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(Post)humanizing Nonhuman Matter and the Politics of Water Crisis during the Capitalocene in Select Hydro-Dystopian Narratives

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Abstract: *Water crisis is a global emergency. The genre of eco-dystopian literature does the work of dramatically calling attention to all such water crises with narratives of the marginalised sections of societies who are affected the most by emerging water inadequacy or the poor quality of water provided to them. Capitalism weaponises water during crises for the benefit of large corporations and governments by making available such resources to the richest sections of the society first. Ballard's novel,* The Burning World, *engages in a possible posthumanization of water by plastic contamination, which leads to a rupture of the precipitation cycle, causing drought, while Bacigalupi's novel,* The Water Knife, *narrates the phenomenon of monopolising water in a dystopian, drought-ridden America – an obvious future real-world outcome of the epoch of the Capitalocene. Anna Clark's non-fiction work,* The Poisoned City, *is about Flint, Michigan's poisoned water, which resulted from government negligence. These texts talk about environmental emergencies that could occur in any city or country across the globe during the Capitalocene. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to read Capitalocene's slow violence and technological divide with an emphasis on how the contamination, unequal distribution, and weaponization of water affects marginalized communities and presages impending ecological doom. I argue the technologization and privatization of water by people in power has changed the ontological meaning of water –a process I refer to as the "posthumanization of water." Therefore it calls for a review of capitalocentric disparity and colonization of our ecosystem in the name of progress – an idea conceived in the Global North – and to see how nonhuman agency such as water reacts with the human on the basis of how we treat it in the Capitalocene.*

Keywords: eco-dystopia, Anthropocene, environmental racism, material ecocriticism.

Introduction

Apocalyptic visions have the power to transfix their audience with horror, to command attention and shock people out of a position of comfortable apathy in a way that strict adherence to the data cannot, even when the long-term implications of that data are terrifying enough in themselves. Science fiction writing and film-making have embraced the possibilities of apocalyptic soothsaying, from the Victorian era to the present day, free from the expectations of strict fidelity to scientific fact (Hughes and Wheeler 2013, 2). To

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quote Rowland Hughes and Pat Wheeler, "apocalyptic visions" in fiction or film transfix readers and audiences by showing an alternative reality of living in discomfort due to the environment's breakdown. These dystopian-apocalyptic narratives do not take into account our "fidelity to scientific fact," our preconceived belief that science will fix what we wreck in the environment. Both Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann raise concern about the alarming "break-it-and-fix-it mentality of some environmental rhetoric" (2014, 3), whose unconscious repetition in our heads has misinformed us by leading us to believe that human beings can create ecological problems and can also solve them through use of the right technology.

Eco-dystopian narratives are plots exposing suffering and injustice due to environmental collapse under failed governments. This collapse is almost always a human undertaking, given the fact that we are by default people of the Anthropocene or, more precisely, of the Capitalocene. After all, the concept of the Anthropocene—the geological epoch where the human-initiated material modification of the Earth has altered the planet's ecosystem for the worse—is problematic. It draws attention to how humanity as a whole has altered the Earth's terrain, but avoids acknowledgment of the fact that not all communities living in different geographical spaces have contributed equally to ruining Earth's ecosystem. The Capitalocene, in contrast, signifies an era driven by capitalism's environmentally unethical resource extraction practices, which have caused the present climate crisis.

The fascination of reading dystopian novels and annals come from the survival element blended into these texts, in which people have to cope with frightening environmental collapse. The uncanny fear in these literatures comes from the fact that our unconscious identifies the features of impending ecological collapse, such as a ruptured water cycle, global warming or inequitable distribution of water and subsequent mass death, which we consciously fail to recognise. Such unconscious acknowledgment has become a strangely familiar irony. We know we are conducting activities harmful to our ecology, but we still do it. Human domination of the environment is not only immoral, but has also affected seasonal patterns and precipitation cycles and caused global warming ("United Nations," n.p.). As the recent cyclone Tuaktae illustrates, countries in the Global South are experiencing more tropical storms than ever before (Paola and Willoughby 2013, n.p.). Therefore, I have tried to comparatively study how capitalist enterprises have altered the ontological meaning of water, and how water has been posthumanized according to the requirements of the rich and powerful. Here, the posthumanization of water is to read as the capitalist commodification and weaponization of water, which transcends ancient modes of water conservation through the use of technology. A clear example can be found in the contemporary trend of purchasing water rights to underground water reserves. Wall Street corporations like JP Morgan and Goldman Sachs are buying water rights and aquifers as investments (Yang 2012, n.p.). These corporations are part of capitalist enterprises, proving the

