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02

"THE ANIMALS ARE DYING. SOON WE WILL BE ALONE HERE": ANTHROPOCENE, CAPITALOCENE, AND THE NEW DYSTOPIAN TRENDS FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH[1]

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Abstract: The current climatic and environmental changes have been bringing about a number of new anxieties, mostly consolidated in concepts such as the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene, which can be seen as partially responsible for the rise in interest in dystopian fiction since the early years of the 21st century. However, a possible new trend is found in contemporary dystopian fiction from the Global South, inviting a reassessment of the very foundations of what we understand this trope to be. The present article wishes to discuss some of

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these trends using the novel *Migrations* (2022), by Charlotte McConaghy, as an example.
KEYWORDS: Anthropocene. Capitalocene. Dystopian fiction. Global South.

Resumo: As atuais mudanças climáticas e ambientais têm gerado uma série de novas ansiedades, principalmente consolidadas em conceitos como o Antropoceno e o Capitaloceno, que podem ser vistos como parcialmente responsáveis pelo aumento do interesse na ficção distópica desde os primeiros anos do século XXI. No entanto, uma possível nova tendência é encontrada na ficção distópica contemporânea do Sul Global, convidando a uma reavaliação das bases do que entendemos ser esse tropo. O presente artigo pretende discutir algumas dessas tendências usando o romance *Migrações* (2022), de Charlotte McConaghy, como exemplo.
Palavras-chave: Antropoceno. Capitaloceno. Ficção distópica. Sul Global.

The Anthropocene is a contentious term, but everyone involved with it converges in the sense that the human presence on Earth and the exponential growth of the effects brought forth by the industrial production have left indelible scars with which we must have to learn to live, of which the most visible are the effects of global warming. Marina Pereira Penteado reminds us, however that the relationship between literature and climate change is not recent, dating back to the mid-1960s, although it is from the 1970s that the connection between them becomes tighter (PENTEADO, 2021, p. 94-95). Not coincidentally, the 1970s marks yet another crisis in Capitalism, whose industrial centrality of the Global North had been based on fossil fuels since the end of World War II (DeLONG, 2022, p. 432-433). When an unexpected

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surge in oil prices took place in the early 1970s, a U.S.-centred Capitalism realised that the Keynesian ideas and ideals that had for long prescribed its economic pathways — that is, the function of the state should be to guarantee the welfare of its citizens, intervening in the economy whenever and wherever necessary — were no longer functional (APPELBY, 2010, p. 346). A growth in unemployment and inflation rates, a stagnation in economic growth, and a devaluation of currency have quickly led to the necessity of a change in paradigm. This was the opening that Milton Friedman, an economist from the University of Chicago, saw to propose a policy of extreme state deregulation and de-intervention, allowing for the market to regulate itself through the laws of demand and supply, called Neoliberalism. (APPLEBY, 2010, p. 347)

Friedman's policy has not only advocated for, but materially allowed the deregulation of, among others, the energy sector (APPLEBY, 2010, p.348) as well as the defunding of government sectors of primary and secondary control. The result has been the rise in the concentration of greenhouse gas emissions as well as an increase in extreme weather events for the past 40 years. As I write this article, we have just had the unfortunate news that 2023 was the warmest year in recorded history, with an average temperature 1.18ºC higher than that of the entire 20th century. It is important to bear in mind, however, that this is not a mere environmental problem, but one of an economic order. Roy Scranton, in his aptly titled monograph *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*(2015) reminds us that Wall Street has been the place where myriad demonstrations calling for the decarbonization of the economy

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have taken place (SCRANTON, 2015, p.42), to no effect, since the central industrial powers (developed and in development), such as the United States, China, and India have been responsible for an increase in greenhouse gas emissions of 2.9%, 4.2%, and 5.1%, against a global average of 2.2% in 2015 (SCRANTON, 2015, p. 48).

