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The Postcolonial Anthropocene

Abstract: There is a widespread sense that an environmental crisis is unfolding, captured in the new geological epoch the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000), and that few if any places will remain unaffected. As a 'hyperobject' (Morton 2013), it is difficult to make tangible and visible – which is to say that the environmental crisis and the Anthropocene are 'representational concern[s]' (Badia et al. 2021: 4) *pur sang*. It is difficult for this crisis to become sensible on an everyday and affective level; yet as I argue in this contribution, the combination of environmental humanities and postcolonial studies can do so. Specifically, I focus on the urgent figure of the climate migrant. In contemporary Europe, the effects of the climate crisis are acutely felt both along its northern edges, where rising temperatures threaten the Sámi way of life, and its southern rim, such as where Spain is increasingly suffering droughts and extreme heat. This double bind suggests that, from north to south, everybody risks losing life as they know it and becoming a climate migrant. In this essay, I analyze the double bind of the Sámi people as their precarious position vis-à-vis Nordic nation-state policies is compounded by climate change, as well as Madrid's Prado Museum's recent (2019) project with 'updated' versions of its masterpieces to show climate change gone awry. These cases also make clear why postcolonial studies should engage with the Anthropocene, rather than elide the term altogether (Chakrabarty 2021; Davies 2018). If the Anthropocene draws attention to the geological causes of the climate crisis, postcolonial studies makes visible the human impact of the crisis in all its depth and complexity. The postcolonial Anthropocene is not only able to think the crisis' long-term causes, but also its possible futures.

Keywords: Anthropocene, visual art, Spain, Sápmi, environmental humanities, postcolonial studies

1 Introduction

In May 2017, two white hands rose from Venice's Grand Canal to support the Ca' Sagredo Hotel.[1] Seemingly keeping the hotel walls from collapsing into the water (see Figure 1), Lorenzo Quinn's installation – aptly called "Support" – reflects on the

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damage anthropogenic climate change risks inflicting on one of Europe's, if not the world's, most iconic cities and tourist destinations. Due to its position in a lagoon, Venice is particularly at risk, as the mass melting of ice sheets in e.g. Antarctica and the expansion of water when it gets warmer raise sea levels. As such, Quinn's installation directly feeds into the widespread sense that a planetary climate crisis is unfolding, and that humans are fueling it. "Support" makes visible climate change and its effects encroaching on Europe, showing that here, too, people are vulnerable – that Europeans are increasingly at risk of becoming climate migrants.

In November 2019, two years after "Support" had débuted at the Venice Biennale, a smaller version of the installation moved to Madrid, where, in early December, the 25th United Nations Climate Change conference (COP25) would be held. In this context, the installation gained a new geopolitical relevance: one in which not only the existential threat that is climate change was represented, but where questions of agency, distribution, and planetary solidarity moved to the fore. First organized in Berlin, Germany in 1995, the UN's nearly two-hundred member states meet every year to discuss the politics of combatting climate change during these conferences. Perhaps most famously, the 1997 conference in Kyoto, Japan, the 2009 conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, and the 2015 conference in Paris, France have entered public memory due to the level of ambition displayed, their success, or their failure.

Figure 1: Lorenzo Quinn, "Support" (2017). Courtesy of Lorenzo Quinn and Halcyon Gallery.

The Madrid conference proved a fruitful site of artistic activism. Not only was Quinn's installation displayed in the city, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Museo Nacional del Prado also reimagined four works from the museum's collection as works about climate change and, especially, climate refugees. This latter figure has quickly been recognized as an essential figure in our unfolding historical moment, including in Europe, where the Syrian Civil War that erupted in 2011 and the refugees fleeing the violence have been connected to a drought in the region that is thought to have been at least influenced by climate change. This constellation shows well how climate change can become connected to other conflicts and crises, and how it can become embroiled in Europe's xenophobic imaginary of the Middle East and Arabs (El-Tayeb 2011). The challenges presented by living in a changing climate, which at its core revolves around issues of livability and hospitability, thus connects to older crises of cohabitation, belonging, and difference.

At the same time, it is difficult to conclusively establish connections between climate change and events such as the Syrian Civil War. While climate change – or the Anthropocene, a distinction I will return to later in this chapter – is a "representational concern" (Badia et al. 2021: 4), *how* to represent it exactly remains an elusive task. Most people will encounter it as a discursive topic either "through its symptoms . . . or via abstractions" (Richardson 2020: 340; see also Richardson 2018). It is, in other words, difficult for the crisis that is climate change to become sensible on an everyday and affective level; yet as I argue in this contribution, a combination of cultural analysis, environmental humanities, and postcolonial studies can do so. It is in art and literature – in the realm of cultural production –, after all, where the Anthropocene can be turned into a "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977: 133) that compels us to act, rather than one that overwhelms and arrests.

