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The Global Environmental Novel And The Politics Of Food

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The Global Environmental Novel And The Politics Of Food

Abstract

Consumption drives both global capitalism and the lives of literary texts, which may be consumed in two senses: they are purchased and they are read. Most literally, consumption means ingesting food. To consume is also to use environmental resources. In this dissertation, I scrutinize the entanglement of these several modes of consumption. I focus on food systems in an emergent literary genre, the “global environmental novel”: the contemporary novel that illuminates the intertwining of globalization and the environment. Such fictions come from both global South and North. I discuss contemporary authors from South Africa (Zakes Mda and Zoë Wicomb), South Asia (Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy), and the US (Ruth Ozeki), as well as predecessors from South Asia (Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay) and Ghana (Ama Ata Aidoo). Operating at the intersection of postcolonial studies, environmental humanities, and food studies, I situate novels in relation to social movements that invoke food, globalization, and environment. I also engage with ecofeminism, queer theory, modernist studies, and theories of the contemporary novel. The project explores the multifaceted social and environmental injustices, as well as possibilities for resistance, that are encapsulated or indexed by food.

Food politics, I argue, are key to the global environmental novel: both in the realist sense that environmental justice struggles cluster around food, and in informing novelistic strategies to manage the scalar challenges of globalization and global environment. Such mammoth objects provoke a representational crisis: how can we picture (let alone save) something as large as the globe? To resort to abstraction or generalization is to universalize, to flatten out the unevenness of contributions and vulnerabilities to environmental catastrophe among different populations. To instead keep local particularity present while representing globality, global environmental novels synthesize the polyscalar facility of narrative fiction with the polyscalar nature of food politics. Food is immediate, somatic, quotidian, and intimate. Eating cultures and food access are also key to community and cultural identity. And food systems are expressions of power under global capitalism. Resonating across all these scales, food politics are an avenue to global yet specific narratives of entanglement between globalization and the environment.

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Brooke Jamieson Stanley

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ABSTRACT

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Brooke Stanley

Rita Barnard

Consumption drives both global capitalism and the lives of literary texts, which may be consumed in two senses: they are purchased and they are read. Most literally, consumption means ingesting food. To consume is also to use environmental resources. In this dissertation, I scrutinize the entanglement of these several modes of consumption. I focus on food systems in an emergent literary genre, the “global environmental novel”: the contemporary novel that illuminates the intertwining of globalization and the environment. Such fictions come from both global South and North. I discuss contemporary authors from South Africa (Zakes Mda and Zoë Wicomb), South Asia (Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy), and the US (Ruth Ozeki), as well as predecessors from South Asia (Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay) and Ghana (Ama Ata Aidoo). Operating at the intersection of postcolonial studies, environmental humanities, and food studies, I situate novels in relation to social movements that invoke food, globalization, and environment. I also engage with ecofeminism, queer theory, modernist studies, and theories of the contemporary novel. The project explores the multifaceted social and environmental injustices, as well as possibilities for resistance, that are encapsulated or indexed by food.

Food politics, I argue, are key to the global environmental novel: both in the realist sense that environmental justice struggles cluster around food, and in informing

novelistic strategies to manage the scalar challenges of globalization and global environment. Such mammoth objects provoke a representational crisis: how can we picture (let alone save) something as large as the globe? To resort to abstraction or generalization is to universalize, to flatten out the unevenness of contributions and vulnerabilities to environmental catastrophe among different populations. To instead keep local particularity present while representing globality, global environmental novels synthesize the polyscalar facility of narrative fiction with the polyscalar nature of food politics. Food is immediate, somatic, quotidian, and intimate. Eating cultures and food access are also key to community and cultural identity. And food systems are expressions of power under global capitalism. Resonating across all these scales, food politics are an avenue to global yet specific narratives of entanglement between globalization and the environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Environment, Consumption, and Fiction

The Global Environmental Novel

Marija immediately produced two brown paperbags filled with apples, pears, tomatoes, and plums.

But

The plums.

What plums.

Such plums.

Sissie had never seen plums before she came to Germany. No, she had never seen real, living, plums. Stewed prunes, yes. Dried, stewed, sugared-up canned plums. . . . So she had good reason to feel fascinated by the character of Marija's plums. They were of a size, sheen, and succulence she had not encountered. . . . So she sat, Our Sister, her tongue caressing the plump berries with skin-colour almost like her own, while Marija told her how she had selected them specially for her, off the single tree in the garden.

Ama Ata Aidoo, *Our Sister Killjoy*, 39-40

What plums, indeed. In the juicy prose of Ama Ata Aidoo's 1977 novel *Our Sister Killjoy*, plums connote both queer desire and its racialization. Sissie, a young Ghanaian woman sojourning in Bavaria, abides the advances of a German housewife, Marija. Sissie wishes to be "a boy. A man," though she suspects that like other "black boys in . . . these involvements with white girls in Europe," she would find the affair precluded by race or citizenship if not by gender (67, 61). The attraction cannot be disentangled from the fact that Marija, like everyone else in Bavaria, fawns over "the African girl," treating Sissie herself like some delectable commodity (43). Sissie feels rather tired of sweet things by the time Marija bakes her a cake. She rejects Marija's attempts to kiss her. Marija plans a rabbit dinner, which Sissie exhorts her to make for her husband instead: "It is not sound for a woman to enjoy cooking for another woman. . . ."

Special meals are for men. They are the only sex to whom the Maker gave a mouth with which to enjoy eating. And woman the eternal cook is never so pleased as seeing a man enjoying what she has cooked; eh, Marija?” (77). Sissie affirms gendered cooking and eating to reinforce compulsory heterosexuality. Foods indicate both gendered relationality and Marija’s normative European “lower middle-class cosiness,” where “love [has] gone into mortgage and holiday hopes” and everyone eats cold cuts. Sissie “would always puzzle over” this displeasing “[c]old food. ... [I]t had something to do with white skins, corn silk hair and very cold weather” (64, 68). Delicious plums aside, Sissie finds the “cold countries” of Europe places of “loneliness” that

comes with the food from the store. The vegetables and the fruits that never ever get rotten. The meat, the chicken. All of which have been filled with water so that they will look bigger and give the sellers more money. ... [L]oneliness pursued me there in the unwholesome medications on the food that I had to eat out of tins, boxes and plastic bags, just a taste of which got my blood protesting loudly through the rashes and hives it threw on my body. (119)

Food here pivots from metaphor (with industrial foods figuring the alienation produced by capitalism and migration) to become a topic of material concern in its own right: Aidoo flags food safety and the exploitation of consumers. The reference to insalubrious industrial food reframes Sissie’s personal problems in relation to a much larger scale, that of the global food system. Also present is the meso scale, on which Sissie’s enmeshment in the food system is gendered, racialized, and conditioned by colonialism. Sissie’s alienation is at once her private experience; a pattern of postcolonial, diasporic, and queer life; and a problem for all of us.

Our Sister Killjoy hinges between at least three different ways of thinking about food. From one angle, food is immediate, somatic, personal, and small. Food is tied to quotidian practices, domestic space, and intimacy. From a second perspective, culinary

habits are inextricable from cultural identity and kinship. Eating practices structure and are structured by race, gender, citizenship, and other factors, on the meso-scale of community and social interpellation. From a third vantage, food systems express the global organization of power. Our present web of imbalanced trade relationships, exploitative agribusiness, and inequitable food distribution (our global food system) is an outgrowth of European imperialism, ever accumulating new strategies for seizure. Food and taste have motivated imperial projects and shaped globalization since at least the fifteenth century, when the spice trade structured European incursions in South Asia, South Africa, and elsewhere. Sugar cane, first cultivated in South Asia, was brought to the Americas by imperialists – as were slaves from Africa and “coolies” from India, China, Portugal, and Java, who would labor on sugar plantations to satisfy imperial appetites.¹ In the late nineteenth century, agriculture in newly independent settler states (such as Australia and New Zealand) capacitated an international trade based on national economies, even as European nations scrambled for new colonies in Asia and Africa (Friedmann and McMichael 95). Food and famine were weapons used to perpetuate European control, as when Britain mismanaged or indeed engineered famines in India, Ireland, and other colonies.² In the twentieth century, many colonies gained formal independence, but “food power” became a mode of neocolonialism: America won overseas markets by providing “food aid” (Carruth *Global Appetites* 44-5). Food helped US hegemony supersede that of Europe, a process that dovetailed with the

¹ See Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, and Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015).

² See Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (Verso, 2002). See also Chapter Five of the present work.

industrialization and corporatization of farming. In the 1970s, the “Green Revolution” readapted America’s sway over the global South, which became less reliant on American food products, but more dependent on fertilizers, pesticides, and other agricultural technologies owned by multinationals based in the North.³ Since the 1970s, we have seen not only the horizontal spread of such corporations across many markets, but also the vertical integration of the food system: production, distribution, and retail are increasingly dominated by a few companies (Hall and Gössling 13). Today, the “Gene Revolution” repeats many of the Green Revolution’s patterns: corporations encourage small farmers to purchase GM seed by incurring debts they will never manage to repay (Zerbe “Setting the Global Dinner Table” 169). GM patenting and new land grabs are just the latest technologies of neocolonial and neoliberal exploitation, scholar-activists insist.⁴ From this perspective, food seems anything but small. Food systems are key to imperial and now neoliberal power. Can these three views of food, these three scales, be unified?

In *Our Sister Killjoy*, food’s importance is precisely its suturing of individual, community, and global scales. Decolonization left Aidoo’s country, Ghana, with a stratified class system and an export economy centered on cacao. Reliance on this single cash crop made Ghana’s rural poor vulnerable to food shortages (Campbell 52).

Postcolonial elites feasted while their countrymen starved, in Aidoo’s depiction: the

³ See Hall and Gössling, *Food Tourism and Regional Development* (13); Patel, *Stuffed and Starved* (99-100); and DeLoughrey and Handley, introduction to *Postcolonial Ecologies* (13).

⁴ See, for example, Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy*; Noah Zerbe, “Setting the Global Dinner Table”; and Lorenzo Cotula, *The Great African Land Grab? Agricultural Investments and the Global Food System* (Zed Books, 2013).

“wives” of Ghanaian bureaucrats “drive Mercedes-Benzes to / Hairdressers” while
 “Tubercular illiterates / Drag yams out of the earth with / Bleeding hands,” and

Champagne sipping
 Ministers and commissioners
 Sign away
 Mineral and timber
 Concessions, in exchange for
 Yellow wheat which
 The people can’t eat. (56-7)

Aidoo censures the granting of land “concessions” for extractive industries, a practice that enriches corporations and bureaucrats at the expense of environment and ordinary citizens.⁵ Likewise, Aidoo gestures at foreign foodstuffs such as “yellow wheat” that flood postcolonial countries as “aid” or imports, and do little to address hunger. Foreign foods may even make things worse for local agriculturalists and consumers, driving other products out of the market (Zondi 27, 31). Ghana’s interpellation within the global economy promotes hunger and dependency while making a few elites rich, Aidoo insists. Castigating typical modes of neoliberal and neocolonial incursion, Aidoo evokes what sociologists Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael call the “global food regime”: the system by which “forms of capital accumulation in agriculture constitute global power arrangements, as expressed through patterns in the circulation of food” (McMichael 140). Yet Aidoo also uses the idiom of food to frame Sissie’s personal experiences, whether of shopping, eating, and feeling lonely or sick, or of queer desire and racialized interactions. Aidoo invites the reader to understand racial inequality and compulsory heterosexuality

⁵ Numerous scholars have written on extraction in postcolonial states. See, for example, Jennifer Wenzel, “Petro-Magic-Realism: Toward a Political Ecology of Nigerian Literature” in *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2006, pp. 449-464; Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*; and Nixon, *Slow Violence*.

as linked to global capital: part of the same system as industrial food, a regime of normalization in the service of differentiating privilege. Food resonates equally on the personal scale and with histories of imperialism. This simultaneity allows Aidoo to situate quotidian life in its intimacy with global ecological and economic systems. Her novel uses food to deftly segue across micro, meso, and macro scales of representation.

In its polyscalar engagement with food, Aidoo's novel serves as a precursor to the more recent texts at the heart of the present project. In what follows, I trace the politics of food in what I call global environmental novels: contemporary fictions concerned with entanglements between environment and globalization.⁶ Such novels come from locations across global South and North. This project focuses on authors from three geographies: Zakes Mda and Zoë Wicomb (South Africa); Amitav Ghosh and Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay⁷ (South Asia); and Ruth Ozeki (North America). Each of my chapters engages a particular author and a set of local contexts, but also thinks transnationally, considering how these authors theorize globality. Global environmental novels resonate with what Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier call "the environmentalism of the poor": activism by marginalized populations "threatened by the loss of the environmental resources ... they need for livelihood" (Martinez-Alier 119). Unlike environmentalisms

⁶ I am fond of Ania Loomba et al's multimodal definition of globalization: "at once an extension of the world-systems of modern capitalism and colonialism and a newer network that presents a complicated picture of national and transnational agents, capital and labor, suppliers and markets, NGOs and multilateral agencies" ("Beyond What?" 2). I will refer both to long histories of globalization and to the neoliberal variant that has arisen since the 1970s, understanding that the novels in question address the latter in relation with the former. I'll say "neoliberal globalization" or "neoliberalism" when the specificity of a shorter timeframe needs to be clarified.

⁷ I will situate Tarashankar, a mid-century Bengali writer, as a precursor to global environmental novelists.

that idealize “pristine” nature set apart from the human, the environmentalism of the poor focuses on access to land, clean water, and food. Activism results from resource rights being trampled by transnational corporations, often in collusion with national governments. (I discuss several examples in Chapter Two.) It should be no surprise, then, that contemporary novels occupied with environment and globalization would prioritize food. These novelists all depict or allude to environmental justice struggles over food systems. But their references to food also exceed this documentary function. The social and symbolic meanings of food and appetite multiply to signify all manners of desire and consumption. Food functions as a lever in global environmental novels to toggle between personal, community, and systemic scales of representation, revealing how these scales are in fact simultaneous and mutually constituted. This polyscalar engagement with food and food systems has important implications for how we think about environmentalism, intimacy, and eating habits as imbricated with neoliberal economics – or as sites of resistance.

With one exception, the novels that I highlight come from the 2000s. To situate this cultural moment, Aidoo is again a useful forerunner. *Our Sister Killjoy* was written in the 1970s, somewhat after the waves of decolonization that followed World War II (including India’s independence in 1947 and Ghana’s in 1957). By the time of Aidoo’s writing, neoliberalism was becoming the dominant modality of global power. If one of the postcolonial novel’s foci has been national identity and its ambivalences after decolonization, another has been transnationalism, migration, and diaspora.⁸ In the

⁸ Fredric Jameson (in)famously suggests in “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” (*Social Text*, vol. 15, 1986, pp. 65-88) that we should read all third-world literature as national allegory. This argument has provoked many critiques,

neoliberal era, transnationalism means thinking about the modes of connectivity that supersede formal colonialism.⁹ Taking up this legacy at a moment when the neoliberal consensus seems ossified yet ever worse, when neo-conservatism is on the rise, the global environmental novel seeks representational modes that can address global flows of capital, organic matter, commodities, bodies, contaminants, conservationism, and activism – without losing specificity. Global environmental novels fixate on transnational connections, yet also on local places and the local effects of global systems. The novels that I focus on come from deep into the neoliberal era. But in the South African cases, they are preoccupied with South Africa’s “late” integration into a neoliberal world economy, following apartheid’s demise in 1994. Global environmental novels are concerned with globality and locality in the wake of decolonization, the Cold War, 9/11, and apartheid. The fifth and final chapter, meanwhile, turns back in time to Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, a mid-century Bengali author. Situated at the hinge of India’s decolonization, Tarashankar’s novel *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* both acts as an antecedent to the global environmental novel and provides a step outside that archive. Global modernism and the postcolonial novel are renegotiated when global environmental novels probe the affordances of novelistic form in the contemporary moment.

the best-known being Aijaz Ahmad’s “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’” (*Social Text*, vol. 17, 1987, pp. 3-25). But the argument has also been defended and repurposed by critics such as Imre Szeman (“Who’s Afraid of National Allegory? Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization,” in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 100, no. 3, 2001, pp. 803-827). Neil Lazarus has differentiated the critiques of nationalism in “postcolonial criticism” from nationalism’s place in “postcolonial literature.” He suggests that many postcolonial novelists, dramatists, and poets are more critical of statist discourse than of the nation or nationalism per se (70-71).

⁹ This is not to suggest that territorial colonialism has vanished, nor that there is necessarily a historical discontinuity between formal colonialism and other modes of capitalist imperialism, but simply that neoliberalism has become dominant.

With the question of the novel's localizing and globalizing capacities, my project touches a literary-critical conversation on the genre's relationship to scale. Global environmental novels, as I have defined them, visibly question how and why fictional narrative might be chosen to engage environment, globalization, and consumption. These novels are anxious about the role of novelists in the face of environmental crisis (perhaps most explicitly Ruth Ozeki's work). And they worry about the legacy of the postcolonial novel in the contemporary moment (perhaps most consciously the work of Amitav Ghosh and Zoë Wicomb). Global environmental novels foreground scale. They ask how we might picture a global environment without flattening out the unevenness of globalization, environmental damage, resource access, and resource use. How can narrative attend to the specificities of localized experience while also engaging with the whole? How does the novel bridge between individuated characters and depth psychology, on the one hand, and on the other, representing systems?

There are antecedents for these representational questions in modernist studies, ecocriticism, and postcolonial studies, and related inquiries in theories of contemporary fiction, world literature, and the global novel. Modernist collage, for example, is understood by Ursula Heise as a novelistic technique for zooming across multiple scales of environment, reformulated today by Google Earth.¹⁰ More recently, Amitav Ghosh has suggested that the mainstream modern novel finds climate change too big to represent, because the genre has specialized in individuation.¹¹ Outside of "serious fiction" as Ghosh defines it, we have genre fictions such as sci fi that have engaged extensively with

¹⁰ See Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*.

¹¹ See Chapter Two.

climate change (“cli fi”). Are genre fictions better at representing groups, collectivities, and large-scale changes? On the other hand, some scholars see the novel in general as “the genre best able to afford tentative answers” to “the problem of imagining culture at the world scale” (Haley 112). If there is, as Madigan Haley suggests, a critical turn towards thinking about how novels negotiate the scale of globality, my project could be seen as part of that turn.¹² But Haley is thinking about scholars such as Pheng Cheah, for whom fictional narrative excels at a kind of “worlding” situated between literature and continental philosophy.¹³ I instead consider the affordances of fiction in relation to postcolonial and ecocritical approaches to scale and globality.

In the tension between novels having facility with multiple scales or excelling at individuation, and in the generative friction of realism with modernism, I would situate

¹² Haley suggests that literary critics are returning to the work of Immanuel Wallerstein in worlds-systems theory, privileging a “distant view” and asking how the novel genre might be suited to negotiate worldliness (111, 112-13). My project is certainly invested in the novel’s relationship to scale and the globe’s narratability. However, I work across the “closer viewpoint” and the “distant view” (Haley 111). Similarly, Haley posits that another emergent body of criticism (led by Eric Hayot, Pheng Cheah, and others) focuses on the novel’s “ability to conceive immersive worlds for its readers at vastly different scales” (122).

¹³ See Cheah, *What is a World? Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*. I will have several occasions to refer to Cheah’s monograph, which rethinks cosmopolitanism from the perspective of literary studies, emphasizing how literature produces a world. Cheah’s focus on postcolonial literature is crucial. Yet I am left with questions about the monograph’s division into a theoretical section on philosophic traditions from Europe and a literary section on works from the global South. Cheah mentions this issue in the introduction, and proposes to address concerns about reading postcolonial literature as world literature (*What is a World?* 15). But rather than engaging with postcolonial theory on this question, Cheah excoriates graduate students who took Cheah’s seminar for being more interested in Western theory than in literary selections from the global South. I do not disagree with Cheah’s critiques of their critiques, but I wonder about the choice to quote from student evaluations in a publication. I am myself interested in models other than continental philosophy for engaging with how postcolonial novels picture the globe.

the novel's genre's aptness to address ecosocial questions in the neoliberal era.¹⁴ Such questions are themselves about the difficulty of multiple scales. The global environmental novels considered in this project reject approaches to globality or environmentalism that would universalize white, Northern, middle class, and heteronormative perspectives. They insist that globality inheres in difference, in unevenness, and in social and environmental injustice. In asking how novels picture globality, I am thinking about and beyond metropole-periphery relations and long histories of imperialism, and about the tensions between local and global in environmentalism. I am thinking about how polyscalar narrative techniques speak to and dovetail with the ways in which both postcolonial ecocriticism and food studies pitch questions of scale. Globality and local particularity coexist through a variety of novelistic strategies: realism blended with (post)modernist reflexivity (Ghosh and Tarashankar); dialogism and satire (Mda and Ozeki); translocal toggling between already-hybrid settings (Wicomb). These techniques unite with food-focused content to enable representation across scales.

Cultivation, fisheries, and GMOs are key to global environmental novels, as are other transparently “environmental” issues related to the production and distribution of food. But restaurants, cuisine, cooking, eating, and hunger loom large too.¹⁵ As presented in the global environmental novel, we cannot separate trends in “eating culture” (Kyla

¹⁴ I use the term “ecosocial” to indicate that environmental and social concerns are inextricable, from a perspective influenced by the environmentalism of the poor.

¹⁵ In some of the novels I discuss, such as Ozeki's *All Over Creation*, food systems are the central ecosocial issue. In others, such as Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* or Mda's *The Whale Caller*, food politics may seem subordinate to other ecosocial concerns. Yet, as I argue in these cases, the novels' environmental and anti-neoliberal politics are enmeshed with their preoccupations with food.

Wazana Tompkins' term) from questions of environment.¹⁶ To put it another way, we cannot understand production and its ecosocial impacts without looking at consumption, which is imbricated with desire and taste. And we cannot separate "consumption" in the literal sense (eating) from its other meanings: buying, but also looking and reading. These entanglements indicate what we might think of as the politics of consumption. In global environmental novels, environment and eating culture are points of entry to illustrate, criticize, ridicule, and resist neoliberal globalization. Neoliberalism reproduces and exacerbates many kinds of inequality in proximity to food and eating. It follows that race, class, gender, diaspora, postcoloniality, and queerness come variously to the fore across my chapters, as food's social meanings and relationships to power proliferate. Just as we cannot understand our global environmental crisis apart from capitalism, food systems inform our most pressing ecological, economic, political, and social questions.

Postcolonial Studies, Ecocriticism, and Food Studies

This project operates at the intersection of three interdisciplinary fields: postcolonial studies, ecocriticism and the environmental humanities, and food studies. (I also engage with ecofeminism, queer theory, global modernism, and theories of the contemporary novel.) Food studies is a growing field, originating in American cultural anthropology. The emergence of food studies in the American academy in the 1980s and 1990s "coincided with a national explosion in food culture and the growth of what has come to be known as urban 'foodie' culture," a "congruence" that "has led some critics to dismiss the field as 'scholarship-lite'" or too bourgeois (Tompkins 2). I would push back

¹⁶ Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion*, 2.

on such skepticism. Some work on gourmet cuisine is quite smart in its attention to labor, such as Allison's Carruth's thoughts on exploitation at the chic Danish restaurant Noma ("The Culinary Lab"). More to the point, food studies is not bounded to the analysis of fancy gastronomy, even if this was a dominant trajectory at first. Food studies scholars have engaged with global trade; imperialism; slavery and indenture; the relationship between eating, race, and gender; and labor issues in both cultivation and food delivery.¹⁷ Food studies collections also increasingly include work by scholar-activists on social movements and food justice.¹⁸

Yet while I would not dismiss food studies, that field has room to grow by engaging with postcolonial perspectives and with literature from the global South. Indeed, postcolonial studies, the environmental humanities, and food studies all benefit from an encounter. In a certain strain of postcolonial criticism, food has been a "staple"

¹⁷ Sidney Mintz's 1985 *Sweetness and Power*, considered foundational, emanates outward from fieldwork in Puerto Rico to provide a social history of sugar. Mintz develops a key method for food studies: he studies a single commodity to understand links between people who will never meet, sugar's Caribbean producers (slaves, indentured laborers, and their descendants) and its consumers in the global North. Equally influential is Mintz's conviction that we cannot understand these imperial connections without thinking about taste. Why should sucrose extracted from sugar cane, in particular, become an object of insatiable Euroamerican desire? More recently influential is Allison Carruth's excellent monograph *Global Appetites*, which chronicles the development of American "food power" internationally and establishes a literary food studies through an American archive. Exciting monographs in literary food studies also include Sarah D. Wald's *The Nature of California* and Kyla Wazana Tompkins' *Racial Indigestion*. Wald scrutinizes representations of farmers and farmworkers in California, focusing on racialized labor and uniting histories of farmworker activism and environmentalism. Tompkins looks at nineteenth-century America, arguing that eating and its representations produce raced and gendered bodies. Fussy restaurants do not drive any of these studies. The literature addressed in my own project has, in the end, invited me to mention fussy eating habits, but with the goal of decentering mainstream Northern eating culture to refocus on questions of justice and postcoloniality.

¹⁸ See, for example, Eric Holt-Giménez, "From Food Crisis to Food Sovereignty," in *Taking Food Public*.

because of its frequent appearance as a metaphor for ethnic identity or hybridity, à la Salman Rushdie (Huggan and Tiffin 157). Rushdie's "turn to spices as a creative and erotic repertoire" in novels such as *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Midnight's Children* emblemizes a trend in cultural production from the South Asian diaspora, in which "spices have served as a favored trope of cultural representation" (Parama Roy 156). Indeed, as Anita Mannur notes, some critics have been quick to charge that in postcolonial and diasporic literatures food is deployed "as an intractable measure of cultural authenticity" (Mannur 3). Postcolonial scholarship on food has sometimes emphasized its function "as a signifier for ethnicity in multicultural contexts," as well as noting disordered eating as a common metaphor for postcolonial ambivalence (Huggan and Tiffin 157). But such simple symbolic functions are not the only meanings of food in postcolonial and diasporic literature, as Mannur and others have suggested. Taking the example of *Midnight's Children*, pickling is the novel's metaphor for cultural memory, but an ironized one – and the novel also references food rationing, hoarding, drought, famine, and the Green Revolution (Rushdie 62, 64, 77, 198, 382, 401). Rushdie's food references have a materialist as well as symbolic dimension, engaging the relationship between food systems and inequality. Surely food in postcolonial literature, then, has never been purely metaphorical. (I discuss this further in Chapter Two.)

And indeed, postcolonial studies has other modes of engaging with food – for example, in postcolonial ecocriticism. Postcolonial studies and ecocriticism have in some ways been difficult fields to reconcile, though it seems obvious that empire and environmental destruction are mutually informing phenomena (a point long articulated by environmentalists and scholar-activists from the global South, such as Ken Saro-Wiwa

and Vandana Shiva). It is also the case that Western conservationism developed in concert with empire.¹⁹ This means that environmentalism sometimes manifests as a “white” or “Western” issue. Yet this legacy is a compelling reason for postcolonial and environmental concerns to be reintegrated, attending both to the imperial histories of conservation and to anti-imperialist modes of environmental thought. Postcolonial ecocritics have sought to explain and push through conceptual clashes between ecocriticism and postcolonial studies.²⁰ An integrated field has developed, which centers the entanglement of empire and environment. This field of postcolonial ecocriticism challenges the white-centrism and Northern-centrism of ecocriticism as it evolved in the American academy, insisting on the centrality of perspectives from the global South (and from colonized populations and minorities within the North). Scholars such as Rob Nixon have made the environmentalism of the poor a central concept for ecocriticism, pushing back on perceptions of environmentalism as solely a white, bourgeois phenomenon, and on the tendency of early ecocritics to perpetuate the types of environmentalism that are indeed white and bourgeois.²¹ As already mentioned, access to food – along with water,

¹⁹ See Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism*.

²⁰ Rob Nixon identifies four “schisms” between postcolonial and ecocritical priorities and viewpoints: hybridity versus purity, displacement versus place, transnationalism versus a national (American) canon, and submerged histories versus timelessness (“Environmentalism and Postcolonialism” 235). Anthony Vital suggests that discursive approaches in postcolonial studies (or, we might say, in the version of postcolonial studies most influenced by poststructuralism) have clashed with ecocriticism’s emphasis on material reality. Vital suggests reconciling these priorities by attending to “the complex interplay of social history with the natural world” and to “how language both shapes and reveals such interactions” (“Toward an African Ecocriticism” 90). All of these critiques are necessarily generalizations. Still, postcolonial ecocriticism does have potential to diversify the priorities in each field.

²¹ First-wave ecocriticism in America tends to idealize untouched “wilderness” spaces, ignoring histories of labor and indigenous removal (for example, to create national parks). Pastoral writing in South Africa has suffered from similar tendencies, and the

land, and other resources – has been a central concern in environmentalisms of the poor. Food needs to be central in postcolonial ecocriticism too, and the field is developing in this direction.

Scholars closing the gap between food studies and postcolonial ecocriticism, such as Allison Carruth, Susie O'Brien, and Jonathan Highfield, situate literary gastronomy in its enmeshment with the ecosocial impacts of food production and distribution.²² Food is not only a symbol for race, ethnicity, or class. Rather, food systems matter in themselves as material expressions of global hierarchies, for which race, ethnicity, and class are

clash between conservationist measures and indigenous land needs has been a problem in India and many other postcolonial nations. For the Americanist version of this critique, see William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by Cronon (W.W. Norton and Company, 1995). For versions focused on the global South, see Guha, *Environmentalism*, and Nixon, *Slow Violence*. For a South African critique of pastoral writing and art, see J.M. Coetzee, *White Writing*. The situation in India, and the example of Project Tiger, is discussed in Chapter Two of the present writing.

²² Carruth's *Global Appetites* sits between globalization studies, postcolonial ecocritical methods, and food studies, although her archive is American. Susie O'Brien likewise addresses North American literature with a postcolonial ecocritical framework, turning to food as a "rich site through which to think about... environment, colonialism, culture, affect, subjectivity" that "embodies and also masks the networks ... of global ecologies, economies, politics, and culture" (O'Brien in Szabo-Jones 207-8). We might similarly situate work on food sovereignty and indigenous North Americans by Joni Adamson, Janet Fiskio, and others. Jonathan Highfield's eco-focused readings of African novels revolve around foodways and food sovereignty. All these scholars have made forays into a mode of analysis that demands expansion in its geographic and linguistic scope. See O'Brien, "No Debt Outstanding"; Fiskio, "Where Food Grows on Water," in *The Routledge Companion to Native American Literature*, edited by Deborah Lea Madison (Routledge, 2015); Adamson, "Medicine Food: Critical Environmental Justice Studies, Native North American Literature, and the Movement of Food Sovereignty," in *Environmental Justice* (vol. 4, no. 4, 2011); Highfield, "No Longer Praying on Borrowed Wine: Agroforestry and Food Sovereignty in Ben Okri's *Famished Road* Trilogy," in *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*, edited by Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers (Ohio University Press, 2011); and Highfield, "Relations with Food': Agriculture, Colonialism, and Foodways in the Writing of Bessie Head," in *Postcolonial Green*, edited by Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt (University of Virginia Press, 2010).

among the structuring lines.²³ Food production and distribution are key intersections of the environmental, corporeal, and social, crucial to what Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley call “postcolonial ecologies”:

The new material resources of the colonies literally changed human bodies and national cultures as New World foods such as tomatoes, potatoes, maize, chili peppers, peanuts, cassava, and pineapple were transplanted, naturalized, and creolized all over the globe, while Asian and African crops such as sugarcane and coffee became integral to the plantocracies of the Americas. ... [T]hese food introductions also catalyzed the rise of monocrop agriculture, ... [which] triggered severe famines in the British colonies of Ireland and India. This rapid global agricultural change was an important antecedent to the twentieth-century ‘green revolution’ in which the introduction of genetically modified seeds, agrichemicals, and a fossil-fuel based monoculture was expected to eliminate starvation in developing nations, but in many cases contributed to malnutrition, famine, social instability, and large-scale ecological problems. Tracing out these histories of nature is vital to understanding our current era. (DeLoughrey and Handley 13)

I have quoted at length from DeLoughrey and Handley’s introduction to the collection *Postcolonial Ecologies*, because they articulate the large-scale reasons why food must be central to postcolonial ecocriticism. I take up their call for postcolonial ecocritics to use food systems as a window onto machinations of colonialism and capitalism through global economic and ecological circuits. These large-scale questions outlined by DeLoughrey and Handley are fundamental. Yet I am also invested in the small: the details of everyday lives, without which we cannot understand the affective and even material realities of larger entities. I am interested in how novelists, activists, scholars, and even cultivators and restaurateurs engage textures of the local and somatic to conceptualize globality in all its unevenness. Large, small, and medium are inextricable.

²³ See Carruth, *Global Appetites*, p. 96.

To position food politics in relation to scale, I will reflect now on some contemporary contours of eating culture and food activism.

Cultures of Consumption

Since the 1980s, America has seen the emergence of “foodie culture”: a host of trends in restaurants, food-shopping, home cooking, tourism, cookbooks, blogging, environmental politics, and more.²⁴ On the high end, foodie culture includes “molecular gastronomy,” in which chefs borrow techniques from chemists to regulate texture, color, and taste. This rather fussy aesthetic relies on ingredients and equipment previously only found in labs, making it “the preserve of a few (expensive) restaurant kitchens” (Edwards-Stuart, n.p.) More casual trends include gourmet food trucks, witnessed in the popular American film *Chef* by John Favreau (2014). In the film, a chef frustrated with traditionalist critics leaves the rarefied restaurant world and opens an independent food truck. With the truck, he rekindles his enthusiasm for eclectic eating. But the chef’s experiment takes the form of ethnicized culinary sampling, assimilating Cuban sandwiches from Miami and beignets from New Orleans. His fusion tactics typify foodie culture’s exploratory (some might say colonial) spirit. Indeed, the food truck itself is arguably a form borrowed from the global South and from diasporic populations.²⁵ With the emergence of gourmet food trucks, cities such as Los Angeles are seeing conflicts

²⁴ A “foodie” could be described as “a person who devotes considerable time and energy to eating and learning about good food, however ‘good food’ is defined” (Johnston and Baumann x).

²⁵ As a boldly titled Smithsonian Magazine article would have it, “Food Truck Parks Are Making America More Like Southeast Asia” (Matchar). Food trucks may seem “new” in some cities and class brackets in the global North. But less pricey versions have long been “common in the Global South” and in cities such as LA (Agyeman et al 1).

between “creative-class, hip, entrepreneurial” food truck operators and their pre-existing, lower income counterparts (Agyeman et al 3). Such skirmishes symptomatize larger fracture lines: for Kyla Wazana Tompkins, “foodie culture is founded on problematic racial politics in which white, bourgeois, urban subject positions are articulated ... through the consumption and informational mastery of foreign, that is, non-Anglo-American food cultures” (2). This is one symptom of foodie culture’s “lack of critical reflexivity about foodie privilege, especially in relation to the larger global food system” (Johnston and Baumann x). To analyze eating culture in relation to inequality, we do need to think about production as well as taste, and we need to think globally.

Analyses of “foodie culture” are often concerned with the US. But foodie trends are rampant in many parts of the world, and are key to transnational circulations of culture, organic matter, and capital. Our understanding of public cultures of consumption needs to encompass trends in the global South – including travel from North to South – as well as the influence of coloniality and diaspora on eating cultures everywhere. One key mode of connectivity is culinary tourism, which surged in the 1990s and 2000s, becoming the world’s fastest-growing form of tourism (Black 8, 27). Food tourism has blossomed in South Africa since its postapartheid reentrance into the global economy, for example. Cape or pan-African cuisines attract visitors to Cape Town or Johannesburg, while scenic wineries bring them to rural areas around Stellenbosch and Franschhoek. Here and elsewhere, culinary tourists seek out local or regional cuisines, wines, and food producers. But as Michael Hall and Stefan Gössling point out, food tourism complicates the idea of “local food.” The spending of international tourists makes possible many initiatives to revive or sustain local cuisine and production, which “creates something of a

paradox”: “while the local food system is often regarded as a device to counter some of the negative elements of globalisation, tourism by its very nature is a potent force for encouraging globalisation” (Hall and Gössling 12). Culinary tourism can bring much-needed revenue. But food globalization, including tourism to the global South and the popularity of “ethnic” cuisine in the North, can go hand-in-hand with exploited labor and multiculturalist attitudes. As Shameem Black puts it, “eagerness to taste the cuisines of different cultures can be seen as a symptom of the failures of a pluralism willing to claim the virtues of liberal tolerance but reluctant to invest in larger structural changes ... a mode of bourgeois complacency that assigns minorities [in the North] to service roles in the larger community” (4-5). The alternating refusal and commodification of “ethnicized” food has long animated the reception of non-Anglo cuisines, literatures, and even bodies, as Black, Parama Roy, Anita Mannur, Graham Huggan, and others have pursued. Food has been key to the formation of a “postcolonial exotic”: a desire to consume the other, making otherness into a commodity.²⁶ The Western quest for “exotic” flavors is not new, nor is it purely symbolic. Rather, this desire has structured an imperialist world. From a postcolonial perspective, then, we might understand foodie culture (encompassing food tourism, fusion cuisines, enthusiasm for “ethnic food,” and more) not as an anomaly, but as a neoliberal iteration of the longstanding appropriation of culture, resources, and labor.

²⁶ The “postcolonial exotic” is Huggan’s term both for the fetishism of otherness, and for strategic exoticism in cultural products aware of their own fetishization. Authors such as Rushdie and Arundhati Roy produce a self-reflexive postcolonial exotic in part by using gastronomic language, Huggan argues. In Chapter Two I push further on why food, in particular, matters to these authors’ engagements with exoticism. See Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*.

This colonial enthusiasm for exploration and discovery makes a strange coupling in foodie culture with the aspiration toward ethical eating. “Fair-trade,” “farm-to-table,” “local,” “organic,” and “natural” have become buzzwords. Ethical eating is a lucrative concept in upscale restaurants, supermarkets, and tourist ventures. *Agriturismo* or farm stays commodify consumer connection to farmers and greener cultivation, while the supermarket chain Whole Foods claims to marry “the finest natural and organic foods” and an “unshakeable commitment to sustainable agriculture” with “the excitement and fun we bring to shopping for groceries” (“Company Info”).²⁷ Such companies would convince spenders that middle class consumption need not run counter to ethical eating. They feed on “postconsumerism”: Jennifer’s Wenzel’s term for the aspiration to “help the poor or save the planet by buying things” (“Consumption” 598). Wenzel joins numerous scholars of environmentalism and food studies in pointing out that we can hardly fix problems such as poverty or environmental degradation by participating in rarefied versions of consumerism, since a consumer capitalist system creates those problems in the first place.²⁸ We are living in an era that Jason B. Moore calls not the Anthropocene, but the “capitalocene”: an era in which environmental change is driven by a very particular version of human activity, called capitalism.²⁹ Yet the ideal of sowing social

²⁷ “Agriturismo” brings visitors into agricultural settings, often wine farms. They are served food made with local ingredients, and may learn about wine and food production. This is popular in Italy, where state aid can be used to convert disused farm buildings into tourist accommodations (“Agriturismo”). Similar trends have proliferated elsewhere, such as “enoturismo” in Spain and tours and tastings in South Africa’s wine region.

²⁸ See, for example, Michael F. Maniates, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Ride a Bike, Save the World?” in *Global Environmental Politics* vol. 1, no. 3, 2001, pp. 31-52; Jason B. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*; and Susie O’Brien, “No Debt Outstanding.”

²⁹ The term “Anthropocene,” coined by biologist Eugene Stoermer and popularized by chemist Paul Crutzen, designates our era, in which humanity functions as a geological force, altering the planet on an unanticipated scale. There are numerous critiques of this

change by engaging in unfettered consumption is, for obvious reasons, saleable. Does the ideal of ethical eating carry any weight, beyond its readiness to be commodified?

We might argue that foodie culture and corporate greenwashing have corrupted keywords and initiatives that originated with social movements. “Local” and “natural” foods have different (less capitalist) meanings in activist contexts, we might suggest. This argument would be both compelling and incomplete. As an example, let’s take the word “local” – a concept with enduring traction in various environmentalisms, as in the slogan “Think globally, act locally” or the idea of a “sense of place.”³⁰ Today, “local food” movements emphasize buying directly from nearby farmers or cooperatives, rather than from big corporations. Yet they often share failings with corporate discourses of ethical eating. In many North American movements, “romanticized and insufficiently theorized attachments to ‘local’ or organic foodways ... at times suspiciously echo nativist

buzzword, pointing out its potential to universalize human impacts on environment and vulnerability to climate change, when we should instead attend to power dynamics among humans. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s essay “The Climate of History: Four Theses” (*Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2009, pp. 197-222) thinks through these different levels of the human. Other scholars have proposed alternate terms to replace “Anthropocene.” See, for example, Donna Haraway’s *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016); and Nicholas Mirzoeff’s “It’s Not the Anthropocene, It’s The White Supremacy Scene; or, The Geological Color Line,” in *After Extinction*, edited by Richard Grusin (University of Minnesota Press, 2016). Moore’s replacement term, “capitalocene,” underscores that capitalism is the cause of climate change. See Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*.

³⁰ Made famous by the microbiologist and environmental thinker René Dubos, “Think globally, act locally” was a popular slogan of the mainstream American environmental movement that arose in the 1960s and 70s (Heise *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* 20, 38). See Chapter Three. “Sense of place,” meanwhile, has been advocated by many locally-oriented environmentalists. One elegant example is the essay “Where I Ought to Be: A Writer’s Sense of Place” by the Ojibwe novelist Louise Erdrich (*The New York Times*, July 28, 1985). Ursula Heise, for one, believes environmentalists and ecocritics have emphasized “sense of place” entirely too much, to the exclusion of global connections. See Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*.

ideological formations,” eliding the settler colonial status of many “locals” who participate (Tompkins 2; see also O’Brien.) When local food movements focus on “ethical consumption” linked to “nostalgic visions of agricultural land ownership,” they “naturalize the consumer citizen” (Wald 24). Advocating change through consumer “choices” that are only affordable for the middle class, many local food movements indulge in postconsumerism rather than critiquing capitalism. Local food initiatives are often racialized as well as classed: while the values of healthy, sustainable, non-corporate food are not inherently white, “the emphases and absences ... in community food make them so” (Slocum 526). Local food has a grand vision and it has individual actors, but many of its manifestations have no sense of the meso scale, no attention to the structural inequalities that condition “choice” (O’Brien).

But does local food always refer to such problematic movements? Not necessarily. For Noah Zerbe, “local food” describes a variety of urban gardening movements in Durban, South Africa. These initiatives range from “the increasingly popular mixed-used of private gardens by the privileged upper middle class, for whom growing their own food is often viewed as a legitimization of progressive politics,” to the city’s “formal allocation of unused urban lots ... to poor communities for local food production,” and to the informal, illegal reclamation of vacant lots by “guerilla gardeners” (Zerbe “Global Politics” 36). These “guerilla gardeners” have motivations that range from “wholesale rejection of notions of ownership and private property, to more basic and limited claims of social justice and necessity” (Zerbe “Global Politics” 36). In this example, “local food” does have a bourgeois meaning, but it has other meanings too, encompassing differently classed movements that critique the capitalist

concept of private property. We must avoid generalizing from the term's common usage in North America.

Yet it is worth thinking transnationally about the critique of American local food movements made by scholars such as Susie O'Brien. O'Brien sees local food's problem as one of scale: a myopic focus on the individual, coming from an "ideological aversion to thinking about structures and institutions" (242). This scale-based critique of local food is almost identical to common critiques of bourgeois environmentalism,³¹ and of neoliberal economics: specifically, of neoliberalization in South Africa since apartheid. For Agatha Herman, a "neoliberal focus on ... choice and productivity" in South Africa's narratives about economy "migrates responsibility to the individual scale and detracts attention from broader structural constraints and repressive structures" (Herman 18). For Herman as for O'Brien, we would do better to think across the scales of individual and system, in order to analyze the impacts of structural conditions. Across the geographies, social movements, and novels important to this project, I identify this urge to think across scales as a common thread of anti-neoliberal thought. This logic is nowhere more concretely realized than in the politics of food. The food system, including many alternative food movements, can be an important metonym for neoliberal capitalism. And it is by turning to the global South (and to disenfranchised communities in the North) that we will find many food-focused social movements that critique private property and differentiated privilege, as well as environmental negligence. Key issues for such movements include land and resource grabs, GM patenting, the privatization of resources

³¹ See, for example, Michael F. Maniates, "Individualization: Plant a Tree, Ride a Bike, Save the World?" in *Global Environmental Politics* vol. 1, no. 3, 2001, pp. 31-52.

such as water, and the commercialization of agriculture. Their focus on food is an avenue not to postconsumerism, but to a wide-reaching critique of neoliberal capitalism. Many such movements explicitly move beyond the “local” to analyze global structures, but often in ways informed by local practice, attempting – like novels – to think across scales.

One key mobilization is the food sovereignty movement, led by the umbrella group La Via Campesina. This global coalition of farmer-activists advocates for each community’s right to self-determine its food and agriculture systems (“International Peasants Voice”). Local groups affiliated with La Via Campesina cover a wide range of geographies and issues.³² Linking member organizations around the world, the food sovereignty movement prioritizes ecological care and community autonomy in foodways, and decries industrial agriculture, the World Trade Organization, and transnational corporations such as Monsanto and Cargill.³³ Local politics are crucial, but the movement does not reify the idea of “eating local” per se. Instead, La Via Campesina speaks of “[g]lobalizing hope, globalizing the struggle!” (“International Peasants Voice”). We

³² In spring 2018, for example, La Via Campesina declared solidarity with Palestine and a Palestinian member organization; endorsed agroecology with the Zimbabwe Smallholder Organic Farmers’ Forum; and highlighted agrarian reform campaigns by Brazil’s landless people’s movement (“La Via Campesina Condemns Israel’s Massacre”; Mpofo; “The Fair of the MST”).

³³ The term food sovereignty is not to be confused with “food security,” language that scholar-activists tend to associate with the UN and the World Bank. While food security “simply implies the general ‘availability’ of food in a given region, country or household,” food sovereignty emphasizes the “right to food” (Coomons and Yakpo 42, 29). For advocates of food sovereignty, food security is a neoliberal ideology that has forced peasants to farm for export, to accept expensive and damaging chemical inputs (the Green Revolution), and to buy patented GM seeds (the Gene Revolution) – measures which enrich transnational corporations without alleviating hunger or poverty. See Zerbe, “Setting the Global Dinner Table;” Amin; and Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy*.

might then consider this movement not anti-globalization, but counter-globalization: food sovereignty activists are advocating modes of transnational connection apart from the tentacles of agribusiness, encouraging collaboration among grassroots groups. As Samir Amin puts it, the movement seeks “convergence in diversity” (xvii): shared goals and mobilization across groups that have autonomous identities and priorities based on their local situations. Likewise, Raj Patel suggests that food sovereignty is an “intentionally vague call ... so that the communities involved in claiming food sovereignty might answer issues around production, distribution, and consumption of food for themselves” (“Food Sovereignty” 2). A decentralized structure allows the movement to prioritize both local autonomy and global connection, to think and operate on multiple scales.

Food sovereignty, as a conceptual ideal, informs many of my analyses of literary food politics, as does the environmentalism of the poor. This project takes the insights of activists and scholar-activists seriously, triangulating between their writings, institutionalized scholarship, and literature. Each of my chapters considers a novelist’s work alongside a constellation of local and transnational developments in eco-activism, food politics, and eating culture. Matters as diverse as food tourism, GMOs, disordered eating, fisheries, conservation regulations, queer desire, and hunger float in and out, allowing a range of resonances to emerge across chapters.

Chapters

Chapter One, “Hunger versus Taste: Zakes Mda, Tourism, and Food Sovereignty,” explores South African novelist Mda’s engagement with consumption – in consumption’s multiple senses of eating, using environmental resources, and

participating in global capitalism. Mda's novels *The Heart of Redness* and *The Whale Caller* have been read as parables about subaltern environmentalism and multispecies intimacy. I argue, however, that Mda's satire of neoliberal development crystallizes in his depictions of how environment and eating culture collide, particularly in tourism – a key feature of South Africa's postapartheid "opening." The positioning of Mda's novels vis-à-vis capitalism, environment, and food is intimately connected with their variable gender politics. *The Heart of Redness* seems to present a Western-educated outsider, Camagu, as the eco-savior of a rural community. Camagu subverts plans to build a casino by creating an ecotouristic backpacker's hostel after he falls in love with an environmentalist indigene. Yet if we reread the novel in relation to feminist movements for food sovereignty, we find that Mda satirizes the central character's masculinism. He offers food sovereignty – not ecotourism – as a goal for environmentalist, anti-poverty, and feminist action. *The Whale Caller*, meanwhile, has been celebrated for rethinking human-animal intimacies. But in Mda's depiction of a whale-watching town, just as important are questions of food justice, which surround both conservation laws and gourmet restaurants. Mda satirizes an exclusive eating culture that has arisen in conjunction with ecotourism. The novel dramatizes a clash of hunger versus taste, in which food access is sidelined by obsessions with global cuisines and ritualistic eating. Such issues resonate beyond South Africa, to all countries embroiled in culinary consumerism and beset by environmental and food injustice. And where do they leave us with literary consumption?

In Chapter Two, "Imperial Appetites: Amitav Ghosh, Environmentalism of the Poor, and Disordered Eating," I turn to South Asia and to the novel genre's management of scale. I begin with *The Great Derangement*, in which Amitav Ghosh argues that the

“modern novel” is too individualist to represent climate change. I suggest instead that the novel is well-suited to toggling across scales, as I illustrate with Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and then Ghosh’s own *The Hungry Tide*. In the global environmental novel, I argue, references to food align with the polyscalar facility of the novel form to connect individuals and communities to the global scale of environmental catastrophes. While *The Hungry Tide* could, like Mda’s novels, be read for the moral of Westerners learning to embrace subaltern environmentalism, this would be an oversimplification. My reading reintegrates critical conversations on the environmentalism of the poor with those on food’s symbolic role in the South Asian novel and postcolonial literature more broadly. I explore how *The Hungry Tide* links individual bodies and acts of eating to global trade in food and agricultural products. Allusions to declining fisheries and other structures of hunger are mapped in relation to seemingly small-scale matters, such as the central character’s disordered eating and her enthusiasm for nutrition bars and Ovaltine. Eating habits and commoditized foods drag in complex histories of empire and labor, complicating the eco-politics of *The Hungry Tide*. These topics converge with *The Hungry Tide*’s ruminations on elite authorship, at the juncture of the novel’s realist and (post)modernist elements. Foods and eating gesture toward an outside to elite perspectives, a subalternity that Ghosh’s novel cannot directly voice, even as it dramatizes a struggle for polyvocality. With the invocation of food commodities overdetermined by imperial appetites, a set of haunting material histories disrupt *The Hungry Tide*’s otherwise rosy ending. The novel’s individuating qualities build towards a systemic and nuanced critique of global food capitalism and its imperial

histories. Questions of environmental catastrophe move across scales by virtue of their linkage with food.

In Chapter Three, “Beyond the Blue-Green Orb: Ruth Ozeki, the Family, and GMOs,” I turn to North America, while thinking transnationally about anti-GM politics. Resisting GMOs has spurred new political coalitions across India, South Africa, North America, and elsewhere, changing how food movements manage scale and globalization. Japanese American novelist Ruth Ozeki playfully considers anti-GM coalitions in *All Over Creation*, through the unlikely alliance of a right-wing Idaho potato farmer and a Winnebago-load of grassroots leftists. The novel attends to convergences and fractures between agrarian and radical resistance to GMOs, asking what kind of social ecology can get us outside monoculture. My reading parses four potential eco-political orientations explored in Ozeki’s novel. First, analogies between biodiversity and social diversity are satirized. *All Over Creation* would map relations among social organization, environment, and empire through more complex logics than analogy. Second, anti-capitalist modes of translocal connectivity emerge in leftist anti-GM activism, but are ultimately dissociated from farming. Third, non-normative structures of kinship and care reach toward a post-capitalist future. This future, as imagined in the novel, would be multi-racial, queer, and environmentalist, and would restructure care for elders, children, and biodiversity as communal tasks. But, I argue, the novel abandons queer kinship by its end, recentering the white, heterosexual nuclear family. Yet the novel’s eco-politics are redeemed in its self-reflexivity around fiction’s capacity to picture a global environment. Ozeki debunks a universalizing iconography of the earth as “blue marble,” associated with mainstream US environmentalism. She offers an alternate way to picture globality:

multiscalar representation that prioritizes heterogeneity, as enacted through her novel's heteroglossia and aesthetics of excess.

In Chapter Four, "Capitalism and its Outsides: Zoë Wicomb, Indigeneity, and Flesh," I return to South Africa with Zoë Wicomb's novels *October* and *Playing in the Light*. I explore the politics of food and flesh in these novels, intersecting consumption, cuisine, and postcoloniality with questions raised in transnational indigenous activism, ecofeminism, and queer studies. Across field, kitchen, supermarket, and butcher shop, Wicomb's engagements with food evoke the messy intersections of racial and gender politics amidst postapartheid global capitalism. Wicomb uses scenes of cooking and eating to explore translocal identities and connections. She locates the temporality and spatiality of racialized global capitalism in food systems. Appetite and conspicuous consumption are closely linked, leaving seemingly little space to escape rigid social hierarchies. But, I argue, Wicomb also situates interactions with food as her characters' opportunities to resist racial taxonomy, patriarchy, and the exigencies of consumer capitalism. Cape cuisine, meat, fruits from the supermarket, and plants in the field are freighted with imperial histories, the commodification of African identity, and patriarchal violence. But they are also the tools with which Wicomb's characters investigate transgressive possibilities, rewriting both the idealization of capitalist upward mobility and what have been called the sexual politics of meat. Her novels ask whether, through food, there can be an outside to capitalism's regimentation of time, space, and bodies.

These first four chapters focus on neoliberal-era novels written in English. Chapter Five, "Paddy, Mangoes, Molasses: Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay and Famine," breaks open the project's temporal and linguistic framework by addressing a 1946-51

Bengali novel, *The Tale of Hansuli Turn*.³⁴ While questions of hunger and food access have been important throughout the project, this chapter brings famine into focus. How do translation, the production of global modernism, and the eco-politics of famine intersect? Centering the lives of rural cultivators amidst a shifting agro-food system, Tarashankar's novel culminates with the 1943 Bengal famine. This famine reprises Victorian-era patterns, yet exemplifies the fallout from imperialism's reformulation during World War II, which reconfigured global food. As such, this moment echoes across today's food politics. *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* is also a stylistic forerunner of the global environmental novel with its modernist techniques, allowing me to reflect on the aesthetic and generic stakes of novels engaged with environment, globalization, and food. Attending to food and hunger helps Tarashankar connect individual somatic experience to regional dynamics of labor and starvation, and to global systems. His food lexicon connects the material and discursive modalities of power. Tarashankar combines modernist style with realist documentation of the eco-politics of food in order to meet the representational challenges of globalization – a procedure foundational for the global environmental novels of today.

Having considered both Tarashankar's and Aidoo's works as antecedents to the global environmental novel, I end the dissertation by considering the futurity of environmental narrative in the age of climate change. In the coda, I shift the lens to water, without which there would be no food – as we are reminded by the central character in “Water No Get Enemy,” a 2015 South African short story by Fred Khumalo. And while Khumalo's story is full of food as well as water, no food at all appears in *Pumzi*, Wanuri

³⁴ As translated into English by Ben Conisbee Baer in 2011.

Kahiu's 2010 Kenyan Afro-futurist film. Water and its scarcity are an obsessive optic in both of these texts, which I situate against South Africa's 2018 and ongoing water crisis. How can literature help us negotiate climate change realities that feel like "science fiction"? How will such literary categories change as the tensions of resource access intensify on a planet both too dry and too wet? What is the future for us, and for the literature of food and environment?

The concept of global environment produces a representational crisis: how do we imagine (let alone save) something so big, without resorting to abstraction or generalization? How can we think system with local particularities? Novels can help food politics with polyscalar thinking. As Allison Carruth puts it, "literature has a facility with shifting from macroscopic to intimate scales of representation that can provide an incisive lens on the interactions between local places and global markets" (*Global Appetites* 5). I suggest that the converse is also true: representing food and eating allows the novelists that I discuss to work across the scales of individuated character and global system, making the novel form useful to the eco-political questions of our globalized and uneven world. But why food? If novels should, in theory, be good at thinking across scales anyway, why does food in particular offer purchase on multiple scales of environmental engagement? I believe one reason is because food, unlike many environmental issues, is hard for anybody to find abstract. Food, as Shameem Black says, is "the ultimate vernacular cosmopolitan" (14). Food feels quotidian and immediate, yet it is embedded in the global circulation of culture, and in material and ecological histories. Food is intimate and worldly at the same time. The intimacy of food can manage the scalar challenges to imagining globalization, making the transnational tangible. A kind of translocation

becomes possible: rather than globality as an abstraction that elides heterogeneity, or, on the other hand, the small as an avoidance of the systemic, reading for food brings into view the intimate connections among different localities that build our global systems.

CHAPTER ONE

Hunger versus Taste:

Zakes Mda, Tourism, and Food Sovereignty

Abalone and Empty Bellies

Since 1991, a “whale crier” has wandered the town of Hermanus in South Africa’s Western Cape, wearing a sandwich board and blowing a kelp horn. In this tiny whale-watching hub, the crier helps ecotourists locate the leviathans swimming in Walker Bay. Zakes Mda’s 2005 novel *The Whale Caller* riffs on this “much loved tradition” of the tourist industry (“The Hermanus Whale Crier”). Like the whale crier, Mda’s Whale Caller roams Hermanus with his horn, seeking whales. But “his mission in life was quite different from the whale crier’s. The whale crier alerted people to the whereabouts of whales, whereas the Whale Caller called whales to himself ... when he was alone, so as to have intimate moments with them. He was not a showman, but a lover” (14). The Whale Caller finds offensive and irresponsible the behavior of tourists and their guides, whose boats veer too close to the whales in attempts to touch them. With the juxtaposition of the Whale Caller to the whale crier, Mda’s novel denaturalizes the commodification of whales for the tourist economy, asking readers to consider their potential as love objects. A love triangle vexes the Whale Caller, his favorite whale Sharisha, and his human girlfriend Saluni. Through this twist on human-nonhuman relations, the novel foregrounds conflicting modes of environmental and social consciousness.

The Whale Caller's main narrative concerns humans and whales, with multispecies intimacies abutting ecotourism. But this is not the only narrative thread. Mda relates postapartheid globalization to quite a few areas of environmental concern, which include poaching and the regulation of fisheries. South Africa's illegal abalone trade has soared since big cuts to the allowable catch in 1996. The coastline near Hermanus is the most heavily poached of four regulated zones (Hauck and Sweij 1024, 1026). The village of Hawston, at thirteen kilometers distant, is particularly notorious. Hawston's poaching economy poses not just conservation issues but social threats, such as gang and drug activity. But it is "difficult to define who is a poacher" because the informal market includes a range of activities, and actors from many "socio-economic, racial, and professional backgrounds" (Hauck and Sweijd 1028). Subsistence and small-scale fishers often resort to "poaching" because they are denied legal access rights. These rights instead go to large commercial operations. Hawston residents have mobilized to protest regulations that force the poor "to continue poaching rather than to become legitimate members of the industry" (Hauck and Sweijd 1028). Controversies over poaching have "raised important issues about access rights and ... political injustices of the past" in Hawston, which was designated a coloured area under the infamous Group Areas Act (Hauck and Sweijd 1028).³⁵ The management of fisheries has not addressed

³⁵ In apartheid terminology, "coloured" refers to persons of "mixed race," who were granted more privileges than "Africans" but less than "whites" under the racialized regime. I use the South African spelling to emphasize the term's national specificity. (See also Chapter Five.) The Group Areas Act was a key piece of apartheid legislation that determined specific areas where racial groups could live. The act mandated forced removals, obligated non-whites to carry pass books in order to enter "white" areas, and reserved most of the country for the white minority.

these concerns. Instead, environmental sustainability has been prioritized over socioeconomic factors as a matter of policy (Sowman 65-6).