Thus, the acknowledgement that the Anthropocene has an economic core, leads to a number of interesting provocations. Firstly, the deconstruction that, as Daniel Hartley states, humanity is a geological force exposes that the early versions of the Anthropocene's "implicit philosophy of history is deeply problematic, leading to practical proposals that are apolitical and narrowly technological, and a grasp of modernity that is entirely ignorant of the complex historical processes at the heart of the capitalist world-ecology and its cultures" (HARTLEY, 2016, p. 155). Hence, there has been a growing preference to other nomenclatures that address the impacts humanity has had on the planet, yet centred not on the mere presence of humans, but on the impacts of economic and political exploitation of Earth. Here, the contribution presented by Jason W. Moore (2016) is central: that we address these issues brought forth by the Anthropocene through the lenses of what he refers to as Capitalocene. Rather than simply replacing one term for the other, Moore states that the Capitalocene expands the views brought forth previously:

> The Capitalocene argument says three things that the Anthropocene perspective does not — *and cannot*. First, it insists that the history of capitalism is a relation of capital, power, and nature as an organic whole. It is world-ecological [...] It is a multispecies affair. Capitalism is neither a purely

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> economic nor social system, but 'a historically situated complex of metabolisms and assemblages' [...]. Second, the history of capitalism cannot be reduced to the burning of fossil fuels, in England or anywhere else. It is a history of the relations of power and re/production premised on the cash nexus. Those relations enfolded coal and other energy sources from the sixteenth century; they allowed for successive waves of global conquest and the worldwide appropriations of Cheap Nature. Third, the Capitalocene argument challenges the Eurocentric — and frankly false — view of capitalism as emerging in England during the eighteenth century. (MOORE, 2016, p. 81)

This allows to make explicit the uneven power relations capitalism imposes on humans and, thus, the *Anthropos* in the Anthropocene does not and cannot refer to a broad concept of humanity since many groups of humans have, by force of the many faces capitalism has had over time, been deprived of entry into the very concept of humanity.

Anthropocenic and Capitalocenic narratives tend to converge in their fatalistic views, but they diverge in their perceptions of possible futures. As the debates around the former have been expanded to include other forms of epistemologies and ontologies representative of non-Eurocentric cultures, the latter allows more careful, critical viewers to access the machinations of capitalism as a system based on its own perennial crisis, or, as Eduardo Marks de Marques puts it in his article "Survival by Promise: Dystopian fiction as denouncer of the Capitalocene" (2021), "[c]apitalism, therefore, is a never-fulfilled promise; one that depends on an ever-changing set of circumstances to remain presenting its materialisation

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on the utopian horizon" (MARKS DE MARQUES, 2021, p. 623). In the opening chapter of his *Capitalist Realism* (2009), Mark Fisher evokes a powerful truth: it is far easier for us, in our relationship to art and reality, to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism (FISHER, 2009, p. 1). Discussing Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006), the movie adaptation of the homonymous novel by P.D. James (1992) as a powerful metaphor for the materiality of capitalist realism, Fisher states:

> The power of capitalist realism derives in part from the way capitalism subsumes and consumes all of previous history: one effect of its 'system of equivalence' which can assign all cultural objects, whether they are religious iconography, pornography, or *Das Kapital*, a monetary value. Walk around the British Museum, where you see objects torn from their lifeworlds and assembled as if on the deck of some Predator spacecraft, and you have a powerful image of this process at work. In the conversion of practices and rituals into mere aesthetic objects, the beliefs of previous cultures are objectively ironized, transformed into *artifacts*. Capitalist realism is therefore not a particular type of realism; it is more like realism in itself [...] Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics. (FISHER, 2009, p.4)

Thus, capitalist realism allows us to see the forms in which capitalism: 1) has expanded the processes of commodification to all material and non-material entities; 2) depends on the maintenance of apocalyptic discourses to maintain its own centrality; 3) normalises its own social and political practices through an illusion

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of a-historicity and/or of the best alternative within an illusion of duality — as is the case in Francis Fukuyama's main argument in his now infamous *The End of History* (1992) and his claim that the "victory" of liberal democracies (as the sociopolitical materialisation of capitalism) after the collapse of the Berlin Wall represents the best of all possible worlds (FUKUYAMA, 1992, p. 42).

