FAITH AND CHANGE IN COMMUNITIES OF PERIL

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Faith and Change in Communities of Peril

While social and climate scientists alike have attempted to present the crucial facts of climate change, their urgent warnings have seemingly resulted in comparatively little political action. In this project, I investigate the intersections of faith, environmental justice, and speculative futures in both Christian and popular literature and media in the US. Utilizing analysis based in interpretive methodologies and my own experience as a political educator and organizer, I analyze specific narratives in works of faith and fiction—each attempting to address environmental apocalypse, collective struggles for survival, and the processes of building livable futures—as works of political theory. I examine literary and cultural texts and consider ideas, values, beliefs, and strategies for surviving and adapting in the face of varying potent apocalypses. I specifically explore narratives in sermons and scriptural interpretations, novels, televised series, and podcasts as well as the strategies and processes presented to achieve articulated visions of the future. Additionally, I examine how storyteller-activists are defining and mobilizing specific communities in the face of climate disaster. My project provides a novel account of the intricate relationships between storytelling and prophecy, embodied experience, and on the ground political organizing in the US. My research seeks to identify practical

strategies in hopes of facilitating movement through melancholic lamentation and doom and into sustained, creative political organizing.

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INTRODUCTION:

FAITH & CHANGE IN COMMUNITIES OF PERIL

"All struggles Are essentially power struggles. Who will rule, Who will lead, Who will define, refine, confine, design, Who will dominate. All struggles Are essentially power struggles, And most are no more intellectual than two rams knocking their heads together. Earthseed: The Books of the Living." —Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower (1993, 81).

"We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. [Laughter and Applause]. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words." —Ursula Le Guin, National Book Awards,(2014).

"All organizing is science fiction"—Walidah Imarisha, Octavia's Brood, (2015).

In November 2019, I participated in the *Just Futures: Speculative Arts and Social Change Symposium* in Corvallis, Oregon. The event, co-sponsored by the Anarres Project for Alternative Futures was a transdisciplinary symposium that highlighted the ways that the speculative arts (most broadly interpreted) could help us to diagnose and deal with social, economic, and political injustices *right now* and to imagine futures built on solidarity and justice (The Anarres Project 2019). The room was filled with storytelling: what could we learn from the many futures presented in *Star Trek*, the art installations of Beatriz Cortez, the endless possibilities in table-top gaming and podcasting, the very visible popularity of *The Handmaid's Tale*, and from the urgent call to Black and Indigenous perspectives of the future?

I was invited to participate as a political science scholar, educator, and labor organizer working with Oregon State's School of History, Philosophy, and Religion. I

was present to be a storyteller *and* to bear witness to others: to provide critique, hope, and strategies for change. The keynote speaker, Grace Dillon (Anishinaabe), amid her discussion of Indigenous futurisms, passed around at least 20 different novels and comics and challenged us to dig into them while she spoke. Taking up these stories and their powerful narratives, Dillon suggested, would allow us all to survive what is to come, to build connectivity, implement strategies for change, and to create livable futures here on Earth.

While none of the presented papers during the symposium focused solely on Octavia E. Butler, her presence as a political theorist and prophet was consistently weaved into the presentations and discussions. Butler's portrayals of the "slow violence" of climate change and ecological degradation (Nixon 2011), consistent referral to the influence of Christianity and spirituality to political world making, and eerily pointed descriptions of American political collapse, trauma, and survival in the *Parable* series (*Parable of the Sower (1993), Parable of the Talents (1998)*, collected notes for *Parable of the Trickster (unpublished)*) were treated as a shared language and narratives for future building. Her analyses of power, human nature, gender, and colonization in the *Xenogenesis* series (*Dawn (1987), Adulthood Rites (1988), and Imago (1989*)), and the relationship between past, present, and future in *Kindred (1979)* were also considered foundational to our collective practice.

The *Parable* series in particular was regarded as a mirror of the near-present moment: a setting of constant environmental disaster including a California alight with fire, gradual global economic collapse accompanied by the rise of company towns and

squashed labor movements, drug addiction as fiery pandemic, and a chaotic political system fully shifted to right-wing demagoguery. The exodus of the main character Lauren Oya Olamina in the *Parable* series and her creation of a new community and faith practice—Earthseed—have indeed given many people "in real life" hope that livable futures are possible.

In September 2020, *Parable of the Sower* became a New York Times Best Seller for the first time since its release in 1993. In the novel, Olamina is faced with a bleak reality, but manages to help her community move through rupture, and create tools to "shape change" in the face of what William E. Connolly would later call the "evangelical-capitalist resonance machine" (Butler 1993; Connolly 2005). It is through practice of shaping God, Olamina explains in the series, that humans shape themselves. While influenced by Olamina's experience as the daughter of a respected pastor, Olamina's God is not hierarchal or humanoid. It is not the God of her father (a phrase repeated by women in the *No Place Like Home* podcast discussed in this project), but rather God is a praxis of change—of resistance—that must be literally planted, grown, and sown together. She provides a scrappy fashioning of futures forged by the tools at hand in an already-becoming apocalypse.

Much of the same concerns and questions considered by the symposium and foregrounded in Butler's work, animated this project at various points in time: What stories, narratives, and genres have come to dominate our relationship to the uncertain future of Earth? How do we tell compelling stories that allow movement though impasse and access to an "ending" worth working toward? How do we organize to resist powers

that captivate rather than enable change? And what do experimental changes among political groups in the US reveal about the emergence and contingency of political affinities and strategies?

While social and climate scientists alike have attempted to present the crucial facts of climate change, their urgent warnings have seemingly resulted in comparatively little political action. In this project, I investigate the intersections of faith, environmental justice, and speculative futures in both Christian and popular literature in the US. Utilizing analysis based in interpretive methodologies and my own experience as a political educator and organizer, I examine specific narratives in literary and cultural texts and consider ideas, values, beliefs, and strategies for surviving and adapting in the face of varying potent apocalypses—as works of political theory. I learned from both science fiction authors and faith leaders that we can never predict the future—only imagine future histories—future struggles—perhaps new combinations of our many knowledges, dreams technological developments, and maybe some of the second and third order effects we envision stem from the lives we live now in the ongoing present. I focus on the seemingly disparate genres of Christian scholarship and speculative fiction—because these genres are concerned with these same questions about the uncertain future of Earth and consistently depart from and intersect with one another in US popular culture.

In the US, while the political right's narratives and affective charges dominate popular media and scholarly attention, there are vibrant and variant forms of organizing and strategizing that go woefully unattended. Speculative arts are well situated to reach

broad audiences through captivating narratives, images, symbols, and thought experiments. Unlike most academic approaches to political theorizing, the narrative forms can be a more accessible way to communicate political questions and ideas and suggest viable strategies and actions (Baccoloni 2004; Jones and Paris 2018; Orosco 2017b; Somers 1994). And unlike popular news or social media that may also reach broad audiences, the speculative aspect of the genre allows the reader a different avenue for investigation and critique of their own situatedness. Through the dual processes of estrangement and imaginative potential, readers can compare and contrast their own sets of ideas and experiences, hopes and fears for the future to the characters and outcomes in the literature (Baccoloni 2004; Jones and Paris 2018). In time of crisis in particular, the genre can allow a reader a way to investigate that ever-intriguing question of "What would happen if…" in ways that attend to more lengthy temporal scales as well as individual and collective experience—a more capacious understanding of identity and agency than often offered in much of contemporary social science. According to Lauren Berlant, speculative fiction helps in revealing when "ordinary life becomes a landfill for overwhelming and impending crises" and allows the reader to sift through this dumping ground before the crisis is in full swing (2011, 3). Furthermore, the genre's narratives frequently accentuate political conflicts in highly memorable and persuasive ways—conveying information to publics without direct venues for argument or disagreement or overly simple resolutions to political issues or problems (Jones and Paris 2018).

Political theorists William E. Connolly and Elizabeth Anker point to the ways that specific dramatic narratives of literature and cinema can seem to "jump" into political

rhetoric and action, and political realties can in turn seem to play out like a fictional novel or movie (Connolly 2002; Connolly 2005; Anker 2014). In 2018, Calvert Jones and Celia Paris find consistent evidence that speculative fiction dystopias like *The Handmaid's Tale* heighten dispositions toward radical and even violent forms of political action (Jones and Paris 2018, 969). "Whether or not regular news media generally shapes beliefs about political effectiveness, the contrast with dystopian fiction is notable, as we find more evidence for people drawing "political life lessons" from a narrative about an imaginary political world than from fact-based reporting about the real world" (Jones and Paris 2018, 982). According to Jones and Paris's experimental political science approach to engagement with dystopia and political attitudes, "exposure to dystopian media made people more willing to justify radical—and particularly violent—forms of action *against injustice by political elites*" and that it is specifically political fictional narratives that *are* persuasive (2018, 970, emphasis mine). Readers and viewers are expected to imagine themselves as certain characters, or perhaps simply align or empathize with certain storylines and moments of political resistance (Jones and Paris 2018). Furthermore, these scholars show, stories that are dramatic enough to provoke political action—may be just that—stories rather than contemporary realities.

In 2020, international relations (IR) scholars Audra Mitchell and Aadita Chaudury find that much of scholarly literature on environmental apocalypse, human extinction, and global catastrophe produced by climate and political scientists is problematically concerned with protecting the future of whiteness and capital, rather than producing just and liberated futures (Mitchell and Chaudury 2020, 2). While this comes as no surprise to

many scholars even within the discipline of political science, the authors argue that when IR scholars seek to reach broad audiences and influence disciplinary scholarship through their diagnoses of global threat and "treatments" for potent apocalypse, IR scholars consistently provide a singular Western white future which recapitulates a linear collapse sequence, individualistic strategies for survival, and Hobbesian (popularly interpreted) post-apocalyptic visions of catastrophe (Mitchell and Chaudury 2020). They emphasize that the same handful of voices in IR, validated by their proximity to certain scientific methods or academic lineages, have come to dominate questions of social risk, planetary threat, institutional roles[1], agency, and subjectivities—narrowing and often homogenizing global understanding of world-making and possibilities (Mitchell and Chaudury 2020). Calling for trans- or interdisciplinary organizing strategies in political science and beyond, Mitchell and Chaudury advocate for world-making grounded in Black and Indigenous futurisms and a focus on connection and creativity in the face of global catastrophe (2020, 3). Stories of resistance based in real historical and contemporary struggles which articulate strategies for survival, then, are a key to imagining livable futures.

Storytelling, particularly in this genre of speculative fiction, is just one way to live out multiple possibilities and practice different futures with different relations of power (brown 2017, 19).[2] Children often face accusations of reading or engaging with this genre

[1] More so institutional betrayal.

[2] The near and far futures *feel* bleak in any genre: mathematical models and other academic predictions, stories from faith communities, and speculative fictions are nearly all expressing horrifying futures.

of literature as “escape,” but it is also a practice in potentials. Walidah Imarisha calls this “visionary fiction” which allows for the exploration of possibilities unconstrained as they may be in daily life (2015). Storytelling and movement work are always political and require the creation of worlds with novel relationships of power and intersections of identity which consistently reflect on real, lived experience of proximity to power (Cohen 1997; Imarisha and brown 2015; Phillips 2016). Butler’s narratives, for instance, I interpret as political theorizing on how to acknowledge and deal relationally with an environmental apocalypse and a society that fostered the rise of an American president whose motto is “Make America Great Again” (1998). Her stories establish a framework through which we can see our own present circumstances and locate our own identities and ideas of the future. In the words of George Shulman, “there are dominant narratives that people are mostly enacting without self-reflection” and these “dominant narratives are at once very costly to others, and ultimately often self-defeating to those who believe them” (2019). Literature and particularly speculative fiction tell stories in such a way that “readers can experience them and see their costs in a way that they can't always otherwise see” in a moment or experience of constant crisis (Shulman 2019). Butler precisely creates this sense of “crisis and reckoning” in her work, demanding the reader identify themselves, come to terms with reality, acknowledge their proximity to power, and start the process of shaping change and working through issues as they arise—while simultaneously acknowledging the need for a kind of faith in action. There is no “solution” to climate change or political discord that can rely on plain statements of facts, dazzling data, or “mere scientific evidence” without any attention to narrative, metaphor,

positionality, organizing plans, and hope. Assuming social engagement is affectively motivated by technologies that privilege the spectacular, there is a need for conversion of these critical challenges into a story "dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention" (Nixon 2011, 3; Anker 2014; Jones and Paris 2018; Naerland 2019).

As Joseph Orosco points out in relation to *Star Trek Discovery*, many in the US and beyond crave guidance through our current political and environmental (perhaps apocalyptic) conditions (Orosco 2017b). Many feminist speculative fiction writers such as Margaret Atwood, Octavia E. Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, Marge Piercy, and Sheri Tepper provide forms of guidance in their work often through literal journey "guides" (Lauren Oya Olamina in the *Parable* series, Offred in the *The Handmaid's Tale* and Ren, Jimmy the Snowman, and God's Gardeners in the *Maddaddam* series, or through hopeful, but directional prophetic narratives and parables. Many of these same "guides" specifically draw on the interplay of Christian faith and politics in their work. Atwood, for instance, provides for the heroic guidance of women through the voice of Offred, Offred's daughters, and even Aunt Lydia (particularly in the Hulu series) who take faith-informed action to survive and build better futures. Butler does so through Lauren Oya Olamina and the creation of the Earthseed communities—always in tension with the interpretation of Christian scripture and Baptist preaching adhered to by her father and brother.

In August of 2019, I embodied a character from a similar narrative in a local theatre production of a speculative fiction play called *Sun Poisoning* by Harrison Sim. I

played a prophet of environmental apocalypse named Chloe who desperately, but quite casually warns of a non-descript desert town's impending demise (Kress 2019). Through her own intuition about apocalypse, relationship building with children, and through the prophetic words of her teenage boy doppelgänger Charlie, they try to prepare the town for the end of the world (at least, as they've known it) (Kress 2019). Unable to cope with the potential loss of their only access to goods and the sudden disappearance of the previously unrelenting sun, the town reacts to the ensuing becoming of prophesy by sacrificing Chloe and Joe the shopkeeper[3] on a makeshift pyre of excess summer goods and Canadian Mist. Chloe, in her final moments, describes her role in preparing others for the apocalypse through a story of her own childhood trauma-patterning and survival— an embrace of the "doomed" present. Charlie ultimately finds a way to bring back the sun which allows the town to endure, but in eulogizing Chloe, demands that *the next time* the town be prepared to listen and act together in order to better survive the apocalypse and to bring connection, justice, wisdom, and mercy instead of reactionary, scarcity-based competition and vitriol (Kress 2019).

Stories like these animate our understanding of real-life political problems and relations of power, and certain narratives give these stories affective intensity and meaning making potential. Generally, narratives involve characters in a setting, experiencing and enacting a set of events in scenes. Most often there is some character or

[3] The play was directed by a labor union president (Ellen Kress), both Chloe and Joe the shopkeeper were played by "real life" labor organizers and political scientists (myself and Michael Magee), Charlie was played by a community organizer (Miles Shepard), and the music composed and played by yet another union organizer and philosopher from California's San Joaquin Valley (Ricardo Friaz).

characters that encounter some issue or problem, often leading to a conflict or intense moment(s), and change, resolve, or stagnation. These narratives generally shape communities through their experiences of collective peril. In biblical narratives[4], a problem or issue is often presented with a calling from God, some internal emotional struggle where weak, flawed individuals or people must do more than they imagine that they can do, often with some amount of educating and organizing work (calls to action) required. Some person or group of people must use their power(s) to do something that will be meaningful for generations or until the end of this planet called Earth, and their individual decisions matter to the existence or sustenance of a collective.

As jeremedic prophets, these storyteller-activists call on everyone to acknowledge the obvious decay, account for destruction of capitalism, and realize that neoliberal reforms are not enough. As prophets, they also understand themselves as having a calling—and everyone who hears their words is meant to heed a call to action. What many of these stories and storytellers illuminate is an experience of mass social and spiritual death and decomposition, but also regeneration and renewal. They communicate that change will not be easy, but also that we all need to prepare ourselves and our bodies for the worst part has yet to come and we will have to create "the now" and what comes after together.

[4] Biblical narratives do not originate or shape a singular understanding of prophesy, as George Shulman demonstrates. Prophesy is a social, political, and cultural practice (2008, 2). I focus on Biblical narratives of prophesy as influential in US political culture despite the dominance of secularization theories in political science research for the last several decades.

As Margaret Somers shows in her extensive body of work, narrative analysis has been difficult to assimilate into contemporary social science research, primarily because of the methodological turns in the social sciences away from "storytelling" and discursive analyses as "epistemological others" associated with the humanities (1994, 606). This was before an even stronger turn toward quantitative methodologies in the social sciences, believed to be generalizable explanatory statements rather than different genres accounting for social phenomena (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006). As Somers argues in relation to identity formation:

> it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities… [All] of us come to *be* who we *are* (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of our own making*… [Everything] we know, from making families, to coping with illness, to carrying out strikes and revolutions is at least in part a result of numerous cross-cutting relational story-lines in which social actors find or locate themselves (1994, 606-7, emphases original).

As narrative creatures, however, we need stories that seed hope and faith that a better future is possible, framed in ways that allow for coping with despair, and that provide specific paths through rupture and impasse. Experiences of climate change, environmental degradation, and related pandemics can involve deep trauma and melancholia expressed in the mourning of past, present, and potent loss (Lertzman 2012). "Sometimes, we consciously register this *affectedness* [of how power operates] and realize we are touched, we feel. If we give this *feeling* a name, it registers as an emotion: for instance, love, anger, intrigue, surprise, hate or fear" (Wiebe 2020, 183). To move

with and through this melancholia, our practices cannot be cruelly optimistic or built from trauma patterning (Berlant 2011; Lertzman 2012; brown 2017).[5]

Following the work of environmental justice scholars Giovanna de Chiro and Rob Nixon, popular attention and understanding of climate change and environmental collapse suffers from a representational problem (religion and politics literature calls this diagnostic framing) that is more easily overcome through narrative storytelling. Unlike much scientific scholarship, popular media can tell a digestible story of the complex, multifocal, and temporally slow violence of climate change (Nixon 2011). And perhaps more importantly, these narratives can better depict resistance and response to environmental calamities without *necessarily* being pre-politicized or polarized—as the characters are not often bound to national or partisan identities or ideologies. This representational problem is something that speculative fiction scholarship addresses through character and narrative point of view, and something that faith-based activists discussed later in this project similarly attend to through choice of scripture, focus of sermons, witness narratives (testimonies), and their own eco-theological scholarship.

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[5] When asked what affect theory can "do" for contemporary society, Lauren Berlant shared her hope, "Since affect is about *affectus*, about being affected and affecting, and therefore about relationality and reciprocity as such, affect theory is inevitably concerned with the analysis of collective atmospheres. It's not always enough (for my taste) about the kinds of structure that create biopolitical, class, and imperial misery, though, but not everyone has to have the same project. What kinds of worlds for mass thriving affect theory, or any theory, can induce is another question. The reason so many queer theorists are interested in it, I think, is because while one can't intend an affect, one can become attentive to the nimbus of affects whose dynamics move along and make worlds, situations, and environments. In attending to, representing, and standing for these alternative modes of being, we seek to provide new infrastructures for extending their potential to new planes of convergence. I hope!" (Berlant and Greenwald 2012, 88).

In this project, I attend to how futures are imagined through narrative and who imagines our collective struggles for survival in pre-, present, and post-apocalyptic worlds. In order to show how stories of and strategies for change are important to our collective survival, my analysis draws on several storytellers in various organizations, medias, and literatures focused on the contemporary struggle over our shared environmental future. I am interested in how actors prophesize, imagine, and make change through narration, prayer, and care: grounding concern in the present as well as future generations, paying close attention to poverty and extreme economic inequality in *this* perhaps dystopian time, rooting in the places impacted by environmental degradation or disaster, and promoting a willingness to work across creeds to solve contemporary environmental problems (Connolly 2005; Viterna 2013; EEN 2014; CFTM 2014).

In Chapter I, I provide the theoretical and methodological groundwork for the project. My path in this project was anything but linear, and this chapter illuminates my own meandering, iterative, looping way of collecting materials, reading, interpreting, and writing. In the "infinite resources" version of this project, I would have engaged in conversations with dozens of people about their experiences of storytelling and testifying for livable futures; the faith that motivates them, the narratives that compel them to respond, and how these experiences inform their political, cultural, and ideological perspectives and practice. This version of this project, however, is based in close reading of these narratives with brief moments of autoethnography.

In Chapter II, I discuss the role of prophetic narrative in two series that are differently shaping understandings of the future: Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the*

Sower and *Parable of the Talents* as well as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. Ultimately, I am telling a story about storytellers who are hoping to move us through impasse, shape change, plant seeds, and "sow worlds" in a phrase from Donna Haraway (2016).

In Chapter III, I amplify the political creativity of Christians coming up against what William E. Connolly calls the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine. While narratives of moral decay are constantly re-articulated by the Right, this chapter highlights the oft neglected ways that Christians (I focus primarily evangelicals) seek to create explicitly political change by engaging in public storytelling through prayer, pamphlet and magazine distribution, development of curricula and pedagogical practices, and poetry in order to live in a way that transforms thought. Identifying the complex affinities between Christianity and capitalism in the work of William E. Connolly and others has made it possible to analyze resistance.

These potent faith-based environmental efforts have been emerging on the US political periphery for some time—stitching together innovative interpretations of biblical text, concerns about the destruction of God's creation, lived experiences with environmental degradation, as well as dissatisfaction with formal political processes and more dominant secular social movement organizations. Sometimes referred to as "creation care" or "evangelical environmentalism," these efforts are connected by a focus on the sanctity of all life on Earth—including the Earth itself—and on the importance of the biblical interpretation of obligation to this world and it's life—sometimes referred to as environmental "stewardship." In so doing, these actors often provide stories and

strategies rooted in a critique of capitalism from within Christianity; challenging the hegemonic status of politicized evangelical actors and organizations who are tied to major industrial giants in oil, natural gas, coal, dairy, and their ever optimistic and colonizing discourses of technological frontiers, modernization, and development (Connolly 2005; Dochuk 2012).

In Chapter IV, I focus on stories of the fragility of Earthly life and strategies for surviving and thriving as illuminated in podcasting and social media. Primarily concentrated on the climate storytelling podcast *No Place Like Home* hosted by Anna Jane Joyner and Mary Anne Hitt and the apocalypse survival skill podcast *How to Survive the End of the World* hosted by sisters adrienne maree brown and Autumn Brown. This chapter focuses on grounded narratives and emergent strategies for change.

In the Conclusion, I sew these seemingly disparate elements and efforts together in their desires to shape futures we can all inhabit. I also discuss the ways in which the COVID-19 crisis, social uprisings, and climate disasters on the West coast of the US reshaped and changed this project immensely in a very short time. These events have only heightened my interest in the intersection of culture, politics, and shared experiences of precarity. The crisis has illuminated for me how quickly humans can indeed miraculously change and adapt in the midst of intense anxiety and fear. My own priorities have shifted swiftly in 2020, thoughts have coalesced differently, and it is hard to talk about political action in the ways I might have before the pandemic, global reckoning with police brutality, and climate fire disasters in the Pacific Northwest. In these uncertain/wild/unsettled/terrifying/challenging/unprecedented/unrelenting times, I feel

acutely aware of my own thinking, feeling, and meaning-making activities and hope that this project does justice to the political creativities presented within.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL ENTRANCE POINT & METHOD

"Literature is an uttering, or outering, of the human imagination. It puts the shadowy forms of thought and feeling—heaven, hell, monsters, angels, and all—out into the light, where we can take a good look at them and perhaps come to a better understanding of who we are and what we want and what our limits might be." — Margaret Atwood (2004, 517).

In this chapter, I provide the theoretical and methodological groundwork for the project. As I stated out the outset, the route to the completion of this project from the collecting of materials and reading of relevant literatures to interpretation and actual writing process was one that looped back and forth and frequently overlapped itself. In order to best illuminate this process, this chapter focuses on the original motivation for the project and its morphology, my embrace of interpretive methods, the frames for my substantive readings, and continuing sites of inspiration.

Morphology of the Project: From Countering the Evangelical Capitalist Resonance Machine to Emergent Strategies for Change

In the 2011 edition of *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, John Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips describe political theory as "an interdisciplinary endeavor whose center of gravity lies at the humanities end of the happily still undisciplined discipline of political science," and as an "unapologetically mongrel sub-discipline" in its challenging relationship to political science, philosophy, history, and the so called "real world" of politics (Dryzek, Honig, and Phillips 2011, 62). And that is precisely the sub-discipline I found best suited for this project. While I have engaged

with both science fiction and faith literatures intentionally for as long as I can remember, I never thought they were political theorizing and that my interaction with these literatures was quite literally shaping my capacity for world-building, the ways that I imagined futures, the way I entered and held space in communities, or the ways I understood hope in this world.

While this project is an investigation of the use of narrative to imagine and strategize change, it did not start out quite that way. This project is an "intellectual detour" from a project that began with a focus on evangelical Christians attempting to deal with climate change and environmental degradation, specifically those working to combat the dominance of right-wing mediation of human relationships to faith and systems of power and privilege (Scott 1998, 1). The project morphed, however, into a consideration of a broader range of narratives of identity and futures for two reasons. First, it became very clear that the evangelical Christian actors and organizations that I was in the midst of investigating were not necessarily dealing with climate change (and later the pandemic outgrowth COVID-19) through the narration of an *evangelical* Christian identity, through evangelical-specific materials, or on behalf of an evangelical Christian collective or organization. Self-identified evangelical climate scientist Dr. Katharine Hayhoe, for instance, narrates possibilities through climate modeling, but understands herself to be telling a climate story through prophesies she fears will never be heard—seeing herself as the Greek Cassandra or the biblical Jeremiah and definitely not a "climate evangelist" or as an evangelical first and foremost (Zak 2019).

Secondly, I found William E. Connolly's diagnosis of the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine compelling, but his perspective on counter organizing to be less productive. The creative narratives of faith and the environment I was investigating seemed capable of de-centering what Connolly diagnoses as the alleged "alliance" of capitalism with "the most militant section of American Christianity" which Connolly considers to be "the greatest threat to democracy" (Connolly 2005, 870). This "machine" operates by magnifying "affinities of sensibility" in seemingly contradictory sets of beliefs and practices. These affinities begin to resonate and sometimes even echo in mediated settings. This shared affective, rather than say moral or political ethos, continues no matter the apparentness of contradiction or the insistence of "factual" or "scientific" evidence. According to Connolly, the machine was generated by humans "interacting across different subject positions during a period of accentuated uncertainty" (Connolly 2011, 19)—perhaps similar to the one we find ourselves in now—with much less affectively charged discussion of the ways this mechanistic process is interrupted.

In *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style*, Connolly describes the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine as those "affinities of identity" infused with "religious intensities" that form a unique "imbrication" of revenge and resentment which resonate in the "media echo chamber" (2005, 871). These affect-imbued "religious" dispositions loop back and forth, helping to "crystallize, amplify, and legitimize" their positions of power (Connolly 2005, 873). This machine is the consolidation of a

movement that is larger than the sum of its parts[6], which pulls in elements seemingly irrelevant to its structure, and which attaches fragments of the evangelical right and capitalist endeavors:

> "Spiritual sensibilities, economic presumptions, and state priorities slide and blend into one another, though each also retains a modicum of independence from the others. Causation as resonance between elements that become fused to a considerable degree… in which heretofore unconnected or loosely associated elements fold, bend, blend, emulsify, and resolve incompletely into each other, forging qualitative assemblage resistant to classical models of explanation" (2008, 40).

These patterned interactions of evangelical identity-making with capitalism combine with the media's political polarizing capabilities to produce reinforced transmissions of religiously-intensified individualist dispositions, dispositions marked by ubiquitous neoliberalism and market ideologies which tend toward destruction of the earthly world in the process (Appadurai 2002; Connolly 2005, 871; Connolly 2008).

Mechanistic organizing has long troubled Christian fiction writers like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien[7], Tolkien once remarking to his son in 1944 after watching a flock of birds:

> "There is the tragedy and despair of all machinery laid bare. Unlike art, which is content to create a new secondary world in the mind, [machinery] attempts to actualize desire, and so to create power in this World, and that cannot really be done with any

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[6] This understanding of intersectionality and looping in causality should be attributed to Kimberle Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, Dorothy Roberts, and many others who have shown how overlapping institutions of oppression work, but are never mentioned in this work.

[7] Both authors feared American "feminism" (partly because of a perceived relationship of empowered women and the need for more machines from the US), fought in WWI fully aware of and participatory in English imperialism, and included problematic obsessions with human genealogy and racial castes in their works. Particularly in Tolkien, there are hardly any women characters at all and many of them are stereotypes.

> satisfaction. Labor-saving machinery only creates endless and worse labor. And in addition to this fundamental disability of a creature, is added the Fall, which makes our devices not only fail of their desire but turn to a new and horrible evil" (Tolkien 1944).

And in another letter stressed his fears:

> "Well, the First War of the Machines [WWII] seems to be drawing toward its final chapter—leaving alas, everyone the poorer, many bereaved or dead and only one thing triumphant: the Machines. As the servants of the Machines are becoming a privileged class, the Machines are going to be enormously more powerful. What's their next move?" (Tolkien 1945).

Both authors expressed fears of a fully catastrophic apocalypse should humans and other than humans not organize across long-held divisions—that humans and otherthanhumans on Earth are bound together *as kin*. And emphasizing that humans and their creations are not somehow *outside nature*. In order to counter this powerful form of mechanistic resonance, Connolly argues that a new provisional project or emergent assemblage must form and forge on the periphery, comprised of multiple constituencies and creeds in a more "eco-egalitarian economy" that links across conventional dividing lines, and discards politicized discourse and certain orientations toward the future (Connolly 2005, 2008). Connolly's assemblages are arrangements consisting of miscellaneous fragments fastened together in an ad hoc fashion.[8] These "affect-imbued"

[8] Jane Bennett has a slightly different understanding of assemblages, but one that is more obviously applied to political movements: "Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within. They have uneven topographies, because some of the points at which the various affects and bodies cross paths are more heavily trafficked than others, and so power is not distributed equally across its surface. Assemblages are not governed by any central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group" (Bennett 2010, 23). Connolly's definition is also less rigid in 2008, "a bringing or coming together; a meeting or gathering, the state of being gathered or collected. The joining or union of two things; conjunction; a work of art consisting of miscellaneous objects fastened together" (1).

compositions are an inseparable mixture of faith, doctrine, *and* sensibility and are installed in the very "soft tissues" of emotion, habit, posture, and intellect (2005, 873). And thus, a counter political project must be constructed as a positive one that can be both *visualized* and *felt* (2008, xi). Usage of media like film and podcasting and the goals of the actors in this project do align with the counter assemblage as outlined by Connolly here:

> "Those who resist the drive to existential revenge whirling within the evangelical-capitalist machine need to make connections with dissidents on the edge of that machine. Not because our creeds reflect theirs, though they may in some cases. But, first, because they seek to insinuate an active pluralization of faith into evangelical Christianity; second, because they convey a protean care for being that must grow if democratic energies are to expand; third, because they diminish the element of dogmatism in the ethos of faith; and fourth, because they drive a wedge into that ungodly alliance between cowboy capitalism and extremist Christianity that smothers the prospects for egalitarianism and pluralist democracy" (2005, 879; emphasis mine).[9]

Connolly's dedication to deepening pluralism and democracy are revealed when identities holistically connect in proximity and locality with inclusive and participatory activist formations across politically defined borders, such as ideologies, districts, or states (Connolly 2005; Appadurai 2002).

Connolly, however, focuses so strongly on the resonance of the machine that he frequently elides the contemporary energies working against it: composed of marginalized dissidents in dissent that is not dogmatic, that is more caring, and definitely

[9] Connolly's solution is "open theism" which affirms a God that changes, however the actors through which I am telling this story do not necessarily see themselves as open theists. Again, for the most part they identify as Christian or spiritual.

not simply "left" politics (Connolly 2005; Kretschmer 2009). By engaging in public prayer, solidarity actions, community organizing, pamphlet and magazine distribution, development of curricula and pedagogical practices, embodiment workshops, poetry, podcasting, these actors are creatively and assertively interpreting scripture, recognizing and reconciling with the "real" past, and imagining more livable futures.

