

Precarity in the Capitalocene: *Gun Island* and Climate Change

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Abstract

This paper, mapping the trajectory of migrant workers' lives in Amitav Ghosh's novel *Gun Island*, locates precarity in the nexus of capitalism and climate change and identifies the latter as a new determinant of precarity. Heightened precariousness is generally perceived today as an effect of conflicts and wars. Contemporary South Asian novels mostly explore how caste, class, religion, gender, and sexuality condition the production of precariousness in today's world. My paper looks into the production of a precarious subject seldom represented in contemporary South Asian Literature: climate refugees. Drawing upon *Gun Island*, I argue that climate refugees inform us about the necessity to expand our understanding of vulnerability so we are able to factor in those whose lives have been upended by the effects of anthropogenic climate change along with the dynamics of neoliberal capitalism.

Keywords: Climate change, Anthropocene, precariousness/precarity, capitalism, world-ecology

Amitav Ghosh's novel *Gun Island* casts light on a frontier of precarity that contemporary South Asian novels are apparently unobservant of. Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* portrays the precarious deadlock of generational subjugation under the caste-class dynamics of rural India. Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* depicts the precarious experience born of social and political conflicts, as collateral violence of national projects, of government's retaliations on the Maoist insurgency in Andhra and Chhattisgarh, and resistance in Kashmir. In the depiction of precarious life, Mohsin Hamid's magical realist intervention in *Exit West* shifts the lens to the refugee crisis that emerges from the wars in the Middle East. In these fine works, the generalized condition of vulnerability is represented through the relations of class, caste, religion, gender, and sexuality, intertwined in the social, political, and economic nexus that constitutes the contemporary world. Like *Exit West*, *Gun Island* foregrounds the refugee experience in a transnational setting to portray human vulnerability and the trajectory of precarious life. In fact, there are significant works, including Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* itself, that connect precariousness with the refugee crisis. What sets *Gun Island* apart is that it turns the lens to the planetary repercussions of anthropogenic climate change to identify precarity and represent the precarious subjects of climate refugees.

Precarity refers to both labor conditions and life experiences that mirror unstable, insecure, and uncertain circumstances. It is recognizable in "social risk and fragmented life situations" caused by contingent employment, wage squeezes, pernicious work risk, and uncertainty, reflecting a life condition without "security and predictability" (Schierup and Jørgensen 3).



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The ontological condition of vulnerability engendered by precarity is often designated as precariousness. Judith Butler demarcates precariousness from precarity, suggesting that while the former refers to the biological and bodily vulnerability and injurability of life, the latter finds these states conditioned socially and politically (Butler 3). In short, precariousness is a generalized human condition whereas precarity is a structurally determined condition of life. This paper, departing from Butler's biopolitical premise, situates them in the circuit of the capitalist mode and relations of production. Contrary to the argument that precarity has arisen as a novel historical symptom characteristic of neoliberal capitalism, Marx's writings on the reserve army of labor who face the intensifying threat of being cast away into the surplus population "of the unemployed and underemployed" show that precarity has been a constant norm of capitalism (Kasimir 4-9; Jonna and Foster 4-5). The irregular migrant workers and refugees find themselves in the reserve army of the transnational labor market. Migrant workers, the "surplus population of globalization," are often regarded as "the quintessential incarnation of precarity" (Schierup and Jørgensen 4-5). A significant share of them is the "new migrant group," displaced by climate disasters, who are increasingly crossing the threshold of precarity and entering a life of intensifying insecurities (Standing 93). The climate crisis and the consequent global ecological rift have emerged as factors creating further interfaces of precarious labor conditions and ontological experiences of precariousness (Kasimir 3; Jonna and Foster 14). The repercussions of climate change are creating subjects who are weighed down by the precarious condition of marginality, uncertainty, and anxiety.

