Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of English Language and Literature

English Language and Literature Programme

STRUGGLES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN JOHN BURNSIDE'S *LIVING NOWHERE*, CHRISTIE WATSON'S *TINY SUNBIRDS FAR AWAY*, AND MARCEL THEROUX'S *FAR NORTH*

Selen AKTARAN

Ph.D. Dissertation

Ankara, 2024

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KABUL VE ONAY

Selen AKTARAN tarafından hazırlanan "Struggles for Environmental Justice in John Burnside's *Living Nowhere*, Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, and Marcel Theroux's *Far North*" başlıklı bu çalışma, 07.06.2024 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından Doktora Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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Selen AKTARAN

To the loving memory of my aunt who always believed in me and inspired me with her strength

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ABSTRACT

AKTARAN, Selen. *Struggles for Environmental Justice in John Burnside's Living Nowhere, Christie Watson's Tiny Sunbirds Far Away, and Marcel Theroux's Far North*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Ankara, 2024.

This dissertation examines the literary representations of environmental justice struggles in John Burnside's *Living Nowhere* (2003), Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* (2011), and Marcel Theroux's *Far North* (2009) by reflecting particularly on the entwined issues of class, race, and gender. The importance of these novels resides not only in their portrayal of environmentally damaged ecologies but also in their fusion of these ecologies with social and ideological toxicities, thereby creating what this dissertation terms "sociotoxic ecologies." Hence, against the backdrop of environmental justice theories, this study claims that nature, as depicted in the selected novels, is a "sociotoxic" terrain, that is an unjust terrain of social contamination and ecological degradation, disrupted by even relations of power and oppressive ideologies. The first chapter of the dissertation delves into the theoretical framework of environmental justice, alongside an exploration of the concept of sociotoxic ecologies. The second chapter examines Burnside's *Living Nowhere*, questioning the interrelated and complex problems of industrial capitalism, contaminated workplaces, and class discrimination. Burnside depicts a sociotoxic ecology where working-class people struggle with industrial pollution that leads to health issues and mental devastation. The third chapter analyses Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, focusing on the ecological and social violence caused by the oil business. Watson illustrates a sociotoxic ecology where oil pollution and unjust (neo)colonial relations involve the Niger Delta communities in a fierce battle against multinational companies. The fourth chapter explores Theroux's *Far North*, scrutinising the inequalities and individual struggle for survival in a post-apocalyptic world ravaged by climate change. Theroux presents a dystopian future where gender oppression, slavery, and radioactive contamination have merged to create a toxic social and ecological landscape. Taken together, all three novels provide thought-provoking insights on how environmental justice and societal inequality intersect with ecological challenges and demonstrate that environmental justice is far from being achieved unless social equity is reached.

Keywords: environmental justice, sociotoxic ecologies, social inequalities, environmental pollution, climate crisis

ÖZET

AKTARAN, Selen. *John Burnside'ın Living Nowhere, Christie Watson'ın Tiny Sunbirds Far Away ve Marcel Theroux'un Far North Romanlarında Çevresel Adalet Mücadeleleri*. Doktora Tezi, Ankara, 2024.

Bu tez, John Burnside'ın *Living Nowhere* (2003), Christie Watson'ın *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* (2011) ve Marcel Theroux'nun *Far North* (2009) eserlerinde temsil edilen çevre adaleti mücadelelerini, özellikle sınıf, ırk ve toplumsal cinsiyet gibi iç içe geçmiş konulara odaklanarak inceler. Bu romanların önemi yalnızca çevresel olarak zarar görmüş ekolojileri tasvir etmelerinde değil, aynı zamanda bu ekolojileri sosyal ve ideolojik kirlilikle birleştirmelerinde ve böylece bu tezin "sosyotoksik ekolojiler" olarak adlandırdığı ekolojik ortamları yaratmalarında yatmaktadır. Dolayısıyla bu çalışma, çevre adaleti teorileri doğrultusunda, incelenen romanlarda tasvir edildiği şekliyle doğanın, iktidar ilişkileri ve baskıcı ideolojiler tarafından yıpratılan, adaletsiz "sosyotoksik" bir alan olduğunu iddia eder. Tezin ilk bölümü, çevre adaletinin genişleyen teorik kapsamını ele alarak sosyotoksik ekolojiler terimini ayrıntılı olarak açıklar. İkinci bölüm, Burnside'ın *Living Nowhere* eserini inceleyerek endüstriyel kapitalizm, kirli sanayi tesisleri ve sınıf ayrımcılığı arasındaki ilişkileri sorgular. Burnside, bu eserde, işçi sınıfının endüstriyel kirliliğe karşı mücadele ettiği, sağlık sorunlarına ve zihinsel çöküntüye yol açan sosyotoksik bir ekolojiyi tasvir eder. Üçüncü bölüm, Watson'ın *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* eserini analiz ederek, petrol endüstrisinin neden olduğu ekolojik ve sosyal şiddete odaklanır. Watson, petrol kirliliği ve adaletsiz (neo)kolonyal ilişkilerin, Nijer Deltası topluluklarını çok uluslu şirketlere karşı şiddetli mücadeleye sürüklediği sosyotoksik ekolojiyi gözler önüne serer. Dördüncü bölüm, Theroux'un *Far North* eserini irdeleyerek, iklim değişikliğinin harap ettiği post-apokaliptik bir dünyada eşitsizlikleri ve bireysel hayatta kalma mücadelesini mercek altına alır. Theroux, cinsiyet baskısı, kölelik ve radyoaktif kirliliğin birleşerek zehirli sosyal ve ekolojik çevre oluşturduğu distopik bir gelecek resmeder. Bütün olarak ele alındığında, her üç roman da çevre adaleti ve toplumsal eşitsizliğin ekolojik zorluklarla nasıl kesiştiğine dair düşündürücü içgörüler sunar ve sosyal eşitlik sağlanmadıkça çevre adaletinin de elde edilemeyeceğini gösterir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: çevre adaleti, sosyotoksik ekolojiler, sosyal eşitsizlikler, çevre kirliliği, iklim krizi

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INTRODUCTION

There will be no nature without justice. Nature and justice, contested discursive objects embodied in the material world, will become extinct or survive together
—Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters"

In conventional Western thought, "environment" and "society" have long been conceptualised as dichotomous and antagonistic towards each other. Dualistic modes of thinking that have separated the mind from the body and human from nonhuman have also separated the societal from the environmental and placed nature outside the boundaries of culture. Environmental justice, as a scholarly field and an activist movement, purports to dismantle this deeply embedded hierarchical division, illuminating the interrelations between environmental issues and social justice concerns. In general terms, scholars and activists of environmental justice "call attention to the ways that disparate distribution of wealth and power often leads to correlative social upheaval and the unequal distribution of environmental degradation and/or toxicity" (Adamson et al. 5). They maintain the view that global ecological crises from climate change to resource depletion do not affect all communities equally. It is the poor and the marginalised who bear, in an unfair way, the burden of these problems, whereas the economically and politically powerful manipulate resources to ensure their own environmental welfare. Reconsidered in this perspective, environmental justice unveils the political and ethical questions of who causes ecological destruction and who suffers from it disproportionately. In so doing, it expands the notion of "justice" to show how environmental problems are inextricably linked with social injustices.

Unfortunately, existing scholarship on environmental justice has drawn mainly on sociology and environmental theories, often neglecting the significance of cultural imagination and the role of literature in understanding the connections between ecological, economic, and social devastation. In their introduction to *The Environmental Justice Reader*, Joni Adamson, Rachel Stein, and Mei Mei Evans articulate this problem, arguing for "an expansion of the canon of environmental literature by focusing on texts that incorporate racial, ethnic, and sexual differences, and that emphasize interconnections between social oppressions and environmental issues" (9). The same

concern is also expressed by Julie Sze who suggests that "[e]nvironmental justice can be read and understood not only through the narrow grind of public policy, but through the contours of fantasy, literature, and imagination as well . . . Literature offers a significant tool to the emerging field of environmental justice studies – a tool that opens up critical avenues of understanding" ("From Environmental Justice Literature" 173). Storying environmental justice struggles is as significant to the eco-political agenda as developing public policies because stories can give voice to the experiences of marginalised communities silenced by hegemonic culture and pave the way for a broader social change that will enhance environmental problem-solving processes. Therefore, this dissertation examines the literary representations of environmental justice struggles in John Burnside's *Living Nowhere* (2003), Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* (2011), and Marcel Theroux's *Far North* (2009) by reflecting particularly on the entwined issues of class, race, and gender. In so doing, it aims to contribute to the growing need to analyse the interconnections between social and environmental inequalities in fictional texts.

The importance of the selected novels resides not only in their depictions of environmentally degraded landscapes but also in their fusion of these landscapes with social and ideological toxicities, thereby creating a new conceptualisation that I have termed sociotoxic ecologies. Proceeding from the premise that "social culture as an environment . . . can be toxic in its expression of sexism, racism, classism, and other oppressions" (Gaard, "Feminism and Environmental Justice" 82), this dissertation proposes the phrase "sociotoxic ecologies" in the framework of environmental justice studies to discuss the inseparability of social contamination from ecological contamination and degradation. To give a broad definition, sociotoxic ecologies refer to unjust, othered, or marginalised ecologies that are generated by social and environmental inequalities. They emerge through the enmeshment of material and discursive practices. Thus, understanding sociotoxic ecologies entails an intersectional mode of analysis that takes into account "the importance of actual ecosystems [and natural processes] . . . while also acknowledging that these processes and systems are mediated by social history [and injustices]" (Caminero-Santangelo 228). Sociotoxic ecologies acknowledge the inextricable link between the social and ecological realms, emphasising that environmental problems cannot be isolated from social injustice. These ecologies

highlight areas where pollution, exploitation, and degradation of the environment are accompanied by social oppression and discrimination.

The novels chosen for analysis here illustrate, in a different time and a different geographic location, a different aspect of sociotoxic ecologies, including the devastating effects of chemical pollution in working-class environments, the colonial underpinnings of oil extraction and its ecological violence in the Niger Delta, and the gendered dimension of a climate change catastrophe. They demonstrate how oppressive systems in the form of racism, classism, and sexism can operate as social toxins and infiltrate natural environments, sickening ecologies and creating unequal ecological conditions of living. Hence, against the backdrop of environmental justice theories, this study claims that nature[i], as depicted in the selected novels, is a "sociotoxic" terrain contaminated and disrupted by uneven relations of power and social oppressions. In so doing, it hopes to offer a new hermeneutical framework that interprets nature as a hybrid domain of social, material, and moral struggle.

All three novels examined in this dissertation are politically engaged texts that critique the differential impacts of environmental problems across various social groups, delineating whose environment is degraded and whose is preserved. Therefore, thematic concerns are foregrounded over aesthetic features in these works. As Sze also states, "Literature can facilitate a politics of seeing that also expands cultural recognition by foregrounding the lives and experiences of those hardest hit by ecological justice and those with the least responsibility for the [environmental] problems" ("Environmental Justice Anthropocene Narratives" 103-04). The stories of eco-justice presented in the selected novels aim to promote such a politics of seeing and exposing the unequal environmental burdens borne by marginalised communities, particularly those who contribute the least to environmental degradation but suffer the most from its effects. They demonstrate the diverse and complex costs of environmental destruction for these communities while emphasising that the causes of environmental degradation are rooted

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[i] It should be noted that the term "nature" as used in this dissertation does not adhere to a preservationist perspective. Rather, in this context, "nature" encompasses all environments, such as urban areas impacted by pollution, landscapes devastated by ecological disasters, industrial sites contaminated by toxic substances, and regions severely affected by climate change.

in social inequities. Hence, by elaborating on the term "sociotoxic ecologies," this dissertation will explore how these novels question the social implications of environmental degradation and the dynamic relationship between nature and power.

The entire dissertation is structured into four chapters. The first chapter delves into the theoretical framework of environmental justice, alongside an exploration of the concept of sociotoxic ecologies. The second chapter examines Burnside's *Living Nowhere*, calling into question the interrelated problems of industrial capitalism, polluted workplaces, and class discrimination. Centring on the lives of two immigrant working-class families in the 1970s, the novel "reveals a form of class-bound environmental degradation" (Macdonald, "Green Links" 231), depicting how the capitalist system can damage irreversibly the environments and lives of working-class people in the steel town of Corby. The hazards of the factory, labour exploitation, and chemical poisoning are imprinted on the air, water, and soil of the town of Corby, which makes it a sociotoxic landscape. And the materialising effects of this sociotoxic landscape are particularly projected on the workers' bodies. The dust and filth of the factory penetrate their lungs and throats, affecting their bodily health. The novel, in this respect, raises significant questions about what Stacy Alaimo refers to as "trans-corporeal maps of transits" ("Trans-Corporeal Feminisms" 238) among uneven toxic landscapes, biological bodies, and economic/social injustices affecting working-class people. Trans-corporeality, as defined by Alaimo, highlights the interconnectedness between human bodies and the material world, stressing that bodies are not isolated from their surroundings but are instead enmeshed in a dynamic and reciprocal relationship with the environment. Within this framework, this chapter, by benefitting from Stacy Alaimo's concept of "trans-corporeality," discusses the corporeal and environmental impacts of sociotoxic ecologies on working-class people. It also reflects on the false dualistic thinking that forces working-class people to accept the dichotomous choice between unemployment or risky jobs in hazardous facilities. On the one hand, the steel plant, which is referred to as the Works, provides the inhabitants of Corby with opportunities for labour. On the other hand, the traces of carbon, ammonia, ore, and iron released by this plant pollute their locale and bodies. The novel exposes how this false dualistic thinking reinforced by the industrial capitalist system further causes the exploitation of working-class people, even imperilling their mental health. Some

become violent and bad-tempered because of social and environmental oppression to which they are subject. Some cannot identify with their community and search for alternate homes. As a result, the sociotoxic environment in which they live and work becomes a cause of mental devastation, too.

Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, which the third chapter of this study analyses, illustrates a sociotoxic ecology where oil pollution, corporate globalisation, and unjust (neo)colonial practices are amalgamated. Set in the present, the novel revolves around the struggles of the local communities of the Niger Delta against multinational extractive industries. Oil pollution, as demonstrated in the novel, is not a simple toxic phenomenon that occurs rapidly; rather, it has been produced by a long history of colonial oppression and imperialistic exploitation. Hence, deploying Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence," this chapter questions the ways in which unjust (neo)colonial forces have operated over time to produce the sociotoxic environment that has been endangering the lives of the people of the Delta. Nixon develops the term "slow violence" to describe the unseen and delayed destruction resulting from environmental degradation. Watson's novel vividly demonstrates how the oil pollution caused by the Western Oil Company evolves into slow violence, impacting both the Delta's ecosystem and its local communities in a detrimental way. While the Western Oil company prospers with enormous economic wealth, the poor Niger Delta communities must cope with the eco-oppression of the oil industry. By contaminating rivers with petroleum spills and releasing poisonous gases everywhere, the Western Oil Company exploits the land of these communities and violates their right to live in a healthy environment. No crops grow anymore in their soil, and they are forced to pay money for clean water. Watson also portrays in a detailed way how the devastating costs of oil pollution slowly invade family ties, harming parent-child relationships and breeding youthful violence. The sociotoxic environment presented in the novel, then, turns out to be a source of not only ecological but also domestic anguish.

The fourth chapter scrutinises Theroux's *Far North*, which takes place in a post-apocalyptic society in the future. Civilisations crash down, and the world sinks into total chaos because of an unspecified climate-change catastrophe. The impacts of such an eco-catastrophe give rise to the formation of a new sociotoxic ecology where gender

disparities, slavery, and radioactive contamination all coalesce in inextricable ways. With slave trading emerging as an entrepreneurial business, the impoverished and the less privileged people are detained in slave camps to be sent to a highly radioactive zone to collect precious objects for traders who still maintain contact with the West and live in fairly good conditions. Viewed in such a light, the sociotoxic ecology pictured in this novel is rooted in Val Plumwood's conceptualisation of the "master identity," which "is expressed most strongly in the dominant conception of reason and gives rise to a dualised structure of otherness and negation" (*Feminism* 42). In general terms, Plumwood's idea of the "master identity" refers to a cultural mindset that elevates rationality and dominance, creating a hierarchy that devalues and subjugates the "other," whether it be nature, women, or marginalised groups. Theroux's novel compels a critical questioning of this cultural identity, revealing how a climate-fuelled disaster is intimately tied to a toxic rationalist mindset and social injustices. Women are especially oppressed in the battle of survival as in the case of the central character, Makepeace. The environmentally and socially poisonous landscape in which she lives becomes a source of traumatic experience for her resulting in her rape and slavery. In depicting her story, Theroux highlights both her vulnerability and resilience. Using Plumwood's concept of the "master identity," this chapter interrogates the imbrication of sexual and ecological violence as well as the problems of climate change and radioactive contamination in generating the "sociotoxic ecology" portrayed in the novel.

To conclude, set in distinct time zones and locations, the novels under analysis emphasise the significance of rigorous critical thinking on the intertwined politics of race, class, and gender in conceiving environmental crises. The sociotoxic ecologies presented in these novels demonstrate that visions of environmentally sound and socially just societies are far from being achieved unless an egalitarian environmental ethics is established, one that replaces hegemonic power structures with social diversity and seeks ecological integrity without any form of discrimination or domination.

CHAPTER I
THEORETICAL CONTOURS OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

As environmental justice theories provide the analytical framework for the examination of the selected novels, the first section of this chapter attempts to shed light on the origins of environmental justice and explores its growing influence in the Humanities. The second section focuses on the expansion of the field and the new theoretical directions it has taken, while the last section explains the term "sociotoxic ecologies" in further depth.

1.1. ORIGINS OF ENVINRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Environmental justice developed out of the convergence of various activist movements, including civil rights activism, anti-toxic movements, anti-nuclear movements, indigenous people's movements, and human rights movements. However, to be more specific, the pivotal event that paved the way for the emergence of environmental justice was the publication of "Toxic Waste and Race Report" by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice (UCC-CRJ) in 1987. The report, based on the findings of a national study, demonstrated that African American and Latino communities in the USA suffered disproportionately from ecologically related diseases since a high percentage of unwanted toxic waste sites were often located in their neighbourhoods. This event fostered a new ecological awareness, drawing attention to the problem of "environmental racism," a term coined by Dr Benjamin Chavis to refer to the uneven exposure of racial minorities to environmental hazards. In Chavis's words,

> environmental racism is the racial discrimination in environmental policy-making and laws and the unequal enforcement of the environmental laws and regulations. It is the deliberate targeting of people of color communities for toxic waste facilities and the official sanctioning of life-threatening poisons and pollutants in people-of-color communities. (6)

With this coinage, environmental racism not only found a formal definition but also gained widespread recognition politically. It was now officially acknowledged that issues of race and environment were not separate but mutually defining and necessary to be addressed together.

Following the publication of the UCC-CRJ report, another important event that sparked the growth of environmental justice was the First National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit, which was held in Washington, DC, in 1991. The summit brought together people of colour from diverse countries to protest discriminatory environmental practices targeting impoverished societies and to call for environmental sustainability on a global scale. As a result of a strong coalition, delegates of the summit drafted a charter that laid forth the seventeen "Principles of Environmental Justice." "From the outset," Giovanna Di Chiro notes, "EJ principles embraced an analysis of interconnectedness and strove to dismantle the oppressive binary systems that construct divisions between 'local and global,' 'economic and ecological,' 'human and environmental'" (103). Delegates believed that commitment to the notion of interconnectedness would lead to the development of nonhierarchical, ethically fair, and environmentally sound livelihoods for all species. The impetus behind EJ Leadership Summit influenced other ecoactivist circles, and soon after this event, various organisations began to be established all around the world to build alliances against the unequal distribution of environmental hazards, such as EJ Networking Forum (South Africa), The Center for Environment Equity (the USA), Environmental Justice Foundation (the UK), and Nazdeek (Fund for Global Human Rights in India). All these organisations made one point clear: "it is impossible to separate defence of people from defence of the planet, human rights from ecological survival, justice from sustainability" (Coupe 5).

Activist voices of environmental justice had strong resonances in academia as well, and by the mid-1990s, environmental justice had already started to attract increased attention in many academic disciplines, including social sciences and environmental sciences. The African-American sociologist Robert D. Bullard is recognised as the key scholar to theorise environmental justice. He set out the academic basis of the field in his seminal works *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (1990) and *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots* (1993). Bullard mainly investigated the role of race in the allocation of environmental hazards, citing an abundance of evidence from the communities of colour and the communities of the poor

in the USA. In an interview he gave to *Earth First! The Journal of Ecological Resistance*, he defines environmental justice as such:

> Environmental justice movement has basically redefined what [mainstream] environmentalism is all about. It basically says that environment is everything: where we live, work, play, go to school, as well as the physical and the natural world. And so we cannot separate the physical environment from the cultural environment . . .What the environmental justice movement is about is trying to address all of inequities that result from human settlement, industrial facility siting, and industrial development. It's more of a concept trying to address power imbalances, lack of political enfranchisement, and to redirect resources so that we can create healthy, liveable and sustainable types of models. (5)

Seen in this light, thinking through environmental justice is thinking through a complex web of power relations, oppressive hierarchies, and economic forces that allow for the release of harmful pollutants into the environment. As opposed to mainstream environmentalism which is dominated by white, educated, middle-class activists and concerned primarily with the preservation of wildlands/bioregional places (e.g. the Amazon rainforest), environmental justice is concerned with the ecological conflicts that disadvantaged/poor/marginalised communities confront and emphasises that these conflicts should be examined from the perspective of social justice. Therefore, its commitment to social justice serves as the identifying feature of the field and distinguishes it from mainstream environmentalism which tends to favour "the natural" over "the cultural" due to its preservationist stance.[ii]

Although environmental justice as a scholarly field is rooted primarily in sociology, it has also "begun to achieve a more forceful presence within the greening of the humanities" since the 2000s (Nixon, *Slow Violence* 255). *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, Pedagogy* (2000), co-edited by Adamson, Evans, and Stein, formed the major tenets of environmental justice in cultural and literary studies. What made this work especially significant is that it drew attention to the influence of environmental justice in

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[ii] For the environmental justice movement's critique of mainstream environmentalism, see Giovanna Di Chiro's article "Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice." The major criticism targeted against mainstream environmentalism is that it is elitist and ignores toxic/contaminated landscapes by valuing Edenic notions of nature untouched by humans. It also remains indifferent to the social dimension of environmental problems and tends to disregard the role of power inequalities in the distribution of ecological hazards. The environmental justice movement has challenged this preservationist framework of mainstream environmentalism and reoriented the focus towards a socially and politically driven analysis, showing how power inequalities also reinforce environmental inequalities.

the field of ecocriticism and initiated, in Lawrence Buell's terms, "the challenge of ecojustice revisionism" (112) to the wilderness-centred approach of first-wave ecocriticism, which advocated a nostalgic return to "pristine" nature. Because of its exclusive concentration on traditional nature writing and the concept of wilderness, first-wave ecocriticism mainly grappled with the issues of regionalism and pastoralism, assessing "the effects of culture upon nature, with a view towards celebrating nature, berating despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action" (Howarth 69). Therefore, it was criticised heavily for being "culturally oblivious" (Roos and Hunt 4) and failing to attend to the issues of gender, class, race, and sexuality in the examination of environmental problems.

Recognising the limitations of the wilderness-oriented analysis, environmental justice challenged ecocriticism to enlarge its boundaries and progress towards a more socially/politically engaged green paradigm. This revisionist stance of environmental justice triggered the emergence of a new turn in ecocriticism, or as Buell terms it, "second-wave" of ecocriticism. Unlike first-wave ecocriticism which privileged natural environments over built ones, second-wave ecocriticism, by benefitting from the insights of environmental justice, revised its definition of "environment" to include urban/metropolitan/contaminated/degraded places and became more conscious of how issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality interact in these places. In this vein, embracing the insights of environmental justice diversified the ecocritical field and pushed it in new engaging directions that regard "the cultural" and "the environmental" as co-constitutive spheres.[iii]

[iii] To get further information about the first and second-waves of ecocriticism, see Lawrence Buell's book *The Future of Environmental Criticism*. In contrast to first-wave ecocriticism which engages itself with the representation of nature in non-fiction nature writing such as Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and John Muir, second-wave ecocriticism places emphasis on the social, political, and economic roots of environmental problems and examines how these issues are represented in literary texts. It incorporates insights not only from environmental justice but also from ecofeminism, postcolonial ecocriticism, and urban ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism has now developed into a third wave, which is global in scope and "explores all facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint" (Adamson and Slovic 7). Third-wave ecocritical studies adopts a multiplicity of approaches including but not limited to new materialisms, material feminisms, queer ecologies, postcolonial ecologies, and critical posthumanisms. Environmental justice studies continue to nourish and to be nourished by third-wave ecocritical approaches.

The alliances between environmental justice and ecocriticism not only enriched both fields but also yielded new coinages. T.V. Reed developed the term "environmental justice ecocriticism" to forge "connections between environmental concerns and social justice in the context of ecocriticism" ("Toward an Environmental Justice" 145). Highlighting the problematic aspects of wilderness-based ecocriticism, Reed claims that "to isolate the environment from its necessary interrelation with society and culture has severely limited the appeal of environmental thought, to the detriment of both the natural and social worlds" ("Toward an Environmental Justice" 158). Therefore, in coining the term "environmental justice ecocriticism," he attempts to bridge the gap between the two fields and highlights the need for a conjoined approach that views sociocultural issues as integral to ecocritical analyses. To further his argument, Reed compiles a list of critical questions that an environmental justice ecocritic could ask. Some of these include:

> How can literature and criticism further efforts of the environmental justice movement to bring attention to the ways in which environmental degradation and hazards equally affect poor people and people of colour? How has racism domestically and internationally enabled greater environmental responsibility? How can issues like toxic waste, incinerators, lead poisoning, uranium mining and tailings, and other environmental health issues, be brought forth more fully in literature and criticism? How can issues of worker safety and environmental safety be brought together such that the history of labor movements and environmental movements can be seen as positively connected, not antagonistic? How can ecocriticism encourage justice and sustainable development in the so-called Third World? ("Toward an Environmental Justice" 149)

The questions raised by Reed have brought to the fore the significance of placing a greater emphasis on environmental justice concerns in literature and literary/cultural criticism. Because the global ecological crisis is the result of ongoing discursive practices, an environmental justice ecocritic's primary role should be to explore both the discursive and material dimensions of the problem. More importantly, as the fight for food, clean water, and energy resources intensifies in tandem with the global ecological crisis, environmental justice ecocritics should strive towards creating a more inclusive platform that addresses and repairs multiple inequalities.

1.2. NEW DIRECTIONS IN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Although environmental justice seeks to explore the links between social and environmental ills, one of its shortcomings is that it has become synonymous with

environmental racism due to its initial focus on the racist implications of environmental hazards threatening communities of colour in the USA. As the field has evolved and matured, it has become apparent that centring solely on environmental racism obscures the acknowledgement of other power structures and social hierarchies in the production of environmental degradation. For example, David Pellow and Robert Brulle have claimed that "scholars cannot understand . . . environmental injustices through a singularly-focused framework that emphasizes one form of inequality to the exclusion of others" (298). By the same token, David Schlosberg has highlighted the necessity for a broader and pluralist mode of analysis, arguing that insisting on one type of injustice "limits the diversity of stories of injustice, multiple forms it takes and the variety of solutions it calls for" (117). Faced with such criticism, environmental justice has not adhered to a single methodological approach but has grown over time to become a "multimethodological field of knowledge" (Sze and London 1331) that draws insights from a variety of disciplines and approaches ranging from environmental ethics to political ecology, feminist theories, ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, and theories of class. Accordingly, the remainder of this chapter aims to contribute to ongoing attempts to pluralise the analytical framework and scope of the field by examining its growth into three key trajectories: postcolonial environmental justice struggles, working-class environmental justice struggles, and feminist environmental justice struggles. Understanding each of these trajectories is essential for understanding multiple lines of domination and inequalities that shape "sociotoxic ecologies" portrayed in the novels selected for analysis in this dissertation.

1.2.1. Postcolonial Environmental Justice Struggles

In order to grasp postcolonial environmental justice struggles, it is crucial to explain first the critical connections between environmental justice and postcolonial ecocriticism, as well as the origins of postcolonial ecocriticism. Postcolonialism and ecocriticism have long been considered two separate academic fields with different interpretative methods and divergent foci; therefore, the integration of postcolonial studies into ecocritical studies has rather been late and problematic. In his early essay "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism," Rob Nixon discusses in a detailed way the reasons for the late entry of

postcolonialism into ecocriticism by listing the major discrepancies between the dominant concerns of postcolonialists and early ecocritics. First, postcolonialism is primarily interested in hybridisation and cross-culturation, whereas ecocriticism, during its early stage, attaches importance to the "discourses of purity" (Nixon, "Environmentalism" 235). Second, postcolonial scholars are engaged with the concepts of displacement and diaspora; however, early ecocritics emphasise the significance of ethics of place and earthly ties to nature. Third, postcolonialism adopts a view of cosmopolitanism, while early ecocriticism adopts a view of bioregionalism. Fourth, postcolonialism devotes considerable attention to revealing the history of marginalised people and the legacy of the colonial past. Early ecocriticism, by contrast, remains indifferent to history in "the pursuit of timeless, solitary moments of communion with nature" (Nixon, "Environmentalism" 236). Given their contradicting perspectives, reconciliation between the two schools of thought seems to be quite a difficult task. However, in the early 2000s, a group of scholars, among whom were Rob Nixon, Helen Tiffin, Graham Huggan, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, and George B. Handley, issued a clarion call for the emergence of a complementary approach that brings ecocritical and postcolonial concerns into a mutual conversation. Postcolonial ecocriticism developed in response to these calls, opening a new frontier to rethink postcolonial issues from an environmental perspective and environmental issues from a postcolonial perspective. [iv]

Although postcolonialism has been negligent of environmental issues and the question of nonhuman, "the devastating impact of transnational corporate commerce [and the neocolonial exploitation] on local/indigenous ecosystems" has urged the field to become cognisant of "its commitment to the environment, reiterating its insistence on the inseparability of current crises of ecological mismanagement from historical legacies of imperialistic exploitation and authoritarian abuse" (Huggan 702). The problems of

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[iv] Some of the publications which played an influential role in the theoretical development of postcolonial ecocriticism are Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010); Laura Wright's *Wilderness into Civilized Shapes: Reading the Postcolonial Environment* (2010); Boonie Roos and Alex Hunt's *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives* (2010); Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee's *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English* (2010), Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011), and Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011).

resource extraction, land ownership, water depletion, and management of agricultural systems in postcolonial countries have shown that ecological concerns should be vital to any postcolonial critique and vice versa. As Pablo Mukherjee also explains,

> [s]urely, any field purporting to theorise the global conditions of colonialism and imperialism (let us call it postcolonial studies) cannot but consider the complex interplay of environmental categories such as water, land, energy, habitat, migration with political or cultural categories such as state, society, conflict, literature, theatre, visual arts. Equally, any field purporting to attach interpretative importance to environment (let us call it eco/environmental studies) must be able to trace the social, historical and material co-ordinates of categories such as forests, rivers, bio-regions and species. ("Surfing the Second Waves" 144)

Postcolonial ecocriticism, therefore, seeks to offer a "hybrid approach" (Boos and Hunt 8) that greens the postcolonial thought while concomitantly politicising and historicising the ecocritical commitments. By including postcolonial issues in its scope, ecocriticism has achieved to shift its emphasis to non-Western concerns and recognise the importance of cultural factors in ecological issues. In a similar vein, by including ecocritical concerns in its scope, postcolonial criticism has become more attentive to the ecological dimension of European imperialism and colonialism. Hence, the commingling of the two fields has promoted an intersectional framework of analysis that "understands ecology in a complex, historically contingent, and mutually-constituting relationship with human cultures" (Miller 477).