Connolly presses toward his project of "deep pluralism" ideologically beyond the goals and strategies outlined by the actors themselves. For Connolly, the most pressing issue is deep and multidimensional pluralism and in so doing he separates his work from the meaning-making of the human actors actually involved in many on-the-ground counter projects. In *A World of Becoming*, Connolly attempts to redefine "faith" in line with immanent realism and as opposed to everyday Christian definition or transcendent understandings of the concept. Connolly offers that faith "does not mean the receipt of divine grace that infuses devotees with a confidence that cannot be communicated to others without such an infusion," but rather is a "contestable element of belief that extends beyond indubitable experience or rational necessity, but permeates your engagement with the world" (2011, 39-40). This seems to establish that there is something new about Connolly's understanding of faith—but this is an overemphasized difference in conceptual development. Faith is indeed a "contested concept" in "belief" (and practice) that has extended beyond experience or necessity. For many actors here, their faith involves forms of trust, hope, rage, presence, love, and communion that do not need and would never accept Connolly's redefinitions or bounds of faith or spirituality. Actors can and have articulated "faith" and *feel* that they can ethically cultivate futures

from within their own understanding and in community. Connolly also defines belief very specifically, as "an embodied tendency to performance" for which "new intensities of belief fold back into future desires, performative priorities, and potentialities of political action" (2011, 145). Belief and faith become necessary to political action for Connolly, as a way to prepare spiritual grounds, plant seeds, and disturb the incorporating powers of the machine. Combatting the turn in political science to a distinction between micro and macropolitics, Connolly attempts to offer a politics that is multiscaled and mobile, but in many ways creates unnecessary boundaries and conceptual limitations. More firmly, despite the intent, Connolly begins to sever many people of faith from his political projects—defining immanent realist philosophy as in opposition to a universe created by God or higher power (Connolly 2011, 43). Later in the same work, however, Connolly "allows" some Christians a radical immanence by which they emphasize sensibility and spirituality in a "collective ethos to faith, art, culture, economic life, and politics" (Connolly 2011, 74). This is to say while people of Christian faith may come on board with some of Connolly's proposals for a new political project, they would be unlikely to come to terms with the complete erasure of divinity or articulations of faith and spirituality exclusively defined.

Connolly's counter project does not allow for narratives of the future steeped in elements of particular identified faiths or truly varied articulations of faith. For Connolly, commitments to pluralism demand a move away from contemporary identities. But this leads experienced identities and proximities to power to drop out of his work. What he calls "cowboy" in "cowboy capitalism" is white supremacist patriarchy by a more

interesting title. For Connolly, the discarding of identity politics and "politicized discourse" is necessary to counter the machine. However, it is unclear how this is possible without first confronting contemporary identities on their own terms, reckoning with the past, and providing future imaginaries built through reconciliation and ongoing intersectional analyses.

Last, in *A World of Becoming*, Connolly briefly brings to the foreground new "alliances" in everyday politics—cohorts of various faiths (including evangelicals) forming new political resonance machines—urgent, intersectional, and present in combatting the "dangers" of "the current organization of capitalism" to the "precarious balances favorable to human life and species diversity" (2011, 41-42). In the end, Connolly does indeed radiate political hope—but hope that is tied to his new politics of inspiration, militancy, and shaming (Connolly 2011, 146). To combat neoliberalism, Connolly offers what looks more and more like pluralized formal social movements which mobilize to combat neoliberal elite controls, hawkish international strategies, top-down domestic approaches to political change, and continual promise that the self-regulating economy will arise like a Phoenix from the ash of the final left-right battle. A successful counter organizing project, however, must also work in the micropolitics of mood, belief, desire, and everyday action simultaneously with sovereignty, creed, capital flows, international organization, etc. and be open to a world that may look very different from this one with identities that emanate from the actors themselves as they narrate this new world. Connolly's calls for a more environmental ethos or a hope-filled potent assemblage already have elements of practice everywhere, are alive in relations between

people and things all over the globe, and are already working to counter the existential revenge of the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine.

If we look to Connolly's ethical perspectives provided further in the same text, which hinge more on care for diversity of life, earth, and futures as emergent from a "seed of care" cultivated through certain sensitivities and critical approaches to modes of operation (Connolly 2011, 79), then Connolly offers a theoretical basis for a counter project to the mechanistic partnering of white supremacist capital and evangelical faith—what adrienne maree brown might call an "emergent strategy" (brown 2017). Brown, however, further grounds this call in both currently existing and speculatively imagined everyday experience, individual and collective identities, and contemporary approaches to organizing. According to brown, who identifies mainly as a Black Movement facilitator, emergent strategies are those ways that humans "practice complexity" and "grow through relatively humble every-day interactions" (brown 2017, 20). These practices are focused on beings in relationship to a shared home and each other and must have decentralized sites with adaptive leadership (brown 2017, 23). For brown, emergent strategies are made up of several elements (located in *this* world)[10] that allow agents to investigate the relationship between macro and micro scales (what she calls fractal), how we as humans change (or adapt), who we are and how we share (through identity, interdependence, and decentralization), the pace and pathways of change (which are non-

[10] Much of the language in both academic and faith-based writing on climate and environments mobilizes metaphors of plants, seeds, soils, rhizomes, roots, folds, veins, mutations, and branches. Mycelium and rhizomes are the main metaphors for growth and change for both Connolly and brown—as well as central to the *Star Trek Discovery* franchise and the gothic work of Silvia Moreno-Garcia.

linear and iterative), how we recover and transform (with resilience and transformative justice), and lastly, how we move towards life (by creating more possibilities) (brown 2017, 50). Through the work of Octavia E. Butler, brown imagines and strategizes alongside "multi-generational, female, nonbinary, and/or gender-fluid subjects who lead by attuning to and 'riding the waves' of complexity, drawing on multiple worldviews and knowledge systems and driven by powerful senses of wonder and for emerging futures" (Mitchell and Chaudhury 2020, 15). For brown, fiction is an important site of simultaneous analysis and critique of the contemporary as well as a site for continued dreaming and imagining of possibility, building of the right relationship to change, and the space to "become prophet" (brown 2017; brown and Brown 2017; Mitchell and Chaudhury 2020).

What brown calls "fractals" is the observation that practice at the micro scale can be made to reverberate at the meso and macro scales.[11] Social movement scholars have long argued that at least part of the problem in forming robust social movements is that in the US, communities have stopped the regular practice of coming together to make decisions, create compromises, or discuss the future together (Skocpol 2003; Wedeen 2008). In Lisa Wedeen's *Peripheral Visions*, Wedeen argues that at daily, lengthy meetings called qāt chews, Yemeni men come together to work through aspects of practice and identity formation. These chew-based discussions are "part of what it means

[11] While not obvious to me in the beginning of this project, there are different organizing strategies juxtaposed: one side understood as more mechanistic (the [white] evangelical-capitalist resonance machine) and the other is depicted as more socionatural (emergent strategies of flocking and fractaling).

to act democratically" and "to entertain lively disagreements about issues of mutual public concern, and to make worlds in common" as "they meet to debate literary matters, political life, and social problems. It is the political salience of such publics, specifically the significance of this type of activity for our understanding of democracy" (Wedeen 2008, 104). Wedeen points to these more "everyday practices of vibrant political contestation" which exist outside of formal electoral politics which don't quite fit aspects of the Habermasian framework commonly used to investigate the public sphere, but do "reverberate" into political action. Wedeen argues that "the very activity of deliberating in public contributes to the formation of democratic persons," but does so in conditions fundamentally different from those articulated by mainstream political science (2008, 104). Through an investigation of newspapers, intellectual conferences, mosque sermons, and event attendance, Wedeen shows that in these small deliberative spaces political events are discussed, policy decisions are made, grievances are aired and addressed, strategies are formulated, and power is negotiated in emergent and contingent ways (2008, 114). Specifically looking at Mosque sermons, Wedeen shows that though they are not under tight state control, sermons in Yemen often openly address social inequalities, criticize the government, political corruption, and the "moral laxity" of the state (2008, 111). Brown argues for a focus on facilitation of conversation and strategies that "engender better relations with complexity through speculative, futures-oriented practices" that are deeply "fleshily embodied" practices which counter narratives meant to create Others across space-time (brown 2017; Mitchell and Chaudhury 2020, 15).

Brown's further emphasis on the sacredness of Earth and earthly organizing as an important dimension of political struggles resembles what Alex Latta calls "insurgent ecologies" (Latta 2014). According to Latta:

> "Notions of the sacred help human actors make sense of their material and political engagements with nonhuman substances, systems and beings. Though by no means a universal or necessary route to such meaning-making, the sacred flows through numerous contemporary articulations of political ecological subjectivity and agency. Traditional belief systems are often taken as cultural components of political ecological analysis, but rarely is the link between the sacred and the political probed in any great detail; meanwhile, it is largely ignored or actively rejected by theorists of the new materiality… the relationship between the sacred and the political, as human actors enter into dialogue with the material vitality of this substance as an active counterpart in defining new political- ecological horizons" (2014, 325).

For Latta and emergent strategists, spiritually informed "ecological insurgencies" push back against the domination of "western objective technical knowledge," mechanistic partnerships, and instrumentalist anthropocentric rationality which actively "marginalizes aesthetic and affective dimensions, converting the vibrant tapestry of human-nature relationships into a calculus of utility and market value" (Latta 2014, 333).

In investigating social justice organizations, brown calls attention to the ways that most of our organizing is done mirroring the status quo of power—top down decision-making models driven by funds acquired from members, maintained through the work of organizers who are asked to work themselves to death "for the cause"[12]. brown argues that we cannot simply "scale up" or multi-scale growth and change before actually

[12] As an organizer in a national union and local political campaigns during this project, I can attest the veracity of this.

learning through experience, understanding proximity to power, generating connection to human and otherthanhuman beings and systems, and narrating possibility (brown 2017, 22). For brown, while it may be unclear what to do or feel in climate crisis, the experience must be acknowledged and honored as such. In order to combat problematic patterns of *organizing and deliberating*—brown suggests affectively engaged storytelling and collaboration as the most powerful ways to "reverberate" or create "echo" based on intention, connection, and transformation—what Connolly calls "resonance" (2005; 2008). The "measurement" of success is not simply resisting environmental degradation or climate change, but the change in *patterns of coming together* and *how people feel* about the practice that will shift political cultures. I am particularly interested in what narratives are being articulated and how they express strategies for growth and change and how this feels along the way. Connolly focuses closely on the power of evangelical-capitalist resonance itself, while brown provides more practical assessments of one's own experiences, realities, and capacities for embodiment, adaptations, interdependencies, decentralization of power, practice, resilience, transformation, and creation.[13]

To counter cowboy capitalism and in order to move toward interdependence, decentralization, and interconnection of power relations, for brown, requires a feminist and Black and Indigenous futurist praxis of shifting narratives of vulnerability and generosity (brown 2017, 91). Both secular and Christian affective communication and

[13] Quite literally. There are assessments provided at the end of *Emergent Strategy* (2017, 265-269). Part of what is missing from Connolly's original approach to the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine is a robust discussion of colonization, whiteness, white identity, and the construction of the "white evangelical" in relation to his mechanistic partnering of faith and capital.

organizing, as discussed throughout this project, are threaded heavily in Black American and feminist political thought. Focus on lived and embodied experience particularly of the most vulnerable, love and kinship as necessary to resistance,[14] collective responsibility and communal problem solving, the centrality of spirituality, as well as a very Earthly understanding of the relationship between theory and practice are deeply rooted and still growing in the works of David Walker, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King, Jr. James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Walidah Imarisha, adrienne maree brown, and many others.

George Shulman and Stephen Marshall have each emphasized the centrality of Black authors to theorizing prophesy as a tradition of radical storytelling and critique (Keller and Zamalin 2017; Marshall 2011; Shulman 2008). Alex Zamalin offers that Black American political thought is "less concerned with philosophical coherence," as white dominated political theory may be, "and more with the world as it is with all its hierarchies" and different from a larger "canon" in that it is "explicitly concerned with remaking the world in ways that allow for it to be less oppressive and more viable for marginalized populations" (Keller and Zamalin 2017, 20). According to Zamalin, liberatory political thought and action are made possible through an *affective critique* of political and social inequities (Keller and Zamalin 2017, 21). Focusing on Walker's *Appeal*, DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, and Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Zamalin highlights the ways that injustice is "as much a product of political institutions as it was

[14] Related to what Lisa Beard calls "boundness" in their analysis of James Baldwin's work (2016).

of everyday feelings" and how power can be challenged through storytelling and narratives which allow power to be newly improvised, creatively repurposed, "questioned, satirized, made irreverent and snatched away through words" and allowed space for vulnerability (Keller and Zamalin 2017, 23). Like brown, Zamalin calls for emergent strategies that imagine and embody a more just world—based in lived experience, community needs, attention to affect, empathy, generosity, and hope, and a collaborative process (brown 2017; Zamalin 2017).[15]

Interpretation and Method

In this project, I am using literature as a guide to inquiry into political thought—an opening that has long been engaged in political theory, but oft neglected as a possible disciplinary avenue. I focus on the narrative and storied character of dealing with the affective qualities of climate change and future building through varied voices, experiences, and knowledges. While the primary method of engagement of these materials is close reading and narrative analysis, varieties of interpretive methods appear throughout to attend to empirical and theoretical elements of the guiding questions of the project. Interpretative method conducted as a process of "sustained empathic inquiry" (Atwood and Stolorow 1984, 121) involves knowing how to locate and access knowledge and to carefully make it the subject of reflection and discussion (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, 22). In many ways I pull from Jack Halberstam's theorizing on the "queer art

[15] The activists and organizations discussed here are calling for a more moral, hopeful, and immediate response to environmental problems. But connections to a specifically Christian morality, faith, charity, and hope should also be problematized—as specific and exclusive moral imperatives have reigned down their own environmental apocalypses.

of failure" and constant movement between high and "low theory" as adapted from the work of Stuart Hall (Halberstam 2011, 2). According to Halberstam, low theory, "tries to locate all the in-between space that save us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony and speared by the seductions of the gift shop. But it also makes its peace with the possibility of the counterintuitive" (2011, 2). This requires a constant movement between "high" and "low" cultural registers and dwells in popular culture and obscure "nerdy" knowledges and be radically open to possibility, change, and failure at "success" (Halberstam 2011, 2-3).

In terms of environmental and climate peril, investigating narrative is necessary to moving through futility, what Connolly calls existential revenge (2005), in order to shape change (brown 2017). The actors discussed in the project are shifting their own methods from human-only or individualistic processes to more capacious and emergent strategies for change and I have chosen to follow this path. This project is thus a far too hefty endeavor, one that attempts to account for the goals, strategies, experiences, and feelings of actors while maintaining a hold on many of the central critiques that began with New Social Movement scholars and continued into the cultural and interpretive turns (Melucci 1989; Benford and Snow 2000; Goodwin and Jasper 2004; Yanow 2006; Jasper 2012; Goodwin 2012; Pachirat 2018; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014). In this vein, I do not shed light on causal mechanisms. Just as I do not wish to reproduce individualistic approaches in political analyses, I also do not wish to reproduce reified causal mechanisms that may be organizationally helpful, but analytically void or over-qualifying in their attempts to fit the many moving parts. This does not mean that I do not appreciate

this type of work, emblematic in the dynamics of contention approaches to social movements, but rather preferred not to limit my approach to the often messy, contradictory, resonating, and looping patterns of interaction between living beings and systems. It is my hope to stimulate thoughts about political potentials, not produce or reproduce the "right" thoughts about them (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006).

As an interpretive project, I am attempting to engage questions of power by making "tacit knowledge" and shaping relationships explicit and thus move across a continuum of descriptive and critical methods throughout the project (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, xx). This project was created under the assumption that my own positionality matters to my approach, generation, and analysis of materials and that this positionality is also not static.[16] I was shaped and changed by interactions with these materials and actors which in turn altered my perception and interpretation, critique and creation continually through the project (Schatz 2009; Wedeen 2008; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006; Zirakzadeh 2009).

I also allowed the project to incorporate a wider web of literature and mediums as soon as I held less regard for disciplinary boundaries. Political scientists often write-off the potency of fictional stories, and this is quite odd given that many classes in the

[16] For example, as a currently identified queer femme person with multiple disabilities and neurodivergence, I am particularly attuned to identifying narratives of the future that are based in heterosexism and which perceive disabled people as unable to survive the environmental apocalypse. As someone who has been unhoused, has unhoused family members, and works closely with homeless people—I am also acutely aware that a sense of apocalypse may be felt for much longer temporal scales than for those who might pinpoint a day of disaster. As a feminist and environmental political theory scholar, I am also trained to investigate interlocking systems of oppression and shifting experiences of risk and vulnerability.

discipline construct classroom lessons with political fiction (most often Greek plays), but also the reading of conjectural histories (speculative fictions of the past—especially those of social contract theorists), predictive modeling (also a unique form of speculative fiction), and analyses of developing conspiracy narratives like QAnon. As Margaret Somers notes in her argument for a more social and relational narrativity, disciplines like political science staked out their scholarly identities at least partially by creating an epistemological other—solidified through a binary association of narrative analyses with idiographic, particularistic, thick *description* versus scientific, quantitative, generalizable *explanation* (Geertz 1973; Somers 1994, 613, emphases mine; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006). For a substantial part of this project process, I too held my various sites of knowledge apart. It was precisely this intersection of American politics, environmental studies, religious studies, and feminist political theories, however, that drove me to ask different questions about the knowability of the social, the relationships between these actors and various politics, groups, identities, and ideologies. This particular intersection of studies also shaped my conceptual frameworks and tools for approaching issues of faith, fiction, and affective sensibilities, real people involved in actions on climate change, and the strategies used to respond to climate change and create possibility. Stemming mainly from feminist theory, these writer-activists put forth that political, social, and environmental change can only result from connecting, organizing, and

coordinating actions and that this requires a valuing of traditionally feminized relational qualities of listening and empathizing.[17]

My role as an academic as I understand it is to bear witness, to listen, tell a story that helps deepen understanding, build connection between concepts and material, and translate lived experiences for an outsider or wider audience (Million 2013; Wiebe 2020). I am following the path of adrienne maree brown and may others who can never be "scientist" enough for some of social science[18]—who come alive in the stories that are told about survival and the future—and through a focus on novel and urgent elements of stories. My material choices are reflective of my values and the problems that I see as central to our political world-making—as all dissertation projects ultimately are—even if I might focus on the values and problems as articulated by other scholars and activists at any given point. I understand through experience, collaboration, revelation, and reflection and I believe that this project shows that. Also, in the vein of Octavia E. Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, Walidah Imarisha, adrienne maree brown, and many others—I understand solving the environmental crisis as an "imagination battle" that must be won together (brown 2017, 18).[19] It is my own curiosity, empathy, imagination, and lived experiences

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[17] As well as traditionally feminized labor necessary in apocalyptic conditions: child-rearing, growing and preparing food, foraging, sewing, weaving, etc.

[18] See methodological debate regarding "rigor" and "objectivity" (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, 4; Yanow 2006, 67-81).

[19] My own pedagogical practice around speculative futures began in 2016 when I started ending my classes with speculative futures exercises. Following readings of short pieces by Derrick Bell, Ursula Le Guin, E. Lily Yu, and Octavia Butler, I asked my students to imagine any future that they want with whatever worlds, beings, values, cultures, and relations of power that they allowed themselves to imagine. The students would always provide me a vast array of possibilities: some even opting for purposefully humanless futures. A particularly memorable response involved an anarchist canine planet of Godly

that drew me to these actors and materials—and I hope that if this project has one impact—it is to draw others to these questions and how these actors and materials help us cope with our climate (and now pandemic) feels. In the following chapters, I apply these methods to illuminate the multitude of ways that actors are engaging these imagination battles and creating change in the face of very uncertain pasts, presents, and futures.

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creation very near to Earth with dog-beings who chose their daily activities based on their sense of smell and affective connection to each other.

CHAPTER III

WHERE SHADOW FUTURES LOOM

"I have read that the period of upheaval that journalists have begun to refer to as "the Apocalypse" or more commonly, more bitterly, "the Pox" lasted from 2015 through 2030—a decade and a half of chaos. This is untrue. The Pox has been a much longer torment. It began well before 2015… It has not ended. I have also read that the Pox was created by accidentally coinciding climate, economic, and sociological crises. It would be more honest to say that the Pox was caused by our own refusal to deal with obvious problems in those areas." —Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower (1998, 7).

"What rule must we observe and walk by in cause of community of peril?"—John Winthrop, A Model of Christian Charity (1630).

This chapter turns to popular speculative fiction writers and their narratives of environmental apocalypse, survival, and future-building. Speculative fiction has long been a genre of environmental concern and critique. Mary Shelley's *The Last Man (1826)* depicts the 21st century as ravaged by a global pandemic which ultimately leaves a solitary human being to ponder the point of scientific and technological progress *alone*. W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Comet* (1920), while not drawing on explicitly "environmental" overtones, tells an allusive Christian origin story in which two survivors of a comet's crash into New York, a Black man and a white woman, briefly imagine starting a new human population on Earth. There are many early environmental jeremiads, however, that did not become popular *as speculative fiction* until much later—as various elements of the narratives intensified in popular cultural production and came to define the genre through questions and concerns for relations of power between humans, otherthanhumans, Earth, and worlds and times beyond.

This popularity was spurred, at least in part by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring (1962),* which alongside her own critique, also brought renewed attention to earlier speculative literature. *Silent Spring,* while known for the more journalistic revelation of the harmful effects of DDT, began with a fable of a town devastated by pesticides in order to broaden the scope of concern for the effects of DDT (Carson 1962; Nixon 2011). Environmental speculative fictions or readings of earlier texts as environmental fictions proliferated in the decades that followed: Ursula K Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest* (1968) and *The Dispossessed* (1974), Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia (1975)*, and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time (1976)* further shaped scholarly conceptions of the genre. Western speculative fiction in the 1980s and 1990s, in the context of the rise of the Religious Right and neoliberalism, is said to have taken a unique dystopian turn highlighting constant cycles of doom, despair, rage, and hope (Baccolini 2004). These narratives frequently emphasize neoliberalism's particularly environmental impressions across different times, spaces, and scales of impact—tying seemingly disparate social, political, and environmental justice issues together. By the 2010s, this trend reemerged even more strongly in novels, podcasts, and video streaming services—popular culture in the US appearing almost obsessed with dystopian narratives of the past and present with a seemingly endless list of examples in literature, film, and television (Jones and Paris 2018; Orosco 2017b). These narratives continue to produce explicitly political landscapes—imaginaries of dynamic relational and resource struggles and solidarities.

In this chapter, I focus on Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower (1993)* and *Parable of the Talents (1998)* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale (1985)* and

The Testaments (2019) as prophetic environmental and political parables—stories meant to make audiences admire or reject human activities of the present moment—to understand the character's lives as analogous to their real actions, choices, and overall futures. Their narratives are meant to act as a mirror, warning, *and* a catalyzing agent and mobilize the jeremiad as familiar rhetorical strategy—particularly for American audiences. They are narratives of moral decay, exile, and exodus—or at least attempted exodus in the case of Atwood's Offred—*as well as* relationship and community building strategies for survival. They each construct a terrible present, predicated on a nostalgia for the *less terrible* (but not idyllic) past, and on hope that a brighter future is possible through expressly collective action.[20] As Olamina's daughter Larkin/Asha offers in *Talents*, "Perhaps [the US] simply lost sight of what it once intended to be, then blundered aimlessly until it exhausted itself. What is left of it now, what it has become, I do not know" (Butler 1998, 8).

Both series draw on the tension between the power of the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine (at the forefront of *The Handmaids Tale* and *Parable of the Talents*) and how to resist and organize. Women and their communities attempt to survive the climate apocalypse, political collapse, exodus, dangerous sojourns, corrupt policing forces, contemplate personal trauma through their faith, follow their intuition about the unfolding of events, and sustain collective mobilization. Both series do so from positions of women who eventually become pregnant and metaphorically shape future generations.

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[20] Offred's ending statement in *The Handmaid's* Tale, "And so I step up into the darkness within; or else the light."

The novels focus on the immediate necessity of politically and imaginatively addressing climate change and environmental collapse and help illuminate why embodied experience and identities are critical to the strategies mobilized to survive and thrive.

While political theorists have long studied and analyzed literature such as Greek plays, political scientists are only now turning to questions of genre, affect, and political critique. Bringing into the light questions of shared presents and shared futures is indeed a political endeavor as this process requires consideration of testimony, power and authority, responsibility, "adjudication of survival strategies," and conceptions of the good life to follow (Berlant 2011, 4). William E. Connolly, Lauren Berlant, Eric Slauter, Sonali Thakkar, Linda Williams, and Elisabeth Anker, as well as many in the vein of critical theory have turned to literature to animate the ways in which new subjectivities and politics are formed, expressed, and shaped by the culture as industry. Elisabeth Anker argues that genre, specifically melodrama as genre, organizes and animates national affects toward acceptance and legitimation of state violence (Anker 2014). For Anker, affective flows in the United States are expressed by and also work to shape political discontent around continued exploitation and inequality (Anker 2014). Genres set the terms of engagement with literature and highlight questions of how we interpret texts and feel about political realities—especially through the choice of narrative voice as a subject position for which audiences are meant to feel intense connection or disconnection (Anker 2014; Antaki 2013; Baccoloni 2004; Crawley 2018). As adrienne maree brown and Autumn Brown point out in their podcast, genre can also be a way to limit the political potential of literature—a way to say that a text is written by a particular *kind of*

person in a particular *way* so that it is marketable to a specific audience (brown and Brown 2017, Nov.28). There are no neutral genres and genrefication is itself a political process (Imarisha and brown 2015; Phillips 2016).[21]

Within the genre of environmental speculative fiction, jeremedic and prophetic narratives commonly shape relationships to the past and future. Perry Miller, Sacvan Bercovitch, Richard Slotkin, Jane Bennett, Michael Rogin, James Morone, Jonathan Keller, and George Shulman have each differently illuminated the influence of scripture as American literary traditions with common narratives of parable, redemption, jeremiad prophesy, and apocalypticism— as well as a sustained focus on literature and literary figures *as political theory and theorists*. These jeremedic and prophetic narratives are also used to investigate and shape human relationships to nature (Bercovitch 1978; Keller and Zamalin 2017; Miller 1952; Shulman 2008). And as Richard Slotkin warns in *The Fatal Environment (1985)*, some narratives have dangerous power when weaved tightly into longstanding cultural myths. Once a narrative assembles commonly held beliefs grounded in everyday experience, centralizes a figure or heroic figures in that myth, and has the capacity to evolve with culture—as many utopia/dystopia narratives do—these narratives can recapitulate problematic colonizing discourses of an empty wilderness, constant frontier, fear of vulnerability, and anti-urbanism (Slotkin 1985; Susman 1984, Zaki 1990). Prophetic and jeremedic narratives are particularly persistent in US politics:

[21] Not all imagined futures are visionary or mobilized in real life for the purpose of a more just and liberated reality. Culture as industry of publishing, film, television, etc. means our futures have been created as products under white supremacist capitalism.

biblical language and stories akin to common language or popular knowledge for more than three centuries in the US, and powerful political elites were often religious leaders trained specifically in this form of storytelling (Zamalin and Keller 2017). However, these narratives do not always leverage prophesy, testimony, and community building in the same ways.

George Shulman's *American Prophesy* illuminates the uniquely American prophetic tradition—a rhetorical tool of redemption of the past and promise of livable future for an "exceptional" people (2008). Through the works of Frederick Douglass, Henry David Thoreau, Martin Luther King, Jr., James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison, Shulman reveals the ways that prophesy has been retooled, primarily by Black authors, into a critique of white supremacy and hope for collective transformation. Prophets, according to Shulman, are those who "address community by mediating its relationship to the larger realities conditioning its existence and choices" and we "count some and ignore others—at our peril" (2008, 3). It is not always necessary for a prophet to predict the future for Shulman, rather it is the affective register of the voice and the resonance that energizes and enflames communities (2008, 4). Prophets hear a "*calling*" and respond with a *call to action*—usually reluctantly or at least stubbornly—for a "common" good that is located in the contemporary lived experience of (generally human) communities. Prophets are educators and organizers—interpreting complex calling narratives as more discrete actions. According to Shulman, prophets are messengers who "speak truths" to their audiences that those audiences do not wish to hear (2008, 5). For instance, that their planet is finite, and their actions or non-actions against injustice are

destroying that planet or perhaps the future of the world. Prophets bear witness to injustice, and the truth they speak is testimony to "make present what has been made absent" (Shulman 2008, 5). They testify as warning in order to transform, reconstitute community, and tell a new story of the future before it is too late. As the theologians, activists, writers, and podcasters discussed in this project do, they sing—literally and metaphorically—and help communities of peril endure (Shulman 2008, 5). Prophets are the voices of "traumatic loss and hopes of redemption" who "bear bodily witness to their testimony in speech" and demand a practice of justice that acknowledges love and kinship as necessary to resistance, interdependence of all beings, and thus a collective responsibility to engage in communal problem solving (brown 2017; Connolly 2008; Shulman 2008, 7).

Prophetic narratives for Shulman are living, streaming, ever-mutating and consistently infused with new meanings that swirl and transform real political action. Based loosely on the story of the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah, the narrative frame sometimes reimagines a particular collective as a community in exile. The American people (limited in some imagined identity) align themselves with the those cast out into the wilderness[22], subject to Earthly and human dangers, and called to explicitly political

[22] In Jane Bennett's early work on Hegel's faith and enlightenment dialectic, Bennett argues that conceptions of nature are not deterministic to conceptions of politics—but rather help to enable them—and not just in the US context (1987, 137). According to Bennett, the attempt to master nature is only one relationship between humans and nature—others also try to accommodate nature as the "providential boundary"— this mastery impulse drives environmental management while accommodation drives a more holistic and spiritual appreciation of nature—but that the second orientation almost always gives away to scientific management (1987, 46-47). This scientific management encompasses most studies of environmental politics and the more spiritual impulses fall from view. Michael Rogin roots American political development in a similar division of American self-image—between those of market relations and

action to save the people. According to Jonathan Keller, the jeremiad is "the most political of the prophetic languages" as the "language deployed by ministers who were trying to extend their visions into the political sphere" (Zamalin and Keller 2017, 170). In his description of several hundred years of exile, Shulman also highlights prophesy as expressly political—it is about human action and transformation in crisis (Shulman 2008, 4). As Shulman demonstrates, the political import and "cultural vigor" of storytelling involving religious or prophetic rhetoric and jeremedic narratives are well recognized outside political science (2008). This form of storytelling is continually open to reform and recurrently revised, recycled, and redeployed.

According to Andrew Murphy, jeremiads must not only identify moral decay compared to the past, specific turning points for this moral decay, and necessary political actions toward reform, repentance, and renewal; they must also glorify the Founders (2009). I do not accept this last piece as necessary to all jeremiads—but rather identify this element as a defining line between the intended political appeal of the jeremiads: appeals directly to the virtues of the Founders of the US (Christian Right) or appeals to the moral imperatives of "the People" and their calls to action—the premium on "commitment" to each other over plurality (Shulman 2008, 9). For Murphy, there are also

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social contracts (economic) and the other more interior "religious" and "psychological experience" (familial) (Rogin 1987, 169). In this account of political development, political heroes (both idyllic and gothic) enter nature to sanctify the American "birthright" as the Children of Israel—inheritors of Abraham's covenant who derive authority from the wilderness and regeneration through crisis (Rogin 1987, 181). James Morone locates a unique relationship between Christian revivals and government reform in a much-repeated phrase from *Hellfire Nation*, "Across American time, nothing rallies the people or expands their government like a pulpit-thumping crusade against social injustice" (2003, 2). Morone argues that American political development has not been marked by secularizing movements, but rather "from revival to revival" (Morone 2003, 3).

two types of jeremiads: nostalgic and Golden Age (2009). Nostalgia as affective state is present in both: but one is a nostalgia for an actually experienced past versus one of the imagined, but now gilded memory of the Founding (2009). While Murphy separates these, this also seems like an unnecessary division as it is precisely this nostalgic affective state that influences interpretation of *any* past—whether experienced or distant. In other words, nostalgic affects collapse all space-time and gild all pasts. It is an expressly political move to locate that nostalgia in the Founding and in particular some Framers over others. In other words, all jeremiads are deployed as calls to action that must be interpreted by those who hear the call.[23]

Speculative fiction and academic studies of environmental exploitation invoke jeremiads and prophecy: lamenting the contemporary and potential future state of society—cautionary tone and great warning of a near undesirable end to Earth. It is hard to imagine environmental concern *without* jeremedic narrative of decline or the prophesy of horrible judgements that await Earthly reality should we not heed the warnings.[24] Jeremiad, parable, and prophecy are intimately linked to a sense of despair or hope mobilized in the production of dystopia/utopia as "critical dystopias show that a culture of memory is one that moves from the individual to the collective is part of a social

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[23] As biblical stories faded from common language and popular knowledge (somewhat) and religious practices diminished as *the* dominant political traditions, the jeremiad continued as a defense of religion as such (Zamalin and Keller 2017). In this project, biblical allegory is still common language as most environmental political fights are described as "David and Goliath" battles and invoke a jeremedic narrative as the path to the fight.