This gives us a possible (albeit somewhat superficial) explanation for the popularisation of dystopian novels, movies, and series since the beginning of the 21st century. Novels targeted at young adults such as Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* (2008), and Veronica Roth's *Divergent* (2011) (as well as their sequels and prequels), as well as those by well-known authors, such as Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2006) (and its sequels) and *The Testaments* (2019), the prequel to her best-known novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) provide interesting insights as to the power of dystopian fiction to best represent (and denounce) Capitalocenic anxieties. As Marks de Marques states,

> in this sense, considering literature as an art form that deals directly with and from socio-political anxieties, it is fair to affirm that dystopian literature is a genre with specific internal and external features. Not only does it deal with the intricate, ambivalent co-dependence of the locus of dreams (utopia) and the locus of nightmares (dystopia) […], dislocating political anxieties from the contemporary moment of its creation to another time, usually future […], usually portraying totalitarian regimes […], following a one-person fight against a regime which creates an illusory enclave of resistance only to realise that this is a

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> tool operated by the very regime that cannot be defeated; dystopian fiction shows what is rather than what can be a result of the oppressive social disposition of capitalism. (MARKS DE MARQUES, 2021, p. 623-624)

And, since dystopian fiction has been connected to the anxieties brought forth by a system of maintenance of inequalities and of exploitation of land and people which uses a discourse of crisis to remain in place, talking about "neodystopias" makes as much sense as talking about "neocapitalism": none whatsoever.

However, the distinctive features of dystopian fiction have been the object of much dispute. Whereas one can (somewhat) easily identify a novel as a dystopia, when it comes to the critical exposition of its elements, they may become blurred. Until the turn of the 20th to the 21st century, societies of nightmare and hell portrayed by dystopian novels tended to be supported by authoritarian regimes of vigilance and control, openly or otherwise. Hence, novels such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) always appear as examples of dystopian novels where the perspective of a character who, despite operating within the machinery of the state, goes through a sort of epiphany, and allows readers to experience the real oppression the system imposes on its citizens. The same examples above allow us also to state that there is no escape from the tentacles of dystopia inasmuch the characters whose perspectives present readers to these societies eventually succumb to the system they seek to contest or fight against.

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In his comprehensive study *Distopia: A Natural History* (2017), British historian Gregory Claeys proposes a rethinking of the term to encompass more than just its use as a synonym of its literary materialisation, evoking an expansion similar to that proposed by Lyman Tower Sargent's course-changing article "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" (1994), for whom

> [m]uch of the original basis for the antiutopian position came from anti-communism or antifascism. It was transformed first by the coalescence of these two positions into an antitotalitarian position, and transformed second by the development of dystopia. More than any past age the twentieth century has appeared to reject hope. There was a complete loss of confidence, but it seemed, and to many still seems, justified. The catalogue of the twentieth century has been read as nothing but failure — World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, the Gulag Archipelago, the rising rate of violent crime, the Cold War, the apparent failure of the welfare state, ecological disaster, corruption, and now the upsurge of ethnic and tribal slaughter in Eastern Europe and Africa. Not surprisingly this has led to pessimism about the ability of the human race to achieve a better society, and the dystopia — warning that things could get even worse — became the dominant Utopian form. (TOWER SARGENT, 1994, p. 26)

Claeys, when proposing his rethinking, states that

> both utopia and dystopia conceive of ideal harmonious groups which privilege close connections between individuals and the unity and interdependence they exhibit. A key question here is how inclusive or exclusive this exchange of benefits is.