The underlying premise of postcolonial ecocriticism is that anthropocentrism (human-centredness) and Eurocentrism are intrinsically interwoven and reinforce each other. In other words, the dualistic modes of thinking that enabled and perpetuated the anthropocentric thought by relegating nature to the position of the "other" also relegated indigenous people to the position of the "other" and enabled the legitimisation of colonial impulses. Therefore, "the very ideology of colonialism is . . . one where anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism are inseparable, with the anthropocentrism underlying Eurocentrism being used to justify those forms of European colonialism that see indigenous cultures as 'primitive,' less rational, closer to children, animals and nature" (Huggan and Tiffin 5). Under European colonial rule, racial violence went hand in hand with the drive to achieve ecological domination over nature. Just as the colonised were systemically exploited and subjected to brutal treatment, the natural resources and animals of the colonised territories

were subjected to ruthless plundering for the sake of the economic progress of the colonising countries. Proceeding from this vantage point, postcolonial ecocriticism analyses the material and ideological interrelations between the history of colonial oppression and ecological destruction. It also examines the ways in which the current environmental exploitation in postcolonial settings and Third World countries is tied up with the continuing legacies of imperialist expansion.

What role does environmental justice play in this context? A thorough answer comes from Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt: "In our view, it's the term 'justice' that provides a space for theoretical work bridging and merging ecocriticism and postcolonialism" (3). Postcolonial ecocriticism, as Roos and Hunt compellingly argue, is centred upon the emphasis that environmental justice puts on the entanglement of the social and the environmental spheres. Therefore, an alliance between these two fields is essential and helps them enhance their analysis in many ways. Echoing Roos and Hunt, Travis V. Mason, Lisa Szabo-Jonas, and Elzette Steenkamp also characterise environmental justice as "the natural bridge between ecocriticism's focus on environment and postcolonialism's focus on people, particularly given its mandate to emphasize how the two are indivisible" (6). From their perspective, environmental justice should be an integral part of postcolonial ecocriticism since it draws attention to the ways that social oppression and environmental devastation intersect, thereby providing "a point of convergence" (6) to interrogate issues of power, dominance, and marginality along with issues of ecology and ethics. By making use of the insights of postcolonial ecocriticism, environmental justice can move away from its US-based focus and form a broader understanding of justice that considers the role of postcolonial relations and structures in the uneven distribution of environmental problems. In turn, by forging a coalition with environmental justice, postcolonial ecocriticism can better question how (neo)colonial practices and capitalist globalisation have produced environmental disparities and socioecological oppression that postcolonial and Third World countries confront today.

As postcolonial environments continue to be exploited in unjust ways by the repressive regimes of developed countries, environmental justice has become an indispensable paradigm for understanding the struggles of indigenous people to preserve their

ecosystems and territories. Examining postcolonial lands through the viewpoint of environmental justice has revealed that the ecological and human costs of eco-disasters are far more overwhelming in these places than in developed countries due to the periphery position to which they are assigned, and indigenous people pay a dear price to survive. As a case in point, the Indian Ocean earthquake that hit Indonesia in 2004 left 500,000 people dispossessed, and the 2007 cyclones in Mozambique caused hundreds of families to starve to death by destroying their crops and farmlands.

In addition, environmental justice studies have also revealed that many postcolonial countries are disparately burdened by the toxic wastes illegally dumped on their lands by the West. As Reed concurs, Western colonial discourse

> frequently has drawn a symbolic association between subaltern peoples and waste and declared the lands of subalterns to be 'wastelands.' From the beginning of the European colonial era to the present, dominant cultures have argued the lands of indigenous peoples are underdeveloped and empty (*terra nullius*) and that the people on them are less than human, less civilized. ("Toxic Colonialism" 29)

The imperial drive to exploit indigenous environments continues at present in the form of toxic colonialism. The indigenous lands, which were once treated as uninhabited wilderness by colonial powers, are now targeted as "disposal" grounds of the West. To illustrate, the forests of Ghana have been heavily contaminated by e-wastes imported from Europe, and Somalia has long been suffering from "uranium radioactive waste, lead, cadmium, mercury, industrial, hospital, chemical, leather treatment and other toxic waste" (Eichstaedt 38) dumped along its beaches. Another striking case is the 2006 Abidjan Ivory Coast scandal in which the ship of a Dutch company left 500 tons of hazardous chemical wastes on Ivorian shores, poisoning the ecosystems and human and nonhuman species living there. Although more than a decade has passed, the toxic ramifications of this scandalous event continue to jeopardise the health and livelihoods of Ivorians as well as their environments.[v]

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[v] For a more detailed account of the environmental injustices that prevail in postcolonial countries, check the *Environmental Justice Atlas* (http://ejatlas.org), which provides an extensive list of ecological conflicts and inequalities all over the world.

The examples given above all serve to highlight the fact that environmental problems in postcolonial places are deeply entangled with social and economic discrimination and cannot be thought apart from human rights issues. More importantly, these examples demonstrate the fact that contemporary environmental injustices are rooted in the same colonial and imperial ideology that provided the basis for Western dominance over indigenous cultures and ecologies. The problem of toxic waste dumping which has been plaguing South Africa is "a historical consequence of colonial ideology of the past and the present struggles against its new forms" (Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments* 41). Lawrence Summers, the former president of the World Bank, notoriously explains the reasons behind the promotion of toxic waste exportation in a memorandum, which leaked to *the Economist* in 1992 and appeared under the title "Let them Eat Pollution":

> Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [Least Developed Countries]? . . . From this point of view, a given amount of health impairing pollution should be done in the country with the lowest cost, which will be the country with the lowest wages. I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that . . . The demand for a clean environment for aesthetic and health reasons is very likely to have very high income elasticity. (82)

Although Summers later claimed that he intended to be sarcastic in his remarks, his rationale illustrates starkly how the West, to remain economically dominant, has imposed and continues to impose harmful and discriminatory environmental practices on postcolonial countries, trapping them into a vicious circle of poverty, starvation, and environmental degradation.

Drawing attention to the neoliberal logic underlying Summers' proposal, Rob Nixon points out that "[i]n Summers' win-win scenario for the North, African recipients of his plan were triply discounted: discounted as political agents, discounted as long-term casualties of what I call . . . 'slow violence,' and discounted as cultures possessing environmental practices and concerns of their own" (*Slow Violence* 2). Nixon introduces the term "slow violence" within the critical lens of postcolonial ecocriticism and environmental justice to provide a novel conceptual framework for perceiving the prolonged effects of ecological oppression exerted on impoverished communities. Challenging the conventional notions of violence as imminent and visible, Nixon defines

slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically viewed not as violence at all" (*Slow Violence* 2). His major hypothesis is that the devastation wrought by environmental calamities, such as climate change, deforestation, soil erosion, and industrial pollution, gradually increases and unveils over a long period; therefore, its impacts are not immediately perceptible and can be postponed for generations.

In contrast to spectacular violence that sparks immediate attention, slow violence necessitates grappling with the "conjoined politics of scale and the politics of invisibility" (Nixon, *Slow Violence* 158). For this reason, the material and cultural reverberations it produces are often unnoticed and bracketed:

> [c]asualties of slow violence – human and environmental – are the casualties most likely not to be seen, not to be counted. Casualties of slow violence become light-weight, disposable casualties, with dire consequences for the ways wars are remembered, which in turn has dire consequences for the projected casualties from future wars. (Nixon, *Slow Violence* 13)

According to Nixon, it is the places in the global South[vi] – such as Nigeria, India, and Antigua – which are exposed to slow violence since they are geopolitically marginalised and denied the right to take part in environmental policy-making processes. Therefore, thinking about slow violence also requires thinking about the challenges of environmental justice as it brings to the fore the global North/South division, the uneven distribution of wealth, social and economic inequalities, and the differentiated impacts of environmental problems over time. By reformulating violence as slow violence, Nixon points to the inseparable connection between social and environmental justice in postcolonial settings and demonstrates that ecological disparities in these settings are not temporary, time-bound phenomena; rather, they are generated by long histories of systematic oppression and exploitation.

By engaging with Nixon's concept of slow violence and postcolonial ecocriticism in general, environmental justice can adopt a transnational perspective and acknowledge

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[vi] Nixon uses the term "global South" to refer to postcolonial countries and Third World countries collectively.

how ecological inequities move across social, geographic, and temporal borders. As Sarah J. Ray concedes,

> thinking transnationally is important for environmental justice because it challenges dominant constructions of local/global binary and of temporal boundaries . . . A transnational environmental justice perspective looks at closely how the power and politics of unique places and events are conditioned by, and can also affect, broader global forces and eras. (4-5)

Embracing a transnational perspective allows environmental justice to recognise that localised environmental struggles in the global South, such as toxic waste disposal in Somalia and e-wastes in Ghana, are intimately linked to wider economic and political problems like neoliberal globalisation and neocolonial ideologies. This type of perspective also recognises that working toward socially and ecologically just solutions is not possible by relying solely on domestic policies. An integrative approach must be formed, one that takes into account not only the regionally specific aspects of ecological conflicts but also the global dimension of unequal power relations that "shift[…] risks and hazards from North to South, from rich nations to poor communities between and within nations, and from racially privileged communities to racially despised communities" (Pellow 95).

Analysing the significance of the transnational turn in environmental justice, Adamson also claims that environmental justice scholars should

> move at times from a large-scale pattern or theory to a specific place-asking for example, how differences in ecological, cultural, economic, political, and social conditions get produced and how these differences manifest themselves differently in specific places. At other times, they might move from a specific issue outward to a more universal foundational concept or theory-asking, for example, how radically different socio-ecological circumstances imply quite different approaches to the question of what is or is not just. (83-84)

The local and the global, as Adamson emphasises here, do not supersede one another. They are inextricably enmeshed, and they must be thought through one another in order to comprehend environmental inequalities in their complexity. In an increasingly globalised world in particular, the convergence of environmental justice and postcolonial ecocriticism can offer a productive space to articulate "eco-global perspectives" which "recognize[…] ethnic and national particularities and yet transcend[…] ethnic and national boundaries" (Adamson and Slovic 6). This shift to a planetary perspective can push environmental justice towards a "transnational questioning of structures of power

and violations of human rights" (Athanassakis 21) and help cultivate an egalitarian notion of equity that seeks ecological democracy for all communities, regardless of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

1.2.2. Working-Class Environmental Justice Struggles

In addition to the alliances it has developed with postcolonial ecocriticism, environmental justice has forged links with other theoretical perspectives as it has progressed. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the convergence between environmental justice and working-class struggles. Although class as an identity marker has long been "described in terms of exploitation, income, occupation . . . and the combination of these factors" (Bell, *Working-Class Environmentalism* 27-28), the role of the environment in working-class struggles has received less critical attention and has not been fully explored theoretically. As the political ecologist Stefania Barca also observes, "work and its complex relationship to environmental concerns is probably the less known aspect of environmental justice struggles . . . yet work is and has always been relevant to those struggles" ("Laboring the Earth" 19). How do, then, social class structures and labour matter to ecology? In what way can the concepts of the working class and classism be reformulated in ecological terms? How do social class divisions impact the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens? What is the role of capitalism in generating and spreading class-based environmental inequalities? These are some of the questions that environmental justice needs to be concerned with and reflect on from a class-based perspective.

One of the reasons why the relationship between working-class struggles and environmental studies has remained understudied is the dichotomous thinking that separates labour from environmental concerns. Conservative environmental groups have historically viewed labour as the "antithesis of nature" and considered the working-class labourers to be "on the side of capital who regard nature as an exploitable 'natural resource', a means to an end for production" (Räthzel and Uzzell 83). As a result, they have accused working-class labourers of lacking ecological awareness and isolated them from environmental debates. This deeply held dichotomous thinking has also influenced

academic disciplines "such that environmental studies have taken little account of labour; while labour studies have largely ignored the environment" (Räthzel and Uzzell 81). Environmental justice intends to overcome this disjunction between labour and environmental issues by interrogating "the ways in which class structures, access to power in the workplace, the material conditions of work, and the more-than-human environment interact" (Robertson and Westerman 3).

Defining the environment as "the place where we live, *work*, and play" (Adamson et al.; emphasis added), working-class environmental justice analyses advance upon the notion that class, labour, and environmental exploitation are all concomitant, and they must be examined as interrelated manifestations of the capitalist ideologies. In exploring the links between these systems of exploitation, the theoretical insights of political ecology provide a critical window for environmental justice to draw upon. Political ecology[vii], in the broadest sense, "combines the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy" (Blaikie and Brookfield 17). It investigates a broad range of topics, including the social relations of production and capitalist production of natural resources, industrialisation and socioenvironmental transformations, the commodification of nature and the commodification of labour, and environmental governance and sustainability, among others. "Political ecology stories," as Paul Robbins expresses, "are stories of justice and injustice" (87). Since political ecology at its core seeks to unveil the political implications of environmental conflicts, putting it in close proximity with environmental justice can foster the cross-fertilisation of ideas and the development of new research paths that challenge the unequal ecological costs of economic progress for different social class systems.

[vii] Political ecology developed in response to the neglect of political factors in the study and discussion of environmental problems. Taking its cue from Marxist political economy, cultural ecology, and hazard studies, it has become a diverse field over the years "query[ing] the relationship between economics, politics, and nature" (Robbins 13). Some of the vital figures who helped to establish the basis of the field are Michael Watts, Piers Blaikie, and Harold Brookfield. For broader information on the historical trajectory and development of political ecology, see Paul Robbins's *Political Ecology*: *A Critical Introduction* (2011) and the *Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology* (2015), edited by Tom Perreault et. al.

Barca's work exemplifies this kind of cross-fertilisation and presents critical illuminations for reconsidering the working-class struggles in the context of environmental justice and political ecology. In contrast to the conventional definitions of the working class as mere waged blue-collar labourers, Barca sets forth a "socio-ecological" redefinition, asserting that "as a primary agent of energy and matter transformation through the labour process, workers –broadly defined as those performing physical labour, including non-paid housekeeping and life-supporting work– are the primary interface between society and nature" ("On Working-Class Environmentalism" 75). Her reconfiguration of workers as "the interface between society and nature" is crucial to environmental justice analyses in two major ways. First, she calls into question the binary logic that detaches labour from nature, revealing how the two are inseparable from each other. According to Barca, the process of labour is an inextricable part of nature. Thus, an understanding of labour, in her perspective, is inadequate without an understanding of nature and vice versa since "labour shapes and is shaped by its biophysical environment" ("Ecologies of Labour" 26).

Second, Barca brings to light how the nature of labour and class polarisation directly impact the uneven distribution of environmental risks and toxins. As she herself remarks, "working-class people are the most threatened by the destruction of the environment because they work in hazardous environments, live in the most polluted neighborhoods, and have fewer possibilities to move to some uncontaminated area or buy healthy food" ("On Working-Class" 76). The hierarchical division of labour places working-class people at the bottom of the production chain, rendering them vulnerable to environmental deterioration as well as social maltreatment. In this respect, Barca claims that the violence that working-class people face is both material and symbolic. It is material because pollution to which they are exposed in their workplaces affects their well-being and causes irreversible damage to their bodies. It is symbolic because their struggle goes largely unaddressed, and their voices are silenced due to the socioeconomic marginalisation to which they are subject.

Karen Bell has proposed the term "environmental classism" to render visible the environmental struggles from which working-class people have long been suffering. Her

coinage is especially important in reconceiving class discrimination from an ecological perspective and ecology from a class-based perspective. Bell describes environmental classism as "policies or practices that impact less favourably on working-class individuals and groups with respect to the quality of their living, working and leisure environment" (*Working-Class Environmentalism* 3). She discusses a wide range of factors that lead to class-based ecological inequalities, but she identifies capitalism as the major cause of this problem. For Bell, "environmental classism" is grounded in power imbalances generated by capitalism:

> capitalism relies upon *discrimination* so that marginalised groups can carry the burden of its negative costs without excessive mainstream concern; it requires *industrialisation* so that production can increase while overall labour costs are cut, whether at home or farther afield . . . it incorporates *market dynamics* that enable the concentration of wealth and power . . . and finally capitalism requires and promotes a compatible *culture* carried in Damaging Hegemonic Environmental Discourses, such as the unquestioning acceptance of growth so that excessive production and consumption can continue unfettered, in the face of impending environmental disaster. (*Achieving Environmental Justice* 217)

It follows from this argument that the capitalist system in its very essence is geared towards infinite expansion; however, its desire for limitless expansion creates serious stress on nature since the resources of nature are not infinite. Therefore, to maintain its power, capitalism operates on what Bell terms "Damaging Hegemonic Environmental Discourses (DHEDS)" (*Achieving Environmental Justice* 217). These discourses help to justify, legitimise, and naturalise the "beliefs that ever-expanding growth is 'good' or 'necessary' and environment is separate from humans and needs to be controlled" (Bell, *Achieving Environmental Justice* 9), thereby making nature and working-class labourers subservient to capitalist needs at all costs.

In critiquing the environmentally harmful aspects of the capitalist system, Bell benefits from the political ecologist James O'Connor's formulation of the "second contradiction of capitalism," which provides a valuable reference point for environmental justice studies. Drawing on the Marxist theory of contradiction, O'Connor suggests that the capitalist system embodies within itself two types of contradictions. The first one, he asserts, "expresses capital's social and political power over labor, capitalism's inherent tendency toward a realization crisis or crisis of capital overproduction" (176). As capital expands and increases its profits, it also inflicts more pressure on working-class labourers;

hence, labour exploitation escalates in tandem with capitalist overproduction, which in turn leads to extreme economic inequalities. While the first contradiction is that of capital and labour, O'Connor introduces a second source of dilemma which relates this time capital with ecology: "[I]f the costs of labor, nature, infrastructure, and space increase significantly capital faces a potential 'second contradiction,' an economic crisis striking from the cost side" (242). Because capital cannot sustain its existence without constant growth, it conceives nature as a "free gift" and reduces it to a manufactured commodity by placing it in a system of economic exchange. Yet, the more capitalist accumulation accelerates, the more degraded the environment becomes. In this regard, capitalism's craving for constant growth clashes with the limited nature of environmental resources. And by degrading the environment, capitalism also degrades the resources on which it is dependent and threatens its own existence as well as the balance of ecosystems.

Taking O'Connor's argument a step further, John Bellamy Foster reframes the first contradiction of capitalism as the "absolute general law of capitalist accumulation" (77) and the second one as the "absolute general law of environmental degradation under capitalism" (78). Unlike O'Connor who examines the conflicts inherent within capitalism as separate concerns, Foster presents a more holistic approach suggesting that the first and second contradictions of capitalism trigger one another and must be tackled together:

> It is characteristic of capitalism that the second of these 'absolute general laws' derives its momentum from the first; hence, it is impossible to overthrow the second without overthrowing the first. Nevertheless, it is the second contradiction rather than the first that increasingly constitutes the most obvious threat not only to capitalism's existence but to the life of the planet as a whole. (78)

From this vantage point, overthrowing one type of contradiction alone is ineffective since the capitalist overproduction that results in the deterioration of the environment also results in the deterioration of labour conditions. As a consequence, any solutions for a green economy and healthy environment must involve dismantling both of the contradictions.

Underpinned by O'Connor and Foster's claims that capitalism is a system of domination relying on unsustainable forms of production, environmental justice emphasises that "working-class people face a dual injustice: the economic insecurity that accompanies

boom and bust and disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards" (Robertson and Westerman 3). On the one hand, they are oppressed by capital holders who want to obtain the highest profit from their labour. On the other hand, they are compelled to work in highly toxic environments, trading their health for their jobs because of economic discrimination:

> Working-class communities can be more vulnerable to accepting toxic or otherwise unwanted facilities because they are more in need of the potential economic benefits that they claim to bring . . . Working-class communities are particularly in need of the potential jobs, forcing them to choose between unemployment and the health and safety of themselves, their families and their communities. In reality, the claims about hazardous facility bringing new jobs for the local community are often exaggerated and even false. (Bell, *Working-Class Environmentalism* 168)

Environmental justice endeavours to challenge this false dualistic thinking that leaves working-class people with the choice of either no jobs or low-paid jobs in hazardous facilities. The reason why hazardous facilities are located largely in working-class neighbourhoods is that they "seek out cheap land, favourable zoning laws, less regulation, good infrastructure, and a community less likely to offer opposition" (Faber 64). Although these facilities seem to promise economic and social prosperity, they also result in irreversible ecological contamination by poisoning the land, air, and water resources of the areas on which they are constructed. Therefore, the economic and social benefits they promise to bring can be taken as a cover-up of their ecologically and socially poisonous practices.

Ecological contamination caused by polluting industries is mapped not only on the workplaces but also on the bodies of working-class people, which brings into question the correlation between social class divisions, hazardous pollutants, and bodily diseases. As Richard Lewontin and Richard Levins concede, "Your body knows your class position no matter how well you have been taught to deny it" (306). Entangled in industrial pollution and discriminatory practices, the bodies of working-class people carry the heavy cost of capital growth and ecological decay in a rather unjust way. In Lewontin and Levins's words,

> [t]he conditions under which labor power is sold in a capitalist labor market act on the individual's glucose cycle as the pattern of exertion and rest depends more on the employer's economic decisions than on the worker's self-perception of metabolic flux. Human ecology is not the relation of our species in general with the rest of nature, but rather the relations of different societies, and the classes, genders,

> ages, grades, and ethnicities maintained by those social structures. Thus, it is not too far-fetched to speak of *the pancreas under capitalism* or *the proletarian lung*. (emphasis in the original 37)

The notions of the "pancreas under capitalism" and the "proletarian lung" exemplify how the capitalist ideologies that produce vast amounts of environmental pollution produce at the same time vast amounts of polluted bodies. Disproportionate exposure to harmful substances like chemicals and metals menaces workers' health, as evidenced by miners with chronic respiratory diseases, farmers who contract pesticide-related illnesses, and steel workers who suffer traumatic skin injuries and burns.

Elaborating on the connections between environmental injustices, toxicity, and the materiality of the self, Stacy Alaimo similarly points out that "workers' bodies are not only the sites of the direct application of power, but permeable sites that are forever transformed by the substances and forces --asbestos, dust, radiation-- that penetrate them" (*Bodily Natures* 30). Therefore, focusing on the bodies of working-class people sheds light upon the complicated interplay of economic systems, class hierarchies, and the environmental harms posed by capitalism.

Alaimo's concept of "trans-corporeality" emerges as an essential ground for environmental justice to understand the co-extensivity of workers' bodies with the industrial workplaces in which they labour. To define the term briefly, trans-corporeality refers to "time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from 'nature' and 'environment'" (Alaimo, "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms" 238). Against the traditional perception of the human body as a disembodied and self-closed entity, trans-corporeality recasts the human body as an active agent that is always open to the impacts of its physical and social environments. In so doing, it provides an "epistemological platform that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors" (Alaimo, "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms" 238). By replacing the human body as an active part of the material and social realms, trans-corporeality blurs the sharp distinctions that pit culture against nature, human against nonhuman, and mind against

body. It entails a new line of thinking where the natural and the cultural, and the biological and the societal do not stand in opposition to each other but co-exist.

As part of her analysis, Alaimo re-examines Lewontin and Levins's "the proletarian lung" to question the trans-corporeal connections between the bodies of working-class people and their environments:

> If ostensibly external social forces have transformed an internal bodily organ, does this movement across the social and the biological, the private body and the social system, suggest traffic among other personal, political, epistemological, institutional, and disciplinary domains? . . . The proletarian lung illustrates my conception of trans-corporeality, in that the human body is never a rigidly enclosed, protected entity, but is vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environments, which may include industrial environments and their social/economic forces. (*Bodily Natures* 28)

The "proletarian lung," in Alaimo's analysis, becomes a powerful representation of the material effects of class discrimination, displaying how socioeconomic disparities can physically alter one's body by leaving distinctive marks on it. The hazards of working places, labour exploitation, and chemical poisoning are hidden within and imprinted onto the "proletarian lung," which demonstrates that "social injustice is inseparable from its physical environment [and human health]" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 64).

What is equally problematic is that toxic agencies that endanger workers' health do not remain confined within the boundaries of their workplaces and bodies. They threaten workers' families and communities as well:

> The existence of toxic bodies, both human and nonhuman . . . still mixes things up. Since the same chemical substance may poison the workers who produce it, the neighborhood in which it is produced, and the web of plants and animals who end up consuming it, the traffic in toxins reveals the interconnections among various movements, such as environmental health, occupational health labor, environmental justice . . . and children's health and welfare. (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 18)

Hence, exploring the trans-corporeality of the bodies of working-class people calls for a broad mode of inquiry that is attuned to the material, ethical, and political implications of toxicity.

Considered within this context, the concept of trans-corporeality becomes extremely pertinent to environmental justice studies. It offers an innovative vision which stresses

that social, ecological, political, cultural, and economic forces are not distanced from the material world; the material world and the materiality of the self are moulded by these forces. "Environmental justice movements," Alaimo writes, "epitomize a trans-corporeal materiality, a conception of the body that is neither essentialist, nor genetically determined, nor firmly bound, but rather a body in which social power and material/geographic agencies intra-act"[viii] (*Bodily Natures* 68). In this sense, aligning environmental justice with the conceptual framework of trans-corporeality can develop a more robust understanding of the maps of transits between polluting industries, toxic work sites, and the uneven distribution of toxins in working-class communities. As Richard White also puts it, "[w]e cannot come to terms with nature without coming to terms with our work, our own bodies, our own bodily labour" (173). Trans-corporeality helps to transgress these boundaries of which White speaks and to work towards cultivating an ecological class consciousness that appreciates the agency of the working class, their labour, and their environments.

1.2.3. Feminist Environmental Justice Struggles

Just as the role of class has been neglected in creating and perpetuating environmental inequality, gender has been another overlooked but significant dimension of environmental justice that needs a much deeper and richer theorisation. Even though women have made up the majority of environmental justice activism, the lack of adequate attention to gender inequalities in the field has generated a great deal of criticism. For example, Susan Buckingham and Rakibe Kulcur claim that "a focus on either race/ethnicity or poverty, as delineations of environmental injustice, will not be sufficient to ensure that gendered injustices as a result of environmental problems are resolved" (677). In a similar vein, Greta Gaard who is highly critical of this narrow focus of the field states that "[w]hile the concepts of environmental racism, and to a lesser extent environmental classism, are well-known, the analytical categories of environmental sexism, environmental heterosexism, environmental ageism and ableism, not to mention

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[viii] Alaimo borrows the term "intra-action" from Karen Barad to discuss the inseparability of social, ecological, and material realms. These realms do not precede one another, but they are co-mingled and emerge through each other.

environmental speciesism, are almost unthinkable" ("Feminism and Environmental Justice" 74). If environmental justice aims to fulfil its objective of providing equal and healthy environments for all, it must address gender inequalities as one of its central categories of analysis.

Rachel Stein's *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, Activism* (2004) is one of the first anthologies to challenge the long-standing blindness to gender in the field. In the introduction, Stein proposes that adopting a feminist intersectional lens can be the key to embedding struggles for gender equality into the discussions of environmental justice:

> This anthology works to create an expansive understanding of environmental injustice that emphasizes the structural interconnections between race, gender, and sexual oppressions as historically related forms of the domination of nature that are once again erupting and converging with current environmental ills. Once we understand that these oppressions have common roots, we may understand why issues of gender and sexuality are now emerging so prominently within environmental justice and why they strike us as necessitating the same attention that race has already received. ("Introduction" 8)

Because hierarchical modes of thinking that produce racism and classism also produce sexism, a multifaceted approach that sees these forms of domination as intersectional can provide the critical tools to recognise "the integral relevance of gender" (Stein, "Introduction" 8) in investigating the extent and intricacy of ecological inequalities.

One of the earliest examples of feminist environmental justice struggles that highlights this kind of intersectionality is the Love Canal Disaster which took place in New York in 1978. Lois Gibbs, a working-class woman, found out that a toxic waste dump located nearby her neighbourhood could be the leading cause of the "rising rates of miscarriage, inexplicable clusters of birth defects, and a series of debilitating illnesses, from asthma to cancer" (Newman 101). Variety of factors, including the location of the chemical dump in a poor working-class neighbourhood, the drastic increase in female reproductive problems, and the muting of women in environmental decision-making processes, all point to the deeply layered nature of this toxic event, which resists a singularly-framed analysis. In her book *Love Canal: And the Birth of the Environmental Health Movement* Gibbs shares her experience in detail and writes, "There is mounting evidence that the locations industrial plants and dumps are, and for years have been, selected based on

community demographics and the associated assumption that there is not enough community power to stop such as a facility" (6). Despite the attempts of the authorities to label Gibbs and other women of Love Canal as "hysterical" and "emotional" (Blum 54), their discovery triggered collective activism, and they soon launched the Love Canal Homeowners Association to fight for the well-being of their community. Especially, the fact that local women became the initiators of such an environmental movement set an important example for other marginalised women and disenfranchised communities to embark on an activist quest to save their environments from exploitation.