[24] In the early colonial period, Puritans mobilized jeremiads specifically linking moral depravity and any unexpected climate and environmental experiences—especially sudden crop failures or unexplained weather.

project of hope… (Baccoloni 2004, 521). It is specifically collective memory and acceptance of responsibility that shapes change in these narratives. Baccoloni goes on to argue that, "it is important to engage with the critical dystopias of recent decades, as they are the product of our dark times. By looking at the formal and political features of science fiction, we can see how these works point us toward change. We need to pass through the critical dystopias of today to move toward a horizon of hope" (2004, 521). In other words, narrations of the possible future not only reflect power relations, but also the effects of power relations.

Environmental degradation is differently mobilized in the contemporary moment as a "sin" of the people—the perpetuation of capitalism and neoliberal policies at the heart of environmental exploitation (particularly the hoarding of profits and luxury). Both dystopian speculative fiction as a genre as well as narrative of environmental concern, in many ways, tend toward the jeremedic formula. First, the protagonist feels utterly doomed, heavy with despair in the face some moral wrong or breaking point and an outcast group identity is formed. Then, the narrating character or group finds a glimmer of hope in everyday political resistance and a moral purpose. Lastly, the protagonist(s) rages against the authority—either by (inner or outer) conspiracy, rebellion, escape, or an exodus that leaves that experience behind. The perpetuation of this narrative arc is most common in American fiction.

Fictional literature, especially speculative fiction as televised entertainment series, continues to make up the bulk of contemporary media consumption in the US (Jones and Paris 2018). According to Connolly, a major hindrance to representation and resistance

formation is the resonance of the evangelical-capitalist assemblage. For Connolly, the *Left Behind* speculative fiction novel series is at the core of this amplification and intensifying reverberation of what he called 'the machine' (2005). In *Left Behind*, all born-again Christians are suddenly lifted up into the Heavens in the Rapture and those left on Earth are left in social chaos, environmental collapse, and eventually the remaining "non-believers" are cast into interminable fire. In his work, the assemblage is affectively powered by the sensationalized version of this Second Coming found in the 16-book series authored by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins and films (Connolly 2005, 874). The answer to why evangelical Christians have not become social gospelers rallied around progressive politics, according to Connolly, is found in the reading of this popular fiction novel and film series—the so-called "cutting edge" of right-wing evangelicalism. Through an affectively charged connection to the contemporary in literature, certain kinds of political actions are opened, and others foreclosed—and storytelling allows for investigation of what sort of political futures are available (Connolly 2005; Di Chiro 2010; Berlant 2011). The already-occurring apocalypse is associated strongly with right-wing literature and radio talk show hosts like Glen Beck who reimagine the present as apocalypse which "operates as a para-science fictional political strategy—one which seeks to make the reader or viewer perceive catastrophe is not to come, but is already here" and thus brings together Christian eschatology and right-wing paranoia as part of Connolly's resonance machine (Connolly 2005; Connolly 2008; Cunningham and Warwick 2013, 443). As Cunningham and Warwick point out in relation to *The Coming Insurrection*, apocalypse can take on the literal opposite of its root—not revelation or

anything revealed, but in fact "unnoticed" and disregarded as the catastrophe that it in fact is (Cunningham and Warwick 2013, 438). The future, instead of a singular apocalyptic event, is instead an "endless intensification of the present" (Cunningham and Warwick 2013, 438; Melville 2009).

Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower (1993)* and *Parable of the Talents (1998)* have only just reached the *New York Times* Best Seller list in 2020 as the resonance of climate dystopia surges and her depiction of the US becomes more seemingly prophetic particularly because of the right-wing Texas Senator and presidential candidate of the series, Andrew Steele Jarret, who espouses the motto "Make America Great Again" as he tries to revive "something nasty out of the past," or an "earlier, 'simpler' time" according to the main character Lauren Oya Olamina (Butler 1993, 294). Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale (1985)* and *The Testaments (2019)* comprise a dystopian series that looms in the contemporary background for several similar reasons: the novel is shaped by the emerging political context of the both the rise of the Religious Right in the Reagan Era as well as heightened scholarly debates around environmentalism, feminism, and political movement formation in the late 1970s and 1980s. Fears of potent heteropatriarchal regimes and the slow violence of ecological crises[25] are intimately connected in both series. This specific combination of fears prominently re-surfaced in the build-up to the 2016 Trump election and is echoed in the subsequent release of the 2017 Hulu television series based on *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. In 2020,

[25] Rob Nixon's key concept from Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor (2011).

these fears yet again brought to the forefront with the nomination and appointment of Amy Coney Barret to the Supreme Court. Alongside the larger questions that guided this project, my reading of these novels is also in relation to an ultimate question posed by Shulman, "Are you upholding your promise to each other to live in a certain way?" (Shulman 2008, 8). Are these authors telling stories of "infidelity to the covenant" and the actions that will need to be taken to order to embrace change?

The Parables and Prophecy

The *Parable* series is set in a near dystopian future (approximately 2024-2090), in which right-wing patriarchal demagogues rise to power on a both dogwhistled and overt racist, sexist, homophobic, and xenophobic platforms. Environmental collapse, much like in the *Handmaid* series, is considered both an instigator and a symptom of political collapse—looping and folding intensifying crises—narrated mostly from the point of view of a young Black woman from Southern California named Lauren Oya Olamina.[26] In *Sower*, we primarily understand Olamina's ordinary experience through written journal entries that cover the landscape and weather, her meals—particularly acorn bread which influences the name of her intentional community "Acorn", her relationships and communities, and her strategies for surviving the trek she prophesizes she will be set on.

[26] The American West, specifically California, are the most common settings for environmental apocalypse speculative fiction. California is a site for so many "real life" disaster experiences (genocidal conquest and colonization, as well as continued environmental exploitation and degradation in the forms of poorly managed fires, floods, landslides, earthquakes, parched landscapes, etc.); but also strong resistance, constant demands for change, formal social movement organization, commune formation, etc.

Each journal entry begins with a verse from Earthseed—Olamina's new faith practice influenced heavily by Christianity and her lived experience of apocalypse as revelation.

Sower begins with passages from Olamina's *Earthseed: The Books of the Living* concretizing Olamina's "purpose" in Earthseed: "positive obsession," cultivation of persistence, relationship to change, and hope (Butler 1993, 1). Olamina is just 15 years old in 2024 and understands that humans must always be growing, changing, both moving and rooting in order to survive and thrive. More controversially, she begins her story with the controversial and profound declaration that, "God is Change." To be right with God is to embrace constant change and transformation. In Olamina's recurring dream, the world is on fire and she looks to the stars. Her stepmother misses how the cities used to block out the stars with light pollution. This first chapter presenting the dream as a "lesson," in contemplating the meaning of apocalypse, the state of society, and giving the first inkling of the importance of the stars to Olamina's transformative path and to confronting change.

Initially, she lives with her family in the walled community of Robledo, California. Robledo and the world outside are described as decaying—morally and literally. Olamina's father is a pastor and educator who helps develop Robledo into a mostly sustainable community—purposefully small, trained in self-defense, and prepared to live off the very little water and food available within the walls of the community. Olamina's intuitively knows that she will not be safe within the walls forever, and attempts to prepare her community for living off the land more broadly—studying Indigenous cultivation and eating habits specific to her region, learning how to properly

use weapons, and learning how to organize "followers" for what will eventually become the community of Acorn.

Her journal entries are intertwined with her own book writing and the creation of her faith practice—Earthseed—in her book entitled *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*. The theological foundations highlight the interconnection and interrelation of everything in the universe and the "truth" of change and changeability—based in Olamina's embodied experience and understanding of Earthly processes.

> "We do not worship God.
> We perceive and attend God.
> We learn from God.
> With forethought and work,
> We shape God.
> In the end, we yield to God.
> We adapt and endure,
> For we are Earthseed.
> And God is Change" (Butler 1993, 15).

Primarily through ecological systems metaphors, Butler's Olamina imagines constant change—God *is* change—and that inevitably, Earth will die, and humans and all other beings and things of Earth will "take root among the stars" (Butler 1998, 394). This does not, however, dissuade Olamina from focusing on change in the present and interim future—even if *she knows* this is the ultimate fate of Earthly life. Instead, she makes a plan to survive, migrate north, perhaps to Oregon or maybe Canada, where the climate will still sustain life, and build community that will eventually—hopefully—go on to

inhabit distant planets.[27] This very prophetic narrative forecasting is somewhat peripheral in the novel, which is focused more closely on the day-to-day preparations of characters: keeping books about edible and dangerous plants, dressing in more masculine expressions to reduce sexual violence, learning basic medic skills, burying cash, tools, and weapons for future use, as well as Olamina's thoughts on what caused society to decline.

Olamina understands herself as disabled by "hyperempathy syndrome"—caused by her mother's usage of a popular pharmaceutical before her birth (reminiscent of the story of thalidomide impacted children in the 1960s). This means that she shares both the pain and the pleasure of beings within her sensorial realm and will require constant community to keep her from certain death. Olamina also understands herself—including her hyperempathy—as part of the necessary apocalypse as revelation—which will bring growth, adaptation, and shape the change that is the foundation of her faith. Intensifying weather patterns and environmental disaster events drive many of the plot lines in both novels. Fires make them move, earthquakes shake them forward, floods free them from the captivity of the Christian Crusaders.

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[27] Terry Bisson's *Fire on the Mountain (1988)* imagines the answers to "What if John Brown had joined with Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass and was successful at Harper's Ferry?" In Bisson's story, this success leads to an 1859 slave rebellion and ensuing war that ends in the creation of a separate African state called Nova Africa in the US South. By 1959, Nova Africa is a socialist country and is planning a centennial celebration on Mars. The story is also told from the point of a view of a pregnant scientist (common trope in neo-slave and feminist speculative fiction) who decides she will climb the Blue Ridge in search of connection to her enslaved great-great grandfather who fought with Brown, Tubman, and Douglass. As a story within a story, Nova Africans read a dystopian horror called *John Brown's Body* in which Brown loses, Black people continue to be enslaved and oppressed, capitalism destroys the Earth, and no one ever makes it to Mars. Butler would have been aware of this story as her *Xenogenesis* series beginning in 1987 also predicted a destroyed Earth—war as an outgrowth of capitalism—that leads an alien species to attempt to save and change Earth and its inhabitants.

Olamina's reflections and contemplations on politics are often references to the formal political actors, such as Texas Senator and Presidential Candidate Andrew Steele Jarret's own desperate, post-racial jeremiads like this one in *Talents*:

> He wants to take us all back to some magical time when everyone believed in the same God, worshiped him the same way, and understood that their safety in the universe depended on completing the same religious rituals and stomping anyone who was different. There was never such a time in this country… [Jarret] has a simple answer: 'Join us! Our doors are open to every nationality, every race! Leave your sinful past behind and become one of us. Help us to make America great again!'" (1998, 294).

And throughout the novels, she contemplates what kind of society must have allowed for the rise of this kind of leader and the Christian America movement.

Olamina is a teenager and young adult throughout most of the novels, and her political and faith beliefs ever changing and evolving. While in Robledo, Olamina is quite fearful of those outside the wall—depicting outsiders as either addicted to drugs or in poverty—characterizing them a destructive force that will overtake them at any moment. These addicts, called "Pyros" because of the particular sexualized attraction to fire, are said to have once been the part of a "burn the rich" social movement started by the children of wealthy elites (Butler 1993, 99). Olamina predicts this reality as later the Pyros overtake Robledo, murdering most of the community, destroying the crops, and taking most portable items. Olamina slowly adjusts her perceptions of those "outside" once she, too, is outside the protection of Robledo.

Early in her journey, she locates two surviving members of her former community and along their meandering route through California's "desert" landscape, pick up other survivors and weary travelers. Eventually she meets Bankole—an older physician with

whom she falls in love, develops Earthseed and nurtures the Acorn community, and has a daughter named Larkin. Olamina learns that Bankole's family owns property in northern California, so instead of heading for Canada—they go there to start building. *Sower* ends with a conversation between Bankole and Olamina about whether or not what the United States once was is "salvageable"—a term that Earthseeders use to refer to found compostable and reusable items. Bankole is upset—wishing Olamina could have known the US before "this moment" and sad that she will never "understand what we've lost" (Butler 1993, 292). But Olamina immediately turns to change and growth—to literally and figuratively burying the dead and planting oak trees that will eventually produce acorns while simultaneously telling stories, singing songs, and speaking Bible and Earthseed verses alike. Finally, Olamina the novel ends with a journal entry from Olamina citing the "Parable of the Sower" (Luke 8: 5-8 KJV):

> A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. An some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and chocked it. And others fell on the good ground, and sprang up, and bore fruit hundredfold.

Olamina believes that Christian America (and eventually the leadership of her brother Marc) have not heeded obvious warnings and are unable to see that their "seeds" have been stolen, starved, and choked by their actions, particularly "The deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful" (Mark 4:19).

In *Talents*, Olamina is imprisoned by Christian Crusaders—loose bands of right-wing zealots that enslave "nonbelievers" in concentration camps. Those who are captured are "collared" with a shock-choker that prevents them from escape. Olamina's Acorn members are all captured, and most are raped, beaten, tortured, and killed. Olamina's young daughter is taken from her to be raised by a "good Christian America" family and much of the second half of the novel hinges on Olamina attempting to locate her daughter. This Christian America rhetoric bears a strong resemblance to the "traditional" and "family values" rhetoric of the 1990s and the US and President Donner to George H.W. Bush. In what now feels like a premonition from Butler, 2024 Presidential candidate Andrew S. Jarret bears a striking rhetorical likeness to Donald J. Trump.

The jeremiad and foundational myth shape and are reshaped by Butler in the *Parables.* The narrative of the first novel alludes to the political projects of the Puritans and Biblical discourses are prevalent throughout. Olamina leads an exodus from California's cities to a more isolated area and promised land (though not wilderness), where she develops a strong sense of workings of Earthly processes (ordering the chaos), focuses on community formation in the face of peril and physical hardship (subordination of the individual to the survival of the collective), and the development of Acorn and Earthseed perhaps to resemble the (not exactly shining) city upon a hill (Bercovitch 1975; Susman 1984, 41). Butler accentuates the relationship between faith, culture, and imagining futures illuminated as a distinctive American literary tradition by Sacvan Bercovitch. This productive narrative, drawn from John Winthrop and Cotton Mather by Sacvan Bercovitch as fundamental to American identity formation, however, is reshaped

by the centralization of a Black woman leader who understands the predominantly white Christian America movement as ruthless bands of men who prey on the likes of Olamina and Acorn.

The Tale and Testaments

In *The Handmaid's Tale* series (novel and televised), the focus is primarily on the risks and vulnerabilities of women in environmentally apocalyptic conditions. While climate change and widespread environmental degradation are prophesized globally, the disparities in risk and vulnerability are key to potent political mobilization. *The Handmaid's Tale* focuses on a near dystopian future in the territory formerly known as the United States and now called The Republic of Gilead.[28] It is a totalitarian fundamentalist Christian regime established by a violent uprising of the Sons of Jacob. The regime is installed in New England and centered around Boston with unknown size and borders—alluding to a coup in the center of America's own revolutionary beginnings. The uprisings and eventual regime are said to be a response to a rapid decline in birthrates which, for the empowered of Gilead, necessitates the establishment and maintenance of a gendered, raced, classed and strictly heterosexual hierarchy. The narrator named Offred[29] provides the point of view of a witness—a testimony for the

[28] Gilead loosely translates from Hebrew into "mound of testimony." Gilead is a city of evildoers, stained with footprints of blood (Hosea 6:8). Gilead is a very notable name for Atwood's new state—the biblical home to Hosea who lives out cycles of repentance, redemption, and restoration. He knows through prophecy that he will marry a woman who will betray him, that the people of Israel have come to worship wealth and adultery—but that he should always operate with forgiveness, love, and attention to justice while leaving ultimate judgement to God.

[29] For those who may be unfamiliar with the work, the name is "Of Fred" meaning of the family of her commander and rapist.

future later discovered as recordings on cassettes. The reader comes to know the regime through this first-person narration of Offred, a woman who has become a "handmaid" or subjugated surrogate to a Commander and his Wife who are unable to bear children due to this shadowy environmental disaster. In order to discipline women into their roles as handmaids, women called Aunts teach them applicable and carefully selected scripture, enforce the new rules of the household, facilitate handmaid rape, and oversee the births of the children that will be taken from them and placed in the homes of Commander and their Wives.

The first-person narration and focus on handmaids under the Gilead regime works to both highlight the likely gendered experience of environmental disaster, democratic collapse, and regime change, but also to erase the history of systemic environmental violence and exploitation in the contemporary United States in which the novel is situated—an issue in speculative fiction that the podcast storytellers carefully acknowledge and attempt to avoid in their world-making. While *The Handmaid's Tale* does provide a critical lens on contemporary political discourses on Christianity and environmentalism, the novel (and more so the television series) also reflect the state of contemporary liberal politics which occludes experienced environmental and political atrocities and also elides sites of potent radical contestation.

Speculative fiction allows us to imagine what societal forces would need to fall apart and what others need to come together in order to lay the groundwork for a government like Gilead. The process of collapse in *The Handmaid's Tale* gives perspective on 1) the significance of understanding and urgently responding to climate

change and potential environmental catastrophe (this includes framing of the problems and solutions); 2) the necessity of robust institutions and research to this understanding (scientific and religious institutions); 3) by who and how the story of environmental disaster and regime change is told and consumed (media). Ultimately, *The Handmaid's Tale* reveals the fragility of the systems that keep states from total collapse in precarious environmental times.

The environmental violence that occurs prior to *The Handmaid's Tale* (and in the actual US)—is violence that "occurs gradually out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (Nixon 2011, 2). For Nixon, one of the main problems with calling attention to slow violence is one of representation—and novels are a way into popular representation. Because the "violence is not always visible, time bound, or body bound" writers must "devise arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects" (Nixon 2011, 3) and speculative fiction allows for this representation of past, present, and future events and effects.[30]

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[30] These slow and cumulative environmental catastrophes are illuminated through both the narration of Offred and the later "Historical Notes" chapter analyzing the Gilead regime. Offred focuses on the impact to bodies and reproduction in particular in both fears of what are called "unbabies" remembering facts from the Aunts, "the chances [of an unbaby] are one in four, we learned that at the Center. The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules, all of that takes years to clean up, and meanwhile they creep into your body, camp out in your fatty cells" (Atwood 1985, 112). Offred fears the impacts of the kind of violences that cannot be seen on ecosystems, women, and herself. In terms of ecosystems, she wonders, "Who knows your very flesh may be polluted, dirty as an oily beach, sure death to shore birds and unborn babies. Maybe a vulture would die of eating you. Maybe you light up

According to the regime in the novel and television series, problems with reproduction are due to the disintegration of the moral fabric of the United States which can only be rectified through the return to traditional family values (an allusion to Puritan jeremiads as well as the political rhetoric of the right in the 1980s) which includes a new interpretation of Genesis and specific relationships from the Old Testament. The regime avoids explanations that would call into question capitalism, military expansion, or human-induced climate change and its effects. Instead the regime blames the loss of fertility among women on adultery, homosexuality, and abortion. Atwood's Professor Pieixoto argues that women in Gilead's colonies were used as "portable populations" in "expendable toxic-clean up squads" as well as the supposed "less hazardous" tasks of "cotton picking" and "fruit harvesting" which are references to specific historical work of people of color who are mostly absent from the novel—assumedly due to environmental racism in the United States—which also goes undiscussed (Atwood 1985, 308).

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in the dark, like an old-fashioned watch" (Atwood 1985, 112). And then turns to her own body, "I can't think of myself, my body, sometimes, without seeing the skeleton: how I must appear to an electron. A cradle of life, made of bones; and within, hazards, warped proteins, bad crystals jagged as glass" (Atwood 1985, 112). But it is in the focus on women in relation that we see the Aunts' judgement in particular, "Women took medicines, pills, men sprayed trees, cows ate grass, all that souped-up piss flowed into the rivers. Not to mention the exploding atomic power plants, along the San Andreas fault… [Some women] did it themselves, had themselves tied shut with catgut or scarred with chemicals. How could they, said Aunt Lydia, how could they have done such a thing?" (Atwood 1895, 112). Atwood consistently draws attention to the ways that women themselves perpetuate certain kinds of violence. It is through the later historical-anthropological chapter analyzing the tale itself which first attributes reproductive issues to birth control, abortion, and STIs like syphilis and AIDS before condemning "nuclear-plant accidents, shutdowns, and incidents of sabotage" and "leakages from chemical- and biological-warfare stockpiles and toxic-waste disposal sites, of which there were many thousands, both legal and illegal—in some instances these materials were simply dumped into the sewage system—and to the uncontrolled use of chemical insecticides, herbicides, and other sprays" (Atwood 1985, 304). Later, men's fertility is separated from these causes as a "sterility-causing virus that was developed by secret pre-Gilead gene-splicing experiments with mumps, and which was intended for insertion into the supply of caviar used by top officials in Moscow" which "some wished to sprinkle it over India" (Atwood 1985, 309).

The Handmaid's Tale does bring back into view casualties of past real-world events—preserving them in a re-spectacularized form long after the journalistic media has stopped reporting on them. Atwood argues that no aspect of the book is itself "fiction," but rather actual historical events and political potentialities weaved together. The events in the book are combinations of real-life happenings from newspaper clippings available in the late 1970s to early 1980s as well as selected scripture: abortion laws in the US and Romania, falling birthrates in Canada, the toxic chemical spill in Bhopal, Iran's revolution in 1979, banned books in schools in the 1980s, and a Catholic-based cult that called their wives "handmaidens," as well as Genesis 30:3 (Atwood 2004; Mead 2017). The novel was partially written in divided Germany which influenced the division between the former US and Gilead. The totalitarian governance of Gilead is "same as the real ones and most imagined ones" as it has "a small powerful group at the top that controls—or tries to control—everyone else" (Atwood 2004, 516). The "unbabies" that result from the combination of environmental disasters that befall the former US, resemble closely the "jellyfish babies" of the Marshall Islands born well into the period of Atwood's novel writing—the result of a people subjected to dozens of nuclear tests by the US in the 1940s and 1950s (and long forgotten by US citizens and US government of the present). The "Historical Notes" chapter, then, is meant to show that repressive governments like Gilead in our actual world eventually become mere "subject for academic analysis" than motivations for change (Atwood 2004, 517).

The novel also provides a glimpse into the political import of contentious interpretations of biblical text. Much of the novel engages biblical ideas and places—the

city of Gilead, the Sons of Jacob (great-grandchildren of Abraham), and the reasoning given by the government for the enforced surrogacy is from the stories of Hagar and Sarah as well as Rachel and Leah, but it is the interpretations of these events in the novel's present that matter. The Sons of Jacob—those descendants of Abraham not born of Hagar the handmaid, take up a particular fundamental interpretation of text. While right-wing groups such as the Sons of Jacob interpret these passages to mean that fertile women must be pulled from their families and made to give birth to elites—rebellion and resistance to tyranny are also biblically addressed in the novel (particularly in relation to the Israelites) and Offred offers her own interpretations of biblical texts throughout.

Unlike some speculative fiction that depicts all religion as a relic of the past, faith-based resistance is presented on the periphery to the main characters' experience in the novel. While one could draw threads of Christian faith and environmental concern well before the American colonies, the impact of Calvinist Puritans (later Congregationalists) is key to Margaret Atwood's choice of Boston as the site of Gilead. Atwood poses Baptists and Quakers as the marginal resisters to Gilead in the novel—mirroring the structure of religious segregation in the colonies in the 1600s. Baptists in the context of the US history have strongly rejected state power, restraint over their religious affairs, as well as strong ties between church and state—instead highlighting the experience of individual conversion. In the 1600s, this would lead to Baptist marginalization—and in the novel to their resistance. In the novel, many who hold hope, faith, and rage together come to fight against Gilead's interpretation of biblical text. Baptists and Quakers are named as the main enemies within Gilead. The smoking out of

"Baptist guerillas" in the Blue Hills and Appalachian Highlands by "Angels of the Apocalypse" and "Angels of Light" are casually mentioned by Ofglen (another handmaid) to Offred and seen on television (Atwood 1985, 34, 79). In US history, Quakers have been central to abolition and civil rights movements as well as to attending to the poor and most environmentally impacted. Atwood positions Quakers as some of the most actively resistant. A "heretical sect of Quakers" who are "smuggling precious national resources over the border to Canada" are seen by Offred on the nightly news and later aid Moira in her escape attempt (Atwood 1985, 83). It gives Offred comfort to imagine Quakers and an exiled government of resistance (Atwood 1985, 85). Moira notes choosing safe houses memorized from lists with "Q" for Quaker, specifically avoiding staying with "anyone gay" or "single" (Atwood 1985, 200).

When *The Handmaid's Tale* was reimagined as a television series in 2017, the 1985 novel's sales resurged in popularity in the United States and beyond. The Hulu series has likely reached a much broader audience than the novel or the first film. The television series deepens a commitment to a post-racial view of the world (new and improved handmaids include women of color!), and the resistance forces in the Hulu series are militias fighting under the banner of the United States (rather than the radical Quakers, Baptists, Appalachian leftists, etc. as in the novel) (Atwood 1985; Miller 2017).[31] The second season of the show also capitalizes on affective charges at the

[31] Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* which also became increasingly popular during this period differently deepens commitment to this post-racial imaginary of the past, present, and future. Together, these pieces reveal a boldening of polluted liberal politics—a dedication to a form of nationalism that uses storytelling to hem together the Founding and a post-oppressive present-future. Real historical injustices

expense of a broadly enabled politics. By the second season, the show fixates tightly on Offred's maltreatment, pain, rage, personal triumph in birth, and ultimate failure to maintain. Affective charges are ratcheted up—fear of loss especially—but by the end it is simply Offred in conjunction with the Shlaflyesque Serena Joy working to save the future embodied in Offred and Nick's "normal" baby. The audience is left feeling like they have/would resist an imminent theocracy or perhaps the Trump administration—but also perhaps the audience's hearts race, tears fall, and fists clench in an experience that traumatizes more than mobilizes a more progressive politics.

There is one page in the entire sequel where much of the major environmental and political questions get attention. Aunt Lydia, mobilizing the words of Robert Frost stating, "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and I took the one most travelled by. It was littered with corpses, as such roads are. But as you will have noticed, my own corpse is not among them" (Atwood 2019, 66). She notes her own role and lack of action as significant to democratic collapse. Aunt Lydia goes on to describe the environmental issues faced because of climate change: hurricanes, droughts, and water shortages. She also describes problems in the former United States with infrastructure, earthquakes, decommissioned atomic reactors, and the accompanying political collapse and scarcity, economic decline, unemployment, falling birth rates—and the beginning of the cycle of

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are elided in ways that undercut organizing. This is in opposition to, for example, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* or Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* which differently illuminate that revolution is not a singular moment in space-time, but rather a continual process of reflection on the past and present and the need for creative revisioning of the future. As Connolly warns, oppressive structures will always re-emerge and reorganize. This must be continually recognized, reconciled, and our current constructs reimagined.

doom, despair, hope, and rage (Atwood 2019, 66). Overall, Aunt Lydia notes that the problem was both personal and collective disbelief of scientific facts and shifting blame onto others (particularly women and queers) for experienced hardships.

That said, there is little engagement with the actual activities of collective resistance in Gilead or exactly how they interpret Christian doctrine, practices, or discourse differently than the leaders and beneficiaries of Gilead. Instead of providing room for resistance, they may very well work to empower the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine itself. The political elites of Gilead closely resemble the political elites of the 1980s. They attempt to live out some of the programs of the Puritans in terms of their agricultural attention, parks programs, and conservation efforts, displayed most prominently in the third season of the Hulu series. Much like the building of the Calvinists' shining city upon the hill juxtaposed with the mansions of televangelists in the 1980s like Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker, and Pat Robertson, the Commanders live in luxurious homes (probably built of cedar).[32] In the third season, the Waterfords make reference to Gilead's sense of environmental order and morality, some examples include: cleaning up the old industrial wreckages and radioactive waste (through enslaved women), growing crops in ways that are more environmentally attuned (not depicted, but

[32] "Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his own people work for nothing, not paying them for their labor. He says, 'I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms.' So, he makes large windows in it, panels it with cedar and decorates it in red. "Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the Lord." Jeremiah 22:13-16 (NIV).

also likely through enslaved labor), and the chief economist responsible for Gilead drives a Tesla.

Following the airing of the third season, Atwood also released a long-awaited sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale* entitled *The Testaments* on September 10, 2019 which focuses on the testimonies of Aunt Lydia, and two women who are assumed to be Offred's daughters (if you have seen the television series this is clearly revealed there), Agnes and Nicole. Testimonies are a common tradition in many churches—often as a way to celebrate personal triumph through the glory of God or to receive support from community. The idea is that everyone has a story to tell—including Aunty Lydia in this particular novel—because those stories help us understand our relationships to each other by sharing our sojourns and illuminating potent paths for others. Testimonies are also a way to process trauma and to manage grief and loss.

This novel, however, puts Atwood's series in a complicated space by elevating the specific testimonies that it does. First, this novel almost completely avoids any discussion of the environmental collapse that motivated its predecessor. Secondly, the reader is frequently led to cheer on fascist sympathizer Aunt Lydia because she (finally) decides to aid in taking down Gilead. Lastly, the novel provides clear hope that Gilead crumbles (eventually), based on the heroism of Aunt Lydia and the sisters who survive (three saviors, all white in the novel) to give evidence to the Canadian government (another savior) of Gilead's crimes against humanity. Unlike in the television series, resistance to Gilead is led by Quakers and other Christians in rural areas, "back-to-the-landers," Missouri hill country folk, Utah's Mormons (who are massacred by Gilead), the

independent Republic of Texas, the West Coast led by California, as well as Alaska, Canada, and "global citrus smugglers" (Atwood 2019, 113).

Aunt Lydia's journey to Aunthood is by force, but she willingly and excitedly partakes in gender enforcement, rape, torture, and execution of women. The reader is led to believe that this was simply so she could eventually tear it down from within using her superpowers of scientific evidence collection (she is allowed to read and write as an Aunt and was a judge in her former life in the novel, a teacher in the television series). But other times, the nature of these characters is called out directly—such as the Aunts' meetings in the Schlafly Café to sit around and drink tepid milk. Aunt Lydia calls to the reader herself, knowing that the reader will wonder, "How can I have behaved so badly, so cruelly, so stupidly? You will ask. You yourself would never have done such things! But you yourself will never have had to" (Atwood 2019, 403). Atwood makes these direct questions of the reader—to academics of the present-future—imploring academics to understand and explain what exists now without allowing it to become mere scholarly fodder for future rather than present action.

In *The Testaments*, Atwood calls attention to a society (both the US and Gilead) similarly built to the colonies on lies of omission, extreme violence, and fool's errands. Gilead's beginnings are practically a model of John Winthrop's introductory words to "A Model of Charity" in 1630, "God Almighty in his most holy and wise providence hath so disposed of the condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in subjection." Aunt Lydia is given the job of Aunt in order to help Gilead become its true self—and uses the words of

John Winthrop, "a city upon a hill, a light to all nations" which will better serve women who have been led into lives of decadence and corruption (Atwood 2019, 174). Atwood uses language about Gilead's borders that mirrors the language of early colonists, "The wilder patches of Maine and Vermont are a liminal space note fully controlled by us, *where the natives are, if not overtly hostile, prone to heresies…and they are prone to vendettas if crossed"* (Atwood 2019, 112, emphasis mine). One character, in a very casual way discusses women in New England in the 1740s as held hostage by men and traded away (to Indigenous people) which explains her "mixed heritage" as "part stealer, part stolen" (Atwood 2019, 191).[33] The women of Gilead come to believe that Gilead is endless, borderless, edgeless, and inescapable.

