

**MIGRANT ECOCRITICISM:  
UNBINDING MOVEMENTS AND SPACES IN ANTHOLOGIES OF ECOPOETRY**

by

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## Abstract

In the environmental humanities, curating ecopoetry into anthologies has been transformative in defining what ecopoetry is and the extent of its scope. Yet, ecopoetry anthologies have often un/consciously valorized the concept of “place” and, at times, legitimized the colonial standards of a Euro-American literary canon. The territorialized discourse of ecocriticism has created a deep divide in its goals for an environmental discourse beyond the academic institution. On that note, ecocriticism is also a radical and outward-looking field eager to acknowledge the gaps in its foundation, and is working towards scholarship, art, and activism that are responsive to multiple interpretations of our relationships with the “environment.”

This dissertation analyses ten selected ecopoetry anthologies—*Earth Shattering: Ecopoems* (ed. Neil Astley); *Here: Poems for the Planet* (ed. Elizabeth J. Coleman); *Wild Reckoning: an anthology provoked by Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring* (eds. John Burnside and Maurice Riordan); *Ghost Fishing: An Eco-Justice Poetry Anthology* (ed. Melissa Tuckey); *Open Wide a Wilderness: Canadian Nature Poem* (ed. Nancy Holmes); *Regreen: New Canadian Ecological Poetry* (eds. Madhur Anand and Adam Dickinson); *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (eds. Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street); *Sustaining the Archipelago: An Anthology of Philippine Ecopoetry* (ed. Rina Garcia Chua); *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (ed. Camille Dungy), and *When the Light of the World was Subdued, our Songs Came Through* (ed. Joy Harjo)—using a migrant reading practice. A migrant reading practice is a methodology that acknowledges generalized experiences and metanarratives that shape ecopoetry anthologies but insists upon the singularity of an anthology’s curation, the collated ecopoetry, and their counternarratives. Using a method of personal scholarly narratives,

this dissertation argues a critical migrant reading practice as a radical method to reimagining, reconceptualizing, and reconstructing the future and value of an ecopoetry anthology in the environmental humanities to deconstruct territorialized and Euro-American concepts in ecocriticism. A Migrant Ecocriticism is a timely and compelling framework in this world of increasingly politicized and polarized migration of humans and more-than-humans across walls, seas, national borders, and the boundaries of fragmented habitats.

## **Lay Summary**

Ecopoetry has been important in the environmental humanities to trace the history of how poets have responded to and “constructed” the natural environment. Compiling these kinds of poems into an anthology makes them more accessible to the general public, especially to students. Yet, the process of compiling an anthology brings with it the decision to create a story that involves exclusions and inclusions. Therefore, this thesis focuses on ten ecopoetry anthologies to discover their motivations and editorial narratives, both “centripetal” articulations of place and nation and “centrifugal” expressions from diverse poets. Using scholarly personal narratives, a Migrant Ecocriticism contrasts themes of ecology, migrancy and dispossession with those of nature, nation and belonging, while analyzing the singular qualities of each anthology and poems selected from them. A migrant reading practice is timely and compelling in a world of increasingly politicized migration of species across walls, seas, national borders and boundaries of fragmented habitats.

## Preface

The essay, “Toward a Migrant Ecocriticism,” was published in *Latag: Essays in Philippine Literature, Culture, and the Environment* (edited by Timothy Ong and Isabelle Lacuña) last June 2019. The paper was also presented in the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) Biennial conference, “Paradise on Fire,” in the University of California, Davis in June 26-30, 2019. A Migrant Ecocriticism stream, co-chaired with Lisa Fink, was also a part of the ASLE Biennial Online Conference, “Emergence/y,” on July 30, 2021. There were eight panels organized under this theme, with at least thirty scholarly and creative presentations.

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Writing this dissertation has been an act of isolation and community. Some of the hardest moments of my life occurred in between the rush to organize an outline and complete a revision. Yet, if there is anything that is clear to me now after completing another new manuscript is that writing continues to save me. It has pulled me out of the dark space I was in when Pang passed away, and it hauled me out of the hole I fought to keep myself in when Mang left to join her beloved. The year and a half I spent writing this dissertation is a complete blur; however, I know that whenever I return to this work—in this form—I will find memories, joyful and bitter, buried within these pages.

I have immense gratitude to my supervisor, Greg Garrard, who has welcomed me as both a student and his friend. I look back at the time we have spent together in Kelowna—just before the IGS program started to progress in the direction we both anticipated it to go—with wonder and fondness. I sometimes think about how we even survived those almost-six years of my degree with both of us trying to navigate a program we are not familiar with then, but we did! I am thankful, forever, for his unrelenting support and friendship. I also thank his family, including Verity Teagle, for welcoming me into their home and lives—especially during the winter holidays I thought I would spend in Kelowna alone. My fondest memories of the Valley will always include my time with them and with their beloved dog, Spencer.

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The environmental humanities community is, perhaps, one of the biggest motivations why I have pursued ecocriticism for almost a decade now. Here, in Canada and in North

America, I found my people. My gratitude to my colleagues in *The Goose*, ASLE, ALECC, ASLE-ASEAN, and *Tiger Moth Review*. I am thankful most especially to Heidi Amin-Hong, Jeffrey Santa Ana, Zhou Xiaojing, Siobhan Angus, Melanie Dennis Unrau, Rachel Jekanowski, Alec Follet, and Anita Girvan.

In my MA Thesis’ acknowledgments, I stated that I was ready to be a mother to my only daughter, Stella. I did not keep that promise, and here I am once more. This time, I will not make any more promises to her—instead, I am assured by the gut feeling within me that I am now finally ready to be a mother. It’s been an upward battle trying to prove myself as more than a single parent to everyone else, especially myself, for many years; however, I am ready to move on and focus on Stella. In the end, it is my love for her that has constantly encouraged me during the most difficult moments of this degree.

Lastly, I am in deep gratitude to the everyone at UBCO—especially the Filipino maintenance and staff—for their kindness, warmth, and the many conversations we had when I was staying late in my office. I am grateful to the many migrants in my community who have given me energy so that I can sustain my advocacy for them beyond this dissertation. I understand that this work is only the beginning, so it’s time for me to turn the page.

## **Dedication**

For Benjamin Osias Chua (1946-2016) and Regina Garcia Chua (1953-2021).

I kept both of you close to me while writing this dissertation. Mang, Pang, you are the life of these words.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Where is home? Is it the motherland, the left-behind world of birthplace and ancestry, or is it the strange but fresh landscape of possibility and promise? Which language articulates the private self, which the public? ... What is the cost of such unwilling or hopeful migration?"

- Mihaela Moscaliuc and Michael Waters, Introduction to *Border Lines: Poems of Migration*

Refurbished as well as unreconstructed nationalisms and transnationalisms, battles for state power and civil liberties, identity-based claims to political and economic enfranchisement, liberal-democratic ideals of civil society—such are the familiar trajectories of world-historical agency in these times, trajectories from which all other manner of human and parahuman lives, pasts, presents, and futures, cultural imaginations, and virtual realities are jettisoned. These things fall away, and their barely apprehended importance to our worlds is lost to us, who seek different holds on our immanent future.

- Neferti X.M. Tadiar, *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization*

In “Photo of my Grandmother Running Toward Us on a Beach in Ilokos,” Filipino American poet Patrick Rosal frames his observations of his Lola with the vantage point of the “American grandchild” who is taking her photo: “She is sopping wet / trying to balance / an entire sea on her head Her arms are // flung wide open And she laughs / as if she were asking us / to bring our burdens too” (*Ghost Fishing* 313). It is a nostalgic image that evokes not only the unmistakable warmth of familial kinship, but also the contrast between the grandchildren on the shore—kids born in another continent—who are watching this elderly woman of the islands carry baskets of fish with naïve joy.

The manner in which Rosal describes his grandmother through the photograph—perhaps the last concrete symbol of that childhood memory—loops in my head as I sift through the digitized images of my mother on an old external drive. Mang, as my elder sister and I fondly called her, was oftentimes the reluctant subject of our early camera phones since we thought that she is the most beautiful woman we have ever known. By native<sup>1</sup> Filipino standards, she is mestiza, or the epitome of localized desire for Euro-American or hybrid beauty. It is not to

hierarchical privilege she owes this heritage to, but to violence: her birth mother, a young maid, was raped by her Spanish father. She was eventually given up for adoption as “payment” to the local dentist who assisted in her birth. Mang grew up speaking broken Spanish<sup>2</sup> in now war-torn Zamboanga<sup>3</sup>, and eventually, because of this said beauty, she became a part of the earliest batches of Flight Attendants for the first airline in Asia, *Philippine Airlines* (PAL). A favourite photograph of hers, which I made sure to scan before I left Manila back in 2016, was of her young and svelte on a camel in the deserts of Egypt. Another, which she excitedly showed me before I finished packing for Canada, was of her (not so young and svelte at that time, but she was still stunning with cold red cheeks) and her close friends in Vancouver—a random corner somewhere downtown, but where it was does not matter because the important thing to feature is that they were standing on snow. One of her most vivid memories of Canada is being stuck on the Richmond airport runway as they waited for the ground crew to clear a path for them. “I’ve never seen so much white in my life,” she would recall like clockwork when I video-called her during wintertime.

During the intense blur after Mang passed away last January 2021, I distinctly remembered thinking of all the moments I missed in her life: the world she had before me, her thirty-five years of working in the sky and temporarily staying in foreign countries, and then those four years after I left Manila. The questions I wanted to ask her about those lived experiences are now all suspended in time, similar to the way I rationalized her absence from my childhood whenever she worked long haul flights<sup>4</sup>: *she is never anywhere when she is not with me*. I do wonder who she was in between the arrivals and departures, on that camel and in Vancouver years ago, before she is real and warm in my young arms once more. Mang rarely complained, and she never took a day off even when she was the sickest and despite her hearing



loss<sup>5</sup> to financially support us. Rosal's poem opens with a couplet that describes the state his Lola was in when she greets them: "Consider how happy she is / carrying the whole load of an ocean." Recently, I have contemplated how happy Mang was when she went on flights; it is a job that she held onto for economic survival, but I know that it also meant freedom.

My current notion of the worlds Mang lived beyond me are purely speculations; I will never comprehend the depth of her lived experiences in my own lifetime, and I have to eventually—painfully—accept that I will never have the opportunity to talk to her. Yet, when my childhood mind believed she was "never anywhere" when she went on a flight, she *existed*. As I understand it, she was in an environment that persisted in liminality.

I first encountered the term "liminality" in Victor Turner's seminal essay in performance studies, "Liminality and Communitas." Here, he emphasizes the existence of the liminal in a Rite of Passage: those that elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space<sup>6</sup> (79). For Turner, these are "overlooked" persons and/or places erased and disassociated from the more visible spectacles of traditional Rites of Passage. Lee Rozelle further adds that the liminal is a concept that has the capacity to renew the relationship between culture and noxious environments (444). In other words, the liminal is an opportunity to reconcile with the new ecological body that is formed from being in between urban and industrialized places and malignant sites that may have been the result of urbanization and industrialization. Within the liminal period, Rozelle adds, the ritual subject "is ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification; [they pass] through a symbolic domain that has few or none of the attributes of his past or coming state" (232). Though both Turner and Rozelle articulate the tangibility of liminality, the challenge is to add a nuanced interpretation of this in-betweenness that does not detach from the overlapping spaces

the subject (or the individual) encounters and engages with while in the process of movement. I argue that these overlapping spaces are crucial to the way subjects reconstitute themselves as cultural beings wherever they arrive at and inform the many environments they are encountering. This is the *liminal environment*, which is defined in this dissertation as where an individual exists among overlapping movements that require or invite renegotiation of one's cultural identities and expressions. It occurs when the individual finds a moment to *pause* in the midst of all the movements to comprehend the direct environments one is immersed with.

The liminal environment is where an individual remains as they move within, above, and across margins, boundaries, and borders. These movements can bolster someone into the right circumstances, especially when they aim for a better life; unfortunately, it is these same movements that largely sustain and nurture the global systems which operate the world through colonization, globalization, capitalism, neoliberalism, racial capitalism, dispossession, and displacement. The liminal environment is also a highly contested and theorized environment, for if further dissected, it will reveal the underlying inequities imbricated in movements, such as (but not limited to) warm-body exports from Third World<sup>7</sup> countries to the West; imperial projects of resource extractions and import-export transactions; climate refugees and border closures/detentions, and the mobility of whiteness and hierarchical citizenship. At the same time, the liminal environment provides the *transition* necessary for a migrant to achieve what they sought to move from one space to another for, which is “to disrupt their ways of living, and to force themselves to try newer things in unfamiliar countries” (Guest, “City Air Makes You Free” 11). One goal is to ultimately achieve economic satisfaction, social assimilation—even freedom. The liminal environment is not built on homogeneity but on the deterritorialized trajectories of environments that an individual embodies through multiple movements.

This is the challenge of the liminal environment: to not let all the things that construct the liminal environment *fall away*, as Filipinx scholar Neferti X.M. Tadiar reiterates in the beginning epigraph. Serpil Oppermann reminds us that environmental issues demand “solutions to new—socially and ontologically transversal—forms of violence” (250). These violences, which I counter as nothing shockingly new, are the interlocking systems of oppressions that reconstitute the liminal environment. However, these systems are not all that the migrant experiences in the midst of the liminal environment: there is also joy in this transition and in the pursuit of overall well-being in another country. Thus, I take care to distinguish the liminal environment as *not* a totalizing symbol for the migrant’s multiple lived experiences but as a reality formed out of the necessity to illumine these experiences of time-space compressions. The liminal environment is not a tangible place that is attached to geography but is not entirely abstract either; this may be a separation, reunion, displacement, resettlement, entrapment, reconstruction, realization, even an erasure. The liminal environment is even responsive to Lawrence Buell’s “environmental crises narrative” that Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin recount as:

... a narrative in which the multiple disjunctions of global warming are made visible, temporally and spatially, in and across a wide range of multidimensional sites. The differential effects these sites produce may be radically disruptive – of linear time, of bounded space, or even of the ontological status of the human – but they are not necessarily unimaginable. (90)

Indeed, this kind of narrative is immersed in the varied encounters and experiences that alter and affect an individual’s perception of lived histories and probable futures. The “environmental crises narrative” as further defined above challenges the linear monolithic narratives that plague concepts such as “place,” “nature,” and “environment” in ecocriticism; they also reiterate that

there are deep time-space gaps that are yet to be addressed by the field through a framework that is attentive to the complex differential effects of species. What are these complex differential effects? These can be as grand as what “sustainability,” in a given context, wishes to achieve: Is it rushing to come up with innovative solutions to the rapid decline of salmon populations in British Columbia’s Fraser River, or the opportunity for Californian scientists to work on bringing an extinct passenger pigeon back to life in a laboratory? These can also be the tension among white European settlers, Indigenous peoples, and arrivants<sup>8</sup> in a rapidly growing urban area and tourist hotspot like Kelowna, or First World governments encouraging skills-based immigration from countries like the Philippines to accommodate the gaps in healthcare, hospitality and agricultural industries. These contrasts and tensions, when they provide the moments of self-reflexivity that enrich a migrant’s comprehension of their purposes, community, and destination, are an integral part of the liminal environment.

It is the same liminal environment that Mang existed in when she traveled; for example, she was part of an industry that is responsible for 2% of all human-induced CO2 emissions all over the world<sup>9</sup> but is deemed as the gateway to globalization (and neoliberal capitalism). It was certainly the job that sustained our family throughout the years. There were also moments of erasure throughout her time as a FA, when she was hesitant to share the details of her journeys with us because our father, Pang, thought my sister and I would get “jealous” of her watching *Beauty and the Beast* on Broadway or shopping at Target during their after-holiday sales. At times, Mang disassociated herself from these experiences by relating to us only the struggles of the flight, and never the great fun and freedom she had while being in flux. She asserted that she *only* flew to earn money for our futures; thus, it was never for her own satisfaction or self-fulfillment. Above all, the flights allowed her to establish her core identity as a responsible

breadwinner of the family who had to make insurmountable sacrifices to keep food (luxurious, at times) on the table. However, I have always known there was more to this identity of hers since these flights would always end with a Samsonite luggage full of goods we could never get in Manila: Kinder eggs, thick Australian steaks wrapped in dry ice, expensive wines from Napa (to be gifted to our family doctors), perfumes from Duty Free, and even fresh cherries. These foreign goods were all hints of Mang's enjoyment in the many countries she discovered and explored. And yet, as a migrant mother myself, I see these exorbitant gift items ("pasalubong," as we call it in Filipino<sup>10</sup>) as tokens of her guilt, too—a way to assert the nobility of her economic endeavour. Ultimately, these erasures and disassociations my mother forced on her identity have formed the individual, and the migrant, I am now.

"Migrant Ecocriticism: Unbinding Movements and Spaces in Anthologies of Ecopoetry" is an interrogation, reconceptualization, and reconstruction of the manner in which ecocriticism has valorized "place" in not only its many theoretical iterations but also in its formation of the ecopoetry canon. The territorialized discourse of the environmental humanities and the fact that it is largely (and initially) built on frameworks by mobile, economically secure, and abled white scholars have created a deep divide in its goals of a democratic environmental discourse that translates beyond the academic institution. On that note, ecocriticism is also a radical, evolving, and outward-looking field that has been eager to acknowledge the gaps in its foundation, and is working towards scholarship, art, and activism that are responsive to the interlocking systems of oppressions that constitute the discussion of the "environment." Ecocritics like Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Ursula Heise, Graham Huggan and Hellen Tiffin, Nicole Seymour, Serpil Oppermann, Rob Nixon (among others) have chosen to address these gaps through postcolonial and decolonial lenses. Building on their works and the works of many IBPOC<sup>11</sup> scholars within

and outside the field, my concern is the migrants: their liminal environments, their movements, the spaces they occupy, and how all these inform the cultural synergy of the environments they settle in—whether by choice, force, or circumstance. Thus, I will focus on exploring a “Migrant Ecocriticism” to answer questions that percolate from similar queries the aforementioned scholars have tried to address: What is a migrant in ecocriticism? What space does a migrant occupy? What migrant issues are legible in anthologies of ecopoetry, which are largely nation- and place-based? How are the concepts of “home,” “place,” “nature,” and “environment” in ecocriticism decentered and reimagined through a Migrant Ecocriticism? To ruminate on these questions, I will first discuss the contexts of the terms I will utilize and the backgrounds of the problems that inform the prospective methodology of a Migrant Ecocriticism.

### **Movement, the Migrant, and Space**

Twelve hours: that is how long a direct flight between Vancouver and Manila is. During that time, I would have crossed six thousand miles of ocean. That crossing is constantly peculiar; I usually take a Graval to make sure the first six hours of transit is spoken for. Yet, there are moments—perhaps before the plane’s massive wheels touch the runway—when I look around me and see (un)familiar faces, such as tired Filipinx<sup>12</sup> parents juggling their fussy infants between each other; exhausted tourists, businesspeople, and balikbayans<sup>13</sup> jamming their earphones into their ears, and then people like me who try to mind their own business by perfecting the art of sitting still. There are always those Filipinxs though who buzz with excitement before we touch down in Manila; oftentimes, the Flight Purser (a role Mang was promoted to for the last ten years of her career) will lightly scold the naughty passengers through the PA to “sit down” with their “seatbelts fastened” because the plane is still taxiing on the

runway. I pride myself as a good passenger and try my best to keep still until the plane is halted completely, but that buzz electrifies me, too. It is the diaspora collective coming together, in a confined pressurized space, to celebrate the return to their heartland—that no matter how long they have been away, the archipelago is still their “home.”

On one hand, the liminal environment is born out of the contrasts and tensions of transitioning from one territory to another, for example: flying on a plane; waiting in airports for the next connecting flight; fleeing the heartland for safety or better opportunities; surviving disasters and returning to rebuild what was lost; imprisoned or trapped on land due to material conditions. On the other hand, the liminal environment ceases to exist once the migrant (re)settles into a new space and begins to endow it with value. Borrowing from Yi-Fu Tuan (6) and building on my earlier discussion, I characterize the liminal environment as the “pause” in movement that makes it possible for location to be transformed into a home.

If so, what is movement? I contextualize *movement*, as it relates to this dissertation, as the excitement and discomfort which construct a repository “of time and memory ... that endows us with the capacity to see that the present world is neither final nor unique in its permanence” (Bullock and Paik 11). It is the purposive process of seeking for different modes of experiences (sensimotor, tactile, visual, conceptual) that promotes direction and/or repulsion towards objects and places (Tuan 12). What is defined as “place” and “environment” in ecocriticism is reconstituted by fluid, porous, and dynamic movement. It allows the direct environment to evolve and continue evolving.

The present world that was previously mentioned also translates to the search for “space” in ecocriticism. Indeed, “place” is often exalted as special. It represents attachments and a tangible home—a concretion of value and dwelling (Tuan 12). Heise further reiterates that the

characters of particular places rely heavily on human intervention and cultural history more than by natural processes (46), which is why these symbolize a concrete reality from the individual's active and reflective mind. Place denotes intimacy and symbolisms which form attachments individuals search for. Yet, it is important to remember too that place is "now imbricated in larger networks" (Heise 55) that leverages its stability, and that it is influenced by the fact that people with varying social positions perceive and experience place differently (Keller 202). Place is interpreted as a security of belongingness, and/or a direct expression of "fromness" that actualize socio-historical realities into individual identity and agency (Tadiar 106).

How is space different from place, then? According to Tuan, if place is a special kind of object, space is the ability to move towards, or against, objects and places (12); if place is security, space is freedom. In this dissertation, *space* is both the freedom and constraints of movements, and are often invisible to a geographical location's grand narrative. It assumes a rough coordinate frame centered on the mobile and purposive self (Tuan 12) and is compelled by the experiential "pause" (in the liminal environment) to clearly seek and reach out beyond the individual self. Space is apparent to those who are classified or classify themselves as migrants as the capacity to create and recreate a "home." As Huggan and Tiffin ascribe, it is not "unimaginable," and it is not based on an abstract concept of multiple networks intersecting on a territorialized zone (90). It instead recognizes that space is a "social product<sup>14</sup>" that, when lived, is "associated [with] images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users,' but also of [people] who *describe and aspire to do more than describe*" (Razack 10). Space evolves, and it evolves along with its inhabitants. Carol Schick notes that "space cannot be understood as a sign of personhood and legitimacy" (101), but it does produce identities that are validated or invalidated by the way space is negotiated with the fixed concept of place. Rozelle even argues



that it is crucial to find the place in the space (447), if only to affix symbolisms that are perceived by the human mind as real, tangible, secure, and stable.

It is concerning but not surprising to note that place “continues to function as one of the most important categories through which [mostly] American environmentalists articulate what it means to be ecologically aware and ethically responsible today” (Heise 29); thus, I find space (as it will be developed in this work) helpful in decentering the often contentious “place” in ecocriticism, but also useful in describing where the migrant is at a given moment in time. For instance, the concept of place is associated with the pastoral tradition in ecocriticism which romanticizes human metaphors, relationships, and interventions with what is perceived as “place;” another contention is how place is valorized as pristine and/or wild so it cannot be contaminated or degraded by modern and capitalist structures, including the bodies that are associated with such change like migrants, arrivants, and racialized communities. Nevertheless, even the concepts of “place” and “environment” are rapidly evolving in ecocriticism, as the discourse complicates and endows the ideas associated with localism and globalization.

I classify myself as a migrant, and perhaps I have always been one. I never truly felt I belonged anywhere. In the Philippines, I was often regarded by the way I look as a fair-skinned Filipino, while here in Canada, I am conscious of how the brownness of my skin, and my faint Filipino accent make me either blend in or stand out in a crowd. I distinctly remember being on a short cab ride two years ago when the white male driver assumed I was born here because of the way I have assimilated the Canadian English accent. When I told him I’m native Filipino, he *carefully* asked if I was working as a “nanny” in Kelowna. It was a disembodied experience—I immediately recalled the painful realities Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) experience around the globe, and perhaps the shameful shock that registered as my second reaction. I also recalled

collecting myself and thanking him for thinking that I am capable of copious amounts of skillful care; however, I'm but a graduate student who is striving and struggling to finish her dissertation. He was, needless to say, also shocked for a few uncomfortable yet satisfying minutes.

What was so satisfying about that encounter though? In the Philippines, I am never "Filipino" enough and even the Filipino Canadians here do not think I am native to our own country. I know that if I decide to continue living here in Canada, I might never be "Canadian" enough either. I have majored in English for half my life and I am still learning vocabulary that only exists in Canadian lingo (what is "dinged?"). Though passports, visas, and citizenships classify me as one or another, it was only recently that I felt that I was most comfortable with the designation of "migrant." That said, I am quite lucky that I can safely call myself as such—the United Nations report that there are almost 272 million migrants globally, and two-thirds of those are labour migrants<sup>15</sup>. These numbers are rough estimates of what constitutes a migrant in political and geographical sense: legal, illegal, undocumented, documented, temporary, permanent<sup>16</sup>. The statistics and labels that many governments bestow on migrants are, in large part, "categories for signifying, by way of organizing, social relations of power and production, gender, race, and sexuality not only to structure the practical, material relations and practices of the nation-state and the world economy, but also shape and set limits to political imaginations of change" (Tadiar 22). These bureaucratic categories do not encompass the identities and experiences of a migrant, nor the complex identities they rebuilt in order to thrive or survive in a foreign country.

Most migrants *do* thrive in the countries they move to: according to Robert Guest, migrants who move from lower- to higher-income countries would earn three to six times more

than they did at home; the simple act of moving makes them more productive because First World countries have better institutions in place—including rule of law, efficient capital markets, and modern companies (“A World of Walls” 3). Even more, migrants send home a lot of money in the form of remittances, which the World Bank predicts will soon be the largest source of external financing for Third World countries (“Labourers and loved ones” 7). Some migrants even move back to their native countries and share the knowledge they have accumulated from living in foreign countries or studying in First World universities. All in all, migrants help support the spaces they move into, which brings more efficient and speedy flows of new information between and among countries.

*A migrant*, in this sense, is a “malleable, mutable, tenuous” (Tadiar 112) individual who is edified and altered by direct or indirect multiple modes of experiences that stems from their movement out of and into spaces. This definition comes from how the term itself is rapidly evolving due to our uncertain world condition:

The recent history of forced or voluntary migrations, massive transfers of population, and traveling and transplanted cultures is seen as part and parcel of the postwar, postindustrial, and postcolonial experience. Understandably, narratives that originate at border crossings cannot be bound by national borders, languages, and literary and critical traditions. (Seyhan 4)

I will add to Azade Seyhan’s overview of migrancy’s developing conditions by saying that the migrant’s narratives are not anymore originating only at border crossings—they originate and flourish in the liminal environment, this pause, that the migrant embodies and at times ignores or forgets about. These pauses can be the blurs of tears and farewells, the sheer joy of reunions, the dank darkness of a transporting vessel, the grief of losing a dwelling, the collective unity in

rebuilding communities; for me, these are the tears that Mang hastily wiped away on her face when she first saw me in the airport after two years of separation. It is so tempting to imagine the space I occupy right now as the only space I ever occupied in order to ease the insurmountable amount of pain and longing I have long battled with when I decided to move to Canada. However, to do so would be a disavowal of the experiences that created the migrant I am comfortable labeling myself with: *I am because of*. Being a migrant has allowed me to learn and explore multiple experiences that I could never have in my own native country: obtaining my first driver's license, learning how to cook and bake vegetarian versions of Filipino foods, and traveling to areas I only was familiar with through the airport codes on Mang's flight calendar. One of the happiest moments I shared with Mang was through a video-call in Honolulu, where I was showing her the surroundings as I walked through the University of Hawai'i at Manoa and she was sharing with me her experiences of traveling to Honolulu, her favourite destination. Being a migrant is a unique state of existing that cultivates emotions of ecstasy and exhaustion, and this state is reciprocal: it enriches the migrant and the spaces they arrive in.

In the overarching framework of my dissertation, the definition of a migrant<sup>17</sup> not only recalls the exhilaration of arriving at a new space after a transition, but also brings to front the systems of oppression that are linked to the term itself. Global industries and contemporary capitalism, as Tadiar says, have found ways and manners to incorporate arenas of human activity outside of their formal productive economy, like the extraction and commodification of natural resources from former colonies and new economic relations with Third World countries (13). Historically, labour migrants and arrivants, for example mainland Chinese and Sikh Indians, have also immigrated to countries like Canada to build mining towns and railways—oftentimes at the cost of having lower wages than their white European counterparts or being siphoned for

the most dangerous jobs on the field, but notably earning more than they would if they stayed in their own native countries. Many labour migrants, for example Africans who were forcibly sold to the West as slaves, were forced to build industry and nations from the very resources that were plundered and extracted from their own lands. Dispossessed and displaced migrants, like some Indigenous peoples, were eliminated from their ancestral lands and tricked into signing questionable treaties that have further oppressed and deeply divided their communities. Currently, displaced migrants (many undocumented) risk their lives every single day to maintain economic footing in Western countries for their own familial responsibilities in dangerous and vulnerable jobs like sex work, freelancing or gig jobs, or the service industry, and they keep risking their lives to support their families back in their native countries because they would still earn better in the First World. All these violent perpetuations of oppressions are enforced to maintain the mythical narrative of the great North, or the national story of the West:

If Aboriginal peoples are consigned forever to an earlier space and time, people of colour are scripted as late arrivals, coming to the shores of North America long after much of the development has occurred. In this way, slavery, indentureship, and labour exploitation – for example, the Chinese who built the railway or the Sikhs who worked in the lumber industry in nineteenth-century Canada – are handily forgotten ... (Razack 3).

DeLoughrey further stresses that the recognition of migrant movements offers a distinct method to deterritorializing the historiography of European colonial models of the past that forgets these invisible narratives (22). It is this same historiography that funnels into enormous and abstract place-based attachments such as nation-states, which inform and regenerate identities based on a colonial model. This kind of model also forge a “fear of the unknown” or “not-in-my-backyard” attitude, and a resistance to rapidly growing migrant movements that have influenced an

established place. This resistance has also given rise to territorial extremism that have become the basis for policies such as “controlled immigration,” “skills-based immigration,” or even—to some extent—populism.

Just as I feel that my identity as mestiza Filipino-Chinese migrant living in Canada is highly politicized<sup>18</sup>, the migrant is often middle of a crosshair of successes and struggles that are exacerbated or celebrated by their material conditions. Migrants take on jobs that native citizens shun in workplaces, and many eventually move up to bigger and better salaried positions in their fields. Some go to school to get further accreditation; many eventually petition their immediate families and relatives to move with them. Some migrants are exploited too and have had to hire criminals to help them cross borders and oceans. The varied situations migrants have undertaken are often used as the basis for arguments for *and* against migration. Thus, even if they choose to not want to be political, they often *are* by virtue of their existence.

Thus, if as ecocritics we want to address the systemic issues that plague our environmental discourse and the communities we want to advocate for, then there is a need to decentre the Eurocentric trajectory of the field<sup>19</sup>. This observation is not novel; this is continued desire towards rethinking the limitations of frameworks—mostly Western-based—that have, for the most part, occluded other perspectives in the field (Cilano and DeLoughrey 73). Oppermann continues on to ask: how does the debate about ecocriticism and the environmental humanities respond to these [migrant] stories and mutating configurations as well as to the fractures they impose on our master narratives? (249) I want to sustain this debate by focusing on ecopoetry, the anthologies that have shaped this poetics, and the direction a Migrant Ecocriticism will take the field, in particular through postcolonial ecocriticism.

## Anthologizing Ecopoetry

Last year, the Norton Anthology<sup>20</sup> series published *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*, an anthology of Native Nations Poetry, edited by Muscogee US Poet Laureate Joy Harjo. The poems in the anthology are classified by geographical territories in the United States, not borders, and each are introduced with the poet's tribal affiliations and their biography. One poem written by Yuma writer Arsenius Chaleco, "The Indian Requiem," was *only* published in *The Indian Teepee* in 1924; Harjo's anthology is its second publication.

Written with rhymed couplets and cross rhyming quatrains, it narrates the death of a warrior and his land's destruction at the hands of the "white man:" "They waste us – ah, like April snow / In the warm noon, we shrink away, / And fast they follow as we go / Towards the setting day" (271). The price for battling with the white settlers is costly—"Their race may vanish hence like mine / And leave no trace behind,"—but the poem ends with what seems like a persisting cry for resistance:

Save ruins o'er the region spread,  
And tall white stones above the dead.  
And realms our tribes were crushed to get  
May be our barren desert yet. (271)

What may appear as death is continuity for the speaker: the "white man" may have believed he has erased every trace of the tribe, but the persona indicates that their burial in the desert is a silent victory: their dead bodies still rest within their lands.

In her introduction, Harjo states that Indigenous peoples begin with the land, emerge from the land, and will return to the land. The anthology's core is to pass on the poetry—language and literature that is crucial to their cultures and rich traditions—to share with most

readers who do not have an idea that there exists a Native poet, let alone “the number included in this anthology” (1). “The Indian Requiem” is an example of a poem that has been inaccessible because Native poets are not often recognized by or are deemed inaccessible to the mainstream literary community, and so miss out on being published in national anthologies. It also troubles me further that the Yuma, a tribe on the lower Colorado River in Arizona and California, may not have had any access to Chaleco’s poem or may not be even aware that it ever existed.

Chaleco was born on the Fort Yuma Indian Reservation, an area now known for its Quechan Casino Resort. Historically, reservations are spaces where Indigenous peoples are forced to live as white settlers colonize their ancestral lands. These reserves were forms of confinement that also policed the way Indigenous peoples practiced their cultures—they were forced into school systems (like the residential schools here in Canada) to read and write in English or are taught to wear non-native clothes<sup>21</sup>. Varying forms of abuses are rampant during this “indoctrination,” including coercing them into Christianity.

To this day, Indian reservations are still spaces of inequity and oppression. Many reserves here in Canada do not have access to public transportation, clean water, electricity, public schools, or hospitals. There are limited jobs in the reserves, which force many Indigenous peoples to strategize their mobilities through dangerous ways like hitchhiking. This situation has led to an ongoing cycle of addiction, violence, death, and abuse—especially for Indigenous women<sup>22</sup>. Razack emphasizes a “racialized structure of citizenship that characterizes contemporary Canada” (5). This structure demonstrates that the white settlers’ primary claim to the land and to the nation necessitates the invisibilizing of Aboriginal nations and their stolen lands; thus, deeming the spaces they occupy or the spaces they are forced into unseeable in the metanarrative to establish the nation. At the same time, the national story also masks the bodies



of colour whose labour are integral to developing this nation and its stolen lands. A Native Nations anthology, a Norton one at that, resists this national story by reclaiming the space that has been denied by the literary institutions that are directly influenced and are products of this metanarrative of a national identity. Arsenio Chaleco's poems (and so many more) are not only preserved and reproduced for institutional or mass reading but can also be taught and included in curriculums all over North America, or beyond.

As has been mentioned, the power of anthologies is astounding *and* frightening at the same time. They do create opportunities to "share" texts that were almost lost to the mechanism of de-historicization, but they also enact a bigger purpose, which is to legitimize or delegitimize a canon. This makes me reflect on the four to five years I dedicated to anthologizing Philippine ecopoetry in *Sustaining the Archipelago*: I realized that while I was compiling what I believed ecopoetry from a Global South country *already was*, I was also prescribing what this new Philippine "canon" *must* be. Many times, the standards and categories of ecopoetry I was adhering to were set by Euro-American tradition as defined by *The Ecopoetry Anthology*'s Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street, Jonathan Skinner, Scott Knickerbocker, Robert Hass, even Timothy Morton. However, despite the various anthologies of ecopoetry currently available, "what ecopoetry is" remains a vigorously debated topic in the environmental humanities. Timothy Clark believes that these human responses to the environment are often not romantic or pleasant, and that they stem from a profound realization of the changing environment one is faced with:

What genuinely differentiates ecopoetry from this long line of [poetic] practice and argument [present in nature poetry] is its attention to modes of bodily derangement and

forms of illness that break down illusions of any comfortable correlation between human mood and object world. (56)

If ecopoetry is a creative and productive response to the environment, then it is also an attempt to interrogate and renegotiate the human position in respect of the environment in which we are enmeshed (Knowles and Blackie xvi). Consequently, if ecopoetry's ethic is to oppose violent assumptions about the environment as resource for economic gain or an overarching metaphor for the human condition, then it must strongly strive to investigate and advocate against the human conditions that are tied to resource extraction and lucrative economy, and the narratives that are overwhelmingly invisible to what we experience as the "environment."

For instance, Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street in *The Ecopoetry Anthology* attempt to distinguish the kinds of nature poems that exist within the vast genre of American poetry. This categorization is helpful since they define the kind of nature writing that has surfaced due to a particular era or critical movement that it inhabits, especially in North America. In the "Editor's Preface," Fisher-Wirth and Street declare that:

In recent decades, the term "ecopoetry" has come into use to designate poetry that in some way is shaped by and responds specifically to that crisis. The term has no precise definition and rather fluid boundaries, but some things can be usefully said about it. Generally, this poetry addresses contemporary problems and issues in ways that are ecocentric and that respect the integrity of the other-than-human world. It challenges the belief that we are meant to have dominion over nature and is skeptical of a hyperrationality that would separate mind from body—and earth and its creatures from human beings—and that would give pre-eminence to fantasies of control. (xxviii)

After providing this general definition of ecopoetry, they classified it into three clear divisions: nature poetry, environmental poetry, and ecological poetry. They begin by defining nature poetry by saying that “[n]ature poetry has existed as long as poetry has existed” (xxviii), but what has altered the way nature poetry—especially in the United States—is written has been the public attention on the burgeoning environmental crises. With regards to this term, the editors defaulted to Wendell Berry’s definition of it as poetry that “considers nature as subject matter and inspiration” (xxviii). Moreover, the editors stress that not all nature poetry is environmental or ecological, since most verge on metaphorizing the environment or anthropocentrism.

The second classification of American ecopoetry in the “Editor’s Preface” is environmental poetry. The editors explain that this,

... is poetry propelled by and directly engaged with active and politicized environmentalism. It is greatly influenced by social and environmental justice movements and is committed to questions of human injustice, as well as to issues of damage and degradation to the other-than-human world. (xxix)

In addition, these kinds of poems are not *just* agitprop, as the editors assert, but are interested in deconstructing concepts that are dear to nature writing, such as “nature,” “environment,” “wilderness.” The introduction and interdisciplinarity of postcolonialism and environmental justice in institutional and popular discourse also shifted the kinds of ecopoetry produced after the 1960s in the US. Similarly, Susanna Lidström and Greg Garrard also include a definition of environmental poetry in their essay, “‘Images adequate to our predicament’: Ecology, Environment, and Ecopoetics,” where they trace the evolution of “ecopoetry” through traditions that have influenced it (i.e. Romanticism and deep ecology); they establish that environmental poetry “tries to grapple with the changing relationship between human societies and natural

environments” (37). In the previous definitions, it appears that environmental poetry has stepped out of nostalgia and romanticism<sup>23</sup> to show how the changing socio-environmental factors surrounding the human being and our societies demand novel and radical creative responses. Similarly, Adam Dickinson and Madhur Anand offer another perspective to environmental poetry: they wish to consider Juliana Spahr’s distinction that “ecopoets” are concerned with a poetics full of systematic analysis and critique that questions the divisions between nature and culture while also acknowledging that humans consume the world excessively (13).

Finally, ecological poetry is described by *The Ecopoetry Anthology* editors as “more elusive” than the first two groupings since it does not only question the form of ecopoetry itself, but also the coherent self (xxix). It is a kind of ecopoetry that is experimental and is also more self-reflexive as it thinks of not only about how poems can be more ecological but also how the self can also enact being ecological. They cite Forrest Gander in further explaining this: “it thematically and formally investigates ‘the relationship between nature and culture, language and perception.’” They do acknowledge that there is a weakness to this kind of ecopoetry, just as there is weakness to nature poetry: it may become agenda-driven propaganda wrought with hyperintellectualism and emotional detachment. Yet, Fisher-Wirth and Street champion that not all models of ecological poetry included in *The Ecopoetry Anthology* show how powerful language can be when informed by a biocentric perspective.

These three groupings in *The Ecopoetry Anthology*’s “Editor’s Preface” offer a summary to the evolution of ecopoetry that is specific to North America. Though these groupings provide a comprehension of ecopoetry’s trajectory as a genre of nature writing, they also raise more questions that are instigated by the recent burgeoning innovations in ecopoetics. For example, What are the limits or limitlessness of ecopoetry? Who gets to classify poems as ecopoetry or

not? How permissible can these limitations or limitlessness be as the genre continues to evolve and gain more popularity?

In a sense, a response to befuddled conversations and queries about a particular literary genre has been the process of anthologizing. Jeffrey DiLeo attests that there is “formative power” in anthologies (qtd. in Lecker 2), while Mary Jo Bona and Irma Maini remind us that “works gain cultural credence through ceaseless discussion and through publication in various forms” (13). Anthologies—though beset with their own internal contradictions—are confluences of imagination, conception, and execution; these confluences makes them troubled and exciting as literary forms (Lecker 30-31). Even more, Frank Davey says that anthologies have an assumed cultural power that stems from quantity i.e., copies sold, and students served (273). When executed and edited with material support and resources, anthologies can illuminate genres that have long been forgotten or define new ones that can change the direction of a literary discourse; when they fail, they fail spectacularly, and create another dent in the genre they wish to define. Anthologies are purchased by institutional libraries, included in curriculums by teachers, and studied by students because they provide the sum total of a specific narrative—no matter how fragmented—for a genre in the literary field. Anthologies promise answers and a clarity of discussion that, in turn, offer a convenient stream of information for teachers and students alike.

For the writer, to be anthologized means that one is read, recognized, and discussed within and outside the academe. If curated through extensive research, an anthology can publish forgotten works like “The Indian Requiem” and rethink previously established genres; if collated through a Call for Submissions (CFS), independent and aspiring writers are given the opportunity to have their works welcomed and recognized by the editor, and ultimately, the publisher. In a sense, anthologizing is also carving a figurative space for “home:” poems beyond,

before, and after publication find “homes” in anthologies that allow these to be read by a bigger collective.

At any rate, publishing in an anthology or having an anthology published creates an understanding—at least in academia and in the educational system—that there now exists a particular set of standards that can distinguish one text from another. In actuality, anthologies are the “only literary vehicles that post the concept of literary origin” (Lecker 30), and when one is anthologizing, the editor/s “create” a version of the literature that did not exist before the process of anthologizing, and even if it will eventually only exist within that particular anthology (Cavell 36). The power of the anthology is so because it *names* literature and theorizes a space for it; in short, it is directly related to canon-making. Lynn Keller insists that, “[c]anonization is a complex process of construction, a process that articulates with race, ethnicity, class, institutional power struggles, differential evaluations of popular and canonical literature, and gender” (127). I am aware here that canonization is continuous attention to what is included or excluded in the study of a genre, and that the power is in *who* ultimately decides these categories. The canon, as a set of texts, is to promote what an anthologist believes should be cultural inheritance, or “cultural capital” (Lecker 3). It is not surprising that anthologies are frequently categorically national, because the arguments that circulate within these anthologies are related to *what the nation is and how it is perceived to be*. Again, it is important to remember that the anthologies are curated and collated based on who or what will benefit the most from them, which are secondary or tertiary courses that are designed to be historical, nationalistic, and/or regional. The anthologies oftentimes fill a need, or gaps, in the curriculum, and are convenient vehicles for classroom conversations that will facilitate how critically the students can comprehend a particular literary genre. So, piecing together the fragmentary tradition and trajectory of literature

is to ascertain a narration of the nation, of a collective, that appears comprehensive and exhaustive; however, that is not always the case since the process of anthologizing itself is fraught with material concerns relating to permissions, publishing stipulations, and funding. Curating and collating are responsibilities that an editor must not take lightly. Declaring anthologies as sole purveyors of a national literary canon (in this case, the ecopoetry of a place or nation) ignores the persistent issues of the conceptualization of what a “nation” is: the reinforcement of a status quo and the hegemonic tradition.

June Dwyer adds more: “Who determines literary merit? What is the level of intellectual involvement of a given reading audience? And perhaps most importantly, What is the nature of the relationship between the book, the author, and the reader?” (167). The latter question proves to be crucial in discussing the importance of anthologies in establishing a canon—not only a canon, but also a readership of whom are mostly comprised of the academe’s ecosystem. I sense that this readership is the value and violence of anthologizing; it is this relationship and how they engage with one another that also proves why it is important to interrogate its processes, and to explore the possibility of conversations beyond what already exists conveniently in front of us on a bookshelf.

I do have faith in anthologies and in anthologizing: I believe anthologies are a trove of possibilities. Even if the act of curation does enforce a canon and can be interpreted as a measure of “gatekeeping” among established writers, it also surfaces gaps of irreducibility and spaces of opportunities. The canon may be affiliated with an anthology, but then it also brings with it unaddressed realities that are waiting to be investigated. Camille Dungy in *Black Nature* declares that African American poetry in nature-related anthologies is—unsurprisingly—sparse and rare. Blacks, according to her, are not seen as able to affix themselves to the landscape:

They haven't been seen, or when they have it is not as people who are rightful stewards of the land. They are accidentally or invisibly or dangerously or temporarily or inappropriately on/in the landscape. (xxvii)

She goes on to say that the poems in *Black Nature* are mostly treatments of nature that are historicized and politicized as expressed through the lenses of an African American, and so they are usually overlooked as political poems, historical poems, protest poems, socioeconomic commentary. I relate to her concern as an anthologist, since one of my aims for anthologizing Philippine ecopoetry is to make plain that Filipinos have been writing about nature or are writing about nature constantly. My people's kind of nature writing is different from the pastoral traditions of Western ecopoetry that have relatively peaceful, and thoughtful alliances and separations with nature—it can be *that*, but it is also about experiencing and surviving disasters, the crude corruption of the local government for globalized and localized economic gains, the deaths of loved ones due to rising seas, the separation from one's heartland, and the act of celebrating one's native culture, myths, and traditions through the environment. *These* are all ecopoetry too, but because they intersect with other socioeconomic, historical, and political concerns, they often are not considered as such by the Euro-American ecopoetry canon. Ecopoetry anthologies, or definitions of ecopoems, are vague about interrogating the human conditions that are directly tied with nature, but also, as Dungy argues, “literature about nature or the environment is limited to poems that address the pastoral or the wild, spaces and subjects removed or distanced from human contact” (xxvii). Like her, my configuration of the environment is radically disparate from the many ecopoems I read in Western and settler anthologies.