Following the footsteps of the local women of the Love Canal Homeowners, many women eco-activists all around the world have started to battle against toxic ideologies that result in unjust environmental conditions, such as Latin and North American women protesting the extractive industries that have polluted their waters, African women demanding climate justice and gender justice, and indigenous women of Philippines resisting militarisation and its ecological costs. However varied their struggles are, these women eco-activists are united under one cause: to bring to the fore the importance of women's voices and women's rights in attaining environmentally sound societies. In Gaard's words, "when women and those they care about are disproportionately affected -whether through breast cancer, toxic exposures during pregnancy and lactation, toxic and gendered workplaces, or the siting of polluting industries – these matters become feminist issues" ("Feminism and Environmental Justice" 132-33). Therefore, developing a feminist perspective is essential to comprehend the full depth of the idea of justice in environmental justice theories.

Studies addressing the intersection of gender and environmental justice vary with regards to the theoretical viewpoints and issues they take up. The early body of research done in this field has focused mostly on the interrelations between women's bodies and environmental toxicity. As Serenella Iovino puts it, "often 'infiltrated' by material exposure to health-impairing substances and by ideological constructs of power, women's bodies become a meaningful crossroad of multiple agencies" (38). By the same token, Serpil Oppermann concedes that women's bodies are "complex sites of ideological, ecological, and discursive power relations whereby we are encouraged to rethink the

materiality of bodies interconnected with their discursive formations" ("Feminist Ecocriticism" 77). In this respect, scrutinising the linkages between women's bodies and environmental health has become critically significant for feminist environmental justice as women carry a disproportionate burden of ecological hazards and illnesses due to socioeconomic, cultural, and physiological factors.

Some of the issues with which the early strand of feminist environmental justice grapples include the question of overpopulation and environmental eugenics, reproductive health and reproductive injustices, and environmental hazards to child and maternal health. One palpable example is the unusually high levels of dioxin pollutants detected in the breast milk of Inuit women living near the Canadian Arctic. Research, at first, associated dioxin toxicity with the Inuit's large consumption of meat as part of their traditional diet; nevertheless, it was later revealed that "the majority of the pollution in the Canadian Arctic originated at solid waste incinerations, copper smelters, and cement kilns located in the midwestern United States" (Lucas 191). It turned out that dioxin pollutants, knowing no borders, could travel long distances through winds and rains, looming into the environments of the Inuit, their water supplies and food chains. Even worse, they could accumulate for years in Inuit women's breast milk, poisoning their bodies and that of their infants'. Sheila Watt-Cloutier, the international chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, voices Inuit women's struggle with the following words: "A poisoned Inuik child, a poisoned Arctic, and a poisoned planet are all the same" (260). Seen in this light, Inuit women's exposure to dioxin is a global problem that represents the complex intermeshing of unjust economic practices, sexist and racist biases, and their material effects on socially marginalised bodies. Despite the correlation made between the contamination of Inuit women's breast milk and the pollution produced by corporate industries in the midwestern United States, "the harm [inflicted on these women] remains unrecognized because the dioxin poisoning of their bodies through traditional food source is implicitly regarded as a costless consequence of economic development" (Lucas 201). Inuit women continue to heavily suffer the devastating consequences of dioxin poisoning for which they are not responsible.

Another notable issue that has been discussed within the framework of feminist environmental justice is DES, “a synthetic estrogen that was prescribed to millions of pregnant women in the 1940s through the 1970s in the belief that it helped prevent miscarriages” (Dutton 6). It was also given to livestock animals in the hopes that it would accelerate their growth. In spite of the uncertainties and disagreements about its safety, pharmaceutical industry widely promoted DES on the grounds that it was more effective and benign than natural estrogen. Yet, after decades of use, this so-called benign drug proved to be highly malleable causing rare forms of reproductive cancers, genital abnormalities, and infant death. The environmental historian Nancy Langston documents the hazardous side-effects of the drug in detail: “The drug moved inwards into women’s bodies, making its way into organs and cells, even transforming the genetic code, with effects that cross generations. The drug moved outward into broader ecosystems as well, when the metabolic byproducts of DES were excreted by humans and feedlot cattle” (111). Though it is no longer in use, the traces of DES have not yet been eliminated, so acknowledging its legacy has crucial implications for feminist environmental justice since DES highlights the fluid boundaries between humans, nonhumans, nature, gender, and technology. As Sze also puts forward, “as a case study in polluted women and livestock (animal) bodies, DES illustrates changes in the human relationship to nature and what these changing relationships might mean for the possibility of justice and ethics in a hyperpolluted, highly technological world of corporate concentration” (“Boundaries and Border Wars” 793). It specifically epitomises how women’s and animals’ bodies as well as the environment can become exploited by the technocentric policies of pharmaceutical organisations and chemical companies for unfair profit and power.

The example of DES and Inuit women’s struggle with dioxin both point to the urgency for the development of a more inclusive eco-justice that encompasses the boundaries of nations, generations, and species. Like DES and dioxin pollutants, many other toxic chemicals have become an inseparable part of nature and human/nonhuman bodies as a result of “industries leak[ing] waste into rivers and oceans, meteorological conditions transport[ing] contaminants to the breast milk of humans and other mammals in polar zones, plastics seep[ing] endocrine disruptors into a myriad of sea and land-living organisms” (Cielemecka and Asberg 102). This alarming increase in toxic chemicals has

demanded embracing an innovative understanding of ethics which perceives material and discursive practices as integrally interlaced. In Karen Barad's terms,

> Ethics is not simply about the subsequent consequences of our ways of interacting with the world, as if effect followed cause in a linear chain of events, but rather ethics is about mattering, about the entangled materialisations we help enact and are a part of bringing about, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities – even the smallest cut matters. ("Queer Causation" 336)

Only through adopting such an entangled ethical stance can feminist environmental justice pave the way for alternative modes of thought that contest the ecological discrimination targeting gendered bodies.

While one strand of feminist environmental justice studies engages with environmental health and the toxic predicament of gendered bodies, a more recent and growing strand has begun to interrogate the anthropogenic climate change crisis and its gendered dimensions. As the effects of melting ice glaciers, droughts, and heat waves intensify in the age of the Anthropocene, tackling the dangers of climate change in scientific and academic circles has become urgent more than ever. Environmental sciences have extensively described climate change as the acceleration of greenhouse gases on a planetary scale; nevertheless, this kind of representation is rather simplistic and leads to an over-generalisation that holds all human beings equally accountable for the climate change crisis:

> No other animals are directly responsible for the industrial greenhouse effect, and industrial greenhouse gases are indeed generated by human beings, but the implication that human beings as a species have caused climate change is also misleading. Particular people, particular cultures, nations, industries, and economic systems have caused and contributed to the pollution that created the industrial greenhouse effect, and we need not take those actions to be representative of the entire human species. Attributing blame to humans simpliciter diverts attention from the real sources of the problem and reproduces the narrow view that there is a universal greedy human nature that inevitably leads toward planetary destruction, and the mistaken assumption that everyone naturally desires the lifestyles enabled by modern Western colonial development. (Cuomo 697)

Viewed thus, the use of universal homogenous "we" in climate change discourses is a deceptive tool that masks "the question of unequal human agency, unequal human impacts, and unequal human vulnerabilities" (Nixon, "The Great Acceleration" n.p.) in a

time of increasing injustices. As the Bali Principles of Climate Justice[ix] explicitly state, it is the industrialised nations of the global North that contribute the most to the greenhouse gas effect, whereas it is the less developed nations of the global South as well as "the 'South' within North" that shoulder the worst of the ramifications of greenhouse gases due to poverty, weak infrastructure, and insufficient healthcare systems. Hence, climate change is a social, political, and moral issue as much as it is an atmospheric event.

In contrast to mainstream scientific analyses, feminist environmental justice evaluates the climate change crisis from an intersectional lens, tying it with broader problems of structural disparities and historical inequalities. The feminist environmental philosopher Val Plumwood's examination of rationalism can lay the groundwork for unravelling the root causes of the climate crisis. In her influential work *Environmental Culture: Ecological Crisis of Reason*, Plumwood emphasises that ecological crisis in general is a crisis of rationalism that "is built on the myth of the autonomous reason and autonomous man, inheriting the rationalist failure to situate the human in ecologically embodied and socially embedded ways" (27). Her critique of rationalism is embedded in her concept of the master identity which she developed in her earlier work *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. The master identity is a "dominator identity" that feeds itself through exploitation and human exceptionalism (Plumwood, *Feminism* 5). It grows out of a hierarchical worldview that ascends reason, mind, culture, and men to a central position and banishes nature, nonhumans, and women to the periphery. "This cultural identity," Plumwood points out, "framed the dominant concepts of Western thought, especially those of reason and nature" (*Feminism* 5).

The reason/nature dichotomy that gives shape to the master identity is at the heart of Plumwood's attack on rationalism. Plumwood does not denounce reason entirely; instead, she attacks hubristic versions of it that promote an illusory sense of superiority and allow the mastery of nature by denying its agency. Such type of rationalism, as she posits, has

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[ix] "The Bali Principles of Climate Justice" were released at the Earth Summit in Bali in 2002 to combat the climate crisis and its disproportionate effects on the global South. The full document can be accessed at https://www.ejnet.org/ej/bali.pdf

invaded many spheres of life, including science, politics, and culture, but it has chiefly manifested itself in the economic realm:

> The economic rationalist imaginary draws on typical rationalist oppositions which are highly gendered: reason requires the rule of a pure, detached, and impartial rational calculus, 'soft' emotions such as sympathy and ethic concepts of social care are opposed to its 'hard' discipline of economic mathematisation and quantification. Above all, the rational market is rationalist in its ecological disembodiment, its disregard of the enabling ecological preconditions of human and nonhuman life. ("The Crisis of Reason" 909-10)

Economic rationalism employs reason as an instrument of oppression to dominate nature. It operates through a polluted logic whose major purpose is to secure the expansion of the global market without paying any attention to the social and ecological harms it perpetuates. Thus, it can be taken as an explicit embodiment of the anthropocentric thinking that prioritises economic gains over environmental well-being.

Examined from this vantage point, climate change is also a product of the disembodied rationalist mindset of the fossil fuel-driven economy that considers unlimited progress and overconsumption of energy resources the key to success. On one side of the coin, "[t]he world's wealthiest nations, and the privileged elite and industry-owning sectors of nearly all nations, have built fortunes and long-term economic stability on decades of unchecked development and energy consumption" (Cuomo 693). On the other side, extreme climactic changes caused by this excessive energy consumption have disrupted human and nonhuman life in uneven ways. The escalating temperatures and the rising sea levels have pushed many animal species, including Adelie penguins and polar bears, to migrate to different habitats because their natural habitats have become uninhabitable. Likewise, a significant number of human beings in poor parts of the world like Kenya have been compelled to abandon their homes permanently and become climate refugees because their living conditions have become unliveable.

An increasing amount of feminist environmental justice analyses have also interrogated how the climate change crisis heightens the prevailing gender inequalities. For example, in her article, "Noticing gender (or not) in disasters," Joni Seager claims that climate change disasters, contrary to popular representations, are not "gender neutral" by giving references to the 1991 floods in Bangladesh and the 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia (29).

In each situation, she elucidates, the disaster "fell hard" on women owing to their socially prescribed roles as caregivers within the domestic sphere (2). Along similar lines, Geraldine Terry, in the introduction to *Gender Justice and Climate Change*, points out that the gendered division of labour puts rural women at a great risk of ecological degradation produced by climate change:

> A person's vulnerability to climate change depends in part on gender roles and relations; rural women in developing countries are one of the most vulnerable groups. . . This is because they are often dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods, do most of the agricultural work, and are responsible for collecting water and fuel. Climate change is widely predicted to affect all these areas of women's lives adversely. For instance, increased climate variability is making agriculture more unpredictable, and continuing desertification in some regions exacerbates the domestic fuel crisis. In urban areas, on the other hand, poor women are likely to bear the brunt of health problems caused by 'urban heat island' effects, increases in vector-borne diseases like malaria and, for cities situated in dry zones, water shortages. (3)

It must be noted here that women's vulnerability "is not innate" in any sense; instead, it arises from "inequities produced through gendered social roles, discrimination, and poverty" (Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* 123). That is, rural women experience the detrimental impacts of climate change because their gendered tasks as food gatherers, fuel collectors, and caregivers are backgrounded and deemed inessential by dualistic patriarchal modes of thought that fabricate hegemonic femininities and masculinities. This, in return, shows that the problem of climate change is not only about the disparate distribution of greenhouse gas emissions, but it is also about politics of misrecognition and discriminatory gender norms.

Although discussions about vulnerability and gendered impacts of climate change are gaining a lot of attention in feminist environmental justice studies, this line of approach has, at the same time, drawn fierce objections because it creates "a [monolithic] view of women in developing countries. . . as victims of ecological crisis" by disregarding their resilience and agency (MacGregor 223). According to Petra Tschakert and Nancy Tuana, this ongoing tension between vulnerability and resilience approaches results from the binary thinking that defines vulnerability as a negative state and resilience as a positive state:

> The labelling of certain groups or regions as vulnerable itself may constitute a type of stigmatization likely to exacerbate marginalisation and, consequently, undercut community agency, autonomy, and just and long-term adaptation. Resilience

> provides a constructive counter-discourse to narratives of vulnerability that typically describe poor and marginalised populations as passive victims of global changes, including climate change. Unlike vulnerability, a resilience approach provides the necessary discursive and material space for recognising and building adaptive capacity. . . However, we argue that debates between resilience and vulnerability frameworks flounder on a series of false dichotomies that are neither necessary nor desirable. (77)

To challenge this binary thinking, Tschakert and Tuana develop a hybrid analytical lens, which they term "situated resilience." They emphasise that "situated resilience" catalyses a new relational approach that fuses the states of vulnerability and resilience into a productive dialogue. Rather than examining vulnerability and resilience as distinct and contradictory concepts, they argue that adopting a relational approach will bring forth "a better understanding of how to access and incorporate lived experiences of people vulnerable to climate change, in combination with other socioeconomic, cultural, institutional, and political shocks and stressors as well as persistent inequalities, and precisely how to build resilience under complex, dynamic, and uncertain conditions" (78).

Tschakert and Tuana redefine vulnerability within the framework of their new relational approach. Vulnerability, in their view, is neither a negative nor a passive condition. It is, according to Tschakert and Tuana, rather a dynamic state of "openness to the other through which each being's uniqueness emerges" (86). Hence, it is both a reciprocal and corporeal process. It is reciprocal in the sense that "peoples and places are vulnerable to one another because of their porosity and inter-relationality" (86). It is corporeal in the sense that it emerges from the situated embeddedness of material and discursive processes, so "it requires that we appreciate how deeply situated all things are in materiality, values, habits, and interests" (85). Tschakert and Tuana coin the term "situated resilience" through this renewed understanding of vulnerability. Since humans and nonhumans are situated in specific "social relations of power, knowledge, and culture" (Tschakert and Tuana 89) producing environmental harms and benefits, developing resilience is possible by comprehending the interconnections between these relations. Thus, the conception of "situated resilience" demands particular attention to the acknowledgement of the "mutual porosity of socialnatural systems" (Tschakert and Tuana 92). Such acknowledgement, as Tschakert and Tuana contend, will provide the

necessary basis for cultivating new ethical commitments in coping with the disproportionate impacts of climate change and other ecological crises.

1.3. EXPANDING ON THE TERM "SOCIOTOXIC ECOLOGIES"

The struggles of various groups that have been discussed thus far, such as the rural women in the global South trying to find clean and uncontaminated water for their families in the face of the climate crisis, workers forced to work in the midst of dust and smog, and Third World countries whose lands have become the dumping grounds of First World countries, all highlight the fact that social injustices are inevitable constituents of environmental injustices. Unfortunately, despite its efforts to give voice to the struggles of these groups, environmental justice as a political, ecological, and cultural field remains overlooked or ignored in academic and literary discussions. Particularly, in the age of the Anthropocene, where human activities have left permanent and irreversible ecological scars on the planet, the stories of environmental justice need more scholarly and critical attention as they bring to the fore the social, political, ethical, and ideological dimensions of environmental problems that are suppressed in mainstream environmentalism.

Therefore, this dissertation seeks to create new pathways for the interpretations of environmental justice concerns in literary discussions by developing the term "sociotoxic ecologies." As opposed to mainstream environmentalism that values pristine, Edenic notions of nature, sociotoxic ecologies demand a rethinking of the porous boundaries between humans, nonhumans, and nature by drawing attention to the inextricability of ecological and social degradation. Highlighting the problematic aspects of mainstream environmentalism, Phil Macnaghten and John Urry contend that "[t]here is no singular nature . . . only a diversity of contested natures . . . constituted through a variety of socio-cultural processes" (1). Taking its cue from these scholars, this dissertation, in coining the term sociotoxic ecologies, purports to challenge the long-established divide that separates the social from the environmental and to question the ways in which social and natural ecologies become intertwined. As Noel Sturgeon also concedes, "Conceiving of nature and culture as radically separate spheres, presenting humans as universalised cause of damage to a pristine nonhuman environment, and promoting individualistic solutions

to environmental problems without considering the need for structural, economic, or social change does not get at the root of our problems" (8). Thus, to delve into the underlying causes of environmental issues, examining the entanglement between social and natural ecologies is a necessary task of an environmental justice critic, and the term sociotoxic ecologies can offer a critical window into better understanding of this entanglement.

Central to the notion of sociotoxic ecologies is the idea that environmentally contaminated and devastated places are also socially contaminated and devastated places. Hence, sociotoxic ecologies are ecologies of exploitation, degradation, and pollution. They are unjust and uneven ecologies because they are produced by the very oppressive systems that result in social injustices. They are also othered and marginalised ecologies because they are inhabited by marginalised people whose struggle for social and environmental change is disregarded. As Karen MacAfee argues, "The politics of nature cannot be neutral . . . In a world of great geographic variety and vast social difference, decisions and actions by states and others, or inactions opting for the status quo inevitably have consequences that affect some people and places very differently than others" (65). Sociotoxic ecologies lay bare these power imbalances as well as the classist, racist, and gendered practices that shape environmental conflicts. Social discrimination and environmental inequalities are intrinsically interwoven in these ecologies and cannot be separated.

In sociotoxic ecologies, the "socio" component is about recognising and addressing the deep-seated social dimensions of environmental issues. It acknowledges that places suffering from environmental pollution and exploitation are often simultaneously suffering from challenges, such as poverty, economic disenfranchisement, cultural subjugation, and political oppression. Considered in this perspective, the concept of sociotoxic ecologies fundamentally disrupts the traditional environmental narrative that often romanticises nature as separate from human influence. It posits that to fully grasp the depth of environmental crises, one must also consider the socio-cultural contexts in which these crises unfold. For instance, industrial pollution that disproportionately impacts working-class neighbourhoods cannot be effectively tackled without confronting

class disparities and economic exploitation that place such neighbourhoods at higher risk of environmental hazards. Or, the exposure of indigenous communities in African countries to toxic substances from resource extraction activities cannot be mitigated without examining the historical and ongoing capitalist oppression and racial discrimination that disregards indigenous rights. Moreover, the contamination of water sources in rural areas inhabited predominantly by low-income communities cannot be adequately addressed without dealing with systemic neglect, lack of infrastructure investment, and insufficient regulatory enforcement that allow such environmental injustices to persist.

Evaluated within the framework of these examples, sociotoxic ecologies expose the uneven distribution of environmental benefits and burdens across different social strata. These ecologies unveil the recognition that efforts to remediate environmental harm must simultaneously address the underlying social inequalities and injustices that reinforce ecological damage. As Barad also puts it, "The point is not merely that there are important material factors in addition to discursive ones; rather, the issue is the conjoined material-discursive nature of constraints, conditions, and practices" ("Posthumanist Performativity" 823). Sociotoxic ecologies emphasise the importance of developing a conjoined analysis that examines ecological issues through a social lens and vice versa. By challenging the separation between the social and ecological, as well as the discursive and material, this term invites scholars to adopt an integrated approach that acknowledges that environmental and social exploitation are not separate phenomena but deeply interconnected.

By expanding on the term "sociotoxic ecologies," the remainder of this dissertation examines to what extent and in what ways environmental injustices are linked with problems of classism, racism, and sexism in John Burnside's *Living Nowhere*, Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, and Marcel Theroux's *Far North.* The environmental crisis portrayed in each novel does not simply point to a natural crisis out there, but it is a material manifestation of a crisis of hierarchical modes of thinking and hegemonic social structures. The novels, in this respect, problematise and challenge the monolithic representations of nature as pure wilderness outside the realm of culture. They

reconfigure nature as a “sociotoxic” terrain, that is an unjust terrain of social contamination and material degradation, showing that the ontological status of nature is not free from divisive ideologies, societal oppressions, and historical inequalities.

CHAPTER II
CLASS AND ENVIRONMENTAL INEQUALITIES IN JOHN BURNSIDE'S *LIVING NOWHERE*

John Burnside is an award-winning author whose work defies straightforward categorisation. He writes in a variety of genres, addressing the intricate relations among ecology, philosophy, politics, religion, and spirituality. Burnside began his career as a poet and later gained recognition as a novelist. Among his notable poetry collections are *The Hoop* (1988), *Common Knowledge* (1991), *Feast Days* (1992), *The Asylum Dance* (2000) which received the Whitbread Book Award in 2000, *The Light Trap* (2002), and *Black Cat Bone* (2011) which won the T.S. Eliot Prize and the Forward Prize in 2011. His novels include *The Dump House* (1997), *The Locust Room* (2001), *Living Nowhere* (2003), *The Devil's Footprints* (2007), *Glister* (2008), *A Summer of Drowning* (2011), and *Havergey* (2017). He has also written short story collections, memoirs, and numerous essays as well as newspapers columns. More recently, he has been honoured with the prestigious 2023 David Cohen Prize for his outstanding literary achievements.

Given his extensive body of work, it would be appropriate to characterise Burnside as a "writer-thinker" who "attempts to think in ways that are different from, and challenge conventional, rational modes of thought, and knowledge" (B. Davies 3). While the themes he explores vary, his writings in essence question and contest anthropocentric mindset, which he believes is the root cause of humans' separation from nature. As he expresses in one of his interviews,

> . . .a concern for ecological questions and for the natural world is actually a concern with human life on Earth. Where I live, the quality of life has been degraded in a significant way. I lament the fact that there are fewer butterflies or birds of certain types, and I lament the fact that there are fewer green spaces. So it isn't just a concern about skylards and autumnal trees. We must remind ourselves that as human beings we are part of nature, and that we cannot survive in any meaningful sense, unless we respect animal life. (118)

Through his emphasis on the interconnectedness of all life forms, Burnside advocates more equitable and ecologically sustainable worldview which takes into consideration the moral and ethical aspects of the growing environmental crisis. Equating ecological well-being with the well-being of humanity, he perceives the natural world as intrinsically tied to issues of social inequality and oppression. This viewpoint is succinctly encapsulated

in his assertion that "social and environmental justice are not only linked, but continuous" ("John Clare" 88).

Burnside's claim aligns closely with Deane Curtin's contention that "if we believe that environmental and social justice are intertwined, we need to adjust our understanding of what an environmental problem is" (114). As a "writer-thinker," Burnside appears to have embraced Curtin's call to action, complicating the traditional notions of nature, culture, human, and nonhuman through his literary works. According to Burnside, an ecological problem is not a simple external phenomenon dissociated from discursive practices, but it is, at its core, a problem of justice where material and discursive practices commingle. Thus, to have a thorough comprehension of his engagement with ecology, it is essential to understand the social and political criticism woven into his texts.

Setting Burnside in context with such writers as James Kelman (1946-), George Mackay Brown (1921-1996), and Alasdair Gray (1934-2019), Graeme Macdonald claims that his novels constitute an essential part of "a cluster of [Scottish] texts imaging scenarios where individuals and groups of limited political power confront the social and economic causes of ecological disaster and environmental ruin" ("Green Links" 227). The interrelated issues of ecology and social justice become manifest in Burnside's early fiction, beginning with *Living Nowhere*, and they continue to resurface in his following novels, including *Glister* and *Havergey*. In the fictional worlds he constructs, Burnside specifically critiques the capitalistic exploitation of nature and its intersection with other forms of exploitation. "At present," he remarks, "the version of history we are encouraged to consume is one that suits big corporations and their employees in our state governments. It's a history of conflict and consumption that denies us elements of our very nature, as human animals" ("Poetry as Ecology" 93). From Burnside's standpoint, the capitalist system, a primary driver of the anthropocentric mindset, acts as a disruptive force that severs the intrinsic connections between human beings, nonhumans, and the broader environment. Consequently, his novels prompt a critical re-evaluation of the harm wrought by this disruption upon the social and ecological fabric, compelling readers to confront the need for a paradigm shift towards a sociopolitically greener world. *Glister,* for example, draws attention to the co-constitutive links between economic and

environmental subordination by depicting "a ruinous post-industrial landscape, destroyed by the presence of a large chemical plant, whose toxic substances have entirely poisoned the environment [and its inhabitants]" (Niedlich 213). Similarly, *Havergey*, which takes place in a remote post-apocalyptic island, examines the repercussions of unregulated industrial and capitalist practices, laying bare how these practices can lead to a massive eco-catastrophe with far-reaching consequences for the whole planet.

Burnside's critique of the capitalist industry takes a more powerful stance in his fourth novel *Living Nowhere*, which forms the central focus of this chapter. H. Gustav Klaus describes the novel as "a richly complex work uniting several interests and different genres" (111). It can be interpreted as a "tale of two-working class families in the diaspora," "a story of adolescence, crime and punishment . . . with a whodunnit element" or a "historical and autobiographical work" (Klaus 111-12) that contains memories of Burnside's own working-class background. Above all, the novel, as this chapter proposes, can serve as an important environmental justice narrative intersecting the issues of class, industry, labour, and environmental degradation. It "depicts the transition from heavy manufacturing in Britain from the 1970s to the present, through the effect it has on generations of families of Scottish and East European 'migrants' working in the steelworks in the town of Corby in Northamptonshire" (Macdonald, "Green Links" 234). Drawn by the promise of increased wages and improved job prospects, the Camerons and the Ruckerts, migrated to Corby, only to witness their lives deteriorate further under the shadows of the steel plant called The Works. Through the intersecting narratives of these two families, the novel delineates a socially and ecologically toxic industrial landscape where class disparities result in unequal exposure to environmental hazards and bodily diseases. The inhabitants of Corby not only struggle with the social injustices perpetrated by the industrial capitalist system, but this very system also exploits their environment and bodies. This triple exploitation to which they are exposed brings to the fore the ongoing environmental justice debates about whether it is possible to have green industrial working environments that value both ecological health and the health of its workers. As the environmental justice critic Bullard puts it, "[p]oor people and poor communities are given a false choice between having, on the one hand, no jobs and no development and, on the other hand, risky low-paying jobs and pollution. In reality,

unemployment and poverty are also hazardous to one's health. This jobs-versus-unemployment scenario is a form of economic blackmail" (42). Expanding upon Bullard's premise, this chapter claims that the sociotoxic ecology presented in *Living Nowhere* is rooted in the dilemma between having hazardous jobs in polluting industries or no jobs at all. And it further argues that this dilemma is embodied in the bodies of the working-class people who are forced to an exchange of their health for toxic working conditions. Hence, by putting the environmental justice perspective in a critical dialogue with Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality, this chapter discusses the enmeshment of class, bodily, and environmental injustices caused by the industrial capitalist system in the sociotoxic town of Corby.

2.1. TRANS-CORPOREAL DYNAMICS OF CORBY AS A SOCIOTOXIC ECOLOGY

Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality serves as a crucial analytical framework for examining sociotoxic ecologies as it elucidates the "interconnections and interchanges between human corporeality and the more-than-human world" ("Trans-Corporeal Feminisms" 238). At the center of Alaimo's argument is the idea that human bodies and nonhuman environments are not distinct entities; they transform and are transformed by each other. Therefore, analysing sociotoxic ecologies through the lens of trans-corporeality can open up, to use Alaimo's words, a new framework for understanding "how 'body' and 'nature' are comprised of the same material, which has been constituted, simultaneously, by the forces of evolution, natural and human history, political inequities, biological and chemical processes [and social and ecological injustices]" ("Trans-Corporeal Feminisms" 247). Such an analysis requires a thorough examination of "a dense network of relations" (Bennett 13) in which social/political/economic systems that generate unjust toxic practices also contaminate biological bodies. In *Living Nowhere,* Burnside interrogates this dense network of relations by presenting a trans-corporeal "sociotoxic ecology" where classed bodies, industrial pollutants, and discriminatory labour practices all intertwine. On one hand, steel workers of Corby and their families are oppressed socially and economically by the relentless pursuit of economic growth. On the other hand, industrial capitalism "as an ecology of exploitation and contamination"

Iengo and Armiero 195) infiltrate their environment and bodies, creating pollution, illnesses, injuries, and even death. This part of the chapter examines how the town of Corby as depicted in the novel emerges as a sociotoxic ecology and proposes that the environmental crisis that the town faces is an entangled crisis of class inequalities and industrial capitalism. It also discusses how this environmental crisis extends to the bodies of steel workers, rendering them sociotoxic too. Their bodies represent the fusion of "biological and discursive processes through which toxic agencies and discourses transit, impressing their visible marks" (Oppermann, "Toxic Bodies" 417).

Throughout the novel, Burnside "uses a wide spectrum of viewpoints and perspectives to show the inextricable interweaving of social and environmental injustice and ecology" (Pass 100). Therefore, it is vital to understand the narrative structure of the novel before delving into a detailed analysis. Each chapter alternates between the consciousness of different characters who offer insights into various aspects of the trans-corporeal sociotoxic ecology in which they inhabit. The first two chapters, narrated in the third person, are filtered through the lens of Alina, the daughter of the Latvian family; Alma, a Latvian immigrant and Alina's mother; Tommy, a Scottish immigrant working in The Works; and Derek, Tommy's older son who gets a job in the Works to make money for his music. The rest of the novel consists of letters penned by Francis, Tommy's younger son who leaves Corby after the tragic death of his best friend, Jan Ruckert. Although the characters represent different families and generations, the common thread that binds together their narratives is the pervasive influence of The Works "whose generalised name underlines its economic dominance" (Klaus 114). The pollution caused by The Works has drastically altered their lives as well as the ecology of Corby.