But we also have some questions from the prior novel firmly answered: Gilead is meant to be a white Christian utopia—not a multiracial one as portrayed in the Hulu television series. The "Historical Notes on *The Handmaid's Tale*" chapter highlights that the handmaids are indeed white through both the title of the professor's department (Professor Maryann Crescent Moon, Department of Caucasian Anthropology, University of Denay, Nunavit) and "Men highlight placed in the regime were thus able to pick and choose among women who had demonstrated their reproductive fitness by having produced one or more healthy children, a desirable characteristic in an age of plummeting

[33] Atwood's racism, particularly against Indigenous peoples, is well documented and as Grace Dillon reminded the audience during my talk on *The Testaments* in 2019, Atwood's complete disregard of Indigenous pasts, presents, and futures is a "testament" to her inability to imagine truly livable futures for all. Notably, Canada is portrayed as the saving grace for escaped handmaids and the eventual downfall of Gilead in both the texts and television series.

Caucasian birthrates, a phenomenon observable not only in Gilead, but in most northern Caucasian societies of the time" (Atwood 1985, 304). Gilead is studied as a white society and the focus on "the failure to reproduce" illuminates that academics see whiteness as something to preserve (Atwood 1985, 304). The academics of the future blame availability of birth control and abortion on the low birthrates of whites and "willed" infertility—highlighting that these were not available to non-whites in this version of the US before Gilead and perhaps eliding the unwilled sterility of women of color in the US (Atwood 1985, 304). Academics in this chapter also appropriate the name of the Underground Railroad and apply it to the subjugation of white women in Gilead as the "Underground Female Road" (Atwood 1985, 302). The narration of Offred ends rather ambiguously, "And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light" (Atwood 1985, 295). While we know she goes on to record the story on cassettes, we do not know anything about activism against the regime, how it falls, or what the cumulative impact of these continued environmentally destructive activities are.

Those from Gilead attempting to escape to Canada are described with the present-day right-wing rhetoric of "unstoppable flood" as many attempt to acquire a "Certificate of Whiteness" created by Commander Judd which fails because of document forgeries and political bribery (Atwood 2019, 64). This novel, too, ends with a "Historical Notes" chapter looking back at Gilead from an academic symposium that involves everything from an opening acknowledgement of the Indigenous land on which the symposium takes

place, a costumed re-enactment of Gilead, to a male professor's sexist jokes about women coming into leadership positions in the association (Atwood 2019, 407-8).[34]

Atwood has published on *The Handmaid's Tale* in the progressive Christian journal *Sojourners*, spoken on Canadian Christian television shows, and worked with the international faith-based environmental organization such as A Rocha. In *Sojourners*, Atwood plainly states the importance of faith involvement in environmental issues, "I think all of those things are connected and what is also connected is: It's going to be up to major faiths to come to understand these things, because they actually have some leverage in their hands that could move the conversation (Williams 2017). Atwood goes on to explain that this power must be mobilized with "concern for the environment, because you can't love your neighbor or even your enemy, unless you love your neighbor's oxygen, food, and water. You can't love your neighbor or your enemy if you're presuming policies that are going to cause those people to die" (Williams 2017). Atwood argues, "When you refuse to take steps to reverse climate change, you are therefore endorsing more floods, more famines, more extreme weather conditions, more droughts, and all of that is going to have an impact on the world food supply, particularly in areas that are already challenged" (Williams 2017). It is possible, then, that *The Handmaid's Tale* may work to produce a polluted liberal politics or even embolden the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine if it is simply looped into right-wing media as anti-religious and anti-Christian.

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[34] This part truly feels like an acknowledgement of polluted white liberal politics, even if Atwood herself generally reproduces such politics.

For Nixon, storyteller-activists help expose injustice, provide counter-histories, new rhetorical or narrative strategies, or perhaps lengthy counterfactual thought experiments. If the problem, as Nixon puts it, is the imbalanced attentiveness and responsiveness given to spectacular violence, then the depiction of something like *The Handmaid's Tale* in dramatic series format should be more attention-grabbing—more difficult to look away from. It brings to cinematographic color and contrast to the somatized drama of infertility, social division of bodily productivity, and the political messiness of regime change. To address slow violence, Nixon argues, also includes contestation over defining violence, who or what experiences violence, and who holds the authority to bear witness and give testimony to violence. According to Connolly, the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine limits the reverberation to a right-wing empowered echo chamber defining violence, experience, and authority—who is brought onto Fox News, who makes money from the violence and the stories themselves, etc. It is a messy politics of spectacle of event, memory, and temporal scale—of thought, culture, and speed as Connolly puts it.

Atwood herself understands her role similarly to those of the podcasters discussed later in this project, telling a story for the future as a writer-activist—specifically in this intersection of literature, faith, environments, and politics. She is frequently cited condemning environmental toxicity, biological manipulation, right-wing politics and politicized faith. Atwood describes *The Handmaid's Tale* as a "classic dystopia" in the vein of George Orwell's 1984 which greatly influenced her writing of the text in the "real" 1984 (Atwood 2004, 516). Unlike political theory approaches to genre that may

become far removed from on-the-ground politics, Rob Nixon outlines the important role of the writer-activist. Nixon's attention to the slow violence of environmental disaster also highlights the role of the writer or scholar as activist in overcoming the challenges of representation and narrative posed by climate change and environmental calamities. Nixon calls figures like Indra Sinha, Rachel Carson, Njabulo Ndebele, Ken Saro-Wiwa, among others "combative" writer-activists—testifying for the future.

Left Behind or Continually Leaving Behind?

For Connolly, the *Left Behind* novel series is at the core of this amplification and intensifying reverberation of what he called the "evangelical-capitalist resonance machine" (2005). For the writer-activists discussed here, a return to the value of storytelling, oral and visual interpretations of survival lessons, and so forth are key to countering the machine. In terms of Christian relationships to the environment, Rob Nixon's concerns can be brought to bear on the representational and affective power of the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine. As Connolly reveals in his attendance to the *Left Behind* series, it is difficult to match the visceral and affective dimensions of burning up in the fire and brimstone of apocalyptic violence, almost impossible to keep focus on such slow moving environmental disaster and ever postponed or "unnoticed" collapse—something that speculative fiction does well to address (Connolly 2005; Cunningham and Warwick 2013; Nixon 2011, 3). In explaining exactly how this resonance works to create a powerful assemblage, Connolly states that these affective charges resonate back and forth, "generating a political machine more potent than the aggregation of its parts" (Connolly 2005, 876). This is expressed in "the promise to plunge millions into a fiery

hell… the legitimation and displacement of corporate crime… the demand for new tax breaks for the rich when they impose sacrifices on the poor now and entire generations in the future…generalized readiness to table any economic evidence or theological uncertainty that might temper the drive to revenge (Connolly 2005, 876). This revenge becomes embedded in the our very "habitual patterns of perception, identity, interest, and judgments of entitlement" (Connolly 2005, 878). While "the possibility of existential resentment thus resides in any and every mortal, existential faith, and political movement," (Connolly 2005, 881), the focus on the "evangelical movement" as one sewn tightly into right politics by affect seems to preclude affective dispositions that differ quite intensely or even possibly amplify movements for change within evangelicalism.

While Connolly provides no close reading of the text, the literature is said to foster an embrace of the will to revenge, distrust of humanistic progressives through fear of the Antichrist figure, and to interpret the good will of outsiders with fear and suspicion (Connolly 2005, 875). For Nixon, the question is of the animation and affective charging of the images and narratives of the "disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and that star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world" (Nixon 2011, 3). Through an affectively charged connection to the contemporary, certain kinds of political actions are opened and others foreclosed. In many ways, several shadow futures loom in the background—sometimes named, but often unspoken—imagined fears contoured by storytellers and demands that we act now to prevent the shadow (or perhaps the light?) from casting across the Earth.

It is unclear in any of these novels what eventually happens to the governments and multinational corporations most responsible for environmental crises. Much like Connolly's evangelical-capitalist resonance machine, the powerful coalescence of traditional family and capital lives on while the sacrifices of people of color and the environmental poor are unrepresented and unaddressed in the *Handmaids* series. As both Giovanna Di Chiro and Rob Nixon have pointed out in relation to queer ecologies and slow violence, selective telling of stories matters and in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood chooses to tell the story in first-person narrative of a "normally" reproductive straight white woman with a heteronormative family. *The Handmaid's Tale* alternates between Offred's perspective on her current situation, her memories of her life before, and shifting perspectives of other characters in the novel. We do not come to know how Gilead came about in a strictly linear chronology, but rather through flashbacks which interrupt Offred's contemporary experience to reveal her productivity and reproductivity, her prior freedoms, and her familial and romantic love. All but the "Historical Notes" chapter are told through the voice of Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* through Aunt Lydia and Offred's children. Most conversations appear to be memory—without quotation marks or separation of the voices of other characters. Offred *is* the voice of the former United States. Through this particular narration, the subject-position from which we are allowed to feel and connect is one of the disempowered—but still very privileged (in the real past and present) position of Offred. If Offred is contrasted with *The Parable of the Sower*'s Lauren Oya Olamina or *Future Home of the Living God*'s Cedar Hawk Songmaker, all of which are young women wrestling with faith, child-bearing,

environmental and democratic collapse, and migration (or attempted migration) north, the pitfalls of an Offred or Aunt Lydia motivated politics are quite stark.

For each writer-activist, literature is an expression and investigation of human despair and optimistic hope that humans will eventually come to a better understanding of the self and the world. Alongside faith-based environmental organizations and organizers, fiction often frames the possible. Biblical journeys reimagined—such as *Noah* (2014), or the path of Lauren Oya Olamina in the creation of Earthseed have given many new hope, especially given the bleak reality of many experienced pasts and current situations. Adaptation of well-known, particularly biblical stories has been increasingly prominent in the mid-2010s and into 2020.

According to Connolly, the first step in countering the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine is to visualize the interim future—and this may require a reimagining and reinterpreting of texts and events of the past. In Darren Aronofsky's *Noah (2014)*, Noah and his family do not consume animals before, during, or after they have been brought aboard the ark. The one character that does consume meat does not survive.[35] While this scripture has been interpreted to mean the necessity of proper acquisition, preparation, and care for meat (such as Kosher or Halal foods), in the film this is imagined as non-consumption of anything with "lifeblood" because God will demand an

[35] Genesis 9: (2) The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. (3) Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. (4). But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. (5) And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from

"accounting" for this death. The animals brought aboard the ark are preserved, not to be used or destroyed by humans and the natural environment is to be preserved following the flood. This film was not created by avowed "evangelical environmentalists" or "creation care" advocates, but it is precisely these imagined futures (and recurring pasts) regarding scarcity of food, poor health, and preservation of beings that are at stake.

As Morrigan Phillips and Walidah Imarisha remind visionary fiction writer-activists, there are important lessons in speculative fiction, but there is also education in problematic imaginative fiction (Imarisha and brown 2015; Phillips 2016). As James Morone stated in the epilogue of *Hellfire Nation*, "Politics change when rich sinners replace poor ones. That shift raises subversive questions about the bias of the system and the basis of wealth and poverty. People begin to 'realize their interdependence'" (2003, 496). But these visions must be hopeful (but not optimistic) stories of what we ought to do in the face of catastrophe. This hope cannot be predicated solely *on likelihood or possibility* and cannot appeal to a moderate center. Appeals must be actionable and grounded in the material world and experience—focused on the desired outcome and the relationship building needed to feel and function. There appears a conceit among many religion and politics scholars who believe that their academic appeals to centers and moderates will be heard and will be transformative of polarized ideologies. Much of this literature, based in the US for instance, focuses on a very optimistic pluralistic outcome if the center is simply rhetorically catered to. For Connolly, there is a goal of "deep pluralism," for Philip Gorski a "vital center," all a perfectly warm Tolkien Middle Earth between the fiery apocalypticism and the cold secularism said to characterize US politics.

Adrienne maree brown's emergent strategies, for the most part, leave aside the similarities of the narrative to Bercovitch's "American Jeremiad" in an account of subjectivity and agency derived from *Parables*. While Atwood's work and "white futurisms" may depict "rupture as a threat to existing structures of power and security, seeking to instrumentalize them and recuperate power," Butler's *Parables* and brown's emergent strategies highlight the "creative uncertainty of crisis" and embrace apocalypse as revelation of the bases of American tradition as built on structures, institutions, narratives, and affective states that directly oppress Black and Indigenous people (Mitchell and Chaudury 2020, 15). The dominant paradigms in political science and political theory have been inherently foreclosing our capacities to envision and create futures worth living for and "endings" worth working toward. These authors, however, provide important guidance and strategies for politically and imaginatively addressing climate change and environmental collapse. As Halberstam argues in the *Queer Art of Failure,* "Why not think in terms of a different kind of society [rather than] the one that first created then abolished slavery? The social worlds we inhabit, after all, as so many thinkers remind us, are not inevitable; they were not always bound to turn out this way, and what's more, in the process of producing this reality, many other realities, fields of knowledge, and ways of being have been discarded…" (Halberstam 2011, 8; Scott 1998). My focus in this chapter is primarily on writer-activists outside of traditional academia and the discipline of political science because academic knowledge, like any kind of knowledge, is limited—and disciplinary knowledge often purposefully bounded by the types of works you "should" cite. But there are few questions of interest to me regarding

the potent futures of beings on Earth, relationships between humans and other than human worlds, and experiences of violence or even cooperation that should have limited exploration or be considered apolitical. Speculative futures engage political questions of governance and nationalism, politicized religious beliefs, economic inequalities, homophobia, racism, and gendered experiences of environmental degradation. In investigating questions of narrative, representation, belief, and affect, I believe we can better understand our political possibilities.

CHAPTER IV

COMMUNITIES OF CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENTAL PERIL

"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule [over] the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and [over] every living creature that crawls [moves/creeps/scurries] on the earth [ground].'"
—Genesis 1:28 (CSB, [NIV]).

"Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed [into his nostrils] the breath of life, and the man became a living being." —Genesis 2:7 (CSB, [NIV]).

"How Christian is it to say that God is going to fry the world, but you're going to be up in a cloud watching? And then God will make you another one. ...So how can people engage?"
— Margaret Atwood in Sojourners (Williams 2017).

In this chapter, I discuss the various origin stories and organizers of "creation care" and attempt to amplify the political creativity of Christians coming up against the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine in the US. As fiery cries from both pulpits and mountaintops alike continue to contribute to an ever-increasing sense of precarity (Morone 2003; Connolly 2013; Schneider-Mayerson 2015), the antagonistic relationship between Christian and environmental concerns has become largely taken for granted—naturalized in the language of religious right political interests, conventional conservative political activities or attitudes, or in acquiescence to "the great moving right show" (Hall 1979). I focus on these environmentally concerned activists of faith and to highlight the ways that they narrate their experience, collaboration, revelation, and reflection on building better futures for their communities of environmental peril.

In February 2018, amid extremely abnormal climate conditions including record breaking heat waves and cold snaps throughout the United States, Scott Pruitt as administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) took to the Christian

Broadcasting Network (CBN)[36] to deliver a candid political statement regarding the EPA and his role at the agency. Pruitt stated, "the biblical worldview with respect to [environmental] issues *is* that we have a responsibility to *manage and cultivate*, *harvest the natural resources that we've been blessed with* to truly bless our fellow mankind" (Christian Broadcasting Network 2018, emphasis mine).[37] Pruitt accessed CBN with an expressly political and empowered position to deliver a message—that there has never been more of a threat to liberty than right now, that this moment requires a return to the (singular) intent of the Founding, and that Pruitt imagined himself among these great leaders (just as the Puritan leaders imagined themselves)—referencing Isaiah 1 as example (Christian Broadcasting Network 2018). Isaiah 1, sometimes entitled "A Rebellious Nation" is mobilized as a form of jeremiad—a lamenting of the state of the contemporary society (Zion) in dire need of the restoration of City of Righteousness (Isaiah 1:7-9, NIV)[38].

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[36] Christian Broadcasting Network was founded by Pat Robertson in 1960 and is known for the broadcasting of The *700 Club* (English)/*Club 700 Hoy* (Spanish) on television and radio throughout US, Latin America, and across the globe in various forms.

[37] CBN introduces Pruitt as the "kind of guy you might meet in Bible study" utilizing his previous roles as Sunday school teacher and church deacon as credentials for his federal government appointed role. Pruitt describes the role of the Trump Administration as one in which they should "minister to people, serve people, and have a light and cheerfulness as [they] do it" (Christian Broadcasting Network 2018).

[38] 7 Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. 8 Daughter Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a cucumber field, like a city under siege. 9 Unless the Lord Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah. I will restore your leaders as in days of old, your rulers as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City. […] 27 Zion will be delivered with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness. 28 But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the Lord will perish. 29 You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen. 30 You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water. 31 The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire.

Mobilizing such a narrative of moral decay is not new—it is considered a uniquely American tradition in political culture (Miller 1956; Bercovitch 1978; Morone 2003; Shulman 2008; Murphy 2009; Gorski 2017). Telling a story strategically for evangelical Christians is also nothing new—as they have been a major target "demographic" of politicians and political campaigns around abortion and same-sex marriage laws for at least the last three decades. Pruitt articulated a formulaic jeremiad in his reference to Isaiah: this country was once a shining city upon a hill, now it is desolate, burned, stripped by foreigners, and akin to Sodom and Gomorrah—and for Pruitt there is hope for redemption through the Trump administration's approach to environmental regulation. This message resonates with many in the US who believe that the nation has fallen from the (again singular) intent of the Founding and that Americans must maintain hope that God will reward such believers with liberty and the grace of God. Jeremiads, as Jonathan Keller shows, allow for narrative of causality in which the Christian Right only entered the realm of politics through a "reluctant calling" to defend itself against an increasingly powerful federal government combined with a "liberalizing" and "humanistic" culture which required the bringing of "traditional values" to restore the nation (Keller and Zamalin 2017).

However, there are a multitude of responses to such despair and this specific "stubborn" optimistic hope—emanating from Christians themselves. In a traditional jeremiad, society's problems are located in obsession with profits or material wealth, failing to provide for the poor, failing to provide for children, or participating in excessive sex, drinking, and gambling (Morone 2003)—but for Pruitt and many

conservatives like him—despair that the US has fallen from grace is met with repentance and renewal through "patriotic" business and technological industry—through market mechanisms and potent profits. In the CBN interview, Pruitt went on to denounce the "environmental left" stating that it "tells us that, though we have natural resources like natural gas and oil and coal, and though *we can feed the world*, we should do what? Keep those things in the ground? Put up fences and be about prohibition? That's wrong headed and I think that's counter to what we should be about" (Christian Broadcasting Network 2018). Pruitt, utilizing evangelical media, equated the need to extract oil or coal to the need to grow and consume food—as CBN added that "Pruitt believes God commands us to take care of the environment and that also means *use what He has provided*" (Christian Broadcasting Network 2018, emphasis mine). By drawing on elements of contemporary conservative thought and dominionist evangelical biblical interpretation—Pruitt revealed a long term project of the Right: a story that stitches together anti-federal government, pro-market solutions which are also meant to be connected directly into an "evangelical" Christian understanding of the world—a process often naturalized as the defining characteristics of the ideologies themselves in US politics.[39]

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[39] There are numerous stories told about the rise of the Christian Right in the US. For the most part, I have consciously chosen not to rehash them at length, but rather to pull them gingerly into the footnotes. As Philip Gorski also points out, evangelical Christians "flew" or "drifted" to the right—specifically toward narratives of moral decay or crusader nationalisms in the 1980s instigated early by Paul Weyrich and cultivated by elites like Ronald Reagan and Jerry Falwell (Gorski 2017, 174). Gorski argues that the later religious nationalism that fomented in the South and in Southern California continued this lineage of keepers of the currents of sanguinary connective tissues—a belt of sun and blood that would eventually form the Reagan coalition of the Southlands (Gorski 2014, 141). According to Gorski as well Connolly, media profited from this drift and ideological rift—facilitated the affective injection of anger and resentment in the United States (Gorski 2017, 175).

Perhaps it is his insight on Reagan that is most relevant here—while Reagan was quick to invoke covenant and renewal in the face of communism—he was less ready to do so for the identity of the

American people. Through his speeches, Reagan was able to play up the greatness of the chosen American people without playing up the immorality of excess and wealth as the social gospelers had. Reagan's famous quoting of Winthrop's *Arbella* at CPAC 1974 and again when announcing his candidacy for presidency a few years later left off the section "wee must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply for the others' necessities" as well as any mention of obligations to the poor (Gorski 2017, 178). Beyond that, Winthrop's message is stripped of community and any sense of mutual aid or obligation by Reagan. As Gorski points out, to Falwell and Reagan, "interpretive disagreements of any kind suggested veiled ambitions or defective character. Thus, did the New Right belatedly develop its own "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Gorski 2017, 182). Furthermore, women like Anne Hutchinson were integral to the development of an individualized and personalized interpretation of Christian daily action—foreshadowing evangelical practices heightened centuries later—an anti-elite, anti-intellectualist and sometimes anti-patriarchal practice of faith. Hutchinson, however, read biblical stories as allegories—countering Cotton Mather's more literalist interpretations of text. Hutchinson imagined a peaceful return of Christ and the Kingdom of God—Mather a bloody apocalypse. Debates formulated in this period would persist and shape political ideologies: blood lineage or moral laws? Biblical allegories or literal narratives? These debates persist into questions of faith and environments.

Much of the rupture among Christians became more pronounced in the Civil War era in a period sometimes referred to as the Second Great Awakening. "Evangelicalism" in the North developed in the oratory and personal commitments of some abolitionists and women's rights activists (Morone 2003) and all over the country developed deeply entwined with a more populist social gospel fervor. "Evangelicals" in the North—primarily abolitionists—focused deeply on both the personal responsibility of each believer, the importance of the community in educating, speaking, and acting to wrest the freedom of "the people" from oppression, and promote the idea of equality in the eyes of God (i.e. David Walker, Angelina and Sarah Grimke, Sojourner Truth, etc.). Darwin's theories, however, thoroughly challenged the biblical relationship between humans, animals, and the Earthly environment. While many evangelicals were willing to incorporate these new findings in various ways—others became more deeply committed to showing that these findings could not be true if one thoroughly read and understood the Bible—that there were clearly delineated biblical dispensations, and that Christ would return in the near future.

Furthermore, those that argued against this scientific research picked up the language of (social) Darwinism—often arguing for religious education to guard against non-Protestant foreigners (especially German, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese immigrants in the 1880s and 1910s). Evangelical belief and action continued to be molded by political events in the early 20th century. "Fundamentalist" Christian belief was coined in the North, but following the widely publicized Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925 (*The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes*) and through popular evangelical magazines, evangelicals in Southern states began to identify with a more "fundamentalist" form of evangelicalism. Scopes had agreed to be accused and arrested of violating Tennessee's Butler Act which stated that teachers in public schools could not "teach any theory that denies the Story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals" (Tennessee Butler Act 1925). While it did not restrict teaching regarding the earthly environment, it influenced ideas of faith-based education for evangelicals—especially in Southern states. Segregated public schools utilized this issue (among other racist and social Darwinist explanations) to form their own separate white fundamentalist evangelical schools away from greater public scrutiny, influence, and cultural shifts.

Integral to the rise of the Christian Right story is the work of Paul Weyrich from the late 1960s well into the early 2000s. Weyrich is often described as the architect of the New Right's connections between anti-integration, anti-science, anti-intellectualism, anti-elitist, pro-business, pro-religious freedom, pro-Creationism, (sometimes pro-Nazism in the case of Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress's co-founder Laszlo Pasztor), anti-IRS, and later anti-pornography, anti-abortion, and anti-homosexual (sic) ideas that characterized the movement. Weyrich co-founded several of the most prominent conservative think tanks that would work to connect these seemingly disparate ideas into a portable platform. While contemporary QAnon believers see everywhere liberal elite puppeteers pulling strings, this was and is

Jeremiads of the Christian Right, like this one, share a vision of the future and tell the same stories to advance their political agendas (Murphy 2009; Zamalin and Keller 2017). Initially, powerful clergy hammered home the message of the Chosen people in need of repentance and renewal, but the jeremiad was never meant to stay in the mouths of religious leaders. Political leaders mobilized the narrative of jeremiad among increasing fears of Darwin's theories of evolution and the mostly hyperbolized secularization of the 1920s. In this period, evangelicals begin to swing away from social gospel revival toward individualistic, pietistic, dominionist, and protectionist actions and formal policies. This is in line with Morone's description of recurring, politically and socially driven revivals. Within this story, however, is also one of variation, contradiction, confliction, and ambivalence. While evangelical thought and climate change are both highly "politicized," evangelicals simultaneously advocate for depoliticization of biblical interpretations and issues. The Right's approaches to environment in particular have to be constantly cultivated and adaptive to challenges from other evangelicals, leftists, and conservatives themselves on the ground—especially

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actually the case of right-wing elite white evangelical churches then and now. Weyrich worked in Barry Goldwater's campaign in 1964 and went on to develop The Heritage Foundation (1973), American Legislative Exchange Council (1973), Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress (1974), Free Congress Foundation (1977, now the American Opportunity Foundation), Christian Voice (1977), and coined the language through which the "moral majority" identity was formed and the political action committee which would bare that name in 1979. In late 1977, Weyrich's tightly aligned web of organizations began to target white evangelical churches as hotbeds of potent political activism in the 1970s. Framing the federal government as an elitist intruder into the privacy of faith and business and a murderer, their various organizations started a grassroots (or perhaps astroturf in some interpretations) movement through church flyer distribution and direct mail campaigns funded by Richard Viguerie. Using fairly traditional political education methods, Weyrich's organizations and advocates created a master frame for churches and communities across the nation that would eventually become the bedrock of the Christian Right and much of the Republican Party platform for two decades.

since the 1990s and early 2000s as some evangelicals and other people of faith have openly combatted the narratives of the Christian Right with counternarrative (including jeremiads), scriptural interpretation (particularly in seminaries), and in practice.

Pruitt's use of jeremiad was also recognized by many Christian leaders and activists as the tool of political persuasive sermonizing that it was intended to be (EEN 2018).[40] How to treat God's creation *is an enduring debate* among Christians (including among Southern Baptists such as Pruitt). The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) have reformed their platforms on climate change and environmental action substantially every year since the 1970s—becoming more and more politically conservative even as many prominent Southern Baptists have left the Convention (such as Jimmy Carter) or have offered counter documents with hundreds of notable signatories (such as the Evangelical Climate Initiative in 2006, discussed later in this chapter).[41]

That is why many have begun a process of adapting and changing both the identity of evangelical and the practices of ritual and worship: stitching together innovative interpretations of biblical text, concerns about the destruction of God's creation, lived experiences with environmental degradation, as well as dissatisfaction with formal political processes and more dominant secular social movement

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[40] Wen Stephenson posited that there are two types of narrative forms or sermons at odds in the US: the manifesto and the jeremiad (2010).

[41] Environmental concerns and action plans have been articulated and supported by the aforementioned associations such as the SBC and NAE which represent upwards of 100,000 church congregations in the United States and almost 300 churches that signed on to the Evangelical Climate Initiative in 2006, as well as tens of millions of self-identified evangelical individuals, their families, and their faith-based organizations.

organizations. Sometimes referred to as "creation care" or "evangelical environmentalism" or these efforts are connected by a focus on the sanctity of all life on Earth—including the Earth itself—and on the importance of biblical obligations to this world and it's life—sometimes referred to as environmental "stewardship." They also maintain a deep dedication to practice—to a kind of "dust of the ground" change.

The right consistently attempts to draw faith organizations to a scarcity narrative in which Earth and its bounty are limited and its powers understood as resources which must be seized *right now*.[42] But as Orosco points out, "It's not that nature is limited, it's that some have more than is fair because of an economic system, global capitalism, that privileges hierarchy and domination" (Orosco 2017a) and those outside the right are quick to note this. While some Christians like Pruitt see land as inert resource owned and operated by whoever maintains the most force (Connolly's cowboy capitalists), others opt for an ethic of creation care or even a social gospel attendant to environmental justice, and others accept climate change science while simultaneously demanding that individuals and not collectivities or governments respond to these environmental (and other political) problems. Still other available narratives—particularly in the genre of speculative fiction—warn of a potent dark underbelly to specifically (white) Christian interpretations of biblical text in light of environmental disasters—such as those available

[42] The left is also consistently fastened to an eventual end of "organized" religion as inherently limited in functionality in the future. Again, as a practice in boundaries, this project could have included a robust discussion of various interpretations of the teleological fate of religion in Marx and the influence on dominant secularization theories in the US, but does not. I do think a critical conversation with Alasdair MacIntyre's recent work on Marx and religion and the virtue of hope would bolster the theoretical implications of this work, however, and could be a future pathway for this project.

in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and to some extent her *MaddAddam* series, or William E. Connolly's diagnoses of the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine in Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins's *Left Behind* series.

The faith stories presented here identify interdependency in ways of living, sensitivities to suffering and destruction of relationships and attempts to counter contemporary political modes of theorizing about faith-based political knowledge and practice. Ultimately, each individual and organization is attempting to make plain why some interpretations of biblical scripture can lead to worldly destruction and others to livable futures. In this time and place of fragile relationships between humans and environments, it is particularly important to highlight lived experiences, the stories that are told, the relationships between humans and environments, and the political work necessary to fostering empathy, interdependency, and interconnection.

In the Beginning…

In the last several decades, there appears a marked shift of some evangelical individuals, churches, and organizations toward a more environmentally oriented ethos (Ellingson 2016; Hescox and Douglas 2016). There are a plurality of origin stories for this shift—influence of liberation theology in Latin America on Catholic and evangelical communities in the US, influence of 1960s-1970s progressive politics on all faiths, the impact of faith communities involved in the first Earth Day, and in the environmental social movement in the US and around the globe. There is also a sort of backlash origin story wherein evangelicals began a cultivation with the Earth in direct response to the rise of the Right in the 1980s. Evan Berry's genealogical account of environmental thought in

the US focuses on unique notions of salvation, redemption, stewardship, wilderness, and spiritual progress to show the ways in which religion came to constitute our very understanding of and relation to a shared world (2015, 5). Without wholly Christian theological concepts, Berry argues, environmental concern would have remained completely irrelevant and unintelligible to the US public who were increasingly living in urban areas and experiencing new (built) environmental crises. According to Berry, "Materiality has thus always been implicated in the quest for redemption" as the material world and human experience in relation were made "meaningful primarily as landmarks along the soul's journey to return to God" (Berry 2015, 22). Furthermore, even secular environmental discourses have never been severed from their religious—often Judeo-Christian—influences. As Evan Berry has pointed out, "American environmentalism is related to religion, not out of serendipitous resemblance, but by way of historically demonstrable genealogical affinity with Christian theological tradition" (Berry 2015, 2). It was political action that worked to obscure the strong affinities between faith and environmental concern and it is these "connective tissues" between discourse and affect that need remembering and rearticulating (Berry 2015). Furthermore, Berry notes that the naturalist societies and outdoor associations in the US formed through early Christian romantic thought, not initially as the legalistic or activist-oriented organizations and advocacy networks they now are.

That being said, Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring* is often credited with broadly popularizing environmentalist concern—particularly among the white middle class (Carson 1962; Nixon 2011). According to Nixon, Carson's story is one of many that

"helped instigate movements" and gave "imaginative definition to the issues at stake while enhancing the public visibility of the cause" and aptly used a platform to produce "testimonial protest, rhetorical inventiveness, and counterhistories" (Nixon 2011, 6). Focused on the chemical industry's deceit and disinformation regarding the impact of biocides (specifically DDT) on humans, animals, and the Earth itself and by addressing the slow violences of biomagnification and toxic drift, Carson "dramatized," "plotted," and "narrated" long-term effects and slow processes for a broader audience.