Drawing from *Gun Island*, I situate precarity in the nexus of capitalism and climate change and argue that climate change has emerged as a new determinant of precarity. Recognizing climate change-induced precarity as another interface of capitalist exploitation, I also examine how capitalism conditions both climate change and precarity. Critically examining the novel's subscription to the Anthropocene ethos, I propose to read the Anthropocene from the lens of capital and argue that the collective agency of humans that is characteristic of this perceived geological era became possible because of the global subsumption of labor processes and entire terrains of social relations by capital. In order to explore *Gun Island's* depiction of climate change-induced precarity, I find it necessary to examine how the novel formalistically incorporates the question of climate change as its representation in narrative form faces significant challenges because of the incongruity between the degree of the spatial and temporal dimension of climate change and of the individual and collective human experience of this crisis. Pivoting on the novel's representation of an array of crises engendered by climate change, it is postulated that the fictional representation of climate crisis allows us to grasp the troubled relationship between ecology and capitalism, between precariousness and the circulation of bodies in space and time.

***Gun Island* and the Fictional Representation of Climate Change**

Ghosh's earlier novels *The Hungry Tide* and the *Ibis* trilogy are imbued with ecological sensitivity but concern over climate change appears rather obliquely. But in *Gun Island*, climate change is recognized both as the subtext and the motive force that substantiates the content and conditions the narrative progression. In the novel, Deen, the narrator,

who lives in New York, comes to know about the legend of Gun Merchant while visiting Kolkata. The legend is a derivative of Manasamangal Kāvya, an immensely popular poetry of medieval Bengal. Deen is asked to visit the shrine of this Merchant on an island in the Sundarbans since he has a PhD in Bengali folklore. On that trip, he meets Tipu and Rafi. A chain of uncanny events complicates his visit, making him depart for New York unnerved. The uncanny encounters become a regularity in Deen's life, following him to Los Angeles and Venice. In Venice, he bumps into Rafi who has migrated to Europe after losing his home in a storm. Deen later learns about Rafi's perilous journey and gets to know that Tipu is on a boat full of refugees – the Blue Boat – that is crossing the Mediterranean to make shore in Italy. Deen, with his historian friend Cinta and a group of activists, takes a ship to rescue that boat. The Italian Navy, joined by a flotilla of anti-immigrant nationalists, head in that direction too to push the boat back. After a series of coincidences and the intervention of forces of nature, the passengers are finally rescued. In the course of this plot, the novel explores the polyphonic reality rendered by climate change.

The parable of Gun Merchant and his journey serves as an allegorical subplot to which Deen's own journey of making sense of the altering reality around him runs parallel. Gun Merchant was a wealthy and successful merchant who refused to worship the goddess of serpents – Manasa Devi. As a result, he is hunted across mysterious lands by the infuriated goddess. The parable can be read as an allegorizing attempt to symbolically represent the dialectical interactions between nature and human agency. Gun Merchant's adventures and exploits symbolize the capitalist enterprise of profiteering by appropriating and exploiting the natural environment. Manasa Devi's rage that hunts and haunts Merchant can be read as the aftereffects of the human exploitation of nature evident in the form of climate change that is now hunting humanity. The evocation of this allegory and a series of uncanny happenings in representing climate change in this novel make it imperative to examine how apropos of the existing paradigm of fiction *Gun Island* does it.

Ghosh himself notices a “peculiar form of resistance” faced by fiction while addressing climate change and posits that forms and conventions of contemporary fiction are inadequate to represent it (*Derangement* 09-11). It is argued that the climate crisis renders narrative problems and the problem of imagination to the effect that the articulation of climate change is inhibited by the dominant cultural narratives (Wenzel 1; Trexler 24). This particular difficulty of representation takes place because of the discrepancy between the enormity of the “spatial and temporal scale” of climate change and that of the “individual human experience” (Goodbody and Johns-Putra 10). In short, the canon of fiction and criticism appears underequipped to represent the complexity of this planetary phenomenon. Ghosh finds that the conventional mode of fiction writing complies with the logic of bourgeois rationality where the narrative follows a continuum of probability eliminating the “improbable” (25). Literary imagination here goes through a process of rationalization, making the representation of climate conditioned by capitalism's logic of organizing nature and its ideological reproduction in everyday life. The planetary implications of climate change seem too improbable to make sense in the domain of urban-bourgeois life which makes the fictional representation of contemporary climatic reality exiguous.