Because anthologizing ecopoetry is about defining and redefining what ecopoetry is, place-based ecopoetry anthologies then define and redefine ecopoetry that is relative to a particular geographical nation. These are important traditions that *do* need further discourse, yet they are also territorial or they furbish a set “territory” in literature. What is amiss in these territorial anthologies—nation-based, regional-based, ethnic-based—is that place is not a fixed and fossilized concept. It is fluid; place is and will be constantly affected by the multiple movements that inhabit it at any given space-time. Thus, even if these ecopoetry anthologies do have poems about movement, migrancy, and even diaspora, their significance to the “territory” is misunderstood. One of the methods I am interested in exploring in this dissertation is to “deterritorialize” ecopoetry in the anthologies included as my primary texts: How does an anthology “territorialize” itself? What are centripetal articulations of ecopoetic traditions does it possess? And what are the centrifugal forces that transgress these traditions by “rehoming” the poems in it through a migrant reading practice?

### **Rehoming the Home**

One clear trajectory that deterritorializing brings me to is to question the concept of “home.” In the epigraph from the short Introduction to *Border Lines: Poems of Migration*<sup>24</sup> by editors Mihaela Moscaliuc and Michael Waters, they provoked the query “Where is home?” by also asking, “What is the cost of such unwilling or hopeful migration?” I am not sure I know the answer to those questions myself, nor do I think this dissertation will allow me to answer them in a concretely academic manner. Still, it is crucial to comprehend that deterritorializing—whether in a literal or figurative sense—is intimately linked to the reconceptualization of “home.”

Rahul Gairola cautions against the utilization of “home” in postcolonial studies, as the agency that is formed from the “imagined community” of a home is often rooted in national affiliation. The term is bonded to ideas of belongingness; he also professes that,

Conceptualizations of home are so deeply imbricated in institutions that they fashion it as an organizing concept that surfaces in everyday aphorisms that we utter like mantras. Yet we seldom reckon critically with the immense gravity that home casts on our daily lives, possible *because* it pivots upon quick and sharp exclusions even as it promises inclusive hospitality. (xv)

Home denotes comfort, stability, nostalgia *and* the source of a diaspora, but it is also associated with the same hierarchical systems that have established what a place is and how a nation should be or look like. There is more fluidity in the discourse of home though, and even I have deferred to using the romanticized “heartland” when talking about my native Philippines. When it comes to what “home” is, Gariola recounts what James Baldwin states in *Giovanni’s* room: it is historicized space, the irrevocable condition “because so much of how we define it constitutes how we think of our place in the world, which always precedes us as historical affect, despite its profuse definitions and cultural aphorisms” (xiii). On one hand, home is seen as related to one’s past dwelling, but it is not often thought of as a solid, unmalleable place since as migrants move, they eventually decide what to call home—permanently or not. On the other hand, home is so intertwined with one’s identity (“Where do you come from?”) that it does affect where one settles. Unfortunately, home is at times another racial project (Gairola 215; Razack 7) that is sustained through an inside-outside rhetoric that is policed by the metanarrative of a national identity. These kinds of policing also include the frail tensions between the “people who stayed” and the migrant who left or had no choice but to leave (Smithers and Newman 5). For migrants

like me, “home” is at times contingent on “benevolent assimilation” or how well I fit into the microcosm of a city and macrocosm of a country. At times, it is also because of socio-economic and material conditions, such as this is my home because I have no other choice but to stay here.

In ecocriticism, “home” is unsurprisingly complicated by “place” and “localism.” One can be allowed to call a place home if one has territorialized that space with intimate knowledges, care, and, as Fuan mentions, value (8). DeLoughrey in *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* poses a challenge to this focus in ecocriticism by stating that it “needs to problematize ... the land with national belonging” (24). The erasure of a space’s socio-cultural history—as Razack reminds, space seems empty (7)—bolsters the romanticized ideas associated with place like “building it up from the ground” or “being first here.” These common phrases are not at all different from rhetoric that formulate a territorialized nation-state. In relation, Mitchell Thomashow has argued in *Bringing the Biosphere Home: Learning to Perceive Global Environmental Change* that rootedness in a particular place is not the most “natural” form of relating to place since migration is so common and widespread a phenomenon in both human history and ecology. He advocates instead for “place-based transience” that facilitates the mobility of most beings with their affinity with a space they are inhabiting (180-182 qtd. In Heise 40). Following this discussion, the argument against territorializing place is not as simple as deconstructing intimate knowledges and rootedness; it is also about how multiple networks of movements allow for these attachments to flourish, and how the concept of what is local is reliant on gaining awareness of the “ecosystem services” upon which people’s lives depend on (Thomashow 325). Individuals establish a “home” when they perceive a space to be most beneficial and productive to their lives and livelihood, and then they begin to initiate what is local to their points of view. Nancy Easterlin’s

concept of “bioregionalism” is a variation of Thomashow’s idea, where her emphasis is on how social connections, evolving from the way species developed to protect groups, may have central importance in the attitude toward what is described as “place” in ecocriticism (94). Human beings create a “place” not only due to their economic needs, but also largely due to their social needs, which is the strength and stability of human relations.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, and Environment* affirm that the primary function of postcolonial studies (which is to promote global consciousness in wide postcolonial contexts) should translate to environmental writing’s aspirations of dismantling the overarching context of the nation through critiquing the ongoing exploitation of natural resources and the peoples inexplicably tied to these (37). They also promote that the narrative of what an environmental crisis is as twofold: first, it is an ecological crisis brought on by the use of resource-destructive technological processes and, second, a cultural crisis that emerges from the erosion of social structures that make cultural diversity and plurality possible (54). The two crises are bound together by the possibilities afforded by environmental writing, which includes a plurality of narratives and the capacity to be radically disruptive. The true relationship between postcolonial and ecocritical discourse, according to Cilano and DeLoughrey, will be to foster a globally engaged commitment to an open dialogue about the diverse production of local and global knowledges (74).

Ursula Heise echoes these sentiments by saying that shifting the core of environmental thinking’s cultural imagination from the contentious sense of place to a less territorial and more systemic sense of planet may be a challenge worth taking up in recognizing the increasing connections around the globe that are crucial to environmental awareness and ethics (55). She champions “eco-cosmopolitanism” to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary

“imagined communities” of both human and nonhuman kinds; a pathway that explores how ecocriticism is now examining the cultural ties to the natural world, and how these ties construct complex relationships with regional, national, and transnational forms of identification (61). Heise places the emphasis, for the most part, on these tangible or intangible connections encouraged by mobility, the World Wide Web, and the expansive globalization of the planet. These practices, she says, are bound to “larger networks” and rapidly deterritorialize the “sense of place” that is conventional to many (55). Early on, Heise does acknowledge the issue that such global thinking means mobility and networking projects are often based on the material conditions of a particular social group: who has access to the finance, education, flexibility, and time to carry out such endeavours (48). Eco-cosmopolitanism, I argue, is useful in its reconfiguration of an ecocritical framework that opens up to the realities of a rapidly changing “sense of place,” but it is still tied to the concept of the “cosmopolitan”—one Keller cautions as readily associated with privileged travel and the view of the colonizer (179). Eco-cosmopolitanism may engage with the networks-at-large that inform environmental thinking as of now, but it does not shed light on the many narratives that create the cosmopolitan, even if it explores time-space compressions that may alter what a cosmopolitan view of the planet is in the expeditious moment we are in through technologies such as the World Wide Web. Its fluidity is certainly effective in thinking of ecologically and socially viable forms of solutions in material practices that are not totalizing impulses or frameworks (Oppermann 251), but it does beg for a nuanced complexity of the environmental discourse that is often geared towards immediate and tidy solutions without an informed recognition of the problem’s roots.

My interest in a Migrant Ecocriticism, which is partly informed by my personal narratives, is *not* to tackle the immense complexity of this kind of postcolonial environmental

discourse in one body of work, but to open the possibilities that may arise from my methodologies here. Like Heise, I am interested in dismantling the concept of “place” in ecocriticism, without completely disclaiming what it has signified in the field. At the same time, I am keen on exploring the challenges outlined by Huggan, Tiffin, DeLoughrey, Oppermann, Nixon, and so many others: gravitate toward frameworks that are responsive to the cultural and historical materialities that are affixed in space, and to build on this framework to reach out to the multiple realities that manufacture what we define as the “environment.” In short, I am aiming to investigate the centripetal frameworks that have established “place,” “nation,” and “environment” in ecocriticism while reading ecopoetry with a respect to their singularity and the centrifugal direction that are informed by the lived experiences of IBPOC communities and migrancy. If Marrero Henríquez José Manuel articulates, “nature’s imaginaries are exactly that: imaginary, and consequently, cultural constrictions” (32), then there is nothing limiting our imaginations as ecocritics to impugn cultural constructions within and outside our very own field.

It is still to Heise that I return when I think about the layers of a Migrant Ecocriticism and what critically examining these layers may reveal. Perhaps, it may just be to answer these simple questions:

What if immigrants—just as other people—are not reborn but constantly reassembled out of the many changing experiences of their life histories, of which North American identity is only one piece? What if works and hearts are not confined to one continent but sustain ties to several? (44)

Despite the accuracy of intention behind the question, it is still limiting because othering immigrants from native populations does not define their life histories nor is North America the

only nation that singularly defines the immigrant experience. Further, there are multiple North American identities and not only a monolithic one. At this point, I have found that postcolonial and diasporic concepts like hybridity and imagined communities have floundered to articulate the multiplicities most migrant identities grapple with. The majority of these concepts are also pessimistic about the migrant's condition, and thus offer a polarized viewpoint of the migrant's embodied experiences. The frameworks of ecocriticism available at this time also do not encapsulate the breadth of the migrant experience and the redevelopment of a sense of place, while ecopoetry anthologies that are mostly nation- and place-based have been largely focused on solidifying a geographical and national identity. Ecopoetry, as outlined above, has the tendency of movement that can be critically re-curated in a space where its proximity or tensions with one another is articulated beyond the nation and the place. Subsequently, ecopoetry anthologies can be "unbound" to convene migrant spaces that are often lost in the narrative of a national and geographical mythology.

Deterritorializing ecopoetry anthologies means to track movements in these ecopoems and curate them with one another to envision how they address issues particular to a migrant, such as language, space, resistance, and diaspora. The anthologies I am working with in this dissertation will be the following: *Earth Shattering: Ecopoems* from editor Neil Astley (2007); *Here: Poems for the Planet*, edited by Elizabeth J. Coleman (2019); *Wild Reckoning: an anthology provoked by Rachel Carson's Silent Spring* from editors John Burnside and Maurice Riordan (2004); *Ghost Fishing: An Eco-Justice Poetry Anthology* from Melissa Tuckey (2018); *The Ecopoetry Anthology* from Anne Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street (2013); *Open Wide a Wilderness: Canadian Nature Poem*, edited by Nancy Holmes (2009); *Regreen: New Canadian Ecological Poetry* from Madhur Anand and Adam Dickinson (2009); *When the Light of the*

*World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* from Joy Harjo (2020); *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* from Camille Dungy (2009), and *Sustaining the Archipelago: An Anthology of Philippine Ecopoetry*, which I edited (2017). Some of the anthologies are apparent in their classification because they are obviously thematically and ethnically based, and as such already have begun unraveling the issues that this dissertation will address. The ones that are clearly nation- and place-based will ascertain the more familiar processes of anthologizing that is apparent in many compilations available today. My work here—in particular with *Ghost Fishing*; *Black Nature*; *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*; *Here*, and *Sustaining the Archipelago*—is to poke holes into the Euro-American canon, or to provide gradation to the construction and conceptualization of the nation- and place-based ecopoetry anthologies. Some of these anthologies are also ethnic-based, such as *Black Nature*, *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* and *Sustaining the Archipelago*, and the tensions with the territorializing impulses of Euro-American ecopoetry anthologies and IBPOC relations to space will also be explored.

Another important distinction to make for this dissertation is that I am using the terms metanarrative and counternarrative for reasons that are specific to a migrant reading practice. These terms are borrowed from the fields of Critical Race Theory, Political Science, and Sociology. If metanarratives are the overarching stories that provides structure and belief systems for people's cultures, then counternarratives are stories that interrogate widely accepted truths and beliefs—whether intentionally or not—to foster a space of resistance. The metanarratives that I am pointing out in this project are the centripetal articulations in the anthologies, namely the metanarrative of a national identity, the editorial metanarrative or how anthologies curate their own materials, and the metanarrative of anthologizing—which are



arguably more complex in terms of how centripetal these ideas truly are. Meanwhile, the counternarratives are discovered through the ecopoems' centrifugal expressions that are compiled within the anthologies. These counternarratives are also more discursive than simply being an instant space of resistance, and thus insist on a more nuanced analysis that is critical to the fluidity and flexibility of a migrant reading practice.

### **Modelling a Migrant Reading Practice: *Earth Shattering***

The methodology in this dissertation is to introduce and discuss anthologies based on their own terms and processes (nation-/place-based; ethnic-based; a response to nature/natural disaster, among others) or the centripetal articulations that are funneled from their editorial metanarratives, and then deterritorialize these anthologies by centrifugally investigating tensions and contrasts in the ecopoems to inform multiple issues that concern the space/s they speak for. This way, the methodology is responsive to what kinds of affiliations these anthologies represent or adhere to, and how they are engaged with perspectives and embodied experiences without polarizing the discourse against each other. A migrant reading practice in this dissertation strives to acknowledge the metanarratives that were previously mentioned, but insists upon the singularity of the individual anthology, the ecopoetry, counternarrative, and the threshold experience<sup>25</sup>. The issues I am analyzing in each chapter are as follows: Chapter 2, "Verging the Liminal Environment," seeks to emphasize the liminal environment that migrants experience and narrate about as counternarratives in their ecopoetry and how anthologies respond to or accommodate this liminal environment in their editorial metanarratives; Chapter 3, "The Metanarrative of National Identity in North American Place," deterritorializes the concepts of "place," "nature," and "environment" in place-based ecopoetry anthologies as they inform the

metanarrative of a national identity by focusing on how counternarratives in the ecopoems create nuance in the dominant imagination of North American space, and Chapter 4, “Counternarratives as Communities,” focuses on how the counternarratives of truth in the ecopoems uplift the radical moves in this chapter’s anthologies and their editorial metanarratives. These chapters operationalize a migrant reading practice using an interdisciplinary structure that yields a concrete framework throughout the analysis. These also speak to my interest in topics, themes, tropes, and what possibilities a migrant reading practice may bring forward, rather than constraining or prescriptive frames.

I will demonstrate how a migrant reading practice functions, on a smaller scale, by analysing Neil Astley’s *Earth Shattering: Ecopoems*. I choose to begin with this anthology for three reasons: first, Astley’s editorial metanarrative is to counter the negative image of nature poetry and to bring together ecopoetry that reflects 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking about nature has evolved; second, the anthology curates ecopoetry and poets based on themes *and* their importance to the development of ecopoetics rather than nation- or place-based affiliations, and third, its detailed commentaries for key poets and ecopoems provide unusual access to Astley’s interpretation of anthologizing. I actually find the anthology a curious compilation; it is less organized and more unwieldy than most ecopoetry anthologies for it tackles both historical and thematic organizations simultaneously. Still, the editor’s motivation in undertaking the project appears to override the external factors that affected its creation: Astley distinguishes *Earth Shattering* from its predecessors—Peter Abbs’s *Earth Songs: A Resurgence Anthology of Contemporary Eco-poetry* (2002); *Wild Reckoning* (included in this dissertation), and *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet* (2005)—by highlighting the ecological and literary perspective of each included poet in notes that show the progression of ecopoetry from its

descriptive tradition to an ecologically aware poetry (Astley 19). In doing so, he traces how ecopoetry has progressed from its egocentric, pastoral, and romantic traditions into ecopoetry that explores relationships and connections between humanity and nature (Astley 20).

Aside from this, Astley's editorial metanarrative is further compelled to convey that the "power of poetry is in the detail, in the force of each individual poem, in every poems's effect on every reader" (20), and that if one's resolve is stirred by poetry, then that will invigorate a collective call for change. Circling back to Lecker's ideas, *Earth Shattering* attempts to reframe the existing ecopoetry canon through a "cultural capital" that transmits social values through the educational system (3). Overtly instrumentalizing the anthology as an impetus towards a collective movement for the environment leads to a code of inheritance and influence (Lecker 12). In all honesty, I do not think that Astley (or most editors of anthologies) think about the laborious process of anthologizing for the end goal of being included in curriculums or being purchased for a course requirement. That is perhaps the publisher's job and motivation, which is external to the anthologist's inclination. But the metanarrative of anthologizing—including an ecopoetry one—often asserts an invisible frame that promotes a planned, organized, processed, and published result with the intention of either creating a literary space for where there was none before *or* in the hopes of stirring, like Astley advocates, a spark for collective change. It is an abstract goal that most ecopoetry anthologies base their motivations on and can be argued as a metanarrative of anthologizing, which is then siphoned into their editorial metanarratives.

Importantly, *Earth Shattering* was a novel publication at the time of its release in 2007. As Astley himself mentions, the centre of ecopoetry and contemporary poets addressing the environmental crisis have mostly been in the US (15). A centrifugal expression of his editorial metanarrative is that he laments how UK poets know so little about American ecopoetry and that

they have been “robbed” of inspiring role models. More than that, the misconception of ecopoetry being solely political and propagandist is another primary motivation for this anthology’s conception. In that sense, the anthology perhaps is one of the first that firmly claims it includes Anglophone poems from both sides of the Atlantic and a sampling of poems from other parts of the world. Astley arranges the ecopoems into sections: *Rooted in Nature (The Wilderness Poetry of Ancient China)*; *Changing the Landscape*; *Killing the Wildlife*; *Unbalance of Nature (Pollution, Interfering with Nature, Country to City)*; *Lost and Persistence*; *The Great Web*; *Exploitation*, and a separate section in it called *Dispossessing America*; *Force of Nature*, and *Natural Disasters*. One of the most compelling sections is the first one, which acknowledges how many modern writers like Ezra Pound and Gary Snyder were influenced by Taoist and Ch’an (Zen) thought. It demonstrates how the Euro-American ecopoetic tradition has emanated from the “rivers-and-mountains” poetry of great Chinese poets like T’ao Ch’ien, Tu Fu, and Li Po. This recognition confounds the dominant tropes that wholly associates the pastoral and romantic traditions of nature poetry as the inception of ecopoetry, especially since the Chinese wilderness depicted in these ancient poems is a dynamic cosmology where humans participate in the most fundamental way (Hinton qtd. in Astley 21). Even then, ancient Chinese poetry describes how the experience of living is a part of the natural world and its processes, which juxtaposes these dominant tropes discussed in Chapter 3.

Despite this, *Earth Shattering* is still, by large, a Euro-American ecopoetry anthology. It does articulate a coherent timeline of how ecopoetry has significantly progressed into the form it is now, which, I argue, has been adapted into Fisher-Wirth and Street’s definition of ecopoetry (in *The Ecopoetry Anthology*’s “Editor’s Preface”) that is well-cited, even in *Sustaining the Archipelago*’s Introduction. And yet, the placement of *Dispossessing America* as a small

category under *Exploitation* to show “how indigenous people have lived for centuries in tune with the natural environment” (Astley 20) is confounding since Astley himself mentions in the former quote how critical Indigenous poetry is to the development of nature poetry. Another thing to note is the section *Exploitation*, which is where postcolonial and ecofeminist perspectives in ecopoetry are clustered together with fewer editorial notes than the earlier parts of the book. It can be hypothesized that during the anthology’s original publication, there may have not been enough postcolonial and ecofeminist poems published or visible yet. However, this dedicated small space for Indigenous poetry in *Earth Shattering* shows the value in anthologies like Joy Harjo’s (*When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*) to interrogate the fragmentary narration of *Earth Shattering* and most anthologies (Cavell 37). Furthermore, an anthology—after publication—shifts into a capsule of unique space-time that will be scaffolded by future anthologies like it or those that are responsive to it.

Lecker claims that material conditions and limitations in the metanarrative of anthologizing inevitably lead to decisions that distort the canon and literary history, despite the best intentions of the anthology’s editors (6); though I strongly agree with this view, I stress that these very same conditions may also generate the singularity of a literary text included in a compendium. There are texts in an anthology that, when compiled into a divergent framework, can offer a varied narrative from the ones established by the editorial metanarrative. I argue that these literary texts often fit one frame of the anthology’s goals or are made to fit the goals because of what and who they represent (e.g. IBPOC poets and communities); thus, as they are annexed into an organization that corresponds to a metanarrative of a national identity or an editorial metanarrative, they yield their own counternarratives to splinter the tidiness of an anthology’s organization, the systems and structures it adheres to, and, in this case, the

development of a literary canon. Circling back, a migrant reading practice is interested in the catalysts that conceive a specific ecopoetry anthology *and* its accord and tension with the poems included in it. These contrasts, for me, are critical in discovering an ecopoem's counternarrative.

At this point, I proceed with the second part of how I structure a migrant reading practice in this dissertation, which is to pivot the analysis to ecopoetry. The succeeding chapters in this project all adhere to a trajectory of a Migrant Ecocriticism: the liminal environment, space, and movements. This is not to say that a Migrant Ecocriticism is bound by those terminologies, which are all fluid in their own theoretical definition and application; instead, my decision to focus on them is to continue expanding the terms as intrinsic to the framework. Thus, in analysing select ecopoems from *Earth Shattering*, I am employing these same terms to guide my thinking and to discover the centrifugal output of each.

Tu Fu's<sup>26</sup> "Spring Prospect" in *Earth Shattering* denotes how one's perception of their environment is altered by a catastrophic civil war (23). Rather than embody a pessimistic outlook of the future, he instead "achieved a panoramic view of the human drama: he saw it as part of China's vast landscape of natural process" (Astley 23). This geologic perspective, as Astley ascertains, stems from the liminal environment Tu Fu encounters after "black despair" and "exquisite" beauty brought on by the war. The poet renegotiates his identity by becoming a recluse and a wanderer in his 40s, and perhaps finding solace in China's environments rather than with fellow human beings.

This altered perception is evident in "Spring Prospect," as Astley himself points out in his analysis; however, the poem also maintains a lucid comprehension of "verging," which I fully discuss in Chapter 2, in these lines:

Beacon fires three months in succession,

A letter from home worth ten thousand in gold.

White hairs, fewer for the scratching,

Soon too few to hold a hairpin up. (23)

As the war rages on, denoted by the metonymy of “beacon fires,” the persona expresses his comfort in receiving a letter from home. Further, as months pass, it is also evident that he is aware of his physical state. It is a small observation, but one that holds emotional gravity: the persona’s white hairs have become few and soon will not be held up by a hairpin. He is, unfortunately, ageing in war and in flux. Through the bleak pessimism of these lines (including what Astley calls one of the most famous lines in Chinese poetry: “The nation falls to ruins; rivers and mountains continue.”), we are introduced to the “panoramic” view that Tu Fu paints for the reader in his poem, and that is in sharp contrast with what is temporary versus permanent, and what is catastrophic versus what remains. In this poem and in many of the poems analysed in Chapter 2, the liminal environment is how the individual responds to these contrasts in their<sup>27</sup> direct environment at that time, and how they make sense of the space they are currently at. To the persona in Tu Fu’s poem, that is expressed by observing the devastation and persistence of the world and bringing awareness to his own mortality without feeling compelled to move out of the liminal environment; the persona, in that moment, chooses to stay there in the unsettling.

It is only since the 1980s that John Clare has only been recognized as one of the great English poets of the Romantic period. The reason behind this is that Clare writes from the loss and alienation he has suffered and was categorically known as a “peasant poet” whose writings did not equate to the early perceptions of what “nature poetry” is. Clare, being working-class, does not see the separation of “the rights of man” from the “rights of nature;” instead, they are co-extensive and co-dependent for him (Bate qtd. in Astley 46). He wrote about how the change

in landscape is directly enforced by those in power, and how rural labourers or “commoners” in his native UK were “given smaller and less arable pieces of land” or were allowed to “remain only on the condition that they take on the prohibitive expense of fencing their allotment” in the Inclosure (Consolidation) Act of 1801 (Rosenman). This loss is felt evidently in his poem, “Round Oak and Eastwell,” where the persona describes how a “fell destroyer’s hand” has altered his “native field” by ridding it of every tree until only two are left. The two trees symbolize the divide imposed on the landscape:

Although one little solitary tree  
Is all that’s left of its old pedigree;  
The other, more deformed, creeps down the dell,  
Scarcely the shade of what was once Eastwell. (45)

One tree reminds the persona of what the land was before it was violently changed, while the other tree—an unsightly one—is a reminder of what the town was before. The poem shifts to a somber tone, recounting the glory of old Eastwell and the haunting of memories that were shared on that “spot” that are now forgotten, except for the poet who remembers. Considering that this poem was written in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is jarring to read a poem that depicts a different relationship with nature. It is this kind of counternarrative that I am interested in for Chapter 3, where I theorize that the metanarrative of national identity’s centripetal influence on the nation- and place-based ecopoetry anthologies insists on dominant tropes of ecopoetry. These dominant tropes, in turn, are questioned by the counternarratives of individual ecopoems that express the unsteadiness of a national identity. Clare’s poem is written from the vantage point of the poor folks who are experiencing how systemic political processes are carving up the countryside he loves without or with little regard to how these directly affect those who are



marginalized. The persona in “Round Oak and Eastwell” can only resist these changes with his memories, which he preserves in his writing. The poem is also a stark contrast to what Astley recalls as the modern perception of nature poetry as irrelevant to people living in today’s predominantly urban society, where the bond with nature is a retreat from social commitment (46). Instead, “Round Oak and Eastwell” complicates that preconceived notion of nature poetry, especially during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by introducing how a Romantic poet documents the effects of political processes on “peasants” like him in their artistic expressions.

The final poem that I am analysing in this section is Arthur Sze’s “*from Archipelago*.” Sze is a second-generation Chinese American poet born in New York but who have chosen to live in New Mexico. Astley describes that his poems introduce a startling juxtaposition of images and ideas that reveal the interconnectedness of our world (193). These familiar images of nature are intermingled with metaphysics and quantum physics, too. In this specific poem from *Earth Shattering*, Sze uses the imagery of colours to follow through the present, past, and future memories. These contrasts are evident in these following lines:

things: from the air, corn and soybean fields are  
a series of horizontal and vertical stripes of pure color:  
viridian, yellow ocher, raw sienna, sap green. I  
remember in Istanbul at the entrance to the Blue Mosque  
two parallel, extended lines of shoes humming at  
the threshold of paradise ... (192)

The persona starts to notice spring all around him, until April snow falls and how everything blurs into “abstraction desire” and vivid colours that bring him back to his time in Istanbul. The poem moves from his present in the changing seasons of New Mexico, his past travel in Istanbul,

and the present where Pueblo women start dancing a Harvest Dance to signal the start of spring and to bring in more rain for the healthy growth of crops. The space the persona occupies in the poem is not static nor stable; instead, it is dynamic—informed by the multiple movements that the individual, or persona, brings with them. In “*from Archipelago*,” how the changing season alters the landscape recounts the persona’s lived experiences and informs his interpretation of the space he is in. In Chapter 4, I think about how counternarratives in the ecopoems hold truths of threshold experiences that are disregarded or erased from the dominant culture. These counternarratives in the ecopoems compel the editorial metanarratives of the anthologies in this chapter, where the editors attempt to centre their communities instead of the literary canon. In Sze’s poem, the worldview is articulated through constant motion, change, and transformation of all things in the universe and in our everyday experience (Zhou qtd. in Astley 193). Sze promotes how a diverse frame of reference can be processed by an individual to make sense of overlapping experiences, and to find value in the instability and unsettling of this reality.

As an anthology, *Earth Shattering* implements a strong direction in its editorial metanarrative to articulate how ecopoetry has evolved progressively from its earliest conception. Its intensive organization based on themes and influence show that the curation leans towards a metanarrative of anthologizing: that ecopoetry and the way it has evolved has been predominantly a Eurocentric phenomenon. Further, Astley’s detailed focus on a select few ecopoets (whom he insists are largely influential in ecopoetry’s development) convey how powerful an editorial metanarrative is in constructing a canon. These poets whom Astley hails important may be critical in the development of ecopoetry; however, by placing an extended emphasis on them, some ecopoems that hold similarly important and exciting counternarratives are not given enough space for discussion. Ecopoems from Tu Fu, John Clare, and Arthur Sze

indicate that there are divergent angles that are present in the development of ecopoetry that the editorial metanarrative may have picked up on or not. One startling notion is that Indigenous poetry is materially separated from the entire development of ecopoetry, when Indigenous storytelling and oral literatures have long promoted the relationship between humans and the more-than-humans as integral to their understanding of the land. Another is the prolonged focus on European and American poets who represent nature as metaphor, wild, and an escape, rather than critically analysing how these writers have been made central to the canon. On that note, the concentrated curating Astley establishes in *Earth Shattering* has yielded ecopoetry that safely expands on the Euro-American ecopoetry canon's dominant tropes, while opening up spaces for possibilities in pursuing counternarratives that were not given attention or significance in the anthology. Like most anthologies, perhaps *Earth Shattering* best functions now as a capsule in literary time-space. Even if it deviates from current expectations and trajectories for an ecopoetry anthology (as shown in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*, *Black Nature*, and *Ghost Fishing: An Eco-Justice Poetry Anthology*), in its own right, it still stands to preserve information that is relevant to how we currently imagine and rethink the ecopoetry canon.

To affirm, a migrant reading practice is open to the discoveries of the metanarratives and counternarratives of the anthologies and ecopoetry. What remains is that the analysis focuses on the centripetal connections made by the anthology, anthologist, and the process of anthologizing, while discovering the centrifugal expressions of counternarratives in the ecopoems within a collection. It is a tricky balance that, I admit, is not easy to maintain as I wrote each chapter; yet, it does offer me—and hopefully, future scholars and creatives—a guide, or another method of

analysis that may propose a radical methodology to confront the Euro-American centre of ecocriticism.

### **Holding On, or Why My Narratives**

I am aware that there are many other ecopoetry anthologies that were not included in this dissertation due to brevity and time constraints, such as *Earth Songs: A Resurgence Anthology of Contemporary Eco-Poetry*, edited by Peter Abbs (2002); *Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California*, edited by Lucille Lang Day and Ruth Nolan (2018); *Refugium: Poems for the Pacific* (2017) and *Sweetwater: Poems for the Watershed* (2020) both from Yvonne Blomer; *Entanglements: New Ecopoetry* from editors David Knowles and Sharon Blackie (2012); *Agam: Filipino Narratives on Uncertainty and Climate Change* (2014) and *Harvest Moon: Poems and Stories from the Edge of Climate Crisis* (2021), which are both from Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities; *Poems of Nature*, which is edited by William Roetzheim (2009), and *Big Energy Poets: Ecopoetry Thinks Climate Change* from Heidi Lynn Staples and Amy King (2017), and that there are more than the multiple layers of place, nation, migrancy, and dispossession that are presented here. My foci will also be on the migrant-persons' lived experiences, and this choice stems from the organization of this dissertation: I am going to write about topics that are responsive to my own narratives and the counternarratives that are present in these poems. I also do not want to make major assumptions about the more-than-human as I am not academically equipped to do so; yet, there are some more-than-human experiences that will be referred to in this work from time-to-time as it relates to the migrant-person's narrative.

In addition, the pressing issues of ecopoetics will be addressed within each chapter as they arise, but they are not the focal point of this dissertation. Postcolonialism here, though a

huge chunk of this dissertation's big umbrella, will be discussed as related to postcolonial ecocriticism and what a Migrant Ecocriticism is. Most importantly, the narratives here are based on my limited perspective and are susceptible to my own experiences as a migrant person of colour, an arrivant, in spaces within North America. I am still learning and relearning my many biases and naivety as a Filipinx in North America, and there will be times when that process will be apparent in my writing. Nonetheless, I am asserting in this body of work citation that is political, that anthologizing as political, and that writing this dissertation is also political, as much as it is personal. If writing is a way of resisting, I find that it is also compelling to me as a form of remembering where I came from, who I came from, where I am in this very moment, and where I am going.

Personally, at this point, I do not know where I am going. I am in flux; this is my liminal environment. I can take account of what is real and in front of me at this very moment and they cannot amount to the loss that sits heavily in my gut. Two years ago, I wrote a poem entitled "Premonitions" about Mang and my intense ties to her personhood. Little did I know that they would predict so much more:

But I was certain  
when I crossed  
that ocean, that it  
was her voice in  
my head, and her skin  
my last country. (lines 85-90)

Last February, I admitted to myself I was lost—I have always associated my idea of home with my mother. It is a frail association that I know is pinned on the stability of the childhood she

worked hard to provide me with, but I cannot explain it beyond the idea that she *is* my country. People, not places, are my country. Recently, I've been kept awake by dreams simulating varied versions of Mang, and sometimes she is unrecognizable in them. In my cognizance, I painfully grasp what is happening: I am unremembering. My memories are reverting to her beautiful and perfect image in my childhood, and not the errant senior she was the last years of her life. Seyhan remarks that "[m]emory marks a loss. It is always a representation, making present that which once was and no longer is" (16). Mang is becoming a memory; a representation of who I want to be waiting there at the airport when I come back, and I am not just ready to let go yet. Perhaps I am not yet ready to let go of what I believe is my home.

This dissertation is fraught with intense crippling mental and emotional labour—of love and pain, of displacement, of lost and hope. Though I have not yet accepted that I do not have a perceived home anymore, I also do not want to give up trying to find the space that can be. This body of work still aspires what it wants to represent in the field I am passionate about, but it is also reimagining a new home for myself. It is a rediscovery of my roots as a scholar, a migrant, a Filipinx, a person, a mother, and a daughter. This dissertation, perhaps more than anything, is to find my way back home.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Elleke Boehmer has presented a layered usage of “native.” It was once a derogatory label for colonized peoples but is now in the process of being reclaimed by postcolonial critics to designate those who ‘belong to a particular place by birth’ and its connotative meaning has been transposed “from the point of view of ‘them’ to that of ‘us’” (8-9). I use “native” in this dissertation to denote a subject’s relation to their place of birth, and with careful mindfulness of its many other associations that exist outside of postcolonial and cultural studies.

<sup>2</sup> Chavacano is a creole Spanish dialect that is specific to the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, in Zamboanga City. It is a legacy of three hundred years of Spanish colonization dating back to the 1400s.

<sup>3</sup> Zamboanga City, a highly populated urban city in Mindanao, is also the site of violent clashes between the Moro National Liberation Front (MILF)—a Muslim separatist group in the Philippines—and the Philippine government. Due to these clashes, there are many displaced Zamboanguenos who are currently living in various supportive housings throughout the city.

<sup>4</sup> Long haul flights, for a flight crew, would mean ten or fifteen days in one city. These were flights that were ten to twelve hours or more, which for Mang’s schedule were typically San Francisco, Los Angeles, Hawaii, and Vancouver. She would usually bid for long haul flights as they offer more compensation in USD and would have more opportunities for Duty Free sales commissions from generous Filipinx who are onboard and panicking for a pasalubong.

<sup>5</sup> Hearing loss is extremely common in the aviation industry, especially to pilots and flight crews since they are exposed to extreme noise inside the airplane. Mang started showing signs of hearing loss in her late forties, and it exacerbated to the point we thought she would need a hearing aid just before her untimely death.

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<sup>6</sup> I originally used this quotation in the essay, “0-Plan Tabang: Eco-minstrely as Ritual and Performance in Volunteerism after Haiyan,” which I presented in collaboration with my close friend and colleague, playwright Mario L. Mendez, Jr. for the *Fluid States* conference in the Philippines in 2015. It is sad to note that Mario, or “Em” as we lovingly referred to him, passed away last 2020 due to COVID-19.

<sup>7</sup> I will again refer to Elleke Boehmer’s discussion of “Third World:” as a term that has been claimed by decolonized or neo-colonial governments to refer to their economic and political difference/deformation in a post-imperial world (9). Historically, it was in the 1950s when the newly independent Asian countries of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, and Indonesia decided to band together as Third-World countries against colonization. They hosted the first Afro-Asian Conference five years later to assert their independence and positionality in global affairs.

<sup>8</sup> I use the term “arrivants,” with thanks to Sonnet L’Abbé, to distinguish between settlers and coloured settlers. The distinction is presented in a thread on Twitter (@mors\_lakota) who state that settlers “are people who live with sovereignty and permanence in a nation that is colonized” and that they displace people and participate in the grand design of eliminating Indigenous peoples. Meanwhile, an “arrivant” is an individual who arrives at the settler-state and participates in its benefits and structure, but does not benefit from “either sovereignty or permanence as does the settler.” It is also usually that this person arrives to the settler-state because of the imperial actions of the state. The thread also makes it clear that Black peoples, who have been forced to arrive at the settler-state due to slavery, are not necessarily all arrivants. The thread can be viewed here: [https://twitter.com/mors\\_lakota/status/1234585935339126784](https://twitter.com/mors_lakota/status/1234585935339126784) (accessed on 10 February 2022)



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<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the aviation industry is also responsible for 12% of all CO2 emissions from all transports sources, which is small in comparison to 74% of road transport, but still significant. Information is taken from *Air Transport Action Group*: <https://www.atag.org/facts-figures.html> (accessed on 22 March 2021).

<sup>10</sup> The Philippines recognizes “Filipino” as its national language, but it is a modernized and more contemporary version of the Tagalog dialect that is spoken in northern Luzon regions. I refer to the Tagalog words in this dissertation as “Filipino” to avert confusion.

<sup>11</sup> I choose to use the acronym IBPOC (Indigenous, Black, Persons of Colour) throughout this dissertation, rather than BIPOC, to recognize that the land where my university is situated is on unceded Syilx territory, and that this is where I am settling in as of the moment. IBPOC as an acronym was introduced to me by my Co-Editor in *The Goose*, Jamaican-Canadian scholar Anita Girvan, and I find it fits the privilege I enjoy as a POC and migrant-arrivant here in Kelowna.

<sup>12</sup> I use the term “Filipinx” with care here, recognizing that it is a diasporic label that many ethnic and or mixed Filipinos use from outside the “nation” as a way to assert against colonial and gendered vowels from the Spanish language. It is a term that many Filipinos *within* the heartland disavow, for they feel that it is another way that diasporic Filipinxs appropriate and capitalize their struggles – which are admittedly different from those of us who are living away from the archipelago. Many Filipino scholars also remind the diaspora that “Filipino” in itself is already gender neutral in its usage; this is information that I still grapple with. In this dissertation, I will use “Filipinx” to refer to Filipinos living away from the Philippines (unless they have a hybrid designation such as Filipino American or Filipino Canadian) and refer to those who are within the country as “Filipinos,” unless I personally know that the scholar prefers one label over the other.

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<sup>13</sup> Philippine law defines a “balikbayan” (translatable to “returning to the country”) as someone who has been out of the Philippines for more than one year.

<sup>14</sup> Razack also describes the “social space” as indistinguishable from mental and physical space, and as containing the social relations of production and reproduction (9).

<sup>15</sup> The UN say that despite migrants being only 3.5% of the world’s population, these numbers have surpassed the projected 250 million migrants for the year 2050 (taken from [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/wmr\\_2020.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/wmr_2020.pdf), accessed on 23 March 2021).

<sup>16</sup> These categorizations are also inherently racist. In Canada, Europeans like the British and French are allowed working holiday visas for two to three years where they can find any job in Canada during that time. In contrast, most labour migrants from Asian and African countries need a verified employer to be admitted to Canada.

<sup>17</sup> I take care here to use the word “migrant” over “immigrant,” since I believe that the description of the experiences and realities that I am embodying in this dissertation are encompassing of a migrant’s experiences. A migrant is someone who has not yet arrived, per se. A migrant is someone who is still within the liminal environment and in the pursuit of temporary movement. An immigrant, consequently, is someone who is a permanent resident of a country that they are not native of. I would like to argue that most immigrants have been migrants at some point, and that for some the word “immigrant” is selectively coopted to pursue the narrative of a successful white settler in a new country. So, in choosing migrants, I am acknowledging that both classifications enrich and oppress the other.

<sup>18</sup> The ongoing territorial tensions for the West Philippine Sea between the Filipino people and the Chinese government have been complicated by current President Rodrigo Duterte’s relations with China when it comes to economic ventures. He has in the past both threatened China for

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taking over the contested Spratly's Islands and welcomed China to "occupy" the Philippines for economic posterity. I feel that I carry that tension with me as someone who has "mixed" looks and has a Chinese last name. I have been assumed to be many nationalities, and these are often incorrect assumptions of what I symbolize and who I am.

<sup>19</sup> There is good work being done in ecocriticism at the moment with the growing pool of radical scholars that have imploded, for instance, the Association for Literature and the Environment (ASLE) with its largest numbers for conference attendees at the last in-person conference in Davis, California (2019). Full disclosure, of course, as I am current co-diversity officer of the organization, and I do experience an immense communal effort towards creating a more inclusive, radical, and publicly-engaged ASLE that I strongly feel were not possible a couple of years ago. That said, there is still so much intentional and self-reflexive work—internally and externally—to be done.

<sup>20</sup> The Norton Anthology is known as a "traditionally more conservative" series, though it is one of the most powerful in the world of anthologizing. Mary Jo Boma and Irma Maini mentions that though the series has recently refocused its energies in recent editions by including voices of many cultures alongside their traditional fare of publishing the dominant Anglo-American culture, there persists the long road of reworking the influence of the traditional Norton Anthologies in creating and shaping the literary canon as we know now, especially within the classroom (13).

<sup>21</sup> More about Indian Reservations can be read here: <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/indian-reservations> (accessed on 24 March 2021).

<sup>22</sup> Samira Saramo declares that "violence has been a primary tool of colonialism and patriarchy used to undermine Indigenous women's place and power" since European settlers arrived in

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Turtle Island, perpetuated by erasures, the educational system, formation of nation-states, and historical narratives (207).

<sup>23</sup> Lidström and Garrard's definition for "ecophenomenological poetry" mirrors Fisher-Wirth and Street's definition for "nature poetry." The latter note that ecophenomenological poetry focus on "descriptions and appreciation of non-human nature with roots in Romantic and deep ecology traditions, aiming to heighten individual readers' awareness of their natural surroundings" (37).

<sup>24</sup> *Border Lines* is part of the *Everyman's Library Pocket Poets* which are a series of pocket-sized anthologies with topics ranging from "Father's Day poems" to "Chinese Erotic Poems."

<sup>25</sup> This term, "threshold experience," is borrowed from anthropology. These are events that unsettle the individual into one state and into the next in their lives. Further discussion about what a threshold experience and how significant it is in the overarching framework of a migrant reading practice is in Chapter 2.

<sup>26</sup> In succeeding chapters, I provide endnote biographies for each poem's writer who was discussed. The unique organization of Astley's *Earth Shattering* does not require this note, since his biographical poet notes are embedded in his critical analysis.

<sup>27</sup> I follow Ursula K. Le Guin's notes in her book *Steering the Craft: A Twenty-First-Century Guide to Sailing the Sea of Story* on using the singular and plural they/them/their in this dissertation. She states that: "My use of *their* is socially motivated and, if you like, politically correct: a deliberate response to the socially and politically significant banning of our genderless pronoun by language legislators enforcing the notion that the male sex is the only one that counts. I consistently break a rule I consider to be not only fake but pernicious. I know what I'm doing and why." On that note, I follow how the poet's pronouns is addressed in their biographies and use that to describe their persona unless explicit. Otherwise, I use they/them/their.

## Chapter 2: Verging at the Liminal Environment<sup>1</sup>

Infinity appears in the horizons of the liminal. Infinity may be a great place to start; it is possibly also the worst place to end.

- Bjørn Thomasen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living through the In-Between*

Everywhere he goes in the world, his country follows.

- Charlie Samuya Veric, "The Planet as Homeland"

A decade ago, I swam alone in flood waters to find my way home. It was not the first time I had done this; the Filipino term for crossing flooded areas to reach a higher elevation is *lusong*—to siege, to surge. I have photographic flashes of being nine years old and my Dad, or Pang, holding my hand in a death grip as we crossed chest-deep floodwaters during the monsoon season. I never thought of myself as a survivor of Typhoon Ketsana<sup>2</sup> even after five hours of swimming and/or walking until I could not feel my legs. Why should I, when we survive disasters every single day in my heartland?

The life I left behind in Manila was accustomed to discomfort. It is a discomfort that materialized my (apparently) superhuman strength as I waded and felt for crumbling concrete barriers under my feet for a second's rest, but it is also a discomfort that created a capacity for me to continue living as if that swim never happened. It has taken me almost a decade to write a poem that processes that experience, after the many times I struggled to narrate what had transpired:

We/you were never the same after the flood; somehow you came out of that dirty dark floodwater with your tummy swelling with survival and your heart still paddling its tiny arms to safety.