hypothesis that the Anthropocene has slowly moved towards the Capitalocene. For example, T. Boone Pickens, one of the owners of Ogallala Aquifer (also known as High Plains Aquifer), is said to be the largest owner of water in North America (Yang 2019, n.p.). Pickens' ownership of Ogallala Aquifer and the consequent sale of water from the aquifer to small enterprises for profit is a classic example of what happens to water in the Capitalocene. These large corporations have started monopolizing water for their personal benefit. The abuse of resources is done solely by capitalist owners, but the subsequent environmental devastation is for all to share. A new materialist reading of two fictional and one non-fictional work will thus help to explain how water's natural state is changed by the likes of people in power and how such changes affect poorer communities more than it affects the ones who are primarily responsible for this environmental havoc.

Ecocriticism, Technology, and the Paradox of Sustainable Development

Technological modernity is driving us towards widespread incidents of social injustice and environmental degradation. A growing number of examples of environmental racism and injustice are an inherent feature of capitalism and therefore of the Capitalocene. To look for a solution to the trouble we have made with our own hands calls for fresh insight. The posthuman turn, which looks at matter and how it communicates with humans from a new materialist perspective, shows a network of relations between human and nonhuman agents. When we read stories like those of Serpil Oppermann, who describes how nonhuman matter tells us of its becoming, or the changes it experiences through its interaction with humans, we are set on "[t]he voyage of the storied matter" that "currently generates material narratives of what Latour calls an ecology of collectives consisting of humans and nonhumans" (Oppermann 2016, 30). Oppermann draws on the similarities and interconnectedness between "human corporeality and the material world as agential rather than as passive, inert, and malleable" (Alaimo 2016, 193). She argues for a "trans-corporeality that traces the material interchanges across human bodies, animal bodies, and the wider material world" (187). As a result, a new materialist reading of eco-dystopian fiction and nonfiction compels us to accept the trans-corporeality of human beings and that the nonhuman world communicates back to us, depending on how we treat or interact with it.

Western countries in the Global North have created an abstract idea of modernization driven by technological superiority. This idea of progress is propagated by the Global North in the Global South by using a "technocratic apparatus" (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 27) to design global economies that fulfill the Global North's economic interests. Development through technology therefore becomes propaganda concocted by the west as "historically produced

discourse" (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 28). It is synonymous with modern-day neo-colonialism. The fact is that all ideas of "development" and ways to achieve it are created and deployed by the countries in power. The countries who bear the burden are only neocolonial subjects of the West, which uses its "technocratic apparatus" to woo the Global South. Developed nations consciously choose to exploit the other half, which agrees with Pramod K. Nayar's opinion that difference is what primarily gives meaning to humans (Oppermann 2016, 25). First, this difference creates the meaning of being human, as opposed to the nonhuman and, later, divides the human race into the group of the empowered through its *difference* with the group of the powerless. The meaning of development is adaptable as per the needs of those in power. The German sociologist Wolfgang Sachs writes that "what development means depends on how the rich nations feel" (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 27). These developed nations have enough power to determine how natural resources will be distributed across the globe but will not take responsibility for the environmental havoc such resource accumulation processes create. Instead, they have invented the term "sustainable development" as a method of normalising rash resource extraction, which was started by these capital-driven Global North countries in the first place.