Gun Island attempts to transcend the formalistic limitations of modern fiction to animate the tensions of anthropogenic climate change and its predicaments by addressing a planetary totality – the apparent and the underlying reality, consisting of both human agents and nonhuman forces – and its cognitive representation in the narrative. It breaks away from the existing narrative logic that resists the formalistic incorporation of climate change by deploying the uncanny. As the narrative progresses, an array of uncanny events take place like Deen’s multiple encounters with snakes, Tipu’s visions and predictions, an anonymous email predicting the mass-beaching of dolphins, and the resolution of the Blue Boat crisis where the creatures of the sky and sea kindle a preternatural moment. In the novel, the “reclamation of the uncanny” is observed as an attempt to dissolve the “distinction between imagination and reality” (Armitstead). This approach to conditioning the narrative progression by coincidences and uncanny happenings can be seen as an act of subversion where the above-mentioned regime of bourgeois rationality is destabilized. Capitalism’s ideological conditioning has led to the crisis of representation where the new global and fundamental realities remain inaccessible and unrepresentable and fail to emerge into “the presence of perception” because of the growing contradiction between the lived experience and the structural coordinates that condition such experiences (349-50). This contradiction is reflected in the precarious living experiences against the reality engendered by climate change and its ungraspable spatiotemporal scale. In the novel, the tensions concerning climate change – the rise of sea level, the destruction of micro and macro ecosystems, animal migration, unpredictable and inclement weather and their effects on human lives and affairs, the change in livelihood, forced migration, unsettling interactions with the changing reality and increasing experience of precariousness – are accompanied by improbable and uncanny happenings. This evocation of the uncanny tries to dissolve the incongruence between the living experience and the structural reality so that climate change and concomitant crises like precarity become perceptible and representable in the medium of fiction.

In representing climate change *Gun Island* sketches how this crisis creates new conditions and experiential frameworks of human vulnerability as well as intensifying the existing conditions. The novel not only depicts the increasing precariousness experienced by migrant workers and refugees but also explores climate change’s intertwined relations with the equations of globalization. In devising world-imagining, a mode of imagination to facilitate narratives to locate “a world and one’s place in it,” Jennifer Wenzel insists on understanding the continuities and disjuncture between globalization on one hand and repercussions of neoliberal capitalism and imperialism’s exploitation of nature on the other (1-2, 4). Here, it is implied that climate change and concomitant crises are transnational and global phenomena. Besides subscribing to this idea, *Gun Island* accommodates both the local and the global cultural frame to address climate change, as Ursula Heise emphatically makes the point (04-08). Its narrative trajectory traverses from the remote island of the Sundarbans to Europe, implying that climate disaster at the periphery causes reverberations at the very center which is recognizable in the global distribution of precariousness. This paper offers a reading of *Gun Island* to map the precarity in the nexus of the global dynamics of capital and the planetary impacts of climate change.

***Gun Island* and the Mapping of Climate Change-induced Precarity**

The early part of *Gun Island* is set in the Sundarbans which depicts the disruption in the relation of negotiation and dependency that the people have formed with this mangrove forest spanning parts of India and Bangladesh. As most people inhabiting this muddy landscape of ebb and tide live by fishing, farming, and collecting honey and timber, the rise of the sea level and the invasion of salinity into freshwater have made both the land and water hostile to local livelihoods. The damaging effects on freshwater ecosystems and land fertility are echoed in Tipu's words to Deen, "the fish catch is down, the land's turning salty" (*Gun* 60). Moreover, increasing storms and cyclones are aggravating those difficulties as vast stretches of fertile lands and commercial fishing ponds get over-flooded by saltwater and become unusable for years. The peril is evident in Moyna's lament: "Both land and water were turning against those who lived in the Sundarbans" (48). The gradual change of the environment and the repeated assault of natural disasters are jeopardizing their usual course of life which is propelling them to leave their homes in search of new professions, migrating to new places (60-61). Deen reflects, "Communities have been destroyed and families dispersed" (49). Tipu and Rafi, both concerned about the growing insecurities of life there, embark on a journey to Europe. In *Gun Island*, precarity is recognizable in the matrix of relations represented in the emblematic journey of the migrant laborers to the metropolis and the life lived there. Tipu and Rafi travel to Europe through the land route used by the human trafficking network, illegally crossing multiple borders. While crossing the border to Turkey, Tipu gets shot by the border guards on his leg and falls behind. Rafi manages to get to Istanbul, and through Eastern Europe finally reaches Venice. Tipu, after recovering, goes to Egypt and gets on a boat to cross the Mediterranean to come to Italy.