Maybe you like staying there; maybe you like that dank bile.

Maybe there's never been a way out of the flood; maybe you do not see a way out of the flood.

Maybe this is where you want to be; if this is where I want to stay<sup>3</sup>.

The last line is a challenge to myself, one that I sometimes still play around with in my head: *Is this where I want to be? What if this is where I want to stay?* I do not know a life outside of moving across an ocean, nor do I know a life outside of floods.

In Ifugao<sup>4</sup> mythology, the great flood occurred after a season of severe drought. A group of elders suggested that their community dig into the grave of the river to find its soul; on the third day, they struck a great spring and there came the water they craved for. The water gushed out so fast that many drowned as they tried to scramble out of the pit. Meanwhile, while some people reveled in the river's return, the gods were angered at their intrusion and they let the rain fall. As the river continued to rise, people tried climbing up the mountain for safety but only two were able to do so—a brother and sister who had to be assured by the gods that it was their duty to repopulate the earth (Eugenio xxix). There have been times that I made sense of the necessity of swimming in floods through that myth—I am trying to follow the soul of the river and this faith will anchor me to safety. Maybe that is true: I am here, after all. However, the discomfort of not feeling dry solid ground beneath the tips of my toes still haunts me.

Living in the Western world has entirely shifted my perspective: I am still haunted. Not anymore by the discomfort, but by the chokehold of safety. Here, I do not fear to the same ferocity spring floods or forest fires; we rarely feel earthquakes in Kelowna despite living near a fault line. Sometimes, I mull the reality that I have softened up and become unguarded in strange ways, like leaving my backpack open in university common areas or chatting with strangers in public transportation. This safety is a veneer over the settled uncertainty within me. I still think

that any time, any moment, the ground will be pulled beneath my feet and I will be wading in flooded waters again.

In 2016, I woke up one early autumn morning to frantic messages from my family back home: Pang has suddenly passed away. Not knowing how to respond, I put on a thin raincoat and ran out into the rapidly cooling weather. My body had not yet adjusted to the sudden drop in temperatures then, but I did not feel anything. There was a bench atop the Bellevue Creek's banks, behind the Woodhaven student residences, that I traversed with my slip-on Crocs and plopped onto with the weight of grief blanketing me. My tears stopped. I had that hour alone, thinking of nothing and wanting nothing but to have Pang visit me in my dreams that night so I could hear him tell me that this was where I am *meant* to be, and that I could continue moving in this strange new world without him.

In the previous chapter, I described a *liminal environment* where an individual exists among overlapping movements that require—or invite—renegotiation of one's cultural identities and expressions; it occurs when there is a moment to pause in the midst of overlapping movements to be self-reflexive about the direct environments the individual is experiencing. It may be, simply, a space to grasp the new world. Yet, what if an individual does not find the opportunity or chance to pause? What if the movements are not only simultaneous but also unrelenting, and the only clear choice is to keep going despite the enormity of an uncertain future?

Of course, the questions here are not to discount that there *are* hopeful possibilities in the liminal environments, and that is why many people decide to move away from spaces. However, there is also the realization of volatility—that one's position is challenged or caught in-between the silence and noise of one's own experiences. It is a phenomenon that Réne Dietrich defines as

“verging:” when the individual is brought to a perpetual awareness of their instability and ambivalence (463). Just as Victor Turner claims that the concept of liminality has to do with transitions, it is also in this specific environment that the world-at-large is realized through experiences of reversals, inversions, and opposites (qtd. In Thomassen 104). Thus, not all pauses in the liminal environment are successful transitions into the new community; in fact, many are paralyzed by the enormity of this “rite of passage” and are perpetually in-between, or constantly verging, neither here nor there. The movements may persist, but someone—or a part of the individual—is either left behind or frozen in time.

Verging creates room to doubt what is perceived as “successful” in transitions; it also opens the discussion to understand what experiences and events occur within the liminal environments and how individuals are able to process or embody these into the next space they move into. It is important to remember at this point that having an experience means something “happens” to us, and this experience is above all an *event* that simultaneously shapes and reshapes the way we function in a space (Szakolczai 17). Further, these events make it possible to embrace the ambivalence of a liminal environment, to willingly and fully engage with “the multiple perspectives of the realm in-between and not to choose one side over the other” (Dietrich 454). In short, the individual is provided space to process the event when verging, and they do not have to make a decision that will tether them to the next movement they have to take, yet.

The most common definition of the term “verging” is from anthropology, and a significant part of it is “threshold experiences:” events that unsettle the individual from one state to the next. To be verging is to grapple with the uncertainty ahead of us, but it is also where one becomes radically creative in order to move on from the threshold experience, or where one



decides that the pain of transition is not worth overcoming. I do not think there is any path here that is triumphant; these kinds of choices are complex, and each circumstance is unique. However, an incomplete transition from the liminal environment into stable identity does create an isolated identity that is vulnerable to crippling apprehension and distrust. In fact, Bjørn Thomassen maintains that:

Liminality is both social and personal. Liminality reminds us of ... that pleasant but unsettling sensation of infinity and openness of possibilities which—at some moment, sooner or later—will start searching for a new frame to settle within. And if it does not, the void will perpetuate, and anxiety with it. (4)

This statement relates to the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, which mentions that “infinity is possibly the worst place to end.” Unfortunately, as much as verging is a space to process threshold experiences, one cannot stay within that liminal environment either. To stay constantly in transition and without any clear inevitable future is exhausting and draining. Migrant, racialized, and marginalized bodies are also often the ones who live within these liminal environments and create a new frame with this existence, whether by choice or by force.

While verging at the liminal environment, the individual sees all possibilities and experiences all doubts, and to not settle with any of these perplexities is the challenge. Neferti X. Tadiar remarks that one simultaneously flees and reaches for the finite identity, but one also realizes that this identity is threatened with erasure when facing infinitude (119). Our identities may be malleable and vulnerable, but they are what we have. There has to be something one holds onto in the face of a catastrophic pause—a concrete barrier to ground one’s feet on—to forge new pathways and identities attentive to the transitions undertaken. This process of exiting the passage is a potential for transformation, and it means extending one’s finitude beyond one’s

given limitedness or taking part/s in other lives as new vectors of subjectivation and becoming (Tadiar 124). We do not merely create identities as we exit the liminal environment; we also seek and create communities. In doing so, we enrich and perplex the spaces we move into.

In that sense, I think an ecopoetry anthology serves as a liminal environment in this environmental crisis, since they are one of many methods for editors and writers to transition out of the dissolution and chaos of a world-order that is not functional anymore. In other words, they are responses to figuring out how we get ourselves out of the “mess” we have been predicting for decades. It is Eric Voegelin who says that individuals crave “experiences of order” when submerged in a world of decay. When their ground is shaken, human beings “artificially” create order out of disorder by utilizing their own ordering devices—whatever is at their disposal—to an intriguing space of cultural creativity (qtd. In Thomassen 7). Considering this, the ecopoetry anthology as a liminal environment functions as a collective that proposes a process of acclimatizing to the uncertainty of a future with climate degradation. Alternatively, it may also be a way to hammer out a path from climate degradation so that we do not feel fixed or frozen in the enormity of the catastrophe we are facing ahead. With this in mind, the ecopoetry anthology as a liminal environment presents a challenge with these set of questions, borrowed from Thomassen: How do ecopoetry anthologies show the ways editors and poets cope with the uncertainty of climate? Who, or what, can lead us out of *or* help us exist safely in this uncertainty? (2-3) How are the anthologies’ editorial metanarratives proposing methods to lead us out of this perplex chaos? Importantly, what is our role (as academics, scholars, and creatives) in this chaos?

This chapter, “Verging at the Liminal Environment,” will analyse three ecopoetry anthologies, namely *Here: Poems for the Planet* edited by Elizabeth J. Coleman (2019), *Wild*

*Reckoning: an anthology provoked by Rachel Carson's Silent Spring* from editors John Burnside and Maurice Riordan (2004), and *Ghost Fishing: An Eco-Justice Poetry Anthology* edited by Melissa Tuckey (2018) as liminal environments that have responded to the uncertainties of climate chaos by offering creative and critical proposals/collectives out of it. Conversely, as these anthologies' editorial metanarratives aim for radical goals by way of their own unique features, there are counternarratives that explore the individual embodied experiences in each anthology's selected ecopoems as texts that respond to each other by cultivating comfort through "verging." I argue that these counternarratives are critical to transitioning out of the liminal environment so that writers make sense of the environmental crisis *beyond* the process of anthologizing. In turn, the ecopoetry anthologies function as harbingers of hope that nurture a differentiated productive space that is attentive to, as Rosi Braidotti notes, the complex materiality of thinking differently about the kinds of subjects we have already become and the deep-seated transformations we are undergoing (163). These counternarratives centrifugally complicate the metanarrative of anthologizing and the ecopoetry anthology's editorial metanarratives to process the verging that is necessary for a stable identity and the possibilities of mobilizing communities for climate-oriented action. In the next section, I look into the centripetal aspiration of the anthologies that are documented in their editorial metanarratives, and then discuss how the counternarratives of verging in ecopoetry centrifugally yield moments to pause, process, and comprehend threshold experiences.

### **On solid ground: *Where are you going?***

Liminal environments are varied; their existence depends greatly on the motivations for moving towards the in-between and between space, and onto the bigger goals yet to be attained. The

ecopoetry anthologies in this chapter's centripetal aspiration, as referred to in their editorial metanarratives, is to secure a productive space for where ideas are creative, critical, action-oriented and instrumentalized. Each of these anthologies dream big: either they desire to preserve a legacy of a threshold experience in environmental discourse, or they seek to create one. Curating and collating "ecopoetry" presuppose an anthology's aim, and the expectation is that it should be some form of a response to our degrading climate situations. Thus, if the anthologies are liminal environments, then my analysis strives to comprehend the ways they produce and generate space/s for thinking, conversation, actions, or change (realistic or not) while still adhering to their editorial metanarratives. This notion means that counternarratives, present in ecopoems, may have been engineered during the process of anthologizing to uplift the aims of these editorial metanarratives—not that this is a horrendous thing. As Braidotti states, "the point is not just mere deconstruction, but the relocation of identities on new grounds that account for multiple belongings (i.e., a non-unitary vision of a subject)" (181), which means that the possibilities for prioritizing multiple identities and multiple narratives, above solely deconstructing dominant ones, may promote a method that is nonhierarchical and explores all possibilities for multiple belongings.

It is these counternarratives that I am interested in, as most of them are intertwined with the individual's experiences of movements, pause, or verging. These experiences, threshold or not, are present in some of the ecopoems within the anthologies to provoke centrifugal nuance in the editorial metanarratives. For instance, *Here: Poems for the Planet* is focused on galvanizing readers "to address the environmental crisis head on, with enthusiasm and without the paralyzing fear that leads to indifference and inaction" (Coleman xvi), while *Wild Reckoning* states that it wishes to remind readers that Rachel Carson's legacy is "so integral to our thinking that while

we scarcely notice its influence, it informs our poetry at a fundamental level” (Burnside and Riordan 20). If *Here* wishes to provide readers with the impetus to move beyond the paralyzing fear of a climate collapse, *Wild Reckoning* is more focused on investigating how a seminal literary piece has impacted creative responses to the climate crisis in ways that are not often acknowledged. Melissa Tuckey in *Ghost Fishing: An Eco-Justice Poetry Anthology* is blunter, explaining that though eco-justice poetry is aligned with ecopoetry, it *is* different from it. She also professes that the anthology “began as a quest to better understand how poetry could respond to the environmental and social crisis” (1). *Ghost Fishing* stems from an academic and instrumentalizing perspective, and perhaps places undue burden on ecopoetry as something tangible against the climate crisis, but it is considerably more action-oriented than most of the anthologies included in this dissertation. What is clear is that the three anthologies’ editorial metanarratives clearly wish to initiate a paradigm shift in the communities they serve or wish to serve.

In this sense, though the anthologies’ motivations are valid, there is always the danger that these totalizing goals discount the diverse counternarratives embodied in the process of creating and writing ecopoetry. It is important to continue resisting the uncritical reproduction of sameness on a planetary scale that is the function of most metanarratives (Braidotti 178), especially those that are attached to anthologizing. In contrast, migrant identities are reminded that their lands of birth and cultural capital are interpellated when assimilating into a fresh space, and that they continuously renegotiate threshold experiences. These threshold experiences, when processed in creative outputs, are once more interpellated into the motivations for publishing in ecopoetry anthologies, and they become homogenized in the editorial metanarratives. Migrant narratives are constructed as “tethers” of a whole fabric and, at times, are situated under

performative concepts like diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism. In fact, these same identities regularly have to create and construct under a language that is not their own, and with the constraints of translating experiences that are traumatic, painful, or senseless. In other words, they are in a constant state of “becoming” a part of the dominant culture in the anthology and the spaces they are inhabiting or enjoined to (Bladow and Ladino 5). The threshold experience as an event has never *truly* ended for migrants; it is relived again and again in manifold ways to feed into a metanarrative of a national identity or, in this case, an editorial metanarrative. This idea does not discount the fact that ecopoetry for the diaspora is an exercise of self-reflexivity and identity-formation in relation to cultural belonging and relationship with the spaces they inhabit. However, participation in collectives such as anthologies may also be repurposing former traumas to benevolently assimilate into a canon or critical tradition where a migrant identity is not always welcomed or recognized.

We have to pause here and recall that motivations fuel *and* force movements. Movements can be both productive and destructive, depending on the transition from the liminal environment. Documented in multiple ways, migrants are obviously able to successfully transition into communities after the liminal environment and be actively involved in sustaining that space; yet, when the transition fails or is incomplete, isolation can reverberate. As Charlie Samuya Veric states in the epigraph: “Everywhere he goes in the world, his country follows,” meaning that we carry our culture and country no matter where we arrive. When I am asked, “Where are you from?”, it is a loaded question since I am not exactly sure how to respond. When I say that I am from the Philippines, the next statement would often be: “You do not look/sound Filipino.” When put on that spot, I am not comfortable recounting my complex history of being part-Spanish, part-Chinese, and full Filipino who has found herself studying in a Canadian

institution. My Spanish is only basic and functional when I hear other people speak Spanish; my Mandarin or Fookien is non-existent. I speak Bisaya<sup>5</sup> better, though I am losing that ability every day, too. I proudly carry all these heritages in my name, even if they do arouse more questions after the initial one. Honestly, I find that when a migrant is asked, “Where are you from?”, it denotes more than just curiosity—it is a demand for one’s motivation to be *here*. It also asks: Why are you here? What are you doing here? Why *here*? Perhaps the most hurtful of all questions that I have been asked, at times from fellow Filipinos, is *Why did you leave*? It is a question I have not yet found a sufficient answer to, aside from the obvious practical reasons. This question, whenever encountered, is a reminder that verging follows the migrant. They are reminded of their instability and ambivalence even after they thought they have found their communities.

Ecopoems from the three anthologies demonstrate the perplexity of verging and the anxiety related to the query of “Where are you from?” but also represent counternarratives within the collections. My interest in this analysis is to organize the poems to communicate with one another; if part of verging is isolation, then engineering the poems to converse with one another repels the alienation of the betwixt and between to rear centrifugal nuances in the liminal environment. Further, Maria Elena Barretto-Chow reminds us that the effect of isolation is a lack of body, an incompleteness (391); if so, I argue that a dialectic among the counternarratives of the poems<sup>6</sup> forge a resistance to this isolation—perhaps an imagined community of migrant ecopoets—to transition out of the liminal environment.

Aimee Nezhukumatathil’s<sup>7</sup> “What Are You / Where Are You From?” in *Ghost Fishing: An Eco-Justice Poetry Anthology* reflects on where one is born, where she is at the moment, to how she is perceived through her name. She begins by telling a story about the indigo buntings—

bright blue migratory birds that move from northern Canada, to Florida, and then to northern South America during winters. In this story, the scientists try to trick these birds to following a “false star” in a darkened room, but the lines, “There is no other blue like these birds - // no other feather more electric. Not even a bright gumball in a glass cage could match it,” appear to insinuate that the birds were attracted to their own bright colours instead. Eventually, Nezhukumatathil smoothly diverges into other small instances that happened during the time the persona was born: a drizzle on a sunny day; a funnel cloud; a farm fence falling with animals huddling together and not knowing what to do with their freedom until they all scattered away by nightfall.

All these snapshots that flow through the poem like ghostly memories appear to be passively observed, where the persona becomes a figure who associates one’s existence with the direct environment. This process recalls Edward Said’s (qtd. in Seyhan 14) “contrapuntal” awareness, where the “habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against another environment,” meaning that the persona starts to relate her past and present experiences with a specific space. Furthermore, these ephemeral, ghostly, unsettling, immaterial and dream-like snapshots of experiences also shape and cultivate one’s relationship with said space (Park et al. 8) and the spaces they will encounter in the future. It forces the persona to infer that both old and new environments are occurring vividly, contrapuntally, and this informs her identity.

As the persona comprehends the contrapuntal plane of her memories, it is apparent that this self-reflexivity is driven largely by the persona’s unique last name and how it is pronounced in the Western classroom:

... On my first day of school, no one



could pronounce my name, and when they tried it, it sounded like  
bread sputtering as it bakes ... (20)

The verging here arrives when the persona realizes that silence is a weapon against the perplexity of “Where are you from?” When the world-at-large cannot yet perceive how one fits into the dominant culture, then silence becomes a tool to resist interpellation until one is ready to speak on their own terms. Eventually, the persona focuses on a dandelion gathered in the apron of her dress; with him (anthropomorphized in the poem), she experiences the comfort of being quiet in “trying to figure out what to say.” Rather than responding to the interpellation, the persona then decides to be silent—a contemplative isolation—to take up her own space until she is prepared to speak. Through silence as a counternarrative of verging, the persona is able to reclaim her agency.

Another way of reclaiming agency is through a counternarrative of verging that contemplates myth and history together, as shown in Natalie Diaz’s<sup>8</sup> “How the Milky Way Was Made” in *Here: Poems for the Planet*. In this poem, the persona shares that she remembers how the Colorado river used to flow continuously all the way to Mexico as one body of water. It is undisturbed by dams, pipes, and pumps that fill swimming pools and sprinklers in other states. Then, she recounts the myth of how her community saved their fish by lifting them up from dry riverbeds and letting them flow into the heavens where they rippled the “sapphire sky-water into a galaxy road” (53). The persona, feeling that the river she has known all her life is being broken down to fulfill the excessive unnecessary need for water, reclaims agency over what she predicts is the death of the river by expressing how the Mojave created the galaxy that the earth inhabits. They took what was dying and sent it off to the sky, where these fishes charted the pathway for

the Milky Way. By way of contrast to Nezhukumatathil's persona, Diaz's persona finds agency in the stories of her ancestors, which are crucial to her identity.

Also in *Here: Poems for the Planet*, Mark Tredinnick's<sup>9</sup> "Inland" expounds on "West of the divide" of the Australian landscape by finding affect in describing the landscape. Rather than contemplative silence, Tredinnick separates the poem into six stanzas that describe in different intensities and relationalities the inland<sup>10</sup>, as the persona experiences it. Here, the focus is on smell—how the land smells like "itself, not the sea," "country, old, old // Rain," "sadness and eternity," "ancient history," "of sheoak<sup>11</sup> and cockatoo," lichen and salt and dryness," a "continent of long time." Smell becomes a verging, where the distinctness or ambiguity of the land provides direction in comprehending one's identity as a settler. In the poem, associations with smell become a capsule of experiences and symbolisms that relate to one's identity. Further, smell is a contrapuntal experience that overwhelms the persona as he attempts to demonstrate how this space is familiar to him:

Wherever you are, the smell  
Of rain coming or just gone  
Is the smell of the same rain  
Locally inflected. Here  
It's limestone and politics,  
Paddocks and poplars and grief. (15-16)

The smell of rain becomes a middle ground, pivoting into a communal sensory experience and imbricated into belongingness. This stanza seems to answer Nezhukumatathil's title, "What Are You? / Where Are You From?" If she finds herself in the powerful resistance of silence, Tredinnick associates his identity with what the varied smells of the land represent to his own

identity. What is he, then? This may be his answer: “West of the divide smells like // Where you’d want to come from if // You knew who you really were.” It almost appears as an acknowledgment that the land he is settling on is forged out of intricate relationships; that to claim belonging to the land means being cognizant of one’s identity relative to many multiple identities that inhabit similar time-space. In the end, the persona does not have a direct answer to “Where are you from?” Instead, what he does have are strong associations with sensory experiences that occur contrapuntally within the poem, and a verging that demonstrates his troubled apperception of his relationship with the Inland as a counternarrative to settler-belongingness in a place.

W.S. Merwin’s<sup>12</sup> poem, “Native Trees,” also from *Ghost Fishing*, has a different retort to the same question. Here, the persona relies heavily on memory and its fickleness. The father and mother are not able to answer their son’s questions about the names of the trees native to where he is born. He points at them, but they neither hear him nor even look in the direction he is pointing. The persona then changes the questions and tries to relate these to their own upbringing: “Were there trees // where they were children // where I had not been // I asked.” Unfortunately, even if they do offer an answer, it is only a “yes” without any context since “they did not remember.” The encounter is reminiscent Azade Seyhan’s claim that “[a]s culture experiences changes, memory is contested, repressed, or reconfigured” (16). Migrating may have made them forgetful of where they used to call home, or reticent in recounting these past experiences. The bitterness in the poem’s tone does emphasize a verging that is insecure about one’s belongingness to the landscape due to the parents’ ambivalence to it. In particular, when the persona continues to prod about the trees in his parent’s childhood, he says:

What were they I asked what were they

but both my father and my mother  
said they never knew (44)

The fluidity of the lines and their unpunctuated narration (a Merwin trademark) denote an urgency in this insecurity—the persona, embodying his younger self, is concerned that his parents are not able to reproduce the knowledge he demands of them. It is as if he is actually seeking for answers to the question in Nezhukumatathil’s own poem—“What are you?”—rather than simply asking for the names of the trees in his parents’ childhood. The persona’s fragile identity and the unsettling beckoning of his curiosity is also an interrogation of his agency: if his parents do not have this connection to the land, then where is *he* from? Do they even belong there if they do not intimately know the place? In relation, Derek Gladwin says that “human spaces, viewed as a conflation of totalizing space and personal place, mirror and inform our relationship to them” (49), which means that the way we inform our relationships to human spaces are through our communal and personal beliefs alike. Unlike Tredinnick’s poem that attempts to make sense of his relationship with the land through his sensory experiences as a settler, the persona in Merwin’s poem does not show an effort to transition out of verging, as it appears to end with the parents’ lack of knowledge: his communal and personal identities are not enough to inform his relationship with the place. If Tuanian concepts are invoked here and if we heed Bryson’s statement that each pause in movement makes it possible for space to be transformed into place (9), then the parents never had the opportunity to pause to create their place. Sometimes, individuals do not have the luxury to pause and have relationships with place due to economic, settler, and political reasons. Sometimes, all they have is the liminal environment, this perpetual in-between, and that is enough for them to keep on surviving. Another poem from *Wild Reckoning*, Lavinia Greenlaw’s<sup>13</sup> “The Recital of Lost Cities” is a

destruction of the world's cartography through the melting of the polar ice caps. Greenlaw's persona narrates the erasure of worlds as we know it and how people grapple with this sudden change. As nations disappeared, they made new ones or renamed them, while cartographers raced to document these changes until it became futile. Eventually, as seas rose and coastlines unravelled, the people gathered atop hills to remember names of lost cities (167). The poem paints a harrowing picture of climate collapse, which seeks to answer the question of "Where are you from?" with a challenge to remember and keep on remembering. Greenlaw's persona describes a world that is stuck in verging and are paralyzed with helplessness. Clinging to memories of places that used to be and reciting these names out loud with one another appears to be their only form of hope.

The poems discussed from the selected anthologies all respond with their own centrifugal nuances to the question, "Where are you from?" What is striking in their responses is that verging is most often a part of figuring out the answer, and that the question itself interrogates one's relationality to what they think their established communities are. In relation, the ecopoems provide a probable basis for how individual roles are performed in the chaos of environmental discourse, which is through discovering agency in counternarratives. The anthologies' editorial metanarratives of instrumentalizing the ecopoems for action-oriented results are challenged, since the ecopoems demonstrate verging: individuals make sense of their own identities with agency and against the interpellation of the dominant culture. Through this, the ecopoems highlight their unique counternarratives—rather than the overarching theme and motivations of the editorial metanarratives.

Consequently, tensions are present in the way the anthologies pursue their motivations and adhere to their editorial metanarratives, and the way these tensions unraveled when the

anthologies respond to each other based on multiple nuances are the reasons why I decided to organize *Here*, *Wild Reckoning*, and *Ghost Fishing* with each other. Most importantly, these anthologies try to make sense of the chaos surrounding us and be possible creative pathways to transition out of it. Thus, in the next section of this chapter, the analysis shifts to how anthologies function as environments, and how this notion engages with their editorial metanarratives and the centrifugal counternarratives in the ecopoems.

### **Anthologies as Environments**

If anthologies are environments, then they can be spaces of freedom. Potentially, they can be radical and creative motivations to move against systemic issues and towards a more hopeful solution. Anna Muenchrath insists that,

the publication of these anthologies facilitates a movement of the poems into a new linguistic and spatial context ... the paratexts, in turn, acknowledge that previously existing distance and continue to attempt to shrink it, bringing the reader closer to the world of the poetry by bridging contextual, linguistic, and historical lacunae. (555-556)

Muenchrath shows how poems in an anthology often function to bring the reader new information and comprehension about a specific theme that is explored. The migration of poems from their individual pages or from a collection and *into* an anthology also means that they assume a new function as a piece of the big puzzle the anthology is aiming to address and solve. In reality, anthologies that bridge and facilitate gaps are part of the “experiences of order” that proposes a method out of a specific chaos. They are also, according to Dietrich, “liminoid” works—another Turner concept that signifies innovative responses to an issue that challenges, criticize, or subvert central societal norms and value (452). However, the effect of these works is

felt *fully* if they are consolidated or are engaging in the “centre” of the conversation; that is where they are best suited to alter it in the process. There is no monolithic ecopoetry anthology, of course, but there is the persistent danger of presenting one’s liminoid work as the emerging centre of current discourse. In other words, anthologies will most probably not save the world from environmental degradation. Even in the circles they are attuned for (like academia), they will not offer *the* sole tangible solution that will mobilize world leaders and policy makers into action, let alone individual human beings. To say that anthologies offer another glimpse into a space yet to be explored in environmental discourse is fair; yet, to ascertain it as an essential tool to address the interlocking systems of oppression present in global environmental discourse right now is another problem on its own.

What ecopoetry anthologies do offer best is something so simple yet fundamental to an individual’s becoming, and that is hope. The reason why I chose these three anthologies in this chapter is because of that feeling—despite the varied engineering of each collection by their editors and publishers based on the impetus of their metanarratives, they almost all reverberate one clear premise and that is to remind or instill in the reader that there is hope. Whether the hope involves a message from the Dalai Lama, calling a phone number to place pressure on policy makers, or a living document by scientists on activism, all these amount to the fact that the editors behind these anthologies wish for their communities to realize that there is hope in the face of the looming dread before us. Certainly, as Camille Dungy affirms in her Foreword to *Ghost Fishing* that, “... this collection helps give us language through which we might come to comprehend what we are losing, what we have already lost—and possibly even learn what is necessary to fight against such loss” (xvi). Language, as Dungy says, is powerful. To find the language to speak of the threshold experiences we are undergoing is important to our identities.

To empower individuals in comprehending their own spaces at the immensity of the insurmountable challenge of a possible extinction is a path away from the void of a perpetual liminal environment. It is hope away from the chaos; a concrete block to set a foot onto when everything else appears to be crumbling around.

More so, the language of a hopeful collective is an assertion that the world is not an impersonal object and is built on a structure of shared understanding, and that we have this shared understanding *because* of language. In short, “[l]anguage embodies and enacts the totality of our experience of the world” (Seyhan 5), and we rely on this kind of language to communicate our threshold experiences with one another—perhaps to find our communities. It is these experiences that are encapsulated in every ecopoem collated in these anthologies, especially as they are an act of “inquiry and exchange, and ... they contain the kind of questions that reframe thinking” (Tuckey 6). In relation to that, what ecopoetry does—in the midst of chaos and perplexity—is to lend agency to not only the writers involved in the anthology, but to readers as well. Importantly, ecopoetry, as Sarah Nolan says, “move[s] beyond idealized interactions with the physical world and begin to represent nature for its own inherent value and autonomous self” (9), which is indicative of the possibilities for ecopoetry. We see the centrifugal movement from pastoral and romantic representations of nature and instead are discovering new methods of writing about nature that are attuned to the varying relationships we have with it. The ecopoems are provided their own spaces to generate counternarratives of self-becoming within an environmental space, which do facilitate the transition from viewing a space as mere abstraction into something more definitive and meaningful. Additionally, they foster hope against the rising tide of helplessness that many people feel when they are in the midst of either fathoming or addressing the future of the planet and their space in it.



Helplessness is a dangerous emotion. It has manifested in not only my actions, but also vividly in my subconscious. As I processed how I did not have any control over my parents' health and passing, I kept begging for both of them to communicate with me from the beyond they are in. Eventually, I dreamt about my father during the haze of the 2017 wildfire season in the Okanagan. He never did say anything in that dream so I still kept on hoping that he would return to my subconscious and tell me something, anything. Meanwhile, I talk to my mother as if she is still alive. I keep reaching for my phone when I remember a joke we shared, or anything I think only she will understand. I sometimes hear her voice in my head when I am cooking, or when I go out in wintertime: "Ang lamig-lamig diyan,"<sup>14</sup> she used to say when we video-call. I argued that she would get used to it when she visits me someday. "Use up your free miles," I teased. She would smile and change the subject.

These moments are how I exercise the power of my agency over the helplessness of these threshold experiences. Hope—in whatever shape or form it is—is the sole reason why I am here. It is hope that I bring with me despite the uncertainty of its motivation: I know Pang and Mang will never return to this same universe, and I am not entirely sure I believe there is an afterlife. All I know is that I have hope that they are with me, and this hope is my higher ground. It is why I feel I have kept moving out of liminal environments in this strange new world, despite being constantly pushed back to the uncertainty.

The agency in creating ecopoetry anthologies is associated with a revolutionary activity that promises to transform spaces, shift paradigms, and spur action as detailed in the centripetal editorial metanarratives. It suspends a social order that is not anymore operative through presenting centrifugal counternarratives that are unheard, different, forgotten, displaced, and dismissed. These stories are powerful tools in the environmental humanities; according to Craig

Santos Perez, anthologies in general craft sites of ecological healing, belonging, and resistance (72). The power of counternarratives in ecopoetry are also performances of individual agency against homogeneity and totalization. It allows for interactions between past, present, and future multi-perspectival subjects to convene so that communication is started (Giragosian 48), and community is fostered. In the next section, I argue that each anthology's centripetal editorial metanarrative compels the specific environment they are fostering during the process of anthologizing. I will analyse each anthology separately from each other to discover what kind of environment their editorial metanarratives establish.

### **Hope Imagined: *Here***

For *Here: Poems for the Planet*, editor Elizabeth J. Coleman divided the anthology into five sections, and then another section for "A Guide to Activism by the Union of Concerned Scientists." Each division is specific to either the beauty of the earth, the peril suffered by the earth and other species in our hands, and the possibility of hope. Coleman insists that poets in the anthology are "listening, seeing, feeling, mourning, hoping, and acting" (xvii). At the beginning of the book, before the Introduction, is the Foreword from the Dalai Lama who praises the book as containing "many beautiful, generous poems and ideas for action." He also hopes that:

... they will inspire readers who ask themselves, "But what can I do?" to see that there is a way forward—learning to share the earth and its resources, while taking care of it together. (xiii)

This quote shows that this ecopoetry anthology is not only tasked as a revolutionary piece to shift the feelings of helplessness from the enormity of the situation, but it is also expected to lead the community towards tangible actions. Whether the goal is to "inspire ideas" or "start organizing,"

the message is clear: there is a way forward, and *Here* is one of those ways forward. Importantly, Coleman herself acknowledges that editing the anthology has empowered her:

I no longer feel despair but hope, like a crocus shooting up from the ground, the kind I could count on seeing at the beginning of April when I was a child. As I've read and reread these poems, I've come to believe that together we can solve the daunting environmental challenges we face Poetry speaks to us and changes us as nothing else can.  
(xviii)

Adding to that, she wishes that the collection would leave the reader as hopeful and ready to act as they have left her. These are bold assertions, especially when she instrumentalizes poetry in general as literature that “changes us as nothing else can.” Further, she also sees poetry as a secular prayer that celebrates the earth despite grieving for what we have done to it and its creatures (xvi). She likens this emotion to celebrating and mourning for a loved one in hospice care, which I find is a strange metaphor that anthropomorphizes the whole complex system of ecological issues. There is then the explicit reference to the fact that the poets all come from many nations and cultural backgrounds, “yet their poems live side by side in this space, reminding us that we are in this together across a geography and identity” (xvii). The paradox is curious in acknowledging that the poets are socio-culturally diverse *and* that their poems are placed side by side without any critical consideration of what this nuance demands from the anthology's editorial metanarrative.

Definitely, *Here: Poems for the Planet* creates an environment that is communal or in Turner's words, a *communitas*, which is when individuals distance themselves from mundane structures and their social identities in order to facilitate a homogenization of status and a strong sense of community (qtd. in Thomassen 82). I do not think this kind of imaginary totality and

optimism is problematic; what I do think is that the *communitas Here* promotes may be a pitfall of the white saviour complex that performs hope the best way it knows how, which is to assert the diversity of voices within the compendium, even if these voices are unembodied in the anthology's optimistic promises. These promises may be the opportunity to publish in a North American publication *with* the Dalai Lama, or because these poets are genuinely interested in sharing their own threshold experiences to inform the collection. There is a motley of reasons that would attract creative and critical responses to be a part of *Here* as a centripetal motivation for each poet, but as their works are compiled in one anthology, some of them bring ecopoetry with unique counternarratives that do not completely align with *Here's* editorial metanarrative.

A big chunk of the anthology is "A Guide to Activism by the Union of Concerned Scientists," which Coleman explains "focuses specifically on the problem of climate change" (191). She also cites that "engagement with environmental activism is a journey of exploration and of hope for the planet we all share." In that sense, the document at the end of *Here* is a variety of "tactical approaches," as Coleman calls them (191). It is a breath of fresh air and could have been a book itself, with simple steps such as "individual/household actions," "communicating our commitment," "thinking bigger," and "institutional change." It is written and edited like a textbook, with a primer about the environmental challenges that we were facing at the time of publication, verified scientific data, eye-catching layout, and clear instructions on actions like writing letters to policy makers, writing op-eds, strategies for organizing community gatherings, and so much more. More importantly, the document appears to be separate from the anthology itself: there is barely any mention of utilizing the ecopoems in the Guide to Activism, and is there no acknowledgment of the ecopoems that were published in the same anthology. It is clear that Coleman intends the Guide as a logical next step after the reader asks, "But what else

can I do?”, but it does promote the kind of binaries that separate environmental disciplines from each other. In *Here*, the arts are compiled in the anthology to inspire and provoke change, but it appears to not be a part of the mobilizing force that enacts change. This separation does not count on the possibilities of public engagement, or the conversations and actions transpiring when there is the union of interdisciplinary fields in addressing an issue. The environment promoted by *Here* is a form of *communitas* as a promise out of the liminal; however, the anthology’s arrangement promotes a centripetal tendency: the disconnect between art and science. Despite this, *Here*’s motivations are ferociously energizing and reverberates throughout the entire collection.

### **Interdisciplinary Collaborations: *Wild Reckoning***

*Wild Reckoning: an anthology provoked by Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring* is a collective that wishes to sustain interest in how Carson’s seminal work has so deeply influenced the course of environmental thinking. Rather than separating approaches to addressing climate degradation, editors John Burnside and Maurice Riordan reminds readers that Carson was keen on showing us all that “everything was interconnected ... but that matter is continuous, like a Celtic knot. This continuum, she believed, was the single narrative that includes all others” (19). This statement denotes the anthology’s method of facilitating collaboration between poets and scientists to create art as Carson has imagined it, by linking connections to apprehend the greater whole of a problem.

There are commissioned poems (seventeen in all) included in the anthology that are funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, marking the fortieth anniversary of *Silent Spring*’s publication. The editors describe these commissioned poems as a “ground-breaking”

collaboration between poets and scientists which include popular names in the two fields like Seamus Heaney, Christopher Reid, Maurice Riordan, Mark Doty, Linda Gregerson, Sir David Attenborough, Dr. Elizabeth Cooper, and many others (22). It is a powerhouse of names that piques interest in the anthology, especially as it provides access to “Notes on the Commission Poems” at the end of the book. This part, however, provides narrative by the poets and not the scientists, even if the former were also contributors to the creative process themselves as the editors assert in their Introduction:

... we asked poets from both sides of the Atlantic to work directly with a scientist on, first, a dialogue, and second, a poem that related in some way to that scientist’s area of expertise. What we were looking for wasn’t ‘nature poetry’. Instead, we sought out poets who, it seemed to us, had something vital to say about the human relationship with the natural world in the broadest sense: poets with a philosophical concern with the land; those whose work dealt, in a clear-sighted and compassionate fashion, with animal and plant life; poets whose lyrical explorations had to do with connection, continuity and the interlaced quality of all life. (20)

The stipulations for selection are stated here, though the ambiguity of how they define ecopoetry or nature poetry is still a pressing issue. Despite that, some poets acknowledged how fundamental their conversations with the scientists were in their creativity; for instance, Robert Wrigley who wrote “The Gift of the Bear” has a narrative of how Professor Charles Robbins of the Washington State University’s Bear Research Center allowed him to directly engage with the pre-hibernation blood draws for the bears there. It was an influential experience for Wrigley, as he later summarizes: “... the presence of bears where we live keeps us a little more alive than we might be otherwise” (248), which indicates how that experience has influenced his creativity. In

addition, Micheal Symmons Roberts on his poem “To John Donne” credits his conversations with Sir John Sulston, who is the head of the team that mapped the genome at the Sanger Centre in Cambridge. He shared Sir Sulston’s concerns about patenting parts of the human body’s genome for profit, and how this capitalist endeavour is reminiscent of the exploitation of the land.

*Wild Reckoning*’s environment diverges from *Here* when it comes to its purpose: the anthology wants to remind people how much appreciated a writer Carson is, and how her influence is so integral that it informs poetry at a fundamental level (Burnside & Riordan 20). Its editorial metanarrative stresses that Carson’s legacy is so pervading that it has set the stage for collaboration among disciplines in addressing environmental issues and has been a blueprint for how writers narrate to their readers the overwhelming intricacy of ecology. The ecopoems collated in this anthology are considered more than just “nature poetry,” but are a return to the delineation of a *Logos* or dwelling; neither are exclusively methods of science or art, but “side-steps such definitions in an attempt to understand, in the fullest sense, what it is to dwell in the world as humans” (Burnside & Riordan 21). They say that how we view nature is only part of a wider question that is of belonging, a reckoning, and an accommodation where everything is shared. Therefore, even if *Wild Reckoning*’s reflective approach differs from *Here*’s optimistic effort for a call-to-action, they nonetheless both instrumentalize the curated poems in the anthology towards their own editorial metanarratives.

### **Redefining Ecopoetry: *Ghost Fishing***

*Ghost Fishing: An Eco-Justice Poetry Anthology* has an editorial metanarrative that contrasts the other two: it defines eco-justice poetry as poetry born of deep cultural attachment to the land,

poetry born of crisis, and aligns itself with environmental justice activism and thought, which is a visible shift from the pastoral traditions associated with nature poetry (Tuckey 1). I have mentioned that *Ghost Fishing* does share similar motivations with the previously discussed anthologies; however, this collective draws largely from communal threats against biodiversity, language, and culture. It is also more concerned with the power of language, saying that language is how we know the world, and culture is how we negotiate with and survive the environment (2). Melissa Tuckey, its editor, also stresses the reason for her diverse representations in the book: “If cultural diversity is a sign of ecological health, it follows that an ecologically healthy eco-poetry would be as culturally diverse as the landscapes we seek to protect,” which is another of the anthology’s unique editorial metanarrative (2). She avows that there is no monolithic environmental experience, as there is a need to be careful in reading any one particular human voice as speaking for an entire culture or category of people (5). As an environment, *Ghost Fishing* extends a deep and pervasive comprehension of the threshold experiences that many writers and creators share to uplift a collection. There is certainly a thoughtfulness present in the book that is flexible and porous to the multiplicity of cultural movements that make up its entirety. At the same time, there is still hope that an ecopoetry (or eco-justice poetry) anthology will instigate one to read, as Camille Dungy in the Foreword notes, “widely and wildly,” and embrace the opportunity to “think beyond the limits of our own perspective and cultures, to enter human conversation from a deeper and more sustaining place” (5). For fellow anthologist Dungy, this collection and the promise of eco-justice poetry is to bring poets of colour, Indigenous poets, women, and other marginalized voices (the “unseen”) to the proverbial centre of “eco-poetry.”



*Ghost Fishing* is voluminous, compared to the two other books. It has well-known contributors like Natalie Diaz, Ross Gay, Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, Naomi Shihab Nye, Patrick Rosal, Wang Ping, and more. It is divided into eight sections:

- I. *La Frontera / Sin Fronteras*: Land, Culture, Possession, and Dispossession
- II. Instead of Flowers: War
- III. Little Farm, Big Farm: Food, Culture, and Capital
- IV. Tell the Birds: Human-Animal Relations
- V. Unquiet Air: Resource Extraction
- VI. To See the Earth: Eco-Disaster
- VII. Taking Root: Resistance, Resilience, and Resurgence
- VIII. Plead for Me: Beyond America

The last part is a short manifesto entitled “Principles of Environmental Justice from the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit,” which enumerates a collaborative document that provides seventeen affirmations of the Principles of Environmental Justice. What is commendable about *Ghost Fishing*’s section divisions is the broad recognition of the interlocking systems of oppressions that are often erased in environmental discourse—from food insecurity, imperial ruination, disasters, displacement, and resistance. These tropes of environmental justice are not the easiest to address as each represent a multifactorial situation. As a whole, the poems in the anthology appear to fill a gap that some ecopoetry anthologies are careful not to tread on: environmental racism. Tuckey affirms this in the discussion of her editorial choices:

In constructing this anthology, I looked for thematic intersections of social justice, environment, and culture. The resulting sections reflect those intersections. I’ve arranged

the book thematically to reflect the connection between the poems in the book and our individual and collective response to world events with the intention of focusing the conversation around key environmental concerns ... Each of these thematic sections represents a key intersection of eco-justice concerns and an opportunity to widen conversations across disciplines. (9-10)

She goes on to describe the kind of poems she chose, and these offer witness, fresh perspectives, unique ways of looking/thinking, emotional catharsis, and imagination. Of course, she was also aware of the complexity of the poems' languages and their stylistic diversity (10). Also conscious of the solidarity formed by the anthology, she decided to publish mostly living poets as she wishes to see the conversation expand and grow within the community that is formed by the book. This signposting is certainly helpful, since Tuckey herself acknowledges that she has chosen to focus on North American eco-justice poetry since this mode of poetry is relatively ignored in this continent.

Despite the ferocity of *Ghost Fishing's* clarion call, the last division, "Plead for me: Beyond America," questions Tuckey's editorial metanarrative. For one, this section is fulfilled by poets and creators who care about the environment across "international borders." There is also an emphasis on the Global South that is quite vexing to me. I wonder if this "emphasis" on the Global South is productive, since it is only discussed as tangential to the Global North. Rather than satisfy the aims of providing opportunity for readers "to look beyond a North American perspective" (Tuckey 10), it instead galvanizes the anthology into geographical binaries without noting that some counternarratives in the poems before *Plead for Me* are already emanating from *beyond* North America. Further, the phrase "Plead for Me" designates another white saviour complex notion that the Global South needs to or are constantly "pleading" for

help from North America—which is a surface level representation of the systemic issues between and among global relations, most importantly neoliberal diplomatic matters (some that Tuckey herself mentioned in the introduction). Again, there is a burgeoning gap here that is unaddressed when it comes to environmental justice: the counternarratives are powerful enough to speak to their own individual threshold experiences. There is no need to “plead” for the Global South, just as there is no need to assume that the focus on North American eco-justice poetry is *only* about North American experiences. As Tuckey herself affirms, “environmental and social crisis are global, and the impact of US foreign policy and North American consumer choices ... felt globally” (10). Thus, in this instance, the editorial metanarrative of the anthology misses to encapsulate the centrifugal yield of the ecopoems in its different sections.

On that note, the anthology’s editorial metanarrative does find hope in building community and in creating shared meaning through language. Poems here are imagined as “alternative energy and farmer’s markets and cooperatives, protests and community gardens” to offset the despair these topics provoke (Tuckey 11). These metanarratives are where *Ghost Fishing* thrives, since it provides poets with creative agency to embed the process of writing within the larger context of the community. Particularly, the poets are encouraged to take control of the story (Blend 95). The poems in *Ghost Fishing* are energizing on their own, with each corresponding not only to the thematic issue it is appended to, but also to such tender threshold experiences that express a deep relationality to the spaces an individual has inhabited or is inhabiting.