In Mda's novel, the management of fisheries exemplifies neoliberal South Africa's greenwashed failure to address poverty. ("Greenwashing" refers to disguising social injustice behind conservationist rhetoric.) Poaching comes up when the Whale Caller and his girlfriend Saluni, wandering the coast outside Hermanus, find a sack filled with abalone (or perlemoens). The Whale Caller declares the bag's owner a "poacher" because "[t]he law allows you only four perlemoens a day for the pot" (190). The Whale Caller is himself poor, but this is one of many moments in which he ventriloquizes a bourgeois conservation perspective, taking into account only nonhuman life. The "puny man" who owns the bag protests that abalone regulations condemn the poorest, and indeed may have more to do with capitalist profit than environmental conservation: "Big companies are making money out of these perlemoens. The government gives them quotas. What about us, sir? Do you think if I apply for quotas I will get them? How are we expected to survive?" (191). Conservation policies that do not take socioeconomics into account should be blamed for the "woes" of the puny man's village, presumably Hawston, "where the whole economy depends on poaching" (191). Organized crime syndicates dictate the informal market's "established racial hierarchies," as Mda elucidates in the puny man's free indirect discourse:

Coloured folk sell their harvest to white men who pay about two hundred rands a kilogram. The white men sell to the Chinese men for about a thousand rands a kilogram. The Chinese ship the abalone to the Far East where they get about two thousand five hundred rands a kilogram. ... The puny man ... is at the very bottom of the food chain. He sells to better-established coloured poachers who only pay him fifty rands ... He now wants to deal directly with the white men. ... But the rich coloured poachers are not eager to increase the circle of people who have direct access. (192)

As the puny man describes, the informal market keeps most coloured people poor. Just a few join the elite. South Africa's income gap has continued to balloon since the end of apartheid, a situation evoked by the puny man's description of "double-storey houses" rising from the "dusty townships," which belong to a few "[w]ell-known poachers [who] have become rich" (191). Illegal industries, neoliberalization, and government corruption all intensify this stratification.

Entangling crime, conservation, and alimentation, abalone exemplifies the snarl of concerns that motivate eco-novelists such as Mda to engage with food and hunger. Mda's vantage is ecosocial: he presents environmental and social concerns as inextricable. A focus on food access helps make this perspective legible, as when the puny man critiques both conservation policies and the informal market by highlighting the politics of hunger: "We have got to eat, sir. . . . We have got to feed our children" (191). The discourse of hunger enables a subaltern critique of conservationism, in a context where state and capitalist forces frequently greenwash oppression.³⁶ It is unsurprising that food

³⁶ Environmental conservation has been used to justify violence or exclusion directed at the poor and marginalized in industries such as fisheries and tourism. The rhetoric of conservation surrounds the removals of populations from their lands to create national parks (where flora and fauna are enjoyed by wealthy South Africans and foreign tourists as luxury commodities, rather than as basic resources). This phenomenon has continued in the postapartheid era, with the ANC government using the rhetoric of conservation and community empowerment to legitimate neoliberal projects which undermine the latter. The case of the Makuleke is a paradigmatic example. After a successful land claim, the Makuleke own part of Kruger National Park, which they co-manage with South African National Parks (in theory). The ANC has represented this situation as one of state and "tribal" collaboration, yet sidelined the Makuleke in negotiations regarding the park's future. Similar legacies attach to conservationism in a number of national contexts, including the US and India. For the Makuleke and other southern African cases, see Büscher, *Transforming the Frontier*; Steven Robins and Kees van der Waal, "Model Tribes' and Iconic Conservationists? Tracking the Makuleke Restitution Case in Kruger National Park," in *Land, Memory, Reconstruction, and Justice: Perspectives on Land*

proliferates across global environmental novels such as the work of Mda, as the politics of food condense key postcolonial and ecocritical concerns. “Empty-belly environmentalism” is Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier’s term for environmental discourses that emphasize issues germane to the poor, such as resource access and toxicity.³⁷ Guha and Martinez-Alier contrast these subaltern mobilizations to the “full-stomach environmentalism” of the leisure classes, which is often concerned with iconic elements of nature, whether charismatic megafauna such as whales, lions, and elephants, or the dramatic landscapes of national parks (*Varieties of Environmentalism* 116). Taking empty-belly environmentalism rather literally, access to food is a central ecosocial problem for marginalized communities. Food can redirect readerly attention from forms of environmentalism that sideline the poor, to ecosocial concerns impinging on disenfranchised communities.

Mda’s novels bulge with material legible as empty-belly environmentalism, and postcolonial ecocritics have flocked to both *The Whale Caller* and *The Heart of Redness*, often reading them as parables about subaltern environmentalism.³⁸ One might expect this scholarship to highlight food, since food facilitates postcolonial ecocriticism’s

Claims in South Africa, ed. Cheryl Walker et al (Ohio University Press, 2010), pp. 163-180; and Brooke Stanley and Walter Dana Phillips, “South African Ecocriticism: Landscapes, Animals, and Environmental Justice,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism Online*, ed. Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). For global comparisons, see Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History*.

³⁷ Guha and Martinez-Alier also use the term “environmentalism of the poor” synonymously. I use these terms and “subaltern environmentalism” interchangeably.

³⁸ See, for example, Anthony Vital, “Situating Ecology in Recent South African Fiction;” Laura Wright, *Wilderness into Civilized Shapes* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010); Byron Caminero-Santangelo, “In Place: Tourism, Cosmopolitan Bioregionalism, and Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*”; and Jonathan Steinwand, “What the Whales Would Tell Us.” *The Whale Caller* has also inspired animal studies scholars, as I mention later.

avored angle of political intervention. But food makes few appearances in criticism on Mda, despite the novelist's many pages on subjects ranging from fishing and poaching to macaroni and cheese, restaurants, supermarkets, and the aphrodisiacal properties of oysters.³⁹ Perhaps this is because his references to food do not always help ecocritical and postcolonial priorities gel into a simple moral. Instead, Mda's food themes often reveal a discomfiting affinity between eco-politics and conspicuous consumption. For example, *The Whale Caller* depicts Hermanus's foodie restaurant culture, a thread which may be harder to read in terms of subaltern environmentalism than the passages on abalone rights. Yet both are indispensable to my reading of Mda's novel as an environmentalist and justice-oriented satire of neoliberal development. By bringing food politics front and center, I argue we can extract from Mda a subtle and multifaceted ecosocial critique of neoliberalism, whose mode is satire rather than parable or moralism. Far from presenting a comfortable harmony between environmental and social justice priorities, food in *The Whale Caller* highlights the coexistence of consumerist gluttony with ecologically-inflected critiques of capitalism. This is a problem in eating cultures as in Mda's work: culinary aesthetics such as "farm-to-table" masquerade as alternatives to industrial food, when they in fact perpetuate the classed and racialized differences in access to good food that are fundamental to the food regime. Mda brings such ironies to our attention by satirizing fine dining, which bifurcates taste from questions of hunger. Hermanus's tourist-inclined restaurant scene converges with its status as ecotouristic hotspot, showing how both animals (in this case whales) and cuisines are commodified within an

³⁹ For a discussion of this lack of attention to food in Mda criticism, see Katherine Hallemeier, "An Art of Hunger: Gender and the Politics of Food Distribution in Zakes Mda's South Africa," in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2016, pp. 1-15.

exclusionary culture of leisure that ignores questions of equal access. The aesthetics of food can displace food's material import, as Mda reveals by tracing transmutations of subsistence goods into simulacra.

In this chapter, I track the changing valences of food and tourism across Mda's novels *The Heart of Redness* and *The Whale Caller*. Before I discuss the novels, I lay out some contours of ecotourism and culinary tourism in South Africa. By situating these South African trends in relation to the global food regime, I reframe the landscape of the "literature of food" to center postcolonial authors such as Mda. I also map feminist discourses of food sovereignty, which will animate my reading of *The Heart of Redness* for a submerged narrative of food sovereignty. This novel's structure and critical reception reenact the tendency for masculinist eco-development strategies to overshadow local feminist alternatives.⁴⁰ Finally, I turn to a longer and thornier discussion of *The Whale Caller*. I lay out the novel's dialogical representation of ecosocial issues, tracing both the title character's environmentalist critique of his girlfriend Saluni, and her reciprocal attention to social justice. I then turn to Mda's playful and canny portraits of ritualized supermarket shopping and restaurant dining, discussing how the leitmotif of "civilised living" elucidates the dangers of bifurcating hunger from taste. If the vectors of food and gender harmonize environmentalist and social justice priorities in *The Heart of Redness*, they return in *The Whale Caller* to unsettle this neat packaging of subaltern environmentalism. (And if Mda's own gender politics are redeemed in my reading of *The*

⁴⁰ For a number of scholars and activists, food sovereignty can function as a feminist platform that would empower local women's groups, whereas neoliberal initiatives promoted by outsiders can entrench a gender hierarchy as well as ignoring local priorities. I discuss this gendering of eco-politics further in the next section.

Heart of Redness, they are problematized vis-à-vis *The Whale Caller*.) Taste gets ugly in *The Whale Caller*, underscoring that self-righteous food politics coexist with gluttony – and that reading may parallel eating in this regard. I explore consumption in the multiple senses of eating, buying, reading, and looking, teasing out parallels between the circulation of food and the circulation of novels. In discussing Mda’s satire of foodie tastes that neglect hunger, I recognize the homologous limitations of anti-capitalist critiques performed within genres that enjoy privileged circulation, such as the Anglophone novel.

Tourism, Food Sovereignty, and the Literature of Food

The end of apartheid in 1994 enabled South Africa’s reintegration into the global economy after diplomatic and economic isolation.⁴¹ The country’s peaceful transition, meanwhile, compromised socialist and communist leanings within the resistance to apartheid. A negotiated settlement ended the racial regime but did not involve the substantial structural changes (such as redistributions of land and wealth) that some had hoped for. While it entailed political restructuring, the transition was “relatively conservative” economically, “reflecting more of a continuation of late apartheid policies and ideals” (Herman 18). The version of the African National Congress (ANC) that came to power embraced neoliberalization. The ANC’s economic policies have been widely critiqued as the income gap expands rather than contracts, and remains racialized despite the emergence of a black elite.

⁴¹ Global boycotts of South African goods increased political pressure against the apartheid regime in the 1980s, and were lifted in the early 1990s (Herman 29).

Since the end of apartheid “reopened” South Africa, tourism has become an important way to attract foreign capital – and thereby a key topic for satire in Mda’s excoriation of neoliberalism. Two popular modes of travel are culinary tourism and ecotourism. Ecotourists come to see South Africa’s sweeping vistas, gorgeous seascapes, and charismatic megafauna, such as lions, rhinos, and whales. Visits often include safaris in a national park such as the vast and famous Kruger, which stretches along South Africa’s border with Mozambique. South Africa’s iconic environmental features not only attract tourists, but also bring out historic and contemporary tensions. Environmental conservation in the style of creating big parks has often gone hand-in-hand with expelling or disenfranchising human populations, just as forced removals were key to apartheid’s spatial politics.⁴² And today, the imperative of environmental conservation can seem at odds with making economic improvements for low-income populations. Ecotourism is popular in part because it has a reputation as a “holy grail,” capable of reconciling the competing priorities of equitable development and environmental conservation (Büscher 54). In theory, local publics – especially isolated rural communities with few sources of income – should be able to profit from conserving their environmental assets and rendering them accessible to visitors, if tourism is structured to have low impacts on the environment. However, in practice, locals and the poor profit less from ecotourism than we might like to believe: the ecotourism market in South Africa “is set to benefit ...

⁴² The irony of conserving land for animals while refusing place to people is pursued, for example, in Nadine Gordimer’s short story “The Ultimate Safari,” which tracks a group of Mozambican refugees across Kruger National Park (in *Life Times: Stories, 1952-2007*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010). See Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* and Büscher, *Transforming the Frontier* on the removal of human populations to create national parks in South Africa and elsewhere.

(overwhelmingly white) market leaders” and “black political elites” (Büscher 59). Conservation areas that straddle international borders (“peace parks”) have been narrated by the ANC government as mediators of international relations, and sites for simultaneous nature conservation and community empowerment. But as documented by Bram Büscher, programs in Community-Based Natural Resource Management too often frame “contradictory realities in consensus terms,” sidelining the groups they supposedly empower (xiii).⁴³ Ecotourism, as Büscher suggests, cannot resolve the heritage of anti-human conservation if pursued within a neoliberal model. These politics of ecotourism are an important backdrop for Mda’s novels *The Heart of Redness* and *The Whale Caller*. The novels explore, respectively, the creation of a backpackers’ hostel to provide coastal wilderness experiences in the Eastern Cape; and the infrastructure surrounding whale-watching in the town of Hermanus in the Western Cape.

Another backdrop is the recent upsurge of culinary tourism: travel undertaken to visit restaurants or food and wine producers and to experience regional cuisines (Hall and Gössling 6-7). With culinary tourism on the rise worldwide, international travel columnists present South Africa as a must-see destination for foodies.⁴⁴ Cape Town is

⁴³ As an iconic example, Büscher discusses the case of the Makuleke people who own the northernmost section of Kruger National Park. The Makuleke “were not taken seriously” in negotiations to form the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park linking Kruger in South Africa with the Limpopo National Park in Mozambique (55). See also footnote 36.

⁴⁴ Recent travel reviews recommending culinary tourism in South Africa have appeared, for example, in UK publications such as *The Telegraph* (Graham Boynton, “South Africa: Raise a Glass to Cape Cuisine,” 30 January 2016) and *The Independent* (Melissa Twigg, “Move Over Cape Town, There’s a New Big Hitter on the Food Scene,” 26 February 2018), as well as the travel industry publication *Travel Weekly* (Dorine Reinstein, “Africa Seeks Its Place at the Table with Culinary Travel,” 27 April 2017). Meanwhile, travel agencies such as Cape Fusion Tours and Food Routes – “your one stop ... site for Foodie Travel” – offer culinary tours in South Africa (“Food Routes” website).

celebrated for gourmet restaurants such as Test Kitchen, noted for its food and wine pairings. Johannesburg, meanwhile, is marketed for offering not only gourmet options, but also casual South African and pan-African culinary experiences (Twigg). African authenticity may be invoked to encourage culinary tourism: “[T]here are culinary experiences in Africa that you simply won’t find anywhere else in the world;” “[T]ravelers ... want to taste something that’s typically ‘African’ to fully immerse themselves in the country” (Reinstein). Yet just as available is the discourse that South Africa’s Western Cape is a good place for food tourism because it is like Europe, but cheaper.⁴⁵ Culinary tourism’s place in the packaging of a national culture is perhaps still undecided. In the view of food guide writer Jean-Paul Rossouw, South Africa is still finding its way to a “national cuisine” because apartheid delayed a “shared national culture” (qtd in Twigg). Similarly, for chef and food writer Nompumelelo Mqwebu, a South African “food history” has been “either misconstrued or really lacking, and it’s because of a failure of acknowledgement of the various cultural groups that are indigenous to South Africa” as well as disinterest in the available “indigenous crops” (qtd in Twigg). As Mqwebu implies, cuisine and culinary tourism in South Africa are entangled with both cultural and material histories of racialized inequality, and often with their contemporary perpetuation.

These tensions are obvious in the wine industry, an important component of culinary tourism in the Western Cape. The winelands around Stellenbosch, Franschhoek, Constantia, and increasingly Hermanus are key foodie destinations (Boynton; “2nd

⁴⁵ See Boynton, discussed further in Chapter Four.

Annual South African”).⁴⁶ The mainstays here are wine tastings, often with food pairings, and tours of mountainside wineries. But options such as foraging and farm stays are increasingly popular (Reinstein). Although many tourists will take in the gorgeous views and the fine wines without a worry, wine tourism invokes problematic labor histories and contemporary conditions. South Africa’s wine industry was first based on the labor of slaves (brought to the Cape Colony from elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa and from India, Indonesia, and Madagascar). The abolishment of slavery at the Cape Colony in 1834 did not change worker conditions much. During the apartheid era “wine industry workers experienced some of the worst working conditions in South Africa” (Herman 29). Today, some wineries are responding to a combination of political pressure, economic opportunity through Fairtrade branding, and perhaps “moral obligation” by changing exploitative practices (Herman 4). Yet the wine industry remains characterized by troubling conditions. Since the end of apartheid, maintaining profitability in what is now an export-driven market has meant a number of “neoliberal moves towards more casual and contract labour,” increasing the gap between a population of skilled workers with stable employment versus the precariously employed multitudes of rural poor (Herman 35).⁴⁷ Benefits from the foreign capital attracted through food and wine tourism

⁴⁶ In 2017, a series of annual South African Food and Wine Tourism Reports were launched as an effort to get a handle on the tourist market’s food-related desires. Their second annual report (2018) found that in the Western Cape, wine tourism grew 16% from 2016 to 2017. 99% of Cape Town -focused itineraries booked through the surveyed travel operators also included the nearby winelands around Stellenbosch. Wine tourists were noted for spending more than average tourists do (“2nd Annual South African”).

⁴⁷ Improving these conditions is challenging for a number of reasons, including neoliberalization and also the frequency with which union organizers are denied entry to farms (Herman 32). There are also some reports that certain wine estates continue the “infamous ‘dopstelsel’ or dop/tot system in which workers were part-paid in low quality wine,” an apartheid-era practice that has been outlawed since 1962 (Herman 31). Even

need to be measured in relation to historic and postapartheid inequalities. Culinary tourism is emblematic of the issues with postapartheid economic growth.

Alongside culinary tourism itself, there are numerous ways in which tourism and the culinary industry intersect (Hall and Gössling 6). All tourists eat, for starters. Their presence affects the food industry whether or not they are traveling for gastronomic purposes. And the line between culinary tourism (motivated by eating regional food and wine) versus ecotourism (motivated by viewing nature or thinking about conservation) is frequently blurry. In South Africa, visits to scenic wineries are popular with tourists interested in sustainability.⁴⁸ Ecotouristic lodges, such as Singita Safari Lodges, are increasingly marketing their food as part of the “safari experience” (Reinstein). The pairing of culinary tourism with ecotourism is perhaps astute marketing for South Africa: many restaurateurs and travel agents feel that even as culinary tourism increases, clients from the United States and Europe make their first priority going on safari, perhaps with a food-focused experience as an add-on (Reinstein). Likewise, visitors may come to Hermanus for whale-watching, but meanwhile seek out Hermanus’s restaurant scene. *The Whale Caller* depicts Hermanus as offering little South African fare, with a mostly multiculturalist culinary orientation. Cuisines from many parts of the world are available to whale-watching tourists. Like culinary tourism, this food globalization becomes suspect when it creates an exclusive eating culture unaffordable for local residents – just as ecotourism becomes suspect when it is yet another exclusionary practice designed to

where this practice does not occur today, it has left a legacy of alcoholism, domestic violence, foetal alcohol syndrome, and endemic tuberculosis (Herman 31).

⁴⁸ 85% of wine-oriented tourists consider practices such as organic farming, carbon neutrality, biodynamic winemaking, and even “social equality” when deciding which winery to book at (“2nd Annual South African”).

make natural resources available to the wealthy for leisure, rather than to those who need them for their livelihood. Social inequalities perpetuated by tourism are important contexts for both *The Whale Caller* and *The Heart of Redness*. Trends in tourism are fodder for Mda's satire of neoliberal development, operating at the conjuncture of ecotourism and eating culture.

To understand the importance of food to a critique of neoliberalism, we must think about alimentation in general as well as in the context of tourism. Food functions as a technology for differentiating privilege across the globe. Global food regimes have taken a number of configurations since the nineteenth century, as discussed in my introduction. Today, the circulation of food is a crucial technology of neoliberal economics, and a key arena of their class-differentiated effects. As Hall and Gössling point out in thinking about tourism, food, and globalization, the “modern agrifood system” has meant a “loss of traditional farming systems and products ... and increasing food insecurity in many locations as a result of lower local production and dependence on global supply chains stretching thousands of kilometres” (Hall and Gössling 13). The industrial food system is also a central factor in pollution, ecosystem degradation, and climate change. Such impacts are distributed unequally, affecting populations more or less based on class, race, and citizenship. Unequal relations to the food regime manifest through a number of interconnected systems, including not only production circuits but also delivery systems such as restaurants and supermarkets. Eating out is a luxury for the middle and upper classes, while kitchen labor is often underpaid, even sourced by human trafficking. Restaurants, bars, and agriculture are three major areas of labor trafficking, all connected to the food industry (Godoy n.p.). Supermarkets likewise have tremendous

social and environmental costs, as scholar-activists such as Raj Patel and Chris Carlsson describe. The supermarket's supposed economic efficiency entails the "resource profligacy" of expecting to eat "foods from around the world, on tap, all the time" (Patel *Stuffed and Starved* 254). Supermarket food is cheap because enormous energy inputs to industrial agriculture and trucking firms are subsidized to hide real costs (both economic and ecological). This typifies capitalist logic's creation of false "externalities" (Carlsson 45). Sourcing for supermarket chains also makes subsistence products (such as mollusks in Hermanus or quinoa in Bolivia) unaffordable for locals at the site of production, whose access may be restricted by inflated prices, conservation legislation, and the privatization of land and waterways.⁴⁹ Supermarkets ostensibly diversify consumer choices, but "convenience, low prices, and a paradise of choice in supermarkets go hand in hand with price gouging, discrimination, exploitative labour practices, local community destruction, environmental degradation, and shiftless profiteering" (Patel *Stuffed and Starved* 237-8). Particularly for low-income customers, supermarkets provide "the kind of choice that's no choice at all ... 'Coke or Pepsi?'" (Patel *Stuffed and Starved* 252). Across production and consumption, the food regime speaks to the hidden costs of neoliberal "choice" and "efficiency."

The discourse of "food sovereignty" disrupts complacency with a neoliberal food regime, and cuts against elitist eating cultures, insisting on the importance of hunger as well as taste to food politics. This concept originates with the transnational farmer-activist organization La Via Campesina, which defines food sovereignty as "the right of

⁴⁹ Demand for quinoa in wealthy nations has soared since the early 2000s, making the Andean staple difficult for Bolivians to afford (Romero and Shahriari) – a by-now hackneyed example of food globalization's inequities.

peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (“International Peasant’s Voice”). Food sovereignty should not be confused with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)’s concept “food security”: that “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food” (qtd in Patel “Food Sovereignty” 1). Food sovereignty is a “deeper concept” because “it proposes not just guaranteed access to food, but democratic control over the food system” (Holt-Giménez “From Food Crisis” 595.) Food sovereignty does not necessitate that a community produce all of its own food. It does entail local autonomy, which might combine local production with, for example, equitable trade terms. Food sovereignty functions as a “movement of movements”: a broad umbrella sheltering a plethora of grassroots organizations, which focus on foodways to denounce ecosocial violence (Holt-Giménez “Introduction” 2).

Of course, the diffuse shape of a decentralized umbrella movement entails that food sovereignty means different things to different proponents. Activists such as Tabara Ndiaye and Mariamé Ouattara understand food sovereignty as a feminist platform. Ndiaye and Ouattara are consultants of the New Field Foundation (a network in West Africa that disseminates grants to women’s farming associations) and contributors to *Food Movements Unite!*, a farmer-activist and scholar-activist volume. They argue that because women perform 70% of food production and processing in Africa, food sovereignty necessitates women’s leadership (Ndiaye and Ouattara 53).⁵⁰ Ndiaye and

⁵⁰ According to Ndiaye and Ouattara, many West African communities expect women to ensure food security without owning the land that they work. Food production lands are thus vulnerable to cooption for other uses, such as sale to multinationals (59-60).

Ouattara advocate that postcolonial states address agricultural policies toward rural women, whom they claim are the farming experts, rather than toward men and youth (64). Many postcolonial governments approach rural women about food security only “in the form of instruction ... [arriving] in a village with new seeds, chemicals, and fertilizers and tell[ing] women farmers what they must do, without asking what they think” (55-6). Such practices ignore rural women’s extensive agricultural knowledge. Ndiaye and Ouattara emphasize that “[t]he most effective method of achieving thriving food systems in West Africa is to support rural women to bring it about themselves. It is not a question of outside agencies ... doing it for them. ... [External] [o]rganizations ... must give rural women and their [local] organizations enough leeway to decide what they will produce and how” (66-7). In other words, food security cannot be instituted top-down, but must arrive through feminist sovereignty. While Ndiaye and Ouattara are based in a very different region from South Africa’s Eastern Cape, their conceptual thinking about women and food sovereignty can support a reading of Mda’s representation of rural women as engaging in feminist food sovereignty.

And global models for theorizing food sovereignty have been pursued both by activist organizations such as La Via Campesina and by feminist scholars. Ndiaye and Ouattara impute the tendency to ignore rural women’s “centrality ... to food security” to women’s “low status” (55). To historicize these gendered relations in agriculture is to look at the dynamics of capitalist imperialism. Agricultural policies of British and French colonials in Africa tended toward granting land and training to men, while women farmers were subordinated, asked to help their husbands grow cash crops (Federici “On Capitalism” 2). When we take this into account, feminist food sovereignty can be

positioned as “a rejection of the capitalist model of agriculture,” in Silvia Federici’s words (“On Capitalism” 5). Federici identifies the neoliberal era as “but the latest act in [a] long process that has been unfolding for at least two centuries” (“On Capitalism” 4). Land expropriation, cash crop systems, and monocultures were introduced by imperialists. Many postcolonial states maintain these commercial, export-focused agricultural systems now, because of economic and political dependence on Euroamerica. Federici sees capitalism as inevitably producing inequality and hunger: “Neo-liberalism, the speculative drives of the financial system, the promotion of bio-fuel, all have *exacerbated* trends that are *inscribed* in the logic of agriculture and food production under capitalism” (“On Capitalism” 4, my emphasis). Federici demands the demolition of capitalism tout court, not just its reregulation or de-neoliberalization.⁵¹ On the other hand, Vandana Shiva dates the sea change in agriculture not to the dawn of capitalism, but to the Green Revolution in the 1970s, the advent of neoliberalism (*Staying Alive* 120). But Shiva’s analysis gels with that of Federici in castigating the masculinist marketization of agriculture, which has increased “women’s dependence on wage labour” by moving them “from the ecological category of ... soil-builders and primary producers ... to the economic category of subsidiary workers and wage earners” (*Staying Alive* 114). There is, of course, a certain gender essentialism to these analyses, but also a helpful historicization of the gendering of neoliberal-era agriculture. The anti-neoliberal and feminist position espoused by Federici and Shiva appears in many but not all invocations

⁵¹ Federici does risk overgeneralizing, claiming that women “in every part of the world” once had major roles in agriculture, but were “relegated to the rank of ‘helpers,’ field hands, or domestic workers” with the advent of capitalism (“On Capitalism” 2). Such global flattening may imperil Federici’s evidentiary process. Yet I am compelled by her temporal long view.

of food sovereignty, which can name a range of positions: some in favor of reregulating the market, some demanding capitalism's overthrow, and others indeed neoliberal.⁵² La Via Campesina itself presents food sovereignty as a big tent, a "pluralist and multicultural movement, independent from any political, economic or other type of affiliation" ("International Peasant's Voice"). We would best understand food sovereignty as a flexible concept. Its advocates tend to prioritize ecologically sound foodways and agriculture systems; land and food rights for indigenous people, people of color, the poor, and subaltern women; local autonomy coupled with transnational coalitional work; and a focus on food systems as both a primary arena of oppression and an opportunity for change.

The priorities of food sovereignty are present in Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, if overshadowed by a dominant narrative about masculinist development plans in the form of ecotourism. My next section will use food sovereignty as an organizing concept to extract a feminist environmental politics from *The Heart of Redness*. In *The Whale Caller*, meanwhile, supermarkets and fine dining both come under fire. Across both of these novels, Mda refers to food to satirize the neoliberal regime, while scenes of food also splinter off into a range of complications to his novels' eco-politics. Mda's multifaceted deployment of food invites us to complicate the analysis of literary food in postcolonial studies. Postcolonial scholarship on food has often emphasized ways in which "food frequently operates as a signifier for ethnicity," whether that ethnicity is

⁵² See Holt-Giménez's edited volume *Food Movements Unite!* for a collection of essays representing this range. I would argue, however, for labeling neoliberal perspectives *distortions* of food sovereignty, much as political economist Massimo De Angelis has flagged capitalist distortions of the "commons" concept that evacuate its leftist heft. See De Angelis, "The Tragedy of the Capitalist Commons," in *Turbulence* 5, 2009, p. 32.

articulated in terms of purity or hybridity (Huggan and Tiffin 157).⁵³ But by thinking in terms of the food regime, we can mine Mda and other postcolonial authors not just for metaphor, but for materialist perspectives on food systems as a facet of neoliberal economics and environmental degradation. By materialist, I mean a perspective attentive to the concrete realities both of economic dynamics and of ecological impacts.

Postcolonial novels have much to offer to such an analysis of the literature of food.

The potential of postcolonial novels to effect these critiques, however, may be tempered by the fact that their own circulation relies on popular marketability within a neoliberal commodity culture. References to food could enhance a contemporary novel's marketability, perhaps especially for postcolonial fiction circulating in the global North, given literary food's mainstream currency. Writers such as Vandana Shiva have been exposing the ecological and social devastation of neoliberal food systems since at least the 1980s, while Harriet Friedmann theorized the food regime in the 1970s. But food politics have more recently become a flashpoint in bourgeois environmentalism, creating markets for the literature of food. Witness, for example, the proliferation of American "locavore memoirs," such as Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Gary Paul Nabhan's *Coming Home to Eat*, and Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*.⁵⁴ Another genre that has gained traction might be called the food regime exposé, epitomized by films such as Robert Kenner's *Food, Inc.* and non-fiction narratives such as Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals*. Such texts may miss or muddy the power differentials of global food politics, as Community

⁵³ See the introduction and Chapter Two.

⁵⁴ Allison Carruth traces this phenomenon in the final chapter of *Global Appetites*.

Supported Agriculture and farmers markets may fall short of confronting race, class, and citizenship.⁵⁵ Still, mainstream interest in food would make a variety of food fictions more marketable in the US, creating space for food literature from the global South too. This could allow eco-oriented novelists such as Mda (if we also frame him as a food writer) to redirect us toward analyzing the dynamics between differently empowered groups in the food regime. It is for postcolonial ecocritics oriented towards food both to celebrate this potential, and to note the various foreclosures entailed in the canonization of a bourgeois form often written in English by postcolonial elites. Like many authors canonized by postcolonial ecocritics, Mda is from the global South, but was educated internationally, writes in English, and is housed in a Northern institution.⁵⁶ He can be classified as a postcolonial elite. And the Anglophone novel is an elite form, enjoying wide circulation. Mda's novels, rather than his anti-apartheid plays, have brought him international fame.⁵⁷ He describes these novels as a postapartheid "luxury": during apartheid, there was "an urgency of writing novels that would have an immediate impact on the struggle ... We're no longer writing for the struggle; we're writing for ourselves" (qtd in Donadio). A more cynical reader might suggest that the end of apartheid has

⁵⁵ See the introduction and Chapter Three.

⁵⁶ Mda studied painting in Switzerland and obtained advanced degrees in theater and communications from the University of Cape Town and Ohio University, before taking posts at Yale and the University of Vermont. Since 2002, he has resided in Ohio, teaching literature and creative writing. Mda is among the few black South African authors acclaimed not only in South Africa (where he has won every literary prize) but internationally, and published in the United States (by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in his case).

⁵⁷ In Mda's 2002 satirical play "The Importance of Eating," "eating" comes up constantly, as a dead metaphor in many African contexts for officials taking a little extra. The play's central character is under pressure to "eat" amidst the corruption of the postapartheid government.

liberated Mda to more internationally marketable forms and themes. Critics may hesitate to foreground the commodity status of Mda's novels, as it compromises the novels' framing as moral tales about a subaltern environmentalism that steps outside capitalism. Focusing on Mda's food politics will instead reveal a sharper critique of neoliberal systems and their ecosocial impacts, while also attending to some of the ways in which gender politics and consumption get ugly in Mda's writing.

Ecotourism versus Food Sovereignty

The Heart of Redness follows Camagu, a black South African who has spent his adult life in America. After apartheid's demise, Camagu returns to South Africa to look for work, but grows discouraged by corruption and favoritism in Johannesburg. He plans to return to America, but instead follows a beautiful stranger named NomaRussia to Qolorha, a coastal village of Xhosa people in the Eastern Cape. Here, Camagu becomes romantically interested in two more women, Xoliswa Ximiya and Qukezwa, and gets involved in local politics. Two factions called the Believers and Unbelievers have squared off regarding proposals to build a casino, which would expand Qolorha's modest tourist industry. Mda interweaves this contemporary story with another narrative set during the Xhosa cattle killing in the 1850s, a historical event that originated conflict between Believers and Unbelievers. In the midst of European military incursions and the bio-ecological assault of imported lungsickness on the amaXhosa's cattle, a young woman named Nongqawuse reported receiving a prophecy in 1856. If the amaXhosa killed their cattle and burnt their crops, the prophecy stated, their ancestors would rise to bring new cattle and expel the Europeans. Riven between the believers of the prophecy

(the *amathamba*) and the unbelievers (the *amagogotya*), the amaXhosa were overswept. Europeans seized amaXhosa lands and reduced 50,000 famished people to wage laborers in the Cape Colony. 40,000 starved.⁵⁸ In Mda's novel, the Believers and Unbelievers have been at odds since the cattle killing. Their 1990s conflict is fueled by these remembered politics of hunger from the colonial context, now intermingling with concerns about conservation and postapartheid "development." Bhonco, leader of the Unbelievers and father of Xoliswa Ximiya, asserts that the casino will bring jobs and civilization. The Believers, led by Qukezwa's father Zim, insist the plan will destroy Qolorha's natural resources for the pleasure of tourists, without significant benefits for locals. Camagu proposes the alternative of a backpackers' hostel for tourists interested in "communing with unspoiled nature" (201). He describes ecotourism as "the kind of tourism that will benefit the people, that will not destroy indigenous forests, that will not bring hordes of people who will pollute the rivers and drive away the birds" (201). At first glance, Camagu's plan seems like the right way to harmonize environmentalism with equitable development. But just as the "holy grail" of ecotourism is often suspect, Camagu's idea is self-interested, providing him with both income and personal satisfaction. In creating profit for an outsider, Camagu's ecotourism scheme resembles the casino plan that it would displace.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Mda draws on Jeff Pieres's 1989 historical account, *The Dead Will Arise*, in framing his narrative of this event. See Wenzel, *Bulletproof*, 19.

⁵⁹ Moreover, Camagu relies on an outmoded and politically suspect concept of "unspoiled nature": wilderness that human activities have not affected, something that in fact exists nowhere. See William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995), 69-90.

Mda's novel may appear to idealize ecotourism, but only if we collapse Mda's perspective with that of Camagu.⁶⁰ Mda however destabilizes Camagu's authority at times, particularly in narrative threads concerning food and local women. While Camagu and his plans occupy most of the narrative space, I will concentrate on the subordinated narratives of women characters' food gathering activities and environmentalist discourse. Prior to Camagu's arrival in Qolorha, local women including Qukezwa, MamCirha, and NoGiant already have strategies to secure their families without large environmental impacts: they combine subsistence fishing with minimal participation in the tourist economy. Qukezwa becomes not just a love interest for Camagu, but also his key interlocutor on ecosocial issues. And while Qukezwa is positioned in terms of her connection to indigenous Khoi heritage, her environmentalist discourse exceeds the stereotype of the ecological Indian. Her savvy rhetoric on economic and ecological issues combines Xhosa history, local botanical knowledge, and democratic discourse. Such tools help Qukezwa (and MamCirha and NoGiant) pursue feminist food sovereignty, an alternative to ecotourism and to intervention by outsiders such as Camagu.

While Mda associates Camagu with ecotourism, Qukezwa is the key figure for feminist food sovereignty. Qukezwa, not Camagu, formulates keen critiques of the casino project. When learning about the casino scheme, Camagu asks Qukezwa why her father

⁶⁰ Meg Samuelson sees Mda's and Camagu's perspectives as aligned, which leads her to find Mda's novel anti-feminist. She alleges that Mda uses "the female form to house his 'heart of redness,'" epitomizing the novel's "reliance on a set of gendered tropes spawned in both colonial and nationalist discourse" ("Historical Time" 17). Focusing on sketches of Qukezwa, Xoliswa Ximiya, and NomaRussia, Samuelson ignores other female characters (such as MamCirha and NoGiant), who epitomize not "redness," but the clever integration of subsistence food gathering and the tourism economy, as I will discuss. Moreover, in focusing on Qukezwa as "reproductive body," Samuelson ignores Qukezwa's voice ("Historical Time" 17).

Zim is “against progress” (102). Camagu asks for Zim’s views rather than supposing that Qukezwa’s own opinion might be of interest, one of many details that destabilize Camagu’s authority in the novel by situating his masculinism as troubling. Qukezwa’s response does not parrot her father’s ideas, but rather shows her own understanding and investment in the issue: the casino would impoverish local people, because “[t]his whole sea will belong to tourists and their boats and their water sports. Those women will no longer harvest the sea for their own food and to sell at the Blue Flamingo. Water sports will take over our sea!” (103). This conversation sways Camagu to Qukezwa’s view, which prioritizes use of the environment by locals, especially women. Qukezwa does not, however, represent some unchanging indigenous tradition.⁶¹ She is modern and dynamic, dissecting the casino plan based on an up-to-date understanding of foodways and privatization. Qukezwa combines ecological knowledge with a sense of “how tourism development schemes can work,” and moreover has “desires . . . in part conditioned by the capitalist economy,” as Byron Caminero-Santangelo puts it (300). In this way, the novel complicates “the image of the eco-indigene, in which indigenous peoples are envisioned as living in perfect harmony with nature and having an ideal ecological wisdom” (Caminero-Santangelo 299). Qukezwa rather than Camagu scrutinizes “development,” local economics, and environmental concerns.

Camagu, however, steals credit for Qukezwa’s ideas by occupying more space

⁶¹ This is Anthony Vital’s reading: he criticizing Mda for associating Qukezwa with the indigenous and “the local, coded in terms of a vulnerable and feminised pre-modern,” while Camagu functions as “the male hero, breaking ranks with a rapacious modernity, [who] rides into town to save the local-in-distress” (“Situating Ecology” 311). This reading ignores Qukezwa’s rebuffs of Camagu and the fact that it is he who adopts her political stance.

than her – both in Qolorha’s public fora and in Mda’s narrative. Locals call him out, challenging his right to public space in several instances. At a village fundraiser, Qukezwa compels Camagu to publically declare which woman from a crowd is most beautiful, subjecting his “cosmopolitan judiciousness to delightful mockery” (Barnard 166). Similarly, when Camagu chides the casino plan at a meeting with the developers, Bhonco demands, “[I]s he circumcised? Are we going to listen to uncircumcised boys here?” (202). For the amaXhosa and other southern African groups, circumcision ceremonializes the transition into manhood (Vincent 79). Camagu dismisses this tradition: “Facts are facts, whether they come from somebody who is circumcised or not” (202). He would use a rationalist discourse of objectivity to make identity irrelevant to his right to speak. But Zim concurs with his nemesis Bhonco on the importance of circumcision: “Yes, it does matter. . . . Of course, if this son of Cesane is uncircumcised we shall not deal with him” (202). Ready even to cross the line between Believers and Unbelievers, Zim affirms that being an outsider to Xhosa practices *does* matter in desiring space to speak. This passage not only checks Camagu’s authority, but dispels critical over-identification of Camagu as “the character most closely associated with the author” (Samuelson “Historical Time” 17). Mda questions, rather than endorses, the facility with which a Western-educated interloper claims undeserved discursive space. Whereas the fundraiser flusters Camagu, he bluffs his way out of the circumcision question, challenging Bhonco “to come and inspect [him] here in public to see if [he] ha[s] a foreskin” because “[h]e knows that no one will dare take up that challenge. And if at any time they did, they would not find any foreskin. He was circumcised, albeit in the most unrespectable manner, at the hospital” (202). In order to speak in Qolorha’s public

forum, Camagu would evacuate Xhosa circumcision of its meaning, substituting an anatomical status for the cultural production of manhood. His disrespect towards this practice lowers his character, rendering his occupation of public space in Qolorha a usurpation. The novel satirizes this malapportionment of space in the public sphere by mirroring it in the distribution of narrative space. From this perspective, Camagu's domination of the narrative throws his role in local politics into question, rather than indicating anti-feminism on Mda's part.

Yet while Camagu's disrespect for local discourses of manhood indicates his invasive behavior as an outsider, masculinism on the village council also comes under fire. Local men level rhetoric on the right to speak against not just Camagu, but also Qukezwa. She stands trial for violating the Xhosa law against felling trees (other than the abundant mimosa). Qukezwa explains that she only cuts down "foreign trees" that use too much water and kill indigenous species (215-16). Qukezwa bases her actions on botanical knowledge, inspiring the respect of the many elders who "nod their agreement" (216). However, Chief Xikixa insists that Qukezwa's father be tried in her place because she is unmarried, and therefore a minor. Mda spotlights the gendering of the right to public space, juxtaposing this scene with the other that privileges circumcised men. Qukezwa protests that unmarried women being tried as minors comes from "the old law ... that weighed heavily on our shoulders during the sufferings of the Middle Generations. In the new South Africa where there is no discrimination, it does not work" (213). "Old law" refers not to an indigenous tradition but to "customary law," a colonial divide-and-rule

tactic.⁶² Of course, that “there is no discrimination” in postapartheid South Africa is not true. Qukezwa’s comment sounds naïve, but it could as easily be strategic. Whether or not Qukezwa truly believes the whopper that South Africa has eliminated discrimination, she plies democratic nationalist discourse as part of her feminist toolkit for claiming space. Qukezwa utilizes Xhosa tradition, the laws of the postapartheid state, and ecology all as tools that she can recombine in service of her own agenda, jumping across scales between the local and the national, and as concerned with feminism and class equity as with ecological conservation.

Indeed, Qukezwa and other Qolorhan women have an environmentally-friendly adaptation to the encroachments of tourism that predates either the casino plan or Camagu’s arrival. This narrative thread contests the primacy of Camagu’s development ideas, which include both his ecotourism plan and a fishing cooperative. Qukezwa, MamCirha, and NoGiant harvest mollusks for familial consumption, but also for sale to the existing local hotel and to individual tourists. Thus they combine direct subsistence with tapping into the tourist industry. This bimodal strategy insulates them from full incorporation into the food regime as wage-earners and buyers of food, while they still derive some benefit from the globalized economy. In contrast, Bhonco’s wife NoPetticoat often “walks to the hotel to find out if there is any [nanny] work. She has had to do that

⁶² As Mahmood Mamdani explains, colonial authorities in South Africa and many other parts of Africa ruled African populations as “tribes” by establishing “customary law,” naming a member of each community as “chief” (22). These chiefs possessed judicial, legislative, executive *and* administrative power. As Mamdani emphasizes, “[o]ne should not be misled by the nomenclature [chief] into thinking of this as a holdover from the precolonial era” (23). Instead, customary law was based on colonial states’ choice to privilege one of many African traditions, “the one with the least historical depth, that of nineteenth-century conquest states. . . . In this sense, [customary law] was an ideological construct” (22).

since she discovered that the managers call her only as a last resort. Their first choices are the young women whose bodies are still supple enough to make red-blooded male tourists salivate” (6-7). The tourist industry mistreats the local women that it marginally employs, as manifests both in ageist exclusion of NoPetticoat and exploitation of the younger nannies. The women who harvest abalone and mussels for both subsistence and sale retain greater autonomy, making their practice of food sovereignty the more advantageous adaptation to the swelling tourist economy. Nonetheless, the casino developers threaten their income model by proposing to privatize the sea.

Enter Camagu. Prior to articulating his ecotourism idea, Camagu initiates a cooperative society for gathering and selling mollusks. Just as his counterarguments to the casino spring from Qukezwa’s astuteness rather than his own ingenuity or his PhD, this scheme adds little to the existing successes of women from Qolorha. When he first encounters NoGiant, MamCirha, and Qukezwa harvesting mussels and oysters, “Camagu is curious. ... He is not one for seafood, and was not aware that the amaXhosa of the wild coast eat the slimy creatures from the sea” (101-2). He becomes interested for gastronomic reasons: “It all started with oysters and mussels that he ate at Zim’s. He was sold on the taste” (138). He starts buying from MamCirha and NoGiant, but soon wants

to learn to harvest the sea himself. But the women would not teach him. He was good as a customer and not as a competitor. One morning he found Qukezwa harvesting the sea. She ... offered to teach him. ...

NoGiant and MamCirha were not happy that he was no longer buying their seafood now that he could harvest his own. In fact, he could not eat all his harvest, and this gave him a good idea. He had no means of earning a living in this village. ... He made up his mind to catch oysters and mussels, keep them in sea water as he was taught by the women, take them in his car, and sell them to hotels in East London. ... He was not going to compete with the women. Instead he would form a cooperative society with them. ... It is not as lucrative as they might wish. It is struggling on. But Camagu, for the first time after many years, is a very fulfilled man. (138-9)

Camagu's motives for harvesting the sea and forming a co-op are gastronomic preference and economic necessity. But his payoff is emotional satisfaction. The idea of helping the women (however unrealistic) makes Camagu feel "fulfilled." MamCirha and NoGiant, however, see Camagu in economic terms: either he is their customer, or he is their competitor. They are not seeking an external helper, although Camagu styles himself as such. It is Camagu who needs their knowledge. Mda underscores the gender dynamics of Camagu's leeching paternalism by repeatedly referring to MamCirha and NoGiant as "the women," while linking Camagu's self-satisfaction to him being a "man." This language helps identify Mda's tone towards Camagu's masculinism as satirical rather than indulgent. The women's attitude resembles comments by food sovereignty organizers Tabara Ndiaye and Mariamé Ouattara that rural women would prefer to manage their own food systems and be consulted on what they need, rather than "outside agencies or someone else doing it for them" (Ndiaye and Ouattara 66-7). The cooperative society neither substantially improves the women's material circumstances ("It is not as lucrative as they might wish"), nor revolutionizes their social roles. More than anything, Camagu co-opts space from Qolorha's women – in the industry of harvesting the sea, and in the narrative space of the novel.

By giving Camagu and his ideas so much room in the narrative, Mda does reify a focus on ecosocial cure-alls that we can associate with a masculinist, urban-centric, and Western politics of elite expertise imposed on the rural global South. But we can also read around this thread, attending to moments of satirical play against Camagu and to the understated narrative of feminist food sovereignty, an alternative eco-politics. But does displacing an ecotourism narrative in favor of a food sovereignty narrative mean

addressing ecosocial challenges by extracting from literature yet another simplification? How might literary uses of food instead render ecosocial questions yet more difficult?

Looking versus Eating

So far I have followed the vectors of food and gender to find a submerged food sovereignty narrative in *The Heart of Redness*. This narrative offers an alternative to the masculinist and externally-imposed eco-development strategies central to the novel. Mda's more recent novel, *The Whale Caller*, proves less amenable to a recuperative feminist reading. The leading lady is Saluni, an acerbic village drunk. Petty jealousy governs her response to the Whale Caller's flirtation with Sharisha, a whale. There are greater stakes to this lovers' quarrel, which pits the Whale Caller's care for cetaceans against Saluni's concern for economic inequities. Their relationship problematizes the disarticulation of conversations about environment and about social justice. For example, Saluni castigates environmentalism focused on megafauna for greenwashing inattention to poverty. This critique is on point, but Mda makes its mouthpiece a "cackling" shrew who beleaguers her boyfriend and hates nature (114). Romantic jealousy can hardly seed an energizing subaltern environmentalism such as that springing from food sovereignty in *The Heart of Redness*. Saluni is justice-oriented when thinking conceptually at a societal scale, but is less thoughtful about either the planetary scale or the personal. It seems the novel would have us condemn this failure to think across scales.

To complicate matters, the flipside of Saluni's indictment of neoliberal economics is her voracious consumer desire. Discomfort with Mda's representation of a subaltern woman as material girl may have motivated readers of *The Whale Caller* to focus on the

nonhuman, rather than grappling with social inequality and cravings to consume.⁶³ I instead sink into these unsettling aspects of Mda's novel, which not only smack of anti-feminism, but also exceed tidy morals about subaltern environmentalism. By looking at the manifestations of inequality that surround Saluni, I highlight connections between ecotourism and eating culture, whose shared exclusivity Mda subjects to satire. Scrutinizing Saluni also compels an uncomfortable recognition of the foodie desires that dog anti-capitalist and environmentalist pronouncements on food politics. Questions of hunger versus taste emerge through the novel's fixation on optics: motifs of blindness, sight, looking, images, and windows evoke convergences and divergences between visual, alimentary, and economic modes of consumption. As I will argue, *The Whale Caller* uses troubling appetites and unexpected optics to hash out discomfort with the politics of consumption. This discomfort applies not only to rhetoric on food, but also to consumer capitalism in general, and to the commodified status of the global environmental novel.

⁶³ *The Whale Caller* has attracted animal studies approaches from scholars such as Wendy Woodward, Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin, and Harry Sewlall. Woodward sees the whale Sharisha's death as a common tragedy of sacrificing fictional animals to a human idea of "the Animal," which shows that compassion occurs only when animals are individualized (301, 295-97). Sewlall and Huggan and Tiffin each argue that Mda contests "the boundary between the human and the non-human," in Sewlall's words (138). In Sewlall's rather clichéd reading, *The Whale Caller* "celebrates the possibility of existing in harmony with nature" (138). Huggan and Tiffin, in their coauthored book, tackle bestiality, "a profoundly difficult subject" (194). While these three readings contextualize Mda's representation of human-animal relations differently, they all suffer from the same limitation: the authors engage only those parts of the novel that focus on whales, ignoring how Mda intertwines animal questions with social justice themes.

The Whale Caller is the novel's environmentalist. But his concerns take ineffectual forms, oriented towards nature-appreciation and disinterested in human needs.

While fishing, he gets upset if

an angler does something unseemly, such as use a piece of lead to sink the hook. Although it is illegal to do since it pollutes the water, selfish people do it all the time.

“Forget about other people,” Saluni tells him, “and focus on your work.”

“It is dangerous to the wildlife, Saluni. Hooks and tackle in the sea will kill many innocent fish and other sea creatures.”

“We are catching them here, man. They are going to die in any case. And we're going to eat them. What's the difference?” (166)

Saluni's dismissal of nonhuman animals (and of the Whale Caller) is nasty. But the Whale Caller's environmental knowledge is naïve: that lead weights pollute the water is dubious, although seabirds could be harmed by swallowing them. The Whale Caller's environmentalism seems even less effective because it mostly concerns whales, especially Sharisha, his favorite whale and love object. His obsession becomes erotic (and ridiculous) in passages such as the following:

He breathes even faster. ... He blows his horn even harder, and the whale opens its mouth wide. ... She ... performs the tail-slapping dance that is part of the mating ritual. ... making loud smacking sounds that leave the Whale Caller breathing more and more heavily. ... He is drenched in sweat as his horn ejaculates sounds that rise from deep staccatos to high-pitched wails. (41)

After playing for Sharisha all night, the Whale Caller “was drenched in sweat and other secretions of the body. The front and the seat of his tuxedo pants were wet and sticky from the seed of life” (66). The reader might share the embarrassment expressed by Saluni, who shouts, “You have shamed yourself – and me!” (66). By satirizing the Whale Caller's sexual love for Sharisha, Mda questions forms of animal appreciation that would draw nonhumans into human relations. Still, why should human-nonhuman romance be so cringe-worthy? What portion of our discomfort or hilarity at this scene stems from

considering nonhumans inferior to humans? Saluni's dismissive anti-animal responses – such as mooning and cursing at Sharisha – are equally excruciating. Neither eroticizing nor denigrating animals yields an ethics to emulate.

Saluni gains moral ground when she indicts the Whale Caller for obscuring human needs, such as those of Lunga Tubu, a character based on a real boy from the township Zwelihle. Lunga Tubu sings for tips on Hermanus' waterfront. But the Whale Caller cannot hear his singing, to Saluni's outrage: "You can hear your whales a hundred miles away but you cannot hear a boy only a few meters below us? ... He is here at least twice a week. But you never see him because you only see whales" (84-85). The Whale Caller's myopic attention to megafauna blinds him to poverty, making him literally not "see" or "hear" Lunga Tubu. Motifs of sight, blindness, and myopia encode social and ecological (un)consciousness throughout the novel, later darkening in tone when Saluni blinds herself in order to monopolize the Whale Caller's attention. (These motifs also instrumentalize disability as a metaphor, a common literary tactic but a troubling one.) Upbraiding the Whale Caller for his inattention to Lunga Tubu, Saluni denounces how neoliberalization has worsened South Africa's income disparities:

Saluni explains ... that Lunga Tubu's presence here destabilises the serenity of Hermanus – a sanctified playground of the rich. ... His tiny frame nags the delicate souls with what they would rather forget: that only a few kilometres away there is ... a whole festering world of the disillusioned, those who have no stake in the much-talked-about black economic empowerment, which is really the issue of the black middle class. ... While the town of Hermanus is raking in fortunes from tourism, the mothers and fathers of Zwelihle are unemployed. ... [T]hey have seen politicians and trade union leaders become overnight millionaires. ... Only tiny crumbs trickle down to what used to be called "the masses." (86)

As Saluni elaborates, the mass public campaigns and rhetorics of the resistance to apartheid have given way to closed-door politics, with the formation of a black elite at the

expense of the majority. In expressing this widely-held view, Saluni articulates a canny concern for the poor, as thoughtless as she might be about nonhuman nature. The Whale Caller makes the complementary mistake, being too fixated on whales for the good of humans. Saluni and the Whale Caller's dismissals of each other's views allegorize the failures of certain conservationist and social justice discourses to integrate.

But Saluni is as devoted to neoliberal capitalism's structure of feeling as she is critical of its societal manifestations. She longs for fancy food and other goods. To this end, she proposes that the Whale Caller start fishing "to increase our income, so that we can raise our standard of living a bit" (161). While the keyword "standard of living" has fuzzy definitions, it comes from the early twentieth-century American middle class. The term "gained both popular and scientific usage at the turn of the [twentieth] century" in America, referring to "[a] quality of life to which many Americans aspired" and which "increasingly became defined through consumer goods" (Moskowitz 3, 4). By linking Saluni's aspirations to this structure of feeling, Mda critiques the proliferation of consumerist ideologies in postapartheid South Africa, a condition of the country's reentry into the neoliberal global economy.⁶⁴ Saluni originally plans to generate a modest extra income by selling fish, as well as eating the fish itself: grilled, curried, and pickled fish vary the menu of mac and cheese (162-3). This initial project resembles the successes of

⁶⁴ Theorists such as Deborah Posel locate a postapartheid explosion of conspicuous consumption as central to changing discourses of race and class. Posel argues that the regulation of consumption and racialized regimes have co-produced each other. Under apartheid "blackness was produced as in part a regime of restricted consumption," such that after apartheid's fall the liberation struggle became available for cooption into an ideology of freedom as conspicuous consumption (173). I lean on Posel's definition of modern consumerism as a participation in capitalist market relations wherein "aspirations to consume ... are closely linked to the making and performance of selfhood" (161).

Qukezwa, MamCirha, and NoGiant in *The Heart of Redness*, whose survival strategies combine direct eating from fisheries with a small income made from selling mollusks. But once the Whale Caller becomes a successful fisherman, subsistence goals give way to Saluni's enthusiasm for entrepreneurship based on fetishized commodities. The Whale Caller catches a huge kabeljou. Tourists want their picture taken with this fish, so Saluni charges them. This "rent-a-fish" business, selling photos, displaces the activity of selling or eating fish themselves (170). For the tourists who want to be photographed holding up the huge fish, the cultural capital of the photos hinges on the claim to have caught the fish, evoking an outmoded masculinity linked to the ability to provide food. Yet in the sale of the photos, such a materialist and sustenance-focused ideology of value (however gendered and proto-capitalist) yields to a regime of value based on simulation: actual food (fish) is displaced by a simulacrum of the gendered capacity to provide food (the photo). The sale value of fish as a basic necessity is evacuated by the more lucrative potential of fetishizing fish for tourists. This particular means of commodifying environmental resources proves short-lived: the kabeljou starts to stink after two days. Saluni clings onto it (despite the Whale Caller's protests) until "[p]eople begin to complain" that the fish "fills the whole area with its stench" (170). The Whale Caller and Saluni continue the rent-a-fish business using new fish, though they never again catch such a big one. But the incident brings home that something is rotten. Saluni's rent-a-fish concept is in some ways an ingenious subversion of the capitalist pecking order. It generates income for the poor by making the friends and family of tourists (the potential photo-viewers) the butt of a joke. It sidesteps state-imposed quotas that limit fishermen to ten fish, as Saluni mentions (169). But Saluni's "new venture" also stinks (169). Mda

would have us confront something wrong in its consumerist and fetishistic orientations.

We may (rightly) squirm at how Mda's novel attributes this scourge of capitalist ideology to poor characters who eke small profits from tourism.⁶⁵ But Mda does not demonize Saluni's class aspirations, despite representing her as a fishwife. Those who already enjoy middle class lifestyles should hesitate to critique consumer desire on the part of the disenfranchised who only aspire to join the middle class, such as Saluni. Her attempts at upward mobility are quashed, exposing the discrepancy between neoliberal capitalism's promises and its realities. This crystallizes in the leitmotif of "civilised living," which names Saluni's simulation of unaffordable consumer behaviors, mainly related to dining. Saluni initiates "what she refers to as civilised living" as a rebuff of the Whale Caller's minimalist lifestyle, epitomized by his diet of macaroni and cheese (70). Civilised living "started with decorating the walls with seashells. Then she bought a vase and a tablecloth from the flea market. ... She rearranges the flowers every day ... and as she does so the Whale Caller feels his own life being rearranged" (70). Saluni would inculcate the Whale Caller into bourgeois behavior, but she cannot afford the relevant commodities. So she simulates the experience, performing the patterns of luxury dining in the absence of fancy foods:

All of a sudden eating has become a ritual. Before this the Whale Caller used to eat in order to fill his stomach and didn't attach much importance to the process.

⁶⁵ Readers may be relieved to balance the stink of the rent-a-fish business against the pathos of the puny man's marginalized abalone fishing. We are invited to extend the same sympathy to the Whale Caller (if not to Saluni), given that the Whale Caller had considered fishing before Saluni suggested it, but was "discouraged by the fact that he would have first to obtain a fishing permit at the post office, which would only allow him ten fish a day. The permit would further prohibit him from exceeding five fish of any particular species" (162). As in the abalone sequence, conservation legislation, while understandable for the sake of animals, restricts subsistence use by the poor – even though large-scale commercial operations contribute more to overfishing.