The urgent figure of the climate migrant – both human and more-than-human – is my entry point in these discussions. Climate-related migration is a topic high on the political agenda, where projects aiming to manage or tackle it are usually framed as being about vulnerable, racialized, and poor populations (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012; Ahuja 2021). Yet as both a victim of a disruptive climate and a potential threat to those who are to receive him, the figure of the climate migrant is a highly ambiguous one (Baldwin 2013). This ambiguity rests in no small part on this figure's racialization, feeding into Europe's historical anxieties of being overrun by those who are not-white and/or not-Christian. From this perspective, "the poor" is nothing more than a phrase covering up white Europe's racism and prejudice – a form of masked Othering.

This chapters offers a different perspective on the figure of the climate migrant. In contemporary Europe, the effects of the climate crisis are felt increasingly

acutely. My examples in this chapter are meant to be explorative rather than all-encompassing, and representative of a number of present challenges the continent is facing today. They are taken from its northern edges, where rising temperatures push white birch trees ever further above the Arctic Circle and threaten the Sámi way of life, and its southern rim, where a country like Spain is increasingly suffering droughts and extreme heat. This double bind suggests that, from north to south, across Europe people risk losing life as they know it and becoming climate migrants themselves. Thus, far from focusing on Europe as the destination of climate migrants potentially coming from elsewhere into the continent, this chapter focuses on Europeans themselves as risking being forced to migrate away from places disrupted by climate change, at the same time also conceptualizing birch trees above the Arctic Circle as non-human climate migrants.

Through my examples drawn from Spain and Sápmi (the name the Sámi use for their region), I also want to argue in favor of the postcolonial Anthropocene, an analytical lens that is not at all self-evident; while postcolonial studies have historically been hesitant to engage the Anthropocene out of skepticism towards that concept's implicit universalism, this need not be. In fact, we need postcolonial theory's political sensibilities to further refine the diagnoses thinkers of the Anthropocene put forward.

2 For the postcolonial Anthropocene

In *Planetary Specters*, Neel Ahuja states that "environmental injustices must be understood as components of longer processes of colonialism and racial disposability generated by extractive capitalist development" (2021: 11). Even if the Anthropocene manifests everywhere and is therefore planetary in nature, it does so in profoundly unequal ways. In addition to being a geological, political, and moral problem, it is also a social problem; and as such, it is best understood with reference to postcolonial studies. Only a postcolonial Anthropocene can be attuned to its differentiated impact and the failure to protect economically weaker and underdeveloped states from climate change's impacts – what we could call, with Robert Young (2012), "postcolonial remains."

In a recent article, the historian Julia Nordblad argued that "the temporal characteristics of the Anthropocene concept renders it unhelpful for thinking critically about how the current environmental crisis can be addressed" (2021: 330). This argument finds it echo in the work of much scholarship by postcolonial critics. For them, too, the idea of "the" Anthropocene is too totalizing and universalizing, which sits at odds with the attention they themselves pay to the variegated,

globally unequal impacts of both climate change and mitigation efforts. The reasons for this are to be found in the concept's origin within earth systems science, in conjunction with its later migration into the humanities and social sciences.

Eugene Stoermer first coined the term in the 1980s, but it was only around 2000 when it gained wider currency in Paul Crutzen's formulation (see Davies (2018) for a comprehensive history). In its strictest sense, the Anthropocene was used to describe the period that succeeds the Holocene, in which humanity's impact on the planet and its ecosystems can be measured geologically. When the concept was adapted by humanities and social sciences scholars, its relatively straightforward geological meaning was complemented, contrasted, and contested by political and ethical interpretations. The wide uptick in these disciplines came with an interrogation of the concept's foundational assumptions, with scholars focusing especially on its supposed universalism. "The" Anthropocene applies to humanity as a whole, an emphasis that sits at odds with critical theory's focus on difference, variation, and historical and cultural specificity. Additionally, the period's supposed starting point became a topic of discussion: if the Anthropocene marks the moment when human influence on the planet is geologically legible, what exactly is this "influence"? Does it refer to, e.g., the Industrial Revolution, the post-1945 Great Acceleration and its heavy use of coal and oil, or traces of detonated atomic bombs? Or, in a different version again, does the Anthropocene start when Columbus and in his wake many other Europeans arrived in the Americas, killing millions of the native population there with their diseases, thus causing forests to regrow and bringing about the Little Ice Age? In this spirit, the Anthropocene has in recent years been rethought as, for example, the "Chthulucene" (Donna Haraway) or the "Capitalocene" (Jason Moore) – to name but two important theorists.[2]