Carson's story was overshadowed in many Christian faith communities and conversations, however, by Lynn White, Jr.'s 1967 lecture and article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." White directly connected certain Christian scriptural interpretation and action to contemporary environmental degradation. While mostly concerned with the dynamic relationship between humans and their environment, White argued that environmental exploitation was the direct result of (primarily white) Christian dominionism.[43] With evidence based heavily in the creation story of Genesis and the implied dualisms of nature/culture, spirit/flesh, heaven/earth, White argued that Christianity's linear time, concept of progress, and special place for man in nature as God's image led to the consumption of the earth itself throughout the Industrial

[43] Dominionism or dominion theology is derived from Genesis 1:28, the passage granting humanity "dominion" over the Earth. "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (KJV 1:28). In the late 1980s, some evangelical authors used the phrases to label a loose grouping of theological movements who often appealed to this phrase which can also be interpreted as a mandate for Christian stewardship—especially when illuminated by the New Testament (McVicar, 2013).

Revolution and into the 1960s (White 1967; Simmons 2009; Wilkinson 2010; Danielsen 2013).[44] White articulated human relationships to nature:

> "…a loving and all-powerful God had created light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes. Finally, God had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image…. Man's effective monopoly on spirit in this world was confirmed, and the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled" (White 1967).

Making a cultural argument about religious belief, White insisted that these specific Christian values had yet to be displaced by the 1960s and that the political solution for Christians has always been to reject nature (White 1967). White's article is still widely cited in academic environmental literature as an example of Christianity's responsibility for environmental degradation and inherent obstruction to environmental action (Kellert 2012; DeWitt 2012). Environmental literature, for example, often contains sections or chapters on faith and solidly root the subjugation and transformation of Earth in the dominion of Western Judeo-Christian belief as interpreted in the Book of Genesis as the "manifestation" or "impulse" of domination (Kellert 2012, 87). Stephen Kellert even makes a clear combinatory argument—Christianity together with free-market ideologies is the deadly mixture—the mixture we see in Connolly as well—one which

[44] White was not attempting to represent the contemporary state of Christian thought on the environment and did not discuss the multitude of interpretations of text.

lead to desire for control and management of the Earth itself (Bennett 1987; Kellert 2012, 82).

Evangelical pastors in particular reacted strongly to White's story of "dominionist" Christians, and biblical scholars began offering up numerous elements of scripture and Christian historical practice that countered White's interpretation of Christian interpretation of Genesis 1:28 over say a focus on Genesis 2:15 or any number of those included in this project's Appendix X which many scholars and practitioners have interpreted as a demand from God to take care of the Earth and each other.[45]

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[45] While I focus mostly on more emergent strategies and bottom-up practice, top-down as well as conservative approaches have much more diverse histories than explored in most scholarship. The Environmental Protection Agency was established during Richard Nixon's administration following popular discontent and fears around areas of pollution, severe water degradation, oils spills, and ideas of overpopulation and rapid urbanization. Nixon's response was to advocate to conserve and restore nature, referring to clean air, water, and "open-spaces" as the "birthright of every American" in his State of the Union address (Nixon 1970). In a special message to Congress in July 1970, Nixon stated: "Despite its complexity, for pollution control purposes the environment must be perceived as a single, interrelated system. Present assignments of departmental responsibilities do not reflect this interrelatedness. […] As no disjointed array of separate programs can, the EPA would be able—in concert with the States—to set and enforce standards for air and water quality and for individual pollutants. This consolidation of pollution control authorities would help assure that we do not create new environmental problems in the process of controlling existing ones. […] In proposing that the Environmental Protection Agency be set up as a separate new agency, *I am making an exception to one of my own principles: that, as a matter of effective and orderly administration, additional new independent agencies normally should not be created.* In this case, however, the arguments against placing environmental protection activities under the jurisdiction of one or another of the existing departments and agencies are compelling. […] Because environmental protection cuts across so many jurisdictions, and because arresting environmental deterioration is of great importance to the quality of life in our country and the world, I believe that in this case a strong, independent agency is needed" (Nixon 1970, emphasis mine).

By the time evangelical and environmentally-oriented Democrat Jimmy Carter took office, the EPA had grown significantly and was faced with some of the worst environmental disasters in US history—Love Canal in 1978 and Three Mile Island in 1979. Based in evangelical stewardship for the environment, Carter highlighted the "dominionist" approaches to the environment in his May 23, 1977 "Environment Message to the Congress: "[If we] ignore the care of our environment, the day will eventually come when our economy suffers for that neglect. Intelligent stewardship of the environment on behalf of all Americans is a prime responsibility of government. Congress has in the past carried out its share of this duty well—so well, in fact, that the primary need today is not for new comprehensive statutes but for sensitive administration and energetic enforcement of the ones we have. Environmental protection is no longer just a legislative job, but one that requires—and will now receive—firm and unsparing support from the Executive Branch" (Carter 1977). The address goes on to identify major areas of concern

Behavioral political science has most strongly argued that Christian "beliefs" or the "thinking" aspect of Christianity is dogmatically counter to environmental efforts (Guth et al. 1995; Simmons 2009; Carr et al 2012).[46] Guth et al. argue that believers in Christian theologies, especially evangelicalism and those theologies focused on biblical literalism, are not likely to support environmental causes (1995). Using data from national surveys of American clergy, religious activists, political activists, and the public, the authors highlight concerns about the apocalypse as negatively correlated with environmentalism (Guth et al. 1995). Several more social science surveys have done the work to confirm

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including attention to the poor, global communities, wildlife, human and nonhuman health, workplace safety as well as attention to energy, natural resource extraction, and promotion of local input on federal program implementation. Carter was also the first president to identify as a "born-again" Christian and prominently bring evangelical discourse to the fore. In 2000, however, Carter would cut ties with the Southern Baptist Convention for which he had been a member for almost 70 years as he felt they were no longer in line with the teachings of Christ.

Among conservatives, W. Winston Elliott III of the Free Enterprise Institute quoted Russell Kirk in response to Nixon's address, "…it is all a matter of belief. *If most intelligent and energetic people come to believe the prophets of despair, then indeed ruin falls upon the state, for many folk withdraw to hide-holes, there to conceal themselves from the coming wrath*" (Elliot 2018). This is followed by questions aimed at conservatives: "We should ask ourselves if we encourage our fellows to have hope. Do we suggest paths to cultural renewal as often as we lament the present discontent? Or have we given in to a conservatism of nostalgia where we immerse in mourning the loss of what we can never regain? Are we prophets of despair?" (Elliott 2018). Elliott goes on, "Joy cometh in the morning! Let us proclaim a conservatism of joy, gratitude, and love. Let us proclaim a passion for the true, the good and the beautiful. Let us be true conservatives, conservators of all that is worthy of conserving. And yes, let there be dancing, praise, gladness, laughter and joy. Shouldn't conservators rejoice in the grand heritage they've inherited to share with the next generation?" (Elliot 2018). If read, this could be any Christian of any ideological persuasion—until the last sentence. Conservatives, including Bliese, make frequent reference to a heritage or "natural heritage" to be enjoyed in perpetuity by conservatives on US soil—with little to no investigation of said concept especially in relation to colonization, acquisition, slavery, or wealth accumulation.

[46] There are and were even then many prominent examples that show quite the opposite of this dominionist story—Dolores Huerta regarding pesticides, Dr. King's "A Time to Break the Silence" speech on the triplets of racism, militarism, and capitalist materialism, and United Church of Christ's 1987 study on environmental racism can be understood in this vein. Academic work, however, continues to "show" that these ideas were and are unlikely to develop and leaves it there—even though these challenges to a singular ideology have been strong and impactful in a multitude of ways.

the "The White Thesis" and tie these theologies to dominionism and mastery-over-nature ideologies which ultimately lead to environmental exploitation (Guth et al. 1995).

Calvin DeWitt (2000), Simmons (2009), and Carr et al. (2012) expand on the possible reasons why specific Christian groups, such as evangelicals, are unlikely to support environmental efforts: fear of appearing sensitive to liberal (left) political ideologies, distrust of political means for religious ends, distrust of scientific knowledge, suspicion of secular environmentalists or cynicism regarding the political efficacy of environmentalism, global warming as punishment for sins, disgust with environmental groups sympathetic to theological "heresies" such as pantheism and ecofeminism, or strong feelings about the imminent apocalypse.[47] DeWitt is one of the most influential scholars on what will be called "creation care" in the 1990s—cofounding the Evangelical Environmental Network discussed later in this work. Despite this hermeneutic shift, the resistance to creation care remained strong with some evangelicals who even in the contemporary still lean on dominionist thought as interpreted by Puritan settlers in the 1660s. These interpretations echo John Winthrop that the United States is to be a developed shining city upon a hill—whatever the cost or sacrifice.

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[47] But the imminent apocalypse was also a concern among environmental movements, especially in the 1990s and mid-2000s. The destruction of Earth and "our way of life" were very popular narratives which mirrored millennial Christian concerns. Belief in inevitable destruction does not necessarily lead to political inaction—apocalyptic beliefs and narratives are deployed both to curb political action as well as to spur it in various forms (for instance preppers, homesteaders, and peakists) (Danielsen 2013; Schneider-Mayerson 2015). As Schneider-Mayerson notes, in some ways the focus on local environmental issues may also allow for self-fulfilling prophecy—one in which those most concerned for the environment deal with issues in small faith-based communities rather than in larger formal political processes—which may mean that they will end up living the apocalyptic fantasy of survival after actualized mass failure to deal with finite resources in a time of infinite growth or they might develop truly sustainable ways of being and surviving.

Danielsen (2013) specifically ties a lack of environmentalist support among "average evangelical" actors to the evangelical relationship with right politics. As there was "increasing closeness and coordination between evangelical institutions and the Republican Party, there was a desire to suppress attention to an issue that created separation between themselves and Republicans and focus instead on the issues that most bonded them" (Danielsen 2013, 208). Furthering the connection to political ideologies, Wilkinson points to political ideology as one of the "driving factors" for the changing beliefs about climate change (Wilkinson 2010). Wilkinson focuses on how the confluences of conservatism, scientific skepticism, and neoliberal individualism have led to a lack of environmental concern in the majority of evangelicals. Wilkinson (2010) defines the foundation of conservative ideology that prevents environmental concern as "free market ideology and distrust of government [which] seemed further heightened by skepticism about Democratic support for climate change solutions," and the belief that former vice president Al "Gore epitomized the link between partisan politics and climate change and the liberal trappings of environmentalism" (Wilkinson 2010, 53).

These connections—echoing of Connolly's resonance machine—and the solidified force of these connections in the 1980s in the religious right smoothed over the variety of evangelical environmental thought, whitewashed the reality of lived evangelicalism, and re-fortified the idea that faith and (environmental) science were diametrically opposed. What the literature does not clearly articulate (beyond DeWitt discussed later) is that evangelicals have had a broad range of political associations—despite the visibility of these right-wing evangelical personalities and the heightened

media and scholarly attention to groups comprised of evangelical actors—including the somewhat overlapping moral majority, Christian coalition, and new religious right. Connolly's tight focus on his conceptual formation of "deep pluralism" as made difficult by the problematic and powerful right limb's anti-pluralist resonance does not explain the deep relationship between elements of the assemblage.

While I do note the remarkable energy of an evangelical-capitalist machine as well as the possible political ambivalence of many Christian individuals (Wadsworth 2014; Schneider-Mayerson 2015), I am most interested in the emergent strategies and actions from evangelicals, preppers, peakists, and those attuned to an imminent apocalypse etc. as well those similarly concerned who want to avoid formal politics as the means for addressing environmental action (Wadsworth 2014; Schneider-Mayerson 2015). Social movements as such and electoral politics are not always perceived as viable options given the rise of the dominance of new religious right movements, the election of Donald Trump, and the right-wing empowered media echo chamber. In the vein of social movements of the 1960s, there is resistance to incorporation into the political mainstream—a mainstream that now includes both reform and radical environmental movements and which is perceived as quick to politicize and polarize any issue.

Ascriptive identification of evangelicals with environmentally aware politics as "left" or "progressive" are also wholly inappropriate. Though many have supported and continue to support movements and policies considered "left" (civil rights movements and same-sex marriage campaigns, ending world hunger, fighting against U.S. military involvement overseas, working to abolish prisons and the death penalty, etc.), most are

also pro-life/anti-abortion to some degree, some are anti-same-sex marriage as such, and some believe the apocalypse is not all that distant (and these are not necessarily mutually exclusive). These complicated and intertwined ideas and identities make their positions on the traditional political spectrum ambiguous at best and a sign of new and interesting ways Christians are recombining theological, political, and affective perspectives (EEN 2014; ESA 2014; Munson 2009).[48]

Some evangelicals have exited mainstream evangelicalism or maintained positions on the margins of evangelicalism—positions often assumed to have generated in the wave of new left social movements of the mid-1960s (Fowler 1982; Ammerman 1982; Swartz 2011). The political left of the mid-2000s even gleefully referenced the potential “evangelical crack-up,” and provided that "evangelical environmentalists” in particular might be able to counter the dominant alliance. Scholarly literature, however, also does not really illustrate the ways in which Christians and Christianity maintain ongoing critique, theological and ideological investigation and change, and analysis of their own actions and habits (Kearns and Keller 2007). Christians do understand themselves in relation to other faiths as well as secular ideologies, but the multiple and conflicting ways in which this is articulated continue unexplored or underdeveloped.

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[48] What many studies of evangelicals consistently avoid is the relationship between whiteness and the environment that is often the guiding ideology. While historically Black churches are assumed to have social justice, projects focused on environmental justice or environmental racism—this is not the case for majority white evangelical churches or communities. While many environmental political theorists point to the significance of social justice projects established by people of color, it is rarely discussed why white evangelicals continue to maintain distance from such projects. The complex ties of conservative maintenance of the boundaries of whiteness are mostly absent.

Even on the issue of stewardship—which some evangelicals believe is a biblical mandate—is interpreted in a myriad of very interesting ways.

Differing conceptions of stewardship and care have gained popularity and include recognition of the special relationship between Creator and creation, the intrinsic value of the created Earth and everything it contains, the position of humanity in the Creation, and human limitations in God's creation (Simmons 2009, 44; DeWitt 2012; Ellingson 2018; Simmons 2009, 44). Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller's edited volume *Ecospirit* (2007) brings together several perspectives and analyses of scriptural metaphor, political theory, and religious and political practices. For Kearns and Keller, humans have become caught between "sleepy denial" and "apocalyptic insomnia" over earth, earthlings, and climate (2007, xii). Evangelical-capitalist resonance makes all nonhuman life subordinate, exploitable, or mere matter for human manipulation. Systemic apathy and indifference to our shared worldly futures whirl around in the realms of spiritual, economic, social, and the political.

According to Kearns, the primary objections from within faith communities to involvement in ecological concerns is the potential threat to private property rights, free-markets, and capitalist endeavors. It is not a difference of religiosity or even scientific knowledge, but rather a more nuanced political separation that makes climate change an issue of faith (and not politics)—albeit from politically informed identity positions and ideologies. More in line with Connolly, faith in the market is a powerful political force that prevents access to connection, interdependence, and change. Kearns highlights the political process of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE), "the

topic [global warming] could be conveyed with scriptural, scientific, and moral authority, and as we shall see, both challenge and still appeal to aspects of the dominant cultural economic ethos [neoliberalism]. It was a topic that could be constructed in various ways, supported by multiple claims to authority, with a variety of strategies of action that would be 'acceptable' to diverse constituents"—Connolly's pluralism (Kearns and Keller 2007, 105). But Kearns and Keller remain hopeful for our shared terrestrial futures and specifically point to the need for transdisciplinary approaches—that is academic approaches that are meant to shift action beyond academic writing and dialogue into every day and mundane practices. There is a literal and metaphorical shared ground from which futures emerge through attention to material, things that matter, autocritique, shared finitudes, and vibrant interrelation. As this particular group met to form *Ecospirit* volume, they planted a tree and delivered poems—what Kearns and Keller refer to as a performance of hope (2007, 16).[49]

As Anna L. Peterson has pointed out, human formal political "behaviors" (as measured in quantitative survey methods) do not always match our articulated ideas, values, desires, needs, personal consumption, etc. (Kearns and Keller 2007). For Peterson and Hayhoe discussed later, it is not solely about getting people more information or

[49] It came to my attention that I should have discussed the body of work of Alfred North Whitehead in this dissertation. As dissertations are odd exercises in limitations—I have not here, but intend to engage in further iterations. What is sometimes imagined as "process thought," "process faith," or "process theology" are indebted to Whitehead. Whitehead's process theology imagines a universe as an ecosystem that is interconnected, interrelational, creative, iterative, and open to many futures. Power is distributed and shared: the power of being, and becoming, affect and affecting, choice and choosing, and love create a strong interdependence among earthlings. I am sure his theorizing on time and relationality to environmental thought and faith can be found in other scholarly works as can a better engagement with process theology and speculative fiction, particularly in the works of Monica A. Coleman.

knowledge, but rather how to make these ideas and values into everyday practice. For political science and Western philosophy more broadly, Peterson points out that there is a perceived linear relationship between ideas and action. This is partially why transdisciplinary approaches become necessary and not only suggested. While humans may all experience fear of our personal failures at climate action or environmental effort—and might be very fearful of the ultimate climate disaster—we are all living contradictions and as such need practices more attuned to experienced precarity, hope, and even anger. For Peterson, this means creating conditions in which we experience this precarity as nonmediated interdependence, vulnerability, and fragility with the human and otherthanhuman world simultaneously. Ultimately, that is what I hope to do here—to bring together a more materialist environmental approach, lived religion, and existing practices. For Peterson,

> "These actions provide grounds for hope because they entail living as Christians might say, the reign of God in our midst. We experience hope in and through the experience of living in right relationships, or what Jordan describes as communion with nature and people (and what Marx might call the reduction of alienation within and among persons as well as between persons and nature). Grounds for hope come not only from what is in our midst, here and now, but also from the future possibilities these practices create. Here is the hope that our ideas can matter in a new way and help shape future ways of living on earth" (in Kearns and Keller 2007, 62).

These emerging practices which are happening at the margins in more ordinary spaces can become statistically insignificant, anomalous, or totally paradoxical in traditional political science literature. One problem here, and with many of the discussions of political ideology, identities, and political parties, is that political

ideological and party leanings are partially or even wholly defined by positions on issues such as environmental concern and effort, leading to this unhelpful tautological understanding of causality, or totally in avoidance of paradoxical intersections—and this is precisely where a focus on "dust of the ground" strategies and stories of change are needed.

Deepening Faith through Environmental Care: The Fall

While many in the United States have lost faith in environmental efforts, many others feel a glimmer of hope that those with faith can revive it (Steffen et al. 2011; ESA 2014). There are many ways to approach these demands for change among Christians, I start primarily with stories and strategies emerging in the 1950s.[50] By 1970, prolific evangelical theologian and author Francis A. Schaeffer had offered strong evidence against "The White Thesis" and similar academic takes on the relationship between Christian faith and the environment in *Pollution and the Death of Man* (1970) and *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (1976) which focused on the biblical basis for immediate evangelical responses to issues such as the environment, American political apathy, marriage, pornography, and most

[50] It is hard to draw boundaries to this project and some I think are drawn haphazardly. Indigenous Christianities have been influential to the development of "creation care" and are lacking in this project. There are many good stories for understanding this relationship, *Words and Worlds Turned Around: Indigenous Christianities in Colonial Latin America (2017)* by edited by David Tavárez contains a thorough investigation of the "multitudinous re-creations of Christianity" by Indigenous peoples which have in turn impacted Western understandings of Christianity itself (2017, 5). *Future Home of the Living God (2017)* by Louise Erdrich discussed briefly elsewhere in this project is from the point of view of an Indigenous (Ojibwe) Catholic woman attempting to survive an apocalypse of political, social, and biological de-evolution who understands herself as against abortion—writing letters to her unborn child and treating them as a person early in pregnancy.

prominently abortion and euthanasia. Schaeffer is considered integral to the rise of the religious right, but his work on the Earthly environment and the importance of a deeply rooted everyday practice of Earthly care were never fashioned into the political dogma of the religious right. *In Pollution and the Death of Man*, Schaeffer argued:

> "[Hippies and the counterculture activists] were right in fighting the plastic culture and the church should have been fighting it too... More than this, they were right in the fact that the plastic culture - modern man, the mechanistic worldview in university textbooks and in practice, the total threat of the machine, the establishment technology, the bourgeois upper middle class - is poor in its sensitivity to nature... [As] a utopian group, the counterculture understands something very real, both as to the culture as a culture, but also as to the poverty of modern man's concept of nature and the way the machine [capitalism] is eating up nature on every side" (1970, 24).

In *Genesis in Space and Time* (1972) Schaeffer told stories of Creation that sound very much like speculative fiction writers of the time. Narrated as a conjectural history rather than literal interpretations of biblical text, Schaeffer used storytelling to demand that Christians understand themselves in relation to a larger plot in the cosmos and to attune themselves with art and beauty of the specific "space-time event" of existence by caring for the Earth (Schaeffer 1972). Determined specifically to connect young people to faith and Creation care, Francis and his wife Edith founded L'Abri[51] in Switzerland, starting some of their "creation care" practices as early as 1955. L'Abri—a combination of commune and seminary—looks like any leftist mutual aid group or labor union that I have been a part of in terms of everyday practice: all participants are either "students" or

[51] The name, which is the French word for "shelter," is meant to delineate the space and practice as a shelter from the overly "secular" outside world (L'Abri 2015).

"workers" engaged in specific work, play, and study time. Study time includes student symposia, dialogue, and lectures from workers. Work time includes collective gardening, cooking, cleaning, and property maintenance. For "workers" who stay long term, they even have a collective decision-making process. You do not have to identify as a Christian to participate and most participants develop a practice over two to three months. The community looks a lot like Octavia E. Butler's Acorn.

L'Abri still exists today, and according to the organization, they continue to help participants "develop a Christian perspective on the arts, politics, and the social sciences" (L'Abri 2015). In February 2020, L'Abri's annual conference focused on why American obsession with liberty over other values is its "gravest threat," included a talk called "I feel, therefore I am" centered on Christian critical affects, tackled political polarization in the US, and discussed Christian relationship to social justice organizing—all with intermingled Christian song, art, and meals created through collective work (L'Abri 2020). The ideas of the Schaeffer's were complex—and alongside these practices they advocated for an end to abortion and any form of euthanasia—as issues of human rights. And while very basic elements of these ideas did get picked up by the Christian Right in the US, their process of getting to a kind of society without abortion and euthanasia, Creation care, and especially critiques of capitalism were completely eliminated.

Tim LaHaye, author of *Left Behind* series, credited Schaeffer as the seed of his ideas for the series. Despite Schaeffer consistently rebuffing such associations, Schaeffer's "late" writings were very clearly stitched into the Christian Right and the works of LaHaye. In Schaeffer's 1982 lecture "A Christian Manifesto," he specifically

notes pornography, public schools, the breakdown of the nuclear family, abortion,[52] euthanasia, and the ill understanding of the First Amendment as the main symptoms of US society's fall from grace. But it is important to note that Schaeffer did not see a treatment of the symptoms as particularly helpful if this spiritual illness—an illness of a purely material, all-knowing "Man" who is infallible and capable of Earthly control and management, was not treated. Nor if "the State" and "the Law" as established by this type of "Man" went unchallenged by what he calls "civil disobedience" and deeply engaged in a social and spiritual meaning-making activity. Schaeffer warned all Christians and non-Christians alike:

> "Not only are you going to die individually, but the whole human race is going to die, someday. It may not take the falling of the atom bombs, but someday the world will grow too hot, too cold. That's what we are told on this other final reality, and someday all you people not only will be individually dead, but the whole conscious life on this world will be dead, and nobody will see the birds fly. And there's no meaning to life" (1982).

The focus on "Humanism" as the problem is also nuanced and complex as Schaeffer goes on to argue that it is not, in fact, Marxism as "economic" premise as such that is a problem in Soviet countries of the time or the fact that Christians cannot "pray in public schools" in the US that is an issue—but rather the "tyranny" of "order" based on material chance and a lack of intrinsic value given to the Earth and its beings which has led people away from their true "heritage" in revival and social change (Schaeffer 1982). Once these ideas were sutured to market ideologies and state powers, the very

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[52] It should be noted that the lives of women or women's bodily autonomy are rarely, if ever discussed.

"Humanist" beliefs Schaeffer feared most, the Christian Right would no longer look the way Schaeffer imagined the necessary revival or social change should look.[53]

Much of Creation Care work in the 1990s picked up elements of Schaeffer's writing, along with values found in the works of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien: the focus on the intrinsic value of the planet and its diverse lifeforms, the importance of developing a faith-based ethic of care, and on specifically social means to solving political problems. Evangelical scholars and authors of fiction continued the work of stitching together Christianity and a practice of protecting God's Creation—particularly ecologist Calvin B. DeWitt. One of the most longstanding institutions of creation care, the Au Sable Institute for Environmental Studies was established in 1961 as a biblically focused boys camp in Michigan, but eventually became a center for biological research under its current name in 1979 with the leadership of Calvin B. DeWitt. The program now based mostly in Washington and Michigan specializes in field immersion and serves students from Christian colleges and K-12 schools in these communities who are interested in biology, chemistry, botany, environmental law, and various related fields of inquiry—far too

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[53] Most progressive Christians of the 1960s-80s, as well as some far from progressive political scientists including Samuel Huntington, Richard Hofstadter, George Kennan, Hans Morgenthau, Arthur Schlesinger, and Kenneth Waltz, cited Reinhold Niebuhr as the most influential theologian to their politics, some specifically rebuking Francis Schaeffer. This was not coming from a leftist desire for a new social gospel, but rather from the maintenance of a rationally acting state, law and order. Schaeffer's ideas were considered tantamount to anarchism by progressives and political scientists alike *until* elements of his work were sewn into the Christian Right's platform. Schaeffer was extremely critical of academic approaches, any scholarly work that assumed a valid rationality to humans and human decision making, or political solutions based on this conception of humanity. Schaeffer's ideas would actually fit much more comfortably into certain elements of the Tea Party movement than the Christian Right, except of course, the overlap in desire for heritage and the continuation of capitalism. The influence of either theologian should not be underestimated and there is interesting work to be done on the influence of their political thought in the contemporary—especially within political science itself.

"Humanist" for the likes of Schaeffer, but grounded in social relationships to the Earth. Science is defined by DeWitt as accumulated "knowledge about how the world works" and he illustrates the importance of this knowledge to the practice of human world-making on shifting sands and alluvial fans and in the paths of tortoises in the California desert (DeWitt 2012; 76).

DeWitt is a storyteller and song singer who argues that people come to understand their world through stories including biblical stories, speculative fiction, testimonials, etc., as well as through hearing the testimonies of creation by "seeing, hearing, smelling, [and] touching" (DeWitt 2012; 19). DeWitt also understands creation to be a somewhat democratic one—of checks and balances, interdependence, radical access to teaching and learning, and interconnectedness (DeWitt 2012). This awareness, in turn, can lead to appreciation and stewardship, he argues, through a process of naming, cherishing, and serving God and the Creation (DeWitt 2012). Unlike with some of the right-wing evangelical interpretations of scripture, environmental action is not precluded by the "end of the story" or the end of times—but a story that we are still living, acting, and singing in.

Furthermore, DeWitt's work hints at a deeper spiritual resonance—in the songs of wasps, birds, wolves, canyons, bogs, mollusks, batrachians, and scientists in his *Song of a Scientist* (2012) in which he asks the reader to join in a song of science and theology, "singing the Creator's ineffable love" in "the same score and sung in multi-part

harmony" in order to "bring the scientific and biblical together" (DeWitt 2012; 9).[54] Far from the urgency that fills much of the work discussed here, DeWitt highlights the importance of pause in beholding these songs of creation. DeWitt is aware that understanding his work requires dis-covering—revealing all the "covering" done for political ends since the US founding period and revived in the Christian Right of the 1980s. This is his sense of apocalypse. The world of the Christian Right will indeed end.

DeWitt's work also directly challenges the linking of scripture and capitalism, "the value and worth of God's creatures do not come from their usefulness, market value, or charm. Instead we can appreciate their value and worth only when seeing them through the eyes of the Creator… Creator-based value makes all the difference… helping us to ascribe intrinsic value to the creators and creation" (DeWitt 2012; 44). DeWitt encourages Christians to think about the value of every being in a system—not as an individual thing potentially for market or meal. DeWitt separates out a special place in creation for humanity—but not in a role of patriarchal dominion. Rather, DeWitt argues that humans are special specifically in this capacity and will to destroy each other and Creation itself—understood as a wholly permanent responsibility of humans to work toward the classically environmentalist understanding of preservation, conservation, restoration, and reconciliation—"human beings know what environmental integrity means, yet they degrade the earth. This is the human predicament" (DeWitt 2012; 46).

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[54] As a queer theorist, I find DeWitt's call for love of traditionally "unloved" and "destroyed" creatures, embrace of batrachians and hippopotamuses (literal biblical Behemoths) as the great, fat, goopy, glandular, bony, warty, and beautiful creatures they are worthy of note.

Specifically arguing contrary to the Lockean understanding of land, labor, and property, DeWitt argues that scripture clearly shows that humans cannot build fences around small plots of creation and call it good even if they have personally worked, tilled, done their part—but rather must understand how that work is related in a system. And this is precisely the set of ideas Scott Pruitt later attempted to undercut with his appearance on the Christian Broadcasting Network—one that clearly understood that philosophical and theological traditions hold various scholarly interpretation, one that is grounded—literally and metaphorically, ones that tend to gardens rather than risking contamination from fossil fuel extraction or climate change denial. On stewardship, DeWitt highlights the significant differences in English translations of Hebrew in key passages such as Genesis 2:15 which may ask humanity to "work and take care" of earth, "till and guard" earth, "till and keep" earth, or "dress and keep it" pointed out that no matter the translation that human service to the garden is explicitly required by God (DeWitt 2012; 48).

Much like Dr. Katharine Hayhoe, evangelical climate scientist, DeWitt has consistently argued that cultural, theological, and scientific ignorance are integral to continued misuse and abuse of creation. Christians have callings—a specific form of experience and work— and this is how DeWitt understands actions that bear and restore the image of God. Callings, as spiritual and revelatory experiences, are different from the "calls to action" of issue advocacy organizations and require a specifically theological interpretation. But, as revealed in the discussion below, there are many actors and organizations consistently shifting between registers: callings to calls to action. While a

calling provides neither an ideology nor an identity, calls to action often require actors to stake out some relation to each other—some shared identity—and to act on some common understanding of expressly political problems and their solutions—ideologically, even while disavowing said singular identity or ideological foundation.

From Callings to Calls to Action

While they take no universal form, many of different groups and actors have experienced callings and shifted between more explicitly theological and political registers. While many of these groups are constituted by actors who share faith, they do not necessarily hold the same religious beliefs or political goals. Marginalized by both the American right and left, they must attempt to organize across all channels at once and value—rather than trying to homogenize—the differences between them. Particularly combatting the totalizing fiction of the white evangelical identity, these groups must organize from a space of faith—but not *as* that faith or any universal or stable concept of "Christian" or "evangelical" at all—which is a political choice.

During the 1970s, a burgeoning evangelical movement arose, mostly from shared anti-war sentiments and support for ongoing civil rights movements (Swartz 2011). In 1972 and 1973, many Christians, including evangelicals, mobilized for the Democratic candidate George McGovern[1] and in the following year many of the same supporters participated in the "Thanksgiving Workshops" intended to consolidate "progressive" movement among evangelicals, closely linking faith with their political actions (Swartz

2011).[55] Loosely bonded by evangelical leadership at Christian colleges and churches, Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) formed in 1978 and continued work for broad social change in to the present; supporting civil rights battles in the US, contesting previous US involvement in Vietnam and in Nicaragua and the death toll from these interventions, gathering support for sanctions on the apartheid government in South Africa, as supporting the US Equal Rights Amendment in its early stages as well as attending to more everyday practices and testimonies (Swartz 2011; ESA 2014). This movement and its leadership were scattered throughout the country; and debates over roles of race, gender, and ecclesiasticism inside the initial movement still rage on (Swartz 2011). Many of these individuals and organizations continue to tell stories of environmental care, deepen local involvement in Earthly practice, and prepare their communities for environmental calamity.