The term "sustainable development" in the Capitalocene is a paradox and myth at the same time. Donna Haraway discusses in *Staying with the Trouble* the underlying question of concern: "when do changes in degree become changes in kind?" (Haraway 2016, 99). When or how do we know that it is time to stop changing? How can we know if our anthropogenic practices have started to affect species and their assemblage and also other biotic and abiotic forces? The argument is, we can never determine how many "changes" in degree are permissible or "sustainable." We cannot "develop" in the Capitalocene if we stop using natural resources, even when those resources have started to deplete, because the Capitalocene is characterised by its unquenchable demand to exploit natural resource. Therefore, Donna Haraway rightly warns that "Change on earth is not the problem; rates and distributions of change are very much the problem." (Haraway 2016, 47) We have been trapped in the Global North's exhibitionist use of technocratic apparatus, which propagates a belief that scientific development can fix all environmental havoc that the Global North has wreaked or will wreak. What Huggan and Tiffin (2010) call the idea of "sustainable development," as propagated by the Global North, is what Iovino and Oppermann (2016) call our 'break-it-and-fix-it mentality'. Haraway (2016, 3) also describes the Anthropocene as "a comic faith in technofixes."

Storied Matter and the Posthumanization of Water

Dale Jamieson suggests that "what makes the Anthropocene a moment of crisis is the recognition of humanity's collective power that is oddly and perhaps

paradoxically matched with a widespread feeling of powerlessness" (as cited in Cielemęcka and Daigle 2019, 1). Hydro-dystopian narratives likewise draw on the specter of human "powerlessness" in the Anthropocene. Karen Barad (2007, 185) writes that:

> Although robot technologies, genetic engineering, cybernetic mechanisms, and biotechnological developments indicate a speedy move beyond the speculative in alarming ways toward a more literal disavowing of human control, the fundamental question framing posthumanism is not about superseding the human and establishing a robotic culture, but admitting the human as an interdependent part of the material configurations of the world "in its differential becomings". (2007, 185)

Posthuman does not mean the end of humanity but rather a shift of power and control from human to nonhuman. Lead and plastic in these eco-dystopian narratives achieve power over humans to control the fate of the Anthropocene. Nonhuman matter, such as volcanos, carcinogenic cells or bioluminescent water "are all material forms emerging in combination with forces, agencies, and other matter" (Iovino and Oppermann 2014, 1). This "matter" is interrelated through the process of shared becoming, in the form of intermeshed networks producing "undeniable signifying forces" (2). Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann talk about the relationship between the written text and the world by reading the text through a new materialist wave of thought in their book *Material Ecocritism*. This material turn looks at nonhuman matter in a non-anthropocentric way by focusing on the "material practices, such as the ways we labor on, exploit, and interact with nature" (2). Our preconceived consideration of nonhuman matter as passive, inert, and unable to convey any meaning is flawed. As a matter of fact, nonhuman agency is 'a community of expressive presences' (Iovino and Oppermann 2014, 3), meaning the natural world has power to communicate. As we continue to colonise matter through unethical resource gathering or waste disposal, nonhuman materials will communicate with us through their altered states. Oppermann writes that the world is a network of "matter endowed with stories," agreeing with postmodern ecological thinkers who have stressed "ecologically accountable interpretations of the more-than- human world" (22). They have argued against the ongoing anthropocentric approach of describing nature as lifeless, which is a "capitalization of local ecosystems in the name of economic progress." (23)

Although the dystopian fiction and nonfiction being discussed here was written by writers from the Global North writing about environmental crisis in the Global North, such catastrophes are not limited to the Global North but affect the Global South too. Cielemęcka and Daigle (2019, 1) write about our "linear vision of human-centric futurity." This linear vision of how we perceive the earth's resources for our Capitalocentric needs belies any meaningful sustainable development initiative. How can we aim for a sustainable development if our own vision of the future is draped with blinders? I believe that this "human-centric futurity" is not as inclusive as people in power want us

