-Riddick, used this identity strategically to pressure the company to take responsibility for environmental remediation (Easthope; T. Miller).[61] Taking on the identity of "shareholder" functions as a strategy for the protestors to become legible in the eyes of the corporation as constituents deserving of the organization's responsibility. Rather than buy their way onto Dow's board and share in the company's successes, however, the Midland and Bhopal protestors use their bodies as evidence of the corporation's global toxic load and demand a response proportionate to the scale of harm done. With respect to Bhopal, and other sites of water mismanagement and privatization throughout South Asia, becoming a shareholder thus means reclaiming the right to decision-making and restoring agency over how infrastructure provides necessary and viable solutions for distributing clean water to poisoned environments.

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[61] Shareholders at Exxon Mobil adopted a similar strategy in June 2021. A coalition of activists united through a hedge fund called Engine No. 1 to secure enough votes at a shareholder meeting for three of their members to join Exxon's board. Engine No. 1 advocates for Exxon to move toward cleaner energy policies and cease oil and natural gas operations in the Canadian tar sands (Krauss).

The protestors' arguments to be recognized as shareholders by virtue of their embodied toxic load also exposes the corporation's epistemological reliance on objective "proof" of the harm they have caused. In other words, Dow, and many corporations like it, will only admit responsibility for harm that is already done. According to Dave Dempsey, a policy advisor for the International Joint Commission and former advisor for the Michigan Environmental Council, Dow Chemical has repeatedly deployed a legal loophole to evade responsibility for environmental contamination. As part of a 2003 settlement with Tittabawassee activists, Dow refused to agree to the terms of the cleanup without an accompanying health assessment that proved dioxin had caused adverse impacts on Midland residents. Dempsey says that while linking a cleanup to a health study initially sounds plausible, "that's at odds with our whole system of environmental laws. We charge companies with avoiding and preventing pollution of the environment, and if we start saying that they can dump as much as they want into the environment until we can prove that they're hurting or killing somebody, there won't be an environment worth saving" (Meador). The body thus serves as the burden of proof, but only belatedly, when the toxic effects of water contamination become legible as disease.

Dow's argument comprises what science and technology studies scholar Sheila Jasanoff has termed a "civic epistemology"—"how knowledge comes to be perceived as reliable in political settings, and how scientific claims, more specifically, pattern as authoritative" (250). In other words, knowledge is constantly shaped by powerful actors and institutions over time, until its patterns cohere into an argument that is recognized to be credible by dominant groups. The knowledge pattern in question here frames corporate responsibility as conditional: Dow refuses to acknowledge harm until it can be quantified and made legible through a public health assessment after enough time has passed for these effects to appear within the body itself. In this

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way, accountability is always belated. Unless culpability can be "proven" through scientific assessments of the poisoned body, the corporation's responsibility for mitigating harm they may have caused can be thrown into doubt. Meanwhile, their work continues unhindered, producing future environmental crises that will further delay environmental justice and remediation efforts.

At the intersection of corporate negligence, groundwater contamination, embodied harm, and belated accountability, the Dow/Bhopal protests raise the following questions: Who possesses knowledge of potential environmental harm, and how are environmental and human health dependent on how this knowledge is used? What are the particular challenges of and strategies for making groundwater pollution legible to perpetrators? And what kind of power do shareholders wield to demand recognition and accountability from corporate polluters, especially in cases where so much harm has already been done? This chapter thinks through these questions within the context of contemporary South Asia, where water serves as the nexus of knowledge, embodiment, corporate responsibility, and the agency of the shareholder. Both Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007)—a reimagining of the Bhopal disaster 19 years after the event—and Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013)—a satirical self-help book depicting the rise and fall of an urban water entrepreneur—depict water infrastructures as sites of environmental harm and corporate negligence. Sinha's foul-mouthed protagonist Animal, whose back is severely disfigured due to MIC exposure as an infant, takes readers on his adventures through Khaufpur, a fictionalized Bhopal in which water contamination forms the present struggle for survival under increasingly unbearable environmental conditions. In Hamid's novel, a nameless, disembodied Narrator chronicles the life of a similarly nameless Protagonist, whose quest to become "filthy rich" involves rebottling and selling boiled tap water and, later, pilfering water from local farmers to supply luxury housing developments with 24/7 running taps.

By tracing the ambient presence of water throughout these texts, this chapter considers how these novels are not necessarily interested in the project of environmental representation. Rather, Hamid and Sinha ask thornier ethical questions that press on the relationship of various shareholders' knowledges of environmental degradation, infrastructural maintenance, and equitable distribution of resources. Deploying a second-person address and an allegorical mode, both novels interpellate the reader as a protagonist and raise the possibility that the highly specific locations of their texts—Bhopal and Lahore, respectively—could in fact be anywhere. By making the place of their novels ambiguous and incorporating the reader directly into the text, Hamid and Sinha thus echo Sedgwick's interest in how knowledge is performative, as I discussed in Chapter 2. Their novels press on the distinctions between how much *is* known, how much *can be* known, and how much we *want* to know about corporate-sponsored environmental violence and water contamination.

Perhaps the most interesting formal feature that *Animal's People* and *Filthy Rich* share is their engagement with the picaresque genre. The picaresque has a centuries-long history, dating back to the anonymous publication of *Lazarillo de Tormes* in 1554, during the height of both Spanish literature's "Golden Age" and Spanish imperial power. As exemplified in *Lazarillo*, the core characteristics of the picaresque include an episodic or "itinerant" structure (Balkan, "Rogues" 26); a streetwise narrator who speaks informally and often crudely; an attention to the grotesque or the scatological; and an aimless plot structure that features mundane episodes from daily life (Bakhtin 125). My interest in the picaresque stems from its ability to understand ontology and epistemology—or, embodiment and knowledge—as uniquely intertwined. The *picaro*'s "streetwise" knowledge and ability to critique hegemonic social structures is related intimately to his embodiment as poor, disfigured, diseased, or all or the above. *Animal's People*

exemplifies nearly all of these picaresque qualities, leading Rob Nixon to argue that the novel invents the "environmental picaresque" due to its political investments regarding environmental justice for Bhopal (46). Animal is literally streetwise, due to his distorted posture, and his sarcastic, humorous, and vulgar narration shocks as much as entertains his readers, whom he names "Eyes," in connection to the frequent stares he receives from passersby. *Filthy Rich* is a slightly less obvious choice for the picaresque, although Jens Elze reads the novel as such in conjunction with Hamid's earlier text, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist.* Whereas most picaresque stories tend to feature a first-person narrator, *Filthy Rich* splits the Narrator and the Protagonist into distinct entities. The Narrator, I argue, is a *picaro*-figure not only due to his constant attention to scatology and his division of the novel into twelve distinct episodes, but also due to his deliberately—and often viciously—satirical takes on both the *Bildungsroman* and self-help book. The picaresque narrator is always in on the joke of the self-help book's inherent failure. By conflating both the Protagonist and the reader as "You," the Narrator forces both to remain gullible and naïve to the streetwise and savvy knowledge that the Narrator brings forth.

Throughout this chapter, I am invested in reading Sinha's and Hamid's novels as picaresques because of the alternative epistemologies the *picaro* makes legible through his water-poisoned embodiment. The earliest version of the genre in Spain served to expose how the majority of Spaniards remained excluded from the exorbitant wealth that Spain's empire in the Americas made possible. In Nixon's words, despite the global power of the Spanish empire, "the great majority of Spaniards remained deeply poor" (56). The postcolonial picaresque narrator offers a similar critical perspective, not as the abject of imperial power, but as the abject of the transnational corporation. In these novels, the *picaro* is the inhabitant of already-degrading environments, is skeptical of transformative change, and holds up survival as an admirable goal.

The corporation and its agents—including Hamid's nameless Protagonist—are the "villains" deserving of the *picaro*'s critique and his wily tricks that attempt to redistribute wealth to the poor. Through my readings of Hamid and Sinha, I argue that, like the Bhopal and Midland protestors, the *picaro* adopts the identity of shareholder by materializing and embodying the supposedly placeless, vanishing corporation. As such, the *picaro* exposes the consequences of corporate negligence and speculates on the possibilities for solidarity with others who are harmed by corporate environmental violence, whether in the highly specific locations of Bhopal and Lahore, or elsewhere. With respect to water infrastructures, the picaresque narrator approaches the built environment differently from Azaro's magical realist perceptions of urban development or the Niger Delta insurgents' demands for access to oil and its profits. Rather, the picaresque narrator and the protesting shareholders demand infrastructure as a solution to the entangled crises of knowledge, embodied violence, and environmental degradation that the corporation engenders.

My argument in this chapter proceeds in four sections. First, I offer an environmental history of water infrastructure in South Asia, which frames water in terms of a crisis of knowledge. Just as Dow Chemical insists on epistemologies of certainty and proof, corporate interests during the Green Revolution and structural adjustment eras framed the environment as a resource to be maximized and extracted. Water contamination emerges as this epistemology's blind spot, a by-product of pesticides leaching into the soil as natural reserves of groundwater are over-extended to support massive agricultural schemes. From there, I move to a literary history of the picaresque in South Asia with specific attention to the location of the slum, where the *picaro* dwells. Drawing on recent work by postcolonialists including Stacey Balkan, Elze, and Nixon, I examine the particular purchase of the picaresque for South Asian literature, and

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consider how Hamid and Sinha subvert the linear arc of the picaresque entrepreneur who "overcomes" the conditions of the slums.

My chapter then proceeds to examine three strategies of the picaresque that are especially useful for demanding legibility and accountability from the corporation to its shareholders. I consider how Sinha's and Hamid's engagements with scatology position the body as a threshold for perceiving corporate violence. Embodied knowledge thus makes legible what the corporation refuses to acknowledge about the environmental impacts of its operations. I then turn to the picaresque's anti-development ethos, noting how the genre refuses the discourses of development that have structured both the bourgeois *Bildungsroman* and India's and Pakistan's relationships to water infrastructures since Partition. I conclude by reading Hamid's and Sinha's engagements with allegory as a strategy that makes the "place" of the corporation portable. Echoing the oft-cited claim that "We all live in Bhopal" (qtd. Wenzel, *Disposition* 196), I demonstrate how the allegorical mode and the second-person address in *Animal's People* and *Filthy Rich* collapse the geographical distance between picaresque narrator and reader. Doing so creates space for the reader to question how they, too, may have been compromised to satisfy a corporation's bottom line. Through these literary strategies, Hamid's and Sinha's picaresque narrators position literature as a kind of infrastructure, one that reaches beyond the diegetic world of the text to establish connections and solidarities across geographical, textual, and epistemological boundaries.

Environmental Histories of South Asian Water Management

Water systems in South Asia have historically been heavily contested because they cut across both biophysical and built infrastructures. From the controversies over the Narmada River Valley megadam project, publicized through the activist efforts of Vandana Shiva and Arundhati

Roy, to the contemporary catastrophe of poisoned groundwater plaguing Bhopal, water infrastructures entangle nationalist symbols of development, indigenous environmental relations, private interests, and the ways in which climate change adversely impacts the hydrological cycle. Rather than attempt to encompass the vast range of infrastructural systems, cultural practices, and national as well as spiritual narratives of water that emerge across the South Asian subcontinent, this section offers an environmental history of water infrastructure through the lens of competing regimes of knowledge regarding environmental management. Just as the *picaro's* alternative knowledge of urban life and embodied toxicity speaks back to the corporation's evasion of responsibility, so too do competing regimes of knowledge about water raise political debates about public versus private management of infrastructure.

Anthropologists of water systems in South Asia, including Lyla Mehta, Nikhil Anand, and Lisa Bjorkman, all point to the problem of knowledge as a key differentiator between the state's and private industries' understandings of water scarcity and infrastructural maintenance versus those of slum- and city-dwellers, whose relationship to water is central to their very survival. In what follows, I explore two modes of environmental management that are important both for South Asian environmental history and Hamid's and Sinha's literary representations of water—namely, the expansion of pesticide manufacturers during the Green Revolution and the increasing privatization of urban water utilities. By tracing the historical relationships between industries, the state, and the public, I demonstrate how dominant regimes of environmental management repeatedly neglect to include water safety in their visions of industrial progress and deny decision-making to those who are most impacted by water's availability and potability.

Changes to water infrastructure in post-Partition India and Pakistan initially came not through projects of urban renewal, as was seen in West Africa, but through innovations in

irrigation and agricultural practices. The so-called "Green Revolution," a global movement to modernize agriculture through technological innovations like pesticides and genetically modified seeds, took hold in the northern Indian region of the Punjab in efforts to create a national food surplus (Everest 63-64). Although promoted under the guise of "abundance," both in terms of food supply and economic prosperity, activist Vandana Shiva argues that the Green Revolution was invested in the production of scarcity, especially from an ecological point of view (*Violence* 14-15). The high-yield crops planted with modified seeds required increased irrigation; at the same time, these agricultural practices released chemicals into the soil from pesticides believed to enhance crop growth. Additionally, according to Everest, industrializing agriculture concentrated production in the hands of wealthy landowners, dispossessing peasants from both their ancestral lands and their traditional farming practices, which relied on the natural hydrological cycle (63-64). As a result, the knowledge regime of the Green Revolution can be described as the "planned destruction of diversity in nature and culture to create the uniformity demanded by centralized management systems" (Shiva, *Violence* 12). We have seen this impulse for uniformity before, in both the sanitation-driven slum clearances in Lagos and the exclusive dependence on oil revenues in the Niger Delta. Like these West African initiatives, the Green Revolution took hold in South Asia as an opportunity to modernize India for the twentieth century. Left out of this vision of modernity, however, was the health and safety of India's water infrastructures, both built and biophysical, as the high-yield crops overburdened the subcontinent's groundwater supply in the name of agricultural efficiency (Shiva, *Water Wars*).

The Green Revolution provides context for understanding how Union Carbide came to establish its affiliate location, Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) in Bhopal in 1970. Pesticide use tripled in India between 1956-1970, and Union Carbide took part in this economic

prosperity, switching from the production of batteries to pesticides as demand grew (Shrivastava 30). Although numerous chemicals were produced at the Bhopal location, the most dangerous was methyl isocyanate (MIC), the active ingredient in the pesticide Sevin, which causes lung, skin, and tissue damage when humans are exposed to large quantities of it. Despite the dangers posed in producing this substance—and in storing mass quantities of MIC in underground tanks—UCIL never provided extensive safety training to its Indian employees, nor informed them of the dangers involved in working with MIC. Further, all safety signs and employee training materials were written in English, and Hindi was expressly forbidden from being spoken in the facility, revealing how the corporation enacts neocolonial language policies that place Indian workers at risk (Hanna et al. 33). According to Everest, workers at the plant came to learn the chemicals were harmful through their own experiences with sickness; he reports that "Workers used to vomit, feel uneasy, or get pains in their chests, so we knew it was dangerous" (49). As Hamid and Sinha depict, the South Asian body functions as a threshold for corporate negligence, making legible what the corporation intends to hide or ignore.

Because UCIL kept both their technology and safety procedures proprietary, the extensive loss of life and ongoing embodied consequences of the Bhopal gas disaster can also be framed as a crisis of knowledge. As numerous historians and cultural critics have recounted, on the night of the disaster, the Bhopalis living in the slums closest to the factory did not know how to protect themselves from the gas because they did not know what it was or how it would affect them. According to Bridget Hanna, Ward Morehouse, and Satinath Sarangi, "Nobody knew that it was better if you didn't run from the burning fumes, that the harder you breathed, the worse it was for your body. Nobody knew that a wet cloth over the eyes and nose and mouth offered a protection that might save your life" (3). By contrast, employees who had received training knew

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to check the direction of the wind, and run from the gas in the opposite direction, avoiding

exposure almost completely (Mukherjee, Rai 8). As has been well-documented, the Bhopal

disaster produced both an instantaneous and an ongoing health crisis, killing anywhere from

2,000-10,000 people and condemning close to half a million others—and their descendants—to a

range of chronic medical problems, reproductive issues, and birth defects (Hanna et al. xx).

Suroopa Mukherjee argues that women's bodies bear out the intergenerational consequences of

the disaster, illuminating the slow violence of environmental poisoning—a fact that will be

explored at length in my reading of *Animal's People* (7). Just as in Sinha's novel, the Dow

Chemical protests and Union Carbide's "vanishing" into thin air occur between 2001-2003.

Mukherjee cites these same years as turning points in the Bhopal disaster because they signify

the moment when victims who were children on the night of the disaster come of age, as well as

when the next generation of Bhopali survivors begin to be born.

As discussed above, the Bhopal disaster illustrates Nixon's concept of slow violence

because of its ongoing, evolving consequences over nearly 30 years. The crisis has evolved from

one of acute medical emergencies as a result of gas exposure to one of chronic, unpredictable

conditions brought about by contaminated groundwater. In a *Scientific American* report

commemorating the 25th anniversary of the disaster, Sara Goodman notes that contaminants in

the soil are threatening the region's aquifer, a naturally-forming underground water reservoir that

provides drinking water to 15 communities surrounding Bhopal. Typically, aquifers replenish

through the hydrological cycle, in which rainwater either returns to freshwater sources like rivers

and lakes, or drains into soil where it can be stored until it is pumped out through sources like

wells or irrigation technology. In other cases, however, groundwater is locked in subterranean

bodies of rock and cannot be replenished through the hydrological cycle. If these "closed

system" aquifers are contaminated, the entire supply of groundwater becomes toxic, and fresh water must be found elsewhere (Barlow, Clarke 5-6). In Goodman's piece, she reports that the Indian government is legally responsible to ensure clean water is brought to Bhopal. However, the need for a cleanup and full-scale remediation effort can only be confirmed by an independent environmental assessment, which the government denies is necessary.

Ten years after Goodman's report, *The Atlantic's* Apoorva Mandavilli explains that the groundwater—still in need of cleanup—would need to be extracted and cleaned, but that is only possible if the direction of the subterranean toxic plume can be located. In the meantime, "if the source is still there, and the plume is still there, it's just going to keep moving," allowing the temporally and spatially dispersed effects of slow violence to persist, spreading beyond the urban center of Bhopal to other neighboring regions (Mandavilli). Here, we can see how the short-term logics of the Green Revolution's vision for modernity by way of agricultural advancements collapse. By framing the environment as a substance to be mastered and maximized for profit and yield, the civic epistemology of the Green Revolution produces an environmental, social, and embodied catastrophe that continues to threaten the livelihoods and environmental wellness of Bhopalis. Just as the slum dwellers of Lagos and inhabitants of the Niger Delta endured road and oil infrastructures that were not designed with them in mind, so too are Bhopalis forced to bear the long-term consequences of the short-term plans for "developing" the Indian environment into an agricultural machine.[62]

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[62] In addition to water disputes surrounding agricultural usage within India, water scarcity is expected to increase conflicts between India and Pakistan in the coming decade. Climate scientists predict the South Asian region will experience increasingly unpredictable weather patterns as a result of climate change. In Ben de Bruyn's reading of *Filthy Rich*, which I discuss further below, he interprets the novel's attention to security apparatuses and militarization as evidence of resource wars over water. He notes that a "water war" between India and Pakistan is especially risky due to these nations' histories of threatening to use nuclear weapons on each other—a phenomenon that forms the focus of Chapter 4 in this project (60-61).

A second regime of environmental management—privatization—has emerged in recent years to respond to more localized challenges facing the equitable distribution of potable water to both urban and rural areas. Whereas the Green Revolution centralized the management of agriculture via government investment in pesticides and other technologies, water privatization centralizes the procurement and distribution of clean water in private entities rather than the state itself. As Barlow and Clarke argue, privatization is a win-win for governments because it alleviates both financial debts and state responsibility to maintain water infrastructures themselves (90).[63] Like Hamid's Protagonist, proponents of water privatization tout their entrepreneurial abilities as a mode of making infrastructure more efficient and cost-effective (Bakker 348). Offering better alternatives like "low coverage rates, low rates of cost-recovery, [and] low tariffs," private corporations assign economic value to water distribution, often reselling it to the public at much higher rates with little to no guarantee of improved quality (Bakker 348).

Opponents of privatization take issue with the assignment of economic value to water, which is typically viewed as a universal human right. As one of the most vocal opponents to privatization and spectacular infrastructural development projects throughout South Asia, Arundhati Roy echoes Vandana Shiva's concerns about the artificial production of scarcity as a justification for expanding private enterprise. In one of her many essays, "Power Politics," Roy writes, "'Privatization' is presented as being the only alternative to an inefficient, corrupt state. In fact, it's not a choice at all. It's only made to look like one. Essentially, privatization is a mutually profitable business contract between the private (preferably foreign) company or

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[63] This exact scenario occurred in Midland, MI in May 2020 when two dams breached in the wake of 500-year flooding along the Tittabawassee River. Two years prior, the dams switched from federal to a hybrid state-private management, allowing the dams to evade more stringent regulatory measures. I return to this example in this chapter's conclusion to discuss its relevance to Dow Chemical's ongoing cleanup in Midland.

financial institution and the ruling elite of the third world" (60). While privatization often occurs on local scales within cities or smaller regions, one of the key examples for thinking through this debate is the Sardar Sarovar dam project, which proposed building a megadam on the Narmada River.[64] The project claimed that the dam was necessary to bring piped water to populations in the drought-prone states of Kutch and Saurashtra in Gujarat. However, according to anthropologist Lyla Mehta, who performed fieldwork in Kutch, the majority of piped water from the dam project was diverted to the hotel and tourism industries. Everyday people, especially in remote areas, still relied on traditional methods of collecting groundwater to survive in the arid region (xiii). Mehta's fieldwork supports Roy's claims in another of her polemical essays, "The Greater Common Good," that the justifications for spectacular infrastructure projects "conflict with one another" (123). Roy writes, "Irrigation uses up the water you need to produce power. Flood control requires you to keep the reservoir empty during the monsoon months to deal with an anticipated surfeit of water. And if there's no surfeit, you're left with an empty dam. And this defeats the purpose of irrigation, which is to *store* the monsoon water" (123). At the end of the day, major hydrological projects like the Sardar Sarovar dam reinforce an epistemology—and some might say mythology—of developmental nationalism. Turning over water infrastructures to private interests risks alleviating state responsibility for maintaining and operating the systems that distribute life-sustaining resources to the masses rather than the few.

It is worth noting that, for many South Asian citizens in both India and Pakistan, privatization is seen as desirable because of its promises to bring both much-needed resources as well as legibility in the eyes of the state. In her study of public perceptions of the Bangalore

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[64] In a striking coincidence, Bhopal is in the region of Madhya Pradesh that would allegedly benefit from the Sardar Sarovar dam project. I have not yet encountered any research linking the two projects, but Mandavilli notes that the 2012 infrastructure scheme to bring clean piped water to Bhopal uses the Narmada River as its source.

water project, which aimed to distribute piped water to 1 million people beginning in 2003, Malini Ranganathan reports that many residents opted to pre-pay for water services as far as a year in advance. These residents, many of whom lived in peripheral or improvised settlements outside of Bangalore, used their payments for water as proof of residence, making them eligible for other kinds of social services in India. The semi-privatized water distribution scheme gained currency among large swaths of eligible populations precisely because it afforded them a degree of legibility for other rights and services in the eyes of the state. As Ranganathan concludes, "In this way, agency here resembles Asef Bayat's 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary'—a nebulous politics that involves action to acquire the basic necessities of urban livability, but one that is expressly not a politics of resistance" ("Paying" 595). Ranganathan's complication is important to consider in the context of both Bhopal and the ongoing privatization schemes in urban centers like Lahore. If infrastructure is ultimately perceived as a solution, whether to crises of pollution, scarcity, or federal illegibility, then compromises regarding privatization will need to be made in order to help these populations survive an increasingly challenging and changing environment. In what follows, I explore how the picaresque genre is uniquely suited to engage with these contradictions and to present the gritty realities of survival in poisoned environments, both in South Asia and elsewhere.

The Picaresque and the South Asian Urban Slum

When considering the picaresque's purchase for postcolonial studies nearly 400 years after the genre's inception, literary critics including Stacey Balkan, Jens Elze, and Rob Nixon have been drawn to four of its core features: its episodic or "itinerant" structure; its attention both to the material body and the brutal socio-economic conditions that struggle to support it; its refusal to engage in teleologies of development, both socially and narratologically; and its

strategic intimacy between the picaresque narrator and reader. Blaber and Gilman view

postcolonial iterations of the picaresque as yet another example of writers from the Global South

"writing back" to the Anglophone literary traditions imposed upon them through British colonial

education and culture. They write that the picaresque adapts its hero, "an outsider who makes do

in a chaotic world," to the postcolony, where she "explore[s] and then subvert[s] some of those

stereotypes which are endemic in postcolonial societies" (ix). Just as the traditional picaresque

emphasizes self-preservation among the alienated and marginalized underclasses (Maiorino 4),

so too is the postcolonial picaresque invested in exposing the socio-economic conditions which

create barriers to materially fulfilling lifestyles.

In my previous chapters, I was drawn to magical realism and petro-fiction, respectively,

for their capacities to animate the environmental conditions that disrupt—or are entirely

excluded from—hegemonic Western understandings of "reality" and "realism." Magical realism

exposes the constructedness of "the real," while petro-fiction considers how resource extraction

becomes "naturalized" as necessary for economic progress. In a similar vein, the picaresque

leaves no doubt about the brutality of the human condition under colonialism, both past and

present, especially in the slum. The genre also expresses no interest in making the reader

comfortable with its visceral depictions of scatology and the failures of development. These

characteristics of the picaresque, I argue, afford it the unique capacity to examine ontology and

epistemology together. The grotesque or scatological body contains specific knowledge about

environmental and infrastructural degradation, disrupting the illusion that bodies can be

contained, isolated, or shaped into appropriate subjects who are "deserving" of infrastructure.

Rather, the picaresque not only lauds the unruly poisoned body, but speaks from that subject

position himself. Below, I extend recent work on the postcolonial picaresque regarding the

genre's refusal to adhere to developmentalist teleologies of "self-help" and individual

improvement, as advocated most notably by the *bildungsroman*. From there, I consider how

these narratives of development and self-transformation have surfaced in South Asian

Anglophone literatures of the slum, before exploring how Hamid and Sinha both engage with

and critique these literary traditions through their picaresque narrators.

Elze, Balkan, and Nixon all identify the picaresque's rebuttal to the *bildungsroman* as

one of the genre's defining features. Although my reading in Chapter 1 focused on magical

realism, Jens Elze identifies Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* as a picaresque novel that is not

only outwardly skeptical of the *bildungsroman*'s developmental telos, but one that actively

resists any changes in the protagonist Azaro's character development.[65] Elze argues that *The*

Famished Road reflects "a postcoloniality that no longer projects a better future after a *rite du*

passage, which is independence, but becomes increasingly skeptical about such teleological,

bildungsroman-like, narratives of development" ("Precarity" 48). As I have argued, Okri

strategically positions the trilogy on the eve of Nigerian independence while also knowing how

the promises of independence have failed. In her dissertation, Balkan argues for a genealogy of

the picaresque situated in South Asian Anglophone literatures. She identifies significant parallels

between the Spanish rogue, skeptical of but also excluded from imperial wealth, and Bengali

tenant farmers, who were dispossessed of land and labor throughout the British empire's century-

long occupation of India. Although this historical comparison justifies her turn to the picaresque,

Balkan's work ultimately considers the genre in contemporary South Asian fiction, arguing that

"a new *picaro*—in Bihar, in Delhi, in Bhopal—is produced by similar modes of colonial and

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[65] Elze traces the etymological connections between Okri's Azaro—originally named "Lazaro" because of his recursive ontology as an *abiku*, or spirit-child who repeatedly returns from the dead—and the prototypical *picaro* Lazarillo, whose name is the diminutive form of "Lazaro" in Spanish ("Precarity" 53).

corporate violence" (*Rogues* 31-32). Balkan thus examines "those forms whose *telos* is not 'incorporation,' but resistance" (31-32), reading texts which range from Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy, to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, to Indra Sinha's *Animal's People.* Balkan claims South Asia is an appropriate context for characterizing the postcolonial picaresque precisely because of India's and Pakistan's syntheses of development and nationalist discourses. As discussed above, India and Pakistan used large-scale infrastructural projects, like megadams, to craft their myths of developmental nationalism post-independence.

Nixon extends Balkan's and Elze's work by characterizing *Animal's People* as the "environmental picaresque," a genre he finds particularly useful for theorizing the delayed and dispersed effects of slow violence in the Bhopal gas disaster. By adopting the perspective of Animal, who is severely physically deformed as a result of his exposure to MIC, Sinha is able to perform a threefold critique of neoliberal capitalism. According to Nixon, the genre allows Sinha to address the exorbitant wealth gap between the ultra-rich and ultra-poor; to expose how ecological destruction disproportionately impacts the poor; and to examine how transnational corporations take advantage of deregulation for exploitative purposes (46). The environmental picaresque thus leverages the roguish, bawdy voice of the *picaro* not only to speak back to the corporation's hegemonic capacities to "vanish" without accountability, but also to "corporealize" the corporation through evidence of environmental degradation, disrupting its ability to seemingly disappear into thin air.

