

# “HOPE TO DO SOME GOOD, NO MATTER HOW FUCKED UP YOU ARE”: ECOTERRORISM, TRAUMA AND ECOLOGICAL AFFECT IN *THE MINISTRY FOR THE FUTURE*

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**ABSTRACT:** As climate change becomes increasingly evident, public awareness has grown and mobilized into the environmental movement. Familiar concepts like global warming, ocean acidification, and mass extinction shape a charged emotional landscape where love for nature coexists with fear and despair. This tension contributes to the rise of radical environmental activism, driven by disillusionment with ineffective policies and deep ecology's biocentric philosophy. At its extreme, environmental direct action can culminate in ecoterrorism, defined as environmentally motivated violence or threats aimed at symbolic targets. The emotional balance underpinning environmentalism is increasingly unstable, shaped by eco-anxiety and climate trauma. This paper explores ecological affect through an ecocritical reading of the depiction of ecoterrorism in Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future*, examining how climate trauma fuels radical responses and how such responses are portrayed, problematized, or legitimized in fiction.

**RESUMEN:** A medida que el cambio climático se hace cada vez más evidente, la conciencia pública crece y se moviliza en el movimiento ecologista. Conceptos familiares como el calentamiento global, la acidificación de los océanos y la extinción masiva conforman un paisaje emocional cargado, en el que el amor por la naturaleza coexiste con el miedo y la desesperación. Esta tensión contribuye al auge del activismo medioambiental radical, impulsado por la desilusión ante

las políticas ineficaces y la filosofía biocéntrica del ecologismo profundo. En su extremo, la acción directa ecologista puede culminar en ecoterrorismo, definido como violencia o amenazas motivadas por el medio ambiente y dirigidas contra objetivos simbólicos. El equilibrio emocional que sustenta el ecologismo es cada vez más inestable y está determinado por la ansiedad ecológica y el trauma climático. Este artículo explora el afecto ecológico a través de una lectura ecocrítica del ecoterrorismo en la ficción especulativa, en particular en *The Ministry for the Future*, de Kim Stanley Robinson, examinando cómo el trauma climático alimenta respuestas radicales y cómo tales respuestas son retratadas, problematizadas o legitimadas en la ficción.

## INTRODUCTION

The environmental movement has gained traction as the evidence of climate change becomes increasingly clear and as the wider public becomes aware of the seriousness of the consequences of this environmental breakdown. Key concepts in environmental science such as global warming, the acidification of the oceans and even the sixth extinction are now widespread knowledge, and global mobilization, both in the social and political spheres, is taking place, aided by a particular affective landscape in which the positive affects generated by closeness to nature coexist with the negative affects that the climate crisis inevitably brings forth. Radicalization, in this context, is also rising in numbers (Döring; Gaborit). The ideology of deep ecology, which promotes a biocentric philosophy, together with disappointment about the failure of many environmental measures and the lack of government action, has resulted in the rise of more radical environmental justice groups such as Extinction Rebellion or Just Stop Oil, that believe that the environmental threat has reached a critical point, necessitating direct action. In its most extreme form, it also may manifest in threats of ecoterrorism, which the FBI defines as environmentally motivated violence or threats aimed at symbolic targets (Long 3-4). The affective landscape that characterizes the environmental movement is getting increasingly precarious, as ecoanxiety and climate trauma become more and more the affective landscape of the environmentally aware (see Albrecht).

For the purpose of defining what ecological affect is and what affects comprise the contemporary environmental movement, this paper focuses on an ecocritical reading of ecoterrorism: from civil disobedience to sabotage to violent felonies and murder, how is

ecoterrorism defined, how can environmental action reach that stage and what purpose does its portrayal in speculative fiction serve. Through a close reading of Kim Stanley Robinson's 2020 novel *The Ministry for the Future*, a reflection on climate change and environmental activism in the near future, this article analyzes how ecoterrorism emerges in the fictional context of heightened negative affects, including the umbrella of climate trauma. It also examines how ecoterrorism is codified both from the margins and through the academic lens of ecocriticism, with the intention to study how radicalization in the climate movement is constructed and depicted in speculative fiction.

## ENVIRONMENTALISM AND AFFECT

Though it would be reductive to equate the environmental movement solely with its Western manifestation (for more about the development of environmentalism through a de-centralized lens, see Deloughrey, Huggan and Tiffin, and Nixon), this article will refer to the movement in the United States both because of the inevitable limits of scope and because of its aim to connect environmental feelings with terrorism, given how pervasive the fear of terrorism is in the sociopolitical landscape of the United States. The theory and analysis provided here will focus on the manifestations of affect and the building of environmental awareness as they take form in the United States and as they are reflected in its fiction, while not losing sight of the ramifications of the union of colonial and climate violence in the global context.