The novel opens with Alina, who is under the influence of LSD and experiencing an acid trip with Francis in a graveyard. The acid in her blood awakens her senses and helps her to discover the vitality of the objects around her, including the snow falling in Corby, which reminds her of a "cleaner way of being, an elsewhere of light" (13). The whiteness of the snow poses a stark contrast to the darkness of the graveyard and "the dull orange glow from [the blast furnaces of] The Works" (19) which dominates the whole sky. The novel, from the very beginning, employs such imagery of whiteness, lightness, and

darkness to depict the severe and disproportionate impact of industrial contamination. The snow, as Klaus explains, "is suggestive of purity, freshness, beauty and quietness, the very opposite of life in their [Alina and Francis's] polluted environment" (114). However, upon tasting the snow, Alina feels a "black and metallic [taste] in her mouth, like iron fillings mixed with morning frost, eternally intertwined" (35). From this perspective, despite its symbolic connotations, the snow in Corby is not in fact pure or fresh as it is tainted with chemicals oozing from The Works. The snow, therefore, becomes a carrier of the industrial pollution, signalling the breakdown of natural and cultural ecologies. Its whiteness is illusionary and cannot cover the oppressive and dehumanising effects of the capitalist industrialisation on the physical environment of Corby as well as its inhabitants:

> It was like living in a suburb of hell, Alina thought. At night, the light from the blast furnaces cast a dull glow over everything for miles; by day, tiny flakes of flash and dust drifted on the wind, a taint on the air you could taste, a corruption you couldn't help breathing. . .Now, looking back from here, she saw that the town was nothing, really. It was The Works and not much else: Corby Steel Works, like a huge animal drowsing in the dark, breathing men and fire, crouched in its own miasma of smoke and dust surrounded on all sides by estates where its attendants lived, like the peasants in some medieval barony, their huts pitched in rings around the great castle. (19)

This striking portrayal of Corby, with toxic industrial smog emanating from The Works, brings to mind Ulrich Beck's famous saying that "[p]overty is hierarchic, smog is democratic" (36). While Beck's claim conveys the idea that environmental risks, such as smog, can affect everyone across different socioeconomic strata, the smog that surrounds Corby contests this notion by revealing the hierarchical structure of environmental risks. Challenging Beck, Alan Scott also proposes that "smog is just as hierarchical as poverty so long as some places are less smoggy than others" (36). Similarly, the smog in Corby is as hierarchical as the poverty experienced by the characters because it emerges from the interplay of unregulated modes of capitalist production, industrial pollutants, and hegemonic classist discourses that relegate working-class environments to a subordinate position. Conceived this way, smog becomes a vivid example of "how the material is imbricated with the social" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 40).

As opposed to the contentions that environmental threats can equally impact people regardless of wealth, the novel demonstrates that the environment in which people live and work determine their degree of exposure to such threats:

> Placing environmental burdens in the social [and material] spaces of the poor. . . is an expression of the ways in which the inhabitants are valued by the more powerful decision-makers in our society. When the decision-makers are set in participatory power, they value their social location enough to consciously avoid locating harms upon themselves and their environments. The regularity with which environmental burdens are concentrated in the spaces of poverty . . . announces who is the most institutionally powerful and who is represented in environmental decision-making. (Figeuro 316-17)

Examined in this light, environmental contamination prevails in the town of Corby, not because industrial pollutants randomly accumulate in this place, but because Corby has specifically been selected as a site for capitalist expansion. Therefore, Corby is portrayed in the novel as an uneven toxic landscape "laden with political implications" (Griem 100). Although the architects of the town wanted to mask industrial toxicity by leaving "patches of green between the houses, narrow strips of dusty wood, mysterious angles and recesses of greenery and brackish water" (19), these green places ironically produced "the opposite effect, reminding everyone of what had been there before The Works arrived" (19) Even through this irony, Burnside shows how Corby, as a poor steel town, stands at the crossroads of poisonous economic, social, and chemical practices.

The contamination from The Works is of such an intolerable degree that steel workers and their families find themselves entangled in a traffic of toxins travelling through the steel plant to their bodies and then to the wider environment. As Alina expresses,

> All their lives they had lived and breathed The Works; their bodies were steeped in a miasma of steel and carbon and ore; all their stories had to do with the Corporation, or the unions, or what happened in the blast furnaces. That was the irony of it all; after a few months, there was no doubting that they belonged to this place; their bodies were drenched in the stink of coke and ammonia and that lingering undertow, part-carbon, part – iron, that was everywhere –in the soil and the water, on the air . . . in the flesh of the living and the bones of the dead. (13-14)

Alina offers here a compelling trans-corporeal picture of Corby where the residues of carbon, ore, and iron lurking in the air, soil, and water, make it difficult to separate the natural from the industrial, the human from the nonhuman, and the material from the discursive. "The traffic in toxins," Alaimo writes, "may render it nearly impossible for humans to imagine that their own well-being is disconnected from that of the rest of the

planet" (*Bodily Natures* 18). Even though "the inhabitants of Corby might experience their position as relatively peripheral to the wider world," tracing the traffic in toxins "establishes their centrality to at least two global systems: industrial capitalism and ecosystem" (Macdonald, "Green Links" 235). The environmental contamination that they face is not solely a result of local factors; it rather "results from contradictions between the environmental and public health costs of industrial production and the inescapable dependency of social reproduction on industrial jobs" (Barca and Leonardi, "Working-Class Ecology" 492).

As the narrative switches to Alina's mother Alma, she exposes that pollution stemming from The Works permeates even the domestic realm, blurring the boundaries between the public and private spheres as well as the personal and the political:

> Everything in Corby was dirt. Everything was marked, even the people. When she went outside, she could see it; when she went into the garden to hang the washing, or to fetch something from the shed, she could taste it on the air: dirt, carbon, steel, flakes of ore; the smell, not of burning, but of the burned, not of the soil, but of the clay. She could only hang the washing out on certain days, when the wind was right, but even then it never felt clean, it was always touched with grime, and that stink of ore. (50)

The "smoke and grime" from The Works reach everywhere, "drift[ing] into the garden, into the house even, to contaminate everything – clothes, skin, food, dishes – with their subtle poisons" (49). Such intrusion of industrial pollutants into every aspect of life reflects the inescapable impact of The Works, illustrating how "working-class communities typically experience nature from subordinate social positions as those most affected by pollution and other industrial hazard" (Barca and Leonardi, "Working-Class Communities" 65). When Alma moves to Corby, she feels uneasy about the place. She is worried about the job that her husband Marc is doing in The Works. She is also worried about the poisonous air, "afraid of what her children might be breathing" (49). The Works, she notices, is home for various hazardous events. For example, one August night she saw "a cascade of soft bright flakes that she would have mistaken for snow, falling all along the street in the dense heat summer heat" (49). What may appear as a natural occurrence could indeed turn out to be toxic; therefore, the distinction between the natural and the chemical is completely dissolved in this sociotoxic town.

It is not just the physical landscape that is tainted with contamination, but so are the social structures of the town, as Alma realises: "[t]here had been days when Alma found vomit, used tampons, dried-up trails of urine, even once, some kind of animal remains, either here, on the doorstep, or on the path, or scattered across the narrow front lawn. She had no idea who was responsible for this persecution" (46). Her doorstep turns into a dumping area for unwanted items. As Alma tries to make sense of this unsettling situation, she begins to suspect that the root cause of the problem lies in her family's ethnic background. She thinks that the hostile attitude of her neighbours may result from the fact they consider her family to be German immigrants, though they are of Latvian descent.

Having to deal with the hostility of her neighbours, Alma reveals that it was not her but her husband Marc who wanted to move to Corby in the first place because he believed that "he had the chance of a good job, and he saw it as a means to an end, a way to save enough money to move on" (48). Marc is one of the many steel workers in the novel who feels confined to The Works to have a better life. Hence, his situation "is representative of one of the hallmarks of environmental injustice: the poor must accept the violent injustices of capitalist systems in order to achieve even a modicum of financial security" (Westerman 68). The fact that Marc succumbs to an unknown mental disease soon after he gets a job in The Works testifies to this view. Some type of imbalance occurs in his memory, which makes him forget things and behave strangely. In Alma's opinion, Marc's disease is caused by "a rogue chemical [that] had entered in his blood . . . or maybe just by something that floated in the air up there, some tiny particle of dust or metal that he breathed every day, or absorbed through his fingertips" (59). She hints at a trans-corporeal link between Marc's illness and The Works, implying that The Works, which is responsible for degrading the environment, is also responsible for degrading the workers' health.

Through Marc's predicament, the novel confronts one of the pivotal questions raised by environmental justice scholars: Why is the exploitation of workers and the degradation of the environment perceived as inevitable outcomes of economic expansion? (Robertson and Westerman 12). This conflict lies at the centre of the trans-corporeal sociotoxic ecology presented in the novel. The Works promises jobs, but it does so at the expense

of mistreating the steel workers, contaminating their environment, and jeopardising their health. This is a type of job blackmail as workers are forced to choose between toxic jobs and unemployment. The novel problematises the trade-off between toxic working conditions and economic survival, exposing "how 'this false choice' exploits working-class people and the more-than-human world" (Robertson and Westerman 12). As Barca and Leonardi also contend, "[t]he job blackmail is a widely used mechanism of industrial relations, which affects working-class communities of all types, normalizing ecological contradictions as a 'natural' fact of life for working-class people, and thus making them the subjects of environmental injustice" ("Working-Class Ecology" 489). In line with this argument, it is possible to maintain that the steel workers of Corby not only epitomise but also internalise the social and ecological contradictions embedded within industrial capitalism. As they grow increasingly dependent on industrial capitalism, they become more vulnerable to labour and ecological abuse; nevertheless, they accept their vulnerability as an integral part of their lives.

This situation, for example, is reflected in Tommy's case. He decides to move to Corby from Cowdenbeath driven by the desire for "a better place to live and bring up [his] children" (63). Coming from a miners' family, Tommy does not want to work in the pits because of the dangers associated with coal-mining; however, he finds himself in the by-products section of The Works, a job which turns out to be "just as risky as coal-mining, more so even" (63) since all the poisons of the plant are gathered here. Through Tommy, the novel critiques the deceptive nature of the choice between risky jobs and unemployment, highlighting how working-class people are coerced into accepting exploitative conditions under the guise of economic necessity. Despite the risks of getting hurt and even getting killed, Tommy attempts to rationalise his situation by convincing himself that his new job offers good money and that he can work anywhere as long as "there [i]s a door or window nearby and enough space to stand up straight" (63). Therefore, his acceptance of the hazardous employment at The Works reflects a broader problem of environmental injustice where workers internalise the belief that they have limited options and must tolerate harmful working conditions in order to provide for their families. However, this internalisation results in the further exploitation of Tommy as his health begins to deteriorate in a noticeable way day by day: "[N]ow the irises were paler,

as if the smoke from The Works had clouded them, and his mouth was darker than before, a little tighter, a symptom of the disappointment he had had to manage, day-to-day, and of the work he'd had to do, holding himself back, smothering the fire he carried in his blood" (81). He feels that "The Works . . . claimed him" (72) in every possible way physically, spiritually, economically, and socially. Hence, his pursuit of a brighter future is shattered as he finds himself entangled in a web of social exploitation, environmental degradation, and disillusionment.

Tommy's first impression of The Works is quite significant as he portrays a complex industrial workplace fraught with hazards:

> His first impression of The Works itself had been of something impossible to navigate; a vast labyrinth of rail lines and machinery glimpsed through wide shed doors; smoke from the coke ovens drifting into the open yards between the mills, shrouding the men in a soft, dusty monochrome, like the light in an old Cagney film; heat billowing out and wrapping him close in a blanket of what felt like actual fire as he wandered through the huge machinery of the place, blinking and gasping for breath, but trying to look as if he was accustomed to it all. (68-69)

The depiction of The Works as a labyrinth not only evokes a sense of entrapment but also, more importantly, highlights the co-extensivity of workers' bodies with the vast machinery of industrial production. The smoke and the scorching heat that dominate The Works also permeate the workers' bodies, inflicting them with diseases and injuries, such as "local burns, spills, falls, temporary and permanent blindings" (70). The novel offers a nuanced portrayal of the declining health status of steel workers, revealing how industrial capitalist system creates "trajectories of environmental contamination extended into every metabolic system" (Oppermann, "Toxic Bodies" 414-15). Both nature and steel workers are commodified and disproportionately subjected to contamination in this system which prioritises overproduction above human and environmental welfare.

Entangled in economic and ecological discrimination, the polluted bodies of steel workers are a potent example of "trans-corporeal space" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 22) in the novel. As Tommy observes, the hazardous chemicals to which they are exposed leave permanent marks on their skin, making them sick:

> Everything about them was defined by their occupation. A furnaceman would have a cherry-coloured burn on the end of his nose, or on his forehead, from lifting the furnace doors; another man might have fingers missing from working on the

> machines, or his clothes would be peppered with tiny holes from being showered with hot metal sparks. Every part of The Works had its own smell, its own colours. Traces of dust would soak into a man's skin, sometimes oxblood red, sometimes green or pale blue, but mostly a grey-black, the underground tones of ore and sinter and slag. Tommy knew his skin was already a map where every spill, every gust of heat, every shift was signalled by some after-stain of carbon or metal. (71)

Building upon Lewontin and Levins's concept of "proletarian lung" which emphasises the unequal exposure of workers' bodies to ecological threats, it is possible to discuss here "working-class skin" tainted by various colours of chemicals. Tommy's comparison of his skin to a map serves as a powerful representation of the corporeal costs of steel labouring, attesting to "the penetrating physiological effects of class . . . oppression" and demonstrating that "biological and the social cannot be considered separate spheres" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 28). Just like the surrounding sociotoxic landscape which is saturated with industrial pollution, workers' bodies turn into a sociotoxic ecology, as exemplified by their tainted skin on which lethal industrial substances, environmental injustices, and exploitative labour practices are imprinted.

The fact that steel workers' skin becomes indistinguishable from the environment in which they labour also brings to the fore the pressing question posed by Linda Nash in *Escapable Ecologies*: "Where does the body end and 'nonhuman nature' begin?" (8). The novel illustrates the challenge of separating the body from the natural world and nonhuman agencies, suggesting that there is "only ever intra-action, only ever porous co-relations" (Van Horn 30). However, these co-relations are not harmonious; instead, they reveal a detrimental fusion of human bodies and nonhuman entities. The novel, in this respect, does not draw attention to "a cooperative configuration, but a corrosive hybridization of human and nonhuman agencies, displaying the stark reality of alien kinships" (Oppermann, "Toxic Bodies" 419). It highlights a dangerous and destructive type of trans-corporeality experienced by the workers, where the interconnections between their bodies and chemical toxins result in diseases.

When Derek, Tommy's elder son, joins The Works, he also finds himself, to use Alaimo's words, "inextricably part of the flux and flow" (*Bodily Natures* 17) of the toxic substances which, he realises, know no borders invading every corner of the steel plant as well as the workers' bodies. Derek's encounter with Sammy, an experienced worker who has been

in The Works for a long time, serves as a pivotal moment on his first day, catalysing his awareness of the porous boundaries of his own flesh. Sammy cautions Derek about the detrimental consequences of toxin exposure as such:

> Take a deep breath. Now you can smell it. Taste it. You know, your sense of smell isn't independent of taste. It's all the same. Which means that what you are detecting right now, by smell, by taste, is something you are taking in, the way you take in food, tasting it, absorbing it into your body. It's in your body now, becoming a part of you for all time, for your lifetime and beyond that. Even when you're in the ground, it's still there. If somebody digs you up, centuries from now, some archaeologist say, he'll find it in whatever's left of the clothes you were buried in. He'll find it in your bones. (94)

While Sammy's words are quite significant in shedding light on the immediacy of trans-corporeal experience within the present moment, they also highlight a type of trans-corporeal experience that extends across temporal dimensions comingling the past, present, and future state of toxicity. As Sandra Steinbrager also puts it, "what is written . . . inside the fibers of our cells and our chromosomes . . . is a record of our exposure to environmental contaminants" (236). Similarly, steel workers' bodies become a living record of their intra-action with chemical toxins which leave long lasting imprints on their health. More importantly, the fact that these chemicals can linger on the environment for centuries even after the death of the steel workers raises serious ethical considerations regarding the transgenerational impact of hazardous industrial practices. It turns out that the lives of future generations are at stake, too, and molded by the enduring legacy of industrial pollution.

As Sammy guides Derek through the factory, he continues to reflect on the hazardous aspects of the trans-corporeal dynamics between the workers' bodies and chemical toxins: "I stop and remind myself of what it is I'm breathing. What it is I'm becoming. That clay smell, for example, that's iron ore" (95). Then, he scents the air one more time, saying: "Smoke: yes. But you have to think about it. Because there are so many different kinds of smoke that, to live in a place like this, you need a whole new language for it, like all those words the Eskimos have for snow" (95). Within The Works, even the seemingly basic need of breathing transforms into a sociotoxic activity, illustrating, in Alaimo's words, that a worker's body "is never a rigidly, enclosed, protected entity, but is vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environments, which may include industrial environments and their social/economic forces" (*Bodily Natures* 28). From the air they

breathe to the food they eat in the canteen, steelworkers are in a constant and continuous becoming with chemicals like iron and ammonia; however, this intricate process of becoming is an unjust one as it is the exploitative forces of industrial capitalism that place steelworkers amid these lethal chemical toxins which transform their bodies irrevocably. Viewed through this lens, the novel underlines a trans-corporeal relation between workers' bodies, chemical agencies, and the industrial forces; however, this trans-corporeal relation is far from being neutral as it "flows according to the pipelines of power and privilege in operation" (Van Horn 31) which dictate who gets benefit from the production of steel and who bears the burden of its toxic impacts.

Derek also discovers the unjust dynamics involved in The Works as he queries his shift supervisor about protective clothing:

> Derek wanted to know where his protective clothing was.
> 'How do you mean' Andy seemed genuinely puzzled. 'What protective clothing?'
> 'They said in the office that I'd be provided with protective clothing'
> 'What, like overalls?' Andy said.
> 'I don't know'
> The supervisor gave a short hard laugh. 'I expect they meant the glove' he said. 'There's an asbestos glove kicking around somewhere. I wouldn't wear it, though. It's too hot. Your hand'll turn to putty in that thing.' (88)

The careless attitude of the supervisors towards safety rules shows "how [m]aterial and discursive elements are deeply interlaced in the 'trans-corporeal' domino effect of the toxic event: contaminated are the soil . . . humans, and their future . . . But also contaminated – and toxified – are politics, ideological frames of mind, in what we could call an 'oncology of mind'" (Iovino 43). Supervisors, such as Andy, can be considered embodiments of this "oncology of mind," with the poisons of The Works seeping into their work ethic. They not only force steelworkers to toil under hazardous conditions without any protective clothing but also normalise accidents, injuries, and diseases as evident in Derek observations: "every shift change, one of the supervisors came and read through the list of injuries – burns, lacerations, chemical spills, broken bones – before he copied them into an old-fashioned ledger and wiped the blackboard, ready for the next shift" (93). Rather than acknowledging the gravity of industrial maladies, supervisors take a mechanistic approach, reducing these maladies to mere statistical data to be written on a board. Such a toxic frame of mind, or in Iovino's words, "oncology of mind" sparks controversial questions within the novel: How do industries ascertain the safety of

chemicals and determine their allowable quantities? Who sets the criteria for environmental standards in industrial zones, permitting industries to operate under conditions that normalise occupational risks and environmental degradation? The novel posits that the answers to these questions lie in a hazy mixture of political considerations, issues of social justice and labour, and concerns for environmental and human health.

The underlying reason behind the normalisation of industrial diseases and accidents is hegemonic discourses which subjugate workers to uneven social and environmental conditions for the sake of corporate interests. Therefore, supervisors become important agents in perpetuating this hegemonic agenda. By making diseases and accidents seem normal, they mask the questions of causation and accountability and legitimise workers' disproportionate exposure to chemical toxins. Sammy unveils the manipulative intentions of the supervisors as he cautions Derek against becoming accustomed to the hazardous working conditions: "You can't let yourself get used to it. Because that's what they want. They want you to get used to it. They want you to take it for granted. They want you to *be* that smell [referring to the smell of iron ore]" (95).

Despite Sammy's persistent warning, Derek realises that workers, including Sammy, have already come to terms with the unjust labour conditions in The Works. To his astonishment, workers recount stories of injuries and accidents, "repeating the details with grim relish and unmistakable pride" (96). One particularly chilling story involves a father and son labouring together in a blast furnace, but the son tragically succumbs to flames with half of his body burnt. Derek also meets a man named Peter who, despite being advised to avoid heat due to his heart disease, persists in remaining at The Works out of financial necessity, and the belief that he is going to die anyway. Peter's situation demonstrates that economic desperation drives workers to accept accidents, injuries, and diseases as an inescapable part of their jobs. Since the wealth of the town depends on The Works, workers see it as the only viable option to secure their lives. However, in acquiescing to unfair conditions of The Works, they paradoxically contribute to their own subjugation because their passive acceptance allows supervisors to maintain the unfair conditions without facing significant resistance.

Through the characters, such as Sammy and Peter, the novel problematises the normalisation and internalisation of the social and ecological conflicts by the steel workers of Corby, who, despite experiencing exploitation and environmental harm, resign themselves to their circumstances without putting up any resistance. This problematisation culminates in the following paragraph in which Tommy reflects on unjust social hierarchies and the unequal distribution of wealth:

> What disappointed him was the world people made, the institutions, the rules, the conventions by which they lived, whereby one man's life was richer and easier than another's for no good reason and – worse – those rules by which the poor, the weak, the deceived, the disadvantaged perpetuated their own condition, looking for a boss, believing what they were told, obeying the joyless laws that were made for no other reason than to hold down and contain every spark of life in their hearts and minds and bodies, every last glimmer of energy, or imagination. (187)

Tommy's observations summarise the precarious situation of the steel workers who are entrenched in power inequalities created by the capitalist structures. Industrial capitalism traps them in a relentless loop of economic dependency and environmental degradation, but what is equally problematic is that by passively accepting their existing circumstances, they also perpetuate the cycle of exploitation in which they are entangled and prevent any chance of liberation from social and environmental injustices that have been imposed on them. The novel questions this paradoxical entanglement where both the oppressed and the oppressor participate in the act of oppression, though not with an equal share. By internalising unjust societal norms and environmental violence inflicted on them, workers succumb to a sense of fatalism, believing they have little agency to alter their circumstances and must accept the place assigned to them in life. This sense of fatalism is especially evoked in Tommy's belief that people like him are destined to transition from one type of imprisonment to another: "He was Corby through and through just as he would have been Cowdenbeath through and through if he'd stayed at home: men like him didn't escape, they just moved from one prison to another, from the pit to steelworks. . . from being told what to do at school to being told what to do by politicians and managers and television" (188). Since he feels trapped within the oppressive social structures and the polluted environmental conditions, Tommy cannot envision an alternative future outside the confines of the sociotoxic ecology in which he lives. The novel, in this respect, implies that a change towards a better future is not possible unless

there is a collective effort to break free from the fatalistic mindset that plagues the community of Corby.

Although the novel focuses mainly on the challenges endured by male workers in The Works, it also offers "glimpses of female factory life" (Klaus 120) through Alina's experiences at Snakpak. In so doing, the novel opens to discussion the interconnections between gendered labour practices and industrial workplaces. When compared to the hazardous environment of The Works where accidents are commonplace, the work that women do at Snakpak is relatively safer. Nevertheless, it is still demanding and oppressive. Women are confined to long lines, spending hours packaging nuts. The physical toll of this work becomes particularly inscribed on their bodies. They are drenched in sweat due to the heat. Their fingers itch from the plastic and salt with which they come into contact, and their legs and feet grow numb from standing in one position for extended periods (207). However, the physical toll of this work is not the only challenge that female workers endure. They also grapple with sexual exploitation, which further exacerbates their already difficult working conditions. Alina, for instance, constantly faces verbal harassment from her supervisor and other male workers, subjected to comments, such as "Hey Alina. If I said, you had a beautiful body…" or "Alina, meet me outside after work and I'll show you the big estate" (207). She realises that the whole situation has morphed into a sort of game where she is expected to play along and be compliant like other women in the factory: "Play The Game. Meaning: be a girl. Smile, walk on, pretend the whole thing is a joke" (207). This is a game which is not fun, but rather one that perpetuates a culture of sexism. Alina's experiences at Snakpak highlight the need for recognising the oppression and exploitation of gendered bodies in industrial workplaces. They further suggest that "as we seek to expand the ethical, political, and epistemological purview of environmental studies through 'trans-corporeality,' gendered proletarian body must be a central concern in critical investigations in the ethics and politics of environmental justice" (Xiaojing 68).

The novel does not draw any explicit correlations between bodily diseases and women's job at Snakpak, but it highlights the potential risks of this job, through Lizzie, Tommy's wife, who worked at Snakpak for a couple of months, "when she had the first attack of

her mysterious illness – an illness nobody understood, which made everyone assume it was cancer – and she couldn't go on" (74). The fact that Tommy juxtaposes Lizzie's deteriorating health condition with their move to Corby implies that the polluted environment of Corby, coupled with her work at Snakpak, has led to her illness: "So he had come south, and he had hoped for a change – a new life, a new start. Instead, the distance between them had grown, till they hardly spoke to one another – only began speaking, in fact, when Lizzie first fell ill, and it began to dawn on them both that it was serious" (73). Instead of a new life, Lizzie finds herself entangled in a battle against cancer, enduring years of pain and suffering. By placing emphasis on Lizzie's illness, the novel illustrates how women's bodies like those of steelworkers become "complex sites of ideological, ecological, and discursive power relations" (Oppermann, "Feminist Ecocriticism" 75). The same chemicals that plague the ecosystem of Corby and steelworkers' bodies also plague Lizzie's body, resulting in her death. Therefore, her death is not a simple biological event. It is a consequence of broader unjust economic and industrial systems that expose working-class people to harmful and toxic environments.

2.2. FROM TOXIC BODIES TO TOXIC MENTAL ECOLOGIES

While, on the one hand, the novel brings into focus the "trans-corporeal maps of transits" (Alaimo, "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms" 238) between the bodies of working-class people and industrial environments, on the other hand, it also shows how these maps of transits extend to the psychological state of steelworkers as well as that of their families, creating a parallel toxic mental ecology that is just as harmful as the physical one. As Klaus puts it, "[t]he machinery in The Works cuts and forms metal, but also cuts and deforms the men who work it, and not just physically. The contamination reaches into their souls" (119). The industrial pollution sickening their bodies sicken their psyche as well, making them angry and bad-tempered. Hence, the sociotoxic ecology in which they live and work becomes a source of mental devastation, too. By recognising the intricate links between the environment and psychological well-being, the novel challenges the dualistic attempts to separate the social and the material from the mental. The damage and harm of injustice done to the working-class families is not limited to their environment and bodies. Rather, this harm has a deep psychological dimension and consequences, too. Considered in this

framework, the novel expands on the understanding of justice in environmental justice. It highlights that justice cannot be achieved by focusing solely on environmental factors or bodily harm but must take into account the mental health of working-class communities.

Focusing on the psychology of social class, Anthony Manstead claims that "[t]he material conditions in which people grow up and live have a lasting impact on their personal and social identities and that this influences the way they feel about their social environment and key aspects of their social behaviour" (267). In this context, the anger embodied by steelworkers can be attributed to the toxic labour conditions and the unjust treatment they receive from their employers and society at large. It is not simply a matter of personal temperament, but rather a result of broader environmental and social conditions. Derek's observation of the steelworkers' anger is quite insightful, as he captures the multifaceted nature of this emotion:

> Every man Derek knew was angry, they just had different ways of carrying it. Some wore their rage on the outside like a badge or a tattoo, others smothered it deep in their bodies, so it only shone through at odd moments, a terrifying gleam in the eyes or around the mouth. Some transformed it into other things-hobbies, drinking, fantasies, even music-but it was never completely buried, and it came out whenever a man had to raise his voice to be heard, the hard note of anger glinting like steel through a shout or a warning. (88)

The fact that anger is such a pervasive emotion among these workers suggests that it is a coping mechanism for dealing with the physical demands of their jobs as well as the danger and the uncertainty of their working environments. The constant threat of injury or death, the long hours and gruelling work, and the economic instability that comes with working in steel industry all contribute to this pervasive anger that they experience.

Like Derek, Tommy also discerns "in the eyes of every man who worked on Steelside a look, a kinship with . . . dark machinery of fire and metal" (71), which indicates that their deep-seated anger is a by-product of machinery that both sustains and destroys their lives. Although Tommy initially does not recognise this kinship within himself, he comes to the realisation that he is over time "contaminated with an anger he didn't understand, tainted against his will with an extraordinary capacity to hate men" (77). In Tommy's case, his anger stems from a deep sense of injustice rooted in his upbringing, having been

"born in a coal town, with nothing to look forward to other than the pits, growing up in the dirt while other people, people he could see, people who were no better than him, drove by in their cars and fancy clothes" (186). His anger, therefore, is a reaction to larger societal failure to appreciate the value and work of working-class people. It is a manifestation of his sense of powerlessness and frustration at the lack of recognition and opportunities available to people from his background.

Although anger is a "highly social emotion" that "can motivate and mobilize efforts against the injustices of everyday life" (Schieman 329), the anger that steelworkers experience, including Tommy himself, often gives harm and results in violence. It becomes a destructive force, leading to horrifying acts of brutality, as in the case of Peter who loses his temper and cuts a cat's tail with his crowbar in front of Derek's eyes. The violence is not confined to the steel factory but carried out to the streets of Corby, which are plagued by gangs and criminal activity: "There were nights when anything seemed possible. A man out walking his dog on Occupation Road was attacked with an axe and left for dead; a fifteen-year-old boy was singled out on his way home from the fish and chip shop opposite the Phoenix: while four of the gang held him down, another pulled out his two front teeth with a pair of pliers" (175). Innocent people are attacked and brutalised all the time, such as Jan Ruckert, Alina's brother and Alma' s son. He is murdered for no apparent reason by the Nivens boys whose father works in the factory. Such increasing acts of violence that prevail in Corby demonstrate that an industrially toxic ecology co-exists with a morally toxic one. Abused by the capitalist industry and subjected to years of poverty and harsh conditions, the inhabitants of Corby, in turn, abuse and inflict violence upon each other instead of uniting against the social and environmental injustices that they collectively face. Hence, the polluted ecology of the town leaves them morally polluted, too.