Overall, the environment in this anthology is personal, subjective, responsive, and malleable. It is not fixed or frozen in time, nor is it abandoned. It is always filled with talk, thoughts, encounters, happiness, heartbreak, wonders, and distresses. The environment is

community, where identities are fractured and formed. There is much promise in the anthology's individual contributions; I dare say that the poems here (when read on their own) are more exciting than the editorial metanarrative. A lot of these poems are written in the profoundly personal style of today's celebrated eco-poets such as Craig Santos Perez, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, and Billy-Ray Belcourt. On that, I like to think back to what Robert Lecker claims: that the radical energy of anthologies does not come from the coherence of the narrative they present, but from the coherence they can never obtain and the discrepancy between what the editor wants and what the editor knows will never achieve (13-14). Perhaps this is the manifestation of a *communitas* that has the capacity to successfully transition out of the liminal environment. It is a community that responds to each other's threshold experiences in empathetic and compassionate dialogues to generate limitations and aspirations. For the next sections of this chapter, I will be analyzing eco-poems that respond to one another's counternarrative to focus on what the centrifugal yield of their threshold experiences are while verging.

### **Estrangement and Longing in Grief**

Victor Turner warns that if there is no transition to *communitas*, then confusion takes hold. The liminal environment illuminates human reactions to threshold experiences: the ways in which personality was shaped by liminality, the sudden foregrounding of agency, and the sometimes dramatic tying together of thought and experience (Thomassen 201). Hence, to leave the liminal environment, one has to *desire* to leave, take action, and move forward with perception and wisdom. If not, one remains incessantly perplexed and unstable, longing to move on, estranged from where they came from and where they are supposed to go.

Longing is also a pervasive theme in the ecopoems's counternarratives of verging from the anthologies. What do the individual identities long for? What do *we* desire? Perhaps there is longing for the familiar and the dream of what we do not have. On one hand, within the liminal environment is the tenderness in finding solace through what is common to us, even if it is just a promise. On the other hand, movements create separation and estrangement, and though some of these divisions are necessary to start new communities, they can be disruptive and painful. Is this not akin to diaspora? The space of possibility and freedom (Blend 93)? Where there is the dream of belongingness waiting behind what is desired or longed for? I believe that the kinds of longing expressed here is adjusting to the discomfort of the situation—when one is not yet ready to transition out of the liminal environment, one settles on a temporary emotion that sustains their existence there. Perhaps one also contends with the same questions I have raised in the poem I wrote: *Is this where I want to be? What if this is where I want to stay?*

Many will describe the mood of Joy Harjo's<sup>15</sup> "Summer Night" as nostalgic and will do the same for Tim Seibles'<sup>16</sup> "Late Shift:" both poems vacillate from one thought to another, one symbolic object to the next as they elucidate on what it means to long for something or someone, to feel desire in its purest form.

In *Ghost Fishing*, Seibles' "Late Shift" has a persona ruminating on where he cannot physically return, such as places or the familiar face of someone he has loved before, and juxtaposes these to where he is at the moment. It is an entirely different space, which he describes as unnaturally abundant:

I know the shelves stay stocked, big cars lead the chase,  
There's always more      and more to eat.  
But was that ever      my country? (18)

The estrangement is apparent in the persona questioning whether this abundance has ever been his own. What is more, the significant spaces in between the lines are stop-gaps that mimic a breathing pause to think, to reconsider, before blurting out the next word. He is verging, wanting to go back to where he was born in but not knowing if he belonged there. The persona is still searching for something in the liminal environment; he is not yet ready to move out of the transition, but what is he waiting for?

Harjo describes a quiet night in a suburban neighbourhood in “Summer Night” from *Wild Reckoning*—the moon is nearly full, the air is humid, children’s voices call out to each other, and exhausted parents play cumbia<sup>17</sup> records. These experiences are muted against the intensity of the persona’s longing, as she waits for someone to come home:

There is an ache that begins  
in the sound of an old blues song.  
It becomes a house where all the lights have gone out  
but one.

And it burns and burns (240)

Rather than short pauses in between the lines, Harjo employs longer stretches that appear to express a protracted desire to be with someone. When she proclaims, “And it burns and burns,” it further expresses the smoulder of this emotion; it stays flickering despite all elements. This desire keeps her awake, as everyone else “is sleeping in someone’s arms // even the flowers // even the sound of a thousand silences.” She is calm while waiting for the beloved to “come back,” not really concerned about the reasons that has held them back from her.

“Late Shift” is likewise concerned about a persona who hesitates to go back to the country he was born in, but his hesitation is pronounced when he realizes his part in the grander

scheme of things: he belongs to no nation and is hopeful to one day be able to “hold” the earth again like a long-lost lover. He professes that the “soul” is “what we are,” and that even if trouble keeps finding him, he is unchained by his blood to any tongue or language. He is not yet ready to come home or create a home; he is comfortable in verging, for now. The end of his journey is visible, but he is not there yet:

I have seen the door    that is not there

still open            (19)

Meanwhile, “Summer Night” expresses the strength in waiting and longing: one can look forward to a conclusion. Like a ghostly entity, her beloved materializes after hints from the smell of damp honeysuckle and the ordinary spirit who is watching over her street:

And there you are, the secret

of your own flower of light

blooming in the miraculous dark. (241)

In this analysis, engineering these poems together centrifugally yields a fluidity of longing and desire. There is the longing to return, a longing to wait; the desire to stay, and the desire to see the beloved. These tensions repel and respond to each other in assessing estrangement: What does it mean to be alone? If the choice is there to stand back or wait, how does one sustain themselves despite the desire and longing?

The two poems indicate that though the liminal environment is a space of transition, it can also be a space where one finds temporary belongingness. The personas’ exploration of their direct environment further strengthens this relationality of their personal decisions in either staying or waiting. They both find solace in wherever they are, but are also not blinded by this

veneer of comfort. They both comprehend the need to move on from one space to the next, but that the pause within the liminal environment provides them with a deeper impetus for their motivations to do so. If the persona in “Late Shift” recognizes that he belongs to no country so he can be at home anywhere else, the persona in “Summer Night” recognizes that the wait she experiences has an end once the beloved comes home. One poem describes a door staying open; the other poem creates a metaphor for a door shutting closed. These counternarratives are paths of hope out of the liminal environment and into a more certain and stable space.

Similarly, poems that denote a space of transition are prominent in the anthologies. Linda Hogan’s<sup>18</sup> “Milk” in *Ghost Fishing* juxtaposes the extraction of milk from humans and cattle, and how these contrasting but interrelated biological processes interrogate how life continues to unfold despite verging in the memories of treasured humans and sick animal bodies (152). Meanwhile, Vievieve Francis’<sup>19</sup> “A Small Poem” in *Here* expands on the unexpected movements that one encounters throughout the day, and how one small moment can spiral into a startling realization that jars the persona into a new space (188). Finally, Jennifer H. Atkinson’s<sup>20</sup> “Landscape with Translucent Moon” in *Ghost Fishing* expounds on the histories behind a lone enlightenment tree from Bodh Gaya that stands in the forests of Maldives, persisting as a symbol of peace despite the many destructions that has occurred in the land it is planted on. In the poem, the tree sits where tsunami and war have ravaged for the last two thousand years but is guarded by armed personnel day and night (70). The three latter poems are spaces where the personas are all verging at critical moments in their lives: how milk nourishes, perishes, and is extracted; a day that spirals into a startling moment that can change one’s life forever, and a tree standing to symbolize resilience and peace that is under threats of extractive violence. Hope is not prominent in these poems; however, there is certainty in where the poems situate their personas. Perhaps



there is acceptance in their threshold experiences and a self-reflexivity of their purpose in their space so that they can move on from one event to the next. That said, what happens next after the counternarratives in these poems is a moment that is sometimes left to the reader's imagination.

### **A Grizzly Visiting Dreams and the Soul of the River: Where are We Going?**

Attila Nelson of the Lil'wat First Nations shares the story of The Great Flood<sup>21</sup> in *Indigenous Arts & Stories* from his ancestors as a reminder that they are spiritually connected to their land. In this, a great grizzly bear started visiting the village old man, N'chinemqen, in his dreams. At first, he did not understand the language of the bear as it was from an older era. So, he begun conversing with the grizzly and started doing what the bear told him to do, such as creating cedar and willow tree ropes that were much too thick for anyone to use and war canoes larger than the usual dugout ones they have made. His community tolerated his orders, since they believe he was being coaxed to the afterlife by his recently deceased wife. However, when he ordered his younger brother-in-law Hamo'Qo and the other young warriors to position the huge canoes for battle, they started to believe he was going insane.

After that task was done, the rains came. The people at the bottom of the valley, nearest to the river, were helplessly swept away. Those who remained marched up to the gunsight to the large canoes and gathered there like refugees as the rains continued on for three days. The two rivers, a smaller river that came from Skalula Mountain and a larger river that ran alongside it for a few kilometres, overflowed and joined together. The big lake seemed about to swallow the rest of the valley.

Eventually, some people were able to escape the floods on N'chinemqen's canoes and some did not. This great flood carved the valley into a new world; N'chinemqen decided to settle

where the old rivers used to meet and called that place Mimshk. Soon, he crafted his copper canoe to sail into the spirit world. The people he had left behind mourned for his death but were grateful that they listened to an old man who believed the grizzly's warning in his dreams.

Flood myths are a symbolism for cleansing and renewal. After a great deluge, there are survivors who repopulate the earth. The flood myths are insights into a new way of living that was not an option beforehand. In order to transition from a failed system and into a new one, something has to be left behind: a clean slate or a break with previous practices and routines (Szakolczai 18). When one is in the midst of the chaos, there seems to be no hope and all things appear to be futile. Possibilities are limited *or* limitless. Once more, infinity at the liminal environment is a curse, and individuals hold onto anything that symbolizes hope.

I believe that we hold onto the power of language when we are in chaos; Laura-Gray Street in "The Roots of It" insists that language is not something that separates us from and elevates us above the rest of this planet. Rather, language is an integral part of the biological self (xxxvii). Language as organic to our own bodies provides us the possibility of order that we might not have yet grasped within the liminal environment (Harb 123). Language is a transformative practice of achieving interstitial and interlingual communication that cultivates spaces of shared belongingness and nuanced individualities. We create our own identities through our languages; we foster communities through language.

Like a flood, grief is unrelenting. It is not a force to reckon with, but an emotion to live with. There are days I wake up and think, "I feel great and I can keep on going," and days when I feel like letting myself drown. Somehow, I find the strength to keep on moving and I am still here. I have permitted myself to occupy multiple feelings: I can grieve and feel joy at the same

time. I can survive and drown simultaneously, too. I also know that there is something persuasive within me that assures, “I can do this,” and often I could.

In reality, what the anthologies aim for, or the editorial metanarratives that compel their process, is not enough to transition out of a liminal environment of chaos. After the curating, then what? After the publication, what now? Editors have to ask, *Where are we going?* In the rush to find solutions to the challenge of climate change, to find our way out of the chaos, what are we forgetting? What have we ignored? If they see the anthology as a capsule in space-time, what is its function? How do we sustain hope even after the publication? After another new ecopoetry anthology on the shelf? As creators, we can permit ourselves to be angry and hopeful at the same time, and the communities we create out of a body of work is never meant to be perfect. It will evolve, and the evolution may not include us. There is not one sole way out of this chaos; so, while we are here in the liminal environment and awaiting the promise of a radical and achievable solution, we embody the tensions and discomforts that are necessary to achieve a supportive community among each other. In short, we keep trying.

“Where are you going?” is another question that ecopoems from the anthologies engage with. The question demands not a motivation but a destination—a fixed point where one has to stop and say, “I’m home.” Yet home is never a fixed space for many migrant identities. To define home is to suggest that “a sense of place” requires boundaries and an identifiable notion of what is outside and beyond one’s senses (Dreese 2). It also supports the idea that one can only understand identity if one identifies with the territories they come from. That is not always the case though, as exploration among multiple spaces paves the way for identity-making. “Where are you going?” as a demand jeopardizes the ability to pause and comprehend one’s positionality before making a decision to move forward. Though urgency is a key feeling during many

situations out of our control at the moment—including climate degradation—sometimes a pause is like the flood cleansing our slates so we can move forward, stronger and wiser.

At this point, I am interested in how some ecopoems from the anthologies respond to the question, “Where are you going?” In *Wild Reckoning*, Philip Larkin’s<sup>22</sup> “Going, Going” stresses that the answer is not his choice: it is overdevelopment that is swamping the space he has known all his life. The persona contemplates as the world moves at a faster pace. He wonders how split-level shopping and bleak high risers have sprouted amidst fields and farms. Then, he continues:

Things are tougher than we are, just  
As earth will always respond  
However we mess it about;  
Chuck filth in the sea, if you must:  
The tides will be clean beyond  
— But what do I feel now? Doubt? (29)

The persona affirms the resilience of his faith in the earth; however, as the mobilization of industries overtake what was once familiar, he hears the resonance of profit and capital over individual voices. Even if he tries to go near the sea, there appears to be less and less land that is left free.

Freedom here is a double-edged sword as well, as the persona thinks about what other areas of England are being “snuffed:” the shadows, the meadows, the lanes, the guildhalls, the carved choirs. The only spaces he sees being left alone are the tourist parts of Europe, and even these he calls “slums.” The poem’s intriguing attribute is not its cynical tone or even obvious pastoral devotion, but that the persona is verging in a liminal environment that has a destination he is not in favour of. He predicts what will happen to England and is sure that all will remain

are “concrete and tyres,” but is persistently doubtful on whether this shift will actually take place. He doubts himself too, even to the end, ruminating that greed will persist and that the ruination will happen soon. I do not believe that Larkin here is warning of an impending doom or is finger-wagging against globalization; the doubt arises from the reality that these rapid changes are due to the pitfalls of capitalism. For the persona, the cosmopolitan is not a place to be revered as the utopia that will solve the world’s pressing problems. In the quest for the cosmopolitan ideal, spaces are now belonging to more and more individuals, but also to no one entirely (Boehmer 240), which signifies that the metanarrative of communal space is another language for capitalization of land for the “common good.” Unfortunately, this rhetoric displaces the socio-historical lives and threshold experiences that have been existing in a particular space. There is history to space, as Tredinnick has asserted in “Inland” and now Larkin explains in “Going, Going,” and these are sacred to many individuals. Sudden change at the hands of capitalist ideals is a dangerous precedent to an erasure.

Natasha Sajé’s<sup>23</sup> poem, “We Saw No Caribou” in *Here: Poems for the Planet*, narrates this kind of dangerous precedent, where the actual physical animal is erased from the landscape it is expected to be in. What instead replaced the caribou are metal signs with cartoony depictions of the animal, paintings, Disney interpretations, and the actual caribou stuck in a zoo somewhere with fake rocks and pools (113). Consumption of a specific species has erased its history from their dwelling space, and they are now delegated as relics of a past that is remembered through signs and symbols. Even as signs and symbols, the caribou becomes a victim of capitalism, where their images and caricatures are used for profit by capitalist ventures.

Meanwhile, Kirmen Uribe’s<sup>24</sup> persona in “Don’t Make it a Choice,” also in *Here*, tethers at the in between space with a clear reluctance to transition away or into one environment to the

next. The resistance to movement here is a verging that embodies the anxiety of the liminal environment and stubbornness against transition. In the poem, he conveys, “Don’t make me choose / Between the Sea and Dry Land.” There are parts of both spaces that he loves like an “idiotic child,” and that this naivete urges him to sacrifice his positionality—even if both spaces invoke eventual danger:

Don’t make me choose  
Between the Sea and Dry Land.  
I know my residence is a fine line of thread,  
But I’d be lost with only the Sea,  
Drown with Dry Land. (22)

The juxtapositions in the statements of being “lost with only the Sea” and “drown with Dry Land” signifies the irony of where the persona is living at: there is the possibility of drowning if he chooses the sea and the possibility of being lost on dry land (22). It is not safety nor security that he craves; instead, he seeks to stay despite the changing shoreline and the eroding land to be where he feels he belongs. Where is the persona going? He is going where he relishes living the most, on the threshold of safety and danger, within instability because that is where he finds his solace and comfort. Dissimilar to the sentiment in Larkin’s “Going, Going,” Uribe’s persona in “Don’t Make it a Choice” is willing to choose estrangement, even at the expense of his own precarity. Conversely, Javier Zamora’s<sup>25</sup> “Saguaros” in *Ghost Fishing* details perilous migration across borders. The saguaros, or a giant cactus with branches shaped like a candelabra (native to Mexico and Southwestern US), becomes a symbol of this journey. The persona recounts how he ate the red fruits at the top of the cactus to survive the crossing, and how the taste of the fruit sometimes bubbles at the back of his throat until now (29). Unlike the persona in Uribe’s poem,

the migrant in “Saguaro” has no choice in where he ends up. He wants freedom and wants to escape but is caught by bright spotlights that drive him (and thirty others) into a corner, until he is “swallowed” by a cold cell. An important point to make here, from analyzing these two ecopoems, is that both describe juxtaposing movements: one can make a choice to move or not, and the other cannot. One can make a clear decision about his own precarity, while the other can only live in precarity. Some movements are necessary, urgent, a matter of life-and-death, and some movements are by choice. What is clear, however, is that these two poems describe a verging that is full of anxiety. Unfortunately, instead of acceptance, the centrifugal output is trauma that forms at the end of the poems.

In *Ghost Fishing*’s “Lunch in Nablus City Park,” Naomi Shihab Nye<sup>26</sup> describes the disembodied feeling of being in Nablus at a city park, among people who are seemingly not concerned with the political tensions that are insidious in their lives. Nablus City is in northern West Bank, just forty-nine kilometres north of Jerusalem. It is, according to Nye, a town “which has recently known war.” As the persona brunches, there are words that are easier to say than most, like “casualty” (too casual, persona remarks) and gestures that are harder to accept like prayers (“Lady, it *is* not enough, then what?”) (76).

The verging in this poem is in the vacillation between and among conversations, and lived experiences that Nye expertly translates into words. One person talks about marriage and true love; the next thinks about going to the University of Texas though it seems so remote to him like Mars. The markets are selling shoes; a beggar drags his scabby leg; students argue about the best way to protest. It is a mundane environment where everything and nothing is happening at the same time. The persona in Nye’s poem continues to describe how surreal it is to function in a place rife with tension and still pungent with war:

Today only our table sends its laughter into the trees.

What cannot be answered checkers the tablecloth

Between the squares of white and red.

Where do the souls of hills hide

when there is shooting in the valleys?

What makes a man with a gun seem bigger

than a man with almonds? (76)

The questions invoked in the stanza are also part of the verging—how does one function to be “normal” when chaos is simmering on the ground? When any moment the hills can erupt with gunfire? The conversations around the persona foster an embodied estrangement. She realizes that these are simply people trying to survive the fragility of their liminal environment; they are trying to find order in the situation they were thrust into. They, including the persona, keep on speaking, thinking, planning, and dreaming because they need to have hope; they each have something to hold onto away from their shared precarious situation. At the end of the poem, Nye lets the persona speak to these individuals who are fighting to live their lives with a semblance of normality by saying that despite all the erupting violence around them, someone believed enough (“with sky and birds in his heart”) that this space would be a good place for a park. “Believing” is a strong word; the persona encourages the people to believe that there is a way out of the war and that they should continue to hope. The park is a promise from ages ago that someone believed in the space and they can still hold onto that belief. On that note, poems in *Ghost Fishing* by Frances Payne Adler<sup>27</sup> (“Supreme” 81) that documents how a Palestinian grape grower, Atta, struggles to find permits to let him continue growing grapes in the borders of Kiryat Arba, and Wang Ping<sup>28</sup> (“A Hakka Man Farms Rare Earth in South China” 215) that



expresses how their persona, a Hakka Man, continues to dig for precious metals that create today's latest technology at the expense of their own health embody personas who are often marginalized and shunned. The latter two poems show a verging that, again, insinuate how there are individuals who do wish to transition out of the liminal environment, but are held back by their material conditions and oppressions out of their control. The grape grower, Atta, naively wishes to keep growing grapes and relishes the two days out of the year that the Army allows him into his *own* property, while the Hakka Man sees how working in the mines among noxious gasses has affected his and his family's health but finds that there is nowhere else to go except back down again since Mongolia is also a "rare earth pit" for the world. For these three poems, the answer to "Where are you going?" is not a question of physical and emotional direction or movement, but an acceptance of one's fate at the time being and the ability to believe there is freedom meant for them, somehow. Their counternarratives centrifugally show that to think, plan, grieve, harvest, work, and love means there is hope to continue surviving despite not being in control of their future.

### **Hope as a Form of Belongingness in Ecopoetry Anthologies**

The ecopoetry anthologies in this chapter have shown their editorial metanarrative is one shared by writers and creators: we all want to grasp onto something to offer hope, one way or another. What the analysis of these anthologies and the engineering of select ecopoems in conversations with each other show is that editorial metanarratives do not encapsulate the multiple counternarratives present in the ecopoems. Sometimes, these counternarratives offer perspectives that may not even be considered by the editors. Many of these ecopoems' counternarratives recount threshold experiences—sometimes pleasant, often painful—that are part of the anthology

as a form of belongingness and to contribute to the editorial metanarrative. Yet, what is blurred and forgotten are how these threshold experiences and their relationality with the multiple spaces the poets move in and out of are, in reality, also important to transition out of the chaos. There is no one way out of the liminal environment, and these ecopoems have demonstrated that there is no one clarion call for environmental degradation. We may all have similar hopes, but we have individualized threshold experiences that have urged us into the same space we inhabit together now, and that is to address climate change critically and creatively. Perhaps, in order to move against performative solutions to this pressing problem, we need to reassess what it means to be a “community” during these challenging times (within and outside the academe) and think about how we can consistently be attentive to each other’s unique counternarratives. As we move forward, we move forward together; we lift each other up and lift others up with us, too.

I often think about what I have forgotten as I moved from one country to another, and what I have ignored as I tried to find my space here in Kelowna. I remember trying to communicate with a different friend from the heartland every day until that routine faded away. Some people held on; some let go. Recently, I realized I struggle to write in Filipino and that my tongue does not enunciate some words as easily as I did before. The last time I was in Manila, I took Ubers everywhere because I was afraid to ride jeepneys or other forms of public transportation. The immensity of people inside an enclosed area also frightened me. Maybe I have succumbed to the lure of this Western world’s security, or maybe the fearlessness I valued is just hibernating within me.

A week before the Strawberry full moon of June 2021, I dreamt I was in flooded waters again. I have returned to Manila and was working a sketchy job that involved teaching online. When the heavy rains came, I was convinced that I could easily get home. It was a no brainer: I

needed to find the right transportation to get me from one point to another. If I needed to walk, I would; I had done it before, so what was stopping me now? However, after what seemed like hours of walking in painful shoes and attempting to communicate with other stranded passengers trying to siege the floods, I felt utterly broken. I did not understand why I could not save myself like I did a decade ago.

I limped back into a store where I vaguely knew someone; he consoled me and told me that if I was able to survive a flood in this lifetime, I can definitely survive another one. Yet, there was a man at the counter who scowled at me and asked me where I am from. Without hesitation, I explained that I just arrived back from Canada. He scoffed and berated me for being weak. He vilely declared that if he kicked me out of his store at that instant, he is a hundred percent sure I will drown. I started sobbing so hard not even shame could have contained me.

I woke up, at six am, and there was a second when I was in between dreaming and waking up. In the semi-darkness, just before the brief moment the sun's ray penetrated the cloudy morning in my bedroom, I realized that I was still in Canada. I never left.

If dreams challenge binaries of belongingness and place-making, then even in my dreams I am mourning. That is fine; this intense rush of emotions in my subconscious reminds me that there are moments I have to remember, instances I need to reclaim, and matters I need to return to when I am able. Moving from one country to another, leaving a life behind, losing my parents, and finding the desire to—finally—reclaim my agency over this chaos are harnessing all parts of me that have fragmented in this tremendous transition. I have survived many floods and will many more. I do not find the need to go back to anywhere; I try to keep moving forward. If my role in this chaos is to find peace and acceptance in survival, then that is what I will do. I keep writing, until I reach higher ground.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is in sacred and loving memory of Mario L. Mendez, Jr., a talented and award-winning Filipino playwright, who was my closest friend and fiercest ally during the time I was completing my master's degree in De La Salle University – Manila. I discovered Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep through our collaboration together for a conference paper, and I felt strongly that he was with me when I was led to their theories once more in completing this portion of the dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> Also known as Tropical Storm Ondoy, Haiyan devastated Metro Manila with a record-breaking rainfall of 17.9 inches in twenty-four hours. Seven hundred eighty-nine (789) people died in its aftermath.

<sup>3</sup> The poem is entitled, “As she pleases (After Tropical Storm Ondoy, 2019).” It is available to read in the online version of *World Literature Today's* Summer 2019 issue on Climate Change: <https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2019/summer/three-poems-philippines-rina-garcia-chua>

<sup>4</sup> The Ifugao peoples are an Indigenous tribe of wet-rice agriculturalist who reside in the mountainous region of northern Luzon in the Philippines. They are most famously known for the *Banaue Rice Terraces*, which operates with simple technology that provides irrigation to crops through steeply contoured mountain-terraced walls of stone.

<sup>5</sup> Bisaya or Cebuano is one of the eight major dialects in the Philippines. It is mainly spoken in Central Visayas and Mindanao. Pang grew up in Cebu and Mang stayed in Cebu for her Flight Attendant training for more than a year (she was trapped there during the initial onslaught of the Martial Law years). They both speak fluent Bisaya, and I have acquired this language from hearing them converse with each other.

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<sup>6</sup> I am also making the decision to include a short background of the poet whose poem I am analyzing from throughout the dissertation. If “Where are you from?” is a question that motivates this chapter, then honouring the individual poets’ histories is important in responding to this perplexing query.

<sup>7</sup> Aimee Nezhukumatathil was born in Chicago to a South Indian father and Filipina mother. A lot of her narratives as an essayist and poet are drawn from her upbringing and paternal roots.

<sup>8</sup> Natalie Diaz is from the Fort Mojave Indian Village in California. She played professional basketball in Europe and Asia before earning her MFA. Her poetry collection, *Postcolonial Love Poem* (2020), won the Pulitzer Prize.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Tredinnick hails from New South Wales in Australia, and his work (largely poetry) is concerned with the Australian landscape and its ecology.

<sup>10</sup> The “inland” is a space that is situated in the interior of the region or country, rather than the coast.

<sup>11</sup> Sheoak or She-oaks, or casuarina, is native to Australia, the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, Pacific islands, and Eastern Africa. It is also called Australian pine, due to its slender green or green-gray twigs that bear scale leaves in multiple whorls.

<sup>12</sup> William Stanley (W.S.) Merwin was born in New York City and raised in New Jersey and Scranton, Pennsylvania. He is perhaps one of the most well-known poets in this dissertation, and had great success as an American poet (he was named US poet laureate twice). He is known to be a proponent of deep ecology and practiced Buddhism during his lifetime.

<sup>13</sup> Lavinia Greenlaw was born in London and is an award-winning poet of three collections. She is currently a professor of Creative Writing in Royal Holloway, University of London.

<sup>14</sup> This translates to “It’s too cold there!”

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<sup>15</sup> Joy Harjo, the editor of *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*, is from Tulsa, Oklahoma and is a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. She is the first Native American Poet Laureate, and frequently writes poetry that inhabits the landscapes she has been intimate with in her lands.

<sup>16</sup> Tim Seibles was born in Philadelphia, and was former poet Laureate of Virginia where he currently resides in. He is known to explore racial tensions, class conflict, and intimacies in his poetry.

<sup>17</sup> Cumbia is a folk dance originally from Colombia, until it was adapted by the rest of Latin America. Many people say that cumbia represents the history of Latin America in its own rhythms, and that's why it is crucial to the Latinx communities.

<sup>18</sup> Linda Hogan is a Chickasaw novelist, environmentalist, and essayist who was born in Denver, Colorado. She is Professor Emerita of the University of Colorado.

<sup>19</sup> Vievie Francis is a poet born in West Texas. She currently teaches creative writing at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire.

<sup>20</sup> Jennifer H. Atkinson currently teaches in the MFA and BFA programs at George Mason University in Virginia, USA.

<sup>21</sup> The entirety of Nelson's story can be read here: <http://www.our-story.ca/winners/writing/7141:the-great-flood#story> (accessed on 5 April 2022). It won a Writing Award back in 2019 from Indigenous Arts & Stories.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Larkin is a celebrated poet from Coventry, England. He is best known for his poetry, but he also produced novels and reviews of jazz music.

<sup>23</sup> Natasha Sajé was born in Munich, Germany, before growing up in New York City and New Jersey. She is currently a professor of English at Westminster College in Salt Lake City, Utah.

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<sup>24</sup> Kirmen Uribe is from Ondarroa, a fishing village in Spain's Basque country. He has won the National Prize for Literature in Spain and his works have been translated into over 15 languages.

<sup>25</sup> Javier Zamora was born in La Herradura, El Salvador, and had to migrate to the US after the US-funded Salvadoran Civil War broke in the 1980s. He currently resides in Tucson, Arizona.

<sup>26</sup> Naomi Shihab Nye is the daughter of a Palestinian refugee and is an award-winning writer. She was born in St. Louis, Missouri, but lived in West Bank, Palestine when her grandmother got sick. They left just before the Six-Day War occurred. Her works include poetry, young adult fiction, picture books, and novels.

<sup>27</sup> Frances Payne Adler is a retired faculty member of the California State University Monterey Bay, where she founded CSUMB's Creative Writing and Social Action Program. She currently resides in Portland, Oregon.

<sup>28</sup> Wang Ping was born in Shanghai, but grew up on a small island in the East China Sea. She earned her master's degree from Long Island University and PhD from New York University. She currently resides in St. Paul, Minnesota.

### Chapter 3: The Metanarrative of National Identity in North American Place

As the poet stands by the portage in the photograph, or sits by the campfire in the poem, he embodies a contradiction pervasive in colonial experience – spiritual acuity and sensitivity to the landscape, coupled with a deafness to the voices already there. He is not really alone.

- Don McKay, “Great Flint Singing”

Brokenness and fragmentation link the poems, which are not bounded in a specific location but go back and forth between national affiliations, heritages, and identities. This movement expands the traditional definition of breaking to perform it as a rebellion against boundaries, visas, and inherited classifications.

- Sirène Harb, “Between Language and Selves: Migratory Agency, Fragmentation, and Representation in Suheir Hammad’s *breaking poems*”

One of my earliest childhood memories is showering in saltwater. For the first few years of my life, I vividly remember saltwater pouring out of our indoor plumbing. We had a hand water pump installed in our backyard for freshwater, but it was saltwater for mostly everything else indoors. My childhood nanny<sup>1</sup> constantly had to remind me to close my eyes tight when showering; weekly, we would have showers outside by the freshwater pump to wash off remnants of soap, shampoo, and salt on our bodies. Saltwater does not lather and cleanse as well as freshwater. Plus, after a couple of days our skins would start to dry and flake. When it rained during siyam siyam<sup>2</sup>, our parents encouraged us to run outside and bathe under the rain so they could spare themselves and our helpers the arduous task of pumping water for hours. Eventually, a private water company installed freshwater pipes into our neighbourhood’s plumbing system, and there was black, brackish water coming out of the faucets for a week. Then, the novelty of showering in freshwater—indoors—took a while to wear off: it was a marvel to me that nothing hurt when I opened my eyes under water.



These challenges we experienced with freshwater access were expected knowing where we were situated. The city I grew up in is located south of Metro Manila. Its name, Las Piñas, is alleged to have come from its earliest exports to the Spanish colonizers: piñas, or pineapples. It was primarily a fishing settlement by the Manila Bay but was also a huge salt bed corridor. Along the Don Galo River and on our way to school, salt bed grids lined the river. Pyramids of crystal salt dotted the intersections of these grids, with what I know now as solar dry beds<sup>3</sup>. I remember them shining under the sun on an early morning drive to school; sometimes, they would reflect such striking brightness into our old car that Pang started wearing sunglasses only while passing through this area. These salt beds were called “irasan,” and they were known to produce the finest salt in the Philippines. The salt’s quality was deemed “white as snow” and the salt had to be maintained by clay tiles to separate the drying salt from impurities. Years later, after the salt-making industry died, some baranggays<sup>4</sup> kept “irasan” in their names even as they pivoted to other sources of income.

I felt pride in the fishing and salt-making industries of my city when I was young. Pang would disappear for an hour every Sunday and come back with fresh fish from the palaisdaan<sup>5</sup> or a kilo of salt direct from the irasan. Sometimes, we would eat in restaurants built atop the seaside (the area was literally called “Seaside”) and barter with fishermen as they held up their freshest catches of the day to us. I even felt fortunate that we had running water; some of my friends who lived a city away had little to no access to clean water and lined up at their baranggay’s hand water pump stations to get their daily ration. Also, despite living so close to seawater and beside salt-water beds, our neighbourhood subdivision never flooded during the monsoon seasons.

The images of salt, saltwater from faucets, and showering under rainwater fiercely remain with me, however, and I recognize that this is a form of security that I attribute to the

permanence of the neighbourhood I grew up in. Yi-Fu Tuan indicates that “[p]ermanence is an important element in the idea of place. Things and objects endure and are dependable in ways that human beings, with their biological weakness and shifting moods, do not endure and are not dependable” (140). According to Tuan, the comfort and stability of permanence is appealing to the point of being romanticized for many. Changes to place are often attributed to the people who come and go, or the infrastructures that are created or destroyed. Material place remains a fixed point on a map or is a clear direction that one may want to eventually return to or settle in. The romanticization of place (intimacy of knowledges about land, neighbourhood, a city, province, a whole country) symbolizes that an individual has a centre (or a heartland) that is recognized as crucial to identity. However, movement can distort the concept of this centre and interrogate a sense of place, for better and worse.

This chapter explores three nation- and place-based ecopoetry anthologies and the metanarratives that are centripetal in their collections using a migrant reading practice. The anthologies—*The Ecopoetry Anthology* edited by Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street (2013), *Open Wide a Wilderness: Canadian Nature Poems* edited by Nancy Holmes (2009), and *Regreen: New Canadian Ecological Poetry* edited by Madhur Anand and Adam Dickinson (2009)—have metanarratives that use place to define their respective national identities through carefully selected ecopoems that are curated based on research, submissions, or selection. I argue that a migrant reading practice reveal centrifugal expressions from counternarratives that are responsive to North American national identity but are resistant to the metanarrative of national identity.

The counternarratives stem from some ecopoems in these anthologies that centrifugally express stories of movements and a syncretism of the colonial tongue. If nation- and place-based

ecopoetry anthologies convey a cohesive national identity, what tensions and negotiations arise from specific ecopoems that respond to these metanarratives? How do counternarratives from ecopoems in the anthologies query what is being asserted in these metanarratives? Finally, what does a migrant reading practice within the three ecopoetry anthologies reveal about the ideas of anthologizing, a sense of place, and national identities?

### **The Framing of a National Identity**

How do I remember my country? It is naïve to assert the childhood images in my head as reality; even the city I grew up in has been trying to revive the fishing and salt-making industries since 2005 to “restore cultural heritage of Las Piñas City” (Villanueva), with little success. The two times I was back in Manila since 2016, I was astounded by how the present reality was starkly different from the images I kept in my head. Returning reminded me that Filipino writer Nick Joaquin once wrote that the Philippines has “a heritage of smallness:” the streets were narrower than I remembered, the buildings more cramped and darker. Some local foods I had craved for months did not taste the same anymore, which was a common phenomenon fellow migrant Filipino friends revealed to me as we shared our experiences of returning. The malls seemed more monstrous than ever and escalators made me panic because of how high they reached. Yet, the ocean seemed as pristine and vast, even if its pungent seawater smell sometimes caught me off guard.

It is easy to assume that the country one has moved away from does not change *or* has changed significantly, and when faced with a reality starkly different from expectations, there is something within the self that shatters. These recent encounters with my heartland serve as a shattering of the images I hold as constant truth in my memories. In short, my sense of

belongingness is threatened, and to reference Uslaner, “I” am not part of the “we” who I am supposed to share values, attributes, and experiences with anymore (44). They have stayed and experienced the country intimately; I have experienced the country through the lenses of distance and diaspora. Furthermore, this sense of belongingness feeds into a *collective identity*, or that which is “constituted by a shared and interactive sense of ‘we-ness’ and ‘collective agency’ (David Snow as qtd. in Uslaner 44). Thus, a migrant’s identity may be deconstructed by losing the sense of belongingness and being apart from what is perceived to be integral to their collective identity. It is social movement scholars (like Cristina Flesher Frominaya, Alberto Melucci, Francesca Poletta and James Jasper) who attribute this idea of belongingness to a structural cultural perspective, which means that to be a part of a collective—say, a community or a nation—one has to be fluent in rituals, styles, and narratives that are recognized within that collective. To have divergent embodied experiences from what was once true to the particular identity is to be removed from that collective.

Another concept that is important is *framing*. Based on the writings of interactionist Erving Goffman (1974), Uslaner emphasizes that framing is interpreting the “world out there” by simplifying and condensing objects through selective punctuating and encoding experiences, and actions within the past and present environment (48). This statement means that reality can be punctuated and encoded based on what is real to the collective identity, or that particular parts of reality can be emphasized (which means hiding some, too) so as to protect a collective identity *or* legitimize a collective action<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, framing is a deliberate process reinforced through values, networks, belief systems, and algorithms in order to ensure the saliency of the collective identity. This collective identity *becomes* the necessary framing to construct a national identity,

which is the identity that defines a nation—a body of people who are united through culture, language, history, and concepts of place.

This idea of a national identity is where tensions arise, especially for migrants; to expect that a migrant's collective identity is maintained through space and time is naïve as well. As one physically moves away from the country, the personal identity is strengthened away from the collective national identity for many reasons—often as a mode of survival<sup>7</sup>. Thus, to form this personal identity, one has to challenge the framing of the collective identity to create a reality that is valid and sensical to the new space occupied. Sometimes, it is as simple as choosing which images of the heartland to hold onto, and which should be forgotten.

On that note, I specify the metanarrative for this chapter in relation to nation, since the collective identity in these anthologies is fraught with myths that are attached to North American place. Tuan notes that myths flourish in the absence of precise knowledge; as human understanding remains to stay limited *and* polarized despite the expansion of networking platforms, these myths will persist. The reverence for place may be a result of these myths, fostering a collective identity of place that is reliant on localized knowledge often promoting myths of “what is out there” (85). Tuan goes on to discuss how these kinds of myths have affected environmentalisms since fifth-century BC:

For example, folk wisdom has it that nations can be divided into “north” and “south”: people in the north tend to be hardy and industrious, people in the south tend to be easygoing and artistic. Europe itself is divided into north and south; each part can claim a distinctive personality ... Citizens with any knowledge of their country are seldom at a loss to compare and contrast its two halves in a language that indiscriminately mixes fact with fantasy. Countries have their factual and their mythical geographies. It is not always

easy to tell them apart, or even to say which is more important, because the way people act depends on their comprehension of reality, and that comprehension, since it can never be complete, is necessarily imbued with myths. (97-98)

These binaries—us versus them, or north versus south—enforce myths that have systemically damaged perceptions and treatments of material place, and have disparaged racialized, minority, and migrant communities, at times to near extinction. The discourse of place has been amplified to legitimize colonial and imperial conquests, again reverting to nature-culture binaries in which “pristine wilderness” (Rigby 155) triumphs over “wild.” In the same way, William Cronon maintains that many popular ideas of the environment (starting from the early 1900s) brandish the conviction of nature being a “stable, holistic, homeostatic community capable of preserving its natural balance more or less indefinitely if only humans can avoid ‘disturbing’ it” (24). The collective identity that is built, exigently, on these kinds of binaries are also exalted by the individual who then must subscribe to the framing of a particular vision of the environment. Simply, in order to have a sense of belongingness, one also has to be a part of the place they are in—whether that means they speak the language, look the part, or care for “nature” the way the collective is caring for it—else they are ejected from the collective identity and, ultimately, the place they want to belong to. For those with imperial and (now) neocolonial motivations, that means place has to fit the vision of the collective identity and the vision they are framing so that the nation remains unified.

I am curious, in this chapter, to discover counternarratives that have been accepted into the collective identity but are postulating their own social, political, and historical realities from racialized, minority, and migrant communities. I go back to Tuan who says that “seeing has the effect of putting a distance between self and object. What we see is always ‘out there,’” but

things that are close to us can be explored by our senses but are *not seen*—not clearly (146). One of the messages a colleague imparted to me before she left for her PhD studies in Australia was this: “If you decide to go back, you will realize that *nothing* has changed. But *you* have changed.” I experience that dissonance when I rely on the images I had taken of my country years ago, versus images that I see on the Internet. I think, *how familiar this strange land is*.

In analyzing the ecopoetry anthologies, I will first discuss how a national identity is defined in *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, *Open Wide a Wilderness*, and *Regreen*. Then, I will explore what centripetal tensions exist in the national identity in these anthologies, and how these tensions frame their relationships with place. Thus, the imagination of a unified place is legitimized as a critical part of a national identity.

### **Constructing a National Identity**

A national identity comes from the framing of a collective identity since it is an active value system anchored on metanarratives, beliefs, and cultural practices that are deliberately formulated to construct a cohesive dominant culture. These metanarratives are often reliant on mythologies or stories about a nation’s origins and history that, according to Sherene H. Razack, enable citizens to think of themselves as part of a community that can define who belongs and does not belong to the nation (2). The collective identity *builds* the national identity in order to ensure that the individual appropriately acts out their corresponding role. Therefore, to build a cohesive national identity, much is dependent on the kinds of individual identities that are promoted and formed within that collective. Unfortunately, as Linda Ivey notes, it is often the case that race and nationality are framed as aspects of an idealized citizenry, which then makes a rhetoric of exclusion appealing (115).

In relation, place becomes integral to the formation, cohesion, and resilience of a national identity. Indeed, if “external” place plays an important role in defining a national identity, then establishing place as “home” contributes to the boundaries formed to protect that identity. Tuan further asserts that attachment to the homeland is a common human emotion, and its strength varies among different cultures and historical periods (158). This idea means that even if sentiment for home is a commonality among most cultures, it is still attached to specific places that are affected by deep time-space continuums, disruptions, changes, and challenges. In a national identity, these places—e.g. forests, shrines, skyscrapers, churches, bays, islands, and more—function to delineate shared experiences to bond the cohesion. That is to say, even if each individual has their own narration of place that is integral to their own identity (Andrew and Turner 6), these narratives still serve to legitimize the frames that maintain the nation.

Relationships with the environments we have inhabited are affected by our national identities. For example, growing up with saltwater to shower with and with the ocean surrounding the borders of my city are parts of my national identity, as is my nostalgic desire to reclaim lost attachments to my childhood images of Las Piñas. It is also part of my national identity to emphasize the paradise-like beaches of my country—the powdery white sand, limestone cliffs, islands that disappear with the tides, and crystal-clear ocean—as a framing device when I explain the Philippines to many North Americans. It is the simplest commonality I can anchor my narrative on before expanding onto other complex issues that are NOT part of the national identity. It is also difficult to assert that the Philippines is *not* a poor country; it is instead a nation ravaged by the insidious heritage of colonial mindsets permeating the governing state, its officials, and the masses. In other words, I have the capacity to challenge the national



identity I inhabit because of my lived experiences (including being a migrant), and I know that not every Filipinx has that capacity.

Many choose not to challenge the national identity because the notion of “home” is important to their individual identities, but some simply do not have the facilities and resources to challenge this either. If place is a pause in movement where home is built, then it nurtures lasting affection that denotes safety, rest, and family. These attachments all bounce back to concretizing the national identity, because within it, one is sheltered from the outside that is strange, dangerous, or different. Within that safety and belongingness, an individual may not have the education or resources to look beyond their realities or may not have the desire to do so. Even the concept of migrancy when organized with the idea of a home feeds into the creation of a national identity that allows individuals to build global attachments *without* risking losing the ones they have built back home; the hierarchical structures of global travel and the hegemonic socio-economic classifications of migrants (e.g. expats versus immigrants) have been dependent of the security of a national identity<sup>8</sup>. The motivations for movement from one space to another are largely determined by the individual’s capacity *or* urgency to move, or both.

That place is used as part of the national identity is one of the major arguments in this chapter. *The Ecopoetry Anthology* and *Open Wide a Wilderness* are both nation- and place-based. Centripetally, the anthologies’ editorial metanarratives recognize that American and Canadian poetry can be interpreted environmentally (pre-1960s) and are environmentally responsive especially among contemporary writers. Despite having their own purposes for anthologizing ecopoetry from the two North American countries, one of their goals is the same—that is, to define what differentiates an American ecopoetry or Canadian ecopoetry from the many ecopoems out there. Another shared goal is to also document how relationships with the

environment have changed and have been affected by significant social movements in deep time-space. *Regreen* is a curious Canadian ecopoetry anthology because of its different approach and aim in anthologizing. Though it touches up on what a Canadian ecopoem is and the challenges in trying to define that genre, it still deviates from the affiliations to place (i.e. environment as nature) that are present in the other two anthologies. Aside from that, *Regreen* is experimental in nature—it focuses on restoration ecology and defines environments permissively, so though there is engagement with what a Canadian national identity is, it does step away from attempting to define what the Canadian environment is and instead focuses on how Canadian writers creatively imagine restoring multiple environments. Nevertheless, the next part of this chapter will discuss the centripetal editorial metanarratives that inform the national identity explored in each anthology.