Here, Rafi belongs to the category of illegal immigrants who live outside the assurances of certain rights that are availed of by "citizens" and survive with minimal legal protection. In return, they offer the metropolis the basic services it needs to sustain itself. Dipesh Chakrabarty calls them the "new subaltern classes" of today's global economy which includes migrant workers, minorities, "the stateless," asylum seekers, and refugees (229). They do the heavy construction work, cleanings, and sweepings and serve as street vendors, salesmen, and waiters. Doing multiple jobs and working extra hours do not guarantee them minimal comfort as Rafi and Bilal often bunk at night in abandoned buildings and warehouses. They get no protection from the state as being of rights but live in constant fear of deportation and incarceration. They represent the lives that are "reduced to a bare life stripped of every right" (Agamben 183). More aptly, they live "a complex and contradictory mode of being or surviving somewhere between legality and incivility" (Bhabha 39). Their life is a constant negation of civility and the legal question applies to them only when the legal measures are to be taken against them, not to endorse any protection for them. Chakrabarty describes their precarious situation as representing "emergent, undocumented lifeworlds that break through the formal language of 'protection' and 'status'" (229). They cannot ask for police help since they are "illegal," as happens with Rafi. Their survival takes place in a zone of "privation and disenfranchisement" (Chakrabarty 230). Their very state of being is sketched in Deen's reflection: "In their eyes, I could see an anxiety that bespoke an existence of extreme precariousness" (*Gun* 155).

The Blue Boat registers a climactic point of precarity. This episode of *Gun Island* is a representative phenomenon of the capitalist metropolis' contradictory attitude toward migrant workers. The metropolis cannot survive without the essential cheap labor provided by these "illegal" migrants, yet it deliberately leaves them in a constant state of precariousness. It assumes the most inhuman role when its naval forces try to push the arriving migrants back into the sea. The boats, unfit for long sea voyages, overcrowded, short on supplies, and always a strong wave away from drowning, are denied permission to make port and forced to drift on as the passengers count seconds in fear of drowning. The boats getting capsized and corpses hitting shore are common stories in news media. The contradiction is apparent in the rescue of the Blue Boat. Here, Tipu is rescued by the same state that threatens to drown him and deliberately leaves Rafi outside the frame of protection. Precarity appears here as a "politically induced condition of maximized precariousness" where the people who are subjected to state violence, have to seek protection from the same state (Butler 26). Precarity, here, implies the politically initiated conditions that deprive people of the economic and social nexus of support and expose them to violence, injury and death (Butler 25). A constant threat of violence, the very survival against that threat and the mode of being that led these migrant workers to that condition signify both their bodily precariousness and the politically conditioned precarity. In *Gun Island*, Rafi and Tipu incarnate climate change-induced precarity as they belong to a significant share of the migrant population who are being displaced by climate disruption and turning into climate refugees. For Chakrabarty, these refugees embody "the human condition negatively, as an image of privation" (231). Here, precarity – the socially and politically conditioned uncertainty and vulnerability that determines human life and existence – becomes a parameter of the human condition. For Arendt, humans as a species are conditioned beings, and whatever comes in contact with humans becomes transformed into their condition of existence (9). This claim can be stretched a little to say that whatever socio-political milieu or ontological situation influences and determines human life can be taken as the conditions of human existence – the human condition. Precarity appears as the point of reference to understand the human condition in the wake of climate change.

Precarity, the Anthropocene, and the Ecology of Capital

Contemplating the human condition apropos of climate change, Chakrabarty looks into the imagination of the two figures of the human: "the human-human and the nonhuman-human" and argues that the human needs to be understood in both of its modes of existence – ontological and non-ontological (237-41). The latter is understood in terms of the collective agency of humans which the Anthropocene ascribes to the whole of humanity. The Anthropocene posits that the human species has collectively become "a geological agent on the planet" to "act as a main determinant of the environment of the planet" (Chakrabarty 174-75). *Gun Island's* subscription to this argument is imbued in the narrative as it formally and aesthetically embodies the tensions of the anthropogenic climate crisis. It addresses the dialectical negotiation between the human-made systems and the nonhuman entities that configure human experiences. Deen's "sense of being" endures phases of disorientation and reorientation as he encounters migrated animals, erratic weather, and uncanny coincidences