... Now they sit down ... with a white tablecloth, flowers and a candle. Although ... their diet comprises pasta and cheese, she makes a whole ceremony of eating it, in a number of courses – the same macaroni and cheese served as a starter, entrée and dessert – for she is keen to teach him how to eat a meal of many courses, which she says they are destined to do one day. ... “We were born for better things. At least I was.” (70-71)

Saluni aspires to bourgeois eating habits as a telos toward which she is “destined,” for which she was “born.” She also espouses that aspirational individuals become “better” by climbing the social ladder. In this way she parrots the contradictory ideology of the European civilizing mission, combining a capitalist-Protestant ethic of work, competition, and social mobility with the notion that some individuals are destined for better lives than others – although she is unable to attain the class status that this narrative promises. Mda satirizes the deployment of such ideologies to bolster racial essentialism and other excuses for differentiated privilege. This capitalist-colonialist ideological nexus is indicted by the Whale Caller’s experience of civilised living as an imposition of unwanted practices “against which his whole body rebels”: a form of cultural imperialism, for which Saluni has become a vessel (70).

Mda uses the motif of civilized living to satirize the unfair expectation that poor South Africans should internalize bourgeois norms, without getting middle-class stuff. Despite their real flowers and tablecloth, Saluni and the Whale Caller stick with mac and cheese out of economic necessity. They likewise go to the supermarket to act out the delectation of foods that they cannot buy:

[They stroll] along the [supermarket] aisles, stopping at the shelves displaying food they like, and then eating it with their eyes. They walk together pushing a trolley. Saluni stops in front of a shelf containing cans of beef stew. ... She swallows hard as she eats the stew with her eyes. Then she moves on to the next shelf.... Food fit for a queen. She gormandises it all with her greedy eyes. (71-2)

Mda reveals the food regime's big lie: that with packaged, industrialized food delivered globally via supermarkets, everyone will eat like a queen. What's being sold is arguably bad food in the first place. Regardless, Saluni cannot afford it. She can only consume in the sense of looking, not that of buying or eating. Her visual simulation of gustatory consumption stages the fact that South Africa's poor have yet to taste the goodies promised with democracy and neoliberalization. Similarly, in Mda's *Ways of Dying* the impoverished Toloki wallpaper his girlfriend's Noria's shack with magazine pictures of luxurious homes into which the two imagine strolling, walking through gardens and trying out luxury beds. Their performance creates "ephemeral, experiential space ... 'where there is none,'" as Rita Barnard has described (149-50). Toloki and Noria simulate a bourgeois lifestyle because they cannot afford the real thing, as do Saluni and the Whale Caller. Saluni has "greedy eyes," not a greedy stomach: taste is an issue of aesthetics and imagination rather than bodily consumption. Saluni situates this ritual of looking as a component of civilised living, and calls it "window shopping." That language initiates a metaphoric of windows and screens that joins architecture and perception as dual engines separating consumer aspiration from satiation: "By the time they walk out of the supermarket they have satisfied their *tastes*, now they go back home to satisfy their *hunger* with macaroni and cheese" (72, my emphasis). By separating alimentation from the aesthetics of eating, Mda underscores the gulf between global capitalism's ideology and its material delivery. Saluni may be developing middle-class "tastes," but poverty bars her from eating middle-class food. Hunger is a material experience of poverty, bifurcated from the bourgeois taste that Saluni performs by "window shopping."

The supermarket scene opposes sustenance to simulacrum, like the distinction of fish from fish photos. Saluni and the Whale Caller ogle not fresh produce or animal products, but the pictures on cans. Saluni pretends to eat “the pieces of meat, tomatoes, carrots and potatoes swimming in brown onion gravy on the label” of canned beef stew (71). This detail satirizes the normalization of processed, packaged foods. It also questions the aesthetic logic under which the object of desire becomes the iterable image, rather than the material good. The bifurcation of taste from hunger is itself aestheticized. This logic is central to supermarket culture, as scholar-activist Raj Patel writes: “[W]e’re tricked by the simulacrum, mistaking the dead green ‘Certified Organic’ packaging for a living connection” because we have never “experienced a direct connection to the people who grow our food. . . . [W]hen you shop in a supermarket, you’re already inside the label” (*Stuffed and Starved* 252-3). As evident in Patel’s critique of supermarkets, the aesthetics of the label cannot be separated from material effects, as the idolization of the image bolsters a culture of alienation from food production. The rent-a-fish sequence and the supermarket scene both question the tendency for real foods to be converted into simulacra. These images become coveted aesthetic objects, supplanting the use of material goods for sustenance in ways that prickle when we consider class-differentiated access to food.

Mda complicates this relationship between gastro-aesthetics and alimentation in a sequence on fine dining, which extends the preoccupation with looking and ridicules the role of ceremony in culinary aesthetics. Saluni decides to supplement window shopping with “window eating”: she and the Whale Caller dress up and stroll through Hermanus’s restaurant district. First they pass the “American-type fast food franchises,” allowing

Mda to snub “whopping burgers, deep-fried thick-battered chicken and slick pizzas that bear little resemblance to the original Italian peasant fare” (113). In this description, fast food is a form of Americanization that destroys culinary traditions from elsewhere and produces unhealthy fare – a characterization that feels on point, if trite. But fast food is mentioned only briefly. Mda’s critique instead lodges on the “classier” forms of culinary globalization (113). Expensive restaurants dotting a tourist locale like Hermanus speak to the crescendo of culinary tourism in many parts of the world since the 1990s (Black 8). In South Africa, this development works alongside the country’s emergence as a major tourist destination since the end of apartheid. Mda scrutinizes these trends, with the Whale Caller and Saluni gazing through the windows of a sushi place at “the patrons sitting on cushions or mats on the floor like a congregation of some New Age religion, eating delicate oval-shaped balls of rice rolled in fish. . . . Other worshippers are sitting at the bar drinking some whitish sacramental drink and eating similar fare” (113).

Comparing fine dining to “New Age religion” with “worshippers” and “sacramental drink,” Mda invites us to view foodie culture as a cult that uses rituals to brainwash its devotees. Similarly, in the Whale Caller’s earliest rumination on civilised living, “eating has become a ritual,” “[t]he table itself looks like an altar,” and Saluni “makes a whole ceremony of eating” (70-1). Saluni, it seems, is emulating the cult-like ceremonial aesthetics of foodie culture, to the Whale Caller’s dismay. Throughout the novel, Mda juxtaposes eating, environmentalism, capitalist consumption, and religious ceremonies by depicting them all as rituals. Mda also describes many ritualized behaviors in terms of “addiction” (108). Saluni’s obsessive-compulsive disorder and her alcoholism are only the most overt of many addictions peppering the novel. Sex, for example, is described as

both “cleansing ceremony” and fixation, becoming a cause of psychological “sickness” (97, 172). Mda blurs the differentiation between ceremony, with its connotations of purification, health, and fulfillment; and obsession, causing degeneration or death. Sushi-eating as a ceremony of power made South African headlines in the fall of 2016, when Kenny Kunene, a shady business mogul, tweeted that Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) politician Julius Malema used to practice “nyotaimori”: eating sushi off the bodies of naked women (“Malema Ate Sushi”). This scandal may seem silly, but it gets to the heart of the power differentials behind the ritualized aesthetics of luxury dining. Beautiful foods – accessible only to elites – are symptoms of an ugly food system. Mda presents fine dining and fast food as two faces of the same ecosocial violence: the food regime provides luxuries to the wealthy (often using practices dangerous to ecology and human health), while it metes out low-quality or insufficient fare to the poor, including the many who labor within the food system. The bifurcation of hunger from taste denies these operations by moving food’s import from a material realm to that of pure aesthetics. Mda satirizes this displacement through references to ceremonies, spectacles, and practices of looking.

Mda’s subaltern characters are not eating beautiful foods, but observing. Since Saluni cannot afford the kind of dining that would suit her tastes, her visual consumption seems less a kind of voyeurism and more a grasping at compensation for inequality. The novel extends the considerations of sight, blindness, and simulacra by repeatedly foregrounding the presence of window screens that separate the Whale Caller and Saluni from the food. Most of the windows that they pass have curtains drawn, but at the single fancy restaurant serving South African cuisine, “there has been some carelessness since

there is a big gap between the curtains through which Saluni and the Whale Caller can see inside” (115).⁶⁶ The restaurant window becomes a screen. The wealthy diners’ alimentation and entertainment becomes, for the Whale Caller and Saluni, a display of taste without food. The physical infrastructure of the restaurant enforces this regime of food distribution, while also framing luxury dining as a spectacle of conspicuous consumption. Saluni and the Whale Caller “have to press their faces against the panes in order to have a good look” because “[t]he glass reflects their own images,” underscoring that identity is what bars them from being in the restaurant, a space only for elites (115). The window glass enforces the poor’s disadvantage by keeping them as observers rather than eaters. Yet these window metaphors also reverse the tendency for poverty, hunger, and racialized bodies to be rendered as consumable images. The privileged classes, erstwhile creators and spectators of zoos, freak shows, and spectacles of poverty, are now behind the glass. (This has particular resonances in a postcolonial context such as South Africa, from whence the “Hottentot Venus,” a Khoi woman named Sarah Baartman, was infamously taken to Europe to have her body parts exhibited.) But this joke on the wealthy does not redistribute power, as becomes clear when Saluni and the Whale Caller tangle with the restaurant’s *maître d’*. He invites them in, not knowing they cannot afford it. When Saluni insists that “they would rather enjoy his decorative delicacies with their eyes from a distance,” the *maître d’* banishes them: “You make my customers nervous watching them like that. Please go and be spectators somewhere else” (113, 114). Even though the foods are aesthetic objects (“decorative delicacies”) it is reprehensible to

⁶⁶ That the novel singles out the one South African restaurant points to the social politics of food globalization, so-called local food that relies on tourist dollars, and the idea of national cuisine. See the coda to the dissertation.

spectate “with their eyes” without eating – as if Saluni and the Whale Caller had any choice. The poor are castigated for looking at the indulgences of the rich, even as conspicuous consumption begs for attention. The absurdity of Saluni’s civilised living schemes, such as staring through restaurant windows, facilitates Mda’s satire of the real absurdity: that social inequality can be aestheticized. As Julie Guthman puts it, “privileged eating is intrinsically tied to impoverished eating” in that “what allows an aesthetic of food is disparity” (Guthman 506). In fine dining, neoliberal globalization’s chosen ones enjoy confections whose aesthetic value resides in their inaccessibility for the masses.

The Whale Caller provides a much-needed (if crude) counter to this exclusive dining culture. He notes that the “worshipping of food [is] obscene” in part because the food “will be digested and will surely become stools. Then it will be scorned and despised. People forget that only a few hours back they were venerating it” (116). With this materialist gloss – earning him an “acid glare” from Saluni – the Whale Caller objects to aestheticizing goods that are basic to bodily functions (116). For a moment, he gets to voice a pragmatic minimalism that parries the decadence of restaurant culture: “[T]his deification of food is a new experience for him. He eats to sustain himself, because if he does not eat he will die. ... When he used to walk the coast he only needed to get fish, braai⁶⁷ it ... and eat it. There was no ceremony. When he returned from the coast it became easier and cheaper to boil macaroni. ... Again there was no ceremony” (117). As the Whale Caller implies, an excess of “ceremony” can lend itself to exclusive aesthetics prioritized over material needs. Yet as Saluni teases, the Whale Caller is a

⁶⁷ Grill or barbecue (Afrikaans).

“creature of ritual” like herself in other habits, such as playing music and waltzing in front of the whale at sunrise (117). Only when it comes to eating is the Whale Caller disinterested in the ceremonies that Saluni covets. Although the Whale Caller’s obsessions are less consumerist than those of Saluni, her point recontextualizes gastro-aesthetics as one among many modes of ritual participation in globalized capitalism. In a touristic context, the desire for megafauna can be another. Looking at the novel this way, we can question the spectacles of looking involved in both eating cultures and ecotourism. We are invited to attend to when aesthetics distract from material injustice, versus when visual consumption – as in Saluni’s “window eating” – can itself become an act of resistance to the inequalities of consumer capitalism.

Consuming Novels

I have argued that *The Whale Caller* reveals the gulf between, on the one hand, ideological associations of food with bourgeois taste, and on the other, the material realities of structurally-produced hunger. Saluni bears the conflict between foodie desire and anti-neoliberal politics, as reflected in her modes of simulation and spectatorship vis-à-vis gastro-aesthetics. But Saluni is poor. However reprehensible her bourgeois taste may seem, she lacks the capital to indulge it in material form. She can only eat with her eyes. Placing the tension between hunger and taste on her shoulders may make us particularly loath to confront it, lest we fall into the trap of criticizing the poor for wanting what the wealthy already enjoy – which, to be clear, is not this argument’s

endpoint.⁶⁸ I am instead interested in how Mda's representation of hunger versus taste relates to *The Whale Caller's* reception as an eco-novel about whales rather than about food – and the larger issue that “food is rarely considered a serious topic of academic inquiry within literary studies,” with “food studies” readily bracketed apart from other specializations and dismissed as “scholarship-lite” (Mannur 12, Tompkins 2). As Anita Mannur asks, “why as critics [are we] more comfortable with thinking about food through its *absence* [?] Why, for instance, are we comfortable in theorizing hunger, collective or individual, but less able to think about consumption and desire?” (Mannur 17, original emphasis). Does discomfort with discussing the gluttonous side of food politics, particularly in relation to a subaltern character, underwrite the critical tendency to ignore food in novels such as Mda's that are concerned with subaltern environmentalism? Do we focus on the deprivations that such texts expose, or on nonhuman animals, in part to avoid an exposure of appetites?

The figure of Saluni stymies such partial analysis, compelling us to consider consumption together with hunger. Saluni critiques the food regime from the perspective of hunger, yet simulates bourgeois behavior and learns bourgeois taste. She flags what anti-capitalist, environmentalist foodies might not like to admit: consumerist indulgence haunts the espousal of anti-regime politics by bourgeois subjects. This can be observed at

⁶⁸ Astrid Feldbrügge makes this mistake. She ignores Saluni's subaltern critiques of capitalism to lambaste her “uncritical embrace of a capitalist ideology,” decrying Saluni's “selfishness” as “[e]ven worse” than the behavior of what Mda describes as “boerewors-roll-chomping tourists, mustard and ketchup dripping from their fingers and chins” (Feldbrügge 164, 163). Feldbrügge's chastisement of Saluni exemplifies a generalized logic that would deny the poor the consumerist pleasures of the wealthy. This is a problem with bourgeois environmentalism, noted by numerous critics. See for example Julia Martin, “New, with Added Ecology? Hippos, Forests, and Environmental Literacy,” in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1994, pp. 1–11.

any chic farm-to-table restaurant or in numerous alternative food trends.⁶⁹ But this may be true also of tendencies in literary consumption. As Mannur asks, “what is it that as readers we are so hungry for? Why do we find pleasure in consuming narratives about difference, almost as a guilty pleasure, at the same time that we are so ill at ease with navigating the contradictions inherent in the culinary narrative?” (Mannur 17-18). Silence around Saluni’s cravings for commodities may indicate critics’ reluctance to discuss the commodity status of global environmental novels themselves. Such novels may butter up leftist readers and critics by feeding our desire for righteous resistance to capitalism, to environmental degradation, to the food regime. But such self-satisfying modes of reading are themselves a kind of conspicuous consumption. As Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee describes in reference to contemporary postcolonial eco-literature, “the purportedly oppositional and radical contents of literary works make these . . . valuable and marketable to the very regime to which they are opposed. Protest sells. Marginality is chic” (8). Global environmental novels are marketable via what Graham Huggan has called the “postcolonial exotic”: the commodification of otherness that makes postcolonial literary and cultural products prime commodities. But the postcolonial exotic also refers to the procedures of “strategic exoticism” by which some works self-consciously remark upon the conditions of their own consumption.⁷⁰ *The Whale Caller*

⁶⁹ The history of organic salad mix (or *mesclun*) in the San Francisco Bay area is an example that food studies scholars have explored. Originally tied to agroecological leftist values, *mesclun* became a chic-chic product sold in expensive restaurants – hence its nickname “yuppie chow.” The production of *mesclun* was industrialized, following the pattern that “organic production depends on the same systems of marginalized labour as does fast food,” and undermining the politics with which *mesclun* first claimed association (Guthman 506).

⁷⁰ See Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*.

exhibits this subversive self-consciousness indirectly, through its references to food. If reading postcolonial novels is a popular form of consuming difference, Mda satirizes a homologous form of conspicuous consumption: the foodie desire that accompanies anti-poverty and environmentalist rhetoric on food. Saluni is repugnant in her consumer desire yet admirable in her anti-neoliberal politics. She wants to eat like many of us read: to indulge foodie appetites that coexist with anti-regime politics, just as consumers of the global environmental novel indulge in anti-capitalist texts that enjoy privileged sales. Saluni's failure, finally, is an inability or refusal to think across scales. This is the key failing of Camagu in *The Heart of Redness*, too. Each character thinks conceptually about social inequalities, yet each is selfish in their personal actions.

But Camagu has economic, educational, and gender privileges that Saluni does not have, making his ridicule in *The Heart of Redness* easier to sit with. Saluni can never realize her consumer desires. She simulates such satisfaction. She watches other people have it. She remains outside the glass, both excluded indigent and wry observer. In these ways, Saluni could be an object for pathos. My own reading slants toward that angle – somewhat against the grain of Mda's novel, in which Saluni is not a likeable character. She is narcissistic, greedy, acerbic and even abusive towards the Whale Caller. She is an alcoholic who suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder, but these afflictions are not represented sympathetically. (Readers are asked to sympathize with the Whale Caller's patient and thankless struggle to get Saluni to stop drinking.) These threads make *The Whale Caller* seem anti-feminist (and potentially ableist and classist), charges I would not impute to *The Heart of Redness*. The difference in gender politics across the two novels make *The Whale Caller* harder to stomach, and harder to read as a parable about

subaltern environmentalism unless its engagements with food and gender are ignored. But both novels exceed the rubric of subaltern environmentalism in their satirical bite. In so doing, they bring us important insights about the intersection of environmentalism with eating culture. Satire emerges as a key tactic of the global environmental novel, in Mda's example, combining with and complicating the realist elements of his work. Through this combination of satire and realism, Mda's novels ask us to refuse ways of eating or of conserving the environment (and perhaps of reading) that perpetuate neoliberal consumer capitalism. The dialogic structure of Mda's novels – where political points are disparately argued by a variety of characters – asks the reader to do the work that Saluni and Camagu refuse, the work of thinking across scales. Readers must knit together a more effective food politics, rather than outsourcing hope either to the choices of each individual or to an abstract system that none of us can touch.

CHAPTER TWO

Imperial Appetites:

Amitav Ghosh, Environmentalism of the Poor, and Disordered Eating

“Chutnification”

From childhood onwards, an Indian is exposed to more combinations of flavours and seasonings than perhaps anyone else in the world. Our cuisine is based on this variety, which ... stretches from the freshness and sweetness of highly aromatic curry leaves to the dark pungency of the resin, asafetida, whose earthy aroma tends to startle Westerners. Around the world, food is eaten to fill stomachs. ... In India ... [we] eat to keep our bodies finely tuned, physically and spiritually.

Madhur Jaffrey, *A Taste of India*, 10-14

Symbolic value of the pickling process: all the six hundred million eggs which gave birth to the population of India could fit inside a single, standard-sized pickle-jar. ... Every pickle-jar ... contains, therefore ... the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time! I, however, have pickled chapters.

Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 529

Few nations have been subjected as often as India to the overidentification of country with cuisine. Food sells, as witnessed by the wild success both of novels such as *Midnight's Children*, and of cookbooks such as Madhur Jaffrey's *A Taste of India* – filled with delectable images of food and temples, and Jaffrey herself on the cover, reclining in a red sari with a spread of garlic, cinnamon, dal, ginger, legumes, coconuts and rice.⁷¹ Jaffrey's readers are purchasing a visual and textual “taste of India,” aside from the real

⁷¹ See Image 1. As Shameem Black notes in her work on Jaffrey's cookbooks, “an emphasis on food is exceptionally prominent in the construction of South Asian identity in Anglophone discourse” (6). Black emphasizes how some of Jaffrey's cookbooks engender a sense of domestic cosmopolitanism in their transnational borrowings, yet Jaffrey remains best-known as an “Indian chef.” Her career has been fundamental to the “invention of Indian food as a national cuisine in India and in the West” (Black 6).

foods they may cook. The consumption of Indian food is exoticized and eroticized. In this context, gastronomical representations mingle with large-scale questions for literary studies: does an Indian national canon exist? Or is this as farcical as the idea of a homogenous Indian cuisine? What about a South Asian canon? What languages would be included? Does the South Asian diaspora form part of this canon – indeed, perhaps too big a part? What are the many foods in these literatures doing?

Salman Rushdie sits at the head of the table for these conversations.

“Chutnification” is Rushdie’s relentless metaphor for the preservation of cultural memory, miring the South Asian novel in national allegory and ethnic identity at the first mention of food. As Pankaj Mishra puts it, numerous Indian novelists writing in English suffer from “Rushdie-itis,” a “now familiar literary condition that has claimed Rushdie himself in his later works” (Mishra n.p.).⁷² Rushdie-itis, Mishra elaborates, produces “defective clones” of *Midnight’s Children*, “sprawling shapeless narratives where all the traditional ingredients of the novel – irony, style, sense of economy and structure – have been abandoned in an effort to arrive at spicier concoctions” (Mishra n.p.).⁷³ Mishra’s own gastronomic metaphor exposes that while he describes Rushdie-itis as a phenomenon of literary style, it cannot be separated either from critical practice or from the representation of food. Gastronomic metaphors are widely used to capitalize on orientalist fantasy and make South Asian and postcolonial works more marketable, in Graham Huggan’s view. For authors such as Rushdie and Arundhati Roy (whom Huggan

⁷² Mishra’s beef is specifically with Indian writing in English. He notes that a plethora of writing in other languages has wider circulation within India, but is ignored in the West.

⁷³ Neil Lazarus, meanwhile, suggests rather hyperbolically that postcolonial criticism has enshrined too narrow a canon, so much so that “there is in a strict sense only one author in the postcolonial literary canon. That author is Salman Rushdie” (22).

finds prototypical), these metaphors also render ironic their own packaging of India as a delicacy.⁷⁴ As Anita Mannur also argues, the “culinary register can deliberately and strategically disrupt the notion that cultural identity is always readily available for consumption and commodification and always already conjoined to culinary practices” (Mannur 8). Gastronomical metaphors for ethnicity – sometimes ironic, sometimes not – are a commonality that these critics identify across food’s appearances in postcolonial and diasporic literature. Another recurring trope is disordered eating that signifies discomfort and anxiety around postcolonial nationhood.⁷⁵

But what else can food do? How might tracking food and eating propel a richer account of contemporary literatures – and in particular, South Asian and postcolonial literatures concerned with environment and globalization? Can or should novelists interested in such questions avoid sitting at Rushdie’s table? To the extent to which American reception wields influence, part of the difficulty is that the curators of the American mainstream promote a tiny cadre of South Asian novelists who (ostensibly) work in the same mode.⁷⁶ For example, a 1997 issue of *The New Yorker* on “India’s leading novelists” features ten Indians and one Sri Lankan, all writing in English (Buford

⁷⁴ See Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, Chapter Two: Consuming India.

⁷⁵ The anorexia of Nyasha in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s 1988 Zimbabwean novel *Nervous Conditions* epitomizes the latter formation for Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (*Postcolonial Ecocriticism* 157). See also Parama Roy, *Alimentary Tracts*, 156.

⁷⁶ In Mishra’s view, American (and UK) reception is crucial for Indians who write in English. They are “dependent on the patronage of publishers in the west and on cosmopolitan readership in Europe and the US” because “[r]eaders of books in English are a small minority in India” (n.p.). This dependency leads to a “colonial bind” in which “publishers and reviewers in Europe and the US” have undue influence, since “for many west-smitten Indians whatever is published in the UK or the US is axiomatically better than anything produced at home” (n.p.)

6).⁷⁷ These authors provide “precisely that mix of difference and legibility that makes Indian writing marketable to an audience unfamiliar with India” (Anjaria 10). In Ulka Anjaria’s description, the cover of the issue “relie[s] on tired, Orientalist imagery ... showing the surprise on the intrepid, white explorers’ faces when they find a statue of Ganesh ... reading fiction,” but inside the authors are photographed together “all dressed in shades of black, suggesting a kind of staged hipness” (Anjaria 10).⁷⁸ In Huggan’s account, “Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy beam happily into the camera” while “at the back ... an out-of-focus Amitav Ghosh looks merely disgruntled” (*Postcolonial Exotic* 59).

Huggan’s description of a grumpy Ghosh in the photograph may be a reach. But this positioning speaks to the ways that Amitav Ghosh both rehearses and exceeds Rushdie-itis, as evident in his 2004 novel *The Hungry Tide*. Piya Roy, Ghosh’s central character, cannot stomach Bengali food for reasons of anxiety. Her disordered eating offers us new ways to think about food in the neoliberal era. At the scale of character, Piya functions as a figure for contemporary globalization’s variations on postcoloniality: she is a child of diaspora who returns to Bengal, a would-be advocate for locals yet an agent of the global regimes of food, conservation, and NGOization.⁷⁹ At the scale of

⁷⁷ Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Vikram Chandra, Rohinton Mistry, Amit Chaudhuri, Kiran Desai, Ardashir Vakil, Vikram Seth, and Romesh Gunesequera. See *The New Yorker*, 23 June 1997.

⁷⁸ See Images 2 and 3.

⁷⁹ As discussed in the introduction, the “food regime” refers to the system by which “forms of capital accumulation in agriculture constitute global power arrangements, as expressed through patterns in the circulation of food” (McMichael 140). The global North has maintained hegemony through several different configurations of food circulation, including the post-WWII distribution of “food aid” to create markets for American products, the forcible introduction of chemical fertilizers and pesticides from North to South in the 1970s, and the more recent pushing of GM technologies to keep

canon, Ghosh's novel uses edibles to renegotiate the colonial and postcolonial Anglophone novel toward an environmentalist gloss on neoliberal reality. In so doing, *The Hungry Tide* epitomizes the global environmental novel's renegotiation of the colonial and postcolonial Anglophone novel.

In addition to reinvigorating postcolonial perspectives on food, my reading seeks to nuance ecocritical accounts of contemporary fiction. In what follows, I situate literary-critical approaches to the environmentalism of the poor against Ghosh's theory of the novel in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Meditating on the failure of "serious fiction" to represent climate change, this 2016 nonfiction work reveals much about our desires both for environmental writing and for fiction's negotiation of scale. In Ghosh's view, climate change's vastness eludes the modern novel's focus on individuated characters. But as I see it, mainstream fictions work across scales. Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* helps me elucidate how food can function as a lever for such scalar leaps, and for a convergence of materiality and metaphor. I then turn to a longer reading of *The Hungry Tide*, considering how its ecopolitics are nuanced by references to disordered eating and commodities in the food regime.

Environmentalism of the Poor and Novelistic Scale

farmers in cycles of debt. As for conservation and NGOs, global organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund have often clashed with the livelihoods of local inhabitants. Such organizations (in collusion with national government) have blocked locals from using resources or forced them to leave their land. See Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, pp. 112-113, for a discussion of Project Tiger's impacts in the Sundarbans, where *The Hungry Tide* is set. I will discuss the related massacre at Morichjhapi later in this chapter.

A key concept in postcolonial ecocriticism is the “environmentalism of the poor,” which can be traced to Indian historian Ramachandra Guha and Catalan economist Joan Martinez-Alier. They use the term for “the activism of poor women and men threatened by the loss of the environmental resources and services they need for livelihood” (Martinez-Alier 119). Unlike many bourgeois environmentalisms, the environmentalism of the poor does not revere Nature as a pristine space separate from the human. Instead, “[i]ts ethics derive from a demand for contemporary social justice among humans” (Martinez-Alier 11). Guha and Martinez-Alier’s examples are rural communities resisting plunder by multinationals in cahoots with the state. For example, the indigenous Ogoni people have mobilized against the genocidal oil empire of Royal Shell in the Niger Delta. The Nigerian government has supported Shell, executing the Ogoni Nine, a group of activists including the playwright and poet Ken Saro-Wiwa (Guha 100-102). In such cases, “nature” is not considered untouched or uninhabited; rather, “a longstanding, *prior* claim to the resource in question—land, water, forests, fish—has been abruptly extinguished by profiteers working in concert with the government, which has granted these outsiders oil, mineral, or logging concessions” (Guha 106, original emphasis). In the environmentalism of the poor, the injustice is capitalism’s destruction of the home and resources of a subaltern group.

Literary scholars in the US and UK have borrowed this concept of environmentalism of the poor, in order to contest an old-school ecocriticism devoted to “wilderness” and white, mostly male authors, such as Henry David Thoreau.⁸⁰ Arguably

⁸⁰ Wilderness ideology has been reprimanded for erasing indigenous presences and questions of race, class, and gender from environmentalist and ecocritical discourse. For the seminal critique within Americanist ecocriticism, see William Cronon, “The Trouble

the biggest splash was made in defining postcolonial ecocriticism by Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* – dedicated to Guha, Rachel Carson, and Edward Said. Nixon features the “writer-activists” Saro-Wiwa, Arundhati Roy, Wangari Maathai, Indra Sinha, Abdelrahman Munif, Jamaica Kincaid, June Jordan, Njabulo Ndebele, and Nadine Gordimer. The first three represent social movements addressed by Guha. A similar archive circulates through much of postcolonial ecocriticism: Roy and Saro-Wiwa join Amitav Ghosh, Zakes Mda, and J.M. Coetzee as go-to examples. Sinha, Munif, and Ben Okri trail not far behind. We see the same authors and texts being referenced over and over to form the canon of postcolonial eco-writing.⁸¹ We might forgive this repetitiveness, because of the imperative to recognize these major figures from the global South. My own archive of global environmental novelists includes several of these canonical figures. I would insist on the continuing utility of their writing to disrupt a white Euroamerican eco-canon. But I also take a critical stance toward this archive, examining the process of canonization. Other works may be forgotten when formalistically and linguistically elite genres take precedence, such as Anglophone novels (a question which I give some space in Chapter Five). More to the point of this chapter,

with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995), 69-90. For a postcolonial critique, see Nixon, *Slow Violence*.

⁸¹ As a sampler of monographs and collections central to the field of postcolonial ecocriticism, see Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (on Roy, Ghosh, Mda, Coetzee, Saro-Wiwa); Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments* (on Roy, Sinha, Ghosh); Laura Wright, “Wilderness into Civilized Shapes”: *Reading the Postcolonial Environment* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010) (on Roy, Mda); Byron Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2014) (on Mda, Saro-Wiwa); DeLoughrey and Handley, ed. *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (pieces on Mda by both Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Jonathan Steinwand, and on Coetzee by Allison Carruth).

the subtleties of eco-novels themselves may be lost if the most basic imperative – to recenter the environmentalism of the poor – takes up all the space in the criticism.

Lionizing texts because they are “about” subaltern environmentalism risks casting literary discourse as no more than documentation, as Jennifer Wenzel has argued. Wenzel exhorts postcolonial ecocritics to remember that literary texts “make their interventions not as empirical evidence of ecological crisis nor as ready-made blueprints for action,” but by means of “literary genres and aesthetic modes” (150-1). The critic must attend to literary convention and address “the contested status of the literary itself” – but in ways that are “worldly and engaged rather than hygienically formalist,” thinking with “scientists, historians, anthropologists, policymakers, and activists” (151). Wenzel is not disavowing interdisciplinary scholarship, but arguing that disciplinary training should be complemented rather than discarded. Borrowed concepts, such as the environmentalism of the poor, need to be re-elaborated as tools of literary-critical method. We must attend to literature’s particular affordances for helping us think about the big questions that are relevant across disciplines.

To get at some of these affordances, I turn to Amitav Ghosh, a public intellectual who has increasingly occupied himself with the entanglements of environmental activism, postcoloniality, and narrative form. Popular as a novelist with postcolonial ecocritics, Ghosh is also an agent in the field’s canon-formation project, as critic and essayist. In his 1992 essay “Petrofiction,” Ghosh notes that the oil encounter has produced few literary representations. He attributes this dearth to oil imperialism’s tendency to create multilingual, placeless spaces, which flout the novel’s evocation of a “sense of place” in a monolingual, often national context (“Petrofiction” 30). This

discussion reappears in Ghosh's more recent mélange of environmental history, literary criticism, and narrative nonfiction, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016). His central claim is that modern fiction fails to represent climate change because of its focus on the individual. In service of this argument, Ghosh links "Petrofiction" to his own novelistic forays into oil, and to a nasty review by John Updike of Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* – an expansive novel concerned with oil imperialism in Saudi Arabia. Critical of Munif's ensemble of characters with no central protagonist, Updike finds Munif "insufficiently Westernized to produce a narrative that feels much like what we call a novel" (Updike 117). This jab should be discredited for its blatant ethnocentrism.⁸² Nonetheless, Ghosh lays out, Updike is "in a certain sense, right": the literary establishment in the West has come to expect novels that focus on the individual psyche, whereas Munif depicts what Updike calls "men in the aggregate" (Ghosh, *Derangement* 77-8). Ghosh is not making a new argument so much as scaling up. Whereas he argues in "Petrofiction" that the modern novel's individualism impedes its representation of the oil encounter, in *The Great Derangement* he stages a homologous argument about a trendier (and bulkier) subject: climate change. The twists and turns of this argument will occupy me for several pages, as they take us to interesting places in thinking about eco-politics and aesthetic value.

The failure to manage climate change's scale is not a feature of novels in general, but specific to "what is now regarded as serious fiction," Ghosh clarifies (*Derangement* 9). This category of "serious fiction" bears some thought, as do its implications for

⁸² Nixon indeed takes Updike to task for the imperialist attitude that undergirds his objections to Munif's use of novelistic form. See *Slow Violence*, 86-92.

relations among canonicity, prestige, marketability, and genre. For Ghosh, “serious fiction” is individualist not because of any inherent quality of the novel as a form (as Updike argues), but rather because of “a turn that fiction took” in the West in the twentieth century (*Derangement* 9, 79). Ghosh sees this inward “turn” as characteristic of “a dominant culture in which the idea of the collective has been exiled from politics, economics, and literature alike” (*Derangement* 80). This story of the novel in the West is not new (although Ghosh’s climate change gloss may be). Postwar American fiction constantly provokes charges of being “self-involved” with its self-referential interest in the psyche, as Mark McGurl notes in his monumental study of creative writing programs, *The Program Era* (31, 32).⁸³ For McGurl, creative writing programs produce elite contemporary fiction in concert with other establishments of mainstream prestige, such as the Booker Prize (in the UK) and the *New Yorker* (in the US). By “serious fiction,” Ghosh means exactly the type of fiction credited by such institutions, which spurn genre fictions (9). Indeed, science fiction does engage with climate change, spurring the new subgenre “cli fi,” but literary institutions do not consider such work “serious” (Ghosh 72).⁸⁴ (Ghosh is scrutinizing, more than endorsing, such a narrow view of seriousness.)

⁸³ And, painting with a larger brush, Fredric Jameson has suggested that Western literature and culture are condemned to “psychologism and the ‘projections’ of private subjectivity,” to a fundamental split of the personal from the collective or political (85). Jameson, however, is asserting this individualization within Western literature as a contrast to what he (infamously) calls the “national allegory” mode of “third world literature,” which, he finds, imbricates the collective with the personal. Ghosh, instead, seems to suggest that the influence of Western psychologism on the novel genre is so powerful as to also encompass postcolonial or global South novels, such as his own work *The Hungry Tide*.

⁸⁴ Ghosh himself considers sci fi’s engagement with climate change inadequate, claiming it locates climate change in the future rather than dealing with the here and now of our world. However, this argument runs counter to the logic of much sci fi, where a different world functions as an allegory for our own. (I am indebted to a conversation with Ursula

Academic institutions also reject science fiction, which “is only minimally represented in the creative writing program establishment. Privileging ideas and adventures over disciplined elevations of literary form, this genre is often brainy but is only rarely considered literary” (McGurl 405). This is not to suggest that “cli fi” is unpopular. The relationship between literary prestige and marketability has been ambivalent at least since the nineteenth century, when the novel’s predominance in the expanding book market started to attach “a taint of many-ness” to the genre: “increasingly, if always ambivalently, a large audience for a novel was taken as *prima facie* evidence that the novel might not count as literature” (McGurl 309, my emphasis). Today, with our numerous literature prizes, the “concept of autonomous aesthetic value” has not by any means vanished, “[i]t’s just that this value is no longer granted without argument to be in inherent conflict with market value” (McGurl 329). Nor are market value and cultural capital convergent, as Jim English notes in his influential study of cultural prizes: “Contrary to conventional wisdom, the correlation between commercial success and the kind of prestige that major prizes confer has grown weaker rather than stronger since the early twentieth century ... especially in literature” (152-3). Prizes are “fundamentally equivocal” in that they serve “simultaneously as a means of recognizing an ostensibly higher, uniquely aesthetic form of value *and* an arena in which such value often appears subject to the most businesslike system of production and exchange” (English 7, original emphasis). Given this complex relationship between market value and cultural prestige,

Heise at the 2017 ASLE conference for this gloss.) Ghosh’s claims about sci fi’s engagement with climate change bear reexamination, a worthwhile endeavor somewhat beyond the scope of the present project, which engages primarily with global fictions that Ghosh would label “mainstream.”

“serious fiction” connotes the latter, but not exclusively. Whether serious fiction means mainstream popular fiction, then, or high literature, is the wrong question. We might instead ask how well these kinds of writing can be distinguished from one another. Questions also arise about to what extent US and UK institutions determine the standards of seriousness for authors such as Ghosh, who was born in Kolkata and grew up in India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, but lives in New York and has been affiliated with CUNY and Harvard. The global environmental novelists canonized in the US are generally cosmopolitans such as Ghosh and Mda, who combine either a global South background or a minoritarian identity with affiliations to American academic and literary institutions. Ghosh has an Indian readership too, but in *The Great Derangement*, US and UK institutions define serious fiction.⁸⁵

Ghosh stops short of arguing that serious fiction fails to represent climate change *at all*, complaining that the “subject figures only obliquely” (*Derangement* 9). Ghosh’s argument turns on this adverb, “obliquely” – he cannot quite claim that the mainstream modern novel never mentions climate change. He does flirt with this stronger claim:

[W]hen novelists do choose to write about climate change it is almost always outside of fiction. A case in point is the work of Arundhati Roy: not only is she one of the finest prose stylists of our time, she is passionate and deeply informed about climate change. Yet all her writings on these subjects are in various forms of nonfiction. (*Derangement* 8)

⁸⁵ That is, Ghosh defines serious fiction as that endorsed by “highly regarded literary journals and book reviews” such as “the *London Review of Books*, the *New York Review of Books*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, the *Literary Journal*, and the *New York Times Review of Books*” (7).

Following the publication of her Booker Prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy has written two widely circulated eco-activist essays: “The Greater Common Good” (1999), condemning the damming of the Narmada River in India, and “The End of the Imagination” (1998), on India’s nuclear program.⁸⁶ Not unlike Ghosh, Rob Nixon sees Roy’s essay-writing as a “second career,” finally making her “an international writer-activist” (*Slow Violence* 157). For Nixon, *The God of Small Things* merely provides Roy with an audience, which then allows her to “shift her creative center from the novel to the essay, a form that allowed her to participate more directly and flexibly in the showdown between social movements, a showdown that acquired a generic dimension whereby the agile personal essay was set against the ponderous, strategically impersonal epic report” (*Slow Violence* 169). Nixon refuses the novel as an indirect genre, therefore ineffectual for eco-politics. This gesture resembles Ghosh’s claim that *The God of Small Things* exemplifies the modern novel’s absent or “oblique” engagement with climate change. Both critics ignore or downplay that Roy’s novel engages the same politics as her essays, as both Roy herself and Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee have argued.⁸⁷ Roy’s thematization of ecological damage in *The God of Small Things* is secondary to the novel’s plotting, but this makes it no less salient. That these critics exclude Roy’s novel illustrates the narrowness of a quest for texts *about* environmentalism or climate change. If we value only direct environmentalist

⁸⁶ For a contextualization of Roy’s essays within the relevant social movements, including an explanation of the failures of the Narmada Dam project, see also Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, 46-54.

⁸⁷ See Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, 82-3, and Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, St Ives: Flamingo, 2002.

pronouncements and dismiss “oblique” engagements, we will lose much of the novel genre’s potential for eco-political intervention.

I do not mean to suggest that Roy has been denied canonization. She counts among the best-known Indian novelists in the West (as made clear by the aforementioned *New Yorker* issue). Her Booker Prize ensures her “serious fiction” status. As for Roy’s Indian reception, author and translator Meena Kandasamy remarks that “if you are a woman writing in English in India, everybody (I mean everybody) asks you to strive to follow her trail. ... [S]he has been transformed into a really looming presence” (Jana 6). Roy is a favorite with postcolonial ecocritics and others interested in environmental literature, whether those such as Nixon who tout her essays, or others such as Mukherjee who discuss *The God of Small Things*. Nor would I characterize essay-writing as “squandering ... novelistic gifts on mere polemics,” as Roy’s detractors have alleged and as Nixon rightly refutes (*Slow Violence* 171). Even more searing is the condemnation of Roy’s activist essays by Ramachandra Guha, who suggests that Roy’s celebrity involvement does the campaign against the Sardar Sarovar dam more harm than good. This point might merit consideration. But Guha couches it in blistering language that seems motivated by sexism: he accuses Roy of “self-absorption” and “hysteria,” and asserts that she lacks the “intellectual probity and judgement” of great “men” such as George Orwell and Kota Shivram Karanth (“The Arun Shourie of the Left” n.p.). Guha concludes, “I am told that Arundhati Roy has written a very good novel. Perhaps she should write another. Her retreat from activism would ... [be] good for literature, and good for the Indian environmental movement” (n.p.). Again, we have the bifurcation of literature (meaning novels) from activism (meaning essays). And here we have the

implication that only men can excel in both worlds as “activist-novelists” (Guha n.p.). Sexism aside, what is repeatedly denied is the reality that the political and literary projects of Roy’s novel and her essays are continuous.

We can better understand the relations between eco-politics and novelistic style by tracing what Nixon would call “the politics of scale” (*Slow Violence* 161) through a little-discussed aspect of Roy’s novel: the interconnection of ecosocial violence and food systems. We see these connections when Roy’s central character Rahel revisits the river of her childhood in Kerala:

[The river] had shrunk. And she had grown.

Downriver, a saltwater barrage had been built, in exchange for votes from the influential paddy-farmer lobby. The barrage regulated the inflow of salt water from the backwaters. ... So now they had two harvests a year instead of one. More rice, for the price of a river.

... [T]he river was no more than a swollen drain now... sequined with the occasional silver slant of a dead fish ... that ferried fetid garbage to the sea. Bright plastic bags blew across its viscous, weedy surface. ...

The stone steps that had once led bathers right down to the water, and Fisher People to the fish, ... led from nowhere to nowhere. ...

On the other side of the river, the steep mud banks changed abruptly into low mud walls of shanty hutments. Children hung their bottoms over the edge and defecated directly onto the squelchy, sucking mud. ... Upstream, clean mothers washed clothes and pots in unadulterated factory effluents. People bathed. ...

[A] five-star hotel chain had bought the [former colonial estate]. ... The hotel guests were ferried across the backwaters, straight from Cochin. They arrived by speedboat, ... leaving behind a rainbow film of gasoline.

The view from the hotel was beautiful, but here too the water was thick and toxic. *No Swimming* signs had been put up in stylish calligraphy. They had built a tall wall to screen off the slum and prevent it from encroaching. (118-19)

The river has been sullied by several forces paradigmatic of the neoliberal era: it is drained by a dam, contaminated by a factory, and encroached upon by a hotel chain. These changes are not effects of climate change, but tourism, big agro, and heavy industries are notorious carbon emitters. The passage foregrounds both ecology and scalar shifts: the first four lines move the reader from Rahel’s personal experience of

changing sizes (her own, and that of the river) to the scale of local politics. With the references to the hotel, we move into international tourism, an industry which is itself a metonym for neoliberal encroachment (Chapter One). The dam project promotes larger scale food systems (the “influential paddy-farmer lobby”) at the expense of localized, low-impact foodways, such as fishing, which the “Fisher People” can no longer pursue in this river of “dead fish.” This logic of scaling up – “two harvests . . . for the price of a river” – also undergirds industrial agriculture. Corporations such as Monsanto claim that chemical pesticides and fertilizers, corporatized farming, and GM seeds are efficient. But the efficiency of such measures over time is dubious at best, and their costs are paid by the poor.⁸⁸ These costs will ultimately be visited upon us all: industrial agriculture is one of the leading contributors to climate change, and agro-food systems are threatened as climate change accelerates. If the relevance of Roy’s passage to climate change is “oblique,” its attention to the intimacy among ecosocial damage, global capital, and food production is not.

Given these eco-food connections, an ecocritical reading of Roy’s novel could also explore the novel’s object world of Orangedrinks and Lemondrinks, pickles, tea, and

⁸⁸ For example, “Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA)” is a Monsanto / Gates Foundation project selling hybrid maize seed that ostensibly “uses water more efficiently and resists insect pests” (“Water Efficient”). Farmer organizations from South Africa, Tanzania, Mozambique, Kenya, and Uganda have condemned this project, asserting “no evidence showing that the drought tolerant trait even works,” no “risk assessment,” and “massive pest resistance” from previous uses of the insect resistant gene. The farmers insist that “agroecological practices such as organic matter and mulching” will provide higher yields (“African Civil Society,” n.p.). Industrial agriculture is not efficient when we look at full inputs and declining yields over time, as Vandana Shiva and other scholar-activists have argued (*Making Peace with the Earth* 17).

other foods.⁸⁹ Indeed, literary foods ought to be central to postcolonial ecocritical conversations. Food access is central to the environmentalism of the poor as originally conceived. Guha's main cases touch on food access: for example, the Penan, a forest-dwelling community in Malaysia, have demonstrated against logging which has "fouled their rivers, exposed their soils and destroyed plants and animals which they harvested for food" (Guha 100). Likewise, peasants in Thailand have resisted monocultural eucalyptus farming on the basis that "their rice fields would be affected. . . . [T]hey also mourned the loss of the mixed forests from which they harvested fodder, fuel, fruit and medicines" (Guha 100). As if to underscore the centrality of food, Guha and Martinez-Alier also call the environmentalism of the poor "empty-belly environmentalism," operating on a logic of scarcity, as contrasted with the "full-stomach environmentalism" of the wealthy, which assumes plenitude (Guha and Martinez-Alier 116). The gastronomic connotations of these terms foreground the overlap between food justice and the environmentalism of the poor. One might think then that a postcolonial ecocritical reading of Roy's novel would have much to say about her abundant references to foods and eating.

But when the environmentalism of the poor inspires literary critics in the US and UK to address food production and distribution, such a systems-level approach can sideline zoomed-in matters of cooking and eating, seen as frivolous. As Anita Mannur writes, despite a "flourishing interest in foodways" among scholars of literature and culture, many "literary and cultural critics remain ambivalent about the status of 'food

⁸⁹ For example, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee recovers the neglected politics of *The God of Small Things* by reading Roy's formal choices and spatial-architectural motifs as a radical refusal to dichotomize environment and culture. It would be within this ambit to discuss food among elements that blur the categories of the social and natural, but Mukherjee does not do so.

studies.’ ... [F]ood is rarely considered a serious topic of academic inquiry within literary studies” (10, 12). This bifurcation along scalar lines means that even if ecocritics note Roy’s mention of “pesticides bought with World Bank loans,” as Nixon does, they might not connect these agro-industrial references with the intimacies of popcorn-eating and cucumber-peeling, or with Roy’s constant gastronomic metaphors (Roy 14, *Slow Violence* 160). Literary food studies have mushroomed since the publication of Mannur’s book in 2010. But a tension remains whether to read food as metaphor or materiality, as if these modes of reading were mutually exclusive. Mannur, for one, is “less interested” in material foodways; she asserts that “the real import of food derives purely from its symbolic functions in expressing group or cultural identity” (7, 12). I would instead insist, with Allison Carruth, that “food ... is not strictly a symbolic register” (*Global Appetites* 96). We must attend to both the material and the metaphorical dimensions of food, and we must think across scales. If the minutia of cooking and eating seem purely symbolic while materialist analysis zooms out to food systems, Carruth’s book *Global Appetites* overcomes this divide between material and metaphor, macro and micro. In her chapter on Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby*, Carruth frames her intervention as “shifting the scholarly focus from scenes of food preparation to the regional and global food routes that shape Morrison’s treatment of racial identity, motherhood, diaspora, and empire” (91). But supermarket shopping and hungry dreams of consuming oranges remain central scenes for Carruth’s analysis. Quotidian food practices are not too small to factor into an ecocritical and systems-oriented reading. The true payoff of Carruth’s method is that she works across scales. In this vein, I consider both food’s metaphoric and material valences

by linking representations of small-scale eating and cooking to those of large-scale food systems.

If scholarship on food bifurcates by scale and by metaphorical versus materialist mode, novels do not work that way. In *The God of Small Things*, food functions as a lever for switching scales. In the face of the altered river, “[t]here wasn’t much [the hotel] could do about the smell,” but at least they had “fresh tandoori pomfret and crêpe suzette on their menu” (119-20). Imagine from these dishes how the hotel might market itself: European luxury meets exotic flavor. By including these details while describing the hotel’s deleterious effects on ecology and foodways, Roy links micro practices of eating to larger problems with international tourism. Similarly, pickles – a riff on Rushdie – begin small and tangible, and scale up through a narrative about the family’s growing pickle business. This business begins with Rahel’s grandmother pickling at home, and is converted into a factory-scale enterprise under her uncle Chacko. When Chacko’s ex-wife and daughter visit from England, the factory workers pause to witness their arrival:

The picking (and the squashing, the slicing, boiling and stirring, the grating, salting, drying, the weighing and bottle sealing) stopped.

“*Chacko Saar vannu*” the traveling whisper went. Chopping knives were put down. Vegetables were abandoned, half cut, on huge steel platters. Desolate bitter gourds, incomplete pineapples. . . . Pickled hands were washed and wiped on cobalt-blue aprons. Escaped wisps of hair were recaptured and returned to white headscarves. (163)

Pickles work on the small scale of the somatic, with the description of specific manual labors and food items, the details of “half cut” vegetables and “wisps of hair.” But because passive constructions absent human subjects from this passage’s grammar, those agents become many unspecified workers, indexing the largeness of factory labor as a classed institution and form of production. This issue will culminate in a labor conflict at

the pickle factory, connecting Roy's novel to a history of Naxalite agitation in India. That the laborers pause to observe also speaks to the outsized status of Chacko's privileged family, whose personal drama halts subaltern lives as well as dominating the narrative. With these scalar shifts, foods such as pickles and crêpe suzette accrue to an overarching metaphor for how personal matters (love, hunger, taste) impinge on the driving forces of history. Recall the scale changes in Roy's description of the river: she presents food systems and environment as not only intertwined, but homologous in their multiscalar nature. The question of scale then invites the ecocritic to engage Roy's figurations of food and eating, not just direct environmentalist content.

Tea too works in multiple registers. Rahel's father is the assistant manager of a tea estate in Assam, a region of northeastern India. The British Raj converted Assam into a network of export-oriented tea plantations in the nineteenth century. These imperialists narrated their activities as an "Edenic transformation ... of a jungle into a garden," while importing and exploiting laborers from other parts of India (Sharma 22). Roy's mention of tea estates calls up colonization and reorganization of landscape and labor, underscoring the effects of tea as a commodity. Tea, a Chinese beverage introduced to India by English companies in the 1840s, was by 1900 a major plantation crop. In a 1920s essay called "Tea or Poison," Sir Prafulla Chandra Ray, the first Indian professor of chemistry at Calcutta University, deplored the consumption by Indians of tea. In Ray's view, tea was displacing more nutritious Bengali beverages, and its consumption only profited European capitalists (Greenough 76). Mohandas Gandhi also characterized tea as unhealthy, proliferating discourses on tea and health within the nationalist struggle (Sanyal n.p.). Tea, then, has long been politicized in India, connecting individual

consumption to the politics of imperial capitalism and nationalism. Roy genders these dynamics by linking tea estates to Rahel's father, who abuses his ex-wife, Rahel's mother Ammu. But for Roy, tea is also a metaphor for acculturation. She repeatedly describes Christianity in Kerala as something that "seeped [in] ... like tea from a teabag" (33, 162). Tea, in *The God of Small Things*, exemplifies the simultaneous material and metaphoric valences of food: food systems are crucial to ecology and economy, while foods evoke a rich range of sensory and cultural associations. Foods not only bridge across the scales of representation, but also bridge the documentary and evocative valences of novelistic meaning-making.

With the idea that food can carry novels across multiple scales and modes, let us revisit *The Great Derangement*. Ghosh's argument (that serious fiction struggles to represent climate change) has everything to do with scale. For Ghosh, novels become narratable by constraining their scale, both temporally and geographically. Whereas forms such as the epic "embrace the inconceivably large," novels

conjure up worlds that become real precisely because of their finitude and distinctiveness. Within the mansion of serious fiction, no one will speak of how the continents were created; nor will they refer to the passage of thousands of years: connections and events on this scale appear not just unlikely but also absurd within the delimited horizon of a novel. ... Here, then, is [a] form of resistance, a scalar one, that the Anthropocene presents to the techniques that are most closely identified with the novel. (61-3)

For Ghosh, the modern novel struggles to represent climate change because the phenomenon is too large for "serious fiction" focused on individuated characters. But as we have seen with *The God of Small Things*, novels – including those acclaimed as serious fiction – work across the scales of the minute and the vast. Food can facilitate this work, and the polyscalar capacities of the novel form can in turn illuminate food systems

as relations between individual consumers and the global food regime. Multiscalar and multimodal references to food are not unique to Roy: rather, I would argue they are paradigmatic of the emergent global environmental canon. Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* makes scalar leaps between disordered eating and subaltern access to food, between Bengali cooking and global trade. In what follows, I show that a food-focused ecocriticism can use *The Hungry Tide* to complicate Ghosh's own claims about scale, and to shake up critical consensus both in postcolonial ecocriticism and in postcolonial studies of food. To this end, I read *The Hungry Tide* first for fauna, and then for food.

Fauna or Food?

The Hungry Tide takes place in the Sundarbans, a tidal mangrove forest that spans West Bengal and Bangladesh. The area is home to the iconic and endangered Bengal tiger. India's national government and NGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund have intervened to save these animals, with their "Project Tiger" occurring at the expense of the local poor. In 1979, the Indian police massacred a group of refugees squatting on Marichjhapi, an island designated for tiger conservation. This history haunts Ghosh's novel, which opens with the cetologist Piya Roy arriving to study Gangetic dolphins (or Orcaella). Piya is an American of Bengali descent, with a commitment to animal conservation and little knowledge of human lives in the Sundarbans. She is not wealthy by American standards, but privileged by citizenship and education, in ways that tangle with the difficulties of her diasporic childhood. Piya meets Kanai Dutt, an arrogant Bengali businessman who runs a translation agency in New Delhi. As an interpreter figure, Kanai helps Ghosh interweave the politics of language and translation with

questions of food, class, and environment. Kanai is visiting his aging aunt Nilima, the leader of a local anti-poverty NGO called the Badabon Trust. Attracted to Piya, Kanai invites her to stay at Nilima's house on the island of Lusibari. But first, the two part company, and Piya gets into trouble with two corrupt guards from the Forest Department. A fisherman named Fokir rescues Piya and uses his knowledge of the area to help her track dolphins on his boat. Kanai joins them for a second research trip, insisting that Piya ought to have a translator, since she does not speak Bengali and Fokir does not speak English. Conflicts emerge between these three characters – diasporic conservationist, postcolonial elite, and subaltern – and peak over how to prioritize the lives of impoverished humans versus endangered nonhuman animals. Ultimately, Piya accepts that conservation must take forms that do not harm the poor. This ending could seem facile, presenting subaltern access to resources and animal conservation as easy priorities to reconcile. And indeed, this narrative has led postcolonial ecocritics to canonize *The Hungry Tide* as a moral on subaltern environmentalism. For Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, *The Hungry Tide* exemplifies postcolonial environmental literature's technique of "uneven form," borrowing from indigenous genres such as Bengali folk theatre to insert subaltern voices into the Anglophone novel.⁹⁰ In Rajender Kaur's reading, deep time confronts the frenzy of development politics, until Piya discovers "a new paradigm for transcultural ecocritical engagement" ("Home" 127-8). These readings are quite different, Mukherjee's being far more formalist. But both critics are content with the novel's realist legibility in terms of environmentalism of the poor. They accept the reconciliation of subaltern access to resources with animal conservation, at face value.

⁹⁰ See Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, Chapter 5: 108-133.

However, the confluence of social and environmental concerns in *The Hungry Tide* can also be mapped in terms of food and eating, in ways that complicate the seemingly idealistic ending. I will read *The Hungry Tide* two ways. I will first track references to dolphins, tigers, and crabs. This animal-focused reading situates eco-politics in relation to the novel's realist and modernist modes, and its self-reflexive sense of canonicity. But the narrative arc that emerges is disappointing, introducing ethical ambiguities only to flatten them. When I reread the novel, I will foreground disordered eating and commoditized foods. This method reveals the complexity submerged under the rosy ending.

When we follow the fauna, *The Hungry Tide* seems like a glib guide to subaltern environmentalism. To Piya's delight, her research on dolphins and Fokir's fishing seem synergetic. She conducts observations at a pool where Orcaella congregate, while Fokir fishes for crabs. Piya

had thought they might end up disrupting each other's work. ... But to her surprise no such difficulties arose. ... [T]he [fishing] line acted like a guide rail. ... She needed her monitor only to make sure that each run began at a point fifteen feet farther along the quadrant. This was just as much to Fokir's advantage as it was to hers. ...

It was surprising enough that their jobs had not proved to be utterly incompatible – especially considering that one of the tasks required the input of geostationary satellites while the other depended on bits of shark bone and broken tile. But that it had proved possible for two such different people to pursue their own ends simultaneously – people who could not exchange a word with each other ... seemed almost miraculous. (117-18)

Taken on its own, this passage suggests that studying fauna can easily be reconciled with the livelihoods of the local poor. It refutes distinctions between high- and low-tech jobs, underscoring the simultaneity of different modes of using the environment. This is one of many overwritten passages laden with heavy-handed ethics: Ghosh is at pains to flag the

unexpected symbiosis between the scientist and the fisherman, rather than trusting the reader to extrapolate this moral. The same can be said of another early passage, in which Piya realizes that Fokir knew where *Orcaella* congregate because he had observed them while following crabs. Piya waxes philosophical on the ecological and symbolic primacy of crabs:

Hadn't someone said that intertidal forests should be named after crabs rather than mangroves since it was they – certainly not the crocodile or the tiger or the dolphin – who were the keystone species of the entire ecosystem? ... [W]ho was it who had said that the definition of 'nature' was that it included everything not formed by human intention? But it was not her own intention that had brought her here today; it was the crabs – because they were Fokir's livelihood and without them he would not have known to lead her to this pool where the *Orcaella* came. ... Perhaps it was the crab that ruled the tide of her destiny. (119)

Dolphins, crocodiles, and tigers are what conservation biologists have called charismatic megafauna. Single-species conservation prioritizes such eye-catching creatures at the expense of other organisms, including humans, underwriting a colonial history of forced removals and “antihuman ecology” (Nixon *Slow Violence* 139). Crabs, a “keystone species,” represent an alternative, “ecological” approach, concerned with how different organisms interact – Ghosh's metaphor for cooperation among humans. Ecocritics often borrow the vocabulary of ecology to suggest that nature is oriented towards cooperation and togetherness, “attempting to derive ethical principles from the functioning of ecosystems” (Heise “Transnational Turn” 383). But ecology as a branch of environmental science has no such moral value. The idea that ecosystems tend toward harmony is not backed by the authority of “science.”⁹¹ Ghosh participates in this distortion of ecology.