to think. Resources such as water are far from being distributed equitably. For example, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) receives most of its water through desalinization because of water scarcity in the area. The UAE's oil reserves has given it the economic power to desalinate ocean and sea water and cultivate crops in the middle of the desert through irrigation. The disparity in water resource distribution in the Middle East is starkly visible when we compare the UAE's position to Yemen's deteriorating water supply. Apart from the concern that water is not equitably distributed, we ought to notice the posthumanization of water bodies, which alters the quality of water, making it unfit for consumption, or decreases the amount of water poorer states receive in comparison to richer states. What I have termed the posthumanization of water happens in two ways: the first is by contaminating water through the introduction of technology's by-products, and the second is by moulding naturally occurring water into forms which suit profit-driven anthropocentric purposes better. The ontological meaning of water, by which I mean water as it was when humans started using it to "live", is contrary to the "colonisation" of such water bodies. The posthumanization of water has changed its ontological meaning and so we must think about water with a posthuman lens. We cannot correctly perceive water without considering its altered state. Human-water relations have changed over the time.

In the Capitalocene, we have given up power to capitalism, which now decides how resources will be distributed and therefore introduces the possibility of monopoly. However, what should concern us is that all human beings, whether in the Global North or Global South, are experiencing critical changes in the environment, even though these environmental changes were brought about by capitalist industries. *The Burning World*, *The Water Knife* and *The Poisoned City* are dystopian narratives in which human beings have wrecked water resources in their own different ways. Ballard's *The Burning World* (1964), later expanded, retitled and published in 1965 by Jonathan Cape as *The Drought*, engages in a possible post-humanization of water through plastic contamination that leads to a rupture of the precipitation cycle, causing drought. In *The Water Knife* (2016) by Paolo Bacigalupi, the major issue is the commodification and unequal distribution of water in a drought-ridden future America. This is quite an obvious future real-world outcome of the epoch of Capitalocene. Anna Clark's *The Poisoned City* (2019) is a work of non-fiction which documents how the government of Flint poisoned its own people with lead via mismanagement and negligence. The importance of studying a work of non-fiction alongside fictional representations of water crises is that the former testifies to the possibility of real-life environmental disruption at the hands of the powerful. Such texts also testify to the fact that it is the poorer or the powerless sections of society who are deprived when such crises are deliberately instigated by governments or capitalist organisations.

"Slow Violence" and Environmental Breakdown in Hydro-dystopian Literature

Anna Clark's *The Poisoned City* embodies the consequences of such deliberate negligence on the part of corporations and government officials. The problem started when Flint's local authorities decided to shift its water supply from Lake Huron to Flint River in order to save money. It was a hot summer day in Flint, Michigan when the people noticed that the water which poured out of some fire hydrants was dark as coffee. Rashes, hair loss and ruined water pipes came as a warning, which was often dismissed by authorities. After an array of denials, there was soon an outbreak of Legionnaire's disease and lead poisoning amongst the children of Flint. The problem with Flint's water could not be solved – firstly because authorities refused to acknowledge that there was something wrong with the water of Flint and, secondly, because the city was underfunded. After reports that polluted water was causing engine corrosion in its nearby plants, General Motors swiftly changed its water supply. This meant that even though a large corporation knew about what was going in Flint, the authorities in charge of delivering water to Flint's people denied the cause of the alarming health effects for as long as they could.

The Michigan Civil Rights Commission concluded after thorough research that the government's indifferent response to the Flint's water crisis was a "result of systemic racism" (NRDC, 2018). Flint is only one example of what Clark calls "shrinking cities," a category that also includes places like Albany, New York and Baltimore, Maryland. Shrinking cities are chronically underfunded cities that "have been hollowed out by generations of public policy that incentivized urban living" (Clark 2018, n.p.). In short, the situation in Flint, Michigan was not simply a crisis of local leadership, but also a crisis of the system as a whole. Those who are the most hurt are "communities that are poor and communities of color – and especially those that are both" (Clark 2018, n.p.). This is the same as Rob Nixon's idea of "slow violence" (2013), which describes how environmental modification (such as changing the natural landscape through unsustainable resource extraction or waste disposal) negatively affects people living around such activities. These people often belong to the marginalised sections of society. This sort of modification, in which a place's natural ecology is changed slowly, inflicts violence on the residents, as is seen in Flint's case.