Meanwhile, in a widely noted 2009 article, later collected in *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021), Dipesh Chakrabarty famously introduced postcolonial studies to the Anthropocene. One of his main points pertains to the challenge Anthropocene thinking poses to historical – and, by extension, humanist – thinking: namely, that the scales with which we work are undergoing profound changes in the current moment of climate change. The separation between geological history, human history, and socio-economic history – summarized as the Earth, the human species, and capitalism – no longer holds, Chakrabarty argues. The universalist bent of this argument, however, has been perceived as going against postcolonial studies' emphasis on particularity, historical inequalities be-

2 Mark Bould (2021: 7–8) gives a more elaborate overview of various alternatives.

tween countries, and, indeed, the wholesale denial of large parts of the global population's humanity.

This clash leaves the discipline in the awkward intellectual spot that while questions of land and environment are indispensable, it also rejects one of the major conceptual nodes with which to think about those questions. Although this might be a reason to prefer Haraway's or Moore's theoretical innovations, I nevertheless stay with the Anthropocene, since its ambiguity and layers of meaning make visible the imbrications of past events, present inequalities, and future possibilities, and allows us to supposedly couple value-neutral planetary developments with their human and civilizational consequences. Indeed, it is exactly Chakrabarty's point that these two levels are now intrinsically intertwined: the intellectual challenge is then not to think them together, but to start from their enmeshment.

One of Chakrabarty's most important critics is Ian Baucom, who in a recent work differentiates between what he calls "forces" and "forcings." Trying to do justice to Chakrabarty's distinctions between the various types of histories and their entanglements while translating them into a perhaps more straightforwardly postcolonial vocabulary, Baucom's binary aims to capture that some pressures are planetary and more-than-human in nature ("forcings") and some are manmade ("forces"). If the former are the purview of the environmental humanities and are thus part of the Anthropocene, the latter are the material of postcolonial scholars. Yet these, as Baucom (2020: 16) asserts, are intertwined: "these new forcings, as they impact the conditions of life on the planet, manifest themselves also as forces of profound violence and unfreedom; as forcing-forces for the reactivation of old and the animation of new modes of subalternality, inequality, and vulnerability." Planetary forcings can reinforce already existing power relations and asymmetries, such as they have been studied historically by postcolonial scholars.

A well-developed notion of "postcolonial Anthropocene" is thus urgently needed. To prevent the engagement with anthropogenic climate change from being subjected to the imperialist and Eurocentric impulses known all too well from the past (Chakrabarty 2021), scholars of the postcolonial Anthropocene have to bring concerns about a fair and just distribution of global resources and responsibilities in dialog with environmental analyses that can at times be blind to them. If the Anthropocene is a representational challenge due to its distributed nature and the complex ecological processes behind it, it does not mean that it is materially invisible. The parts of the world where people have had the luxury to be able to look away and direct their gaze elsewhere, are rapidly shrinking; yet in many of the places where Europeans have historically ravaged the lands in their colonialist and imperialist quests for resources, this option was prevented much earlier than in the old industrial "cores" of the global North.

If the Anthropocene draws attention to the geological causes of the climate crisis, postcolonial studies makes visible the human impact of the crisis in all its depth and complexity. The postcolonial Anthropocene is not only able to think the crisis' long-term causes, but also its possible futures. It thinks through the "slow violence" (Nixon 2011) or "slow catastrophes" (Warde, Robin and Sörlin 2018: 3) of environmental degradation and links the current epoch to its roots in deeper history, whether that of the (neo)colonial and economic system of domination and resource extraction, or of the planet's enmeshed history. The metaphor of "the slow" attests to the difficulty of making the environmental crisis visible and tangible, yet also emphasizes the necessity of bringing for example Chakrabarty's work on historicity in the Anthropocene into view to scrutinize the deeper histories that constitute our present world as both planetarily shared and brutally differentiated.