⁹¹ For a discussion both of ecology's discredited status within the sciences and of ecocritics' haphazard misrepresentation of its terms, see Dana Phillips, Chapter 2 in *The Truth of Ecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

He represents Piya's replacement of charismatic megafauna with a keystone species as a way to overcome the epistemologies behind colonial violence (even as Piya dismisses Fokir's "intention" along with her own). Just in case his readers might miss the lesson, Ghosh has Piya interpret the symbolism of crabs, explaining her own character development as a realization that the crab "ruled the tide of her destiny." Both crabs and dolphins help Ghosh overwrite the harmonization of ecosocial tensions.

Tigers, however, complicate this symbiosis, marking the incommensurability of various worldviews. More glamorous than Gangetic dolphins ("phlegmatic, beady-eyed creatures" lacking the "sex appeal" that Kanai had imagined [251]), tigers are the stars of ecosocial drama in the Sundarbans. Endangered but also dangerous, tigers routinely kill locals. In one much-commented passage, Fokir dismays Piya by helping villagers kill a trapped tiger. The scene is focalized through Piya, who sees the villagers as "screaming in a kind of maddened blood lust," "shrieking '*Maar! Maar! Kill! Kill!*'" in "extreme fear and uncontrollable rage" (243, 240). Piya perceives a savage throng, rather than acknowledging that it is logical for this community to protect itself. The villagers are shrouded in "mist ... lit by the orange glow of the massed torches," reprising the climactic scene of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which Marlow finds Kurtz in the jungle near a firelit gathering of Africans (*Hungry Tide* 239). Conrad imputes savagery both to Africans and to the imperialist Kurtz, modes of reading that resonate across Piya's impression of an angry mob. The scene haunts Piya on the following day:

"The village," she said. ... "Last night: I still can't get it out of my head. ... [T]he people, the flames. It was like something from another time – before recorded history. I feel like I'll never be able to get my mind around the—" Kanai prompted her as she faltered. "The horror?" "The horror. Yes. I wonder if I'll ever be able to forget it." (248)

Piya places this scene of rural life in an imagined past (“before recorded history”), denying its contemporaneity. Her lens of “horror” marks her gaze as imperialist: “The horror! The horror!” is Kurtz’s line in *Heart of Darkness*. Ghosh splits these words into a call-and-response between Kanai and Piya, indicating that in the postcolonial era, the imperialist position is parceled out between postcolonial elites and citizens of the global North. Kanai suggests as much, rebuking Piya after she laments that Fokir is “part of the horror too”:

I don’t think it’s quite that simple, Piya. I mean, aren’t we a part of the horror as well? You and me and people like us? ... That tiger had killed two people. ... It happens every week that people are killed by tigers. How about the horror of that? If there were killings on that scale anywhere else on earth it would be called a genocide, and yet here it goes unremarked. ... And the reason is just that these people are too poor to matter. ... [W]e’re complicit in this ... [b]ecause it was people like you ... who made a push to protect the wildlife here, without regard for the human costs. And I’m complicit because people like me – Indians of my class, that is – have chosen to hide these costs, basically in order to curry favor with their Western patrons. (248-9)

Ghosh’s reformulation of Conrad’s “horror” positions Western-style wildlife conservation as neo-imperialism, and the global environmental novel as the heir of the colonial novel, with all the privileged status accorded to modernist classics. The Conrad reference complements *The Hungry Tide*’s realist mode with a self-reflexive orientation to these legacies, acknowledging that elitism muddies the Anglophone novel’s ethics. While Ghosh documents ecosocial strife in the Sundarbans in a realist fashion, he layers on a modernist aura of ethical irresolution, predicated on acknowledging the constraints to novelistic representation.

This modernist sensibility underscores the limitations of any particular subject position. Although Kanai parses the tiger-killing more thoughtfully than Piya, his rationality vanishes when alone in the boat with Fokir. Aggravated by Kanai’s

haughtiness, Fokir intimates there may be a tiger onshore and dares him to disembark. Kanai falls in the mud and explodes at Fokir, his fury “rising from sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master’s suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; ... the city’s antagonism toward the village” (269). Kanai’s anger at Fokir springs from their opposition in a range of inherited subject positions. Kanai understands his own ire as sparked by a language problem, analogous to a failed or frustrating translation:

There had been occasions in the past ... when Kanai had seen his clients losing their temper in like fashion. ... And almost always ... he was the target of their rage: the interpreter, the messenger, the amanuensis. He was the life preserver that held them afloat in a tide of incomprehension; the meaninglessness that surrounded them became, as it were, his fault, because he was its only named feature. ... [S]uch episodes were merely a professional hazard – “nothing personal” – it was just that his job sometimes made him a proxy for the inscrutability of life itself. (269)

The “inscrutability of life itself” can be understood as a failure of communication across social difference. But that failure can be commodified: as a professional translator, Kanai makes his living from the mutual incomprehension of foreign businesspeople and locals. Globalizing forces are Kanai’s bread and butter: his business “specialize[s] in serving the expatriate communities of New Delhi: foreign diplomats, aid workers, charitable organizations, multinationals, and the like” (17). As an interpreter, Kanai illustrates links between language and capital. Translation also figures the position of postcolonial elites in general, who can be seen (if reductively) as mediating power relations between Northerners and subalterns – just as Kanai translates between Piya and Fokir. Fokir is silenced for most of the novel, his words rendered only as Kanai’s translations. Only when Kanai and Fokir are alone together does Fokir have direct speech: the scene is focalized through Kanai, who can understand Fokir’s Bengali. The novel circulates between several different focalizers, but never focalizes Fokir – and just how direct is his

“direct speech”? Ghosh’s English words on the page are translations of subaltern speech too. Rather than assume the voice of the subaltern, Ghosh’s novel positions the elite author as a translator, entrusted to represent the subaltern to an Anglophone, largely Northern audience. This dubious task highlights the connection between language and capital, when we frame the novel as a saleable commodity. This is not a new theme so much as a self-conscious dialogue with canonical postcolonial novelists such as Chinua Achebe, who have long “foreground[ed] the difficulties in recovering subaltern oral histories in the realist mode of written English” (DeLoughrey and Handley 7). By rendering Fokir’s untranslatability explicit, Ghosh positions his novel as an heir of that troubled postcolonial legacy.

Cultivating this self-reflexive hesitance, tigers and translation motifs seem to suggest that certain gaps in communication are irreconcilable. But this irresolution vanishes in the novel’s abrupt ending, when Piya learns to reconcile subaltern environmental concerns with her conservation projects. First, Fokir dies. Shielding Piya from a storm with his body, he is sacrificed to ensure her survival. Piya is traumatized, behaving for several weeks like “a kind of human wraith, inward, uncommunicative, leaden-faced,” before leaving the Sundarbans (324). However, this is all glossed over within a two-page section on Fokir’s funeral, plus the short final chapter named “Home: An Epilogue” – framing the emotional impact of the storm as an afterthought. Indeed, Piya’s anguish is mentioned only as Nilima’s flashback. Meanwhile, the narrative present has leapt forward two weeks, to Piya’s unexpected return. A fully-recovered Piya chirps to Nilima that various conservation groups have offered to fund her research. Piya wants to collaborate with Nilima’s anti-poverty NGO, rather than “do the kind of work that

places the burden of conservation on those who can least afford it. ... I'd want it to be under the sponsorship of the Badabon Trust, so the local fishermen would be involved. ... We'd share the funding" (327). This plan harmonizes conservation with social justice, helping people and dolphins alike. And it resolves the narrative's major threads. The new project will employ both Piya and Fokir's widow Moyna, and Piya adds that she and Moyna could teach each other English and Bengali, as if to smooth over the power differentials attached to language. Kanai will move his business closer to the Sundarbans, reopening the foreclosed possibility of a love match between him and Piya, without interfering with either of their work. And the peripatetic loner Piya has found a "home": she ascribes this word to Nilima's house, where Piya has decided (without invitation) to move in as a renter. Overlooking her presumptuousness, Piya explains, "You know, Nilima ... for me, home is where the Orcaella are, so there's no reason why this couldn't be it" (329). This platitude erases the importance of this specific place to its residents. And the sunny ending downplays the price of Piya's wakeup call: Fokir's death. The sacrifice of the subaltern is a chilling condition of possibility for a cheerful resolution of ecosocial conflict. The ending seems to package environmental justice as an easy position to adopt, and the global environmental novel as a feel-good product. Reading bestselling texts from elsewhere becomes a self-congratulatory gesture, substituting reading for political action, styling commodity consumption as awareness.

But is Ghosh merely participating in this commodification of conflict? Or is he satirizing that process? Is the epilogue tacked on to sell the novel? Or to mock the reader's desire for resolution? *The Hungry Tide* provides reasons to distrust Piya's proffering of a solution to local problems: she has made suspect claims to understand

subalternity, as Kanai points out regarding her affinity with Fokir: “[T]here [isn’t] ... anything in common between you. ... Nothing. He’s a fisherman and you’re a scientist. What you see as fauna he sees as food. He’s never sat in a chair, for heaven’s sake” (222). Kanai is right to check Piya, who overestimates her and Fokir’s mutual understanding, and assimilates Fokir into her category of the eco-indigene.⁹² But Kanai’s scorn of Fokir is no better. Kanai positions environmentalism as a classed orientation only available to the Western-educated, excluding concerns about “food” from its purview. What if alongside fauna, we also saw food?

Ghosh’s novel self-consciously positions bourgeois conservation as a neocolonial force that the contemporary novel must address, as we have seen. But we need to turn to food in order to see how Ghosh complicates the legacy of the colonial and postcolonial novel, reworking it for the neoliberal era by commenting on the role of global capitalism. If we highlight commodified edibles as well as animals, we see that eco-politics in *The Hungry Tide* are enmeshed with food and eating across personal and systemic scales. Piya and Fokir’s interactions begin with a face-off between fishing and nutrition bars. When Fokir first takes Piya to look for dolphins on his boat, she notices him “tending a set of fishing lines,” which “worried Piya at first, for dolphins had been known to get themselves tangled.... But... Fokir’s tackle was too flimsy to pose a threat... and she had let the matter pass, deciding that it was all right to ignore such lightweight lines” (114). With the condescension of the Western conservationist, Piya permits her rescuer to fish on his own boat, provided he does not harm dolphins. She prioritizes animals over human

⁹² The “eco-indigene” refers to the stereotype of an indigenous person “living in perfect harmony with nature and having an ideal ecological wisdom” (Caminero-Santangelo 299).

use of the environment for food, illustrating her “full-stomach environmentalism.” In contrast, Fokir keeps “for kindling” a paper that Piya “would have tossed... away,” exemplifying the careful resource use of “empty-belly environmentalism” (116). While I would not dismiss endangered species, Fokir and Piya’s interactions highlight the tendency for bourgeois environmentalism to sideline low-income populations. Piya would disrupt Fokir’s livelihood for her research, as becomes clear when she detains him near a pool where *Orcaella* congregate. She notices that Fokir and his son Tutul are running low on food. Rather than defer to their normal fishing patterns, Piya shares her “carefully hoarded stock of nutrition bars” (115). She carries these and other industrially-produced foods in order to avoid local cuisine, rarely eating “anything not from a can, a jar or a package” (80). Piya’s offer to replace Fokir’s foodways with the nutrition bar allegorizes the global North’s imposition of agro-food products on the South. Such practices disrupt local food systems to enrich transnational corporations.⁹³

Piya’s preferred foods – nutrition bars, mashed potatoes, bananas, and Ovaltine – are both synecdoches for the globalized food regime and manifestations of her own disordered eating. Piya refuses to eat Bengali food, a neurosis that dates from her childhood in Seattle: she “discovered, from pointed jokes and chance playground comments, that the odors” of her mother’s Bengali cooking “followed her everywhere, like unseen pets” (81). Food smells breed shame because they reify cultural and racial difference. Piya’s playground experience is paradigmatic of narratives in which “food odors, often indelibly grafted onto bodies of racialized subjects, serve to negatively

⁹³ Across the twentieth century, these impositions have included food aid, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and patented GM seeds. See the introduction.

racialize South Asian bodies” (Mannur 5). Her “response was to fight back ... against [the odors] and against her mother, shutting them away with closed doors, sealing them into the kitchen” (81). Her avoidance of Bengali food indicates her discomfort with diasporic identity, and frames her childhood loneliness, stuck at home with a mother who suffered depression until death from cervical cancer. Bengali words evoke only Piya’s parents’ arguments, because Piya’s father never wanted her to learn the language: “the Bengali language was an angry flood trying to break down her door. She would crawl into a closet and lock herself in, stuffing her ears to shut out those sounds. But a door was no defense against her parents’ voices” (78). Piya tries to close both the smells of food and the sounds of language behind doors, drawing the reader’s sympathies for her childhood trauma. Also sympathetic is her loneliness and gendered mistreatment: Piya travels constantly for work, and has stopped seeking relationships since being burned by a boyfriend. Yet when Piya’s linguistic and culinary refusals accompany her to Bengal, they become markers of her American self-indulgence. Piya’s linguistic incompetence causes misunderstandings, especially with subaltern characters. Her refusal of food is a parallel barrier to communication or empathy. After several days of refusing dinner at Nilima’s house, Piya receives a spread of “plain mashed potatoes and two bananas” in addition to “the usual fare of rice and fish curry” because of her special “eating preferences” (187). This anecdote flips platitudes about travel: rather than Piya opening up to the places she visits, other people shift their habits to accommodate her American stridence. Piya is scarred by the loneliness of diaspora, yet privileged by her American status. Her nutrition bars, eaten in place of Bengali food, link the postcolonial trope of disordered eating to the industrial food system, of which Piya is both victim and agent.

Piya is even ruder when Fokir cooks onboard his boat, where her neurosis elucidates her enmeshment within commodity culture. The “acrid odor of burning chilies” brings Piya’s childhood “phantoms ... alive again, clawing at her throat and her eyes, attacking her as though she were an enemy who had crossed over undetected. She retreated to the bow and when [Fokir] followed her there, with a plateful of rice and cooked crab, she fended him off with her protein bars and her bottled water” (81). Piya’s refusal of ethnic identity turns on the seeming placelessness of these packaged foods. Piya travels many places for work, but tries to eat like she is anywhere and nowhere, bringing foods that efface their origins. But protein bars and bottled water are not culturally blank. They are artifacts of the consumerist culture of globalized capitalism. Capital may purport to homogenize access to products, but in fact perpetuates imperialist and racialized inequities. Ironically, the only “Indian” food that Piya likes is Ovaltine, a malted chocolate milk powder trademarked by Associated British Foods. Piya describes drinking Ovaltine as “a habit my parents brought over. ... They used to buy their groceries in Indian stores. I like it now because it’s easy to carry and convenient when you’re out on the water” (187). Piya’s one inherited predilection is for a mass-produced residue of British colonialism. Ovaltine underscores the symbolic valence of Piya’s eating habits as a manifestation of diasporic postcolonial anxiety – and of the ideology of globalized capitalism, which she connotes by advertising Ovaltine as “convenient.” Ghosh tweaks the postcolonial trope of disordered eating to scrutinize neoliberal-era consumerism. As someone with buying power, Piya ostensibly has consumer choice. But this privilege hooks her into the same food regime that she spreads onto Fokir’s boat.

Piya's rejection of Bengali food is figured as a paranoid defense mechanism with the references to her "phantoms" and with her dramatic reaction to Fokir offering food, which Piya sees as an assault to "fend off." This is not simply rude behavior, but a neurosis, an eating disorder. But is Piya's disordered eating a metaphor for diasporic anxiety, or a symptom? Does Ghosh instrumentalize disease, or position racism as a structural cause of disordered eating? If the latter, representing disordered eating as a symptom of Piya's combination of entitlement and trauma could complicate stereotypes of eating disorders as a disease of the privileged. Medicalized accounts of eating disorders need to be tempered by attention to structural factors, such as the targeting of low-income populations by the fast food industry, as Susan Bordo argues (268). Bordo challenges the assumption that only "privileged, heterosexual white girls" have eating disorders, asking for richer accounts of relationships among race, gender, sexuality, and disordered eating (Bordo 266). Piya's disordered eating does complicate the racial dynamics of such stereotypes, connecting her experience of the food regime to diaspora. She is a target of racism in America, yet a privileged American in Bengal – just as she is both agent and victim of the industrial food system. On the other hand, Ghosh prolongs accounts of eating disorders as a feminine problem. He rather hastily genders Piya as a naïve victim of former boyfriends and, in Kanai's eyes, an "out of place, almost exotic" object, all the more interesting for her "neatly composed androgyny" (3). Ghosh's representation of the feminine and/or non-binary body as a passive victim of the male gaze, coupled with Piya's gendered food neurosis, creates a troubling intersection between Piya's racialization (which Ghosh represents with a fair amount of subtlety) and her less nuanced gendering. The postcolonial trope of disordered eating is revitalized by

Ghosh's attention to diaspora, yet his representation of women as victims remains dubious. Still, I am interested in the analytical force of categorizing Piya's eating habits as disordered. Can disordered eating in this novel shift some of our definitions of pathology, out of the medical realm and into the social? By calling Piya's embrace of nutrition bars, Ovaltine, and bottled water an eating disorder, I suggest that we need to shift our cultural sense of what kind of eating is pathological. If it is participation in a regime of industrial food that is pathologized here, it follows that the problem is not Piya as an individual, but the food regime itself. Industrial food is pathological. Piya's depth psychology can be reframed as structural critique of the food system. A diet of packaged and mass-produced food, which has become increasingly standard for many people, is then denaturalized. So-called "alternative" diets that have been pathologized (such as veganism⁹⁴) start to seem more reasonable – with the caveat that we should not think about alternative diets as freely-taken individual choices, but as differentially available based on structures of power.

In support of this reading, *The Hungry Tide* allows us to connect disordered eating and food commodities to severe and direct forms of structurally-produced hunger. Passages on subaltern hunger shadow Piya's disordered eating. While uncommon, these sections are central to the novel's environmentalism of the poor. The prawn industry has imperiled fishermen in the Sundarbans because of new nylon nets, which "are so fine that they catch the eggs of all the other fish" (112). As Moyna explains to Piya, Nilima's trust could not get the nets banned because "there's a lot of money in prawns and the traders had paid off the politicians. What do they care ...? It's people like us who're going to

⁹⁴ See Wright, *The Vegan Studies Project*, 96-106.

suffer” (112). As Moyna identifies, the depletion of the fisheries exemplifies an ecosocial issue germane to the food-gathering practices of the poor. Luxury trading threatens subaltern lives via the degradation of the ecosystem. Dangerous food gathering practices are presented as a “way of life” in the Sundarbans, whose inhabitants

were mainly of farming stock who had been drawn to Lusibari by the promise of free farmland. Hunger drove them to hunting and fishing, and the results were often disastrous. Many died of drowning, and many more were picked off by crocodiles and estuarine sharks. . . . [T]housands risked death in order to collect meager quantities of honey, wax, firewood and the sour fruit of the kewra tree. No day seemed to pass without news of someone being killed by a tiger, a snake or a crocodile. (67)

The use of local ecology for food produces the precarity of “ecosystem people”: those who are “dependent for their survival on the seasonal cycles of adjoining ecosystems and therefore often living in circumstances of necessarily adaptable mobility” (Nixon *Slow Violence* 151). Hunger and risky food-gathering practices are quotidian causes of death. Passages like this are rare in *The Hungry Tide*: everyday forms of subaltern food deprivation flit around the margins of the story, whereas Piya’s food issues are indulged as special. This distribution of narrative space prioritizes the desire of privileged readers for psychological access to a character with whom they may identify (Piya), speaking to the market pressures on mainstream fiction. I would subvert this distribution of space, both by recasting Piya’s disordered eating as a structural critique of the food regime, and by highlighting the latent narrative of subaltern hunger. This narrative’s submersion echoes the meagre attention to systemic causes of hunger in food-obsessed cultures, such as Piya’s USA. Piya’s own attempts to defray subaltern need are ineffectual because of her enmeshment in the food regime. During Fokir’s wake, Piya flashes on his death, remembering that “she had been unable to do anything for him other than hold a bottle of

water to his lips” (324). Piya had brought bottled water and nutrition bars to wait out the storm in a tree. These packaged foods prove to be not saving graces, but tokens of failure, useless to forestall the sacrifice of the subaltern. This detail reiterates the fraudulence of the food regime’s promises to eliminate hunger by using industrially-produced commodities.

A sensibility of political failure, uncertainty, and ethical complexity holds through the novel’s ending, if we attend to the material histories of commodities such as bananas. At Fokir’s wake, his son Tutul “place[s] a couple of bananas on [Piya’s] lap and [sits] with her, holding her hand, patient and unmoving” (323). This detail recalls the earlier reference to the “two bananas” served along with mashed potatoes to please Piya (187). Tutul’s offering implies the continuing willingness of Lusibari’s residents to indulge Piya’s privilege. While liking bananas may seem a tiny detail of personal preference, it scales up. India is the world’s largest producer of bananas at 20% (Koeppel 31). Do bananas represent some sort of cultural compromise, an Indian food that Piya likes? The politics behind the banana get complicated as soon as we trace the commodity’s history. In a rather orientalizing account of the banana’s global significance, journalist Dan Koeppel describes India as a country of “banana mania” (31). Noting how Palaniyandi Sundararaju, director of India’s National Research Centre for the Banana, “gushed” that the fruit is “Mother Nature’s most wonderful gift” at a 1998 conference on food security, Koeppel insists that “there is no country on earth that loves bananas more” (30, 31). If bananas bear such nationalist or orientalist fantasies, this may be because India both grows a plethora of indigenous varieties, and keeps nearly all its bananas for domestic consumption (Koeppel 31, Striffler and Moberg 9). Neoliberal institutions might like to

see this change.⁹⁵ But is becoming a big banana exporter a good idea? What of the histories of brutal worker exploitation, land appropriation and forest-clearing, and political violence surrounding banana exportation from Latin America and the Caribbean?⁹⁶ Increasing exports would likely disadvantage local producers in favor of foreign direct investment, and encourage jungle-clearing for monocultural farming of the export-suited Cavendish banana (Rao and Prahalathan 22, Koepfel 32). By accepting Tutul's bananas, does Piya participate in an orientalizing or neoliberal vision for India? Or is enthusiasm for bananas part and parcel of Piya's American sensibility? For Americans, bananas once represented "luxury consumption," "the exotic, the tropical," but today they have become "commonplace everyday-in-the-lunchbox fruits" (Willis 591). Bananas are a basic American taste, whose consumption epitomizes carefree disavowal of labor, figuring the global South as "a cornucopia spilling out a steady

⁹⁵ Exim Bank (India's major player in foreign investment and cross-border trade) advocates exporting bananas in a 2005 paper. This trend may be starting: India's exports of fruits witnessed 78% growth in 2003-4. There are, however, infrastructural limitations: prolonging shelf life would require cold storage at each stage of shipping (Rao and Prahalathan 13-15, 19).

⁹⁶ In the early- and mid-twentieth century, the agricultural giant United Fruit wielded substantial influence in its so-called "Banana Republics" (Gottlieb and Joshi 104-5). Worker exploitation was rife, as was interference by the US government. For example, a US-backed coup ousted a government committed to land reform in Guatemala, where United Fruit has long been the largest landholder (Striffler and Moberg 6). Large swaths of Central and South America as well as the Caribbean have been affected by United Fruit and its competitors Dole and Fyffes Limited. The activities of "El Pulpo" – the Octopus, as United Fruit is nicknamed – have inspired both worker resistance and a literary outpouring from authors such as Gabriel García Márquez. Since World War II, United Fruit has shifted away from direct production towards contract farming, but this system continues to imperil small farming and privilege "highly capitalized farmers" (Striffler and Moberg 14). Recent "banana wars" have opposed the "dollar bananas" cultivated by US multinationals in Latin America against European countries producing bananas in former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific (Striffler and Moberg 16). Banana workers today continue to face exploitation and pesticide poisoning (Gottlieb and Joshi 26).

supply of ordinary foodstuffs for North America's supermarkets" (Willis 591).⁹⁷ Piya's predilection for bananas, predating her arrival in Bengal, can as easily represent this thoughtless consumer behavior as any attachment to India. Bananas are both a portent of monocultural cash-cropping, and a sign of Piya's privileged participation in the food regime. The history of the banana haunts Ghosh's novel.

Tea is another such specter. The novel ends with Piya's blunder that "home is where the Orcaella are," and Nilima's cutesy reply: "That's the difference between us. For me, home is wherever I can brew a pot of good tea" (329). As this exchange reaffirms, two perceptual modes are available in this novel, organized by two sets of objects: fauna ("home is where the Orcaella are") and food ("home is wherever I can brew a pot of good tea"). But this ending also reduces Nilima's identity to a single consumption habit, one overburdened by orientalist fantasies in which tea-drinking may be seen as quintessentially Indian, despite tea's more complex relation to colonial and nationalist histories (as discussed in the previous section). Nilima's platitude recalls the saccharine deployment of foods to represent ethnicity, ghosting the imperial history of trade in tea. Not unlike bananas, tea connotes a legacy of land grabbing and labor exploitation. Tea estates in Assam imported indentured laborers from distant parts of India such as Chotanagpur, racializing the local inhabitants of Assam as "lazy natives" unfit for work (Sharma 25). The migrant "tea coolies" had "little option but to stay and toil, despite harsh conditions that local labourers refused to countenance" (Sharma 25). Worker exploitation remains a problem with tea production today. Ghosh is alert to such

⁹⁷ American stores continue to sell bananas predominantly from Central and South America, products of the aforementioned history of banana-related imperial violence (Wells 332).

imperial legacies, explicitly tracing commodity circulation in works such as his Ibis trilogy, which maps the opium trade. His reference to tea is no small matter: it recalls a history of imperial exploitation.

Nilima's blithe reference to tea also exposes her own privilege, as a consumer with capital and a postcolonial elite. Both Nilima and her husband Nirmal are bourgeois leftists whose subject positioning vitiates their earnest efforts to help the hungry. When Nilima and Nirmal moved to the Sundarbans from Kolkata, "[t]he destitution of the tide country was such as to remind them of the terrible famine that had devastated Bengal in 1942 — except that in Lusibari hunger and catastrophe were a way of life" (67). Nirmal and Nilima perceive the Bengal famine as a freak event. But as Amartya Sen has argued using this case from Bengal, famines result from structural inequality — not simply from unusual weather events or a simple lack of food.⁹⁸ Nilima and Nirmal are inattentive to structural causes of hunger, complicit in a class system that privileges them. Nirmal's ineffectuality manifests in his food-based interactions with the refugees settling Morichjhapi, recounted in his notebook. Upon his death, which predates the novel's main action, Nirmal leaves his journal to Kanai. Its contents appear in italics throughout *The Hungry Tide*, giving a ghosted account of how refugees squatting on Morichjhapi were massacred in 1979. Prior to this horrific event, the refugees throw a feast in order to recruit influential leftists to their cause (a lobby to be allowed to stay on Morichjhapi, which was a tiger conservation area). They invite Nirmal because he is a Marxist. Nirmal is shocked by the bounty of food: "[K]nowing that many of the settlers went hungry, I couldn't understand how this show of plenty had been arranged" (159). He asks Kusum

⁹⁸ See Chapter Five for further discussion of the Bengal famine.

(one of the settlers, Fokir's mother, and the object of Nirmal's desire) where the food came from. She answers that "[e]veryone contributed what they could. . . . But there was not much to buy – only the rice. The rest came from the rivers. Since yesterday we've all been out with nets and lines" (159). Nirmal supposes that the settlers are helpless, not recognizing that they can care for themselves as long as they are allowed to occupy land. He discounts the refugees' capacity to organize and plan, refusing to see why they would feed their guests rather than themselves: to garner political clout for the long-term, which is more important than eating well today. Rather than participating in the feast on his hosts' terms, Nirmal insists he is "not of [the] number" of the guests from Kolkata, and that the "precious food . . . would be wasted on [him]" (159). So he "hung back in the shade of the trees, and from time to time Fokir or Kusum would bring [him] a few morsels wrapped in a banana leaf" (159). With this gesture, Nirmal shifts the focus from the settlers to his personal insecurities. He positions himself as a conscientious abstainer, a self-styled neo-Gandhi, by denying that he is of the same class as the "journalists, photographers, and well-known authors" from Kolkata, "exactly the people [he] would have known" if he had continued to live there (158). Nirmal is embarrassed at being more privileged than the refugees yet less classy than the Kolkata intelligentsia. He tries to conceal this discomfort by narrating partial abstention from food as ethical behavior. This vaunted sense of righteousness indicates his political ineffectuality.

Nirmal and Nilima frequently bristle over Nirmal's desire to support the refugees, because Nilima considers compliance with the government essential to her NGO's survival. While these two approaches to helping the hungry are opposed, Ghosh seems critical of both. The failure of bourgeois leftism is also coded as a crisis of masculinity in

Nirmal's unfulfilled desire for Kusum, and as a representational crisis. Nirmal longs to write about the tide country and the experience of the Morichjhapi settlers, but laments, "In what way could I ever do justice to this place? What could I write of it that would equal the power of their longing and their dreams?" (180). Direct representation of the Morichjhapi massacre fails, motivating its indirect rendering through Nirmal's journals. This second narrative haunts the main action of *The Hungry Tide*, corroborating several references to the limitations of realist representation. For example, Piya carries a set of drawings of Gangetic and Irrawaddy dolphins, so she can ask locals whether they have seen the animals. These sketches "were not the best or most lifelike pictures she had ever come across (she knew of innumerable more accurate or more realistic photographs and diagrams), but for some reason she'd always had good luck with these drawings: they seemed to make the animals more recognizable than other, more realistic representations" (28). While a realist account of ecopolitical conflict in the Sundarbans persists at the surface level of Ghosh's text, he insists that "realistic" representation is not always effective or possible. Nirmal's vacuous gesture of fasting figures the emptiness of leftist politics, tied in turn to the limitations of the Anglophone realist novel. Nirmal's behavior reveals eating's valence as metonym for political behavior and for the politics of authorship. When read this way, *The Hungry Tide* ceases to provide naïve eco-political resolutions in Piya's vein, but instead admits the failures of the left, including circulating Anglophone novels by postcolonial elites as the voice of the subaltern. What to do in the face of hunger, poverty, and ecological devastation becomes a question the novel, mercifully, cannot answer.

These conjoined political and representational failures lie just beneath the surface of *The Hungry Tide*'s seemingly pacific resolution. This is a novel about food systems and long histories of globalization, far subtler than the overlaid novel about tigers, dolphins, and crabs. This is not to suggest reading for food as an alternative to reading for the environmentalism of the poor. Imperiled food access is a crucial eco-social issue, which Ghosh's realism records. But we would be stopping short if we saw this documentary objective as the only effect of Ghosh's references to food. The payoff of reading for food is not prioritizing different content, but producing a methodological disorientation, to avoid reducing literature's eco-politics to its realist content. *The Hungry Tide* invites us to move beyond showcasing literary texts as "evidence" of subaltern environmentalism, and also to revisit the consensus on representations of cuisine as ethnicity and disordered eating as postcoloniality. These food tropes are not so fusty when commodities connect them to imperial and neoliberal systems, situating long histories of globalization in relation with the psychodynamics of food and eating.

The material histories of food commodities alter their symbolic function: bananas mean something different when we consider labor struggles, orientalist fantasies, and neoliberal economics. As such, my reading does not oppose materialism to attention to symbolism, or suggest that materialism aligns with realist documentation. On the contrary, a materialist reading of Ghosh's novel in relation to the food regime nuances our sense of the novel's metaphors, and unleashes its modernist ambiguity. But nor is my method a deflation of realism, or an assertion of modernism as its opposite. Revisiting Jennifer Wenzel's appeal for postcolonial ecocritics to transcend reading literary texts "as empirical evidence of ecological crisis," Wenzel notes that such reductive hermeneutics

“assume a transparency so unliterary that it cannot even be dubbed ‘realist’” (Wenzel 151). We must read with a rich sense of realism not only as documentation, but as a literary practice open to a sensibility we may think of as modernist: an assertion of the ethical thorniness and inconclusive reflection that literary mediation affords.

CHAPTER THREE

Beyond the Blue-Green Orb:

Ruth Ozeki, the Family, and GMOs

Anti-GM Movements: “Politically Opposed to Lawns”

Schoolkids costumed as carrots to celebrate settler colonialism. God and the family farmer against abortion and big agro. Activists making veggie porn and pieing an exec with tofu-crème. Potato monocultures against “exotic” heirloom seeds. Pregnancies lost to pesticides, synthetic hormones, and getting knocked flat by a cow in a slaughterhouse. Cutting, silly, and smart, Ruth Ozeki’s satires *All Over Creation* (2003) and *My Year of Meats* (1998) link environmental activism, gender, race, consumer capitalism, and food. They differ from Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* and *The Whale Caller* or Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, whose food themes take the backseat to louder discourses about flora and fauna. Ozeki’s ecocritics could never avoid food politics. If anything, Ozeki is the “food” author who gets included in postcolonial ecocritical collections, such as *Postcolonial Green* (edited by Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt), in which *All Over Creation* is the subject of Rachel Stein’s contribution “Bad Seed.”⁹⁹ Stein maps Ozeki’s connections between agribusiness and reproductive and sexual oppression, especially of women of color. But Stein downplays Ozeki’s insistence that white patriarchalism aligns not only with biotech corporations, but also with certain

⁹⁹ Ozeki’s appearance in a postcolonial collection may be surprising since she is North American. But she is a minoritarian author taking a transnational approach to ecopolitics, enough to convince reviewers such as Riona Kelly that Ozeki is relevant. See Kelly, “Exploring Narratives of Global Justice and Sustainability: The Rise of Postcolonial Ecocriticism” in *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1, spring 2013, p 179.

anti-GM ideologies. Discourses that juxtapose GMOs or synthetic hormones to “truth,” “nature,” or “purity” condemn the alien and mixed, shading into xenophobic and anti-miscegenation sentiments (François 50). Ozeki clearly opposes the corporate patenting of GMOs. But *All Over Creation* probes the complexity of anti-GM politics through an alliance between radical leftists and a pro-life farmer. The tangle of radical and conservative thought within food movements is central to Ozeki’s novel. Several ideologies clash, including agrarianism, local food, and the Commons.

In what follows, I will trace such food movements through both scholarship and activist discourse, sketching out several itineraries and intersections of anti-GM politics. This mapping will then help me draw throughlines across *All Over Creation*, amidst a dense web of characters, situations, and discourses that lend the novel an ambience of excess. I will pursue several ways in which Ozeki articulates patriarchalism, orientalism, immigration, indigeneity, empire, industrial agriculture, and more. I will then turn to the question of excess itself, which inheres in *All Over Creation*’s aesthetic, its swarm of characters, and its heteroglossia. Heterogeneity and excess also become thematized as the novel’s eco-politics, as I will show.

Broadly speaking, American agrarianisms posit an environmental ethics inspired by working the land – an ideal often clustered around the figure of the (white male) farmer. This model of ecological stewardship counterbalances American wilderness ideology, which fantasizes that we can and should leave “nature” untouched. Wilderness discourses privilege vacation pursuits, such as camping and hiking in “pristine” national parks, by ignoring labor.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, American agrarians often sentimentalize

¹⁰⁰ See Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism*.

certain types of work, such as non-mechanized farming (when performed by white males), while ignoring the agricultural labor of slaves, migrants, and other exploited populations.¹⁰¹ The latter figures are variously elided and abjected by what Sarah D. Wald describes as “a long-standing cultural investment in the white male farmer as the quintessential and ideal US citizen” (3). Such concepts and rhetorics are traceable to Thomas Jefferson’s vision of a nation of “independent land owners to counteract the rising power of Eastern industrialism” (Barillas 62). From Jefferson, the yeoman farmer became a “central symbol in American political discourse” for anti-industrial stewardship as “the basis for a truly democratic society” (Barillas 62). But the Jeffersonian legacy reeks of plantation slavery, indentured or precarious labor, and maldistribution of land.

These issues haunt a range of American environmental ideologies influenced by Jeffersonian thought, such as Midwestern pastoralism. Aldo Leopold, this tradition’s major figure, drew on both Jefferson and the wilderness-oriented Romantics Thoreau and Emerson. Leopold advocated “ecological and democratic diversity” against the “bleak monoculture” of farming methods obsessed with profit (Barillas 71). But his famous “Land Ethic” – a plea to include nonhuman species in our community – urges stewardship by the private landowner, whom Leopold considers likelier than the legislature to protect the land. Leopold supposes that the “economic self-interest” of the wealthy can be remedied by teaching them an “understanding of ecology” that will produce an “ethical obligation toward land” (Leopold 229, 240). The Land Ethic ignores the inequitable distribution of resources, and the labor conditions of agricultural workers

¹⁰¹ See Richard White, “‘Are You An Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?’ Work and Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon (W.W. Norton and Co., 1996).

who are not landowners. An even more troubling legacy of Jefferson is the 1920s and 30s resurgence of southern agrarianism. Some agrarians of this vintage argued for a “return to small-scale subsistence farming,” while others endorsed a “landed aristocracy that would control a large plantation system” (Vernon 340). This convoluted movement is epitomized by the 1930 volume *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*. This collection of essays endorses segregation and positions the elite white farmer as steward not only of the land, but of the lives and labor of African-Americans and “poor whites” (Vernon 344). These racist and classist legacies are reasons to hesitate before recycling agrarian images, such as the farmer as figure for democracy – a multifaceted image in which progressive and reactionary content may coexist.

This farmer figure is everywhere. He is readily adapted to a consumerist economy, as visible in Dodge Ram’s 2013 Super Bowl commercial. The ad layers a voiceover of Paul Harvey’s 1978 “God made a farmer” speech onto images of agricultural labor, interspersed with shots of the Dodge Ram cruising through mud and carrying bales of hay. The farmers shown are almost all white, almost all cis-male. The commercial’s end-text dedicates the Dodge Ram “To the farmer in all of us,” leaving few doubts about whom Dodge does and does not mean by “us” (“Official ... ‘Farmer’”). As Sarah D. Wald puts it, this commercial “conveys a nostalgia for the rugged individualism of America’s past that it suggests we can regain if we just buy the right truck” (2). The farmer figure’s cultural valence extends beyond the politics of farm labor per se, weaving into the marketing strategies of consumer capitalism, not to mention political campaigns. In Wald’s analysis, the (white) nationalist “prestige of farmer” is transferred from participation in actual labor – as the number of US citizens who farm has plunged –

onto “consumer purchasing practices” (3). Extrapolating from Wald’s reading, consumerism smooths over the incommensurability between, on the one hand, the ideal of farming as a “sacred calling . . . that establishes the virtuous character of the true American citizen,” and, on the other, “a culture that also perceives actual agrarian labor as beneath white US citizens and as the natural domain of undocumented laborers” (Wald 4).¹⁰² The histories and present of farm labor and its representation are far more complex than an image of a white man alone in a field. These are legacies that any contemporary agrarianism ought to confront.

“New agrarianism” today positions itself against industrial agriculture, whose philosophy originated with the American left, as a critique of conservative agrarianisms. While agrarians following Jefferson had long given agriculture a special moral status, many on the left suggested between 1920 and 1960 that “agriculture should be viewed as just another sector of the industrial economy” (Thompson 48). The hope was that “agricultural labor would become organized,” forcing “the owners of land and capital to negotiate with the working class” (Thompson 48). Of course, these hopes were not realized through industrial agriculture, which by 1980 was critiqued by the left and endorsed by neoliberal ideologues (Thompson 52). In today’s context, “new agrarianism” is one of the voices of anti-corporate environmentalism – an “alternative to the modern industrial/technological/academic paradigm,” disrupting narratives that the information

¹⁰² Perhaps no more comforting – although clearly responsive to a perceived shift in political climate – is Dodge Ram’s 2018 Super Bowl commercial. This ad structurally and tonally echoes that of 2013, but replaces Harvey’s voiceover extolling the farmer with Martin Luther King, Jr., expressing “greatness” in terms of service. The ad supplements images of white farmers with rather tokenistic shots of racially diverse (although still mostly cis-male) teachers, parents, and members of the military (“Official . . . ‘Built to Serve’”).

economy, new (bio)technologies, and global capitalism will improve life (Wirzba 2-4). New agrarians are likely to disclaim association with racist and classist ideologies. Norman Wirzba, for example, situates agrarianism as a mode of critiquing the “corporate interests” that threaten “indigenous culture and ways” (3). Wirzba cautions against romanticizing farming communities, noting that they “have not always been respectful of the contributions of women” or “welcoming of foreigners or people with new ideas,” and distancing new agrarianism from such “provincialism” (8-9). But Wirzba’s vague and euphemistic language takes the place of any sustained critique of agrarianism’s history. Jefferson and the southern agrarians directly influenced Wendell Berry, new agrarianism’s central figure.¹⁰³ Berry is in turn praised by the “locavore” figure Michael Pollan, author of popular non-fictions such as *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* – exemplifying how Jefferson’s legacy has influenced a wide range of US environmentalisms (Vernon 346). Indeed, for Zackary Vernon, the southern agrarians helped to inspire the mainstream American environmental movement that emerged in the 1960s and 70s (349). Agrarianism underpins buzzwords such as “slow foods, localism, and sustainability” (Vernon 349). And new agrarians are admittedly doing some interesting work, such as rethinking antagonisms between urban-centric and rural-centric worldviews. (Wirzba, for one, wonders if we need an “urban agrarianism” [Wirzba 6]). Vernon suggests not that we should dismiss agrarianism, but that we should reexamine its history before bandying the term around. He concludes that we will then be able to extract agrarianism’s utility.

¹⁰³ As Zackary Vernon has documented, Berry’s early work critiques the southern agrarians, but he later recants these ideas and, while acknowledging the racism of the Twelve Southerners who penned *I’ll Take My Stand*, sidesteps to praise their ideas. See Vernon, “Problematic History.”

But Vernon attempts no synthesis between agrarianism and the anti-racist, anti-classist, and anti-sexist environmentalisms that have also informed the American public.¹⁰⁴

Rather than the agrarian tradition, a variety of Marxist, anarchist, socialist, and ecofeminist groups offer the concept of the Commons: an alternative to either the state or the market (Federici “Feminism” 1). Scholar-activists such as Vandana Shiva, Silvia Federici, and Chris Carlsson position the Commons as the organizing ideology behind anti-capitalist food initiatives, such as urban gardening. Common lands in Europe were declared vacant, up for grabs, in the eighteenth century, as were all lands in the Americas and other regions slated for European colonialism. Appropriating and enclosing these lands capacitated modern capitalism. Accordingly, these activists argue, building new commons could undergird a post-capitalist society (Shiva *Biopiracy* 3). To render land common, groups such as the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners and City Slicker Farms in Oakland have mobilized to garden on disused lots. These are often private or city-owned vacant properties, which activists and neighbors reclaim. Urban gardens use green methods to grow healthy food and “re-situate basic food security in local

¹⁰⁴ One obstacle to recuperating agrarian concepts is that they might not be scalable without exploited labor. For example, agrarians “stress the importance of living as much as we can within local economies” (Wirzba 8). There may be a great deal to say for localism as a counter-discourse to economic globalization. Yet as discussed in my introduction, North America’s well-known manifestation of localism, the local foods movement, stalls at the small scale: organic and small-farm products price out most consumers. Local food caters to a white, bourgeois populace. Local food also tends to emphasize conscientious individual choice about what to eat and how to buy or grow it. This “binary opposition in which hardworking, thrifty people are pitted against corporate thieves . . . precludes any critical analysis of the capitalist economic system, in which the Protestant ideology of the former provides cover for the activities of the latter” (O’Brien 238). In order to contest a capitalist food system buoyed by the ideology of hard work (an alibi for the demise of the welfare state), we cannot consider consumers free agents of choice. Local food, like new agrarianism, would do better to partner with other movements that take class, race, and food justice into account.

communities” (Carlsson 104). They also build community networks. These American movements have many analogs in other parts of the world.¹⁰⁵ In the United States, leftist urban gardening has long involved clashes over property rights and privatization.¹⁰⁶ But community gardens had federal financial support during the 1970s, riding on the patriotic wave of WWII “Victory Gardens.” The Reagan administration slashed this aid, along with other forms of “welfare,” when instituting neoliberal policies (Carlsson 84-7). Today government support for community gardens is often tied to the hike in property values prompted by the “greening” of vacant lots (Carlsson 89). Cities may smile upon urban gardening as free public improvement, allowing projects to continue for years on private land, until gentrification elevates land values and motivates the legal owner to sell. This phenomenon has incited controversies in areas such as South Central Los Angeles in 2006, or New York’s Lower East Side in the 1980s and again in the 1990s, when mayor Rudy Giuliani sought to sell off hundreds of community gardens to real estate developers (Carlsson 93). Federal disinvestment from communal gardens exemplifies how neoliberalism has re-entrenched patterns of dispossession that began with the advent of capitalism, as activists intent on the Commons would suggest. Beyond food, agriculture, and gardening, childcare and elder care are also foci for building new commons. The nuclear family and the “atomized, serialized family house” are primary structures not only of gender-based oppression, but of the isolation that reinforces

¹⁰⁵ Radical gardeners in Durban, South Africa, for example, also seize unused lots for cultivation – sometimes as a mode of political resistance to “ownership and private property,” and sometimes just to ensure basic subsistence (Zerbe “Global Politics” 36). See the introduction and Chapter Four.

¹⁰⁶ Today’s radical movements draw on 1960s and 70s mobilizations, such as the People’s Food System in San Francisco, or the “People’s Park” founded on a vacant lot reclaimed from the University of California at Berkeley (Carlsson 84-7).

capitalist relations and resource profligacy (Federici “Feminism” 7). Proponents of the Commons advocate non-normative structures of kinship and collectivized work.

The Commons discourse has its pitfalls, particularly in an often naïve orientation to the use of the Internet. Carlsson, for one, idealizes the “open bandwidth” of the Internet as a tool for liberation (4). Email and new media do capacitate contemporary activist networks. But server farms and computer production and disposal spur global warming, toxify water systems, and expose workers and others to carcinogens.¹⁰⁷ And it is harder and harder to idealize the Internet as a tool of the left in an era of fake news and endless marketing, more carefully pitched to the individual Facebook user all the time. As media scholar John Durham Peters puts it, “[a] boom in data, much of it proprietary, does not necessarily mean an advance in democratic control” (7). Though the internet might appear to lack “centralized control,” in fact “there is plenty of state and market power shaping its development” (Peters 31). Perhaps the flip side is the growing power of

¹⁰⁷ Digital information storage requires server farms that stretch over acres, sucking electricity to run and air-condition computers (Morris 6). Recycling computers, while important, exposes workers with insufficient training to a range of health risks. Producing a computer is far more resource-intensive by weight than making a car or refrigerator, requiring substantial fossil fuels and hazardous chemicals. Just producing a two-gram microchip requires about 970 grams of fossil fuels and 72 grams of chemicals – 500 times the weight of the chip itself (Williams 46). Semiconductor fabrication emits perfluorocarbons (potent greenhouse gases) and other toxins. Acids and alkaline solutions leech into water systems, affecting plant and animal life and also cancer rates and reproductive health. For example, leakage from storage tanks at the Fairchild Semiconductor facility in Silicon Valley famously provoked miscarriages and birth defects in 1977-81. Similar contamination cases have been noted in Japan and elsewhere, but unlike the Silicon Valley case have not always involved successful class-action lawsuits (Williams 46-9). In the 1980s most semiconductor production occurred in the global North, but today production is dominated by multinationals operating in Asia. Little information is available on their environmental practices. Workers will likely suffer significant increases in birth defects and cancer rates (Williams 48). These are just a few of the ecosocial damages associated with computers and internet use.

“hash-tag activism,” in which the logic of data centralization – the capacity to “tag” and collate information and comments – could be as valuable to activists as to corporate and state interests. In any case, a celebration of the internet Commons should not be unqualified. The rhetoric of “the Commons” has also been coopted by neoliberal institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations, as Federici notes.¹⁰⁸ Their distortions takes the “guise of protecting biodiversity” in projects that create ecological reserves by expelling indigenous populations, setting aside land ostensibly for common use but in practice for “those who can pay ... through eco-tourism” (Federici “Feminism” 2).¹⁰⁹ The concept of the Commons is vulnerable to reabsorption into the capitalist structures it is meant to critique, just as the centralizing and decentralizing data powers of the internet unleash any number of interest groups.

On the other hand, the Commons matter to anti-capitalist mobilizations against GMOs, as articulated by key figures such as Vandana Shiva. In 1999, Shiva led petitions for greater regulation of Monsanto’s Bt cotton in India’s courts (Scoones 319).¹¹⁰ She has become something of a transnational activist icon: she has been a high-profile speaker for anti-GM coalitions in other countries, such as South Africa, and has staged protests for international World Social Forum events organized to unite anti-GM activists from many countries (Scoones 321, 327). Shiva’s writings frame the patenting of seeds and other life forms as “the second coming of Columbus” (*Biopiracy* 5). Biotechnologies, she argues,

¹⁰⁸ See Federici, “Feminism” 2, and also Walter D. Mignolo, “The Communal and the Decolonial” in *Turbulence*, vol. 5, 2009, pp. 29-31.

¹⁰⁹ See Chapter One for more on ecotourism and its social impacts.

¹¹⁰ “Bt” crops are genetically engineered to produce their own insecticides. This reduces the need for spraying, but can create other hazards.

are a new device to justify appropriation, akin to the charters and patents that supported exploration-age European colonization:

The principle of effective occupation by [C]hristian princes has been replaced by effective occupation by the transnational corporations supported by modern-day rulers. The vacancy of targeted lands has been replaced by the vacancy of targeted life forms and species manipulated by the new biotechnologies. The duty to incorporate savages into Christianity has been replaced by the duty to incorporate local and national economies into the global marketplace. (*Biopiracy* 2)

For Shiva, global capitalism (instead of the Christian god) is the new idol, and GM patenting is the new colonialism.¹¹¹ Shiva articulates peasant resistance to GMOs as a movement to return genes, like land, water, and other contested resources, from the privatized realm to the “commons” (*Biopiracy* 5). The Commons have been a rallying cry for anti-GM mobilizations that use figures like Shiva to build transnational coalitions and profiles.¹¹²

Anti-GM arguments sometimes get dismissed as baloney because of debates about whether eating GMOs actually harms human bodies. Health concerns aside, the ecosocial destruction wrought by corporate-patented GM seeds is a sufficient reason to contest them. Buying patented seed (often under duress) can loop small farmers into cycles of debt, as their yields are insufficient to repay loans with which they purchased

¹¹¹ Shiva’s emphasis on Christianity as the earlier ideology of rule, now replaced by transnational capital, can be read in sympathy with Walter D. Mignolo’s assertion that Christianity was “[t]he first” of a series of “global design[s] ... constitutive of modernity and its darker side, coloniality” (721-2). In Mignolo’s periodization, world-making has seen at least four different (but linked) moments since the sixteenth century: first, the Atlantic commercial circuit based around the slave trade that defined the Other in terms of religion and race; second, the move toward the nation-state that redefined Others as “foreigners;” third, the Cold War emergence of neoliberalism articulated as a project of “human rights” against “communists;” and fourth, today’s “post-national” form of neocolonialism through global capital. See Mignolo, “The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis.”

¹¹² See Scoones for more on the transnational politics of anti-GM mobilization.

these GM seeds or other expensive inputs. In India and elsewhere, debt has provoked epidemics of farmer suicide. Monsanto has targeted small farmers in North America too, suing for patent infringement in cases such as that of Percy Schmeiser, a Canadian canola farmer. Schmeiser never intended to grow Monsanto's seed. His fields were cross-contaminated by a neighbor's crop. The court found in Monsanto's favor that Schmeiser "had no right to the Roundup Ready canola growing amidst his own nonmodified varieties and visibly indistinguishable from them, even if its presence there was the work of accident" (François 63). Monsanto has pursued such outrageous litigations since the mid-1990s.

GMOs have become an "iconic" issue for activists, "representative of a wider set of struggles" against the commercialization of agriculture, disenfranchisement of the poor, and destruction of biodiversity (Scoones 339). Left-leaning anti-GM organizations in India, South Africa, North America, and elsewhere leverage "issues of sovereignty, inequality, rights, [and] justice" to garner media attention for "an alternative 'grand narrative,' one counter-posed to the mainstream neoliberal worldview" (Scoones 340). These counter-globalization movements criticize the concept of private property. This makes them very different from agrarianisms or pastoralisms that idealize plantation agriculture or private landowning, even if concerns about rural communities are shared. Leftist anti-GM discourses garner strength from polyscalar thinking, mobilizing connections between rural and urban issues across local, national, and global frames. However, the loose coalitions that characterize anti-GM activism can be fragile or unrepresentative. Leaders tend to be well-off urbanites. They court farmers with rhetoric about agrarian reform, often regardless of the farmers' level of information about or

interest in the technical end of GM debates (Scoones 337, 334). Controversies abound over whether anti-GM movements adequately represent women, indigenous groups, or the poor (Scoones 338). These are representative challenges of coalitional politics.

Ozeki's *All Over Creation* sympathizes with the discourse of the Commons, modelling non-normative families that resist "monocultural" logic and share the work of caring for elders, children, food supplies, and biodiversity. Ozeki's portrait of anti-GM activism is in dialogue with the concepts expressed in Shiva's *Biopiracy*, Carlsson's *Nowtopia*, and other activist texts, and with patterns in anti-GM mobilization. For example, urban gardening is a tactic of demonstrators in Ozeki's novel. Calling themselves the Seeds of Resistance, Ozeki's young environmental radicals are "politically opposed to lawns" (256). They contest private ownership of land and grow "food for the people" by planting fruit trees in traffic medians, "bringing back the Commons" in Oakland (256). Like the real-life activists that Carlsson, Shiva, and Federici discuss, the Seeds also make elder-care collective, shaking up the atomized structure of the nuclear family. The Seeds of Resistance also fall into one of the pitfalls of the Commons discourse, extolling the "nonhierarchical networking potential of the Web" (356). As for the transnational mobilizations that I have discussed, GMOs are a signal issue for Ozeki's young activists, linked to a host of concerns about reproductive rights, land ownership, racism, and unequal wealth.

Yet Ozeki challenges expectations that anti-corporate environmentalism necessarily aligns with greater respect for women and racial minorities. *All Over Creation* can be read as a thought experiment about how leftist and reactionary agrarianisms might synthesize, what might be lost, and what might be afforded by using

narrative fiction to imagine this scenario. In the novel, the hippie Seeds of Resistance form a coalition with a traditionalist farmer, Lloyd Fuller. All these actors are anti-GM and anti-corporate, but the Seeds are social leftists, while Lloyd understands himself as “pro-life” in resisting both abortion and GMOs. Lloyd and other characters go too far in drawing analogies between human and plant life, an excess that Ozeki ironizes through a superabundance of (bio)diversity metaphors. Moving beyond analogical thinking, Ozeki’s novel probes subtler and more ambiguous kinds of entanglement – among misogyny, agriculture, exoticism, and parenthood; among indigeneity, immigration, and monoculture; between empire and adoption; between androgyny and racialization. Non-normative structures of care and translocal connectivity model an anti-capitalist ecology. Yet the novel’s ending reneges on this interest in non-normative kin, recentering the white, heterosexual nuclear family. Can the novel’s eco-politics be recuperated, despite this conservative ending? I think so, if we attend to self-reflexivity. *All Over Creation*’s smartest bid for diverse eco-politics is not the analogical argument that human diversity is like biodiversity (which the novel problematizes), nor the representation of non-normative family (which it undermines), but rather an aesthetic argument that pits heterogeneity and polyscalar representation – affordances of the novel genre – against the single-scale aesthetics of mainstream American environmentalism.

“Make Kin Not Babies”? The Eco-Politics of Family

All Over Creation revolves around the childhood trauma and adult homecoming of Yumi Fuller, the daughter of white farmer Lloyd and his Japanese American wife Momoko. Yumi runs away at fourteen after Lloyd shames her for having an abortion. The

novel pieces this story together out of sequence. Ozeki uses mostly third-person narration with a range of focalizers, but intersperses first and second person sections by Yumi.

Yumi-the-narrator has an alternately mystical and wry voice, more easily associated with the implied author than with Yumi-the-character. The novel also includes fictional letters, newsletters, press releases, and other documents. An epistolary section speeds through twenty-odd years of Yumi and Momoko's sparse communication. Afterwards, Yumi returns to Liberty Falls, Idaho with her three children because Lloyd is dying. The farm setting intermingles race, gender, and agro-food politics. Food and farming work as both material concerns and powerful metaphors.

Lloyd and Momoko Fuller can be situated in relation to two figures of farm labor that have much baggage in American culture: the white male farmer, positioned as an idealized figure of the American citizen, and the Japanese (or Mexican, or Filipino...) immigrant farmer or farmworker, stereotypically associated with illegal immigration and accused of taking jobs from Americans (even as actual immigrant farmworkers are subjected to appalling labor conditions).¹¹³ The immigrant farmworker is, in Sarah Wald's words, construed as an "abject alien" to perpetuate the romance of the white male farmer/citizen (Wald 5).¹¹⁴ Ozeki marries these figures in the couple Momoko and Lloyd. With their marriage, Ozeki comments on and complicates the stereotypes associated with each figure, while somewhat ironically opening up the "family" as a microcosm for American society, a metonymic unit in which America tries to understand its normativity or "diversity."

¹¹³ See Wald (25).

¹¹⁴ For example, fears of Japanese American farmers becoming landowners underwrote Japanese American internment during World War II (Wald 22).

While Lloyd is a potato monoculturalist for many years, Momoko's kitchen garden is a "vegetative wonder" where "she planted varieties of fruits and flowers that no one had ever seen before in Power County. ... People drove for miles to see her Oriental ornamentals and Asian creepers. ... It was truly exotic" (5). Biodiversity is a sardonic metaphor for human diversity here and throughout Ozeki's novel. Yumi narrates that as an Asian American child she felt like "a random fruit in a field of genetically identical potatoes" (4). Potatoes work all too perfectly both as synecdoche for monocultural farming and metaphor for anti-diversity, because they are cloned:

[Y]ou cut up a potato into small pieces, each containing an eye, and you plant these. The eyes grow into identical replicas of the parent. ... The reason you clone rather than plant from seed is because potatoes, like human children, are wildly heterozygous. ... if you try to propagate a domesticated potato using seed, sexually, chances are it will not grow true to type. ... it may prove superior to the parent plant or may be wildly inferior. At eight, gazing up at my father's face, I didn't know which was worse. (57)

With potato-cloning as a synecdoche for monoculture and also an analog for human reproduction, the novel's agro-political concerns parallel its objections to normative whiteness. While Lloyd perhaps hopes for Yumi to "grow to type," Yumi devastates him by having an abortion. Lloyd's objections are based on his pro-life stance. Yet the text implies that Lloyd or the larger farming community would inevitably feel disappointed by Yumi, because they wish she were white. For starters, she "never liked potatoes much. I preferred rice, a taste I inherited from my mother ... and which, in a state of spuds, was tantamount to treason. Momoko used to make me rice balls, the size of fingerlings, to take to school in my lunch box. Lloyd called them 'Tokyo tubers'—this was his idea of a joke" (2). Idahoans read Yumi's taste for rice as a confirmation that race determines personality and political allegiance – an understanding that Ozeki mocks. Comparisons

between humans and foods are overwrought and satirical in this novel. Perhaps most obviously, everyone in Liberty Falls pronounces Yumi's name incorrectly, as "Yummy." Likened to a delectable food, Yumi is sexualized and exoticized at a young age. This makes her ideal prey for Elliot Rhodes, a young high school teacher who "always had a thing for Asia" (83). Elliot lures fourteen-year-old Yumi into a relationship, gets her pregnant, encourages the abortion, and dumps her.

