

Just Stories: The Role of Speculative Fiction in Challenging the Growing Climate Apartheid

Abstract

Starting with the current climate emergency, this paper addresses the role of narratives in shaping our views and actions towards managing the burgeoning climate crisis, especially as this is growing both unequally and iniquitously across the globe. This divergence of impact appears to reflect a form of 'climate apartheid' with two major population groups potentially emerging – the 'climate privileged', i.e. mostly those from the Global North with resources to mitigate climate impacts; and the 'climate precariat', those largely from the Global South, at the 'coal face' of climate change and with limited resources to adapt. We argue for the relevance of narrative justice – i.e. stories which attempt to challenge, transgress and change this trajectory, focusing on social and climate change with disruptive, alternative, and more socially just visions of our global future. These stories may be encapsulated within the new and emerging literary tradition of 'climate fiction', but are particularly represented within climate focused speculative fiction (SF), which posits new models for the future, confronting current passive and dominant discourses around 'the myth of eternal growth.' We end with two personal stories, starting with the discussion of an African 'solarpunk' future focused on a war over water by a 'climate privileged' author (NW), entitled 'Water Must Fall'. The concluding story is by a 'climate precariat' author and water activist from the Global South (FM), focused on her daily struggles for land and water justice within her community, as they challenge dominant narratives and structures enforcing 'climate apartheid'.

Introduction

In this paper, we will start with a short, but large and urgently hot story and then move on to discuss ways of

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using stories: both fiction, specifically speculative fiction (SF), as well as harnessing other (often marginalised stories) to try and find solutions to the current (and growing) climate crisis. This paper will thus foreground narrative approaches and, given an emerging form of ‘climate apartheid’, we will make a particular argument for *narrative justice* as an essential component to finding ‘answers’ – i.e. our stories need to be both radical and inclusive to find solutions fit for the majority of the Earth’s inhabitants (and not just limited to human life too). To illustrate, the use of SF to address the issue of ongoing systemic racism (in the US and beyond) in the anthology **Octavia’s Brood** will be unpacked (Thomas, 2016).

The paper will then discuss the climate crisis, emphasising the unequal and unjust nature of this crisis, akin to a form of ‘climate apartheid’. We will further develop the idea of using fiction to address climate issues, highlighting the rise of ‘climate fiction’. Given the adage that the personal is political, we will intersperse our accounts with relevant elements of our own life stories too, which carry their own lived veracity – this will include references to climate fiction and the first author’s second SF novel **Water Must Fall** (2020).

Finally, from fiction to fact – we will end with the power of a ‘personal’ story by Faeza Meyer, addressing one notable climate challenge – the need to preserve the rights of all, to access a rapidly dwindling global supply of fresh water (IPCC, 2021). This is a personal and powerful story which will provide a fitting ending and will thus be followed by only a brief conclusion. As Faeza argues, water rights are enshrined in Chapter Two of the South African Constitution: s27 (1b): “*Everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water.*” The realisation of this right, however, remains a fraught and contested challenge, for all too many citizens of South Africa – and this theme is currently echoed for multitudes across the globe (Subramaniam, 2018).

This emphasis on narrating social and community justice, echoes the current movements within psychology focused on liberatory, decolonial and critical approaches within the profession, as partially represented in the recent narrative review on psychological perspectives and climate justice/apartheid (Barnwell and Wood, 2022; Barnwell, Stroud and Watson, 2020); for additional references see: Kessi, Suffla and Seedat, (2021); Suffla and Seedat, (2021).

The Short, Hot Story

“It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere, and biosphere have occurred.” (IPCC, 2021, SPM-5).

These are the chilling opening two lines, from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change's (2021) latest report IPCC AR6 WG1. Yet, they are also the start of a story. We are not suggesting that this account is fiction but reasserting that narrating 'stories' is an ancient, lasting, and universal way humans have developed, to make sense of themselves and the world, and this includes linking together a series of facts (or events) from which to derive meaning, some of which may be 'hidden' (Bruner, 1990; 1991; Henkeman, 2019). This opening story from the IPCC is unfortunately all too overt and 'real' – the world is heating up and this is 'unequivocally' our fault.