which signal a new domain of planetary reality forged by climate change. Adam Trexler mentions that the novels that capture the Anthropocene explore “how things like ocean currents, tigers, viruses, floods, vehicles, and capital relentlessly shape human experience” (26). *Gun Island* corresponds to this Anthropocene ethos that is evident in Deen’s efforts to make sense of the changing reality. When talking about a particular consequence of climate change, Cinta tells Deen, “It is here because of *our* history; because of things human beings have done” (214). This “*our*,” gesturing towards a non-ontological agency, does not differentiate humanity and attributes the agency of making history – the history of changing geological and climatic composition of the planet – to the entire species. The novel’s subscription to the Anthropocene points towards sidestepping capitalism as the particular history of human endeavor that incited climate change. The Anthropocene may capture the geophysical change of this planet and its vicissitudes but while attributing the agency to the undifferentiated humanity, it evades the question of uneven relation of power and perpetual differentiation by inequality that differentiates this species. Endorsing this agency to humans irrespective of their class and power position overlooks the question of how “humans co-produce patterns and relations of power and production within nature” (Moore 25). The intra-species differentiation such as class inequality, and unequal racial and gendered relations produced by non-linear, unequal, and uneven relations of power and wealth – by capitalism. Before any collective agency is attributed to the entire species, the lens needs to be shifted to the history of capitalism as it re/produces unequal relations of power in the web of life.

The Anthropocene is further questioned for forwarding ahistorical and abstract humanity that obfuscates the history of exploitation and class struggle, and for offering apolitical and technocratic solutions (Hartley 155-57). Behind this obfuscation is its oversight in recognizing capitalism as a driving force of climatic change, as it also overlooks the question of labor from the perspective of capital (Banerjee 02). To overcome the apolitical thrust of the Anthropocene, Moore proposes the term “Capitalocene” to locate the origin of climate crisis in the operating logic of capitalism that determines the relations facilitating the unremitting accumulation of capital (6, 172-73). Of course, the Marxian intervention in capitalism’s impact on nature began with Marx himself as he advanced the idea of social metabolism which is defined as the interactive process between humans and nature, mediated by labor itself (283). However, capital’s appropriation of the labor process and unfettered accumulation through the exploitation of nature create a rift in this metabolic interaction (Foster 156-60). The rift marks the dissociation of human labor from natural conditions of production as the necessity of nature to capital appears not “in the form of an organic social and material unity between the producers and their natural conditions of existence” but as distinct material conditions so that the use-value of the labor power can be appropriated (Burkett 62). Moore, however, finds it more of a metabolic shift than a rift when this metabolism is seen through the double internality of the flow of capital and power in nature and the flow of nature in capital and power such that the Cartesian dualism of nature and society coalesces into a singular world-ecology, “a way of organizing nature” that conjoins “the accumulation of capital, the pursuit of power, and the co-production of

nature in dialectical unity” (2-3). Capitalism itself is an ecological system where nature and capital are in a contradictory unity of interpenetrating processes that are constantly being “produced and reproduced” (Harvey *Contradictions* 247-8). Capitalism’s organization of nature, as a “world-ecology,” converts the natural environment into Cheap Nature – an enormous repository of unpaid work/energy and the value-relations associated with it – by “the exploitation of labor-power and the appropriation of unpaid work” (Moore 81). This unrestrained accumulation, appropriation, and exploitation of nature have led to the planetary crisis of climate change.