The modern environmental movement in the United States emerged in the 1960s, driven by the rise of ecology, public awareness of visible pollution (Jamieson 20), and the holistic perspective inspired by early satellite images and the space race (Heise 22). Ecocritical sources (Garrard; Lousley; Grove) highlight Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) as pivotal in shaping environmentalism, emphasizing the interconnectivity of nature and human life, and advocating for the "politicization of ecology" through a blend of scientific data and literary expression (Lousley 157). Carson's text showcases the importance of affect in the development of an environmental consciousness (Houser 22), mixing scientific data with lyrical narrative language that contrasts gothic descriptions of the loss of nature and pastoral depictions of unpolluted environments. Carson's book is, of course, not the first manifestation of environmental consciousness in the US:

there is a long tradition of nature writing tracing back to American pastoral (Garrard), and environmental philosophy is greatly indebted to the proto-ecocritical insights of Emerson and Thoreau, among others (Westling 26). But Carson's book was key to catalyze global consciousness into the formation of a popular environmental movement (Deloughrey 327), and it exemplifies succinctly the affective attachment that will come to characterize the environmental movement: the positive affects of an idyllic encounter with nature, as well as the tension of the negative affects caused by the threat of the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of natural environments.

The combination of affects that underlie the environmental movement grew more complicated as time passed. Since the 1960s, environmental mobilization grew through events like Earth Day (1970), the rise of Greenpeace, anti-nuclear campaigns, and the formation of Green parties (McCormick viii). From the 1990s, climate justice and youth-led movements such as Fridays For Future have further transformed public concern into social and political pressure. The response, however, has come short of environmentalists' expectations and demands. Despite its history of conservation policies (viii) and symbolic actions like Al Gore's run as Vice President in the Clinton administration after the publishing of his book *Earth in the Balance*, the United States' government position has been one of obstruction and denial, and its policy has been markedly anti-environmental (Urpelainen and Van der Graaf 840). The country's refusal to join negotiations towards reducing emissions and keeping global warming to 2 degrees Celsius started as soon as the first Conference of the Parties in 1995 (Jamieson 39) and has continued to interfere in the reaching of global accords, while denialism becomes a core part of American politics (81). While some progress, such as ozone layer recovery, has occurred (43), global action remains insufficient. The affective landscape of the environmental movement today is characterized by an increasingly negative outlook on the future, one that takes the shape of feelings of anxiety, fear, and even trauma.

The underbelly of the environmental movement, as of all social movements, is emotion: "movements move, albeit in differing directions, through evocation and provocation: that is, through emotion" (Eyerman 52). The affective landscape of environmentalism has shaped its history, and understanding its current state will determine the actions of those who identify with the movement. Building on precedents such as affective ecocriticism (Bladow and Ladino), Seymour's notion of environmental affect as the entanglement

of ecological and queer affects, and Buell's "ecoglobalist affect" linking place to planetary scale, I propose ecological affect as the subset of environmental affect most directly tied to the formation of environmental consciousness and activism. Whereas environmental affect, according to Seymour, encompasses the broad spectrum of feelings arising from encounters with nature, ecological affect designates those emotions—grief, anger, hope, belonging—that generate political awareness and collective mobilization (Merola 32). This cluster has enabled environmentalism since the 1970s to solidify into an affective landscape, shaping both the emotional texture of the movement and its capacity for action.

Positive feelings such as belonging, hope and joy are essential for recognizing human interconnection with nature and engaging in activism. Yet negative affect is more likely to propel action: in Brosch's study of affect and emotion as drivers of climate action, he reveals that "negative affect was moreover the largest predictor of individual willingness to engage in climate change mitigation behaviors" (15). Historically, social movements have been driven by anger, frustration, shame, and guilt—emotions that spur protest and public displays of discontent (Eyerman 68). Today's worsening climate change, pandemics, and global risks intensify such feelings, particularly eco-anxiety, which Lafontaine defines as arising not only from existing threats but from the continuous projection of future risks (34). Climate change as a hyperobject (Morton) makes this anxiety inescapable, touching our very conditions of existence. Yet anxiety can be productive: "we have anxiety because we care" (Morton 152), and this has the potential to motivate resistance. Stanley et al. explain that affect has both valence (pleasantness) and activation: some emotions inhibit action, others propel it (1). Anxiety induces movement in the avoidance of threat, while anger is activating and associated with approach (1). Anger is a particularly apt response to the ecological crisis, with the potential of being "a healthy and adaptive form of expressive coping" (3): anger is "not only the facilitator of collective action but also an emotion that can help disadvantaged and marginalized groups re(claim) their agency" (Antadze 25). While the state of the climate emergency is not positive, as is clear by the growth in negative responses, it can also forge bonds, anticipate danger, and motivate preemptive resistance, making it central to transforming fear into the ground for collective action (Lafontaine 40).