### **If North America Is an Ecosystem**

In Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street's *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, Theodore Roethke's<sup>9</sup> "Meditation at Oyster River" exemplifies a dominant trope in ecopoetry: the lone person<sup>10</sup> in the wilderness. In Part 2 of the poem, the persona likens himself to a "dying star" that persists among the "shy beasts," a "deer at the salt-lick," a "young snake," and "the hummingbird" (85). Water surrounds the persona too, and crashes all around him as he sits on the rock where he is meditating for hours, alone. The anthropomorphizing of forest animals and the body of water further situate the persona as an individual who infuses environmental experiences with personal and cultural phenomena. As such, the environment is perceived anthropocentrically.

This is not to say that the anthologies promote that trope; in fact, they are self-conscious about earlier ecopoems that gravitate to this kind of writing. Roethke's poem belongs to the

“historical section” of *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, which was suggested by poet Robert Hass to “give readers a sense of American poetry that predates the 1960s environmental movement but that presents the relations between humans and natural or built environments in striking and memorable ways” (Fisher-Wirth and Street xxx). Hass also wrote the introduction of the book. Hence, the editors of this anthology comprehend the gravitas of compiling nature or nature-related poetry from American literature within an indeterminate time period and the persisting tensions that this activity may bring, but they do take this challenge on by explicating their perspectives on the experience of collaborating on such an anthology in an Editors’ Preface, two separate forewords from the editors, and an introduction from poet Hass. These essays provide important context about the centripetal metanarratives the editors were drawn to while anthologizing, such as the motivations for the book; the process of curating the poems, and how the editors interpret what “American ecopoetry” is. Most importantly, they acknowledge the gaps in the collection, and recognize the perspectives of the nature poems they have compiled versus the arguments ecocritics have formed for and against these kinds of nature poems. Fisher-Wirth and Street even write that, “[b]ut in our contemporary sense of it, ecopoetry isn’t just any poetry garnished with birds or trees; it is a kind of paradigm shift” (xxxviii), perceiving that the environmental discourse is turning a more critical eye towards ecopoems that invoke nature.

The treatment of this dominant trope in ecopoetry deviates slightly in Nancy Holmes’s *Open Wide a Wilderness*. The epigraph from Don McKay’s introduction to the volume, “Great Flint Singing,” already zeroes in on a self-reflexivity that is evident in Canadian nature poems: the person is *not really* alone out in the wilderness. McKay is quick to point out that a reader of Canadian poetry will recognize that there is inherent difficulty in addressing the wilderness of this “new world” using traditional conventions and forms, and that some may say that these

responses are “irredeemably colonial and derivative” (6). However, there is also the possibility that, as Susan Glickman suggests, Canadian poets have transformed their English and broadly European literary inheritance to articulate their confrontation with the land (qtd. in McKay 6). Nicholas Bradley and Ella Soper have expressed that Canadian writers have historically comprehended the nature *of* nature—the constitution and character of wilderness and countryside—to represent its effects on people, harmful or otherwise (xvi). Thus, the lone person in the wilderness in Canadian ecopoetry is framed differently since it is “grounded in empirical observation” (McKay 16). The person, in this case, *observes* the wilderness with a clear boundary (perhaps fear) that recognizes nature’s agency apart from anthropocentric metaphors. In similar vein, Adam Dickinson, one of the editors of *Regreen*, stresses that Canadian landscapes come with the realization that landscapes are connected to other places, whether these are urban spaces, the tar sands, and other industrial practices (13). This ingrained knowledge of connections and empirical observations sets the Canadian apart from their American counterpart. In relation, I stress that how each geographical region *and* nation interpret this dominant trope (and the subsequent two in this chapter) is dependent on the way the editorial metanarratives are organized. It is also dependent on the scope of each anthology, which the editors are conscious of. They separately acknowledge that their anthologies will not offer a complete volume of ecopoetry from their nations. For example, Fisher-Wirth and Street write, “[e]ach reader will probably say at some point, ‘Why isn’t so-and-so included?’” The more we found, the more was left to find, and poets have inevitably been left out. The abundance of material is heartening, but it has made the selection process arduous” (xxxi). Similarly, Holmes writes, “I must add my voice to the chronic lament of anthologists: ‘This anthology could easily have been twice as long

without undermining its quality or interest.’ Any omissions or errors are my responsibility alone. I am bound to have overlooked or excluded many favourite or remarkable poems” (xvii). With a different approach to interpreting the environment (“broadly,” as Dickinson states), Madhur Anand and Adam Dickinson, editors of *Regreen*, ascertain that their collection’s three divisions are not prescriptive but are perspectives. As such, “depending on your perspective, [these divisions] both broaden and narrow the environmental focus” (Dickinson 13). The editors of *Regreen* are interested in restoration ecology as it is encapsulated in poetry, and in the possibilities of an ecological poetics, which specializes the focus of their anthology despite the openness of their call. In Dickinson’s words, “[t]he physical, social, and linguistic environments are all sites of inquiry” (13).

Returning to my earlier point, the different editors’ transparency that their anthologies are *not* accurate representations of either American or Canadian ecopoetry at that moment and as of now elucidate that these categories of ecopoetry in general may have changed from the time the anthologies were published to the time I am writing this dissertation. For *The Ecopoetry Anthology* and *Open Wide a Wilderness*, it is apparent that the selection process has been extremely challenging (with such a wide scope). To this, Dickinson responds specifically to Holmes’ decisions of inclusion and exclusion as such: “... it must be acknowledged, her decision comes not from willful neglect, but from a recognition of the necessity of thematic boundaries given the scope of the anthology’s ambitious project” (12). The same can be said about *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, which Hass notes is a project that is “sweeping across 150 years” (lxv).

With this in mind, I assert that the editors’ own individual readings, curation, and collation that expand on how nature poetry has evolved into an ecopoetics have shown three distinct tropes. These dominant tropes of ecopoetry in North American—namely the imagery of

a lone person in the wilderness as mentioned, wilderness interpreted as religious salvation, and emotional responses to the climate change—funnel into a national identity that is either distinctly American, distinctly Canadian, or an amalgamation of both due to similar framing of the North American environment.

Although I do not believe either *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, *Open Wide a Wilderness*, or *Regreen* are designed to bolster this kind of national identity, editing an anthology that is nation- and place-based is by nature a centripetal project. In fact, *Regreen*'s editors have stated that, “we make no claims for a distinctly national ecological poetics” (Dickinson 13). Because these writers are operating from their own national identities, their ecopoems will either be compounded or enlivened by the frames of their environmental imaginations. In the next section, the thread of dominant tropes in ecopoetry that are embedded into North American national identities are discussed, as well as how the editorial metanarratives respond to these tropes by discussing them chiasmically. I begin with the reintroduction of the concept of “nature,” followed by a discussion of the succeeding two dominant tropes of ecopoetry in the anthologies.

### **Framing “Nature” in North American Ecopoetry**

“Nature” is integral to the metanarrative of a national identity since specific cultures situate their own relationship with “nature” based on geography, materiality, and symbolic value. As mentioned, “nature” as a terminology is complex and contested, often used interchangeably with “environment” or “wilderness” in many texts, with the exception of publications like Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* and Ashton Nichols' *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism: Toward Urbanatural Roosting* that explicate how images or imaginations of “nature” stifle environmental discourse into vagueness, contradictions, and

binaries. Even my own perception of nature is starkly different from North American nature: the salt-bed industry is nature to me, as much as the vast ocean is. The ocean does not frighten me, and I trust it with my life, whereas for North Americans, nature could be snow-capped mountains, hunting out in the bush, and living lakes with impenetrable bottoms. Time after time, these contradicting images of nature penetrate the signification of nature, specifically when it comes to an assertion of what “ideal” nature should be. Indeed, Timothy Clark avows that:

For some modern Americans, ideal nature is clearly a pristine wilderness ... For others, ... ideal nature is the pastoral countryside or the small town, while others still would celebrate the suburb or even the city as the natural home of humankind. It hardly needs saying that nothing in physical nature can help us adjudicate among these different visions, for in all cases nature merely serves as the mirror onto which societies project the ideal reflections they wish to see. (36)

Following Clark’s argument, if the concept of ideal nature is crucial to framing a national identity, then it is automatically and organically operationalized into the consciousness of the citizens within a constructed nation. A unified vision of what ideal nature can be important to the cohesion of a national identity. As Clark says, nature at times merely serves as the mirror that projects the ideal reflections a specific society wants to see. To achieve that ideal, citizens can support actions and movements that lead toward that vision.

The introduction Hass writes for *The Ecopoetry Anthology* is a comprehensive and detailed reiteration of socio-historical events and movements that have framed the treatment of nature in American ecopoetry. It is also self-reflexive work that revisits ecopoems within the anthology under the critical eye of new historicism (though Hass does not explicitly mention this in the essay). As the ecopoems are discussed, Hass takes into consideration when they were

written and what viewpoint they offered about nature. He is quick to spot contrasts between some of the most influential American poems, such as Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" and TS Eliot's "The Wasteland," which are "both rooted in vegetation myth" (l). Whitman sees the world as endlessly giving, renewable, deeply democratic, while Eliot laments the failure of the natural world because of urbanization and sexuality gone wrong (even if the poem is about London). In a parallel occurrence, Hass recounts Midwesterner Aldo Leopold writing *A Sand Country Almanac* before its publication in 1949, which documented Leopold's experiences as a forester in the southwest and his interest in Frederic Clements' ecology. It is not surprising that Leopold's important work is summed up by Hass as proposing that "everything is connected to everything else" (li). Later on, Hass himself appears to subscribe to this idea while he ruminates about the beginnings of ecopoetry in American nature writing.

It is intriguing to note that *Open Wide a Wilderness* also has a prominent male poet to write its introduction, though Hass and Don McKay have divergent paths in discussing the ecopoetics of their countries. In "Great Flint Singing," McKay provides a varied perspective to Hass' socio-historical background essay on the evolution of ecopoetry in the United States by beginning with an ekphrasis of Duncan Campbell Scott's poem "The Height of Land" with a photograph of Scott as he stands by a portage. Immediately, McKay acknowledges the pervasive colonial language that frames early descriptions of nature in Canadian poetry, yet he does express later on that the difficulty lies in addressing the wilderness of the new world with traditional (i.e. Euro-American) conventions and forms (6). McKay also indicates the binaries that are present in Canadian ecopoetry, similar to American ones:

One of the most widespread of those assumptions, stemming from the pastoral and the Romantic traditions, is the moral differentiation of natural phenomena into good and bad



... Wilderness comes to us morally undifferentiated, truly ruthless in the sense that it is without ruth—compassion—as we are informed, often in a Parks Canada pamphlet, every time we contemplate stepping a few kilometres away from the Trans-Canada Highway.

(6-7)

These highlights from “Great Flint Singing” demonstrate that while American ecopoetry is ruminating on the connections or disconnections among nature and cultures, Canadian ecopoetry is completely immersed in these connections. There is also the apprehension in Canadian ecopoetry that nature is the vast and untamed version of “wilderness.” Perhaps due to the tumultuous and unpredictable geographic patterns, plus the unmapped spaces in many parts of the continent, Canadians seem to have predominantly written about nature with a consciousness that *they are never alone*. Of course, the tropes related to colonial-settler heritage still surface in the earlier poems of the anthology (as it is arranged by the authors’ birth dates), particularly when it comes to attributing religious symbolisms to the environment. Yet, Canadian ecopoetry appears to be keen on phenomenological methods, for which McKay implies that it is important “to know the species in detail, to tell the horned larks from the meadowlarks, and the western meadowlarks with their musical gargling from the eastern species ...” (16). The way Canadian ecopoetry makes sense of nature is through, as mentioned, empirical observation. These dominant tropes shared with the nation south of the border are punctuated with a recognition that the human being is infallible and without control in wilderness; to be intimately familiar with the terrain is the key to persisting. Indeed, as Holmes attests, *Open Wide a Wilderness* is not only an anthology of Canadian nature poetry but it is also an anthology of Canadian poetry (xvii), which may mean that this volume also documents the socio-histories of Canada as a national identity and how that has evolved—even if not explicitly.

With *Regreen*, editors Madhur Anand and Adam Dickinson refer to Holmes' *Open Wide a Wilderness* often in their separate introductions to point out that after Canadian ecopoetry was analysed socio-historically in *Open Wide a Wilderness*, they are more interested in expanding at the "new spaces created in the understory of towering legacies" (Anand 19). These understories are focused on ecological disturbances and how Canadians reimagine responses to these disturbances in poetry. This volume is not as rigid as to whether the ecopoem is written about Canada or not; in fact, Dickinson implies that "[t]he concerns and practices of these poets are as varied as the Canadas that do and do not appear in their works" (13). The inclusion of poetry about other places (i.e. Ireland, Peru, Arizona, and India) serves, as Dickinson emphasizes, to deterritorialize myth and local familiarity.

At this point, I will return to the first dominant trope I have discussed, which is the lone person in the wilderness. This trope can exhibit two different scenarios: either one who is in control of their encounter/s or one who is helplessly alone and has to find ways to either "be" with nature or get out of there. For the lone person who is indeed in control, they show complete dominion over their faculties and the species that are within their space. In the first two anthologies, poems that anthropomorphize animals are common, such as in Robert Frost's<sup>11</sup> "The Most of It," in *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, which is told through the second person point-of-view perspective of a young buck who sees a human across a lake. In this poem, the young buck even demonstrates the same trope, thinking that "he kept the universe alone; / For all the voice in answer he could wake / Was but the mocking echo of his own" (24) as a hunter stares at him from afar. In Robinson Jeffers'<sup>12</sup> "Hurt Hawks," also in *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, the control extends beyond anthropomorphizing a dying hawk who, according to the persona, is left to suffer and await its end. After the first part of the poem describes what the hawk might be going

through (“And pain a few days: cat nor coyote / will shorten the week of waiting for death, there is game without talons”) and romanticizes how the bird is further tormented by its dreams of freedom, Part II of the poem recounts the persona’s thought process as he decides to kill the hawk out of mercy. Here, the lone person is not only in control of his interpretation of the hawk’s pain, but also of its life. The lamentations leading up to the act of “mercy” are but rationalizations of the hawk’s death in his hands, justifiable or not (43).

In *Open Wide a Wilderness*, the excerpt of Adam Hood Burwell’s<sup>13</sup> *from Talbot Road* narrates “one solitary man” who has to undertake an arduous task (“unaided and alone”) in the wilderness. Despite his toils, he is able to “pierce” the woods and create a settlement along Kettle Creek, where angels look down on him and tell him to “go and prosper” since the “fostering hand of heaven” shall help cultivate the highly favoured land he has chosen. The lone person in the wilderness is glorified in this ecopoem as someone who ushered civilization into the “blissful land” by documenting how his family and others prospered in the land he claimed. As more and more people take over the surrounding areas, the persona narrates the destruction of the landscape before his eyes, without acknowledging the part he plays in this inevitable result (41-43). Similarly, Standish O’Grady’s<sup>14</sup> “from The Emigrant,” also in *Open Wide a Wilderness*, is a poem of four cantos that document a persona’s experiences as he emigrates to Canada. Bleak and stark, the poem narrates how the persona tries his best to work with the challenges of living in Canada but fails miserably (as do the many characters in this epic poem). Thus, it is wholly unsurprising that the persona details a negative purview of the land he is in. He depicts it as a “barren waste” and “unprofitable strand,” where the whole landscape does not provide any economy for unemployed Canadians. The “emigrant,” being the lone person in the wilderness, does not see an end to his sufferings from the unwieldy environment and instead becomes averse

to it (41-43). Even the famous poem, “The Peace of Wild Things,” by Wendell Berry<sup>15</sup> in *The Ecopoetry Anthology*—a work I myself love—demonstrates control by using “the peace of wild things” as a framing device to settle internal turmoil. In it, the persona is in complete control of what he chooses to frame his encounter with, like rest, stillness, and waiting. Again, it is “pristine wilderness,” where the lone person’s projections of nature are acclimated to his needs and desires. By way of contrast, Rhea Tregebov’s<sup>16</sup> “Elegy for the Wild” in *Regreen* recounts seeing “wild country” through a moving bus. Rather than compounding the vast wilderness with anthropocentric projections, the ecopoem instead contemplates on the barrier between the moving bus and the wilderness to focus on an awe-inspiring experience. The persona, as a lone person in the wilderness, instead chooses to “keep looking” until she is done, noting in the end that “I think we’re more important than we are” (30). The ecopoem is responsive to the trope since the persona expresses awe at the realization that she is not in control of nature. That said, the ecopoem does provide a contrast by offering another solution to the overwhelming feeling of loneliness in the unknown: to sit with the experience, without judgments or impositions.

So why has this trope responded to the environment in these two distinct ways? Perhaps due to the unpredictability and vastness of the land that is North America. In response to John Muir’s musings about the ever-changing physical geography of this continent from the last ice age, Hass says:

If the North American continent is an ecosystem, then all the ways we have imagined it, all the conceptions of it—maps, geographies, metaphors, mentalities, technologies, infrastructures, peoples, languages, institutions, battlefields, creature life, seasons and the holidays that made ritual of them—are its cultural equivalent. And so are religions, farm implements, architectures, the lapels of coats and the hems of dresses, massacres and

factories and statues in parks. So are the 10,000 years of Native American experience with the land and their expulsion from it by a combination of European diseases and wars. So are the flood of immigrants who swept across the continent, those early settlers who looked into the forests on the Eastern Seaboard and saw demonic darkness, who, where they did not see wheat fields saw Satan; and the settlers who looked into the forests and saw ahead the incredible labor of girdling trees and uprooting them to prepare the land for a European agricultural regimen. And so is the extraordinary story of slavery, of the millions of Africans whose labor transformed the entire Southeast and the mid-Atlantic states, and the ways their struggle for freedom and equality shaped American culture as their labor shaped the land. (liii)

I have chosen to use the quotation in its entirety because it is a full acknowledgment of the complex history of exerting control over nature and culture here in North America, but also that these histories have influence on how relationships with nature are controlled by a national identity. In that quote alone, Hass stresses that there are still narratives that many people will not acknowledge—such as the expulsion of Native Americans from unceded territories, immigrant movements into and out of the country, settlers utilizing natural resources for economic success, the painful narrative of slavery, among others. These are the counternarratives that are buried and silenced by the metanarratives that create a nation.

McKay says the poetries of Canada have demonstrated that place will never truly belong to us, and if we removed it from its “wilderness,” then we also prevent ourselves from belonging to it. These binaries assure that we “remain as colonizers and colonials” (23), which means that acts of erasing and invisibilizing are imminent. There are many counternarratives waiting to be shared and some that will remain untold. Being the lone person in the wilderness presupposes a

choice that has been made in depicting North America: nothing exists until the white settler has arrived, and whatever disruption occurs to the white settler also disturbs the ecological balance of the land. At this point, I am reminded of what Tuan has affirmed: “[i]n large measure, culture dictates the focus and range of our awareness” (148), which means that if a monolithic culture is dictating the national identity’s historical scope of recognition, then erasure becomes a necessary method to ensure the cohesion of remembering and forgetting.

### **Religious Salvation in North American Ecopoetry**

The second dominant trope in North American ecopoetry is using the environment as a framing device for expressing religious salvation. At times, these ecopoems (predominantly in *The Ecopoetry Anthology* and *Open Wide a Wilderness*) try to make sense of the environmental unknown through the lenses of their religious beliefs, yet some also try to figure out how their manifest destiny<sup>17</sup> is reflected onto the unknown and undiscovered landscapes. As early settlers moved into the continent, there is the general idea that the land they were occupying was the “promised land,” and their faith would guide them towards building their idealized environments. These idealized environments were oftentimes achieved through continuous expansion and cultivation that introduced foreign and invasive species into the continent, or through the exploitation of racialized trade and labour. They perceived the land, and the Indigenous communities who have lived with the land for centuries, are through a colonial lens that fostered binaries such as sin versus purity, demonic versus holy, men versus women, and wild versus civilized, etc. These binaries became an integral part of settlers’ collective identity. It is imperative to note here that colonizers, depending on the countries they come from, also brought with them different religions and as they settled, which have also fractured into their

own sects: Spanish and French colonizers preached Catholicism<sup>18</sup>, while English colonizers promoted other versions of Christianity (Anglican, Puritans, Protestants, Methodists, etc.).

These religious ideals have bled not only into manifest destiny but also into conservative beliefs held firm by many white settlers and arrivants until now. The most common criticisms against constructs of nature within Christianity, Catholicism, or related sects is the “dualistic” paradigm that distinguishes and separates “nature” from “society” (Binde 15). Western interpretations of the Bible’s text have compounded these distinctions, especially when aspects of capitalism and industrial viewpoints are integrated into spiritual paradigms about nature (Escobar qtd. in Binde 15). As a result, the separation of mind and matter<sup>19</sup> is recurrently the frame through which Biblical text is interpreted. As this separation is subsumed into a national identity, it construes direct and indirect encounters with the environment as figuratively encountering the almighty “God,” and creates a hierarchical distinction over who has access to this religious salvation.

Consider Bliss Carman’s<sup>20</sup> “Vestigia” in *Open Wide a Wilderness*. It is a five-stanza poem with a quintain rhyme scheme. Unabashedly romantic, the persona walks through the “woods untamed” and experiences encounters with a “God” as movements occur in his pathway. It appears that he has a religious ecstasy as he contemplates how every single occurrence in the wild represent his God, for example “His voice upon the air” and “his footprint in the sod.” The persona even believes that the untamed woods have become more than mere place:

And even as I marvelled how  
God gives us Heaven here and now,  
In a stir of wind that hardly shook  
The poplar leaves beside the brook –

His hand was light upon my brow (82)

What that encounter makes the persona realize, upon returning to the world with a “quickenings start,” is that God was within his heart. The poem demonstrates a religious version of pantheism, where after projecting God’s presence unto the wilderness, the persona actually comprehends how these encounters may have been anthropocentric after all. Perhaps it is mind-body dualism too, since he appears to tidily rationalize the religious ecstasy as something more of a feeling and embodiment than a true material moment. Also in *Open Wide a Wilderness*, Frederick G. Scott’s<sup>21</sup> “The Unnamed Lake” describes the lake as it changes throughout the season. It is depicted as being isolated, “where no man ever trod” and that its music is filled with the silences of God. The lake is mystical, and the pathway towards it is treacherous (“half down the mountainside”), which adds to its exoticization (92). The persona’s comment that they passed the lake in silence and left it without a name, denotes that the wild in nature becomes sensical when it is attributed to their God.

In Hart Crane’s<sup>22</sup> “To Brooklyn Bridge” in *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, the use of apostrophe in this poem addresses the Brooklyn Bridge as if it is a living, breathing matter. As a part of a longer poem (“The Bridge”), this portion shows the persona romanticizing the way the bridge has been built. Though there are times when the persona appears conflicted about symbolisms of the bridge (“*building high / Over the chained bay waters Liberty—*“ versus “*All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn / Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.*”), the bridge’s structure is interpreted in the following lines:

*O Sleepless as the river under thee,  
Vaulting the sea, the prairies’ dreaming sod,  
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend*



*And of the curveship lend a myth to God. (64)*

Here, the Brooklyn Bridge is a pathway towards God, or a connection with “us lowliest” and the heavens where God is. It appears here that the persona is attempting to comport his conflicted feelings about the towering bridge with his perceptions of how to justify its creation and function<sup>23</sup>. This ecopoem engages with the dominant trope by interpreting the symbolic function of an infrastructure as a step closer to God. Meanwhile, in Robinson Jeffers’ “Shine, Perishing Republic,” also in *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, the metaphor of America as a fruit decaying from “vulgarity,” “empire,” and “corruption” is the strongest imagery. The poem takes on a didactic rhetoric when the persona lectures children to “keep their distance from the / thickening centre; corruption / Never has been so compulsory, when the cities lie at the monster’s feet there / are left the mountains.” These lines express the desire to “guide” or enforce a morally upright pathway for the children through God. It is interesting to note that in this poem, the persona first addresses “children” in the second to the last stanza, but then reverts to “boys” in the last few lines:

And boys, be in nothing so moderate as in love of man, a clever servant,  
insufferable master.

There is the trap that catches noblest spirits, that caught – they say – God,  
when he walked on earth. (42)

The centering of young “boys” to uphold the love of man as clever servant and insufferable masters pinpoints to the gender binaries prevalent in the dualistic Western interpretations of the Bible. The persona also insists on these young boys to be “insufferable”—maintaining the highest conduct of purity and morality in order for them to follow in the path of the holy. Most importantly, the separation of heaven and earth is also stressed in the last two lines; that the land,

nature in particular, is symbolic of mortal corruption. To ascend into salvation, one has to resist temptations that have compromised even the “noblest spirits” (42). In this poem, the mind (and the spirit) can transcend the matter (and the body). Anything material on land is but distraction from the holiness that is critical to the national identity.

When it comes to this specific trope, the promise of salvation brought and spread by the early white settlers has permeated the national identity, influenced the treatment of nature in ecopoems within the anthologies, and spread throughout the settlement and expansion of the colonial empire. Given these points, this trope has also subscribed to problematic dualistic binaries that are, at times, apparent in ecopoems within the anthologies. It becomes clear that attributing nature as a symbolic means to attain religious salvation or to experience God is a centripetal image throughout early North American ecopoetry, and in the literatures of its postcolonial countries and colonized territories. This trope has galvanized many earlier representations of nature in the canon of ecopoetry and has become a critical tradition that is still practiced in nature writing.

### **North America Responds to Climate Change**

When ecological change occurs, we are challenged to somehow respond to make sense of it. Don McKay suggests that “[p]lace alters its sense according to the perspective of the viewer, who might be a recent immigrant, someone whose connections to an outpost go back to the eighteenth century, or a native person who grew up on a reservation” (23), which pertains to how our collective identities, and movements away/toward space create new perceptions of environments we encounter. As the twentieth century dawned and new technologies allowed poets to rethink their interpretations and understandings of nature (as well as reimagine their relationships with

it), some binaries have been disputed organically, while some flourished. Due to events that began at the dawn of the 1900s (e.g. the Industrial revolution, the World Wars, Wars in the Pacific, the environmentalisms of the 1960s, the energy crisis, etc.), there arose a new level of urgency that poets and scientists alike had not yet faced before: climate change.

According to Hass, climate change, fostered by the new level of crises that was fast approaching or has not yet been reached, influenced the way poets imagined and responded to nature (lxi). Significantly, in my analysis of select ecopoems, I have observed a deeper and more comprehensive engagement with the environment through what Street in “The Roots of It” professes as a “paradigm shift:”

... the apprehension of real biological selves (as opposed to fantasy selves inhabiting this planet along with us, a mix of negative capability and empathy expressed with the cadence, imaginary, and wit to make it visceral, so that it lodges in our neural systems and cultivates the environmental imagination that is analogue to the crucial biodiversity of the rainforests and our intestines. (xxxviii)

Street has a point: the paradigm shift evoked a stark binary dividing ecopoetry’s environmental imagination in the twentieth century into either “negative capability” or “empathy.” As energies shifted towards an alternative future, Hass recounts that environmental journalist Bill McKibben claimed in *The End of Nature* that “insofar as ‘nature’ meant those parts of the world not essentially affected by human activity, nature was over” (lx). Note that McKibben’s statement effectively dematerializes ruined and polluted places, since it does promote a mindset of living alternatively by returning to the wild or imagining freedom from the constraints of our civilized lives, and that climate change can be reversed. The concept of ecology became a method of restoration and sustainability—an attempt to salvage what may be salvageable. Anand validates

this point by indicating how ecologists have accepted that ecosystems will *never* be reinstated exactly the way they were, and that the goal should move towards improving ecosystem functionality (productivity, stability, and resilience) (24). Yet, there is the danger that restoration becomes an urgent bid to create what is aesthetic and appreciable, not functional.

In a sense, the critical eye on place has become symbolic and personal, either inspiring affection or disgust. In *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, Hass describes that there is a positive outcome to this critical eye, and that there is a new world to look at founded on change: "... not the quick chemical change of fire perhaps, but a powerful, directionless, hungry, theatrical, terrifying, beautiful, and incessant play of the energies of transformation" (xliv). Conversely, Anand avows that the ability to "restore" or "regreen" is dependent on understanding "evolutionary pathways, spatial ecologies, imagined realities and complex causal relationships in which our human identity is affected by our relationship to the environment" (26). These two statements offer a median to the tensions present in place-based discourse and a hopeful possibility for the future of ecopoetry. As the North American continent changes into astounding and frightening images of climate collapse in our lifetimes, then attachments to place and the imaginations spurred by these attachments are pushed away from their boundaries. In this trope of how ecopoems in the anthology respond to the rapidly changing North American material place, the clear responses are often personal and deeply emotional—perhaps a sense of grieving.

Anne Marie Macari's<sup>24</sup> "Migration South" in *The Ecopoetry Anthology* responds to the changing migratory patterns with humility and helplessness. In front of the river, one early morning, the persona notices the species that persist in their movements while she comprehends her exhaustion after walking and hiking all day. She proceeds to notice all living creatures that surround her tent and asks:

and who was I to question them?

Who was I with my binoculars and books? (390)

After, she thinks about how infallible she is compared to everything else that was surrounding her: “but a frightened / creature of the north, // out of her habitat, no feeble quills on my back/ no gliding from the tree, // just the same falling and falling again, startled” (391). The humility here is expressed through a direct comparison of humans with the more-than-human animals within the forest. The persona is astounded by the life that surrounds her and she appreciates how she does not have the same evolutionary features and skills that have been developed by those who are meant to live in the wilderness. Subsequently, the persona is helpless—she does not have “feeble quills,” cannot “glide from the tree,” and does not have “feathers” on her skin.

Dehumanization—when humans are represented as more-than-human species or bear characteristics similar to theirs—is exhibited here by describing the persona with animal-like survival features. Even at the end of the ecopoem where the persona describes an unknown creature trapped “in the peaked roof, frantic for release” (391), it also points back to how the persona feels trapped at that moment in the woods. She accepts her vulnerability among more-than-human species and begins to empathize with the creatures surrounding her. Place in this ecopoem allows the human being to contemplate her susceptibility to the life that is surrounding her in the wilderness.

Alanna F. Bondar’s<sup>25</sup> “What in the Tall Trees? Stacks Made for Undoing & Leaves the Shape of Reaching” in *Regreen* also registers a deeply personal and emotional response as the prose poem descends into an observation of the Amazonian jungle. Nature and culture mix as the persona details her fear upon encountering fire ants and how their bites “from fire go down / first

stick of wood, first flame, first love and lost –” to how these sum up her tethered emotions to an estranged individual. These same emotions intervene with her experience of the Quechuan forest, specifically the faces and the places she craves for in Sudbury. She then ruminates about the life she has left in Ontario, and how that contrasts with her experiences in the jungle—like how the leaf-cutters move silently in a line that is reminiscent of “uncle mike’s folded and stacked grocery bags in the basement” (39). Anthropocentrism punctuates almost every other sentence, with the jungle species becoming a representation of one person or another from “thousands of kilometers away” (39). In the last stanza, the persona desires to “stumble into the caverns of fire ants” and morph into something that is “carrying tiny green leaves on my back.” This transformation allows a pathway from the jungle onto the forests of Northern Ontario, where everything strange becomes mundane and the untranslatable becomes legible. Craving the familiar, she wonders about the *palma real*, a towering tree with palm leaves scattering and covering the view of the sky. The poem ends with the sentence, “For us to make it undone is to really / really / really want the sky” (40). Bondar’s ecopoem weaves thoughts about what the persona considers home (Sudbury, Ontario) and unfamiliar space (Quechuan jungle), but with an emphasis on human desire and vulnerabilities when confronted with the unknown and unfamiliar. In this case, the jungles become an opportunity to personally reflect on how the persona navigates the sharp contrasts of her reality and what she is remembering. That said, Bondar is meticulous about not condemning each place she describes; rather, the poem is aware of its interpretation of the environment and constructs its point-of-view with self-reflexivity.

More often than not, disgust as an emotional response to ruination of place signifies Romantic ideals or a valorisation of place ideals that are supportive of the national identity. This disgust erases the histories of pollution and degradation that have ruined particular places more

than some. Places of ruination are sites of inquiry and provocation that, with a critical eye, are usually evidence of colonial, neoliberal, and capitalistic debris that continue solidifying metanarratives of national identity. For example, D.A. Powell's<sup>26</sup> "republic" in *The Ecopoetry Anthology* describes a land that industry and agriculture have taken over, creating the "land into a production" (428). The poem documents these productions and their results—machinery that has leveled the land and created "monochromatic and mechanized" suburban areas—and how this mentality of production and sanitization has eradicated a lot of societal issues like unsavory lands and sicknesses (e.g. typhoid and yellow fever). Yet, what has been vanquished has been replaced by chronic illnesses like dyspepsia, arthritis, heart disease, etc. Further, the persona frankly admonishes that dead bodies will return to the land—not the land that has been tamed and cultivated for aesthetics, but to what is hidden underneath: "enriched with sewer sludge and urea / to green against eternity of green" (429). At this time, the poem exercises caution, stating that:

I know I should be mindful of dangerous analogy:

the pig is only the pig

and we aren't merely the wide-open field

flattened to a space resembling nothing. (429)

In this stanza, the persona accepts that his previous musings are pessimistic narratives of how place has changed: from the untouched wilderness, it has become an engine for production and civilization that is to sustain human living and comfort. For the persona, it is a "doubleness" (428) or a duplicity to hide problems rather than create solutions that do not devolve into degrading lands and bodies of water. The poem closes with the persona asking, "you want me to tell you the marvels of invention? that we persevere / that the time of flourishing is at hand?" (429), and instead of answering, he searches for his notebook where he has started scribbling:

“the smell of droppings and that narrow country road ...” It appears that he has returned to daydreaming about “the country,” and perhaps also acknowledges his complicity in this “doubleness” as he writes about how the space was than what it is now (429).

Similarly, in *Open Wide a Wilderness*, Irving Layton’s<sup>27</sup> “Lake Selby” presents disgust with ironic “doubleness” of what the lake represented back in the 1900s: in the morning, the lake is slimy and weedy, but at night, it becomes a sanctuary for the townspeople. It is where they smoke their pipes, sit, and stare at the lake in silence, watching the moon reflected on its surface. The persona declares that the lake is definitely not polluted “since no germ would wish / to be found dead in it” (159), and admits that his water-loving son refuses to swim in it. There is almost an awe to the poem’s tone when its imagery shifts to the summering townspeople who *enjoy* swimming in the water for hours and then find solace on the lake’s banks at night. Still, there is the unvoiced insinuation in the poem of localism versus tourism—the locals who live by the lake all year do not swim in it because they are more familiar with how dirty it is, versus the tourists who come and go without intimate knowledge of how compromised the water is. The disgust at the lake’s ruination—as a body of water overrun with dirt and slime, then occupied by tourists—also becomes a disgust at the strangers who come and go without care. Perhaps it is also envy of how lackadaisical they are about where they are swimming in that implies the persona is bitter about their presence because they are still *able* to enjoy the lake without care, while the locals cannot anymore.

These dominant tropes of ecopoetry stem from the assertion of what idealized place is for a national identity and, as a result, has become entrenched in the consciousness, actions, and activities of the monolithic culture. The tropes analysed in this essay are by no means the only tropes present that support national identities in other nation-based ecopoetry and literary



anthologies. Clearly, the function of anthologies in legitimizing a canon becomes the end goal, to which Don Mckay says that the idea of a canon is inevitable when “when institution sets itself too firmly among literary phenomena” (28). At the same time, he recognises that the canon does not seem appropriate to define the trajectory of nature poetries. Maybe it is not, and maybe it is. What these metanarratives of a national identity have shown through the poetic verse is that it is so easy to seep our collective identities into our writings, the choices and decisions we make, and into our anthologies. Retooling place-based ecopoetry anthologies or nation-based literary anthologies may be a question of collaboration among editors and publishers who recognize that compiling nature poems based on who wrote them and what they are writing about can reinforce the very same systems many ecocritics and creative writers are pushing against or are moving away from. In a migrant reading practice, these tropes are recognized because of their space in the ecopoetry canon, but they are deliberately and critically regarded since they have dominated and polarized ecopoetry into a canon perceived as purely Romantic, religious, or even frivolous. What a migrant reading practice makes certain at this point is that these tropes exist but they are fraught and precarious, despite the fact that these tropes are still influential and will continue to be so as ecopoets and ecocritics persist in discovering the limitations and limitlessness of ecopoetry.

Conversely, all the anthologies still cling to the motivation of finding and promoting hope within the pages. Fisher-Wirth poignantly mentions that co-editing *The Ecopoetry Anthology* has been a “labor of love against despair” (xxxv). I identify with that sentiment; I too had an unquenchable hunger for optimism when I was editing *Sustaining the Archipelago*. It almost feels like live sparks from my chest to my throat when I have the honour of reading compelling poems. I believe this core emotion of hope also allows me to hope for the future of place-based

ecopoetry anthologies, specifically in the form of the counternarratives within them. Thus, this chapter's next section identifies counternarratives that are imparted by the ecopoems within these three anthologies.

### **Counternarratives in Select Ecopoems**

Before we transitioned to freshwater in Las Piñas, people in our neighbouring subdivisions expressed their excitement with this forthcoming change. Mang and Pang started complaining about how saltwater erodes faucets quicker than freshwater would and how our sink had to either be repaired or replaced yearly because of the acidity. I felt sad then when the transition happened, since it meant the end of rainwater baths and taking turns to pump water out of the ground. The city started to change drastically, too: part of the Manila Bay area in our city was reclaimed into a highway, the "Coastal Road," to provide easier access to cities and provinces outside of Manila. Soon, they built malls. Lots of them. Coastal Road decimated Seaside restaurants and the fishing industry, and in turn disrupted the salt's quality. It was not unusual for a fisherman to also be a salt-maker, since during the monsoon seasons the salt beds would become fishponds. However, with the reclamation, these fishermen could not go out to sea as easily anymore due to the invasive reclamation, so it was more difficult to continue producing the highest quality of salts. Further, the malls were being built on top of previous salt beds and coastal lines as part of the reclamation project, which immediately overwhelmed the sewage systems. There was little to no urban planning to accommodate the city's dream expansion. Our neighbourhood, which had never flooded before, began to experience neck-deep waters.

It is strange to return to my childhood neighbourhood, let alone to hear about the pervasive floods in our subdivision. Similar to what I have recounted in Chapter 2, I experienced

a disconnect from the city of my childhood when I last returned. The images I had in my mind's eye were different to what was in front of me: there were malls (and junior malls) two blocks away from each other and there is a strip mall called "Seaside" by the Mall of Asia (known to be the fourteenth largest mall in the world) that has fresh seafood in stalls by bigger restaurants, but it sits on a concrete side street instead of on the sea. Even my childhood home, now our ancestral house as both our parents have passed away, seemed more dilapidated and darker. The foliage of banana and malunggay trees that used to neatly occupy the vacant lots surrounding our house grew wild, unrestrained; I could barely walk through the area without worrying about snakes or broken beer bottles. The last time I dared to enter the vacant lot from our backyard, or at least tried, I stood by the rusting gate facing walls of banana trees, looked for a pathway, thought about making a pathway, and turned around to close the gate behind me.

Filipino American poet Luisa A. Igloria<sup>28</sup> writes about how nostalgia is akin to being stranded on a remote island in "Ziggurats there aren't here, my Sweethearts—" in *The Ecopoetry Anthology*:

*Queridas*, why is an overcast day naturally  
perfect for nostalgia? I'm stranded as usual  
on an island of incidentals, wanting forgiveness for  
not having arrived at a less stammering representation of  
myself, (342)

These lines remind me that the experience of diaspora is sometimes articulated through a freeze in time-space: I have never left, but I do not live there anymore. I have arrived, but I still do not belong here. I felt that striking jolt of longing when I faced the overrun backyard. Who could chop down the trees for a clearing if Pang was already gone? What have I missed and will miss if

I leave again? When I returned to Canada in 2019, I did not miss my city with ferociousness anymore. Most importantly, *I* have changed and that had changed how I thought of myself as part of my native country.

There are multiple methods to discover counternarratives within the metanarratives of national identity or within nation- and place-based ecopoetry anthologies. However, it is to Uslander that I return to once more when thinking about this part of a migrant reading practice I am operationalizing in this chapter. I harken back to my early months in Canada when I was struggling to reconcile the life I had left behind and the reality I was facing in front of me, and I distinctly remember thinking about the multiple identities we occupy as persons. Uslander avows that these multiple identities are organized hierarchically and become salient in different situations, and that identity as a cognitive schema pertains to the expectations for behaviour that we have for ourself as a person in a particular role, and the way this role is enacted in the collective identity (45-46). Afterwards, he proposes that divergence from the collective's actions plays a crucial role in the process of fragmenting that same collective identity (244). Consequently, I find that counternarratives can be identified in the way ecopoetry has been innovating through form and language. These innovations are subtle in ecopoetry anthologies that are voluminous and steadfast in their centripetal editorial metanarratives, but they are there. Usually, I find these ecopoems as compelling and striking, perhaps so because they speak to me as a person of colour and a migrant; however, it is also more than that—it is a cognitive dissonance that tells my gut that this poem has something *else* to say.

That said, analysis cannot be based on gut feeling alone (or maybe it could). Take for example Igloria's poem. It distinctly resists the framing of a national identity by peppering her description of the prairies with what she longs for—stir-fried noodles (pancit), milkfish in sour

broth (sinigang), sticky rice, raw jicama (in Filipino, singkamas) slices in vinegar and pepper flakes. The nostalgia pulses in her like a “raw hunger” that she does not understand but knows is not an elegy for what is being longed for. She likens the feeling to seeing someone feed the stray animals by the lake every day with a bag of crumbs because she shares the longing of familiar companionship with that person. In the poem, the persona is not alone in the wilderness, nor is she offering religious salvation or responding emotionally towards where she is. It is a comprehension of the unsteadiness of her reality—a gentle acceptance of what she longs for versus what space she occupies—that spurs her emotions. At the poem’s mid-point, she exalts, “I wanted to give you / keepsakes that won’t tarnish” from the homes they have tried to make, and that encapsulates the effect of movement on the relations with place (342). The spaces she has encountered are celebrated, cherished, but they are not owned. Sentiment ties her heart to the tiny objects that signify home; yet she is not tethered to their existence. Change visibly occurs and, rather than upsetting the persona, she relishes in it.

Movements, as I have mentioned in the introduction, affect place and one’s perception of place; in short, movements in select ecopoems deterritorialize these place-based ecopoetry anthologies because they provide a varied and radical perception of what is construed as “one true place” or a singular national identity. If so, these ecopoems facilitate reckonings about one’s national identity by chronicling counternarratives that reveal the unsteadiness of dominant tropes in ecopoetry, and, ultimately, metanarratives of a national identity. The ecopoetry anthologies in this chapter, suffice to say, have multiple counternarratives. There are those like Igloria’s that are oriented on how she functions in her space as a diasporic figure, but there are those with a colonial mindset that subscribe to the framing of the metanarrative of a national identity. With that in mind, there are clear moments when nostalgia becomes powerful in a counternarrative,

especially when there is a successful attempt to humanize the individual behind harmful racist rhetoric. For this section, I am identifying the counternarratives in the ecopoems through the movements that I have identified, which are the use of form and language.

For example, Langston Hughes<sup>29</sup> who is known as the pioneering Black voice of the Harlem Renaissance, has a poem called “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” in *The Ecopoetry Anthology*. It repeats the line “My soul has grown deep like the rivers” to emphasize the ancestral lineage of a Black individual beyond the socio-historical realities before US Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s (72). Hughes, known for his poems’ musicality, experiments with the rhythm and sound of the poem—letting it flow like a river—as it talks about where the persona’s soul has been: bathing in the Euphrates; sleeping in a hut near the Congo; raising pyramids above the Nile, and listening to the Mississippi sing when Abe Lincoln went to New Orleans. The musicality of the poem and its calm meditative lines are true to Hughes’ background as a proponent of jazz poetry; it is also this movement of form *within* the poem’s form that is distinct from the conventions of Euro-American lyric poems. Without aiming for a clear form or even an established rhyming scheme, Hughes instead relies on the poem’s form and sound to counter both the connotations attached to a Black individual during that time and to the kind of poems that can be written in a dominantly Euro-American poetic canon. Hughes subtly creates a counternarrative with his persona’s musings and assertions without much sentiment.

With similar reverence for the power of movement to fragment, Lorna Dee Cervantes<sup>30</sup> “Freeway 280” in *The Ecopoetry Anthology* narrates the freeway as a “raised scar” built to conceal the community below it and destroy the vegetation that was once inhabiting that area. The persona sees the vegetation begin to reoccupy the area (“new grasses sprout, / wild mustard remembers, old gardens / come back stronger than they were,”), and the community (“Viejitas

come here with paper bags to gather greens.”) also returning to forage among what is growing. Eventually, the persona thinks about escaping that area under the freeway and her community with a desire to climb over the fence that is designed to “have kept me out” to find a place without the sun, but she thinks about what she is looking for—*en los campos extraños de esta ciudad* (“in the strange fields of this city”), she will find herself mown under, dead or like a seed that will flourish again (207). Cervantes’ counternarrative of estrangement from the persona’s community and her desire to escape and create experiences elsewhere is compounded by the infrastructure designed and built to marginalize space. Space, in North America, is often arranged to benefit white affluent communities and suburbs over immigrant ones. Racialized and marginalized spaces are built on top of or over to hide them from plain view or are sacrificed for the growing economy. As Sherene Razack reminds:

In the same way that spaces appear to develop organically, so too the inhabitants of spaces seem to belong to them. If the slum or the housing project has a disproportionate number of Black or Aboriginal people, it is thought to be simply because people lack the education and training to obtain the jobs, and thus the income, that would enable them to live in a wealthy suburb. Perhaps, we often reason, poor districts are simply occupied by recently arrived immigrants who will, in time, move up to more affluent spaces. (8)

Space is a social product, but it can also be a resistance to the dematerialisation of place.