Also present for Yumi's abortion is Cass Quinn, Yumi's childhood best friend, a figure around which the novel connects industrial agriculture with women's health, but also with race and empire. Cass suffers through breast cancer and numerous miscarriages as an adult. She and her husband Will suspect the problem might be "nitrates in the groundwater" or "one of the other inputs—stuff we use around the farm" (77). Cass has also been physically abused by her father, and bent under Will's gentler authority. Patriarchy, environmental poisoning, and big agro's profit imperatives cluster around Cass as interconnected engines of the abuse of women's bodies and the land alike. The novel takes these connections seriously, although it's all a bit Jane Smiley. The setting and character names make *All Over Creation* a transparent rewriting of Smiley's 1991 novel *A Thousand Acres*, itself a riff on *King Lear*: sisters Ginny and Rose are poisoned by agricultural inputs and sexually abused by their father, a farmer named Larry. But Ozeki refracts Smiley's connections among misogyny, toxicity, and the family farm by referencing race and globalization too, as the lexicon of (bio)diversity makes clear. Cass and Will also wonder if their fertility issues come from Will suffering "chemical exposure" while fighting in Vietnam, linking social and personal degradation and big agro's abuses to US imperialism in Asia (77). Will himself notes this connection. He

feels ambivalent about whether to plant NuLife potatoes, which are genetically engineered with a built-in pesticide: “In Vietnam, the government said spray and we sprayed. Never gave it another thought. Now I got this numbness in my arms that the doc says may be Agent Orange, only he can’t tell for sure because of the exposure factor on the farm. It bugs me. Cynaco made Agent Orange for the army. They make GroundUp and now the NuLifes, too” (219). Cynaco is the novel’s stand-in for Monsanto, the real-life corporation that makes the herbicide RoundUp and the “New Leaf” Bt potato. Monsanto also supplied the US government with the two chemicals they combined into Agent Orange.¹¹⁵ Disturbed by Cynaco’s connections to chemical warfare in Vietnam, Will still decides to plant NuLife potatoes. He hopes that their built-in pesticides will allow him to reduce the chemical inputs that are poisoning his family. This solution re-embeds Will and Cass in the same cycle of violence, imperialism, and big business that originated their problem.

The relationship between Cass and Yumi, meanwhile, troubles ecological feminisms that focus exclusively on white women. Their school used to put on an annual Thanksgiving pageant, casting each kid as a food. Cass remembers that she “started out as a pea ... but by the time they got to fourth [grade], she had gained so much weight they made her a potato. ... [A] fat, round, dumpy white thing, wrapped in burlap, rolling around on a dirty stage” (7). This implied critique of fat-shaming cannot be disentangled from Cass’s whiteness, which she articulates as coextensive with being chubby and plain.

¹¹⁵ Rampant spraying of this carcinogenic defoliant in Vietnam resulted in hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese deaths and children born with birth defects, according to reports by the Vietnamese government, which the American government has denied. Cancer or other health problems linked to Agent Orange are also reported by American veterans (Gaspar 274-5).

Cass is jealous that Yumi was always cast as the beautiful “Indian princess” (7), confessing when Yumi returns to Liberty Falls as an adult,

“I envied you, you know. I was always the potato.” ...

“Yeah, but look at you now! Like a beanpole. Anyway, all you vegetables got to do the Pageant of the Side Dishes, and I had to sit there and *watch*. There were so many of you it took *forever*.”

“It was our moment of glory! Yummy, do you know what it’s like to go through life as a side dish?”

“No.”

“I don't suppose you do.” (64-5, original emphasis)

Cass’s view of whiteness as unattractiveness, a disadvantage contrasted with Yumi’s beauty, denies the racism directed at Yumi. If Cass is a “side dish,” that makes Yumi a “main dish” – racialized, sexualized, and consumed (by Elliot) at a young age.

Adolescent envy ripens into the adult Cass blaming her miscarriages on fourteen-year-old Yumi’s abortion: “I started to think it was all your fault. Each time I miscarried and saw the blood ... I felt like God was punishing me for helping you out. Crazy, huh? But if that’s the case, then how come you’re here now with three great kids? ... If anyone deserved to get punished, it was you, right?” (79). Myopic in her own pain, Cass ignores that Yumi was a victim of statutory rape, and orientalized in a way that Cass cannot understand. The pageant illustrates a double-bind for women between sexiness and unsexiness, but more importantly satirizes the myopia of white feminism.

Yumi’s racialization as the “Indian princess” locates a conflation of indigenous and Asian American identities that Ozeki teases out with both the pageant and Lloyd’s agro-politics. Cass recalls that “[i]t wasn’t like they didn’t have *real Indians* in school. They did. But ... the Shoshone kids didn’t seem to mind, or maybe they just knew better than to care” (7-8, my emphasis). The hyper-visibility of Yumi’s body is the condition of Native students’ invisibility, even as the pageant’s Thanksgiving narrative denies both the

genocide of indigenous Americans and the experiences of Asian Americans. On the next page Yumi resignifies the same phrase “[r]eal Indians,” to refer to people “from *India*,” underscoring another commonplace of Asian/indigenous elision (8, original emphasis). Similarly, after the adult Yumi’s return, people in Liberty Falls assume her baby Poo is from the nearby Shoshone reservation, when he is Japanese American and native Hawaiian (129-30). The multiple erasures at work here also emerge in the newsletters that Lloyd writes to the customers of an heirloom seed business that he starts with Momoko. No longer a monoculturalist, Lloyd promulgates (bio)diversity as he markets “Mrs. Fuller’s ‘Oriental Collection’” and other seeds:

[O]n the subject of Exotics, there is a [sic] idea in circulation that these so-called “aggressive” non-native plants are harmful, invasive, and will displace “native” species. How ironic to hear these theories propounded by people of European ancestry in America! Just consider this: Not a single one of the food crops that make the U.S. an agricultural power today is native to North America. Our plants are as immigrant as we are! ... Mrs. Fuller and I ... believe anti-exoticism to be explicitly racist, and having fought for Freedom and Democracy against Hitler, I do not intend to promote Third Reich eugenics in our family garden.” (67)

(Bio)diversity metaphors become unwieldy here. Lloyd likens the rejection of “non-native plants” to a racist or anti-immigration stance, which he finds “ironic” because “people of European ancestry in America” are also “immigrant[s]” (7). The commonplace that all white Americans are immigrants too can be useful in challenging xenophobia, but it collapses settler colonialism with immigration. Lloyd fails to note that in order to identify Anglo-Americans as “native,” white nationalist discourse not only demonizes “Exotic” immigrants of color, but also erases indigenous peoples (as well as ignoring the role of plantation slavery in amassing American wealth). Lloyd only addresses the first of these exclusions. He concludes that anti-exoticism is both “propaganda” used by the “large Corporations that hold the American Farmer in thrall,

prisoners to their chemical tyranny and their buy-outs of politicians and judges,” and “Anti-Life” (67). Lloyd interweaves his objections to agribusiness and white nationalism with his anti-abortion stance and the white patriarchalism that forced Yumi’s departure. Genetic engineering is Anti-Life for Lloyd too, a way to “defy God’s Will” by appropriating “the Act of Creation” (105). His cocktail of anti-corporate, nationalist, Biblical, orientalist, pro-diversity, and pro-life rhetoric blends political positions that we may be surprised to find aligned. As an overdetermined figure of the (white American) family farmer, Lloyd is Ozeki’s device to develop a multilayered and counterintuitive portrait of relations among “family values,” agro-food politics, gender, and race.

Lloyd’s newsletter attracts an unexpected set of allies: a Winnebago full of crunchy anti-GM activists who tour the country using leftover fry grease to power their biodiesel engine. These “Seeds of Resistance” (Geek, Y, Lilith, Charmey, and Frankie) come to Idaho to meet Lloyd and Momoko. Yumi is overwhelmed (despite Cass’s help) by her aging parents, her children, and her adolescent trauma. The Seeds start caring for Yumi’s kids, Lloyd, and Momoko, while demonstrating against GMOs in the area, linking the itineraries of anti-GM activism and communalized care work. Attracting attention with their demonstrations, the Seeds are disparaged in a press release as an “antiglobalization” group (165). This characterization introduces questions of how different interest groups ply the term “globalization.” The Seeds certainly oppose global capitalism, decrying the unregulated behavior of agro-food corporations. But they object to transnational movements of capital, not people. They are not xenophobic or racist, and they see themselves as part of a global movement: “It’s a class war . . . and we’re fighting for the planet” (416). For Ursula Heise, Ozeki’s novel “seeks to appropriate the

oppositonality of the transnational subject” by including “multicultural” families while “remain[ing] resolutely local in [its] opposition to globalization” (“Transnational Turn” 387). But this reading neglects how the Seeds showcase global thinking to resist global capitalism. One of their leaders, Y, describes a protest they will attend in Seattle (the demonstration at the 1999 WTO meeting) as “massive. . . . Global. The whole concept of the nation-state is an anachronistic fiction, a comforting smoke screen for the multinationals. The WTO is the throbbing heart of the new world order. It’s a new millennium, dude” (399). Food politics help Y differentiate a moment in which a post-national, global capitalist system has matured. The protest must be “global” to respond. We might describe these politics not as anti-globalization, but as an environmentalist counter-globalization movement, a form of what Heise elsewhere calls “eco-cosmopolitanism.”¹¹⁶ Ozeki’s representation of the Seeds explores how globalization and globality might be imagined or represented in environmentalist discourse, which is key to *All Over Creation*’s function as a global environmental novel.

The Seeds oppose the patenting of life, but they are modern, savvy builders of political coalitions, not reactionary pastoralists. Their discourse allows Ozeki to explore non-capitalist modes of connectivity across past and future, local and global, and technology and ecology. The Seeds build networks of resistance using all the tools of the information age, finding that “the Internet is a perfect vehicle for dissemination” (354). After a big demonstration, the Seeds and their allies go straight to the Web: “Copies of a recent exposé on Cynaco, published in Britain, were being distributed. From sympathizer coffee shops and Internet cafés throughout the city, the commander and her staff faxed

¹¹⁶ See Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*.

and e-mailed press releases out to the international wire services and local networks” (259). Their activism highlights the synthesis, rather than separation, of the “international” and “local.” Ozeki acknowledges the irony that food politics may combine digital networking with the idealization of the rural past: Charmey is pregnant, and wants a home birth because “[w]e do not believe in hospitals or the paternalistic power structures of Western medicine. Lilith and I will do the birthing together. Like the pioneer women on the Oregon Trail. We are studying how on the Internet” (192). Learning how to be like “pioneer women” from the Internet certainly sounds silly. Yet Charmey’s comment undoes the binary opposition of the backward-looking and forward-looking – a move that the discourse of the Commons shares with agrarianism.¹¹⁷ This points to the potential for coalition between the Seeds and small farmers.

“Dissemination,” one of the Seeds’ mantras, also describes Momoko and Lloyd’s business: “seeds were the sole objective of [their] garden,” cultivated “for dissemination” to customers around the world (113). Spreading information is key. This means both spreading activist news, and sharing the genetic information inside seeds, which Geek describes as “rare and valuable books” that “embody the fruitful collaboration between nature and humankind, the history of our race and our migrations. Talk about narrative!” (162). Ozeki plays with the metaphoric potential of language about seeds and about information technology on several levels. “Dissemination” is a dead metaphor that she reawakens by referring to literal seeds. The Seeds also describe planting fruit trees on

¹¹⁷ In Wirzba’s description, new agrarianism is “not a throwback to a never-realized pastoral arcadia, nor is it a caricatured, Luddite-inspired refusal to face the future. It is, rather, a deliberate and intentional way of living and thinking that takes seriously the failures and successes of the past. ... As such it takes seriously what we know (and still need to learn) about the earth” (4).

public land as “hacking the landscape” (256). We understand “hacking” as a computer term, used here as a metaphor for renegade gardening. But the IT language “hacking” is itself a dead metaphor, borrowing a word for physical cutting and chopping (procedures involved in agriculture). Ozeki synthesizes the technological and the agro-ecological at the level of language. Words maintain both literal and metaphoric meanings to probe the relations between our information-age knowledge and the data contained in seeds.

Ozeki clearly sympathizes with the Seeds’ anti-GM stance. But she avoids idealizing them, preventing the novel from becoming didactic or flat. The Seeds are subject to Ozeki’s equal-opportunity satire of a range of interest groups. Orientalism is rampant among all her characters, for starters. Yumi’s rapist Elliot reenters the story as a PR agent for Cynaco, and we meet his boss Duncan, who gushes about a raw food retreat in Maui as a way to “[b]alance the Yang” (83). Duncan buys figurines of Ganesh and other deities, saying he needs to try something new because he “was finding Buddhism somehow lacking” (275). When Elliot’s work is off-course, Duncan tells him to “try some yoga. Maybe your *doshas* are out of balance. Book a consultation with my Ayurvedic doctor” (277). Elliot finds Duncan irritating, yet has himself long fetishized Asia. Indeed, Elliot starts to like yoga too, because he likes checking out his female colleagues in spandex. And Cass remembers how teenage Yumi “would take a foot out of her sneaker ... and place it, storklike, against the inside of her thigh. It’s a yoga pose, she [would tell] Cass,” while wearing a bindi that she called her “third eye” (8). The Seeds, too, are repeatedly mentioned doing yoga. Everyone participates in such pedestrian cultural appropriation, Ozeki seems to suggest, regardless of their politics. The Seeds also appropriate “Eastern” symbols for an act in which Lilith performs sex with vegetables:

“Lilith sat there in lotus position ... fingering a zucchini. ... Between her breasts hung an Egyptian ankh” (121). Videos of Lilith’s act populate a subscription-only portion of the Seeds’ website. The Seeds finance their operations via this pornography, though they all feel slimy about objectifying Lilith – inviting readers to question their methods. We may also struggle to take Lilith’s act seriously, and it certainly extend Ozeki’s mockery of the Seeds’ appropriative aesthetic.

Ozeki’s satire of the Seeds is quite funny, but it also points to serious concerns about the makeup of food movements. Frankie, a foster kid who joins the Seeds when they roll through his hometown in Ohio, has hesitations about their demonstration at a local supermarket. Geek crows that “Thrifty Foods’ gonna get its consciousness raised,” but Frankie “knew a lot of the kids who worked at Thrifty Foods ... and he wasn’t at all convinced they were ready to have their consciousness raised quite yet. Wages, yes, but consciousness?” (86). Frankie registers the class bias of activism that would reorient consumer choices, which remains a problem with the Seeds’ approach even though they favor dismantling capitalism. Their coalition with Lloyd has troubling aspects too. The Seeds convince Lloyd to host “the Idaho Potato Party,” a teach-in and demonstration. Yumi worries that this will be too much excitement for a sick person. In a scene that Yumi narrates in first person, she upbraids Geek for “turning [my father] into a goddamned poster boy for your politics,” to which Lloyd retorts,

“This is not about politics. This is about life!”

My face was burning. “Oh, for God’s sake, Dad. It’s just plants.”

Geek said, “Plants have a right to life, too.”

And then I lost it. ... The two of them—the young radical environmentalist and the old fundamentalist farmer—made a ridiculous alliance, and I started to laugh. “Oh, wow! That’s the kind of pro-life bullshit that drove me out of here in the first place!” (267)

This moment foregrounds the potential alignment of pro-life and anti-GM rhetorics. In Rachel Stein's view, Yumi's worries about the social politics of environmentalists are "alleviated" on the next page, when Geek assures her that he is "pro-choice" (Stein 187, Ozeki 268). But Geek's willingness to engage in pro-life rhetoric for Lloyd's benefit has quite a few reverberations. Ozeki is probing the risks of coalitional work. Is Geek's manipulation of Lloyd and Yumi a justifiable strategy to pursue anti-GM goals? Or does Geek compromise his own principles in ways that are unacceptably hurtful? It is Geek who first suggests that the Seeds work with Lloyd, to which Y objects, "Dude's a major Christian. All this God shit is way too heavy for me" (106). But Geek says "[T]hat's the whole beauty of it! ... He's an icon! Totally salt of the earth. The American farmer making a lonely stand, defending his seed against the hubris and rapacious greed of the new multinational life-sciences cartel" (106-7). Geek gets interested in Lloyd for reasons of spin, wanting to appeal to a broad range of anti-corporate allies. Real-life anti-GM movements likewise tend to address "the big issues of poverty, trade and human rights" with "a poorly defined category of 'farmer' at the centre of each" (Scoones 326). Geek's rhetoric also resembles that of the corporate hack, Elliot. When the Seeds destroy Will Quinn's NuLife potatoes for their demonstration, Elliot plans to spin Will's victimhood: "He's even a Vietnam vet, for chrissakes. I can see it playing as a story of domestic terrorism—honest American farmer, salt of the earth, his crops targeted by the antiprogress forces of the Luddite left sort of thing. A vicious attack on the American way of life" (278). Despite their very different goals, Elliot and Geek alike try to marshal the "salt of the earth" figure of the farmer to sway audiences with pastoral nationalism.

This points to the danger of such rhetoric while indexing larger concerns about conservative agendas in agro-food politics.

Ozeki also invites us to question the novel's constant analogies between plants and people, showing the limits of analogical arguments to protect social and species diversity. Squashes, "the most promiscuous of garden vegetables," are intent on cross-pollinating, while Momoko wants to preserve separate species (115). This metaphor of promiscuity becomes racialized. Momoko identifies a hybrid squash as "a little bit zuke, and a little bit Delicata, and little bit ... [s]weet pumpkin" then points to Yumi's kids, saying the squash is "Like them. All mixed up" (118). This explicit analogy to mixed race persons lends an anti-miscegenation aura to Momoko's efforts to prevent the squashes from hybridizing. She identifies a "girl flower" and uses tape to "[seal] the petal's tips shut" because "[h]er flower just start to open. ... But it is too soon. She must wait. ... Bee so quick, maybe he get inside with some other squash's pollen, then baby is no good. You gotta shut her up tight until the right time" (115). Momoko's rhetoric about preserving female chastity from miscegenation verges on moralizing about Yumi's sex life and blaming her for her statutory rape, particularly since Yumi's children are Momoko's analog for hybridity. On the other hand, when Momoko pollinates the female squash flower by swabbing a male from the same species, then repeats the procedure with another male, she explains that "[i]t is better using two boy flowers for one girl. ... Sometimes three," which sounds like an uncanny blessing on the fact that Yumi's children have three different fathers (118). Momoko's gardening techniques might make sense for preserving the biodiversity of plants, but would be atrocities if applied to people. Ursula Heise has castigated *All Over Creation* for its (bio)diversity metaphors,

arguing that the novel “offer[s] cultural or ethnic diversity as a narrative solution to environmental problems” by supposing that social and biological difference are “homologous” and “pose parallel ethical challenges” (Heise “Transnational Turn” 388). Certainly we should not suppose that cultural difference and biodiversity merit similar interventions. Invasive plants can threaten local biodiversity (although the consensus on this is shifting some in recent years), whereas applying the same logic to humans is xenophobic.¹¹⁸ However, Ozeki is smarter than Heise credits. She does not ask us to take (bio)diversity metaphors at face value, but rather presents them ironically. Consider Yumi’s description of her thesis: “It’s called ‘Fading Blossoms, Falling Leaves: Visions of Transience and Instability in the Literature of the Asian-American Diaspora.’ Basically it’s about the way images of nature are used as metaphors for cultural dissolution” (42). Natural metaphors for cultural change appear in Yumi’s trite title as a fusty literary convention and a banal research topic, pushing Ozeki’s own (bio)diversity metaphors into the realm of satire. (This moment is one of several in which Ozeki takes a self-deprecating tone toward the work of humanists. I will discuss another shortly.) Likewise, the squash-pollination scene is so ludicrous that the human-plant analogy becomes satirical. Ozeki sketches the limits of using biodiversity as a metaphor for human diversity, warning against victim-blaming and racism.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Just how harmful invasive species actually are has recently come up for debate in the field of “invasion biology,” which emerged in the 1980s. Some biologists and ecologists have suggested that ecology’s narratives of invasive species causing extinctions are oversimplified, and that in many cases non-native species are not harmful (Zimmer n.p.).

¹¹⁹ Heise also asserts that Ozeki wants to decouple economic and cultural globalization and “occlude any consideration of how transnational cultural encounters might be related to and, in quite a few cases, causally dependent on economic globalization” (399-400). Again, Ozeki is much smarter than this. Her transnational character Momoko meets and marries Lloyd as a product of war. The aforementioned references to Agent Orange link

On the other hand, we might question Ozeki's choice to attribute problematic metaphors to Momoko, an immigrant woman whose actions and lexicon Ozeki restricts to gardening. This is part of a pattern of Orientalist representations in a text that tries to counteract them. When Lloyd refuses to speak with Yumi, Momoko throws a trayful of poppy seeds into the air in the hospital and waters them on the carpet, telling Lloyd: "Poppy! ... Same like father. Get it? It is good joke. Ha, ha. ... Okay, poppy. Now you grow up!" (72). Kooky and senile, yet something of a stereotype in dispensing wisdom through metaphors about plants, Momoko receives little narrative space in the novel. For Stein, "it is symbolic that Momoko, an immigrant woman of color, brought sexually reproducing seed crops into the asexually cloned potato farmlands of Idaho" (184). But this symbolism extends orientalist fantasies of sensual Asian women, which Ozeki both perpetuates and critiques in relation to Yumi. Justifying her adolescent interest in Elliot, Yumi tells Cass that she "had this wildness inside that was driving [her]. ... If it hadn't been Elliot, it would have been someone else. ... Sex was a big part of it. The wildness that was pushing [her]" (241). The narrative certainly blames Elliot for seducing his student, but Ozeki does not exonerate Yumi, who repeatedly sleeps with Elliot as an adult. This plot line corroborates the notion that Yumi had a "wildness inside" – an essentializing narrative that plays on orientalist stereotypes of female sexuality.

agribusiness to US wars of aggression, and also to transnational adoptions of Vietnamese children, an option that Cass and Will consider (of which more later). Ozeki is mapping specific histories of US – East Asian conflict that point to collusions between American imperialism and multinational corporate endeavors, which produce violence against ecosystems and people alike while catalyzing transnational migrations. Ozeki's attention to connections between economic and cultural globalization is clear. Suggesting (as Ozeki's novel does) that we should critique US imperialism and international capitalist ventures without blaming immigrants is not the same as supposing that the movements of peoples and of capital are unrelated.

Yumi's adult relationship with Elliot is part and parcel of her bad parenting and alcoholism, implying a structural critique of white patriarchy: Yumi's problems stem from her traumatic subordination to Elliot and to her father. Yet this structural critique is destabilized because, over and over again, the corrective for Yumi's behavior is the intervention of white potential parents Will and Cass. Yumi gets drunk and meets Elliot in a hotel, leaving her fourteen-year-old, Phoenix, alone with baby Poo. When a medical emergency arises, Phoenix calls Cass, not Yumi, for help. Cass seizes the moral high ground, telling Yumi, "You drink way too much" because she is "concerned for the welfare of [Yumi's] children" (390). Phoenix gets arrested for bringing a knife to school, and explains that the sheriff's son had pulled a gun on him. Will says, "I believe you, son. ... The thing to remember is, when you have a problem, you tell a grown-up immediately" (239). Yumi is relieved that someone knows what to say to Phoenix, who listens and "didn't seem to mind Will's calling him son" (239). The scene implies that Phoenix needs a (white) male influence. But the real problem is the mission of Phoenix's classmates to "clean up the school" by getting rid of "Niggers, Japs, queers, wetbacks, hippie scum, whatever" (237). Ozeki's exposure of these forms of bigotry is undermined by the normative reassertion of Will as benevolent white patriarch. Ozeki jeopardizes her anti-racist and anti-sexist narrative by making Yumi easy to pity but impossible to like, and positioning Cass and Will as white saviors.

This normative vector jangles with Ozeki's exploration of anti-normative gender and kinship. Ambivalent references to androgyny recur throughout the novel. When Frank meets the other Seeds, he thinks Charmey ("Char") is a young boy, with a "matted head ... covered with wild black hair that looked like it had been chopped with a

hacksaw. ... a small, pointed face. Dark brows. Large, animal eyes, liquid and quick. Looked to be about twelve or thirteen years old, Frank figured. Spooky” (49). Char is described in terms of juvenile masculinity and compared to an animal in ways that feel racialized. For several pages after introducing this character, the third person narrator avoids using a pronoun for Char, referring to her as “the kid” so the reader can share Frank’s confusion about her gender (52-3). When she starts touching his stomach and kissing him, Frank thinks “[h]e was being molested by a juvenile punk” (54). He objects “Dude! What the fuck—?” with the result that

Char sat up ... threw back the blankets and started to peel off sweaters and shirts, in layers, like an animal shedding skins. ... The slim body unfurled ... and Frankie found himself staring at a perfect pair of girl’s breasts. Naked, they gleamed in the light ... and the transformation was complete. Animal to human. Boy to girl. Girl to fucking goddess. (54)

This “transformation” suggests that Char only *seems* androgynous and rat-like, until her true (human, cis-female) identity is revealed. The only explanation needed to justify Char kissing Frank is that she is a “girl,” proven by the fact that she has breasts. Anatomy is taken as direct evidence of gender in a cis-normative way, flattening out the references to Char’s androgynous presentation and reducing gender to biological sex (while taking the heterosexuality of both Char and Frank for granted). The gender-neutral name “Char” is erased once femininity is revealed: she becomes “Charmey” for the remainder of the text. Pregnancy is also described as feminizing: Charmey’s stomach after giving birth is no longer a “taut, boyish abdomen” (346). Meanwhile the character initially known as “Frank” is then referred to as “Frankie,” a potentially feminizing nickname. These shifting character names contribute to an aura of ambivalence around non-normative gender performance. The suppression of Charmey’s initial androgyny is incomplete:

when Frankie and Charmey later have sex, she is described as “riding him like a hobbyhorse. Her smile turned rapt, abstract, and for a moment she looked like the kid he’d first mistaken her for” (120). Charmey is not articulated as a gender non-conforming character per se, but moments such as this acknowledge the incompleteness of the text’s binary gender vocabulary. There is, however, a troubling homology in the novel between androgyny and foreignness: the two androgynous characters are Char, a French-Canadian described as an animal-like “kid,” and Momoko, who “bought her work clothes in the little boys’ department at Sears” and “looked like Lloyd’s son instead of his wife” (5). In both cases, female-bodied androgynes resemble not men but little boys, a decontextualized allusion to the frequency with which non-binary and transmasculine people scan as young. These are also the only two characters who are not native speakers of English. Both are given potentially offensive pidgin dialogue. And they rarely speak for themselves, instead being glossed by other characters: Charmey is described as “pretty nonverbal ... not much of a conversationalist” (52). Androgyny subtly disrupts the novel’s otherwise binary treatment of gender and sexism, but the text’s ambivalence impedes a recuperative reading of these representations.

A louder disruption to compulsory heterosexuality and the nuclear family norm is the kinship structure associated with the Seeds of Resistance. Lloyd’s conservative family values sever Yumi from her parents. Rather than Yumi’s return healing the nuclear family, she cannot manage caring for her parents alone. She relies on the Seeds, who provide healing via non-normative patterns of kinship and chosen family. On his sick bed, Lloyd feels refreshed by the presence of these “[y]oung people,” reflecting that “[i]t had been a long time since anyone had listened to him” the way the Seeds do (145): “He

liked the way they gathered in his room, settling around his bed, to listen to him talk about seeds and farming. The air in the room changed when they all trooped in, like someone had opened a window. They smelled of oxygen and peatmoss” (144). Not only are the Seeds a healing breath of air for Lloyd, they integrate themselves into practical matters by agreeing with Yumi that they can stay on the property if they help with Lloyd, Momoko, and the kids. Y becomes Lloyd’s preferred nurse. Lilith cares for Yumi’s daughter Ocean, teaching her to dance and educating her about organs by painting them on her body (148). The Seeds are themselves a non-normative family, absorbing seventeen-year-old Frankie from an unhappy foster arrangement and supporting Charmey throughout her pregnancy. Their interventions collectivize the care of children and elders. This non-normative family provides healing where the nuclear model fails, not only for people but for plants: Geek helps Momoko and Lloyd with the garden and seed business, which Lloyd worries will vanish after his death. Geek resolves Lloyd’s anxieties by starting a self-sustainable and anti-capitalist seed-sharing website. Gardeners receive seeds for free by pledging to propagate them and share them back through the network. In caring simultaneously for the Fuller family, for food supplies, and for non-human biodiversity, Geek and the other Seeds answer Donna Haraway’s injunction to “Make kin, not babies!”: to cultivate “something other/more than entities tied by ancestry or genealogy” in order to “practice better care of kinds-as-assemblages (not species one at a time)” in our era of environmental change (161-162). Ozeki’s aforementioned satire of the Seeds is well-placed, allowing the novel to celebrate but not romanticize communal care as an environmentalist orientation to post-capitalist futurity.

Non-normative family also helps the adolescent Yumi survive after fleeing her father's patriarchalism. Yumi spends a year on the streets in Berkeley, until some students incorporate her into a group house. These alternate parents make sure Yumi goes to school and help with her homework (38). Yumi describes the group house (and Berkeley) as a "real pan-Asian scene," linking alternative family to discourses of racial and cultural hybridity (38). She gets pregnant by Paul, a gay-identified graduate student. They decide to have the baby together without getting married, agreeing "that since normal families are so screwed up and dysfunctional, we might as well try to have an abnormal one" (42). The novel indulges alternatives to the nuclear family (although Yumi and Paul eventually marry and then divorce). Cass and Will, however, react with approbation when Yumi returns to Idaho. Cass enumerates to Will what strike her as unusual facts about the parentage of Yumi's three children:

The baby's daddy is Hawaiian. ... A native, which makes sense, 'cause he's pretty dark. ... They were living together, but she broke up with him because he can't hold down a job. ... The little girl's daddy sells surfboards in Waikiki, and the oldest boy's father teaches something about plants. He's Japanese. Yummy said he was still a homosexual when she got pregnant. ... I don't see how that could be, do you? The homosexual part, I mean. They must have had sex, right? ... [D]id she seduce him, and then he just converted? (96)

This description is rife with racist and queer-phobic stereotypes. But Cass's affect is curiosity and sheltered ignorance, rather than hatred. She wants to "puzzle ... out" Yumi's "different" life (96). Will, however, cuts Cass off: "That's a whole lot more than I need to know. ... How am I gonna look her straight in the eye if you go putting thoughts like that in my head?" (96). Will's bigotry is sharper, but both he and Cass experience their white heterosexuality as normal and Yumi's family as weird. Cass's concerns about Yumi's sloppy parenting cannot be disentangled from stereotypes about single mothers,

composite families, queerness, and people of color. Cass warms up to Yumi and the Seeds, collaborating to care for the Fullers and their farm: Cass becomes Charmey's pregnancy coach and babysits for Yumi's Poo. Yet in a tense moment she accuses Yumi of courting trouble with the police by having "a brood of fatherless children and a gang of dirty commie hippies in tow" (159). Cass is angry in part because her own childlessness makes her jealous. She feels "as though the whole middle section of her life—the part where she was supposed to grow to adulthood, bear children, be a young mother, and watch her children grow—had simply been elided. Slurred over. She felt, at once, far too old and impossibly young, and there was a great gap in the middle" (335). Cass's own desires and pain conform to an expected temporality of heterosexual life: they are as normative as they are understandable. But Cass exercises these affects at Yumi's expense. She grows possessive of Yumi's baby, Poo, convinced that Yumi does not "deserve" her children (323). This climaxes with an aborted attempt to kidnap Poo: Cass packs baby and suitcases into her car and drives toward the Canadian border. She turns around and apologizes to Poo when he will not stop crying. Cass's desire to appropriate Poo and her aggression toward Yumi provoke remorse, suggesting that these are inappropriate responses. It seems that Ozeki would critique Cass and Will's bigotry.

Yet the novel's ending reasserts the heteronormative white family. The Seeds are arrested after holding their "Potato Party" on Lloyd's property and uprooting some of Will's GM potatoes. Charmey is released to give birth. Soon after her delivery, Charmey is killed by a bomb. When the grieving Seeds make plans to leave Idaho, Frankie suggests that Cass and Will keep the baby. Lilith protests that the Seeds will "parent her collectively" (402). Frankie drowns out this assertion of the non-normative family with a

heteronormative rejoinder that “a kid needs a mom and a dad,” on which basis Cass and Will are delighted to say yes (402). Communal care work has functioned on the diegetic level as a temporary solution during Lloyd’s hospice, and on a thematic level has illustrated problems with white patriarchy. But communal care is granted no longevity. Ozeki treats non-normative family as a cute thought, not serious enough to safeguard reproductive futurity (for which the baby is a symbol). The departures of the Seeds and of Yumi with her mixed family (taking Momoko with her as if to remove social difference from Idaho) leave the Child in Cass’s hands. The narrative settles back into a white nuclear family structure, with the small concession of the normative family absorbing an adopted rather than biological child. Cass regrets having almost kidnapped Poo. Yet her receipt of this replacement baby excuses Cass’s feeling that as a married heterosexual white woman, she deserves a child more than a non-normative family does, or has more potential as a caregiver. The point is not whether or not seventeen-year-old Frankie’s choice is right given his personal circumstances. What matters is the symbolic value of this ending, which ousts anti-normativity, reinstating the idealized white, heterosexual nuclear family in order to achieve narrative closure.

Before receiving Frankie and Charmey’s baby, Will and Cass had contemplated resolving their fertility problems through transnational adoption, a complex global movement of bodies and capital. Cass trolled babies from Bulgaria and elsewhere online, while “Will had once expressed interest in a Vietnamese child, but when ... he’d seen the birth defects and the land-mine injuries, he shook his head and turned away. ‘I can’t,’ he said. ‘I’d want to take them all’” (204). Will is distraught by the effects of Agent Orange and other US tactics. But he and Cass do not consider the politics of transnational

adoption, which David Eng has described as a “post-World War II phenomenon closely associated with American liberalism, postwar prosperity, and Cold War politics” in which “infants are entangled in transnational flows of human capital” (1). Not just heterosexual couples but often queer couples and singles seek through transnational adoption “to (re)consolidate and (re)occupy conventional structures of family and kinship” (Eng 1). Cass and Will’s flirtation with transnational adoption links them to imperial networks that are exploited to extend the normative American family. As Eng implies, transnational adoption can, like gay marriage, neutralize queer politics by absorbing gays into normative structures. Likewise, the adoption of Frankie and Charmey’s child does not create a non-normative family. It rather makes the normative model available to a couple incapable of biological reproduction. This adoption short-circuits the novel’s articulation of non-normative family as an alternative to poisonous agricultural inputs, chemical warfare, and other ecosocial violence linked with infertility. It also illustrates the risk that “make kin, not babies” dissolves into just another directive blaming “overpopulation” in non-Western countries for environmental issues and positing white family models as the solution (not Haraway’s intention).¹²⁰

Difference dissolves into either tokenism or normativity in the baby’s naming, too. Charmey calls the baby Tibet “for orphans. For people who have lost their homeland,” which Cass later amends to Betty (346). With this name change, does Ozeki want us to see that something (liberation politics?) is lost in the reinstatement of the

¹²⁰ The levels of fossil fuel consumption enjoyed by the wealthy (and the military endeavors of Northern countries) are far more substantial contributors to climate change than population. Narratives about overpopulation have been used to greenwash atrocities such as forced sterilization.

normative family? Any such message is muddy, as it seems so misguided in the first place for Charmey to name the baby Tibet. With “Free Tibet” as a trendy bumper-sticker, this name connotes Americans appropriating narratives of freedom struggle as accoutrements of a “do-gooder” or performatively “political” liberal aesthetic. The conversion of Tibet to Betty, a normative white name, merely extends the sense that such appropriations do not shake normativity, but rather function (as can transnational adoption) to reabsorb difference and globality. The final scene shows Cass at home, reading Betty a letter that Frankie sends from the demonstration in Seattle. Folding up the letter, Cass closes the novel by announcing, “Daddy’s going to save the world” (417). Mommy is at home with the baby, so Daddy can be a hero? The rehabilitation of the Father figure is complicated by the fact that this “Daddy” – Betty’s biological father Frankie – is mostly out of the picture. Meanwhile Will, Betty’s adopted father, has decided to consider organic farming: a banal gesture towards small-scale change. Likewise, Frankie’s condition for the adoption of Tibet is “about her food. . . . could you try to feed Tibet the organic stuff?” (404). These tiny concessions neutralize the Seeds’ anti-capitalist mission, reincorporating their values into individualized “life politics” that can be performed as consumer behavior within normative kinship structures.¹²¹ The family is recuperated, it seems, at the price of severing its relations with radical politics: the non-normative family is removed, and the revolutionary anti-capitalist “Daddy,” Frankie, is re-narrated as an old-school war hero, while expelled from childcare and other family matters – and from (family) farming, Will’s province. Similarly, when the Fullers’

¹²¹ Susie O’Brien describes North American local food as an “ecological life politics” that tags the potential for societal change to individual consumption choices (231).

seeds corrode because Geek is too busy with the Potato Party and its aftermath to dry them, Yumi-the-narrator concludes that “farming requires a kind of stability that is incompatible with revolution” (407). “Farming,” a conservative activity done by Will and Lloyd, is bifurcated from “revolution,” the activity of the leftist Seeds – even though the novel has emphasized the productive synthesis of farming and revolution, as epitomized by the anti-capitalist website for sharing Lloyd and Momoko’s seeds. With the cleaving of the activist “Daddy” (Frankie) from the involved father/farmer (Will), are we to take away that parenting, like farming, is incompatible with revolution? Does Ozeki suggest that the family, and the family farm, ought to remain in their normative forms, protected from any radicalizing potential? Is revolution merely an affectation of the young?

All Over Creation and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* each close with a platitude that seems on the surface to flatten eco-political possibilities. In *The Hungry Tide*, the simple ending was the too-easy harmonization of conservationist and subaltern politics. In *All Over Creation*, the white nuclear family is idealized, and harmonized with the modest potentiality of organic farming. The ending also redeems the family farmer Lloyd, in part: his patriarchal violence sparks early in the novel, but fades as Ozeki courts our sympathies for his old age and anti-GM stance. He dies with dignity. If these two texts both need a happy resolution, perhaps in order to sell to bourgeois readers, how do global environmental novels complicate these naïve, pat resolutions? I have argued that *The Hungry Tide*’s arc toward naïve eco-politics can be disrupted by reading for food. This helped situate eco-political intervention as bound up in polyscalar thinking that links individual eating to consumer capitalism and empire. I will recuperate radical potential from *All Over Creation* by reading eco-food themes in relation to polyscalar

representational strategies. Ozeki's accomplishments rely on the particular intersection of eco-politics and aesthetics that the global environmental novel affords.

Representational Limits, Eco-Global Imaginings

The relationship between agro-food politics and textuality comes front and center in *All Over Creation*. Geek repeatedly uses the analogy of the book to describe seeds:

Every seed has a story, Geek says, encrypted in a narrative line that stretches back for thousands of years. And if you trace that story ... you might find yourself tucked into an immigrant's hatband. ... Or you might be clinging to the belly wool of a yak as you travel across the steppes of Mongolia. ... Seeds tell the story of migrations and drifts, so if you learn to read them, they are very much like books—with one big difference.

“What's that?” Ocean asks at this point in the story. She loves stories. ...

The difference is this: Book information is relevant only to human beings. It's expendable, really. As someone who teaches for a living, I shouldn't be saying this, but the planet can do quite well without books. However, the information contained in a seed is a different story, entirely vital, pertaining to life itself. Why? Because seeds contain the information necessary to perform the most essential of all alchemies. ... They know how to transform sunlight into food and oxygen so the rest of us can survive. (171)

This passage opens a chapter seemingly in third person. Geek's reported speech melds into his free indirect discourse, until Ocean's line of dialogue interrupts. The section turns out to have Yumi as narrator, as becomes clear in the third paragraph. Blurring these narrative perspectives, the passage also cycles through mystical, kid-friendly, and wry registers: Ozeki interweaves reverie about the “alchemies” of seeds with both a dialogic scene of bedtime storytelling and an in-joke about the plight of novelists and educators. The passage is not just about the expendability of books and the humanist's self-pity, nor the importance of seeds. Ozeki is probing relations among narrative power, the novel's representational limits, and eco-political sway. The planet might do fine without books, but Ozeki wants (us) to believe that books also can foster environmental awareness. She

toes the line between asserting a naïve song for the humanities and dismissing the literary. In this way Ozeki queries the potential and limits of novels for representing globality and disseminating eco-consciousness.

The concept of global environment provokes both representational and political crises. How do we delineate such a large entity? And how could we possibly rescue it? A slurry of concerns about approaches to environmentalism and to aesthetic representation becomes thematized in Ozeki's novel, when Geek rails at Yumi about the destruction of biodiversity:

He held out his hand, as though he were offering me a peach or a tennis ball, then shook it in front of my face. “*This* is how diminished, how pathetic the planet has become, that you can picture it like a cute little blue-green orb cupped in the palm of your hand. Like a logo or a fucking brand! Is this progress? I don't think so. It's bullshit, but that's all we hear—the same old stories, justifying the same old bad, exploitative, greedy, fucked-up behaviors. The same old excuses about why it's ok—no, it's economically beneficial—to raze the land and destroy animal habitat and exploit people and drive honking big SUVs to go shopping at the fucking mall. Nothing changes.” (409, original emphasis)

Within a critique of commodification and capitalist ideology, Geek links the problem of branding to the “blue-green orb” – an image straight out of 60s and 70s vintage American environmentalism. The image of the earth as “Blue Planet” or “Blue Marble” seen from space, popularized by photographs taken by the Apollo missions in 1968 and 1972, was key to the iconography of first wave American environmentalism.¹²² Apollo 8's image was showcased at the first Earth Day in 1970 (Heise *Sense of Planet* 4). The Blue Planet remains one of the most mainstream images for environmental awareness. The earth is pictured as a perfect sphere, holistic and precious yet simple and small – like a marble (as the 1972 picture is named), or a peach or tennis ball (as put by Yumi-the-narrator), or,

¹²² See Images 4 and 5.

more cynically in Geek's words, a "cute little blue-green orb cupped in the palm of your hand." Geek objects to how the orb image makes the earth seem small enough to own – to reduce to "a logo or a fucking brand." In Geek's narrative, the Blue Planet is an icon for what Jennifer Wenzel has called "postconsumerism": the affect that environmentalism and social justice are for sale, that you can "help the poor or save the planet by buying things" ("Consumption" 598). As an anti-capitalist, Geek opposes this consumer logic. But he is also objecting to the way that the orb image renders the earth as a single unified entity. What matters to Geek is heterogeneity.

This heterogeneity has at least two senses. First, differentiated responsibility for and vulnerability to environmental impacts are collapsed by the Blue Planet image, "an obvious target of criticism for its erasure of political and cultural differences," as well as for its technocratic origins (Heise *Sense of Planet* 24).¹²³ Second, Geek cares about biodiversity. The orb, a miniaturized representation of the whole, is insufficient when the point is not the whole but the detail – the "incredible beauty and diversity and rich profusion. ... the whole planet as a garden, teeming with millions upon millions of flowers and trees and fruits and vegetables and insects and birds and animals and weevils

¹²³ Mainstream American environmentalism has aspired to consider local as well as global frames of reference. But the well-known slogan "Think globally, act locally" did not inspire synergy across these scales so much as disconnection. Modes of thinking globally were limited to either "envisioning the planet as ruled by corporate conspiracies" or "celebrat[ing] its encompassing harmony and beauty" (Heise "Transnational Turn" 385). Both of these narratives that are too generalized to acknowledge heterogeneity or to have progressive utility. Despite the governing Blue Planet image, the movement "invested most of its imaginative and aesthetic capital in the reconception of the local subject," without acknowledging that not every kind of locality translates toward the global in homologous ways: different populations are located differently in terms of advantage and relationship to environmental destruction (Heise "Transnational Turn" 385). In this context, to "think globally" becomes an alibi to "act locally" in ways that do not take into account the bias of where and how one is located.

and us” that Geek asks Yumi to “[i]magine” because it cannot be fully described (409). Listing out biodiversity is impossible, but Geek’s catalogue of plants and animals gives a sense of richness even as it performs incompleteness. Geek catalogues to underscore the impossibility of cataloguing, oversaturating his sentence then asking for the imagination to extend the work. This representational strategy underscores its own partiality, yet asserts incompleteness as an improvement upon oversimplifying the whole. Geek’s monologue captures a representational crisis basic to the global environmental novel: the struggle to represent the planet in all its social and biological diversity.

Geek’s disavowal of the blue orb resonates with conversations on modernism and realism beyond the ecocritical realm, in which the representational crisis introduced by globality or globalization has been key. Jed Esty and Colleen Lye, for example, have argued that modernism “stylizes, even heroicizes, its baked-in failure to map the global system,” while “peripheral realisms” “approach the world-system as partially, potentially describable in its concrete reality ... via its local appearances” (285).¹²⁴ Geek’s objection to the orb is all about representational scale: the image squishes the enormous to the tiny, missing the whole point by missing the details. Ozeki presents an alternative in the novel’s capacity for polyscalar representation. In Allison Carruth’s reading, Ozeki’s *My Year of Meats* uses “formal hybridity” to address multiple scales, foregrounding a “productive tension between intimate and informational narratives” (*Global Appetites* 118-19). The protagonist Jane’s “individual experiences of food compete for our attention with a ludic satire of postindustrialism that centers on the U.S. beef lobby and its marketing campaigns in Japan. The conflict between these two registers – the

¹²⁴ See also Chapter Five.

interpersonal and the systemic – emerges in the relationship between Jane’s first-person narrative and the other perspectives and discourses Ozeki weaves into the novel” (Carruth *Global Appetites* 118, 119). Ozeki “samples” language from “professional, scientific, and epistolary documents,” such as beef advertisements and sources that Jane, a documentarian, reads while researching DES (synthetic estrogen diethylstilbestrol, a growth hormone given both to livestock and to women as a fertility drug) (Carruth *Global Appetites* 118, 128). We could likewise say that in *All Over Creation*, the tensions of polyscalar thinking emerge in the relationship between Yumi’s first person narrative and other perspectives and discourses. As we saw with Geek’s bedtime story about seeds, first person sections push at the limits of their categorization, blurring the lines between Yumi and the novel’s other voices. The novel is first person then second person then third person then epistolary. It is slangy then lyrical. It is localized in Liberty Falls, Idaho, yet overwhelmed with references to globality. Lonely farmhouses cut to corporate boardrooms, to supermarkets, to hippie houses in Oakland, to the McDonalds in Ashtabula, Ohio. Four babies are born. One is aborted. Many are miscarried. There are at least eleven main characters. Two die. There are far too many vegetables mentioned to count. Ozeki’s novel is 417 pages of deceptive simplicity, as promiscuous in its language as a squash, as overpopulated by humans as by plants, seeds, and eggs.

Ozeki intervenes in environmentalist discourse via this profusion of plants, characters, linguistic registers, narrative perspectives, plots and subplots, and levels of allegory. Her aesthetic of excess communicates a sense of superabundance – precisely what is threatened by the human-induced loss of biodiversity that some scientists are calling the Sixth Mass Extinction (Kolbert 6). Ozeki’s emphasis on formal, scalar, social,

and ecological heterogeneity is articulated against the orb iconography of mainstream US environmentalism, whose representational strategies prevent an inclusive or sufficiently specific eco-politics. Whereas Ghosh claims in *The Great Derangement* that “serious fiction” is too individualist to represent a phenomenon as large-scale as climate change, Ozeki capitalizes on the novel’s ability to represent at multiple levels.¹²⁵ Does Ozeki’s novel fit into “serious fiction,” the category of writing that Ghosh sees as failing to represent climate change? Ozeki’s reader-friendly play on the lexica of hippies and TV shows, plus elements borrowed from melodrama, may make her novels appear rather silly. But humor is not the opposite of seriousness. Carruth, for example, sees “ludic strains” as a way that *My Year of Meats* “make[s] abstract, gigantic, and ‘too complex’ systems accessible” (*Global Appetites* 151). Humor, then, can be a polyscalar strategy. One reviewer describes *All Over Creation*’s tone as an “apocalyptic cheerfulness” that “makes for a surprisingly sophisticated tension in a novel that at first appears to be mere farce” (Dederer n.p.). My own reading has emphasized Ozeki’s satirical take on a variety of food-based movements, important to her eco-politics rather than flippant. Ozeki is taken seriously by quite a few literary critics, notably Carruth and Ursula Heise. She has also been written up in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* and repeatedly in the *New York Times Review of Books* – publications that Ghosh mentions as arbiters of the category of serious fiction (*Derangement* 7). Ozeki’s novels certainly participate in the “serious” literary mainstream that Ghosh identifies, rather than in the genre fiction, such as “cli fi,” that he absents from his argument’s purview.

¹²⁵ See Chapter Two.

Is *All Over Creation* then a counterexample to Ghosh's argument that climate change is too large a topic for "serious fiction"? The novel's environmental issue of choice is not climate change, but that is not because the topic would be too big. As Carruth puts it, Ozeki's novels "make sense of an abstract and globalized food system via the interpersonal, the intimate, and the everyday" (153). Ozeki's choice to focus on food systems (both a major contributor to climate change and vulnerable to its effects), rather than on climate change itself, does not result from scalar limitations of the modern novel's form. It is this form that allows Ozeki to sweep between the global and the personal. In many forms and many environmental epistemologies, polyscalar thinking is quite hard, and this is a place where novels can help us out: as Carruth puts it, scale switching is "a fundamental attribute of the novel after postmodernism, which is invested in mapping systems at all scales" even if "bound up with liberal ideas of individuality" (*Global Appetites* 119). Carruth, however, suggests that the liberal-individualist narrative in *My Years of Meats* is at odds with the novel's overall mission. The narrator Jane solves "the problem of complexity" by deciding "to zoom in," capturing the image of an individual cow rather than the feedlot, and making a documentary more about her own family's history than about the structural disempowerment caused by the food regime: ultimately "[t]here is a conflict ... between [Jane's] filmic work and the work of *My Year of Meats*" (Carruth 137). *All Over Creation* instead situates the perspective of the individual (indeed a mainstay of the novel in the West) not in conflict with representing global systems, but as one of two poles in polyscalar representation. Ozeki's critique of the "blue marble" makes clear that the zoomed-out view is just as much a problem as the individualized zoom-in, if either exists alone. We cannot think about systems only

through individuals, especially when some individuals are louder than others. But if we narrate globality without zooming in, we lose heterogeneity. We tell lies about the whole by eliminating the details. Ozeki's intervention is not to emphasize either the globe or the individual, but to insist on their simultaneity. What crystallizes in my reading of *All Over Creation* is how the eco-politics of the global environmental novel are enmeshed in multiscale representational strategies, an aesthetic retaliation against environmentalist discourses that flatten the globe because they operate at one scale.

CHAPTER FOUR

Capitalism and its Outsides:

Zoë Wicomb, Indigeneity, and Flesh

Gardens

Cape Town has long figured in the colonial imagination as garden. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) first established the colony as a “refreshment station” to feed sailors in the spice trade. As Richard Grove documents, Cape Town and other imagined gardens allowed Europeans to “characterise, identify, and organise their perceptions of nature” (Grove 13). The garden as a “metaphor of mind” developed in part through actual botanical gardens, such as the Company Gardens at Cape Town (established 1652), which collected, taxonomized, and conserved species to build imperial knowledge (Grove 14). The lush Company Gardens enabled the fantasy of the whole Cape region as a garden: an oasis of biodiversity, characterized by *fynbos*, or multicolored heath. An urgency around preserving such landscapes indexed fears not only about “the effect of man on the environment” but about whether “change of climate might cause a transformation or even degeneration in man himself” (Grove 14). The metaphor of the Cape as garden expanded to encompass the entire planet, with fears that “the whole earth might be threatened by deforestation, famine, extinctions, and climate change. ... [T]he human race appeared to face expulsion from the garden altogether!” (Grove 15). Related anxieties today touch on the very real threats of global warming and a “Sixth Extinction.” As Grove puts it, the garden myth evolved into Western environmentalism. Botanical gardens managed such large-scale thoughts by providing “analogues ... of the world, of

climate, of economy” (Grove 13). On the small scale of the garden, it seemed possible to recreate Paradise, and “interactions between people and nature could be morally defined” (Grove 13).¹²⁶ This conceptual frame worked with a pseudo-science of racial taxonomy to make excuses for selective protection and predation of human and nonhuman life.

Today, as Cape Town’s 2018 water crisis makes headlines, the Cape might re-figure as a dried-up garden: a forerunner of what climate change could mean worldwide. However, the water crisis (discussed further in the coda to this project) will likely follow long-standing patterns of environmental degradation. It will affect the poor first, while the wealthy rely on privatized water access (Weeks and Weeks). Such unjust distributions of environmental problems have often been elided by the rhetoric of the garden. In the “Garden of Extinction” in Cape Town’s Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, for example, signs lament threats to the Cape’s unique biome, blaming “illegal informal settlements” for endangering rare plants.¹²⁷ Such rhetoric prioritizes plant conservation

¹²⁶ Contra Grove, J.M. Coetzee argues in *White Writing* that “the garden myth ... of a return to Eden and innocence, fail[ed] to take root” at the Cape because, unlike the Americas, “Africa could never, in the European imagination, be the home of the earthly paradise because Africa was not a new world” (2). Yet for Coetzee, the Cape otherwise fits into the “topos of the garden, the enclosed world entire to itself, [which] is more extensive than the Judaeo-Christian myth of Eden. In its isolation from the great world, walled in by oceans and an unexplored northern wilderness, the colony of the Cape of Good Hope was indeed a kind of garden” (3). This in the end does not differ so much from Grove’s argument, although there is one important divergence: Coetzee emphasizes the (partial) projection of a European topos onto South Africa, whereas Grove’s intervention is to argue that European conservation discourse developed largely *in* the colonies, rather than emanating from the metropole.

¹²⁷ The land that is now Kirstenbosch was appropriated by the VOC from indigenous Khoikhoi who had used it for two thousand years (“History of Kirstenbosch NBG”). A series of Europeans privately owned the area, culminating with imperialist and early conservationist Cecil Rhodes. Rhodes protected a swath of land around Table Mountain’s slopes, ironically bought with a fortune made in diamond and gold mines at the cost of environmental damage and labor exploitation (Twidle 56). Kirstenbosch became a botanical garden in 1913.

over human life, rather than addressing the societal and economic structures that give rise to informal settlements (or mentioning land use by the wealthy).¹²⁸ By invoking the garden myth, Kirstenbosch's signage excludes the possibility of combatting poverty and protecting endangered plants at the same time.

The garden myth is then an insidious beauty. Legacies of colonialism hide behind blooming proteas – South Africa's national flower. The love for Cape flora torments the main character in Zoë Wicomb's 2014 novel *October*. Mercia comes from a village called Kliprand in Namaqualand, an arid coastal zone in South Africa's Northern Cape. She lives in Glasgow. When travelling with her Scottish husband Craig to the island of Lanzarote in the Canaries, Mercia is struck by the landscape: "[T]hey might as well have gone home to the Cape. Mercia was surprised by the familiarity of the island, the wide plains of dry earth and sparse growth. ... [T]he place was uncannily like that of her childhood" (205). Mercia visits a cactus garden, filled with

species from home. Euphorbia from Transvaal, quaintly labeled in the old geographic names of the trekkerboer, and the very melkbos from Kliprand. ... She thrilled at seeing the name given by Portuguese seafarers: Cabo de Buena Esperanza. Her own Cape of Good Hope, words printed on the municipal exercise books and rulers of her childhood. ... [S]he could not but savor the memory of a little girl riding on her father's shoulders as he taught her the homely names of plants. ... Mercia had to remind herself that she preferred the lush flora of the Northern Hemisphere. (208)

Mercia's nostalgia for home overdetermines her experience of Lanzarote, which she reads for likeness to the Cape. She indulges a colonial enthusiasm for exploration and discovery by "the trekkerboer" (the Afrikaner, or Dutch-descended settler, moving into

¹²⁸ For a reading of hysteria about protecting Cape plants as a symptom of xenophobia, see Jean and John Comaroff, "Alien-Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism," in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 101, no. 4, 2002, pp. 779-805.

the interior) and Portuguese “seafarers.” She remembers her indoctrination in such narratives at school. Labelling, measuring, and classifying are pleasures for Mercia, associated equally with institutional “exercise books and rulers” and with learning plant taxonomies from her father. *October* traces how paternalistic and colonial legacies dovetail through logics of taxonomy – both botanical and racial.

The novel opens with Craig leaving Mercia, which propels her to visit her brother Jake in Kliprand. Mercia thinks (mistakenly) that Jake and his wife Sylvie want Mercia to take their son Nicky to live in Scotland. Mercia believes this because she feels superior: she is a lecturer at a university, while Sylvie and Jake are poor and live in an isolated village. Jake is an alcoholic who spends most of his time in bed. Sylvie’s circumstances are more or less desperate, but she is a resourceful (albeit traumatized) woman who has no interest in Mercia taking her child. Mercia’s haughtiness toward Sylvie is also racialized. Both women are “coloured,” meaning of “mixed” racial heritage.¹²⁹ But Mercia’s father, now deceased, considered Namaqualanders such as Sylvie racially inferior. Mercia’s trip will occasion her wrestling with her own racism and classism, and discovering that her father sexually abused Sylvie in her childhood. The myths of the garden and the nurturing father both derail as Wicomb’s novel interweaves racialized and gendered violence, the logic of taxonomy, the love of nature, and empire.

¹²⁹ The term “coloured” designates a heterogeneous group of people with heritages from indigenous southern Africans, slaves brought from East Africa and South Asia, and European settlers. It was originally an apartheid designation that positioned coloured people between “Africans” and “whites.” The term’s postapartheid life is discussed in the next section. I emphasize the term’s national specificity by retaining the South African spelling, except when quoting American sources that drop the “u.”

October is the most recent novel by Wicomb, a major figure of South African fiction since the publication of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987). Wicomb is best-known within South Africa and by readers interested specifically in South African literature, yet she has a substantial international presence.¹³⁰ She is also an incisive postcolonial critic. Wicomb's fiction and criticism together offer compelling models within and beyond the South African context for rethinking postcoloniality, cosmopolitanism, race, and indigeneity in our late neoliberal moment. Indigeneity has always been at the heart of Wicomb's oeuvre, as recognized at least since the enthusiastic reception in South Africa of *David's Story* (2000).¹³¹ Yet Wicomb has most often been discussed not in relation to indigeneity, but as a cosmopolitan thinker.¹³²

Cosmopolitanism differs from globalization by foregrounding affect: if globalization is "a set of designs to manage the world," then cosmopolitanism is "a set of

¹³⁰ From 1994 to 2013 Wicomb was Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland. She received a Donald Windham - Sandy M. Campbell Literature Prize from Yale in 2013, and has been praised by authors and critics from South Africa and abroad, such as J.M. Coetzee, Gayatri Spivak, and Toni Morrison (Attridge "Introduction" 3; book jacket of *David's Story* [Feminist Press, 2002]).

¹³¹ This novel pursues the treatment of female activists and suspected traitors in ANC camps, and the complex relationship to apartheid of the Griqua, a coloured community descended from indigenous Khoi people and Dutch colonists (Attridge "Introduction" 2).