## **THE MINISTRY FOR THE FUTURE, ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION AND ECOTERRORISM**

As we move on to the analysis, it is worth introducing the book that will be discussed and its author, to explain why they are relevant not only to this paper on ecological affect, but on the wider context of the environmental movement. *The Ministry for the Future* was published in 2020 by Kim Stanley Robinson, a household name in science fiction known for his descriptive and thoroughly researched speculative scenarios, which often deal with ecological themes. At its core, this novel is a utopian speculative projection, taking the material conditions of the present and, through geopolitical and social action in the very near future (the novel starts as early as 2025), mitigating, stopping and reversing the effects of climate change in order to have a livable future. The Ministry of the title is an international political group, established during the 2025 Paris Agreement, tasked with climate action. The whole novel follows this pursuit, as the Ministry takes different actions to alleviate climate change as well as dealing with the many setbacks and complications that come with trying to establish global change in the era of the Anthropocene. *The Ministry for the Future* is a well-researched attempt to make sense of climate conditions and propose solutions, drawing on real-life policy proposals and scientific theories—from a carbon currency tied to mitigation, to geoengineering in Alaska, and the rewilding of half the Earth under the Half Earth movement.<sup>1</sup>

This book is another iteration of the author to use the science fiction genre to imagine better worlds, and is, as Canavan et al. say,

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of a carbon currency grew out of 1990s debates on tradable carbon permits and early 2000s proposals for personal carbon trading, where carbon allowances could circulate like money. Since then, scholars and policymakers have expanded the idea into visions of carbon-backed coins and global currencies, framing carbon units as a new monetary standard to align economic exchange with climate goals (Singhal and Gupta 219). The idea of geoengineering—defined by the Royal Society of London as the “deliberate large-scale manipulation of the planetary environment to counteract anthropogenic climate change” (Shepherd 1)—emerged in the mid-20th century, when scientists speculated about modifying weather and planetary systems. Early discussions in the 1960s and 1970s (notably by Soviet climatologist Mikhail Budyko) proposed stratospheric aerosol injection to counteract warming from greenhouse gases (Jamieson 204). The Half Earth concept comes from biologist E. O. Wilson’s 2016 “Half-Earth: Our Planet’s Fight for Life”, which proposes that half of the Earth’s surface should be left to human-free wilderness as an effort to preserve biodiversity.

part of his career "in service of the Utopian form" (203). Robinson's work has long explored the potential of speculative fiction for the discussion of humanity's entanglement with its ecosystem. Through the Mars Trilogy's debates on terraforming and ecological ethics, the Capitol Trilogy's focus on science, technology and politics, *New York 2140*'s climate-induced flooding, and *The Ministry for the Future*'s sociopolitical and economic response to climate change, Robinson's oeuvre foregrounds the ecological crisis as a central narrative concern, using speculative settings to interrogate the limits of anthropocentrism. This situates him at the forefront of cli-fi, a growing body of narrative work that focuses on climate change and the ramifications of the Anthropocene (Goodbody and Johns-Putra 1). Dorson points to the importance of the recent surge in cli-fi literature in generating knowledge about the climate crisis: "Like scientific models, fiction about climate change helps us understand the consequences of global warming" (284). Robinson's work goes a step further than representing the environmental crisis; it uses a particular combination of "scientific and technical speculation, social, political and economic critique and depiction of the everyday lives of people as they are affected by climate change" (Pak 107) to depict present conditions and speculate on futures where change is possible (Dorson 296). Robinson himself describes his work as presenting "permaculture," an alternative to utopia that emphasizes process over perfection:

We should take the political and aesthetic baggage out of the term utopia. I've been working all my career to try to redefine utopia in more positive terms—in more dynamic terms. People tend to think of utopia as a perfect end-stage, which is, by definition, impossible and maybe even bad for us. And so maybe it's better to use a word like permaculture, which not only includes permanent but also permutation. Permaculture suggests a certain kind of obvious human goal, which is that future generations will have at least as good a place to live as what we have now. (Robinson, in Canavan et al. 202)

In a world that, according to the author himself, veers either into utopia or catastrophe, Robinson aims, through his fiction, to create spaces for imagining better worlds, a way of transforming our reality into a better one; it is "rooted in the realities of current corporate capitalism and aware of its critiques, but aware also of how to render corporate capitalism useful to a global project of climate

action” (Mikes and New 229). In its effort to showcase its sociocultural context in a realistic manner, Robinson chooses to include many less than utopian aspects, including the failures of ecological policies, the refusal of the economic elite to relinquish their neoliberal hegemony, or the rise of ecoterrorism.