As the workers grapple with an uncontrollable form of anger leading to aggression and violence, their families struggle to cope with feelings of homelessness. This kind of homelessness is not linked to the lack of physical shelter; it rather refers to a broader feeling of displacement that occurs as a result of the adverse impacts of environmental crisis. "In our current age of environmental crisis," as Derek Gladwin emphasises, "many

people feel a sense of disconnection from place, or pervasive homelessness even if they have physical homes" (183). Glenn Albrecht similarly contends that the deterioration of the natural environment due to pollution or other ecological issues can create "a place-based distress" (44) that leaves individuals feeling disconnected from their surroundings and unable to relate to the landscapes that were once familiar to them. Albrecht describes this type of place-based distress as "solastalgia." Drawing from the concepts of "solace" and "desolution," Albrecht defines solastalgia as "the pain or sickness caused by the loss or lack of solace and the sense of isolation connected to the present state of one's home and territory" (45). His concept underscores the deeply rooted connections between ecological and psychological well-being. The factors that contribute to "solastalgia" are myriad ranging from natural disasters to the destruction of natural habitats due to climate change, loss of biodiversity, land clearing, mining, industrialisation, and urbanisation. In Burnside's novel, the uneven social and environmental conditions produced by industrial capitalism amplify the feeling of homelessness and the sense of disconnection among the inhabitants of Corby. This is particularly observed in the character of Alina, who yearns for an alternate, untainted home, which reflects her desire to break free from the confines of socially and ecologically polluted environment of Corby: "All that mattered was that she could imagine somewhere outside this smoky, poisoned town: light; empty woods; deer crossing a country road in the dusk. This imagined place, this country did not exist was home for her. Anywhere could have been home for her, as long as it wasn't Corby" (13). Her rejection of Corby as a potential home underscores the deep emotional impact that environmental degradation can have on one's sense of place and place-home. It appears that an "escape to a conceptual dwelling place, a place which can only be inhabited by the mind, is the only true habitation possible" (Gairn 173) for Alina in the poisonous town of Corby.

Alina perceives the industrial contamination as a form of corruption that is "bound to her skin" that she wants "to be cleansed, to wash away" (35). She characterises it as "a sticky, tainted staleness that had been with her for a long time, with her but not of her, a taint from outside, a trace of poison she had breathed or swallowed long ago, that had grown and spread inside her till it was almost impossible to decide what was her, and what was this other, alien thing" (35). The pollution from industry continues to grow both outside

and inside her. It affects her bodily and mental state, making it difficult for her to separate the boundaries of her physical existence from the boundaries of the physical environment. This blurring of boundaries raises important questions about the relationship between the body, mind, and environment, inviting the reader to consider the complex ways they are intertwined. Alina's desire to be cleansed of environmental contamination is more than a physical yearning; it is a spiritual one that represents her need to escape from social and ecological toxicity that her community faces. She dreams of invented places, journeys with "[t]he fuzz of drifted pine needles on lakeside roads" and "chill in the air" (221-2); however, she later dismisses these thoughts, realising the harsh reality of her everyday life: "the map of her own world was unconvincing now: The Works . . . the stop across the road where she used to catch the bus to the baths on Sunday mornings" (222). Her dreams of journeys are not simple idle fantasies; instead, they express a desperate longing for a better, just, and uncontaminated future that she could have. Even though she is aware that these journeys might never take place, the mere thoughts of them give her comfort and ease of mind in the midst of the unjust and degraded environment in which she lives.

Like Alina, her mother, Alma, cannot either identify with Corby. She feels a "displaced person, a lost soul" (140). Her sense of alienation stems not only from her immigrant status but also from the constant presence of pollution and contamination in Corby. The Works with its "oozing smoke and carbon and the microscopic flakes of iron" infiltrates every corner of her life from the laundry to her bedroom windows and even the leaves of trees (133-4). This contamination disturbs her to an alarming extent, making her realise that the idealised home of her childhood with "a sky night peppered with stars, the snow reaching for miles around her father's house" (43) is no longer attainable. Instead, she is faced with the negative consequences of industrialisation and pollution, which have slowly crept into her life since she moved to Corby. The sense of powerlessness that comes with this realisation is a chief reason for Alma's feeling of homelessness. As Gladwin puts it, "One major cause to the feeling of homelessness in the place where one continues to live is a feeling of powerlessness to influence and substantially change the outcome" (138). This claim holds particularly true for Alma, who has internalised the effects of her prolonged exposure to contamination after living with it for years:

> The Works. It seemed further away now, smaller and less monstrous. At night, she could see the flames, she could taste the smoke and the rusty taint of the ore, but it

> was gentler now, less corrosive, less real. Perhaps, after all these years, she had become immune to it. Perhaps a balance had been reached, a bargain struck: there was just enough carbon and ore and ammonia in her blood that no more could enter; perhaps the poison she had breathed all this time had made of her its natural dwelling, and she had accepted it, taken it in, made it, if not her friend, then at least her accomplice. (141)

Upon realising the irreversibility of the pollution and the damage it has done to her body, Alma accepts pollution as a fundamental aspect of her identity rather than resisting or attempting to change her precarious situation. Hence, this passive acceptance of hers can be taken as a psychological adaptation to make the unjust ecological burdens that she faces more manageable.

When Alma cannot identify Corby as home, she finds solace in gardening. Digging and growing plants is like a therapeutic experience to her through which she discovers her connectedness and rootedness to the natural world: "The only times she was ever happy, the only times she felt real, were the hours she spent in her garden, digging and weeding and sowing seeds, making things grow, waiting for the odd gleam of colour and freshness to appear before the dirt and the smoke from The Works blotted it out" (58). Examining the significance of gardens from an ecocritical perspective, Avril Tynan proposes that gardens function as a "half-way between nature and culture, between death and growth, between the home and the world, between the past and future-between that which has been planted and that which will grow" (74). Alma's garden embodies this sense of in-betweenness. On the one hand, it is an inevitable site of contamination where the chemicals of The Works drift in "blackening the leaves, tainting the daffodils" (134). On the other, it transcends its physical boundaries to become a sanctuary for the souls of the deceased: "It wasn't just a garden, it was a place to be, even with The Works looming overhead . . . it was a refuge, a separate world, where the souls of the dead . . . all the people who died . . . in The Works, burned or scalded or crushed to death . . . could rest a moment, could take up residence, and find a dwelling place" (134). Despite being tainted by The Works, Alma's garden evolves into a symbolic site that she constructs against the injustices of her world, with the intention of bringing justice and recognition to those who have suffered an untimely death because of industrialisation. Therefore, Alma cultivates here a sense of purpose and consolation she cannot find elsewhere.

Despite the aspirations of the characters to escape Corby, only Francis succeeds in doing so. His decision to leave is triggered by the tragic death of his best friend, Jan. This pivotal event prompts him to embark on a journey that takes him from Corby to various locations, including Scotland, Cambridge, and California. In relation to Burnside's male characters, Gairn claims that they often appear as "a population of loners, drifters, would-be escapists, searching for an elusive being in the world" (165). In a similar vein, Francis becomes a lonely drifter in search of a more righteous way of living. His escape can be interpreted as an attempt to erase "all the traces of the a past binding him to . . . industrial infrastructures of Corby" (Griem 98) as well as its polluted moral environment. He desires to create a new identity, untethered from the burdens of Corby's industrial and moral legacy as he asserts, "I just wanted to be a stranger, to stop a while and then be gone. No name, no history. Nothing to remember or forget" (271).

Although Francis enjoys the freedom of living as a drifter, there are moments when feels a strong desire to return to Corby: "I think a little part of me was tempted to go back to Corby and see what was going on, because I'd heard snippets of news here and there about a strike, and The Works closing down and I'd started thinking about them all, and whether it was safe to go back" (249). His conflicting feelings towards Corby, oscillating between the urge to break free and the urge to go back, mirror the complex relationship that the people of Corby have with industrial capitalism. For them, "'[h]ome' is and is not capitalism" (Macdonald, "Green Links" 235). Home represents capitalism as it provides them with employment and a means to sustain their lives. However, this economic reliance comes with a cost, as the industrial activities of The Works also lead to pollution that degrades their environment, physical well-being, and mental health. Hence, Francis's inner struggle epitomises the broader struggle that working-class people face in capitalist societies. They rely on the capitalist system for their livelihood but also suffer its destructive consequences socially, ecologically, and psychologically.

Through the end of the novel, Francis, after years of wandering, makes the conscious choice to return to Corby, where The Works has been shut down and "erased from the background, leaving nothing where there once had been fire and darkness, or nothing but a sickly lukewarm sky" (333). He learns that workers, casting off their inertia, has

engaged in a strike to combat the unfair conditions imposed on them. With the disappearance of The Works, there is a noticeable change in the landscape from darkness to a cleaner environment; however, there are fewer job opportunities and financial resources in the town. Macdonald also draws attention to this dilemma, stating that "Corby's air becomes cleaner[,] but the town is impoverished . . . This is a superficially sanitized form of capitalism. It brings hidden social and ecological costs" ("Green Links" 234). Although the collective uprising of the workers is a positive step towards reclaiming their social and environmental rights, the closure of The Works has led to other challenges this time, as exemplified by Tommy who now grapples with unemployment and declining health: "Tommy was dying . . . though he seemed able to get around, he was slow, careful, held in check to conceal the fundamental awkwardness, the potential for clumsiness of a body that no longer functioned as it ought" (337). Years of exposure to chemicals in The Works have taken a devastating toll on Tommy's well-being, leaving him decaying and dying. His aging body still bears the brunt of toxic working conditions, which highlights the fact that the social and ecological costs of capitalism cannot be easily erased or remedied.

With the closure of The Works, the novel prompts a critical reconsideration of the question that has been raised at the very beginning of the discussion in this chapter: Is it possible to move from a sociotoxic ecology created by unsustainable forms of capitalism to an environmentally just and sustainable form of capitalism, where the working class is not compelled to choose between unemployment and a polluted working environment? A meaningful answer to this question comes from John Bellamy Forster, Brett Clark, and Richard York:

> The proposition that unlimited economic growth under capitalism can and should be managed so as to generate a system of sustainable capitalist development (a view we call in "Capitalism in Wonderland") rejects at one and the same understanding of capitalism as a historical system and the notion that nature itself is historically complex and contingent in ways that we are beginning to understand . . . Given the alienation and reification that are today so pervasive, ecological destruction has simply become a way of life in an era dominated by the interests of capital. The only thing that can save us is a revolution in the constitution of human society itself. (38)

Examined from this vantage point, the idea of sustainable capitalism is itself self-contradictory as it fails to acknowledge the fundamental contradiction between capitalism's principle of profit maximisation and ecological sustainability. Although

Burnside's novel emphasises the need to re-question current economic systems and power hierarchies, it problematises the idea of sustainable capitalist development, demonstrating that capitalism in its essence is anti-ecological and based on limitless expansion. The inherent tendency of the capitalist system towards unlimited growth is further illustrated at the end of the novel as Francis observes the emergence of the new estates encroaching upon the countryside:

> New estates reached out into the countryside where he and Jan had gone on picnics and bike rides with their cameras; they had sprawled out as far as Great Oakley, swallowing up the woods, the reaches of waste land, the open fields where Francis had hidden out for hours, looking for birds' nests or smoking dope when he should have been in school. (333)

After the closure of the steel factory, capitalism, under a new form and disguise, extends its dominion over new environments for exploitation. Viewed in such a light, the ending of the novel echoes David Harvey's claim that "capitalism never solves its crisis problems; it just moves them around" (n.p.). It constantly evolves and adapts to new circumstances and places in the pursuit of profit.

In conclusion, the sociotoxic ecology depicted in Burnside's novel illuminates the complex interplay between polluting factories, ecological destruction, labour exploitation, and unjust class hierarchies. Through its portrayal of the lives of the steel workers at The Works, the novel highlights the interconnected injustices of industrial capitalism, which devastate not only the natural environment but also the bodies and the minds of working-class people. While the novel implies the need for a transformative societal and environmental change through the closure of The Works, which is the major source of pollution and illness in Corby, it also suggests that achieving this change will be a complex and multifaceted task that demands a radical rethinking of policies, behaviours, and attitudes at social, economic, and political levels.

CHAPTER III
(NEO)COLONIAL EXPLOITATION, RACIAL DISPARITIES, AND ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICES IN CHRISTIE WATSON'S *TINY SUNBIRDS FAR AWAY*

Christie Watson gained recognition in the literary world following the publication of her debut novel *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* (2011), which not only earned her the prestigious Costa First Novel Award but also established her as an author with a keen activist spirit. Through her writing, Watson delves into pressing societal issues, using fiction as a powerful platform to shed light on the struggles of the oppressed and underrepresented groups of society. Therefore, it would be appropriate to characterise Watson as a writer-activist since her body of work is dedicated to amplifying the voices of the marginalised and peripheral. As she herself expresses in one of her interviews, "I believe that our society can be measured by how we treat the most vulnerable and I look to the fiction to explore questions" ("Interview: Christie Watson" n.p.). This quote perfectly captures her belief in the transformative power of storytelling to provoke thought and incite change. By highlighting the struggles of the marginalised and challenging societal norms, she challenges readers to reconsider their perception of justice and their potential role in creating a more equitable society.

Nigeria occupies a significant place in Watson's literary landscape serving both as a setting and a thematic focal point in her fiction. In *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, she brings to the fore the plight of the Niger Delta, portraying a tumultuous landscape rife with violence and exploitation driven by the politics of oil. She condemns the corruption of multinational oil companies along with the failure of the Nigerian government to protect the rights of its citizens. In her second novel, *Where Women are Kings* (2013), she scrutinises the shortcomings of the foster care system through the story of Elijah, a seven-year-old Nigerian boy who is adopted by a British-Nigerian couple living in London. By interweaving the perspectives of Elijah, Nikki, his adoptive mother, and Deborah, his birth mother, Watson crafts a compelling story that explores "the complexities involved in creating familial bonds, particularly the painstaking adoption process, and the daily life of a newly formed household" (Tully 56). Elijah's journey, marked by trauma and

abandonment, raises serious questions about the effectiveness of existing child welfare systems, highlighting the need for reforms that better ensure the emotional and cultural well-being of immigrant children in England.

Watson's commitment to social justice is further evinced in her short stories where she continues to address a spectrum of critical issues. For example, in "Big Men, Big Decisions," she emerges as an outspoken advocate for LGBTQ rights and inclusion, taking a stand against the anti-gay legislation in Nigeria. Her advocacy extends to women's rights and reproductive health in "The Importance of Screams," where she reflects on the harms of female genital mutilation and encourages her readers to speak out against this "extreme form of gender-based violence" as she calls it (106). Watson also gives voice in her stories to the experiences of the elderly, whom she believes "are disregarded, put to the bottom of the pile and are almost invisible" ("Just Hurting" 101) in society. In "Exit Wounds," she explores the issues of ageism and death by portraying the life of an elderly woman, Margaret, who lives alone and is unable to afford her health care expenses. Through the emotional turmoil of Margaret, she underlines the fact that more support and compassion should be given to older members of society. Apart from her novels and short stories, Watson has produced medical memoirs, such as *The Language of Kindness* (2018) and *The Courage to Care* (2020), where she tackles taboo subjects about health and critiques the flaws in the healthcare system, further solidifying her role as a writer dedicated to promoting social change.

In discussing her inspirations for writing, Watson expresses her deep fascination with Nigeria, describing it as a land of profound contrasts rich with stories and tales: "It's a place of such extremes, of poverty and wealth, so modern and yet traditional. Everyone is political, from the hawker selling oranges on the roadside to businesswoman on her way to work at the bank. There is a story on every corner" ("Interview: Christie Watson" n.p.). However, Watson's interest in Nigeria goes beyond its cultural richness. She is deeply affected by the unrest and socioeconomic disparities prevalent in the country, which urges her to address these issues through her writing. She asserts, "Most people are living in absolute poverty in Nigeria and yet the country is so rich from oil. The government and Western oil companies work together so anyone in the West who is

filling up their car is collaborating, really" ("Interview with Christie Watson" n.p.). This realisation serves as a driving force for her first novel *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, in which she questions unequal power dynamics and injustices that arise from global oil trade. What distinguishes this novel from Watson's other works is that it merges social justice activism with environmental justice activism, highlighting how "human relations with the planet at large and with local ecosystems on national and regional scales have . . . been grounded in unsustainable practices [such as extractive industries] that rely on systems of domination and hypersepearation" (Oppermann and Iovino 4-5).

Set in present-day Nigeria, *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* is narrated from the perspective of a twelve-year-old Nigerian girl, Blessing. When her parents get divorced, she is forced to move with her mother, Timi, and her brother, Ezikiel, from their luxurious home in Lagos to a village near Warri in the Niger Delta where her grandparents live. This region, devastated by pollution, sickness, and the oppressive presence of the Western Oil Company, is an example of a sociotoxic ecology affected heavily by the negative impacts of oil extraction and environmental racism. Rivers that were once teeming with life are now contaminated with petroleum spills, while the sky is dominated by burning gas flares. The local communities which protest the ecological damage of oil industries are either burnt or destroyed by the "Kill and Go" police, who work incorporation with the Nigerian government. In this chaotic and unruly setting, Blessing and her family's life undergo a drastic change, as they struggle to find basic needs, such as food, clean water, and electricity, which have become scarce resources. Ezikiel, once a promising student with dreams of becoming a doctor, gradually transforms into a militant, joining the Sibeye Boys, a group of local teenagers infamous for kidnapping white-rich oil workers and sabotaging oil pipelines. Meanwhile, Blessing finds herself assisting her grandmother as a birth attendant, where she witnesses first-hand the terrible conditions of people in other villages, including the suffering of pregnant women and babies born with deformities. In a desperate attempt to improve her children's circumstances, Timi secures a job at a hotel and eventually marries a white oil worker, hoping for a better life. However, her efforts are overshadowed by the tragic death of Ezikiel who cannot come to terms with her mother's marriage. The novel ends with Timi's leaving the Niger Delta for England with her new husband, Dan, while Blessing chooses to stay in the Niger Delta with her

grandparents. This decision of hers symbolises the enduring struggles and sacrifices made by the inhabitants of the Delta in the face of social upheaval and environmental devastation.

As can be understood from the synopsis, the novel calls attention to "the lived realities of ecological violence, crisis, and transformation [in the Niger Delta] that are intimately tied to imperialist practices" (DeLoughrey, Didur, and Carrigan 6). A socially and environmentally unjust environment exist side by side throughout the novel, just like Burnside's *Living Nowhere*. However, while Burnside depicts a sociotoxic ecology that problematises the interrelations among class inequalities, industrial capitalism, and polluting factories, Watson portrays a sociotoxic ecology that questions (neo)colonial oppression, the greed of oil industries, the ecological devastation caused by oil extraction. She draws attention to the long-term traumatic effects of oil pollution on human and more-than-human worlds. Therefore, Nixon's concept of "slow violence" proves to be relevant in understanding the nature of the sociotoxic ecology depicted in the novel. Nixon posits that the destructive impacts of slow violence are "incremental and accretive" (*Slow Violence* 2); hence, representing this form of violence in narratives is a challenging task as it requires "plot[ting] and give[ing] figurative shape to formless threats whose fatal repercussions are dispersed across space and time" (Nixon, *Slow Violence* 10). Watson's novel accomplishes this task by unveiling the slow wreckage of oil pollution through the domestic affairs of a household and the initiation process of two teenagers. On the one hand, it demonstrates how oil pollution irrevocably alters the ecosystem of the Niger Delta, contaminating the water, soil, and air. On the other, it shows how oil pollution also seeps gradually into the fabric of domestic life, fracturing familial relationships. The microcosm of the household demonstrated in the novel mirrors the violence and chaos that pervade the macrocosm. The novel, in this respect, transcends the local/global binary, exposing how domestic conditions and local environmental degradation intricately relate to uneven political and economic structures working at larger scales. Thus, this chapter also benefits from the sociologist and the political scientist Johan Galtung's concept of "structural violence" as the slow wreckage of oil pollution portrayed in the novel emerges as a manifestation of broader systems of unfairness. Galtung's idea of structural violence played a significant role in Nixon's

theorisation of slow violence, providing him with a lens to focus on the social dimensions of environmental harm. And Watson's novel exposes the interconnectedness of these two forms of violence, illustrating how the inequalities caused by global oil politics evolve into prolonged suffering and injustice, impacting both the Delta's ecosystem and its local communities.

Within this analytical framework, the aim of this chapter is twofold. First, it merges Nixon's concept of "slow violence" with Galtung's notion of "structural violence" to argue that the sociotoxic ecology portrayed in the novel is rooted in a slow form of violence that is shaped by a long history of (neo)colonial practices and imperialistic exploitation that has allowed oil companies to abuse local communities for economic gain. Second, it claims that the sociotoxic ecology in which the characters live leads to spiritual devastation, slowly poisoning family ties and perverting the mother-son relationship, as exemplified by Timi and, his son, Ezikiel who turns into a young militant boy. Similar to the sociotoxic ecology that exists in Burnside's novel and has a negative impact on the mental well-being of workers, leading to anger, the sociotoxic ecology in Watson's novel fosters youthful violence. The constant exposure to oil pollution and social injustice fuels feelings of hatred and anger among the youth, who respond to violence with more violence as a form of revenge. The novel also problematises this harmful cycle, emphasising that responding to violence with further violence only exacerbates the existing ecological and social damage, offering no real solution.

3.1. STORYING THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE STRUGGLES IN THE NIGER DELTA AND PETROFICTION

The battle for environmental justice in the Niger Delta against oil pollution has deep historical roots, tracing back to the 1950s. Hence, it is crucial to examine the social and political backdrop of the oil extraction history in the Niger Delta before proceeding with the discussion of the novel. The oil industry in Nigeria began officially with Shell's discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri in 1956, which "shaped the contours of the political economy and environmental history of the country in manifold ways" (Karmakar 4). Despite the significant revenue generated from oil extraction, the Niger Delta has endured

and continues to face a multitude of negative impacts, including environmental degradation, social injustice, and economic instability. Since the departure of the first oil tanker from Oloibiri in 1958, the relentless pursuit of oil has "marked the transformation of the Delta environment from a region rich with biodiversity to one encumbered by devastating exploitation" (Iheka 90). Oil spills, gas flares, and pipeline breakages that occur as a result of the extraction process have severely polluted the region and destroyed its main resources of income like farming and fishing on which the Delta communities rely.

The report of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) compiled in 2011 highlights the catastrophic effects of oil pollution on the natural world, such as the widespread destruction of vegetation, including mangroves, and the loss of fish habitats (10). This ecological devastation not only threatens the biodiversity of the region but has also left the Delta communities economically vulnerable and impoverished. As Nixon puts it, "Who could have dreamed in 1958 that four decades and 600 billion of oil revenues later, some 90 million Nigerians would be surviving on less than a dollar day?" (*Slow Violence* 106). Despite their nation's oil riches, the Delta region disproportionately bears the burden of poverty, misery, and diseases as oil "is unearthed and piped away for consumption elsewhere [in the West]" (Wenzel 84). The country, in this respect, epitomises the notion of "the resource curse" (Auty 1), the source of which can be found in ecological imperialism and the legacy of colonialism. M. Perelman elaborates on this notion and states:

> The origins of the curse of oil do not lie in the physical properties of petroleum but rather in the social structure of the world . . . A rich natural resource base makes a poor country, especially a relatively powerless one, an inviting target – both physically and militarily – for dominant nations. In the case of oil, the powerful nations will not risk letting such a valuable resource fall under the control of an independent government, especially one that might pursue policies that do not coincide with the economic interests of the great transnational corporations. (50)

Although Nigeria gained independence in 1960, which marked the end of colonial rule and the beginning of a new era for the country, the oil boom which followed the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta soon created a new set of challenges, leaving the country susceptible to exploitation by transnational oil companies. What should have been a source of prosperity has instead turned into a curse and a problem of environmental justice

for the Nigerians, particularly, those in the Delta communities. The inequitable distribution of oil wealth has led to prolonged political unrest and violence in the region, with the emergence of "armed rebel groups . . . and ethnic militas figh[ting] for control of the oil-bunkering trade or for protection money from oil companies" (Caminero-Santangelo 230). The Nigerian government has also played a role in perpetuating this cycle of conflict and violence. Its corrupt policies and actions have "paved the way for the hegemony of transnational oil companies . . . empowering them to impose political, economic, social and environmental constraints on the local population" (Karmakar 5). As a result, the Niger Delta region, with its abundant oil reserves, has transformed into a zone of chaos and become "one of the most severely impacted ecosystems" (Karmakar 5) in the world.

Watson's novel fictionalises the complexities of oil politics that have been plaguing the Niger Delta for decades. The novel, therefore, can be read in the context of "petrofiction," a term coined by the Indian writer Amitav Gosh to refer to literature that engages with the role and consequences of oil in society. According to Gosh, the question of oil has "proved so imaginatively sterile" (30) in fiction, and it has not been given the literary attention it deserves. He argues that this lack of engagement with oil as a subject in fiction stems from the contradictions it represents. While oil is a dominant energy force that fuels cars, heats homes and powers industries, Gosh explains that it also carries negative connotations:

> [O]il smells bad. It reeks of unavoidable overseas entanglements, a worrisome foreign dependency, economic uncertainty, risky and expensive military enterprises; of thousands of dead civilians and children, and all the troublesome questions that lie buried in their graves . . . And to make things still worse, it begins to smell of pollution and environmental hazards. It reeks, it stinks, it becomes a Problem that can be written about only in the language of Solutions. (30)

This dual nature of oil makes it a complex and slippery topic for writers to address, requiring a careful consideration of its multifaceted nature and the ethical dilemmas it poses.

Expanding on Gosh's argument, Macdonald contends:

> Registering oil's sheer significance in modern petro-life – myriad material, representational, and non-manifest forms – provides a platform for interpretive and

> imaginative disciplines to elicit new ways to consider its past, present, and future. It also presents a challenge for Humanities scholars and cultural practitioners to make good on the claim that how we read, cognize, visualize, narrate, perform, and represent oil is connected to the social and cultural way we inhabit and are habituated to it. (“Containing Oil” 36)

Looking at oil from this perspective, it becomes clear that “[o]il is not only physical and material, but also a socially produced idea, animating various abstract categories such as justice, freedom, or oppression” (Gladwin 86). Since the history of oil is intertwined with violence and corruption, its materiality cannot be disentangled from the broader social and cultural frameworks within which it operates. Therefore, writing about the question of oil requires addressing what Imre Szeman refers to as the “social ontology of oil- the how, why and wherefore of oil in our social, cultural and political life” (“Crude Aesthetics” 426). It involves engaging with difficult questions about networks of knowledge, power, politics, and the environment. It also necessitates challenging the prevailing narratives of progress that often dominate mainstream discourses. Szeman acknowledges that “[w]hile the great works of petrofiction for which Ghosh longs remain to be written . . . there is, finally, a [literary] move afoot to puzzle out the implications of our dependency, as much metaphysical as material, on a slippery substance that connects technological futures with prehistorical pasts in ways that cannot but be difficult to conceptualize” (“Introduction to Focus” 3). Among the examples of works that he cites are Steven Amsterdam’s *Things We Didn’t See Coming* (2009), Robert Charles Wilson’s *Julian Comstock* (2009), Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* (2010), and Teddy Wayne’s *Kapitoil* (2010).

Watson’s *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* can also be considered a valuable addition to the growing body of petrofiction cited by Szeman. The novel calls into question the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in the oil industry, unmasking its destructive dimension. Analysing the common characteristics of petrofiction, Macdonald notes that “[m]ost oil fiction . . . contains certain thematic preoccupations: volatile labor relations and ethnic tensions, war and violence, ecological despoliation, and political corruption” (“Oil and World Literature” 31). While Watson’s novel addresses these themes, what distinguishes her novel is its narrative approach, which centralises the perspective of a little girl. By filtering the story through Blessing’s eyes, the novel imbues the common

themes of petrofiction with a heightened sense of realism and relatability for readers. This narrative strategy allows Watson to vividly portray how the gradual, often unnoticed effects of oil extraction actually unfold in the lives of local Delta communities. The child narrator's intimate lens renders the destructive impacts of the oil industry all the more devastating and difficult to ignore.

Moreover, Watson's novel also stands out for its critical examination of extractive capitalism. To define it briefly, extractive capitalism refers to "a mode of accumulation based on the large-scale withdrawal and processing of natural resources" (Henry 401). Watson problematises "the mythos of fossil fuel development as a path to economic and social progress, thereby exposing the epistemological failures of extractive capitalism" (Henry 404). Through the daily struggles of Blessing's family, the novel reveals how the promises of prosperity and modernisation associated with oil extraction lead not to a thriving society but to a devastated one suffering from food insecurity, political marginalisation, and health issues. As this chapter attempts to show, Blessing and her family grapple with the consequences of living in a sociotoxic ecology where extractive capitalism and the slow violence of oil pollution intertwine with (neo)colonial oppression and racial injustice. And in this sociotoxic ecology, oil emerges not as a symbol of progress but as a "monstrous transformer" (Macdonald, "Monstrous Transformer" 289) breeding inequality, emotional turmoil, and a cycle of oppression that affects the impoverished. It generates "violent ecological transformations that cannot be separated from exponentially degenerating social conditions" (Caminero-Santangelo 226). By drawing attention to the human and environmental costs of oil extraction, the novel invites a re-evaluation of the role of this powerful, yet harmful and socially polluting resource both in the global context and in the everyday struggles of the affected communities.

3.2. STRUCTURAL AND SLOW VIOLENCE OF OIL POLLUTION IN THE SOCIOTOXIC ECOLOGY OF THE NIGER DELTA

This part of the chapter posits that the Niger Delta as delineated in the novel emerges as a sociotoxic ecology where slow violence and structural violence collide to create a complex entanglement of environmental degradation, social injustice, and human

suffering. Hence, understanding the link between these two concepts is essential for comprehending the depth of the sociotoxic ecology depicted in the narrative. As highlighted in the first chapter, Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence "complicate[s] conventional assumptions about violence as a highly visible act" by emphasising its gradual and unnoticed nature (*Slow Violence* 3). Similarly, Galtung's notion of "structural violence" broadens the understanding of violence beyond direct and physical acts to "account for suffering caused through the denial of basic needs [and systemic injustices]" (T. Davies 414) In his famous essay "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," Galtung defines structural violence as such:

> We shall refer to the type of violence where there is an actor that commits the violence as personal or direct, to violence where there is no such actor as structural or indirect . . . There may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances. (170-71)

The structural factors Galtung refers to encompass broader cultural, political, and economic systems, including "caste, patriarchy, slavery, apartheid, colonialism, and neoliberalism as well as poverty and discrimination by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and migrant/refugee status" (Rylko-Bauer and Farmer 47). Galtung considers these structures to be violent "because they result in avoidable deaths, illness, injury; and they reproduce violence by marginalizing people and communities, constraining their capabilities and agency, assaulting their dignity, and sustaining inequalities" (Rylko-Bauer and Farmer 47). Nixon expands upon these ideas of Galtung in his construction of the concept of slow violence, stating "What I share with Galtung's line of thought is a concern with social justice, hidden agency, and certain forms of violence that are imperceptible" (*Slow Violence* 10). Similar to structural violence which "is silent . . . and does not show up" (Galtung 173), slow violence unveils the silent and invisible harm. Additionally, like structural violence which can occur "when the subject, the object, or both are not immediately involved" (O'Lear 2), slow violence lacks a direct perpetrator, making it difficult to identify or address. Lastly, slow violence, like structural violence, is deeply rooted in social inequality and disproportionately affects the poor and the marginalised. Viewed in this framework, it is possible to propose that "slow violence is not simply time and the uneven velocity of social harms; rather, it is also attuned to the uneven structures that allow such brutalities to gradually propagate" (T. Davies 414).