In 1963, the National Black Evangelical Association (NBEA) now based in Chicago, Illinois[56] formed and focused on reparation and reconciliation based on "a vision whose time had come" (NBEA 2018). Specifically noting that their congregations were and are predominantly, but not wholly Black, the NBEA described themselves as "intentionally Biblical" and "culturally Black" sharing in an understanding of themselves as experiencing fellowship through "holistic redemptive cross-bearing experience and

[55] Nuclear weapons and environmental disasters altered interpretations of biblical text in the post-WWII period. Premillennial dispensationalist discourse among evangelicals aligned with the imagery of the horrors of war and environmental destruction ushering in the Second Coming.

[56] Originally named the National Negro Evangelical Association and based in Los Angeles, California.

mission" (NBEA 2018). Their current mission drawn from their original is "To be an umbrella association that identifies, calls together, unites in prayer, fellowship and evangelism, and empowers leaders for Jesus Christ who desire Biblical and cultural integrity" (NBEA 2018). Their concept of reconciliation is intimately tied to a more environmental ethos of repairing the Earth and includes a consistent acknowledgement of stolen people on stolen land. This "Ministry of Reconciliation" has the motto, "Unity in Diversity without Conformity" (2018). Their statement of faith is similar to the National Association of Evangelicals; however it more strongly connects all beings as kin called to social justice:

> We believe that the local church is an organism of the Body of Christ and that the entire Body, comprised of all in heaven and earth who submit themselves in faith obedience to Christ, and the carrying out of God's purposes in Christ comprise the kingdom of God.
>
> We believe the Church in every age must be a visible demonstration of Christ in the world, standing in holiness as the pillar and foundation of truth, championing Christ's call of social righteousness and justice for both persons and groups, especially for the downtrodden, dispossessed masses of the poor and needy, according to Gospel values and practices.
>
> We believe the Church is an open, inclusive, reconciled fellowship of believers in Christ, mutually committed to standing with and supporting one another, notwithstanding tribe, kindred, and ethnic group. Reconciliation consequently is God's purpose in Christ reuniting humanity and God, and all humanity with itself (emphasis mine).

Drawing on a continued experience of lamentation as well as hope, the National Black Evangelical Association and their leadership have been very influential to churches around the globe attempting to combat the cultures of "colonization, racism, and Afrophobia" around the world (NBEA 2018). Highlighting specifically the spiritual

resistance of formerly enslaved peoples, forced migration, and the experiences of dispossession and ongoing environmental racism directed at Black and Indigenous communities, the NBEA provides hope and a vision of a future where Black evangelicals always surviving and ever rising. Unlike their predominantly white counterparts, the group has always been expressly political, calling attention to specific US policies: Andrew Johnson's revocation of land agreements and widespread land seizures, housing policy and redlining, the problematic implementation of the Social Security Act of 1935, the exclusion of primarily Black fields in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, denial of G.I. Bill benefits to Black service members, and the War on Drugs and mass incarceration (NBEA 2018). NBEA advocates for a telling of stories and testimonies, present and past, just as Jesus Christ loved to tell stories to create change and mobilize people. Storytelling is the calling; one must have access to the embodied practice of "hearing" this calling, resourcing the self, and mobilizing to action.

In the 1980s and 1990s, scholarship and movement work coalesced specifically around issues of environmental degradation, colonization, and racism. United Church of Christ and Justice & Witness Ministries 1987 report *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States* revealed that the racial makeup of a community was the most salient factor in the placement of toxic waste sites by corporations and the US Government (1987). Work in the areas of "environmental justice" and investigations of "environmental racism" developed as a new genre of scholarly critique. In 1991, the Indigenous Environmental Network and First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit created the "17 Principles of Environmental Justice" as a guide to the emerging movement "of all

peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities" in order to:

> "re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to ensure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples" (NRDC 1991).

Much of this new environmental justice work was also guided by feminist scholarship on disproportionate experiences of climate change and environmental degradation highlighted in the "17 Principles". Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of "intersectionality" created an "alternative narrative frame"[57] which greatly influenced approaches to environmental injustice by highlighting the ways that interlocking and "intersecting" privileges and oppressions related to differing experiences of risk and vulnerability due to climate change and specific environmental disasters.

Many Christian groups understood these principles as part of their calling and mobilized them into discreet calls to action. The NRPE and its member leadership from NBEA, Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA), US Catholic Conference of Bishops, Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life, National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group, Religious Witness, Interfaith

[57] Pausing here to think about the Sept. 22, 2020 "Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping."

Power & Light, Jesus People Against Pollution (JPAP), and several other congregations and organizations with various theological scaffolds came together and deliberated on global warming and faith-based action, quality and quantity.

By the 1990s, many more organizations and denominations had formed with the intent of caring for the Earth. Emerging churches or the Emergent Church Movement (ECM) gained momentum advocating for the creation of a "conversation" or "deliberation" about Christ and Christianity and a more "Christ-like" praxis among "allies of hope" (Patheos 2017). Most broadly, the church participants advocated for a blurring of lines between church and greater community, a focus on democratic practice within the movement, and a diverse and inclusive politics—which includes environmental efforts, providing for the poor, and encouragement of LGBTQ participation (Patheos 2017). One ECM media organization, *Patheos* lists the contributor demographic information as part of their "About" section, mentioning that they are comprised of, "50% women, 50% people of color, 25% LGBTQ, and 10% international" organizers (Patheos 2017). While admonishing the Religious Right, ECM folks also generally support limiting abortion access (though they explicitly do not limit theological conversation on the topic). "Leadership" in the movement is also intended to remain decentralized and participation is rooted in the idea that there is no singular interpretation of biblical text—there is only the process of seeking truth through conversation and deliberation. This approach allows influential people in ECM to avoid taking stances on politically divisive issues (for the most part)—which highlights the importance of the

process of relationship building, ongoing dialogue, and hope that folks will come to faith-based political decisions through an open intersubjective process.

While not limited to evangelicals or even Christians, ECM provides many avenues for evangelicals to engage the movement and often mark the political interpretation of the text, practice, or action as more conservative or more progressive as not to alienate potential participants by an unspecified or "surprise" political ideology (Patheos 2017). Like many of these Christian individuals, organizations, and movements—social media, blogs, podcasts, and online boards are considered a more useful and "decentralized" media. Built from what are sometimes called Noah Congregations, churches in ECM understand themselves as in opposition to the existential revenge of right-wing evangelical Christianity and frequently publicly identify and literally sit with groups targeted by right-wing evangelical leaders and Fox News.

Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) fervently took up the issue of the environment throughout the 1990s, and it did so in conjunction with the newly formed Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN). In 1993, the EEN transformed the growing eco-theological literature and concern for social and economic ills into activism and everyday practice. ESA and EEN together attempted a contemporary form of social gospel through what they called the "quiet revolution" which blurred from initial calling to calls to action (ESA 2014).

ESA specifically focused on "glocal" activism (a term from social science social movement literature) and transformation of everyday practice aimed at deepening of democracy described by Arjun Appadurai (2002):

> "The mission moves from local to global. It begins on the local level and extends to the ends of the earth. And how well we "*do mission*" at home will inform how well we do mission "over there." Mission must be radically local, and committed to go global. There is no distinction between what we do "over there" and what we're supposed to do "right here." No matter where in the world we are, our mission from Jesus is to *bear witness to the good news of the kingdom through both word and deed*. So, it is not global mission or local mission, but "glocal mission." Glocal mission is bearing witness to the gospel of the kingdom by both word and deed on the local level until it extends globally to the whole world" (ESA 2014, emphasis mine).

As a direct response to the ills of globalization, they promote localized knowledge and practices which emerge from "dialoguing, eating, studying, working and serving together while living under the same roof" and "facilitate[ing] deeper discipleship" through "action upon the world in order to transform it" (ESA 2014). ESA still provides its members, readers, and the general community possible activities for Christians to "look deeply, live justly, and love radically "by making changes to ordinary language practices, such as putting "women first" in literature, advocating for women, people of color, and LGBTQ people in leadership positions in their own daily church activities and in greater institutions (ESA 2014). They also focus on publishing the work of marginalized authors, literally bringing differences in experience to any table at which you sit, and countering those religious narratives and actions that "wreak havoc [on] bodies and souls" (ESA 2014).

In 2014, ESA promoted the film *DIRT!*, which advocates for the importance of well… dirt. They highlight the film's ability to show the symbiotic relationship between people and the land, and the importance of "the smallest of actions" on a finite planet, and the ways in which these stories of the land "help us as stewards to cultivate and value

dirt for what it is, rather than simply treading it underfoot," citing the importance of dirt to Genesis: "God formed Man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The Man came alive—a living soul!" (ESA 2014). In the vein of new materialist thought, there is a constant reminder that earthlings are themselves composed of nature. Effectively utilizing social media and forums, their online information suggests endless further information about beneficial farming practices attendant to culture and climate[58], the ways in which reforestation addresses poverty, and the difficulty each of these same programs face in the United States specifically.

High profile campaigns by ESA and EEN went national in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In 1997, an educational program called the John Ray Initiative which began in the United Kingdom greatly influenced leaders of these organizations in the United States. Leadership of this Christian environmental organization and several forums that developed from the initiative, leader John T. Houghton also sat on the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—the primary international body investigating and dealing with climate change and environmental policy. It was through these forums that Richard Cizik, then on the board of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) became associated with evangelical faith-based environmental efforts.

Dr. Ronald J. Sider of ESA had also recently discussed the environmental actions that came from their connection between tending to God's creation and every-day

[58] Missionizing is also colonizing.

activism as the "most politically influential" and that in partnership with NRPE and the EEN in 1994:

> " [We] planned a public day in Washington to tell the political world that many evangelicals cared about the environment and wanted to preserve, not destroy, the Endangered Species Act. We had a large meeting with the Secretary of the Interior and then held a press conference at the National Press Club. Word got out that a live panther from an endangered species would be there and the place was packed. I opened the press conference with prayer and then said we were there because God the Creator cared about his creation and therefore evangelical Christians must care for the environment. This blew apart all the current political stereotypes and we were a top story on the evening news. There were headline stories all across the country. The momentum for gutting the Endangered Species Act was reversed. In fact, secular environmental leaders have subsequently said: "We won that one because of the evangelicals" (ESA 2014).

Even following this more visible movement activity, scholars continued to focus on the rise of ring-wing leaders and movements and the Christian Right's outrage, fire and brimstone. The ESA and EEN continued connecting with local communities, providing their church affiliates and community members with skills for sustainable gardens and ways to cut down on pollution, and also helping and radiating hope for a livable future.

Starting in 2002, the ESA and EEN led the "What Would Jesus Drive?" grassroots campaign, raising awareness of the fuel economy of SUVs and the pollution caused by the increasing number of vehicles on the roads in order to highlight the ways in which workers, consumers, and the poor have paid the greatest price for environmental degradation (ESA 2014). This was met with immediate backlash in the right's echo chamber. Perhaps most visible were responses from the Christian Coalition and

memorable media displays of President George W. Bush at the Daytona 500. The President's entire motorcade of SUVs drove around the track, fuel-fed F-15s and a B-2 stealth bombers flew overhead, and presidential support for the sport of NASCAR went alongside "God Bless America" over the loudspeakers (Connolly 2005; Newman and Giardina 2011). Connolly noted this incident in a more provocative manner:

> "The crowd responded to the SUV as a symbol of disdain for womanly ecologists, safety advocates, supporters of fuel economy, weak-willed pluralists, and internationalists. Bush played upon the symbol and drew energy from the crowd's acclamation of it. Resentment against those who express an ethos of care for the world was never named: a message expressed without being articulated (2005, 879).

The EEN has been unafraid to ride the coattails of secular environmental organizational efforts, such as Al Gore's global warming awareness pursuit, as long as they could maintain a position outside the overly politicized media punditry. Indeed, there was a noted "swell" in support for evangelical environmentalism and the culmination of the Evangelical Climate Initiative in 2006, the same year as the release of Al Gore's *The Inconvenient Truth*. In 2004, NAE released "For the Health of the Nation" which opens with the preamble:

> "Evangelical Christians in America face a historic opportunity. We make up fully one quarter of all voters in the most powerful nation in history. Never before has God given American evangelicals such an awesome opportunity to shape public policy in ways that could contribute to the well-being of the entire world. Disengagement is not an option. We must seek God's face for biblical faithfulness and abundant wisdom to rise to this unique challenge. […] Evangelicals may not always agree about policy, but we realize that we have many callings and commitments in common: commitments to the protection and well-being of families and children, of the poor, the sick, the disabled, and the unborn, of

> the persecuted and oppressed, and of the rest of the created order" (NAE 2004, emphasis mine).

Alongside climate change, the document called for greater civic engagement around family life, children and the unborn, the poor and vulnerable, peace-making, and basic human rights. The Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI)[59] now has 232 signatories from over 40 states reconceptualizing and acknowledging the importance of climate change nationally and internationally (Evangelical Climate Initiative 2006). This call-to-action continues to provide evangelicals a chance for "biblically based moral witness" and "contribute to the well-being of the entire world" (Evangelical Climate Initiative 2006). The call-to-action makes several claims and asks the Evangelical community to support:

> 1) Human-induced climate change is real, 2) The consequences of climate change will be significant especially for the poor 3) Christian moral convictions demand our response to the climate change problem, 4) The need to act now is urgent. Governments, businesses, churches, and individuals all have a role to play in addressing climate change—starting now (Evangelical Climate Initiative 2006).

Similar to the glocalized goals of ESA, EEN uses interpersonal networking locally and internationally in order to attain this goal. Most importantly, they note their importance in the incremental step and toward the interim future. In 2007, the Scientists and Evangelicals Initiative, formed by academic and faith-leadership including Richard

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[59] ECI was based heavily on The Sandy Cove Covenant (2004) which was developed by the leadership from EEN, NAE, and the popular Christian magazine *Christianity Today* which would then appear in NAE's letters "For the Health of the Nation" which is an evangelical policy outline still available on the NAE website in 2017 which states, "God's concern extends from the protection of marriage and the family to justice for the poor and the oppressed, from the sanctity of human life to care for creation, and the furtherance of peace and freedom. The Scriptures make it clear that a biblical agenda is broad and urgent" (NAE 2017).

Cizik of the NAE[60], based at Harvard issued their own call to action—also signed by several scientists, clergy, and faith-based environmental activists entitled "An Urgent Call to Action: Scientists and Evangelicals Unite to Protect Creation" and sent to the president and congressional leadership. This call-to-action centered life as a common right and on concern for the poor, climate refugees, war and migration, and the impacts of climate change on biodiversity (Scientists and Evangelicals Initiative 2007). In 2009, evangelicals, scientists, and evangelical scientists met to discuss the Waxman-Markey Bill or American Clean Energy and Security Act (H.R. 2454, 2009), a mostly deficit-neutral cap-and-trade bill meant to limit carbon emissions nationwide. The bill had bipartisan and industry support, but was never heard on the Senate floor—primarily due to the perceived weakness of the bill—detailed in the Heritage Foundation's report on energy. Evangelical scientists (and Nobel Peace Prize recipients) such as like Dr. Eric Chivian of Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard were integral to the composition and discussion over this bill.

While appearing most often in scholarly research, EEN has had very few updates, does not engage in social media as often, and has been far less visible in the community—at least until the election of Donald Trump, appointment of Scott Pruitt in 2017, the re-make of *The Handmaids Tale,* and the devastation of Hurricane Harvey which re-invigorated their community presence and calls to action. EEN and ESA have limited social media presences, but have put forth a handful of new initiatives. In 2020,

[60] Cizik would be asked to step down from the National Association of Evangelicals in 2008—likely because of his vocal support for same-sex relationships.

ESA officially changed their name to Christians for Social Action—specifically because they identify "evangelical" with a now politicized right-wing identity that is outside faith (CSA 2020). They have also changed their motto to, "With Empathy and Faith We Act" and have predominantly Black leadership. Unlike EEN, CSA is attempting to move away from associations with conservatives and evangelicalism of the 1990s. According to EEN, their Pro-Life Clean Energy Campaign efforts culminated in a 2016 challenge to Texas Governor Greg Abbot to change Texas' climate trajectory with a direct ask for 100% clean energy by 2030. EEN has only strengthened their demands for life-focused policy since 1993. More than some of the other organizations discussed here, EEN emphasizes climate impacts on wombs and unborn children—especially in terms of the prevalence of asthma and other respiratory diseases in Texas.

President of EEN (since 2009) Reverend Mitch Hescox and meteorologist Paul Douglas' book *Caring for Creation: An Evangelical's Guide to Climate Change and a Health Environment (2016)* highlights the unique pairing of work on the bible and environmental degradation and the connections between caring for the unborn and the Earth itself. In 2013, Hescox presented a lecture for the Garrison Institute entitled "Reaching Conservative America" which began with a discussion of his personal experiences at the Gulf oil spill and the disbelief some evangelicals felt when confronted with Christian approaches to environmentally oriented care. His solution was that climate scientists and activists need to focus on the politicization. Most importantly, he argues, while "science" has been systematically devalued, it is stories of real and experienced medical concerns and health care and the connections to peoples' lived experience that

must be centralized. As a "pro-life Republican" Hescox outlined the most important thing to any conservative: faith, family, life itself, and health and wellness (especially of children). The lecture showed a short history of the political work done by evangelicals—emphasizing the ways that some Republicans have had to rearticulate care for life through stories about their daily lives.[61] For Hescox, transforming conservative evangelicals is about the "who" and the "hope" of the story:

> "…But I have personally made or had over 300 dialogues all around the country to conservative theological groups and my staff another hundred. This data is sort of our practice of how we have actually conveyed the message and changed and allowed people to be changed. The first thing you start with any talk of climate change [is] who is impacted. It's not a matter of what or how, it's the who, its people. It's telling those stories of people that are there and what happens. […] We were able to take on that issue [The Mercury and Air Toxic Standard] and turn it into an issue involving children's health, especially unborn health and we were credited by changing enough conservatives to actually get that now as a matter of law in the United States. If you ask anybody in Washington D.C. why we have a reduction of mercury from coal-fired power plants, they will say it was the evangelical community who carried the day because we reframed the issue in a way that was understood and important and therefore we're able to get buy-in and get grassroots support" (Hescox 2013).

When one is discussing why climate change matters or why an extreme weather event or environmental disaster occurred, for Hescox this requires deep storytelling, testifying, and listening—something that evangelicals, he argues, should have learned to practice in congregation. It can start with a small comment—for Hescox it is something like "winters around here sure aren't like they used to be" or begin with anecdotal

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[61] While not discussed in this work, further research on the connections between these groups and international relief organizations and mission campaigns could highlight this.

experience, emotional experience, experientially grounded scientific dialogue, and emphasizes being as truthful as possible. Because of their "missionary heritage" Hescox offers, evangelicals do understand how to care beyond the individual and pulling that thread through a narrative is the key. Hescox then goes on to link climate change, sea level rises locally, and to the everyday experiences of a community and its people. For Hescox, what to do is to empower people in their own capacities for stewardship, motivation, but also policy action. In the end of his talk when he must turn to government intervention, however, Hescox turns to a conservative nationalistic appeal as he becomes louder and more hurried—focused on an "all-American" idea of climate action through the story of an Iowa corn farmer's conversion experience to a more environmentally friendly farming practice to missionizing energy policy in the developing world. In the end, Hescox seemingly undermines his own goal of everyday practice by using signifiers of American businesses, American ingenuity, American can-do spirit—an ideology he frequently states that he does not agree with in terms of the Earth. His political ideology as a pro-life Republican is revealed as at odds with his own long held theological beliefs, arguments, and community actions. That being said, he acknowledges this tension and is willing to work through political and theological ideas and strategies.

Dr. Hayhoe is also the scientific advisor to the Evangelical Environmental Network. She is an atmospheric and political scientist who studies climate change and the impacts on human systems and the natural environment. Dr. Hayhoe—known for speaking specifically as an evangelical and environmental scientist states, "I don't accept global warming on faith: I crunch the data… The data tells us the planet is warming; the

science is clear that humans are responsible; the impacts we're seeing today *are already serious*; and *our future is in our hands"* (Hayhoe 2015; emphasis mine). Hayhoe frequently addresses the academic, scientific, secular, and evangelical communities at once: in her church, in the local Citizen's Climate Lobby, in the classrooms of Texas Tech, etc. As a scientist, she is able to reach scientifically oriented young people and scholars with evidence-based stories and calls to action.

Dr. Hayhoe is particularly attuned to the politicization and polarization of certain ideas, scientific evidence, and on-the-ground experiences of climate change. Throughout her *Global Weirding* videos, Facebook posts, and interviews—she points to the politicization of science and evidence-based approaches to climate change as the main issue to understanding the story of our shared Earthly experience:

> "I think that first of all, if people could recognize that a thermometer isn't Democrat or Republican. I mean these days literally the number that a thermometer gives you is somehow seen as a partisan issue. If people could understand that we scientists are doing the very best we can to be impartial with the information we generate, checking and cross-checking, and double checking, and triple checking. And, so, when it goes out into the public sphere that information is something we feel very confident about. That climate is changing, that humans really are responsible. We've been studying it for over 150 years. The impacts are serious, but there's also solutions. So, first of all, I think a basic trust in science is one of the most important things. But, then second related specifically to climate change, the fact that it is not a future issue anymore. It is not about what's happening only to the polar bears or what's gonna happen to future generations, but not us. Climate change is already affecting each of us in the places that we live and if we open our eyes and look around, we can see that evidence ourselves. And then, the third thing, that I think is more an awareness that is building in the scientific community right now, is the fact that we have never pushed our climate system like this before. In fact, as far back as you look in history in paleoclimate records, we have never seen this much carbon dioxide being pushed into the atmosphere this fast

> ever. And, so, the potential for surprise for things that we scientists have not yet even conceptualized or maybe we've thought of, but we don't think it's very likely, the potential for surprise increases the further we push our planet. And, so, that is why from a purely precautionary conservative perspective, it just makes sense to ween ourselves off fossil fuels as soon as possible because we are conducting an unprecedented experiment with our planet. And chances are, odds are, that if anything our scientific projections are actually too conservative" (Hitt and Joyner 2017, emphasis vocalized in recording).

Hayhoe is clear that the problem she frequently faces is the politicization and polarization over climate. Often making a plea for conservative policy implementation, Hayhoe marks the importance of climate change debates in terms of ethical and moral obligations rather than solely political ones—while still recognizing that climate is a political issue. In the preface to Dr. Hayhoe's book written with Pastor Andrew Farley, they start with a proclamation of their beliefs which are that Jesus Christ is the way to eternal life, the Bible is God's word, climate change is real, and that the universe did not come from "nothing" and humans did not directly evolve from apes (Hayhoe and Farley 2009, xi). They advocate for a middle political ground—in a government that is not "running our lives" or "destroying the economy to save the Earth," and in continuing to drive (albeit different) cars and to eat meat (2009, xi). This book was specifically written to address climate change with primarily evangelical Christian friends, colleagues, church members, and the general public—by and for conservative evangelical Christians.

Hayhoe and Farley argue that the people they come across in church and publics (in Texas especially) narrate a very strong association between their lived experiences of wild weather patterns (that are not always seemingly warming), the complexities of climate science, and fears that admitting the reality of climate change ends in bland raw

vegan diets and worship of an inert Earth over God. Ultimately, for evangelicals if "faith can move mountains," there may be no need for human action (Hayhoe and Farley 2009, xv). But what Hayhoe and Farley inadvertently point to is that *politics of climate change* in their faith community is *the* frame through which climate change information and action is interpreted among these evangelicals—and that therefore makes their goal to depoliticize facts of climate into ones of "thermometer readings and history" (Hayhoe and Farley 2009, xv). Hayhoe and Farley are also economically mindful for their audience—in ways that attend to conservative concerns about job loss, resource degradation, etc. One way that they intend to appeal to everyday conservative actors is through a conversation about insurance—that the fact that conservatives living in states like Texas are willing to buy insurance for their homes, things, and bodies is proof that they are willing to take actions that mitigate future disastrous risk and cost. That decision can be made to avoid this potent apocalyptic consequence and at least partially accept this reality.

Hayhoe and Farley also reveal their very interpretive approach to this problem. Much as Connolly offers, these affective and political changes must be "woven throughout the fabric of our lives" as "disentangling" and "replacing" these strands requires purposeful and careful thought and investment (Hayhoe and Farley 2009, 25). For some Christians, they note, their interpretation of the Bible may lead them to vegetarianism or veganism (Joyner), for others to complete exploitation and subjugation (Pruitt). Hayhoe and Farley state that they are attempting to move climate change out of politics rather than into it. And yet, they attend to the urgency and immediacy of the

problem—the ways that real people and places are affected by climate change as well as the intricate ways in which these questions are tied to identities—which are inherently political interpretations. In a section on decisions and consequences—a very affectively charged chapter—they invite fellow Christians to consider their identities, "So let's pause to consider this [global] warming in light of our identity, as children of the creative God who spoke into existence this unique planet He has given us. Is concurring that global warming is indeed happening somehow contrary to our beliefs as Christians?" (Hayhoe and Farley 2009, 21). For Hayhoe and Farley the answer is a resounding "no," that to be Christian is not to be inherently skeptical relative to the consumption of information and interpretation of physical evidence and the testimonies of their neighbors. Instead, Hayhoe and Farley offer scriptural justifications for confronting problems like climate change by modeling those biblical "heroes" who confront uncomfortable realities and revelations (Hayhoe and Farley 2009, 22).

Hayhoe and Farley use the story of The Fall from Eden to aid readers in understanding the importance of taking action—that through their very human actions they were able to alter the trajectory of the world created by God. Humans can and do alter the planet's systems and must take responsibility for their actions and their intended and unintended consequences. While Earth may have a terrifying "diagnosis" and the symptoms are unmistakable, for Hayhoe and Farley we can still take both individual *and* collective actions to change it, to care for the poor, etc. Earthly inhabitants must be able to feel tangible impact from action, it must be swift with glocal focus, and it must attend to the most vulnerable on Earth. For Hayhoe and Farley, this should be easier for

Christians—as most of those who are the most vulnerable are siblings in Christ throughout the world. For Hayhoe and Farley, this means that Christians cannot remain paralyzed with guilt and fear, ever use God's divine plan as an excuse for inaction. While they mention the problems caused by rapid industrialization and environmental degradation—there is little to no mention of the problems of capitalism. And unlike DeWitt and other creation care advocates, Hayhoe and Farley disagree that there is a clear mandate to care for the Earth in the Bible—and yet still advocate for doing so *as evangelicals.* In the *No Place Like Home* podcast discussed in the following chapter, climate activist Anna Jane Joyner asks Hayhoe to discuss the relationship between her faith and her climate science:

> It's a sad commentary on the world we live in these days I think that those rules are seen as some type of oxymoron as if they can't coexist. So yeah, so often people are saying you're a what? I have to say sadly I get a hundred times more people telling me that you can't be a 'real Christian' if you're a scientist then I get people telling me you can't be a 'real scientist' if you're a Christian. Somehow, we've arrived at this idea that studying God's creation, whether it's this planet or this galaxy or this universe, studying God's creation is an *un-Christian* thing to do. That is a relatively new idea, because if you look back in history at some of the leading scientists back 100, 200, 300, even 500 years ago, all the way from Newton through Faraday and through Francis Collins today, they're motivated by their faith to understand this world that we live in. I mean if we believe that a thinking, sentient being designed this incredible universe that we live in, that is the assumption and on what science has built that somehow this universe will make sense and we can use our brains to figure out it's logic. To mean there's really no incompatibility between these ideas. But somehow, we live in this world where studying science has become this suspicious activity and that absolutely breaks my heart (Hitt and Joyner 2017, Sept. 9).

Hayhoe is clear that doubt in the science of climate change was "deliberately sewn" by political actors because they do not like the implications of the science for their neoliberal political agendas (Hitt and Joyner 2017, Sept. 9). When Joyner asks: "How [can] we better communicate about this issue through storytelling?" Hayhoe is clear:

> "It's fascinating because a science fiction writer Isaac Asimov back in the 80s deplored the state in democracy where he said there's this dangerous idea that my opinion equals your fact… and that is exactly the world we live in today. So, how do we talk about climate change? I can tell you the number one thing that we don't want to do, that does not work, that just deepens the divide between us that just leads to even more entrenched positions than before, is to haul out all the facts… [That] actually won't change anybody's minds. Their real objections are not scientific. Their real objections are the fact that they've been told, we've all been told, that we can't be who we are—whether that is a Christian or a conservative politically speaking—*we can't be who we are and agree that climate is changing because if we did that would mean government control, loss of personal liberties, complete destruction of the economy, possible rise of the beast and the Antichrist*. I mean that sounds like an exaggeration, but I have heard that quite a few times…[What] will change minds is talking about solutions that are palatable, that are attractive or cool, solutions that are [framed as] "good for the economy" or "local jobs" or "national security"—solutions will change people's minds. And the social sciences showed that as humans *if we feel like we can be part of the solution to a problem we're much likely to accept the reality of the problem* than if we feel like it's this huge thing that we could never fix anyways… When it all comes down to it, at the most fundamental level, we pretty much all want the same thing which is to be okay. So, if you can listen beyond the rhetoric to people's fears and their hopes and their anxieties and concerns and also their loves—then that's how we might be able to find common ground.

Hayhoe shifts strongly to the importance of storytelling and the hope she feels in personal stories:

> "Sometimes the big stories, but even more often the small stories of individual people making a difference in the place where they live. Again, whether it's with clean energy or new technology,

> whether it's founding a new citizens climate lobby group out in the wilds of west Texas and 30 people show up to a group that you thought there would be 30 protestors outside and two people inside, or just hearing about people who are talking about this issue from a different perspective and sharing from their hearts why they care about it or cities that are taking action to prepare for a change in climate so that the people who live there will be okay whether they agree that climate is changing or not. So when I hear these stories of people, that is what gives me hope and for me too as a Christian one of the biggest things that gives me hope is the idea that there's a bigger picture here and we are in the moment in the present looking backwards unable to look forwards, so rather than being overcome with anxiety and fear we are actually told and this is my favorite verse in the bible, it's not one of those verses that we green you know there's a green version of the bible, it's just a verse about our attitudes and it says, God is not the author of fear. So, if I am overwhelmed by fear and anxiety, that's not coming from God. And that verse goes on to say that what we do have from God is a spirit of love, a spirit of power to get things done, the ability to act, and, my favorite, a sound mind to make good decisions. And that, when it all comes down to it, is what keeps me going" (Hitt and Joyner 2017, Sept. 9).

David and Goliath Battles

These important fights discussed by Hayhoe, Hitt, Joyner, and more are often described through the metaphor of David (usually individuals and communities of faith) and Goliath, but the Goliath is not always the same. Sometimes Goliath is a specific industry, other times the federal government including the Environmental Protection Agency, sometimes local government, sometimes the hurdle of educating and organizing the people for change, or even attempting to shift culture.[62]

Churches and faith organizations throughout the US participate in community gardens, trail clean-up crews, collective meal preparation, recycling programs, and

[62] In the Jerusalem Talmud, Goliath is born of a hundred fathers and this Goliath is as well.

clothing exchanges motivated by environmental concerns. These "compassion-based" or "empathic" ministries, as they call themselves, seem to be commonplace—deeply connecting issues of poverty and climate crisis. In 1992, Jesus People Against Pollution (JPAP) was founded as a grassroots evangelical environmental justice organization located in Columbia, Mississippi. According to Founder Charlotte Keys, the organization was created in response to the environmental outgrowths of a March 1977 explosion at the Reichhold Chemical Company that resulted in severe exposure of the community to toxic substances (JPAP 2014a). Through the work of Keys and JPAP members, the community learned that the town had been slowly, but heavily polluted for decades following the explosion.

According to Keys, her investment in helping her community caused her to lose her county job and experience harassment and death threats (JPAP 2014a). After she discovered and publicly discussed lawsuits filed by several workers against Reichhold Chemical Company, many powerful white community leaders turned on her. In her daily work at the county, she realized that the severe public health problems plaguing her community could very easily be traced to the 1977 explosion. Keys created Jesus People Against Pollution and became a pastor in order to help organize and mobilize her community, both Black and white, to demand public health and environmental justice as grounded in scripture. Particularly focused on the "sloth" of local and federal government, JPAP argued that governments had become the "law breakers" themselves and could only be held accountable by the people impacted by the disaster and their allies (JPAP 2014a). JPAP revealed the reality of many communities in the US: residential

neighborhoods housed dangerous giant corporate facilities whose operations were obfuscated to the workers and in the communities themselves. Keys was clear that her concerns for her community and the Earth were grounded in her love of God and role as a steward of God's creation.