Ecoterrorism, for the FBI, denotes “the use or threatened use of violence of a criminal nature against innocent victims or property by an environmentally oriented, subnational group for environmental-political reasons, or aimed at an audience beyond the target, often of a symbolic nature” (Long 3-4). The word ecoterrorism is a recent invention, according to Lawrence Buell in “What is Called Ecoterrorism”, but the actions of ecoterrorism date much earlier—as early as the 1970s, which, as explored before, is the start of the environmental movement in the US—and the criminalization of the act dates back to the 1980s (Buell 158). Ecoterrorism is an ambiguous label, as “[d]efinitions of ecoterrorism can be as vague as ‘any crime committed in the name of saving nature’” (Woodhouse 486). More often, what is called ecoterrorism involves acts of civil disobedience, which was proposed by Thoreau and refers to “a morally justified rebellion against an injustice caused by the state, even if that state is built on the rule of law” (Lederer et al. 3). The reformulation of acts of vandalism, property destruction and general civil disobedience—the spectrum of ecotage, or ecological sabotage—happened while groups like the Animal Liberation Front and Earth First! were in their height, in the 70s and 80s, as the FBI hardened the definition of terrorism to include attacks on property (Long 7). Mass media reinforced the terrorism label, since “[t]errorist acts command greater public and media attention” (Wagner 28), and use of the term intensified after 9/11: “There is a marked increase in the use of terms related to fear since early 2001. This includes direct references to ecoterror, ecoterrorists, and ecoterrorism to report on ecotage” (33). The ability of the media to influence society’s perception of risk is powerful, as it appeals directly to emotions: Sarah Ahmed argues that terrorism is a concept constructed affectively, executed to strike fear into the hearts of the population (128), and therefore the defense against terrorism, and all the policies that get imposed in the name of counter-terrorism, are an act of love. This extreme dichotomy of affect gets spread from government agencies to the general public, who is called to action appealing to its emotions: “The role of citizens as police is translated as an imperative to love, in which love becomes the foundation of community, as well as the guarantor of our future” (134).

Ecoterrorism, or the sabotaging actions that are labeled as such, is condemned affectively, but it also emerges through affective relations. In specific, Diehm points out to the connection between ecoterrorism and the deep ecologist notion of the ecological self, proposed by Arne Naess in 1989, an "identification-as-belonging" (Diehm 64) through which one becomes aware of the interconnection between the self and nature. This identification allows environmentalists to filter ecological damage through their affective filter, such that harm to the environment is harm done to humans: "if nature is an extended part of oneself, then to protect it is to protect one's Self, and thus property destruction on nature's behalf is as permissible as property destruction on behalf of oneself" (67). Through this sense of moral high law, environmentalists find justification for direct action, even to the extreme of violence. The influence of negative affects involved in climate action, particularly anger, when filtered through the ecological self, allows for the rise of violent forms of action, which are regarded as ecoterrorism. This argumentation is reflected directly in *The Ministry for the Future*, as people that ideologically align with ecoterrorists argue in their favor: "They're killing the world. People, animals, everything. We're in a mass extinction event, and there are people trying to do something about it. You call them terrorists, but it's the people you work for who are the terrorists" (Robinson 104). While recognizing that ecoterrorism, and even the terrorism label is not precisely defined, and is more a framing, I will use it in the analysis to refer to all acts of violent direct action portrayed in the book, including violence to people and infrastructures, since the purpose is to see the rise of radicalization in worsening climate conditions and the way violent actions for the environment are regarded and discussed in fiction.

*The Ministry for the Future* is not, in itself, a book about terrorism. Its main focalizer is Mary, the president of the Ministry, and as such the narrative follows the Ministry's attempts at policing the climate catastrophe. But, as environmentally focused books recently reflect—Richard Power's *The Overstory*, J. R. Burgmann's *Children of Tomorrow*, Jeff VanderMeer's *Hummingbird Salamander* to name some—a complete discussion of climate catastrophe and the modern environmental movement brings forth the issue of ecoterrorism. Not to introduce the possibility of ecoterrorism in a book so committed to the faithful representation of the sociopolitical reality of the climate crisis would be myopic since, despite the low numbers of violent acts by environmental activists today, the worsening of the conditions of

climate change alongside government inaction points towards the likely development of ecoterrorism in the near future (Spadaro). The book introduces three main agents to explore the different ways in which terrorism can happen in the context of climate action: Frank, an individual who suffered through the extreme heatwave in India; the Children of Kali, an organized underground ecoterrorist group made of people who experienced the same heatwave; and a “black wing” of the Ministry, an illegal but government organized operation.