In the context of Watson’s novel, these two forms of violence reinforce each other to form an unjust and damaging sociotoxic ecology. The novel opens with a graphic portrayal of the Niger Delta as an “uneven geography of pollution” (Cole 108) where “the ecological disruption is co-extensive with the damage done to the social fabric” (Huggan and Tiffin 52). Upon learning that they are going to move to Warri, Blessing’s brother, Ezikiel, conducts an online search and is met with a barrage of alarming information: “Warri is not safe. And those villages outside are even worse. Swamp villages! I googled Warri at the internet café. Oil bunkering, hostage taking, illness, guns, and poverty. What about my asthma? They burn poisonous chemicals straight into the air! It’s not a safe place to live” (13). These threats, coupled with Ezikiel’s asthma and allergies, heighten his sense of vulnerability and insecurity about Warri: “It’s dangerous. The whole Delta region. And if we don’t get shot the bacteria and parasites will surely kill us . . . It’s the parasites you should be worried about. What about my allergies? That place is so bush; I doubt they even have medical facilities!” (14). Ezikiel’s discovery of the myriad dangers awaiting them in Warri, including oil theft, kidnappings, and armed violence represents just the visible surface of the Niger Delta’s issues, which are frequently highlighted in the media and grab immediate public attention due to their overt nature. However, the novel goes further, exposing the more insidious aspects of the Delta’s crisis, where the entanglement of social and environmental issues creates a complex web of challenges that are harder to discern and address.

Throughout the novel, Watson uses vivid imagery to illustrate the extent of ecological destruction and environmental injustice in the Niger Delta. During their journey from Lagos to Warri, Ezikiel and Blessing witness scenes of utter devastation. As Blessing describes,

> The further away we had driven from Lagos, the brighter the sky became until we were on the outskirts of Warri, and it looked bright enough to be day . . . I saw a flame in the distance. A giant torch, which made the sky look angry. ‘Pipeline fires,’ said Zafi [the driver]. ‘They are burning the gases from the oil.’ He started coughing again. (19)

The sight of this artificially illuminated sky, as a result of the oil industry’s gas flaring, serves as a palpable reminder of the aggressive extraction practices that have been rampant in the region for decades. As they approach Warri, the environmental

degradation intensifies. The air grows heavier, and the landscape seems to suffocate under a viscous layer of oil. The smell is so overpowering that Blessing cannot help but close her eyes and take a deep sniff: "The air smelled like a book unopened for a very long time, and smoky, as though the ground had been on fire" (20). This powerful description not only captures the physical contamination of the air but also symbolises the slow accumulation of environmental damage caused by oil pollution. It evokes a sense of neglect and stagnation, implying that impacts of oil contamination have been accumulating over a long time without any significant intervention or remediation. Furthermore, the same description also alludes to the long-standing history of structural violence and (neo)colonial oppression perpetrated by multinational corporations, which prioritise profit over the well-being of the natural world. It suggests that the current ecological crisis in the Delta region is historically deep, entwined with a legacy of colonisation where foreign oil companies exploit natural resources with little regard for the consequences on the local communities or the environment. In this respect, when Blessing smells the air, she does not merely inhale toxic pollutants; she also smells the weighty burden of exploitation and negligence that has characterised the Delta region for far too long.

As Ezikiel and Blessing immerse themselves in the everyday life of the Niger Delta, the slow violence inflicted upon the region becomes increasingly evident. The poor condition of their grandparents' house, the absence of electricity and running water all serve as clear indications of the broader neglect and poverty afflicting the area. Blessing's description of the house illustrates the severity of their living conditions: "An area of wasteland stretched out before me up to a large fence surrounded by thick bushes . . . The outside space was wild and dusty and dry. Goats and skinny sheep roamed with chickens and half-dressed children" (29). The depiction of the barren land along with malnourished children and animals epitomises the silent but prolonged damage that slow violence entails - wrought by years of economic and social exploitation that have left indelible scars on the environment, humans, and nonhumans. In contrast to immediate ecological disasters, this type of violence, as Nixon puts it, "remains outside our flickering attention span — and outside the purview of a spectacle-driven corporate media" (*Slow Violence*

6). Yet, its consequences are profound, perpetuating a cycle of degradation that erodes the health, culture, and vitality of the entire Delta region.

The novel reveals the depth of oil pollution when Blessing, touring the village with her grandmother, encounters the contaminated water of the Delta. Her grandmother's words, "The water of the Delta is the blood of Nigeria" (34), emphasise the essential role the river plays in sustaining life. However, this life-sustaining resource is tainted by pollution, which is evident in the water's muddy appearance: "The water was dark, dark, dark. It looked like thick mud. Swirly patterns coloured the top. I could not see the reflection of the strange twisted trees. I peered in, half closing my eyes, but there were not reflections. Not mine. Not even Grandma's." (35). This visual representation of pollution illustrates not just an environmental concern but a significant violation of social justice, where the slow encroachment of pollutants and the structural conditions that allow the release of pollutants to the environment go hand in hand. The river, once a source of sustenance and pride, now becomes a vivid embodiment of both slow and structural violence through its contamination and the impact this has on the community. The pollution of the river is not an abrupt catastrophe; rather, it is an unfolding process embedded within global political and economic frameworks that govern the extraction and use of oil. And this process has been propelled by decades of oil extraction practices and the indifference of global corporations towards the ecological and social ramifications of their activities. Moreover, Blessing's observation that the river, just like the air, "smelled of Warri, old books that had been left in the rains" (36), captures the essence of the region's plight in a powerful way. It highlights a sense of abandonment, conveying how the environment and the Delta region have been left to decay, like forgotten books that decay in the rain. Their suffering and the hardships faced by the people in this area have been disregarded by the Western Oil Company, reflecting a troubling disconnection between the global demand for oil and the local consequences that arise from meeting that demand.

Blessing's role as a birth attendant further exposes her to the grim realities of the sociotoxic ecology of the Niger Delta and its interplay with public health. The villages that she visits with her grandmother unveil how "environmental violence is closely bound

up with social catastrophe" (Caminero-Santangelo 230). One stark example is Emete's village, which resembles more of a post-war zone than a liveable community:

> The village on the riverbank looked like all the other villages, as if a war had recently happened there. Everything clung to the sides, as though the world was folding in on itself. The huts were burnt out, held together. There were small huts in no particular order and skinny animals tied with ropes to sparse trees, but the area was clear of people, which was unusual. Whenever I had been to these places before, the whole village came out to greet a visitor. (185)

The environmental devastation depicted in Emete's village represents more than just a horrific sight; it signifies a deeper health crisis, as evinced in her childbirth scene. Rather than symbolising hope and renewal, Emete's labour is fraught with contamination and risk. The arrival of her husband with buckets of oily water to assist in the labour process foreshadows that this birth will be challenging and dangerous. As Blessing observes, "This afterbirth smelled rotten. Infected . . The air smelled of something dead that had not ever been born. The smell stayed in my nostrils for a long time" (187). The tragic death of Emete's newborn baby immediately after the birth, turning grey and lifeless, signifies a passing down of harm through generations, where toxins from the polluted water and air are unwittingly transmitted from mother to unborn child. This distressing incident echoes Nixon's contention that "the past of slow violence is never past," as its ramifications "live on in the environmental elements we inhabit in our bodies, which epidemiologically and ecologically are never our simple contemporaries" (*Slow Violence* 8).

While Blessing bears witness to the devastating manifestations of environmental degradation through her role as a birth attendant, Ezikiel experiences a more "traumatic material and bodily encounter with a hostile environment" (Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments* 90). The insidious effects of the sociotoxic ecology become manifested in his deteriorating health as his allergies worsen progressively. He cannot tolerate the use of groundnut oil in meals, which severely restricts his dietary options, and the absence of alternative cooking oils like sunflower oil aggravates his predicament. Blessing's detailed account underscores the severity of Ezikiel's situation: "He had been unable to eat any meat or fish since we had first arrived nearly a week before . . . He was getting thinner. Every time he ate, his mouthfuls were smaller until he was hardly eating anything at all" (42). Ezikiel's deteriorating condition extends beyond a simple health issue to reflect a

broader systemic failure to provide safe, nutritious, and accessible food alternatives for the region's inhabitants. His frustration with his monotonous diet becomes palpable when he exclaims, "I'm so bored with eating corn and pounded yam. I need proper food!" (145). His exclamation is not merely a complaint about dietary variety but can be taken as a desperate cry for a life free from the toxic shackles of his environment. Blessing's remark that "A person becomes part of their surroundings" (15) finds embodiment in Ezikiel whose physical decline serves as a corporeal reflection of the surrounding ecological decay, highlighting the intricate and inevitable bond between human health and environmental health. This interdependence forms the crux of environmental justice advocacy, which insists that the right to a clean and safe environment is fundamentally linked to the right to health and well-being of individuals. When the land is ravaged and plagued by pollution, so is the health of its inhabitants.

The impact of environmental degradation extends further into Ezikiel's life as his asthma is exacerbated by the heavily polluted air. Throughout the text, he is frequently described as "whizzing" (56), "puffing" (56), and "breathless" (174). His chest is compared to "a pan of boiling water" making bubbly sounds (174), which demonstrates that even the fundamental act of breathing transforms into a daily struggle for him. Examining the socio-political implications of breathing, Magdalena Gorska postulates that breathing is not a just simple biological process but also "an articulation of the suffocating operations of social norms and power relations" because "it does matter whose breath matters (and whose does not) and how" (23). Gorska's analysis is crucial since it prompts a reconsideration of breathing as a reflection of societal values and priorities, highlighting disparities in how different communities experience environmental harm. It points out the structural violence embedded in the unequal distribution of environmental hazards, where marginalised communities, like the one depicted in the novel, bear a disproportionate burden of pollution and its health consequences. Viewed through this lens, Ezikiel's battle for breath represents the deeper social and environmental injustices that pervade his surroundings. It is the toxic byproducts of gas flares in conjunction with the exploitative (neo)colonial practices of oil companies that create the polluted air which leads to Ezikiel's respiratory challenges. In such a sociotoxic context, breathing becomes

what Gorksa calls "an ethico-onto-epistemological phenomenon"[x] (249), reflecting the ethical failings of the imperial mindset that favours capitalist gains at the expense of human and environmental health. Therefore, Ezikiel's struggle for breath is a material-discursive struggle that intersects with broader problems of politics and power imbalances.

One of the most pivotal moments in the novel emerges when Ezikiel, in a town council meeting, recounts the full extent of oil pollution. He vehemently accuses oil companies, stating, "Give us respiratory diseases, cancers, make our women suffer miscarriage after miscarriage, and make our children deformed! Some of the stories I hear from my own sister who is an Assistant Birth Attendant, prove that the air is poisoning our women!" (202). The town council meetings, of which Ezikiel also becomes a part, serves as a rare platform where the elders of the region discuss the grim realities faced by their communities. Since the local populace is barred from engaging in decision-making processes, these meetings become critical venues for them to voice their agency and seek redress for the injustices inflicted upon them. During their discussions, the words of one of the chiefs especially come to the fore as he draws attention to the root causes of their plight:

> It's a collaboration of the politicians and oil companies. You can't lay all the blame at the oil companies' feet when our government is taking bribes from them! Our government would not be in power if not for the oil company. The oil companies are being allowed to get away with it. Let us light our pipeline fires, they say, burn our gases, destroy the local environment, and here, is a million dollars for your convenience. We will turn our backs while you wipe out democracy. (200)

This explanation unveils the tangled web of corruption and complicity that underpins the environmental and social crises in the Niger Delta. It eloquently captures how structural violence, facilitated by both national and multinational interests, perpetuates the slow violence of environmental degradation, systematically dismantling livelihoods and ecosystems. Through the speech of the chief, the novel problematises the interplay between government malfeasance and corporate greed, emphasising how the oil wealth, rather than bringing development and progress, has caused perpetual pain and suffering

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[x] Gorska borrows the term "ethico-onto-epistemology" from Karen Barad. In *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* Barad coins this term to refer to interconnections between ethics, ontology, and epistemology, suggesting that our ethical commitments are deeply intertwined with our understanding of reality and knowledge.

to the people of the Delta. It critiques the dangerous alliance between power and profit, providing a stark reminder that without a fundamental shift in both policy and power structures, the communities of the Niger Delta will continue to bear the catastrophic costs of oil exploitation.

As Blessing listens to the town council meeting, her innocent and inquisitive mind delves deep into the unfortunate events plaguing her community. She contemplates the motives behind the government's lethal actions against its citizens, questioning the roles of various power players:

> I understood that the oil companies were paying the government to kill villagers who wanted their oil back. That I understood. But why would our own government kill our own people? Surely not for money? And if it was for money then who caused the deaths? The oil companies who give money to kill, or the government who take the money and give the guns, or the boys who join the army because they have to? Or the Sibeye Boys who fight the wrong way, for the wrong reasons? (201)

This critical examination by Blessing serves to problematise the seemingly straightforward narrative of simple causality which appears in discussions of violence and corruption. Through her interrogation, Blessing unveils a complex network of culpability ranging from oil corporations to local government and military forces, revealing a grim picture of structural violence where it is increasingly challenging to pinpoint a single perpetrator or wrongdoer. Thus, her reflections encourage a deeper contemplation of the moral ambiguities involved in issues of environmental degradation, where responsibility is diffused among various actors, and the path to justice and reform is often fraught with complications.

While Blessing grapples with the complexities of corruption and exploitation discussed in the town council meeting, the narrative transitions to an even more stark representation of inequality when she and Ezikiel visit their mother's boyfriend, Dan, in the Western Oil compound. Usually inaccessible to locals, the compound starkly contrasts with the impoverished and polluted villages nearby, where sickness and death are common. As Blessing steps into the compound, she immediately senses a dramatic change in the environment. It is greenery and surrounded by palm trees. The air inside feels different, raising questions about possible artificial enhancements to its quality:

> On the other side of the gate the air changed. It was impossible, I knew, but it really felt like we were breathing different air. Everything was cooler and quieter. I looked at the top of the gate. The air must have been travelling back and forth . . . I breathed deeply and felt certain the air tasted cleaner. Was it possible to filter air in the same way you could filter water? Maybe the air was pure air and arrived in giant pouches with the pure water. (332)

This perceptible shift in air quality illustrates the discriminatory environmental practices facilitated by the petrochemical industry. Even though the local people of the Delta and white oil workers breathe the same air, the fact that the air is cleaner in the compound shows, in Michelle Murphy's words, how "society is structured in a way that protects the privileged from toxic event" (266). Guarded by armed personnel, the compound acts as a kind of fortress, sheltering the white oil workers from the environmental degradation and societal chaos afflicting the indigenous population. This separation is not just physical but also emblematic of entrenched racial and class divisions perpetrated by global corporate practices. When Timi secures a job within the compound, she is also overwhelmed by its luxury. She describes the place as a "palace" with clean floors, seven swimming pools, bars, restaurants, and a fully air-conditioned cinema: "Honestly, I can't believe that the other side of the wall is another world. One minute you're in an oil swamp, the next, five star luxury" (87). This vivid juxtaposition exposes a deep-seated inequality where the comfort of a few is predicated on the sufferings of many. The stark contrast between the two worlds - the polluted villages on one side, and the luxurious Western Oil Company on the other - provokes unsettling questions about the distribution of protection and harm: How can we justify a system where some live in comfort while others endure the sociotoxic consequences of pollution? To what extent are societal structures complicit in deciding whose health is protected and whose is disregarded? Is it ethical to maintain an economic order where prosperity for some necessitates environmental sacrifice for others? The novel, in its exploration of these questions, transcends its mere storytelling function and becomes an urgent call to action, prompting a critical review of who truly bears the cost of environmental degradation and who benefits.

3.3. EMOTIONAL IMPACTS OF THE SOCIOTOXIC ECOLOGY OF THE NIGER DELTA

Suggesting an intrinsic connection between environmental harm and social suffering, Oppermann and Iovino propose that "the wounds of the natural world are . . . social

wounds" (4). Watson's narrative expands this argument, demonstrating how ecological wounds also mutate into profound emotional scars. The sociotoxic ecology of the Niger Delta impinges on the characters not merely in physical terms but also in spiritual terms, eroding aspirations and corrupting the moral landscapes of young individuals such as Ezikiel. Ezikiel's gradual shift from a diligent student aiming to become a doctor to a rebel joining the local militant group, the Sibeye Boys, is driven by the inequitable conditions in his community where the industry of oil extraction enriches foreign corporates, leaving his family and the local inhabitants of Delta to suffer the detrimental environmental and economic impacts. This part of the chapter focuses dominantly on Ezikiel's transformation, demonstrating how the slow and structural violence moulds young individuals like him into perpetrators of the chaos that they wish to escape.

Initially portrayed as a bright and ambitious young man with dreams of pursuing medicine, Ezikiel's potential begins to wane under the oppressive conditions of Warri, where environmental toxicity and rampant social injustices linked to oil exploitation pervade. His declining health coupled with the disillusionment with his socioeconomic circumstances leads him to a pivotal moment where he decides to quit school and sell his beloved "Encyclopaedia of Tropical Medicine." This act is not just a relinquishment of his educational aspirations but also the first significant marker of his shifting identity, influenced by the pervasive despair that marks his community's interaction with the exploitative oil industry. Blessing observes the change in Ezikiel's behaviour with growing concern:

> At first when he said that he no longer wanted to a doctor, I had not believed him. And when he told me he was to sell his Encyclopaedia of Tropical Medicine I began to worry. 'It's your favourite book,' I said 'What about the river-dwelling parasites?'
> 'I don't need it any more,' he said. 'I'd rather have the money.'
> . . . .
> 'And I do not understand. If you sell your book how will you be able to study?'
> 'How many times? I told you, I do not want to study. I do not want to be a doctor. It's too many years wasted in a classroom.'
> The words reached my ears but they were the wrong shape and bounced straight back out again. 'You have always wanted to be a doctor. I know you are angry but - ' (278-79)

This critical dialogue reveals a young man who feels cornered by the circumstances, leading him to reject the traditional path as futile in the face of systemic corruption and exploitation that seems to benefit only a select few at the expense of many, including his

own family. As Blessing struggles to understand Ezikiel's decision, his responses signify a critical shift in his perspective, reflecting his loss of faith in the promise of education in a society marred by oppression.

This disheartening evolution of Ezikiel's ambitions is paralleled by a growing estrangement between him and his mother, as Timi engages in a relationship with Dan who symbolises the oppressive oil industry that Ezikiel despises. While Timi has been a source of unwavering support for Ezikiel's educational ambitions, her involvement with Dan turns her into a focal point of conflict. Ezikiel perceives this involvement not just as a personal betrayal but as a betrayal of his community's struggle against the forces that exploit them. His feelings manifest dramatically when he accuses his mother of "prostituting" herself for Dan's financial support: "'I don't want money from your friend. I don't want school fees from him. I refuse to go to school with his money! He's after one thing,' Ezikiel said. 'One thing Only. You are prostituting yourself!'" (246). This accusation marks a significant turning point in their relationship, highlighting the spiritual toll of the broader socio-political and environmental crises on family dynamics. The once supportive bond between mother and son becomes fraught with accusations and resentment, showing how the sociotoxic environment of the Niger Delta "is not only an external threat, but also [becomes] a source of deep personal and spiritual anguish, soul murder, that may poison native families from within" (Stein "Activism as Affirmation" 200). It can deeply infiltrate and disrupt familial ties, transforming support and understanding into conflict, alienation, and even domestic violence.

As his anger towards his mother and hatred of Dan escalate, Ezikiel finds himself aligning more with the Sibeye Boys, moving further away from his initial aspirations and descending into rebellion. This situation becomes palpable when he directly confronts Dan over a seemingly benign gift of chocolate. He sees Dan as "a double oppressor" (Elizabeth, Noor, and Talif 221) stealing the resources of his country and his mother: "'You people come here,' Ezikiel slammed his fist down onto the table top, making us all jump, 'and take our women,' he looked at Mama, and 'and our money. And our jobs . . . You pay people to kill us, and you rape our land, then our women! And you give me a chocolate bar?'" (290-91). At this moment, Ezikiel not only confronts Dan but

symbolically challenges the entire structure of (neo)colonial exploitation that has shattered his community. Disillusioned by a system that pledges progress but yields only ruin, Ezikiel's frustration escalates to physical aggression, leading him to attack Dan and strike his mother across the cheek and ear. This violent response illustrates how the toxicity of his environment both socially and environmentally mirrors and intensifies his own moral degradation, pushing him toward extreme actions as he grapples with a reality where familial bonds are sacrificed on the altar of survival and resistance.

Ezikiel's full commitment to the Sibeye Boys completes his transformation from a hopeful student to a militant activist, which is demonstrated during the dramatic events at his mother's wedding. By orchestrating the kidnapping of Dan, he embraces his new role within the militant group, positioning himself against what he perceives as (neo)colonial and corporate enemies: "'A white man? A fucking oil worker! He's going to get what he deserves.' . . . 'I will show you, White Gold. Me and the Sibeye Boys.'" (373). This change is a direct response to the continuous exploitation and violence that he witnesses and experiences in the sociotoxic landscape of the Niger Delta. By joining the Sibeye Boys, Ezikiel attempts to claim agency in a fight against the overwhelming forces that have disrupted his life and community. He no longer sees a future for himself within the traditional structures of education and success but within the armed resistance for which the Sibeye Boys stands. However, his adoption of militancy and armed resistance is short-lived, as he loses his life in a pipeline sabotage on the very night he joins the Sibeye Boys. This violent end, which is a direct result of the radical path he chose, underscores the dangerous dimension of armed resistance and its potential to harm not only those it targets but also those who wield it. It raises moral and strategic questions about the efficacy and ethics of such actions. Ezikiel's mother also queries the cause and reason for his death, asking "What was the cause of your death?" (409) and "Why did you die?" (410). These questions emphasise the complex, often tragic implications of choosing violence as a means of resistance, challenging readers to reconsider the true cost of militancy in the face of injustice.

Through Ezikiel's death, the novel critiques the idea of armed resistance epitomised by the Sibeye Boys. Ezikiel first sees these boys on a riverboat, armed with rifles and

adorned with bullet necklaces. Later, he hears them on the radio, claiming to be freedom fighters combating for the rights of the people of Delta, rather than a terrorist group. However, their actions, such as abducting white oil workers for ransom, bunkering oil, and participating in illegal arms trade, cast a serious shadow over the accountability and legitimacy of their resistance. Adekunle Adegite explains the root cause of their militancy as such:

> The disorientation of the youths of Niger-Delta is as a result of their traumatic experience [of their socially and environmentally polluted ecology]. What they experience on a daily basis is a harrowing plundering of their natural resources by Western Oil Company. They are not in any way empowered to be economically productive. The government failed them. The oil companies did not do better either. (37-8)

The novel, however, does not glorify their actions or depict them as heroic; instead, it problematises their approach. While their causes can be seen as a justifiable outcry against severe injustices inflicted on their community, the methods they employ, fraught with violence and retribution, do not resolve but rather exacerbate the plight of their community and the degradation of their environment. Hence, they become a part of the destructive processes that they aim to overthrow, failing to bring about the desired social and environmental justice.

In contrast to the armed resistance displayed by the Sibeye Boys, the conclusion of the novel highlights an alternative, more constructive form of protest led by women. This peaceful demonstration takes place in front of the Western Oil Company compound, where women of the Delta gather to voice their discontent with the damaging effects of the oil industry on both the environment and society. Through singing and dancing, they express their frustration. This protest serves as a prime example of what Nixon refers to as "environmentalism of the poor" in relation to his discussion of slow violence. Nixon states that "if the neoliberal era has intensified assaults on resources, it has also intensified resistance" (*Slow Violence* 4). According to Nixon, the fact that environmental problems impact especially poor communities inevitably pushes them "to patch together threadbare improvised alliances against vastly superior military, corporate, and media forces" (*Slow Violence* 4). Therefore, environmentalism of the poor emerges as a necessary form of resistance for these communities to assert visibility and make their voices heard. It is a way for them to stand up against the powerful, and demand accountability and change.

The novel vividly portrays this type of environmentalism, as women, including Blessing and Grandma, unite under a common cause to articulate their rights to a healthy and safe environment free from the burdens of oppression. They passionately declare:

> We no want dangerous gas burnt in all this pipeline fire, give us cancer, coughing, asthma, like our lungs are less important than any other place. We want our fruits to grow, our animals to be able to eat grass and not drop dead. We want to drink water that has no oil in it. We want to stop paying people to kill us. To stop funding the military regime. To admit to the blood on your hands! (428)

While any glimmer of hope in the novel can be associated with this peaceful protest of women, their obstruction by the armed personnel of the Western Oil Company reveals that their battle is laden more with perils than with immediate rewards. As Grandma further reveals, “the last peaceful protest ended up with the oil companies paying the government men to kill seven women” (431), so she warns women to retreat when the armed personnel make their appearance. This incident, along with the death of women in previous protests, demonstrates that the journey towards justice is indeed thorny and can be shadowed by the threat of violence from those intent on maintaining the status quo.

To conclude, through the sociotoxic ecology it depicts, the novel draws attention to the hidden violence of oil pollution, which is often imperceptible to the naked eye but can have devastating effects on both human health and the natural world. It emphasises the intricate relationship between economic dependence on oil and the ethical imperative to protect and restore damaged ecosystems. In so doing, the novel raises critical questions about the feasibility of reforming oil industries toward more responsible and environmentally sound policies. It suggests that a fundamental shift is needed in societal values, corporate ethics, and global economic practices, one that recognises the rights and voices of those most affected by environmental injustices and integrating their needs and perspectives into the heart of environmental decision-making processes. Nonetheless, it does not provide definite or easy answers on how this shift can be achieved. This open-endedness implies that resolving the complex issues of environmental and social justice is not straightforward as it involves manoeuvring through a labyrinth of challenges where solutions must transcend simple policy changes to address deeper political and moral dilemmas.

CHAPTER IV
SEXISM, SLAVERY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL INEQUALITIES IN MARCEL THEROUX'S *FAR NORTH*

Marcel Theroux has distinguished himself in the literary world with his remarkable ability to navigate a range of genres and explore deep thematic content, solidifying his reputation "as one of the most versatile British writers of his generation" (Wright n.p.). His first novel, *A Stranger in the Earth* (1999), marked the beginning of a prolific career that would span several novels, including *A Paperchase* (2001), *Blow to the Heart* (2006), *Far North* (2009), *Strange Bodies* (2013), *The Secret Book* (2017), and *The Sorcerer of Pyongyang* (2022). Throughout his literary works, he primarily explores the intricate relationship among society, technology, consciousness, individual identity, and human vulnerability and adaptability. He weaves these themes together to create narratives that challenge readers' perceptions of reality and morality. While his plots are intellectually engaging, they also reflect a profound philosophical undertone, questioning established norms and potential future ethical landscapes. This philosophical depth positions Theroux not just as a storyteller but also as a commentator on the trajectory of human society.

Marcel Theroux's engagement with environmental issues began in 2004 while hosting a program titled "The End of the World as We Know It," which focused on climate change. This experience served as a precursor to a significant encounter with the renowned scientist James Lovelock, whose Gaia hypothesis left a lasting impression on Theroux. In an interview he gave to Carolyn Kellogg, Marcel explains how Lovelock's ideas influenced his thinking:

> I met this famous scientist James Lovelock – he has this notion that the world is an organism, which he calls Gaia. He understands it as a single organism, and the idea is that Gaia acts in her own best interest. So we, as humans, do things to Gaia – like put[ting] too many greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, Gaia has to figure out a way of regulating her temperature. Much like if you or I had a virus, our bodies would figure out a way of getting it out of our system. Lovelock's idea is basically that human beings have become the virus on Gaia, and that global warming is one of the responses to us. There's a lot of talk about climate change, and people focus on carbon emissions and using the SUV less. What was interesting to me about it was that the repercussions of climate change are very simple: They get very hungry, or they don't have enough water, and they start moving around to find it. And that

> could be profoundly destabilizing, particularly for weak states, to have masses of people on the move. (n.p.)

These insights shaped the thematic foundation of his novel *Far North,* in which he explores the complexities of survival, resilience, and moral dilemmas faced by humans in a radically changed world.

In the introduction he penned for the novel, which he published on his website, Theroux offers a compelling critique of the current human condition and its estrangement from the natural world:

> It's hard not to feel that many of us have lost a once instinctive relationship with fundamental natural processes. We have come to accept the extraordinary unhesitatingly, and to give ourselves too much credit for the pure accident of our birth at this historical moment, when centuries of technological expansion, of investment, and sacrifice – and the profligate use of the planet's wealth – have allowed us to live blindly, without feeling the cold, or the heat, or understanding the engines in our cars, the microprocessors in our phones, or the food in our refrigerators. (n.p.)

Theroux's commentary underscores the paradox inherent in technological advancement. He observes that as technology has progressed, the relationship between humans and the natural world has become uneasy. While technological advancements have enabled humans to live comfortably and to accomplish feats that were once unimaginable, they have also contributed to an unwitting destruction of the environment. According to Theroux, such heavy reliance on technology and the exploitation of natural resources have caused humans to lose their appreciation and respect for the planet as a living, breathing system. In *Far North*, he questions and criticises this overreliance on technology and unsustainable industrial consumption, envisioning a bleak future where an anthropogenic climate change catastrophe forces the characters to revert to a primitive way of life marked by scarcity and a constant battle for resources.