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> Typically, the collectivist dystopia assumes two main forms: the internal, where coercion pervades the privileged main group; and the external, where coercion defines the relationship to outsiders as a means of upholding the main group, who are, however, free of most of the repression inflicted upon outsiders. Stalinism, we will see, typifies the first type, and More's Utopia the second. In both cases, however, equality and plenty are enjoyed by some groups at the expense of others.
> The crucial question here is how many are involved on each side. The more universal the system of benefits, the more utopian the society. A glib observer might posit that a utopia was a society surrounded by a wall designed to keep others out, and a dystopia one intended to keep its inhabitants in. Yet it is an abuse of language to propose that societies where 51 per cent of the population live a privileged life by oppressing the other 49 per cent are 'dystopias'. Most societies, on the basis of gender alone, let alone the accumulation of property, would have to be called dystopian as a consequence. Many majorities are willing to sacrifice minorities for their own well-being. But we can certainly see the case for treating some dystopias as utopias of the equal few based upon the oppression of the many. (CLAEYS, 2017, p. 7-8)

This allows us to reassess the classic examples of literary dystopias as possible utopias where the key element happens to be the perspective through which readers are presented to that society.

Such a reassessment becomes relevant when we look at the historical and political origins of paradigmatic dystopian novels. The genre tends to be analysed through comparison to classic narratives such as those by Orwell, Huxley, and

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Bradbury establishing both a chain of internal legacy and a mode of external connections to their contemporary society. For instance, whenever critics are looking at the two quintessential paradigmatic examples of dystopias from the first half of the 20th century, they are always (and correctly so) eager to merit many points of contact with Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921), a novel placed in a futuristic totalitarian state of constant and absolute vigilance based on the author's life as a naval engineer in post-revolutionary Soviet Union. Zamyatin's novel was translated into English in 1924, after the author managed to have the manuscript smuggled to the United States following the Soviet Union's refusal to publish it, despite its final message that there can be no room for any counter-revolutionary activities inside the One State (the novel's version of the USSR), guaranteeing the success of the permanence of the state and of its regime.

Thus, it is fair to assume that, if both *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have built their versions of a capitalist and of a socialist totalitarian dystopian society respectively based on *We* (albeit denied by Orwell), the paradigmatic examples of 20th century dystopian novels have been rendered by *shared* rather than *lived* experiences of actual oppressive totalitarian regimes. This can be traced as the history of the understanding of the relationship between literary dystopias and the convergence of the trends of future totalitarian regimes based on hypervigilance being narrated from the perspective of individuals who attempt — and fail to perform — counter-revolutionary actions after undergoing a process of political awakening (similar to an epiphany), usually driven by the development of love interest in someone.

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On the other hand, those dystopian narratives produced under the effects of the Cold War and into the 1990s have fed the dystopian novels from the second half of the 20th century with other social anxieties such as those brought about by the Civil Rights and feminist movements, though without leaving the then canonical elements of classic dystopian fiction behind. Thus, novels like Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952), Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1959), Ira Levin's *This Perfect Day* (1970), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) expand the ways in which individual liberties may be diminished or even extinguished while operating with fears close to the reader. The experiences brought about are both *shared* and *lived*, though presented as warning signs of a possible (albeit foreseeable) future.

The experiences fuelling these narratives, although presented as universal, are in fact localized within the historical and cultural contexts of the Global North. England and the United States, for instance, have never lived periods of totalitarian governments and, thus, the localization of dystopian narratives in mostly unrecognisable futures in spaces suggestive of real places function also as political allegories to expose the plights of marginalised groups within a given community. The discursive universality of such experiences helps create an illusion of unity among similar groups, and such illusion may have contributed to the maintenance of the relevance of these texts throughout the decades.

Interestingly, the absence of environmental issues in the creation of dystopian scenarios was not a point of concern until very recently. What can be noted in the last decade may be an important change in how dystopian fiction has been produced and