In this last case, the line between terrorism and environmental action is intentionally blurred. Early in the book, Badim, chief of staff of the Ministry, tells Mary that there exists “a secret division of the ministry, working in secret to forward the cause” (Robinson 115). They disagree on what constitutes terrorism: Mary argues it encompasses actions “that are maybe illegal, or in some senses ill-advised. Undiplomatic” (115), while Badim counters, “terrorism means killing innocent people to scare other innocent people into doing what you want” (120). This tension reflects the contested nature of ecoterrorism, which can be understood in two main ways. Mary’s view aligns with the FBI, which in 2002 broadened domestic terrorism to include attacks on property (Spadaro 65). Her focus on diplomacy and nonviolence is echoed by groups like Fridays For Future, committed to “strategic pacifism” (Malm) and massive public mobilization. Badim, however, asks, “What was the damage before? And did doing some of these things lessen the damage overall? This is what is never clear” (Robinson 119), reflecting a more radical perspective. Badim represents a more militant stance, shared by some activists who argue that radical action has historically catalyzed substantial political change (McLaughlin 4). This debate mirrors long-standing arguments within environmental and civil disobedience movements: whether violence advances a cause or undermines it by alienating the public.

Despite their differences, they do reach a compromise in that what characterizes the illegal actions taken by the Ministry is elicitation of fear, defining terrorism as the act of terrorizing, scaring someone into action:

‘Has anyone been hurt or killed?’  
 ‘Not on purpose.’  
 ‘Has anyone been terrorized?’  
 ‘You mean scared away from burning carbon?’  
 ‘Yes.’

‘I think it might be good if that had happened, don’t you?’ (Robinson 119)

This passage shows how Badim is able to justify ecoterrorism; a negative action can be condoned if it produces a positive consequence and evokes positive emotions, given strong moral grounds. The reasoning for the Ministry's black wing's actions lies in the existence of the ecological self: violent defense of the planet is violent defense of the self. Badim argues: "If you really were from the future, so that you knew for sure there were people walking the Earth today fighting change, so that they were killing your children and all their children, you'd defend your people. In defense of your home, your life, your people, you would kill an intruder" (107). As Ahmed explains, "the accumulation of affective value shapes the surfaces of bodies and worlds" (121): the stronger ecological affect becomes, the more determined the environmental ideology of a person or a group, and therefore the more radical in its actions. In the case of the black wing of the Ministry, the ecological affect only goes as far as using fear as an intimidation maneuver, and this is problematized by the narrative itself. While the book does not make explicit which actions portrayed are done by which group, since it makes use of unnamed narrators and different points of view, one action that can arguably be attributed to them is the hijacking of the World Economic Forum in Davos, a group of the economic elites of the world, "eighty percent male and in the top ten percent of the top one percent when it comes to personal wealth among other attributes" (Robinson 158). Despite its illegality and the fear it caused, the nonviolent operation focused on climate and class reeducation, making it ultimately fruitless. The people sequestered never felt truly threatened, which meant that the reeducation was unsuccessful; as the narrator, a Davos man, says at the end of the chapter: "So, effect of this event on the real world: zero!" (164). The failure of this action, which had at its root a type of ecoterrorism that firmly rejected violence against persons, opens the room for the contemplation of more radical types of ecoterrorism, speculating what shape these actions might take, what their justification might be, and what would be their repercussion.

## **TRAUMA AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFECT**

Robinson's book presents another dimension to the discourse around ecoterrorism, which is the introduction of climate trauma and the impact its negative affects have in navigating climate action. The book opens with a devastating heatwave in India that leaves 20 million people dead in what Mikes and New call "the Indian climate holocaust"

(229). Since “[p]sychological trauma occurs as a response to an event” (Caruth 4), extreme climate events have the potentiality to become traumatic, especially in the local landscape they take place in, as “[t]he traumas we perpetuate in an ecosystem through pollution and unsustainable resource management inevitably return to harm us” (Narine 9). Trauma can happen in both the individual level, through psychological trauma, and the social level, through cultural trauma. The heatwave thus becomes the source of two different types of trauma: psychological trauma, represented through Frank, and the collective trauma of the Indian people. This heatwave is narratively important in more ways than simply the introduction of the effect climate catastrophe will have in the near future: it serves as a catalyzer for the narrative of environmental reform that the book is built on. Though the Ministry had been formed before the heatwave, the account of its establishment does not happen until the third chapter, and instead the first chapter is used to relate the account of the heatwave through the narration of Frank. This serves as a way to locate the reader in the context of climate change through the visceral depiction of the brutality of the weather event; the descriptions of the death of hundreds, the violence of the people trying to survive and the hopelessness of the narrator—seen together in passages like “There was no coolness to be had. All the children were dead, all the old people were dead. People murmured what should have been screams of grief” (Robinson 12)—make for a horrifying account meant to shake the reader and wake them up to the reality of the consequences of global warming. But it also serves in-fiction, as Dorson argues, to mobilize people around the adoption of environmental measures, “catalyzing a chain of geopolitical actions that ultimately comprise a best-case scenario for energy transition” (Dorson 295). The heatwave changes everything: “Civilization had been killed but it kept walking the Earth. [...] The culture of the time was rife with fear and anger, denial and guilt, shame and regret, repression and the return of the repressed [...], the Indian heat wave stayed a big part of it” (Robinson 225).