In this chapter, the figure of the climate refugee is my example of why an integrative analysis of the postcolonial Anthropocene is necessary, also – or especially – within a European context. Sidestepping figurations of the climate refugee as racialized, which echo Europe's racist cultural archive (Said 1993), art works emerging from two sites in Europe where climate change is manifesting itself very clearly imagine a future of climate refuge as not only a possibility, but a likelihood for people across Europe, regardless of race or ethnicity. At the same time, in line with Ahuja's (2021) argument, this future is not brought about exclusively by anthropogenic climate change only, but also by socio-political choices and forces. This is especially visible in Máret Ánne Sara's works protesting the forced culling of reindeer herds due to government policies and COP25 as the institutional backdrop against which the various works around were exhibited in Madrid in 2019.

The Anthropocene is as much a geological concept denoting a specific moment in Earth's planetary history, as it is a political term that brings into view humanity's role in contemporary weather events. The former is, potentially, value-neutral – a mere descriptor –, the latter by definition cannot be. The lens of the postcolonial Anthropocene requires us to keep these tensions and contradictions at the center of analysis; going forward, as the effects of rising CO_2-levels in the Earth's atmosphere will escalate weather events that already disrupt daily life in communities across the globe, the question of historical inequalities between North and South, former colonizers and the formerly colonized, the not-yet-affected and the already-affected, will only grow more important in discussions of global politics and international relations. Postcolonial studies, with its representational sensibilities (both as *Darstellung* and as *Vertretung*), can help rectify the representational void at the center of universalized notions of the Anthropocene by understanding the differentiated nature of who is included, in what way, and by which means.

3 Representing climate change

In a recent overview article, Axel Goodbody and Adeline Johns-Putra (2019: 229) speak of the "many representational challenges mounted by climate change." Discussing primarily the challenges posed by climate change to realist literature, they engage with a discussion that was given a polemic twist in 2016 by Indian novelist and essayist Amitav Ghosh, in his book *The Great Derangement* (see also the chapter by Shaul Bassi in this volume). The question of how to represent the Anthropocene extends beyond Ghosh's intervention, however, and also beyond the specific domain of realist literature. The classic reference here is Timothy Morton's notion of the climate as a "hyperobject," or those things that are "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (2013: 1). These objects are what Morton calls "nonlocal," meaning they do not manifest somewhere concretely. In the case of the climate, it becomes apparent that the climate is not the weather, but rather the accumulation of weather patterns through time and their relative change over time. It is impossible to point at some concrete object and say, *that* is the climate. Because the climate cannot be felt or seen, individuals also cannot get a sense of what climate *change* is – nor, therefore, what it means to live in the Anthropocene, with its man-made climactic instability.

The climate and climate change as such are, in other words, invisible – or in any case not immediately intelligible to human eyes, ears, and brains. Timothy Clark (2015: 139–155) has called this situation "Anthropocene disorder", arguing that what is needed is an analysis attentive to scales of time and space that extend beyond our human frames of reference. This need to jump scale in order to comprehend climate change is what Ghosh as well as Goodbody and Johns-Putra analyze as the challenge realist literature is perhaps not able to meet: to transcend the time of the human and its generally homely and well-organized plots. It is no wonder, then, that much criticism has focused on more speculative fictions set in dystopian futures where floods, droughts, and fires have remade the world as we know it today – or have known it until yesterday.

In a noticeable exception, Mark Bould takes issue with those critics who in his estimation have too narrow an understanding of what it means for a text to be "about" climate change. Even in realist – or what he calls mundane – fiction, climate change makes itself known. Indeed, Bould (2021: 15, original emphasis) asserts, "the Anthropocene *is* the unconscious of 'the art and literature of our time,'" and he goes on to trace its manifestations in a wide range of novels and films. To read Bould's intervention is to realize how the climate crisis presents a dual challenge: to produce new art works and to develop new reading strategies, attuned to the complexities of the world's ecosystems and the contemporary imbalances brought to them by manmade climate change.

The increasing attention paid to climate fiction and other art responding to the new lifeworlds inaugurated by the Anthropocene, as well as the growing body of such texts and works, speaks to the rising prominence of climate concerns in the contemporary cultural imaginary. Timothy Clark warns that this development should, however, not lead to an overestimation of what such literature and art can do. We can compare Clark's warning to Edward Said's writing in *Culture and Imperialism* that even if "the enterprise of empire depends upon the *idea* of *having an empire*" (1993: 11, original emphasis), the end of empire is not heralded by the emergence of a new idea only. To believe this in the case of climate change, Clark writes (2015: 21), is to "exaggerate the importance of the imaginary" and thus "to run the risk of consolidating a kind of diversionary side-show." The crisis from which this chapter takes its leave – of anthropogenic climate change promising to change life as we know it, in Europe if not all around the world – will not be solved by the artistic and cultural reflections discussed on the following pages; rather, what these will show is an "irreversible break in consciousness and understanding" (Clark 2015: 62; cf. Van Amelsvoort 2023). I continue now by tracing the contours of this break in Spain.