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consumed worldwide. Several dystopian novels from the so-called Global South[2] not only have been written and published but have also broken the frontiers of their own cultures, gaining a worldwide readership through digital circulation as well as translated editions in multiple languages. Novels such as Agustina Bazterrica's *Tender is the Flesh* (2020), the English language translation of the Argentinian novel *Cadaver Exquisito* (2018),Ignacio de Loyola Brandão's *Zero* (2004), the English translation of his homonymous Brazilian novel (1983)[3], Samanta Schweblin's *Fever Dream* (2017), the English language translation of the Argentinian novel *Distancia de Rescate* (2014), Fernanda Trías's *Pink Slime* (2023), the English language translation of the Uruguayan novel *Mugre Rosa* (2020), Yoko Tawada's *The Last Children of Tokyo*[4] (2018), the English language translation of the Japanese novel 献灯使 (2014), Ilze Hugo's South African novel *The Down Days* (2020), and Rhydian Thomas's New Zealand novel *Milk Island* (2017) suggest that new tensions have come into play and they might force a new understanding of the very foundations of our knowledge of dystopia. On a preliminary, even superficial look, two factors for such an epistemological change stand out: the growing presence of the debates around the Anthropocene, and the focus on individual (intrapersonal and

2 I refer here not only to the set of countries located geographically and culturally in the Southern Hemisphere, whose existence has been marked and set forth by the horrors of colonial encounters, but, rather, as cultures that actively reject the ideas and ideals of a *Euro normality* by counteracting it with often Indigenous epistemological and ontological concepts, usually untranslatable, that question the reach of Eurocentric social and scientific paradigms (MENON, 2022, p.1-3).

3 As this list is based of texts which can be found in English, it leaves out Brandão's *Deus, o que quer de nós?* (2022), a not-yet translated novel that most closely fits the pattern of the list and, thus, needs to be mentioned somehow.

4 Also published in the United States as *The Emissary* (2018).

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interpersonal) affect rather than on the protagonist's perspectives to denounce social and political oppression.

In Trías's novel, readers are presented to an unnamed port city (whose elements suggest to be Montevideo) which have been taken by a mysterious fog coming from the that kills everything it touches. This is presented through an unnamed narrator who, no longer being able to work as the editor for a magazine, sees herself forced to look after Mauro, a young boy with Prader-Willi syndrome, a genetic disease that hinders physical and mental behaviour and causes, among other things, constant and insatiable hunger, reason why he is morbidly obese. The narrator must deal with her own anxieties brought about by a desire to leave the city (reason why she takes care of Mauro, whose parents are healthy, once every few months — it pays well) and the need to stay and be close to Max, her ex-husband who is in isolation at a hospital after being infected but not killed by the plague carried by the fog. The combination of the intra and interpersonal anxieties shape and are shaped by the dystopian space of a society overtaken by a pandemic.

In Bazterrica's novel, usually marketed as a horror story, all animals of the world have fallen victim to an unknown virus that makes the consumption of meat deadly to humans. In order to guarantee the consumption of animal protein, the world has legalised and normalised cannibalism, opening the market for farms and slaughterhouses that breed, kill, and process the flesh from humans genetically modified to be born without tongues, so they cannot speak. The novel follows Marcos Tejo, an intermediary between the breeders and the slaughterhouses of "special meat" (which is how human flesh is marketed), whose perspective is

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twofold. On the one hand, it presents readers with the functioning of this society, where the breeding, slaughtering, and processing of human flesh is described in details, as well as the many different cuts, their quality and market value; the disposal of the carcasses for the poor to eat; the illegal hunting grounds for the very rich; and the policies surrounding the domestic breeding of the heads, very much mimicking the first half of Huxley's *Brave New World*, where the functioning, structure, and rules of the World State need to be introduced to the reader. However, unlike what happens in Huxley's novel, the world Bazterrica depicts relies on only one change: that of animal protein to human protein, which is, of course, the cause for all the strangeness. The institutions, be them social or political, remain functional as they have always been. Now, on the other hand, we follow Tejo's personal dilemmas: that of having been recently abandoned by his wife after their child dies in infancy, and that of not quite knowing what to do with a gift he received from one of his customers: a "domestic head", First Generation Pure (meaning born, raised, bred, and butchered in captivity, and presented as top quality protein) adult woman.