The epistemological connections between the picaresque, the *Bildungsroman*, the corporation, and discourses of self-improvement are most clear in what Joseph Slaughter has termed "the corporate branding of human rights" (36). As he discusses in his foundational book, *Human Rights, Inc.* (2007)*,* the universal principles upheld by "human rights" are codified

through both literary and legal discourses. He writes, "One of the multiple meanings of incorporation comprehended in my title…is the notion that human personality development is *a process of socialization*, a process of enfranchisement" (20, emphasis added). In Slaughter's assessment, the *bildungsroman* is the literary genre that dramatizes and illustrates how this socialization takes place, in which individuals are transformed into an Enlightened, liberal subject who is prepared for and deserving of universal human rights. This process of transformation has its historical roots in both the colonial charter company and the contemporary corporation. Both deploy "humanitarian rhetoric of progress, rights, development, and responsibility for 'underdeveloped' peoples," and the corporation especially presents itself as "the new global engines of *Bildung*, making equal opportunity and social mobility available not only to their advantaged consumers but to the disadvantaged producers of their goods in the economic, social, and political 'backwaters' of globalization" (Slaughter 36). Slaughter also reads the picaresque as the antithesis of the *Bildungsroman* because the *picaro* is externally excluded from opportunities to develop and improve. He "seems to have unbounded physical mobility but no real upward mobility, [and] is buffeted about by social forces beyond his control" (42). The *picaro* is thus unfit for liberal citizenship and by extension—recalling my argument from Chapter 2—he is unfit to make decisions about or utilize built infrastructures. As *Filthy Rich* and *Animal's People* demonstrate, the picaresque reveals the hypocrisies of these myths of national and individual development. They do so by subverting the *telos* of character development and levying a political critique of the fallout of spectacular infrastructures through a grotesque attention to the poisoned bodies of those excluded from the "promise" of infrastructure.

Before turning to my readings of the novels and the picaresque epistemologies they promote, I want to think through the slum as both the postcolonial *picaro*'s familiar territory and as the location for a tradition of South Asian *Bildungsromane* which emphasizes self-help, individual development, and nationalist progress as the ideal outcomes for postcolonial subjects. In her book-length study of stereotypes that recur throughout South Asian Anglophone fiction, Mrinalini Chakravorty identifies the slum as "the most captivating stereotype for imagining India's global rise" (85). Chakravorty's interest in stereotypes comes from questioning how recurring images of South Asia in global cultural productions pose ethical questions to readers. Encountering stereotypes of "otherness" produce equally insightful conclusions about how we position ourselves as readers of world literature in the globalized era (9). Through extensive readings of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) and Danny Boyle's film from the same year, *Slumdog Millionaire*, Chakravorty argues that "the slum stereotype electrifies the notion that a certain grab-and-hustle attitude is the only tactic for survival available to the vast majority as postcolonial nations attend to the pressures of late-modern economies" (86). Such stereotypes glorify the slum as a "magical" place, one that imbues the hero with the unique savviness, resilience, and ambition to exceed and improve upon the circumstances of his birth later in life— not unlike Okri's magical realist depictions of Azaro's slum community, as discussed in Chapter 1. These characterizations, however, not only hold up "slum magic" as an unattainable ideal, but also smooth over the structures of socio-economic inequality and power that create the conditions for such "resilience" and ambition in the first place. The "utopian assumptions of global capitalism for the postcolony" thus valorizes the stories of those who escape the slum, rather than those who are forced to endure it (Chakravorty 87).

Beyond the scope of the *Bildungsroman*, this stereotype of the slum as both a location

and condition to be overcome has its origins in the complicated cultural history of sanitation in

India. Prior to colonization, the Indian caste system designated certain classes of people as

Dalits, or untouchables. Often, these classes were those who performed sanitary labor, such as

street sweeping or cleaning up the waste of higher castes, who were entitled to a greater range of

purification rituals.[66] These pre-existing cultural norms surrounding sanitation mapped on well to

the British's sanitation schemes for their colonial settlements in cities like Kolkata and Mumbai.

Just as the caste system provided an opportunity for colonial educators to create a "buffer class"

of translators and interpreters between the British and the colonized masses (Macaulay), sanitary

infrastructures like sewage and water were implemented strategically, and were deemed

appropriate for certain populations and not others. Implemented approximately 50-75 years prior

to the sanitary infrastructures in Lagos discussed in Chapter 1, these infrastructures were

"designed to discriminate between those who were deserving of membership in the colonial city

and those for whom the promises of liberal citizenship were deferred or denied" (Anand 14).[67]

As sanitary infrastructures came to demarcate materially "clean" and "unclean" locations in

postcolonial cities, slums emerged as the ultimate boundary between both sanitary and

unsanitary space, as well as liberal and "uncivilized" or "uncultured" subjects. Slums come to

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[66] One popular mode of protest against Union Carbide in India was the "Jhadoo Maro Dow ko" campaign. Translated by Ecology Center correspondent Ted Sylvester as "Hit Dow with Brooms," the protestors waved and piled up sweeper's brooms outside of the Union Carbide factory as an attempt to "sweep" Dow out of India. Organized primarily by women, the campaign aimed to draw attention to the contaminated groundwater in Bhopal (S. Mukherjee 47; Sylvester 6).

[67] Ranganathan notes that colonial discourses and projects related to sanitation have directly caused contemporary water contamination in Bangalore. Beginning in 1898, in the midst of a subcontinent-wide plague, colonial urban planners determined all local water sources to be "unsanitary." As such, storm drains were to be built underground where they would remain out of sight. However, they were built in the same structures as sewers, so that freshwater runoff commingled with human waste. When storm drains overflow and flood—which has been happening more frequently due to heavier monsoons impacted by climate change—Bangalore is inundated with contaminated water ("Storm Drains" 1307-1309).

embody the "fear" of falling backward from the privileges of modernity, a stereotype that Chakravorty argues has remained virtually intact since the nineteenth century (100).

Anglophone literary production in South Asia reflects this dual association between caste and infrastructural sanitation as early as Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935). The novel chronicles a day in the life of Bakha, a member of the sweeper caste who cleans latrines. For the majority of the novel, Bakha's life appears small and meager. His family relationships are strained, and he is also publicly shamed when he fails to warn a higher-caste man that he, an untouchable, is nearby. The climax of the novel occurs when Bakha stumbles upon a crowd gathered to hear a speech in which Mahatma Gandhi speaks about the need to emancipate untouchables from the caste system if India is truly to be a modern nation. Elated by Gandhi's speech, Bakha then overhears a conversation between two men in the crowd discussing the merits of the flush toilet, which is expected to arrive in India in the next few years. The flush toilet offers a technological and infrastructural opportunity to transform Gandhi's call into a reality of modern life. Simply, the toilet would eliminate the need for the sweeper castes to manage human waste, thus offering them the opportunity to be emancipated from their social role and pursue other interests. Throughout the novel, Bakha mourns his lot in life, repeatedly registering his disgust at handling excrement and admiring the cleanliness and orderly clothing of men like the British colonial officers. Aspiring to another kind of life, for Bakha, means a progression out of poverty, slums, and shit into a sanitized, "modern" profession. Infrastructure, in Mulk Raj Anand's account, materializes this hope for Bakha as the novel concludes.

Anand's characterization of infrastructure as the savior of the untouchable caste echoes similar attitudes throughout much of the Indian nationalist project to equate technology and spectacular infrastructural projects as indicative of India's modernity. As discussed above, part

of the impetus for megadam projects like the Sardar Sarovar came from prime minister

Jawarhalal Nehru's proclamation that "dams will be the temples of modern India" (Roy,

"Common Good" 111). Nehru's adage perhaps explains why India was so receptive to structural

adjustment policies as outlined by the World Bank, economic schemes that, according to Mike

Davis, adopted the rhetoric of "self-help" to bring urban regions like slums out of poverty.[68] In

the 1970s, World Bank president Robert McNamara and architect John Turner collaborated to

frame slum renewal programs in terms of "helping the poor help themselves" (Davis 72). In this

way, the urban poor began to be characterized as resilient and ambitious. Unlike the *picaro*'s

developmental stasis, these slum-dwellers were framed as deserving of infrastructure because

they actively sought better lives by migrating from rural areas to urban centers. Here we can see

urban slum dwellers beginning to take on the characteristics that emerge in Chakravorty's

assessment. In reality, "Praising the praxis of the poor became a smokescreen for reneging upon

historic state commitments to relieve poverty and homelessness" (Davis 72). In other words,

investing in urban infrastructure provided an opportunity to relieve state governments from

further responsibility—laying the groundwork for privatization of previously public

infrastructures like water discussed above.

The figure of the entrepreneur emerges in this context: in which sanitation is conflated

with modernization, infrastructure is framed as self-help, the urban poor are stereotyped as

magically resilient, and state governments further abscond responsibility. The entrepreneur

functions as both the stereotypical figure who "rises" out of South Asian slums, and as the

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[68] In Chapter 4, I examine how India's adherence to structural adjustment institutions, like the International
Monetary Fund and the World Bank, is connected to the clandestine development of its nuclear weapons
infrastructures. In *Shalimar the Clown*, Salman Rushdie's character Max Ophuls is one of the architects of the
Bretton Woods financial accords, which establishes the IMF and World Bank. I read Ophuls and his affair with
Boonyi as allegorizing India's desire to join a global nuclear elite.

postcolonial *picaro* whose existence is a testament to the dark side of global capitalist wealth. Such is the trajectory of both Jamal, the hero of *Slumdog Millionaire*, and Balram Halwai, of *The White Tiger*—trajectories that, I argue, both Hamid's Protagonist and Sinha's Animal engage with but ultimately subvert. Jamal literally embodies the transformation from shit to star in Boyle's picaresque romance. In the film's iconic opening scene, the young Jamal crawls through sewage to jump to the front of the line and score an autograph from a Bollywood star. By the film's end, after he has won a million dollars on an Indian game show, it is Jamal who is dancing to a Bollywood tune alongside Latika, his love whom he rescues from prostitution.

Whereas Jamal's rags-to-riches story depicts his payday coming from "a blend of fear, cunning, acquisitiveness, and industriousness ostensibly cultivated by his escapades in slumming" (Chakravorty 86), Balram's transformation into an entrepreneur is much darker. Determined to achieve greatness after growing up in a rural village run by corrupt landowners, Balram becomes a driver for Mr. Ashok, one of the landlord's sons, in Delhi. After toiling away for months and allowing himself to be charged for a crime Mr. Ashok committed, Balram murders Mr. Ashok and flees to Bangalore, where he reinvents himself as the entrepreneurial owner of a taxi company. Embodying the *picaro*'s sarcastic tone, scatological humor, and roguish abandonment of others in the name of self-interest, Balram's entrepreneurial rise "serves, through its sheer ugliness and violence, to discredit the neoliberal turn in Indian political economy and the entrepreneur myth it uses to lend itself a veneer of reasonableness and moral justification" (Walonen 252). Rather than offering insights to change these unequal systems, however, Balram feels no remorse about Ashok's murder, nor of his bribing the police to run other taxi companies out of business, allowing him to corner the market for "White Tiger

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Drivers."[69] Indeed, in contrast to Adiga's portrayal of a mildly paranoid and doubtful Balram at the novel's end, Rahmin Bahrani's 2021 film adaptation suggests that Balram revels in perpetuating the discriminatory economic systems to which he was recently subject. In the film's final scene, Balram speaks directly to the camera, breaking the fourth wall as Hamid's and Sinha's picaresque narrators do. He states, "I've switched sides. I've made it. I've broken out of the [rooster] coop," referring to his previous life of poverty in which he compared his meager survival to roosters waiting to be slaughtered. As the transformed Balram smirks and walks out of the scene, the camera pans back to show his many male employees, all wearing uniforms with "WTD" embroidered. While Balram may have indeed "switched sides," it is clear that the "rooster coop" itself remains intact, and that the drivers he employs are still in its precarious economic grip, even with one of their own in a position of power.

In what follows, I argue that Hamid and Sinha engage with this literary tradition of sanitation, infrastructure as "self-help," and entrepreneurship by leveraging the voice of the picaresque narrator to position infrastructure as a political solution to environmental degradation and to collapse the geographical distance between narrator and reader. They each alter various elements of these literary antecedents. Hamid's entrepreneur is not nearly as financially successful as Jamal nor Balram, while Sinha's Animal is by no means entrepreneurial, though his escapades in the slum parallel the bawdy humor and laughter that first enthralled *Slumdog*'s screenwriter, Simon Beaufoy. At the same time, however, Hamid and Sinha are invested in the picaresque's capacities for structural critique; their *picaros* leverage their disfigured and diseased bodies to provide proof of corporate environmental violence and to deny the corporation's ability to "vanish" into thin air. In the sections that follow, I trace how Hamid and Sinha deploy specific

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[69] In the 2021 film adaptation of *The White Tiger*, Balram lands a dig at *Slumdog Millionaire*: "I was trapped in the rooster coop, and don't believe for a second there's a million rupee game show you can win to get out of it."

conventions of the picaresque to achieve this structural critique—namely, emphasizing

scatological observations to position the body as the threshold for perceiving slow consequences

of groundwater pollution; adopting the genre's anti-development ethos and refusal of "self-help";

and finally, weaponizing the intimacy of second-person narration to collapse the geographical

distance between reader and narrator. In doing so, Hamid and Sinha interpellate the reader as a

"shareholder" as well, imploring them to take part in this now-public knowledge about corporate

violence and realize how the fictional struggles for clean water and collective agency might not

be as foreign as they think.

The Body as Threshold

One of the picaresque's most defining features is its bawdy and often vulgar attention to

corporeality. Because the genre typically depicts the material realities of the urban poor,

picaresque stories do not shy away from the grotesque or the scatological, but rather present

them as features of daily life that other genres, like the *Bildungsroman*, prefer not to address

(Balkan, "Rogues" 28-30). Whereas prominent literary theorists like Mikhail Bakhtin relegate

the picaresque's use of scatological humor to lesser comedic tropes, like those belonging to the

clown and the fool (406 fn. 63), others note that the *picaro*'s deployments of laughter, humor,

and vulgarity offer a kind of narrative agency and control.[70] According to Randolph Pope, "The

gruesome events [depicted] are shifted into humorous situations by the fact that the narrator, who

lived them, has survived and considers them amusing…After all, here they are, telling the story"

(72). Throughout this section, I am interested in the kinds of knowledge that scatology and

corporeality afford, especially when relating the lived, embodied experiences of those who are

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[70] Indeed, one of the most striking features of the protestors depicted in Figure 5 is that they appear to be laughing, suggesting they may be "in" on the reality of Dow Chemical's culpability and responsibility for Bhopal.

enduring toxic environments as a result of corporate negligence. On the one hand, this knowledge makes legible what the corporation refuses to acknowledge about its responsibility to victims of environmental degradation, a refusal that is borne out of an epistemological insistence on quantifiable "proof" of embodied harm. On the other hand, scatology affords a visceral specificity to the "facelessness" of the corporation; it embodies the corporation's train of destruction via its poisoned shareholders. One of the main frustrations running throughout *Animal's People* is the absence of the "Kampani" representatives to stand trial in Khaufpur. Similarly, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*'s insistence on an allegorical setting diminishes the intensely specific and localized impact of corporations on South Asian environments, as discussed above regarding Roy's opposition to the Sardar Sarovar dam project. Thus, this section thinks through Nixon's questions on the picaresque's central themes—"What does it mean to be reduced to living in subhuman, bestial conditions?...What does it mean, in the fused imperial language of temporal and spatial dismissal, to be written off as 'backward'?" (66-67)—and takes seriously the knowledge of environmental poisoning made legible through the "subhuman, bestial" body.

"Wells full of poison": Toxic Embodiment in Animal's People

Sinha's picaresque narrator, Animal, was an infant on "that night" of the gas disaster in Khaufpur. Though he was born able-bodied, the exposure to his back produced significant deformities in his spine, to the point where he is forced to walk on all fours, thus earning him the nickname "Animal" from his childhood peers. Narrating the novel 19 years after the disaster, Animal is now a young adult who makes his home in the remnants of the destroyed Kampani factory, occasionally visiting a retired French nun, Ma Franci, who cared for him as a child, and otherwise traipsing about the city's slums, searching for food or odd jobs to occupy his time. His

extraordinary physicality is quite literally a visualization of corporate environmental violence, his back bent double by Union Carbide's "foreign load" (Nixon 57). As a narrator, Animal is extremely vulgar and cynical. He regularly draws attention to his own sexual appetites and physical virility, especially his lust for his neighbor Nisha, and regards the rounds of humanitarian workers and journalists who come to Khaufpur as profiteers looking to benefit from the ongoing suffering of the people there.

It is curious, then, that the second-person address which arrests readers' attention throughout the text is a result of Animal's encounter with a journalist who leaves Animal a tape recorder and encourages him to speak his story so it can be written and circulated globally later on. The journalist tells Animal to imagine how "thousands of other people [will look] through his eyes," a thought that horrifies Animal and raises his suspicions of those who find Khaufpur to be a titillating catastrophe while doing nothing to remediate harm (Sinha 7). Once Animal eventually assents, he repeatedly refers to his readers as "Eyes," calling out their perverse curiosity and also conflating these disembodied readers with those in Khaufpur who blatantly stare at Animal's own hypervisible physicality. However, I find that naming these readers corporealizes them in a way that grants Animal a degree of control over his own narrative, commanding, "My job is to talk, yours is to listen. So now listen" (Sinha 14). Like the shareholder's ability to corporealize the "vanishing" corporation, so too does Animal, as a picaresque narrator, materialize his readers' embodiments. Although he initially despairs that his readers will not identify with his experience—"Have these thousands of eyes slept even one night in a place like this? Do these eyes shit on railway tracks? When was the last time these eyes had nothing to eat?" (Sinha 7-8)—critics such as Andrew Mahlstedt argue that this defamiliarization between narrator and reader is a crucial "ethical dilemma" that the text raises in

addition to the environmental crisis of Khaufpur/Bhopal (64). By corporealizing his reader and adopting the grotesque language and perspective of the picaresque, Animal asks readers to question *why* such distance exists between them in the first place.

In thinking about what epistemologies the picaresque makes legible outside of the corporation's emphases on quantification and objectivity, Animal's deformed embodiment and narrative status as *picaro* afford him a streetwise perspective that literally brings him close to the ground. While he does not fully submerge himself underground—a perspective that I will discuss in my reading of Hamid—Animal's posture subverts the physical as well as geospatial position of the Eyes. In one of the novel's opening statements, Animal argues:

> The world of humans is meant to be viewed from eye level. Your eyes. Lift my
> head I'm staring into someone's crotch. Whole nother world it's, below the waist.
> Believe me, I know which one hasn't washed his balls, I can smell pissy gussets
> and shitty backsides whose faint stenches don't carry to your nose, farts smell
> extra bad. (Sinha 2)

These scatological encounters invoke the picaresque on multiple levels. Animal obtains these perspectives from his travels through the streets, bumping up against the masses of Khaufpuris as he wanders the city each day. While he doesn't dwell here on which of his fellow compatriots are disfigured like him or have lingering health problems from "that night," he does emphasize the centrality of the Khaufpuri body to his mode of storytelling. Adele Holoch argues that these grotesque moments are sometimes meant to be humorous, inviting readers' laughter as a way to establish a casual intimacy rather than a confrontation between reader and narrator (128, 133). The grotesque here works to characterize Khaufpur as something other than a victimized space,

defined only by the catastrophe of "that night," and establishes Animal's perspective as one that can take his readers into a "whole nother world," both culturally and epistemologically.

At the same time, Animal's embodiment restages the environmental history of Khaufpur's poisoning, especially with respect to poisoned groundwater. While the disaster is invoked each time someone encounters Animal's extraordinary physical form, he also narrates the history of his own embodiment as a slow transformation that occurs because of his repeated encounters with toxic water. Although he has no memory of his body before his spine began to curve, he knows from Ma Franci that "I used to enjoy swimming in the lakes behind the Kampani factory," who recalls he would "dive right in, with your arms and your legs stretched out in one line" (Sinha 14). By the time he was eight or nine years old, however, Animal's "arse stuck out of the water" when he'd try to swim with his peers (Sinha 16). Sinha's references to the lakes behind the factory call to mind both Bhopal's pre-Green Revolution reputation as a "city of lakes" and the extent to which Union Carbide has damaged the city's natural groundwater reserves. In her "book for young people" on the Bhopal disaster, Suroopa Mukherjee notes how Bhopal grew to be an influential city in central India in the 11th century in part because of its two man-made lakes, Pukta Pul Talao ("lake of the stone bridge") and Bada Talao ("the great lake"), and the aqueduct that distributed water throughout the city (4). Mukherjee goes on to describe how the lakes absorbed much of the MIC gas and prevented it from spreading further throughout the city, speculating, "Perhaps the lakes saved the rest of Bhopal" (9). Animal's secondhand memory of swimming through the lakes—which had served as retention ponds for "different colored sludges" before and after the disaster (Sinha 16)—demonstrates how toxicity is both hypervisible and ambient throughout Khaufpur/Bhopal. Even when Animal's body does not convey outward signs of his poisoning, the very environmental space where his body can

celebrate its full capacities likely contributes to his health problems as a child and young adult. The pervasiveness of groundwater pollution becomes legible through the Khaufpuri body, revealing the lies of environmental responsibility and remediation to which the Kampani claims to be committed.

Animal's retelling of his experiences in the Kampani lakes is one of the only scenes in the novel in which poisoned water is explicitly represented. Instead, readers come to understand how water forms the contemporary environmental crisis in Bhopal primarily through hearing characters talk about it. In fact, the status of Khaufpur's clean water serves as the impetus for setting a new court date in the endlessly deferred trial between Khaufpur and the Kampani. In the wake of the disaster, the Kampani "ran away from Khaufpur without cleaning its factory, over the years the poisons it left behind have found their way into the wells, everyone you meet seems to be sick" (Sinha 33). Echoing the environmental activists arguments' who met on the grounds of Dow headquarters, Zafar, a charismatic young leader who arrives in Khaufpur to support their legal battle, claims that the Kampani must be held accountable. As long as the water remains unclean, justice has not yet been served in Khaufpur (Sinha 52).

Placing water at the center of the legal battle against the Kampani also reveals the extent to which the gas disaster has compromised regional water infrastructures, both man-made and biophysical. Although some Khaufpuris like Somraj, a former music teacher and Nisha's father, receive tap water through pipes, many others who live in the slum known as the "Nutcracker" depend on well water. As discussed above, wells are naturally forming infrastructures, in which humans drill into the aquifer, or water table just below the surface, to obtain fresh groundwater that is naturally replenished through the hydrological cycle. For many rural communities in India, such as the community in Kutch that Mehta studies, wells and other biophysical

infrastructures like "tanks" are traditional methods for obtaining and distributing water (144). Pesticides leaching from industrial agriculture, as well as increased temperatures in arid regions like Kutch, threaten the safety and sustainability of these wells. While large-scale infrastructural projects like those proposed in the Narmada River Valley offer piped water as a solution to well stability, that water often does not reach the most vulnerable populations, as is evidenced both by the communities in Kutch and the slum-dwelling people of Khaufpur's Nutcracker. In this context, Animal's statement that "although Khaufpuri pump water stinks it is free" takes on a double meaning (Sinha 102). While it is certainly easier for Khaufpuris to continue gathering water traditionally and without further financial burden, such "free" practices are also easier for the state—who has claimed legal responsibility for both Bhopal and the Union Carbide cleanup. As Khaufpuris/Bhopalis struggle for legibility in the national legal system, they continue to be re-exposed to environmental toxins, waiting for infrastructural solutions to the water crisis that are constantly deferred.

The reality of Khaufpur's extensive water pollution comes to a head in an extended scene during which Animal, Elli Barber—an American humanitarian doctor—and a representative of the Indian government walk through Paradise Alley, one of the most destitute regions of the Nutcracker slum. Elli has come to Khaufpur to open a free medical clinic and try to alleviate the ongoing health crises throughout the city. While I will discuss the ethical framing of her clinic further in my next section, her interaction with a woman refusing to breastfeed her child viscerally depicts the choices Khaufpuri women are forced to make, not only regarding their own health but their children's, in light of the ongoing water pollution. As the three travel through Paradise Alley, they come upon a woman who sits in a courtyard with her breasts exposed. Animal reports that the woman is "pressing her breasts, sending jets of milk spurting onto the

earth" (Sinha 107).[71] While Elli stands stunned, assuming the woman's infant died before he was

weaned, the government representative is outraged by the scene, yelling: "How many times have

I told you not to believe rumors?" (107). The woman responds, "My breasts are killing me"

before further explaining, "I won't feed my kid poison" (107). As the scene progresses and she

realizes the woman's child is still alive, Elli continues to ask the woman questions about why she

refuses to breastfeed. Eventually, the woman explains directly, "Our wells are full of poison. It's

in the soil, water, in our blood, it's in our milk. Everything here is poisoned. If you stay here long

enough, you will be too" (108).

 This scene juxtaposes the epistemology of the corporation—and by extension, the Indian

government—with the embodied knowledge of Khaufpuri survivors in stark relief. The

government worker dismisses the woman's fears of poisoned water as mere "rumors," relegating

toxicity to abstract discourse rather than accepting the embodied proof sitting in front of her. Just

as Dow Chemical refuted responsibility for both the Union Carbide and Tittabawassee River

cleanups without evidence from a health assessment, so too does the government worker insist

that the woman is "deluded" and taken in by "fairytales" for fearing the water without scientific

basis in fact. By relegating poisoned water to a discursive matter, rather than material reality, the

government worker justifies the government's and corporation's endless deferrals of action. To

return to Jasanoff's terminology, poison-as-discourse constitutes a civic epistemology in which

toxic water amounts to "just talk" if enough people agree to accept it as such. Elli, too, fits into

this camp. Despite her extensive preparations to open a clinic in Khaufpur, such as learning

Hindi, securing funding, and acquiring supplies, she reveals she is clueless about the realities of

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[71] The woman's nakedness and discarded breast milk evoke Bakhtin's image of the Kerch terracotta figurines, which form his basis for the grotesque. Mary Russo critiques Bakhtin's description of the figurines as "senile, pregnant hags," writing in *The Female Grotesque* that this image "is loaded with all of the connotations of fear and loathing around the biological processes of reproduction and of aging" (63).

such extensive toxification, and doubts the woman understands what she really means by "poison." Her mind goes to another tragedy, one in which the woman lost her infant and is forced to expel her unused breast milk. The reality is perhaps much worse; the woman must find new strategies to keep her child alive in the midst of such a harsh environment.

Critics including Rebecca Oh and Jesse Oak Taylor have identified this scene as one that exposes the generational reach of the Bhopal gas disaster, as the second generation of victims is born into a degraded environment that challenges their health both in the womb and immediately after birth. While the generational impact of Bhopal's slow-motion disaster is crucial for understanding its scale, it is also important to note the explicitly gendered violence inflicted on women's bodies as a result of corporate and government denial of environmental crisis. Collecting testimonies from women survivors, Suroopa Mukherjee notes that the Sambhavna Clinic reported 43 percent of adolescent women had not begun their periods, and that over 100 infants nursed on breast milk containing toxic chemicals (154).[72] Throughout the testimonies she presents, Mukherjee repeatedly argues for a distinct experience among female victims of the disaster, ultimately claiming "the Bhopal survivors became living embodiments of everything that had gone wrong with the development model" (12). Thus, while Animal's disfigured spine materializes one iteration of the Kampani's "foreign load," the woman and her infant materialize the discourses of water poisoning into a distinctly temporal reproductive crisis, one that threatens the next generation of Khaufpuris even before they are born.

I want to connect the woman's slow, deliberate destruction of her breastmilk as an ecofeminist extension of the picaresque's interest in the scatological. Unlike Animal's earlier fascination with gross bodily odors or visceral descriptions of his own phallus, scatology here

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[72] The Sambhavna Trust Clinic is a charitable health organization that serves victims of the Bhopal disaster. Satinath Sarangi, one of the activists who attended the Dow Chemical protest in Midland, founded the clinic in 1996.

functions as a refusal to participate in the reproduction of toxicity. The breast milk functions metonymically as a sign of the toxins' pervasiveness and ontological multiplicity. Indeed, the woman's immediate response—"My breasts are killing me"—points to this plural meaning, as the pain of unused breast milk could conceal a more latent, carcinogenic pain in her breast that comes as a consequence of ingesting unclean water. The woman's clear awareness of the ubiquity of environmental toxins comes not from a scientific health assessment, but from her own embodied knowledge. By refusing to pass on her own toxic embodiment to her child, the woman strongly echoes but also reverses the outcome of Mahasweta Devi's 1987 short story, "Breast-Giver." Translated and introduced by Gayatri Spivak, the story allegorizes competing economic, social, and political interests in India post-independence. The eponymous breast-giver, Jashoda, is hired as a wet nurse for the wealthy Haldar family. However, in order to produce milk for the Haldar children and extended relatives, Jashoda must remain pregnant, conceiving 20 of her own children and suckling over 50 altogether. She is cast out by the Haldars once her milk finally dries up, and she succumbs to breast cancer; her overworked breasts, like the poisoned ones of the woman, literally kill her. Jashoda's body is chosen to decay, literally and graphically, so that the Haldar women can be both mothers and sexual objects for their husbands. Both Jashoda and the woman from Paradise Alley thus question whose (gendered) bodies are marked for decay so that others can flourish.