4 Water and drought in Spain

November 2019's COP25 gave rise to various artistic and activist interventions. In addition to the already mentioned sculpture by Lorenzo Quinn, in this section I want to focus on a more institutional (re)imagining of life in the Anthropocene, namely the project carried out by WWF and the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid. Four of the museum's master pieces were digitally altered to become part of an awareness campaign by the two organizations, aiming to show the potential impact of climate change. The four paintings were Joachim Patinir's *Landscape with Charon Crossing the Styx* (1515–1524), *Felipe IV a Caballo* by Diego Velázquez (*Equestrian Portrait of Philip IV*, 1635–1636), Francisco Goya's *El Quitasol* (*The Parasol*, 1777, see Figures 2 and 3), and Joaquín Sorolla's *Chicos en la playa* (*Boys on the Beach*, 1910).

As Figures 2 and 3 make clear with regard to Goya's painting, the WWF and the Prado have forcefully altered the original paintings. What in the original painting passes for a calm, relaxing afternoon and for a "*capricho*," a "pleasingly aberrant" aesthetic element (Dowling 1977: 432), in the digital alteration becomes the portrait of a moody, seemingly hopeless refugee camp. The main characters – the young pair and the dog – remain recognizable (even if her arm is not extended left anymore, but protectively held to the right), but the entire background

is changed. The pleasant green parasol the young man holds in Goya's original becomes a worn-out umbrella with the text "climate refugee agency," spelling out who gave them the item and making clear what they are. Goya was explicitly commissioned to paint cheerful scenes from everyday life for the dining room of the Prince and Princess of Asturias' Royal Palace of El Pardo in Madrid. In the change from the pleasant to the destitute, the WWF and the Prado show how daily life in Europe could change and, indeed, be thoroughly disrupted in the coming years or decades.

Other paintings imagine other Anthropocene effects. In the altered version of Patinir's painting, Charon is unable to cross the Styx anymore, the river having dried up due to declining rainfall. Amidst a barren land with mud cracked by the heat and draught, his boat remains where it is in the middle of the river. Velázques' heroic king Felipe IV risks dying, together with his horse in high water, evoking rising sea levels. Sorolla's sun-soaked boys on the beach, lastly, in the new version are covered by seaweed and surrounded by dead fish, representing the sixth mass extinction event that is said to be unfolding (Cowie, Bouchet and Fontaine 2022).

Figure 2: The original *El Quitasol* (*The Parasol*) by Francisco de Goya, as it can be seen in the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid, Spain. © Wikipedia Commons.

Figure 3: The WWF and Prado's adaption of *El Quitasol*. © WWF and Prado.

The altered paintings thus try to show the type of changes that await us in the (near) future: these images conjure up times in which habits and practices that are common to us, or have historically been so, such as going to the beach and crossing a river by boat, become increasingly difficult – or, in any case, can only remain possible in a different guise than today's. At the same time, these "new" paintings also project their *Verfremdung* backward in time, indicating to the viewer that the originals implicitly reacted to the climate in their time, too. Only now that the climate no longer remains a "background constant" (D'Arcy Wood 2008: 1) can a certain "eco-historical" consciousness emerge in literature and art that brings the climate historically out of the background and onto the foreground.

It is no accident that 2019's UN Climate Change Conference gave rise to these various artistic reflections, as Spain is particularly at risk of climate change. The country regularly sees new temperature records, especially in the south and the country's central plateaus, where the heat coming from North Africa has free rein. As a result of climate change, Spain's summers today start at least three weeks earlier than in the early 1970s (Henley 2022), and they bring increasingly warm and extended heatwaves. A 2019 report on Spain's progress in complying with the UN's and the EU's climate targets similarly admits that Spain is an "espe-

cially vulnerable" country due to its geographical and socio-economic features (Spanish Government 2019: 2; see also Ecologistas en Acción 2007). Desertification and aridification are the main challenges the country faces, with almost three-quarters of the country said to be possibly affected. From this perspective, the alteration of Patinir's *Landscape with Charon Crossing the Styx* most directly speaks to Spain's own situation, with the others representing risks more pertinent in other parts of the world. Taken together, the four paintings thus respond to COP25 coming to Madrid, with conference delegates from each UN member-state – each of them facing their own set of challenges – and in their wake journalists, lobbyists, and activists.