Metanarratives of national identity utilize symbolic and material processes together to produce, what Razack illustrates, respectable and abjected bodies (8-9). Infrastructure further reinforces these identities to keep them within the space they are intended for. That said, these spaces are often thriving with vibrant communities that depend on one another to persist despite the odds. Cervantes’ ecopoem shows how her own identity formation exists despite being “mown under,”

and how she understands that what she is looking for about herself has always been within the space she belongs to.

Joy Kogawa's<sup>31</sup> "Rain Day in Beacon Hill" in *Open Wide a Wilderness* contrasts with Cervantes' ecopoem. It is a counternarrative of newly built suburbs and shopping malls, and how these all will crumble down with the silent frogs that dive in drying slough; beaver gnawing trees; snapping turtles; mud puppies, and all the microscopic water life that exists but is invisible to the lovely façade of a suburb. Even as the infrastructures spread and take over the space, the persona says that all these visible and invisible creatures "disappear down the roadside drainage / as if they had never been" (241). These lines indicate that no matter how much concrete is built over ecosystems for another pristine housing area, there persists these living more-than-human bodies that are hidden but cannot be rid of by sanitization and construction. The drainage symbolizes the inclusion and exclusion of what can be visible in a suburb, and how these that are pushed into the drainage are ominously real even if one cannot see them: they exist beneath us and will continue to do so, shattering the purview of suburban cleanliness and comfort. Likewise, Rita Wong's<sup>32</sup> "Resilience, Impure, Forms" in *Regreen* also demonstrate the monochromatic aesthetic of a neighbourhood and how "people become very similar in terms of their purchase / decision" in a designated space (76). The persona fragments this domestic monotony by describing what she does instead—that she touches earth, she gets swept and swooshed away in a virtual flood, she wields torches, sings of panda food and complex mats, and many others. The persona asserts her own counternarrative by listing all that she desires and craves outside of the space she lives in. She mentions direct connections with the environment, "how breath seeks tree," the ducks, geese, and grateful swallows; she ends the poem with the word "peace." For the persona, peace is found away from the "electric monoverse" and in what she chooses to



commune with. She may be breaking away from the metanarrative, but she is not alone—she assumes companionship from the more-than-human species she lists (77). Also, rather than using these as metaphors for peace or a peaceful existence outside of technology, she drops the word without any pretense. Is it *peace* like a friendly greeting or *peace* as a description of the space? Maybe it does not matter and what matters here is that the persona creates her own identity away from what the collective demands of her.

Another manner in which the metanarrative of national identity is addressed in nation- and place-based ecopoetry anthologies with counternarratives is through syncretism of the colonial tongue. As Filipina writer Edith Tiempo expresses, the problem of language for colonized nations has been the incongruity between native substance and the foreign medium (Barretto-Chow 388). It is often that the foreign medium, most probably the colonial tongue, gets in the way of a clear utterance. Yet, that does not stop the innovations in using the language. Syncretism, E. San Juan says, is using both abrogation and appropriation of the alien (this case: colonial) tongue to invent hybrid “interlanguages” that become adept at expressing what cannot be fully expressed in, say, English (“Philippine” 75). San Juan asserts that for those whose choice is to write in the colonial tongue, it is not a genuine free choice because of the limitedness of literacy and translation/translatability. In the dominantly English-consuming publishing industry, there is limited access to resources to consider such as channels of publication, audience, rewards, etc. Choosing to syncretize English, which is the most evident form in the ecopoetry anthologies, is more than an aesthetic decision. He argues that it is a political *and* ethical one (“Philippine” 76). If the inability to fully articulate in English leads to isolation and incompleteness, then syncretism creates a “linguistics of contact” (Barreto-Chow 390). This method eliminates the need to assert a “normative vision of a unified and homogenous social

world” and foregrounds the “relationality of social differentiation” (Mary Louise Pratt 59 qtd. in San Juan, *Racism* 15). It is a method that decentres the monolithic culture that is enforced through the use of English (especially in North America and in previously colonized nations) and instead pinpoints the possibilities of linguistic interactions that constitute relationality and differences between the dominant and marginalized communities. This movement in an ecopoem allows a heterogenous experience of language, culture, and environment that does not aim to exclude but invites community. As an editor of a nation-based anthology myself, I found the most joy in discovering words and phrases that are beyond my own fluencies. When I type a phrase to translate online, I feel that I am stepping into a door that was never opened to me before, and that I am challenging myself to be unafraid of what is unknown to my functional linguistic capabilities.

Importantly, a linguistics of contact opens up multiple ways of interpreting the environment. It actively deviates from the metanarrative of a national identity by thinking about how space is constructed and reconstructed by varying counternarratives that wholly constitute its movements, changes, progression, and ruinations. When self-reflexive and cognizant of its relationality with space, syncretism becomes a highly potent manner to address, through a linguistics of contact, the dominantly Anglophone ecopoetry collectives.

Take for example Lois Beardslee’s<sup>33</sup> “Wawaskawanmiinan” in *The Ecopoetry Anthology*. Beardslee utilizes sharp syncretism by interspersing parts of her native Ojibwa language with English in a conversational manner. The persona narrates a moment of picking fruit at the end of summer—apples or berries, the reader is not privy to what it is, except to the experience that the persona shares. She has clear instructions and options for them to take as they gather the fruits in a plastic strainer: “A few here. A few there. Leave some for the birds. Leave some for the /

bunnies, come springtime” (163), indicating the conversations that take place during that moment. There are many ways that they can use the fruits, such as drying them on the top of the woodstove or storing them in a birch bark cylinder with a tight lid. Then, the persona shifts and suggests that the fruits can be mixed with ozawadzhbig if one gets a sore throat, or mashkagiinabishado if one gets a cold from ice skating. These terms, just as the title, are not meant to be translated. The persona offers a snippet of her life to the reader, a tentative invitation, without leaving the door wide open. We understand what she is saying but yield that the nuance is not ours to own. Yet, the reader is not left wanting more. We comprehend that she understands the space more intimately and is leading the way and narrating the stories, so that is enough.

Then, the persona shifts the tone and says, “Maybe sing / that same song this winter, when we drink that tea” (163). Again, it is another tentative invite. The use of “we” (and the only translatable portion of the Ojibwe words in the poem: Giinawind, or “we”) subverts the narrative here to vagueness: Who is being invited? Who is being narrated to? Who is the experience shared with? These are important queries that are enabled by the counternarrative happening through syncretism in this ecopoem; therefore, the linguistics of contact challenges the encompassing dominion of the colonial tongue and fosters a sense of heterogeneous experiences—we might know what the persona is talking about, but that is not our experience. It is hers, on her own terms, and because it is hers, she chooses who she invites to share the experience intimately with. Dean Rader in “When Form Invents Function: Contemporary American Indian Prose Poetry” discusses this kind of syncretism, perceiving that “[w]hat Native poets ask of genre is often linked to what they ask of language. For centuries, language and its power to transform, record, activate, and animate has been one of Native America’s most

powerful weapons.” He continues to say: “[a]lso located in Native poetry is an ontology of orality, which connects even the most contemporary, most postmodern Native poetry to its incantatory roots” (85). An important point made here is the “ontology of orality” that is in Beardslee’s poem. It is a juxtaposition of narration and conversation, striking in how it reshapes a familiar experience into something new.

Fred Wah’s<sup>34</sup> “Don’t Cut me Down” in *Open Wide a Wilderness* creates a linguistics of contact through a sarcastic rebuttal of Joyce Kilmer’s (in)famous poem about a tree. In Wah’s ecopoem, an aggressive colloquial style dominates as the persona declares, “... You don’t know what a / fuckin tree is.” He elaborates on this statement, explaining that trees are only good for lumber and not “bein sumpin else,” and that metaphorizing what trees are assumes that people know what “the rest of us” go through. The “us” in the poem corresponds to the community that speaks the way the words are spelled phonetically. Yet, as expressed by Wah, these are the people who know what trees can do and cannot do. For instance, they can “bust yer back on em” or “break yer ass so fast / ya wouldn’t even wanna look at a / goddamned tree let alone write about / em.” The persona punctuates this seeming anger with the last two lines: “Then ya’d know what a tree wuz, / steda yappin about it” (278).

It is clear here that the linguistics of contact is fostering relationality with some working-class communities and perhaps imagining how they would respond to such an obsession over a metaphor of a tree that they live off of and die from. Indeed, the phonetic spelling of colloquial English interrogates the acceptable institutional conformity of the colonial language: English is not only colonial, but it is also elitist. It excludes the communities that co-exist with the “educated” but will perhaps never be invited into the same conversation or will never get the opportunity to attend university; even worse, this kind of English may exclude all other forms of

Englishes as a valid way to write and communicate, as it has become the “national” language of North America. Wah’s phonetic syncretism reminds that a counternarrative of syncretism signals that these stories are palpable in the same time-space as when these ecopoems occur, and that who or what we are writing for as “educated” people mean that we need to actively be self-reflexive as to who we include and exclude in the language we choose to use.

In a similar manner, Rita Wong’s “Return” in *Regreen* explores how established cities brim with languages of the ancestors as resistance to Anglophone expression and industrial takeover. The first two lines, “*the city paved over with ~~ement~~ English cracks open, / stubborn Halq’eméylem springs up*” (79), shows the persistence of “the languages of this land.” Wong also employs a syncretism of the methodology commonly employed in institutional publications, which is italicizing the foreign language. English is italicized and Indigenous languages are not, indicating that they are the norm of communication within this space. These languages buried under the metaphorical ~~ement~~ are apparently waiting to grow, in and around the infrastructures that have taken over ancestral lands and those that have survived—like supermarkets and trees. Again, an irony there in the poem: supermarkets carry what used to be collected from trees and the land and are packaged to be sold. The last three lines expound on the many languages that elude the people in the city:

*more to tree & bracken & cucumber & oak & raven than  
meets the stiff I  
root & stomach & seed speak glottal, gut & gift (79)*

The poem flows from italicizing the English phrases, then after the “*stiff I*” becomes unitalicized. This can express a glottal stop on the material page, and that after the “*I*” comes a pause that brings together a comprehension of where the languages of the land are: they are seeding within,

as a gift. Wong's poem is a counternarrative of syncretism that subverts Anglophone English as the dominant language of communication. The italicization signals a difference, or something foreign. It is a striking and poignant reminder that determining and insisting that Anglophone English as an integral part of national identity is also a disavowal of how the collective truly communicates, and that this focus on dominant Anglophone communication erases the depth of conversations that are occurring at the same time. Equally, poems by bill bissett ("othr animals toys" in *Open Wide a Wilderness*), a.rawlings ("Shock, Splint" in *Regreen*), and even Lorna Dee Cervantes' "Freeway 280" apply similar movements of syncretism as discussed above in their counternarratives, arguing that Anglophone English cannot accurately engage with the identities that endure outside of the national identity.

In my analysis of the centrifugal movements of the ecopoems from the three anthologies, the counternarratives create spaces of inquiry into the metanarratives of national identity. I think about how these counternarratives are integral to a migrant reading practice, for they reveal the unsteadiness of a national identity. By analysing what select ecopoems within the nation- and place-based ecopoetry anthologies centrifugally yield, I think about how shaky the foundation of a national identity is; perhaps it is even not real. Interestingly, by focusing on the counternarratives of ecopoetry through the movements of form and language, the three ecopoetry anthologies in this chapter begin to take on a new element, which is that they all somehow interrogate the metanarrative of a national identity and, unintentionally, investigate its precarity. They have movements of form and language within their compilations that centrifugally suggest multiplicities of a seemingly cohesive national identity.

**We Are Not Really Alone, or Is There a Future for Place-Based Ecopoetry Anthologies?**

I often think about Heise's quote in *A Sense of Place and a Sense of Planet* about immigrants' identities that are beyond North America and sustain ties to several continents. I now ponder about this quote with the epigraph I included at the start of this chapter. If Heise thinks about sustaining connections despite the movements, Sirène Harb describes how brokenness and fragmentation link poems with themes of migrancy in Palestinian-American Suheir Hammad's collection. Heise interrogates the centering of only one identity (particularly North American) when there are multiple, while Harb suggests breaking against national identities as a form of rebellion. The migrant reading practice in this chapter shows how the ecopoems' counternarratives gravitate among these two ideas: the ties made within and beyond continents are honoured, but there are movements that are forms of rebellion against the metanarrative of a national identity. When conversations are centred in counternarratives, the metanarrative of a national identity—and the idea of a nation—is scrutinized. Moreover, I realize that the dominant tropes of ecopoetry stemming from the metanarrative of a national identity are fraught and unstable. A migrant reading practice recognizes the importance of these tropes, but is interested in the innovations in ecopoetry as poets contemplate on the changing climate in multiple radical ways. Furthermore, despite the anthologies' editorial metanarratives that are responsive to national identities, the three books inadvertently imply that the concepts of nation and place are constructs that have to continually be interrogated in ecopoetry *and* anthologies. As long as ecopoetry anthologies continue to be compiled, edited, and published, there will be opportunities to discover how the movements in the ecopoems surface another counternarrative that chip away at the cohesion of a national identity.

I will hedge here and say that I do think there is value to a national identity especially in a developing country, or a country that is forging its own governance after colonization,

militarization, or wars. I also think there is value in a nation- or place-based ecopoetry anthology because the intention for curating these volumes remains the same: hope. If hope is steadfast, and if we have the need to make sense of the catastrophe we are facing, then ecopoetry anthologies remind us that in the ponderously material reality of these historical moments, there is something we can always cling to, and that is a space familiar to us. Maybe it is even something we call home.

I have not returned to Las Piñas in more than two years. I vacillate between feeling surprised and devastated whenever I think about the length of time I have been away. I do feel afraid of returning and finding everything different from my last mental image of the city. Things have certainly changed: My half-sister is in the process of buying the ancestral house on White Road, and my Ate Ria tells me that they have cleared the decades-old trees out from the front garden. They have left the vacant lots the same because they were too much to deal with during the long lockdown they suffered through in Manila. Perhaps I am most afraid to come back and see my mother's ashes in the urn I purchased for her through a Facebook funeral shop. I am also scared at the prospect of leaving—again—and not knowing when I will be able to return. The city will be unrecognizable to me, and it will cease feeling like it is my hometown. It will feel like I do not belong there, anymore.

Yet, the longing persists and haunts me now more than ever. Since last summer, I have started dreaming about the Philippines, too. Sometimes just about the food (which I try to recreate with my limited skills in my kitchen), and sometimes about the seas I learned to float in. My dreams have also taken me back to Las Piñas many times, or at least to the passenger seat of our old 1970s Toyota as Pang drives through the bridge. In my dream, Pang is still alive and well while driving that old car I despised so much. I am beside him, without any seatbelts on, staring



out the window, looking at the salt bed grids and the random worker checking each pile out. He is half-naked and tanned dark brown under the morning sun, with a dark coloured t-shirt craftily wrapped around his head to protect his hair. His skin is flakey from the salt. White crystals glitter ferociously under the sun.

Pang tells me to look away if they hurt my eyes.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> My childhood nanny's name is Caridad, but I called her "Nanay" or Mom. In the Philippines and before the late 2000s, it was normal for many middle-class households to have hired help living in with them. Most of them we have grown up to know as family, and Nanay is one of them. Eventually, as I started working, I noticed that it was becoming more and more unusual to have hired help in the households—mainly because of the economic precarity from the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s. The ethical and moral reasons for having hired help were also interrogated by many people. Nanay decided to stay with us because we were the only family she had left towards the end of her life, and I wanted her to stay with us because she was my second mother. In 2009, a few months into my MA, we lost Nanay to a fatal stroke. My MA thesis was dedicated to her.

<sup>2</sup> Rice farmers in Philippine provinces wait for the siyam-siyam, which means nine days and nine nights of rains. It signals the start of the monsoon season, and the deluge softens the dry land enough for the farmers to start plowing.

<sup>3</sup> The salt-making technology in Las Piñas was introduced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and immediately hundreds of hectares of the old town was converted into salt beds. More about this history can be found in the city's website: <https://www.laspinascity.gov.ph/lifestyle/24/salt-making-industry> (accessed on 5 October 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Baranggays are the smallest unit of government that operates on a territorialized municipal level in the Philippines.

<sup>5</sup> Palaisdaan are fisheries in the Philippines that are usually for commercial use, like wild fisheries and fish farms. "Isda," the rootword of palaisdaan, means "fish" in Filipino.

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<sup>6</sup> According to Merlin Shaeffer, collective action is necessary to pursue the interests and motivations of a collective identity because it results to goods that serve the group at large—it promotes the shared interests of the group rather than just an individual (7).

<sup>7</sup> A balikbayan is often expected to either be “unchanged” or mayabang (arrogant), and such is recounted in many stories written about Filipinx diaspora such as Marcelino Agana Jr.’s *A New Yorker in Tondo*. It is a play about the return of a Filipino American to her rough neighbourhood of Tondo in Manila where she is perceived to have drastically changed for the worse—she refuses to speak Tagalog, wears designer-label clothes, and only likes classical music. In the end, she reconnects with some of her childhood friends and she reverts into this giggling and happy-go-lucky girl (as they remembered her) who rekindles her love for her former boyfriend. In Filipino culture, these narratives frame a collective identity that enforces the binary of those who stayed versus those who left—a “we” versus “them” mentality that oftentimes compromises one’s identity complicated by migrancy. For many balikbayans, the choice is clear: either you remain the same and be a part of us, or you change and become a dissenter.

<sup>8</sup> In relation to the previous point, there is the national identity that is material and bureaucratic—one that is on the individual’s birth certificate, passport/s, visa, first language—vis-à-vis the national identity that is symbolic. The symbolic feeds into the material national identity, which then utilizes the idea of place as a tool for nationalistic purposes. Heise warns against the political consequences of encouraging people to rely on a sense of place, since far too often “place awareness can be deployed in the service of political ideals ... that may not [be judged] as ideal” (47). Obviously, there are benefits to localisms and care for place, just as there are detriments to a framing that prioritizes neoliberal ownership and progress.

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<sup>9</sup> Theodore Roethke was born in Saginaw, Michigan, and grew up spending time in a greenhouse owned by his father and uncle. He studied in the University of Michigan and graduated magna cum laude, and is largely considered as one of the most accomplished and influential poets of his generation.

<sup>10</sup> I used the term “lone person” in this chapter, but I acknowledge that there is a privileging of the white cis-male’s encounters with nature that is apparent throughout the evolution of American ecopoetry, but especially before the 1960s. This privileging also subscribes to how hegemonies of national identity have been shaped, mainly, by patriarchal notions of what should be included and excluded to assure the cohesion of that national identity.

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the most well-known and beloved poet of the US, Robert Frost was born in San Francisco, California, but eventually settled in Florida for the winter and Boston, Massachusetts during his adult life. He is the only poet to receive four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry and was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 1960. His life was also known to be riddled with grief and deaths, with his parents passing quite early in Frost’s life and mental illnesses seemingly prevalent in his family.

<sup>12</sup> Robinson Jeffers is born in Pennsylvania but dedicated his writings to the central California coast. He was known as an icon of the environmental movement, he wrote poems in narrative and epic form (against traditions at that time), and campaigned against US participation in World War II.

<sup>13</sup> Adam Hood Burwell was born in Bertie Township but moved to Port Talbot, Ontario in 1818 with his family. His poem, “Talbot Road: A poem” is the first known poem about pioneer life in what was then known as Upper Canada by a Canadian. Aside from being a writer, Burwell is also a clergyman.

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<sup>14</sup> Standish O’Grady was born and raised in Ireland, before moving with his wife to Quebec. He wrote *The Emigrant*, a long narrative poem which is known to be one of the earliest books of poetry published in Canada.

<sup>15</sup> Wendell Berry was born in Henry County, Kentucky who is known for his writings and his environmental activism. He is also known as a farmer. He has won multiple awards for his writings and in 2015 became the first living writer to be inducted to the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame.

<sup>16</sup> Rhea Tregebov was born in Saskatoon, and then raised in Winnipeg. She writes fiction, poetry, and children’s books, and in 2021, she became the Chair of the National Council of the Writers Union of Canada.

<sup>17</sup> Manifest Destiny as a terminology was coined in 1845, though its permeations precede its codification. It is the idea that the US is designed by God to expand its dominion and spread its democracy and capitalism across the entire North American continent, which then spurred the expansion into Native American ancestral lands and justification to eradicate them from their homes (History.com editors, “Manifest Destiny”).

<sup>18</sup> Roman Catholicism spread in the Philippines through the arrival of Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan who planned a Spanish expedition and ended up in Limasawa Island in Cebu. He started befriending the natives by preaching the Bible’s narratives, then bartering off gold bullions to have native royalty baptized in Catholicism.

<sup>19</sup> The separation of mind and body are drawn in sharper distinction by Plato, and was later incorporated into Christian doctrine by the theologies of St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Augustine (Suutala as qtd. in Binde 16).

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<sup>20</sup> William Bliss Carman was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick. He studied and lived in the United States for most his life and was acclaimed as Canada's poet laureate later on in his life. He is also classed as a Confederation Poet in Canada.

<sup>21</sup> Born in Montreal, Quebec, Frederic G. Scott is also sometimes associated with the Confederation Poets of Canada but he is more widely known as the Poet of Laurentians. He published thirteen books of Christian and patriotic poetry, and was known as a British imperialist.

<sup>22</sup> Heart Crane is an American poet born in Ohio. He was considered a Romantic despite his writings being highly stylized and ambitious in scope. T.S. Eliot inspired a lot of his poetry, but provided a more optimistic view of modernisation.

<sup>23</sup> The Brooklyn Bridge has been hailed as a marvel of construction during the time it was built in the 1800s, and is one of the earliest examples of steel-wire suspension bridges in North America.

<sup>24</sup> Anne Marie Macari was born in Queens, New York City. She founded the Drew MFA Program for Poetry and Poetry in Translation and currently teaches there, too.

<sup>25</sup> Alanna F. Bondar, from Northern Ontario, was a poet and professor at Algoma University. She is a founding member of the Association for Literature, Environment and Culture in Canada (ALECC) and has contributed scholarly work to ecocriticism during her time.

<sup>26</sup> D.A. Powell is from Albany, Georgia and currently teaches at The University of San Francisco. He is known for his accessible yet experimental poetry techniques.

<sup>27</sup> Irving Layton was born in Romania to Romanian-Jewish parents. He immigrated with his family to Montreal, Quebec in the early 1900s. Layton was known for his disavowal of Puritanism and regarded himself as a freethinker.

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<sup>28</sup> Luisa A. Igloria was born in Baguio City, Philippines, before completing her PhD in English and Creative Writing at the University of Illinois in Chicago. She is the current Poet Laureate of Virginia (2020).

<sup>29</sup> Langston Hughes grew up in Midwestern towns and was known as not only a poet but a social activist. Early on, he innovated the literary art form of jazz poetry and is the leader of the Harlem Renaissance.

<sup>30</sup> Lorna Dee Cervantes was born in the Mission District of San Francisco, and is best known as a Chicana poet and activist. Her contributions to Chicana poetry and multiple distinctions have made some consider her as one of the best Chicana poets of today.

<sup>31</sup> Joy Kogawa was born in Vancouver, British Columbia to first-generation parents. She is a beloved poet and novelist, having been recognized as a Member of the Order of Canada and has awarded the Order of the Rising Sun by the Japanese government.

<sup>32</sup> Growing up in Calgary, Alberta, Rita Wong now resides in the unceded Coast Salish territories in Vancouver, BC. She is known as a poet and activist who explores and operationalize decolonization in her works. She teaches at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

<sup>33</sup> Lois Beardslee is a teacher, writer, and Ojibwe storyteller. She is also an artist who practices many traditional art forms such as birch bark biting, quillwork, and sweetgrass basketry.

<sup>34</sup> Fred Wah was born in Swift Current, Saskatchewan but grew up in the West Kootenays. He is a beloved figure in Canadian literature who was appointed as Canada's Parliamentary Poet Laureate and is an officer in the Order of Canada.

## Chapter 4: Counternarratives as Communities

The history of survival is written under my lids.

- Cyrus Cassells, "Down from the Houses of Magic"

Dead – did I say? There is no death, only a change of worlds.

- "Excerpts from a Speech by Chief Seattle, 1854," *trans.* Vi Hilbert

I never expected wildfires when I first arrived in Kelowna almost six years ago. I expected snow, lots of it, and rain (not as much as Vancouver though). I even expected some flooding, but not as devastating as the ones I have lived through in Manila. Yet the longer I stay here, the more hazardous this city feels.

During the time I have been writing this dissertation, Kelowna has gone through extreme and frightening weather patterns. It is ironic that the current pandemic has forced many of us to stay at home and not travel for public health safety, because even where we are has not been safe either. We experienced wildfires that made the air hazardous and the sky glow red; atmospheric rivers that washed away parts of the Coquihalla and many other critical highways in British Columbia, and the La Niña that has snowed in many parts of the province. Temperatures ranged from -30 Celsius one month to +5 the next, and even native wildlife like coyotes have started their mating season a month earlier than usual.

The wildfires last summer frightened me, so I packed all my essential documents in one bag and situated this in a corner where I could easily grab it in case of a notice of evacuation. Air we breathed in during that time also became so noxious that we were advised to stop all outdoor activities. After the weekend of the deadliest eruption of wildfires in the Valley and feeling desperate to breathe fresh air in, I drove out to the Mainland and on the smouldering Coquihalla.



The air smelled like burning rubber tires. There also was a week when tiny pieces of ash fell from the sky and settled on any surface.

When Mount Pinatubo erupted in 1991<sup>1</sup>, I was six years old. I was playing with our old stereo's knobs one minute, then was being dragged by Pang out onto our open garage after feeling a 7.8 magnitude earthquake grumble beneath the ground. A few days after, thick gray ash fell from the sky and accumulated on surfaces. This was our "dirty snow." Decades later, we would still find it in the nooks and crannies of our windowsills, gates, cars. And decades later, I would meet this dirty snow once more in another part of the world.

Ian Rosales Casocot's<sup>2</sup> "The Vanishing" in *Sustaining the Archipelago*, a poem narrating a family's evacuation during the Mount Pinatubo disaster, encapsulates a verging—the negotiation individuals undertake with themselves and their environment as they become painfully aware of the realities of living in a disaster-prone area:

How we weighed the risks of living among  
The finickiest of fires – and so, while we cry,  
What becomes fast profundity is the searing  
Knowledge of instances. How laughter can become  
Howling, and how love can quickly lead to loss. (156)

The swiftness of movements detailed in these lines as "the searing knowledge of instances" is a striking echo of my experience during the Mount Pinatubo eruption and the more recent wildfires here in the Interior. There is barely enough time to weigh death and survival when life is lived with disasters; we only do what we can within that moment. When Casocot writes, "[h]ow laughter can become / Howling, and how love can quickly lead to loss," these lines mirror the

precarity of lives persisting within the changing climate and the current pandemic. At times, there is no other choice but to settle in the unsettling.

As articulated in previous chapters, the unsettling has become familiar to me. When the few Filipinx I have encountered in this city asked me, “Where’s your family?” I had learned to answer this question without positing the complexity of my grief from separation and loss. Years ago, when some people asked me, “Where do you live here?” I proudly described Woodhaven to them and that I jingled my keys to ward off bears when I walked into the regional park after the sun had gone down; the hour and a half bus ride to the university is nothing compared to three hours in Manila’s horrendous traffic. Recently, the questions have shifted: “Are you planning to stay here?,” “Have you applied for your permanent residency?,” “Does Kelowna feel like home to you?,” and finally, “Do you feel Canadian?”

What *does* it feel like to be “Canadian?” How do I even begin answering this question? I know that I have become comfortable living in Canada since moving here, but that does not mean I do not miss the Philippines with ferocity. I also know that I do not see a life for me in the Philippines anymore, especially now that both my parents have passed away, but at the same time I do not feel “at home” in Kelowna either. Maybe what Filipinx writer Nice Rodriguez says in *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* is the answer to this question: “The longer I stayed in Canada, the more I felt I was being turned inside out into a different person” (418). I do feel I am being transformed, moulded, into another version of me every second I stay in this country. I grasp that I am not the person I was when I first moved here, nor am I that little girl who witnessed the sky fall with dirty snow. I have seen the ashfall again, I have driven through waterbombers extinguishing forest fires, I have seen sunlight touch white pristine snow, and I still fight the urge to consider what I left behind in my heartland.

The way my life is built around the university here in Kelowna has also affected my sense of community: I do not have a lot of Filipinx friends. Maybe because I did not dare try after a lola once asked me to join her for a “communal lunch” in a Jehovah’s Witness Church, or maybe because I did not feel compelled to seek them out. The university’s development has also affected the relationships I have made here, with many friends coming and going as they finish their MA degrees or moving away as job prospects have thinned in this city. Sometimes, I think about the geographical location of the university and how it literally sits on top of a hill that overlooks the city: I feel this exacerbates the polarizing social experience while living in Kelowna.

Community is not a word I take lightly, now. The nuances associated with this word, especially among migrants and racialized peoples, belies a socio-historical complexity that is spurred by refuge and resistance. Communities have come together to save one another, and communities have evolved to chart alternative pathways in spaces that are traditionally monolithic. For me, I have tried to define my own communities as I processed my identity as a migrant scholar. Yet, what I failed to remember (or perhaps realize) until recently that I had the chance to revisit the anthology, *Sustaining the Archipelago: An Anthology of Philippine Ecopoetry*, is that I have been craving for community ever since I pursued literary studies.

In the introduction for *Sustaining the Archipelago*, I mention a motivation for the anthology, which is to gather ecopoems in the Philippines as a “compendium” so that it unites our voices “to occupy a space in the international environmental discourse” (xxxiii). I recall that when I was still in frequent talks with the book’s publisher, they were eager for *Sustaining the Archipelago* to be an environmental writing anthology series in different genres—fiction, creative nonfiction, plays. We even had co-editors in mind. A year after the anthology had been

published and feeling drained from the process, I sent out an email to the contributors asking them if they were interested in continuing these environmental writing anthologies among themselves. I wanted the work to continue but knew that I could not be a part of it anymore, and I was hopeful that whatever sense of community I fostered through the anthology would prevail. Unfortunately, no one responded. I was not surprised, but I never stopped being hopeful.

I contemplate these connections that ultimately create, nurture, or even break up communities, and how these intricate embodied processes are inherent in the three anthologies I am analyzing in this chapter, namely *Sustaining the Archipelago*, which I edited (2018); *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry*, edited by Camille Dungy (2009), and *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*, edited by Joy Harjo (2020). I argue that these anthologies are crucial to the current and future direction of ecopoetry and ecocriticism because they embody centrifugal counternarratives that *inform* their editorial metanarratives, which then challenge the centripetal process of anthologizing ecopoetry. In short, these anthologies have proposed new metanarratives that redefine the concepts of “place,” “nature,” “environment,” “nation,” and even “community” by compiling ecopoetry that are attentive to the individual body as a site of memory. Moreover, these anthologies and the ecopoems within them negotiate movement and groundedness by focusing on the embodiment of these terms through the truths expressed in the ecopoems. The ecopoetry in the anthologies also encapsulate counternarratives that have existed for as long as the genre of ecopoetry has existed. It is only recently that space has been made for these kinds of publications, or that the current political, academic, and environmental climate has shifted priorities to centre these anthologies or even allow them to be compiled, let alone be published. I vacillate among different scholarships, predominantly from two *different* Benedict Andersons: the first being the one who

wrote the seminal *Imagined Communities*, and the second an independent scholar who recently published *The City in Transgression: Human Mobility and Resistance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. These two texts will support my arguments about how the anthologies and individual ecopoems in them express counternarratives of varied movements and groundedness (literal and figurative) that construct the editorial metanarratives. What are the imagined communities in these three anthologies? How are the concepts of “place,” “nature,” and “environment” reimaged or reconceptualized in these anthologies through movements and groundedness? And finally, how do these anthologies challenge the metanarrative of anthologizing and metanarrative of national identity, and open possibilities for newer metanarratives that anchors community-building through counternarratives?

### **Nature as Imagined Communities**

I believed that creating a community among writers from different disciplines *and* with the public (or *masa*, as is the colloquial Filipino term) would be challenging. Nevertheless, I was idealistic: “How can writing be common good when it is often seen as a privilege, that which can be attained through fellowships or degrees in expensive universities, and when you need to pay to read some of the best works here or abroad?” (xxxii), I wrote in “Living Limestones and the Move to Refuse Resilience,” *Sustaining the Archipelago*’s introduction. In a developing country like mine, choices are often made depending on the ferocity of need. These are based on the need for basic necessities; art, criticism, education are all luxuries for the most privileged. Further on in the introduction, I detail how I see myself as an environmentalist who is academically adept, but who can never be an environmentalist by word, body, and trade (*Sustaining the Archipelago* xlii). Hierarchies, binaries, and divisions within the Filipino community were part of what I

wanted to address in *Sustaining the Archipelago*'s introduction. I wanted to reach out to experts in other fields, to fellow literary creatives in different universities, and to the masa. Did I think a camaraderie among these divisions is possible? Yes, I thought so. Did I imagine these possibilities without thinking of the systemic issues deterring this unity? Yes, as well.

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* details how "nationality" is a cultural artefact since it has to be continually assessed historically, how its meanings have changed over time, and why it commands such profound emotional legitimacy among different communities (4). Anderson proposes that the nation is "imagined," since even the smallest of nations will never know *all* of their fellow-members, will never meet them nor hear of them (6). Yet, these members all exist in their heads as living, breathing human beings that they have to reach out to, advocate for, or be the voice for. He further asserts that the nation is imagined as *limited* since it has finite and elastic boundaries that distinguishes it from other nations, and finally, it is imagined as a *community* that disregards whatever existing systemic inequities and oppressions are functioning within it because the nation itself is conceived to have a "deep, horizontal comradeship" (7). These imaginations, strengthened by material and symbolic bonds, inspire a kind of love and loyalty that translate into cultural productions of a national identity.

This notion is a double-edged sword. On one hand, Anderson warns against attachments people feel for the inventions of their imagination to the point of fracturing the communities they belong to or, even, fracturing themselves (8). These intense attachments also spill over to the way nations imagine their "place," "nature," and "environment," and the ferocity to which these imaginations are guarded. Space is often weaponized to keep people in and out, and the border is built from the metanarrative of a national identity. On the other hand, the concept of an imagined

community *beyond* the nation fosters resistance to these concepts. When it comes to ecopoetry anthologies, an imagined community is an opportunity to reconsider what is canonical and institutional, versus what is not. If these standards and institutions are all imagined, then what is stopping communities from reimagining them? It also begs questions about editorial metanarratives: if anthologies facilitate and legitimize a canon, then the editorial metanarratives in an anthology can undo that structure, too. This is where I think about Anderson's concept of an imagined community and how it translates to anthologies of ecopoetry. For me, the imagined community in *Sustaining the Archipelago* is the community that contemplates the space we call the Philippines. Each contributor has their own interpretation of the archipelago, and I am just there to compile all these narratives into a book. This community is not so much a nation; rather, it is bound by the specificities that are attached to the standards of ecopoetry. What ecopoetry was to me—at that time I was editing the anthology—was still based on Anne Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street's definitions of ecopoetry in the American context. Aside from this, there were other concerns, too: For instance, there were the divisions between "Imperial Manila"<sup>3</sup> and the regions, the divisions among disciplines (especially the sciences and the humanities), and the divisions between the institutions and the masa. These are why I tried to accept all submissions despite limited capacity:

... I have made the decision early on not to choose ecopoems for this anthology based on relations, literary communities, and affiliations. My stand has always been to be as inclusive as possible to enjoin more voices in the environmental debate and to give the opportunity for everyone to be heard. (xxxiii)

To add, the criteria for which poems to include were simple: the poem had to be based in or is about the Philippines; it should not use the environment as a metaphor or a framing device, and it

had to adhere to poetic standards or correct scientific facts (if there are any). Not that these categories are novel; in fact, I was conscious that there were some power structures in place when poems were being sent to me or were being endorsed. It was hard to say no, since I was an untenured junior faculty member of a centuries-old institution. These tick points for inclusion and exclusion in *Sustaining the Archipelago* were valid, but they were also my young scholar self who was thinking through these power structures. One of my favourite moments during the anthology's editing process was accepting submissions from an Estonian writer, Margus Lattik, who wrote poignant ecopoems about the time he had spent in the Philippines many years ago. I did not think of it that time, but perhaps the concept of a nation has always been permissive for me as an editor and a writer. I believed that the environmental history of the Philippines cannot be narrated only from the Filipinos' or Filipinx's point-of-view. Our environmental history is not based on citizenship alone.

For Filipinos, "nature" is relative to how European and American ideals interpreted it due to centuries of colonization. However, as these varied interpretations of "nature" begin to emerge from the Philippine academe, nature is constantly challenged. This is where the community in the anthology breaks down, I believe. In Alvin Yapan's essay, "Ilang Paliwanag Tungkol sa Tunguhin at Direksyon ng Ekokritisismong Filipino" ("Some Clarifications about the Trajectory and Direction of Philippine Ecocriticism," *trans. mine*), he reiterates what Epifanio San Juan, Jr. warns about in the discourse of ecocriticism in the country:

... na hindi tingnan ang usapin ng katarungan pangkalikasan nang hiwalay sa katarungang pantao. Kung kaya, mababasa natin sa kanyang artikulo kung paano iniiuwi niya ang usaping pangkalikasan sa usapin pa rin ng bangga ng mga uri, nang hindi na



nabubulid sa antas ng mga indibidwal at lipunan, kundi umaalagwa sa antas ng mga bansa sa estrukturang pang-ekonomiya.

... do not look at the discussion of the environment as separate from human rights. In [E. San Juan, Jr.'s] essay, we can read how he connects environmental discourse with clashes in social justice, how it does not unfold away from the levels of individual and society, and instead unfurls at the level of the country's economic structures. (2, *trans. mine*)

San Juan, Jr. and Yapan in this statement suggest that the interlocking systems of oppressions in the Philippines exist at levels that surpass individuals, societies, and economies, and that these issues pit not only the communities against one another, but individuals against each other, too. So, even if the developing nation is conceived through “spatialized stories,” they do not really bind the collective identity in love and loyalty as is the case in Western communities or not at least to the same intensity (Razack 74 qtd. in Ray 15). To quote Giovanna Di Chiro, “... there is no ‘natural’ bond among people of color groups. They had to tackle the hard work of recognizing one another’s specific cultural understandings of nature and the environment, as well as one another’s specific experiences of environmental racism” (312), and that is a deep and intensive labour that—I have to admit—many communities in my country are not prepared for, yet.

There are centrifugally diverse ideas of nature in *Sustaining the Archipelago*, some that I failed to recognize before. Many of them are explicitly political, and some (like Mark Angeles’<sup>4</sup> “Women and children first”) are a direct commentary of the government’s ineptitude when it comes to disaster responses. Many explore intersections of loss, faith, and Indigenous mythologies as they relate to the environment they are in; some simply talk about imagining a different country or writing hopeful futurisms into reality. There are a few that wish to

contemplate the ocean or watch their cat paw a dying fly. These ecopoems are all inherently about the Philippines, and they all create their own versions and imaginations of nature. Di Chiro emphasizes that communities of colour “perceive[s] its relationship with nature or reinvent[s] it [...] based on specific experiential and historical realities,” and that nature is historically dynamic and culturally specific (311). Due to what I call the “fragmented people” (*Sustaining the Archipelago* xxx) of the Filipinos, the kind of relationships we have with nature will evolve in varying ways. I do not think that it is my place to pin down what that evolution will eventually mould the ecopoetry of the Philippines into, and it will be hard to imagine what cultural production that will create. I can only follow this trajectory along and hope it is sustained.

These reflections of mine about editing *Sustaining the Archipelago* respond to what Di Chiro identifies in this statement:

The place—geographic, cultural, and emotional—where humans and environment converge is embodied in the ideas and practices of “community.” One concept of community advances group identification with common histories, experiences, and endurances of oppression, whether racial, ethnic, gender based or socioeconomic. (318)

To relate that quote to my country, where the Philippines fails as a nation is where it thrives as a community: we identify in multiple ways with one another, outside of national borders. The scattering of Filipinxs all over the world has been pushed by capitalistic and neoliberal motivations; however, it has also cultivated cultural production that are resistant to borders and nationalisms or attempt to challenge these concepts. It seems that community is necessary, especially among minority, racialized, colonized, and migrant groups. Community separated from nation is a practice of decentralized and embodied cooperation, where many groups actively participate to create another future that is sustainable for them with one another. North

American communities that strive to move away from the dominant groups seek bonds among one another to find solace, allyship, and care. As someone who participates in many of these communities, I find the solidarity uplifting *and* messy, with exhausting emotional labour at the forefront of conversations with colleagues and friends who wish to be in this space with us. When it works, it works; when it does not, it is devastating. Recently, a call for submissions for an anthology of Filipino environmental writings in Canada piqued my interest, but when I asked about their specific requirements for submission (e.g., has to be a PR or a Canadian citizen), they said that it is out of the editors' hands and is a common publisher's request here in Canada. Maybe I have a different understanding of what "Filipino writing" is in the Canadian context. I do not think that the gamut of the Filipinx experiences and narratives in Canada will be encompassed by PRs or Canadian citizens alone; however, I also understand economic constraints from publishers in North America as an anthologist myself. The editors have a different imagined community for their anthology, and I respect that, though it saddens me all the same.

At this point, I would like to go back to how I will analyse the three anthologies in this chapter. If I think *Sustaining the Archipelago* does not actually (effectively) promote the Philippines as a nation and instead veers towards the stirrings of a community beyond borders, what function does this anthology serve in the larger discourse of the environmental humanities and ecocriticism? The same is asked of the two other anthologies in this section, too. How are communities reimagined in the three ecopoetry anthologies and their editorial metanarratives? How do these anthologies' editorial metanarratives negotiate the counternarratives to inform their motivations in their collections? And finally, what kind of metanarrative do these anthologies propose? The next section identifies the kinds of literal and figurative movements

associated with the concept of migration to contemplate the imagined communities of the three anthologies.

### **Arrivals, Movements, and Groundedness**

I was underdressed without layers and without sleep when I arrived in Kelowna five or so years ago. Immediately, I was besotted with the challenges of a not-so-well researched migration, such as living on instant noodles and Subway, a parched throat (no one really mentioned how dry the climate was), and threats from the (in)visible Woodhaven bear. The gloominess of the Valley also bothered me more than the rapidly cooling temperatures, and I remember thoroughly enjoying sitting on the second floor of the old double decker buses, front row, and watching the mountains peak from the clouds. The bright autumnal colours of the changing leaves surprised me, too. When my friend Karen from Swaziland visited me in Woodhaven at that time, she remarked how the majority of Kelowna were dressed: “Not a lot of colours here, right?” I agreed, since I was already secretly changing my wardrobe from the tropics into more muted neutrals. Three years later, while attending the MLA conference in Seattle, my constant collaborator Heidi (who is settled in California) looked at my all-black romper, rain jacket, boots and then looked at everyone else at Pike Place Market while we were fulfilling our capitalist fantasies by lining up at the original Starbucks location. “You dress like everyone here,” she teased. “West coast chic,” I shrugged. I think that was when I have *finally* arrived in North America.

With that, I take care to contextualize the kinds of movements that are scrutinized in this chapter. There are multiple kinds of movements that were undertaken (historically) and are occurring (currently) within the context of migration, and the ecopoems may also yield metaphorical and literal movements. In the Philippines, colonization by the Spanish, Americans,

Japanese, and British for over five hundred years have spurred migrant routes for the most privileged and talented of citizens (such as the *illustrado*, or the enlightened ones who were the Filipino educated class during the Spanish occupation) or for labourers (some of the first Filipino communities in the United States were farmworkers in California, for instance, and the biggest population of Filipinx in affluent countries like Singapore are domestic helpers). Now, migration in the Philippines is seen as a choice—largely based on material resources—for many middle- and lower-class citizens. There still remain scholars like me who make a decision to study abroad, while there are temporary workers in many continents (usually in the hospitality and health industries) who eventually decide to resettle in the countries they have migrated to *or* go back to the Philippines to retire. This situation is different from the white settler migration in North America, where the initial goal of movement towards this continent is based on expanding and building the empire. Mohammad A. Chaichian reminds how the development of new social relations based on capitalist principles during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries led to colonization of “known” and “recently known” territories by the Dutch, British, and French empires. It ushered in a new era that the empires were formed and bolstered by “colonial expansion and domination dictated by the inner logic of capitalism” (3), which also encouraged the migration of some white settlers to the North American continent as a form of expansion and/or economic gain. Though white settlers may have intersecting reasons for migration with arrivants from the Global South (e.g. economic), the metanarrative of national identity in North American countries still privilege European and American migrants through lesser visa restrictions and more opportunities for resettlement (such as the “International Experience Canada” visa that offers several pathways to gain a working visa for select nationalities) due to these legacies of colonialism.