This is, however, a huge and constantly emerging story and with no definitive end in our lifetime – a bleak foreboding for the future. How can we prevent ourselves from being overwhelmed by the sheer immense scale of this unfolding planetary tragedy, apart from resorting to the defence of denialism or conspiracy theories (Glorfeld, 2018; Marshall, 2014)?

One way may well be with the creation of more stories – but stories of resilience, transgression, and transformation – stories underlined by narrative justice, including stories from the 'margins' (Bell, 2019; Canham and Langa, 2017; Denborough, 2018; Lau and Seedat, 2016; Lau, Suffla and Kgatitswe, 2017). Not just stories of fiction and facts, but stories of human lives already at the forefront of fighting for climate mitigation – and against the huge global inequalities that are driving our planet towards a form of catastrophic 'climate apartheid' in the first place (Barnwell and Wood, 2022; Rice, Long and Levenda, 2021).

The Unequal Climate Story

Historically, climate change has been driven by the (colonial origins) industrial capitalism of the West/Global North, aided and abetted more recently, by rapid Chinese (neo-colonial) development and expansion for resources (Nixon, 2011; Voskoboynik, 2018). This (historically racialised) capitalism has been both normalised and posited as an inevitable process of 'industrial development' that will characterise **all** societies, and has been held up by the west (and instruments of the west/Global North), such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) as **the** aspirational model for global development (Hickel, 2017). This grand neo-liberal narrative of societal development has also been hammered home by a phrase coined by the deceased Conservative British ex-Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher: 'TINA': *there is no alternative*.

However, this system has proved to be devastating for both the planet and almost all who are its exploited source of workers, or otherwise discarded casualties of the system. Multinational corporations continue to carry on a neo-colonial pillage of the

last, dwindling resources left on a planet that is slowly being brought to the boil, under the weight of polluting atmospheric by-products (Nixon, 2013).

Although many climate activists (including African) preceded Thunberg (2019), it was she who captured the western media's attention, and laid down the public gauntlet around capitalism's enduring 'fairy tales of eternal economic growth,' i.e. excessive consumption (primarily by 'the richest one percent') that leads inexorably towards resource exhaustion and climate catastrophe (Unigwe, 2019). Again, though, echoing the theme of racism above, the starkly negative comparative reception of the Ugandan climate activist, Vanessa Nakate – at the hands of western media – was centred in a form of active erasure (Rafaely and Barnes, 2020). For it is consistently those with the least, who continue to pay the heaviest price. As Rice, Long and Lavenda (2021) argue, climate responses – akin to the impact of Covid and Covid vaccine nationalist responses – have tended to favour the Global North, further entrenching existing disparities and global inequalities, resulting in the emergence of 'climate apartheid' (Alston, 2019).

This development is rooted in the legacies of colonialism, racialised capitalism and hetero-patriarchy, which render many communities – particularly within the Global South – as oppressed, marginalised and implicitly 'expendable'. As outlined by Rice et al. (2021: 3) this coproduces two global populations: the 'climate privileged', with wealth and position to allow mitigation of climate impact – and the 'climate precarious', those without sufficient resources and who are most vulnerable to harm and enforced displacement.

Alongside this are differences around land 'ownership' and access to safe built environments, as well as issues around climate migration, citizenship (which can be bought, by those with the means) and the nationalist tightening of global borders. Those identified as the most vulnerable amongst this climate precariat are 'indigenous populations, BIPOC, women, and LGBTQ+' (Thomas, et al., 2019). Additional to this list, the materially poor, aged and ill/disabled are especially vulnerable as well (Rice et al, 2021). Given all of this, how, then, can we build a more just and inclusive climate future, as workable alternatives to 'TINA'?