"Slow violence" affects all people who are not as economically powerful as capitalist owners. This section of the society, which is not directly responsible for neoliberalism, happens to be affected by climate change and landscape modification driven by neoliberalism. Meanwhile, the capitalist owners who happen to be the creators of environmental havoc have the means to overcome such crises. Therefore, even if ecological modification affects all human beings, the rescue from it is meted out differently depending on the economic status of the people impacted by it. Also, the audacious negligence toward

environmental issues that require immediate attention is based on geographical area. Among the unprecedented water switch (a change in the source from which the city of Flint used to get its water) and contamination lies the question of the status of environmental justice. A similar situation taking place in New York City or Los Angeles would not have been treated the same way it was in Flint. The Los Angeles reservoir's bromine contamination, for instance, was solved almost immediately by floating plastic shade balls, but Flint's lead contaminated water was met with denial. The matter of "slow violence" transcends the boundary of the Global South, into the marginalised communities of the Global North. It is an intermeshed network within economically poor geographical spaces in both the South and the North.

This is also apparent in Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife*, published in 2015, which is an example of what I call hydro-dystopian fiction, narrating the lives of the three characters intertwined with each other in search of water rights. The three protagonists of the novel are Angel, Maria and Lucy. Angel works as a "water knife" for Catherine Case, referred to as the "Queen of the Colorado". A water knife's work is to sabotage water supplies in states other than one's own. Catherine, who represents capitalism, controls Nevada's water supply and has the power to decide the future of water in her neighbouring states. Maria is a refugee from Texas who wants to acquire enough money to be able to leave her drought-stricken state. Lucy, another character, is a Pulitzer-winning journalist who embarks on a journey to expose what is happening behind the water politics in these south-western states. This novel is about a fight between the south-western American states that are completely dependent on the water from Colorado River. Catherine Case's ambition to monopolise water in Las Vegas to fructify her arcology, an artificially engineered living space for the richer section of the population, demonstrates her capitalistic ambition in the midst of a crisis where water is not available in poor states but must be available in her own.

Maria is a victim of the slow violence described by Nixon. It refers to the unchecked violence taking place without caution or awareness. Slow violence does not take place immediately and it often occurs in areas where marginalised communities reside. Maria's poverty and refugee status compel her to do demeaning jobs in order to pay her rent and she can only dream of meeting a client who will one day smuggle her into Phoenix. Angel, Maria and Lucy share one single desire, which is to get their hands on the water rights for which James Sanderson, a legal associate with Phoenix Water, was murdered. James Sanderson happened to possess the water rights legally belonging to the city of Phoenix. Sanderson, however, sold the rights to Michael Ratan of California, even though they originally belonged to the Pima tribe of Arizona.

Years before, the Pima had made a deal with Phoenix to shift all their tribal water rights over to the city. The Pima had water rights to Central Arizona Project water because of old reparations; Phoenix needed that water when the rivers around here started drying up, so it was a win-win (Bachigalupi

n.p).

The water rights that are desired by almost all the characters in *The Water Knife* are only a peripheral concern. The Pima tribe also acquired access to water from the Colorado River itself. However, this right was deliberately buried by the Bureau of Indian Affairs because it would give Phoenix and Arizona access to water over California. Since these documents were buried years ago, Phoenix and Arizona are left at the mercy of Nevada and California. Both California and Nevada are rich states and, during such a water crisis, deceive and exploit poorer states like Arizona and Texas. The whole system run by Catherine Case symbolises capitalism, not only because she owns and wants to own more power over water, but because she also runs the arcology in Las Vegas. Technologies around which such posthumanized living spaces are built do not accommodate people at the margin. The "technocratic apparatus" of richer states or communities, as represented by Case's arcology, is a plain example of capitalism's indifference towards the subjugated. The economic disparity between people inside and outside the arcology epitomises slow violence in the Capitalocene.