Furthermore, the ability of this event to generate environmental action also leads to the rise of a flank of radical environmental action, or ecoterrorism. David C. Rapoport argues that modern terrorism can be understood in ‘waves,’ which are catalyzed by one or several notable events (Rapoport). Da Silva explores the existence of an ecoterrorist wave in the United States, that arose in the early 1970s, carried the most of its activities in the 70s and 80s

(mainly through the groups ALF, ELF and Earth First!), and died down in the 90s after the arrest of David Foreman and the FBI's intensification of the persecution of environmental direct action (Da Silva). He signals that "though the 'Eco-Terrorist Wave' is experiencing a contraction phase, there are reasonable reasons to believe that it is just about to get bigger again!" (Da Silva, 210) and I argue that *The Ministry for the Future* stages just this scenario. The Indian heatwave serves as the catalyzer for a new ecoterrorist wave, which increases in number and severity of actions through the length of the narrative, reaching its peak with Crash Day—the day sixty passenger jets crashed down in the span of a few hours—and dies down by the end of the novel as its energy cannot keep momentum and changes in politics and the perception of the public occur (Rapoport). The experience of the heatwave, the traumatizing effect it has on those who lived it as well as the rest of the world—"Everyone felt it. [...] They went through the motions, always in a state of suspended dread, [...] wondering what massive stroke would fall next" (Robinson 224)—and the ineffective attempt at establishing environmental policies by the Ministry creates the conditions for ecoterrorism to rise, and we see how radicalization happens firsthand through Frank and the Children of Kali.

Frank is a person whose climate trauma changes him irreparably and guides the actions for the rest of his life, actions that include ecoterrorism. He experiences PTSD from the mortal heatwave, revisiting the event that marked him in the way that traditional trauma studies categorize as the repetition of the trauma: "I tried to get people inside. I had a water tank in the closet. I hid what I had. The pistol barrel was a little black circle. Everybody was dead" (Robinson 54), Frank recounts in a visit to a psychotherapist. As Smelser explains, the main feature of psychological trauma is "its embeddedness or indelibility in the structure of personality. Once lodged, it will not go away" (Smelser 41). Therefore, Frank becomes his trauma, getting obsessed with the sociopolitical conditions that created the heatwave that almost killed him, and becomes a traumatized ecological self through an affective imbalance. The way Frank deals with this trauma is through ecoterrorism:

He could feel it burning him up: he wanted to kill. Well, he wanted to punish. People had caused the heat wave, and not all people— the prosperous nations, sure, the old empires, sure; they all deserved to be punished. But then also there were particular people, still alive,

who had worked all their lives to deny climate change, to keep burning carbon, to keep wrecking biomes, to keep driving other species extinct. [...] They wrecked the world happily, thinking they were supermen, laughing at the weak, crushing them underfoot. He wanted to kill all those people. In the absence of that, some of them would do. (Robinson 73-74)

The above passage presents ecoterrorism in a new light, finding its justification not only in the self-defense of the ecological self, but also in trauma: through Frank, and later the Children of Kali, ecoterrorism escapes the justification of the higher moral law and enters into the dimension of trauma response. Traumatized individuals are more vulnerable to get involved in processes of radicalization; Gøtzsche-Astrup and Lindekilde point out that “trauma may be a risk factor for violent extremism” (985), and Rolling et al. explore the role of post-traumatic dissociation in radicalization, finding that “the association between psychotrauma and violence is even stronger when post-traumatic dissociative mechanisms are present, and the more severe the trauma, the higher the risk of a dissociative state” (5). The dissociation of Frank is seen in his chapters, where his trauma is described as “swimming in a river. You can get carried out to sea on riptides not of your making, or at least not under your control. [...] You can drown. Frank was drowning” (Robinson 72). His affective landscape is extreme and completely imbalanced: “the views kept changing their perspectives under the changing weather, reflecting the storms within, the fear, the sudden bursts of exhilaration, the black depths of ocean-floor grief” (73). This imbalance of affect due to trauma is what propels him into action: “He wouldn’t live long with that kind of internal stress, he could feel that as surely as he could feel his triphammer heart pumping over-pressured blood through his carotids. Oh yes, high blood pressure. He could feel it trying to burst him from inside” (74).

Though he is unable to kill directly, Frank’s entire life after the heatwave is defined by his trauma, and his actions are the actions of a severely traumatized person. He kidnaps Mary because of her role as the president of the Ministry in order to terrorize her into making more extreme policies, such as “targeted assassinations” (105). In this exchange, his actions are erratic and violent, and he describes his experience as death: “He turned his back to her, kicked the front of her refrigerator, staggered and then went to the window and glanced out, hissing, fuming. ‘I’m a fucking dead person already’” (108). The

extremity of his emotions, born of unresolved psychological damage, dictates his actions, not only in the kidnapping of Mary—which can be categorized as ecoterrorism insofar as its purpose is to scare Mary into taking more extreme environmental actions—but also in his inability to maintain interpersonal relationships or have a normal life. He is living “[a]lways the same place, always the same day” (193). He gives up recovery: “Therapy taught him to give up those hopes. Hope would have to reside in something like this: hope to do some good, no matter how fucked up you are” (72). It is, therefore, his trauma which pushes him to the extreme of ecoterrorism, and not just his environmental awareness.