The two authors of this paper represent these populations – the first author (NW) carries white climate 'privilege', although born in the Global South (Zambia), he is resident in the North and has access to resources, to assist adaptation. The second author (FM) is part of the global majority, who are 'climate precariat:' – she is BIPOC and has written about being homeless and landless, in the country of her birth and ancestry (South Africa). Notwithstanding this, we propose that stories (as well as ensuing action/praxis) are one way forward for human and planetary survival.

Climate Fiction: Creating New Climate Stories and Futures

Why Fiction?

We live in an increasingly polarised world where rational debates are harder to hold. Studies in attitude formation have shown that pre-existing assumptions and beliefs shape attitudes far more actively (and rigidly) than later rational discussion (Maio et al., 2019). Political and religious affiliations and ‘us-them’ reasoning ring-fences the scope for reasonable attitude change. As Marshall (2014) has stated, people mainly argue from pre-existing ideological positions and cherry pick ‘facts’ to bolster their pre-existing opinions or positions (via confirmation bias). It is only as climate evidence becomes inescapable may (some) action ensue, which is by then, of course, far too late.

Morton (2020) argues the end of the world is already here – and many are still mostly in denial about it. For facing the traumatic loss unravelling in the Sixth Mass Extinction (Kolbert, 2015) is too threatening and painful. But how else can we confront ‘denial’, given psychological ‘defences’ serve a purpose, i.e. to hold overwhelming anxiety at bay?

Two poets hold succinct keys, we believe. As TS Eliot (1943) wrote in Four Quartets, ‘human kind cannot bear very much reality.’ Yet Emily Dickinson (1976) maintained ‘Tell all the truth, but tell it slant ... the truth must dazzle gradually, or every man be blind.’

What else is fiction, but slanted and bearable truth?

What Makes Stories Work

The key to a successful story is to immerse the reader in such a way that there is an implicit ‘suspension of disbelief,’ such that the ‘real world’ does not intrude too much into the fictional world (King, 2012). The fictional world needs to be credible (internally consistent), coherent and engaging, that is, ‘transports’ the reader – and, if so, research suggests it can then also be attitudinal changing, perhaps even life altering (Maio et al., 2019). (As a general exemplar of books impacting on people’s experiences, including mental distress, see the emerging field of ‘Bibliotherapy,’ including ‘lockdown’ reading lists to survive Covid-19). And, as Goosseff (2014) argued, stories are more effective capsules for personal attitudinal change, rather than logic or rational argument. Given the climate crisis facing us all; finding sustainable and inclusive ways of changing attitudes and behaviour is key (Brick, Bosshard and Whitmarsh, 2021).

Narratives and the Climate

Narrative approaches are well established within psychology – both within research (Squire, et al, 2014), as well as providing therapeutic frames for psychological ‘healing’ (Epston and White, 1990). Drawing on narrative theorist Brockmeier (2013: 7), we

argue that stories of the future (speculative fiction: SF) constitute “a psychologically fundamental practice of meaning construction, a practice which cuts across the putative divide between fiction and nonfiction”. In other words, as alluded to above, the mind does not ‘mind’ whether a story is ‘real’ (that is, happened in reality) or imagined (that is, not yet happened); it **perceives** imagined story characters and situations as if **real** (Schiff, McKim and Patron, 2017). In this ability lies the potential to create new experiences, and – to the extent that we create stories that differ, both credibly and more radically from the past – we create models of new possibilities. For as long as *past experiences are repeated* (*‘TINA’*), newness cannot take effect (Sools, Triliva and Filippas, 2017; italics ours).

Such writings of different possibilities not only enable “becoming aware of it [the future] and actively exploring it” (Glaveanu, 2018) but can also be used to “depict, rehearse, motivate, interpret and evaluate” (Sools, 2020) paths for personal and socio-political action. To this end, we focus on climate writing that is **future facing**, as providing potential models for mitigating (and adapting to) climate change (Funk, 2021).

Speculative Fiction (SF) and the Future

SF faces forward, proposing alternative models of the future – different ways of living, organising and being within the world. Because such models may function as a threat to the status quo, it was no accident that several SF novels were banned for periods in South Africa – such as Heinlein’s **Stranger in a Strange Land**, Mary Shelley’s **Frankenstein** and Anthony Burgess’ **A Clockwork Orange** – alongside more overtly political novels challenging apartheid (McDonald, 2009).