Plastic as Storied Matter in Hydro-dystopian Literature

J.G Ballard's novel *The Burning World (1964),* later published as *The Drought (1974),* is about ocean water that becomes contaminated when it is shrouded with "a thin but resilient mono-molecular film formed from a complex of saturated long-chain polymers" (Ballard 1974, n.p). This novel documents the dystopian possibility of the Capitalocene, where industries have polluted ocean water by disposing plastic. In Ballard's novel, the "complex of saturated long-chain polymers" is let out into the ocean in the form of industrial waste. The film of plastic prohibits ocean water from being integrated into the water cycle, thereby causing drought. These chemical chains formed from plastic waste can be broken only by violently agitating water molecules. However, it is a tough solution. Moving trawlers and naval crafts will break these complex chains of chemicals, but only temporarily, as these chemicals keep forming chains when there is no agitation on the water's surface. As we associate plastic contamination with the covers of "saturated long-chain polymers" (21) formed on ocean water in *The Burning World,* we are reminded of ocean and plastic contamination in the Capitalocene. What Ballard warns about in this novel is that our anthropocentric thinking (the way we dump plastic in ocean) will eventually lead to the end of humanity.

However, the indispensability of plastic is our "plastic contract beyond annulment and revocation" (Ghosh 2019, 277). The notion of a "plastic contract" embodies the essence of being plastic, which is its indestructibility. As Ranjan Ghosh quotes, plastic is "resistant and revolting" (278). Plastic is not plastic until we make it into what it is by adding plasticizers. The stubbornness with which plastic (or the saturated long-chain polymers in *The Burning World*)

refuses to interact is nothing less than humanified nonhuman matter. It narrates its story of becoming from oil to plastic and its resistance to break down. Plastic was created to act as a sealant that would be nonreactive for decades (Davis 2014, 348). This is its specialty, but today its resistance to degradation has changed how we are comprehending plastic. Plastic has been posthumanized, meaning it has transcended the meaning of what it was created to do. It refuses to break down and instead forms massive covers on water when it is disposed of in water bodies. After a considerable amount of time, the world will have dumped all its plastic into the ocean. Not only will all ocean life stop, but it will cause a rupture of the precipitation cycle, like in *The Burning World*.

We have a complicated relationship with plastic. Plastic is unimaginable outside a capitalist context. Plastic is a child that capitalism has created and anthropogenic thinking recommends that we use plastic, as it is cost convenient. It has become a part of the narrative of scientific progress. Plastic started as a cheap alternative to the things we already had, driven by the ulterior motive of profit-making. To rethink humanity's relationship to plastic involves thinking about plastic as petroleum, before it is made into plastic. We have altered the primary state of a resource, petroleum, to get something which now speaks through its indestructibility, which is plastic. By chemically shaping this oil into a form which is "resistant and revolting", we have paved our way towards an environmental breakdown. Petroleum was fuel for humans. However, the moment we gave petroleum a different form by making it plastic, we posthumanized it, and now it speaks through its resistance. Plastic can now interact with human and nonhuman matter through its refusal to breakdown. In the posthuman world, the resources which were meant to be non-living now come alive and speak with the human world.

The chemical property of plastic that is called "saturated long-chain polymers" in *The Burning World* is considered the "substrata of advanced capitalism" (Davis 2014, 349). Heather Davis studied the bromine contamination of the Los Angeles's Silver Lake and Elysian Reservoirs in *Life & Death in the Anthropocene: A Short History of Plastic*. Carcinogenic bromine was found in these reservoirs after the water was exposed to sunlight. This happened as a result of "communication" between naturally occurring bromine and chlorine, which is added to water as a disinfectant. This communication between naturally occurring matter is an example of the phenomenon of storied matter. The problem of water contamination was solved by putting "3.4 million black plastic balls onto the surface of the reservoir, with the idea that they would absorb sunlight, drastically reduce water evaporation" (Davis 2014, 347). The image of floating plastic balls in the reservoirs is what Davis calls an "accidental or incidental aesthetic" (348) of the Anthropocene. Plastic started as nylon and quickly took over the market. We did not know when to stop producing it or how to decompose it because it could not be done. However, today we cannot imagine a sustainable alternative to this inert posthumanized petroleum (plastic) and therefore have come to live in a posthuman-postmodern

world. To be human in a future like the one described by Ballard, where plastic prohibits precipitation and causes drought, is the reality of our posthuman journey through the Capitalocene.