At the same time, desertification is not the only risk Spain faces. Its coasts and coastal towns will likely face rising sea levels throughout the twenty-first century. These include the major Mediterranean ports of Barcelona and Valencia, but also Bilbao, which faces the Bay of Biscay and the Atlantic Ocean. In 2021, the Mexican artist Ruben Oroczo submerged a fiberglass installation entitled "Bihar" (Basque for "Tomorrow") in Bilbao's Revion river.[3] Sponsored by a Spanish bank, this sculpture was part of a campaign to encourage sustainable behavior and discussions on climate change. Weighing more than 100 kilos, the sculpture moved with the tides, being covered by water to a great or lesser extent depending on the time of the day. As such, it shows a girl gasping for air in a world where human behavior leads to melting ice caps and glaciers, which in turn causes sea levels to rise. The dynamism of Oroczo's presentation emphasizes the ebb and flow of life in the Anthropocene: even if global temperatures rise, this does not entail that every day will see temperatures higher than normal – whatever "normal" means anymore. "Bihar" stays in place, never floating away from where it was put in the Revion, its more subtle movements in that place suggesting the potential disruption of looming climate-related migration.

The various artworks surveyed in this section show the multiplicity of artistic responses to the climate crisis. While all share a politically engaged stance and want to call attention to the effects of suggesting, whether (fully) visible already or not, they do not so uniformly. Some, such as Oroczo's floating sculpture, directly engage a more local, circumscribed audience, while other artists target their intervention to a more global audience. Due to their location – Madrid and Bilbao – these works suggest the coming home in Europe of climate-related migration, recasting the climate migrant not as external to Europe and its cultural imaginary, but as the possible future of Europe's own populations, too.

3 See a report on, and pictures of, the installation at https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/drowning-girl-statue-causes-stir-bilbao-2021-09-28/.

5 Birches and snow in Sápmi

Over 3,000 kilometers to the north, in the upper regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, the Anthropocene manifests itself differently – although here, too, rising temperatures form the core of the story. Sámi artists take up the representational challenge that is the Anthropocene in a similar, but distinct way from the Spanish examples. My focus in this section will be on the 2022 Venice Biennale's Nordic Pavilion. That year, the Nordic Pavilion was given to Sámi artists by the Norwegian organizers, featuring the performance "Matriarchy" by Pauliina Feodoroff (a Skolt Sámi theater director from the Norwegian-Finnish-Russian borderlands), three art installations featuring reindeer remains by the Sámi Norwegian Máret Ánne Sara, and a mixed media work by Anders Sunna from the Swedish side of Sápmi.

These works espouse Sámi philosophical views while addressing the various ways in which their home territory is threatened, including climate change, altering physical surroundings, but also the Nordic states' colonialist attitudes towards their indigenous population(s). Both Feodoroff's and Sunna's works address the threats posed to the Sámi way of life and territory by state-sanctioned commercial activities and the states' (former) aggressive missionary Christian activities in the region. As such, the artworks contribute to a relatively recent reckoning of the Nordic states with their colonial past (Lehtola 2015; Össbo 2021), which in the case of Finland is complicated by a strong identification as a colonized, rather than colonizing country. Each of these, while not exactly representing climate change as such, nevertheless renders the Anthropocene visible.

Known historically by various names, such as Finnmark or (the now considered pejorative) Lapland, this region today is referred to as Sápmi, and its indigenous population as the Sámi. A historically nomadic people, the Sámi have until recently been able to hold on to their non-sedentary lifestyle; although people do live in towns, cities, and villages, during the summer months reindeer herders follow their herds across the Arctic planes. The Anthropocene seems to threaten this way of life, potentially creating more climate refugees.

In spring 2022, British newspaper *The Guardian* devoted a number of articles to the region and the challenges the local population are facing as the result of climate change. What is striking in these accounts, from the perspective of the present discussion, is how the Anthropocene here introduces a more-than-human climate migration: trees, especially birch trees. Writing from Finnmark county, Norway that they "used to creep forward a few centimetres every year," journalist Ben Rawlence (2022) notes that in recent years this has gone up to a "rate of 40 to 50 metres a year." Buoyed by rising temperatures north of the Arctic circle, the birches not only threaten to warm up the region's permafrost, thus releasing ex-

tremely powerful greenhouse gasses into the Earth's atmosphere, they are also symbolic of how the traditional Sámi way of life is threatened with collapse.