SF’s two main strands are science and people, that is, the characters who inhabit the fiction of the changed world. Creating SF stories may involve extrapolating from *What Is* to *What Might Be* (Wood and Sools, 2022). SF operates as a thought experiment for creating new models and possible paths into alternative futures, sometimes targeting ‘better’, or more optimistic futures, where current catastrophic changes have been both survived and transformed (Streeby, 2019; Wright, 2010).

Some SF concentrates on science as ‘saviour’, that is, providing techno-fixes to prove human ingenuity and survival, such as heat dispersers in the atmosphere, e.g. Neil Stephenson (2021), **Termination Shock**. However, thoughtful SF also recognises science has also helped dig this climate hole and that it is not an objective, disembodied force for ‘good’. Science is a human enterprise and as such, can be bought, corrupted and hijacked – a case in point is the recent return of ‘race science,’ as science (like capitalism) was also part of the colonial project (Saini, 2019).

Confronting the rise of racism, however, is a speculative fiction (SF) project known as 'Octavia's Brood' – based on the works of the first notable African American female and queer SF writer, Octavia Butler. Butler challenged the hitherto predominantly white cis-gender masculine and Euro-American voices and futures, operating within the canon of Western SF. Butler died early, while still in her fifties (in 2006), but she – and Samuel Delany, a magnificent fellow African American writer of SF since the nineteen sixties and author of 'Racism and Science Fiction' – have inspired a new generation of writers of 'colour,' who have subsequently burst onto the Western SF scene. This (and Black Lives Matter et al.) has spurred on the development of an Afro-futurism/African Futurisms movement, along with anthologies for 'social justice' movements that challenges the dominant white status quo, such as **Octavia's Brood** (Thomas, 2016, who was also editor for the ground-breaking **Dark Matters** anthology series). As explored in more detail below, the anthology objective was to 'bend the arc of history' towards social justice. How, though, can we bend downwards the steepening arc of climate change?

The Rise of Climate Fiction (or 'Cli-Fi')

In 2017, Amitav Ghosh, the Indian novelist, published his polemic **The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable**, questioning why there was so little climate fiction around. Since then, as the news has increasingly focused on massive climate events such as global wildfires, collapsing ice-shelves and so forth, climate has rapidly become a focus of concern for many writers. Brown (2019) asserts 'cli-fi' can help readers adjust emotionally to the anxiety and trauma of climate change and learn new, adaptive ways of responding. Barnwell, Stroud, and Watson (2020) point out, however, that 'climate anxiety' as a coined term, is dangerously close to medicalising a normal socio-emotional response to the climate crisis – and is out of kilter with many experiences in the Global South, where this has been a lived reality for years and challenging ongoing neo-colonial power asymmetries are a far more pressing focus (Adams, 2021; Iheka, 2018).

The Guardian recently published a growing list of '*stories to save the world – the new wave of climate fiction*' (26th June 2021). One of these climate novels won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2019: **The Overstory** by Richard Powers, which led to significant mainstream prominence. In this book, a researcher is initially ridiculed for her 'unscientific' thesis that trees are both conscious and communal – science that may well have been preceded within colonised and discarded indigenous belief systems, around the valued vitality (and interdependence) of life within the natural world, inextricably including us (Mzwakali, 2021).

Streeby (2018) gives an overview of some of the more recent climate futures within fiction. One of the quintessential science fiction stories centring climate changes was

the **Parable** series; set to be a trilogy, but sadly incomplete, due to the premature death of the author, Octavia Butler, in early 2006. The **Parable** books (**Sower**, 1993 and **Talents**, 1998) highlight a burning California in the mid 2020's, where a white demagogue US President is pursuing a 'Make America Great Again' agenda. The books highlight the need for adaptability and building sustainable communities of mutual aid which (in this case) are unified by a new, enlightened, and inclusive 'religion', called 'Earthseed'.