The picaresque not only enables us to ask these questions about embodiment and disposability, but it also reveals the arbitrariness of these divisions. In other words, just because the woman in Paradise Alley has been marked disposable, she is no less ignorant nor powerless to speak the truth to the government representative. Rather, her defiant act of squeezing her breast milk into the ground indicates she knows exactly what violence has been done to her and

who is accountable for it. In Spivak's analysis of "Breast-Giver," she writes that "Jashoda's body…is the place of knowledge, rather than the instrument of knowing" (108). Taking this assessment a step further, I argue that the picaresque scatological body is not only the site of knowledge, but also reclaims the agency as an instrument of knowing through embodiment itself. To return once more to the protests at Dow headquarters, the Bhopal survivors present their bodies as evidence of the debt that Dow owes to the rest of their community. If the picaresque invokes the scatological to shock readers into recognizing the existence of the abject, the woman in Paradise Alley and the Bhopal protestors in Midland frame their own bodies as shareholders of corporations' toxic violence. In other words, they surface as the abjection that persists and that demands an immediate response from those they know to be accountable for their degrading conditions.

Scatology and the Ecological Body in Filthy Rich

Unlike Sinha's explicit, politically engaged reimagining of Bhopal and its ongoing environmental crisis, Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* is not outwardly invested in environmental concerns. Instead, it offers a satirical take on the self-help book, the false promises of neoliberalism, and the increasingly popular trope of the South Asian entrepreneur. Each chapter title is written in imperative statements, like "Move to the City" and "Befriend a Bureaucrat," while the novel's second-person address parodies the universality of the self-help book's advice. Like Sinha, Hamid deploys a second-person address, except in his novel, "You" the reader are conflated with "You" the Protagonist, a specific, albeit nameless character who rises out of rural obscurity to enjoy a modestly successful career as a purveyor of privatized water. Controlling the narrative is an omniscient, disembodied Narrator, whose satirical tone, biting wit, and occasional disdain for the Protagonist creates a fascinating,

triangulated power dynamic between reader, Protagonist, and Narrator. When environmental phenomena surface in the text—as brief mentions of "fickle atmospheric currents" (6) or a subterranean view of the city's "ever-dropping aquifer" (155)—it is the Narrator who draws our attention to them. This unique and often subterranean knowledge of the environment, coupled with his structuring of the narrative into episodes, his acerbic wit, and attention to scatology, all lead to my reading of Hamid's Narrator as picaresque. Both Elze and Ben de Bruyn arrive at similar conclusions, respectively reading the novel as thematically invested in the *picaro*'s "self-interest and…anti-idealism" (Elze, *Postcolonial Modernism* 169), and as an instance of Nixon's "environmental picaresque" due to its "implicit socioenvironmental critique" of resource scarcity, war, and climate change (de Bruyn 61). For my purposes in this section, I read the picaresque Narrator as drawing attention to scatology, not necessarily as evidence of corporate negligence, but as a pointed disruption of the "self" at the heart of the self-help book. The hyper-individualized self of neoliberal upward mobility narratives projects a fantasy of the human body as isolated, autonomous, and in control of both his circumstances and environments. Indeed, in Slaughter's terms, the proper human rights subject is "the unitary, monadic, self-possessed individual" (19). Hamid's picaresque narrator leverages repeated scatological observations to point to the microbial, non-human agencies that undo such a fantasy.

Hamid's Narrator's attention to both the body and microorganisms that poison it cohere around issues of water pollution, as they do in Sinha. While the controversies over clean water in Bhopal stem from transnational corporate pollution, in Hamid's "Rising Asia" these toxins emerge due to failed maintenance of infrastructure. Early in the Protagonist's life, he graduates from relabeling and selling expired canned foods to rebottling tap water and selling it to various clientele throughout his unnamed city. The enterprise is successful, though modest. The

Protagonist has two employees who help him siphon water out of increasingly unreliable taps, boil it for a few minutes, and then package it in plastic bottles they recover from restaurants. Hamid's Narrator introduces the enterprise as follows:

> Your city's neglected pipes are cracking, the contents of underground water mains and sewers mingling, with the result that taps in locales rich and poor alike disgorge liquids that, while for the most part clear and often odorless, reliably contain trace levels of feces and microorganisms capable of causing diarrhea, hepatitis, dysentery, and typhoid. Those less well-off among the citizenry harden their immune systems by drinking freely, sometimes suffering losses in the process, especially of their young and frail. Those more well-off have switched to bottled water, which you and your two employees are eager to provide. (99)

Whereas Khaufpuris like Animal and the woman from Paradise Alley are absolutely certain their water is poisoned, in Hamid's city, infrastructural disrepair produces a more ambiguous uncertainty about water quality—uncertainty upon which the Protagonist hopes to capitalize. Recalling the Khaufpuris who continue to drink unsafe well water because it is free, the poorer classes pay no mind to the piped water's safety. The fact that they have regular access to water speaks to a greater degree of stability than they would have in their rural villages, where, as the Narrator mentions earlier, "increasingly fickle atmospheric currents" leave rivers dry (Hamid 6). The wealthier classes evince the uncertainty that interests me here. They know there is something not quite right about the city's water supply, but cannot perceive the ambient odorless and colorless microbes that infect them. The Protagonist is thus not only selling water, but selling safety. By drinking water that comes pre-packaged, his customers feel they are protected from the risk of water-borne diseases, when in reality that is anything but the truth.

I am also struck by the Narrator's observation that "trace levels of feces and microorganisms" exist in the city's water supply in part because it occurs so briefly. This is the only time in the novel that water pipes and their attendant microbes are mentioned; after this short phrase, the Narrator returns focus to the Protagonist's life and work. According to Oh's reading of *Animal's People*, microbes, bacteria, and toxins that infect the human body "are preeminantly political, produced out of bureaucratic deferrals, lack of medical treatment, and continuous exposure to chemicals" ("Claims" 88). Whereas Oh reads the "teeming bodies" of Khaufpuris as leveraging more-than-human matter to protest the corporation, here Hamid seems to invoke these microbes as part of his project of deconstructing the neoliberal, entrepreneurial self—a self who is not yet as powerful as Dow Chemical or Union Carbide, but who certainly aspires to be. This brief narrative attention to disease-causing microbes and feces reveals how the precarious material and environmental foundations of the bottled water industry are literally crumbling as the narrative proceeds. Critics like Adnan Mahmutović read this scene as evidence of infrastructure becoming visible in literature when it breaks down: "We only notice pipes and cables when there is no tap water or the computer is not sending the signal to the water pump" (75). Importantly, however, I read this sign not of infrastructure's failure, but of a more interstitial temporal space between total catastrophe and total functionality. Amid the water pipes' gradual decay, toxins increasingly seep in, but the pipes themselves continue to perform the function for which they were designed. Without knowledge of this leak—and by capitalizing on the uncertainty that water infrastructures produce—the Protagonist and his clients continuously expose themselves to environmental risk. In this extremely satirical portrayal of entrepreneurship, the neoliberal self is not only *not* in control of his surroundings; his very quest to become "filthy rich" is rooted in scatological exposure to increasingly harmful toxins.

Further, this connection between the scatological body and the fantasy of the isolated and autonomous entrepreneur surfaces when we first meet the Protagonist as a child early in the novel. The Narrator frames the Protagonist's quest to become filthy rich as a desire to overcome his difficult childhood in rural poverty, in which he nearly loses his life to a bout of hepatitis E:

> The whites of your eyes are yellow, a consequence of spiking bilirubin levels in your blood. The virus afflicting you is called hepatitis E. Its typical mode of transmission is fecal-oral. Yum. It kills only about one in fifty, so you're likely to recover. But right now you feel like you're going to die. (Hamid 4)

The Narrator's attention to scatology is thus established from the novel's opening scene, with a sarcastic "Yum" making light of the Protagonist's exposure to fecal matter. While the Narrator does not explicitly state the source of the Protagonist's exposure, readers do learn that the Protagonist's village relies on a local river for water, which in turn serves as both a latrine for a village upstream and a runoff site for a textile plant even further along. Roanne Kantor reads the contamination of the river and the Protagonist's illness as signs that "mud and shit persist in the rural landscape despite every effort to get rid of them" (141). She argues that, unlike emblematic postcolonial ecocritical novels set in South Asia, such as *Animal's People* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, pollution in Hamid's novel is locally sourced. The villainous polluters are not foreign outsiders, but members of the local community who drink the same water they defecate in (149).

While Kantor's critique is grounded in her desire not to cast rural people as virtuous "ecological saviors" (149), I am interested in the Protagonist's childhood encounter with fecal matter because it is these same toxins that threaten his bottled water enterprise 30 years later. The Narrator does not make this connection explicit; it is up to "You" the reader to draw these

parallels between water contamination and the illusion of embodied safety. Bottled water cannot protect humans any more than drinking water a little further downstream, out of sight of the latrines, can. By the same token, if corporations wait until enough harm has been perceived through the threshold of the body to take action, there will be no environments left worth protecting, as Dempsey argued, nor inhabitants healthy enough to live in them. Harm in the form of microbial toxins is ongoing in both *Animal's People* and *Filthy Rich*. These toxins exist alongside infrastructural degradation, gradually placing human bodies further at risk regardless of whether "breakdown" occurs. By making the realities of water contamination momentarily explicit, the picaresque Narrator leverages the scatalogical to disprove the corporation's habit of taking action against harm already done. In order to disrupt the expectation for catastrophic breakdown or disease as the threshold for action, it is thus crucial that the body be recognized as a site of knowledge and the foundation for an onto-epistemological alternative to those currently structuring discourses of water pollution and privatization.

The Picaresque as Anti-*Bildungsroman*

In addition to destabilizing perceptions of the human body as contained, autonomous, and isolated from the environment, the picaresque also questions our assumptions about teleologies of development and growth more broadly. As discussed above, similar narratives of development, progress, and improvement cohere around both the hyper-individualized neoliberal self and urban infrastructures, especially in postcolonial South Asia. From a literary perspective, the picaresque's suspicions of these themes situate it as the anti-*Bildungsroman.* As Balkan explains, the *picaro* is a perpetual outcast who "cannot be incorporated" into social and intellectual norms, as the subject of the *Bildung* can (*Rogues* 29). According to Slaughter's influential definition, individual development and knowledge are intimately connected. He writes

that the genre presents "the didactic story of an individual who is socialized in the process of

learning for oneself *what everyone else (including the reader) presumably already knows*" (3,

emphasis added). The genre sets expectations for the protagonist's growth because social and

intellectual norms exist in both the world of the characters *and* the world of the reader.

By emphasizing an anti-development ethos, the *picaro* not only refuses to adhere to

neocolonial logics of development and progress. He also possesses entirely different kinds of

knowledge about the world than the bourgeois subject of the *Bildungsroman* and their readers,

who are typically situated in the Global North and "seem to have an insatiable appetite for the

stories of Third Worlders coming of age" (Slaughter 38). My reading of the picaresque

understands this knowledge base as rooted in the scatological, as my previous section discussed,

and as the direct inverse of Slaughter's definition. In other words, the *picaro* possesses

knowledge that "everyone including the reader" avoids, ignores, or would otherwise *prefer not to*

know regarding corporate negligence and environmental degradation, especially regarding water

pollution. Through the ongoing use of the second-person address, Hamid's and Sinha's

picaresque narrators control their readers' attentions and expose what they have been socialized

to believe or ignore regarding neocolonial narratives of development, environmental degradation,

and the ways in which infrastructures are weaponized to meet these developmentalist goals. In

doing so, these narrators invite readers to share in the now-public knowledge of the corporation's

true actions, including them to identify as shareholders and question how their own bodies have

been compromised by corporate interests without their knowledge or consent.

Ignoring Environmental Degradation in <u>Filthy Rich</u>

Much has been said about Hamid's satirical take on the self-help book in *How to Get*

Filthy Rich in Rising Asia. Critics including Angelia Poon, Michael Rubenstein, and Weihsin

Gui largely agree that his adoption of the genre offers a humorous conceit for the challenges of

coming-of-age under globalization, while at the same time criticizing neoliberalism's

"optimizing technologies" (Gui 174). Alison Shonkweiler makes the connection between the

self-help book and the *Bildungsroman* explicit, arguing that Hamid's didactic chapter titles, like

"Move to the City" and "Befriend a Bureaucrat," "assert a forward teleology by way of the

classic stages of *Bildung*" (109). While its connections to neoliberalism and neocolonial

development are apparent,[73] Hamid himself finds the self-help book to be a useful tool for

millennial South Asians who need new resources for navigating the vast cultural and

technological changes that have accompanied globalization (Appleyard). In interviews and his

own personal essays, Hamid has characterized the self-help book as an act of "co-creation"

between reader and writer, which he believes to be the ideal purpose of novels and of political

life writ large: "I believe that we co-create the overlapping societies we belong to, large and

small, and that we should be free to try to invent new ways of being and interacting" (*Discontent*

xviii).[74] It is important to recognize, as Laura Finch does, that despite Hamid's satirical tone, "he

is far from unsympathetic to the desire to make money in a country steeped in poverty" (385).

The picaresque narrator, then, exposes truths about developmentalist logics and corporate

negligence that exceed even the author's perception. As Liliana Naydan argues, "becoming filthy

rich requires the exploitation of others" (96). What might the Protagonist's financial successes

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[73] In a 2018 *PMLA* article, Beth Blum seeks to recuperate more positive cultural associations with the self-help book. She turns to folk traditions, "wisdom literatures," and practices of cross-cultural reading that are not rooted in neoliberalism, arguing, "I am interested in how the self-help hermeneutic binds in unexpected ways a nonsynchronous, cross-cultural community of practical readers, whose first encounters with such manuals often occur at critical historical junctures, when traditional social and economic hierarchies are upended" (1104).
[74] Hamid reiterates this notion in the text of *Filthy Rich* itself: "Like all books, this self-help book is a co-creative project...It's in being read that a book becomes a book, and in each of a million different readings, a book becomes one of a million different books...Readers don't work for writers. They work for themselves. Therein, if you'll excuse the admittedly biased tone, lies the richness of reading" (97-98). I will discuss this quote further in this chapter's conclusion.

mean for Animal's people and other *picaros* like them who will never have the opportunity to rise out of poverty under current structural economic conditions? By privatizing and diverting water for luxury housing developments, how are vulnerable populations with unclean water placed further at risk?

The Protagonist's transformation from a meager bottled-water salesman to the owner of a privatized water conglomerate further extends the fantasy of the isolated body, as discussed in my previous section. The Protagonist has evolved from selling certainty regarding bottled water's potability to selling ubiquity when he is contracted to implement water services for a luxury private housing development known as "Phase 10." Catering to an exorbitantly wealthy clientele, the developers explain that Phase 10 represents a new level of luxury because it promises uninterrupted access to electricity and water. "Ten will have its own electricity plant," the developer states, "In ten when you turn the tap, you'll be able to drink what comes out of it…Drinkable water. When you enter phase ten, it'll be like you've entered another country. Another continent. Like you've gone to Europe. Or North America" (Hamid 163). Uninterrupted, ubiquitous access to infrastructure thus acts as a portal to the Global North, providing a potential target for South Asia's supposed "rise." As the developer goes on to describe, however, the beauty of the housing development is that it remakes South Asia through the infrastructural hallmarks of the Global North, producing "a secure, walled-off, impeccably maintained lit-up-at-night, noise-controlled, perfectly regulated version of here" (164). According to cultural geographer Nausheen Anwar, improving the infrastructural conditions of life in Pakistan through partnership with private developers is an avenue for the state to repair its relationships with its citizens. She writes that, because "the state can no longer provide uninterrupted electricity" after so many decades of economic restructuring, private companies have stepped in to ensure the

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state delivers on its promise to provide its citizens with basic utilities (3). Privatizing water here accomplishes several goals in Hamid's Rising Asia. It provides evidence that Pakistan—the novel's likely setting—is "catch[ing] up with the world" it seeks to emulate materially (Anwar 36). It offers a coherent national space, one that transports inhabitants to the Global North while reemphasizing the fact that they remain in South Asia. And it delivers on the infrastructural promise of a complete separation of human from environment, with the Protagonist becoming the entrepreneur who transforms that promise into a reality.

Disrupting these visions of uninterrupted access to infrastructure is the picaresque Narrator, who repeatedly diverts readers' attentions underground to "the ever-dropping aquifer" throughout the discussions of the Protagonist's rise (Hamid 155). Like the abrupt mention of the degrading pipes in the previous section, the Narrator affords insight into subterranean phenomena that are impacted by human behavior but that exceed human perception via ambience. In two separate instances, the Narrator draws attention to the aquifer to expose both its subterranean existence, and how it has been "punctured by thousands upon thousands of greedily sipping machine-powered steel straws" (Hamid 155). Drawing attention to the aquifer characterizes potable water as a limited, if not entirely non-renewable resource. Hamid writes:

> [The developer] believes he knows what you are thinking. There are serious technical challenges, not least that the aquifer below the city is plummeting and becoming more contaminated every year, poisonous chemicals and biological toxins seeping into it like adulterants into a heroin junkie's collapsing vein. Powerful water extraction and purification equipment will be needed, plus, in all likelihood, a plan to draw water from canals intended for agricultural use, fiercely contested water itself laden with pesticide and fertilizer runoff. (164-5)

Two types of water intersect in this passage. The first, of course, is the contents of the aquifer itself, which become increasingly contaminated with similar microbes and toxins that infiltrated the cracking pipes in the Protagonist's city. The question of the toxins' origins, however, is an open one. Do they seep in through the "greedy" straws, which may or may not have legal access to the aquifer? Do they slowly accumulate through acid rain and polluted runoff, replenishing the aquifer through the hydrological cycle with toxic rather than fresh water? Unlike water in the aquifer, which exists regionally, albeit miles beneath the Protagonist's feet, the second type of water refers to that diverted for irrigation. As discussed above, the Green Revolution not only transformed agricultural practices in India but also reshaped traditional relationships with water itself. If water is not polluted directly from corporations' irresponsible presence in South Asia, it is either contaminated by the manufactured need for harmful pesticides, or stolen by the entrepreneurs who likely advocated for these large-scale irrigation schemes themselves.

The larger question that this passage poses is one of knowledge about the environmental realities of infrastructural manipulation—or, to invoke Hamid's metaphor, of the embodied addiction of water privatization. The passage begins with an assumption of knowledge; surely, the brigadier thinks, the Protagonist is up for the challenge of building Phase 10 because he possesses expert knowledge of the environmental complications at hand. However, it is crucial to note that the Protagonist does not admit to having this knowledge, nor the ethical quandaries it poses. The Narrator, by contrast, does. In this moment, the Narrator-as-*picaro* possesses an entirely different type of knowledge about "getting filthy rich" through water privatization, one that frames the Protagonist's actions as deeply problematic rather than as the neoliberal success story. Indeed, the developer's concerns over the Protagonist's potential hesitation reveal how much money, time and resources must be devoted to preserve the fantasy of environmental

separation in Phase 10. Infrastructures of extraction and purification, which were deemed too expensive or unnecessary to resolve Bhopal's groundwater crisis, are considered essential to make this water potable. Reading these marginal representations of water as indicative of a brewing, militarized resource conflict, de Bruyn claims the Protagonist has full knowledge of and even regret for "his own complicity in the problem of water scarcity" by the novel's end (63). He writes, "While some people are getting filthy rich, moist mud becomes parched land in a background that does not escape the narrator's notice. It's no coincidence, clearly, that this supposedly generic protagonist sells water" (63). While it is true the regional desiccation and depletion of the aquifer doesn't escape the Narrator's notice, I argue it does escape the Protagonist's. Like Azaro's slum community, who becomes immune to the endless noise of bulldozers and construction workers cutting down the forest to build roads, the Protagonist evidences his complicity through his complacency. He is the "junkie" seeking his next fix, which produces varying degrees of corporeal risk and vulnerability for others, as the image of the "collapsing vein" suggests.

Whereas the *Bildungsroman* traces a protagonist's emotional, social, and intellectual maturation, the picaresque is marked by a lack of growth and mobility. Even if Hamid finds the self-help genre engaging or at least amusing for navigating the complexities of globalization, I am struck by the ways in which the Protagonist does *not* change by the novel's end. In large part, this is due to his commitment to the fantasy of isolation, both in terms of his body and his role in regional environmental degradation. In one of the novel's closing chapters, the Narrator questions the Protagonist's knowledge about his profession explicitly:

> You hear reports that the water table continues to drop, the thirst of many
>
> millions driving bore after steel bore deeper and deeper into the aquifer, to fill

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countless leaky pipes and seepy, unlined channels, *phenomena with which you are intimately familiar and from which you have profited*, but which are now contributing in places to a noticeable desiccation of the soil, to a transformation of moist, fertile, hybrid mud into cracked, parched, pure land. (Hamid 200-201, emphasis added)

Again, the Narrator makes the connections between water privatization and environmental degradation undeniable, but casts doubt on how much the Protagonist actually knows. Although he "hears reports" that the water table is in crisis, the Protagonist expresses no remorse about the environmental consequences of his life's work, which has continued to expand into countless other "steel bores" extracting more water from the aquifer. Although de Bruyn reads this scene as evidence of the Protagonist taking responsibility for his complicity, I find the use of "intimately" complicates this relationship. To be "intimate" assumes intense, in-depth, and often embodied knowledge of a phenomenon. The *OED* notes its origins to refer to what is physically or emotionally internal, implying a physical closeness. Throughout the novel, the Protagonist has rejected any form of "intimate" knowledge, whether that refers to his sexless marriage with a woman 20 years his junior, or his commitment to the fantasy of the body that is totally isolated from its environment. In fact, by virtue of the second-person address, we rarely, if ever, encounter the Protagonist's internal monologue at all. Everything about him as a character is externalized, dedicated to the project of his entrepreneurial transformation with little time for reflection on anything else.

This externalization reaches its zenith when the Protagonist lands in the hospital, having narrowly survived a massive heart attack. To recover, he must remain connected to multiple machines, which allows him to experience "the shock of an unseen network suddenly made

physical, as a fly experiences a cobweb" (Hamid 183). In Michael Rubenstein's reading, "the metaphor tells us something about how we think, or fail to think, about the energy problem, about how electricity comes to seem, never more urgently than when it fails, an essential form of life support" (6). Indeed, the Protagonist understands his very life is contingent upon the continued functioning of "the hospital's power system, its backup generator…the people who refill and circulate the tanks…the trucks that deliver them" and on and on (Hamid 183). The Protagonist perceives infrastructure and the collapse of his autonomous body only when they have been externalized for him. In that sense, the picaresque's entangling of ontology and epistemology here comes full circle. If the Protagonist cannot learn from his mistakes at the end of his life or recognize his complicity in his region's desiccation, he can at least learn what it is like to perceive his body as connected and contingent on multiple non-human agencies—an epistemological revelation that the Bhopalis, and even the Narrator, know intimately.

Infrastructure as (False) Promise in <u>Animal's People</u>

Because *Animal's People* is regarded as a more typical version of the picaresque, its relationship to the *Bildungsroman* is not quite as complex as *Filthy Rich*'s. Animal embodies the failures of the Green Revolution and the broader developmentalist project of structural adjustment, indicating that he and his "people" have been left out of the post-independence visions of progress, growth, and modernization. The novel's fragmented and episodic form— hallmarks of the picaresque—reinforce this rejection of growth and development at the level of narrative itself (Balkan, "Memento Mori" 116). As Oh writes, "the novel's structure of fits, starts, and gaps troubles the idea of progress toward newness or the availability of different futures" ("Apocalyptic Realism" 15). Animal's rejection of these developmentalist teleologies points to a deeper suspicion of humanitarian interventions in Khaufpur, which link the narratives

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of personal growth and improvement found in the *Bildungsroman* with the framing of infrastructure as "self-help," a hallmark of the structural adjustment era (Davis 76). Indeed, Slaughter makes this very connection:

> The implicit *Bildungsroman* narrative of personality development codified in international law unfolds the plot for transforming personal rebellion into social legitimation with the individual's progressive incorporation into the regime of universal human rights—a plot for keeping the *broken promise* of the Enlightenment with the individual's reabsorption into universal humanity through the 'natural' medium of the nation-state. (92, emphasis added)

While the publication of *Animal's People* that same year prevented Slaughter's analysis of the text, the novel adopts a similar stance on the intersection of personal growth and humanitarian interventions by way of infrastructure. This occurs most explicitly in Sinha's depiction of Elli Barber, an American doctor who has come to Khaufpur to open a free clinic and help heal the next generation of the disaster's victims. In what follows, I explore how Elli's humanitarian aid participates in the framing of infrastructure as a "promise" for a better future, a promise that Khaufpuris regard with the utmost suspicion.

Animal first meets Elli when she arrives suddenly in Khaufpur and begins renovating a broken-down and abandoned bicycle shop across from Somraj and Nisha's house in the neighborhood known as the Chicken Claw. Although she can speak Hindi and appears to have no affiliation with the Indian government, Elli arouses suspicions that she may be working on behalf of the Kampani. Zafar suggests she may be conducting "medical experiments" to offer the appearance of corporate responsibility, but to claim ultimately that "the situation is not as bad as

alleged, that not so many people are ill" (Sinha 68-69). Due to these suspicions, Zafar convinces Khaufpuris not to go to Elli's clinic, even if many of them could benefit from her treatments.

As Elli embarks on various efforts to earn Khaufpuris' trust and to build a friendship with Animal, she gradually opens up to Animal and his friends to tell them more about her background and what brought her to Khaufpur. Her childhood was also marked by corporate greed, although not nearly to the same extent as the generations-long poisoning that the Khaufpuris endure. Elli was raised in the American Rust Belt in a steel town called Coatesville, Pennsylvania. Her father was forced to work in unsafe conditions, and was exposed to extreme noise, heat, and dangerous equipment in the steel mills. He raised Elli on the principle that "The world is made of promises," referring to infrastructures like the postal service, food distribution, and banking (Sinha 200). Despite the fact that his own livelihood comes from his working-class role in a steel corporation, Elli's father instilled in her the values of hard work and promises that will be fulfilled. While Elli pushes back on this philosophy as a teenager, she ultimately takes up her life's work in an effort to fulfill a promise to her mother, who suffered from an undisclosed mental illness. Motivated to "heal…broken bodies and minds," Elli holds fast to the belief that "things work when we keep our promises to each other and to ourselves, when we don't keep our promises, things fall apart" (Sinha 204). Such a philosophy is ironic given that Khaufpur is the material proof of broken promises by both the state and the Kampani. State and corporate representatives have promised clean water to Khaufpur for years, to no avail, just as the Kampani has promised to return one day to stand trial in India.

Elli's belief that the "world is made of promises" aligns with recent scholarship in critical infrastructure studies, most notably the coedited volume, *The Promise of Infrastructure*. Seeking to move beyond the functioning/breakdown binary discussed in my reading of Hamid,

anthropologists Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta, and Hannah Appel frame infrastructure as "dense social, material, aesthetic, and political formations that are critical both to differentiated experiences of everyday life and to expectations of the future. They have long *promised* modernity, development, progress, and freedom to people all over the world" (Anand et al. 3, emphasis added). Similarly, Anwar understands infrastructure as "a site of aspirations and desire" in Pakistan for citizens, state officials, and private corporations alike (14). Even as relationships between the Pakistani state and its citizens shift, "expectations of progress and belief in the narrative of development are still palpable in people's perceptions of infrastructure" (Anwar 68). Even as these social scientists parse the complex affective, socio-technical, and political experiences of infrastructure, these systems ultimately promise improvement upon present conditions.