Another important movement is forced movement or dispossession. Kimberly Blaeser conveys how the Anishinaabeg followed the “migis” shell from the St. Lawrence River to their current homelands in the Great Lakes, or how the Oneida moved from upstate New York to the Northeastern and Midwestern regions of the US and some parts in Ontario, Canada (15-16). Many of the tribal nations’ original homelands are scattered across the US-Canadian border, with families “commuting” to and from political boundaries to be with their families (Blaeser 16). Similarly, Jennifer Else Foerster narrates that when the Indigenous Southeastern tribes were removed from their homelands, they traveled in search of the sun and that despite the dispossession, they will always be arriving and renewing their futures (361). Finally, there is also forced migration through slavery and colonization, which is evident in *Black Nature*. With this, Mona Lisa Saloy posts a haunting question: “What does it mean to lose your language, to be forbidden your culture, to be raped from your homeland?” (180). Jacob U’Mofe Gordon recount how the transatlantic slave trade began with voyages to Brazil and other European countries to build the Global North. As cargoes, the slaves were transported to the Americas to “work on various plantation systems—coffee, tobacco, cocoa, sugar, and cotton—gold and silver mines, rice fields, construction industries, ship building” (9). These institutions of slavery and colonialism, Gordon argues, created foundations for Western capitalism, the development of European colonialism, and the development of the Global North—while leaving African countries severely underdeveloped (9).

Nowadays, movements are the result of complex socio-historical issues that have permeated current historical contexts and realities. It has become apparent that in an increasingly connected world, as Ursula Heise argues in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, movements are inevitable and necessary. In *The City in Transgression*, independent scholar Benedict Anderson

insists that though human mobility is a widespread phenomenon since movements cannot be halted, it is also being viewed more and more in terms of fear and threat, and that this view is spun by a few select (often wealthy) nations to deny peoples their rights of mobility to freely access the world (3, 4). It is a privilege granted to the privileged, one that is marred by life-threatening journeys when undertaken by refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants that end in precarious “out-of-space and in-between places, locations, and nations” (12). Yet, the necessity of migration is pressing since people (and sometimes more-than-human species) have limited opportunities to strive for purposeful, healthy, and sustainable existences in spaces that are being marred by the ruination of colonization, land dis/possession, and socio-economic disparities. As we experience more climate devastations and economic destabilization, migration is inevitable as a natural course of living and no border wall will stop this from occurring.

Yet, these divisions still persist despite the necessity of migration and despite arriving at the intended space. The way cities, towns, provinces, and states are divided in this continent is also indicative of the way bodies are arranged in and out of particular areas. To belong in a place, one has to materially and emotionally embed themselves in it, which can dismantle self-reflexive identity formation. Razack in *Race, Space, and the Law* fervently attest to this, as does Anderson in *The City in Transgression*, which is apparent when freedom to move is permitted, denied, or forced upon communities. When it comes to “Living Limestones and the Move to Refuse Resilience,” I think about the life lived and survived in an unstable nation: “... the people living within these islands constantly experience an exercise of disequilibrium” (xxxviii). Movement is relative to what one represents to the dominant culture and where the dominant culture imagines an individual to belong in.

All these diverse movements also exist within a concept of groundedness. I think about groundedness in this chapter as, perhaps with respects to William Cronon, an “uncommon” ground. There exists the groundedness that is rooted in place-based discourse, but the groundedness that the anthologies are certain about is the kind that is not human-centred anymore. Kimberly Carfore insists that, “attending to kinship relationship that aren’t human-centered would be learning to truly be in place. Learning to live together would be learning to love our place” (245). It is love that—she emphasizes—is justice. In the anthologies, the imagined communities are built on the groundedness that is responsive to each individual (humans or more-than-humans) sharing the same space that is threatened by climate collapse. Rather than affixing one’s self to groundedness in place, being grounded in the space fostered by community provides opportunities to deconstruct binaries and borders without sacrificing the heterogeneity of each one’s threshold experiences. If movements are growing as a necessity, then groundedness has to also be reconsidered as a critical part of movement. Perhaps, what it means to be grounded does not have to centre place anymore but involve kinship relationships instead—with each other and with ourselves.

I believe that what Camille Dungy in “Writing Home” responds to this kind of groundedness. She notes that, “I have traveled enough and moved enough to know that home is not a place. I am thinking perhaps home is not language either. Language is too easy to lose. Perhaps home is memory” (284). To explain, many communities do not have the luxury to call any place “home,” or if they are able to do so, they have to live through an identity-shattering benevolent assimilation to assume the same luxuries that are part and parcel of the North American dream and manifest destiny. What Dungy stresses here is the core of the arguments made in this dissertation—counternarratives are narratives that preserve memory that is key to



how we feel grounded. These memories are often lost in the dominance of some metanarratives or are tokenized by many of us who are in positions of power: they do not only do this to us; we are also programmed to do this to ourselves. What I write in this dissertation, these snippets after arriving in another space, are memories that my mind and heart cannot bundle and carry with me all the time, but they exist *within* my body. When I remember and feel them, I embody a sense of groundedness: I belong, somehow.

Thus, the next section examines the editorial metanarrative of each anthology, taking into consideration both their centripetal influences and their centrifugal responses to the metanarratives of anthologizing and national identity. More importantly, this section will explore how the anthologies propose metanarratives that are responsive to their counternarratives, in turn directing the axis of their editorial motivations towards the ecopoetry.

### **Beyond Boundaries and Places, and the Scope of Anthologies**

No one really escapes the politics involved in the process of anthologizing, no matter what the anthology is or where it is published, specifically the process of inclusion and exclusion. This is a centripetal articulation of the metanarrative of anthologizing. I join Nancy Holmes when she laments: I wish I had the space to include *all*. This challenge does not escape Dungy nor Harjo, either. In *Black Nature*, Dungy writes, “[w]hile acknowledging the realities of the publishing world mean a certain few poets must necessarily be left out of this anthology, the comprehensive scope of this book is unique” ( xxix). Meanwhile, in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*, Harjo writes, “[t]here were many more poets we wanted to include, but we were limited by the available number of pages. The poets span four centuries from the seventeenth to the present” (4). She follows up with this statement:

We note that the tribal nations of the states bordering Canada and Mexico often extend beyond those political borders, just as the borders of the states themselves as they are known do not contain or adequately define tribal areas. Because of the limitations of the size of this anthology we could not include our Canadian and Mexican relatives. (Harjo 9)

These acknowledgments of “borders” are crucial in anthologies, as there is constantly the query of who is included versus not. Many anthologists are met with the demand to be as comprehensive as possible, especially since an anthology can precede a canon; yet the constraints of publishing—its theoretical and material implications—mar the capabilities of the anthologist even if they have the support they need. I, too, agree that I could have done more with *Sustaining the Archipelago* despite my precarity during its editorial process. To be fair, I believe not everyone expects an anthology that is the first of its kind to be as comprehensive as it could be on its first print. However, this lament is a nagging thought that probably haunts anthologists like me.

In the ecopoetry canon, anthologies function to announce a space that has not yet been given due attention to in ecocriticism. Joni Adamson in *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism* conveys information that most ecocritics are reckoning with:

Many American naturalists and nature writers, making a case for an original relation with nature, imagine what the country must have looked like when mythical “first white men” entered newly discovered lands for the first time and surveyed a world with no marks of human culture and landscape. (55)

This concept of “untouched” and “pristine” nature is prevalent in early ecopoems; however, what are denied from these writings are the material and social realities of imagining nature as such: the ongoing ruins of colonization and the denial of self-determination, identity-formation, and human rights to colonized, racialized, and migrant groups<sup>5</sup>. In response, anthologies (as suggested by Dungy) can propose *alternative* frameworks for poetry, and not oppositional ones. Anthologies, and the metanarratives they exhibit, may adhere to the direction the counternarratives in the poems are pulling them towards and propose radical new metanarratives that are thinking about the subjectivity of identities. For example, *Agam: Filipino Narratives on Uncertainty and Climate Change* (commissioned by the Institute of Climate and Sustainable Cities), *Indigenous Literatures from Micronesia* (eds. Evelyn Flores and Emelihter Kihleng), and the many more anthologies that are surfacing from communities outside the Euro-American centre of ecopoetry indicate a significant shift in the field of ecocriticism and the environmental humanities. Alternative frameworks for ecopoetry, in this instance, challenge the binaries lingering in ecocriticism by offering another pathway for a more embodied and holistic discourse of our experiences with nature by promoting how these relationships with the environment and ourselves are not fixed nor static. The instability of these literal categories and figurative borders in the metanarrative of anthologizing cultivates a space for a metanarrative that is not anymore dependent on the steadiness of these terms and identities. It also resists frameworks that have been, unfortunately, foundational in ecocriticism; yet I can say with some confidence that if there is one discipline in the humanities that will be the first to recognize its own sins, then it will be this.

In a migrant reading practice, I recognize that terms like “place,” “nature,” “environment” are critical to ecocriticism; however, I also recognize that these terms are fraught with binaries and

oppositions that enforce control (symbolically or materially) over communities who are willing to speak about or promote alternative ways of groundedness and imagining our pasts and futures. At times, this means erasing them from the discourses and conversations in the field. I circle back to how Dungy emphasizes that African Americans poets are not seen as much in nature-related anthologies (xxvii) and how Harjo declares that most readers will not have an idea that there is or was a single Native poet. Their presence is still an afterthought, fraught with tension, because “our continued presence means that the mythic storyline of the founding of this country is inaccurate” (1). In *Sustaining the Archipelago*, I reiterate how the Filipinos need to be heard in the environmental discourse because my country is one of the most affected by climate change in the world (xxxiii).

Furthermore, after exploring the other two anthologies for this chapter, I am able to articulate how the validation of existence and experiences is compelling for many communities. I have felt this way before, especially since moving to Kelowna, but never more intently than recently when I felt my identity constantly challenged by the realities of living through grief, this pandemic, and organizing within/outside the institution. I cannot and will not ever be knowledgeable or embodied enough to fathom the threshold experiences of the contributors in each of these anthologies, but I feel validated when I read Joy Harjo stating in the Introduction to *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* that, “[w]e have always been here, beneath the surface of American poetic consciousness and have questions how there can be an American poetry without our voices” (6). I feel validated, too, when Cyrus Cassells<sup>6</sup> writes in the poem “Down from the Houses of Magic” in *Black Nature* that, “[t]he history of survival is written under my lids” (43). We have survived multiple movements and threshold experiences, are surviving them, but we are *here*.

What is clear from these anthologies, more from Dungy's and Harjo's than mine<sup>7</sup>, is that these poems have existed before and that these counternarratives—both oral and written—have been around for a long, long time. The erasures of these narratives have also persisted until today. Harjo says “[w]e have always been here,” and LeAnne Howe in “Outroduction” in the same anthology declares, “[w]e are not finished yet” (421). What has erased these poems—and their counternarratives—from previous ecopoetry anthologies are the historical establishment of the canon (what gets included and what is excluded), the politics of publication and anthologizing, and the interlocking systems of oppression that have amplified this exclusion by denying opportunities of culture, education, and publication from particular communities.

The editorial metanarratives of the anthologies respond to the metanarrative of anthologizing ecopoetry, but also challenge it by, simply, by being published. In spite of this tension, a migrant reading practice gravitates towards the reality that there is no one way of talking and writing about how we perceive our relationships with nature. Another issue that a migrant reading practice steers this analysis towards is that anthologists have to be self-reflexive in addressing our own implicit biases, and the biases that we embed in our editorial metanarratives. Unlearning biases ingrained by metanarratives of national identity and anthologizing is a lifelong task. It appears that the anthologies here are also moving into a reimagined community that un/learns in cooperation and support, without demands to be exceptional models or to be the “first” of anything.

As a matter of fact, *Sustaining the Archipelago* was anticipated with a tremendous burden: to be the first ecopoetry anthology in the Philippines. Naïve, but also critical, I knew what was asked of me when I proposed to edit this anthology. I even state it in the Introduction: “This anthology is both a sensorium and a sounding board, but more than that, it is the first step

to an environmental revolution” (xlvii). Those hopes have been dashed by the realities of publishing and anthologizing in a developing country. For one, my publisher cannot fund free book copies for all contributors as I originally thought they would (but offered a discount); second, I had to pay for the cover photo out-of-pocket and solicit photos for the chapter divisions from some of my contributors (who were happy to share them with me free of charge), and finally, because the book is almost three hundred pages long, it was priced more expensive than most books in my publisher’s catalogue. I also have been donating all my royalties to the Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), not that they were significant amounts. Even undertaking the donation process from another country has been strenuous. In retrospect, I wonder if I was ever ready for such a task.

In all, *Sustaining the Archipelago* collated 151 poems from 80 poets in multiple Philippine languages. Translations of the poems were submitted by the authors themselves, either their own or with a collaborator. The anthology is divided into themes: *place; species: flora; species: fauna; disasters; environmental justice*. The poets featured in the anthology are not only from established and beginning writers, but also biologists, teachers, environmental activists, policymakers, musicians. Greg Garrard writes the Foreword to the collection, which marks the beginning of our collaboration together in the academic field<sup>8</sup>. I find it ironic that I am writing about the anthology at this crucial time, when I am journeying to the end of my graduate school experience: *Sustaining the Archipelago* has literally bookended my degree. I began with the motivation to document the environmental history of the Philippines and “uniting our voice to occupy a space in the international environmental discourse,” then concluded by critically examining how Filipino/x lives are intertwined with the land/s and water/s we have lived in (xxxiii). As I have amended: “We take from the water—we live with it; we learn from it” (xlv).

If I have declared that the Philippine archipelago has not yet been mapped with predictability, I have come to understand that the ocean (and our islands) is what predicts the lives of my countrypeople.

*Black Nature* is both historical and environmental, since it spans the history of Black poetry in America (not just ecopoetry), which demonstrates how Black poets have been writing about nature all along. One of the bigger arguments in *Black Nature* is that Black people have varied interpretations of their environments, and these are starkly different from how ecopoetry has been established as canonical. Black ecopoetry “... move[s] beyond personal, cultural, and political struggles into spaces of deep appreciation, connection, healing, and peace” (Dungy xxv), which shows that the environment is written as spaces of violence and healing, of distrust and trust, and of labour and connection. Dungy further notes that,

The majority of works in this collection incorporate treatments of the natural world that are historicized or politicized and are expressed through the African American perspective, which inclines readers to consider these texts as political poems, historical poems, protest poems, socioeconomic commentary, anything but nature poems. This is particularly true when the definition of what constitutes literature about nature or the environment is limited to poems that address the pastoral or the wild, spaces and subjects removed or distanced from human contact. (xxvii)

These varied techniques and themes in writing ecopoetry have excluded Black writing from the canon, but as mentioned before, *also* because Black people are not considered the legitimate stewards of the land or have varied interpretations of nature and the environment that are culturally and socially specific.

Dungy interrogates the exclusion of Black ecopoetry from canon by compiling poems that are both historical and contemporary. The poets are represented in the collection depending on how frequently they write about the themes in the book, which Dungy terms as “Cycles.” Some well-known nature poets were not included in the anthology because permissions to use their work were not secured even after due diligence, to which Dungy states that a probable future edition will try to remedy these losses. In total, *Black Nature* has compiled 93 poets and 180 poems as the first and largest collection of African American nature poetry ever published.

What *Black Nature* operationalizes, which *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* also has, are the introductory prose pieces that anchor each of the anthology’s cycles. These are mostly written by contemporary poets and they function as sites of re-examining the importance of these ecopoems in the scope of American literature and the environmental humanities in general. More than that, I find these pieces to be critical and heartbreakingly tender counternarratives of the Black experience of nature in North America, with each one voicing their own truths that inform the collation of that particular Cycle. Some Cycles have the typical experiences that many ecopoetry anthologies associate with nature, such as “Cycle One: Just Looking,” “Cycle Two: Nature Be with Us,” “Cycle Four: Pests, People, Too,” and “Cycle Seven: Talk of the Animals.” Some Cycles escalate into raw threshold experiences unique to Black peoples. As Dungy specifies, these Cycles show “the apparent complicity of the natural world in the difficult circumstances of the poems’ subjects” (xxxi). “Cycle Three: Dirt on Our hands” is about the betrayal of and alienation from the land; “Cycle Five: Forsaken of the Earth” and “Cycle Six: Disasters, Natural and Other” are about the harm humans inflict on one another that is blurred by environmental forces, and how culpability is assigned to the natural world; “Cycle Eight: What the Land Remembers” is on how natural



history is stored in bodies and “Cycle Nine: Growing out of this Land” are about the positive and negative effects of ecological spaces, and “Cycle Ten: Come Always Spring” sees potential reflected in the world, despite histories of devastation, loss, oppression, and alienation. These Cycles, unique in their theoretical and personal musings, reflect what Dungy calls the “transformative powers of nature” that yield “potential for facilitating change in the world” (xxxiv). To summarize, *Black Nature* is the environmental history of African Americans and the spaces they inhabit; it is also, primarily, a reclaiming of their own environmental imagination and ecopoetic agency.

*When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* is different from most of the anthologies in this dissertation, because it is not strictly an ecopoetry anthology. In fact, it is only Heid E. Erdrich in the introductory prose piece to “Plains and Mountains” who mentions ecopoetics:

What’s become an American standard, the wilderness pastoral or eco-poetic lyric, might work as metaphor for non-Native poet, but these poems are from place and related to place. (101)

The statement is also one of the straightforward reasons why I have decided to include this anthology in my analysis: *there is no ecopoetry without Indigenous poetry*. Beyond the pastoral and romantic traditions of Euro-American poetry and literatures that have engaged with nature, native poets have long cultivated their narratives based on their relationships with the natural world, with place, and with the land. The narratives interwoven in their oral literatures are how they create identity within or away from their sacred spaces. Indigenous poets have narrated *beyond* traditional metaphors and tropes of engagements with the land, even before we have realized the need to progress against colonial-settler representations of the environment in our

ecopoetics. Their ecopoems are politicized, truthful, self-reflexive, and even alienating. They have grappled with the same issues of erasure that Black poets have in the ecopoetry canon, but their poems are distinct since they require invitation before one can truly process their threshold experiences and counternarratives. At times, the ecopoems in the collection are beyond my comprehension, and, at first, I struggled with that unsettling feeling. Eventually, I appreciated how the anthology demarcates a clear boundary between the editors and poets, and the readers. It is a line established by respect and tradition, and I am thankful to have some capacity to read these works.

Harjo's editorial metanarrative emphasizes how important *the word* is in Indigenous nations<sup>9</sup> as it is "their ability to speak in metaphor, to bring people together, to set them free in imagination, to train and to teach" (1). The word is more valuable than anything else settlers crave. This root of their imagination stems from the knowledge of the earth being a living being and the power of language to create, transform and establish change. Harjo asserts: "Words are living beings" (2). In these statements, Harjo maintains that imagining deep time-space through words and narratives have been paramount to tribal nations in North America; it is the way they traded with each other and communicated from generation to generation. Thus, the relationships they have established with the land and their environments have been present and recorded through their literatures—oral or written—and have existed for centuries. The erasure of Indigenous poetry from anthologies and established canons is one important point that Harjo addresses in her Introduction. It is also an argument that many of the introductory prose pieces make; in her essay for the "Northeast and Midwest," Kimberly Blaeser says that "Indigenous poetics in these pages tune themselves differently—to a survivance truth both painful and celebratory. The poems look steadily at a dark history" (16). The counternarratives of resistance

in these poems are also sites of truth, where the poets claim agency over their own socio-historical realities in resistance of the metanarrative of national identity.

The book, Norton's first anthology of Indigenous poetry, is critical due to how the Norton series is perceived in the literary canon: Julie R. Enszer specifies how the Norton anthologies are the most widely adopted in US universities, and perhaps all over the world (730). Unfortunately, in a symposium on editing a Norton Anthology, Enszer also recalls how a scholar declares that these compendiums are widely used for their serviceable reproduction of the canon and decried for the exact same reason (172). If Norton anthologies have been problematic in their comprehensiveness *and* comprehensive erasure of many communities, then it is also interesting to witness how the Norton now provides the space today for the communities their volumes have erased. Harjo is wary of the daunting task, so she invites the core selection and editing team to be made up of Indigenous poets to show how the field has developed since American Indian literature began as a recognized field of academic endeavour in the early 1970s (7). Another careful decision that is made for the anthology is respecting the wishes of Indigenous nations to determine who is a tribal member; thus, they only included poets who are enrolled tribal members or are known and work directly within their respective communities (4). Despite recognizing how this may not be a popular decision among many peoples, Harjo is steadfast in their commitment to *not* arbitrate identity even if they are confronted with the task, constantly. There is also an apology for some oral texts that are rooted in deep culture and are translated to English with the best of their abilities. Concerned that the collection will find its way into many hands, many places, she asks forgiveness if they have inadvertently caused any harm in their transmission (10). Finally, the anthology points out that land is central to culture and identity, so the collection is organized into five geographical region and employs the Muscogean directional

path which begins East to North and continues to the West and then to the South (7). They also celebrate the diversity of each tribal nation in orientation, ritual, practices, language, and narratives.

This anthology includes 161 poets, spanning four centuries—from the seventeenth to the present (Harjo 4). Aside from the introductory prose pieces from a representative poet of a particular geographical region (except for the “Pacific Northwest, Alaska, and Pacific Islands” that has a prose piece for each region), there are also stunning biographical notes that are included before a poet’s literary work. These biographical notes are informative, well-researched, sometimes witty and funny, too. Many of them directly inform the poem’s background, while some of them are pieced together from historical documents that have been eroded by the course of time. What I did not expect from the anthology is how much movement—physical, lyrical, and migratory—there is. Jennifer Elise Foerster in “Renewal” (Southeast introductory prose piece) palpably demonstrates these movements as “the reality of in-betweenness that has so long characterized the indigenous Southern experience”—from dispossession, displacement, migration, and the diaspora. I think many of us literary scholars readily associate Indigenous poetry with a strong attachment to the land and oftentimes treat these texts like archival documents that may give secrets that us settlers or arrivants are not privy to. What *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* shows me is that a strong attachment to the land is congruent with embodying the movements within it. These kinds of movements that are both momentous and traumatic for Indigenous tribal nations are likewise fuel to their love for their lands, language, cultures, and communities.

The centripetal articulations of the three anthologies’ editorial metanarratives create complexities in the metanarrative of anthologizing. In a migrant reading practice, my method is

to highlight these complexities as centrifugal expressions of the counternarratives in the eco-poems. This shows that the anthologies are constructing a space for a new metanarrative that focuses on communities rather than literary canon. The communities fostered in these anthologies show how a unilateral and, at times, nonhierarchical cooperation among diverse individuals who participate with their own reimagining of socio-historical events and reshaping their collective identities can generate spaces that are radically transformative, nurturing, and validating. This kind of radicalized care does not run out.

Much like a metaphorical migration, I envision movement in this chapter as a method that transcends material and physical boundaries that bind words to a page, text to a book, and a poem to an anthology. The counternarratives that enlighten the editorial metanarratives are explored in this chapter's succeeding sections, which afterwards considers the future directions of eco-poetry anthologies in the field of ecocriticism.

### **Movement from Stasis**

Hiligaynon poet Genevieve L. Asenjo<sup>10</sup>, in the translation of the prose poem "The Water I Love is a Stranger" in *Sustaining the Archipelago*, details her fragmented encounters with water from her hometown in the province and to where she is situated in Manila:

The water I love is a stranger. I have no thirst or hiccups. In the barrio, water from the earthen jar is spring-cool. From the well, a gallon container is filled. Here in the condo, I let you read the memo. (6)

The poem juxtaposes experiences with water in different parts of the archipelago: in some parts, water is collected freely without corporate interventions, and in some high density cities like Manila, water is regulated and sold as utility. The irony remains, however, when one considers

why water is sold in a country inundated with monsoons and surrounded by seawater.

Afterwards, the poem unfolds the way water does, with gushes of stories that contrast and complement one another, from “mountains of laundry” on the sofa, a pail left in the barrio, light showers that flood the city, and the nearly-empty La Mesa Dam<sup>11</sup> that collects and supplies water to critical parts of Manila. The overall melancholic tone of the poem weaves the persona’s clipped stories seamlessly, almost as if constructing a liminal environment where all these needs and desires for water exist. Strikingly, water in the poem functions both materially and metaphorically. The persona’s fragments of varied encounters alter her own relationship with her own body as she contemplates about the ways in which she depends on water.

Askia M. Touré’s<sup>12</sup> “Floodtide” in *Black Nature* amplifies the needs and desire for water by the Black tenant farmers of the South. In this poem, the personas are introduced to us with a chorus that attests to the persistence of the farmers: “*they carry on. / though butchered and maimed by nature and whitefolks, / they carry on / and sing their songs.*” (184). The poem shifts to the personas as they lament the drought is leaving “dust on the dry tongues” of livestock, tobacco leaves, and in them. They pray for “warm soft rain.” In the next stanza, the sound of thunder “shakes the ground” and is a “violent spatter” that quickly becomes a “killer rain” that breaks their hearts. As the land floods, livestock and people die. “Deathsmells” permeate the fields. However, when Monday rolls in and after a Sunday in church where they all gather to offer flowers and tears for those who drowned, the personas start cleanup in their fields and begin to rebuild again: “*they sing their songs, / and carry on.//*” (187). The cycle of rebirth and renewal in this poem expresses that needs and desires for water are complicated by the space people are in and the livelihoods they are delegated to. For farmers, water is either abundance or threat: the lack of it means a threat to livelihood, and the abundance of it means a threat to their

lives. This poem extends the counternarratives in Asenjo's poem by describing how certain communities, especially Black people who are assigned as farm labourers by "whitefolks," depend on water and its many forms for economic reasons even if it threatens to kill them. The entanglements people experience with water and its effects translate to how bodies are embedded in the environment we are settled in. As Ray reiterates, the body is the means by which environmental injustices occur (7). Often, the bodies that incur these injustices are communities of colour.

Donovan Kūhiō Colleps'<sup>13</sup> "Kissing the Opelu" in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* is a love poem written for his grandmother. Written with a similar melancholic and fragmented tone as Asenjo's, the first line declares, "I am water, only because you are the ocean" (249). The persona establishes metaphor as a concrete method to elucidate the strength of their kin and the endurance of their bond:

I am the milky fish eye, only  
because it's your favorite.

Even the sound you make  
When your lips kiss the opelu  
socket is a mo'olelo. (250)

The relationship with water is established through the bond the persona has with the species that thrive in the ocean, like the opelu or Japanese mackerel. As the grandmother kisses the opelu, she shares the mo'olelo or traditional myths and narratives with her grandson. Every part of her body is his ancestry, and everything around them on the island is connected and integral to their culture and stories. Indeed, Brandy Nālani McDougall in "Poetry of the Pacific" establishes that

the stories of the Pacific are found in their poetry. These poems are a testament “to the superficiality and brevity of the United States in the Pacific; to the resilience, ingenuity, and strength of our communities; and to our fierce love for our islands and ocean, our cultures, and our ancestors” (179). Different from the contrasting narratives in Asenjo’s poem and the violence of Touré’s imagery, Colleps’ tender narratives of his grandmother and the water that surrounds them are more centrifugal expressions of relationships with water. If the body is the means in which environmental injustices can occur, the body also becomes the counternarratives of the land—narratives that are both good and bad, memory and trauma, and pain and tenacity. Further, the body as part of the environment is a signification of how the environment changes. Thus, the body documents our environmental history. As the body becomes a part of it or removes itself from it, we fathom that the environment, its space, is never static. It constantly changes and is in flux.

The editorial metanarratives of the three anthologies allude to how environmental histories surface in bodies that occupy that space. In a metaphorical way, I state that living in the Philippine archipelago means that “the sea marks our lives, our relationships our intertwined with the land we live with, and our lives are uplifted or traumatized by our natural experiences” (xxix). The people of the Philippines are the direct result of the consequences of our spaces. Dungy articulates it better, stating that the poems in *Black Nature* “reveal histories stored in various natural bodies” (xxii). Bodies, for Dungy, document natural and human-provoked disasters that are otherwise not narrativized in dominant culture or historical, mythical metanarratives. These result in connections with the land, but also alienation from it. In relation, Deborah Miranda in “I’m Here to Make a Poem” from the introductory prose piece for the *Southwest and West* emphasizes that:



... our bodies carry traces of where we were born and raised: oxygen isotopes from the water we drank as children are stored within the buds of our teeth, formed before birth or during childhood. The poems in this volume carry, within their words and white spaces, indelible traces of the place where we emerged. (267)

The concept of the body also *carrying* the spaces where it has emerged from is centripetal to the editorial metanarratives of the three anthologies, because these assertions are embedded in the counternarratives of the ecopoems. The latter three ecopoems show that the body also signals how space, specifically water, evolves or devolves. In relation, Ray in *The Ecological Other* scrutinizes the connections present and presented by putting the body back in nature (12).

Recounting that the protection of nature and the protection of an “ideal American” were of the same biopolitical imperative in the Progressive Era and following the logic of imperialist nostalgia, social exclusion was justified based on who the ideal American body was based on ability, race, and national origin. Moreover, the nostalgia for imperialism meant that the development of the frontier was also tied to nostalgia for wilderness, thus cordoning off spaces were a direct function of settling the frontier. Bodies that do not fit this image of the American body or the American wilderness were threats to national, racial, or corporeal purity (Ray 19) and this provided a moral rationale for exclusion and violent oppression. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* validates Ray’s arguments, saying that the metanarrative of national identity thinks in terms of historical destinies while racism dreams of eternal contaminations, which transcend time-space continuum through “an endless sequence of loathsome copulations: outside history” (149). Colonial racism—affecting marginalized, racialized, and migrant communities—welded dynastic legitimacy and national community through divisions to protect the mythic destiny of the empire (150). I extend these arguments by emphasizing that putting

bodies back in nature also demands an outward-looking methodology that demonstrates how the specific body *embodies* the environments it has been grounded in. If the body holds memories that document environmental histories, then we can seek the body as a counternarrative to direct our pathway towards comprehending the real and undeniable effects of climate collapse and degradation. In short, what stories do our bodies hold and reveal?

Alternatively, the anthologies' editorial metanarratives discursively demonstrate that dualisms trickle down from colonial and racist legacies of the empire and into the imagined communities of North America and its postcolonial territories. These have morphed into abstract ways of thinking that have become insidious reality—various communities and their behaviours are demonized by dominant culture and a “sense of place” from the metanarrative of national identity strive to guarantee an environmental correctness. Particularly, imagined communities are tied to who should be allowed within a certain space and those who should not. I find that these exclusions in/of space and bodies are prioritizing the metanarrative of national identity over truth, and where history is written by those who wish to preserve the empire's legacy. That is why the editorial metanarratives of the anthologies in this chapter are compelled by the ecopoetry's counternarratives to speak to the truth. Ecopoetry in the three anthologies may compile stories that are not always recorded in official documentation and instead are narrated from memory and through literary mediums. The disregard for the volatile and complicated histories that endure ruination of spaces have disadvantaged peoples from reclaiming their own agency in their histories and stories. For example, Lois Red Elk's<sup>14</sup> “Our Blood Remembers” in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* recounts the painful history of the Sitting Bull: “... They knew our loss, took the pain from / our dreams, left us with our blood. We were asked to / remember the sweeter days ...” (113). These lines from the poem

express how the lineage of trauma from the Hunkpapa Lakota leader's death lingers in the veins of their ancestral blood. The pain of this loss of memory and Sitting Bull's teachings are passed on from generation to generation as memory and legacy. Piping Walang Kamay's<sup>15</sup> "Galit ang Dagat sa Imperyalismo!" ("The Ocean is Angry at Imperialism!") in *Sustaining the Archipelago* describes how the ocean's waves "clean up" trash thrown by the disastrous systemic violence of imperialism in a postcolonial country. The persona draws out the connection of the trash littering the ocean and its shores as symptomatic of the ills of empire, where the dualistic binary enforced by colonial frameworks is enacted by Filipinos, despite being "liberated" (224). Even Cyrus Cassell's "Down from the Houses of Magic" with the poignant line, "The history of survival is written under my lids ..." constructs a space that is sickened by pollution, disasters, and wars (47). As the persona seeks from God the strength to persist against these ills, he also states the truth: his body is a document of survival. Again, these counternarratives disclose stories that are not historical records, but they are true to the communities they belong to. These ecopoems demonstrate that bodies are witnesses to the environmental history of space and that these bodies become living memories throughout deep space-time compressions. Further, the counternarratives in these poems are reflected in the editorial metanarratives of the anthologies, where the editors recognize how the bodies of their communities constitute the truth that recorded history does not always reveal.

Bodies are also symbolic in the following ecopoems: Gerald Barrax Sr.'s<sup>16</sup> "To Waste at Trees" in *Black Nature* details how Black men build a nation, and that there is no leisure for them. They have no right to waste at trees (40). In "generations," also in *Black Nature*, Lucille Clifton<sup>17</sup> contemplates about the generations of men that are going to be, in a few years, "bottoms of trees." The persona narrates about how "this business of war" erased "those natural

obedient generations” and that the generations of labourers, rendered invisible, have denounced them (57). Meanwhile, Louise Erdrich<sup>18</sup> recounts the helplessness and unfamiliarity of a flooding river in “I Was Sleeping Where the Black Oaks Move” in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*. As the trees surrounding the river were ravaged, the aftermath staggers into a long process of collecting “the same dry wood” and listening to “drifted herons, alone, hoarse-voiced, broken.” According to her Grandpa, “*These are the ghosts of the tree people / moving among us, unable to take their rest.//*” (133). In the same way, Jennifer Elise Foerster<sup>19</sup> also narrates the changing landscape, including the memories and stories attached to it in “Leaving Tulsa” also in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*. She states that the land, Cosetta’s (her grandma’s) land, tells the story of her family. Upon her grandma’s death, the land has been flattened to a parking lot (414). She buries her grandma’s jewelry in the ground (with a promise to return when the rivers rose), where she finally figures out what she has been told all along:

Along the highway’s gravel pits  
sunflowers stand in dense rows.  
Telephone poles crook into the layered sky.  
A crow’s beak broken by a windmill’s blade.  
It is then I understand my grandmother:  
*When they see open land*  
*they only know to take it. (415)*

Yet, when the persona spies open land from an airplane as she leaves Tulsa, she sees “our hundred and sixty acres / stamped on God’s forsaken country,” and the unmanaged space. The persona does not see a land that needs to be built on; instead, she sees it barren on its own,

especially that her grandma has passed away (415). J.C. Duncan<sup>20</sup> in “The Red Man’s Burden” (which is a parody of Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden”), which is also in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*, extends these contrasting narratives between the white European settler culture and Indigenous cultures by responding to the discrimination and stereotypes against “The Redman” by Christians and colonizers. In search of expansion, he narrates, that even “... in seas of blood to wade” (369) the conquest was able to colonize countries like the Philippines, the North Pole, and such<sup>21</sup> “[t]o make a plain and easy way / For the white part of creation” (370). The last few lines in the poem asks for the white man to return the Redman’s freedom, land and moneys, and innocence (370). It is intriguing to experience an eighteenth-century poem informing the brutal extent of manifest destiny as this nationalistic belief ruins the ancestral Indigenous spaces in North America and seeks expansion to resource-rich islands in the Pacific. This poem demonstrates how Indigenous poets have written the kind of ecopoetry we are familiar with long before ecopoems have been recognized as a genre. The ecopoetry of today owes its tradition to Indigenous poetry and the counternarratives of the truth they have preserved.

At this point, I have to again consider how the tensions surrounding movements and groundedness remain as I organize these ecopoems and the three anthologies together for this chapter. While the counternarratives embodied in these anthologies speak to the violence of colonial legacies, it is unfortunate that many non-Native immigrant, racialized, and marginalized communities view Indigenous spaces as blank, but differently: these spaces are not sources of potential wealth or resource extraction, they are simply not visible to them at all (Cariou 35). Many non-Native communities of colour find it difficult to distinguish the intersections of these oppressions among their people and the Indigenous communities, which means that many of

them perpetuate the same symbolic and material violence against Indigenous peoples as part of their benevolent assimilation. If not, they are afraid of Indigenous individuals because of how they are vilely portrayed by the dominant culture. When my friend's family moved to Saskatoon from Manila, she remarked how most Filipinx immigrants in their city warned her from engaging with "the Natives" due to their reputation of being "alcoholics" and "muggers." It was challenging for me to unpack the kind of stereotype and discrimination they were perpetuating to her and her husband. I often turn to Malissa Phung's response to the tensions between POC and Indigenous communities in Canada to guide my own sense of belongingness on stolen land: the more assimilated a POC settler is, the more this settler shares the dominant physical characteristics, language, and nationalistic desires of a settler society, which means that the POC settler will be "afforded the material benefits and opportunities" to become productive and successful citizens of Canada (293). The way POC immigrants can attain "success" in North America is by participating in the colonial project that triumphs benevolent assimilation to the dominant settler culture in order to reap economic and social benefits.

These apprehensions exist and complicate what Adamson state as the wide differences in perception about "the environment" and their space in it—that may either be productive of or militate against the formation of alliances (74). Though not addressed broadly in any of the editorial metanarratives of the anthologies in this chapter, the fact remains that these issues are affixed in the varied communities' socio-histories that experience interlocking systems of oppression. The point I want to argue here is that the decision to group these three anthologies together does not mean that they share homogenous threshold experiences and oppressions, and they definitely do not share similar realities. I cannot claim that these anthologies have the same motivations in their publications, for I can only speak for the one I have edited. Yet, it is critical

to state that as place metamorphoses into un-bordered space from these counternarratives, then the material and symbolic violence that occur from one racialized, marginalized, and migrant community to another are issues that are fundamental to this very same discourse. My focus here is to contemplate about how the communities have persevered beyond their erasures from history, national identities, movements, and literary canons. It is not to force communities into possibilities of alliances, or as Ursula Heise mentions, into a utopian sociocultural project (25). Adamson recounts what Mikhail Bakhtin theorizes about operationalizing language into a “new situation,” so that the writer liberates themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse (119). I am challenging myself to also move away from the colonial concept of authority as I write this chapter, and instead make way for a nonlinear and nonhierarchical organization in analysing the texts. My focus is on the truth from these editorial metanarratives, the introductory prose pieces, and in the ecopoems.

### **Truth in Memories**

Extending the conversations from the counternarratives in the three anthologies seems to lead to a parallel aim: the truth is poetic. Dungy maintains that *Black Nature* allows a broader understanding of America, as a country, and its poetry by looking carefully at how Black poets use landscape, animal life, and ecological poetics. This includes the fact that the intellectual development of many African Americans and their poets is planted in the land and in the agrarian roots of the United States (xxvii). For her, this is the truth that the anthology documents. In addition, Mona Lisa Saloy insists that, “[p]oetry weaves words to record not just what happens but what sense we can make of it, what is important for us to consider, what is good for us to keep” (183). Poetry serves as agency that allows communities to make sense of their

threshold experiences on their own terms, using the processing that they wish to and away from the influences of dominant culture. As many of the introductory prose pieces in both *Black Nature* and *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* demonstrate, there is power in words.

The truth that is written in ecopoetry contrasts with the standards of nature writing and environmental poetry that have been discussed in Chapter 3. Political expressions are apparent in many of the ecopoems in these three anthologies. Ray points out that nostalgic stories about the land erase history and indicate that the blame is put on prior inhabitants for abandoning their own land, ultimately justifying imperialist entitlement to space (164). This entitlement also translates to postcolonial countries that suffer from the ruination of imperial legacies, thus being blamed for ruining their own country when their spaces have been ravaged by colonizers for centuries to begin with. In the anthologies, ecopoems reveal the visceral and often grim truth behind the metanarrative of national identity that promotes nostalgia. These are the ecopoems that have been questioned by the canon because of their content; as Dungy states, they were declared as *anything* but nature poems (xxvii).

In *Sustaining the Archipelago*, poems from the section “Environmental Justice” like Yvonne M. Esperas’ “Numbers: Haiyan, November 8, 2013” and Janis Claire M. Salvacion’s<sup>22</sup> “Elena” narrate the lives behind the never-ending statistics from another devastating typhoon. They also call out the national and local government’s blundered responses to these disasters, effectively bridging the personal and political in raw imagery. In the section “Plains and Mountains,” Erdrich emphasizes that political content is integral to their ecopoems, including historical references to conflict with “(un)settlers” and the performance of resistance to colonization (99). Ravi Howard in “We Are Not Strangers Here” in *Black Nature* believes that



Black poets write about “the gentle flow of the wind and sea” but also there are “other currents, historical and political, that are translated into language” (38). In relation, Sonya Posmentier reiterates that there are ways poems recount, contain, and respond to ecological experience, which for Black communities does not only mean relationships between human and nonhuman organisms but also how environmental relation is rooted in the particularities of Black history, Black experience, and Black aesthetics (4). The ecopoems in the anthologies uphold counternarratives that are critical to the poet’s own identity-formation and the communities they are a part of. In short, one’s individual truth influences the way they relate to and conceptualize nature in an ecopoem.

For the persona in Thylias Moss’<sup>23</sup> “Sweet Enough Ocean, Cotton” in *Black Nature*, the “blown-open cotton” is the sea that she has not seen before in her life. This metaphor is what the persona thinks about as she works without rest in the fields, because her mind “is the part of me / that gets the least rest.” When she moves through the rows of cotton, she calls that her attempt to walk on “rough water” (23). She believes thinking can be sweet enough for now, until the cotton blooms:

Few months after we planted it,  
I called the pink blooms of cotton before it ripened  
an assault of endless sunset on the ocean. (24)

The imagery of fresh pink cotton as “an assault” of endless sunset is an oxymoron that expresses how the Black body is tied to the cotton fields and to strenuous labour, while the persona’s mind is free to think about what she wants (24). The violence associated with the word “assault” is a juxtaposition to the vision of a quiet sunset above the ocean, which denotes that even an image so beautiful can be exhausting when it is all you ever get to see. Meanwhile in *When the Light of*

*the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*, the truth in Kimberly Wensaut's<sup>24</sup> "Prodigal Daughter" characterizes home as "elusive" and shapeshifting with the currents. It is also a "trickster changing / according to the medicine / of the season and its lesson" (90-91). Despite the weariness, the persona is resolved to "meet the morning again" after the miles she has dreamt, despite being called a "prodigal daughter." In the end, the truth beckons her home (91). "Ugat" or "Root" by J.G. Dimaranan<sup>25</sup> in *Sustaining the Archipelago* upholds truth through metaphor, challenging false narratives about farmer protestors of Hacienda Luisita<sup>26</sup>. The persona utilizes the metaphor of how a plant depends on its roots to survive, and that its most important part is underneath the ground ("ilalim ng lupa"). She encourages the masses to rise for those who have been abused by the government, and then reminds the reader that even a rotten fruit is the soil's fertilizer that a new plant will devour (93). In this ecopoem, the truth reveals that farmers are demonized by the nation-state as they protest and fight for their rights to just compensation and fair labour practices. They are vilified by the government and oligarchs as "communists" and "rebels" who must be eliminated. Rather than fighting for their basic human rights, they end up fighting for their own lives.

Counternarratives in the following ecopoems further express their own truths— emotional, spiritual, historical—behind natural and manmade disasters, such as "The seamstress waits for her daughter to come home" by Firie Jill T. Ramos<sup>27</sup> in *Sustaining the Archipelago*. This ecopoem tells the story of a seamstress who refuses to believe that her child will never come home after a storm, and instead focuses on an intricately sown dress that is snagged between the shoots of a tangnan tree (175-176). Patricia Spears Jones'<sup>28</sup> personal retelling of the AIDS epidemic as it tore through San Francisco in "San Francisco, Spring 1986" in *Black Nature* moulds San Francisco's vibrant summer landscape with the worries of the epidemic as it spreads

in their community. The persona also discusses where the caring begins, “where / the caring works,” as lovers refuse to get tested despite their partners wasting away, followed by weeping and anger. Despite the motif of a city’s beauty, the cathedrals and the “sun’s lush glow” over the “rise and fall of exhausted hills,” the men who are dying are not given up without love, caring, and without a fight (197-198). Then, there’s John Trudell’s<sup>29</sup> “Diablo Canyon” in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* that challenges the ridiculing of police authority as he is held captive and was left to squat by the trash. “Little did they understand / Squatting down in the earth / They placed me with my power” (123), the persona declares, afterwards laughing at the sneers and taunts thrown at him. Despite pitying them for seeing through their powerlessness and knowing that they will never be free, he establishes that he will never believe those who speak of “peace and love and caring and duty and god and destiny” when in their eyes they have death, bombs, taxes, and greed (124). Deborah A. Miranda<sup>30</sup> in “I Am Not a Witness,” also in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*, describes how some of their bones rest in “4000 graves / out back behind the Mission” (315). Some of these bones, the persona says, are mixed into mud to “strengthen cool thick walls / where smallpox and measles came and stayed.” The persona declares her truth: she is not a witness, but “left behind, child / of children who were locked in the Mission / and raped” (316). Jean Toomer<sup>31</sup> in “Harvest Song” and Arna Bontemps’<sup>32</sup> “A Black Man Talks of Reaping,” both in *Black Nature*, write from the perspective of Black farm labourers, expressing their truths of how enslaved Black people are visible only as “commercially exploitable resource” (Roberson 5). Their ecopoems’ counternarratives yield strong emotion that mirror similar alienated and disembodied feelings of the Black workers. Margo Tamez’s<sup>33</sup> “My Mother Returns to Calaboz” in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* focuses on the

environment at the borderlands, where the persona's Mother gets harassed by border agents as she jogs by the river (321). The persona remembers that when she was a child, she immerses her hand in the water under the levee, and she thinks that there is something "deeper and older than memory" that is alive beneath the soil (323).

These are only a few of the poems in the three anthologies exemplifying how counternarratives speak to the truth that is undocumented in historical records or in dominant culture and discourse. Instead, the truth are preserved in memories and in individual bodies to be retold through ecopoetry. The counternarratives in these poems are critical in constructing the editorial metanarratives of the anthologies as parallel socio-historical collections that cooperatively reimagine pasts and futures.