Frank’s psychological wound stems from the heatwave as an isolated event, as he is a foreigner working as a volunteer in India when it happens. However, for the Indian people, the heatwave is a catastrophic event inside a system of climate oppression, opening their dimension of trauma to both individual and collective. After the heatwave, the Indian government wants to attempt an extreme form of geoengineering to prevent further heatwaves, which the Indian delegate explains as follows

What you need to know is that we are scared here, and angry too. It was Europe and America and China who caused this heat wave, not us. I know we have burned a lot of coal in the last few decades, but it’s nothing compared to the West. And yet we signed the Agreement to do our part. Which we have done. But no one else is fulfilling commitments, no one is paying the developed nations, and now we have this heat wave. (19)

In this quotation we can see the extent to which the Indian people’s characterization of the heatwave goes far beyond the event itself, and into the systemic oppression of its nation. India becomes a traumatized nation, not only because of the event, but because of the narrative around it: what Madigan describes through the “theory of traumatized societies” in which the traumatic event fundamentally changes the society (50). Through this paradigm, the heatwave is not an isolated event, but rather a manifestation of India’s marginalization and colonial violence, and the traumatic response is both as victims of climate change and as victims of the ecological violence on poorer countries: “Post-colonial anger? Post-geoengineering defensiveness? Tired of the Western world condescending to India? All of the above?” (Robinson 144). According to Nixon, India’s vulnerability stems from

the ability of U.S. power in the neoliberal era to disrupt the lives and ecosystems of populations far away, particularly the poor (34), and India's threats to the Ministry are an act of resistance against this colonial legacy.

However, a vulnerable society is "more trauma prone than others" (Smelser 36), and therefore the affects of trauma will be more severe. The Children of Kali is a secret organization born in India from the aftermath of the heatwave, as a consequence of the Indian people's collective trauma. All of India suffers the impact of the heatwave, its people become more aggressive with their demands and pushing the Ministry past what the nation feels are timid and insufficient attempts at policing. Collective trauma reconfigures their identity around their injustices, which are focused on the heatwave but are therefore also intricately woven to a history of colonialism and racism: "We won't allow another heat wave just so we can be in compliance with a treaty written up by developed nations outside of tropics and their dangers" (Robinson 141). But the Children of Kali goes further with their actions than the assertiveness of the "New India" (141). Their purpose is to kill the responsible parties of climate change in order to create real change: "They killed us so we killed them" (137). Their colonial history is an integral part of their radicalization, even rejecting foreigners like Frank since he can not understand their oppression in its entire dimension: "We are the Children of Kali, and you can't be one of us, even if you were here during the catastrophe" (57). India is a traumatized nation, and the Children of Kali get organized to turn their trauma into action.

Of course, not all people traumatized by the heatwave, or any other extreme weather event, become terrorists, as the book acknowledges. Radicalization to the point of terrorism happens among particularly vulnerable people, with sufficient commitment "to the focal goal as to devalue or banish from mind common concerns" (Kruglanski et al. 72) and, above all, a notable "quest for significance" that fosters "a feeling of helplessness and personal insignificance, arousing a significance quest" (75). The narrator explains that the impact of the heatwave and its aftermath is so strong that it changes them forever: "Everyone in our cell had helped to clean up after the heat wave. You don't forget a thing like that. I myself didn't speak for three years. [...] I was killed that week, and had to start over again. [...] Not all of my comrades were human" (137). This language of dehumanization showcases the impact of trauma in the process of identity making, as the traumatic experience can "fundamentally

shape one's self-narrative and sense of self" (Meretoja 27). The traumatic subject in this chapter sees itself as dispossessed of a fundamental part of itself, symbolized in the radical otherization of dehumanization. This loss of humanity aligns with the quest of significance proposed by Kruglanski and reflected in Frank: both characters refer to their experience in the heatwave as a death, symbolizing that loss of the self that can occur in traumatic events. Meretoja states that "working through traumatic experience requires the difficult task of reinterpreting one's self-narrative and trying to renarrate it in less damaging ways that strengthen one's agency" (31), but in Frank's and the Children of Kali's case, the integration of the traumatic event is more damaging; while strengthening their agency by moving them into action, their trauma triggers a process of radicalization that makes this action destructive. The extremity of their trauma makes them reimagine their identity around the environmental and colonial violence that caused the catastrophe, and they incur in terrorist acts in order to reestablish a moral order.