The birch trees will inevitably be followed by other species, such as pine, yet they are miles ahead of them and also move faster (Rawlence 2022). The arrival of monoculture birch forests compounds changes to the Sámi's reindeer's winter grazing habits. With temperatures hovering just below freezing, or sometimes even above it, the snow changes quality and becomes sticky, making it more difficult for reindeer to remove it and reach the grass. Birch forests can trap snow in high hills that make it impossible for reindeer to find food. The leaves left behind on the ground further increase soil life and bring other plants. At other points, melted snow will freeze to become ice, creating a new barrier to the reindeer's food, but also causing increasingly more accidents as the animals' hoofs are incapable of dealing with the smooth surfaces.

The key problem, as Rawlence also notes, is one of scale. Just as oil can be perceived as a renewable resource on a much larger timescale than the one we inhabit (Lovell 2010: 75), since it does form naturally under high geologic pressures, so, too, the changing climate of Sápmi is livable when approached from a more-than-human perspective. Given enough time, lively Arctic forests will develop which can house reindeer. The painful ambiguity of the Anthropocene, however, is exactly that at the same time that this larger scale becomes sensually if not intellectually apparent, it also confronts humans with the confines of their own, limited perspective from which there seemingly is no escape. One of the many challenges the Anthropocene confronts humanity with is, again, representational.

In the rest of this section, I would like to zoom in on Sara's art works, which both address the Norwegian government's colonialist practices towards the Sámi as well as the threat imposed by climate change. For a long time, Sara's family have been in a legal battle with the state about their reindeer herds. At issue was the Norwegian government's reindeer culling policies, which aimed to reduce the pressure of grazing in Finnmark. This environmental measure would necessitate the death of hundreds of reindeer held by Sara's brother, thus constituting a colonialist intervention into the Sámi way of life. Ultimately, the Norwegian Supreme Court upheld the lower courts' ruling that had sided with the government over Sara's family's objections. In an explanation on the website of the Office for Contemporary Art Norway (2022), which is responsible for the Biennale pavilion, Sara remarks that "what happens to the reindeer also happens to us," meaning that from her perspective the Norwegian state intervened into the Sámi way of life. Her artworks were made in response to the various court cases and are largely made of reindeer parts that would not be used by the Sámi for food and clothing, thus representing the reindeer long after their death. In the specific cases of the works

featured in Figure 4, this includes reindeer stomachs and calves, in addition to other materials.

In their materiality these artworks are "a manifestation of cultural critique [as well as] a different way of being in the present" (Buikema 2021: 150). The reuse of animal products suggests sustainability and circularity, while the reference to Sámi philosophy – with the stomachs in "Gutted – Gávogálši" indexing gut feeling, an important concept for the Sámi, for example – grounds these works in the language and ensuing community in which they are created. "Ale suova sielu sáiget" is an elegiac piece, which laments the death of young-born calves, while the dried plants suggest a changing landscape at the hands of anthropogenic climate change. At the same time, as the accompanying note makes clear, the work also responds to the adverse effects on the Sámi of Norway's environmental laws, which at times walk the tight line between environmentalism and internal colonialism. Its circular motion, at the same time, reinforces the sense of sustainabil-

Figure 4: Foreground: Máret Ánne Sara, 'Gutted – Gávogálši' (2022). Background: Máret Ánne Sara, 'Ale suova sielu sáiget' (2022). © Michael Miller / OCA.

ity and continuation, a clear connection between past and present through which the dangers of outside forces are made visible, worked through, and renewed.

In 2017, at documenta14 in Kassel and Athens, Sara exhibited the work "Pile o'Sápmi," which is now in the Norwegian National Museum (Figure 5). This work

also stems from the court cases Sara's brother had with the Norwegian government. It features 400 reindeer skulls, all with a bullet hole in the forehead. Protesting the government's culling policies that affected Sara's family, the work makes visible once more the centrality of reindeer to the Sámi way of life and culture. The skulls reflect the limitation of the Sámi people's sovereignty both within the Norwegian nation-state and due to a changing environment. From this perspective, with the link between their traditional ways of living and challenges of modernity growing ever tenser, the Sámi are close to becoming climate refugees – like the birch trees that are moving up north at an alarming rate.