So, when *Gun Island* points toward “our history,” subscribing to the Anthropocene, it conceals the role of the capitalist class, the economic and political organization of capitalism, and its organization of nature that have engendered the climate crisis. The novel sheds light on the production of a particular kind of precariousness to which contemporary novels are not very attentive but it falls short of casting light on the original sin. In its thematic organization around climate change and precarity, as the novel addresses the history of profiteering and accumulation by exploiting nature, an implicit critique of human-made systems appears as a subtext here. This critique, however, pinpoints the collective actions of the species and capitalism appears here as a particular moment of the Anthropocene. In the novel, the parable of Gun Merchant allegorically represents the capitalist venture and its dialectical relationship with nature. Allegorizing a present crisis with a historical homology is not new for Ghosh as his *Ibis* trilogy has already been read as an allegorization of neoliberalism that exposes “the rhetoric of freedom and the invisible hand of the market” and extrapolates “how the commoditization of poppy leads towards ... the destruction of life as well as the environment” (Zayed 129-32). In *Gun Island*, the homology is mythical with allusion to a historical past, making it an allegory within an allegory only to gesture towards the proposition that “allegory itself is allegorical” (Jameson 1). However, allegory here appears more as a one-to-one allegory than being an allegory proper that “becomes indistinguishable from the text and no longer visible to the naked eye” (Jameson 1-4). Even though the allegory is distinguishable as a parallel narrative, it aims to reveal a “structure of multiple meanings” (Jameson 9). It signals a relationship between the mythical then and the contemporary now to reveal the structural coordinates and the matrix of relations that inform the dialectical interpenetration of capital and nature. The seventeenth-century adventure of the Merchant for profit-making temporally coincides with the advent of capitalism and its disregard for the natural environment in the process of accumulation. Manasa Devi, the interlocutor between humans and nature, gets angry when she finds that Merchant did not want to worship her and the apparent balance that exists between human society and the natural world gets shifted. Manasa’s curse and rage befall Merchant just like the repercussions of climate change are affecting human life now. The Merchant falling victim to the forces and creatures of nature corresponds to the aberrant weather and climatic phenomena of the seventeenth-century Little Ice Age. Climate change appears as the beast that has been unleashed by the exploitation of nature that is now hunting back humans. Merchant’s exploits that are emblematic of the human ability to master nature end up offering an allegorical representation of the collective human agency that unfolds

in the logic of capitalism. However, as this allegory does not represent the labor process, the history of exploitation, and the hegemony of one particular class which are constitutive of capitalism, the symbolic representation of the capitalist venture ends up showing it as one particular facet of collective actions of the human species. Moreover, if Gun Merchant represents the collective agency of the species, then his sufferings must also point to the collective tribulation of the human species rendered by climate change. Chakrabarty speculates that there are no lifeboats to save “the rich and the privileged” beckoning the sufferings of the whole species in the aftermaths of climate change to which Merchant’s allegorical sufferings correspond (189). However, the representation of the precarious experience in the novel shows that the tribulation afflicted by climate change has a class dimension. It hits them the hardest who are at the fringes of the capitalist class relation. Ultimately, in the novel’s recognition of “our history” signifying the collective human agency of the Anthropocene and the depiction of the uneven distribution of precariousness along the line of class position, an unresolved tension hovers around. This tension actually harbors the contemporary debate over the species agency and the capitalist accumulation process – the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene – to locate the origin of climate change.

The collective agency that the Anthropocene ascribes to the species in fact has a capitalist mediation. Here, I propose that the Anthropocene can be better explained through the global subsumption of labor processes and social relations by capital. As a species, humans never comprise a single unit to consciously act upon this planet collectively. But how can a species divided geographically across nations, cultures, and unequal class relations, and incorporating irreconcilable differences have a collective agency as to bring a new geologic era if a single overarching logic does not connect them? This is where the globalizing logic of capital comes in. The human species can be attributed to a collective agency only when the entire terrain of social relations and the interpenetrating relations between human and natural processes (the labor processes) go through both formal and real subsumption by capital, on a global scale. With the shift from formal to real subsumption, the entire fabric of social relations has been subsumed by capital where a “properly capitalist” instead of indicating homogenization connotes a society formed of multiplicities and interactions of the differences (Hardt and Negri 441-2). The subsumption by capital indicates the species marked by differences and unevenness have coalesced under an overarching logic. If the whole species is to be imagined to have a collective agency then one must take into account how the entire human species and the matrix of relations connecting them have been subsumed by the global dynamics of capital. The collective agency of humans is then the agency of capital that brings the entire species and the matrix of relations connecting them under a single umbrella. Although the species is bound together by the dynamics of capital, the species as a whole does not possess a planet-altering agency since it is differentiated by unequal class relations, and not every individual has an equal impact on the planet’s environment. It is rather the relation of power produced by the world-ecology of capital that determines the distribution of this agency across the species. The class that has control over the capitalist production process and a far greater carbon footprint for over-consumption surely contributes more to the planet’s distress. The subjugated classes