For my purposes here, I want to think about infrastructure's "promise" as a strategic set of decisions made by people in power. To be sure, infrastructure promises material necessities like clean water and electricity—necessities which Bhopalis desire for good reason, as I will discuss in my concluding section. However, when thinking about the "promise" of infrastructure in connection to Elli's proposed humanitarian aid, I find it is important to question *who* makes decisions about infrastructure and *what* those decision-makers are actually promising through these proposals.[75] In one of the most-cited and analyzed scenes in *Animal's People*, Elli proposes vast infrastructural changes to resolve sanitation and health crises in Paradise Alley, the region of the Nutcracker slum where Elli encounters the woman destroying her own breast milk. Just

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[75] Although I frame the corporation as faceless and vanishing in this chapter, accountability can be extended to specific individuals—i.e., the company's CEO—at the end of the day. I return to this question of accountability in the absence of individual responsibility in my reading of *Shalimar the Clown* in Chapter 4.

before she meets the woman, Elli tours Paradise Alley with the government worker, remarking

on the need for various sanitary infrastructures. Animal narrates:

> "Hardly surprising they are ill," Elli is saying quietly, I guess so the Nutcracker
>
> folk don't hear. "Look at this filth, litter and plastic all over, open drains stinking
>
> right outside the houses. Flies. Every bit of waste ground is used as a latrine, I've
>
> seen people defecating on the railway lines."
>
> "Madam, it's these people, *they don't know any better*."
>
> "But you do...So *teach them*. Organize people into teams to pick up the litter.
>
> *Bring in pipes, water taps, build proper latrines*..."
>
> "Of course I agree, but from where is the money to come?"
>
> "Where did it come from for that new road near the lake, or for all the new
>
> buildings that are springing up around the city?"
>
> "Madam, this is not my department." (Sinha 105-106, emphasis added)

Throughout this scene, discourses of personal responsibility, individual improvement, education,

and the "promise" of infrastructure intersect as silver-bullet solutions to Khaufpur's health crisis.

Elli envisions infrastructural solutions to the "filth, litter, and plastic" that line Paradise Alley as

she lists off the steps necessary to transform the slum into a more livable, healthier space. Key to

her plan is a transformation of Khaufpuris themselves. While the government worker marks the

people's apparent lack of knowledge about sanitation as disqualifying for reform, Elli envisions a

transformative program through which the state and built infrastructural systems work together

to teach Khaufpuris how to maximize the resources they need to live healthier lives. In other

words, Elli prescribes a brand of self-help through sanitary and water infrastructures.

Julietta Singh reads Elli's enthusiasm for transforming Khaufpur as indicative of her humanitarian motivations. Labeling *Animal's People* as "post-humanitarian fiction," Singh argues, "Humanitarianism is revealed to be a process of *producing the human* as such, of taking the abject and *rendering it properly human* by not only treating its diseased body but insisting on the transformation of its public spaces as well" (149, emphasis added). Singh's argument echoes both Slaughter's connections between humanitarianism and the *Bildungsroman*, and Anand's historicization of urban infrastructures in Mumbai built for populations deemed "deserving" of them (7). By this logic, in order for states to deliver on the promises of infrastructure, the people have to be ready to receive it and use it properly.

Elli's visions for Khaufpur's infrastructural improvements also negate the collective social bonds and networks that already exist in the city and that have sustained the community since the night of the disaster. Her assessment prescribes education, teamwork, and proper defecation practices as potential outcomes of her humanitarian work, suggesting that all of these social behaviors are lacking in Khaufpur currently. Elli's inability to recognize how education and teamwork already exist in Khaufpur explains why she is so baffled by the extensive boycott of her clinic. In a later scene, when complaining to Animal of the boycott, she sighs, "people in this city tolerate open sewers, garbage everywhere, poisoned wells, poisoned babies, doctors who don't do their jobs, corrupt politicians, thousands of sick that no one seems to care about. But wait, let someone come along with an open-hearted offer of help, these same citizens can't tolerate it...I don't get the way Khaufpuri's think" (Sinha 151). Elli's humanitarianism is motivated by her desire to fulfill a promise to heal bodies and minds, and also to deliver on the failed promises of the Indian state to provide aid in Khaufpur. Her adherence to the creed that "The world is made of promises" renders Khaufpuris' distrust incomprehensible. It also renders

their commitments to collective action and community support illegible. Khaufpuri solidarity is supported by a carte blanche hatred of the Kampani. Because they have never encountered Kampani representatives, anyone and everyone can represent the corporation and exploit Khaufpuris' suffering to support their own ends. Even if Elli's motivations are true—which turns out to be the case—there is no promise left that Khaufpuris are willing to trust because for years they have endured the deferrals of responsibility that characterize the government worker's response: "Madam, this is not my department." As Singh concludes, Elli's commitments to humanitarianism and fulfilling the "promise" of sanitary and water infrastructures makes her unable to understand how she "reproduce[s] the very structures of power [she] desire[s] to dismantle" (139).

Like Hamid's narrator, who reveals truths the Protagonist prefers not to know, part of Animal's picaresque critique is leveraged at Elli's inability to understand how she participates in neoliberal—and to an extent, neoimperial—humanitarian regimes. It is not enough to direct "privilege and good intentions" to treat the symptoms of structural violence (Singh 138). By making his critique of Elli central to the narrative, Animal implicitly questions the motivations of "Eyes" for engaging with his story and others like his. At the beginning of the novel, Animal feels trapped by the thought of thousands of eyes looking through the journalist's perspective to hear Animal's story. He states, "Their curiosity feels like acid on my skin" (Sinha 7). If the picaresque narrator's goal is to reveal inconvenient truths about its readers, Animal's invitation to "Eyes" to listen to his story how he wants to tell it seems to invoke a secondary pedagogical function. Mahlstedt explains: "By calling the reader's attention to our own voyeuristic tendencies, Animal challenges us to be more patient, to listen without desire to the story on his terms. By calling attention to the spectacle of spectacular invisibility, *Animal's People* disrupts

the structures of power in the contemporary consumption of third-world poverty" (70). Animal expects his readers to be like Elli—unable to understand the complexities of life in Khaufpur, both in terms of its material challenges and in the unique social bonds that have sustained the community through the disaster's aftermath. By fixating his reader's attention, Animal teaches them to recognize the limits of their own comprehension, and to take their work a step further than Elli does—to question why they seek fictions like Animal's in the first place.

Whereas Elli is unable to understand how and why Khaufpuris distrust her participation in humanitarian systems, her critiques of Paradise Alley enable Animal to view his home with fresh eyes. As he hears Elli list the inadequate forms of housing, sanitation, and infrastructure in Paradise Alley, Animal reports a dramatic shift in his own perception. He states, "Paradise Alley is a wreckage of baked earth mounds and piles of planks on which hang gunny sacks, plastic sheets, dried palm leaves…Everywhere's covered in shit and plastic. Truly I see how poor and disgusting are our lives" (106). While critics like Taylor, Mahlstedt, and Singh read this scene as indicative of Elli's power to reshape Animal's perception through colonialist stereotypes of sanitation and civilization, Jennifer Wenzel reads these revelations as key to Animal's ability to read himself and his world critically. She claims that Elli's critique enables Animal to compose a site of distant reading within his most familiar environments: "Animal tells his story to discover his own desire, not to implore the sympathy or solidarity of the world…He, not Eyes, is the primary audience of his story; if this Khaufpur story, unlike all the others, will change something, it is because it will help him know what to do" (Wenzel, *Disposition* 217- 218). By staging and narrating his own shift in perception, Animal becomes a more critical inhabitant of Khaufpur and can clearly recognize the need for infrastructural solutions within his community

without the neocolonialist trappings of development, growth, and progress.[76] Indeed, part of this transformation involves his decision to tell his story at all. The novel begins with him rediscovering the journalist's tapes and determining that the time is right for him to share his story with the world. As my final section will go on to show, Animal's realization that infrastructures are necessary for continued Khaufpuri survival is a key component in their self-advocacy as corporate "shareholders." Like the Bhopali and Midland protesters convening outside of the Dow Chemical headquarters, the shareholder identity is one that sees Khaufpuris as deserving of corporate accountability, environmental justice, and transformational change, but on their own terms. Animal's self-critique leads him to recognize that a better world can be possible beyond "shit and plastic," but this world must be created through infrastructures as practices of environmental justice rather than empty promises.

Allegory and the Transposability of Place

Throughout this chapter, I have pursued reading Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* and Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* as picaresque novels because both texts implicate and embed the reader in spaces where environmental harm has already been done. By depicting the scatological body as burden of proof and refusing developmentalist logics that artificially divorce humans from nature, Hamid and Sinha insist that the reader cannot deny the connections between environmental degradation and corporate capitalism because they themselves are embedded into the diegetic worlds of the stories they read. Of course, picaresque texts have always established unique relationships between reader and narrator because the genre typically features charismatic narrators motivated by an autobiographical impulse. Citing Ulrich

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[76] In a similar vein, Oh reads Animal's decision not to pursue life-altering surgery as evidence of his transformation throughout the novel, arguing there is a *Bildung* to his character arc after all ("Apocalyptic Realism" 14).

Wicks, Blaber and Gilman describe this impulse as the distinction between "an experiencing 'I' and a narrating 'I,'" which attempts to reinforce the first-person narration as "unquestionably authoritative" (Wicks 244 qtd. 23-24). At times vulgar, crude, or witty, the *picaro* leverages this narrational authority to titillate the reader's curiosity about life among the poorest of the poor. As Bakhtin notes, humor becomes weaponized as a way for the *picaro* to both entertain and laugh at the reader, situated comfortably at a distance (407-8).

In this final section, I explore how Sinha's and Hamid's novels respectively collapse that distance between picaresque narrator and cosmopolitan reader by conflating them through the second-person address. To rephrase Wicks' formulation, both novels are invested in "an experiencing '*you*'" that learns directly from the picaresque experiences of "a narrating 'I'." I am interested here in distance as both a geographical and epistemological phenomenon. As Slaughter argues, it is readers situated comfortably in the Global North who consume the majority of postcolonial *Bildungsromane*, framing their "multicultural, postcolonial reading [as] a kind of humanitarian intervention"—or, in Hamid's language, as a kind of self-help (35). The *picaros* who narrate *Animal's People* and *Filthy Rich* are conscious that readers approach their texts seeking some kind of direction about how to improve themselves or the worlds they inhabit. By way of conclusion, I consider how Hamid's and Sinha's uses of second-person address and their strategic manipulations of the allegorical mode expose the distances and disparities in knowledge between their narrators and their readers—knowledge of the world writ large, but also, specifically, of the cultural and corporate politics surrounding water infrastructures in South Asia. These *picaros* do not necessarily "know better" than the reader, but they do know differently. These texts thus set out to validate these epistemological differences and to advocate

for prioritizing alternative epistemologies when making decisions about water infrastructures in poisoned South Asian environments.

To conclude my readings of *Animal's People* and *Filthy Rich*, I want to return to the concept of "shareholder" I introduced at the beginning of this chapter. As discussed previously, the Bhopal and Midland demonstrators—adopting the *picaro*'s laughter mid-protest—sought out Dow shareholder meetings as strategic moments to capture corporate attention. By positioning themselves as literally external to the shareholders' meetings—even as Ecology Center staff participated on their behalf inside—the protestors argue that they, too, are shareholders by virtue of their continued embodied bearing of corporate toxic loads. With respect to *Animal's People*, Sinha makes the argument that Bhopalis/Khaufpuris are not merely shareholders deserving of a seat at the table so that they can finally come face-to-face with the faceless corporation. Rather, they ought to be the ones making decisions about how infrastructure can serve as a practical solution to the groundwater pollution crisis. Early in the novel, Animal illuminates the stakes for infrastructural maintenance and control when he muses about his fate to live in a poisoned city:

> Do you suppose anyone can explain, why did the Kampani choose this city to make its factory? Why this land? Is it by chance that the old name for this place is Kali's ground? Is it by chance that Siva her husband wears cobras round his neck?… I would look at the lights of the city and wonder if this pipe had been mended, that wheel tightened, I might have had a mother and father, I might still be a human being. (Sinha 32)[77]

Animal's wistful turn to the subjunctive tense at the end of this passage reveals the stakes for infrastructural maintenance and repair because Bhopal/Khaufpur's poisoning was not determined

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[77] According to Hindu cosmology, Kali is the goddess of death and Siva is the god of both medicine and poison, as symbolized through the cobras.

by chance. Rather, the mundane decisions not to mend pipes, tighten gadgets, and prevent water from seeping in to commingle with toxic chemicals were strategic ones that altered thousands of lives irreparably. By sacrificing safety for their bottom line, Union Carbide proved themselves to be unfit managers of both corporate activity and infrastructural repair. The agency of the shareholders thus transfers from those whose authority has been codified by law to those whose very lives, environments, and bodies have been shaped by the slow violence of toxic pollution. Demanding infrastructure as a solution to the water crisis is not a demand for a share of profits, as we saw in the case of the Niger Delta. It is a demand in the share for mere survival.

Sinha advances this argument surrounding the agency and authority of shareholders by marrying the epistemology of the *picaro* with the narrative mode of allegory, in essence proposing that the disaster that occurred in Bhopal could have happened anywhere. Appearing to approach the fatal end of his hunger strike, Zafar echoes this argument to Animal when he claims that there are many Khaufpurs throughout the world, all united together under the stain of corporate pollution. He states, "Is Khaufpur the only poisoned city? It is not. There are others and each one of has its own Zafar. There'll be a Zafar in Mexico City and others in Hanoi and Manila and Halabja and there are the Zafars of Minamata and Seveso, of Sao Paolo and Toulouse and I wonder if all those weary bastards are as fucked as I am" (296). While Khaufpur is in many ways a clear analogue to Bhopal, not least because of Sinha's activism with Bhopal relief efforts, the fictional city could stand in for Mexico City, Manila, Sao Paolo—even Elli's hometown of Coatesville, Pennsylvania or Midland, Michigan. The allegorical register here positions Zafar's exhaustion, and that of his comrades, as global. On the one hand, this is an empowering realization, as the people of Khaufpur are not alone in their fight to survive; on the other hand, it is sobering to realize how this crisis replicates itself on a massive global scale. As

discussed in the Introduction to this project, Elizabeth DeLoughrey finds allegory provocative

for interpreting contemporary environmental crises because of the purchase it holds for

perceiving scale in her most recent monograph, *Allegories of the Anthropocene*. Noting that it is

especially useful for understanding the "perceived disjunction between humans and the planet,"

DeLoughrey argues that allegory reveals how "the Anthropocene is both forward-looking and a

future retrospective, characterized by 'anticipatory logics' and anticipatory mourning" (4). The

shareholders in Khaufpur, in Midland, and those positioned as the protagonist of Hamid's text,

thus come to understand their fractured spatial and temporal reality through the allegorical mode.

They inhabit environments in which harm is already done and demand stronger opportunities for

survival, reeling in the fact that the bar has been set this low for environmental justice. At the

same time, like Azaro's visions of infrastructural development yet-to-come, they anticipate a

continued degradation of their environments, while also envisioning a more livable, if not

entirely transformed, future.

The Midland shareholders are proof that fighting for a more livable future is possible.

After years of protests, lawsuits, and activists demanding access to shareholder meetings, the

people of Midland won the promise of a cleanup from Dow Chemical in 2010. The EPA and

Michigan Department of Environmental Quality codified requirements for the cleanup, which

included reducing exposure risks along the Tittabawassee River and completely replacing soil in

the floodplain if it contains more than 250 parts per trillion of dioxin (T. Miller). According to

Lone Tree Council activist Terry Miller, citizen watchdog groups pressured Dow for further

transparency, resulting in a regular newsletter informing residents of the cleanup's progress,

which began in earnest in 2012. Thanks to federal, state, and local regulation, Dow Chemical and

its extensive dioxin contamination has finally been brought in check. As Beth LeBlanc noted in a

report for *The Detroit News*, the "500-year flood event" in Midland in May 2020, which occurred when two dams breached on the Tittabawassee River, did not set back Dow's cleanup efforts.[78] Although dioxin levels were higher after post-flood testing in May and June, the levels were not significant enough to trigger stronger cleanup procedures.

To return to my point about localization, however, the relative success of Dow's cleanup is tampered by the corporation's continued refusal of responsibility for Bhopal. While activists from the Lone Tree Council and Ecology Center claimed victory over Dow after nearly 20 years of legal and political fighting, Bhopal is still without clean water.[79] Although the Indian government began a new piped water program for Bhopal in 2012—the same year Dow's cleanup in Midland began—Mandavilli reports that this water's frequency and potability are inconsistent. Piped in from the Narmada River—the site of the controversial Sardar Sarovar dam project—the water "runs right through sewers, and on rainy days, filth and feces mingle with the clean water. In the meantime, each monsoon may be carrying this toxic plume farther" (Mandavilli). Having merged with chemical mega-corporation DuPont in 2017, Dow's own commitments to the local appear to be diminishing as it, like Union Carbide, prepares to vanish under the faceless identity of an even larger corporate conglomerate.

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[78] It is important to note that the Sanford and Edenville dams offer a useful example of infrastructure managed by a public-private partnership. In 2018, federal regulators transferred control of the dams to state regulators which, ironically, have lower standards for safety rules and oversight procedures. A private company, Boyce Hydro LLC, retained licenses for the dams as far back as 2004, but did not follow through on regulatory inspections after federal regulators stepped back. At the time of the May 2020 flood, the Edenville dam was 96 years old and had failed a state inspection in January. The Edenville dam's failure overwhelmed the Sanford dam downstream (LeBlanc).

[79] Unfortunately, the same can be said for Flint, which is located just 63 miles south of Midland. I have not conducted sufficient research to understand the advocacy for Flint from activist groups like the Ecology Center and the Lone Tree Council as compared to that of their advocacy for Bhopal and Midland. That said, there are two key differences between the cases worth noting. Flint's water crisis came as a result of the Snyder gubernatorial administration authorizing the switch from Lake Huron, which supplies Detroit's water, to the Flint River as Flint's water source and scaling back regulatory measures for treating and testing the water itself. In January 2021, Snyder and eight others were brought on criminal charges for their role in the water crisis. As of May 2022, the trial has not yet begun. Second, the demographics in Flint are majority African-American, whereas Midland's demographics are majority white. While both are environmental justice issues, Flint exemplifies the challenges Black communities and communities of color face from environmental racism.

Like Sinha's invocations of the Eyes, Hamid's choice to conflate his reader and Protagonist as "You" critiques the corporation's facelessness by corporealizing it through the Protagonist's life and environment. In other words, collapsing reader and narrator forces the reader to come face-to-face with those the corporation has abandoned. In this way, by returning the material and environmental textures to these spaces and their inhabitants, Hamid thus positions literature as a kind of infrastructure: a material structure able to cross geographical distances while retaining the unique specificities of the places they connect. As Shonkweiler notes, Hamid's use of the second-person address "radicalizes the contradictions of relationality. It heightens the frictions between self and other while insisting on their dependencies. It mediates between singular isolation and the imaginative reduction of entire populations to undifferentiated masses" (121). Indeed, in Hamid's own words, this relationality is crucial to the "co-creative" act of literary production: "It's in being read that a book becomes a book, and in each of a million different readings, a book becomes one of a million different books...Readers don't work for writers. They work for themselves" (97-98). Working for oneself initially invokes the individualist, entrepreneurial logic that drives *picaros* like Adiga's Balram Halwai and Hamid's own Protagonist to try to "overcome" their circumstances and "rise" through the ranks of urban South Asia. However, as Hamid's satire has made clear, this individualist ethos is a myth; the Protagonist's body, like all of ours, is ultimately dependent on the health of his environment and the care of others. The notion that reading is "work" is nevertheless intriguing when thinking about how *Filthy Rich* positions both readers and characters as shareholders, not of a corporation, but of environmental welfare writ large. Part of the genius of Hamid's second-person address is that the reader becomes ancillary to the Protagonist's ignorance of environmental degradation. The harm he commits is also the harm "you" commit, by virtue of

the Narrator's rhetorical address. If Sinha's Khaufpuri shareholders are ultimately invested in improving conditions of their short-term survival, so too does Hamid's unique perspective on infrastructure, maintenance, and decay remind the reader that the novel's "eternal present" is one that is nevertheless degrading slowly (Appleyard). Ironically, Hamid's self-help book stops short of telling readers what to do with this new information, leaving readers to grapple with the questions of how to live with and among infrastructures that may make the present survivable, but may never fulfill the promise of a future.

Hamid's non-prescriptive self-help book thus leaves open several ethical questions: What responsibility does the reader have to participate in the worlds they witness and from which they cannot look away? What do we owe to each other if "we all live in Bhopal"—in other words, if we are all exposed, in one way or another, to environmental degradation as a result of corporate negligence? While my readings of Hamid and Sinha leave me with these questions, my final chapter explores them more thoroughly by taking up Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* as sentimental novels. A genre that ultimately emphasizes relationality through feeling, the sentimental offers unique opportunities to expand our discussions of infrastructure from those structuring the built environment to those forming affective bonds in communities on a global scale. In the wake of the 1998 India/Pakistan nuclear tests, which materialize the risk of a nuclearized South Asia, Shamsie and Rushdie stage sentimental responses to contend with what it means to live under constant threat of mutually assured destruction. While this chapter has shown how the *picaro* demands infrastructural repairs in order to survive in poisoned environment, my project concludes by considering how Shamsie and Rushdie work toward an ethics of repair, one that is grounded not in mutual destruction, but in an understanding of shared vulnerability.

Chapter 4: Toward an Ethics of Repair: Mourning amid Mutually Assured Destruction in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*

My world has died. And I write to mourn its passing. Admittedly it was a flawed world. An unlivable world. A scarred and wounded world. It was a world that I myself have criticized unsparingly, but only because I loved it. It didn't deserve to die. It didn't deserve to be dismembered. Forgive me, I realize that sentimentality is uncool—but what shall I do with my desolation? (Roy, "End of Imagination" 54-55)

Just weeks after India and Pakistan each tested six underground nuclear bombs in May 1998, Indian author and Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy writes an elegy for the world she feels has been lost to the spectacularly devastating allure of nuclear weapons. First published in *Outlook* and *Frontline* magazines, Roy's essay, "The End of Imagination," registers her shock, outrage, and grief upon learning that both India and Pakistan have "gone nuclear," for presumably no reason other than their interest in mutually assured destruction. Throughout the essay, Roy characterizes nuclear power as both recursive and neocolonial. Although the Cold War had nominally ended ten years prior, Roy notes that the allure of nuclear proliferation has resurfaced as "the ultimate colonizer" (49). She identifies nuclear weapons' power in their pervasiveness; they invade everything from unconscious dreams, to social behaviors, to bodies themselves (49). Further, Roy paints a bleak, apocalyptic picture of the environment in the wake of nuclear devastation, illustrating in broad strokes a world characterized by burnt villages, poisoned soil and water, nuclear winter, and mass death of fish, animals, plants, and people. If, as her title suggests, the nuclear represents the end of imagination for India, Roy's wide-ranging and highly emotional essay serves as a last-ditch attempt to imagine the full extent of the devastation and instantaneous violence that will occur if nuclear warfare comes to pass.

Roy's response to the 1998 nuclear tests adopts a strategically heightened emotional register in the face of a state-sanctioned project that repeatedly turned to rationality and objectivity as the ideals driving science and technology in postcolonial South Asia. According to social theorist Ashis Nandy, science's relationship to the newly independent Indian state was a unique one. Rather than an academic discipline that remained separate from state affairs, India's political elites "have deliberately chosen to see science as the responsibility of the state and have, at the same time, treated it as a sphere of knowledge which should be free from the constraints of day-to-day politics" (*Science, Hegemony, and Violence* 4). However, as political tensions grew between India and Pakistan in the aftermath of Partition, nuclear weapons represented more than the technological silver bullet that would modernize India and introduce it on the world stage as a developed nation in its own right. Seeking to imitate the United States' military supremacy in using the atomic bomb to end its war with Japan in 1945, Indian and Pakistani leaders came to desire nuclear weapons not merely as the epitome of their "arrival" into modernity, but as a key piece of their respective military arsenals.

With nuclear weapons representing these dual cultural and tactical functions, Roy's heightened emotional response to the 1998 tests resists what Nandy calls the "psychic numbness" that discourses of scientific rationality and objectivity can produce ("Epidemic of Nuclearism" 2). He writes that, when justifying nuclear weapons as necessary for national security,

> [T]he death or possibility of the death of millions begins to look like an abstract, bureaucratic detail, involving the calculation of military gains or losses, geopolitics or mere statistics. Such numbing can be considered to be the final culmination of the separation of affect and cognition—that is, feeling and

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thinking—that the European Enlightenment sanctioned and celebrated as the first

step towards greater objectivity and scientific rationality. ("Epidemic" 2)

The success of the nuclear tests, alongside the accompanying public euphoria and jingoistic government rhetoric, renders India unrecognizable to Roy, thus prompting her claim that her "world has died."[80] Indeed, Roy has at this moment become emblematic of Indian literature and culture. The success of her 1997 novel, *The God of Small Things,* won her the Booker Prize that same year and skyrocketed her to international acclaim, making her a highly visible public figure. To mourn that her "world has died" at the very moment when she is a popular symbol of that world indicates how her elegy for nuclearized India ties the personal to the political, the individual to the national, and the regional to the global.

When she asks at the end of the epigraph, "What shall I do with my desolation?" Roy expresses that she finds herself adrift among her compatriots in the wake of the tests. Her question expresses both her inability to discern how to make meaning out of the nuclearized present, and her desire to express her grief in the community of others who feel similarly. In seeking ways of relating mutually beyond mutually assured destruction, it is no surprise that Roy turns to the sentimental. First conceived in eighteenth-century British literary and philosophical contexts, sentimentality is, by Roy's own admission, an "uncool" genre in part because of its negative connotations surrounding individual performances of excessive emotion. However, as scholars such as Suzanne Clark, Adela Pinch, and Lauren Berlant attest, sentimentality is at its core a genre that emphasizes relationality through feeling. Synthesizing Pinch's work on

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[80] Much of Roy's apocalyptic rhetoric, as well as her fears of mutually assured destruction, are unfortunately relevant for the current conflict in Ukraine. Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine mirrors, in some ways, the tensions between India and Pakistan, in that these territories were once part of the same nation. Many Ukrainians speak Russian as their first language, and several ethnic communities in the region call both sides of the Russian/Ukrainian border home. Additionally, NATO's hesitation to ally formally with Ukraine is due primarily to their fears of igniting nuclear warfare with Russia.

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century emotionalism, Ann Bolotin writes that sentimentality is "a force that joins the self to the world: the anger and fear do not originate within the individual, but reflects the individual's responsiveness to the world" (9). Similarly, Clark claims that sentimentality enables individuals to "make moral judgments grounded in a private realm which oppose the developments of urban industrial society" (20). The tone and "moral judgments" that Roy deploys throughout "The End of Imagination" thus situate her as a sentimental subject. She leverages her emotional reactions strategically to paint India's so-called "rational" choice to nuclearize as one that will instead devastate both India and Pakistan due to the instability the tests will cause throughout the South Asian region. Far from the "numbness" that rationality may produce, Roy thus suggests that the only appropriate response to nuclear weaponization is a hysterical one. When the postcolonial project of scientific rationality reaches its limits in the 1998 tests, emotion functions differently than Azoulay's and Sontag's rejection of pity or compassion as necessary for mobilizing spectators to action, as I discussed in Chapter 2. Rather, in this context, the sentimental provides an outlet for examining not so much what nuclear infrastructures *do*, but how they make people *feel*.

Aside from her apparent hysteria, Roy's predominant feeling throughout her essay is one of grief. Although the apocalypse of nuclear warfare has not yet come to pass, Roy's mourning is anticipatory, echoing DeLoughrey's formulation of the Anthropocene as both looking to the past and imagining the ecological devastation yet to come (4). Roy seeks to understand how the event of India's nuclearization has changed her relationality with those who are rendered vulnerable by nuclear escalation, both regionally and globally. Her search for community as she mourns her lost "world" echoes Judith Butler's notion that grief and loss can be communalizing rather than isolating forces, an argument she advances in *Precarious Life* (2004). Written as a series of

essays in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Butler theorizes how grief and mourning

shape the contemporary subject, especially in light of national mourning efforts in the United

States. For Butler, grief makes community out of our shared vulnerability to the Other. It reveals

"the thrall in which our relations with others hold us" and the ways in which "we're undone by

each other" (23). Importantly, however, Butler seeks an alternate response to grief beyond

"military violence and retribution," and she hopes that mourning, as an ethical practice, can

provide new pathways to experience and recover from collective loss (xii). In this sense, we can

understand Roy's somewhat desperate question, "What shall I do with my desolation?" not

merely as an overdetermined expression of sentimentality, but also as a strategic ethical mandate

to search for and build community in the wake of nuclear weaponization.