There are rules for the keeping of domestic heads, one of which involves the prohibition of sexual intercourse, which, under the rules of this universe, is considered zoophilia. However, driven by melancholia and loneliness, Tejo ends up humanising the domestic head to the point of impregnating her. The novel ends with the arrival of Marcos's estranged wife, a nurse, to assist with the labour of the domestic head and the realisation that what could have been an image of horror — after all, that child would be socially considered an abomination, similar to a possible product of bestiality — is

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contemplated as a second chance for the couple to start over their relationship, once again as a family. This closing, then, presents an interesting debate around the ethical, but also the affective elements imposed by this configuration of a dystopian society, which may be organised and presented as a possible working trend that may define the narratives from the Global South.

Many of the aforementioned narratives from the Global South present a configuration of dystopian societies where the political orientation is actually constructed as a result from the reaction of nature against the abuses perpetrated by humankind on behalf of an idea of progress driven by the commodification of every single element of life, and this reaction has not only social, but economic effects. Unlike classic dystopias pointing at the end of humanity by the issue of a never explained infertility such as Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and P.D. James's *The Children of Men* (1992), those novels suggest that the Anthropocene/Capitalocene must take a central position not only because of the obvious effects of climate change on Earth, but also because the indigenous ontologies of these cultures are based on different forms of connecting to nature, hence the narrative focus based on trauma, melancholy, and anxieties. There is also the suggestion that a possible return to such ontologies could be presented as a way to mitigate these effects. However, as shall be discussed later, such knowledge is either lost or untranslatable.

The discussion thus far allows us to see in more depth how these trends operate in a reconfiguration of dystopian narratives driven by the rearrangements of capitalism facing climatic crises, as well as the entry into the literary arena of novels dealing with

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such rearrangements from the Global South. *Migrations*, the first adult novel published by Australian author Charlotte McConaghy in 2020, can be seen as a good example for the need to rediscuss the meaning and scope of dystopias in the third decade of the 21st century. The novel follows the story of Franny Stone, and her obsession to follow the migration of the last flock of Arctic terns in a world where all animals have either been disappearing or completely disappeared:

> The animals are dying. Soon we will be alone here. Once, when the animals were going, really and truly and not just in warnings of dark futures but now, right now, in mass extinctions we could see and feel, I decided to follow a bird over an ocean. Maybe I was hoping it would lead me to where they'd all fled, all those kind of its kind, all the creatures we thought we'd killed. Maybe I thought I'd discover whatever cruel thing drove me to leave people and places and everything, always. Or maybe I was just hoping the bird's final migration would show me a place to belong. (McCONAGHY, 2022, p. 3)

It is important to note that even though Arctic terns figure among the species of least concern of extinction, the estimated population of these birds have declined in about 25% in the last forty years, according to The International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species, making a scenario where these birds cease to exist not only possible, but also in potential progress.

Migrations is structured in two parallel narratives. The one in the present shows Franny aboard theSaghani, a fishing boat struggling to find schools of fish in the North Atlantic waters. She

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meets her captain, Ennis Malone, in Greenland during the mating season of the terns, and uses economic arguments to persuade him to allow her on board:

> ‘Most of the funding bodies have given up on the birds’, I say. ‘They’re focusing their research elsewhere, in places they think they can actually make a difference. This is predicted to be the last migration the terns will attempt. It’s expected they won’t survive it’.
> ‘But you think they will’, Ennis says.
> I nod. ‘I’ve put trackers on three, but they’ll only pinpoint where the birds fly. They aren’t cameras, and won’t allow us to see the birds’ behavior. Someone needs to witness how they survive so we can learn from it and help them. I don’t believe we have to lose these birds. I know we don’t’.
> He doesn’t say anything, eyeing the [National University of Ireland] stamp on the papers.
> ‘If there are any fish left in this whole ocean, the birds will damn well find them. They seek out hot spots. Take me south and we can follow them’.
> ‘We don’t go that far south. Greenland to Maine and back. That’s it’.
> ‘But you could go further, couldn’t’ you? What about just to Brazil —’
> ‘*Just* to Brazil? You know how far that is? I can’t go wherever I please’.
> ‘Why?’.
>
> He looks at me patiently. ‘There are protocols to fishing. Territories and methods, tides I know, ports I have to deliver to, to get paid. Crew whose livelihoods depend on the catch and delivery. I’ve already had to shift my route to take into account all the closing ports. I change it more and I might as well lose every buyer I have left’.
> ‘When was the last time you fulfilled your quota?’.
> He doesn’t reply.