With its evocative storytelling and thought-provoking themes, the novel has in general elicited diverse responses and interpretations from the critics. Jeff VanderMeer, for example, describes it as a "postcollapse novel" (n.p.), highlighting its depiction of societal and environmental collapse following a major global catastrophe. Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow, on the other hand, refers to it as an "eco-parable" although she notes that it is

not a “straightforward one” as “knowledge about the origins of the crisis is fuzzy” (58) in the novel. To categorise it more precisely, the novel belongs to the genre of climate fiction (cli-fi), an umbrella term coined by Dan Bloom to refer to literature in general that “addresses the challenges of climate change and its impacts on human and nonhuman life, in the present and in the future, on Earth and in more fantastical settings” (Bell 100).

Although cli-fi has grown in popularity throughout the twenty-first century, one of its significant limitations, as Greta Gaard argues, is that it neglects the deeper social dimensions of climate change, “namely the underpinnings of colonialism, neoliberalism, speciesism, and gendered fundamentalisms” (“What’s the Story?” 272). Examining novels such as T.C. Boyle’s *A Friend of the Earth* (2000), Michael Crichton’s *State of Fear* (2004), and Kim Stanley Robinson’s climate change trilogy made up of *Forty Signs of Rain* (2004), *Fifty Degrees Below* (2005), and *Sixty Days and Counting* (2007), Gaard critiques the common portrayal of climate change as an “equal opportunity disaster” in these narratives (“What’s the Story?” 274). Such a portrayal, as she contends, is “partial and ineffective” as it fails to capture the differential outcomes of climate crisis across diverse communities and social strata (“What’s the Story?” 272). Building on Gaard’s critique, Antonia Mehnert similarly puts forward that “one of the greatest challenges of climate change that tends to get sidelined in climate scenarios . . . is precisely the question of justice and responsibility” (9-10). Because of their predominant focus on environmental scientific analyses, cli-fi narratives tend to present climate change as “a catastrophe facing an undifferentiated [homogenous] humanity” (Schneider-Mayerson 1) rather than addressing the social inequalities that heighten climate vulnerabilities. However, *Far North* diverges from this common trend by framing climate change as a matter of justice, illuminating how wider power hierarchies and inequalities contribute to a climate change catastrophe that disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable groups. This approach enriches the narrative, compelling readers to view climate change not just as a global environmental issue affecting all beings equally but as a significant social justice challenge that intersects with various forms of human oppression.

Through the futuristic scenario he constructs in *Far North*, Theroux problematises and challenges the oversimplified belief that “the Anthropocene will have us all end up in the

same boat at the whim of global climate change" (Gibson 211). This belief, prevalent in discussions about the Anthropocene, suggests that humanity will collectively face the consequences of global climate change in a uniform manner without considering the varied vulnerabilities and capacities for resilience among different communities. However, such a perspective is deeply problematic, particularly in the context of climate change, as it masks the intricate web of economic differences, racial inequalities, and gender disparities that exacerbate the uneven distribution of climate impacts. *Far North* directly contests this perspective, illustrating that not all people are "in the same boat" and "not all will be saved if (or when) it [the boat] shipwrecks" (Oppermann and Iovino 4). The novel offers a compelling exploration into the inequities that a climate catastrophe can bear, demonstrating how unequal power relations can influence who gets to survive and who is left vulnerable for adaptation and survival. By dismantling the myth that we are all metaphorically "in the same boat," Theroux refutes the conceptualisation of global climate change as "the great equalizer" (Gibson 211), instead presenting it as a crisis that demands a response rooted in justice.

Examining the fictional representations of climate justice in contemporary narratives, Rebecca Evans also posits,

> Representations of climate futures matter in terms of climate justice, or the effort to combat the way that climate change is disproportionately caused and disproportionately experienced along lines of privilege. Climate justice narratives thus require an attention both to the likelihood of climate injustice in the future and to the way that such injustice is rooted, and indeed ongoing, in the present moment. (95)

Far North goes beyond merely portraying a dystopic climate-devastated landscape; it serves as a significant reminder that the roots of future climate injustices are intertwined with present-day economic, political, social, and environmental discrimination. By depicting a chaotic world overrun by lawlessness and disorder, the novel conveys the message that without conscientious actions, such as equitable resource distribution, sustainable development policies, and social welfare initiatives, the inequalities prevalent in contemporary society will continue to grow, widening the existing chasms of disparity in the face of an impending catastrophe. Therefore, the novel articulates a clarion call to address the foundational socioeconomic and political factors perpetuating injustice today

as an essential stride towards mitigating the tidal wave of climate inequality that can unfold in the future.

To summarise briefly, *Far North* is set in a chilling future where Siberia becomes one of humanity's last refuges following a climate disaster that devastates much of the global population. The social order has crumbled, paving the way for the emergence of a sociotoxic society where a ruthless hierarchy dominates, monopolising resources and subjugating the weak. In this grim world, the remnants of civilisation are starkly divided: those with power enforce a brutal regime of slavery, with men coerced into labour and women trafficked into brothels. The story unfolds through the perspective of Makepeace Hatfield, one of the last remaining inhabitants of an American settlement in this unforgiving environment. Her life takes a dramatic turn when she spots an airplane, sparking hope of finding a better civilisation. However, her journey towards hope quickly turns into a nightmare when she is captured by a fanatical religious group in Esperanza and sold into a slave camp. Over three years in the camp, Makepeace ascends to the role of a guard and uncovers its sinister plan, which constitutes the basis for the wealth of its leaders. The slaves are sent on perilous missions to Polyn, a former industrial city devastated now by nuclear radiation and biological hazards, including genetically modified anthrax bacteria. They are tasked with retrieving valuable relics for trade with buyers coming from the West. Makepeace's grasp of the corrupt system of the camp deepens when she learns that the airplane she has seen earlier is connected to Eben Callard, the camp's tyrannical leader and her personal antagonist, who had raped her in the past. This revelation fuels her desire for justice, culminating in a climactic confrontation where she kills Eben, liberating herself from the chains of her oppressive past. The novel concludes as Makepeace returns to her desolate former home, reflecting on her journey's end. With the birth of her daughter, Makepeace is left to ponder the future that her child will inherit in this desolate sociotoxically transformed world.

From the synopsis, it is evident that *Far North* differs from the other two novels examined in this dissertation primarily because it takes place in a post-apocalyptic Arctic landscape. Moreover, unlike the collective struggles depicted in Burnside's *Living Nowhere* which centres around a working-class community and Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* which

revolves around the local communities of the Delta region, *Far North* focuses on the personal struggles of the protagonist through the journey motif. The novel uses the journey motif to facilitate a deep reflection on justice and morality in a world where traditional social structures and the natural environment have been transformed by detrimental human activities. It raises critical questions about the state of nature and the essence of humanity in extreme conditions, pushing readers to question whether ethical living is feasible or even meaningful in a socially and environmentally collapsed landscape.

It is crucial to note that *Far North* has been chosen for analysis to illustrate how sociotoxic ecologies could devolve into more primitive, brutal forms of discrimination and exploitation, especially under the strain of ecological and resource pressures. The novel provides a cautionary vision about the future state of sociotoxic ecologies, demonstrating how ecological and social decline can reshape societies in drastic ways unless humans alter their destructive relationship with the environment and each other. In Theroux's vision, the sociotoxic ecology stems from a vicious cycle where environmental destruction leads to scarce resources, which in turn leads to increased human conflict, exploitation, and further ecological damage. Although the Arctic landscape does not exhibit visible signs of environmental pollution in the first half of the novel, it nonetheless represents an unjust sociotoxic ecology as it is ravaged by a toxic climate disaster which not only worsens the deep-seated problem of sexism but also fosters a new form of oppression in the form of slavery. The presence of pollution becomes more prominent in the second half of the novel with the portrayal of the irradiated city of Polyn, which emerges as a stark embodiment of sociotoxic ecology, highlighting the interconnected consequences of environmental contamination and ethical decay.

Within this framework, this chapter analyses how sexual violence, slavery, ecological degradation, and the issues of climate change and radioactive contamination converge to create the sociotoxic ecology presented in *Far North*. The concept of the "master identity," as discussed by Val Plumwood, provides a crucial lens for understanding the sociotoxic dynamics at play in the novel. This "multiple, complex cultural identity" (*Feminism* 5), as Plumwood describes, operates through a dualist framework, reinforcing

structures of domination and control across the lines of class, race, species, gender, and the natural world. This chapter contends that the sociotoxic ecology portrayed in the novel is deeply intertwined with the master identity. The environmental destruction, the revival of slavery, and the brutal treatment of women, particularly the experiences of the novel's protagonist, are direct manifestations of the master identity at work in the narrative. Accordingly, the objective of this chapter is threefold. The first part focuses on Plumwood's notion of the master identity, exploring its features. The second part examines gender oppression within the Artic landscape, positioning it as a sociotoxic ecology where the harshness of environmental degradation amplifies the severity of gender-based exploitation and violence. Through the character of Makepeace, the novel illustrates how women bear the brunt of this sociotoxic ecology. Like the other two novels under discussion in this study, the sociotoxic setting in *Far North* also leads to profound emotional trauma, as exemplified by Makepeace's rape. This incident not only underscores the personal cost of living in such a setting but also catalyses Makepeace's transformation into a figure who actively resists the dominant master identity. Her personal struggle evolves into a potent counter-narrative that challenges the entrenched norms of power and exploitation. The third part of the chapter discusses the theme of slavery and analyses the radioactive city of Polyn as a sociotoxic ecology which epitomises the culmination of environmental destruction and human exploitation. The revival of slavery, as depicted in the novel, not just highlights the resurgence of barbaric practices but can be interpreted as toxic socio-economic response to the harsh conditions of an ecologically devastated world, where the dehumanisation of the most vulnerable enables the powerful to retain their wealth and status. It demonstrates that the remnants of humanity still cling to and "justify oppressive power dynamics as a part of a historical development deterministically tending towards betterment" (De Cristofaro 97). This part of the chapter examines how the revival of slavery exposes the complex symbiosis between environmental degradation and social injustices.

4.1. THE MASTER IDENTITY AND ITS SOCIOTOXIC CONSEQUENCES

Through her idea of the master identity, Plumwood lays a feminist foundation for environmental justice analyses by seeking to comprehend and dismantle systems of

domination and social inequalities. In her seminal work, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood asserts that "the deep structures of mastery are buried in the foundations of Western intellectual frameworks and conceptual history" (191). She closely links her concept of the master identity with her analysis of dualisms that have long shaped Western thinking. According to Plumwood, the development of the rationalist tradition in the Enlightenment era has resulted in a hierarchical distinction between nature and reason, with nature "systematically and pervasively constructed and depicted as inferior" (*Feminism* 47) to the latter. This deep-seated dichotomy between reason and nature, as she explains, serves as the central pillar of the master identity:

> The concept of reason provides the unifying and defining contrast for the concept of nature, much as the concept of husband does for that of wife, as master for slave. Reason in the western tradition has been constructed as the privileged domain of the master who has conceived nature as a wife or subordinate other encompassing and representing the sphere of materiality, subsistence and the feminine which the master has split off and constructed beneath him. (*Feminism* 3)

Conceived in this light, the master identity is entrenched in a "logic of colonisation" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 45) which empowers the so-called "master" (historically characterised as male, human, and rational) to assert control over those categorised as the "other" in the hierarchical order, such as women, animals, and the environment. Such a "dominator identity" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 5) diminishes the moral and existential worth of the "other," reducing them to mere resources or tools for the benefit of the master.

Plumwood identifies several strategies that the master identity employs to maintain its dominance over the "other." The first of these is what Plumwood terms "backgrounding" (denial). This process enables the master "both to make use of the other, organising, relying on, and benefitting from the other's services, and to deny the dependency which this creates" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 48). In other words, the master exploits the labour and contributions of the subordinated group while simultaneously denying any acknowledgment of this dependency, effectively rendering their contributions invisible and unacknowledged. The second strategy is radical exclusion, also called "hyperseparation," where "the master tries to magnify, to emphasise and to maximise the number and importance of differences and to eliminate or treat as inessential shared qualities, and hence to achieve maximum separation" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 49). This

method creates an unbridgeable divide between the master and the "other," reinforcing the master's sense of superiority and justifying the subordination of the "other." The third strategy is incorporation, which involves assimilating the identity and value of the "other" into the identity of the master: "The definition of the other in relation to the self as a lack of absence is a special case of incorporation, defining the other only in relation to the self, or the self's needs and desires" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 52). Through this process, the master diminishes and subsumes the identity of the "other" into his own. The fourth strategy is instrumentalisation, wherein the master devalues the intrinsic value and autonomy of the "other," treating them instrumentally. The last one is homogenisation or stereotyping, which involves generalising and oversimplifying the "other" to fit preconceived notions. The "other" is transformed into a monolithic and easily manipulable group from the viewpoint of the master, which makes it easier for him to control and subjugate them.

When examined as a whole, these strategies used by the master identity not only perpetuate its dominance but also have profound consequences for both ecological and social spheres. As Plumwood also puts it, the master identity "is a legacy, a form of culture, a form of rationality, a framework for selfhood and relationship which, through this appropriation of culture, has come to shape us all" (*Feminism* 191). This oppressive mindset has led to unsustainable practices that exhaust natural resources, degrade habitats, and contribute to global warming. The sociosphere, or the social fabric of human communities, is equally damaged by this logic, manifesting in economic disparities, racial and gender discrimination, and the marginalisation of indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups. Hence, for Plumwood, the master identity is at the root of both current environmental crises and social injustices:

> The master's logic of colonisation is the dominant logic of our time. The explanation of what is happening to the earth and its complement of life is also to be found in this problematic, in the logic of mastery, now being seared into the biosphere of an entire scarred and wounded planet as well as across its sociosphere (*Feminism* 191).

Theroux's *Far North* echoes and expands this critique of Plumwood, demonstrating that the oppressive nature of the master identity could also persist into the future, amplifying power imbalances, gender disparities, and environmental injustices. The novel problematises the way, in which under conditions of environmental and societal

breakdown, the master identity not only endures but also evolves to exploit new contexts of vulnerability. Therefore, Plumwood's analysis finds an unsettling reflection in *Far North*, where the master identity adapts to post-apocalyptic conditions by cementing existing hierarchies and perpetuating violence and subjugation.

Plumwood argues that the trajectory of the master identity is, in fact, self-destructive: "Since he [the master] is set on a course of devouring the other who sustains him, the story must end either with the death of the other on whom he relies, and therefore with his own death, or with the abandonment of mastery, his failure and transformation" (*Feminism* 195). However, these expected outcomes Plumwood envisions do not materialise in the context of *Far North*. The novel illuminates the insidious nature of the master identity, suggesting that its logic of domination persists even in the face of an eco-disaster. Rather than being eradicated, the master identity creates new ways to assert itself and wield authority, specifically by reviving oppressive structures like slavery and sexism.

4.2. GENDER DISPARITIES AND THE ARCTIC LANSCAPE OF SIBERIA AS A SOCIOTOXIC ECOLOGY

In the novel, Theroux portrays a deeply misogynist world that arises from the ruins of environmental and social breakdown. Those in positions of power continue to dominate and exploit the weak, using the chaos of ecological collapse to reinforce their control and widen existing gender imbalances. Although societal structures crumble, traditional patriarchal norms do not diminish but resurface with heightened ferocity. The scarcity of resources and the spread of lawlessness exacerbate these norms, culminating in a ruthless resurgence of male supremacy. Therefore, the narrative not only critiques environmental degradation caused by climate change but also the resultant social decay, particularly the exacerbation of gender inequalities.

Makepeace's journey through the ravaged sociotoxic ecology of the Arctic provides a compelling lens for analysing the intricate overlap of environmental and social injustices. On the one hand, she endures subjugation and exploitation, while on the other, her fight

for survival and autonomy highlights the resilience and resistance of those oppressed by the master identity. This duality in Makepeace's experience is revealed from the very beginning of the novel, as she secures her guns and sets out to patrol Evangelina, the place where she grew up, but which has now become "a ghost town decaying into wilderness" (28). In this desolate yet challenging setting, her primary concern is to be able to stay alive, which makes it twice as hard for her as a woman. She states, "We live in a broken age" (15), highlighting the irreversible environmental damage and the disintegration of societal order. The opening scene of the novel is also important as it sets the stage for the depiction of an environment that is not only physically devastated but also marked by hostility and inequalities. Climate change catastrophe has left behind an ecologically and morally decaying land where survival hinges on predatory instincts and humans "continue to rationalize violence and harm as an inescapable part of life" (Athanassakis 13). The fact that Makepeace never leaves home without her guns and even makes her own bullets underscores the brutality in this unruly ecology, where people are "rat-cunning and will happily kill you twice over for a hot meal" (14). Although toxicity does not manifest visibly in the physical environment, it permeates the moral fabric of humans who ruthlessly exploit one another for power and control.

As the narrative unfolds, Makepeace's spyglass provides a deeper glimpse into this unjust ecology of degradation and exploitation:

> Late in April I was up the lookout again with a spyglass and I caught something moving out on the roadway far to the east: first dust, then a column of people moving out of the horizon and towards us. It's eerie the silence when you look at a thing like that from far off through the glass. You know there are sounds: horses labouring under a heavy load, whips and sticks, chains clanking, men cussing out the stragglers, but you can't hear them. And the spyglass flattens it all out like a tableau in a picture book. (29-30)

Upon a closer look through her spyglass, Makepeace sees "five or six men on horseback bossing the prisoners" (32) and "a pitiful caravan of women in chains" (34) some of whom are "peasant girls, some Chinese, some with chapped red cheeks, some darker, asiatic-looking, natives" (32). Here, Makepeace's spyglass serves as a literal and figurative lens that reflects, to use Plumwood's words, "the dualistic mirror of the master's character and culture" (*Feminism* 32). It serves not only to magnify the physical scene before Makepeace but also to illuminate the inequalities and hierarchies at play.

The disturbing tableau made visible through the spyglass lays bare a fractured world which is steeped in the toxic dynamics of colonisation and dominated by the master identity that enforces a clear divide between oppressors and the oppressed. In this context, the slave traders emerge as the embodiment of the master identity, subjugating women and the weak, reinforcing a dominator culture that preys on the vulnerable for personal and economic gain. When Makepeace sharpens her focus, the sight of the caravan of chained women that she observes against the decaying backdrop exposes the intertwined legacies of colonialism and misogyny, illustrating how these oppressive ideologies reinforce each other in their brutality.

How did the world regress into such a primitive state? What are the causes? Understanding the origins of the environmental crisis in the novel is crucial because it represents the failure of the rationalist mindset of the master identity that prioritises human-centeredness and technological growth over the natural world. Although Makepeace offers accounts of the world descending into an array with "failed crops, cities with no light or water, gangs of lawless men" (138), the underlying causes of the eco-catastrophe are fully revealed later by Shamsudin, a prisoner whom Makepeace meets in a slave camp. He provides a broader historical context that explains the ecological collapse of the world:

> Around four and half milliard years after it began, the earth started to alter. Looking at it from space, you'd have seen rocket ships and satellites burst out of it like corn from a popper. The earth was in one of its warm times, had been a popper now there were so many of us, all wanting so much, and all armed with the inventions of previous centuries. Once, we'd been so many naked apes, scratching for life on the foreshore of an African ocean. Now we were a vast army, a termite mound of giants, who could shake the planet if we stamped together, who could warm the air just by breathing. (139)

Through Shamsudin's recounting, the novel depicts the master identity at its most oppressive stage, where, in Plumwood's words, "reason systemically devours the other of nature" (*Feminism* 192). At this stage, as Plumwood elaborates, "the instrumentalisation of nature takes a totalising form: all planetary life is brought within the sphere of agency of the master" (*Feminism* 192-3). The image of rocket ships and satellites bursting from the earth "like corn from a popper," as recounted by Shamsudin, symbolises the "human colonisation of the earth" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 12) through

technological hubris. This imagery suggests a rapid, almost uncontrollable proliferation of human activity that extends even into space, underscoring the significant alterations humans have made to the natural phase of the planet. Shamsudin continues his story, revealing that when pollution and excessive heating make the earth uninhabitable, humans finally become aware of their destructive impact on the environment. However, their attempts to remedy their mistake paradoxically worsen the situation:

> Shamsudin said the planet heated up. They turned off smokestacks and stopped flying . . . Factories were shut down . . . As it turned out, the smoke from all the furnaces has been working like a sunshade, keeping the world a few degrees cooler than it would have been otherwise. He said that in trying to do the right thing, we had sawed off the branch we were sitting on. The droughts and storms that came in the years after put in motion all the things that followed. (139)

This bitter irony reveals that humanity has already crossed the ecological threshold, which renders them incapable of resolving the environmental damage without causing further harm to the planet. Despite their efforts to mitigate climate change and pollution, they have inadvertently triggered a cascade of unforeseen consequences, pushing the world into a more socially and environmentally toxic state where the master identity remains dominant in a more subtle way.

It must be noted here that the dystopic scenario that Theroux depicts in the novel to explain the root causes of the eco-catastrophe is not entirely fictional. He draws inspiration from the theory of global dimming, "which implies that human emissions of greenhouse gases have already warmed up the atmosphere to the degree that it will have severe consequences to stop such emissions, since air pollution contains some of the heat anthropogenic global warming would create in isolation" (Andersen 40). Theroux utilises this theory to show the alarming degree to which humans' actions have affected the planet, to the point that their well-intended attempt to rectify the situation has ironically caused a dramatic increase in global temperatures, leading to severe weather events, such as droughts and storms. These events have further destabilised ecosystems and human societies in the novel, creating a vicious cycle of environmental and social degradation. As Shamsudin tells Makepeace, "Life in cities ended . . .The whole world is a barer and less interesting place . . . Human misery has few varieties: tent camps, forced labour, hunger, violence, men taking food and sex by force. You yourself have seen them all"

(139-40). The new harsh environment emerging after the environmental catastrophe is characterised by widespread violence, reflecting the enduring influence of the rationalist and gendered mindset of the master identity.

In addition to Shamsudin's narrative, the story of Makepeace's parents is also significant in understanding the origins of the climate change disaster as well as the interplay between ecological devastation and social conflicts. With environmental conditions deteriorating and temperatures rising, waves of refugees begin to head North in search of a cooler climate. Makepeace's parents are the first of these groups to migrate from America to Siberia to escape the severe impacts of climate change. As Makepeace explains, "we settled here out of conviction . . . because the land was empty and our parents wanted the freedom to create their world new. What an old story that is. You'd think people would be done believing in a fresh start by now, in thinking they can escape their own nature" (57). The aspirations of Makepeace's parents to establish a new world mirror "the colonial doctrines of *terra nullius* and *vacuum domicilium*" (De Cristofaro 96), underscoring a historical continuity of exploitation under the guise of renewal. They are allocated a particular piece of land by the Russian government to form a settlement where they can cultivate crops and set up their own rules. However, it turns out this supposedly empty land is not empty or untouched at all but is sociotoxic, contaminated by the blood of the Tungus people. This important detail is revealed to Makepeace when she, as a little girl, visits an old prisoner factory with her father in a town called Buktygachak. Exploring the desolate site, they uncover that the factory was once a place of suffering and exploitation, where prisoners were forced to "dig uranium ore for power stations and bombs" (57). This industrial activity left a legacy of radioactive contamination that infiltrated the soil and water. Considered from this vantage point, the land that Makepeace's parents hoped would offer a fresh start is instead a testament to historical injustices. Therefore, their quest for a new beginning is actually built on the suffering of others.

Although Makepeace's parents had believed that they would be secure from the environmental calamities plaguing the world and could create their own utopia in Siberia, devastation eventually strikes their community as well. The order that they establish

tumbles down with more and more refugees arriving in their town: “What an arrogance made us think we were far enough to be safe? . . . The people who came at first were not of a bad kind at all. They were placid with hunger and eager to work . . . The more dangerous ones began to show up later . . . Most had guns” (100-01). The influx of migrants results in chaos, with the increasing violence reflecting the broader impacts of climate change, where ecological disruptions lead to social disorder. In particular, the starving woman whom Makepeace sees collapsing and dying at the grocery store symbolises the harsh realities faced by women in such circumstances, highlighting their disproportionate suffering. This significant moment in the novel serves to demonstrate the escalating gender inequalities as the environmental crisis worsens.

Theroux uses the character of Makepeace to provide a powerful commentary on the gender-specific challenges that can arise in this new unjust environment. Her experiences of violence and exploitation are emblematic of the heightened vulnerabilities women can confront in the face of a societal and environmental collapse. In response to the oppressive order around her, she cuts her hair and disguises herself as a man, which signifies the enduring supremacy of male dominance in a landscape that is radically altered but remains anchored in restrictive gender dynamics. Makepeace articulates her struggle with these words: “I’ve had to fight the womanish things in my nature for almost as long as I can remember. These are not soft-hearted womanish times” (22). It appears that the rigid male/female hierarchy that underpins the master identity remains firmly entrenched in this post-apocalyptic society, which reproduces patriarchal structures that ensure women’s continued exploitation. Makepeace’s disguise can be taken both as a critique of these oppressive structures and a survival tactic, illustrating the desperate lengths women must go to in order to avoid further harm.

Makepeace’s struggle is further illuminated through the evocative imagery of her scarred face, which not only reveals the extent of her subjugation but also signifies her traumatic past as a rape survivor. The story surrounding her rape is important as it illustrates the profound impacts of living in a sociotoxic ecology where the boundaries between human cruelty and environmental adversity have been obliterated. The chaos caused by waves of migration and environmental calamities set the stage for her brutalisation by a gang of

men led by Eben Callard. This traumatic event marks a critical juncture both in Makepeace's life and in the thematic framework of the novel, demonstrating the role of ecological devastation in intensifying and worsening the conditions for sexual violence. It provides a powerful illustration of how an individual traumatic experience can intersect with broader societal and environmental phenomena, "augmenting the feminist slogan that 'the personal is political' and ecological, too" (Gaard, "Feminism and Environmental Justice" 74). Makepeace recalls the moment that left her face scarred as such: "I felt something wet on my face and I thought he [Eben] had cut me, but it was lye they'd picked up from our kitchen" (108). Burnt by lye, her scarred face serves both as a physical and metaphorical representation of the societal and environmental decay that has inflicted deep wounds upon her existence. It is a constant reminder of her past trauma but also symbolises her resilience and survival. Reflecting on the aftermath of her rape, Makepeace asserts: "Those who hurt you don't have the power over you they would like. That's why they do what they do. And I'm not going to give them that power now. But it was a cruel thing that they did, and when they had finished hurting me, a splinter of loneliness seemed to break off and stay inside me for ever" (108). This statement highlights the intense emotional toll that sexual violence can exact on women. While the rape incident initially shatters Makepeace's sense of security and instils loneliness, it also catalyses her transformation into a resilient figure. She reaffirms her autonomy and strength in the face of adversity, demonstrating her unwavering will to persevere despite the challenges she encounters.

Makepeace realises that she is not alone in her struggle for survival when she encounters Ping. This encounter deepens the novel's thematic exploration of the sexual and reproductive violence that women experience in destabilised and resource-scarce environments where moral and ecological decay feed into one another. Like Makepeace, Ping's story also exemplifies the novel's critique of the master identity's pervasive influence, particularly on women. Makepeace catches Ping stealing old books to burn for heat. She initially mistakes her for a young Chinese boy due to her slight build but soon realises that she is pregnant: "Being a woman in these times, I know some of what she's crying for. The world fighting itself like cats in a bag. The ordinary cruelty . . . I began to wonder how I ever could have thought she was a man. The truth is, save me, I never

encountered a woman in the last ten years who wasn't more or less some man's wife or property" (24-5). Ping's pregnancy is a clear indication of the violence that she has endured. After being raped by a slave trader, she escaped from the caravan of slaves Makepeace had seen earlier. She hid in a drain for nearly three months, highlighting the desperation required to survive in a world where "the impacts of a climate change catastrophe [are] felt hardest by those least able to make adaptations for survival" (Gaard, "What's the Story?" 281).

Ping's arrival has a significant impact on Makepeace, inspiring a shift towards a more hopeful outlook as she prepares for the arrival of Ping's child. This period in the narrative offers a brief respite from the harsh realities of their world, with Makepeace beginning to cultivate land and make modifications to her home. However, this phase of renewal is cut short when Ping and her baby both die. Their death propels Makepeace into a state of despair, leading her to attempt to drown herself in an abandoned lake, but she is interrupted by the sight of a plane crashing. The plane holds significant symbolic weight in the story, representing both the relic of a bygone era and the enduring issue of environmental degradation. As Tuhus-Dubrow also expresses it, "As an emblem of climate change, nothing could be more apt than an airplane. One of our most triumphant inventions, it is also a prime belcher of the gases that are overheating the atmosphere" (59). The plane, therefore, serves as a potent symbol of the dual-edged sword of human progress, illustrating that the very inventions once celebrated for their ingenuity have contributed to the ecological collapse depicted in the novel. When Makepeace first sees the plane, she is awed by its presence. However, this initial sense of wonder transforms into a harsh realisation when the actual purpose of the plane is revealed later in the story. It carries Western buyers seeking valuable materials obtained through the exploitation of slaves forced to work in the irradiated ruins of Polyn. In this respect, the plane can also be taken as an emblem of exploitation and inequality that continue in the aftermath of societal breakdown, highlighting the ongoing human tendency to perpetuate injustice and environmental harm.

The sight of the plane prompts Makepeace to search for a community where the principles of justice and equity prevail, yet what she "finds instead [is] a place where the attempt to

rebuild human civilization is founded upon forced labour" (Andersen 32). Her subsequent chaining and confinement in a slave camp following the revelation of her gender underscore the grim reality that the struggle for justice and equity within this repressive world will be rather challenging and fraught with obstacles.

4.3. SLAVERY AND THE IRRADIATED CITY OF POLYN AS A SOCIOTOXIC ECOLOGY

With Makepeace's transfer to the slave camp, the novel shifts its setting from the ecologically ravaged Arctic landscape to a nuclear-contaminated environment where the oppressive dynamics of the master identity intensify. The slaves' mission to collect valuable relics of past technologies in the deathly irradiated city of Polyn illustrates the sociotoxic dynamics at play in this hazardous setting, where the toxicity of the environment becomes both a cause and a consequence of distorted social relations. The emergence of slavery, as portrayed in the novel, is fundamentally tied to the economic desperation that ensues following the ecological catastrophe. As traditional economic systems collapse and resources become scarce, human labour becomes a valuable commodity, especially in hazardous conditions. Therefore, the novel depicts slavery not merely as a relic of the past resurfacing in a future society but also as a critique of how economic incentives can trigger inhumane and environmentally destructive practices, especially when the rule of law and moral guidelines disintegrate. This form of economic exploitation is deeply intertwined with the rationalist mindset of the master identity, as it utilises the degraded landscape to further degrade human life.