The pre-eminent living climate SF writer is Kim Stanley Robinson (2021a; b), with his latest novel being **The Ministry of the Future** (2020). He spoke at the United Nations' COP26 in Glasgow in November 2021, and argued the time must be **now**, for economic overhaul of an out of control neo-liberal capitalist system, rebalancing private with public resourcing – but which also addresses global inequalities, and the survival demands of going green, alongside required carbon sequestration of the atmosphere.

Finally, closer to home, Nnedi Okorafor's **Lagoon** (2014) establishes a post-oil, post-capitalist society in Nigeria, where a better world is built after 'aliens' have made contact – and awoken the old gods and spirits of the earth (Jue, 2016). A new world emerges where indigenous belief systems are married with technology, a process coined by Ian McDonald as '*jujutech*' (Adenjunmobi, 2016). The reclamation of indigenous (African) epistemologies constitutes a narrative 'push back' – a decolonising turn – against the colonising role of materialistic science and white western science fiction (Rieder, 2012; Whyte, 2018; March-Russell, 2021; Wood and Lavender, 2021).

The Unequal Story

As the SF author William Gibson was reputed to have said, towards the end of the last century: "*The future has arrived – it's just not evenly distributed yet.*" So, too, the climate story, where the emissions of the Global North (and the richest) have exerted devastating impacts, particularly on the Global South, where resources to both survive and manage this are considerably less, due in no small part to long histories of colonisation and exploitation. Neo-colonial style extractions persist within international corporations and financial systems, such that the United Nations News (Alston, 2019) initially reported: 'World Faces Climate Apartheid Risk.'

Given this burning inequality, climate change and climate justice are clearly both intertwined concepts (Ingle, 2020). But where are the voices and stories from those most impacted, in the Global South (Ingle and Jafre, 2019)? There is a form of narrative inequality at work, in terms of whose voices and stories are heard – and under what conditions, by those with the power to either amplify or censor.

As Unigwe (2019) points out, conservation and climate activism within Africa has been operating long before Greta Thunberg, with Wangari Maathai and her Green Belt Movement being the most significant fore-runner in twentieth century Kenya (and beyond). Unigwe highlights multiple and current others too – but international corporations, allied by degrees of state capture, act with increasing neo-colonial impunity too. Eco-activists and indigenous ‘protectors’ have a history of being murdered, particularly in the global South, which is now reaching levels ‘akin to war zones’ (Watts, 2019).

The Story Seeds of Water Must Fall (Nick Wood/NW)

As the world burns, from Canada, California, Siberia, and the Arctic, to the Amazon and the east coast of Australia, it is quite clear that the days of reckoning for our planet are right here, right now (Klein, 2019). One critical resource constantly being depleted in many areas – through drought and misuse – is global fresh water (Subramaniam, 2018). Yet, in 2019, the ‘financialization’/commodification of water has begun – water is seen as the ‘new oil’ – it has been put onto stock markets and is presented as a tradable commodity, not a human right (Wood, 2020b).

Given Cape Town’s threatened *Day Zero* in 2018 (i.e. the city reportedly running out of water), my initial premise was *what if water was completely controlled by western private companies?* This has in fact happened partially previously, seen in the *Cochabamba Water War* in Bolivia – where the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had insisted on the country selling their water to a private multi-national, who ramped up prices to unaffordable levels for the majority of the country’s populace (Barlow, 2007; Shiva, 2016).

Water Must Fall: Trying to Create a Just Future

Water Must Fall is set in 2048, in drought stricken Kwa-Zulu Natal and California in ‘*The Federated States of America*.’ The central question facing the four main characters in this book is: *In a desiccating world, who gets to drink?* I (NW) adopted a rotating three character chapter sequence throughout, with two of the characters focusing on Southern Africa, one on the ‘Federated States’ – a deliberately chosen name to highlight that nation states, however powerful, are subject to change, fracture and even, dissolution. What would a world without borders look like – given nature has no borders?