JPAP collected testimonies of community members, attended public meetings, and created media to try and bring national attention to their experience. In 1993, Al Gore even promised to visit the site, though he never did (JPAP 2014a). As more and more community members were interviewed, it became clear that the community had been purposefully lied to about the chemicals at the site, about how many thousands of drums and tanks of chemicals had been buried at the site, and what the long term plans for the site were (JPAP 2014b). Beyond that, the area was subject to frequent flooding which easily unearthed and spread chemical waste after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Following EPA testing of the site in 1984, 1986, and 1994 it became clear that the water and surrounding soils were filled with a "toxic soup" that included Agent Orange and PCP and that the EPA was attempting to abandon responsibility for the difficult site (JPAP 2014b). Keys was clear that she felt both the government and Reichhold wanted the people to just "die and go away" and used video journalism and testimonies of the people played together with scripture to make the case for an environmentally just, faith-based community response to the issues (2014b).

In their documentary of the toxic site, JPAP played "We Shall Overcome" over the words "And Jesus's Apostle wrote, 'Those who live by the truth come to the light so that it may be clearly scene that God is in all they do'" (JPAP 2014b). Keys makes

frequent reference to the ways that stewards must educate by bringing these things "to light," agitate neighbors by asking the "what if…" questions and must organize to end maltreatment of the Earth and its beings. The testimony of one resident, Lois McCraw highlights the offensiveness of the EPA response to residents, "I don't believe a word they say. You can't tell me that a cyclone fence is all that separates my land from their land and ain't nothing on my land? I don't believe them. No…" (JPAP 2014b). Several firefighters were also interviewed in the documentary regarding the number of fires they had to attend to on the Reichhold property—fires that seemed to "miraculously" burn forever in the surrounding grasses or even underneath the soil without penetrating the top layer of dirt—creating a literal hellscape.[63] Together with the Mississippi Alliance of State Employees union and other labor organizations, JPAP aided residents with job and housing concerns and medical attention as part of their environmental and organizing work.

While now closed, the site continues to register high levels of hazardous waste and is designated by the EPA as a Superfund site (JPAP 2014a). Reichhold still manages several similar sites worldwide. Keys continues to argue that the government has an obligation to help those suffering the consequences of corporate and government greed, primarily people of color, and defends her position with scripture, "May those who sow with tears reap with shouts of joy" (Psalm 126:5). And, "Happy are those who consider

[63] While not discussed in their documentary, the video also highlights that almost all clean-up crews were staffed by Black community members.

the poor; the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble" (Psalm 41:1). And, "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full" (Proverbs 19:17) (JPAP 2014a).

Another organization, Christians for the Mountains (CFTM) promoted alternative paths toward "deepened" goals in a less denominationally segregated and "non-partisan" acts of prayer and care in the Appalachian region. This organization came together in 2005 in order to form a more localized or community-based knowledge from the collection of experiences with mountain top removal coal extraction processes. The explosive removal of entire mountain tops in order to more easily reach coal has led to severe flooding and water degradation, and more importantly the loss of "many lives" and destruction of "hundreds of millions of dollars of property" (CFTM 2014; Billings and Samson 2012, 6). While this group developed as a direct response to local environmental issues of mountain top removal coal mining, the organization is also attuned to new and changing environmental issues in the Appalachian region, including the escalation of fracking projects and the impacts on local water resources.

Much of their work centers the importance of the mountains, water, and air to Christianity. "Water is central in Christian narrative and doctrine," they argue, as "the enslaved Hebrew people are liberated from Egypt as they cross the parted Red Sea, and years later enter the Promised Land as they cross the Jordan River… [Baptism] is liberation from the enslavement of sin and entrance into God's future (CFTM 2014). And in turning to air, point to breath, wind, and air as central to Christian narratives of creative action. Pointing to the problems of capitalistic "greed-motivated exploitation"

and “sinful assaults on the will and purpose of God and the creation” they argue that “Christians need to be astute about the interconnectedness of our lifestyles and political choices with water and air” (CFTM 2014). Because water and air are a “free gift” from God, Christians are not supposed to hoard or monetize such gifts in order to respect covenant with neighbors, fellow creatures, and future generations (CFTM 2014). This group, more so than the others discussed here, shied away from discourses of social movements, politics, or “glocalization”; in favor of local encouragement through “neighborliness, social and ecological harmony, richness in culture, mutual service, and bright hope” as well as maintained in their “grass” roots and community involvement through storytelling (CFTM 2014).

The group also engaged in phenomenological exercises, like lighting their flammable tap water on fire or bringing the sludge from their taps to protests for others to feel or taste, or even giving the survivors or most vulnerable a prominent position in protests in order to show that the extraction and exploitation are obviously not meant to benefit future generations and have little to no impact on poverty in the area. The movement promotes autobiographical and anecdotal witnessing as one of its most prominent activities. On the “Stories: section of their website, they offer that, “This page collects stories of real "flesh and blood" men and women whose courage, faith, love, and perseverance inspire us to follow in their footsteps” and implore that God “grant each of us the faith in which our own stories, told or untold, will usher in waves of justice and peace upon God's good creation” (CFTM 2014). In 2010, they described one activist, Judy Bonds, as David against Goliath:

> "Short in stature, Judy is like the shepherd-boy David armed with 5 smooth stones and a sling. Her face is set like flint, jaw set, eyes glistening, eager to battle the coal company Goliath that dares destroy her beloved mountains and abuse her community. Judy whirls and slings her stones as hammer-shot words of sorrows and angers and facts and truths. Like the biblical Deborah, Judy's inspiring courage leads the charge. Deborah, a mother of Israel; Judy, a mother of the mountains and its inhabitants, a keeper of the covenant, a lover of God and God's people (Judges 5)" (CFTM 2014).

As she became gravely ill, CFTM called Judy Bonds the "prophet of our time" for "calling people out of spiritual numbness and hopelessness at their plight in the face of coal industry abuse" and envisioning "the people to fight injustice for the promise of a renewed land of peace and wholeness" CFTM 2014). In 2014, partially as response to the deaths of prominent anti Mountain Top Removal activists, CFTM developed a volunteer-based community health survey that students from local Christian colleges administered in language palpable to Christians in order to help summarize the problems experienced in the region for the community members themselves (CFTM 2014).

Overall, the group hoped to rebuild the region following centuries of exploitation and ruination. They are more likely to turn to their churches, local outdoor adventurers, and sometimes even to local secular environmental movements in order to avoid political institutions that may co-opt or alter the message to further their own exploitative goals (Billings and Samson 2012, 8; Wadsworth 2014). The group openly reflects about the problems of government agency involvement and the legacies of government induced change as well as the history of colonization of West Virginia, connecting resources to Shawnee and Cherokee spirituality and relationships to the specific lands they are trying to protect (CFTM 2014; Morone 2003; Wadsworth 2014).

CFTM challenged the image of coal mining communities in Appalachia as proud extractors of God-given resources by re-conceptualizing the relationship between the community and the environment and critiquing these forms of exploitation through local knowledge and experience. CFTM worked for over a decade to hold picnics on the only remaining mountains, allow attendees to compare the nearby removals to scars visually, and to teach the community the ways in which this sort of coal mining defies Christian teachings in hopes of strengthening the predominantly Christian community's greater involvement.

Less than 20 miles from where I grew up, Latino community members in the city of Arvin, California—known for the worst air quality in the nation—recently decided to fight big oil companies in what was described as a "David and Goliath" fight to protect the Earth and the people in it. Choosing this fight is considered "unusual in Kern County, where pumpjacks sucking heavy crude from the parched floor of the San Joaquin Valley stretch for miles. Here, in one of the poorest parts of the state, oil means big money: the county extracts 70 percent of the oil and 78 percent of the gas produced in California" (Kane 2020). With the slogan "No drilling where we're living" community members are mobilizing a "right to life" argument in order to combat all Goliaths at once. In California, but more obviously so in Bakersfield, Arvin, Taft and surrounding areas, two million people live within a quarter mile of a pumpjack—and that isn't necessarily including those built near schools, churches, and even hospitals (Kane 2020). For many, it is the cultural shift that seems most difficult—as it is particularly this "right to life" frame that has never been drawn to include health and wellness of the already-born

beings of Kern County. The flagship high school's mascot is still an oil driller[64]and people are affectively and economically attached to oil pumps, so communities of faith feel that there is power in mobilizing particularly through narratives of faith, life, and change using experiential revelation—tasting or lighting the tainted drinking water afire, discussing the makeup of the very visual and palpable particulate matter in the air, and (in order to drive the point home about "right to life") focusing on the brutal impacts to pregnant women, the unborn, their congregation members in churches near pumpjacks, and future generations. Despite the consistent statements of pride in faith in Kern County, faith-based organizations lack a voice in Kern County governance particularly because they challenge the voices of the oil and agriculture giants who now sit on all of the County's various advisory boards and committees.

The Regeneration Project based in San Francisco, California has the main and goal of "deepening the connection between ecology and faith" (The Regeneration Project 2018). Focused on stewardship, renewal, regeneration, protecting, and caring for the planet, this group works primarily with clergy. According to their stated vision, "the moral authority that religion carries is the necessary ingredient for wide social and political change" (The Regeneration Project 2018). Furthermore, they focus on everyday practice and "spiritually grounded people" in which "Congregations serving as examples can demonstrate the proof that something better is now possible. That practical proof of a

[64] Bakersfield High School attended by Earl Warren. South High School, located on the street I grew up on, had the mascot "Johnny Rebel" a confederate soldier. That school is fed by the nearby elementary school, Plantation Elementary.

better way – achieved through living our faith – is the heart of our grassroots organization" (The Regeneration Project 2018).

Practically, the project represents about 14,000 congregations across most of the United States and focus specifically on climate change. Their focus is on renewable energy, energy efficiency, and conservation. In response to Pruitt's 2018 CBN interview, many of the organizations listed here including The Regeneration Project responded with prayer services, public hearings, listening sessions, and community organizing drives to combat this approach to the Earth. The Regeneration Project's press briefing following Pruitt's interview stated, "point out that solar and wind are also God-given resources, and they do not cause harm to human lungs or our climate" and called Pruitt's approach "morally wrong" (The Regeneration Project 2018). The group also responded to Pruitt's rollback on car emissions standards arguing that the rollback and the attempts at "withholding superior technology that's proven to save lives" is also morally harmful (The Regeneration Project 2018). The group argues primarily from an understanding of environmental racism and social justice—that those who will be most impacted by Scott Pruitt and Ryan Zinke's decisions are low-income communities, children, the elderly, and primarily communities of color. For them, this highlights that Pruitt and Zinke are directly rejecting Earth stewardship, caring for their own neighbors, disregarding the most vulnerable, morally bankrupt and careless—the group even calling attention to their homes as "sanctuaries" in a direct connection to immigration justice concerns.

In the Pacific Northwest, I have personally come across schools, churches, community groups, and even climbing organizations centered on biblical stewardship.

Restoring Eden is one of the most popular organizations, beginning in the 1990s formally founded by Peter Illyn in the 2000s, this organization's mission is to "make hearts bigger, hands dirtier, and voices stronger by rediscovering the biblical call to love, serve, and protect God's creation" (Restoring Eden 2016). Peter Illyn, a former evangelical pastor, advocates for a reinterpretation of the Creation narrative—one focused on humanity as created from the substance of the Earth itself and on the recognition of all living beings *as kin* (Hitt and Joyner 2017, Oct. 1; Restoring Eden 2016). In an interview with Anna Jane Joyner and Mary Anne Hitt on *No Place Like Home* podcast discussed in the subsequent chapter, Illyn tells his own narrative of epiphany: on a 1,000-mile hike he heard: "the still quite voice of Creation singing praise to the Creator… [this] love fest between the wilderness Creation to the Creator and declaring the glory and wisdom of God…(Hitt and Joyner 2017, Oct. 1). And then a couple days later:

> "I got out of the forest into clear cut [in the Pacific Northwest] and I opened my Bible and that day I read, "Speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves." And I said, who speaks for elk? Who speaks for the forest? Who speaks for God's creation? And I didn't know that there was a rich history of the church doing it, so I started Restoring Eden to pick up a conversation I thought was lost" (Hitt and Joyner 2017, Oct. 1).

Illyn locates the problematic narrative shift in the Enlightenment in which "very quickly people began to talk about the Earth as a 'well-oiled machine'. Not the Earth as a garden singing praise to the Creator, not the Earth as a choir" and attempts to bring forth a narrative of interconnection and kinship, "we are embedded in this planet. I mean this is our home. We are dust. The word Adam—first human and Addama—red earth—we are Earth and earthling. It's not man versus nature" (Hitt and Joyner 2017, Oct. 1). "Part of

the struggle" Illyn argues, "is that we've lost a sense of kinship with nature. And now we've actually labeled kinship with nature 'loving nature' or 'earth worship' and so people are almost knee-jerk against loving and serving and protecting nature (Hitt and Joyner 2017, Oct. 1). Deepening the relationship to climate change:

> "Once you have a sense of kinship with nature, once you see the Earth not as machine but as an organism, then you realize is climate change, what we take out of the Earth, what we dump in the Earth, all of these things are interconnected. It becomes extremely complex. It's a lot easier to say God doesn't care and it's all gonna burn up. You can't be a bible believing Christian and take those statements, that is not what scripture says" (Hitt and Joyner 2017, Oct. 1).

Many of Restoring Eden's events have center on storytelling and gardening. They support many similar organizations by "going on tour" or through "Appalachian witnessing" by partnering with musicians and activists to end mountaintop removal, hold educational events about coal and coal mining, and publicly "speaking truth to power" and by meeting with Senators and other politicians *in their homes* (before COVID-19) to discuss these issues.

Restoring Eden was also part of the Evangelical Climate Initiative and has worked with Evangelical Environmental Network and Christians for the Mountains. Restoring Eden together with members of CFTM were involved in administering the Appalachian Community Health Research Project health surveys regarding the impacts of mountaintop removal coal mining and links to cancer in their communities (Hendryx et. al 2011; CFTM 2014; Restoring Eden 2016). Restoring Eden also focuses closely on deforestation in the Cascade mountain range and the Pacific Northwest forests—home to the Spotted Owl and the environmental policy controversies related to its habitat. They specifically

focus on biodiversity and interconnectedness—using the web of life metaphor. They closely connect pro-life and pro-environment arguments on their website stating "how can we be pro-life and yet cavalier with the very systems that create life? If we love the Creator, we must take care of creation" (Restoring Eden 2016). In a conversation about how to connect Christian belief and climate action through storytelling, Illyn also notes the power of affectively imbued right-wing evangelical narratives in popular media—particularly *Left Behind*—as powerful misinformation machines. For Illyn, the problem is that communication about climate change does not usually communicate in the right "emotional register", with real faces, lives, and accessible narratives.

Combating a liberal secularist narrative that all people of faith are elders or are not long for this world, Good Stewardship Campaign and Young Evangelicals for Climate Action (YECA) have also collected testimonies and bear witness to God's Creation. Focused on education and organizing youth, the groups mostly formed on high school and college campuses in the US South and engage students in good stewardship practices, divestment and reinvestment campaigns, and local environmental justice efforts. YECA operates and organizes like many labor unions, stating "We're about coming together to unite our voices and act collectively to make a greater difference than what we would make on our own. Our diverse and creative actions are focused on three overarching goals integral to overcoming the climate crisis: mobilizing our generation of evangelicals, influencing our senior evangelical leaders, and holding our political leaders accountable" (YECA 2018).

In 2020, many of these organizations are now joining together with larger interfaith communities to combat the current impacts of climate change, COVID-19 pandemic, and racial injustice in their communities. Successful calls to direct action must tell a compelling story. This narrative might even contain recognizable elements: collective heroes and villains, friendship and allyship (fellowship), campaign (quest), conflict (fight), and relevant landscapes (physical worlding and setting) (Phillips 2016). In August of 2020, faith leaders in southeastern US states gathered remotely for a Climate Resilience Summit aimed at addressing community resilience in the face increasing extreme weather events (particularly hurricanes) and other environmental issues. Mobilizing their faith as a form of common education and basis for community organizing, groups like Interfaith Power and Light and Creation Justice Ministries have been able to help literally prepare congregations for environmental disaster through formation of clear escape routes and community check-in trees, suggestions for weather-resistant building materials, localizing food systems and agricultural knowledge, and other tools for building "spiritually and physically resilient" congregations in the face of climate change (IPL 2020). Groups like IPL are now attempting to make change at every level and starting to engage the electoral apparatus for the 2020 election cycle, even offering their members to make a pledge to be a #FaithClimateJusticeVoter by mobilizing their #Faith4Climate on social media: "As people of faith, we are called to care for God's Creation and to love our neighbors. This is a moment for fundamental change. We can help make change by electing leaders who are committed to working to end structures of

oppression, environmental injustices, and take action to tackle climate change" (IPL 2020).

CHAPTER V

TO WELCOME AN APOCALYPSE

"And all of this stuff does feel like a storm. It feels like weather storms and political storms and personal storms… and how does that feel to you that all this is kind of coming together at once?" —Mary Anne Hitt, No Place Like Home, (2017).

In 2014, the feature film *Noah* débuted in theaters in the United States and sparked a brief controversy regarding the depiction of the biblical Noah as the first human to battle environmental anxieties in the most imminent of apocalypses. The film contained many messages regarding the preservation of all species (albeit in limited number), plant-based diets, the cost of contemporary environmental actions, the prevention of future environmental degradation, as well as the closeness of kin and qualities of humanity. While the film seemed to many Christians to be more "science fiction" than literally Biblical, the film led to intense media speculation, pundit debate, reactions from people of faith, and public dialogue about one of the most familiar story's potential environmental qualities. The film illuminated strange and perhaps uncomfortable possibilities about interpretation and adaptation. Just as the film score created a sense of urgency, what if a new politics were to spring from this increasing occurrence and awareness of global environmental disasters? What about the growing fearful sentiment that the messages of climate science and activists may go unheeded? In her impassioned National Book Awards speech in 2014, Ursula K Le Guin warned the audience, "Hard times are coming when we'll be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now and can see through our fear-stricken society and its

obsessive technologies to other ways of being, and even imagine some real grounds for hope" (Le Guin 2014). In this chapter, I focus on stories of resistance and hope; of the fragility of Earthly life and strategies for survival as illuminated in podcasting. Primarily concentrated on the climate storytelling podcast *No Place Like Home* hosted by Anna Jane Joyner and Mary Anne Hitt and the apocalypse survival skill podcast *How to Survive the End of the World* hosted by sisters adrienne maree brown and Autumn Brown and read in conversation with Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of Talents* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaids Tale* and *The Testaments*, this chapter focuses on speculative fictions, narratives and pedagogies of faith and hope, strategies for change, and movement work aimed at creating a more livable future. This chapter is a story about storytellers. I focus on writer-activists who are attempting to narrate us through impasse, shape change, plant seeds, and sow just futures. The podcasts analyzed in this chapter provide forms of oral history, journalistic attention to the present, as well as speculative narrations of the future.

Revelation: Podcasts and the Storyteller/Writer/Teacher/Activist

New media and media technologies have greatly altered access to storytelling and digital world-making. Portable computer technologies, wireless internet capabilities, and networked systems have profoundly changed our relationships to each other and our environs—and it is no surprise that these technologies and medias have also impacted knowledge production and distribution of stories and storytelling in podcasts, websites, online video channels, and television series and their networks. Bridging experiences across space and time, contemporary technologies allow for live editing of documents

and recordings, availability of media for many years, and mass production and distribution of and in various medias. There are very few academic resources on podcast storytelling as it is such a new media format, but as this is an interpretive project podcasts are taken up as an important cultural product: contextualized and interpreted as such.

Podcasts are pre-recorded audio broadcasts which usually have two recurring "hosts" that present research, stories, news, etc. with a coherent episodic narrative and a serial connection between episodes (Adgate 2019; Barassi 2013; Markman 2012; McCracken 2017). Particularly in the time of COVID-19 and Stay-at-Home orders, podcasts are an increasingly popular medium with over 800,000 active podcasts and over 50 million episodes available on platforms like Stitcher, SoundCloud, Apple Podcast, or Spotify (Adgate 2019). Both *No Place Like Home* and *How to Survive the End of the World* follow this format, releasing weekly installments over themed seasons. Both sets of podcast hosts utilize a dialogic conversation style either with each other or one or two relevant guests. These conversations then spark conversation with listeners who can comment and enter dialogue with the hosts directly on the platforms, via direct messages, or through social media like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Since they are pre-recorded and do not have to be downloaded, they are available at any time and on most computer and cell devices that can access the internet or cellular data. Some podcasts also air live on public radio.

The most popular podcasts in the US such as *Serial*, *ShitTown*, *This American Life*, or *Pod Save America* are all narrating versions of American life and experience—

though none of these podcasts are strictly fiction.[65] *Serial*, for instance, has had upwards of 200 million listeners since it aired in 2014 and is credited with popularizing this narrative form and deeply "intimate storytelling" (McCracken 2017, 1). Both *No Place Like Home* and *How to Survive the End of the World* are different from these podcasts in that they are deeply personal podcasts—primarily narrated in the first person about events in the lives of the hosts who live in different parts of the country—and not from an outsider-journalist or ethnographer positionality. Neither of the podcasts has reached anything like 200 million listeners of *Serial*—both hovering in the several thousand range with dozens of frequent commentators that weave between the podcast content, people's personal interactions with the hosts or their own personal stories, news, and fictional stories. Unlike *Serial*, these podcast hosts are clear that they are not trying to make something strictly as a commodity. The point is education and activation for collective survival.

There is a call by many speculative fiction authors to recognize the significance of personal testimony and smaller, heterogeneous movements—in contrast to academia's tendencies to depersonalize and force observations about the world into generalizability rather than historicized and contextualized experience. The political influence and ramifications of fictional storytelling and podcasting both remain under theorized in political science, though not throughout social science. Storytelling in podcast form is one method to co-create futures with affected communities of peril—what Rob Nixon

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[65] The narrator's fictional liberties in *Serial* and *ShitTown* are highly debated in the genre of "true" crime.

calls "writer-activism," (Nixon 2011; Shulman 2019; Wiebe 2020), but none of these individuals is engaging a singular strategy to survive the already-occurring apocalypse. In both of these podcasts, the hosts see themselves as storytellers as well as stewards of the Earth and the beings that inhabit it. Particularly in *How to Survive the End of the World*, the hosts draw on the experienced apocalypses of Indigenous and Black peoples in the Americas for stories and strategies for survival.

New media studies are well—new. New media in particular highlight political hope, as Natalie Fenton describes:

> "The internet, as with many new technologies before it, has been imbued with a sense of optimism that can somehow transcend the trends of market politics. This new medium, it is claimed, has reinvented transnational activism. The internet with its networked, additive, interactive and polycentric form can accommodate radically different types of political praxis from different places at different times, offering a new type of political engagement. This apparently new mediated politics of the 21st century holds a promise of political hope. […] For a viable political project to emerge requires a collective social and political imaginary that can offer a sense of hope worth aiming for. A reconsideration of the concept of political hope in mediated political mobilization takes us beyond a focus on resistance to one of political project(s). […] [N]ew media may allow a reimagining of hope so that a collective consciousness can be maintained and developed in this complex, confusing and contradictory tangle of mediation, politics, culture and community. […] Hope needs to discover a politics" (2008).

Unlike media communications before, availability and interaction with new social medias is more sporadic, more fragmented, constantly re-articulating fledgling elements, and in greater and greater multitudes. In comparison to the perhaps aging New Social Movement articulations of agency and solidarity—these networks are loosely assembled, fragile, and fleeting (Fenton 2008). Change in this technology has been integral to change

in practice. While widespread use of cable television and public radio allowed for the dominance of charismatic televangelists like Pat Robertson and Billy Graham[66] and raging rants on the radio regarding the spiritual and secular health and wealth of the nation—television and radio use in the US have sharply declined creating a sort of blip in the right's resonance. When one of the few remaining televangelists, Joel Osteen of Houston, refused to open the doors to his 16,000-person megachurch to the victims of Hurricane Harvey in August of 2017, evangelical Christians implied a major reckoning on Twitter, Facebook, and various social media outlets as well as popular Christian blogs. Christian satire websites like *Babylon Bee* suggested that Osteen would react to these weather events by selling a new line of clothing called "Sheep's Clothing," continue to "preach false gospel in spite of critics" and sail his luxury yacht "S.S. Blessed" through Houston's floodwaters to pass out copies of his book (Babylon Bee 2017). These actions highlighted for many Christians that, while many things "happen for a reason" and people should offer their "thoughts and prayers," responses like Osteen's are spiritually and financially void and politically motivated—and that maybe so is the poor construction of their city.

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[66] It is problematic to lump major Christian right leaders together ideologically. Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell, for instance, may have shared opinions on abortion or gay marriage and homosexuality (*sic*), but they did not share the same ideas around economic policy, war, women's rights, Black civil rights, or the environment. These differences—beyond politically ideological—stemmed from different theological underpinnings. Falwell, far beyond Billy Graham, made devils of political actors, different interpretations of the Constitution into heresy, and even described Billy Graham among them alongside the general groupings of homosexuals (sic), liberals, feminists, communists, environmentalists, etc. (Gorski 2017). This line was greatly brightened following 9/11 as prophecy turned strongly from salvation, Providence, and Promised Land to apocalyptic battle—no longer a collective mourning of moral failings, but a *personal* battle against actual *soldiers* of Satan (Gorski 2017; Keller and Zamalin 2017).

This does not mean that these "new media" are used solely for radical political projects. Anna Jane Joyner of *No Place Like Home* discusses her dad's use of Facebook and YouTube videos—connecting God's creation with scripture using Martin Luther's quote, "God writes the gospel not in the Bible alone but also on trees and in the flowers, clouds, and stars" immediately followed by his skepticism of climate change (Hitt and Joyner 2016). Her father releases videos called #RicksRants that resonate with the expressions of vengeance of his conservative following. In response to a particularly racist rant arguing that white supremacy would not exist if not for Barack Obama, Anna Jane Joyner responded with a Facebook video with 100k+ views directed at Christians of Color who may have been harmed by her father; stating that she was standing with them in this, "very serious battle for the soul of our country" (Joyner 2017). Through the buzzing sounds of cicada, she adds, "I will work hand and hand in with you to overturn these oppressive systems that have hurt so many people of color" (Joyner 2017). The video was discussed both on the *No Place Like Home* podcast and on the Pentecostals and Charismatics for Peace and Justice forums. Her father's response was directed *at the media* as a terrorist organization.

Pod Save Us All

The podcast *No Place Like Home*[67] is a climate storytelling podcast—told as if sitting around a table of presumably vegan or culturally appropriate comfort food.

[67] "Home" is a complex space, particularly for many feminist activists, who locate the homeplace as an important site of resistance (hooks 1990).

Established as a conversation between hosts Anna Jane Joyner and Mary Anne Hitt and their guests, the podcast specifically aims to highlight personal stories of climate change. Hitt and Joyner are storytellers concerned with the narrative of climate change and daily experience. They focus on the need for recognition of interdependence, collective responses, kinship, and multivocal stories of adaptation and transformation. The podcast is billed as a climate podcast relevant to society and culture and sponsored by the Sierra Club. Without listening, it would be unclear that this is a very faith-informed podcast with plainly articulated political goals. Working primarily in southern states, Hitt and Joyner are environmental activists and women of faith who "give testimony" on environmental issues—through actual court testimony and witnessing, lecturing to audiences of believers, reaching out to women by phone and social media, and telling stories via podcasts that frequently highlight personal and lived connections between faith and Earthly concerns. They are specifically seeking to counter dominant discourses in their communities about the natural cycles of the Earth, disasters viewed as "God's plan," the relationship between Earth, Sun, and Moon, and the media discourse regarding environmental care as the new 'leftist' agenda. For Hitt and Joyner, livable futures are only possible through relationship building and organizing—not what Joyner calls "rent-a-collar" Christians paraded around by right wing and liberal media personalities or politicians alike (2016, Oct. 12). Much like the social gospels of the early twentieth century, they focus on both individual and social salvation. They articulate new ways of understanding climate change in everyday evangelical life—relating the effects of climate change to their family and occupational environments, the soil and visible landscape, the

poverty caused by economic decline in areas most impacted by drought and flooding—on "making Earth as it is in Heaven" (Hitt and Joyner 2017).

In speaking about the relationship between faith and climate change in *The New Yorker* in 2020, Joyner highlighted the power of narrative emphasis and transformative justice as resilience in the face of COVID-19:

> "I'm learning to take the long view and just focus on the next right thing. When the Rabbi Jennie Rosenn talked with us, for next week's episode, about the seder—a celebration of the exodus of Israelites from slavery and oppression—she emphasized that part of that story is that, first, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years, not knowing what would happen, but with faith that God would protect them. Reverend Lennox Yearwood, of the Hip Hop Caucus, reminded us that for many vulnerable people, activism isn't a choice, it's simply fighting for their lives, families, and homes. For me, that means that even when we're feeling despair, anxiety, and fear, we can't give up—a lot of people don't even have that option. He told us, "We can be overwhelmed but not overcome." Dr. Kritee Kanko, a Buddhist teacher, shared how meditation helped her climb out of a deep depression, and reminded us of our "interbeing"—how deeply interconnected we are, as we're all witnessing now because of COVID-19 As activists, both Mary Anne and I have increasingly turned to spirituality as a way to find our own resilience and courage, and we've heard the same from a lot of fellow climate friends. We wanted to dig deeper into that and share it with our listeners, and also take a look at the landscape of spiritual stories and traditions to find even more tools and guides that offer light during hard, dark times" (Nast 2020).

Joyner has been frequently featured in popular media—especially media directed at the middle class—like magazines. Given that her father Rick Joyner is the executive of an evangelical-capitalist empire called Morningstar Ministries, Anna Jane Joyner must literally face the power of the machine. While she and her father diverge strongly, particularly on issues of the environment, she continually attempts to link climate change, her father's faith, and their experiences together: "Within the Christian faith there is a lot

in the Bible about how you know God is seen through that which he has made. Martin Luther has this great quote that my dad likes to post on his Facebook wall, 'God writes the gospel not in the Bible alone, but also on trees and in the flowers, clouds, and stars.' It's moments like that that we understand each other" (Hitt and Joyner 2016). Joyner tells many stories about her father, emphasizing that the God that she believes in is not the God of her father:

> "It wasn't about what the Bible had to say about this issue or what kind of Jesus talked about in so far as loving our neighbors. But it really was a political ideology. You know you could put as much kind of spiritual reasoning in front of him or as much like scientific reasoning in front of him and the lens that he was looking through was really this very conservative political ideology. The article that recently came out that kind of profiled us some amazing people we worked with on *Years of Living Dangerously*, it really isn't about science or faith. It is about these tribes (sic) of political ideology. I don't exactly know how to change that [uptake in voice], obviously if I did, I would have already done it in my own life [laughs]. But I do think that there is there is something really important about continuing to connect with people …[and] really reaching across these boundaries. You know, I was recently living up in in Brooklyn, New York, and it is kind of as progressive of a hub as you can imagine where people have no idea that rural Alabama exists or people like my dad exist other than like radio caricatures. And I think it is just so important to remember that there are these progressive bubbles. There are these conservative bubbles. Until we start reaching across and connecting with people who don't just think the way that we do or see the world the way that we do, we are always going to be in these us versus them mentalities."

And for Hitt and Joyner this requires understanding your relationship to power and privilege—and to the creation of "the evangelical" as a white evangelical conservative. In the same interview in *The New Yorker* and in several *No Place Like Home* episodes, Joyner specifically points to the problem of white evangelicalism:

> "To me, it seems most white evangelicals are lost in a *false nostalgia* and brainwashed by the cult of Trump and Fox News. They're driven by an *ideological identity and a mentality of my team vs. yours, not science, or even compassion, and stuck in the culture wars of the nineteen-eighties and nineties*. I like to remind people that there's a lot more to Christianity than what white evangelicals have to say. *There's still a lot of hope among young people who were raised in that space, and even those who still identify with it, who are far more likely to embrace science and social justice.* And there are millions of progressive Christians who care about the climate crisis and are inspired by Jesus' teachings and other tenets of Christianity to act. But I fear that many, if not most, older white evangelicals may be lost—not that I won't still keep trying." (Nast 2020, emphasis mine).