During the years Makepeace spends at the camp, she bears witness to a cruel system that is predicated on dehumanisation and abuse. Run by a man called Boathwaite, the camp houses slaves who are primarily vulnerable individuals unable to adapt to the devastated ecological world, along with various ethnic groups, including Muslims like Shamsuddin and Zulfugar. The slaves are expected to perform physically demanding tasks ranging from "shoeing horses to milking cows, sowing, reaping, preparing to feed to salting cabbage, and pickling grass in the silo for winter" (132). Additionally, the camp offers a distorted form of social mobility where some slaves, through perverse incentives, can

ascend to guard status, illustrating the deep-seated hierarchical manipulations at play. As Makepeace explains, “An oddity of our prison was that, once in a while, someone you’d got used to seeing in the bunkhouse, or working beside you, would disappear for a week or two, and then turn up again, but this time holding a gun, perhaps on horseback, having been made a guard” (135). With guards at the top and slaves positioned at the bottom, the internal structure of the camp embodies the instrumental logic of the master identity and operates on, in Plumwood’s terms, a “dualised structure of otherness and negation” (*Feminism* 42). According to Plumwood, “in the colonising strategy of the master, only what is marked as Self is permitted survive” (*Feminism* 193) while the rest “are made part of a network of purposes which are defined in terms of or harnessed to the master’s purposes and needs” (*Feminism* 53). The guards along with Boathwaite represent the executors of this colonising strategy, whereas the slaves are relegated to mere instruments of profit within the survivalist economy that emerges after the climate change catastrophe. They labour tirelessly, often get sick, and suffer from undernourishment. Their relentless labour disproportionately benefits the guards, who live comfortably in another town with their families, in houses equipped with gardens, refrigerators, and ample food supplies. When Makepeace is ordered to do gardening work for Boathwaite and his wife, the stark disparity in their conditions becomes painfully clear: “Facing that woman, I had felt like a beggar . . . I hated the thought of them [Boathwaite and his wife] in the ease and calm of the garden I sweated to build, while I rotted in here, and Ping rotted in the ground, and they crunched ice-cubes, wilfully ignorant of us, living like beetles in this dung heap of barracks” (155). Here, the garden serves as a powerful symbol of the environmental hegemony that underpins the broader thematic framework of the novel. It illustrates how only the powerful can enjoy an ecologically more prosperous life at the cost of the relentless toil of the oppressed. Boathwaite and the guards epitomise those who benefit from this inequality, utilising environmental resources and human labour to reinforce their positions of power, all while remaining deliberately oblivious to the destruction and suffering they cause. The deep frustration and desperation that Makepeace feels while tending Boathwaite’s garden highlight the corrosive impact of such a system, wherein environmental destruction and social inequalities reinforce one another to the detriment of those exploited by power imbalances.

As Makepeace discovers from another slave, the main purpose of the camp is only not to sustain the guards; it also involves dispatching slaves to the Zone, an irradiated region that includes what was once the bustling industrial port of Polyn but which has now devolved into a toxic wasteland: “He told me that it was a factory city to the northwest of the base. Just as some prisoners were promoted to guards, others were taken to the Zone where they were trained to undertake industrial work. Only the ablest prisoners were chosen, he said” (145). This region is not only physically contaminated with lethal radiation and genetically modified anthrax bacteria, but it also symbolises the moral corruption and social degradation resulting from a desperate pursuit of economic gain and survival at the expense of human and environmental health. When Makepeace becomes a guard, she realises that some of the guards have already become rich by sending slaves to the Zone. The more slaves they send, the wealthier they become. This exploitation can be taken as a toxic progression of capitalistic tendencies, suggesting a disturbing continuity rather than a break from traditional economic practices. It echoes issues in today’s societies where industrial and corporate malpractices pollute environments and endanger communities for profit. Therefore, Polyn serves as a palpable example of sociotoxic ecology in the novel, where moral and environmental toxicity collapse into each other forming an inseparable entanglement. The contamination extends beyond the physical boundaries of the city, reflecting a post-apocalyptic society that has become toxic to its core.

What renders Polyn sociotoxic is its role within the larger socio-economic system that the novel critiques. Its physical toxicity has become the locus of a toxic ideology based on exploitation. The slaves sent there are treated as expandable resources, discarded without any remorse once their usefulness ends. Although slaves are aware of the radioactive conditions in Polyn, the lethal risks associated with working in this environment are kept hidden from them, highlighting the deceptive and toxic ideology that governs the place. They are misled into believing in the value of their dangerous mission, as evidenced by Boathwaite’s hollow promises: “Working in the Zone isn’t heavy or backbreaking, and it brings plenty of rewards, but it’s dangerous in other ways. The men who picked you, chose you because they figured you’d have the smarts to use common sense, do what we say, and not get sick” (172). This talk of privileges is merely a facade obscuring the grim

truth that Polyn is essentially a death trap. Its air is so poisonous that simply breathing it can lead to severe illness or fatal outcomes. A similar deceitful tone is also evident in Mr Apofagato's speech. He explains the slaves their duties with his limited English and provides them with maps of the locations that they are supposed to explore and dosimeters to measure their radiation levels: "'Now very important. These dosimeters. Very important know your dose. When return Zone, give dosimeters, we calculate your dose, can give medicine if high dose. Your health very important to us. You are valuable people'" (157). Despite these reassurances, the slaves are immediately killed by the guards upon leaving Polyn to prevent contamination of others. This underscores the complete devaluation of their lives once their economic utility has been exhausted, epitomising the ruthless exploitative mentality that defines the sociotoxic nature of Polyn.

When Makepeace first sees Polyn, she is overwhelmed by the grandeur of the city, with its towering glass buildings, yet also struck by the poison that had ravaged it. She describes Polyn as "[a] city stripped of life but kept intact by the power of the poison that had been spread on it; a dead place, but one that by its size and wealth might as well have been built by gods as men" (191). Once a beacon of human pride and technological mastery but now an uninhabitable irradiated place, Polyn epitomises how "[t]he way that human cultures have understood and manipulated the natural world . . . leads ineluctably to our eventual denaturing, our encounter with a cold and hostile nature which is finally immune to our narrative power" (Boxall 221). Digging deeper into the history of the city, Makepeace learns from the guard Tolya about a secret region called Polyn 66, which used to be a thriving hub of scientific achievement and "had been the most advanced city anywhere on earth" (195):

> The government drew to Polyn 66 the brightest people of the time, doctors, professors, scientists, and put them to work in factories and institutes of higher learning . . . They were like the brain of the human race, puzzling out solutions to problems that had taxed us . . . They made better kinds of fuels, more deadly weapons, more fruitful crops. They looked through telescopes at the stars and made plans for carrying us into space . . . Perhaps they tackled things that we don't have the right to understand: how to breathe life back into a corpse, how to double the lifespan of a person, how to engender a child without the act of kind. (196-7)

These insights of Makepeace shed more light upon the complex power dynamics that underlie the history of Polyn. While the city produced technologies that could potentially

elevate the quality of life, it simultaneously developed technologies capable of great destruction. Theroux uses the city of Polyn as a critical metaphor to demonstrate how past techno-scientific ambitions intertwine destructively with contemporary survival strategies. The radioactive contamination that now plagues the city stands as a testament to the follies of technological hubris, which the novel identifies as a fundamental cause of the climate catastrophe. Consequently, the transformation of Polyn into a profit-making venue utilising slaves after the catastrophe starkly highlights the bitter irony of attempting to rebuild society on the ruins of the very technologies that led to its downfall.

As Tolya further explains to Makepeace, there are unique and special artifacts in Polyn that, if harnessed properly, can make one very powerful: “Knowledge and power can make you a god. There are things in Polyn that, used rightly, will make you a god” (197). The shimmering blue disc that Makepeace finds with Shamsudin is one of these objects. Although its purpose is never fully explained in the novel, they believe that the disc can heal injuries, but it does not save Shamsudin from radioactive contamination or death. The tragic death of Shamsudin challenges Tolya’s claim, exposing the fallibility inherent in ascribing divine attributes to technological marvels.

Moreover, the supposed god-like power to which Tolya attributes Polyn is also revealed to be deceptive, as evidenced by the eventual downfall of the city. Despite its advanced technology, Polyn is affected by the same environmental calamities as the rest of the world: “Because of the city’s great importance, Tolya said, the government had never abandoned it. Its food supply had been more or less constant. And when war and shortages were threatening it with chaos, its inhabitants were moved to safety. They were put in places and flown out west and the city was left to crumble” (197). This detailed account of Polyn’s fate contests, in Plumwood’s words, the “techno-optimist scenarios” which posit that reason alone in the form of science or technology “will be our hero and saviour” (*Environmental Culture* 6). According to Plumwood,

> while we remain trapped within this dominant narrative of heroic reason mastering blind nature there is little hope for us. For the narrative itself and its leading characters are a key part of the problem, leading us to reproduce continually the same elements of failure – including the arrogance and ecological blindness of the dominant culture – even while we seek desperately for solutions within it. (*Environmental Culture* 6)

The collapse of Polyn serves as a poignant embodiment of Plumwood's critique of techno-optimism and its associated hubris. The technological prowess of the city proves inadequate in protecting it from the ravages of climate catastrophe and averting its ultimate demise. This sobering realisation brings to the forefront the fact that even with high technology, humanity remains vulnerable to the relentless forces of nature and their own intrinsic ecological missteps.

The corruption embedded in the history of Polyn is further exposed when Makepeace confronts Eben Callard, who turns out to be the owner of the slave camp. Initially, Eben and his partner, Eli, employed the local Tungus people to work in the hazardous zone of Polyn; however, as Eben chillingly recounts, acquiring labour became increasingly difficult as the Tungus community suffered from severe illness and mortality due to toxicity, leading them to resist further exploitation. "It got harder and harder to get labour," Eben admits, "the Tungus were getting sick and dying and they'd refuse to go. Each time, we'd have to tap up another village. The Tungus there still hate us for what happened in the early days" (263). Then, with the increasing famine and the masses of people craving food, they resorted to setting up a slave camp. As Eben explains, "We didn't like doing it. We didn't do it lightly. But we can't get by without what we get from the Zone. It's as plain as that" (264). This admission not only implicates Eben in severe human rights abuses but also reflects a disturbing utilitarian logic that normalises exploitation as a necessary evil in the pursuit of economic survival. His rationalisation sheds light on a broader ethical crisis where economic imperatives frequently overshadow moral considerations and environmental integrity.

Refusing to be a part of the corrupt order that Eben embodies, Makepeace kills him in a decisive act. Her eventual retaliation against Eben can be taken as a critical move of reclaiming agency and confronting the exploitative system that he represents. Therefore, by killing Eben, Makepeace not only seeks personal justice but also symbolically rejects the toxic social and economic structures that allow ruthless people like Eben to commit unspeakable atrocities and oppress others for their own gain. Following this pivotal moment, Makepeace travels back to her hometown, Evangelina, where she establishes a

territory of her own and resumes her patrols, creating a secure and independent zone free from the corruption and injustices that she previously combated.

To conclude, through Makepeace's journey, Theroux illustrates how a severe climate change catastrophe can precipitate profound social disintegration, magnifying existing disparities and spawning new forms of exploitation and ethical decay. The sociotoxic landscape he depicts challenges readers to reassess what it means to be moral and humane in a corrupted, ecologically devastated world, where survival is contingent upon deep suffering and degradation of the most vulnerable. Although the novel concludes with Makepeace envisioning a new society where slaves rise and liberate themselves, the overall ending remains ambiguous. Theroux does not provide a clear resolution, leaving readers pondering whether a just and equitable way of life can flourish for humanity or whether humanity is doomed to a bleak and uncertain future. This ambiguity serves a critical function, reflecting the complex, often paradoxical choices that societies can face when grappling with climate crises and systemic injustices. It implies that the future is not predetermined but is instead shaped by the actions and ethical decisions of individuals and communities. By ending the novel on an uncertain note, Theroux encourages readers to reflect on their own roles in addressing social and environmental challenges and to consider the importance of collective actions to build a more equitable and sustainable future.

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CONCLUSION

With escalating pollution rates, increasing climate vulnerabilities, pervasive food scarcity, and poverty, the problems of environmental and social injustice are becoming more and more severe globally every day. However, despite concerted efforts to address these challenges, the field of environmental justice has been neglected or undermined in literary studies, as highlighted by such scholars as T.V Reed, Joni Adamson, and Julie Sze. Therefore, this dissertation has sought to contribute to the ongoing attempts to bridge the gap between environmental justice and literary studies by exploring how contemporary fictional narratives represent the complex interplay between environmental and social inequalities. As articulated by Summer Harrison,

> Since narratives affect how we understand environmental problems and solutions, evaluate the ethical questions of risk distribution and access to resources, and imagine the connections between environmental degradation and other oppressions, they become a crucial component of environmental justice work. (459)

Integrating environmental justice perspectives in critical literary scholarship can encourage interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches to studying complex socioecological issues and promote greater awareness of the urgent need to address these issues in literary works. To this end, this dissertation has introduced the term sociotoxic ecologies to develop a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which environmental issues are often embedded in broader social and political structures of power. By coining this term, this study has intended to challenge the dualistic belief that nature and culture exist as two distinct entities, and instead foster a new interconnected perspective that links environmental degradation and toxicity with social and ideological toxicity.

In each chapter of the dissertation, a different conceptual tool rooted in environmental justice analyses has been employed to examine the dynamics of sociotoxic ecologies portrayed in Burnside's *Living Nowhere*, Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, and Theroux's *Far North*. An in-depth analysis of these novels has revealed how toxic and ecologically degraded environments can reflect and reinforce discriminatory practices and ideologies. Each novel examined offers a distinct social, political, and environmental backdrop that gives rise to sociotoxic ecologies. For example, *Living Nowhere* illustrates a sociotoxic ecology set in the past, where industrial pollution is rooted in class injustices

and the capitalist degradation of the environment. The steelworkers of Corby endure a relentless cycle of exploitation, trapped in a socially and ecologically tainted environment that not only undermines their livelihood but also endangers their health trans-corporeally and reinforces their socioeconomic oppression. *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* depicts a sociotoxic ecology that is set in the present, focusing on the damaging impacts of oil pollution, which result from a long history of racial exploitation and (neo)colonial oppression. The Niger Delta serves as an unjust site of ecological and social violence in the novel, where the local communities confront the threats of both corporate globalisation and government exploitation. Finally, *Far North* explores a sociotoxic ecology set in a post-apocalyptic world, where a climate change catastrophe fuels the formation of a new unjust landscape characterised by radioactive pollution, gender disparity, and slavery. In this dystopian setting, the sociotoxic ecology stems from the compounded effects of environmental collapse, social disintegration, and the re-emergence of hierarchical oppositions, including master/slave, male/female, and reason/nature. The city of Polyn, in particular, epitomises the height of this sociotoxic environment. Radioactive contamination in Polyn transcends physical toxicity and becomes a breeding ground for moral toxicity, as evidenced by the sacrifice of slaves who are forced to go there to retrieve technological relics for Western buyers. This grim tableau illustrates the fusion of ecological and moral corruption, emphasising how environmental destruction can magnify societal inequities. Taken together, all three novels demonstrate that the material degradation of the environment is intertwined with toxic discursive formations that sustain and reinforce unequal power structures, highlighting the inseparability of ecological devastation and social injustice.

Furthermore, in each novel, the impact of injustice extends beyond social and environmental damage, leading to emotional devastation as well. The toxic labour conditions, as shown in Burnside's novel, generate anger among the steelworkers, which manifests in violence. Suffering from poverty and discrimination for years within the clutches of the capitalist system, steelworkers abuse both one another and others in their community. The polluted ecology of the town reaches their soul and corrupts them morally, too. Similarly, the sociotoxic landscape delineated in Watson's novel fosters anger and violence, but among the youth, as seen in the character of Ezikiel. In response

to the harsh environment around him, he transforms into a rebellious teenager and his relationship with his mother deteriorates gradually. The broader context of societal exploitation and environmental degradation is mirrored in the intimate sphere of familial relationships, resulting in severe personal and emotional wounds. In Theroux's novel, the sociotoxic environment cultivates gangs of men who engage in acts of violence, and it becomes a source of trauma for Makepeace, resulting in her rape. This personal violation highlights how environmental and social collapse can infiltrate the most private aspects of human life.

Moreover, the struggles for justice in each novel take on distinct forms, reflecting the varied responses of marginalised communities to environmental and social inequalities within their unique contexts. The sociotoxic ecology in *Living Nowhere* breeds a pervasive sense of indifference among the steelworkers. This indifference, however, transforms into collective activism by the end of the novel, as the workers unite to demand better working conditions and environmental protections, signifying a shift from passive suffering to active resistance. In *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, the sociotoxic ecology of the Niger Delta gives rise to armed resistance led by the Sibeye Boys, who fight against the oppressive forces of corporate globalisation and government exploitation. This armed resistance contrasts with the peaceful demonstration organised by women, who advocate environmental and social justice through a non-violent protest, illustrating different modes of resistance within the same community. In *Far North*, the sociotoxic ecology fuels a deeply personal battle for Makepeace, whose journey for a better life leads to her realisation of the relentless and pervasive nature of the social and environmental collapse. Her journey highlights both her vulnerability and her resilience as she confronts and tries to survive the harsh realities of post-apocalyptic life.

These varied forms of resistance ranging from collective activism to armed resistance, peaceful protest, and personal struggle all highlight the multifaceted nature of the fight for justice within sociotoxic ecologies. However, the novels also reveal that these efforts, while essential, can encounter new problems or face powerful opposition, indicating that the path to justice is neither straightforward nor without compromise. For instance, at the end of *Living Nowhere,* the closure of the polluting factory results in a cleaner

environment but leads to unemployment, illustrating how victories in one area can create new issues. *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* demonstrates the violent suppression of the peaceful protest of women against oil pollution, emphasising the formidable power of corporate interests. In *Far North,* Makepeace's pursuit of a just life leaves an ambiguous future for humanity by the end of the novel. Although Makepeace personally manages to escape from the slave camp, the story leaves open whether humanity will adopt an equitable way of life or continue to spiral into further chaos, which reflects the uncertainties and complexities of societal transformation. Collectively, the endings of the novels underscore the fact that while the pursuit of justice is necessary, attaining it is fraught with challenges and uncertainties.

Evaluated within this framework, two important conclusions can be drawn from the in-depth analysis of the novels focused on in this dissertation. On the one hand, environmental struggles and sociotoxic ecologies, as depicted in these novels, expose the flawed logic inherent in the current paradigms of thought, which have been characterised by a dualistic and exploitative worldview. This worldview is damaging as it prioritises human dominance and economic growth at the expense of environmental health. The novels, through their narratives, critique this worldview by highlighting how it perpetuates environmental degradation and systemic social injustices. In so doing, they point to the critical need for a paradigm shift from the dualistic and exploitative mindset towards an egalitarian one that fosters principles of ecological unity, diversity, fairness, and reciprocity. Such a shift demands a radical rethinking of human-nature relationships and the implementation of policies that prioritise ecological sustainability and social equity. It also entails an ethical reorientation in dominant societal and ecological attitudes, urging a departure from perceiving nature as a commodity for exploitation toward recognising its intrinsic value, while also acknowledging humans as integral components of a larger interconnected ecosystem.

On the other hand, the intricate and multifaceted nature of the injustices portrayed in the novels has demonstrated that the road towards justice is far more complicated than scholars of environmental justice might imagine or theorise. These narratives indicate that achieving a meaningful and lasting change is indeed a winding process filled with

obstacles and restrictions. It requires efforts beyond theoretical solutions and involves overcoming significant hurdles, including economic and political barriers. Therefore, the novels reconceptualise the understanding of justice by highlighting that it is a dynamic and complex process rather than a simple goal to be achieved. They illustrate that even when efforts are made towards transformation, dismantling entrenched systems, such as capitalism and (neo)colonialism, is not an easy task, as these systems are firmly embedded in historical contexts and socio-economic structures that resist change. For example, Burnside's novel portrays the evolution of capitalism into a more insidious form following the shutdown of The Works, which is exemplified by the emergence of expansive estates witnessed by Francis in the rural setting. Similarly, Watson's novel portrays the Western Oil Company maintaining its extractive capitalist mentality despite the pleas of the Delta communities and the violent interventions of the Sibeye Boys. Furthermore, Theroux's post-apocalyptic world shows the persistence of capitalist ideologies even in the face of ecological and societal collapse, turning disaster into a profitable venture.

Considered from this vantage point, the novels highlight that the deeply ingrained power dynamics and economic interests that uphold the existing systems can be extremely resistant to change, posing significant obstacles to transformative efforts. Hence, the novels refrain from providing straightforward or definitive resolutions; instead, they present a sobering reflection on the entrenched systemic inequalities and the formidable path towards substantive transformation. By doing so, they acknowledge the intricate and layered nature of the struggle for justice, emphasising that progress is often slow and riddled with setbacks.

Overall, it can be concluded that all three novels provide a bleak but realistic depiction of the difficulties involved in attaining environmental and social justice. They, in essence, highlight the necessity for a socioecological transformation that dismantles dualistic modes of thinking and fosters inclusive, harmonious societies free from any discrimination and domination. However, they also reveal that achieving such a transformation is a challenging process, one that requires "navigating through the simultaneously material, economic, and cultural systems that are so harmful to the living

world and yet so difficult to contest or transform" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 18). This ambivalent position of the novels underscores the fact that the pursuit of justice in sociotoxic ecologies is not a linear trajectory but a continuous journey of becoming marked by the constant negotiation of power and resistance. Each resolution brings forth new challenges, and each effort embodies both defeat and victory. Looking ahead, it can be inferred from these narratives that the future of sociotoxic ecologies will remain influenced by the ongoing interplay of struggle, conflict, resilience, and unwavering dedication to achieving equity. While the fight for justice is essential, the course of change is likely to be a tumultuous one. This suggests that the path to an equitable and sustainable world will be lengthy and tough, twisting through complex societal and environmental dynamics.

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APPENDIX 1. ORIGINALITY REPORT

	HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ	Doküman Kodu *Form No.*	FRM-DR-21
		Yayım Tarihi *Date of Pub.*	04.01.2023
	FRM-DR-21 **Doktora Tezi Orijinallik Raporu** *PhD Thesis Dissertation Originality Report*	Revizyon No *Rev. No.*	02
		Revizyon Tarihi *Rev.Date*	25.01.2024

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞINA

Tarih: 27/06/2024

Tez Başlığı: John Burnside'ın *Living Nowhere*, Christie Watson'ın *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* ve Marcel Theroux'un *Far North* Romanlarında Çevresel Adalet Mücadeleleri

Yukarıda başlığı verilen tezimin a) Kapak sayfası, b) Giriş, c) Ana bölümler ve d) Sonuç kısımlarından oluşan toplam 121 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 25/06/2024 tarihinde şahsım tarafından Turnitin adlı intihal tespit programından aşağıda işaretlenmiş filtrelemeler uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı % 5'tir.

Uygulanan filtrelemeler**:

1. ☒ Kabul/Onay ve Bildirim sayfaları hariç
2. ☒ Kaynakça hariç
3. ☒ Alıntılar hariç
4. ☐ Alıntılar dâhil
5. ☒ 5 kelimeden daha az örtüşme içeren metin kısımları hariç

Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orijinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esasları'nı inceledim ve bu Uygulama Esasları'nda belirtilen azami benzerlik oranlarına göre tezimin herhangi bir intihal içermediğini; aksinin tespit edileceği muhtemel durumlarda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.

Selen AKTARAN

Öğrenci Bilgileri			
Ad-Soyad	Selen AKTARAN		
Öğrenci No	N13249733		
Enstitü Anabilim Dalı	İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı		
Programı	İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı		
Statüsü	**Doktora** ☒	**Lisans Derecesi ile (Bütünleşik) Dr** ☐	

DANIŞMAN ONAYI

UYGUNDUR.
Prof. Dr. Şebnem KAYA

*Tez **Almanca** veya **Fransızca** yazılıyor ise bu kısımda tez başlığı **Tez Yazım Dilinde** yazılmalıdır.
**Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orjinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esasları İkinci bölüm madde (4)/3'te de belirtildiği üzere: Kaynakça hariç, Alıntılar hariç/dahil, 5 kelimeden daha az örtüşme içeren metin kısımları hariç (Limit match size to 5 words) filtreleme yapılmalıdır.

	HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ	Doküman Kodu *Form No.*	FRM-DR-21
		Yayım Tarihi *Date of Pub.*	04.01.2023
	FRM-DR-21 **Doktora Tezi Orijinallik Raporu** *PhD Thesis Dissertation Originality Report*	Revizyon No *Rev. No.*	02
		Revizyon Tarihi *Rev.Date*	25.01.2024

TO HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Date: 27/06/2024

Thesis Title: Struggles for Environmental Justice in John Burnside's *Living Nowhere*, Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, and Marcel Theroux's *Far North*

According to the originality report obtained by myself by using the Turnitin plagiarism detection software and by applying the filtering options checked below on 25/06/2024 for the total of 121 pages including the a) Title Page, b) Introduction, c) Main Chapters, and d) Conclusion sections of my thesis entitled above, the similarity index of my thesis is 5%.

Filtering options applied**:

1. ☒ Approval and Decleration sections excluded
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I hereby declare that I have carefully read Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences Guidelines for Obtaining and Using Thesis Originality Reports that according to the maximum similarity index values specified in the Guidelines, my thesis does not include any form of plagiarism; that in any future detection of possible infringement of the regulations I accept all legal responsibility; and that all the information I have provided is correct to the best of my knowledge.

I respectfully submit this for approval.

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Student Information				
Name-Surname	Selen AKTARAN			
Student Number	N13249733			
Department	English Language and Literature			
Programme	English Language and Literature			
Status	**PhD**	☒	**Combined MA/MSc-PhD**	☐

SUPERVISOR'S APPROVAL

APPROVED
Prof. Dr. Şebnem KAYA

**As mentioned in the second part [article (4)/3]of the Thesis Dissertation Originality Report's Codes of Practice of Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences, filtering should be done as following: excluding refence, quotation excluded/included, Match size up to 5 words excluded.

APPENDIX 2. ETHICS BOARD WAIVER FORM

	HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ	Doküman Kodu *Form No.*	FRM-DR-12
		Yayım Tarihi *Date of Pub.*	22.11.2023
	FRM-DR-12 **Doktora Tezi Etik Kurul Muafiyeti Formu** *Ethics Board Form for PhD Thesis*	Revizyon No *Rev. No.*	02
		Revizyon Tarihi *Rev.Date*	25.01.2024

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞINA

Tarih: 27/06/2024

Tez Başlığı: John Burnside'ın *Living Nowhere*, Christie Watson'ın *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* ve Marcel Theroux'un *Far North* Romanlarında Çevresel Adalet Mücadeleleri

Yukarıda başlığı verilen tez çalışmam:

1. İnsan ve hayvan üzerinde deney niteliği taşımamaktadır.
2. Biyolojik materyal (kan, idrar vb. biyolojik sıvılar ve numuneler) kullanılmasını gerektirmemektedir.
3. Beden bütünlüğüne veya ruh sağlığına müdahale içermemektedir.
4. Anket, ölçek (test), mülakat, odak grup çalışması, gözlem, deney, görüşme gibi teknikler kullanılarak katılımcılardan veri toplanmasını gerektiren nitel ya da nicel yaklaşımlarla yürütülen araştırma niteliğinde değildir.
5. Diğer kişi ve kurumlardan temin edilen veri kullanımını (kitap, belge vs.) gerektirmektedir. Ancak bu kullanım, diğer kişi ve kurumların izin verdiği ölçüde Kişisel Bilgilerin Korunması Kanuna riayet edilerek gerçekleştirilecektir.

Hacettepe Üniversitesi Etik Kurullarının Yönergelerini inceledim ve bunlara göre çalışmamın yürütülebilmesi için herhangi bir Etik Kuruldan izin alınmasına gerek olmadığını; aksi durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.

Selen AKTARAN

Öğrenci Bilgileri				
Ad-Soyad	Selen AKTARAN			
Öğrenci No	N13249733			
Enstitü Anabilim Dalı	İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı			
Programı	İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı			
Statüsü	**Doktora**	☒	**Lisans Derecesi ile (Bütünleşik) Dr**	☐

DANIŞMAN ONAYI

UYGUNDUR.
Prof. Dr. Şebnem KAYA

* Tez **Almanca** veya **Fransızca** yazılıyor ise bu kısımda tez başlığı **Tez Yazım Dilinde** yazılmalıdır.

	HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ	Doküman Kodu *Form No.*	FRM-DR-12
		Yayım Tarihi *Date of Pub.*	22.11.2023
	FRM-DR-12 **Doktora Tezi Etik Kurul Muafiyeti Formu** *Ethics Board Form for PhD Thesis*	Revizyon No *Rev. No.*	02
		Revizyon Tarihi *Rev.Date*	25.01.2024

HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Date: 27/06/2024

Thesis Title: Struggles for Environmental Justice in John Burnside's *Living Nowhere*, Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, and Marcel Theroux's *Far North*

My thesis work with the title given above:

1. Does not perform experimentation on people or animals.
2. Does not necessitate the use of biological material (blood, urine, biological fluids and samples, etc.).
3. Does not involve any interference of the body's integrity.
4. Is not a research conducted with qualitative or quantitative approaches that require data collection from the participants by using techniques such as survey, scale (test), interview, focus group work, observation, experiment, interview.
5. Requires the use of data (books, documents, etc.) obtained from other people and institutions. However, this use will be carried out in accordance with the Personal Information Protection Law to the extent permitted by other persons and institutions.

I hereby declare that I reviewed the Directives of Ethics Boards of Hacettepe University and in regard to these directives it is not necessary to obtain permission from any Ethics Board in order to carry out my thesis study; I accept all legal responsibilities that may arise in any infrigement of the directives and that the information I have given above is correct.

I respectfully submit this for approval.

Selen AKTARAN

Student Information				
Name-Surname	Selen AKTARAN			
Student Number	N13249733			
Department	English Language and Literature			
Programme	English Language and Literature			
Status	**PhD**	☒	**Combined MA/MSc-PhD**	☐

SUPERVISOR'S APPROVAL

APPROVED
Prof. Dr. Şebnem KAYA