Throughout this chapter, I connect Roy's question to a broader South Asian literary

response to nuclearization that holds up the ethical values of mourning against nuclear

weaponry's threats of mutually assured destruction. Like Roy's essay, both Kamila Shamsie's

Burnt Shadows (2009) and Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) grieve the loss of

multiple "worlds" in their novels—worlds that have been carefully and intricately crafted over

generations, but which are destroyed instantaneously by militarized violence, both nuclear and

otherwise. Shamsie's novel follows the life of Hiroko Tanaka, a survivor of the Nagasaki

bombing, as she witnesses major events throughout the twentieth century, including Partition, the

Soviet-Afghan war, and the recurrence of the nuclear bomb through the 1998 tests. As she

travels westward in the wake of each significant historical event, Hiroko observes the ends of

multiple worlds, including cosmopolitan Nagasaki, multicultural Dilli/Delhi, and secular

Karachi. Although Rushdie's text does not represent the nuclear as explicitly Shamsie does, his

allegorical novel offers an elegy for the slow unraveling of Kashmir, the highly contested

northern territory bordering India and Pakistan.[81] By the end of the twentieth century, Kashmir transforms from an idyllic space of religious syncretism into both a hotspot for Islamic fundamentalist terrorism and the crucible for its neighbors' nuclearization.

Shamsie and Rushdie take up a variety of sentimental tropes to imagine the losses of these worlds in the wake of nuclear weaponization. In addition to their florid prose and heavy-handed convergences of characters' personal lives with world-historical events, Shamsie and Rushdie frame their novels' settings through an elegiac backward glance. Although both novels were published in the early 2000s, the texts' temporal settings between the end of World War II and the 9/11 terrorist attacks reflect deeply about worlds that have declined or faded away throughout the twentieth century. Unlike the obsessively future-oriented scientific regimes in India and Pakistan, *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* keep their gazes on the past. I find this move significant—and indicative of why sentimentality and postcoloniality are rarely brought into conversation—because it stands in direct contrast to Stuart Hall's rejection of the "backward-looking conception[s]" of diaspora (244). For Hall, diaspora mixes dangerously with nostalgia; it risks devolving into a lost mythical "essence or purity" that the diasporic community continuously mourns (244). Hall's conception of diaspora is instead forward-moving: hybridity and difference are produced through transformation and regeneration. However, Shamsie's and Rushdie's sentimental novels press pause on the relentless forward motion of both infrastructural

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[81] As discussed in my project's Introduction, Debjani Ganguly argues for 1989 as a new historical marker for literary criticism. In her reading of *Shalimar the Clown*, she notes that both the Kashmir insurgency and the beginning of the *fatwa* against Rushdie take place in 1989. In response to Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Ayatollah Khomeini, the Shah of Iran, accused him of blasphemy against Islam and issued a religious decree, or *fatwa*, authorizing any Muslim to kill Rushdie without consequence. Ganguly, among other critics including John Updike, note a shift in Rushdie's literary style post-*fatwa*. She writes that Rushdie's first-hand exposure to radical Islam contributes to his fiction's investments in galvanizing Muslim publics to conceptualize Islam as a global "geocultural force" (129). This new understanding of global Islam is a form of "cultural politics" that transcends boundaries of the nation-state, and "appeals to the idea of humanity" in a more universalizing sense (129).

modernity and postcolonial diaspora.[82] Rather than imagine the brave new worlds that the twenty-first century might create, *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* ask us to turn our gaze to the past and mourn for what has been unmade in the wake of the nuclear bomb.[83]

Shamsie's and Rushdie's efforts to produce a more rigorous relationship with the past additionally echoes recent work under the rubric of "critical melancholia studies." Like Butler, scholars in this field identify an historically engaged relationship with the past as crucial to an ethical practice of grieving rooted in the present. In the words of David Eng and David Kazanjian, "the past remains steadfastly alive for the political work of the present" (3-4). Enacting this reflective backward glance through history is crucial, not only for reversing infrastructure's obsession with futurity, but also for critiquing the stasis or wallowing that tends to be associated with melancholia.[84] Gaurav Desai notes the prevalence of both nostalgia and melancholia as problematic modes for the writing of history in Amitav Ghosh's fictionalized travelogue *In an Antique Land* (1993). Nostalgia, in his account, constructs a falsely optimistic and cohesive historical narrative, while melancholia "bemoans [the] entrapment in the quagmires of history" (34). At the same time, Desai notes the risks involved in relying on nostalgic accounts of history because "the writing of nostalgia is as much about the forgetting as the remembrance

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[82] In his essay "Imaginary Homelands," Rushdie theorizes diaspora as an imaginative exercise that depends on the backward glance as a method for critical historical engagement: "if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that *we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost*; that we will, in short, *create fictions*, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (10, emphasis added).

[83] I am grateful to Jessica Hurley for articulating this connection so clearly—that Shamsie's historical novel depicts the undoing of multiple worlds rather than narrating the development and consolidation of the postcolonial nation.

[84] Freud first distinguishes mourning from melancholia in a 1917 essay. He defines mourning as reacting to the loss of a specific object or person. The temporality of mourning can vary, but ultimately mourning will reach an end point when the mourner no longer feels the same degree of sorrow for the lost object. By contrast, melancholia refers to a prolonged experience of grief, one that is unable to resolve itself (Eng, Kazanjian 3). Scholars working in critical melancholia studies reclaim melancholia by framing its temporality as a continuous engagement with the past. While I use "mourning" and "grief" interchangeably throughout this chapter, my invocations of these terms align more with this reclaimed definition of melancholia than the traditional Freudian concepts.

of the past" (35). In other words, nostalgia recalls what is pleasurable to remember, rather than recounting historical events in all of their complexity. Critical melancholia studies aims to engage the past deliberately and reflectively, but without slipping into nostalgic indulgences. In doing so, the critic encounters the past not to restore a prior wholeness but, in the words of Mireille Rosello, to "produce a reparative vision" of what was (10). Throughout *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown*, I argue, grieving and mourning become ethical acts of repair, repurposing the hysterics of the sentimental to forge communities out of shared losses that, in turn, reveal shared vulnerability.

Using the sentimental to untangle the complicated histories of violence, nuclear or otherwise, in South Asia is a risky undertaking for reasons beyond the genre's tendencies for nostalgia discussed above. Despite its rich Anglo-American literary history, sentimentality is rarely invoked to frame historical inquiry. Rather, the genre tends to galvanize attention and emotion around contemporary social issues, whether in the nineteenth century or today. Indeed, in Yogita Goyal's study of contemporary slave narratives, she notes that the sentimental resurges with many similar conventions as its nineteenth-century predecessor, "enshrining the language of sentimentalism as the most effective weapon in the human rights arsenal" (36). In addition to contemporary slave narratives, sentimentality also appears prominently to justify U.S. imperialist endeavors in the War on Terror, as scholars such as Berlant, Bolotin, Butler, and Amy Kaplan have recently explored. Bolotin notes the peculiarity of the War on Terror as a "war on an emotional state," one that "calls the national polity into a shared feeling—terror—in order to motivate and justify a political vision" (2). Transforming its grief into action, the U.S. conducts the War on Terror both at home and abroad. It marginalizes citizens who fit the stereotypical outward signs of terrorists (i.e., brown, Muslim, male, wearing beards or turbans) and invades

locations suspected of possessing weapons of mass destruction in the name of "freedom." In actuality, these actions project ideals of American liberalism and democracy onto the world stage as a shield for imperialist interests in the Middle East. As this chapter will go on to show, Shamsie's and Rushdie's novels aim to decenter the United States' hold on the sentimental genre, as well as historicize the modes of grief that emerge post-9/11 into longer, entangled histories of internecine violence throughout South Asia.

Unlike my previous chapters, in which postcolonial characters and environments responded to infrastructural systems like roads and pipelines that were not designed with them in mind, nuclear infrastructures operate more subtly and intangibly in Shamsie's and Rushdie's texts. Aside from the bombing of Nagasaki—which literally occupies multiple blank pages in Shamsie's novel—there are no obvious signs of nuclear reactors, underground tests, or power plants dependent on nuclear energy.[85] Rather, by virtue of their setting post-1945, both *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* already exist in nuclear worlds, inhabiting what Jessica Hurley calls "the nuclear mundane"—the "environmental, infrastructural, bodily, and social impacts of nuclear technologies and the politics that prioritize them" (9). In other words, nuclear infrastructures exceed the singularity of the bomb, pervading everyday life "from bodies and rocks to highways and international treaties" (Hurley 9). I am interested in Hurley's formulation of the nuclear mundane because it encapsulates the problem of ambience that has formed the core of my analysis of postcolonial infrastructures and their presence (or lack thereof) in

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[85] Indeed, representation of the 1998 nuclear tests in contemporary Anglophone postcolonial literature is scarce. Hamid's debut novel *Moth Smoke* is set in summer 1998 and depicts numerous characters discussing the nuclear tests through varying displays of fear, curiosity, and jingoistic national pride. The tests form the backdrop for the novel's plot about a young man's descent into drug addiction and crime. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez returns to Pakistan because he is increasingly worried about the political instability between India and Pakistan, and the increasing likelihood of nuclear warfare to resolve disputes over Kashmir. Aside from Hamid's brief digressions in these two texts, and Hiroko's fearful migration toward the end of *Burnt Shadows*, the 1998 nuclear tests have yet to receive sustained attention in fiction, let alone in postcolonial ecocriticism.

contemporary Anglophone literatures. While texts like *Burnt Shadows* can ask politico-ethical questions by being thematically invested in infrastructures like nuclear weaponization, others like *Shalimar the Clown* demonstrate how infrastructure's ambience shapes contested regions like Kashmir and informs the text's political work, even if the infrastructures themselves are not salient within the narrative's plot. Further, while my readings of *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* take for granted that both novels situate themselves within the nuclear mundane, it is important to note that Shamsie and Rushdie, like Roy, do not stage mundane reactions to the ongoing threat of mutually assured destruction. Rather, their overdetermined rhetoric and emotional narratives express their fear over knowing that, by the time the 1998 tests come to pass, nuclear aggression no longer merely comes from superpowers like the United States to the Global South, but from within South Asian postcolonial nations themselves.

This chapter argues that Shamsie and Rushdie leverage the sentimental to mourn ethically and reparatively for the global consequences of nuclear weaponization in South Asia. Drawing on critical melancholia studies, I argue that mourning in these novels does not pine for a prior historical wholeness, nor wallow in sorrow for worlds lost. Rather, *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* are committed to understanding how entangled histories of violence in South Asia— namely, the aftermath of Partition and the rise of international Terrorism—emerge simultaneously alongside the history of nuclear weaponization. Nuclear weaponry introduces a newly collective precarity to contemporary life. As Roy's essay makes clear, a "world" that took generations to build can be eliminated in an instant through this new technology. Although the nuclear remains relatively backgrounded in the novels themselves, Shamsie's and Rushdie's overdetermined interpretations of sentimentality make legible the emotional burdens and challenges of living in a nuclear world—a world that does not wait for nuclear apocalypse to

enact terrible modes of violence. Before they can dare to forge ahead and envision a future outside of nuclear regimes, Shamsie and Rushdie enact the difficult ethical work of mourning for the entangled pasts that have shaped the present into an experience of shared vulnerability.

In what follows, I offer brief discussions of both India's and Pakistan's state-sanctioned nuclear programs and the literary history of the sentimental before turning to the modes of mourning that *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* enact. Echoing Roy's sorrow for her "world" that "has died," I first examine how Shamsie's and Rushdie's characters mourn for worlds lost to both the violence of nuclear weapons and the violence of Partition between 1945-1947. The authors stage this type of mourning by repurposing the sentimental love plot as a framework for joining characters together through the shared experience of profound loss. In addition to mourning for worlds that can never be recovered, the novels also mourn for futures that were never given the opportunity to flourish. Shamsie and Rushdie respectively trace the anger and disillusionment of a generation denied the chance to "belong" in communities of their choosing due to imperialist interventions. Hiroko's son Raza's and Shalimar's deeply misguided emotional responses lead them to join fundamentalist movements in Pakistan in Kashmir whose ideologies they do not share. Entangling the history of terrorism with the history of nuclear weaponization, Shamsie and Rushdie explore how terrorism does not wait for the spectacularity of the nuclear to enact violence in devastating ways.

I conclude the chapter by exploring what mourning might offer beyond the misguided binary of "revenge or justice," to paraphrase a debate Rushdie engages in the final section of *Shalimar the Clown*. To do so, I examine how Kashmira's and Kim's grief for their respective fathers—both of whom acted in the global surveillant service of U.S. empire—exposes differing degrees of vulnerability to mutually assured destruction. Whereas Kim easily upholds

neoimperialist beliefs in American supremacy, Kashmira's ambiguous final confrontation with

Shalimar conflates mutual destruction with mutual vulnerability. As Butler tells us, vulnerability

is "another way of imagining community" and thus demands an ethical response (27). By asking

what we owe to each other in a nuclearized world, *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown*

imagine an ethics of repair, restoring what Butler calls "grievability" to those populations who

have been, and continue to be, marked disposable by those in power. Taken together, Shamsie's

and Rushdie's novels offer infrastructures not of pipelines and wires, but of feelings, imagining

how to survive and respond ethically to the collective precarity that nuclear weaponization

materializes.[86]

Nuclear Development in South Asia

When India and Pakistan each successfully completed six underground nuclear tests in

May 1998, they confirmed the open secret that their decades-old nuclear programs had finally

produced atomic weapons. Like many nations reeling from the economic and political

consequences of World War II, India and Pakistan responded to the 1945 bombings of Japan

with an intense desire to match the United States' technological and military superiority.[87] India

and Pakistan achieved independence on August 15, 1947 through Partition, in which the British

colony was divided into two independent nations. However, the geographical divisions involved

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[86] In her monograph on West African car culture, Lindsey Green-Simms invokes Raymond Williams to coin the phrase "infrastructures of feeling." She defines this phenomenon as "sets of social and affective experiences that are conditioned by everyday interactions with infrastructural elements, and, as Williams suggests, these sets of feelings are often most visible in art and literature" (24). For Green-Simms, these affective experiences occur in response to the social roles of cars in West Africa. For my purposes, I am characterizing Shamsie's and Rushdie's ethics of repair as an infrastructure of feeling in a slightly different sense—born out of collective vulnerability to the intangibility and ambience of nuclear infrastructures, rather than out of physical interactions with material objects.
[87] For example, Gabrielle Hecht's *The Radiance of France* (2009) explores how nuclear technology symbolized France's opportunity to restore its "radiance"—its rich cultural heritage which had been demoralized under years of Nazi occupation. Hecht notes that France was determined to develop its nuclear program through home-grown talent. By nationalizing the nuclear program and placing its achievements within a cultural history of hypervisible signs of progress, France aimed to legitimize the nuclear as a key component of the modern state.

in independence rested on deeply flawed assumptions regarding India's status as a majority-Hindu region, and Pakistan as a majority-Muslim region—assumptions that produced deadly consequences, as *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* depict.[88] As they recalibrated their political and military resources in the wake of Partition, India and Pakistan subscribed to what Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik have called "nuclear nationalism," a concept that attaches notions of national progress, modernization, development, and regional superiority within nuclear infrastructures (93). For these newly independent nations, nuclear technology represented the apex of scientific achievement. The bomb provided an undeniable sign that these formerly colonized countries had cast off the stereotypes of backwardness and technological immaturity and were now fit to belong among the modernized nations of the nuclear elite. However, because the 1998 tests were largely unprovoked by external military threats, they instead afforded both India and Pakistan the opportunity to advance symbolic arguments for their respective national and regional superiority through the highly dangerous and lethal technologies of nuclear weapons.

Roy's response, then, echoes the shock from the rest of the developed world: How did the 1998 tests come to pass, and what are the global implications of living alongside a nuclearized South Asia? To explore these questions, I trace two interconnected phenomena that shape the history of nuclear proliferation in South Asia: the conflict over Kashmir, which stems from unresolved political tensions during Partition; and the weaponization of religion to justify nuclear technology's role in both right-wing Hindu nationalist movements and Islamic fundamentalist

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[88] Pakistan was initially comprised of East and West Pakistan, determined by the provinces of the Punjab and Bengal, which were perceived as majority-Muslim regions. East Pakistan staged its own independence campaign and achieved sovereignty as Bangladesh in 1971, after a brutal nine-month war during which numerous atrocities were committed by the West Pakistan military upon the people of Bangladesh.

groups.[89] While these topics are deeply complex and part of a much longer history of South Asian nuclear power, I aim to demonstrate how these phenomena explain why India and Pakistan desired nuclear technology so forcefully. Through my readings of *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown*, I will explore how these parallel histories of Partition, terrorism, and nuclear weaponization share a common theme of mutually assured destruction, which also serves as the occasion for Shamsie's and Rushdie's literary acts of mourning. At stake in reading these histories alongside one another is to recognize that to destroy one's "enemy," at least in the context of South Asia, is to destroy oneself. Mourning, as the novels demonstrate, attempts to repair these fractured histories by restoring an ethical obligation to the Other grounded in shared vulnerability.

Because the 1998 tests appeared to be spontaneous, India and Pakistan faced numerous economic sanctions from NATO-aligned nations like the United States. To justify why the tests were necessary security measures, given their apparent military escalations, both Indian and Pakistani leaders cited the disputed territory of Kashmir as a potential opportunity for military conflict. In the days following their tests, Lal Krishna Advani, the Indian prime minister, explicitly connected the Indian bomb to Pakistan's refusal to cede their occupied portion of Kashmir (Bidwai, Vanaik 56). If Pakistan did not stand down, the Indian military response would continue to escalate through the new nuclear option. Pakistan's response via its own nuclear tests on May 28 and 30 thus not only announced its ability to keep pace with Indian nuclearization, but to stage its own defense of Kashmir. It is important to note that India's and

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[89] The line between nationalism and fundamentalism is a blurry one in the context of contemporary radical Hindu and Islamic groups. By "Hindu nationalism," I refer to the right-wing Hindutva movement in India, which seeks to consolidate political power within Hindu groups via the persecution of Muslims, Sikhs, and other religious minorities. Hindutva becomes intertwined with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s policies surrounding nuclear proliferation, which I discuss further below. By "radical Islamic fundamentalism," I refer to extremist groups such as al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and ISIS, which interpret Islam to justify *jihad*, or holy war, against non-Muslims. I discuss the global fears of nuclear weapons falling into terrorists' hands further below as well.

Pakistan's professed interests in protecting Kashmir are rooted in a longer and more vicious conflict over the territory, one that is related to the religious and cultural violence of Partition, but also of the mismanagement of Indian territories under British imperial rule. As Roy explains in her essay "War Talk," "For the governments of India and Pakistan, Kashmir is not a *problem*, it's their perennial and spectacularly successful *solution*. Kashmir is the rabbit they pull out of their hats every time they need a rabbit. Unfortunately, it's a radioactive rabbit now, and it's careening out of control" (235). As Roy makes clear, positioning Kashmir as vulnerable and defenseless provides nothing more than a convenient excuse to reignite a conflict that leaves Kashmiris in the line of fire, which *Shalimar the Clown* depicts.[90]

The disputed territories of Jammu and Kashmir are the crucible through which India and Pakistan's religious, cultural, and territorial battles have been fought, both before and after Partition.[91] As Aiyaz Husain's cogent history makes clear, Kashmir's contested status began under British imperial rule, when the British appointed a Hindu maharaja to rule over the region's majority-Muslim population. Kashmiri dissent gradually consolidated under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah Muhammad—whom Rushdie fictionalizes as the "Iron Mullah"— and calls for Kashmiri liberation grew louder alongside Muhammad Ali Jinnah's movement for Islamic nationalism and Jawarhalal Nehru's for Indian independence. Like so much of the

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[90] Roy also turns her attention to Kashmir in her 2017 novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness.* Through a series of intersecting plotlines, Roy fictionalizes how the Kashmir conflict impacts a group of social misfits and outcasts who come to live with Anjum, a *hijra*, or transgender woman, in Delhi. In one scene, when multiple groups of activists converge on the Jantar Mantar observatory, Roy addresses how mothers of disappeared Kashmiri men combat compassion fatigue, competing for attention "in the international supermarkets of grief…They had wept publicly and often, and nothing had come of it" (119). Later in the novel, an officer in the Indian army searches the papers of Tilo, his former classmate and the lover of a Kashmiri freedom fighter. Tilo has written a "Kashmiri-English Alphabet." Entries such as "A for Azadi," "M for Mujahideen," and "T for Torture/Terrorist" shed light on the region's transformation since the 1989 insurgency (211-214).

[91] In an interview with *Queen's Quarterly*, Rushdie summarizes the nuclear issue thus: "Yes, these nuclear-armed monsters are clawing at one another—and here is poor old Kashmir, this beautiful place, famously peaceful, with its almost comically peaceful people. Indians used to make jokes about the lack of martial spirit in Kashmiris. That this place should have become so contested and violent is a real tragedy" (Enright 557).

botched Partition process, however, Kashmir's fate was determined by an absence of international leadership and by bureaucratic opacity. With Jinnah determined to achieve Pakistani separation, and the British increasingly eager to depart India by a fixed date, the ownership of Kashmir within Partition was left virtually undecided (Husain 95). In the end, India's ability to send substantial numbers of military troops to occupy the territory determined how Kashmir came, initially, under Indian rule (97). The occupation strategy was also supported by the British, who viewed Kashmir as an essential barrier between the encroaching Soviet Union and the Indian subcontinent (96).

As the dust from Partition began to settle, Kashmir transitioned into a key pawn in both India's and Pakistan's participation in the Cold War, indicating how the territory was swept up in nuclear debates long before the 1998 tests. Though hostilities with Pakistan were at an all-time high, India did not initially pursue nuclear technology in their quest for scientific development. Although Nehru proclaimed scientific advancement as the silver bullet that would propel India into modernity, he was skeptical about the advantages of nuclear weapons. For the first twelve years of his tenure, Nehru ensured that India participated in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a brief alliance formed during the early years of the Cold War in which newly independent nations in the Global South declined to ally with either the United States or the Soviet Union. First articulated at the Bandung Conference in 1955, the Non-Aligned Movement emerged from the momentum of decolonization movements that immediately followed the end of World War II. The movement's founding members included Indonesia, Egypt, Ghana, Yugoslavia, and Algeria, and promoted a policy of "friendly coexistence" with the U.S. and Soviet blocs (Westad 103, 107). Nehru saw non-alignment as an opportunity to focus on repairing India's "lack of technological sophistication," which he attributed to the British's ability to colonize the

subcontinent centuries before (Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb* 29). As historian Gyan Prakash explains, scientific development was thus cast "as an expansive moral campaign to unlock the nation's creative energy to live according to the ideals of a scientific temper" (213). In other words, the goal was "not to imitate the West," but to allow India to reach its full scientific, technological, and economic potential—a potential that had thus far been denied under colonialism.

However, the spirit of Indian non-alignment was brief. In 1962, a border dispute with China erupted in the Sino-Indian war, the first military conflict India engaged as an independent nation. Three years later, in 1965, India and Pakistan went to war over Kashmir. Sensing India's vulnerability following the war with China, Pakistan moved troops into the western region of Kashmir to try to reclaim the territory. The war was swift, but brutal; India invaded Pakistan and came within 50 miles of Lahore. Although Pakistan was able to hold the Indian military off, the conflict ended in a stalemate through an agreement brokered by the United Nations (Khan 45-47). The war produced numerous consequences for India's and Pakistan's reputations on the world stage, not the least of which was the confirmation that the United States, among other Western powers, viewed the Kashmir dispute as a local, rather than an international issue (Khan 48). Perceiving Pakistan to be the aggressor, the U.S. removed much of its military aid and instead bestowed its favor on India—a diplomatic relationship I will unpack through my readings of Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* and Ambassador Max Ophuls. With respect to the nuclear, however, the 1962 border war and 1965 Kashmir war reframed how India and Pakistan assessed its preparedness for national security. The conflicts converted Nehru from a nuclear weapons skeptic into a supporter. He authorized nuclear physicist Homi J. Bhabha to develop a nationalized nuclear program, laying the foundation for India's first nuclear device test in 1974.

In Pakistan, the need for a stronger military aided by nuclear weapons also became clear in the wake of the Kashmir war. In the words of foreign minister (and eventual prime minister) Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, "If India builds the bomb, we will eat grass or leaves, even go hungry, but we will get one of our own. We have no alternative" (K. Singh).

Between the 1965 Kashmir war and the 1998 tests, the races to develop nuclear technology and weaponry in India and Pakistan were largely clandestine operations. During this time, outward signs of nuclear development were replaced with behind-the-scenes networks of what Itty Abraham terms "strategic enclaves"—elite cadres of scientists, engineers, and politicians who determined the goals and outcomes of the respective nuclear programs ("India's 'Strategic Enclave'" 233). One exception to these secretive programs was of course India's 1974 test, in which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi authorized the underground test of a single nuclear device in Pokhran, where the 1998 tests would also take place. Presumably, the test intended to boost national morale following the 1971 war of independence in Bangladesh. However, the backlash from the international community, which included economic sanctions, was so swift that the test was less a celebration of national scientific achievement and more of a cautionary tale for those nations who attempted to test nuclear devices without the blessing of the United States and other NATO-aligned nations.

According to Prakash, as Indian leaders sought to repair the disadvantages of colonialism in India's scientific reputation, they increasingly turned to Hinduism as a way of rewriting scientific authority within an authentically Indian tradition (9). This move further distanced the contemporary Indian nuclear establishment from Nehru's vision of a secular, modern, and scientifically advanced Indian nation.[92] Thus, Prakash writes, "The nationalist predicament

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[92] It goes without saying that the social and cultural perspectives on civilian nuclear infrastructures (i.e., for research purposes, or as an alternative source for electricity) are far more intricate and complex than what I have described

dramatizes the functioning of the language of reason as an idiom of power in colonial India,"

culminating in the desire for nuclear weapons as the apex of both rationality and national power

(9). The de-secularization of nuclear science emerged in India through the far-right Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP), who explicitly connected its political agenda in the 1980s and 1990s with

nuclear empowerment and justified India's nuclearization through a new ideology of Hindu

nationalism. According to Raminder Kaur, the BJP touted a loosely interpreted section of the

Bhagavad Gita to argue for the centrality of nuclear weapons in India's national defense

strategy. Kaur cites the text's "creed of Kshatriya or 'warrior' India, thereby pronouncing a duty

of responsible, *dharmik* obligation to protect one's people. The tale about Krishna provides an

indigenous and time-worn ethic for nuclear development...The allegory is now interpreted as a

divine right to harbor sublime on Indian soils" (275). The BJP formally came to power in

February 1998, just weeks before the nuclear tests that May. Their party authorized the tests

under the code name "Operation Shakti," invoking the Hindu mother goddess whose power

animates cosmic energy throughout the universe (Abraham, *Making* 28; Mathur 6). The BJP

sought to materialize their vision of a "strong India" as one that is "united culturally and

politically" through Hindu nationalism and Hindu science (Bidwai, Vanaik 95).[93] The bomb

accomplished both of these, synthesizing the weaponization of both religion and technology.

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here. Anthropologists Raminder Kaur and Rahul Mukherjee provide excellent socio-cultural studies of nuclear infrastructures in Mumbai, the site of a major nuclear research center, and Koodankulam, the site of a controversial, Russian-funded nuclear reactor, respectively. Both scholars discuss everyday citizens' varying perceptions of risk regarding their exposures to radiation and consider how these perceptions conflict with national narratives of scientific advancement and technological progress.

[93] Roy claims that the BJP's equation of nuclear bombs and national power can be traced back to Indira Gandhi's authorization of the 1974 test. Roy writes that Gandhi "injected the venom into our political veins" and "showed us how to conjure enemies out of thin air, to fire at phantoms that she had carefully fashioned for that very purpose" ("End of Imagination" 60). Roy claims that while Gandhi sets a precedent for the BJP to nationalize nuclear power, the bomb is a Western invention, hardly an "old Indian tradition" (61).

If the BJP's bomb was conceptualized in the service and celebration of Hindu nationalism, it was also designed as an anti-Islamic weapon, with Pakistan as the primary target. In comparison to India's nuclearization, which had specifically nationalist aims, Pakistan pursued the bomb foremost as a matter of national security (Perkovich 12). When India tested in 1974, Pakistan refrained from responding, cowed not only by the threat of international economic sanctions but also by the reality that they did not yet possess nuclear technology that was sophisticated enough to rival India's. According to Feroz Khan, a civil servant who spent 32 years working in Pakistan's nuclear program, nuclearization in Pakistan was much more politically divided there than in India. The program consisted of two rival organizations: the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC), formed under the Atoms for Peace program,[94] and the Khan Research Laboratories, headed by Abdul Qadeer Khan, who infamously built an international nuclear trading network that secretly funneled nuclear materials to Pakistan and other proliferating nations without the approval of NATO (Corera 8). Although Pakistan's nuclear program was somewhat of an open secret, A. Q. Khan's network succeeded as a clandestine operation, so much so that the shock of the 1998 tests was not that India had the bomb, but that Pakistan could respond in kind.