Within the SF sub-genres, I would characterise **Water Must Fall** as African **Solarpunk** (Cameron, 2019), where ‘social justice is survival technology’. This genre focuses on resistance against a global system that has proven to be toxic to the planet – i.e. neo-liberal racialised capitalism – and replacing it with a greener and more just way of living, including the reclamation of indigenous rights and knowledges (Suffla and Seedat, 2020).

There is indeed a growing movement for Indigenous Co-Futurisms, alongside attempts to 'decolonise' SF (Dillon and Marquez, 2021; Langer, 2011; Killick, 2021).

The ending of **Water Must Fall** involves a community – the Imbali Collective 'Save our Water' (SOW) – being faced with forcible relocation, to make way for 'gentrification' of their land. Dispossession of a vulnerable, disadvantaged community has multiple painful resonances, which can only echo down the corridors of a long apartheid history (SAHO, 2016). The Imbali SOW survival response involved a considered land occupation, as well as legally pushing for the recognition of historically original land rights and the granting of personhood status to the natural world, à la the *Ganges* in India. ***If a company can be a person, why not a river?*** (In **Water Must Fall**, it's the *Msunduzi*.)

Opponents of land reclamation always point out the dangers of land occupation, especially to the Zimbabwean *Land Occupation Movement* at the turn of the century – but a way must be found to address the massive (and iniquitous) resource inequalities between the 'privileged' and the 'precarious.' Rice et al (2021) highlights the need for reparations, repatriation, allowed mobility and land and water access, in a future which embraces all – and where no one is expendable. A reclaiming of the public commons, such as land and water, over private wealth and a system that continues to carry hegemonic and exclusionary structural violence against the majority of the world's inhabitants (Gilbert, 2014; Shiva, 2020). Nothing less than a new and more just world order is required if we are not just to survive, but to survive compassionately and sustainably, despite the climate depredations that still lie ahead (Weintrobe, 2021; Zambrano-Barragan, 2021).

For what sort of world do we want our children/relatives/loved ones to live in? (Hall, 2015). There can be no just and good future, without a just system – which means oppressive institutional systems and mechanisms that foster exploitation and damage – yet are often hidden and vociferously defended, such as white, toxic, capitalist patriarchies – need to be dismantled or reconstructed, for a fairer way of operating, that respects both life, and what is left of the planet (Ingle, 2020, Ingle and Jafre, 2019; Wright, 2010; Wall, 2019).

Speculative fiction has a history of involvement with issues of justice, more recently in the anthology **Octavia's Brood** (Imarisha, 2015, Imarisha and Brown, 2015). As the co-editor Adrienne Maree Brown stated:

"This is why I write science fiction (after spending so long in social justice work). To cultivate radical imagination...All organizing is science fiction, all efforts to bend the arc of the future towards justice, is science fictional behaviour. How we do that work

really matters. We are all interconnected. Denying that, we die. Surrendering to that, we live. Let us all live.” (Brown, 2015)

Speculative fiction (SF) can help us live and relearn our relationship to life in all its manifestations. As the Nigerian-American SF author, Akwaeke Emezi says *“My job in the revolution is as a storyteller...”* (Anderson, 2021). (Their latest book, **The Death of Vivek Oji** (2020) won the Nommo Awards for best African SFF novel in 2021.)

Yet stories are not enough in themselves. We need to **act** to build a better future, given the forces that continue to carry investments in the deadly status quo (Rice et al., 2021).

We need to act now.

The future is already here.

The Longer Hot Story: Day Zero has Been Here, Long Before April 2018 **Narrative Justice Beyond Water Must Fall**

I have always been aware, as I write, that I carry the privilege to be able to write – not least gathered while growing up white under apartheid (Gibson, 2016). I have looked for ways to try and decant some of this privilege – not from ‘white guilt’ – but in recognition of the need for whiteness to be ‘dismantled’ (Helms, 2020; Wood, 2021). A more just and equitable society can only come at some required and necessary cost, to those who have the most (and often far more than they need). Ecocide and climate litigation; climate (and slave/colonial) reparations, land and water restitutions and renewed/legitimised climate justice narratives – led by those most impacted – are potential ways forward for a new world order (Zambrano-Barragan, 2021).