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> 'I can help you find the fish. I swear it. You just have to be brave enough to go farther than you have before'. (McCONAGHY, 2022, p. 24-25)

The other parallel narrative is presented in a series of flashbacks where readers are initially taken to Franny's childhood, born in Australia from an Irish mother, and taken to Galway with her. She narrates how, when she was 10 years old, her mother vanished:

> Then one day, just outside Galway where the changing light leaches the blue from the water and drapes it over the long grass, I met a boy and he told me a story. There was a lady, long ago, who spent her life coughing up feathers, and one day when she was gnarled and gray she stretched from a woman into a black bird. From then on dusk held her in its thrall, and night's great yawning mouth swallowed her whole.
>
> He told me this and then the boy kissed me with vinegar lips from the chips he was eating, and I decided that this was my favorite story of all, and that I wanted to be a bird when I was gray.
>
> After that, how could I not run away with him? I was ten years old; I packed a satchel filled only with books and I heaved it over my shoulder and set off, just briefly, just for a nose about, a wee adventure, nothing more….
>
> But in the night I slept, and I dreamed of feathers in my lungs, so many I choked on them, I woke up coughing and frightened and I knew I had made a mistake. How could I have left her? […]
>
> When I arrived home my mother was gone.
>
> And that was that.
>
> Perhaps the feathers had come for her, like they whispered they would in my dream. Perhaps my father had returned for her. Or the strength of her

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> sadness had turned her invisible. Either way, my wandering feet had abandoned her, like she'd warned me they would. (McCONAGHY, 2022, p. 13-14)

It is also through these non-chronologically oriented flashbacks that we learn Franny is not actually an ornithologist, but she used to work as a cleaner at university, where she became enthralled by the lectures of Professor Niall Lynch, who falls in love with her. They marry and, during their life together, Franny has moments where she wanders away for days while looking for her mother, whom we later find out has not vanished at all, but actually committed suicide and was found by her. Also, she was responsible for a car crash that killed her husband and another driver.

All these elements are responsible for what can be understood as chronic trauma, where the traumatic events are multiple and happen over a period of time. However, *Migrations* does not focus on the trauma as a paralysing force, but as one which helps characters navigate through a collapsing world, melancholically in peace with the inevitability of the end. This aura does not stop characters from reaching out to one another, creating affective networks which would not happen in a non-dystopian context. As these contexts are presented, though, as not being far-fetched, the recognition of the present in them becomes inevitable, and, thus, readers are faced with an invite to reassess their own affective networks in a more ample form.

A key element in these Global South dystopias, affect needs to be understood as thearea of Affect Studies proposes it. In an attempt to define it, Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg state that

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> affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces —visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion — that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstacles and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations. […]
> Affect marks a body's belonging to a world of encounters or; a world's belonging to a body of encounters but, also, in non-belonging, through all those far sadder (de)compositions of mutual in-compossibilities. Always there are ambiguous or 'mixed' encounters that impinge and extrude for worse and for better, but (most usually) in-between. (SEIGWORTH, GREGG, 2010, p. 1-2)

From this perspective, these contemporary dystopias present the need to readdress the construction of affective networks even in times of imminent crisis such as the climactic one we are currently facing.