Whereas India de-secularized atomic power to articulate a specific understanding of Hindu nationalism that was unique to the subcontinent, Pakistan's nuclearization became connected to broader discourses—and fears—of an "Islamic bomb." Khan writes that Pakistan's achievement in testing nuclear devices is one for the entire Islamic world: "Pakistan's sense of

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[94] The Atoms for Peace program was a U.S. initiative during the Eisenhower administration that offered education and equipment to encourage countries to build nuclear programs for peaceful research purposes. In essence, the program sanctioned who could possess nuclear technology and who could not, and proposed a centralized bank of nuclear weapons that would be overseen by an international atomic energy commission (Corera xii). Hurley notes that the program attempted to reframe nuclear technology through a Christian moral lens (208).

national identity has a complex relationship with its Islamic identity. The perception that Pakistan is a victim of discrimination—that the world is opposed uniquely to an 'Islamic bomb'—became a source of pride. Of the Muslim polities, only Pakistan has managed to cross the nuclear threshold" (10). The notion that Islamic nations are subject to discrimination regarding access to nuclear weapons is an interesting one given the United States' extensive control over non-proliferation since it introduced nuclear weapons to the world in 1945. Political scientist George Perkovich writes that India believed U.S.-led non-proliferation efforts were "racist, colonial project(s) to deny India the fruits of its own labor and the tools of its own security" (7). Importantly, the arrival of Pakistan's "Islamic bomb" in 1998 provided significant leverage to draw international attention to Kashmir as an issue that affected a majority-Muslim region. According to Bidwai and Vanaik, internationalizing Kashmir reflected negatively on India; in Pakistan's view, India illegally occupied territory that rightfully belonged to them (115-116). Raising awareness of an unstable regional conflict that now possessed nuclear weapons served to highlight the Pakistani case for recovering control of Kashmir against an Indian aggressor, who invaded their territory and tested nuclear weapons without provocation (Perkovich 434).

Pakistan's introduction of an "Islamic bomb" also produced tangible fears about the likelihood of Islamic terrorist groups gaining access to nuclear weapons. Two years prior to the nuclear tests, the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan. As Pakistan pursued a cautiously friendly relationship with their neighbors to the north, other nations, including the United States, grew increasingly alarmed by the possibility that the Taliban, or another terrorist group, could easily overpower Pakistan and their nuclear arsenal (Kerr, Nikitin 1). Indeed, placing the 1998 nuclear tests in context with other global instances of Islamic terrorism yields insights into that

very real fear. On August 7, 1998, just three months after the tests, Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda—based in Afghanistan at the time—orchestrated attacks on U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Although not coordinated, the next day, August 8, the Taliban captured the Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif and brutally massacred thousands, many of whom were ethnic minorities, including the Hazara. To return once more to the issue of Kashmir, Islamic terrorist groups increasingly congregated in the valley, both in preparation for the 1989 insurgency and in the years since then. Non-proliferation and supposed discrimination against the "Islamic bomb" thus served to deter nuclear war between India and Pakistan, while also protecting Pakistan's nuclear arsenal from those who would not hesitate to unleash its full power.

Synthesizing Anglophone and South Asian Sentimentalities

As discussed above, Shamsie's and Rushdie's decisions to invoke the sentimental are direct rejoinders to the ethos of rationality that drove India and Pakistan to develop nuclear weapons and that culminated in the 1998 tests. By refusing the "separation of affect and cognition" which characterizes "the first step towards greater objectivity and scientific rationality" (Nandy, "Epidemic of Nuclearism" 2), Shamsie and Rushdie enter somewhat uncharted territory for postcolonial literary studies. As I have discussed throughout this project, postcolonial literary criticism tends to favor politically engaged fiction in the vein of social realism, magical realism, petro-fiction, and the picaresque. Sentimentality, by contrast, has rarely been taken up among postcolonial critics.[95] Of course, the genre looms large in British and American literary traditions as both an affective response, characterizing eighteenth-century British cultures of sympathy and feeling, and a literary genre, surfacing in women's writing and

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[95] For recent works exploring affect and emotion in postcolonial literature, see Bewes, Gaylard, and Scott.

social reform movements in nineteenth-century antebellum America. Shamsie and Rushdie draw on these dual resonances of the sentimental in "writing back" to the imperialist practices that India and Pakistan imitate in their pursuit of nuclear proliferation. At the same time, they synthesize Western forms of sentimentality with South Asian ones—namely Bollywood films and the nationalist and heteronormative ideologies that they normalize. Through this synthesis, *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* deploy sentimentality to reclaim both the literary genre and the affects it produces from Anglo-American contexts. They stage their overdetermined responses to nuclear weaponization as acts of mourning for worlds lost and futures deferred, yet in doing so they aim to build a global community of mourners whose reparative ethics is grounded in an understanding of shared vulnerability.

Despite its origins as a theory that connected moral rightness with the capacity for expansive feeling, sentimentality often conjures up literature and media saturated with "cliches of emotional experience" (Bolotin 34). By the end of the eighteenth century, sentimentality became negatively associated with women's writing featuring increasingly overwrought bodily expressions, ranging from weeping to fainting. Adela Pinch notes that the backlash against sentimentality at the turn of the nineteenth century was due to a fear of "the vagrancy of emotions": the ability of emotions to wander at will and infect individuals with overwhelming sensations, ultimately presenting a threat to social stability (10). Whereas the genre jeopardized the increasingly rationalist and realist conventions of nineteenth-century British letters, sentimentality played a central role in the so-called "American renaissance," the antebellum years of the nineteenth century in which American writers first perceived literary production in terms of a coherent national culture. Jane Tompkins, Richard Brodhead, and Suzanne Clark have contributed well-known interpretations of the sentimental as an important rhetorical tool for

articulating women's interests in culture and politics, most notably in the abolitionist movement.[96]

At the same time, other scholars have noted how sentimentality is concerned with more quotidian forms of sociability, such as appropriate mourning rituals. In Elizabeth A. Boyle's examination of gendered mourning practices, "sentimentality emphasizes the demonstration of morally right and situation-specific emotions through culturally mediated bodily displays, including tears, prayer, and the material artifacts worn throughout the mourning ritual" (113). These external signifiers are important both for gendered socialization and "making [individual] experience legible to others" (Boyle 118), an experience Mary Louise Kete calls "sentimental collaborations" (2). Boyle draws attention to the ways in which social conventions surrounding mourning prevent rather than permit excessive displays of grief. An individual's interpretation of embodied social codes reveals her ability to articulate her membership in larger collectives, whether on the scale of gendered social groups or broader national identities (Kete 4). It is interesting, then, that Rushdie and Shamsie, alongside Roy, seek to establish their sense of community through overdetermined and excessive displays of emotion. Their fears of mutually assured destruction as an outcome of nuclear warfare emphasize the arbitrariness of the divisions, whether religious, political, or national, that have come to antagonize contemporary South Asia. Mutually assured destruction is not a rational enterprise, regardless of what state-sanctioned regimes may argue. In this way, excessive emotion functions as a kind of infrastructure to bring together new modes of community grounded in shared vulnerability to nuclear violence.

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[96] See Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1870* (Oxford UP, 1985), Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), and Clark, *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (Indiana UP, 1991).

By repurposing the sentimental for postcolonial concerns, Shamsie and Rushdie also synthesize the genre with distinctively South Asian cultures of emotion. In adopting the sentimental's hallmark tropes—including an emphasis on the domestic, overwrought and heightened prose styles, and a privileging of female perspectives—Shamsie and Rushdie invoke emotional conventions that are common among Bollywood films. Just as literary sentimentalism is criticized for its unserious perspectives, so too have Bollywood films come under fire for their "lack of intellectual rigor" (Dwyer 103). Regardless of its status as serious art, Bollywood films are wildly popular, influencing films and audiences around the world, in part due to the South Asian diaspora's global reach (Gopinath 93-94). Their characteristic features overlap in many ways with the sentimental. According to Vijay Mishra, Bollywood films "include love stories couched in family values and presented as staged musicals" and "stories that do not unsettle cultural presumptions (inter-caste or inter-religious marriage)" (14). In Rachel Dwyer's account, they emphasize "emotional realism" over psychological or social realism, and invoke genres like melodrama in order to "mak[e] all feelings exterior," going so far as to claim that one can understand a Bollywood film even if one does not speak Hindi because the plot and character development can be understood entirely in terms of the actor's embodied and emotional expressions (109-111).

Sumita Chakravarty identifies this last quality—Bollywood film's transparent emotionality—as crucial for its role in nation-building, especially in the tenuous years after Partition. Because the majority of the Indian population was nonliterate, film was a key genre for mediating nationalism via "the reconciliation of state authority with more traditional centers of allegiance such as the family, caste, or romantic partner" (Chakravarty 120, 124).[97] Just as the

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[97] Mehboob Khan's film *Mother India* (1957) is widely regarded as one of the most popular and influential Bollywood films. It allegorizes the Indian national struggle through the experience of Radha, a young single mother

American literary sentimental mediated the relationship between individual social experience and national belonging, so too do Bollywood films deploy tropes centering on the nuclear family and heteronormative love relationships to negotiate one's sense of belonging to the nascent Indian nation.

Bollywood is undoubtedly a conservative form, especially when these images of domesticity and heteronormativity become mouthpieces for Hindutva's resurgence of patriarchal social structures or creating an ideal image of the homeland for diasporic communities to revisit nostalgically (Dwyer 100, Gopinath 7). However, the films' emphases on emotionalism, visual pleasure, and sexual desire also signal their liberatory potential within the otherwise limiting confines of the sentimental. Nandy identifies this potential by celebrating Bollywood as an explicit rejoinder to Indian society's "domain of instrumentalist rationality" (Vasudevan 6). He writes that Bollywood films exhibit "not only a politics of statecraft but also a politics of culture," one that pushes back on a certain brand of colonial masculinity that insists on being "the only authentic form of Indianness" ("Indian Cinema" 210, 215). In a similar vein, Gayatri Gopinath reads the quintessential song-and-dance sequence in Bollywood films as evidence of queer form and queer desire. She argues, "these sequences act as a place of fantasy and excess, not only for the female film star but also for the viewer, that cannot be contained or accounted for in the rest of the narrative" (101). The sequences often have no bearing on the film's plot, but are also the most transnationally mobile forms.[98] Because they can be extracted from the original film's contexts, the song-and-dance "falls outside the exigencies of narrative coherence and

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striving to support her sons. According to Chakravarty, the film's enduring success is due to "the way it shapes a fundamental level of the Indian experience of suffering into the stuff of myth, investing the everyday with the heroic, allowing its audiences to renew their most cherished cultural assumptions" (150). The film serves as a central intertext for Rushdie's novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995).

[98] For example, in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Ishrat, one of the *hijras* who lives with Anjum, diffuses a conflict among the activists gathered at Jantar Mantar by performing a song from the 1981 film, *Umrao Jaan* (127).

closure," thus providing a space with which to critique norms of heterosexuality, the nuclear family, and the Indian national project (101).

Both Shamsie and Rushdie engage Bollywood forms throughout their *oeuvres* to inform their interpretations of sentimentality. Though Shamsie's engagements are more limited than Rushdie's, her 2017 novel *Home Fire* explicitly references the Bollywood film, *Dil Se* (1998), a story about Kashmir insurgents and their plans to attack independence day celebrations in New Delhi.[99] The film ends with two lovers embracing and dying in an explosion; the woman was wearing a suicide vest as part of her role in the insurgency. Claire Chambers notes that *Home Fire* replicates this ending, with Eamonn, the son of the British Home Secretary, being forced into a suicide vest as he attempts to reunite with Aneeka, the daughter of a Kashmiri insurgent whose brother has died after being recruited to join ISIS (191). Rushdie's intertextual engagements with Bollywood are far more extensive.[100] According to Mishra, "In Rushdie, cinema functions as *the* aesthetic of India, as the dominant cultural form of the country…cinema, as text, provides Rushdie with both a context (cinema as social fact) and a language (cinema as a particular discourse, a particular representational technique) with which to write a national allegory" (16-17). Mishra notes that many Bollywood films influence Rushdie's fiction, including *Mother India* (1957), *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), and *Anarkali* (1953). These last two films are central to *Shalimar*, as Boonyi's dance performance as Anarkali incites both her sexual awakening and her doomed seduction of Max Ophuls, the American ambassador to India.[101]

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[99] Importantly, *Home Fire* is also a retelling of Sophocles' *Antigone*, a play which concerns the right to mourn publicly. *Home Fire* adapts the play to question how contemporary terrorists ought to be remembered and mourned. Butler also explores the play's contemporary relevance for questions of kinship in *Antigone's Claim* (2000).

[100] Rushdie's protagonist Moor Zogoiby, from *The Moor's Last Sigh*, is born in the same year as *Mother India* is released; the film features prominently throughout the novel (Mishra 24-25). In *The Satanic Verses*, Gibreel Farishta is a Bollywood star.

[101] To add to the filmic resonances in *Shalimar*, Rushdie names Max after a well-known German actor and director from the 1930s, a fact which John Updike bemoans as "characteristic Rushdean overflow" in his review.

These Bollywood references in Shamsie's and Rushdie's works enable them to speak directly to South Asian readers, whether on the subcontinent or in the diaspora, at the same time as they address a broader readership through their narratives' global scopes. As Gopinath and Dwyer discuss, Bollywood songs, dances, and romantic tropes are uniquely mobile forms that are legible to audiences who have grown up with these films as a cultural touchstone, whether at home or abroad. At the same time, however, the stories these Bollywood films reenact draw on traditional figures in Indian mythology. In other words, the stories predate the harsh political, religious, and nationalist divisions that characterize Partition and independence for both India and Pakistan. While Bollywood films risk retelling these stories nostalgically, I suggest these intertexts offer a shared cultural lexicon that assist Shamsie's and Rushdie's projects to find ways of relating mutually beyond the destructive practices that nuclear weaponization promises for the South Asian region—and, indeed, the world at large. As I will go on to show, *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* imagine the futility and absurdity of mutually assured destruction. Whether fighting over disputed territory in Kashmir or racing to escalate nuclear tests, Pakistan and India ultimately seek to harm spaces and peoples that were once shared, if not completely unified prior to colonization and Partition. Shamsie and Rushdie thus locate their ethical projects in repairing this shared history. By remembering and celebrating what unites rather than divides people subject to nuclear weaponization, *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* seek not to flatten cultural, religious, and political differences but to live in a world in which these divisions are not the basis for catastrophic destruction. In what follows, I examine how the novels enact their reparative ethics through mourning, both for worlds lost to devastating violence and for futures that never came to pass. Mourning enables Rushdie and

Shamsie to engage rigorously with what has been undone by the past so that they can begin to imagine reparative practices for survival in a precarious world moving forward.

Love Plots and Lost Worlds

The most salient trope threading *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* together with sentimental and Bollywood-esque cultures of emotion is that of the love plot. Both novels center on romantic relationships, framing the emotionally heightened experiences of these individuals as microcosms for the world-historical events each text depicts. Hiroko Tanaka loses her first love, Konrad Weiss, in the Nagasaki bombing, before finding an unexpected romance with Sajjad Ashraf, the Indian apprentice of Konrad's sister, Elizabeth, and brother-in-law, James Burton, who live in Delhi. Whereas Shamsie offers a sincere take on Hiroko and Sajjad's love plot, Rushdie offers a more cynical view of the idealized yet ultimately failed marriage of Boonyi Kaul, the daughter of a Hindu pandit, and Shalimar Noman, the son of Muslim performers. Although the star-crossed lovers' union is upheld as fulfilling Kashmir's ideals of religious tolerance, the marriage crumbles when Boonyi has an affair with Max Ophuls, the American ambassador to India. Numerous literary critics, including Harleen Singh and Nalini Iyer, have noted that these fictional lovers are exceptional witnesses to history. From a narrative perspective, it is perhaps extraordinarily convenient that a single character, like Hiroko Tanaka or Max Ophuls, should bear witness to so many world-historical events and endure so many traumas. In reading these stories as sentimental, it is important that they are overdetermined and highly emotionally charged because, in doing so, they place emotion at the heart of "overlapping strands of history…[that] tell a common story of loss" (H. Singh 37).

Using the love plot to tell stories of loss, grief, and mourning is risky because of the trope's tendency to uphold the status quo under the guise of emotional fulfillment. As Lauren

Berlant explains in *The Female Complaint*, the love plot has enabled women's culture to survive within intimate publics by valuing "having been affectively recognized and emotionally important" (7). However, in these women's searches to be "emotionally important," their writing more often than not produces "a generic wish for an unconflicted world, one wherein structural inequities, not emotions and intimacies, are epiphenomenal" (Berlant 21). As such, the love plot disguises women's empowerment under the sign of conventionality, reproducing and strengthening the social structures that ultimately prevent women's lives from flourishing (2). In reading *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* as responses to South Asian nuclearization, however, I find their interest in what ought to be recognized as "emotionally important" somewhat different than Berlant's critique here. As I have discussed throughout this chapter, Shamsie and Rushdie leverage emotion to identify how the nuclear project's reliance on rationality has reached its limits, and to call out the risks the nuclear tests pose for mutually assured destruction. The predominant emotional responses these authors stage is one of grief—in other words, the mourning that occurs when one loses what one has loved dearly.

Shamsie uses the love plot as a microcosm for interpreting historical change through her protagonist, Hiroko, a Japanese woman who survives the atomic bombing of Nagasaki in August 1945. Hiroko attempts to process her grief through a series of westward movements, first to India on the eve of Partition, then to Karachi, and finally to New York City in the wake of the 1998 nuclear tests. Hiroko's movements signify a refusal of sentimental nostalgia by virtue of her resolute detachment from a sense of place. Rather than indulge the "backward-looking glance" that Hall finds so dangerous to diasporic identity, Hiroko always moves forward, even as the bomb's impact on her body renders her sense of futurity uncertain.

I find Shamsie's interpretation of the love plot significant because of the ways in which the atomic bomb triangulates and violates Hiroko's romantic relationships. In a rather heavy-handed narrative gesture, the bombing of Nagasaki coincides with Hiroko's sexual awakening. Moments prior to the blast, Hiroko has accepted a marriage proposal from Konrad Weiss, a German expatriate whom she has been tutoring in Japanese. Before the bomb, Hiroko and Konrad's semi-clandestine relationship hearkens back to an earlier cosmopolitan era in Nagasaki, when the city was an international cultural and intellectual hub. They imagine their interracial and multilingual relationship will defy the odds of an increasingly conservative and nationalistic Japan, even as Germany's surrender to the Allied Powers places Konrad in an increasingly precarious position. Hiroko registers this newfound sense of possibility within her body itself. After passionately kissing Konrad and watching him "reverse himself" out of her house, Hiroko's "limbs [are] suffused with pleasure, exhausted by it, and yet it feels as though there are wings attached to her, on the verge of lifting her off the ground entirely" (Shamsie 22). Shamsie's elevated and emotional prose is on full display here, as Hiroko, changing into a kimono to prolong these sensations of embodied pleasure, looks upon Nagasaki and reflects that "everything is more beautiful to her than it was early this morning" (23).

Of course, the bomb renders the pleasures of this domestic idyll unsustainable. The blast intervenes into the text itself, taking up three fully blank pages, before returning to the narrative to explore Hiroko's shattered world. The bomb provides two points of reference to the titular "burnt shadows": Konrad's body burned into the ground by the blast, and the images of three black cranes seared from her kimono into Hiroko's back. Shamsie writes:

> Through the smoke, land that looks the way her back feels where it has no feeling.
>
> She touches the something else on her back. Her fingers can feel her back but her

back cannot feel her fingers. Charred silk, seared flesh. How is this possible?

Urakami Valley has become her flesh. Her flesh has become Urakami Valley. She

runs her thumb over what was once skin. It is bumped and raw, lifeless. (28)

This scene juxtaposes the nuclear devastation of the environment with the violation of Hiroko's body, especially at a moment in which she first experienced the sensual pleasures of intimacy and desire. Although the full extent of the bomb's blast is not yet perceptible through the "smoke," Hiroko's body translates the damage to the reader. Her body has become completely alien to her. The limbs that were so recently "suffused with pleasure" now cannot decipher where her back ends and the seared kimono begins. These feelings have been stunted, as her skin is no longer skin; the textures and appearance fuse with the burned landscape itself. Shazia Rahman reads the merging of Hiroko's body with Urakami Valley as evidence of nuclear weapons' ecofeminist violence. She writes that "Hiroko cannot separate the violence against the people from the violence against the land because the land has become her flesh, as have the birds of the land" (146). Environment and embodiment are entangled here, framing her subsequent migrations throughout the novel in a new light. By blending Urakami Valley with her back, Hiroko's scars tether her to her homeland—and the nuclear violence inflicted upon it—regardless of where or how frequently she moves.

At the same time, the heavy-handed convergence of Hiroko's sexual awakening with the bomb's blast borders on a problematic fetishization of the Asian woman. Indeed, it is extremely stereotypical that it is not merely Urakami Valley, but the remnants of her late mother's kimono that are seared into Hiroko's back. The event brands Hiroko's sexuality as an Asian woman as dangerous and explosive, but also titillating, due to the kimono's sensuality. Hiroko, meanwhile, understands the scars to indicate the lingering presence of nuclear radiation in her body. This

forecloses not only her own futurity, but that of any children she might hope to bear, calling to mind the women of Khaufpur who refuse to poison their children with their toxic breast milk from Chapter 3. Despite the speed with which the bomb's blast destroyed her world with Konrad, her fear of a latently toxic future once again illustrates Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence, in which the consequences of an event like nuclear exposure are temporally delayed by years—or generations—into the future, as we saw in the examples of Bhopal and Midland. In losing the world of Nagasaki and her relationship with Konrad to the bomb, Hiroko also loses the prior wholeness of her body, and the stable sense of futurity it afforded to her. While she accepts her fate with a surprising level of stoicism, Hiroko's embodied presence at the site of numerous other historical events throughout her lifetime risks reducing her witnessing to that of a nuclear cipher, unable to rid her identity or body of the bomb's trace.

Despite Shamsie's problematic fetishization of the bomb-marked body, Hiroko's later relationship with Sajjad suggests a sincere take on the love plot which demonstrates how love, grief, and mourning can form a shared foundation for ethical relation. Like her relationship with Konrad, Hiroko falls in love with Sajjad over their shared penchant for languages. He teaches her Urdu while she imparts some of her knowledge of Japanese to him. Over the course of their lessons, Hiroko begins to tell him about her relationship with Konrad and the devastation she witnessed on the day of the bombing. Rather than shy away from stories of her former lover, Sajjad transforms Hiroko's grief into an Urdu lesson, teaching her about the concept of "*ghum-khaur*," or "grief-eaters who take in the mourner's sorrow" (Shamsie 78). Urdu, Sajjad explains, understands grief through collective experience. Grief is not an emotion to endure individually, but to share communally. In addition to recalibrating Hiroko's expectations surrounding grief, Sajjad also alters Hiroko's assumption that her potential infertility precludes her from finding

love and marriage. Sajjad is the only character who sees and touches Hiroko's burns. His touch restores the sexual desire that Hiroko had only experienced before with Konrad, but refuses to prolong the exotic or hyper-eroticized stereotypes that Shamsie initially depicts. Despite Hiroko's claim that "the bomb did nothing beautiful" (93), Sajjad's physical explorations of her body aim to remind Hiroko "there was this too, these parts of her also" (92). According to Greg Forter, Hiroko's scars signify "a communication that graphically renders its own illegibility, one whose opacity to successful translation Shamsie asks that we honor" (218). Sajjad and Hiroko cannot translate the diagonal script of the bomb's scars, but they can pursue their desire for each other in spite of the bomb's violence.

Through his awareness of Hiroko's grief and respect for her bomb-marked body, Sajjad offers an alternative to the solitary, stoic future Hiroko imagines for herself by suggesting they re-envision their relationship as a continuous extension of the present. He states, "if these days teach us anything, it's that all we can do in preparation for tomorrow is nothing. So let's talk about today" (Shamsie 116). By "these days," Sajjad refers to the looming crisis of Partition. His own family is splintering, as each of his brothers determines whether or not to leave for Pakistan or subject themselves to violence and uncertainty once independence has occurred. Indeed, although he does not know it at the time, Sajjad's beloved world of Dilli/Delhi will be rendered lost and irrecuperable to him, characterizing Partition through the same instantaneous violence that destroyed Nagasaki with the bomb. While neither of them can reverse or fully restore the violence they experience, Hiroko and Sajjad form a relationship based on their own terms, grounded in the understanding of *ghum-khaur*. Through their mutual understanding of grief as a slow, communal process, Hiroko and Sajjad come to build a life for themselves that mourns for the worlds they have lost, yet does not wallow in undue nostalgia or regret. Their love plot is a

sincere one that envisions how life can be fulfilling amid the violent histories of nuclear weaponization and Partition.

Like *Burnt Shadows,* Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* also stages Partition as a world-historical event that destroys previously united communities through unprecedented acts of violence. Rushdie localizes his depiction of a paradise lost within Kashmir. In John Updike's review of the novel, whose title invokes this very notion of "Paradises Lost," he notes that the geopolitical conflict in Kashmir is likely unfamiliar for American readers, but it has been "a grievous personal matter" for Rushdie, whose grandparents were from the region and to whom he dedicates the novel (2). Rushdie also invokes the trope of the love plot to narrate Kashmir's devolution from a religiously tolerant and culturally diverse paradise into a region torn by fundamentalist infighting and living under constant threat of nuclear war. But whereas Hiroko and Sajjad's love story is sincere, Rushdie's novel suggests a much more cynical take on the trope through the untamed sexual desires of Boonyi, his female protagonist. Boonyi first pursues a relationship with the eponymous Shalimar out of a mix of curiosity and carelessness, before setting her sights on Max Ophuls, the American ambassador to India.

If Shamsie fetishizes Hiroko's sexuality through her kimono-seared scars, Rushdie not only ridicules Boonyi's sexual appetites, but punishes her for them. Boonyi's marriage to Shalimar is held up as the last hope for the survival of *Kashmiriyat*, or the regional belief that Kashmiris are stronger by what unites rather than divides them. In abandoning *Kashmiriyat* for Max's seductions, Boonyi's affair allegorizes the Indian nation and its desire to be counted among the global nuclear elite. While the novel does not discuss nuclear infrastructures explicitly, Max Ophuls' diplomatic mission to India coincides with the early years of the national nuclear program, during which time India regularly courted the favor of Western nations who

could provide financial and technological support. *Shalimar the Clown* chronicles how desires—for *Kashmiriyat*, for sexual possession, and for the nuclear—contribute to the greater political and military forces that unmake Kashmir's paradise into a shadow of what it once was.

Boonyi and Shalimar's romance as fourteen-year-olds signals both the idyllic insularity of Kashmir's paradise, and the pressure of their families to hold up their relationship as proof of Kashmir's survival in the face of military threats. Boonyi's and Shalimar's fates have been intertwined since their birth. Just as Saleem Sinai and hundreds of other children are born at the very moment India achieves independence in *Midnight's Children* (1987), Boonyi and Shalimar are born simultaneously in the Shalimar Gardens on the night when Pakistan invades Kashmir in October 1947. Debjani Ganguly claims that their coincidental births invoke the "Bombay cinematic vernacular of symbolic births and deaths," which ultimately produces the "eventual reunion [of characters separated by religion or class] and an affirmation of the secular, inclusive nature of the subcontinent's communal ethos" (117). Indeed, these expectations for unity and inclusion characterize Boonyi and Shalimar's relationship, even before they become romantically involved. Though their families are separated by their religious beliefs—the Kauls are Hindu while the Nomans are Muslim—Boonyi's and Shalimar's mothers were best friends, and hoped their children would share a similar bond. This peaceful coexistence across religious divides is a central principle of *Kashmiriyat*, "the belief that at the heart of Kashmiri culture, there was a common bond that transcended all other differences" (Rushdie 110). What makes Kashmir paradisical and idyllic, then, is its apparent commitment to unity and syncretism.

While Rushdie seems to believe in Kashmir's idyllic harmony earnestly, he is extremely skeptical of power of love to sustain this paradise in the face of encroaching political and religious tensions between India and Pakistan. He first establishes his cynical take on the love

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plot by demonstrating how Shalimar and Boonyi each misread the significance of *Kashmiriyat* as it pertains to their relationship. Initially, Shalimar views his love for Boonyi with a kind of sacred reverence. As he anticipates their first sexual encounter, he reflects on how the principles of *Kashmiriyat* have guided him to his soulmate:

> The words *Hindu* and *Muslim* had no place in their story, he told himself. In the valley these words were merely descriptions, not divisions. The frontiers between the words, their hard edges, had grown smudged and blurred. This was how things had to be. This was Kashmir. When he told himself these things he believed them with all his heart. (Rushdie 57)

The simplicity of Rushdie's syntax here indicates the naivete of Shalimar's worldview. Raised "in the palm of his father's hand" (57), Shalimar does not question "how things had to be" in Kashmir, nor does he envision a life for himself beyond the idyllic valley of his childhood. Whereas Shalimar interprets *Kashmiriyat* to understand his purpose in life, Boonyi initiates sex with Shalimar primarily for her own pleasure; it is "their choice, which was really hers" (Rushdie 61). Boonyi takes advantage of the principles of inclusion and acceptance for her own sexual liberation, but with little understanding of her actions' broader consequences within the village of Pachigam. Indeed, although *Kashmiriyat* is a noble principle, and is at the core of the world that Rushdie's novel mourns, it also reinforces Kashmir's insularity and ignorance of the broader political and cultural conflicts impacting the region. In Iyer's argument, *Kashmiriyat* is "fragile," a system of ideals which can only overcome superficial cultural differences because they are limited to the region's relatively isolated scope (130).