¹³² Perhaps most influentially, Dorothy Driver has helped to canonize Wicomb as a key postapartheid and postcolonial writer, characterized by cosmopolitanism. (See Driver, "Zoë Wicomb and the Cape Cosmopolitan" and "Zoë Wicomb's Translocal: Troubling the Politics of Location.") Driver delivered a keynote address at Stellenbosch University for a 2010 conference called "The Cape and the Cosmopolitan: Reading Zoë Wicomb." This conference situated Wicomb's work as an ideal arena to engage "the Cape's history as site of global intersections – as the point of passage that sutured into a new global economy Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds" (Samuelson "Reading" 89). Special issues on Wicomb's cosmopolitanism emerged from this conference in two different South African journals: *Current Writing* (vol. 23, no. 2, 2011, co-edited by Meg Samuelson and Margaret Daymond) and *Safundi* (vol. 12, no. 3-4, 2011, co-edited by Kai Easton and Andrew van der Vlies) (Samuelson "Reading" 89). I draw on pieces from these seminal special issues, as well as later republications.

projects toward planetary conviviality” (Mignolo 721).¹³³ As C oil n Parsons puts it, Wicomb’s fiction stages the “problem (or opportunity) of scale – the dizzying shuttling back and forth between the near and the distant” (108). For Parsons, the affective question is whether the sentiments of the intimate and domestic can extend to the world – especially from the position of otherness, where the nation never felt available as an intermediary scale.¹³⁴ The affective spaces of Wicomb’s work are those of feeling and imagining across scales: what I have theorized as the project of the global environmental novel. Within this rubric, I contemplate Wicomb’s contemporary relevance beyond as well as within South Africa.

October works as global environmental novel in part by assessing how localized readings of landscape impinge on models for understanding globality. As far-flung vistas merge in Mercia’s memories, her diffusion of the garden myth offers South Africa’s colonization as a messy metonym for imperialism around the world. At the end of the

¹³³ For Pheng Cheah, the “tension between cosmopolitanism and globalization, world and globe, is most acute in postcoloniality because ... capitalist globalization incorporates peoples outside the European world-system by violently destroying their worlds” (*What is a World?* 12). Cosmopolitanism once connoted a Eurocentric and elitist Kantian tradition, but now we could identify two streams: cosmopolitanisms of the elite and cosmopolitanisms from below, or, in Walter Mignolo’s terms, “cosmopolitan projects from the perspective of modernity” versus “critical cosmopolitanisms” coming “from the exteriority of modernity (that is coloniality)” (Mignolo 724). Wicomb’s cosmopolitanism is not the “comfortable” kind, but rather a critical cosmopolitanism: an expression of “affective dislocation” across racially- and ethnically-coded geographic space (Attridge “No Escape” 50-51). Crossing of borders is constant in Wicomb’s work, but never easy.

¹³⁴ On the other hand, Dorothy Driver has argued that in Wicomb’s “Cape cosmopolitanism,” cosmopolitanism does not oppose nationalism; rather, in an “ongoing negotiation,” the meaning and importance of each is refracted but not contradicted by the other (“Cape Cosmopolitan” 97). In any case, Wicomb’s cosmopolitanism has never been characterized as repudiating the local: hers is a “rooted cosmopolitanism,” a search to be “simultaneously domestic and worldly, provincial and cosmopolitan” (Driver “Cape Cosmopolitan” 93; Samuelson “Reading” 89).

novel, a job interview brings her to Macau, a former Portuguese colony and present region of China. As in Lanzarote, she reads the landscape for its similarities to home: “so many of the flowers are those of the Cape: bougainvillea, hibiscus, poinsettia, oleander” (232). The specificity of Macau or Lanzarote’s lushness becomes refracted by Mercia’s sense of the Cape, making one postcolonial topography inseparable from another.

Various landscapes coalesce toward a translocal globality that in turn impinges on Mercia’s ability to read any local landscape. Mercia’s reading process indicates the impossibility of understanding local places or identities outside a globalized system.¹³⁵

October processes globality as this entanglement of different modes of localization: in literature and culture, and in material questions of biodiversity loss and food distribution. I’ll refer to this quality as Wicomb’s “translocalism” or “translocation,” by which I mean her technique of sliding back and forth between different localities (often one in South Africa and one in Scotland), each of which is already hybrid, already global.¹³⁶ These shifting settings allow Wicomb to make globality visible without losing sight of local particularity. Segues between settings are frequently facilitated by references to foods, crops, or plants that have circulated from one locality to another, jogging a character’s memory of one place while in another, and haunting the text with imperial connections.

Such hauntings appear in Mercia’s trip to Macau, when her tendency to read a new landscape through the Cape backfires. Mercia wanders a blooming campus before

¹³⁵ As Derek Attridge remarks, Wicomb’s writing investigates “how individuals perceive their environments, and how those environments modify individuals” (5).

¹³⁶ “Translocalism” is also used by some critics to describe Wicomb’s work generally, and in such cases is more or less synonymous with cosmopolitanism, if perhaps a trendier term. See, for example, *Zoë Wicomb and the Translocal*, edited by Kai Easton and Derek Attridge (Routledge, 2017). This collection includes contributions by Driver and others that extend longstanding conversations on space and identity in Wicomb’s work.

her interview, anxiety mingling with her interpellation of Macau within the Cape's biome: "She ought to consider the possibility of a question [in the interview] about why she wants to come to Macau. ... [W]ill she say something limp about the weather, the heat, the flowers of the Cape?" (232). Mercia recognizes comparing flora as a "limp" narrative that can no longer mask her disorientation.¹³⁷ Yet she follows the flowers until she gets lost: "She ... catches a glimpse of morning glory. ... A flash of blue trumpets lures her along a corridor that promises a hidden garden, until she realizes that she has lost her bearings, has lost the garden" (233). Panicking that she will miss her interview, Mercia abandons it, gets in a cab, and flies back to Glasgow. The novel ends abruptly, Mercia having "lost the garden." Why end this novel with the garden myth's failure? Disruptions to the myth are in fact present all along, scaling the collapse of Mercia's personal idyll against the greenwashing function of garden images. When Mercia first returns to Kliprand, she marks its new landscape of "RDP houses ... stretching eastward from the town's rubbish dump" (43). This anti-pastoral image references the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) that went into effect in 1994 under the ANC government. It targets poverty by strengthening both social services and the macroeconomy. Mercia doubts RDP's efficacy, in terms that touch on land distribution:

What amazes Mercia about RDP housing, or rather about the architects of these dwellings, is that in a country where land is plentiful, houses are virtually butted against each other. ... There is no question of a small patch where people could grow vegetables, a few mealies and pumpkins to keep the wolf from the door. How strange that the architects of these townships, living as they no doubt do in comfortable houses lost in large gardens ... should imagine that the poor want to huddle together in cramped conditions, that they do not want to grow vegetables, let alone flowers. (43)

¹³⁷ That Mercia expresses this in ableist and/or phallic language ("limp") perhaps implies unexamined layers of bias.

As framed in this passage, gardens are not merely about “flowers” or aesthetics, but also “vegetables,” sustenance. Mercia’s skepticism around land apportionment is dead-on – why indeed cluster houses so close together? (These concerns are ever more relevant in 2018, with South African president Cyril Ramaphosa promising radical land reform.) Mercia indicts an ideology of expertise, in which “architects” mistake what others might want. Their own homes are places to be “lost” in the garden myth, inattentive to those excluded from it. But if Mercia functions as Wicomb’s mouthpiece for such critiques, Mercia also appears naïve. Her critique of the “architects” is diluted by romanticizing the garden or farm as a space where the imagined subaltern might engage in resistance or sustenance.¹³⁸ Mercia puts great stock in growing “a few mealies and pumpkins.” We are reminded of J.M. Coetzee’s character Michael K, a coloured man with a cleft lip and implied developmental disability, who hides out on a farm during a fictional South African civil war. Michael K delights in growing pumpkins, although he seeks attenuation more than nourishment. He would dodge both work camps and the guerilla resistance, hoping to avoid history and quietly sustain “the idea of gardening” for the future (Coetzee *Life & Times* 109). Nadine Gordimer’s much-cited review of *Life & Times of Michael K* questions this “idea of gardening,” wondering if Coetzee’s novel “denies the energy of the will to resist ... [that] exists with indefatigable persistence among the black people of South Africa” (3). Does Mercia overestimate the cultural,

¹³⁸ The novel excavates Mercia’s conscience in a way that is both ongoing and incomplete, suggesting Wicomb’s skepticism towards left critique that would veil privilege, and acknowledging an entitled cosmopolitan viewpoint. (As I will discuss, the character Sylvie provides a subaltern voice whose perspective the novel cannot embody but who decenters and de-idealizes Mercia.)

spiritual, and political work that “the idea of gardening” might quietly manage? Then again, many activists have found gardening an effective tool for both material and political resistance.¹³⁹ The amount of food produced by urban gardening might be limited, yet essential for the cultivators. The political resistance sown by radical gardening could provide a vision and idealism to counter to the colonial garden myth. Gardening flits between a romanticized bourgeois leftism, which Wicomb disenchant through Mercia’s troubles with landscape, and a more radical mode that Wicomb cannot engage directly.¹⁴⁰

When Mercia takes her nephew Nicky for a walk in the *veld* (or meadow), their outing mixes natural wonders with colonial history. And it brings landscape together with consumption in its most literal form, eating:

Together they marvel at leaf structures, at thorns and succulents ... the flowering sorrel that she had to gather as a child for making soup; she encourages [Nicky] to chew at the long sour stalks packed with vitamin C. Nicky is enthralled by the history lesson on the Dutch sailors who, on their way to procuring Eastern spices, stopped at the Cape to cure their scurvy with sorrel. ... She explains that the

¹³⁹ As discussed in the introduction, urban gardeners in Durban and other cities grow food illegally on vacant property, for reasons ranging from “wholesale rejection of ... ownership and private property, to more basic ... claims of social justice and necessity” (Zerbe 36).

¹⁴⁰ For Mercia, the romance of the garden cannot recover after she learns that her father raped Sylvie in the *veld*, the fields of *fynbos* surrounding Kliprand. Mercia finds her father “[w]orse, more wicked, for offending in the veld—God’s own country, mythopoetic home of ... healthy, simple pleasures seasoned with the plentiful salt of this earth” (215). Mercia situates Nicholas’s wrongdoing as a violation of the pastoral, whose “healthy, simple pleasures” she can no longer credit. The “mythopoetic” vision of the veld’s moral status is a cliché, and a dangerous one. Pastoral writing has been a white nationalist mode in South Africa and elsewhere, upholding the “virtues of the garden—simplicity, peace, immemorial usage” by its “failure to imagine a peopled landscape” (Coetzee *White Writing* 4, 9). To narrate white farming as virtuous improvement of self and land, “[b]lindness to the colour black is built into South African pastoral,” which denies black labor (Coetzee *White Writing* 4). The exploitation masked by pastoral narratives touches Mercia’s father directly. His violation of Sylvie is premised on his classed and racialized arrogance toward Namaqualanders (of which more soon).

scurvy led the Dutch to gardening and refreshing themselves at the Cape, that it could be seen as the root of all the country's troubles. (153)

The spice trade motivated South Africa's colonization, Mercia tells Nicky, and its circuit between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans depended upon an edible plant, sorrel. Sorrel is an actant driving a colonial ecological exchange.¹⁴¹ The landscape, so characteristic of the Cape, is a physical record of imperial history, entangling local and global scales. Local landscape features were key to colonial patterns that changed the structure of global connectivity, bringing different landscapes crashing together. *October* signifies as global environmental novel by scrutinizing the relationship between Cape and colonized globe through the figure of the garden – and, as the rest of this chapter will explore, through references to food and eating. It is no coincidence that to reify the “history lesson,” Mercia invites Nicky to eat the sorrel. Eating incorporates the landscape into the human body, concretizing the individual's relationship to movements of capital and organic matter around the world and across centuries. Consumption shrinks expanses of space and time into a tangible morsel. This is differently true when consumption means eating and when it means buying. The ambiguous relation between these overlapping and diverging senses of consumption is key, I believe, to how Wicomb represents the individual's interface with racialized global capitalism.

While Wicomb has been praised for exploring apartheid histories and legacies, her work is also relevant to the global politicization of food and eating. Indeed, references to cooking and cuisine frequently facilitate the scholarly commentary on Wicomb's

¹⁴¹ I borrow the term “actant” from actor-network theory, as developed by Bruno Latour, and more generally lean on the new materialist suggestion that we consider active forces beyond the human – what Jane Bennett calls “vibrant matter.” See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010).

cosmopolitanism. For example, Derek Attridge finds Wicomb's translocalism epitomized in *October* when Mercia, passing the Scottish town of Falkirk, recalls that "Falkirk was the name stamped in relief on the three-legged cast iron pots at home" in South Africa (112). The Falkirk Foundry (later Falkirk Iron Company) was among the British empire's major suppliers of cast-iron goods. Their iron cooking pots, marketed to South Africa's "indigenous population" to replace traditional clay pots, are now reinterpreted as themselves "traditional" – so much so that middle class South Africans use them to mark "their imagined anti-colonial endorsement of native tradition" (Attridge "No Escape" 49). As Attridge notes, Wicomb mocks a nationalist aesthetic that would ignore transnational origins. But the pots also gesture toward ways in which "indigenous," "traditional," or "local" culinary practices are reified around the globe. And in their association with the foundry, the pots connote the extractive industries that have characterized imperial projects, whether in South Africa or in Scotland. This is quintessential Wicomb, tracing the materiality, coloniality, and environmental implications of cuisine. In what follows, I build beyond readings of Wicomb's translocation that happen to mention food, rereading her novels *October* and *Playing in the Light* with a direct focus on food politics. I trace how and why food, in particular, animates Wicomb's expression of dislocation and re-location – both spatial and temporal – in an era of global commodity capitalism. Her novels, I argue, can help us understand how identity and environmental politics are imbricated within neoliberal structures of dissemination and consumption. Wicomb's evocations of food reattach the transnational translation of culture to the circulations of capital, commodities, botanical matter, and bodies (human and nonhuman). Her food

politics, then, are a concern with how quotidian and material practices of place-making are alloyed with globality.

Having begun with landscapes consumed by eyes and mouth, I will now be occupied with particular food objects that crop up in Wicomb's fiction, with fleshy encounters with fruits and meats. I turn first to fruits in *Playing in the Light*, delving into queer studies to consider how Wicomb negotiates quotidian manifestations of race, gender, and desire. Eating fruit from the supermarket perpetuates social taxonomies and capitalist temporalities, yet allows Wicomb's characters to probe capitalism's outsides. In the following section, I expand the discussion of race and ethnicity by situating *October* amidst discourses on coloured identity and indigeneity. I explore how Wicomb uses Cape cuisine to render what I will call cosmopolitan indigeneity. In the last section, I turn to the politics of meat-eating in *October*. Throughout, I read fruit, spices, bread, and meats as freighted with global food systems and histories of inequality, of which they are tangible, everyday manifestations – meaning that systemic scales are never really left behind. (Sometimes, as with the sorrel, Wicomb makes this freighting explicit.) Food politics allow Wicomb to condense expanses of both space and time into the realm of the perceptible. Food capitalism connects the globe via unequal trade relationships, industrialized production, monocultural export economies, and the alienation of consumers from cultivation and food sourcing. These spatial connections are intimately bound up in temporal orientations that I call “capitalist efficiencies”: regularized intervals of normative middle class life and industrial productivity that hide their true costs (both social and environmental). When Wicomb's characters consume, they are living “the production of social inequality at the level of the quotidian functioning of the body” –

Kyla Wazana Tompkins' description of eating in another context (4). Food shopping, cooking, and eating are practices where taxonomies of identity meet with consumer capitalism. Some subjects are interpellated as shoppers and eaters. Others are left hungry. Yet Wicomb's characters also transgress racialized global capitalism, assaying non-normative temporalities and connections on the scale of quotidian practice. Her novels ask whether we can imagine an outside to capitalism – and whether food can be political differently.

Fruit

In *Playing in the Light* (2008), Wicomb's representations of fruit connect race and class with the supermarket – one of the ur-spaces of consumer culture. Fruit from the supermarket might seem like the opposite of the sorrel that Nicky eats in a field: the first is a consumer product, most likely of industrial agriculture, while the second seems wild, unpurchased, off the grid. But Wicomb undoes this dichotomy between commodity and nature when she situates sorrel as an originary point for a set of imperial relations, an object imbricated in global systems of trade in food. Food distribution via the supermarket is merely a contemporary iteration of such unequal relations. Patterns of purchasing fruit are, in Wicomb's novel, performances of prescribed identity, reinforcing apartheid and postapartheid scripts of race and class. Consumer capitalism functions as a technology for managing bodies and feelings, which are subjected to the regularized intervals of capitalist time. Yet fruits also figure as messy signifiers for a less rigid racial identity, and for queer desire. Scenes of eating fruit probe whether food capitalism can be escaped in the search for less prescriptive modes of belonging.

Playing in the Light is the story of Marion Campbell, an aloof businesswoman in postapartheid Cape Town who discovers that her parents were “play-whites”: persons classified as coloured who passed as white during apartheid. Marion’s investigation probes the social construction of race, while food brokers the relation between affect and material privilege in Marion’s racial transition. As Marion explores her family’s past, she often “isn’t hungry,” and must convince herself to eat anyway (49, 62, 76). Failed appetite figures Marion’s emotional struggle. But that Marion has ample food to eat, even when she “isn’t hungry,” is a privilege. Marion’s food-shopping habits likewise indicate her performance of white, middle class identity.¹⁴² We are told over and over again that Marion shops at Woolworths, an upscale department store and supermarket chain.¹⁴³ Marion brings her aging father groceries, “unpacking a Woolworths bag of fruit into a cut-glass bowl. ... Does she not realise that the bowl, beautiful as it is, is too heavy for him to lift?” (11). Focalizing Marion’s father John, this tidbit suggests Marion’s attention to class performance over practicality. John, who grew up on a farm, finds Marion’s tastes too bourgeois for his homegrown sensibilities:

He complains about not having potatoes, so she cuts a slice of bread and admonishes, You have to watch your weight, Pappa, remember what Doctor said. ... He sulks and does not eat the slice of bread she has buttered with margarine.

¹⁴² I describe Marion’s whiteness as a “performance” not because her family was passing, but because all social identities are a performance, a set of conditioned behaviors – a point important to this novel about the social construction of race.

¹⁴³ Woolworths Holdings Limited is a South African company, founded in Cape Town in 1931, with ties to the UK’s Marks and Spencer (“Our History”). It was named after the American F.W. Woolworth Company, called the “five-and-ten” in the US and “Woolies” in the UK. This chain has gone under, but was seminal for models of mass market retail, setting trends for supply chain efficiencies, supplier partnerships, and strong branding. The South African Woolworths never had a financial relationship with the American company (nor with the Australian chain Woolworths Limited, also “cheekily” named after the American giant) (“A Potted History of F.W. Woolworth”). But its name cashes in on the dubious prestige of an Anglo-American capitalist institution.

He hasn't asked for bread; it is potato that he wants. What kind of a meal is fish without potato? How can butter from God's cattle be bad for one? ...

Marion says that she'll leave some prepared dinners from Woolworths in the fridge. You mustn't shop at Woolworths, he says, it's too expensive. She takes from her cooler bag a bottle of Zonnebloem, still cold. He ... complains that he doesn't like wine; it's cheap stuff that bergies drink. ...

Cheap stuff? Marion repeats. She has admonished herself to be patient, but that commodity runs out without warning. Well, let's not waste the wine on you then. ... It's no good trying to civilise you. (12)

John idealizes natural food straight from "God's cattle." He rejects Marion's "expensive" tastes. However, John's anti-bourgeois pastoralism is something of a facade: he also sneers at the "cheap" tastes of "bergies" (a slur for Cape Town's homeless population, referring to living on Tafelberg, or Table Mountain). Marion, meanwhile, has the white-bread tastes of a middle class used to supermarkets. She cuts fat by replacing natural foods with hyper-processed items such as margarine. She appreciates the convenience of "prepared dinners," and associates upscale shopping with being "civilised." Even her patience is a "commodity." The conflict between John and Marion stems from this commodification of affect. Feelings are subordinated to late capitalist manifestations of "convenience."

The association of Marion with the supermarket becomes a key figure for the atomization and inequality of life under racialized global capitalism, linked to the affective structures of passing. Marion lives alone and thwarts potential friends and boyfriends. The novel attributes this isolation to a quiet childhood trauma. Marion recalls a house with "endless rules and restrictions" and "closed doors that locked her out" (60). Her father John was happy to be mistaken for a poor white Afrikaans farmer, but Marion's mother Helen was "alerted ... to the many shades of whiteness" and determined to achieve the "brightest," which she understood as middle class Englishness (128).

Helen banishes feelings and play, divides the house into locked rooms, and chops their life up into regularized temporal intervals: as Marion puts it, passing meant “parceled days,” “tightly wrapped days” (60, 61). To pass, the novel suggests, entails a rigid management of affect, space, and time. Gradations of racial identity emerge through the regularization of time into intervals associated with the middle class status to which Helen aspires. “Chrononormativity” is queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman’s term for how “naked flesh is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation,” with time used “to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity” (3). Freeman’s analysis has analogues in postcolonial studies, such as Pheng Cheah’s claim that “the hierarchical ordering and control of the world as we know it is based on ... Northern- and Eurocentric regimes of temporal measurement” (*What is a World?* 1). The regimentation of time and space in *Playing in the Light* evokes specific apartheid restrictions, yet also the wide-reaching constraints to life under postcolonial global capitalism – part of why these structures do not vanish (for Marion or anyone else) after apartheid ends.

A key image of capitalist efficiencies enforced by passing is a tray of apples, imagined by Marion. The image links rigid middle class whiteness to the normalization of food via industrial agriculture and supermarket distribution:

Secrets, lies and discomfiture – that was what her childhood had been wrapped in. Each day individually wrapped. ... Before her an image arises: the past laid out in uniform trays of apples, wrapped in purple tissue paper. Marion loves apples; it is irksome that something she finds delicious should now be infected, a drop of poison hidden in the core, under the wholesome, glossy skin. (60)

By referencing individually packaged apples, Wicomb folds the affective impacts of passing into language for critiquing corporate food regimes. The image of “uniform trays

of apples” with “a drop of poison” borrows its uncanny power from anxieties about industrial food. Consumer products could contain harmful unknown substances, and are certainly tied to social inequalities that control who can eat what, who can own what. Linking such menaces to “skin,” Wicomb’s apple image connotes a class system buttressed by racial hierarchy: “delicious” for a white-identified child like Marion, but toxic. Under the skin of the perfect packaged apple lies the “poison” of differentiated privilege. The dominant culture insulates itself from this truth – using packaging, in the dual senses of representation and compartmentalization. Key to this apple tray image is the language of normalized time, with “[e]ach day individually wrapped.” As framed in this image, the lived experience of (racialized) inequality under capitalism is that of interfacing with the global food system. Supermarket fruits produce chrononormativity.

Yet fruit’s significance expands as Marion learns more about her family’s past and her racial identity destabilizes. Fruit becomes a potential site of resistance to racialized capitalism, a sign of queer possibilities. Marion forms a relationship with a new employee at her travel agency, Brenda Mackay. Marion is investigating her parents’ deceased maid, and absurdly assumes that Brenda can help because Brenda is coloured. She cajoles Brenda into a research excursion. The trip brings these women into a confusing new proximity, and culminates with the discovery that Marion’s parents were coloured. Marion and Brenda drive back to Marion’s flat, recognizing that “it is late and Brenda will have to stay the night,” though “[n]either of them relishes the thought” (99). Brenda sleeps on the couch, until awakened by Marion having a nightmare:

[T]he woman thrashes, moans and weeps so pitifully ... that Brenda goes ... to soothe her, to try to wake her up. Marion clutches at the hand that strokes her hair, clings for dear life and shudders with sobs. ... Brenda can do nothing but lie down on the bed and coax Marion into doing the same, hold her tightly in her arms,

stroke the shaking shoulders, rest her cheek on Marion's face to keep her from rising. . . . Marion clings to her, until the taut, arched body finally stops shaking and the breathing subsides. Helpless as a baby, her arms are tightly wrapped around Brenda; her head rests on Brenda's breast.

Like lovers, they wake together. Still entwined, they are disturbed at dawn by the crashing noise of the garbage truck. For seconds they lie stock-still, then Marion disentangles herself limb by limb and rolls to the other side. (100)

This both is a love scene, and isn't. Certainly there is an erotic element. The image of Marion's body "taut" and "arched" until her "breathing subsides" reads like a description of an orgasm and its denouement; the women wake "[l]ike lovers." But more important is the scene's ambiguity, both for the reader and for Marion and Brenda. Brenda is cast not only as lover but as a maternal figure, intimating a new ethics of care. The women's surprising bodily intimacy could also figure the convergence of their racial identities as Marion tries to re-understand herself as coloured. In other words, same-sex intimacy might be rendered important not in itself, but as a metaphor for racial affiliation.

Wicomb could be flipping what Andrew van der Vlies describes as the potential for conversations about sexual identity to "overshadow" those about race and class in South Africa ("ZW's Queer Cosmopolitanisms" 437). This elision emerges from narratives that situate gay rights as a marker of modernity. South Africa's 1996 constitution was among the first in the world to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation. Gay rights have been presented in postapartheid public culture as "a key sign of the democratic values of the 'new' nation," a kind of litmus test for an equal society as much as a matter of concern in their own right (Munro viii).¹⁴⁴ As Brenna Munro would

¹⁴⁴ Note that it is "gay rights" being discussed in this "public culture," and that the wording in the constitutional anti-discrimination clause is "sexual orientation" (Munro vii). This terminology eclipses a more expansive vision of queer identity, and is in many ways a Western importation.

have it, “the gay, lesbian, or bisexual person,” deployed during apartheid as a figure for the regime’s perversity, instead becomes a “stock minor character in the pageant of nationhood in the 1990s, embodying the arrival of a radically new social order and symbolically mediating conflicts over race and class” (ix). This “queering of the standard family romance of nationalism” can backfire: when “a Western-style gay identity” is understood “through the formula ‘gay equals modernity equals capitalism,’” this both marginalizes “alternative, indigenous modes of sexual practice and identity,” and exposes queers to blame for failures of neoliberal capitalism (Munro xxiv, ix). Ongoing economic inequality may be one reason for an uptick in homophobic violence in the new millennium – a crucial complication to any narrative that queer politics have triumphed (Munro ix). Holding up legal “gay rights” as a sign of democratic equality elides these tensions, and sidesteps race- and class- based discrimination.

Returning to Marion and Brenda, then, we could read their intimacy as a metaphoric deployment of queerness to mean race: a deliberate reversal of the displacement of race and class from some discussions about sexual orientation. But there are also less prescriptive ways to read the intersection of desire, race, and class in Wicomb’s scene. As van der Vlies has suggested, the “queer energy” of Wicomb’s fiction comes from characters who “disrupt normative expectations of them in relation to gender, ethnicity, or behavior,” whether or not they identify as queer in sexual orientation (“ZW’s Queer Cosmopolitanisms” 437). Rather than seeing concern with queerness itself or with race as an either/or for Wicomb, I read Marion and Brenda’s relationality as being both about same-sex intimacy, and about affiliation and the constructedness of race. The nature of the affinity between Marion and Brenda is undefined, hard to pin down – and

this would seem to be precisely the point. In a novel that asks what possibilities are left in the wake of apartheid's racial taxonomies, amidst an ongoing regime of capitalist normalization, queerness becomes a mode of thinking beyond categorization, a radical undefinability that emerges out of Marion's unsureness as to whether she is now white or coloured (or neither, or both).

This range of meanings unfurls as the two women move from the bedroom to the kitchen, where they eat fruit:

In the kitchen there is a bowl of peaches, which [Brenda] prods for ripeness. Dare I eat a peach? Brenda calls theatrically. . . . I never understood it, she says, the idea of being challenged by a peach, but it's simple, isn't it? Refined people struggle with the possibility because of the juice that will dribble down their chins. So the answer to Prufrock is to eat the fruit before it's ripe, or to tackle it with a knife and fork.

. . . Nonsense, [Marion] says, it's about eating fruit when it looks perfect, before it's over the hill – firm, perfect shape, perfect colour.

Brenda snorts. The gospel according to Saint Woolworths: packed in polystyrene and labelled ripe, when the rest of us know that ripeness doesn't go with looking perfect. (100)

Brenda scoffs at Woolworths, situating Marion's idea of ripeness within middle class whiteness enacted by shopping. This culture, Brenda implies, prioritizes appearances over truth or content – unlike “the rest of us,” a phrase that identifies Brenda with black working class skepticism of white bourgeois norms. This self-identification is complicated, though by no means invalidated, by Brenda's upward mobility (marked by her purchasing new bed linens from Woolworths) and her literary reference: “Dare I eat a peach?” is a slight misquotation from T.S. Eliot's “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” which identifies Brenda as a university-educated person (van der Vlies “ZW's Queer Cosmopolitanisms” 427). Eating peaches indexes a range of racialized class behaviors as well as desires: on the next page, Brenda suggests that now Marion is coloured, and so

“free to be noisy, free to eat a peach, a juicy ripe one, and free of the burdens of nation and tradition” (102). Brenda associates being coloured with cultural freedom, without the taint of South Africa’s white nationalist history. What of the material conditions that circumscribe such freedom? Brenda romanticizes “free” peach-eating without considering the literal cost of peaches. This matters in a novel where buying fruit at Woolworths evidences privilege. Of course, Brenda might intend this comment sarcastically. Certainly Wicomb is ironizing the idea of cultural (or legal) freedom without economic opportunity. Brenda’s peach-eating also becomes eroticized as she “dips a couple of peaches briefly into boiling water and slips off the skins. . . . I love the way it comes off, she says, holding the slippery, naked fruit between two fingertips before biting into it. She wipes the dribbling juice with the back of her hand” (101). Extending the erotics of the nightmare scene, the “slippery, naked fruit” then transforms from a sensual image to one of failed racial identity. Marion “stares at her peach; she cannot bring herself to eat it. Naked, slippery – that’s me, that’s who I am, she thinks. Hurlled into the world fully grown, without a skin” (101). The naked peach evokes several co-present meanings, emphasizing blurriness between desire, identity, access. The literal consumption of the peach, and the desire to consume, become inextricable from other appetites, both sexual and material, including the racial and class dynamics of shopping (another kind of consumption). Marion “cannot say” that she feels “without a skin” to Brenda, “a virtual stranger, a woman in pink Mickey Mouse pyjamas who sits at her kitchen table eyeing her coolly, who may or may not care for her, who waits for her to eat a peach” (101). Having no “skin” indicates Marion’s disorientation about her racial identity. That Marion has “discovered” that her parents were coloured, but has lived in

the comfort of whiteness, entails both convergence with Brenda and distance. Brenda is in Marion's house, in her pajamas, but she is far away. A slippery and expansive queer relationality exists between Marion and Brenda – cold yet collegial; friendly, flirtatious, sisterly. In its oscillation between filiation and distance, their intimacy acts as a testing ground for Marion's changing relationship to race, friendship, family, and romance.

Wicomb insists on the co-presence of gender, sexual orientation, race, and class, but without reducing them to easy alignment. She stages their intersection as a diffusion of non-linear meanings and associations. Fruit-eating evokes queer relations to race *and* desire – even as fruits also connote capitalist efficiencies, engaged equally in Marion's shopping habits and in her image of time as a uniform tray of apples. Thinking about race in relation to fruit is more than a metaphorical connection: their relationship is literalized in the act of buying fruit from Woolworths, a class performance that in the novel's terms makes Marion white.¹⁴⁵ The supermarket is the ultimate metonym for consumer capitalism as a practice of homogenization via stratification. Food products, shopping experiences, and domestic patterns can be homogenized because of the stratification of purchasing power and of labor, erasing hands that bring food into existence and onto the shelves. If supermarket fruit connotes these inequalities, but the peach also figures queer

¹⁴⁵ As Deborah Posel has suggested, there has been a “historically constitutive relationship between the workings of race and regulation of consumption” in South Africa (160). Under apartheid, race was used to control consumption, but also defined and demonstrated by class performance. Postapartheid, these legacies are being teased out across what Posel sees as a neoliberal redefinition of “freedom” as “conspicuous consumption” (159-160). Wicomb's novel witnesses the shuffling of these terms: a black lower middle class identity is becoming possible in the 1990s for someone like Brenda, yet a racialized gulf between income levels continues to widen. Marion's taken-for-granted capacity to shop at Woolworths continues to be a marker of whiteness as well as class status, at the same time as her relationship to race is in flux.

desire, then Wicomb tags unequal buying power to sexual identity as well as race and class. She invokes the possibility of “gay equals modernity equal capitalism” – but in order to probe how queerness (in South Africa) can be otherwise. How might queerness become narratable beyond a prescriptive “gay rights” frame that, “as a Western way of thinking about sexuality,” stands in for South Africa’s “reentrance into global capitalism” (Munro xxv)?

Queer experiences of feeling out of sync with time have been a site of loss and melancholy but, Freeman argues, also an opportunity for those labelled as sexual deviants “to resist the commodity-time of speedy manufacture and planned obsolescence” (9). For Marion, an undefined queerness could be either the sign or substance of a productive capacity to fall outside normative categories, including timelines, normative relationship expectations, and also racial categories. The queer erotics of the peach introduce feelings of disorientation and loss, but also destabilize Marion’s need to racially “sort” and temporally regulate herself. In the postapartheid moment, South Africa is narrated as “finally” democratic after a long “waiting” period, as “late” to the postcolonial party, as “returned” or “arrived” to the global (neoliberal) stage – and, at the same time, “ahead” on “modern” gay rights with its landmark constitution. Questions of temporality have accordingly become key to work on postapartheid literature and culture.¹⁴⁶ Postapartheid fictions register a temporality that van der Vlies describes as “disappointment” – even as

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, van der Vlies’ study of affect and temporality in postapartheid fiction (*Present Imperfect*) and Jennifer Wenzel’s examination of South Africa’s transition in terms of “unfailure” and “unfulfillment” (*Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond* [University of Chicago Press, 2010]). A collection edited by Rita Barnard and van der Vlies, *South African Writing in Transition*, is forthcoming from Bloomsbury Academic.

they turn waiting, boredom, stasis, and other “bad feelings into new appointments with the unfolding experience of alternative lives and possible futures” (*Present Imperfect* 18, 20). Possibility, here, is not disappointment’s opposite but perhaps its uncanny outgrowth, as in Freeman’s queer possibilities of resisting capitalist time. There is a generativity in failing to fit temporal expectations, which can help efface the rigid taxonomies of apartheid logic – ideally *without* substituting the capitalist rigidities of productivity and efficiency imperatives.

Finding the outside to capitalist time remains a preoccupation in Wicomb’s newest novel, *October*, which turns from fruit to another flesh: meat. In *October*, as in *Playing in the Light*, Wicomb uses food to probe how capitalist efficiencies might be destabilized, loosening racial and class prescriptions in the process. Before delving into the politics of meat, I will consider *October*’s evocation of Cape cuisine in relation to coloured identity, southern African indigeneity, and transnational indigenous organizing.

Cape Cuisine

“South Africa’s Western Cape is barely Africa,” a 2016 travel review in the UK’s *Telegraph* announces. “It is more like a mix of California and the Mediterranean than the southern end of a turbulent continent. ... Over the past decade there has been a gastronomic revolution that would suggest Cape cuisine is up there with the best in the world” (Boynton). Amidst the postapartheid flourishing of culinary tourism, this piece praises Cape cuisine by likening the Western Cape to Euroamerica. It positions the West as the (culinary) center of the world and disavows colonial histories in relation to Africa’s so-called “turbulence.” In reality, Cape cuisine speaks to both cultural fusion and colonial

violence: while some would emphasize the food's Dutch heritage, its characteristic curries and spicy condiments originate with slaves brought from South Asia and East Africa (van Niekerk 6). Such stories are expunged from white nationalist narratives.¹⁴⁷ And as the *Telegraph* review reflects, histories of violence may be forgotten, sanitized, or sensationalized (sometimes all at once) within the burgeoning industry of culinary tourism, in efforts to render South Africa digestible for a Eurocentric "foodie" culture.

These stories are recentered in Wicomb's fiction. In *October*, Cape cuisine marks long histories of globalization, yet evidences the contemporary interplay between local belonging and new forms of global fusion and diffusion. Cape cuisine allows Wicomb to articulate the translocal as an unstable yet irrefutable cultural mode, one that is not mere affective whimsy, but rather interlaced with the material operations of global capitalism. Understandings of indigenous and coloured identities, as well as attempts at translocal belonging, are worked out in quotidian practices and in debates over the origins and meanings of Cape cuisine. The potential for commodification, tokenization, or erasure of such identities, meanwhile, is enacted by Cape cuisine's uptake in a transnational and imperially-tinged culture of global fusion cuisines.

Living in Scotland, the South African emigrant Mercia understands herself as a cosmopolitan and Cape-influenced cook. Questions of local and transnational belonging,

¹⁴⁷ Such forgetting appears, for example, in *Die Geskiedenis van Boerekos 1652-1806 (The History of Boer Cuisine 1652-1806)*, written in the early 2000s. Author Hettie Claassens declares that the sweet-sour and sweet-savory elements of Cape cuisine were imported from Europe, via French and Italian cuisines once influenced by Persian and Arabic traditions. Slaves in South Africa could not have influenced Cape cuisine, Claassens suggests, because "it would have been unthinkable for people from a higher social class to copy the food culture of the lower classes" (Claassens paraphrased by van Niekerk 6-7). (As my Afrikaans is limited and Claassens has not been translated, I rely upon Marlene van Niekerk's redaction and critique of Claassens' book.)

connectivity, and economy are mediated in Mercia's cooking as she interfaces with Cape cuisine. In her kitchen in Glasgow, Mercia

would pound ginger and garlic with cumin and cardamom ... for her signature dish of Moroccan lamb. ... Mercia would turn up the music and dance to Karoo blues, whilst stirring and waiting for the spices to fry slowly. ... Ek will huis toe gaan,^[148] she crooned along with David Kramer, ground her hips and dipped her shoulders hotnos style, waving her wooden spoon defiantly. ... Then, as the smell of fried cardamom rose, repeated its aroma and weaving through coriander and paprika revised its fragrance, she savored a bittersweet homesickness. (170)

With her “defiant” embrace of “hotnos style,” Mercia reclaims a slur for coloured or Khoi-descended people (a contraction of “Hottentot”). This scene is all about recuperative understandings of coloured identity: Mercia takes pride in slave heritage and hybridity through both cuisine and music.¹⁴⁹ Not unlike intersecting lines of melody, Mercia's spices “revise” their “fragrance” as they intermingle, modelling a process of creolization. Paprika, coriander, and cardamom are typical of Cape cuisine. But the scene by no means reifies Cape authenticity. Instead, it probes the food cultures of diaspora and postcoloniality. Mercia is making “Moroccan lamb,” in Glasgow. And she uses a cookbook, learning “from Jane Grigson's recipes, the inventive English cook who borrowed” from Cape cuisine and other traditions (170-1). The domestic becomes a space both local and transnational. Mercia's lamb emphasizes her own multiply located experience – her “homesickness” is for the Cape, yet she also thinks fondly of cooking “back home in Glasgow” (170). At the same time, the lamb indexes layers of globalization over time: Grigson's cookbook draws on a Cape tradition that was always-

¹⁴⁸ Afrikaans, “I shall go home.”

¹⁴⁹ David Kramer (born 1951) is a singer, songwriter, and producer known for blending Afrikaans and English, celebrating Cape Coloured communities, and borrowing from folksongs and tales (Slabbert 101).

already global and hybrid, yet the cookbook is an artifact of colonially-tinged consumerism. A bestselling cookbook is a prime metonym for commodification: it translates oral, familial, regional, or folk knowledge into saleable print form. Mercia retains local agency by violating Grigson's recipe: she recalls the Afrikaans idiom, "soos vinkel en koljander, die een is soos die ander" ("Like fennel and coriander, the one is like the other"), and decides that while "[t]he recipe does not call for fennel, ... Mercia cannot imagine coriander without a dash of its twin. They were lookalikes, meant to go together, inseparable" (170). Recombining folk and consumer knowledge, Mercia could fit Shameem Black's description of cookbook writer and actress Madhur Jaffrey, who constructs "a domestic diasporic self that is ethnically and nationally constituted by its engagement with intimate domestic practices from around the world" (Black 2).¹⁵⁰ Mercia both celebrates an already-hybrid Cape coloured identity in her culinary practice, and incorporates other culinary traditions whilst she makes "homesickness" something to "savor" – an ideal formation of "domestic diasporic self" out of the wastes of colonialism, it seems.

But the novel quickly de-idealizes culinary cosmopolitanism, which, as signaled by Grigson's cookbook, exists within a consumer capitalist world shaped by imperial

¹⁵⁰ Jaffrey is known for books on Indian cuisine. I discuss in Chapter Two how such works contribute to a nationalizing narrative of Indian food. Yet many of Jaffrey's collections feature East Asian, pan-Asian, and other cuisines. Why, Black asks, is Jaffrey known for "Indian cooking" despite these successful compendia? We narrate Jaffrey as Indian chef, yet relish her cosmopolitan borrowings. "Fusion" cuisines are undeniably popular today, yet we seek place-based singularity and accord prestige to "authentic," ostensibly single-origin "ethnic" cuisines. What is indicated about contemporaneity by this insistence on the local and pure, even amidst celebrations of the global and amalgamate? Wicomb can help theorists understand such mixings.

ventures. Medleys of place-based influences are politicized, their depictions policed. We see this in the behavior of Mercia's Scottish husband Craig at dinner parties:

He boasted about Mercia's Cape dishes, her use of spices, learned, he announced to guests, at her mother's knee. Mercia did not correct him. Did not say, no, that she learned from Jane Grigson. ... Instead, Mercia dredged up stories of Lusitanian navigators, the Cape as refreshment station ... in the establishment of a spice route. Vinkel en koljander brought to Cape shores in exchange for scurvy-fighting fruit and veg. Once she spoke of slaves from Goa, Malaysia, East Africa, sizzling their spices in the shadow of Table Mountain, which was not nice, so that Craig explained that Mercia had had too much to drink. No one said that eating meat was not nice. (170-1)

This passage teaches the colonial history of the Cape, and Cape cuisine's global history: the crucial fennel and coriander were not indigenous, rather traded for vegetables as part of a colonial ecological exchange. Wicomb models how violence is sanitized: references to "navigators" and the "refreshment station" connote exploration and discovery rather than colonialism and slavery. When Mercia does mention slavery, Craig silences her. Silenced, too, is the killing of animals. The paragraph's curious final line (focalized through Mercia) links Craig's patriarchalism, the violence of "eating meat," and slavery. Ecofeminists have often drawn such connections, as I address in the next section. Wicomb contrasts white, bourgeois rules of conduct with the realities of violence: what truly is not "nice" is that which only Mercia dares to mention. Eager to advertise Mercia's Africanness through her cooking, Craig would elide colonial histories in the process. His desire, finally, is an account of Africa cleansed of violence.

Wicomb's depictions of coloured identity refuse such whitewashing, instead signaling a mess of historical contingencies. As Wicomb discusses in her 1993 essay "Shame and Identity," anti-apartheid activists often replaced the term coloured with "black," to include the coloured population within the black majority and reject

“apartheid nomenclature” (93). Wicomb argues for instead acknowledging specificities of coloured experience, including marginality in Africanist organizations, but also complicity with the oppression of Africans.¹⁵¹ Nomenclature has shifted over time to manage the shame associated with these subtleties. For example, in South Africa’s first democratic elections (1994), the coloured vote in the Western Cape province went to apartheid’s architects, the National Party. This perceived capitulation with the oppressor provoked a “resurgence of the term Coloured” intended to dissociate this shamed population from blackness (“Shame” 93). The National Party, for its part, engineered this vote with what Wicomb calls a “false appeal to a shared culture centred in the Afrikaans language, the Dutch Reformed Church, and mutton bredie” (“Shame” 93). Mutton bredie is a Cape-style lamb stew. For Wicomb, such meaty Cape cuisine is central to an ideology of shared Afrikaner/coloured culture. Some progressives reject the term coloured, arguing that it is “white-imposed, reactionary and indicative of new forms of racism; an apartheid relic best left behind” (Erasmus 20). Critical race theorists such as Zimitri Erasmus, however, argue that while “apartheid played a key role in the formation and consolidation of these (and other) identities, coloured identities are not simply Apartheid labels imposed by whites” (16). Erasmus conceptualizes coloured identity not as biological “race mixture” but as a “creolized formation shaped by South Africa’s history of colonialism, slavery, segregation and apartheid” (14). Like Wicomb, Erasmus emphasizes that because apartheid “positioned coloured identities as midway between ‘white’ and ‘African,’ we must address both coloured people’s oppression and their

¹⁵¹ Apartheid policies privileged coloured people over black Africans, while oppressing both as compared to whites.

“complicity ... in the exclusion of and disrespect for black Africans” (16). These are the historical and affective difficulties that Wicomb’s characters must brave.

In *October*, Wicomb confronts racism among coloured South Africans. Mercia’s father Nicholas plays out Erasmus’s point that “a discourse of racial hierarchy and its association of blackness with inferiority is mobilized by coloureds against [other] coloureds as much as against black Africans” (24). Nicholas declares that his family, the Murrays,

were of old Scottish stock, people who had settled before the Europeans were corrupted by Africa. A good old colored family, evenly mixed, who having attained genetic stability could rely on good hair and healthy dark skin, not pitch-black like Africans, and certainly not like sly Slamse from the east, who were not to be trusted. The Murrays had no further use for European blood, no need for more mixing; they were proud colored people who kept their distance from others. Nicholas shook his head contemptuously at the people of Kliprand who did not mind at all if one of their girls arrived from the white dorp¹⁵² with a blue-eyed baby, the product of cheap relations with a master. (138)

Nicholas thinks in terms of mixed “blood,” meaning biological essentialism. He considers his part-Scottish family superior not only to “pitch-black” Africans, but also to “Slamse” (a derogatory term for Muslims) and to the “people of Kliprand,” meaning Namaqualanders. In Nicholas’s apartheid context, Namaqualanders, Muslims, and Nicholas himself would all be classified as “coloured.”¹⁵³ But the category is capacious and convoluted, and Nicholas theorizes an internal stratification. It is not that Nicholas

¹⁵² Village or town (Afrikaans).

¹⁵³ As social anthropologist Steven Robins puts it, “[a]s a result of a long history of colonization, missionization, miscegenation, apartheid legislation and anti-apartheid discourse, Namaqualanders have come to inhabit multiple and shifting identities as Nama (Khoi), coloureds, *basters* (people of mixed ancestry—European, Khoi-San, Tswana), blacks and ‘*bruin Afrikaners*’” (“Fenced in” 131). Khoi and San are two (often overlapping or blurry) categorizations for populations indigenous to southern Africa (see also footnote 156). None of these terms is politically neutral or necessarily “right.” But “coloured” can, in context-dependent ways, imply or touch on many other terms.

aspires to be white: “The Murrays had no further use for European blood” that might unsettle their “evenly mixed” balance. Nicholas takes pride in being coloured yet maintains the apartheid logic that condemns interracial procreation. For Nicholas, miscegenation marks the Namaqualanders of Kliprand as “cheap.” They are, for him, the wrong kind of coloured: “[n]omad blood seemed still to course in their veins, for why did they not till the land? why were they content to toil for low-class Englishmen in the gypsum mines? ... These people were too—and he appeared to search for the word each time—well, too indigenous” (137). Why is “indigenous” the perfect word – the word Nicholas overemphasizes – to encapsulate the supposed inferiority of the Namaqualanders? For one, Nicholas links morality to “till[ing] the land.” This discourse has been deployed across many geographies to justify the theft of land from indigenous groups who hunt or forage rather than farm. The doctrine of *terra nullius* – the claim that unenclosed land is empty or unused – was applied by European settlers the world over (Cheah *What is a World?* 8). In southern Africa, a “prevailing stereotype” is that indigenous peoples “lack a concept of land ownership and territoriality” (Saugestad 89). The character of Nicholas condenses a swath of colonial ideologies into a virulent form molded to his particular context.

Nicholas’s racial theories must be understood in relation to apartheid, coloured identity, and other phenomena specific to South Africa. However, that he derides the “indigenous” also opens Wicomb’s novel to conversations among scholars and activists defining indigeneity across various geographies. Indigenous heritage is key to the “cosmopolitan feel” of *October*, in Dorothy Driver’s view (“ZW’s Translocal” 26). This alignment of cosmopolitan with indigenous may sound counterintuitive to readers

familiar with narratives of indigeneity as purity and rootedness (often oversimplifications of indigenous histories in North America, Australia, or New Zealand).¹⁵⁴ Indigeneity in southern Africa diverges from internationally dominant models for recognizing indigenous rights: narratives of purity and primacy would elide the cultural admixture that is key to coloured identity for Wicomb and other thinkers. Wicomb represents southern African indigeneity not in terms of cultural purity, but as always-already creolized. I call this “cosmopolitan indigeneity”: a formulation of translocal indigenous belonging and unbelonging that Wicomb develops by pushing back against racial rhetorics through her references to food. As I argue, Cape cuisine works as Wicomb’s metonym for quotidian cultural creativity that articulates a dynamic indigenous identity while both resisting and participating in globalization.

“Indigenous” is a relational term (distinguishing a minority from a national majority), differently politicized for different geographies. Since the 1970s and 1980s, transnational indigenous organizing has emerged: as Dorothy Hodgson describes it, “scattered disenfranchised groups have coalesced into a broad-based, transnational social movement as they have recognized the similarities in their ... structural positions within their respective nation-states” (Hodgson 1039-40). Sidsel Saugestad characterizes the relationship between domestic and international indigenous movements as “dialectical”: national organizations have campaigned together for international laws that “have in turn informed and assisted fledgling national movements” (29-30). Renée Sylvain takes a more critical view that the “international discourse on indigeneity ... sets the terms under

¹⁵⁴ See Chadwick Allen, *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

which San struggles for land and resources are recognized as struggles of indigenous peoples” (1074).¹⁵⁵ International definitions of indigeneity, modeled largely on groups in North America, Australia, and New Zealand, can become hegemonic for other geographies, Sylvain argues. International discourse may demand “essentializing and primordializing” definitions of indigeneity (Sylvain 1082). What all three of these anthropologists agree on is that San or Khoi claims of “indigeneity” do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, such claims are necessarily negotiated in relation to international debates on the meaning of the term.¹⁵⁶ In the loose international consensus, common features of indigeneity include non-dominant minority status within an imposed state structure, cultural difference from the majority, descent from a “first come” population, and “self-ascription” (Saugestad 43). This international definition developed in the 1990s and has gained some legal and political force with recognition from the UN and International Labour Organisation (ILO). The ILO’s 1989 Convention No. 169, which made provisions to protect traditional uses of land, is the only international law on indigenous rights that legally binds signatory countries (Saugestad 44). The UN has

¹⁵⁵ The San are a diffuse southern African indigenous group.

¹⁵⁶ A note on terminology: Khoi and San are the two broad categories of indigenous peoples in southern Africa. Each category is heterogeneous. There is much blurriness between them, such that “Khoi-San” is sometimes used. But in some situations, San and Khoi groups may be in conflict. Other common terms include Basarwa (used for the San in Botswana) and Nama. I avoid “Hottentot” (for the Khoi) and “Bushmen” (for the San), because they connote stereotypes. “Hottentot” gets abbreviated to the racial slur “hotnot,” and employers may rely on stereotypes of “Bushmen” as “incorrigibly nomadic and therefore unreliable” to justify paying San workers less (Sylvain 1077). The term “San” has come under question too, as it might originally have been an insulting name for hunter-gatherers initiated by cattle-herding Khoi – and some indigenous groups prefer the term “Boesman,” Afrikaans for “Bushman.” I follow the conventions of anthropologists and other researchers, while acknowledging our inability to do full justice to the histories of these terms.

issued a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which “is more radical [than the ILO convention] in its condemnation of the historical and contemporary treatment of indigenous peoples” (Hodgson 1039). But this UN document has no legal force.¹⁵⁷ The UN resolution also advocates “a notion of indigenous ‘culture’ that is more reified and essentialist” (Hodgson 1039). A certain amount of shorthand or undesired codification may be necessary to establish an international law, and I would not critique the achievements of indigenous activists. However, a vision of indigeneity as purity has limited utility in many contexts, including southern Africa. The term “indigenous” has been mobilized more recently in Africa than in the Americas or Australia and New Zealand. Just since the 1990s, international activism has encouraged a trend of Khoi-San land claims (Hodgson 1037, Saugestad 234). Successful restitution cases include that of the Makuleke in Kruger National Park and the #Khomani San in the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (Robins and van der Waal; Sylvain). Such groups continue to see their rights infringed, but their victories are noteworthy given the paucity of land reform since apartheid. Indigeneity is a powerful discourse.

But there are objections. Being “coloured” and being “indigenous” have often been articulated in opposition, or just discussed separately. Erasmus chides people once classified as coloured who “ride the wave of fashionable indigeneity, claiming authenticity based to historical links to the Khoi-San” (20). Why is indigeneity so controversial in southern Africa? The reasons may include histories of interethnic

¹⁵⁷ Presumably since the UN declaration entails no legal obligations, all but four members of the UN approved it in 2007. The four who voted against (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US) have since proclaimed support. On the other hand, a meagre 22 countries (including none of the aforementioned) had ratified the legally-binding ILO convention as of 2017 (“The International Law”; Hodgson 1038).

genocide in Africa, and the way that “the colonial encounter tended to make all Africans ‘indigenous’ relative to the colonizing powers” (Sylvain 1075, original emphasis). Not nearly all black or coloured South Africans are “indigenous” in the sense of “first come,” but they were all disenfranchised by apartheid. However, their experiences are not uniform. Many self-identified San are in particularly marginal positions today. The San in Namibia (part of South Africa until 1990) are at the bottom of a social ladder below Bantu-speaking and Khoi-speaking groups (Sylvain). In Botswana, the argument that “all Batswana are indigenous” elides the marginalization of the San vis-à-vis the Tswana majority (Saugestad 52).¹⁵⁸ Existing literature suggests that San groups have had the most dialogue with international activism of any indigenous southern Africans, perhaps because their situations most resemble indigeneity as codified internationally. Yet this is only one version of San experience. Indeed, that some San groups scan with international definitions may obscure the majority of the San.¹⁵⁹ If international definitions of indigeneity tend toward essentialism, it seems to be that logic of primordial purity – without room for hybridity or history – that irks Erasmus and others who theorize coloured identity in terms of historical contingency. There is something quite reductive

¹⁵⁸ “Batswana” is the plural noun for citizens of Botswana, but also for members of the Tswana ethnic group. Batswana is also used as an adjective (Saugestad 16).

¹⁵⁹ According to Sylvain, apartheid policy produced two categories of experience. Some San were “segregated” into apartheid homelands. The majority were “incorporated” into marginal labor roles in heterogeneous communities (1076). These “incorporated” San have become “nearly invisible” after “several generations as a landless underclass” (1078). Their lives bear little resemblance to the “essentialized and static” visions of indigeneity in international fora (1076). In Sylvain’s view, southern Africans that would leverage the category “indigenous” are “compelled to present themselves as” as authentic, traditional hunter-gatherers “uncontaminated by historical and political economic context” (Sylvain 1079) – in short, they must deny that a specific historical and political economic context is precisely what has produced their precarity.

about stereotypes of indigeneity that cannot address processes of creolization. But it seems equally reductive to deny the indigenous component of coloured identity.

What if a less static understanding of indigeneity were available? How might such a discourse both learn from the ways that Erasmus and others have re-narrated coloured identity, and enrich a sense of racial history and justice beyond rights-based frameworks? Wicomb's work can help knit together postapartheid discourses on coloured and indigenous identities. *October* takes on this project by confronting the denigration of both indigenous and slave heritages: Mercia entreats her father to stop insulting both "indigenous" people and "sly Slamse, pointing out that the slave blood of Cape Malays was also part of their [family's] heritage" (137, 138). Indigeneity is simultaneous here with creolization. Likewise, in "Shame and Identity" Wicomb insists that shame around colouredness has prompted all kinds of forgetting: "shame for our origins of slavery, shame for the miscegenation, and shame, as colonial racism became institutionalized, for being black, so that with the help of our European names we have lost all knowledge of our Xhosa, Indonesian, East African, or Khoi origins" (100). Wicomb would recuperate Xhosa and Khoi heritage and also influences from elsewhere, rather than setting these in opposition. She offers a flexible model of what I call "cosmopolitan indigeneity": an ongoing formation in which indigenous influences work alongside migration, diaspora, and other globalization processes.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Cosmopolitan indigeneity or similar terminology has been proposed by several scholars working on other contexts, such as Latin America: for example, in Robin Maria Delugan's work on migration to San Francisco ("Indigeneity Across Borders: Hemispheric Migrations and Cosmopolitan Encounters" in *American Ethnologist* vol. 37, no. 1, 2010, pp. 83-97), or Marisol de la Cadena's work on more-than-human politics in the Andes ("Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond

Cosmopolitan indigeneity could help to mediate conversations across postcolonial and indigenous studies, fields that have diverged in part by opposing indigenous and migrant figures. US Indigenous scholars Jodi Byrd and Michael Rothberg have analyzed this cleaving. They argue that postcoloniality (as an analytical and political category) has been based on non-settler colonial spaces, such as South Asia and Africa, and that to bring the fields together we need to examine postcoloniality's differences in settler colonial spaces ("Between Subalternity and Indigeneity"). But southern Africa disrupts their dichotomy: spaces such as South Africa or the former Rhodesia are part of "Africa," but were also settler colonies.¹⁶¹ Like her fiction, Wicomb's critical writing advances postcolonial conversations by working through impasses between figures of the cosmopolitan and the indigenous. The emphasis on migration and diaspora by some postcolonial theorists, such as Homi Bhabha, is for Wicomb "inadequate" to characterize the Cape coloured community ("Shame" 105). This community claims as "ethnic homeland" the District 6 area of Cape Town, from whence coloured people were forcibly ejected in 1965 ("Shame" 94). Wicomb finds this "excessively proprietorial attitude toward the Cape," based on suppressing "diasporic slave origins" and linking "authentic colouredness" to place-based roots, just as paradigmatic of postcolonial subjectivity as displacement or hybridity (105). To think across geographies, we need flexible yet locally

'Politics,'" in *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2010, pp. 334-370). See also *Indigenous Cosmopolitans*, edited by Maximilian C. Forte (Peter Lang, 2010).

¹⁶¹ The (perceived) scholarly difficulty of engaging Africa with prevailing models of indigeneity appears, for example, in Chadwick Allen's *Trans-Indigenous* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012). This monograph develops a global study of indigenous literatures and cultures. But its geographic foci are North America, New Zealand, Australia, and Hawaii. These are regions across which indigeneity is often compared. Their differences should not be understated; still, we should note that scholars are likelier to avoid comparisons involving Africa, southeast Asia, and a variety of other spaces.

sensitive definitions of both postcoloniality and indigeneity, ones that account for the influence of global trends, such as transnational indigenous organizing. “Cosmopolitan indigeneity” moves in that direction. I am not suggesting that these scholarly conversations can be smoothed over by simply inserting a new term. But I do think that Wicomb provides an important sketch of some complexities of race and indigeneity in South Africa. This localized case study models how to reconsider the opposition between indigeneity and cosmopolitanism, which could apply across a range of geographies. Rather than “denying history and fabricating a totalizing [pure] colouredness,” *or* on the other hand dismissing “belonging” as inherently “bad faith,” coloured identity could better be understood in terms of “multiple belongings” (“Shame” 105). The multiple belongings of Wicomb’s coloured characters crystallize in their narration of displacement together with place – precisely the ambiguity that animates Mercia’s deployment of Cape spices at home in her Glasgow kitchen.