One very important question arises: if these narratives from the Global South emerge from a perspective of decoloniality in order to make more ancestral forms of affect towards living and non-living beings, the encapsulation of these ideas as an organised body of epistemology reproduces the Cartesian logic which operates the Eurocentric thought against which a decolonial mentality opposes, and, thus, may in itself be a form of maintenance of the colonial/capitalist grasp. In this sense, Dilip M. Menon, in the introductory

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chapter to his collection *Changing Theory:* Concepts from the Global South (2022) offers:

> The second question is that of intelligibility and translation of ideas. We do need to converse across intellectual traditions even as we recover from what Maria Lugones has termed the 'colonial wound' […] and begin to think with Confucianism, or Buddhist philosophy, or African ways of being in the world. This makes the question of language as much as conceptualizing important, while recognizing that the issue is not of producing one-to-one commensurability. We need not swing from asking misplaced questions of whether there are ideas of individualism or secularism in African and Indian languages to the equally ill-conceived venture of assuming that concepts in the languages of the Global South have exact and resonant equivalents in English and European languages. What we need is the beginning of a conversation in a space which has been dominated by a monologue, as much as monolingualism. (MENON, 2022, p. 8)

Thus, it can be argued that the very concepts of Anthropocene and Capitalocene may need reassessment to incorporate or minimally translate the (shared) experiences from cultures belonging to the Global South beyond those presented, for instance, by Donna Haraway in her *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), and the concepts of Chthulucene and tentacular thinking, which call for a repositioning of the Anthropos within the network of beings and structures that occupy Gaia; and Anna Tsing, in *The Mushroom in the End of the World*(2015), where the matsutake mushroom, both materially and as a metaphor, is used to expose the multiple forms Capitalism commodifies nature.

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Despite all that, these Global South environmental dystopias are not driven by any sense of urgence or panic, nor are they concerned at alarming readers of possible futures as a way of avoiding them, but at promoting new forms of understanding and relating with the world as a whole, some of which may even be promising. At the end of *Migrations*, readers learn that Franny's goal at following the Arctic terns' final destination is to scatter Niall's ashes where the birds will most likely die to, later, commit suicide by freezing and drowning in the sea. This gets her and the crew of the *Saghani* to Antarctica, where, surprisingly, they are met not just by birds, but other animals considered extinct until then:

> It takes another couple of hours. I am trudging up a particular gruelling slope, worrying about Ennis, who has fallen a long way behind, turning back to make sure he's still moving, and then I glance ahead.
> And stop.
> Because something just flew across the sky.
> I break into a run.
> More of them appear, swooping and diving and then I am cresting the slope and —
> *Oh.*
> Hundreds of Arctic terns cover the ice before me. Squealing and creaking their cries, dancing upon the air with their mates, caterwauling joyously. Sea swallows, they are called, for the grace of their dips through the water, and I see it now as they dive hungrily for fish, in a sea thriving with what must be millions of scales.
> I sink awkwardly to the ground and weep. (McCONAGHY, 2022, p. 248)

Upon a closer inspection, the apparent happy ending invites readers to realise that the discovery of this animal sanctuary in

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Antarctica, the continent then completely one another and to the environment around us by humans, changes nothing in the world. Animals keep moving away from all those occupied areas where their presence would lead to their commodification and subsequent exploitation. This indicates that humans are not yet ready to create a different affective network where the animals could feel safe and return to occupy the entirety of the planet, and their absence will eventually lead to more economic and social collapse. This sweet-and-sour ending emphasises the need to reconnect to one another and to the world around us to, at least, not be alone when the end comes.

Whether the trends found in these narratives will remain or not is yet to be seen. What can be stated, however, is that they incorporate epistemological and ontological elements typical from the Global South to question the validity and possibility of more “regular” dystopian novels (those focussed on the exposition and denunciation of the macropolitical and macroeconomic structures of society usually by way of a misfit character who, in the end, cannot change the pillars of such structures) to maintain the position of prototypical dystopias. Thus, it becomes urgent to reinvent and reevaluate the very meaning of dystopian fiction to incorporate the anxieties brought forth by the Global South, not as a divide, but as an amalgamation of elements from these macrocultural entities. However, unlike the cruel processes of colonialism, where the cultures from the North were simply imposed on the South, it is time we invert the vector, and propose a dialogue on our terms.

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