Joyner's occupation is environmentally-oriented, and she has given testimony against pollutants like coal ash in coal heavy areas of North Carolina—hoping to prevent damage to waterways, the rock and mountains themselves, and the human and otherthanhuman inhabitants of the area—often citing scripture in her testimony. Alongside systemic change, Joyner also participates in and suggests changes in individual everyday life—eating less or no meat products if culturally appropriate, changes in transportation if possible, and participation in social media and online forums directed at community change. Most importantly, Hitt, Joyner, and their guests highlight the importance of coalitions without centralizing efforts or leadership—the decentralizing and fractaling highlighted by brown. In a conversation with May Boeve of 350.0rg, Mary Ann Hitt further emphasizes this point:

> "Some people are coming to [fighting the Keystone XL Pipeline and other climate issues] because they care about climate change, some people are worried about water pollution in their communities, some people are worried their child having asthma. And its allowing people to come in from these multiple entry points and like you said hold on to your own identity to what brought you to it and then *win*. And, so it's not *just* bringing people together but

> its then winning those campaigns where suddenly you realize David can beat Goliath… It's how *do* we inspire more people to get involved *because* David can beat Goliath? You're rejecting this binary notion that you are either for something you're or you're against it. We shouldn't force people into binary thinking. We're diminishing our power when we pretend that there's a binary" (Hitt and Joyner 2016, Nov. 2, emphasis hers).

Like Anna Jane Joyner and the fictional Lauren Oya Olamina, May Boeve's father was a minister. In speaking of the outcomes of climate movement work and her faith, Boeve adds, "If we're successful right now it will be many, many generations on down the line who are experiencing that. And so, I see that as very similar to having faith. [The] best way I've found for myself of connecting something that's really important to me and that has always been in my personal life to my greatest passion which is movement work" (2016, Nov. 2).

In *Sojourners*, Joyner shared her hope that Christians—even evangelicals—could change following Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si*:

> There could not be a more important year for climate action. It's now or never. The future of our planet and the people, places, and things that we love depend on all of us working together to demand a healthy, just, and vibrant planet home. It impacts everything else – immigration and migration due to drought, flooding, sea level rise, and worsening storms; war and conflict over natural resources; access to drinkable water; food insecurity, hunger, and agriculture; disaster relief. It even impacts the sex trade — when women have to walk farther and farther to find water, they're more vulnerable to rape and kidnapping in many regions...[The encyclical] will be an opening and a challenge to break out of our comfortable, cultural silos, to move beyond our religious bubbles, disagreements, and stereotypes, and to join hands with people, both like us and unlike us, to preserve this earth we all love and call home. And, perhaps, to make a few new friends and learn something along the way. It has yet to be seen whether or not other Christian leaders will stand in solidarity with Pope Francis and join his call for urgent, meaningful action on climate change. I pray they will. Christians

> have led many great social change movements before: anti-slavery, women's suffrage, the civil rights movement. We can help lead this one, too. And who better than Christians, believers in hope, believers in resurrection, believes in salvation — even against all odds? (2015, emphasis mine).[68]

Following the election of Donald Trump, the podcast continued to highlight movement leaders and storytellers, but also took a dystopian turn: focusing on how to weather storms "both meteorological and personal" and prepare for the worst-case scenarios and get through "some intense and very challenging times" (Hitt and Joyner 2017, Sept. 9). The podcast shifts to stories and strategies for survival—particularly after Hurricane Harvey in August 2017 and devastating wildfires in the West (what Joyner describes as "literally Mordor", the mythical badlands of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*) claimed many lives and impacted communities for decades to come.

For Hitt and Joyner, change comes through narratives of hope and in 2019 they too begin to highlight the work of adrienne maree brown and emergent strategies. They see storytelling as an "onramp" into climate movement work (Hitt and Joyner 2016, Nov. 2).

In *The New Yorker* interview, Joyner explains her own ways of addressing panic or climate trauma involves listening to someone else's story whether it be a podcast like hers, a novel, or a movie saying—finding "comfort, creativity, and courage" in focusing beyond her own story before getting to work—adding that she takes "solace in action"

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[68] Dr. Hayhoe has also had a public response to *Laudato Si*'s potential impact on evangelicals, but instead stressed that the Pope's encyclical will not reach those who continue to "plat their politics and ideology before their faith" where these problems are located for Dr. Hayhoe (Hayhoe 2016). She is adamant that the encyclical is not advocating any new ideas, but rather those same faith-based ideas that anyone who takes the Bible "seriously" would know.

(Nast 2020). One of those podcasts is *How to Survive the End of the World*. *How to Survive the End of the World* (2017, Oct. 25) hosted by siblings adrienne maree brown and Autumn Brown begins with the collective recitation of the generative quote from Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*:

"All that you touch
You Change.
All that you Change
Changes you.
The only lasting truth
is Change.
God is Change."

This is followed by quick laughter and a joke about adrienne maree brown conveniently having this tattooed on her body. This is the "inspiration" for investigating how to navigate, survive, and learn from apocalypse with "grace, rigor, and curiosity" (brown and Brown 2017, Nov. 21). The purpose of the podcast, brown argues, isn't about how to build a bunker—though the 2020 season focuses more intently on practical skills. It is about how to "stay connected to what we are as a species and not just what we are as trauma bodies. And then want to survive" (brown and Brown 2020, Jan. 21). Specifically pointing to Octavia E. Butler as the "prophet" that guides their work, brown argues that the podcast is meant to start answering overarching questions posed by her body of work, "'What is a compelling future?' Not a perfect future. Not a utopian future. But, 'What is a future that is compelling enough to move towards?' (brown and Brown 2020, Jan. 21). Almost every episode is available on their website, Soundcloud, and Apple Podcasts and

is hashtagged with #storytelling and involves the coming together of one or multiple stories through conversation. The podcast focuses on lived and embodied experience (particularly of the most vulnerable); sisterhood, love, and kinship as resistance; collective responsibility and communal problem solving; the centrality of spirituality and a lived faith; as well as a very Earthly understanding of the relationship between theory and practice in surviving apocalypse. It is ultimately about emergent strategy as a philosophy based in the "power of change" through the principles of adaptation, collaboration, interdependence, nonlinear and iterative transformation, fractal thinking, and justice as resilience (brown 2017).

In early 2020, both *No Place Like Home* and *How to Survive the End of the World* podcasts both shifted toward apocalypse (environmental and pandemic) survival skills. *How to Survive* listeners are welcomed by the repeated phrase, "Hello, beloved survivors…" and (brown and Brown 2020). According to adrienne maree brown, "for the world we're trying to build, the most valuable resource is each other and so the thing we should be trying to get so great at is loving each other. It feels like the apocalypse skillset that I'm most interested in…" and Autumn Brown follows, "It's one of the only apocalypse skills available to everyone to cultivate at all times. Not everyone's going to be able to learn how to grow food or start a fire, but everyone can learn to be the best loved one and beloved" (Brown and brown 2018, Feb. 27). Even before the pandemic, the podcast focused on community care—particularly from the positions of marginalized peoples (specifically from chronically ill and disabled, queer and gender non-conforming people, Black and Indigenous peoples). Once the pandemic began, the podcast adapted to

conversations about shelter-in-place and stay-at-home orders across the US, mutual aid networks, community medical response teams, squatting and renter's actions, land rehabilitation and the "political power of farming," and community self-defense.

In an episode entitled "Apocalypse Survival Skill #5: Tactical Hope" Autumn Brown and her 11 year old child Finn discuss prepping and place-based skills—her child describing how to filter water from lakes using sand and composted fruit pieces before turning to trauma, affect, prayer, and "nonhuman systems as allies" and "kin" in survival and "thrival" (Brown and brown 2020, May 1). This episode is the first of two discussions with the founders of Queer Nature—Pinar Sinopoulos-Lloyd (Wanka Quechua) and So Sinopoulos-Lloyd—and focuses on their expressly political mission to facilitate connection and/or reconnection, healing, and "wholing" for those who have been marginalized from the Earth and nonhuman life. They offer their resources to those who have been seen as "unnatural" in understanding and presentation of self—particularly queer, Indigenous, and disabled identities and experiences. What they call "tactical hope" involves co-guidance through survival skills, preparation, and "ancestral remediation" to combat the dominant narrative of nature and wilderness as only dangerous and threatening to sole "commando" survivors rather than as potential partners or even kin in the face of racism, sexism, heterosexism, ablism, colonization, etc. (Brown and brown 2020, May 1). Instead of treating the Earth as a "wilderness" where "we" are the protagonist in a Transcendentalist tale, they offer understanding different beings and systems as the protagonists in a larger story of Earth that is "emotionally accessible" to those who have been excluded from narratives of who is an "outdoors person" or even

who survives and thrives in disaster (Brown and brown 2020, May 1). They acknowledge an affective difference between their work and that of right-wing "preppers" as protagonists in their own stories; attempting to control the unknown, prevent insecurity, locate and *eliminate* threat, and manage survival as one person or settler family in "the wilderness" (Brown and brown 2020, May 1). Pinar focuses on the "real-life" survival of Indigenous people as the joy and prayer of their ancestors and that the skills that they teach—skills of belonging—center kinship and relationship with the otherthanhuman, interspecies solidarity as a path to co-liberation, and a feeling of accountability and healthy attachment beyond the human (Brown and brown 2020, May 1). They want to use belonging as *unsettling* and *decolonizing*—by understanding humans, especially settlers, as sometimes and some spaces unwelcome, but still belonging on and with Earth in relationship with the sacred and each other. Pinar in particular takes up Donna Haraway's concept of living in the Chthulucene—an era of "reworlding" made up of ongoing multispecies stories and practices of "becoming-with" or "making kin" over individualistic and human-centered imaginations of futures (Brown and brown 2020; Haraway 2016).

In a second episode with Queer Nature, Autumn Brown discusses collective survival, group communication, mobility and migration, and what is called the OODA loop (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) with So and Pinar (Brown and brown 2020, May 6). The first "skill" that they focus on in survival is bodily attention and awareness and the state of the nervous system, followed by prioritization of need based on this bodily state. These skills may include the ability to locate shelter/clothing, food/water, track patterns

(in materials, across landscapes, trauma responses, internal resources, faith and portals to ancestors and the sacred, etc.), carry variant/stacking functional materials, and most importantly communicate in a group setting. Pinar asks, "What is practicing prayer on the move?" which to them is the same as asking, "What do I want to protect? What do I love?" and Autumn Brown adds that this is also a question of how to deal with ancestral trauma and the plain reality that your ancestors survived (Brown and brown 2020, May 6). The way that Pinar and So present the process of action is through the OODA loop and if the action is something life preserving then one is "allowed" potential aggression, protection, and fierce response and also the choice to stop moving or stop going (Brown and brown 2020, May 6). While not immediately noted outright, their evasive techniques are in many ways to avoid the threats of white militia or military-trained threats in all landscapes—bringing this podcast discussion in direct conversation with Octavia E. Butler's main threats in *Parables.*

One aspect of new pedagogies that needs further theorizing involves changes in media of storytelling—larger shifts toward podcasting (audio) and animation (visual). Figures 1, 2, and 3 are visual accompaniments to *No Place Like Home*, *How to Survive the End of the World*, and a popular social media story about faith-informed agriculture in Iowa. Novels, including Octavia E. Butler's *Parables* and Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's* series, are being re-imagined as graphic novels or miniseries with added visual and/or auditory components which enhance the spectacular and affectively charge elements of the stories. Educators like Brown and brown are also turning towards more audiovisual and distance-experiential pedagogical tools, especially under COVID-19. A

more in-depth version of this project would bring visual politics and Halberstam's "revolting animation" in conversation with this perceived turn to more "animated" narratives.

Figure 1. No Place Like Home hosts (unknown artist).

Figure 2. How to Survive the End of the World hosts (unknown artist).

Figure 3. Iowa's Farmers by Marco Cibola.

In order to tell more compelling stories and activate audiences, storytellers are turning to multi-sensory forms of narration—not always to privilege certain kinds of mediation—but as necessary tools for distributing embodied practices in a time of heightened and constant mediation. Embodied pedagogy, even in the time of increased mediation, for Brown and brown, is an adaptation of communal practice.

In an episode of *How to Survive the End of the World* (2018, Mar. 18), brown and Brown interview Toshi Reagon who created *A Parable of the Sower Opera* and now is co-host with adrienne maree brown for *Octavia's Parables*. The podcast ends with a song from the opera, which is also a dialogue between Lauren Olamina and her pastor father:

Lauren's Father:
Lauren stop. You're scaring people.
You can't predict the future. No one can.
Do you really think the world's going to end?
Do you really think the world's going to end?

Lauren and Chorus:
There's a new world comin'
There's a new world comin'
Everything goin' be turning over
Everything goin' be turning over
Where you goin' be standing when it come?

Lauren's father *knows* that the meek will inherit the Earth but cannot imagine that the *time has come* or that *his daughter* could be a leader and gatherer on that path. Lauren mobilizes his own scripture to inform him that the near future will be more like Jericho; a battle for survival will be had and she has been preparing to lead the way all along. Adapting, iterating, and the creation of new patterns of being on this Earth are urgent, necessary, and difficult processes—and the leaders will not be traditional elected leaders.

In regards of the environment and climate, many of us are grappling with despair and hope, and these feelings accompany an understanding of the world *as we know it* ending. For some, particularly those who have comfortable or privileged experiences, the thoughts and feelings may end there in despair. For others, it is precisely the excitement of *this world ending*—this one that we know—that brings hope. Earthly creatures have experienced many apocalypses, navigated through the aftermaths, and survived. And now, current humans and beyond will be asked to do the same. Autumn Brown and adrienne maree brown's work foregrounds combatting the organizing power of white futurisms, through "active and intentional effort[s] to create generative, sometimes temporary or improvisational solidarities and forms of collective power across the racial borders imposed by white structures" (Mitchell and Chaudhury 2020, 16). The point is not to save the planet as is and thus preserve whiteness and Western domination, but rather to welcome an apocalypse.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION:

REVELATION IN LITERARY AND LIVING LANDSCAPES

"Recuperation is still possible, but only in multispecies alliance, across the killing divisions of nature, culture, and technology and of organism, language, and machine. […] Sowing worlds is about opening up the story of companion species to more of its relentless diversity and urgent trouble" —Donna Haraway, Staying with the Trouble (2016)

"…everything we do, every single thought and action and relationship and institution, everything is practice ground. So, practice…" —adrienne maree brown (2017)

"Don't shove me into your pigeonhole, where I don't fit, because I'm all over. My tentacles are coming out of the pigeonhole in all directions." —Ursula Le Guin (2018)

"There's the story, then there's the real story, then there's the story of how the story came to be told. Then there's what you leave out of the story. Which is part of the story too." —Margaret Atwood, Madaddam (2013, 56)

Organizing Across Killing Divisions

In the summer of 2015, I drove slowly down a single-lane State Route 140 in California's Central Valley. Countless times I had found myself in this exact predicament—watching breathlessly as flames engulfed the near side of the highway and fear of entrapment, burning, and suffocation took hold. As the grasses and trees smoldered, I saw a high and lone billboard in the distance. In solid bold black type on white background, which stood out even through smoke and dust, it read "Pray for Rain." Over the next 30 miles, I would come across the same words spray-painted on farm fences, on various business and church marquees, and professionally printed with

reference to "Thess 5:17"[69], in English and Spanish. Other signs along nearby highways called on prayer for farmers (never farmworkers) and still others focused on the "Congress Created Dust Bowl." I imagined myself walking with Lauren Oya Olamina, on her path through a similar dystopian California on her way to Oregon.[70] The confluence of new weather patterns, environmental politics, labor movements, food networks, faith, and personal discomfort felt intense and hot on my cheeks and at that moment smelled of death and melting things. In 2019, several of my family members in California would lose their homes in the Ridgecrest earthquakes; others in Porterville would still have no access to water and would survive on potable water brought on diesel truck deliveries; and in Bakersfield some of my immediate family members would survive upwards of 110 degree heat while living in their car. In 2020, amidst the completion of this project, I've packed my go-bags, filled up gallons of water, prepped my pets for possible travel, picked all of my grown vegetables and propagated most of my plants, volunteered and organized with climate refugees and my unhoused neighbors, and set up rally points with my apocalypse companions so, if needed, we can caravan into the red sunset to escape fire, smoke, and perhaps the worst air quality currently on Earth. It has been hard to watch the ash—what is remnants of burned beings and things—falling from the sky and covering my home while trying to type the words for this project.

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[69] Thessalonians 5:15-18: "(15) Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. (16) Rejoice always, (17) pray continually, (18) give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." In my own experiences growing up in the Central Valley, this piece of Thessalonians was mobilized by conservative evangelical pastors in my local megachurch to advocate for an individual work ethic and individual sobriety.

[70] Many of the writer-activists and organizations discussed in this project are currently located in the Pacific Northwest, but few are "from" the Pacific Northwest.

However, my work with local climate refugees in September 2020 has also given me hope for coalition building in crisis and in the face of right-wing response. In Portland, Eugene/Springfield, and Medford, for instance, faith leaders came together with people variously identified as queers, anti-fascists, hospital nurses, crisis and social workers, street medics, BLM activists, Tribal leadership, Wiccans, other currently unhoused community members, and many intersections thereof in order to render aid to victims of wildfire and smoke inhalation (Molina 2020). In Springfield, various "Patriots" would arrive with their flag shirts offering to volunteer, but they would quickly out their position as one of righteous judge of those deserving of aid—including one self-identified "Patriot" who professed to me that she could "tell" when someone was "naturally homeless" and undeserving of food, tents, sleeping bags, housing, and so forth. They would quickly be asked to vacate their position, primarily by faith leaders, who patiently showed them off the property. In Portland, many of the mutual aid groups were specifically supported by faith organizations like Faith Bloc and Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice which would find church properties for sleeping and use church gardens and kitchens to serve food (Molina 2020). After rumors spread throughout Oregon that "antifa" were possibly responsible for setting fires, church leaders took to the local media to dispel the myth and to reveal what "antifa" were really up to: feeding the hungry, sheltering the evacuees, and loving their neighbors—and to use the simile that like being "Christian," identifying as "antifa" may mean you share the same belief in antifascism, but it doesn't mean you belong to any specific organization of antifascists

(Molina 2020). Rayah Dickerson, minister with Clackamas United Church, highlighted the adaptability of the individuals and coalition the ground:

> "[These coalitions] have very quickly adapted to what the next need is. I think part of that is because many of these people are marginalized. When you've been in need and have nowhere else to turn and someone loves you and doesn't shame you for it, it is transformative. The gospel is being lived out every day by witches and heathens, and Muslims and atheists" (Molina 2020).

The insights of this project are not immaterial—they are grounded in the political world-making of contemporary writer-activists, in my own survival and those of my beloveds, and in so many visions of the future. I've experienced elements of the ensuing environmental apocalypse and have met so many academic, experiential, and faith prophets—particularly in my organizing work—attempting to be heard about wildfires in Oregon and California and the very scary future we all face here and globally if we continue to privilege certain stories of the future, wait patiently for heroic climate saviors, or continue as communities in constant peril. While I am not a believer or practitioner of any particular religion, I, too, am prone to jeremiad. More and more frequently I have looked at the Earth and questioned where we can literally and figuratively go from "here," sensed myself placing blame in moral and political failures of "the people" and institutions, and maintained hope that shaping change will help me and my communities find appropriate roles in guiding through impasse and crisis and toward building more livable futures.

I wrote this dissertation to conjure hope, honestly, during moments where my own hope was wildly waxing and waning in troubled activist spaces, in a terrifying global pandemic, in swift environmental collapse, in intensifying or at least more scrutinized

forms of police brutality. Graduate school entailed for me many identity crises and I've never known whether to call myself a political scientist or a political theorist, so I settled for political activist instead. But as Angela Davis recently reminded an audience, it is good to be suspicious of divides like "inside" and "outside" political science or the academy. Political scientists and the social science community more broadly should further engage different kinds of stories and storytellers in relation to their investigations of institutions, political ideas, survey data, media analyses, and of course, power. My focus is primarily on writer-activists outside of traditional academia and the discipline of political science because academic knowledge, like any kind of knowledge, is limited—and disciplinary knowledge often purposefully bounded by the types of works that "should" be cited. But there are few questions of interest to me regarding the potent futures of beings on Earth, relationships between humans and other than human worlds, and experiences of violence and cooperation that should have limited exploration or be considered apolitical. Speculative futures engage political questions of governance and nationalism, politicized religious beliefs, economic inequalities, homophobia, racism, and gendered experiences of environmental degradation. In investigating questions of narrative, representation, belief, and affect, I believe we can better understand political possibilities.

"Apocalypse" is etymologically rooted in uncovering, disclosing, or revealing. These writer-activists are helping to imagine what "*contemporary capitalism as the entropic end of the world, as lived apocalypse"* really looks and feels like (Cunningham and Warwick 2013, 439). They are revealing how people have survived catastrophes over

and over and even welcomed an event-apocalypse to the already-occurring one. Much like in Rebecca Solnit's *A Paradise Built in Hell* (2009) focused on the aftermath of the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco, 1917 explosion in Nova Scotia, 1985 Mexico City earthquake, 9/11 event, and 2005's Hurricane Katrina—there is a reminder that what follows calamity is not always the popular Hobbesian imaginary, but rather one of cultivated joyous connection, mutual vulnerability, and recognized interdependence. What many of these stories and activists illuminate is an experience of mass social and spiritual death and decomposition, but also regeneration and renewal. As Jeremiahs they call on everyone to acknowledge the decay, account for the virus of capital, and realize that the reforms of Josiah are not enough. As Jeremiahs they also understand themselves as having a calling—and everyone who hears their words is meant to heed a call to action. This process will not be easy, but we all need to prepare ourselves and our bodies and understand that while the worst part has yet to come—we create the now and what comes after together.

The Next Iteration

In late 2011, I was attempting to finish my master's thesis at San Diego State University. At that time, I was focused on secular state policy's relationship to women's religious education and practice in Algeria, Tunisia, and Senegal. Amidst my concluding work and the opening up of possibility in my own life experience after graduate school, several things happened that greatly altered everything I thought about power and politics: Arab Spring, the brutal death of my brother, severe climate events, a major power outage across the US Southwest, the Occupy Movement, and the murder of

Trayvon Martin. While these events had seemingly little to do with each other on a solidly macro scale, for me they affectively swirled and stirred together questions about state power, policing, and racism; capitalism, poverty, and social welfare; and our practices of grieving, protesting, and organizing against injustice. This project strings together similar moments of intensity—and while no narrative could look exactly like this one—there is danger in seeing the project as merely private or individual. Trauma and intimacy are also collective. The COVID-19 virus has caused great loss and new trauma as we were all forced apart from our communities, and now, particularly on the US West Coast, that is awkwardly sewn to our very intense feelings about the climate as we are forced to take refuge wherever we are—perhaps in even more solitary conditions—due to wildfires. We can only recover and transform together, with grave attention to the intersecting and interlocking conditions we face, and by sitting with the depressed weepies we'll all feel when the intensity fades.

As an academic, the COVID-19 pandemic, social justice movements, and increased fires have also had a multitude of impacts on my scholarship and personal growth in a very short time. I did not always have access to a library or directly to the same community of scholars. Through video conferencing and podcasting, however, I could access more relevant discussions than I could have before, engaged in deep and moving conversations with unexpected interlocutors, and delighted in epiphany. I also found that I needed this time away from the hierarchical structure of academic institutions, my own imposter syndrome and that of colleagues, and my own fear of failure in order to feel open to creativity and to a kind of faith. In order to "finish" this

dissertation project, I had to alter my relationship to the project itself: to know that it would feel "like failure" to detach from the past iteration. I had to embrace that "failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well" and embrace that this work may not be considered as *serious* or *rigorous* as that of other political scientists (Halberstam 2011, 5). I had to organize the way I would in the field through continual processes of education, agitation, organization, liberation, and unknown potential. As a quote in the beginning of this project suggested, all organizing is indeed a form of storytelling—of conjectural histories, counterfactuals, "what if" questions, and narrations of possibilities in our comings together. I still sense an intense urgency to reinvent from a current "scene of survival," which will require "debating what the baselines of survival should be in the near future, which is, now, the future we are making" (Berlant 2011, 262). But I feel committed to "an attachment to the process of maintaining attachment" and that from "being in the middle of the bedlam of world-making," I believe, we can embody "the visceral experience of democracy as such" (Berlant 2011, 260).

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare many struggles that preceded it and provided a sense of scale of the work that is to come. It has revealed how individuals and communities have been navigating and surviving multiple catastrophes and have come to deal with this exact set of possibilities. Repeated experiences of macro level crises *should have* provided our communities and governments with gauges for the timeliness of response as well as the need for clear connection between social, political, and environmental justice actions. I find myself back to the same parables and prophesies, pedagogies and practices that guided me through 2011 and 2012—working to re-wire

mechanistic partnerships and reimagine new relationships and systems. My hands are in the Earth, I am reading, writing, mourning, organizing, and I am holding sustained empathy for myself and others. I am still organizing workers, managing campaigns for people I think will have the courage to make change with community, working with unhoused and LGBTQIA+ youth, using my skills to grow and preserve food, and shaping change in the ways that I can.

I have also attempted to adapt under COVID-19 to more mediated connection,[71] more participation in (or agitation with) local government and organizational meetings, more playlist and soundtrack creation (Appendix X), more mutual aid networks and fire refugee camp work, more petitions to abolish the systems that do not serve us, more marches, sit-ins, vigils, rituals, and speak outs (albeit in limited duration with this particular body). These technological changes may be permanent and, in many ways, may have made some academics, doctors, governmental leaders, and positions of power a little more accessible to more people and given some of us access to knowledge that may have once been held by an institutional pay wall or in what some perceive to be an ivory academic tower.[72]

The COVID-19 pandemic, concurrent racial justice movements, and fire disasters have also made me think more about how "things" like viruses, tear gas, fire, and ash

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[71] adrienne maree brown "liked" one of my comments on social media about coming across *Emergent Strategies* in a queer cuddle puddle (pre-COVID), and I about fainted.

[72] In this moment thinking of the ways that *The Neverending Story* portrays the Empress in the ivory tower who must be named (white supremacist capitalism?) in order to save the world from The Nothing apocalypse.

have huge political effects in the world. As I am wrapping up this project, the sky is a dark sepia tone and my home and yard are covered in ash from nearby fires—where my beloved works in community to stop the flames. As a chronically ill and disabled person, I am also worried about my own bodily endurance.

If the pandemic is a portal, as Arundhati Roy (2020) has posited, what will we bring with us through the portal? I hope that we do not *leave everything and everyone behind,* but rather that we bring our collective responsibility to tell stories of the future and to live them—to embrace our own ignorance, vulnerability, and empathy; to really feel what we need to feel in order to face forward, pick up our tools of survival, find our apocalypse buddies, survive and thrive. This is moment to unburden ourselves of cruelly optimistic relations—to let go of what is no longer serving the ends we want and need—with an understanding that this is not a personal failure, but rather a collective iteration that can utilize the previous destruction toward the new growth (what brown calls "composting") (Coleman, Due, and brown 2020). In the end of "Age, Race, Class, and Sex" Audre Lorde reminded her audience in 1980, "Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together…" and that this can create paths to our collective survival" (2007 [1980], 123). She further emphasizes through poetry that without this change and collective struggle, "someday women's blood will congeal upon a dead planet/ if we win/ there is no telling" (2007 [1980], 123).

I understand that this project means I have a commitment to place in the margins of political science research—and here gather a rather heterogeneous body of works

together (as queer bodies tend to gather) not in hopes of making it necessarily central to political science—because dear God who knows what would become of it—but to at least give anyone who picks this up another path of exploration, another thread to pull on, to adapt and begin a new iteration. In other words, this project is for fellow travelers, storytellers, and beloved survivors. I take to heart that this project, like any, is "not random, but not right either" after over a decade in graduate level political science scholarship, a lifetime of loving and needing stories and storytellers[73] to guide and shape me, and the intergenerational connections I have in all directions to this planet and its future. This is indeed, "just where things landed" (brown 2017, 44).

[73] Sometimes my Polish family of origin would talk about storytelling as a form of hustling—a way to survive through your current conditions. The other side of my family of origin, however, would say that my call to storytelling is a form of compulsive lying.

APPENDIX A

ABBREVIATIONS

CBN	Christian Broadcasting Network
CWA	Cornwall Alliance
CTFM	Christians for the Mountains
ECI	Evangelical Climate Initiative
ECM	Emergent Church Movement
EEN	Evangelical Environmental Network
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESA	Evangelicals for Social Action
IPCC	International Panel on Climate Change
IPL	Interfaith Power and Light
ISAE	Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals
JPAP	Jesus People Against Pollution
NAE	National Association for Evangelicals
NBEA	National Black Evangelical Association
NBC	National Baptist Convention
NEP	New Evangelical Partnership
NIV	New International Version
NPRE	National Religious Partnership for the Environment
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
WEA	World Evangelical Association

YECA Young Evangelicals for Climate Action

APPENDIX B

BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO CARING FOR CREATION OR REFERENCED PARABLES—NIV

Acts 3:21;

1 Chronicles 29:11;

2 Chronicles 7:13-14;

1 Corinthians 8, 10:26;

2 Corinthians 5;

Colossians 1:15-20;

Deuteronomy 10:14, 20:19, 25:4;

Ephesians 1:10;

Ezekiel 34:17-18, 36:35;

Genesis 1-3, 6, 9; 30:3;

Hebrews 1:2-3;

Hosea 2:18, 4;

Isaiah 5:8-10, 11, 24:4-6, 35, 40, 41:18-20, 42, 51:3, 55, 65;

Jeremiah 2:7, 3:2-3, 4, 12:4-11;

Job 12:7-10, 26: 7-9, 11-14, 38, 41:11;

1 John 1:3, 4, 15;

Leviticus 18:26-28, 23-24, 25:2-5, 26:3-4;

Mark 4;

Matthew 6; 13; 15:14-20;

Nehemiah 9:6;

Numbers 35:33-34;

Psalm 1, 19:1-4, 24:1-2, 41:1, 65:9-13, 74:16-17, 89:11, 95:3-5, 96, 104:10-30; 107:33-34, 126:5, 145:9-17, 148:1-10;

Proverbs 19:17

Revelation 4, 11:18, 21, 22;

Romans 1:20, 8:19-22;

1 Samuel 17

2 Samuel 21

1 Thessalonians 5:15-1

APPENDIX C

SOUNDTRACK

Bernice Johnson Reagon & Toshi Reagon, *Parable of the Sower Opera*, entire

Sufjan Stevens*, Carrie & Lowell*, entire album

Moses Sumney, *Aromanticism*, entire album

Janelle Monae, *Dirty Computer*, entire album

Orville Peck, *Pony*, and *Show Pony*, entire albums

Blood Orange, *Negro Swan*, entire album

Johnny Cash, "Personal Jesus" and "God's Gonna Cut You Down"

Colter Wall, "Sleeping on the Blacktop"

Fantastic Negrito, "In the Pines"

Gypsy Kings, "Bomboleo"

Buck Owens, "Streets of Bakersfield"

Merle Haggard, "Mama Tried"

Woodie Guthrie, "Pastures of Plenty" and "Tear the Fascists Down"

Aunt Daddy, "Promises I Couldn't Keep" and "Pump the Brakes"

Phoebe Bridgers "Motion Sickness"

TV on the Radio, "Staring at the Sun"

Leon Bridges, "Texas Sun" and "River"

Massive Attack, "Pray for Rain"

Alison Krauss, "Down to the River to Pray" and "I'll Fly Away"

Nina Simone, “Don’t Let me be Misunderstood,” “Wild is the Wind,” and “Feeling Good”

Portishead, “Western Eyes,” “Sour Times,” and “Glory Box”

Cautious Clay, “Cold War”

Sharon Van Etten, “Every time the Sun Comes Up” and “The End of the World”

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