But if *October*’s references to indigeneity and race (as Nicholas understands them) are so explicit, why this recourse to food as – I have argued – the primary mode of expressing Mercia’s renegotiation of race, indigeneity, and place? Wicomb’s ironic portrait of commodified global cuisine, epitomized by Grigson’s cookbook, brings out a more material engagement with place and displacement than theorists of Wicomb’s cosmopolitanism have often identified. Wicomb’s representation of ethnicized cuisine also transcends a received postcolonial tradition in which pickles, spices, and other delectables evoke or metaphorize cultural memory, and translate ethnic identity into a palatable goodie for the (often Western) reader’s consumption.¹⁶² A magical realist or

¹⁶² See the introduction.

bemusedly mystical mode of postcolonial food writing finds a sharp contrast in Wicomb's work. In *October*, cosmopolitan cooking allows Mercia to reclaim coloured identity yet embeds her in commodity capitalism. Capitalism's global circuits deal in products as piddling as the cookbook: Wicomb refuses to separate questions of race, indigeneity, and hybridity from the realm of the mundane, quotidian, and saleable. If Mercia's objections to Nicholas are as explicit as his racial theorization, Mercia's own reformulation of coloured identity is instead implicit, articulated through cooking, humming, and dancing. In this way Wicomb insists on locating re-theorization in daily practices. Racial belonging and identity are worked out in the texture of her characters' somatic and material lives, rather than in magical realism or the abstractions of theory.

Meat

Throughout *October*, Mercia's culinary endeavors, like her musings on identity, develop in an uncanny dialogue with those of her sister-in-law, Sylvie. Mercia dislikes Sylvie, an antipathy that reflects Mercia's cosmopolitan biases and manifests in tensions over food. Not unlike Brenda in *Playing in the Light*, Sylvie operates as something of a shadow protagonist, a more marginalized presence whose story becomes almost as central as that of Mercia. In the gap between these two focalizers and in their conflicts over cooking, *October* develops what Meg Samuelson calls a "provincial-cosmopolitan point of view," not by a comfortable synthesis of such perspectives, but by a "restless" and "conjunctive" "merging" and "hovering between" ("Unsettling Homes" 178, 190). Meat, in particular, leads to an impasse, as Mercia finds meat dishes prepared by Sylvie increasingly disgusting. She has no ideological conviction to vegetarianism; rather,

Mercia's revulsion symptomatizes her horror both toward Sylvie and toward her own bias. Sylvie, however, would reclaim as feminist fodder the postures of consumer capitalist participation, and the iconography of meat: one of industrial food's most reviled products. To repurpose the offal of the commodity capitalist era, Sylvie rejects capitalist efficiencies in favor of patience and waiting.

When Mercia arrives in Kliprand, cooking and eating spark conflict between her and Sylvie, surfacing discrepancies in these women's values and selfhood that complicate *October's* politics of food and flesh. These tensions first arise over "roosterbrood": homemade sourdough bread that Sylvie makes to honor Mercia's visit. The ensuing scene dramatizes the clash of "country" versus cosmopolitan selfhood, then immediately unsettles that dichotomy. When Mercia tastes the toasted bread, she "exclaims with delight" because "[s]he had forgotten about the sourdough of her childhood, had believed it to be the invention of the metropolitan master chefs" (55). In Glasgow, Mercia herself cooks in a Cape-influenced fusion style. Yet in Kliprand she polarizes "metropolitan" fine dining versus provincial eating, suggesting her ambivalence about diasporic identity. Sylvie, meanwhile, assays a connection:

Yes, Sylvie says, if you like you can take back some of my culture in a Tupperware, just add flour and warm water and leave in a warm place. Her voice gathers volume as the emphatic Namaqua speech takes courage from her sister-in-law's ignorance.

I've never made sourdough, Mercia confesses. ... [B]ut you can buy a sourdough loaf, expensive it is too, at my local organic bakery in Scotland. (55)

Sourdough could link these two women's culinary labors on two continents: Sylvie's starter yeast, if shared, could spawn an organic, domestic, and affectively rich network to sidestep global capitalism's modes of connectivity. In other words, sourdough could signify an anti-capitalist cosmopolitanism. But Mercia, anxious in her own "ignorance,"

revalues sourdough in the monetary terms of an “expensive” commodity. Mercia’s bakery in Glasgow would seem to be “organic” in the sense of a top-down certification for elite businesses, assimilating sourdough into capitalist modes of incorporation and exclusion. Sylvie, who values the domestic labor of making sourdough, is surprised:

She wouldn’t have thought that country bread would be available overseas. ... Look, she says, there’s nothing to it. You boil the water, leave it to cool ... put in thick slices of raw potato. ... you add flour and wait for—

Mercia interrupts. Oh no, what a palaver, that’s way too much trouble. The bread from my local bakery is very good. Even in olden days my mother only made sourdough when she ran out of fresh yeast. Then we were so far away from shops. No need to go to all that trouble nowadays.

Sylvie looks at her askance. What a strange thing to say after she stayed up the previous night to knead. ... What on earth would she have to make for breakfast tomorrow if roosterbrood is not good enough? (55-6)

Mercia naturalizes metropolitan consumer culture, asserting that “nowadays” people buy rather than bake. She ignores the contemporaneity of rural life, subsuming Sylvie’s labor into the “olden days” of Mercia’s own childhood. Certainly a heightened level of consumerism characterizes modern life. But Mercia views this as the only modernity, neglecting the unevenness of globalization. Her developmental narrative idealizes global capitalism without considering who can and cannot access fancy bakeries. Mercia narrates a temporal progression, but the distinction she is noticing is really about geographic location, metropole-periphery relations, and class. Indeed, in remarking that her organic bakery is “local,” she applies another buzzword of food politics, situating herself within a classed regime of cosmopolitan value. Sylvie offers a domestic-to-domestic connection through cuisine, but Mercia is too embedded in consumerist modes of valuation and connectivity to notice.

Mercia views herself as the cosmopolitan (worldly enough to eat “local”) and Sylvie as the country girl. But Wicomb complicates this dichotomy. Sylvie lacks

Mercia's access to luxuries, yet her reference to Tupperware locates her rural life within globalized consumer culture, not outside it. (This remark echoes Sally's declaration in *David's Story* that coloured people are "brand new Tupperware people," "light, multipurpose, adaptable" [*David's Story* 29]. Sally idealizes a sense of unrootedness, seemingly available through the objects of consumer participation.) Buying versus making food comes full circle when Sylvie regrets that she has not slaughtered a sheep to honor Mercia's visit: "It's so much trouble, [Sylvie] explains, forgetting that she is echoing Mercia on sourdough. The business of slaughtering, I mean, when you could just buy from the butcher. I hope you don't mind, she adds timidly. Lodewyk's mutton is good, comes from the same local Namaqua sheep" (60). Sylvie is quite prepared to buy something rather than do the labor, in this case. This prevents the novel from reifying her country authenticity. But Sylvie doesn't just buy from the butcher, she *is* the butcher: she works at Lodewyk's. It is her professional assessment that this mutton is "good." And she values that it comes from "local" animals. Sylvie cares about the merits of traditional rather than industrialized food production, and not because she seeks some nostalgic country isolation. She is as aware as Mercia of the cultural capital behind calling a food "local." Both characters espouse foodie rhetorics, putting Wicomb's novel in an ironic dialogue with the politics of food. Wicomb's representations of food touch on material questions around how food is produced, but also around the affects of food movements – and the affective questions of local and cosmopolitan selfhood.

Cooking meat stokes the conflict between Sylvie and Mercia, invoking questions of class, preference, and relation to place. When Sylvie brings home a sheep's head to

make brawn, “Mercia screams involuntarily as Sylvie ... triumphantly holds up a scraped sheep’s head, its eyes staring glassily out” (167). Mercia is shocked by her own disgust:

What is happening to Mercia, the carnivore, here in Kliprand? Is this the measure of her distance from the place, from her home, her people? ... Is Mercia growing fastidious about meat, about the killing of animals? ... She remembers, as a child at Sunday school, the picture card of John the Baptist’s severed head on a plate, which made her stomach turn. Hideous and barbaric. ... Even years later, in Italian museums, she winced at the paintings, Caravaggio’s and others’. Botticelli’s held her in frozen horror, foregrounding as it did a sweetly smiling Salome holding the head on a plate. Focusing on the richly adorned rim of the plate, Mercia understood that it was indeed the plate, that statement of cultural refinement, that doubled the horror.

No danger of a gilt plate tonight. ... But it makes her gorge rise. ...

The faint nausea that has gripped her over the last couple of days is undoubtedly linked to meat. Is it connected with Sylvie, the butcher girl? (169)

Disapproval of eating meat is a classist (and racialized) position in this context, as Mercia acknowledges. Having joined a diasporic middle class, Mercia suddenly associates meat with poor rural people, and she is revolted. The proximity of slaughter to “cultural refinement,” more so than slaughter itself, horrifies Mercia as she recollects paintings of Salome with the head of John the Baptist. Mercia’s revulsion stems from her own ambivalent and Eurocentric “refinement”: Sylvie’s meat bothers Mercia because Mercia is a self-styled cosmopolitan, her “distance from the place, from her home, her people” linked to privileges such as visiting museums in Italy. The paintings that Mercia remembers feature a New Testament story: Salome dances for Herod, who is so struck that he promises her whatever she wants. At the urging of her mother, who bears a grudge, Salome asks for the head of John the Baptist on a plate. If Salome figures dangerous female sensuality, then Mercia’s association of Sylvie with Salome is all the more troubling. The understanding is slowly welling up (for both Mercia and the novel’s reader) that Sylvie was raped by Mercia’s father, Nicholas. Wicomb reverses the

narrative of Salome and John the Baptist: the truly horrifying “cultural refinement” here is that of Nicholas, whose sense of superiority only makes his seduction of a child look worse. The novel’s arc displaces Mercia’s initial views of sex, race, and class, from finding “Sylvie, the butcher girl” vulgar towards recognizing a history of violence.

Class and race here complicate what ecofeminists have called the “sexual politics of meat.” The production and consumption of meats, they suggest, are embroiled with patriarchal power and violence. In her 1990 classic *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol J. Adams attributes the consumption of meat and the oppression of women to the same logic of domination.¹⁶³ Laura Wright updates Adams in a recent monograph, *The Vegan Studies Project*, arguing that “meat is constructed as essentially male” in post-9/11 America, while “second-class foods—vegetables, grains, fruits” are linked with women (109). A perceived crisis of white heterosexuality masculinity has triggered a “backlash” against male veganism (and other non-normative dietary choices by men), with “male refusal to eat meat” seen as signaling “weakness, emasculation, and un-American values” (Wright 109). The vegan has been vilified and even represented as a terrorist, Wright reports. Meat is linked to both virulent masculinity and white nationalism.

Both Wright and Adams are American theorists focused on US (and UK) contexts. But thinkers such as Wicomb and Marlene van Niekerk identify similar dynamics in South Africa. In a 1993 essay, Wicomb links the Cape’s beloved *braaivleis* (or cookout of meats) to “necklacing,” in which a rubber tire is placed around a victim’s

¹⁶³ Although this idea has much force, Adams’ monograph shows its age in its white-centrism and Western-centrism. Adams makes tokenizing references to non-Western societies as “nontechnological cultures” in which “[f]orbidding meat to women . . . increases its prestige,” a “custom” that she speedily claims is found “worldwide” (27).

chest, filled with petrol, and set on fire. Necklacing was used both by the apartheid government against activists, and by township residents to punish informants. (More recently, the practice comes up in reports of xenophobic violence.) For Wicomb, the *braaivleis* and necklacing both epitomize violence sprung from desperation: “Boers trekking from British domination relied on shooting buck and eating the roasted meat in the open veld; necklacing eliminates those who endanger the community” (“Culture Beyond Color?” 31). The *braai* also features in van Niekerk’s wry “typology” of Afrikaner eaters, which includes the “Old Sort”: a racist patriarch who cherishes the *braai* as “time to bond with the men and with Castle Lager” (“The Eating Afrikaner” 9). The Old Sort believes that “pasta, quiche, and green salad is food for gays. Vegetarians are even more alternative than gays, they must be lesbian. Sushi is quite beyond the pale” (9). Van Niekerk lampoons a white heterosexual masculinity that feels equally threatened by non-normative sexual orientations and diets. An “alternative,” non- meat-centric and multiethnic cuisine (characterized as much by sushi as by a plant-based diet) is conflated with queer identity – pointing to the blurring among sexual and gender identity, race, and eating habits.

Taking such blurring much further, the equivalence of meat-eating with white patriarchalism is destabilized in *October*, where meat is primarily associated with Sylvie, who works in the butcher shop. As Sylvie’s perspective becomes magnified, the meanings of meat multiply beyond Mercia’s revulsion. Making meats becomes an ambivalent possibility for agency in a consumer capitalist world. A younger Sylvie, we learn, was dismayed about working at the local butcher. Her guardians found the job to punish Sylvie when they learned that Nicholas raped her, deciding that Sylvie “was pure

evil. ... [T]here was no question of her staying on at school” (194). Linked in this way to victim-blaming, the butcher shop also signifies the “dreariness of being trapped” in rural life (196). Sylvie rebels by dressing up and photographing herself:

Here before her silver screen, Sylvie can be anyone at all. ... She has borrowed Tiena’s cream canvas jeans and tucked her cigarettes into the right pocket. Just so, on the hip, which she thrusts forward, so that the packet of Marlboros (she always transfers her ciggies into a Marlboro packet) shows. ... Sylvie does not need a mirror for ... pouting, ... tilting her head like the girl with the glossy hair in the Clairol picture. (94)

Echoing the visual grammars of Hollywood’s “silver screen” and an ad for Clairol hair dye, Sylvie mimics consumer culture. She rejects the norms of “Old Ones” such as her disapproving guardians, telling herself that “[t]his is the New South Africa” (93).

Apartheid is over, and some see it as high time to embrace neoliberalization and consumerism – a view that Wicomb is satirizing. Sylvie’s consumerism is mostly make-believe. She puts off-brand cigarettes into the name-brand pack, because she cannot afford Marlboros. She has no mirror and makes or borrows her clothes. Sylvie play-acts consumer behavior that is not actually available to her. This underscores how the promises of neoliberal capitalism diverge from the material realities for most South Africans.¹⁶⁴ Sylvie’s photos ironize the narrative of “freedom” as conspicuous consumption on two fronts, both satirizing the embrace of consumerism by some and underscoring the unfairness of its unavailability to others.¹⁶⁵ Like consumer participation,

¹⁶⁴ Consumerism as “play” by those without funds emerges as an iterable trope in postapartheid literature, critiquing the failed promises of South Africa’s neoliberalization. See my discussion of *The Whale Caller* in Chapter One.

¹⁶⁵ As mentioned in the “Fruit” section, Deborah Posel traces a postapartheid narrative of freedom as conspicuous consumption (“Races to Consume”). Key to Posel’s argument is that the emergence in South Africa of a black elite is coupled with a widening income gap, which remains racialized. The conspicuous consumption of some hinges on the

meat is an ambivalent signifier, whose meaning for Sylvie thickens: “[I]t turned out to be not so terrible learning to make boerewors.^[166] Better than unpicking hems, lengthening skirts, and squinting over invisible stitching. ... [Making sausages] may be damp as babies, but she knows which she prefers” (99). Sylvie identifies meat production as an alternative to stereotypical women’s work such as childcare and sewing. She reclaims the butcher shop as feminist space, taking her photos with the meat:

Sylvie sets up the camera ... holding a rope of perfect sausage. ... [T]he right hand is slightly raised with loops and loops of sausage draped over it. She throws back her shoulder triumphantly ... in spite of the pity of it ... beaming in a butcher’s shop.

Her face is lit with pride. Only fear of someone bursting in prevents her from wrapping a length of sausage around her neck. Like a rich silk scarf. ... She could toss the length of sausage over her shoulder with the flip of her hand, just so, like the film star on TV, the one in *Egoli*. Instead, this tame pose, but never mind, she smiles brightly. ...

Think of it as an advert in *Huisgenoot*. Healthy boerewors for the family, recommended by a healthy, smiling young butcher.^[167] (102)

Sylvie’s parodic photo resembles an advertisement, invoking femininity to sell meat, while the classier conventions of the “film star” are out of reach. She both understands and resists the “pity” of her situation. Juxtaposing her sausages to “a rich silk scarf,” Sylvie acknowledges that laboring with meats is a somewhat debased occupation, yet mocks upper-class identities concretized by luxury apparel. Such femininities are a performance, no less than Sylvie’s play with meats. This sausage/scarf parody teases out

impoverishment of others. As Wicomb implies, a racialized neoliberal system needs to itself be the object of critique.

¹⁶⁶ Cape-style sausage.

¹⁶⁷ *Egoli: Place of Gold* was a bilingual English and Afrikaans soap by Franz Marx. It ran from 1992-2010. eGoli is also the Zulu name for Johannesburg, where the show was set. *Huisgenoot* (“House Companion”) is an Afrikaans-language “family interest” magazine featuring entertainment and celebrity news, with a popular recipe extension. As of 2017, *Huisgenoot* had the highest circulation figures of any South African magazine (Manson).

the consumer logic of late-capitalist femininity, structured by mass-market cultural productions (with TV, film, and ads all offering scripts) and realized through consumerism (which Sylvie cannot quite afford). Meat expresses the racialized patriarchy that has subordinated Sylvie, yet meat also animates her creative practice, which subverts classed and commodified beauty norms. Meat becomes a metonym both for structures of disempowerment, and for their refiguration or sublimation.

In distinction from feminisms that reject the violence of meat-eating, Sylvie reclaims butchery as locus for feminist practice and resists capitalist temporalities via sausage-making. She rejects the unwanted advances of her boss by threatening to chop off his hand with the meat axe and “parcel [it] up as soup bones” (195). She rebels against his “dirty” habits by meticulously cleansing the sausage-making equipment and the shop, “getting all to shine and sparkle” that before her arrival “was a grungy thing” (100-1). Cleaning may be stereotypical women’s work, but for Sylvie it is an exercise of agency. Sausage-making, too, becomes a redemptive process that locates her astute suspicions of industrial food:

Grind the meat in the big old mincer, add just the right amount of salt, pepper, clove and coriander—although she cannot resist an extra dash of coriander—then leave the mixture overnight in the enamel tubs. No nasty cereals thrown in as they do these days in town, nothing like that pink polony. Sylvie would stand over the tubs where time did not only pass, but slowly, wrapped up in itself ... mixed things through, drew the flavors into each other. ... It was time that brought something new called boerewors. ... That too is how a person gets through. You put up with waiting. ... Hers is the best boerewors in Namaqualand, all because of the extra dash of coriander and the patience, the waiting for time to do its blending business overnight. (100)

Like Mercia in Glasgow, Sylvie adapts a received recipe by adding coriander. While Mercia challenges the authority of an English cook, Sylvie modifies the Cape tradition, seizing agency in the face of local histories. Yet the temporality of rural tradition is key:

the logic of boerewors is “patience” rather than efficiency. In “town,” industrial haste yields “nasty” and impure “pink polony.” Sylvie juxtaposes the care and slowness of a small-scale operation both to the perceived fastness of “town,” and to the capitalist obsession with efficiency – the logic behind factory farming. Here, Sylvie is in sympathy with ecofeminist thought. Connecting meat production and the logic of capitalism, Adams makes much of the fact that Henry Ford’s assembly line took inspiration from the “disassembly line[s] of the Chicago slaughterhouses,” where the bodies of animals are taken apart piece by piece (52). Workers’ identities are likewise subject to “fragmentation” by the inhuman industrial efficiency of the slaughterhouse or factory (Adams 52).¹⁶⁸ Wicomb brings the temporalities of capitalism back into focus by their subversion: Sylvie’s valuation of patience rejects capitalist efficiencies.

Sylvie critiques capitalism’s fragmenting qualities from a position of being fragmented. But she does not exactly imagine ending cycles of violence. Instead, Sylvie would concoct a new becoming out of the dead flesh of meat:

Sylvie has the perfect idea. Imagine, in the dark. ... Stealing into Lodewyk’s butchery. ... [A]n eerie, film-set light is cast over everything. ... She, Sylvie, having stripped off all her clothes, would coil the sausage around her nakedness. Carefully, slowly ... Neatly, like an Egyptian mummy, a queen wrapped in time. And if the sausage skin should break? Ag, the sausage meat would stay, plastered to her skin, grafted onto her. Sylvie, the Sausage Girl, brand-new as a baby, at one with her handwork. (102)

Sylvie pictures an uncanny potentiality emerging from her subordination, and from the fleshy materiality of food. Her vision is no longer the upward mobility of becoming a conspicuous consumer (as suggested in her other photographs), but a transcendence of

¹⁶⁸ Such efficiency is false in an ecological sense: industrial agriculture is carbon-intensive.

the human as bounded body. This posthuman image of meat “grafted” to Sylvie’s skin rewrites both the idea of freedom as conspicuous consumption, and the sexual politics of meat. Rather than solidarity between women and living animals, we have Sylvie’s reinvention as “the Sausage Girl, brand-new,” imagined through the intimacy of her flesh with dead flesh in which the animal is an “absent referent” (Adams’ terms for the discursive disappearance of the animal in statements such as “He treated me like a piece of meat” [40]). Sylvie engenders a necro-ecofeminism that should perhaps disturb more than it enchants. Her vision inscribes an ambivalence to postcapitalist or posthuman possibilities, if they are forged out of old violence. (Perhaps the ironically capitalist resonance of “*brand-new*” signals as much.)

Wicomb’s representation of Sylvie does not contradict that meat production expresses patriarchy, or that this power underwrites factory farming’s abuse of animals and environment. But Wicomb does complicate arguments by white feminists on the relation between gender and meat. Sylvie’s experiments with meat are a way to resist patriarchy, offering counter-narratives to capitalism’s glamorous packaging and cruel efficiency. She also refuses top-down or white-centric dictates on the proper tools of feminist resistance, reclaiming meat where veganism may be expected.¹⁶⁹ *October* suggests that meat could be part of a creative and liberating practice from the margins. Yet this emancipatory value is bounded: Sylvie’s resistance through meat must coexist

¹⁶⁹ Vegan feminism, however, is not always “marked by whiteness and elitist social privilege,” Wright notes, engaging with the work of A. Breeze Harper on decolonial veganism among black women (Wright 31, 9). Wright’s own book is pitched as a critique of the Islamophobic logic of American contemporaneity post-9/11. Such feminisms might in some ways co-exist with that of Sylvie, sharing the project of refusing bourgeois and white-centric models.

with meat's status as both sign and material manifestation of violence. Agency and oppression are not mutually exclusive, rather entangled. This ambivalence exceeds any singular statement on the sexual politics of meat.

Sylvie's necro-ecofeminism may give us pause in part because of the new temporality that displaces capitalist efficiencies. Sylvie's patience expands into a fantasy of mummification, a forever-time that is dead time ("like an Egyptian mummy, a queen wrapped in time"). If Sylvie is waiting for her life to get better, she might be waiting forever. Wicomb implies an ambivalence about the politics of waiting – for capitalism to consume its own tail? For damages to the planet to kill off most of us, in the hope that survivors forge something new? In the South African context, this mummification image calls up the moribund potentiality of "waiting" for real change in the face of the transition's failures, the corruption of the Zuma government, the AIDS crisis, the growing gap between rich and poor, and very real ecological threats. If we may take Cape Town's water crisis as a signal, the time available to wait – in any country – may be ending.¹⁷⁰ But can waiting grow new life? Is there living potential in the moribund figure of "the Sausage Girl, brand-new?"

Abject Foods

In a neocolonial system of racialized global capitalism, food shopping and eating can reinforce capitalist efficiencies and rigid identity categories. As Freeman puts it, "[c]hrononormativity is a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts," to "seem natural to those whom they privilege" (3). So

¹⁷⁰ See the coda to the dissertation for a further reflection on the water crisis.

with eating. When we eat, we incorporate a food system and all its attendant histories and ecologies into our bodies – as Nicky ingests South Africa’s imperial history when he eats sorrel. We have to eat, so we naturalize the institutional forces of the food system as “somatic facts,” particularly if our relation to these forces is privileged. Eating both resembles and entangles with temporal normalization, yoking bodies to capitalism.

Yet eating fruit, preparing meat, and changing recipes enable transgressive possibilities in *Playing in the Light* and *October*. Wicomb’s characters cultivate temporalities outside the chrononormative and engender new fleshy connections across bodies and space. These experiments operate with the wastes of industrial food capitalism as their fodder. Mercia would educate Nicky about imperial history by asking him to ingest its material sign, the sorrel. Brenda tells Marion that she is “free to eat a peach,” even though the peaches are from Woolworths, the novel’s locus of class performance through consumerism, and even as the peaches also locate Marion’s alienation from her own “skin.” Sylvie reclaims agency with cheap cigarettes, borrowed jeans, her butcher’s axe, and boerewors. Her sausages are haunted by apartheid history, the present-day commodification of Cape cuisine, and the violence behind meat. Because meat is abject, it becomes Sylvie’s platform for resistance from a position of abjectness. In Wicomb’s novels, transgression entails reclaiming bad foods – meats that ecofeminists would reject, fruit that nobody would sell at a farmer’s market, foods that signal colonial history, foods that would not make the cut for a performatively “progressive” food politics.

With these abject foods, none of Wicomb’s characters offers us a practical platform for “ethical eating.” They have not resolved the violence behind the foods they – we – eat. Yet they may help us move food politics forward, precisely because they do not

try to sanitize or justify their own eating. Wicomb interrupts a chorus of claims to be most ethical – a performance of which food is “local,” which is “organic,” which is “humane,” which is “fair trade,” what you may and may not eat, that all too frequently focuses on white middle class bodies and ideas, and that greenwashes differences in access, ignoring the unaffordability of the avowedly healthy, ecological, and ethical options. Wicomb would remanage our attention in environmental and food politics, asking us to imagine alternatives that are not ideal. On a wasted planet, new possibilities might come from the most uninspiring of places. Looking for less righteous alternatives in food politics might mean reexamining abject foods.

The invocation of abject foods speaks to Wicomb’s novelistic strategy of contesting any kind of single-issue politics. Food politics, in Wicomb’s work, do not subsume other concerns but highlight their entanglement. Her representations of food and eating filter through the confusing intersections of race, gender, environment, and capital with a kind of concreteness, but without the compulsion to produce a parsable logic. Cooking and eating feel concrete because they happen on the level of the body – the individual seasoning the lamb, biting the peach, buying it, plucking the sorrel, raising the axe. But these individual actions depend upon and invoke global movements: the exchange, displacement, and translation of plants, spices, and other ecological matter; of human bodies in slavery or exile or migration; of a corporation’s products; of a concept such as indigeneity; of a recipe. This, I would suggest, is the global environment for Wicomb: this swirl of organic and inorganic bodies, capital, and ideas. Importantly for the global environmental novel, Wicomb demonstrates that thinking about or across scales need not mean constructing a clear hierarchy between differently scaled objects, or

mapping a specific set of relationships. Her novels do engage specific material and conceptual histories, but they do not map them. Perhaps this is how Wicomb resists the notion that such histories have a coherent logic. Indeed, it is often incoherent logic that Wicomb delineates, such as the racial discourse of Nicholas, the taxonomy of apartheid, the garden narrative that plagues Mercia, or Mercia's inexplicable aversion to meats. The desire to evoke but not explain globalization, to pattern but not parse chaos, is Wicomb's contribution to global fiction. Her novels deal in translocal texture to render the confusion and unevenness of the global now.

CHAPTER FIVE

Paddy, Mangoes, Molasses:

Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay and Famine

Realism, Modernism, Famine

A study of fiction and food politics would be incomplete without attending to the absence of food. Imperiled food access, disordered eating, and hunger have mattered to all parts of this project. But in this fifth and last chapter, I turn my focus to famine.

Famine appears here not in isolation from gastronomic language, questions of taste and social position, or agro-environmental issues: rather, as I show, they are all imbricated.

The first four chapters have focused on contemporary Anglophone fictions, under the rubric of global environmental novels. Here, I turn towards a different type of text: Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay's *Hansuli Banker Upakathā*, a 1946-51 Bengali novel, translated by Ben Conisbee Baer in 2011 as *The Tale of Hansuli Turn*. This modernist text focuses on a rural community in Bengal before and during the 1943 Bengal famine. I will situate *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* as a predecessor to the global environmental novel in both content and style: Tarashankar establishes a confluence of gastronomic language with agro-food politics, thinking production and consumption together across multiple scales, and combining modernist and realist techniques. But I also include *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* as a deliberate disruption to this project's temporal and linguistic boundaries, a step beyond my immediate archive. What does it look like to take some of this project's concerns back in time, before the neoliberal moment? And what would it mean to include a non-Anglophone text? Inclusion, here, will be more than simply

additive. It will mean wrestling with concerns about the privileged circulation of Anglophone texts, and the role of translation in producing out of the postcolonial archive something that we might call global modernism.

Famine as theme may conjure expectations of lean aesthetics. These are disgorged by the gastronomic and stylistic superabundance of *The Tale of Hansuli Turn*, a novel as bulging with mangoes, molasses, potatoes, and rice paddy as it is with sprawling sentences, perspectival shifts, diverse dialects, metafictional reflections, and warring genres. Tarashankar (1898-1971) is a major figure of twentieth-century Bengali literature. His fiction from the 1930s and 1940s depicts rural life as the locus of social change. *Hansuli Banker Upakathā* appeared in several versions between 1946 and 1951, straddling India's formal decolonization and partition into India and Pakistan. Set in the shadow of World War II, the novel chronicles the lives of low-caste agricultural laborers amidst the demise of the zamindari, a "quasi-feudal" system "that both persisted in and [was] renewed by colonial rule" (Conisbee Baer xvii). Motifs of gastronomic indulgence cut against a narrative in which perennial deprivation peaks with the 1943 Bengal famine.

Tarashankar's novel localizes a transition between colonial and postcolonial iterations of the global food regime, zooming in on rural Bengal's hinge between a feudal system (the zamindari) and an increasingly capitalized arrangement after World War II. During the war, Japan's advance in the East made Calcutta a key strategic base for the Allies. War-materials production boosted industrialization in Bengal, but only urban areas and commercial sectors benefited. Landlords (or zamindars) and jute mill owners exploited peasants in order to profit from skyrocketing prices for jute and rice. The "Quit India" campaign against British rule commenced in 1942. Operating largely from an elite

base, this movement did incorporate peasants with varying degrees of success, but also trapped many uninvolved peasants between the government and bourgeois nationalists. Meanwhile rape and looting by soldiers and police became rampant in the war years (Srimanjari 119-20). In this volatile context, the Bengal famine of 1943 hit.

A cyclone in 1942 had gutted harvests. But as Amartya Sen has put it, starvation resulted from “some people not *having* enough to eat,” not “there *being* not enough food to eat” (1). Famine is more complex than a shortage of food. The 1943 famine resulted from some combination of hoarding by private speculators and government agents, surging rice prices, and uneven income increases due to the war economy. These causes were economic and political, not “natural.” Rural versus urban dynamics were key. Rice was stocked in Calcutta, while three million rural poor died (Kaur “Interrogating” 10). Most suffering occurred in isolated villages, but relief kitchens were located in towns, requiring peasants to travel far on foot. Many relocated to Calcutta in search of food. Rather than addressing their hunger, the British administration issued a vagrancy ordinance, expelling unsightly beggars to prevent “embarrassment” before the many US and UK troops stationed in Calcutta (Srimanjari 210-11). Prioritizing the war effort and censoring reports of the famine, the Raj sought not to relieve famine victims so much as to hide them.

The Tale of Hansuli Turn challenges the colonial regime’s mode of rendering the rural poor invisible. Tarashankar performs one of the basic realist functions of postcolonial literature: the documentation of marginalized histories. His characters are the Kahars, a community of agricultural laborers in western Bengal. They live within “Hansuli Turn,” a river bend that resembles a sickle-shaped hansuli necklace, in the

Birbhum district of western Bengal. Colonial agriculturalists created the Kahar caste to serve as palanquin carriers and armed guards. Hindu landowners then remolded the Kahars as landless sharecroppers. Wartime industries finally transformed them into wage laborers (Conisbee Baer x). Tarashankar chronicles the latter transition through a conflict between Bonwari, the traditionalist Kahar headman, and Karali, a rebellious youth who embraces factory labor to challenge the landlords. Bonwari's fidelity to the zamindars proves futile as the existing order erodes. However, the novel ends not with the Kahars' liberation, but their reconfigured oppression as a waged proletariat. In their realist detail, such depictions of rural poverty draw upon Tarashankar's experiences of visiting cholera victims. Indeed, for Bengali writer and activist Mahasweta Devi, Tarashankar "only achieved greatness" with material "he took straight from life" (48). In Mahasweta's view, Tarashankar's contribution is including the rural poor within an Indian national imaginary.¹⁷¹ While she values his "realistic and documentary" content, she disparages his "neglected technique," "careless style and heavy language" in her 1975 literary biography (28, 25, 59). But her standards for realist writing may be outdated in our critical moment. Mining Tarashankar's work for descriptions of poverty does little to explain the style of *The Tale of Hansuli Turn*.

The novel's prominent stylistic features are ones we might describe as modernist: perspectival ambiguities, a mix of standard and creole Bengali, and a mishmash of genres on which the novel self-reflexively comments. The account given by an anonymous primary narrator interweaves with the "tale of Hansuli Turn" told by Suchand, an elderly

¹⁷¹ We must take Mahasweta's analysis with a grain of salt, given her primitivist stereotypes of "the earthy, common people, the slaves of basic passion" (40).

Kahar woman who safeguards the community's oral history. Reflexive references to this embedded "tale" abound within the novel, as well as generating the novel's title. (The Bengali word *upakathā* "conveys the somewhat folksy sense of 'tale,' but can also literally mean a subnarrative" [Conisbee Baer xvi].) With the narration moving back and forth between the primary narrator's account and Suchand's "tale," the novel's structure pits written and oral genres against each other. This clash of genres mirrors confrontations between dominant and marginalized social groups, as we see in the narrative's self-conscious commentary on social power and written versus oral genres. For example, when famine threatens, the zamindars demand the Kahars' rent in rice, so they can capitalize on exorbitant grain prices at the Kahars' expense. Bonwari pleads with the landlords, who relent. Yet, as the narrator explains in Bonwari's focalization,

from next time there is a condition attached to sharecropping. They wrote a deed of agreement on legal paper and took his thumbprint.

In the tale of Hansuli Turn—there are no documents, no deeds, no registries. ... Business being done by word of mouth. ... But the gentry have documents and deeds, they have ledgers, their business is not the tale's business; year, month, date, signatory's name, father's name, occupation ... described in writing ... all must be revealed and be placed in that document. (Tarashankar 344-5)

The shifting politics of land and food systems pit the oral "tale" ("by word of mouth," "no documents...") against legal documentation "in writing" – a device of population regulation foreign to Bonwari, whom the landlords have hoodwinked into debt.

Bonwari's thralldom before the gentry exemplifies the Kahars' subalternity, as colonized subjects who also occupy the bottom of the Indian social ladder. Central to *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* is the idea that written histories exclude the subaltern, whereas an oral tale can disseminate subaltern stories.

Tarashankar, an upper middle-class leftist, is not a subaltern writer. As for Amitav Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide* (Chapter Two), also for Tarashankar his own class position presents an ethical quandary. Are the good intentions behind sharing subaltern stories defeated by an elite author's appropriation of their voices? Like Ghosh, Tarashankar addresses this question through self-reflexive modernist elements that complicate the realist representation of marginalized histories. *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* transposes this problem onto the levels of genre and dialect, exploring the question "rhetorically, or structurally, as a reflection on the transformation of a 'tale' ... into a written novel" (Conisbee Baer xv). Orality and the written text clash, for example, in this chilling account of women's deaths in the community:

In the history of Hansuli Turn ... unnatural deaths happen all the time. Snakebites ... hangings, poisonings, and somewhere in the history you can find people cutting their own throats with kitchen choppers. Women die more unnatural deaths. It's in the police station ledger—The women are of poor character; ... they commit suicide. ...

Suchand knows more of the tale of Hansuli Turn than anyone. She says— ... My granddad beat my first grandma's 'ead in with a grindin' stone. ... [The police] slashed granddad's back ta ribbons. ...

Roton's forefather beat his younger sister to death. ...

Porom's forefather ... bound his wife's hands and feet ... and strung her up with a rope around the neck. (224-5)

By denying uxoricide and police violence, the station ledger determines the official "history" in which gender and caste both function as modes of subalternity. The "history" insists that women's mysterious deaths are suicides, and that the impulse to suicide stems from "poor character" rather than circumstance. Suchand's "tale" counters this record, pointing to women's murders by their male relatives (and to violence against men by the police). The oral tale is resisting the biased narratives recorded in the police ledger, which again exemplifies the hegemonic status of written genres. Yet the relationship between

tale and novelistic written narrative blurs in this passage, based on the use of dialect.

Throughout the novel, the Kahars' direct speech appears in creole Bengali, whereas the primary narrator uses standard Bengali. Conisbee Baer preserves this distinction in his translation, using standard English for the narrator and nonstandard English for the Kahars' speech. Accordingly, Suchand generally tells the tale in dialect. The distinction between creole and standard language thus helps to differentiate Suchand's embedded tale from Tarashankar's novel, allowing Tarashankar to avoid appropriating subalternity.

But across the above passage, the relationship between Suchand's speech and the narration changes. As this passage enumerates men's abuses of women, the language shifts from the tale's creole to the narrator's standard English: "My granddad beat my first grandma's 'ead in with a grindin' stone," but then "Roton's forefather beat his younger sister to death"; "Porom's forefather ... bound his wife's hands and feet. ..."

Across dialect to standard English, the feminist content of Suchand's tale continues, now incorporated into the novel's language. The novel itself covets the tale's function of disrupting hegemonic histories.

But can a novel play this role, in the historical context that concerns Tarashankar? Can written text take on the anti-hegemonic properties here attributed to orality? If the novel is to capture these qualities of orality, it may require modernist techniques of self-reflexively scrambling genres. *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* closes with an image of written language and the tale merging, as tributaries into a river. Karali returns to his home years after its destruction, "cutting a path for tale's Kopai to merge with history's Ganges. New Hansuli Turn" (373). Rather than being "washed away" (369) by global forces, subaltern communities can ostensibly join the mainstream, as the local Kopai River joins the

Ganges. The “tale,” like the Kopai, will flow into the larger river of “history.” “History” here continues to indicate a written genre: in the final chapter, Suchand acknowledges that “[t]his tale’s gonna end wi’ me” and entreats the reader, “[I]f ya can, keep it in writin’” (372). The Kahars, Suchand suggests, need to become written as well as oral for their stories to survive. There is the hope that a written genre can successfully preserve their subaltern perspective. The Kopai’s merging into “history’s Ganges” represents both this confrontation of writtenness with orality, and simultaneously the idea of the Kahars joining a different kind of economic system – a more globalized one – as the agrarian society based around the zamindari erodes. But the Kahars’ introduction into industrial capitalism offers them no relief:

The small rivulet of tale has joined the great river of history.
The Kahars are now a new people. ... They’ve exchanged ... plow and scythe for dealings with hammer, crowbar, pickaxe. Yet even as they toil in Channanpur’s workshops they die from starvation ... instead of dying from snakebite they’re sliced by machines. ... But they don’t appeal to [their god] Babathakur for this. Afloat in a boat on the river of history, they’re looking to the compass—to the weathervane. (370)

Proletarianization has changed the instruments of the Kahars’ oppression, not the fact of it. Hope has relocated from God to technology. But the navigational tools referenced – the compass and the weathervane – connote European expansion. Rural serfdom was ostensibly the Kahars’ own “tale,” although one always imbricated in European colonialism and its exacerbation of the zamindari system. Now, at the moment of decolonization, the “great river of history” sweeps the Kahars into the neocolonial era of global capitalism. Euroamerican hegemony reconfigures amidst the waves of decolonization that follow World War II. The Kahars’ circumstances do not improve but are in some sense modernized, a process that Tarashankar represents as a negotiation

between genres. The modernist novel, then, can be seen as staging globalization through form: it integrates local cultures into globality by interweaving genres.

I would not engage in a semantic debate about realism versus modernism. Yet the contrast between Conisbee Baer's praise for Tarashankar's "modernist" style and Mahasweta's earlier interest in his "realism" can help us think about a question important to this project: how literary forms grapple with globalization. Globalization's vast scale and heterogeneity introduce a representational problem: how to describe such a monster without homogenizing the many localities involved? According to Jed Esty and Colleen Lye, modernism "stylizes, even heroicizes, its baked-in failure to map the global system," while realisms from the periphery "approach the world-system as partially, potentially describable in its concrete reality ... via its local appearances" (285). The descriptive value of "peripheral realisms," Esty and Lye suggest, may be overlooked by literary critics determined to excavate global modernisms (273). Resonating with this argument about modernist scholarship are critiques within postcolonial studies by scholars such as Neil Lazarus, who charges that postcolonialism's poststructuralist, anti-materialist strand has obfuscated texts that do not fulfill (post)modernist stylistic expectations.¹⁷² Esty and Lye do not share Mahasweta's account of realism as solely content, as the part of writing that is not style. They do value peripheral texts for documentary power rather than style per se, wondering whether "peripheral standpoints themselves afford distinctive epistemic advantages in descriptions of global capitalism" (280).¹⁷³ But of course realism

¹⁷² See Lazarus, "The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism," in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, ed. Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton, and Jed Esty (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 423-438.

¹⁷³ From a postcolonial perspective, it seems fundamental that viewers apprehend more about global capitalism when capitalism has excluded them from privilege, giving

and modernism are not mutually exclusive. As Esty and Lye underscore, “a dyadic approach to [modernism versus realism] yields inert conceptual results: we do not need a new realist antimodernism to overcome the blind spots of a recent modernist antirealism” (280).¹⁷⁴ Certainly *Hansuli Turn* concerns itself with describing concrete, local realities as they tie into global systems. But to position Tarashankar’s novel as an example of realism *rather than* modernism would be to deny how his movements between local experience and global system rely upon a range of narrative techniques that do look and sound modernist. Tarashankar’s kaleidoscope of genres, speakers, utterances, narrative positions, dialects, verb tenses, and chronologies generate what Mark Wollaeger calls “the family resemblances that make multiple modernisms recognizable as members of a class” (11). Without situating realism and modernism as mutually exclusive, I am interested in what is at stake in desires to claim *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* (or any text) as one or the other, realism or modernism. This chapter stretches toward Wollaeger’s injunction for global modernists to “develop more accurate accounts of cultural productions in particular locations . . . as part of more inclusive systems of exchange, circulation, and multidirectional flows” (15). The challenge for both novelists and critics is to think synthetically across the multiple scales of local specificities and global connections. So what are the epistemic advantages of Tarashankar’s technique of

postcolonial viewpoints “epistemic advantages.” This is a reason why my project focuses on minoritarian and global South authors in order to understand the food regime, an aspect of global capitalism. However, I am interested here not only in this geographic or identitarian valence, but also the intersecting stylistic question of modernism and realism.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, Conisbee Baer does not oppose modernism to realism. He sees modernism’s project as coupling “distanciation” with “more vivid ‘realism’” (xxii). Still, emphasizing “realism” or “modernism” may tilt the canon towards different texts.

combining modernist style with realist documentation? How does he address the representational (and epistemological) difficulties that globalization provokes?

The representation of food is one mode of overcoming these challenges, by bridging the scales of globalization's "local appearances" and the world-system with a mélange of documentary content and modernist style. Food resonates on the most localized scale, the somatic: eating and hunger flood the individual with sensory data. At the same time, food scales up: hunger and delectation cannot be divorced from the food regime, which apportions different qualities and amounts of food and labor to different populations. As Allison Carruth observes, the humanities suffer from a "tendency ... to treat as separate objects of analysis on the one hand, culinary practices and gastronomical rhetoric and, on the other, agricultural production and agrarian discourse" (*Global Appetites* 8). My reading of Tarashankar resists that separation, noting how his novel combines accounts of smelling, admiring, or eating food with depictions of agricultural labor as a cornerstone of local, regional, and global systems. I will analyze gastronomic language and agro-food systems together in order to understand how *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* engages at multiple scales, representing the texture of individual life in relation to the food regime. By depicting a tiny community upended by global war's amplification of long-standing inequities, Tarashankar helps us understand global and regional changes via their local appearances. Negotiating such scalar shifts through references to food and famine, *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* works as a precursor in theme, optic, and style to today's global environmental novels. In representing individual encounters with food and hunger as imbricated with the machinations of food systems, Tarashankar's novel presages many of the scale-switching techniques that I have identified in the food politics

of the global environmental novel. He accomplishes this by combining modernist modes with the realism that Mahasweta values in his work.

In addition to managing multiple scales, Tarashankar's account of food documents the hegemonic operations of language, linking to his concerns with written versus oral genres. As I will show, the Kahars are trapped in a symbolic and linguistic system that naturalizes their oppression, as much as they are trapped in a material regime of ill-paid labor and differentiated food access. Tarashankar's representation of food invites us to connect the somatic to the systemic, and to understand the food regime's materiality as codependent with an oppressive lexicon. By treating the politics of the food system and of language together, I avoid a model of reading that would have us choose between emphasizing Tarashankar's modernist language or his documentary content.

To set the novel in its historical and food political context, let me provide an overview of the 1943 famine and its antecedents. In what follows, I emphasize the political currents of the time and situate the events of the famine as a hinge between two different food regimes. I also outline a perspective on famine as a product of social inequality, rather than a "natural" disaster. I will then return to *The Tale of Hansuli Turn*, mapping several intersections in the novel: gastronomy and agricultural labor, somatic experience and social inequality, and alimentary and discursive modes of power. Finally, I will turn to a brief reflection on the role of translation in producing global modernism, and the status of Anglophone versus non-Anglophone texts.

The Famine of '43

Bengal's agro-food system underwent a gradual overhaul across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These slow changes would coalesce toward the famine of 1943. Rather than a sudden event, the famine was a culmination of declining rural living conditions. Under the longstanding zamindari system, tenant farmers paid rent to landowners (or zamindars), generally as a large share of their crop. The landowners were (in theory) expected to help tenants in times of difficulty, such as failed harvests. This patronage system has clear disadvantages for tenants, and landlords often ignored their traditional obligations – increasingly so as British imperialists discouraged granting “indulgences” to certain populations and urged zamindars to “harden” attitudes towards peasants (Greenough 55).¹⁷⁵ Tenant farmers nonetheless had a better deal than new classes of landless sharecroppers and wage-laborers that emerged in the 1870s and 1880s. Sharecropping and wage-labor had previously existed as supplemental income for tenants who also held fixed parcels of land. Landless sharecroppers and wage-laborers, in contrast, could not form patronage relationships with zamindars. They were ineligible for feudal “indulgences” (Greenough 61, 65). Conditions for agricultural workers were also declining in general. Tenants had once been able to leave if dissatisfied with a landlord, finding a new parcel elsewhere. Such options eroded as Bengal ran out of frontiers.¹⁷⁶ A buyer's market evolved for farm labor, leaving peasants at the mercy of landlords. By

¹⁷⁵ Imperial exacerbation of the zamindari also included a 1793 act that required landlords to make fixed payments on each estate. If payments failed, the estate would be sold at auction, and a new zamindar would take charge. This could make Bengalis feel that “established kings were being brushed aside while alien merchants were carving up whole kingdoms” (Greenough 54).

¹⁷⁶ The Sundarbans, or river delta areas, were among the last places settled for cultivation, between 1880-1940. Paddy cultivation was productive in these moist wetlands, but extremely precarious because of flooding (Greenough 68).

1943, more than a third of families in Bengal would be landless, while another two-fifths had too little land to sustain a family of five (Greenough 69-70).

Food security eroded slowly, with changes in the distribution of rice. This staple was scarce as early as 1862 (Greenough 78). Bengal had long exported both cheap and fine grades of rice. But in the 1870s, British conquest transformed neighboring Burma into the major exporter of cheap rice. Bengal continued to export fine, aromatic grades of rice, but imported cheap Burmese rice for consumption by Bengal's own population. By 1930 Bengal was a net importer. Rice from Bengal was also increasingly marketized. From the early twentieth century, a growing share of Bengal's rice was sold to feed Calcutta and the city's expanding suburbs. Marketization meant that less rice remained in rural villages. Rice production was also faltering, while population was increasing, making rice harder and harder to afford. This was less of a problem for tenant farmers and sharecroppers, who ate some of their own crop before it went to market. But wage-laborers (agricultural and otherwise) were dependent on the market. The Great Depression arrived in 1930, fueling calls to abolish the zamindari system that British colonialism had entrenched (Greenough 81-83, 73). Yet the zamindari would remain until after World War II.

The famine of 1943 was a culmination of these changes in the organization of labor and distribution of food: a crisis point within the more gradual shift from one agro-food system to another. But the famine was also bound up in Britain's participation in World War II. The war (and associated policy shifts at the imperial level) pulled Bengal's economy out of the depression. Industrialization was however limited to sectors relevant to the war effort: jute, iron, steel, mining, textiles, and tobacco. Profits were confined to

urban areas, such as Calcutta, Howrah, and Hooghly. Only particular segments of the Indian population profited. For example, Marwari businessmen in Calcutta with shares in jute companies were able to negotiate with imperial and regional government, achieving directorship in these companies (Srimanjari 80). Workers, on the other hand, experienced horrendous conditions. Their buying power was outstripped as wages failed to match soaring prices for goods, making the war economy devastating for the swaths of population deemed “dispensable” by the government (Srimanjari 94). Owners of jute mills and other factories achieved unprecedented power to manipulate laborers: wartime imperial policy softened Labour and Maternity Benefit acts that had formerly provided some protection.¹⁷⁷

Workers responded by unionizing, demanding increased wages and a war allowance to compensate for the cost of living, which had tripled. The Communist Party of India encouraged strikes early in the war, distributing leaflets that accused mill owners of reaping huge profits at the workers’ expense. These leaflets were banned, and the government waged its own propaganda campaign, hosting pro-war labor rallies (Srimanjari 89). Newspapers such as the *Forward* discouraged strikes, urging workers to contribute to the war effort by remaining at work. What made it possible for the

¹⁷⁷ In November 1939 the imperial government exempted Calcutta’s jute mills from restrictions to work hours and the factory employment of women, citing the “war emergency” as excuse (Srimanjari 86). Likewise, regulations against women’s labor in mines were suspended in August 1943 and lifted entirely in 1944. Women worked in mines throughout the war, despite much debate, and despite the All Indian Women’s Conference (AIWC) arguing that an ILO convention was being violated. The contours of this debate involved racialized arguments by British officials that while Englishwomen should never be asked to work in mines, Indian men working in coal mines “were ‘very unstable’ and preferred ‘to have their women-folk alongside of them’” (Srimanjari 94). Female mine laborers were paid far less than men.

government of India to suppress worker agitation, however, was the shift in international politics when the USSR joined the Allies in 1941. The Communist Party of India abandoned its anti-war stance to support the Allies, and so instructed workers not to strike. In 1942, amidst growing food insecurity, the government launched the Priority Classes Scheme. This measure set aside subsidized food for workers in industries important to the war effort, coaxing unions against joining a new wave of nationalist agitation. (These nationalist energies would soon evolve into the Quit India campaign [Srimanjari 90].) The subsidized grains were however insufficient in the face of the spiraling cost of living. When Japanese air raids on Bengal began, the government failed to insist on protection or compensation for injured workers, which encouraged absenteeism. Workers fled from Calcutta's periphery to return home. By the end of 1942, two to three thousand workers had left Calcutta, most of them on foot (Srimanjari 93, 61).

Famine struck in earnest in 1943. Its causes have been the subject of much debate. The official explanation given at the time was that the famine was caused by a food shortage, produced by low carrying of food stocks from 1942, the cut-off of Burmese rice imports when Japan conquered Burma, and a cyclone that damaged the *aman* (winter rice) crop in Midnapur and surrounding areas (Sen 52). Common-sense opinion at the time rejected this official explanation, calling the famine "man-made" (Srimanjari 155). This epithet of a "man-made famine" was "an accusation ... directed at the officials, politicians, and merchants popularly held responsible" (Greenough 265). In popular opinion, the famine was shaped by "abandonment" at several levels: patriarchs cast off dependent family members; landlords ignored the feudal tradition of obligation to peasants and destitutes in crisis; and the government of Bengal abandoned the rural poor

(Greenough 264). But to call the famine “man-made” also underscores more generally that it was shaped not by natural disaster, but rather “purposeful human conduct” (Greenough 265). This flies in the face of British famine commission reports, which over and over again attributed famines to India’s “unstable monsoon climate” causing crop failures (Greenough 272). Popular understandings of the famine rejected this emphasis on natural disaster.

Likewise, scholars looking back on the famine overwhelmingly dismiss the famine commission’s insistence on natural causes, or indeed on food shortage of any kind. The most influential analysis of the famine has been that of Amartya Sen in *Poverty and Famines*, which rejects explanations based on “food availability decline” (57). Sen uses the Bengal famine as one of several case studies to develop an “entitlement approach” to famines (45). This mode of economic analysis “concentrates on the ability of people to command food through the legal means available” (45). Famines result when some segments of society are not accorded sufficient “exchange entitlements” to be able to buy or otherwise legally procure sufficient food. Famines do not, Sen insists, result from food shortages, but from social inequalities. Sen’s approach, focused on legal, political, economic, and societal structures, “makes no attempt to include all possible influences that can in principle cause starvation, for example illegal transfers (e.g. looting)” (45). Sen acknowledges that his approach will therefore be “defective” in situations where such illegal transfers are widespread (49). He argues, however, that modern famines usually occur “in societies with ‘law and order,’ without anything ‘illegal’” (49). Indeed, legal forces tend to uphold the inequitable structure of entitlements, “guarding ownership rights against the demands of the hungry” (49). In

Bengal in 1943, for example, people “who died in front of well-stocked food shops protected by the state were denied food because of *lack* of legal entitlement, and not because their entitlements were violated” (49, original emphasis). This explanation by Sen has influenced not only analyses of the Bengal famine of 1943, but also theories of famine in general: famines are not caused by crop failure or other “natural factors,” but by social inequalities, enforced rather than resisted by the relevant governmental structures. Legal structures in modern societies emerge as technologies for apportioning starvation to particular members of society, who are supposedly not “entitled” to food.

Accounts of the 1943 famine follow Sen’s emphasis on “man-made” elements. Scholars vary, however, on the relative influence of illegal activities versus government policies (at the levels both of India and of Bengal), and of British versus domestic actors.¹⁷⁸ Despite these differences, the consensus remains that the famine was produced by social inequalities and imbalances in power – both within Bengal and in the face of

¹⁷⁸ Paul Greenough, for one, critiques a “nationalist” approach to South Asian famines that blames “foreign rulers,” which he finds simplistic and excessively ideological (272-3). Greenough does not let the Raj off the hook, but he does tend to cast actions both of the government of India and of the provincial government of Bengal as understandable mistakes rather than criminal negligence. He attributes the famine of 1943 to an insane rice market, precipitated by the government of Bengal’s ineffectual meddling, and states that misuse of authority by both domestic and foreign actors has caused various famines in South Asia (97, 99). There is much value in Greenough’s 1982 study, particularly for its long background history of the famine, upon which I have relied extensively. But from a postcolonial perspective, centuries of imperialist interference, including longstanding colonial rule, make it irresponsible to analyze Bengali actors as if their choices, options, or attitudes were unaffected by British imperialism. Other scholarship has held British colonialism responsible for the famine in a variety of ways. Srimanjari blames the Raj’s irresponsible wartime policy, while tracing the subtleties of provincial and transnational politics involved. Hoarding and speculation are substantial factors for Srimanjari, provoked by an air of unease caused by the administration (157). In Cormac Ó Gráda’s view, hoarding by Indian elites has been overemphasized, distracting from the main problem: British officials’ “lack of political will to divert foodstuffs from the war effort” (90).

British rule. Rice disappeared from rural villages during 1941-44 because of some combination of spiraling prices; speculation, hoarding and blackmarketing; and war-time mismanagement by the British.

In these last years of colonialism in India, Britain's strategic priority was its war effort. Policies resulting from this prioritization provoked a "derangement" of the rice market in Bengal (Greenough 97, 99). Prices fluctuated wildly for rice and other staples. The problem was not only that food prices peaked in 1943 – making it impossible for peasants to buy rice – but also that this followed record lows in 1940 and early 1941 (Srimanjari 158-9). These nadirs in price destabilized a nearly monocultural provincial economy, in which prosperity was lashed to the prices of Bengal's two main crops, rice and jute. World War II increased the demand for sandbags and packaging made of jute. Rising jute prices were another spur to famine, as economic benefits accrued only to mill owners, rather than peasant cultivators of jute. Such "unequal power relations" of cultivators with manufacturers, mill owners, moneylenders, traders, and merchants combined with the instability of the war to make both rice and jute markets "volatile" (Srimanjari 151). Hikes in rice price started from 1941, motivated in part by the government's response to Japan's entry into the war. The administration limited the movement in Bengal of goods traffic, especially food grains, in order to prioritize the shipping of jute and other war needs. Rice mills near Calcutta closed down because not enough paddy was arriving for them to operate (Srimanjari 159). The "wild upsurge" in rice price did not occasion any corresponding increase in wages for agricultural laborers or others not involved in the war economy (Sen 65). The government of Bengal ignored this exploitation of peasants by jute mill owners and zamindars. It officially prohibited

the export of rice in 1942, but allowed so many exceptions that the order was ineffectual (Srimanjari 152-3, 163).¹⁷⁹ Exports continued to exceed imports. Meanwhile the British Indian Army commandeered vast quantities of rice, inflating prices further (Srimanjari 161). The government failed to establish any consistent policy of price control. A brief effort to fix prices in 1942 failed because the control was too far below the current market rate: this irritated merchants and made them refuse to sell at all (Greenough 104). Rather than declare a famine, the government “dilly-dallied with control and decontrol of prices causing the situation to deteriorate” (Srimanjari 162). Prioritizing the war led India’s rulers to mismanage the crisis – or even to produce it.

Catastrophes of colonial mismanagement also include a series of Denial Policies enforced in Bengal in 1942, in response to the Japanese takeover of Burma. These were not quite “scorched earth” policies, but “close” (Greenough 89). The idea was that should the Japanese invade Bengal, they would find neither food nor means of transport (Srimanjari 100). The administration removed stocks of grain from coastal areas such as Chittagong, and requisitioned bicycles and about 66,500 boats (Greenough 89). Boat denial devastated low-income civilians, especially fishers and paddy cultivators (who needed boats to navigate rice fields) (Srimanjari 101). Rice denial also authorized outside agents to buy up grain from rural areas. Unsupervised, these agents engaged in hoarding and speculation on a scale far exceeding the official accumulation of government-held

¹⁷⁹ These exceptions reflected war-time policy: for example, rice was exported from starving Bengal to strategic priorities for the Allied effort against the Japanese, such as Ceylon and Mauritius (Srimanjari 163). Meanwhile, it was actually to Bengal’s disadvantage that the export of rice and other cereals had been officially banned from all of India’s provinces, because Bengal could not then import from other provinces (Sen 77).

stocks (Greenough 94). Similarly damaging was an Evacuation Policy that removed up to thirty thousand people from Chittagong and Comilla. Such measures gave enormous “discretionary powers” to district magistrates, who felt that their mandate to serve imperial war needs released them from obligations to the provincial population (Srimanjari 100).