### **Truth in Languages**

Another important point to take into consideration in the editorial metanarratives, that are palpable in the ecopoems, is the use of the English language in the ecopoems. Can the truth still prevail even while using the colonial tongue in artistic expression? For example, there are times when ecopoems from Indigenous communities are interpreted as assimilation or mimicry of the Euro-American lyric. Ecopoems written in English are often read with colonial English standards and expectations; however, if not for syncretism of the colonial tongue (as discussed in Chapter 2 and 3), it is for survival of stories, too.

Considering this, the ecopoems' counternarratives appear to use language to challenge the dominant culture. For one, it is common for Filipino/x poetry to abrogate and appropriate English as part of creativity and resistance of colonial ruination; in *Sustaining the Archipelago*, this is observable in how poets weave Tagalog words into their English poems, or through

translated poems. Incidentally, Posmentier talks about how the term “nation language” was coined in *Black Nature* (11). Regarding these notions, I find that many poets creatively and deliberately utilize ungrammatical features of English that are, at times, associated with their communities. Toni Wynn’s<sup>34</sup> “a brown girl’s nature poem: provincetown” in *Black Nature* is written in colloquial English, with no capitalizations and long pauses that seem to follow a speaking pattern unique to their community (26). Ed Roberson’s<sup>35</sup> persona in “be careful,” also in *Black Nature*, employs similar techniques in expressing his alienation and distrust of the environment he finds himself in (29).

Harjo establishes that Indigenous communities were forced to forsake their languages for English in “the civilizing genocidal process” (2). Aware that this is ironic, Harjo sees the benefit of using English in writing poetry. She states that these English poems can live alongside texts created and performed within their respective Indigenous languages because “[i]t is the nature of the divided world in which we live (3). Foerster in “Renewal” supports this by sharing that, “[p]ositioned as we were at the crossroads, why would we not also have engaged the dominant language to stand up for our humanity, our rights? One must use all the resources one can” (358). To explain, English is a tool that the colonized have operationalized to share their counternarratives and preserve these stories; most importantly, it has been a tool to keep these stories, and the truth, alive. Anderson in *Imagined Communities* conveys that language, especially the mother tongue, is imperative to peoples for it is where pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures are dreamed (154). I think about how English is appropriated based on the culture and the community’s counternarratives, and how this innovation with the dominant language returns agency to colonized communities. Time-space gaps can be reimagined with the language they choose to use on their own terms.

Though many of poems in the three anthologies abrogate and appropriate colonial English using varied techniques, some of those that stand out are Dennis Espada's English translation for his poem "Why is there no ornament in the coffin of the miner who died of hunger?" in *Sustaining the Archipelago* which in Tagalog is riotous and powerful than its translated version (206-207) because of the musicality of its lines. In *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*, Kimberly M. Blaesus<sup>36</sup> organizes the English words of her poems side-by-side with their translations, such as in "Dream of Water Bodies / Nibii-Wiiyawan Bawaadanan" (67), while in the poem "Captivity," she uses redacted erasures to cancel out "fugitive names" of Indigenous activists (71). Layli Long Soldier's<sup>37</sup> "38" is written with varied sentences as stanzas that narrates the truth behind the Dakota 38 in conversational style. As the stories delve into more specifically violent acts, especially during the Sioux Uprising, the words fall apart from the page and the texts change font sizes and styles. The sentences break apart with long pauses and the words are reshaped into diverse forms that signify how the stories are experienced through the body (149-155). Tanaya Winder<sup>38</sup> in "Learning to Say *I Love You*" captures the nuances of languages in expressing how her own language is lodged somewhere in her throat and that she is losing this language after the violence of colonization in her community (166-167). Conversely, Mary TallMountain<sup>39</sup> in "There Is No Word for Goodbye" in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* has a persona contemplating on what the Athabascan word is for goodbye. The persona is assured when her friend tells her that they just say *Ttaa*, which means "see you." She concludes that there is no word for goodbye, after all (188).

Altogether, the counternarratives of truth and languages in the ecopoems from the three anthologies have helped construct the editorial metanarratives into thought-provoking pieces

that, in turn, challenge concepts of “place,” “nature,” and “environment” in North American ecopoetry and ecocriticism. Ecopoetry’s centrifugal expressions in these three anthologies demonstrate how there is power in claiming one’s own truth for one’s self and their communities. Counternarratives are preserved in the ecopoetry through memories and language to profess truths that are individual and shared within communities, which become pathways to have agency over their own threshold experiences. As Chief Seattle<sup>40</sup> says in his famous speech of 1854, in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*: “There is no death, only a change of worlds” denoting the impermanence of time (184). What has been buried, disregarded, and erased will eventually be known. As for these communities, they tell their stories in their own way, on their own terms, in their own time-space as a testament to the truth and the perseverance of their identities.

As ecopoetry anthologies are constructing new metanarratives that appear attentive to counternarratives to provide a space to profess truths that are present in communities, I also think about how to negotiate the body as a site of memories with the spaces it has been in. It is so easy to centre us, human beings, in a new metanarrative for another ecopoetry anthology. Yet, we have to think about what exists within the body as a capsule of truth: What has it endured and what has it survived? What has brought it to this present space? What has the body preserved? I argue that these questions may help develop a metanarrative that does not centre ourselves in the environmental discourse anymore but consider the kinship relationship that may lead to supporting and uplifting communities.

I believe another important point to be made after the analysis in this chapter is that the instability of our frameworks and identities as academics, scholars, and creatives also mean the unsteadiness of “metanarratives” and “counternarratives.” They are flexible terminologies that

may be present or not within an ecopoetry anthology. What will be consistent in an ecopoetry anthology are centripetal tendencies and centrifugal yields of the texts. Being attentive to how the centripetal and centrifugal expressions of texts may be important to comprehend what kind of metanarratives and counternarratives are being legitimized or explored in an ecopoetry anthology. Perhaps this is the risk of a migrant reading practice—to be comfortable in the instability of these methods as notions of movements and groundedness are continually challenged by socio-historical realities. This means that there are multiple ways to explore ecopoetry anthologies, just as there are multiple ideas to interpret ecopoetry. A migrant reading practice can also be coopted into the larger system of a dominant monolithic framework in ecocriticism or other fields as a manner of legitimizing colonial-settler relationships with the land. I have misread scholarships before, and I have been misread before as well. I am preparing myself, with excitement and trepidation, for how this framework will be utilized outside this body of work.

I would like to return to the idea that a metanarrative in an ecopoetry anthology in the future may be in the form of constructing or supporting communities. It is these communities—us making sense of the chaos each in our own ways—that are creating cultural productions to show the same love and loyalty that is not for one nation alone, but for counternarratives that are truthful to individual identities, imaginations, families, stories, and memories. Ecopoetry anthologies are some of these cultural productions, and I see potential in ecopoetry anthologies as spaces of hope that encourages historically and traditionally excluded communities to profess their own memories with the languages they have chosen. Ecopoetry anthologies can be a site where we can un-embodiment these truths we carried with us for so long—safely and joyfully.



## Eating Wild Things: Making Sense of the End of the World

In the neighbourhood I grew up in, I used to pick out santan (ixora) flowers to eat nectar from. As kids, we would carefully separate the pedicel from the stamen, and out came dripping fresh nectar that tastes like pure liquid sugar. We also searched for hibiscus flowers that grew out of our neighbour's gated backyards and wore them in our hair as we skipped home. Sometimes, the hibiscus flowers would be delicately placed in a clear vase in the middle of our dining table, illuminated by the sun. I would pick out the flower from my unruly curly hair or the tiny vase and crush the stigma in my hand, curious to see what was beneath the yellow pollen dots.

In Canada, I learned which wild berries to eat and which ones I should not. I also learned that there are many varieties of apples and that the red ones we have in the Philippines (which were so expensive) were mealy and awful for baking. I also learned that there are wild apples, tiny ones from bush-like trees. One summer when I was out camping, I excitedly picked a ton of wild apples, probably tasteless, and made them into a semi-sweet apple pie. I was so happy about that discovery—that I could actually pick apples from the bush for free—that I did not care how my apple pie tasted. Of course, I drank fresh rosehip tea (which I painstakingly picked out from the bush, too) together with my slice of wild apple pie.

There are so many poems from the three anthologies here that speak to the threshold experiences I have had the past five years. As I contemplate the very same question that someone asked me months ago, if I feel Canadian, I think about eating wildflowers back in the heartland and baking wild apple pies. I think about how, in Adrian Crisostomo Ho's<sup>41</sup> "The Prospect of Flowers" in *Sustaining the Archipelago* the persona waits among stalled engines and the black dust of car exhaust for a hint of flowers (214), or in Melvin Dixon's<sup>42</sup> "Wood and Rain" in *Black Nature*, the persona finds that there is no home for a Black man in the woods (96). How in

Sherman Alexie's<sup>43</sup> "The Powwow at the End of the World" in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*, the persona shuns the calls to forgive all and instead chooses to be with her community to tell stories about the salmon, to pray, to laugh for hours, and to find reasons for them to dance (234). I think about in-betweenness, occupying that liminal environment and lingering in that space of unsteadiness: many of us continue and choose to be in-between, including me.

As communities grapple with threats of climate collapse and the ongoing ruinations, sometimes the in-between is the last safe space. Eventually, many of us will have to look beyond anthologies and around us to realize the overwhelming chaos that is ready to engulf us. Where is our safe space to un-embody? Always, I think of what grounds me, and these are memories of Mang teaching me how to eat santan or Pang giving me the hibiscus flowers he picked from our neighbour's yard for Valentine's Day. I think of Kelowna and snatching wild apples from the bush, and then the laugh that choked my throat after driving through a wall of black smoke on the Coquihalla. I think of walking the length of Mission Creek Park alone until my legs felt like jelly. I think of wishing for my parents' faces among the cottonwood trees. I think, if home is memory, then I choose the memory of in-between, where the unsettling is solace and where everything—even just for a moment—makes complete, startling sense.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The US Geological Fact Sheet has comprehensive information and photographic documentation of the eruption: <https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/1997/fs113-97/> (accessed on 24 January 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Ian Rosales Casocot is a novelist. He teaches film, literature, and creative writing in Silliman University in Dumaguete City, Philippines (*Sustaining the Archipelago* 241).

<sup>3</sup> “Imperial Manila” is a term that Filipinos who are not from Manila use to describe those who are from the capital city, as they see them/us as imposing and controlling.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Angeles has been a writer-in-residence of the International Writing Program of Iowa, USA in 2013. He has published indie books, is currently the editor-in-chief of *Manila Today*, and is teaching at the creative writing program of the University of Santo Tomas (*Sustaining the Archipelago* 239).

<sup>5</sup> Imperative to note here that the communities focused on here in these anthologies are all heterogenous in their threshold experiences but may have parallel experiences due to the interlocking systems of oppressions that have been enforced by dominant cultures and frameworks.

<sup>6</sup> Cyrus Cassells was born in Dover, Delaware, and is the author of four acclaimed books of poetry. He is Professor of English at the Texas State University – San Marcos, and lives in Austin and Paris (*Black Nature* 363).

<sup>7</sup> As noted, *Sustaining the Archipelago* never had any funding to support its publication. My intention originally has been to include published Filipino/x ecopoetry that are canonical like Carlos Angeles’ “Gabu” or some parts of *Florante at Laura* (this is an awit or an epic 12-quatrain poem by poet Francisco Balagtas); however, without sufficient material funding and

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support, I cannot and will not be able to afford to include these published pieces in the anthology. Besides, I also do not have the support of administrative labour in collating the anthology, which is a shame because I feel that the anthology can have a more expansive scope if I had both supports.

<sup>8</sup> *Sustaining the Archipelago* also features a Foreword by Dr. Greg Garrard, which discusses the power of ecopoetry in the most challenging of times. In the interest of neutrality, I am choosing to not discuss the Foreword in depth.

<sup>9</sup> The distinction between the “nation” that is being transgressed from and the “nations” espoused by the Indigenous writers in the anthology is related to the dominant Euro-American culture of North America. “Nation” when utilized by dominant hegemonic cultures and metanarratives become weaponized against racialized communities that are not a part of the nation’s imagination. The “nations” here are tribal affiliations that recognizes how each tribal identity and language is different from one another, and that these affiliations have been continually threatened by the intimidation of the dominant hegemonic cultures.

<sup>10</sup> Genevieve L. Asenjo writes in three Philippine languages: Kiniray-a, Hiligaynon, and Filipino. She currently teaches at the De La Salle University – Manila and directs Balay Sugidanun (The House of Storytelling) (*Sustaining the Archipelago* 239-240).

<sup>11</sup> The La Mesa Dam and Reservoir is an earth dam in Quezon City, Philippines that supplies most of the water to Metro Manila. It can hold up to 50.5 million cubic metres of water.

<sup>12</sup> Askia M. Touré is a poet, educator, and activist. He resides in Boston and is a member of the African American Master Artists in Residence at Northeastern University (*Black Nature* 376).

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<sup>13</sup> Donovan Kūhiō Colleps is Kanaka Maoli and was born in Honolulu, Hawaii. He was raised on the 'Ewa plains of O'ahu and is a PhD Candidate in English at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 249).

<sup>14</sup> Lois Red Elk is Isanti, Hunkpapa, and Ihanktonwa. She was born on the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana. When she lived in Los Angeles, she worked as a TV talk show host, an actor and a technical advisor for Hollywood productions. She currently lives in Montana, where she is adjunct faculty at Fort Peck Community College (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 113).

<sup>15</sup> Piping Walang Kamay (PWK) is currently in the mountains of the Cordillera Region. They are a humanitarian worker who focuses on the sustainability of the ecosystem and organizing the community (*Sustaining the Archipelago* 249).

<sup>16</sup> Gerald Barrax Sr. was born in Attalla, Alabama. He is Emeritus Professor of English, Creative Writing, and Poet in Residence at North Carolina State University (*Black Nature* 361).

<sup>17</sup> Lucille Clifton has published thirteen books of poetry, a memoir, and more than sixteen books for children. She has served as Poet Laureate for the State of Maryland and is currently Distinguished Professor of Humanities at St. Mary's College of Maryland (*Black Nature* 363).

<sup>18</sup> Louise Erdrich is part of the Anishinaabe-Turtle Mountain Band, and was born in Little Falls, Minnesota. She is the author of fifteen novels, and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and winner of the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, and a National Book Award for fiction, among others. Currently, she owns Birchbark Books, an independent bookstore in Minnesota (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 131).

<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Elise Foerster, Mvskoke, is the author of two poetry collections, *Leaving Tulsa* and *Bright Raft in the Afterweather*. She received her PhD from the University of Denver and was a

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Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 412).

<sup>20</sup> J.C. Duncan is Cherokee and a poet from the late 1800s of whom not a lot of is known. “The Red Man’s Burden” is his only surviving political poem.

<sup>21</sup> This poem has some illegible words, which are denoted with an X and question marks “[?].”

<sup>22</sup> Janis Claire M. Salvacion is a Waray writer who graduated from the University of the Philippines Tacloban. She currently teaches at the National Maritime Polytechnic of the Philippines.

<sup>23</sup> Thylias Moss has authored ten books and has held the MacArthur Fellowship, Whiting Writer’s Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. She is a Professor of Art & Design and English at the University of Michigan (*Black Nature* 373).

<sup>24</sup> Kimberly Wensaut is Potawatomi and a member of the PaperBirch Poets in Wisconsin. She is also a linguist that focuses on her tribe’s Bodwéwadmimwen language. In 1995, she established the first tribal newspaper of her nation, the *Potawatomi Traveling Times* (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 90).

<sup>25</sup> J.G. Dimaranan graduated from the University of the Philippines – Baguio with a degree in theatre arts. She is currently pursuing alternative and holistic forms of healing and is busy being a mother (*Sustaining the Archipelago* 246).

<sup>26</sup> Hacienda Luisita is a six-thousand-acre sugar plantation in Tarlac, Philippines. Its owners have familial ties to the Cojuangco family, which are related to former Presidents Cory Aquino and her son, former President Benigno Aquino.

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<sup>27</sup> Firie Jill T. Ramos was born and raised in Tacloban. She writes poems and children's stories in Waray, and owns The Aram Learning Studio, a school for children with special needs (*Sustaining the Archipelago* 256).

<sup>28</sup> Patricia Spears Jones was born in Arkansas. She has coedited *Ordinary Women: Poems by New York City Women* and is a contributing editor to *Bomb* magazine and columnist for *Calabar* magazine (*Black Nature* 369-370).

<sup>29</sup> John Trudell is Santee Dakota and was one of the spokesperson for the United Indians for All Tribe's nineteen-month takeover of Alcatraz. He used his training in radio broadcasting to run Radio Free Alcatraz. Trudell joined the American Indian Movement (AIM) and participated in many protests in Washington, DC. In 1986, he released an album, *A.K.A. Grafitti Man*, which Bob Dylan called "the album of the year" (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 123)

<sup>30</sup> Deborah A. Miranda is from Oblone/Costanoan-Esselen and Chumash people. She was born in Los Angeles, California, and earned her PhD in English from the University of Washington. Currently, she is the Thomas H. Broadus Professor of English at Washington and Lee University (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 315).

<sup>31</sup> Jean Toomer published *Cane*, his groundbreaking work of prose and poetry, in 1923 (*Black Nature* 376).

<sup>32</sup> Arna Bontemps moved with his family from Louisiana to California at the age of three, and then he moved to Harlem, New York. He edited six anthologies and published fifteen collections of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and children's literature (*Black Nature* 362).

<sup>33</sup> Margo Tamez is Lipan Apache and was born in Austin, Texas. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from Arizona State University and her PhD in American Studies from

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Washington State University. She currently teaches as associate professor in Indigenous Studies in the University of British Columbia Okanagan. (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 321)

<sup>34</sup> Toni Wynn is a Cave Canem Fellow and a member of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers. Wynn is a third-generation Jersey Girl who lives by the water in Hampton, Virginia (*Black Nature* 378).

<sup>35</sup> Ed Roberson was born in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. His collection *Voices Cast Out to Talk Us In* was a winner of the Iowa Poetry Prize, and his book *Atmosphere Conditions* won the National Poetry Series Prize and was nominated for the Academy of American Poets' Leonore Marshall Award (*Black Nature* 374).

<sup>36</sup> Kimberly M. Blaeser is a Anishinaabe poet, photographer, fiction writer, and scholar. She grew up on the White Earth reservation. She currently is a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and an MFA faculty member at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 66).

<sup>37</sup> Layli Long Soldier is Oglala Lakota. Her 2017 collection, *Whereas*, won the National Book Critics Circle Award, the PEN/Jean Stein Book Award, and was a finalist for the National Book Award. She is also an installation artist (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 148).

<sup>38</sup> Tanaya Winder is Duckwater Shoshone, Southern Ute, and Pyramid Lake Paiute. She grew up in Ignacio, Colorado on the Southern Ute Reservation. She currently is the director of the University of Colorado Boulder's Upward Bound Program (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 166).



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<sup>39</sup> Mary TallMountain is Koyukon. She is a poet, stenographer and educator who was born in Nulato, Alaska, but was adopted and relocated to Oregon. She founded the Tenderloin Women's Writers Workshop while living in San Francisco. (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 187).

<sup>40</sup> Chief Seattle is Suquamish and Duwamish. He was the leader over the Suquamish and Duwamish even if the two tribes were separated by Puget Sound. He delivered this speech during the treaty proposals of 1854, and it is still remembered today (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 183).

<sup>41</sup> Adrian Crisostomo Ho obtained his BA in Creative Writing at Simon Fraser University and his MFA in Creative Writing at De La Salle University – Manila. He currently teaches at the De La Salle University's Department of Literature.

<sup>42</sup> Melvin Dixon is a poet, novelist, translator, and critic. He is the author of several award-winning books and scholarly texts (*Black Nature* 364).

<sup>43</sup> Sherman Alexie, Spokane, is an award-winning and nationally recognized poet, novelist, and short-story writer. She founded Longhouse Media, a nonprofit organization that teaches Native American youth how to use media for cultural expression and social change (*When the Light of the World is Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* 231).

## Chapter 5: Our Coda

yet, when the clouds roared  
and gaped at our thirst, they  
unleashed a familiar rhythm  
it doesn't change – the scent  
of the land's exhale when it again  
tastes the tang of rain

- "It's been three months since the last drop of rain," published in *Asteri(x) Journal: (Un)bound*  
Winter 2018/2019 issue

It is spring again. From my window, a variety of birds convene on the still-bald branches of a maple tree. The crows have hung around all winter long, and the finches, pigeons, woodpeckers, magpies have started to join the party. The skies above have become busier too, with planes flying in and out of the nearby airport—an awakening from the pandemic slumber we have been in the past two years. If I squint my eyes, I can sometimes make out the logo on the plane's tail as *Westjet*, *Air Canada*, *Flair*, and some that I do not recognize. I did this too in my childhood. I climbed up a bunk bed in my nanny's second floor bedroom to look out the panoramic window and watch the planes paint the skies with their condensation trails. Most of them had the *Philippine Airlines* logo on their tails. The ones that did not have the PAL logo—*Cathay Pacific*, *Cebu Pacific*, *Air Asia*—would be mocked to no end by me and my sister. If Mang had left for a flight that day and I had no school, I would patiently wait by that window for any PAL plane to appear so that I could wave goodbye to her until it disappeared from my view.

It has been more than a year since Mang passed away, and a little over a year since I began writing this dissertation. A big regret of mine, which I have actively tried to let go of little-

by-little, was that I never had the chance to say goodbye. My Ate Ria said the last thing she told our mother was, “It’s okay to let go. We’ll be fine here.” For a long time, I was angry over what my sister said. If I were there, I would have asked Mang to hold on a little longer. She was supposed to be here at the end with me as I complete my degree. I was not ready to be without my mother.

A recently published research article, by former UBC-V PhD student<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth G. Blundon and her colleagues, explored the myth that hearing is the last to go when a person passes away. Their research was able to give credence to what hospice nurses and physicians have been noticing, which is that sounds from loved ones seem to comfort people during the last moments before death. They urge that it is significant to say goodbye and express love to them during their last moments. I have found myself reflecting on this data because of how I have felt about the swiftness of my mother’s passing, and because of how sound has been meaningful in my own journey as a migrant-arrivant here in Canada.

My memory does not retain many mental images, but it does retain sounds—music, flying planes, bird calls, voices, laughter, the ocean waves, the city noise. I hear these vividly in my memories and in my dreams. Before I left Manila, my close friends arranged for a fancy dinner in the historic corridors of Malate<sup>2</sup> and asked the house band to play me The Hotdog’s “Manila”<sup>3</sup> (a 1976 classic). “So that we’re sure you’ll return,” my friend Em Mendez kidded, pouting his lips like he loved to do when he was making a joke:

Manila

I keep coming back to Manila

Simply no place like Manila

Manila, I'm coming home

I walked the streets of San Francisco

I've tried the rides in Disneyland

Dated a million girls in Sydney

Somehow, I feel like I don't belong (0:42-1:14)

I sang this song in my head as the plane touched down when I last visited the Philippines. Em is gone now, an early victim of COVID, and I have heard that Malate is slowly being gentrified to cater to the richer foreign crowd that have settled around the area. In my heartland, the people and the places I have loved are gone or are changing in a way that I have not yet reckoned with. Once my daughter joins me here in Canada, I am not sure there is anything else to come back for after that. I am certain that Manila is not home, anymore.

There is a sense of closure too as I write this Coda. I have been guided, largely, by the personal scholarly narratives that both healed and challenged me during the entire process of completing this dissertation. The narratives I shared here with you, my reader, spoke largely about the grief I carried with me the past five years: losing my parents, leaving my country, settling in and preparing to leave Kelowna, processing multiple threshold experiences, and letting go of this liminal environment. I have shown in this work that the personal scholarly narratives are crucial to the development of a Migrant Ecocriticism to facilitate and demonstrate the embodied critical analysis of this framework. I circle back to Joni Adamson, who joins Scott Slovic in challenging ecocritics to use narrative or storytelling to encounter “the world and literature together” (xviii) in exemplifying how life experiences shape and define the critic as a person. I agree with Adamson and Slovic; at the beginning of my graduate degree, I was resistant to keep on writing with this method (despite my supervisor’s reminders that this is a strength of

my scholarship) because I was trying to exude the persona of a cool and calm academic. Five years later, I have grasped that my theorizing is inextricably spun from my embodied experiences. I understand texts best when I think with them through my heart.

Indeed, the narrative scholarship helped shaped the key points in the dissertation's chapters. In Chapter 1, I expounded on what a migrant reading practice is, which operationalizes a Migrant Ecocriticism. This method acknowledges generalized experiences and metanarratives that shape the curation and creation of ecopoetry anthologies but insists upon the singularity of an anthology's process, its ecopoetry, and their counternarratives. I had investigated the "centripetal" articulations of "place," "nature," "environment" in the metanarrative of national identity and metanarrative of anthologizing to discover how they shape editorial metanarratives. At the same time, I sought out the "centrifugal" expressions that are embodied in ecopoetry through counternarratives. In all, Migrant Ecocriticism argues a critical migrant reading practice as a radical method in reimagining, reconceptualizing, and reconstructing the future and value of an ecopoetry anthology to deconstruct territorialized and Euro-American concepts in ecocriticism.

Also, in the same chapter, I clarified the terms "liminal environment," "space," and "movements" as they are used in this framework. I also reflected on concepts of home. My definition of these terms, specifically for a Migrant Ecocriticism, build on how they were defined or utilized by scholars such as Yi-Fu Tuan, Victor Turner, Rahul Gariola, Sherene H. Razack, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, and Neferti X. Tadiar. I ended Chapter 1 by showing how a migrant reading practice is initiated with Neil Astley's *Earth Shattering*. With this, I discovered the complexity of Neil Astley's editorial metanarrative since he aimed to deconstruct the misconceptions of "nature poetry" by presenting a collection that has intensive editorial notes to

guide the reader towards the development of what we conceptualize as “ecopoetry.” Diverse representations of nature are apparent in the counternarratives of ecopoetry from Indigenous, postcolonial, and ecofeminist perspectives that were not as heavily appended as some canonical Euro-American ones in the same collection. A migrant reading practice has demonstrated that *Earth Shattering*’s centripetal editorial metanarrative had curated ecopoetry that queried the misconceptions of “nature poetry” in the Euro-American canon. While this focus of Astley’s editorial metanarrative responds to his motivations as an editor, it does disregard centrifugal articulations from counternarratives about more-than-human species and by IBPOC poets that challenge Astley’s tidy construction of ecopoetry’s development.

In Chapter 2, “Verging at the Liminal Environment,” I defined “verging” as when an individual is brought to a perpetual awareness of their instability and ambivalence due to their threshold experiences. These perplexing events doubt their transition from the liminal environment, or the space that is in-between and in flux, onto a more stable identity. Using these terms, I emphasized how the editorial metanarratives of the anthologies *Here: Poems for the Planet*, edited by Elizabeth J. Coleman; *Wild Reckoning: an anthology provoked by Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring* from editors John Burnside and Maurice Riordan, and *Ghost Fishing: An Eco-Justice Poetry Anthology* from Melissa Tuckey aimed for radical goals through the singularity of their own unique features and centripetal expressions. Yet, counternarratives in the ecopoems explored how embodied threshold experiences complicated these editorial metanarratives with the concept of “verging.” Verging is significant in processing what is necessary for a stable identity after liminal environments, and in considering the possibilities of mobilizing communities for climate-oriented action as the anthologies here wish to do. In this chapter, I also identified how ecopoetry anthologies have emerged as creative and critical

responses to how we make sense of the chaos that is a climate collapse: we hold onto hope through writing and anthologizing, and to find a form of belongingness among one another.

Chapter 3, “The Metanarrative of National Identity in North American Place,” expanded on how the collective identity constructs the metanarrative of national identity through symbolic and material cultural productions that inspire love and loyalty among those who identify with a nation. These notions were linked to the way “nature” and “environment” is perceived and used to promote a sense of belongingness and place, which was then expressed in ecopoetry and recognized in the editorial metanarratives of the three anthologies in this section. These anthologies—*The Ecopoetry Anthology* from Anne Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street; *Open Wide a Wilderness: Canadian Nature Poem*, edited by Nancy Holmes, and *Regreen: New Canadian Ecological Poetry* from Madhur Anand and Adam Dickinson—displayed centripetal ideas of the dominant tropes in ecopoetry. Yet, the centrifugal articulation of ecopoetry in these collections demonstrated the unsteadiness a national identity and a nation. In this chapter, I theorized how the ecopoems insisted that these concepts may *not* be real. More than that, the anthologies’ editorial metanarratives unwittingly investigated the unsteadiness of a national identity. These discoveries characterised how the metanarrative of anthologizing, fraught with material and personal perspectives, rendered an openness to interpreting the anthologies and the ecopoems curated within them. The limits of the anthologists and the process of anthologizing can be an asset that welcomes counternarratives that are not recognized by editorial metanarratives or are not part of the centripetal aim of the editors. Another important discovery in this chapter was that I found that there is, and will constantly be, value in nation- and place-based ecopoetry anthologies, since the intention for curating the volumes remain the same: hope. It is hope that we can rely on both our creative and critical resources to make sense of our own

belongingness (no matter how unsteady it is) and find a way out of the liminal environment as a community.

For Chapter 4, “Counternarratives as Community,” I had investigated how the ecopoetry anthologies in this chapter—namely *Sustaining the Archipelago: An Anthology of Philippine Ecopoetry*, which I edited; *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through* from Joy Harjo, and *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* from Camille Dungy—have editorial metanarratives that are enlightened and motivated by the counternarratives in their ecopoetry and the communities they are engaging with. In turn, the editorial metanarratives challenged the centripetal process of anthologizing within the Euro-American ecopoetic canon. Further, the three anthologies had compiled ecopoems that have been canonically excluded or obscured in many ecopoetry anthologies because their counternarratives did not completely adhere to the editorial metanarratives, the metanarrative of national identity or the metanarrative of anthologizing. It is clear that the anthologies have also become counternarratives to the metanarrative of anthologizing, and that they attempt to confront tensions in the concepts of movements and groundedness when organized together. What was stressed in this chapter is that counternarratives preserve and hold memories as sacred, that the body is a site of memory, and that a migrant reading practice gravitates towards the idea that there are multiple ways to explore our relationships with nature. Once more, hope was stressed in this chapter, and hope was found in the creation of communities and formation of alliances through counternarratives of truth to foster a new collective that is not linear or hierarchical. Anthologists and ecocritics are encouraged to be self-reflexive in addressing our own implicit biases that may sometimes be embedded in our editorial metanarratives so that the future ecopoetry anthologies we produce are attentive to the diverse cultural productions informed by



counternarratives and, thus, we are not limited to simply establishing a canon or deconstructing it to create a new one. We can search for multiple modes of production that are beyond the canon.

The analysis of the ten anthologies in this dissertation have exemplified that the idea of metanarratives (national identity, editorial, and anthologizing) all impose particular curation and organization of poems within a collection; however, they are not necessarily problematic nor autocratic, since they strive to be responsive to the complexities of counternarratives. Likewise, the counternarratives from the ecopoems in the anthologies are centrifugal expressions that challenge or question the metanarratives; yet, they also have the capacity to illuminate the anthologies into radical means of anthologizing—perhaps even organizing beyond the anthology. Above all, the analysis in this work has validated that *hope* is centripetal to the metanarratives, just as it is centrifugal to the counternarratives. The embodiment of hope as an idea, emotion, and framework is critical to how these ecopoems were written, how they were collated into the anthologies, and how the anthologies were conceptualized and published. Hence, hope—as revealed in this dissertation—is the bookend of the metanarratives and counternarratives. It is what keeps propelling people like us to write, anthologize, build communities, and attempt to move forward with our counternarratives.

Another important point that I observed through this sustained inquiry of metanarratives and counternarratives in ecopoetry anthologies is the unsteadiness of the terms, concepts, and identities we use to articulate our threshold experiences and liminal environments. A migrant reading practice has encouraged me to settle in the unsteadiness of the terminologies I have tried to define and redefine in this dissertation. They have shifted and changed, even to the last minute that I am writing this Coda. If as a migrant, I live within the flux of the liminal environment, then perhaps as an ecocritic, I should find comfort and confidence in the constant unsettling of these

terms, methods, and frameworks. Similar to the way I know *Sustaining the Archipelago* is now a capsule in time-space that is relevant to the moment it was curated and published (until another Philippine ecopoetry anthology arrives in the future), this is where I embolden fellow academics and creatives to be receptive to the perpetual unsettling that is bound to happen to our works, ideas, beliefs, and identities.

### **Why a Migrant Ecocriticism?**

I wrote the poem in the epigraph at the peak of wildfire season last 2017; there had not been a substantial downpour in almost three months and the whole Valley was like a tinderbox, ready to ignite. Yet, when it did finally rain, the smell was a scent that I never thought I would immensely crave for—the earthy smell of soil after rain or petrichor. As a child, smelling that scent meant it was time to snuggle in, build blanket forts, and eat hot champorado<sup>4</sup>. I was surprised to encounter the scent here in Kelowna when the first fat droplets of rain hit the ground that wildfire season four years ago. One of my favourite things about being a migrant is this—encountering memories of home everywhere I go. Indeed, “it doesn’t change – the scent / of the land’s exhale when it again / tastes the tang of rain.” Being a migrant, for me, means that I can smell Metro Manila in most spaces I arrive at. It was in Honolulu, while walking around the University of Hawai’i’s Manoa campus one afternoon while on video-call with Mang, and the scent of wet grass was permeating in the air. It was in Vancouver when I visited my best friend Pearl and her family, and we loitered around their dining area waiting for Tita Liliane to finish cooking fried bangus (milkfish), lumpiang togue (fried spring rolls with bean sprouts), and suman (glutinous rice cake with coconut caramel sauce). It is in Kelowna too, everywhere, in the

scent of wet mud in Mission Creek during springtime, or fresh sheets on my bed after a long exhausting week.

In fact, one of the questions I posed in the Introduction is, “Who is the migrant in ecocriticism?” I acknowledge that the migrant in ecocriticism, aside from being malleable, mutable, and tenuous, can be interpreted literally and figuratively. Throughout this dissertation, I have expanded on the concept of a “migrant” by challenging ecocritical terms that are centripetal to the way it was understood in the field, such as “place,” “nature,” “environment,” “home,” and “nation.” The literal migrant in this dissertation are the humans and more-than-humans that move from one space to another because of social, biological, and economic reasons, dispossession, colonization, ruination, climate collapse, general movements, among many other reasons. The figurative migrant is found in the anthologies I have studied, in the form of the ecopoems within them that move from paper to paper, collection to collection, and collection to this dissertation. The anthologies themselves can be considered migrants as they are passed down from library-to-library, classroom-to-classroom, and person-to-person. I argue that fostering a receptiveness to the definition of the term “migrant” may bring forth more metaphors, analyses, and methods that can expand the migrant reading practice that was demonstrated in this work.

Another pressing question that surfaced throughout this migrant reading practice is this: Who are allowed to move, who are not able to move, and who are forced to move? That space is dynamic also means that movements develop into a response to the changes space endures. Climate change is the most pressing disruption we are currently encountering, and we hear of dispossession from island nations and communities of colour as a steadfast worrying occurrence. It is perplexing to think that while affluent communities have the socio-economic means to move away from space, marginalized ones either stay with space for they have no other options or are

forced to leave and become climate refugees or migrants in spaces that do not welcome them. Climate change, being a systemic social-justice issue, also means that postcolonial countries like mine that have been ruined by colonization and are continually exploited by neoliberalist motivations do not have the capacity to continue enduring the rising seas and stronger storms. Indigenous communities, forced away from their ancestral lands or locked in reservations where there is little to no economic opportunities, are also violently ignored or seized as governments build infrastructures that alter their environments beyond their control. To illustrate, Jennifer Else Foerster emphasizes that when an Indigenous person from the Southeast looks for evidence of their homeland, they follow invisible maps because the landscape has changed, and the surfaces of their histories have been written over (360). The persistent alienation from the land and from an individual's sense of belongingness are also consequences of the metanarrative of national identity. For the communities in these anthologies, documenting counternarratives about the space they are embedded in and spaces they have moved into and away from is a pathway to honour the truth. Marilyn Nelson express the truth of counternarratives poignantly: "Both our traditional relationship with the land itself have become distant. Yet spring speaks to each of us, in a language our bodies first, then our minds, understand" (325). Counternarratives interrogate monolithic binaries embedded in ecocritical frameworks by speaking in language attuned to the truths of the body, as synthesized from our own personal and collective environmental histories.

Additionally, language plays a big role in counternarratives. Not only do many of us rely on languages to communicate our threshold experiences with one another, we also rely on it to find and build our communities. Anglophone English too is a space of tension, for ecopoems written in English are often read with colonial English standards and expectations. However, colonized, racialized, and migrant communities have attempted to resist the use of colonial

English and instead opt to abrogate and appropriate it. They do it (and will keep doing this) for the survival of their counternarratives, their truths, and stories. Additionally, they exercise their own agency in choosing to express themselves in the medium they desire.

A Migrant Ecocriticism has been an act of metaphorically unbinding the anthologies, the ecopoetry, my personal narratives, and myself—through the openness of this framework’s method of a migrant reading practice and by empowering myself to be guided by ecopoetry and not only theory. Deciding to write this dissertation with an openness to its methods, framework, and hypothesis was a challenge that I had to intensely work with. As a scholar, I am comfortable in working with key terminologies and synthesizing these to fit in the framework I want to develop. Before, I felt accomplished when I can interpret the most complicated frameworks and methods with simplicity. However, this dissertation forced me to be comfortable in sustaining clear and concise inquiries and arguments. Rather than introducing new key terms and frameworks for each chapter, I had to pare down my theorizing to focus on demonstrating what a migrant reading practice is. This control over my methodology has enabled me to think saliently through my arguments and locate ideas I did not expect to discover in this dissertation.

All these ideas lead to important questions about the state of the field I have heavily invested my work in for more than a decade: *What is next for a migrant reading practice? What is next for ecopoetry anthologies? What is next for ecocriticism?* As I have mentioned in the Introduction, there are many more ecopoetry and eco-writing anthologies that have emerged or are emerging within this space. I am curious to how a migrant reading practice can be used to critique these new collections, or how a migrant reading practice can be engineered to critique other modes of cultural productions such as fiction, non-fiction, media. I am also aware, as I have mentioned in Chapter 4, that a migrant reading practice and the openness of its methods can

be coopted by larger monolithic frameworks in the environmental discourse that may utilize its concepts to support colonial-settler arguments; I maintain here that a migrant reading practice models this vulnerability to interrogate the foundations ecocritical terms and literary canons are based on. If published anthologies become capsules of time-space, then I must also be comfortable that this body of work will inevitably become a capsule of scholarship as well and that it is in the hands of the reader from now on.

I also think a keener attention to the singularity of ecopoetry can be explored in the future as another angle of a Migrant Ecocriticism, which will solely focus on the counternarratives of ecopoetry apart from the tensions with metanarratives. I believe that anthologies, no matter what genre they are compiling and whomever the editors are, will consistently have centripetal motivations and centrifugal articulations. What a metanarrative or a counternarrative is can be dependent on any given factor that is involved in the process of anthologizing; these concepts are like a migrant, too—malleable, mutable, and tenuous (recalling Neferti X. Tadiar's definition of a migrant in Chapter 1). Rather than being bound by these concepts and frameworks, a Migrant Ecocriticism seeks to also be accessible to the needs of the text, its singularity, and related contexts. If editors of anthologies are aiming to explore spaces that have been canonically disregarded, and if publishing companies and institutions are working towards actively publishing these works, then anthologies may function as critical counternarratives that embody a community's multiple modes of expression rather than adhering to what a canon dictates as included or excluded. There is value in anthologizing, and I have maintained throughout my analysis that anthologizing ecopoetry not only makes sense of the chaos we are facing in terms of a climate collapse, but it also is the encapsulation of hope that we all try to hold onto as we express ourselves creatively and critically. The ten anthologies I have studied in this dissertation

are all capsules in time of a specific critical and creative expression; however, the future for ecopoetry anthologies will move into the direction of community-building through shared counternarratives. I see this future in the way Melissa Tuckey sought to compile ecopoetry from living writers for *Ghost Fishing* so that the anthology functions as a site of potential collaboration and not only an endpoint in a publishing contract. Similarly, this future is present in Joy Harjo's persistence to address tensions of identity in the multiple Native Nations that are represented in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came through*, as well as her mandate to employ an all-Indigenous editorial team. I also see this future in the generosity of every single editor of the anthologies I have critiqued; many of the editors are my colleagues and friends. Ecocriticism is a burgeoning field in literary studies; yet there are a small number of communities who have invested their time, work, and lives into assuring that younger scholars like me feel welcomed. Now, I understand that I am able to develop terms and concepts within the field because of how accommodating and generous many ecocritics and ecopoets are in sharing their works with us. Ecopoetry anthologies in the future will hopefully be compiled with more care and consideration towards threshold experiences of the individual person, rather than focusing on interpreting and innovating the canon as we know it. Perhaps ecopoetry anthologies will cease to have editorial metanarratives too and instead focus on letting the centrifugal expressions guide the centripetal theme: in short, the ecopoetry will lead the anthology.

Currently, there is a reckoning that many of us who are invested in ecocriticism are experiencing, which is seizing the instability of terms and concepts (like "nature," "place," "environment") that the field is largely built on. I propose that rather than simply providing and facilitating spaces to intervene in the uncertainty of the field's direction, ecocritics can move towards *investing* in this reckoning. How do we build and sustain community among each other?

How do we support those who have been traditionally, canonically, and historically shunned in our field? Can we support scholars, academics, and creatives *beyond* simply publishing an anthology or inviting them into our institutions and organizations? Sustaining community is a complex process of uplifting each individual's needs—material, academic, emotional, spiritual—while being attentive to our own. As I recount in Chapter 4, this kind of work is messy and exhausting but *necessary*. To pursue the radicalization of ecocriticism as a field, we can investigate the unsteadiness of our own standards as scholars, academics, and creatives, and instead strive to reenergize ourselves by building communities. I frequently like to remind myself that there is an individual behind a poem I am editing, and that I can honour their story through my work as an editor. The future of ecocriticism is propelling towards sustaining hope, sustaining communities, and sustaining ourselves as self-reflexive individuals who are making sense of this world we live in, with one another.

Additionally, I believe the openness of a migrant reading practice's methodology has allowed me to explore and re-explore the manner I was analyzing the anthologies and ecopoems. A Migrant Ecocriticism, I argue, is timely and compelling in a world of increasingly politicized migration of humans and more-than-humans across walls, seas, national borders, and the boundaries of fragmented habitats. It contributes to ecocriticism and the environmental humanities as a radical method that is self-reflexive and embodied; it strives to analyse without a preconceived hypothesis. It is a framework that operationalizes the unsettling and unsteadiness of our own critical thinking and the embodiment of our identities in our scholarship.

## **On Higher Ground**



I reflected on the unsettling and unsteadiness of our identities, particularly my own. I still struggle to be open with my own stories, despite writing with personal scholarly narratives. The limits of my academic work for this dissertation also remain within the limits of my own body—I could say more, do more, and be more open in my own narrative and scholarship. However, it is clear to me that my whole being is still grieving the loss of my mother; I have reached my emotional and physical limit. So much of my identity was rooted in my mother because she was—still is—the sky and the ground for me. My mother, as I had mentioned in the introduction, has been my country. I am not entirely certain what I would have told her if I was by her bedside when she passed away. What would I have wanted Mang to hear during the last seconds of her life? Would I have asked her to hold on a little longer like I thought I needed, or would I have asked her to do what she was meant to do all her life—to fly? I want my mother to be free, just as much as I want that freedom for myself, too. Perhaps, with these thoughts in my head and emotions rooted in my gut, I move towards healing.

Likewise, I am moving on from Kelowna, a space I have tried to call my home for the past five years. There are no words for goodbye when I know my time in a city has come to an end; I feel it in my bones. With the sunnier and warmer weather, I have started rolling down my car windows and all the sounds seem to be amplified in my ears. I hear the planes about to land, helicopters mixing the temperature inversion above cherry orchards, and pretty soon I will hear the geese come back to their home here in the Okanagan. These migrating geese were the first birds that I noticed when I arrived at the now-defunct Greyhound Station, to be greeted by Nancy Holmes with a big smile on her face and holding up a sign with my name on it. A part of home for me will always be the smell of Woodhaven in the fall—the earthy loam and sweet decaying

smell of leaves—before the foliage changes colours into the brightest of yellows, oranges, and reds.

I will miss this city. This was the city where I learned I lost my parents, but it was also the city that gave me the moments to breathe as I walked its trails while trying to ease the aches in my heart. This city helped me find myself, the person I am today, and many times, it broke me, too. Yet, as a migrant, I know that there are spaces that will always be there for me when I return. Manila is one of them, and Kelowna is another now.

Softly, I can hear this city singing its goodbye to me. I am not sure what last sounds I will hear from Kelowna when I am about to leave and whether these will give me comfort at all, but I am ready. I am listening and collecting memories. It is time to move on and start making a home.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The research by Blundon can be openly accessed here:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-67234-9#Ack1> (accessed on 31 March 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Malate has been the hub of residence and recreation in Metro Manila. It used to be a playground for old Spanish mestizo families who built their residences in the area, until the Second World War forced them to move out of the space. They moved back after the war, rebuilt Malate, but later on it was annexed by commercial centres, cafes, and restaurants. Malate is surrounded by sport complexes, universities (De La Salle University – Manila being one of them), government offices, and zoos.

<sup>3</sup> The Hotdogs. “Manila.” *Spotify*.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/0pobQmvHou3syiOi6DRqiC?si=648138e25702487c>

<sup>4</sup> Champorado is a Filipino dish that is made of sweet sticky chocolate rice.

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