We can see the limitations of both *Kashmiriyat* and its implementation in the love plot when Boonyi and Shalimar are rushed into marriage, as part of the fallout from their sexual

encounters. Both Boonyi's and Shalimar's fathers argue that "The lovers were their children and must be supported" and "To defend their love is to defend what is finest in ourselves" (Rushdie 110). At first glance, star-crossed lovers who are caught in an illicit relationship yet still have the support of their families suggests the ultimate "happy ending" for a love story. The "feudal family romance," which Madhava Prasad argues is at the heart of Bollywood cinema, is resolved even before it begins (30). There is no melodrama, only faith that *Kashmiriyat* will once again restore balance to Pachigam. By transposing the desire of the lovers—specifically, Boonyi's desire for her own pleasure—into the *Kashmiriyat* framework, the Kaul and Noman families thus repurpose the young lovers' relationship into their own desire for Kashmir's ongoing endurance in the face of political and military challenges. *Kashmiriyat*, as Rushdie interprets it, thus prioritizes stasis over change—a key characteristic of both nostalgia and traditional melancholia, as discussed in this chapter's introduction. In a historical moment when Pakistan and India are forcing Kashmir to choose sides, continuing to adhere to *Kashmiriyat* traditions signals a naïve, nostalgic belief that life in Kashmir will continue to stay the same. We see a glimpse of this stasis in Shalimar's words to Boonyi immediately after they consummate their relationship: "Don't leave me…Don't you leave me now, or I'll never forgive you, and I'll have my revenge, I'll kill you and if you have any children by another man I'll kill the children also" (Rushdie 61). While Boonyi laughs off Shalimar's declaration as "romantic" and "sweet," the novel goes on to show how Shalimar is deadly serious: a betrayal of their love is a betrayal of Kashmir and the principles that uphold the community. Through these threats, the love plot clearly acts in the service of preserving Kashmir's insularity and stasis—in other words, preserving conventionality and the status quo through nostalgia, as characteristic of sentimentality and Bollywood films writ

large. While it fulfills Shalimar's parochial hopes and dreams, the love plot here limits Boonyi to a life of obedience to a murderous husband.

In this context, we can extend our allegorical reading of Boonyi and Shalimar's doomed marriage to consider how Boonyi's desire for something greater than the insularity of *Kashmiriyat* mirrors the Indian nation's desire for nuclear power—both of which have disastrous local and global effects. Boonyi has often been read as an allegory for Kashmir. Susana Araujo writes that her ill-fated affair with Max Ophuls, the American ambassador to India, performs "a parody of conquered territory" (141), while Rajini Srikanth characterizes Boonyi's betrayal as Rushdie's warning to "be careful whom you follow, be careful whom you consider a partner" on the world stage (74). By rejecting the static logic of *Kashmiriyat*, which was invoked for her protection, I am interested in reading Boonyi's desire as imitating India's desire for admission into the global nuclear elite. When describing Boonyi's dissatisfaction with her life in Pachigam, Rushdie veers away from Boonyi's sexual curiosity. Instead, he writes, "this life, marriage life, village life…was not remotely enough for her, didn't begin to satisfy her hunger, her ravenous longing for something she could not yet name" (114). Boonyi's desire defies all rational comprehension; even she doesn't know what she wants, except that it involves something greater than the stasis Pachigam promises her. At its core, though, her desire is obsessively future-oriented, much like the logic of infrastructural development and its attachment to nuclear technology. To achieve this sense of forward progress, Boonyi behaves not like Kashmir, but like India: by ingratiating herself among and trying to win the favor of Western powers.

Although Max is frequently and rightfully read as the allegorical stand-in for American political interference in South Asia, his expertise in development studies is worth exploring for its subtle connections to the nuclear (Araujo 145). Max is one of the architects of the Bretton

Woods financial system, which, among other things, gave birth to both the International

Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in 1944. In Odd Arne Westad's summation, the

Bretton Woods system's "core concept was to make American capital available as cheap public

loans to those governments that chose an open economy and the development of capitalist

markets" (153). In other words, it "guaranteed American hegemony, dammed up Soviet

influence, and contributed to the growth of international capitalism" (Westad 153). Max's

invitation to Bretton Woods is framed overwhelmingly through the language and logic of

infrastructural development: "The future was being born and he was being asked to be its

midwife. Instead of the weakness of Paris, the effete house of cards of old Europe, he would

build the iron-and-steel skyscraper of the next big thing" (173). The image of the skyscraper is

ironic, given how the Bretton Woods system plays out in postcolonial contexts, especially in

South Asia. Because membership in the IMF required aligning currency with the U.S. dollar,

newly independent postcolonial nations in Africa and South Asia acquired massive debts through

IMF and World Bank loans, as I have discussed throughout this project (Westad 153).[102]

Understanding the impact of the Bretton Woods system on South Asia is significant for

understanding how India's and Pakistan's nuclear program developed, and why they required the

utmost secrecy. Feroz Khan notes that, in Pakistan's case, its program lagged behind India's

because the economy depended so heavily on the IMF and World Bank to stay afloat. Part of the

reason why Pakistan pursued its nuclear program through Atoms for Peace—and remained under

the watchful eye of the United States in doing so—was because it wanted to stay in the IMF's

and World Bank's good graces (63). India was in a similar position. In 1966, in the aftermath of

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[102] As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, Nigeria and India took out World Bank loans to facilitate infrastructural
programs related to highway construction and megadams, which distributed these resources unevenly among local
populations.

the conflict over Kashmir, Indian scientists wanted to push forward with the development of the nuclear program, but plans stalled when Indira Gandhi's government was forced to devalue the rupee to avoid faulting on a World Bank loan (Abraham, *Indian Atomic Bomb* 126). Though Max's expertise in India is economic rather than diplomatic, his assignment as the ambassador to India is to determine how close Indian and Soviet ties have become, especially with respect to Cold War militarization. Max is tasked with understanding the motivations behind "what India wanted most: to purchase American supersonic fighter jets in significant numbers and on advantageous terms" (Rushdie 180). Among other things, supersonic fighter jets can transport nuclear weapons. Although the novel does not make this connection clear, we can read Max's presence in India as symbolizing American hegemony by ensuring postcolonial nations follow the financial accords the U.S. invented and develop nuclear weapons through the express permission of those nations that already possess them.

Boonyi's seduction of Max thus produces an interesting power dynamic with respect to his influence in Indian politics, especially in Kashmir. When Max is dumbstruck with desire for Boonyi, Rushdie writes that he "realized that his Indian destiny would have little to do with politics, diplomacy or arms sales, and everything to do with the far more ancient imperatives of desire" (181). What is especially curious is that this dynamic is narrated through the framework of the story of Anarkali, a young dancing girl who seduces the Crown Prince Salim. Boonyi takes on the role when the *bhand pather* compose a play inspired by the Bollywood film *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), in which Anarkali escapes death in a bricked-in room by fleeing through an underground tunnel and living out her days in exile. By embodying Anarkali in her real-life relationship with Max, Boonyi hopes to revise the story's ending, in which the female protagonist is not doomed to death nor exile, but instead has her agency restored. Initially, it

appears Boonyi succeeds; she upholds her end of the "treaty of their affiliation"—which Rushdie compares to "an international arms deal" (192)—to obtain a variety of material pleasures, while also inadvertently using Max's infatuation to sway his political opinions on Kashmir. Although she succeeds in escaping Pachigam, her confinement in Max's apartment in Delhi replicates Anarkali's imprisonment, while Max's growing support for the Kashmiri cause runs him out of favor with his international colleagues, ultimately leading him to abandon Boonyi and their unborn daughter.

In telling such a heavily allegorized story—Max as the embodiment of structural adjustment and economic development; Boonyi's desires mirroring those of India's desire for the bomb—why does the sentimental genre matter? Indeed, Rushdie's interpretations of the sentimental are strikingly cynical. Especially in using the story of Anarkali as the frame narrative, Boonyi's affair with Max is predetermined to fail, and she is punished several times over for daring to desire more than what life in Kashmir offered to her. Amira Jarmakani's work on romance novels—specifically, "desert romances" set during the War on Terror—sheds some light on these questions. Jarmakani examines how popular romance novels provide a framework for understanding "how desire can serve as a primary engine to consolidate imperialist power, specifically in the power of the (U.S.) nation-state to wage seemingly endless war" (3). Romance novels dramatize "how people learn to submit to power through their own desire for subjugation" (3). Even if plots are predetermined or predictable, the form is still useful for exploring these affective dimensions of power dynamics.

I find a similar move is happening with Rushdie's invocations of the sentimental, especially with respect to the story of Anarkali. That Boonyi and Max's affair is overdetermined, heavily allegorical, and highly emotional is precisely the point. The consequences of Boonyi's

desires, alongside Max's neoimperial presence in Kashmir, are obvious to readers who are familiar either with the Bollywoodized version of Anarkali's story or Max's affiliations with Western financial institutions. At a certain point, Boonyi realizes she won't find the liberation or the agency she wished for. In repeating Anarkali's story, Boonyi expresses her desire for subjugation, in Jarmakani's terms, by submitting at first to Max's terms of engagement in their "treaty" and then later destroying her own body through her obsessive consumption of food after their relationship has unraveled. On the one hand, Rushdie's treatment of Boonyi is wholly unfair, and borderline anti-feminist. Whereas the love plot is nurturing and sincere for Hiroko, it traps Boonyi into a series of depressingly unfulfilling choices. She can either return to her husband and submit herself to his revenge, or she can remain trapped in her Delhi apartment, completely dependent on Max's good graces and financial support. Boonyi's pursuit of relationships that hinder rather than grant her agency thus helps illuminate the contradictory logic of nuclear desire—the desire for technological superiority that, if used, will bring about mutually assured destruction.

Despite such a problematic portrayal of a headstrong female character, *Shalimar the Clown*'s elegiac tone mourns for Boonyi's downfall, just as much as it mourns for the idyllic harmony of pre-Partition Kashmir. Her freedom, lightness, and confidence as a young girl growing up in Pachigam can never be recuperated once she casts off the protection of *Kashmiriyat*—nor, it seems, can Shalimar's gentleness or naivete that characterized the first blush of their romance. As the narrative proceeds in the wake of Boonyi's betrayal, Shalimar transforms from a gentle romantic hero into a one-man weapon of mass destruction. While the novel places undue blame on Boonyi's transgressions for this transformation, it enables Rushdie to link the history of insurgency with the history of the nuclear, providing a longer historical

context to the terrorist groups that continue to target both Indian and international communities. In this context, fundamentalist terrorist groups do not wait for the spectacularity of nuclear weaponization to inflict violence. They refocus the act of mourning from an elegiac glance toward the past into an uncertain navigation of the present, with the capacity for mutually assured destruction now infused into the rhythms of everyday life.

Weaponizing Grief

Thus far, this chapter has argued for sentimentality's purchase to leverage an ethical practice of mourning in the face of nuclear weaponization's insistence on mutually assured destruction, which has been disguised as a rational enterprise. By staging overdetermined and emotional responses to the 1998 nuclear tests, Shamsie and Rushdie, alongside Roy, enact grief as a communalizing force, one that mourns for worlds lost by recuperating shared histories that have been clouded by political, religious, and nuclear violence. As my previous section demonstrated, *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* use the love plot to join characters together through their shared experiences of profound loss to mourn for worlds that have been swept away by the violence of Partition. In this section, I examine how the novels' portrayals of disaffected and highly emotional young men—whom I am calling "sentimental terrorists"— mourn for futures deferred by entangling the history of nuclear infrastructures alongside the history of global radical Islamic terrorism.

On the one hand, both Shamsie's and Rushdie's novels contribute to the very open question—and real geopolitical fear—of what would happen should "terrorists" gain control of nuclear weapons. These fears are typically articulated in connection to Pakistan's possession of the bomb and its proximity to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, linking such concerns directly to

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the outcomes of the 1998 nuclear tests. In a 2006 interview promoting *Shalimar the Clown*,
Rushdie discusses this notion explicitly:

> [B]ehind General Pervez Musharraf, there is the possibility of a really terrible
> situation where radical Islamists get control of nuclear weapons. If that happens, it
> would dwarf any other problem in the world. If Musharraf is assassinated and
> some radical from the Pakistani intelligence services takes over, then you
> essentially have the Taliban with the bomb. (Gardels 8-9)

While Pakistani officials have bristled at these associations, claiming discrimination from
Western leaders for their ability to produce the first "Islamic bomb," such fears have increased in
the wake of the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq—the latter of which was of course
authorized due to misguided U.S. intelligence regarding the existence of weapons of mass
destruction. The connections between the nuclear and terrorism are also relevant for the
sentimental. Jarmakani develops her book's central metaphor of "radiation" to explore how
desert romances triangulate eroticism between the exotic "good sheikh" and white heroine
alongside both the desire for nuclear weapons and the very real fear of what such weapons can
cause in the wrong hands (2). Indeed, in Rushdie's own estimation, the hatred that underlies the
Kashmiri insurgent groups—whether it involves hatred of the West, of India or Pakistan, or even
of Kashmir itself—is the flip side of love. He writes, "It turned out that hatred and love were not
so very far apart. The levels of intimacy were the same" (259).

This negotiation between hatred and love is the central struggle for the sentimental
terrorists depicted in *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown*. Raza, Hiroko's son, and Shalimar
are jointly motivated by a denial of belonging to larger collectives. As the biracial and
multilingual child of Hiroko and Sajjad, Raza feels uniquely out of place growing up in 1980s

Karachi. As a jilted husband, Shalimar feels his future domestic happiness, bolstered by the tranquility of *Kashmiriyat*, has been denied to him through Boonyi's affair. However misguided their emotions may be—and I do want to emphasize that they are deeply so—both Raza's and Shalimar's intensely personal quests for belonging draw them into radical collectives: the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the increasing number of Islamic terrorist groups in the Kashmir Valley, respectively. Unlike Raza's and Shalimar's narcissistic struggles, these groups are motivated by an intense anger toward the imperialist interventions of the Soviet Union and the United States, which have destroyed their homelands and displaced populations to refugee camps or to other nations entirely.

Rather than mourn for worlds lost to the past, these insurgents mourn for future worlds and lives that could have been, but were denied the opportunity to flourish. Like the militants whose attacks reproduce environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, these modes of mourning find their emotional outputs in anger and violence, the very cycles which Butler wants to break by theorizing mourning otherwise. As she writes in the preface to *Precarious Life*, "If we are interested in arresting cycles of violence to produce less violent outcomes, it is no doubt important to ask what, politically, might be made of grief besides a cry for war" (xii). While my chapter argues that, on the whole, *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* are invested in such revisions of grief, their depictions of Raza and Shalimar being swept up in the causes of "angry young men" demonstrate the urgency of Butler's ethical mandate. The modes of violence that emerge from mourning do not wait for nuclear apocalypse to bring about mutually assured destruction, but instead operate with such destruction as their primary objective.

Raza's affiliation with the *mujahideen* begins in his adolescence in Karachi in 1982, where he encounters a community of Afghan refugees who have been displaced to Pakistan

during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Whereas Hiroko resolutely refuses sentimental or

nostalgic attachments, especially to one's nation, Raza yearns for them, naively conflating his

desire for racial and linguistic singularity to a nation that increasingly weaponizes religious

difference as justification for conflict. Indeed, as Cilano points out, Raza's desires for cultural

belonging coincide with the regime of Zia-ul-Haq, who came to power in Pakistan by deposing

and later executing Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (195). Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Zia's

regime increasingly bound Islamic teachings to social expectations and institutional priorities.[103]

However, the regime also marks a transitional point in the development of Pakistan's nuclear

program. As Khan chronicles, Pakistan leveraged its strategic position neighboring Afghanistan

to court United States diplomatic support. Pakistan cooperated in the U.S.' proxy war during the

Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, willingly funneling arms and funds to the *mujahideen* while

using Pakistani civilians as the mediators between the insurgents and the CIA. In exchange,

Pakistan was able to convince the U.S. to turn a blind eye to the nuclear program's development,

so long as "Pakistan agreed to keep its nuclear program low key and peaceful and pledged not to

conduct hot tests. The Pakistanis were satisfied to note that the 'U.S. could live with Pakistan's

program as long as Islamabad did not explode the bomb" (Khan 214). Just as Max Ophuls'

presence in Kashmir mirrors the Indian nuclear program's covert development, so too did

Pakistan broker the protection of its nuclear program while still earning the military and financial

backing of the U.S.

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[103] Ranasinha argues that Zia's oppressive dictatorship was formative for Shamsie's coming-of-age experiences, as well as those of her generation of fellow writers. In a 2007 interview with the *Guardian*, Shamsie mentions finding Rushdie's 1983 novel *Shame* to be the first major literary work that spoke to this period of censorship and artistic suppression (Ranasinha 201). *Shame* is generally regarded as a satire of the Zia regime and its emphases on Islamization.

In this context, it is striking that, when Raza adopts a new identity to fit in with the community of Afghan refugees living on the outskirts of Karachi, he does so due to the recurrence of the nuclear in Shamsie's narrative. Because his combined Japanese and Pakistani features resemble those of Central Asian ethnic groups, Raza pretends to be Hazara, an ethnic minority in Afghanistan that has faced centuries of persecution from the majority Pashtun/Pathan groups.[104] He adopts the Hazara persona after a classmate rejects his romantic advances on the grounds that he is physically tainted by his mother's association with the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. Regarding himself as a "bomb-marked mongrel," Raza finds refuge in the Hazara identity to try to erase his family's affiliation with nuclear weaponization (Shamsie 194).[105] When Hiroko learns about Raza's masquerade, she interprets his decisions as not only a new recurrence of the bomb, but an extension of her own embodiment—a reproduction of the toxic curse she has been carrying within her. Shamsie writes:

> All Hiroko could think was: the bomb. In the first years after Nagasaki, she had
>
> dreams in which she awoke to find the tattoos gone from her skin, and knew the
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> birds were inside her now, their beaks dripping venom into her bloodstream, their
>
> charred wings engulfing her organs…She had not imagined the birds could fly

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[104] One of the most well-known Anglophone literary representations of Hazara people and their persecution comes from Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. Hosseini's protagonist Amir, a Pashtun, grows up alongside Hassan, a Hazara servant. Amir is not unlike Raza due to his sensitive and sentimental personality, and his desire to belong within his family by earning his father's approval. *The Kite Runner* is narrated from Amir's point of view. Hassan is treated largely as a plot device within the novel, the object of both Amir's betrayal and redemption narrative through his quest "to be good again."

[105] In light of Shamsie's use of "mongrel" here," there is also a problematic racial dynamic to Raza's masquerade as Hazara. While Abdullah and Raza are seemingly united now in their shared cause to drive out the Soviets, this solidarity will not be the case for long. The Hazara have no place in the liberated Afghanistan of which Abdullah dreams; the Taliban massacre at Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998 makes this clear. While the *mujahideen* offer Raza the community he has been seeking, it is worth questioning how long that community would include Raza if he really were Hazara.

outwards and enter the mind of this girl, and from her mind enter Raza's heart.

(226)

Rather than envision toxicity as a material substance, like the Paradise Alley woman's discarded breast milk from Chapter 3, Shamsie personifies the bomb in terms of its affective capabilities to set actions in motion. Hiroko recognizes Raza's "flight" to the Afghan community in terms of her own desire to escape Nagasaki and the associations she held there as *hibakusha*, or bomb survivor. However, this passage reintroduces the concept of the bomb in the body by detaching the bomb from a specific place. Unlike Rahman's reading of the birds, in which they "reaffirm commitments to place in ways that subvert nationalism through the nonhuman" (144), the aftermath of the bomb persists through affects of fear and belonging. By "flying outwards," the nuclear thus entangles the history of the bomb with the history of the *mujahideen*'s insurgency, as Raza becomes unwittingly exposed to the Afghan refugees' affiliations with the rebel group.

It is important to note that, despite the fears of nuclear weapons falling into terrorists' hands, insurgent groups relied on more conventional weapons to inflict their modes of violence. Indeed, Raza's burgeoning identity as a Hazara refugee aligns not so much with his family's affiliation with the nuclear, but with his own mastery of an AK-47 machine gun. As part of his masquerade to fit in among the refugees, Raza concocts a story in which the Soviets murdered his entire family, a trauma that has made him swear "not [to] speak the language of my father…until the day the last Soviet leaves Afghanistan. And I will be the one to drive out that last Soviet" (Shamsie 201). Raza's emotional story wins the admiration of Abdullah, a 13-year-old refugee who has lost multiple family members at the hands of the Soviets, and who dreams of joining his brothers in the *mujahideen* training camps. Abdullah's first gesture of friendship is to teach Raza how to use the gun, which Raza fetishizes as the missing link to his transformation

into "Raza Hazara." Curiously, Shamsie's Bollywood influences resurface here. Rather than imagine himself using the AK-47 to drive out the Soviets, Raza "knew, he *knew* how it felt to be [Bollywood star] Amitabh Bachchan or Clint Eastwood" upon holding the gun and wielding it in front of a crowd of cheering Afghan children (202). Whereas the AK-47 upholds Raza's sentimental fantasies of finally belonging to a community, Abdullah's radicalization is borne out of a fierce love for his homeland and his people, and a fierce anger for the future life he and his peers have been denied in the wake of the Soviet invasion. He explains to Raza, "I was forgetting why there is no option for me except to join the mujahideen. The boys growing up in the camps, they won't forget. They'll look around and know, if this is the better option that must mean our homeland now is the doorway to hell" (Shamsie 219). Indeed, the boys who "won't forget" channel their anger toward the deferral of their generations' collective futures by desiring the end of Soviet imperialism. Less than a decade later, the *mujahideen* morphs into numerous insurgent groups, including those who populate the Kashmir valley as well as the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Raza's encounter with Abdullah, AK-47s, and the *mujahideen* amid his own personal search for belonging mirrors Shalimar's induction into the global world of Islamic insurgency as he seeks his revenge on Boonyi and Max. Shalimar's vow to murder Boonyi, her lover, and her illegitimate offspring, should she ever leave him, appeared to be a sentimental declaration of passion that Boonyi misinterpreted as "romantic" and "sweet." By the time Boonyi's betrayal has come to pass, however, the sentimental has soured into Shalimar's single-minded pursuit of fulfilling this vow and leveraging the increasing presence of international terrorist groups in Kashmir to help him accomplish his quest. Again, though Rushdie does not represent South Asia's nuclearization explicitly, Shalimar's transformation from devoted husband to international assassin frames him as a one-man weapon of mass destruction. In the aftermath of Boonyi's

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betrayal, Shalimar "stopped dead like an unplugged automaton" (236). His wasted love for Boonyi feels like "an immense crater" that becomes "filled by a sea of bile-yellow hatred," producing "an anger…that would end the world if it could" (236, 230). To echo Roy, Shalimar's "world has died" when Boonyi leaves him, and Shalimar determines that the world must share in his pain. He feigns political interest in *jihad* to find an outlet for his murderous impulses, disobeying the instructions of his leaders to make quick and inconspicuous kills in favor of slow deaths by knife, which "violat[ed] the sovereignty of another human soul" (Rushdie 274). In an ironic twist, the "feeling subject" whose emotions are always validated under the sign of sentimentality here transforms into a sentimental terrorist, who unleashes his anger, rage, and "love" for Boonyi as a weapon.

Shalimar succeeds in concealing his true motivations for joining the insurgency from all except one of his comrades. After a passionate performance in front of the Iron Mullah, in which Shalimar rends his garments and strips naked during his fervent declarations of loyalty to "the struggle" (268), Shalimar meets Janjalani, an insurgent who hails from fishing communities in Mindanao, in the Philippines. Over the last several years, Janjalani has risen through the ranks of Islamic insurgency, traveling to Saudi Arabia to learn from "Sheikh Usama" and to Afghanistan to expel the Soviets alongside the *mujahideen* (Rushdie 268-9). He sees through Shalimar's performance, noting that Shalimar pursues only his desire to kill while he and many of the other insurgents have turned toward radicalism due to their resentment over the futures that have been denied to them at the hands of imperialist interventions. Like Abdullah's proximity to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Janjalani has witnessed the U.S.'s ongoing imperialist interventions in the Philippines first-hand, through the actions of none other than Max Ophuls. He explains, "U.S. secret ambassador comes to the Base [in Mindanao] to give weapons and support. I hold

my fire but in my heart I want to kill this man" (269). The weapons in question lend support to the Philippines' Christian majority, which persecutes and displaces Janjalani's Muslim community on Mindanao into increasingly cramped and squalid conditions. Through Shalimar's exceedingly personal quest, we come to understand the international scope of terrorism, expanding the scale of deferred futures at the hands of imperial powers beyond the *mujahideen* or the Kashmiri liberationists to a more global understanding of the radical Muslim community.

However, the increasingly fractious nature of this community engenders different modes of mutually assured destruction that ultimately descend on and defer the future of Pachigam itself. As the insurgents delight in days full of weapons training—learning how to fire grenade launchers and build improvised explosive devices—their political and religious commitments rapidly diverge, with Pachigam caught in the middle. In fact, Shalimar's brother, Anees, stages his initial defense of Pachigam not against the Indian security forces, but against Lashkar-e-Pak, a radical militant group that has targeted Pachigam because its women have refused to adopt the veil. Though both groups oppose India's occupation of Kashmir, their differences over religious tolerance split the insurgents from facing their common enemy. Mutually assured destruction thus surfaces to destroy groups who, under slightly different circumstances, would otherwise be aligned. By making himself visible in defending his hometown, Anees exposes himself and his family to the Indian security forces, who "made an example of this village" that dared to "harbor militants" (Rushdie 313).

Rushdie narrates the razing of Pachigam with surprising restraint, opting for a speculative mode that spares the reader the worst details of the devastation. After describing how the Indian soldiers drag out Anees' and Shalimar's parents from their home, the narration becomes

strikingly impersonal, reverting to a litany of questions that presents Pachigam's destruction through fragments of the day's events:

> Who lit that fire? Who burned that orchard? Who shot those brothers who laughed their whole lives long? Who killed the sarpanch? Who broke his hands?...Who smashed that house? Who smashed *that* house? Who smashed *that* house?...Who burned the library? Who burned the saffron field? Who slaughtered the animals…Who raped that lazy-eyed woman…Who raped that woman again? Who raped that dead woman? Who raped that dead woman again? (Rushdie 308)

Although the passage does not revert to the textual wordplay or thick descriptions that characterize much of Rushdie's prose, the spare, restrained repetition of the questions' structure, coupled with the excessive number of questions—37 in all—registers the narrator's shock and sorrow in witnessing the scale of Pachigam's destruction. Indeed, despite the questions' fragments, the reader comes to understand the Noman family's terrible fate. We do not learn merely that Shalimar's parents were killed, but that his father's hands and arms were broken, and that his mother continued to be raped long after she died. Curiously, Rushdie's narrator does not ask "why" these events occur, but rather "who" is responsible for each of them. By fragmenting Pachigam's destruction in this way, Rushdie in fact particularizes the experience of each person who was killed because he emphasizes that their death occurred at the hands of another individual. Neither the people of Pachigam nor the Indian military remain faceless. However, by declining to provide answers to these questions, Rushdie also emphasizes that responsibility under the sign of mutually assured destruction is a moot point because both parties are equally involved in the other's undoing.