Yet what these various artworks make clear, is that displacement never occurs solely due to environmental change only. At stake, too, are concrete government policies that prevent the Sámi from continue living the way they were used to. To constitute this as the "unacknowledged 'push' factor behind migration decisions" (Ahuja 2021: 3) fails to do justice to the complexities of historical and politi-

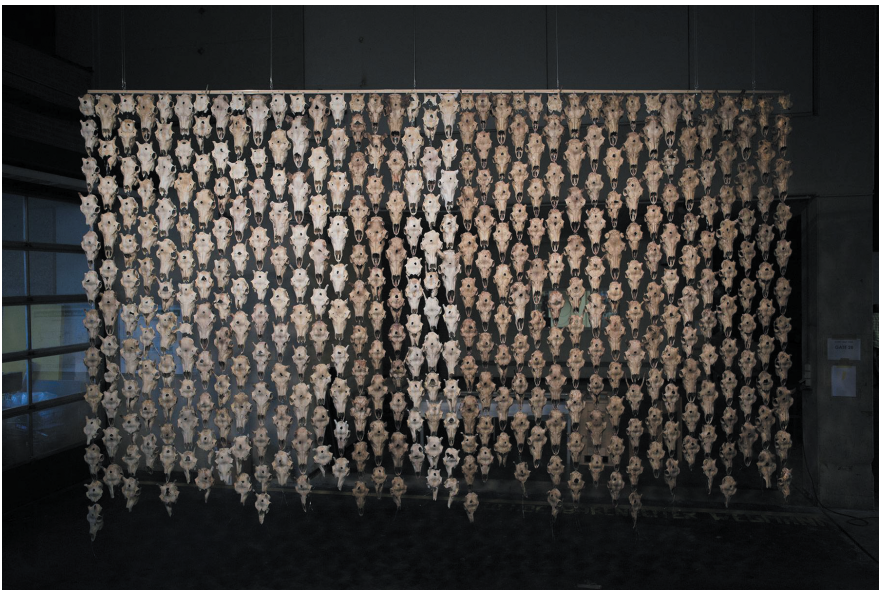

Figure 5: 'Pile o'Sápmi Supreme.' © Máret Ánne Sara.

cal entanglements. This is, in short, why studies of the Anthropocene and cultural imaginations of and responses to climate change must be postcolonially minded.

6 Conclusion: Representation as translation

If the Anthropocene is a representational problem, which cannot be apprehended immediately and in its entirety, we are in dire need of mediators that translate the threatening overwhelm of the climactic hyperobject into more readily graspable units. On this smaller scale, the Anthropocene can be understood to enact a disconnect between past ways of life and new ways that are only just emerging. This problem is not new: Warde, Robin, and Sörlin (2018) briefly pause at the technologies that made it possible already in the 1980s to both signal and solve the thinning of the ozone layer. This example points to the intermediaries necessary to make the environmental crisis legible and enable humans to take action to mitigate its effects, if not prevent them from happening altogether. Yet what Quinn, the Prado/WWF team-up, Oroczo, Feodoroff, Sunna, and Sara show, is not that: their intervention is not a technological shortcut to give an intelligible face to an abstract problem.

Rather, it is through these works that negotiate and imagine the relations between the large and the small, the global and the local, and between cause and effect that we – as a tentatively global, if not planetary, human community – can come to think more productively about limiting and ultimately reversing anthropogenic climate change. Put differently, what is needed, are mechanisms of translation that make the environmental crisis legible and affectively felt in individual lives. As I have shown in this chapter, this imagination must not only be oriented towards environmental concerns, but also take stock of work done in postcolonial studies. Postcolonial studies has a long history of a translational ethics, as its works consists in elaborating historical ties that are often not immediately visible or apparent to a large audience.

Where the figure of the climate migrant often acts as to externalize the problems of migration to other parts of the world, with Europe as the victimized destination, I have instead stressed how the Anthropocene has planetary impacts, including across Europe. Whether this concerns Venice's rising water levels, Spain's increasing problems with water supply, Sápmi's arboreal abundance, or other locations which I have not attended to, life in Europe will change, too. The artists responding to these emergent conditions represent what it means to live in such times of change and make visible especially the effects on individual lives and communities. A postcolonial approach is essential here, to make sense of the

problems of distribution across countries, questions of (internal) colonialism, and the relationship between art and global governance. Collective action is needed to bring CO_2-levels down, yet cultural representations can make the problems more immediate and thus aid the calls to action that resound ever more widely.

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