The Denial and Evacuation policies provoked an upsurge in nationalist activity. The success of the Japanese in the east also encouraged anti-British agitation: some Indians “rejoiced” at Japanese victories in Burma and Singapore, which might spell the end of the British regime (Srimanjari 103). The Quit India movement of 1942 (the Indian National Congress’s campaign against British rule, mobilized by Mohandas Gandhi) capitalized on these circumstances to gather support among non-landed classes. Quit India emphasized “striking at the state machinery” (Srimanjari 104). In Calcutta, as in the United Provinces and Bombay, Gandhi’s arrest mobilized protests and destruction of infrastructure: students attacked tramways, telegraph wires, rail lines, and post offices, but left untouched services deemed unrelated to the British war effort, such as buses. Peasants and the poor were motivated by the Quit India movement’s promises to address hunger. The Congress also gained popularity by intervening to support agitating peasants, such as those altercating with mill owners. In many parts of Bengal, peasants and tribal populations were key to the movement’s momentum. However, their support stagnated because the campaign did not address the exploitative zamindari system of rent collection (Srimanjari 104, 113-14).

The zamindari was the major concern in agricultural regions. Monocultural cultivation of rice paddy had been the economic backbone since the mid nineteenth

century, spreading indebtedness of peasants to landlords. Before and during the famine, many peasants sold their land out of desperation. This led to massive displacements and pushed many of the rural poor into wage labor (a key backdrop for *The Tale of Hansuli Turn*). Many female famine victims resorted to prostitution or were sold into prostitution by family members (Srimanjari 169-70, 201). Such developments were particularly intense in Midnapur, an agricultural region in western Bengal where tensions soared in 1942. Officials were seizing grain and exporting it to Ceylon under the Denial Policy, and the activities of the Quit India movements had provoked severe political repression. Angry civilians resisted the Boat Denial Policy. Officials responded by destroying boats in huge numbers (Srimanjari 101). Amidst this turbulence, a cyclone struck in October 1942, plunging Midnapur and neighboring areas into acute famine. Many rural dwellers could not escape floods induced by the cyclone, because their boats had been confiscated or destroyed – and because district authorities requisitioned the remaining boats in order to rescue officials, leaving thousands of civilians to drown or starve. Local authorities delayed relief work, including anti-famine measures and the removal of bodies, apparently out of spite or “desire to punish” for political agitation (Srimanjari 118). Reports of this unnatural disaster were suppressed and censored to hide the role of mismanagement. Atrocities perpetrated by US and UK soldiers and state-backed police continued to flourish. In a particularly bad incident in January 1943, police and soldiers looted two villages in Midnapur, raping thirty-three women. Uproar resulted in the Legislative Assembly, citing the hypocrisy of British propaganda, which credited soldiers and police with heroism in relief efforts while emphasizing Japanese brutality.

Such atrocities, seen as brutal attempts to suppress the Quit India movement, encouraged cooperation between the Congress and other political parties (Srimanjari 119-20). The British had reason to worry about new coalitions strengthening anti-colonial nationalism. It seemed that the Communist Party might support the Quit India campaign, given substantial reconciliation with the Congress.¹⁸⁰ The Communists campaigned both for Gandhi's release and for cooperation between the Congress and the Muslim League (Srimanjari 131). When the Soviets joined the Allies in 1941, the Communist Party reframed World War II as the "People's War." But this new official party narrative remained unpopular in rural Bengal. Grassroots activities followed different patterns, and the Communists differentiated their strategies across Bengal. They distributed anti-fascist messages in east Bengal, where a Japanese invasion seemed likely. But they avoided explicit support for the Allied cause in areas where discontent with the British was strongest, including Midnapur and other parts of western Bengal. In northern Bengal, the Communists mobilized sharecroppers and tenant farmers to demand land reforms (Srimanjari 128-9).

Despite coalitional and nationalist energies, fractures between Muslims and Hindus informed the patterns of famine relief. According to Srimanjari, the events of the war and famine mostly pushed anti-colonial energies in a sectarian direction (229). Accusations of communal favoritism were widespread during the famine: Hindu organizations might only help Hindu famine victims and Muslim organizations only Muslims. Many Hindu zamindars appropriated land from their Muslim tenants to sell

¹⁸⁰ The Communist Party had been illegal, but was unbanned in 1942. Its relationship to the government remained convoluted, as Party materials continued (often) to criticize British imperialism (Srimanjari 128).

(Srimanjari 143). The Muslim League gained influence with a sectarian “discourse that combined teachings of Islam with radical ideas of land reform,” especially in east Bengal, which was hit worst by the famine (Srimanjari 145-6). Both the British and the Japanese played upon communal tensions with vague promises to support the creation of Pakistan (Srimanjari 140-1).¹⁸¹ Subhas Chandra Bose, an Indian nationalist leader, “offered rice to Bengal and held the British responsible for food shortage” (Srimanjari 126). This tactic echoed Britain’s own offers of Indian wheat to Persia earlier in the war. The Japanese, too, accused the British of deliberately starving Bengalis to debilitate nationalist insurrection (Srimanjari 126-7). Food and famine relief had become key political weapons: for empire, for global war, and for internal sectarian conflict, all of which were entangled.

Rural versus urban dynamics also governed the famine, which was “essentially a rural phenomenon” (Sen 63). Waged agricultural laborers were the primary victims, followed by fishermen, transport workers, paddy huskers, and craftsmen. Populations involved in the military and industries stimulated by the war economy were largely safe (Sen 65, 71-2, 77). Urban areas were shielded from rampant food prices by subsidized food distribution schemes. The protection of workers in Calcutta under the Priority Classes Scheme only heightened food prices in rural areas (Srimanjari 164, Greenough 117). Few residents of Calcutta starved: the city “saw the famine mainly in the form of masses of rural destitutes, who trekked from the districts into the city” (Sen 57). Survival was likelier in Calcutta, because of relief kitchens organized by the state, by the

¹⁸¹ East Bengal would become the east wing of Pakistan with India’s partition in 1947, and later become the nation of Bangladesh. Partition would again devastate Bengal’s economy and provoke mass migrations.

communists, and by other charities. Yet the relief was so inadequate that “unattended dead bodies could be found everywhere in the city” (Sen 57). Stocks of rice requisitioned from rural areas languished in Chittagong, Dacca, and Calcutta, rotting rather than being distributed to the hungry (Srimanjari 186).

In rural areas, hoarding and speculation were both pursued by the agents sent by the government to procure rice, and also inspired by the atmosphere of insecurity that these agents created. Private individuals began to hoard many essential items: “matches, salt, kerosene, mustard oil, sugar, and finally, rice disappeared from the village markets” (Srimanjari 157). Cultivators and landlords kept large stocks of rice. They were willing to sell, but only at illegal informal markets, to massive profit (Greenough 119). Landlords also hesitated to reveal their stocks because they feared looting by the hungry or requisition by the government agents. The presence of agents sent by the government, then, eroded what Greenough describes as “relationships of trust and credit” in the villages, speeding the collapse of the feudal system of “patronage and benevolence” in which landlords might have taken responsibility for destitutes (Greenough 119-21). With this language, Greenough is rather generous towards the zamindari system: these structures of “benevolence” had often gone hand in hand with exploitation. Still, historians concur that government agents caused a newfound atmosphere of heightened fear, competition, and selfishness.

The famine, then, was a crisis point in the zamindari’s long decline. 1943 witnessed a hinge between two different food regimes: from an exploitative feudal system based on local networks of patronage, to a different mode of exploitation by government-sanctioned capitalist “outsiders” (Greenough 120-21). Such outsiders would

have various manifestations over the coming years, including not just agents requisitioning and speculating on rice, but also multinational corporate interests with a variety of plans to transform Bengal's and India's agro-food networks for their own profit. Within the moment that concerns this chapter, the hinge into globalized capitalism was a substantial factor in producing the famine. This is the mode of local-global connection taken up in Tarashankar's *The Tale of Hansuli Turn*. The novel delivers global dynamics via a provincial angle, restoring to view the rural poor at the center of these shifts.

Labor, Hunger, Savor, Language

Unusually for famine literature, *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* does not begin as a novel about famine. Rather, the famine of 1943 is deferred until nearly the end of the narrative. The novel spends many pages depicting the Kahars' social position prior to the famine, with a strain of pastoralism that is always ironized. Tarashankar makes clear the dynamics of production and consumption under the zamindari system, and notes the shifts that begin to occur with the onset of World War II:

It's no profit to [the Kahars] if prices of paddy, rice, molasses go up. They eat by working in the masters' fields and receive a one-third share of the harvest ... don't have paddy or rice to sell. Neither sell nor buy. A few greens in the backyard; snails and shellfish in lake, pond, ditch, and river — catch and bring. The price of coal rises; the Kahars never burn a piece of coal in their lives, they gather twigs and sticks. ... It's certainly a pain if the price of cloth goes up. (107)

This early passage presents the Kahars as as existing almost outside a wage economy.

They “neither sell nor buy,” and live mostly by sharecropping and subsistence gathering, though they do buy cloth. A collective Kahar consciousness is the focalizer in this passage, and seems mostly attuned to the benefits of living outside a wage labor system —

why worry about the price of coal if you couldn't afford it in the first place? But this perspective is also subverted: the irony is that this is a passage about the Kahars' exploitation. As described here, the landowners are profiting from the Kahars' labor, cashing in when the prices of paddy, rice, and molasses spike and never sharing those profits. Tarashankar is both satirizing the supposed beneficence of a feudal system, and documenting the specific dynamics of a war economy that benefits some segments of society based on the exploitation of others. The initial perception that "[w]ar makes no difference at all to the Kahars" becomes untenable (107). The Kahars are increasingly affected by the war's reorganization of what had been an agricultural economy: soon "[n]ot a single cow or goat [is] left in Kaharpara. War broken out. . . . Price of a ten-rupee cow thirty rupees. . . . Not the price of milk, not the price of plow-pulling power, the price of meat. War has made the Kahars forget their cow tending and milk selling; it's wiped that business out" (367). War fundamentally alters the type of food "business" available. The Kahars are initially able to profit by selling their cattle for meat. But as the narrator implies, to "forget" their prior uses of cows (to plow and produce dairy) is to take short-term profit at the expense of longer-term food security. Selling the cows is a disadvantaged mode of incorporation into a buy-and-sell economy. War eliminates the Kahars' previous livelihood, without ensuring an alternate futurity. The causes of a stratified famine are already present, before the war and in its early days.

Towards the end of *The Tale of Hansuli Turn*, a cyclone and the resulting flood destroy homes, fields, and food.¹⁸² By deferring the famine until late in the novel, *The*

¹⁸² Hansuli Turn is located not in Midnapur, but in Birbhum district, close enough to be affected by the cyclone of October 1942.

Tale of Hansuli Turn's narrative structure models the idea of famine as coming on gradually, piqued by the outbreak of war but brewing for many years (and reprising some of the patterns of earlier famines.)¹⁸³ This arc emphasizes the chronic inequities that culminated in the catastrophe, rather than the famine's immediate triggers. Tarashankar centers not the famine itself so much as the gradual changes to social and agro-economic organization. Famine sets in when rice prices soar and the landlords take advantage of the Kahars: "Price of paddy has gone from four to eight rupees. ... No one in the land of India has ever heard of such a thing, it is unthinkable. ... Bosses ... sell paddy and make money. ... They only give [the cultivators] reminders of due" (336). Tarashankar presents the famine as produced not just by storms, but by social inequality. This perspective accords both with scholarship today and with popular opinion at the time. Such passages late in the novel expose how landlords and speculators produced the famine by finagling the agricultural system. But gastronomic and culinary motifs, as well as references to agro-economic systems, saturate the novel from its start. These elements texturize structural inequality as a part of the individual's sensory experience. In this way, *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* both situates the famine historically as a product of longstanding inequalities, and also links large-scale questions of famine and economic organization to the intimate and somatic scale of taste and hunger.

In the transition between a colonial and postcolonial order, and between an agricultural and semi-industrialized Bengal, the Kahar community processes flux by debating the relationship between caste and food access. References to leftover food

¹⁸³ Mike Davis's excellent book *Late Victorian Holocausts* (Verso, 2000) is a good source on the nineteenth century patterns of famine in India and other colonies.

mediate their conceptualizations of caste, prompting us to understand the shifting contours of society and identity materially and somatically, as a matter of who eats what when. The gentry typically give the Kahars leftovers after feasts. Such informal payments are expected within the zamindari system: “Bosses do a lot in times of crisis. ... [T]hey’ll even come visit, make small loans, give such things as aged fine-grain rice, preserves, dried fruit” (Tarashankar 83). Alimentation hinges on the Kahars staying in good favor, as the feudal system construes food as a gift rather than a right. This paternalism jeopardizes the Kahars’ subsistence long before the arrival of famine conditions. By presenting food injustice as a social more which the Kahars have accepted, Tarashankar situates famine not as an aberration, but as continuous with structural inequalities enforced by the colonial system of collecting rent through zamindars. The Kahar leader Bonwari accepts this system, grateful that the gentry give the Kahars feast leftovers which they “eat with pleasure next day” (278). Yet eating leftovers acquires a grisly note in *The Tale of Hansuli Turn*, when another Kahar dies by “stuff[ing] herself full of ritually leftover food offerings ... her breathing stopped and she died gasping and panting” (361). Are readers meant to believe that this Kahar dies because she is greedy, eating food originally intended as a ritual offering? Or is Tarashankar’s suggestion that the Kahars are choked by the more generalized practice of eating leftovers, performing their caste subordination through eating habits?

Leftover food becomes key to debates in the community about whether and how the Kahars’ status will change in these turbulent times of economic reorganization. This comes to the fore when the young Karali rejects paternalism by refusing to eat leftovers. He declares that “[c]aste goes away by eatin’, pickin’ up, others’ leftovers” (195). Karali

creates this narrative because he understands eating leftovers as not only a precarious means of obtaining food, but a performance of inferiority. The Kahars' material subjugation cannot be contested without resistance to such rituals, because material and symbolic modes of oppression are inextricable. When Karali becomes a factory union organizer, he instructs his followers to boycott leftovers: "Eat leftovers, lose caste. The Kahar that eats others' waste falls into outcaste" (279). Rather than taking caste as a given, an inherent quality that mandates demoralizing eating practices, Karali instead positions caste as a social construction, produced by quotidian practices such as eating. Therefore, Karali insists, the Kahars must resist their subjugation by eating differently. Bonwari is "dumbstruck" to learn that Karali rejects leftovers: "He cannot imagine such defiance" (279). Bonwari is shocked not because there is something new about Karali's idea that eating leftovers signifies impurity, but because Bonwari accepts this impurity as correct for his station (and considers his caste status inherent). Eating leftovers was frequently "mandated to give concrete form" to the "inferiority" of untouchables (Parama Roy 62). The forced violation of food taboos was also a sore point between high-caste Hindus and their colonizers. The 1857 Mutiny in the Bengal Army started because sepoys feared losing caste by biting rifle cartridges soaked in cow and pork fat by the East India Company. Food is considered "a significant vehicle of pollution in a high-caste Hindu gastropolitical order ... rendering the Brahmin male subject most vulnerable to penetration" (Parama Roy 46). Karali reasserts the dignity of the Kahars not by rejecting a caste-based system, but by insisting that Kahars, just like higher castes, should resist degrading eating practices. Leftovers highlight the entanglement of systemic deprivation from food with daily performances of status.

This quotidian deprivation becomes palpable in a flashback to Karali's childhood, when he is accused of stealing mangoes. This sequence represents differentiated food access as a somatic experience. The boss, Middle Ghosh, sends Karali to the train station to fetch "a basket of extra special mangoes" (47). A little girl begs Karali for a mango, and he gives her two. But "just as Karali was leaving the station the guard grabbed him ... cut off a bit of mango, ate, sang its unending glory, made Karali taste a slice of mango, and only then released him. There's his crime. Ghosh ... caught him because of the smell of mango on his hands and mouth" (47). Here caste and class skew food access in an unsurprising fashion. The rich man punishes the impoverished, altruistic hero: a hackneyed scene. But the passage captivates by coaxing the reader's salivation with delectable sensory language, describing how the "sweet smell" of the mangoes "was lusciously filling the goods room. If you so much as entered the room that scent would go in your nose and fill your chest, dragging saliva from the back of your tongue until your mouth was wet and drooling" (47). Tarashankar transcends moralism by inviting the reader to salivate, to share the somatic experience of Karali's temptation. Such physicality underscores that the global food system is anything but abstract, particularly for those denied food. The reader may sympathize, but Bonwari condemns Karali: "Shame shame shame. There's God, there are Brahmins, there are respectable householders — they're your bosses; they may eat, but don't they give you the favor of their leftovers?" (47-8). Endorsing food entitlements differentiated by caste, Bonwari helps Middle Ghosh thrash and expel Karali, "[a]nd that's why Karali is today's Karali; and it's because of all this that he wants neither to honor Bonwari nor ... the Ghosh house" (48). This incident seeds a lifelong antagonism between Karali and Bonwari. The

memory motivates the adult Karali's refusal of farming in favor of factory labor, as well as anticipating Karali's fixation on eating leftovers as a quotidian mode of subordination to paternalism. The personal conflict between Bonwari and Karali allegorizes the tension between adherence to the residual feudal system and urban proletarianization. Karali's experience of forbidden mango enacts on an individual, somatic scale the injustice of differentiated food access in a colonial regime where caste underwrites which groups profit and which starve.

These structural inequalities are expressed in somatic experiences not just of gastronomic desire, but also of agricultural labor. Eating and farming intersect in a scene where a Kahar named Pana harvests potatoes:

Pana dug potatoes. The potatoes of Pana's boss are really big. Pana's wife will ... dig potatoes too. [Pana has] stashed four fat potatoes in a hole in the ground marked with a sign. He'll tell his wife to hide them. ... It's boss who always gets the fattest potatoes. Large potatoes to be eaten with rice; he'll get this little extra in his own share. The real pleasure is in getting this bit more. (85-6)

Pana's low-caste position bars him from eating the products of his labor, which are described in the fleshly language of gastronomic desire as "big," "large," and "fattest" – emphasizing the boss's surplus in contrast to Pana's "little extra." Focalized through Pana, the passage juxtaposes these descriptions of potato size with references to manual labor. Pana hates that the boss gets the best potatoes when Pana does the work. He wants to reclaim not just sustenance but the "pleasure" of food by stealing a few of them. When Pana's boss arrives, he finds the potatoes that Pana had squirreled away and retracts Pana's puny share as punishment. The Kahars are food producers, yet they go hungry—a grim irony underscored by Tarashankar's gastronomic lexicon. Tarashankar refuses to separate conversations about agriculture from those about appetite. The representation of

individual gastronomic desire is a key component of his literary interface with agro-food systems.

The novel's movement between quotidian, somatic experiences and larger scales crystallizes in a long sequence on molasses production. Here Tarashankar evokes the enmeshment of individual, regional, and global scales. The passage centers and focalizes Bonwari, who "is better than anyone at making molasses; in Jangol, Bansbadi, the villages on the other side of the Kopai, Goyalpara, Ranipara, Ghoshgram, Nandipur, Karmamath, in all these seven villages Bonwari has no equal in the making of molasses. ... Bonwari's 'handmade' molasses ... [is] of highest quality—doesn't taint even if kept for a year" (105). Bonwari takes pride in the product of his labor. He does so by situating himself regionally: his artisanal molasses gives him a sense of place beyond Hansuli Turn, in relation to other villages in the area. But molasses-making also determines much about Bonwari's place in a wider world. Tarashankar interlocks several scales by interweaving the minutia of molasses production with local caste conflict, and with Bonwari's musings on the world war:

A fire burning fiercely in a great stove. ... Bonwari sitting on a mound. ... [Other Kahars] feeding sugarcane husks into the furnace mouth to fuel the fire. Boiling sugarcane juice bubbles and rises. ... The Mister Mondols sitting over to the side ... keeping a hard eye on the molasses. War's broken out across the world. ... Won't the value of goods go up! Paddy, rice, molasses, beans, the value of all these things will rise. Thus the Mondols are 'vigilant,' not a single thimbleful of molasses must be swiped. ... Privately Bonwari feels a little 'urt' about this. ... [E]ven he's mistrusted. So let them. Bonwari quietly concentrates on making molasses. He thinks about war. (105-6)

In this scene of the Kahars making molasses for the Mondol family, Tarashankar depicts production with careful realist detail. Gerunds such as "burning" and "sitting" even suggest the staging of a dramatic performance. Though offstage, war forms the action,

interrupting the material texture of molasses making to underscore intimacies between small-scale food production and geopolitics: “concentrat[ing] on making molasses” and “think[ing] about war” coextend for Bonwari. Tarashankar presents the Kahars’ dispossession not as a new event during World War II, but as continuous with earlier globalization:

Bonwari has seen another war. Began in nineteen hundred and fourteen time. ... [T]he Mukherjees of Chandanpur saw their coal business expand and they became kings. ... Before this, everyone was just a cultivator and would take up the plow handle ... alongside the Kahars ... [now] everyone’s become a gentleman by selling paddy, rice, beans, molasses in the war bazaars. ... [W]ho knows what they will become in this war? ... In the increase of their wealth lies the well-being of the Kahars. (107)

Tarashankar ironizes the gentry’s suspicions that the Kahars will steal molasses: it is the “gentleman” class that steals Kahar labor.¹⁸⁴ He underscores both globalization’s totality and its unevenness: changes to the composition of the ruling class perpetuate the Kahars’ dependence, even as they shake the foundations of their livelihood. Bonwari muses on such broad changes *while* he stirs the molasses, underscoring the presence of the global in the material, the local, the alimentary. Molasses and other material commodities embed the Kahars in global systems, which they facilitate with their manual labor.

Stratification occurs not only through the maldistribution of labor, wealth, and food, but also at the level of language. The molasses sequence both demonstrates the enmeshment of several scales, and interweaves alimentary and discursive modes of subjugation. At ten o’clock, “the mister Mondols will get up and go home to eat. Once they have eaten, Hedo Mondol will come back with the person whose molasses is being

¹⁸⁴ The Mondols, for whom Bonwari and the other laborers are making molasses, would fall within the class of “peasant farmers,” a cut above the Kahars but not as privileged as the gentry such as Middle Ghosh (Conisbee Baer xii).

prepared” (108). These sentences mark the gap between who produces and who consumes. The Mondols will have a meal, as belabored by the two neighboring uses of the verb “to eat.” They will then sell the molasses to a predetermined buyer, profiting from price hikes but not sharing this profit (or their food) with the Kahars. Meanwhile, the passive construction “whose molasses is being prepared” (rather than “whose molasses the Kahars are preparing”) erases the laborers. The Kahars’ removal from grammatical agency mirrors the attempted erasure of their historical agency. They can be obviated from written text, the syntax suggests, as easily as they can be excluded from profit. Molasses making not only links local labor to geopolitics, but exposes the connection between poverty and discursive or textual violence. The discursive exclusion of the Kahars mirrors their material exclusion.

Throughout the novel, repetitions of the word “scum” underscore these parallels between material and discursive subjugation. Literally, scum is the substance skimmed off while making molasses. But “scum” most frequently appears in this novel as a slur that the wealthy direct at the Kahars. The food byproduct becomes a metaphor that categorizes the Kahars as social detritus, even though their labor sustains the food system. When a sudden rainstorm threatens the molasses, Pana tells “juicy stories” that become “more luscious with his sense of pleasure at the ruin of Hedo Mondol’s molasses. ... Let the bastard’s molasses turn ta crap. A right bastard scum” (122). The language of gastronomic pleasure (“juicy,” “luscious”) codes Pana’s vengeful delight as an inadequate compensation for his culinary labor: he produces molasses but cannot consume it, so instead of enjoying molasses, he must relish the affect of vengeance, or the idea that the boss’s property will be destroyed. By calling Hedo Mondol “scum,” Pana

reclaims the word and turns it against the higher castes. But Pana only trash-talks Hedo Mondol while he is absent, unlike Karali. When Karali saves the molasses from the rain, Hedo Mondol responds with backhanded praise: “Scum’s gotta be called hero now—yep, scum’s a real hero” (123). Hedo Mondol’s acknowledgment of Karali’s good deed comes with a reminder of Karali’s inferiority – his status as “scum.” Karali denounces this language to Hedo Mondol’s face: “Whatcha sayin’ scum-my-scum for?” (123). Karali’s insubordination shocks the other Kahars:

Karali’s made them speechless. The lad’s got guts for sure! ... [W]hat Karali said was right too. Those phrases *are* always ... on the tongue of the gentry sires. They won’t say it if they’re angry; it’ll be fondly. They’ll say—Oh very nice, scum. They will ask “How’s it going?” affectionately by saying—Hey there bastard, how you doing? What Karali’s saying is right. Yet—. Yet ... [y]ou have to respect the difference between great and small. (124, original emphasis)

The narration again conjures a collective Kahar perspective, which disapproves of Karali’s brashness yet acknowledges his point. Tarashankar represents the Kahars’ qualms about rebellion as their hesitation to speak: they are “speechless,” in ways complicated by the punctuation. As this passage showcases, Conisbee Baer preserves Tarashankar’s use of the long dash (—) to introduce direct speech. This is a convention of the Bengali novel (Conisbee Baer xix). The dash following the first “Yet,” however, is followed by a period, suggesting a foreclosure of speech. Rather than initiating direct speech, this particular dash marks a stutter in a string of indirectly relayed reflections: the collective Kahar focalizer balks at completing the thought. The absence of direct speech instantiates the Kahars’ hesitation to seize the *written* word (of the novel) from the narrator, who has been transmitting the collective Kahar consciousness as indirect discourse. Atypically, English-style quotation marks also appear above, but they do not designate quoted speech from the scene itself. Instead, the phrase “How’s it going?”

employs conventions that are familiar to English-speaking readers in order to exemplify the kinds of colloquialisms for which the gentry substitute rude expressions. While this English expression takes quotation marks, the usual dashes offset the “scum” and “bastard” phrases, as if to reemphasize their Bengali particularity by contrast. The scum incident thus sparks a multilayered reflection on language and power: on the lexicon of paternalism; on the Kahars’ hesitance to resist that language; on the limitations of both subaltern speech and of its transmutation into novelistic discourse; and on the reformulations that result from translating such an incident from Bengali to English.

The molasses sequence closes with Bonwari “thinking about this Karali business as he stood beside the stove skimming off the crud, that’s to say the scum. ... [A]ll those bastard-scum phrases are awful, for sure” (124-5). “Scum” appears twice here: both as the physical byproduct that Bonwari must touch in his labor and as an insult. Scum has a material referent (molasses scum) and a linguistic referent (“bastard-scum phrases”), again connecting the materiality of food and labor to a lexicon of oppression. Indeed, the distinction between linguistic and material uses of “scum” blurs with the first reference, “the crud, that’s to say the scum.” Here scum does not in fact *directly* designate the residue of molasses-making, but instead serves as a linguistic gloss to define the word “crud.” Likewise, earlier in the molasses sequence, “scum” glosses “gunk”: “Bonwari straining out the ‘gunk,’ that’s to say the scum, with a sieve” (105). Scum, the material object, repeatedly attaches to Bonwari, figuring how the system treats him like scum. Simultaneously, scum explains the meanings of other words (“crud” and “gunk”). The phrase “that’s to say” recurs in *The Tale of Hansuli Turn*, always to introduce linguistic glosses such as these. This is Conisbee Baer’s translation for the Bengali word *arthāt*,

which Tarashankar uses whenever he is defining a creole word by using a synonym in standard Bengali. Conisbee Baer suggests that Tarashankar uses *arthāt* to link a “glossary” of creole words and phrases throughout the novel (“Introduction” xvi-xvii). This procedure embeds reminders for the reader that the Kahars’ linguistic difference – their use of dialect – is key to their subalternity. Language is power, but so is food. Juxtaposing the multiple meanings of “scum” – linguistic gloss, slur, and food byproduct – enmeshes the manual labor of skimming molasses with the word’s role in encoding power dynamics in language. Bonwari’s discursive subjugation reinforces his material and indeed alimentary oppression. Scum points to a linguistic system that naturalizes the Kahars’ disadvantaged position within colonial and then postcolonial arrangements of food production and food access.

Global Modernism and Translation

Literature helps us understand the food system because “imaginative texts” have a special capacity “to shuttle between . . . symbolic and embodied expressions of power. Just as importantly, literature has a facility with shifting from macroscopic to intimate scales of representation that can provide an incisive lens on the interactions between local places and global markets” (Carruth *Global Appetites* 5). While I agree with Allison Carruth’s claim that literature is specially suited to representing the food system, I have argued the other way around: that food has a special scalar function within literary texts such as *The Tale of Hansuli Turn*, making the representation of globalization possible. Food allows Tarashankar to overcome representational challenges because food enables

shifts between systemic and somatic scales, and between material and discursive modalities of power.

Pairing this understanding with Tarashankar's confrontation between written and oral genres brings us to another expression of power that is simultaneously material and linguistic: the privileged circulation of the novel genre and of Anglophone and Europhone texts. The differentiated labor, access, and commoditization that drive this circuit are not incomparable to those of the food regime. In thinking through globality and literary language, we must underscore the gap between Tarashankar's *Hansuli Banker Upakathā* and Conisbee Baer's translation *The Tale of Hansuli Turn*. What makes a novel available as a candidate for "global modernism," or for a central place in the postcolonial canon? What if global modernism names not just a collection of texts that represent global modernity, but a canon-formation process? Select texts circulate, and Anglophone texts have vast advantages: I myself can only read Conisbee Baer's English translation, a product he has engineered and framed as modernist. (Because his translation is recent, *Hansuli Banker Upakathā* has received little critical attention in English to date.¹⁸⁵) This situation is not unusual: Anglo modernist scholars in English or other Europhone departments frequently reach beyond their linguistic competence in order to go global, reflecting Anglo-America's heft in the academy and literary marketplace.¹⁸⁶ Rather than seeing my access only to the translation as a foreclosure, I would examine how Conisbee Baer's translation process repositions the novel.

¹⁸⁵ More critical attention in English has been paid to Mahasweta Devi's Bengali fiction, for example, thanks to earlier translations into English by Gayatri Spivak.

¹⁸⁶ For example, the editors of both the *Oxford Handbook on Global Modernisms* and *Geomodernisms* acknowledge that their collections suffer from being written in English, discussing non-English texts in translation, and having mainly US-based contributors.

Is it the case that Conisbee Baer not only translates Tarashankar's novel into the English language, but also stylistically translates a Bengali novel into global modernism? Is this text's inclusion in a "global" canon in fact contingent on its alteration? We can certainly trace a process of deliberate adaptation through Conisbee Baer's paratextual explanation of his translation choices. In Mahasweta's view, Tarashankar uses dialect solely as a localizing realist device: "he is writing of a particular community and so he has used [their] language" (48). But Conisbee Baer seeks in translating to preserve "a sense of ... strangeness," of "modernist ... distanciation" achieved by Tarashankar's creole (xxii). To achieve this effect and to echo the creole Bengali of the Kahars' direct speech, Conisbee Baer does not choose a single English-language dialect, but instead has "amalgamated" several (xxii). This "modernist" device is intended to position the Kahars for multidirectional global comparison, as we see in Conisbee Baer's rationale for switching around between different English dialects: "[T]o pick out a single creole or dialect ... would risk falsely fixing in the reader's mind a specific social group in Europe or America as an adequate equivalent. The Kahars are *a bit* like plantation slaves, as they are *a bit* like Italian rural bandits, *a bit* like Welsh provincial farmers" (xxii, original emphasis). Conisbee Baer's shifting creoles insist on the specificity of the Kahars while comparing them with a hodgepodge of English-speaking subalterns. Translating the Kahars' speech into many English creoles transmogrifies a specific group into the *concept* of localized subalternity. This concept has versions in many locales, each of which is particular, like each of the different English creoles that Conisbee Baer uses. But

See Wollaeger p. 17, and Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 6.

globality resides, apparently, in such groups' compilation into the concept of subaltern classes, via linguistic amalgamation. While Tarashankar's Bengali encodes local specificity that no English translation could equal, his novel becomes available as global modernism through Conisbee Baer's procedure of alteration, textual globalization, and even Anglicization, as well as literal linguistic translation. If the novel must become English (literally and otherwise) to be included, then is the project of global literary modernism – to develop a less Eurocentric modernist canon – self-defeating?

We can hope not. In other ways, Conisbee Baer's translation does help us decenter Euroamerica in conceptualizing the modernist novel, at the level of its language and form as well as its content and provenance. Consider Franco Moretti's tempting argument that "in cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system ... the modern novel first arises ... as a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials" ("Conjectures on World Literature" 58). As Susan Stanford Friedman asserts, this "center/periphery binary ... ignores the often long histories of aesthetic production among the colonized" by reducing the non-West to "local materials" (502). Likewise in food terms, it is a misleading shorthand to see the global South as a breadbasket producing raw materials for Northern consumption – or as just a market for Northern products. Bengal did not suffer a famine simply because its rice was exported, although this was a factor. The famine struck the rural poor rather than the province at large, because they were exploited by colonialism and the zamindari system, and also because rice was hoarded in Calcutta to keep the city safe as a strategic base for the war. Tarashankar's novel concretizes the global food system, zooming in on the inequalities *within* Bengal that are spurred by the colonial apparatus and exacerbated

by the rural-urban dynamics of global war. His gastronomic motifs confront global systems by representing macroeconomics on the intimate scale of desire, labor, and alimentation.

Not only does the content of *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* complicate our sense of shifting agro-food systems, the form challenges Moretti's assertion about the novel as a genre. With formal features such as polyvocalism and the long dash, Bengali novels sought to distinguish themselves as both modern and distinct from the Western novel (Conisbee Baer xix-xx). By preserving such features, Conisbee Baer's translation flips Moretti's formulation: he imports Bengali formal elements into the English-language novel and into global modernism. Meanwhile he introduces English-language "local materials" – such as the many dialects he uses for the Kahars' speech – into Bengali literature. Turning the tables in this way highlights both form and content as circulating in multiple directions, much like commodities in the food regime. Following the foods in Tarashankar's novel gives us a localized perspective on shifting food systems. But it also helps us decenter Euroamerica in conceptualizing the modernist novel, and decenter Anglophone texts in both postcolonial and modernist canons, letting a Bengali author's work nuance our understanding of global literature as well as global food.

With the exception of Tarashankar, the authors featured in my dissertation all write in English. Of them, perhaps only Amitav Ghosh (who is familiar with Bengali cultural history) is likely to know Tarashankar's work. The global environmental novel, as I have defined and explored it in this project, is an Anglophone genre (constituted as or in relation to postcolonial literature and postcolonial concerns). I can claim no direct lineage from Tarashankar to the other authors that I discuss. Yet I consider *The Tale of*

Hansuli Turn an important predecessor for the global environmental novel, for its prescient negotiation of concerns with scale, style, and agro-food systems. Resonant, too, is Tarashankar's self-reflexive preoccupation with the affordances and limits of novelistic representation for decentering Euroamerican universalism in how we think about globalization. Certainly Tarashankar makes the novel form a useful vehicle for flagging and exploring these concerns in his moment – as Mda, Ghosh, Ozeki, and Wicomb do in theirs, all helping us create canons that elucidate our most pressing social questions.

CODA

Water

You know that scene from the science fiction movies about the time humans ran out of vital resources to survive?

Daniel Weeks and Sindiso Mnisi Weeks, “The Countdown to Day Zero,” n.p.

We’ve had the land wars, the gold wars, the diamond wars, the oil wars and all that. What do you think the next war is going to be about? I know you’re going to say: food. Yes it will be about food, but there can’t be no food without water.

Fred Khumalo, “Water No Get Enemy,” 73

At its heart, this project has novels from the 2000s. Novels thinking about food, environment, and injustice across all sorts of spaces and scales. I have situated global environmental novels by Zakes Mda, Amitav Ghosh, Ruth Ozeki, and Zoë Wicomb in dialogue with social movements that share their concerns. The framework of “environmentalism of the poor,” my training in postcolonial studies and environmental humanities, and insights from food studies have shaped the nature of this project’s environmentalism: a concern about resource access and inequality. I have sandwiched global environmental novels between two texts that I call predecessors: Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), discussed in the introduction, and Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay’s *The Tale of Hansuli Turn* (1946-51), discussed in Chapter Five. These two novels, while occupied with food and postcoloniality, are at first glance less “environmental” than the contemporary works I have discussed – perhaps because our contemporary framing of environmental crisis is often far too narrow. The relevance of these earlier texts to ecology becomes clear, I hope, in how I frame the centrality of food systems to an anti-capitalist environmentalism. Articulating this point has helped me refuse a distinction between “food” and “environment.” This refusal opens up the

potential of environmental engagements with food to move us across representational and societal scales.

Having evoked two possible pasts for global environmental novels, I turn now to think about their futures. I locate these futures with what seems emergent in our present moment, as I am writing this, in 2018. And I would turn squarely towards one of this project's most legibly "environmental" concerns, a concern that has sometimes flitted around the margins, but that I now invite to take up space. That concern is global climate change. To push climate change a bit to the side – to make a different frame primary – has sometimes felt politically necessary, for all the ways in which discourses on climate change and the Anthropocene can sideline the social justice concerns that are central to my interest in the environment. But the discourse of climate change and that of social justice need to be synthesized, as they are in many contemporary cultural productions from the global South. Resource access, as a question of ecosocial justice, is central to how we must address climate change moving forward. In the space connecting climate and consumption, planet and alimentation, I will take a few pages to think about water.

Cape Town has been suffering an acute water crisis in 2018, following years of build-up. In the third year of a drought, officials have announced the proximity of "Day Zero": the day on which levels in Cape Town's reservoirs will drop too low to provide a potable supply (Maxmen). "Day Zero" does keep moving: it was April 12 of 2018, then May 11, then July 9. Then 2018 was announced safe, with Day Zero moved into another future. There is a certain logic to making the headlines scary, in the hopes of convincing citizens to obey a 50 liter per day water restriction (Maxmen). But there is no doubt that

this crisis is very real, that it mirrors concerns around earlier droughts, and that even if the timeframe shifts, it is not going away.

Nor is water crisis unique to South Africa. Instead, the situation motivates many commentators to re-situate Cape Town as a harbinger for the whole world's fate in an era of global warming: "as climate change intensifies extreme weather patterns worldwide, drought-prone cities no longer have the luxury of assuming that rainwater will replenish reservoirs as they once did" (Poppick). Concerns on wing include potential "anarchy": ordinary policing will be inadequate, as upset citizens will have to queue to collect rationed water (Weeks and Weeks). And while climate-related crises such as this may spell a kind of global chaos, their effects will be anything but uniform. As news commentators Daniel and Sindiso Mnisi Weeks put it, "Cape Town's upper echelons will weather the present crisis intact, aided by private boreholes and private security, [but] the effects of prolonged droughts on more vulnerable populations in the region are grave" (Weeks and Weeks). Here the water crisis follows the pattern of events attributed to climate change. Global warming's anthropogenic causes are uneven, tagged to the differentiated consumption patterns of various governments and citizens. Those with the largest carbon footprints tend to be the least burdened with climate change's consequences. This is true at the several scales of individual, community, nation, and hemisphere. The global South witnesses more suffering via drought, flood, sea level rise, and other extremes of water and weather. Within both South and North, poorer communities suffer more, especially as water goes the way of oil, land, and other valuables: it becomes privatized.

Like oil, diamonds, gold, land, and so many other resources, water will become a motivator for war. So much says the central character of Fred Khumalo's short fiction "Water No Get Enemy." With its frame narrative set in a restaurant in the Yeoville area of Johannesburg, Khumalo's 2015 South African short story centers on Guz-Magesh, a "Storyteller" with a capital S (73). Guz-Magesh reminds the other diners in the restaurant that most wars have been fought over resources, asking, "What do you think the next war is going to be about? I know you're going to say: food. Yes it will be about food, but there can't be no food without water" (73). I follow this provocation in pivoting from food to water. I do so because of the literal truth of Guz-Magesh's assertion that we have no food without water: it is clear that drought affects agriculture, that industrial agriculture requires enormous inputs of water, and that agriculture's vulnerability intensifies with climate change's effects on the water system. But I also would recognize the rhetorical value of water. Water is evocative and increasingly politicized, and not just in South Africa. This trend is one that cultural productions, such as Khumalo's story, are recognizing, engaging, and effecting.

Guz-Magesh berates his listeners for being profligate with water, noting that he too "used to be careless and presumptuous about water – until one day at the Liberation Camp in Angola" (73). Here and elsewhere, Khumalo's story risks becoming didactic. But this is mostly avoided by layers of fictional distancing: ironically called "our hero" by the story's primary narrator, who also notes his "generous abdominal protuberance," Guz-Magesh is ridiculous as well as wise (73). He is an environmentalist mouthpiece in some ways, but also something more complex. Guz-Magesh's ensuing story recalls his time with the Liberation Army, inviting the reader to understand Guz-Magesh's emergent

concern about water as a transmogrification of his resistance to apartheid.¹⁸⁷ Perhaps also transmogrified is pan-Africanism, with the names of black leaders from abroad cropping up, though incorrectly, in Guz-Magesh's jumbled recollections: "Fanon something or the other;" "MacGyver" for Marcus Garvey; Malcolm X and "Martin Luther, the King" (75-6). Guz-Magesh's flimsy grasp on the heroes of a black Atlantic, as well as his involvement in the anti-apartheid military, are swept into a larger narrative arc that begins and ends with water. This is not to suggest that Khumalo would scrub away concerns about racial injustice or other social inequalities. On the contrary, water and the politics of resource access become the new modality for those concerns. By the end of the story, Guz-Magesh and his pan-Africanist comrade, unfairly blamed for losing a weapon, are punished by their commanders with "water-fetching duties":

You are given a huge drum, a fifty-liter drum. You roll it down the steep slope, because the reservoir is located down there in the valley. ... At the reservoir, you fill it up. Then begins the tough part. You must carry the fifty-litre drum up the slope ... a distance of about three to four kilometres. So, like cattle we would struggle up the slope, with the commanders wielding sticks, whipping our backs. Wincing from the pain, you lose control of the drum. It rolls back down the slope. You run after it, catch up with it. The pushing, shoving process starts all over again. It takes hours. (80)

In Guz-Magesh's Sisyphean task, the need to procure water becomes a container for the physical and psychological control of the commanders. In this anecdote, water's scarcity does not yield an even effect, but becomes the modality of stratifying power, labor, and privilege. We should be concerned about water, Guz-Magesh's tale implies, not because climate change is universal, but because its effects are diversified, particular, and unjust.

¹⁸⁷ The armed wing of the resistance to apartheid, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), functioned as a guerilla military with camps first in Tanzania and Zambia and then later Angola and Mozambique. MK's camps became known for their brutal practices (Herman 8). This brutality is reflected in the tale of Khumalo's character Guz-Magesh.

And Khumalo's concern with water does not displace food, any more than it displaces questions of social power. Indeed, this brief story contains quite a lot of food, opening with a description of the changing restaurant culture in Yeoville. Ekhaya Jazz Restaurant, where the frame story takes place, is

the only remaining South African-owned business in the legendary Rokeby Street strip in Yeoville. As a result, when you sit on the verandah at Ekhaya you get blessed with a kaleidoscope of human movement and a babel of languages. Next door is Kin Malebo Restaurant, where you can see the Congolese in colourful clothes, doing their kwasa-kwasa. Cast your eyes across the road, you will be rewarded with the sight and noise of Nigerian brothers arguing at the top of their voices from the entrance to the Rotisserie. Next to this hangout, Zimbabweans are quaffing quart after quart of beer at the Londoner, or Times Square next to it. On the pavements, chaps from Mozambique are roasting chicken gizzards and peddling boiled eggs. Their women are selling mealies, chocolate eclairs and cigarettes. ... All these things combined are a boon to the armchair traveler who, without having left South Africa, can have a peek into the lives of "others." (72)

This passage may remind us of Mda's satirical descriptions of globalized foodie culture in *Hermanus* (Chapter One). But those restaurants were not African but Japanese, Indian, Chinese, French, and Italian, and they were too expensive for Mda's characters to do anything but look (*The Whale Caller* 113-14). In Khumalo's description of Yeoville's restaurants, Euroamerican pretension is certainly present, but so is a pan-African spread of casual eateries, street food, and human bodies. The passage evokes a differently classed food cosmopolitanism in which Eurocentrism is under erasure. As one food columnist writes of Johannesburg, "[A]way from the forgettable white tablecloth establishments of the northern suburbs, the inner-city streets are rammed with Somali and Eritrean cafes, piri-piri joints and Ghanaian restaurants, all serving a mix of spicy prawns, chicken and *baasto*" (Twigg). Yet Khumalo's depiction of food culture in Yeoville also borders on anti-African xenophobia (a widespread concern in contemporary South Africa). The primary narrator pins the disappearance of South African-owned businesses,

something he seems to lament, on a host of immigrants from elsewhere in Africa. The politics of food and water in this story have many layers.

To contrast the proliferation of food in Khumalo's story, I turn to another text that engages water, scarcity, and climate change through a very different set of techniques. No food at all appears in *Pumzi*, a 2010 short film by Kenyan filmmaker Wanuri Kahiu. Daily sustenance might well come in pills in the dystopia of this Afro-futurist piece, which takes place "35 years after World War III – 'The Water War'" (0:15). In this desolate future, everyone lives inside a sealed city that resembles a space station, tucked into a desert landscape that might or might not be radioactive and devoid of life. Water is insistently the film's optic, and water is scarce. We watch the main character Asha receive a few milliliters of water for her daily share, squeeze drops of sweat into her urine to repurify and save, share her supply with a pitiable bathroom attendant, and lose all the precious water in her plastic bottle when she is punished for insubordination. Asha, formerly employed in a museum, is sentenced to physical labor on one of the exercise machines populating the colony's hallways. This city runs on "kinetic energy, zero percent pollution, one-hundred percent self-sustainable," as a piped-in voice of propaganda tells us and Asha over and over (1:53, 10:12). Thirsty laborers on treadmills and rowing machines now occupy the screen, linking the rhetoric of sustainability and the circumstances of ecological collapse into the social divisions of differentiated and forced labor. As their bodies literally produce energy for other people's consumption, the film underlines the costs of ecological collapse for some but not all humans, even as it recalls the exploited labor of black and brown bodies to build the capitalist empires that provoked a climate crisis in the first place.

Asha, however, escapes. After receiving a mysterious package which contains unusually moist soil, Asha plants the bulb of the Maitu tree, which starts to grow. Asha believes, contrary to doctrine, that there must be plant life or viable soil outside the city, and exits through the trash chute with her seedling. She then wanders through the desert until she sees a mirage of a living tree, an image she has previously dreamed. She runs up to the tree but finds it dead. Under its stump, she plants her bulb, trickling onto it her last few drops of water and, lying down, tries to shade the plant under her arm. The film ends with Asha's arm collapsing, presumably into death, and with a spiraling zoom-out shot of the parched landscape. The shot gradually reveals green at its edges, and green blossoms up through Asha's body. The film's last sound is water – the start of a thunderstorm. The green life could be radioactive, could be another mirage, could be hopeful. In this ambiguous piece, Kahiú thinks through environmental destruction and possible futures, via the optic of water and the conventions of Afro-futurist science fiction.

And why science fiction? If we take our signal from the news coverage of South Africa's water crisis, climate change is shrinking the gap between science fiction and reality. So Weeks and Weeks' account: "You know that scene from the science fiction movies about the time humans ran out of vital resources to survive? ... It's a depressing scene largely unimaginable in real life – until now? Enter Cape Town, South Africa, a city of four million people ... with a water crisis the likes of which no major city has seen before." For these journalists, "science fiction" becomes a name to describe not an allegorical genre, but a reality: "our brave new 'science fiction' world," in which "old probabilities no longer apply," rains are impossible to predict because "previous forecasting models have proved useless in the era of climate change," and droughts like

that of Cape Town may become the new normal (Weeks and Weeks). I am interested in Weeks and Weeks' invocation of changing *probability* in the era of climate change, in part because this angle matters to Amitav Ghosh in *The Great Derangement* (discussed in Chapter Two). Ghosh, too, suggests that we need to recalibrate our sense of the probable to grasp the realities of climate change. But he feels that science fiction cannot answer the here and now, because science fiction is, by Ghosh's definition, not concerned with the probable. To address climate change events in science fiction, or in surrealistic or magical realist fiction, is, for Ghosh, to cast these events "as magical or surreal," which "rob[s] them of precisely the quality that makes them so urgently compelling – which is to say that they are actually happening on this earth, at this time" (27). This earth, at this time, is for Ghosh the purview of "serious fiction," a primarily realist genre preoccupied and associated with the probable (though punctuated by improbable events). And serious fiction is the genre that Ghosh worries will not represent climate change, because extreme climate events apparently scan as improbable, as fantastical, even if they are more and more real. To represent climate change, Ghosh insists, "is in fact to court eviction from the mansion in which serious fiction has long been in residence; it is to risk banishment to ... those generic outhouses that were once known by names such as 'the Gothic,' 'the romance,' or 'the melodrama,' and have now come to be called 'fantasy,' 'horror,' and 'science fiction'" (24). For Ghosh, the real of climate change does not go well in realism (or, it seems, in high modernism), immediately pushing a fiction beyond the bounds of the "serious." But what if we instead saw changes to the "probable" – a category wildly out of joint in this climatic and historical moment – as capacitating a convergence

between what has been fantastical and what is real, a convergence that could open literary possibilities rather than close them down?

Pace Ghosh, whose concerns I share and resituate, I have discussed here two texts – one science fiction short film, one realist short story – with remarkably similar concerns: alimentation and lifeways, war, postcoloniality, Afrocentrism, power, militarized societies, unequal privilege, and resource scarcity managed by using labor as punishment. These pieces also share the optic of water, used to condense these concerns – even as their generic conventions, realist versus science fiction, are quite different. And so I want to suggest the emergence of a moment in which divides among science fiction, realism, and modernism soften: a moment in which their concerns and even their optics converge. Water, food, and other resource-based rubrics, as well as genre and form, could become important ways of organizing artistic and literary information. We need all of our intellectual and creative resources – artistic, humanist, scientific – to think through a planetary crisis toward anything other than totalitarianism. Cultural texts with a range of modes of expression will continue to matter in making decentered perspectives heard.

IMAGES

Image 1: Cover from Madhur Jaffrey, *A Taste of India*. Atheneum, 1986.

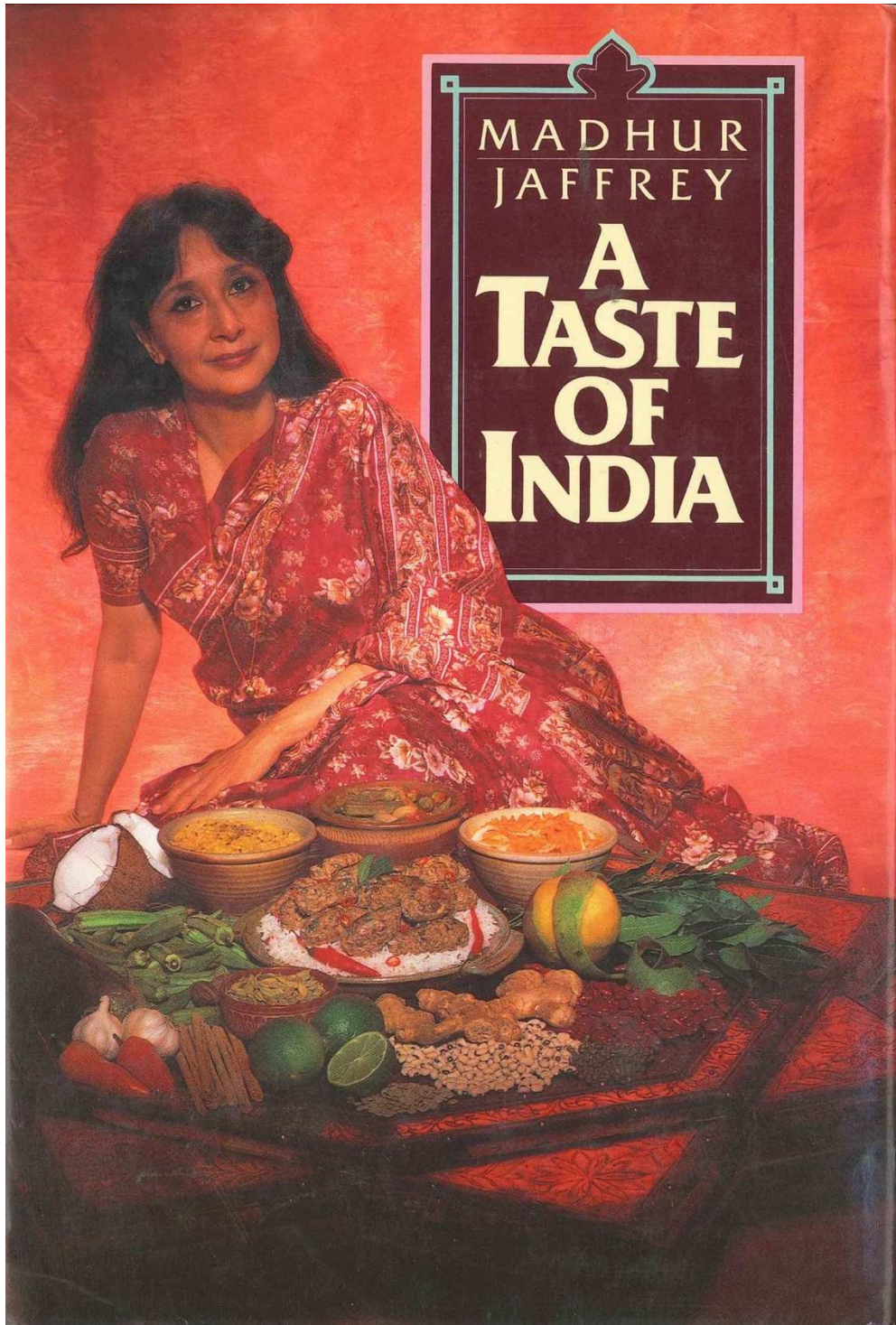


Image 2: Cover from *The New Yorker*. 23 June 1997.

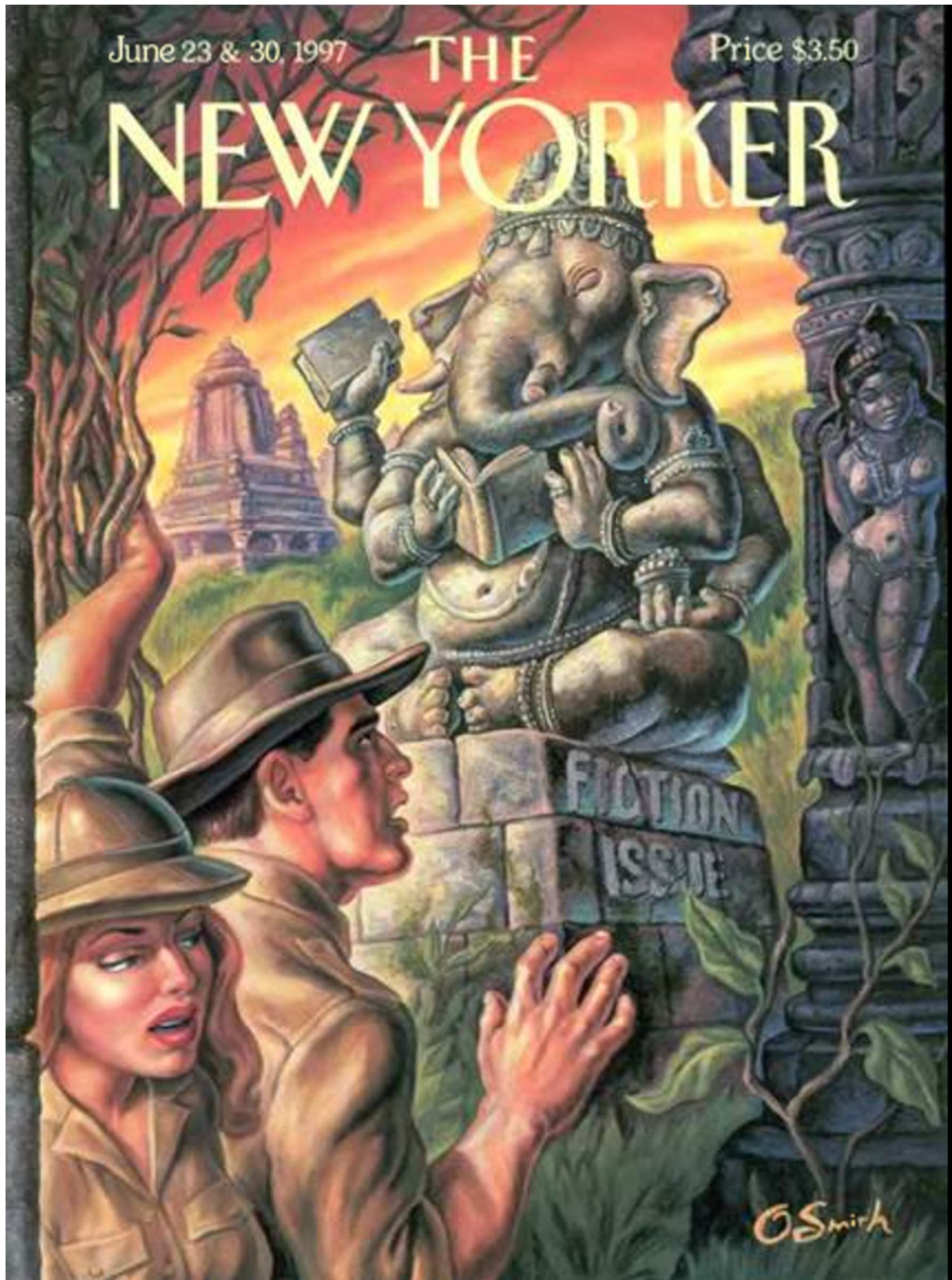


Image 3: "Group Shot." *The New Yorker*. 23 June 1997.

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dian National Army people as a bunch of traitors and ruffians. They wanted to link these men with atrocities and brutalities of the kind that were practiced by the Japanese. They thought the Indian public would turn against the Indian National Army if they could prove that it had behaved in a cruel and unforgivable manner with fellow-Indians. Since all these three had ordered executions, they were chosen for the trial.

In their last hours, all three had been involved in military executions. Prem Sahgal had convened a hasty court-martial after deserters had led British troops back to their base, and Dhillon was given the charge of carrying out the order. Shah Nawaz, too, had passed a sentence of execution on a soldier who tried to instigate desertions. These sentences were based on provisions of the Indian National Army's legal code, which was modelled on the British Army's. The British government did not, of course, recognize the validity of the laws under which the executions had been carried out. The charges of murder and abetment against the three defendants thus became a test of the legality of the Indian National Army itself.

The government's case was argued by the Advocate General of India, Sir Naushirwan Engineer, a distinguished Parsi barrister. From the start, his argument was that the Indian National Army was indeed a rebel army, which had deliberately taken up arms against the British Empire in order to "wage war against the King." To prove this, he called a series of witnesses to testify to the Indian National Army's financial and administrative structure, its legal system, and so on. Whatever its legal strengths, his strategy was a political disaster. The more thoroughly Sir Naushirwan established his case, the more he added to the Indian National Army's popularity and appeal. Until

GROUP SHOT

A gathering of India's leading novelists. Bottom row: Vikram Chandra, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, and Anita Desai. Top row: Amit Chaudhuri, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Yash, Vikram Seth, Anisur Ghosh, and Ramesh Gupte (who is Sri Lankan).

Photograph by Max Vadukul, London, May 30, 1997.



Image 4. "Earth Viewed by Apollo 8." Taken in 1968. *NASA*. 27 Nov 2008.

earthobservatory.nasa.gov/IOTD/view.php?id=36019



Image 5. “Blue Marble – Image of the Earth from Apollo 17.” Taken in 1972. *NASA*. 4
Aug 2017. www.nasa.gov/content/blue-marble-image-of-the-earth-from-apollo-17



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