The particular care and attention Rushdie brings to the litany of questions is then juxtaposed with three final "attempts" to consider how and whether Pachigam still "exists" given the horrors that took place there. In other words, by the chapter's end, Rushdie's narrator moves from raw witnessing of the event toward something like mourning:

> What happened that day in Pachigam need not be set down here in full detail, because brutality is brutality and excess is excess, and that's all there is to it. There are things that must be looked at indirectly because they would blind you if you looked them in the face, like the fire of the sun. So, to repeat: there was no Pachigam anymore. Pachigam was destroyed. Imagine it for yourself. Second attempt: The village of Pachigam still existed on maps of Kashmir, but that day it ceased to exist anywhere else, except in memory. Third and final attempt: the beautiful village of Pachigam still exists. (309)

Yumna Siddiqi reads Rushdie's stilted and clipped syntax here as evidence of the narrative's breakdown. Faced with the ethical imperatives to bear witness to genocide, Rushdie is only able to offer a "partial and incomplete" account of what has transpired (301). Ganguly, meanwhile, reads the final sentence in terms of "melancholic time," a temporal register that characterizes the final section of the novel through "heritage-speak," thus suggesting the backward-looking glance Rushdie brings to the narrative remains suspended in this moment of destruction (124). In my reading of this passage, I suggest that, in trying to make sense out of Pachigam's destruction, Rushdie attempts to turn away from the sentimental, but in fact finds he cannot. The first "attempt" declines to represent the event at all "because brutality is brutality and excess is excess and that's all there is to it." We see here an initial move toward rationality; the event will not be represented because it is too devastating to do so. Immediately after, however, the narrator

concedes that Pachigam does in fact exist in memory—in other words, in the past, and accessible through the backward glance that Rushdie's novel stages. Once the narrator concedes that Pachigam exists in memory, he concludes by claiming that Pachigam "still exists," and that its beauty can be remembered, if not recuperated, through the memorial work of grief.

Here, then, we can see how Rushdie responds to the cataclysmic violence of mutually assured destruction through an ethical attempt to mourn. Rather than erase the past and move resolutely into the future, Rushdie encourages us to linger where Pachigam "still exists," not to wallow in an idyllic era, but to remember what was beautiful about this village and the values it held dear. Shamsie echoes this gesture in Hiroko's search for evidence of Konrad's body after the blast. Like the razing of Pachigam, Shamsie renders the bomb unrepresentable in *Burnt Shadows*, narrating the bombing of Nagasaki through three fully blank pages. The bomb is thus not only in Hiroko's body; it is in the fabric of the text itself, conveying its blinding light much in the same way that Rushdie's narrator shies away from a fully detailed description of the events in Pachigam. Hiroko is convinced she finds Konrad's shadow embedded in a rock because "No one else in Nagasaki could cast such a long shadow" (Shamsie 30). She ultimately decides to bury the rock and mark Konrad's grave—in other words, to respond to his death with an act of mourning and memorialization. As my analysis has already demonstrated, Hiroko does not wallow in the aftermath of Konrad's death; indeed, she leaves Nagasaki and Japan altogether. But in the face of trauma that is so devastating it is unable to be represented, both Rushdie and Shamsie seek not to shy away from it, but to remember it, mourn for it, and, in doing so, attempt to repair it ethically.

Restoring Grievability: Toward an Ethics of Repair

Throughout this chapter, I have analyzed Kamila Shamsie's and Salman Rushdie's interpretations of the sentimental as key to their efforts to find other ways of relating mutually beyond nuclear weaponization's promise of mutually assured destruction. In response to Arundhati Roy's search for a community with whom to share her grief over the 1998 nuclear tests, Shamsie's and Rushdie's novels turn to mourning as an ethical practice of building such community. *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* mourn for worlds lost to the concurrent violence of nuclear weaponization and Partition, joining together characters shaped by these histories through the sentimental love plot. While Shamsie's sincere take on the love plot celebrates how Hiroko's marriage to Sajjad helps repair her bomb-marked body, Rushdie's more cynical interpretation of the trope reveals how the sentimental constrains Boonyi to adhere to convention, allegorizing her desire for a life beyond Kashmir as the Indian state's desire to join the nuclear elite. At the same time, these novels also demonstrate how these histories have shaped a disillusioned generation of "sentimental terrorists," who mourn for the futures they have been denied. Raza's and Shalimar's misguided emotional responses to their lack of belonging draw them into radical collectives whose missions they do not share. Mourning for deferred futures thus replicates rather than repairs violence, as the radical insurgent groups contribute to rather than work against forms of mutually assured destruction.

By way of conclusion, I want to return to Judith Butler's theorization of grief and mourning as an ethical practice grounded in shared vulnerability. Too often, Butler writes, grief is "something to be feared" (29). Such fear "can give rise to the impulse to resolve it quickly, to banish it in the name of an action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a former order, or to reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly" (29-30). She

locates this impulse for a rapid resolution to grief in President Bush's mandate to declare war on

Afghanistan within 10 days of the 9/11 attacks. In this vein, to paraphrase a debate Rushdie

stages in the final pages of *Shalimar the Clown*, grief is often processed through the binary of

"revenge or justice." As India Ophuls mourns her father Max's death at the hands of Shalimar,

she questions "Where was justice? Shouldn't justice be done?" (331). At the same time,

however, India envisions such justice occurring through "avenging angels, angels of death and

damnation" (331). Here, India, overcome by grief, wants a rapid resolution to her father's

apparently senseless murder, but in doing so, she aims to reproduce the violence Shalimar has

inflicted on her family. By contrast, if grief is processed slowly and reflectively, like the Urdu

concept of *ghum-khaur*, it might point us toward a mode of mourning that repairs rather than

proliferates violence by recognizing how grief can make community out of shared vulnerability.

Of course, vulnerability is not a universal phenomenon. Rushdie, for example, highlights

how the neighboring village of Shirmal is spared Pachigam's fate, even as its residents fear the

wrath of the Indian security forces. The unevenness of vulnerability, even amid widely

precarious circumstances, leads Butler to her concept of "grievability," in which "Certain lives

will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to

mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not

even qualify as 'grievable'" (32). Butler envisions grievability as a resource for politics, in order

to "evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more grievable than

others" (30). I find Butler's theorizations of grievability and vulnerability useful for thinking

about what mourning can do in the absence of accountability, as is the case for the modes of

grief that characterize Shamsie's and Rushdie's responses to the entangled histories of nuclear

weaponization, Partition, and terrorism. Unlike my discussions of accountability in Chapters 2

and 3, in which corporations like Shell, Union Carbide, and Dow Chemical can be declared responsible for oil and water toxicity, Rushdie's excessive repetitions of "who" is responsible for Pachigam's destruction remain unanswered. Similarly, in *Burnt Shadows*, Hiroko finds dissatisfying explanations to her question, "Why a second bomb?" (Shamsie 100). In both instances, vulnerable populations have been marked disposable through a bureaucratic calculus that preserves the aggressor under a narrative of self-defense. Residents of Nagasaki are sacrificed to "save American lives" (Shamsie 63), while Pachigam is made into an example for promoting religious tolerance amid the Indian occupation of Kashmir. Rather than frame mourning through the "revenge or justice" cycle, I am interested in how restoring grievability offers a new avenue toward ethics beyond accountability—an ethics that considers what we owe to one another, and what communities of care look like amid the collective precarity and vulnerability that nuclear weaponization makes legible.

One of the most striking similarities between *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* is their depiction of a daughter grieving for her father—a father who happened to work in U.S. intelligence and who assisted the growth of the United States' global surveillance networks. In the concluding section of *Burnt Shadows*, we meet Kim Burton,[106] the granddaughter of Elizabeth and James Burton, who welcomed Hiroko when she arrived in Delhi. Three months after the 9/11 attacks, Kim learns of her father Harry's death in Afghanistan, where he was working for a private security firm after devoting much of his life to the CIA. Kim projects her simultaneous grief for her nation and for her father's death at the hands of Afghan insurgents into

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[106] Kim's namesake is Rudyard Kipling's protagonist, the Anglo-Irish orphaned son of an infantryman who is raised in British India and speaks Hindi fluently. Throughout the novel, Kim is inducted into the British Secret Service to participate in British intelligence efforts for the Great Game, an imperial competition with Russia to gain advantage in Central Asia. Kim's participation in the British military is framed as his birthright. Harleen Singh notes the key parallel with Kim Burton here: "Reminiscent of her literary predecessor, the British Kim who passes for an Indian but remains true to his colonial and national lineage, Kim Burton reveals her true political and intellectual allegiance to the United States" (39).

a racist worldview that is instantaneously suspicious of "Muslim" signifiers. Similarly, Shalimar's successful assassination of Max Ophuls bookends Rushdie's novel, leaving Max and Boonyi's daughter India to learn not only of the assassin's connection to her family, but her father's decorated career as a counterterrorism expert. I am interested in how these anecdotes expose the unevenness to vulnerability that informs Butler's theory of grievability. Through these examples, Shamsie and Rushdie illustrate the challenge of enacting an ethics of repair, as well as the ethical necessity for doing so anyway, especially when accountability for violence cannot be rectified.

Just as Shamsie somewhat problematically renders Hiroko a cipher for nuclearization, Kim Burton stands in for the indignant American response to 9/11, one that is both painfully naïve and blatantly racist in the wake of the attacks. Although her life is virtually unchanged by 9/11, Kim mournfully sighs, "I just want the world to be as it was" (270). She conflates New York City with "the world" and annoys Hiroko in the process, who is anxiously awaiting news of yet another nuclear conflict in India and Pakistan.[107] Indeed, Hiroko came to New York three years prior, in the aftermath of the 1998 tests, to live with Kim and her grandmother, while Raza remained in Pakistan working with Harry in the private security business. In yet another overdetermined convergence, Harry's death occurs just as Raza reinstates contact with Abdullah, who joined the *mujahideen* despite Raza's last-minute abandonment. To alleviate his guilt over this decades-long abandonment, Raza begs Hiroko and Kim to help Abdullah, now illegally working in New York as a cab driver, to cross the border into Canada so he can eventually return to Afghanistan.

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[107] In December 2001, a new conflict between India and Pakistan broke out. Troops from both nations occupied the Line of Control in Kashmir and conducted a tense standoff for five months, during which time the risk of nuclear war was a very real possibility (Kerr, Nikitin 1).

In their fateful car ride across the Canadian border, Kim misinterprets Abdullah's accounts of his time in America and his friendship with Raza. As Abdullah recollects his memories as Raza's student, Kim projects her racist perceptions of Muslim violence onto his innocent stories. The conversation devolves into Kim claiming she is better versed in the Quran than Abdullah and concluding that, because the faith rewards martyrs who kill "infidels," "your heaven is an abomination" (353). Kim projects her father's murderer onto Abdullah, and decides impulsively to report him to Border Patrol, which she justifies through the surveillant adage, "if you see something, say something." Here, we see how revenge and justice can be two sides of the same coin. Under the guise of bringing "justice" to an illegal immigrant and potential terrorist, Kim attempts to earn revenge for her father's fate. Abdullah is rendered disposable in this encounter; one brown Muslim man is exchanged, in Kim's mind, for another. By a twist of fate, Raza has come to meet Abdullah in Canada. When he realizes what has happened, he switches places with Abdullah, allowing his friend to escape while Raza is transported to Guantanamo Bay, suspected of orchestrating the terrorist plot that ended in Harry's death. As the novel's emotional climax, Kim's betrayal of Abdullah and Raza thus demonstrates how the denial of grievability is rooted in a denial of shared vulnerability when grief is weaponized to serve the interests of those in power.

Shamsie's narration attempts to speak across the divides that Kim imposes by narrating the scene from Abdullah's perspective as well. Before Kim destroys their conversation with her anti-Muslim accusations, Abdullah partially shares the story of driving past a large pile of stuffed animals on the highway not long after he first arrived in New York. Although he leaves the story unfinished—and allows Kim to draw her conclusion that the car of Muslim men plowed right through the toys—Shamsie narrates the sensitive moment thus:

> Could he say he had asked Kemal to drive as close to the toys as possible and each of the men inside had taken armloads of rabbits and bears—their fur softer than anything the men had touched in years. Each of them had a child or a nephew or niece or young sibling to whom they would send the toys…Abdullah's son now slept with the soft blue bunny the father he'd never met had sent to him via a cabbie from Peshawar. (349)

Abdullah's memory bears the signs of the sentimental. It emphasizes the soft touch and bright colors of the toys while simultaneously connecting them to the families these men have left behind across the world. The memory is highly emotional, so much so that Abdullah does not know how to translate its significance across language and cultural context. Forter writes of this scene that "[Abdullah's] silence bespeaks a request for mutual acknowledgement of what cannot be translated. And yet that silence becomes a spur for the very violence he fears. Kim ascribes to him and his friends a cruel disregard for the sentimentalities of American childhood. She insists, in other words, that his silence is transparently meaningful and can be read" (221). As Forter suggests, Abdullah worries that finishing the story might paint him as a thief in Kim's eyes, for helping himself to "fallen cargo" (350). Abdullah knows the chances are slim for an emotional or empathetic connection with this woman who already sees him as an extension of her father's murderers. Shamsie's narration, however, attempts to restore his humanity by using her sentimental imagery to remind readers that Abdullah is a father, too.

Kim's choice also helps Hiroko arrive at an answer to the question of "why a second bomb?" When Hiroko eventually confronts Kim, she once again identifies the recurrence of the bomb as characterizing this latest American betrayal, now occurring in the context of anti-

Muslim prejudice during the War on Terror. In order to "decimate" a population and render them ungrievable,

> You just have to put them in a little corner of the big picture. In the big picture of
> the Second World War, what was seventy-five thousand more Japanese dead?
> Acceptable that's what it was. In the big picture of threats to America, what is one
> Afghan? Expendable…right now, because of you [Kim], I understand for the first
> time how nations can applaud when their governments drop a second nuclear
> bomb. (Shamsie 370)

Just as the bomb's detonation coincides with Hiroko's sexual awakening, Shamsie deploys another heavy-handed narrative convergence to convey what comes across essentially as the book's thesis: that "American Islamophobia after 9/11 has the same root as the American attack on Nagasaki" (Nakachi 138). Critics such as Maja Zehfuss find the moment overdetermined to the point of being reductive, writing, "Hiroko appears to assert that nothing has changed, that the United States has always conceived of itself as the center of the universe, still does so and will always continue to do so" (65). While Zehfuss' point is well-made, it is important to recognize how the stakes for Kim are wildly different than those for Raza and Abdullah in this encounter. Rather than considering what might bind her and Abdullah together, despite their cultural and religious differences, Kim asserts her privilege to obtain revenge/justice for Harry's death. While her actions have unforeseeable consequences for Hiroko, Kim faces virtually no repercussions because, in the Islamophobic context of post-9/11 America, she acted in the interest of national security. Shamsie thus depicts the real challenge that power poses to building an ethics grounded in shared vulnerability. When grievability for American lives is prioritized over those of

Japanese, Muslim, or other minoritized groups, Hiroko finally faces the one loss she may not be able to overcome—that of her son.[108]

Whereas Kim recedes behind her privilege and power as she claims to mourn Harry's death, India Ophuls' grief for her father, Max, leads her to question the truth around his political career and, in doing so, grants her access to her Kashmiri heritage. Upon learning of Max's work with U.S. counterterrorism operations, India quickly realizes he is responsible for "a quantity of the world's visible and invisible blood" (Rushdie 335). In this context, India wonders about the ethical impacts of her grief for Max: "What then was justice? Was she, in mourning her butchered parent, crying out (she had not wept) for a guilty man? Was Shalimar the assassin in fact the hand of justice…?" (Rushdie 335). Indeed, the categories of justice and revenge completely fall apart in the wake of India's grief. At the same time, in searching for some meaning in Max's death, India recovers a path to her Kashmiri heritage, leading her to adopt her true given name, Kashmira, and travel to the valley to learn more about her mother, Boonyi. In doing so, India/Kashmira enacts what I have been calling an ethics of repair: mourning for a lost world and for a future deferred, while finding strength in a new aspect of her identity, one that is revealed to her through her grief-work itself.

Importantly, Kashmira's journey to Pachigam helps her recuperate her lost relationship with Boonyi, her birth mother. Raised by Max's cold and jealous wife, Peggy, Kashmira was told her mother was dead from a young age. Once she has the opportunity to go to Pachigam, however, Kashmira can mourn properly for the mother she never knew, and the future life they might have had together in Kashmir. At the site of Boonyi's grave, "something got into her…The thing had no name but it had a force and it made her capable of anything" (366).

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[108] From Shamsie: "[Sajjad] entered the hospital room to see his wife holding their child in her arms with a look of terror which said she had been handed something she could never leave behind, never survive the loss of" (138).

Traveling to Kashmir gives Kashmira the opportunity to reimagine both Boonyi's life and the valley itself before they became pawns in regional geopolitics. Importantly, Kashmira does not romanticize these past lives or remake them nostalgically. Unlike her mother, she also refuses the easy companionship of the love plot by gently rejecting the advances of Yuvraj Singh, her guide, and returns to the U.S. alone, empowered by "the thing" inside her to memorialize Boonyi in a way that honors rather than punishes her mother's spirit.

Kashmira's journey to Pachigam and her recovery of the truth of Boonyi's life and death enables her not only to grieve for her mother, but to restore grievability to Boonyi herself. During Shalimar's trial for Max's murder, Kashmira is called to testify. During her testimony, she narrates the truth of Boonyi's death, relating what she learned from her time in Kashmir: "In a single, brief statement, made with an executioner's calm, she unmade the defense's case. 'That wasn't how my mother died,' she said. 'My mother died because that man, who also killed my father, cut off her beautiful head'" (Rushdie 386). Kashmira's testimony leads to Shalimar's conviction, ostensibly granting her the proof of "justice" she longed for in the immediate aftermath of Max's death. However, by narrating Boonyi's life and death in the space of the courtroom, Kashmira does more than merely make Boonyi's role in this story legible as a piece of evidence. She renders her death grievable—a death that was imposed on her while she was still alive, as punishment for her abandonment of Shalimar. As Rushdie narrates, Boonyi dies multiple times: first in Peggy's story to Kashmira, then by the people of Pachigam in rendering her an outcast, and finally by Shalimar's knife. Her transgression—what I have interpreted as allegorizing the Indian state's desire for the nuclear—renders her ungrievable in the eyes of her community. Rather than seek to prolong the cycles of violence that have characterized her family history, however, Kashmira restores Boonyi's grievability and, in doing so, aims to repair the

historical tensions that have rendered Kashmir a likely casualty in the nuclear arms races that produce fears of mutually assured destruction.

There is, of course, a caveat to Kashmira's move toward an ethics of repair. Although she contents herself with this third option, beyond revenge or justice, Shalimar is not satisfied. The novel concludes with a chilling encounter in Kashmira's bedroom. She is hidden in the dark, armed with night-vision goggles and her bow and arrow poised to strike, while Shalimar, sensing he is at a disadvantage, approaches with his knife at the ready. Rushdie narrates their final encounter ambiguously: "There was no possibility that she would miss. There was no second chance. There was no India. There was only Kashmira, and Shalimar the clown" (398). Many critics read this moment as evidence of Kashmira's triumph, and interpret her confidence in her aim as proof she overcomes Shalimar's final challenge. However, in light of the novel's engagements with Kashmir's nuclear history, I am more interested in reading this final scene as an example of mutually assured destruction. Unlike the insurgents who fetishize their bombs and AK-47s, Shalimar and Kashmira are both armed with more rudimentary weapons to carry out their final task. The knife versus the bow and arrow signals a more intimate mode of warfare, one that brings the challengers into closer physical proximity to each other. Neither Kashmira nor Shalimar can see a way out of their conflict without violence; therefore, it seems likely that both will be killed in their efforts to undo the other. By stopping short of providing closure in this scene, however, Rushdie's depiction of mutually assured destruction also emphasizes the similar vulnerabilities Kashmira and Shalimar share, especially as they approach each other with similarly unsophisticated weapons. Unlike the relative safety and privilege into which Kim withdraws, Kashmira and Shalimar are "only" left unto each other.

Reading this scene in terms of mutually assured destruction extends the allegory of Boonyi and Max's "nuclear" relationship through their progeny, Kashmira, but also emphasizes how mutually assured destruction depends on mutual vulnerability. Both Shalimar and Kashmira are equally vulnerable to each other; to return to the historical context, both India and Pakistan share a similar vulnerability and attempt to resolve it through nuclear arms races. If we recall Butler once more, however, recognizing shared vulnerability is the starting point for ethics just as much as it is the starting point for armed conflict. She writes, "We cannot, however, will away this vulnerability. We must attend to it, even abide by it, as we begin to think about what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporeal vulnerability itself" (29).

While neither *Burnt Shadows* nor *Shalimar the Clown* prescribe exactly what an ethics of repair grounded in shared vulnerability might look like, what remains unresolved in Shamsie's and Rushdie's fictional worlds can still be apprehended and "abided by" in our own. Despite the increasingly alarming nuclear conflicts emerging each day—whether from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, North Korea's ballistic missile tests, or the still-unresolved Iran Nuclear Deal—nuclear warfare and the reality of mutually assured destruction have not yet come to pass. Unlike the belated modes of environmental degradation depicted in Azaro's slum community, the oil-soaked rivers of the Niger Delta, and the toxic water infrastructures of Khaufpur, there is space for politico-ethical action in the "not yet," provided we build a community that shares these ethical values. Building this community is at the heart of Shamsie's and Rushdie's literary works. *Burnt Shadows* and *Shalimar the Clown* thus advocate for affective infrastructures that facilitate relating mutually to one another beyond modes of violence and destruction, in order to emphasize that our shared vulnerability in a precarious world binds us ethically to each other.

Coda

Throughout the development of this project, my driving question has been somewhat blunt: what does literary studies have to offer to the critical study of infrastructure? In the last ten years, the infrastructural turn has taken anthropology, environmental studies, and science and technology studies by storm. Through fieldwork, scientists, anthropologists, and engineers engaged directly with infrastructural systems and the communities where they were implemented. They drew on social science methodologies to understand how humans interpreted the infrastructures on which they relied for the most mundane of daily activities, and through interviews with residents, municipal workers, and policy-makers, these scholars drew insights about how infrastructures produced new notions of citizenship, belonging, and modernity in the locales where they operated. Because infrastructure offers such a stark material presence within built environments, I often wondered what, if anything, imaginative literary engagements would add to existing critical conversations. What does literary studies help us understand about infrastructure's entanglements with environments, communities, politics, and power that these extant ethnographically-informed studies could not? In drawing this project to a close, however, I want to attempt to answer this question by returning to two key takeaways that have informed each of my chapters: the shift from visibility to *legibility* in literary criticism on infrastructure, and an insistence on *ethics* as an outcome of imaginative engagements with built environments.

Following Wenzel, my project has urged for a shift in thinking around infrastructure in terms of legibility rather than the visibility/invisibility binary that has characterized much of the infrastructural turn. By focusing on legibility, I have aimed to show that infrastructure makes

itself apprehensible in built environments beyond its mere visual presence—through roads that retain the trace of their indigenous cosmological significance, oil spills on the surface of rivers, leaking pipes underground, and atmospheres of fear surrounding the specter of nuclear war. Through these examples, infrastructures shape daily life through discursive as well as material modes, expanding their phenomenological influences on human and non-human ecologies through various modes of perception.

My project's emphasis on genre has been a key component of this shift to legibility because genres help direct our attention as readers beyond texts' thematic investments and toward the more ambient ways in which infrastructures operate. By selecting genres offered up organically by the texts themselves, I have demonstrated how magical realism, petro-fiction, the picaresque, and the sentimental afford specific conventions that direct us toward infrastructure's temporal, formal, and affective functions. In considering these four genres as a kind of collective, it is worth noting that they have all been important throughout the development of postcolonial literary studies. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* transposes magical realism from the Latin American context to a newly independent India. Nigerian authors such as Tanure Ojaide, Gabriel Okara, Kaine Agary, and Ogaga Ifowodo have explored the impacts of oil throughout the Niger Delta long before "petro-fiction" consolidated as a genre. And numerous figures throughout colonial and postcolonial letters, ranging from Rudyard Kipling's eponymous hero Kim and Aravind Adiga's Balram Halwai in *The White Tiger*, to Bapsi Sidwa's Lenny from *Cracking India* or Khaled Hosseini's Amir in *The Kite Runner* could respectively be described as picaresque or sentimental protagonists. None of these genres are without precedent in Anglophone postcolonial literary studies, regardless of the extensive literary histories they may possess in other geographical contexts.

Indeed, it is the conjunction between place and genre that I find most illustrative for thinking about genres as literary infrastructures. Despite the long literary history of the sentimental in American letters, or the *picaro* in Spanish continental literature, for example, all of the genres I examine in this project prove themselves to be malleable and flexible forms, as opposed to rigid taxonomies predetermining the content at hand. What matters, then, is not so much the genre's origins—whether, for example, magical realism in fact owes a greater debt to African animist traditions, to return once more to Harry Garuba's argument—but rather how genres work like infrastructures of the built environment: exceeding the functions for which they were designed and adapting to the particular historical and social contexts of the postcolonial locations where they are implemented. As my project has demonstrated, magical realism can certainly fetishize indigenous traditions and demarcate "the West" from "the rest," but it can also disrupt colonial impositions of what counts as "real." Petro-fiction may offer a myopic focus on merely one natural resource, but it can also adapt to local mass media technologies to forge new civic spaces for participation and relationality when access to oil itself is foreclosed. The picaresque may shock or disgust readers with its excessive vulgarity, but it can also speak truth to power and demand reparations from the corporate elite. And of course, the sentimental can reinforce conservative nationalistic ideals, or it can recuperate the importance of emotionalism and vulnerability in the face of apocalyptic violence. At the same time, however, I want to emphasize that, by focusing on these genres, I have chosen to set aside the other formal and generic affordances that my project's primary texts invoke, including detective fiction (*Oil on Water*), the historical novel (*Burnt Shadows*), the epistolary novel (*Animal's People*), and autofiction (*Every Day is for the Thief*). I see these generic roads not taken as opportunities for

further interrogation into the connections between genre, form, and infrastructure, reinforcing the notion that genres open up rather than foreclose critical attention to what lies beyond theme.

Taken together, these four genres at the heart of my project have proven so fruitful because they each offer a framework for analyzing how power operates. When reviewing the infrastructural systems in question—roads and highways, oil, water, and nuclear weaponization—each of these infrastructures restructures the realities and lived experiences of those most vulnerable in postcolonial societies. Oil was promised to magically transport Nigeria into modernity, with little concern for the indigenous peoples of the Niger Delta. India and Pakistan not only concealed their nuclear programs from each other, but from the world at large, knowing the backlash they would face should their clandestine programs come to light. When infrastructures are leveraged by those in power against its peoples, genres invested in legibility, revelation, and exposure prove to be useful tools to interpret, understand, and reshape those power dynamics into more equitable forms.

As Habila's protagonist Rufus demonstrates, however, making something legible doesn't always solve problems of environmental injustice. No matter how many exposés of the Delta militants he publishes, the Nigerian media ultimately fuels the cycles of violence between the oil corporations and insurgent groups. Indigenous groups, like those led by Chief Ibiram, are caught in the crossfire and are forced to remain in place, unable to leave their increasingly dangerous and polluted lands. Thus, by turning away from legibility and refusing to publish his story locally, Rufus suggests that opacity—the refusal to make clear—can also be a response to power.

This choice between legibility and opacity brings me to my project's second takeaway: the capacity of literary engagements with infrastructure to deepen our thinking around ethical relations. Indeed, opacity is key to Edouard Glissant's theorizations around ethics in *Poetics of*

Relation. For Glissant, so many Western modes of relationality depend on transparency—on making the Other "understandable" to the Subject by virtue of what the Subject already knows and understands (189-190). Transparency ultimately reduces the Other to a concept with which the Subject is already comfortable. By contrast, opacity requires the Subject and the Other to meet each other on uncertain ground. Glissant writes:

> I thus am able to conceive of the opacity of the other for me, without reproach for my opacity for him. To feel in solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does, *it is not necessary for me to grasp him*. It is not necessary to try to become the other (to become other) nor to 'make' him in my image. (193, emphasis added)

For Glissant, an ethics rooted in opacity becomes a respect for, if not outright celebration of difference. I find opacity useful here because this is ultimately where my literary interlocutors lead us once they have done the work of making legible the power dynamics at play between infrastructure, environment, and geopolitical context. None of these texts prescribes specific actions to take once the durabilities of imperial power have been exposed in their contemporary iterations. We instead find frankly vague mandates to "watch" and not look away from scenes of environmental injustice, or to "feel" in community with those who share our vulnerability to nuclear violence. But none of these texts tell us what to do next.

Such opacity is both the frustrating reality and imaginative possibility embedded in literature. Just as genres make themselves malleable to the location at hand, I want to suggest that the ethical outcomes literature makes possible out of infrastructural engagements are similarly open-ended and flexible. Throughout this project, I have demonstrated how a literary attention to infrastructure takes us beyond both thematic representation and the built

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environment, toward a more ambient notion of relationality itself. My chapters have explored the relations that literary infrastructures facilitate between authors and their institutional locations, literary genealogies, and non-local readers, as well as the increasingly precarious relationships between human communities and their non-human environments. Ultimately, these literary encounters reframe the kinds of stories that are told, whether about the agentic rather than "inert" biophysical world or the progress narratives surrounding infrastructural projects. If nothing else, *Ecologies of Infrastructure* asserts that such storytelling is not only a political act, but an ethical one—one that leads us to question what we owe to each other by virtue of the material, discursive, and ecological infrastructures that connect us.

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