Narrative inequality is the use of wealth and power to promote dominant discourses and marginalise those who may resist these – and who may lack the resources to amplify their voices and ensure they can be heard. Narrative justice is the movement to both challenge the ‘dangers of a single story’ (Adichie, 2009), as well as moving beyond traditional gatekeepers and finding ways to access and highlight marginalised and oppressed voices and stories.

In researching local community organisations addressing water issues in South Africa, I found a group that appeared to embody the Imbali SOW Collective of **Water Must Fall** – the African Water Commons Collective (AWCC: Scheba et al., 2021). One of the founder members of the AWCC is Faeza Meyer and, given she has been at the forefront of the **real** fight for many years now – i.e. to secure just water access, for families within her community – we agreed it may be helpful if we could highlight her

climate struggle story too. This, after all, is the *real* hard story.

Faeza Meyer (FM), along with others in the AWCC, have been at the coal-face of fighting climate change, particularly the issues surrounding one of the most valuable resources on earth, required by all life – water. Koni Benson from the University of the Western Cape (another co-founder of the AWCC) has been involved alongside Faeza and others, to raise attention for this struggle. Together they have written several articles, analysing Faeza’s use of community writing (described below) as a means of resistance, survival and justice seeking (Benson and Meyer, 2015, a. b). The plan is to publish the full account as a book, titled **Writing out Loud: Interventions in the History of a Land Occupation**.

My Ongoing Struggle for Home and Water (Faeza Meyer)

“Activism chose me” is something I liked to say, when asked why I do what I do.

In 2011, in Cape Town – at the age of 35 – I experienced homelessness for the first time and what happened next, changed my life forever. I occupied land at Kapteinsklop, Cape Town, with 5000 other people. The occupation turned into a war zone between police and the community, and most people were forced to leave. Alongside others – homeless like me – we had no choice, but to stay. The occupation lasted for 18 months, before the high court finally evicted us.

This was where my activism started. We were allowed to live there, but not to put up a structure. What does that even mean? Am I allowed to live there and die? This hit me hard, I could not believe that 17 years into our “democracy” we were literally left out in the cold. Since we had no experience or knowledge about what the law says regarding our situation, we were forced to go out and what we thought at the time was “to find help” – but today I know it was to equip and empower ourselves to be able to push back and to fight, so that we can be seen as human beings, with human rights just like everyone else.

I started writing down the events of the day on pieces of paper, with the hope that if we do find legal help, we would have something that can explain what happened, with who and when.

We would sit around the fire at night, and everyone would contribute, as we documented what happened for the day. Some days were sad, like when law enforcement would come to the field to remove or destroy our shelters, and their name tags would be covered with insulation tape, so that we don’t see it. They would treat us like ghosts, like they don’t see us – or like we were invisible. No answers to any of our

questions, they just came to do their jobs, even if that meant leaving us out in the rain, with no cover. They even considered a trolley covered with a blanket a ‘structure’ and would take that away.

Around the fire, this would spark conversation that would last for hours. Every day, we went to find “help” – and, even though most people went back to the backyard or room they were renting after they were forced off the field – many of them still came back daily, to support the remaining occupiers. We attended public forums, meetings, workshops, and anything else that we thought would bring us closer to the answers we were looking for.

Writing became a tool of resistance and a way of reflecting on the day and then making sense of it later. It was often my sanity during all the frustration, because no matter if no one ever hears me or reads what I wrote, I had the chance to express myself and that helped me.

One specific community activist course that was run by an NGO called International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG) captured my attention. The workshop was run by two different people, who both became key figures in my activism and helped me understand the bigger picture. The course brought together leading activists from across the city of Cape Town and Witzenberg, a more rural area. It was like stepping into a world I never knew existed, the other side of the most unequal city in the world. The NGO provided us with political education. We learned about the different spheres of government, the unequal capitalist structure of our society and we were encouraged to get organized.