This climate of violence and revenge becomes contagious, escalating in the wave of ecoterrorism, as more people outside of Kali use the same direct action, sharing in the feelings of disappointment, anxiety, and anger. As mentioned before, this culminates in Crash Day, which is described as an inevitability: "Everyone alive knew that not enough was being done [...]. So it was not really a surprise when a day came that sixty passenger jets crashed in a matter of hours" (225). More people join to the ideological quest for environmental justice, to the point where this action cannot be clearly attributed to the original terrorist group, the Children of Kali: "The War for the Earth was real, but the aggressors were nowhere to be found. It was often asserted they were not in India at all, and were not even an Indian organization, but rather an international movement. Kali was nowhere; Kali was everywhere" (227). This demonstrates the importance of affect—the more negative affect, the more violent the action taken—and the spread of negative affect under the conditions of climate change. An anonymous narrator in chapter 69 describes the severity of the global conflicts caused by the environmental crisis, in a long enumeration of events that ends with the conclusion: "Death and chaos, and no one findable to blame. [...] Either everyone's happy or no one is safe. But we're never happy. So we'll never be safe" (334). Showcasing the global dimension of negative affect that both causes and is caused by climate change serves to understand the interdependence of all elements of the ecosystem, and functions as

attrition shelling: this accumulation of negative affect is unsustainable and asks for a narrative resolution.

The wave of ecoterrorism follows the same narrative pattern of buildup into culmination and runs its course to its end, which comes when change has taken place and the public opinion, especially that of radical environmentalists inside the movement, shifts. A previous Child of Kali says to the group: “The big criminals are dead or in jail, or in hiding and rendered powerless. So now if you keep killing, it’s just to kill. Even Kali didn’t kill just to kill, and certainly no human should” (373). Whether terrorism worked or not to reach the state of permaculture found in the end of the book is up to interpretation, although the text states that the effects of Crash Day are palpable: “One message was fairly obvious: stop flying. And indeed many people stopped” (225); “some things were just too dangerous to continue doing” (355). Ecoterrorism is one factor inside a maelstrom of events, catastrophes, policies, setbacks, controversies and social movements that make up the narrative towards optopia described by *The Ministry for the Future*. It would be inaccurate to say it is the only reason for the social and political change at place by the end of the book, as it would be to say it plays no role in these changes. The author’s purpose for the depiction of terrorism in the book is rather descriptive: it would be myopic, given recent theorization of radicalization in the environmental movement (Da Silva 213), not to contemplate the rise of terrorism inside a speculation of the future of the climate crisis. Robinson portrays the potential rise of ecoterrorism in the climate crisis, explaining the sociological, political and affective reasons why ecoterrorism might take place in the first place, and the way climate trauma may shape the actions of the environmentally aware.

## CONCLUSION

Affectivity is something environmental activists have taken into account when organizing direct action: “Is your act a strategic one, or is it merely an inarticulate yell, conveying only rage, alienation, and despair?” (Lyon 16). Though stemming from the same environmental awareness and defense of the ecological self, climate trauma might radicalize the responses that more vulnerable people choose to have to climate violence, independently of the main environmental movement, which has thus far refrained from attacks on human lives. It can be argued that ecoterrorism as a trauma response has little to do with environmentalism or ecological affect or even

environmentalism, rather following causality: powerful nations and industry oligarchs create climate change, the effects of climate change kill people, and people defend themselves. At a point in *The Ministry for the Future* ecoterrorism in the name of the Earth becomes exclusively self-defense, not even in name of the ecological self, but mere personal revenge; that the system that causes destruction is climate change and its principal perpetrators is coincidental and secondary.

Trauma and negative affects can be very useful tools for environmental awareness. The nature of trauma as a wound on the self means the possibility for this sense of self to be reconfigured; not just healed, in the way of classical trauma studies, in which the self must be restored, but reimagined into a different, more imbricated self. Climate trauma, in its individual and collective dimension, could lead into a renegotiation of humanity's sense of self in relation to the environment, highlighting the closeness between nature and the human and becoming one more of the ecological affects that make environmental awareness. However, negative affect is difficult to measure and to coalesce into focused action: the enormity of trauma makes its responses unpredictable and excessive, and their reasoning hard to pin down. *The Ministry for the Future* is a useful book to observe these topics through because of its dual temporality: the realistic reflection of the current conditions of both climate and politics, and the speculation into the future of where those conditions will go and what could possibly be done. Ecoterrorism is neither condemned nor condoned; it is merely a reflection of the reality of the climate trauma and ecological affect of the present translated into the future. What it points out is the importance of a balance of ecological affect, a balance that is more vulnerable to be tipped off as climate change worsens, and a balance that is the basis for environmental coexistence between humanity and nature.

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