In order to understand the meaning of humanity, it is equally important for us to "acknowledge the non-human reality" (Paola and Willoughby 2013, 123), which is an important part of total reality. Humans have altered natural ecology in different geographical locations in order to cut costs or extract resources, to the extent that the ecological damage is beyond recovery. Paola and Willoughby's notion of "posthuman sustainability" (2013, n.p), is associated with their relational study between architecture and its surrounding ecology. Their underlying analysis of posthuman sustainability is driven by affect as an ongoing process which takes place through constant "patterns of exchange" in ecology. Architecture is not the only thing that is affected by its surroundings. There is an open-ended choice of affective exchange between all things on earth. A body of water, for instance, is surrounded by human and nonhuman life, which affects the quality of the water, while the water affects the human and non-human life in the ecology. It is an ongoing phenomenon. When we alter the quality of water in a body of water and, in return, it affects our health, it reveals the quality of our symbiotic relationship. Additionally, poor environmental health affects human psychology. It creates alienation between humans and the nonhuman world, which causes humans to fail to identify their place in relation to the nature around them. The importance of this non-human reality is demonstrated, for example, in Ballard's *The Burning World*, where people move towards the coast as their familiar spaces become unfamiliar and inconvenient because it does not rain there anymore. It is also on display in Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife*, which shows California and Nevada's use of biopower and technological colonisation over Arizona to monopolise the water from the Colorado River. Lastly, it is also evident in Clark's *The Poisoned City*, which is not a fictional story but a real example of water contamination and mismanagement, showing that environmental injustice and racist bio-power are not simply the fictional fantasies of a dystopian novel but also a lived reality.

Conclusion: The Bio-politics of Using Water as Weapon

A comparative analysis of *The Burning World*, *The Water Knife*, and *The Poisoned City* shows the possible emergencies that could occur in any city or country across the globe during the Capitalocene. Water contamination due to the deliberate negligence of industries or governments ultimately suits the owners of large corporations and industries, who employ shortcuts or bypass environmental obligations or laws to benefit themselves. The tactics by which industries can dump industrial sewage or contaminate water with plastic are a feature of the Capitalocene. Both water contamination due to negligence and water diversion towards richer communities, as seen in these hydro-dystopian

narratives, are not new or absolutely fictional. These are lived realities in the Capitalocene. Water today is seen more as a weapon than as a naturally occurring resource.

What we ought to understand is that living in the Capitalocene has moulded us to believe in the "break-it-and-fix-it logic" of "sustainable development", which is nothing but a myth. The bacteria in the mines of Franceville Basin Gabon, Africa (Iovino and Oppermann 2014, 32) and carcinogenic bromide in Los Angeles's Silver Lake and Elysian Reservoirs (Davis 2014, 348) mentioned earlier, are the result of independent communication between nonhuman material agencies, like the long-saturated chain of polymers known as plastic communicates with water in Ballard's *The Burning World*. This nonhuman matter either directly communicates, as Oppermann writes, through the changes it makes on other agencies, or else it conveys metaphorical messages with symbolic significance.

The question, "when do changes in degree become changes in kind?" (Haraway 2016, 99) lies at the crux of these hydro-dystopian narratives. It comes up in Clark's *The Poison City*, after contaminated water leads to an outbreak of Legionnaires disease. It is also on display when Catherine Case diverts water from Arizona or monopolises Colorado's water in Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife*, a novel that embodies the essence of the Capitalocene by depicting a handful of people enjoying natural resources at the expense of the deprived majority. The Capitolecene is also characterised by waste disposal (particularly that of plastic). As Ballard's *The Burning World* makes clear through its depictions of dumping and industrial discharge, plastic is another nonhuman agency; storied matter interacting with water through its inertness and non-biodegradability. These narratives show how water's meaning has transformed to something different from what it used to mean. Therefore, it is fitting to conclude that we are in the most decisive stage of our journey form Anthropocene to the Capitalocene.

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