This was very empowering, but for me the most empowering thing that kept me going back was learning from the experiences and struggles of other activists that were attending the course. Learning about how they dealt with their evictions or how they planned to deal with the eviction they were facing. This was how we knew there was a housing crisis. After we were all finally evicted, I have since moved to an informal settlement – and now I’m living in a backyard in Beacon Valley, an area on the Cape Flats.

In 2014, the city of Cape Town started installing blue top water management devices in our area. The device was installed without most residents’ permission, and we even heard of minors signing on behalf of their parents and grandparents. The first shock for residents, the majority of whom were pensioners, was that their water was switched off and they did not understand what was happening. This was the beginning of a nightmare. Those who signed and agreed to accept the device were promised that

their arrears would be scrapped, that they would be able to manage their water usage better, that they would get 350 litres of water per day for free.

Through our own research we found out that this was all lies. On the cities' own website, we found a video explaining that the new blue top water management device will provide 200 litres for free and 150 litres at a 'low cost'. People were not able to "manage" their water usage because the 350L was not enough for the amount of people living on the property, since we live in overcrowded conditions – with up to 4 generations living in one house, and often more than one backyard shack with tenants. This makes the average household size 15. This makes it impossible to live with 350L of water per day. If that's not bad enough the device itself was often faulty and had to be fixed or replaced, leaving families without water for days. We started a collective of water justice activists that is now known as the African Water Commons Collective (AWCC). Our main slogan is "Education for Total Liberation," and we support the building of self-organization through assisting with establishing more local Water Action Committees (WAC's) in the various communities/organizations that we work with, or that have requested our support.

We thought about ways to expose what's happening, without telling people that they should not accept the blue top Water Management Devices, aka on the ground, known as 'Weapons of Mass Destruction'. We designed an easy to facilitate workshop that anyone can do with any amount of people. We called it the 'Mapping out Your Water Needs' workshop. People were asked to map out their own daily water needs vs the 350L that the city was offering. This became a powerful awareness raising and mobilizing tool. We also encouraged people to write up their own stories, and although we assisted with the writing, it remained them writing their own stories.

We noticed that when we exposed the suffering, it embarrassed our officials and then they would come running – however this was only for individuals that could make some noise. It also makes a big difference when people see that they are not alone, that the same things are happening in other areas. So we share these stories across communities. A good example of this would be in 2015 when the Witzenberg municipality received 25 million to install the blue top water management device, but the community was **already** aware of the impacts of this device and protested in their thousands, to stop the municipality from installing the devices.

At the African Water Commons Collective, our main slogan is Water for Life. We framed it in that way because we, as the working class, are the poor people who struggle the most with climate change, even though we are not the ones who are causing the pollution – and we are not the ones who are wasting water. Yet we are still the ones that are at the hard end of that stick.

There's no alternative for water. If we don't have houses, we can live under a box. If we don't have electricity, we can use candles, there are alternatives to these kinds of things. But if we sit back and let things happen the way the city of Cape Town or government or capitalism wants us to, then COVID will be nothing, compared to the amount of people that will die without water.

Water for Life!

Yours in the Struggle (FM)

This paper contributes to literature on the nexus between Speculative Fiction (SF) and climate change, with particular value added by the integration of climate privileged and climate precariat perspectives. Further, the connection of fictional and living stories of activism addresses the need for climate justice centred transitions, which engages the experiences of those who are at the margins of power and privilege. Future collaborative justice orientated work should focus on ways to materialise new and better ways of living on the Earth, with radically redistributed power and resource structures, decolonial in full intent (Bulhan, 2015). Not just 'green living,' but ways that both acknowledge and harness ancient wisdoms, traditional knowledges and indigenous voices and rights as well (Shiva, 2020). For, as the isiZulu saying for uBuntu goes: 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu': ***I am, because we are.***

For the creation and manifestation of better stories of the future, rather than the myth of eternal economic growth.

There are always alternatives.

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