in the capitalist system are part of this collective agency only in the sense that they have become the cogs in the capitalist machine – its production, circulation, consumption, and market networks. The Anthropocene, then, more aptly can be termed the Capitalocene. The temporal overlapping of the proposed Anthropocene and the advent of capitalism and its global operation of subsumption also signals this shift. Paul Crutzen identifies the latter part of the eighteenth century as the starting point of the Anthropocene which coincides with the beginning of industrial capitalism (Chakrabarty 175). However, the umbrella of capitalism as a single economy began subsuming the world in the sixteenth century (Wallerstein 59). Moore illustrates that capitalism's exploitation of nature for endless accumulation began in the fifteenth century (181-89). If a geologic era characteristic of anthropogenic climate change is to be envisioned then it should be thought of as the Capitalocene since it overcomes the theoretical oversight of the Anthropocene and addresses the labor process, the history of exploitation, and the hegemony of the capitalist class in the process of accumulation and the organization of nature, and also explicates precarious life conditions.

The production and distribution of climate change-induced precarity are mediated by the capitalist dynamics too. Capitalism's organization of nature stimulates the process of alienation that dissociates the labor process from natural conditions of production leading to the estrangement from nature itself. This estrangement is exacerbated when climate crises dislodge people of their livelihoods and dislocate them from their spatial relations with the natural environment. Rafi is a fisherman, but his profession is growing more insecure as the rivers are being depleted of fish. The spatial relation he has with the natural environment of the Sundarbans is disrupted by the direct impacts of climate change on its ecosystems. Here, disruption and reconfiguration of certain spatial relations through which social life is re/produced are resulting in human displacement in the Sundarbans which is still operating at the fringe of the capitalist machine but already subsumed by capitalist processes. The vicissitudes of this displacement transcend the borders of nation-states and add more pressure to the already existing global reserve army of labor, making the life of the marginal class more precarious. The uneven development of capitalism contributes to this predicament as it creates necessary conditions for the advanced economies to thrive by drawing capital and labor so that cheap labor from the underdeveloped ends rushes to the developed side (Harvey "Uneven" 150). The contradiction of uneven development conditions the refugee rush and makes them board the boats to cross the Mediterranean and pushes them to precarious living conditions. Understanding the precarious experience of climate refugees thus demands factoring in the global dynamics of capital.

These dynamics are patent in the transnational spaces that are formed by the overlapping of three phenomena – the mobility of labor, the transgression of borders, and the migration of people (Jay 4-5). In *Gun Island*, precarity is recognizable in transnational spaces as the novel factors in all these phenomena to explore the intertwined relations between climate change, precarious life experiences, and the equations of globalization. Globalization has accelerated the subsumption of non-capitalist forms of production within capitalist processes. Marx distinguishes between formal and real subsumption on the ground that the formal incorporates the existing pre-capitalist and non-capitalist labor processes to

produce absolute surplus value, but the real subsumption substitutes those labor processes with the capitalist mode of production to produce relative surplus value (1019-1025). Globalization triggered the transition from the formal to the real subsumption of labor in the past decades as modes of labor and social relations have been increasingly brought into the fold of capital (Munck 87). The global expansion of capital and the proliferation of accumulation enable the global movement of cheap labor by destabilizing national borders. These processes stockpile a global working class, not with a distinctive association to the relation of production but, “in the sense of an accelerated process of proletarianization” (Munck 87). Climate change expedites this shift from the formal to the real subsumption of labor as climate disasters are uprooting people to push them into cities and beyond national borders where their labor – fundamental to current forms of exploitation and value extraction – is subsumed by capital as they end up both in waged-labor systems and informal sectors. Rafi, Bilal and other climate refugees of *Gun Island* share a similar story. Displaced by climate phenomena, they move beyond borders and flock to the spaces created by the globalization processes where they are exploited by neoliberal labor conditions. These spaces appear as conjunctures where the implications of capitalism and climate change intersect. Be it the streets of Venice where migrant labor is exploited, or the waters of the Mediterranean where death awaits just a wave away, precariousness caused by neoliberal conditions and climate dislocation becomes conspicuous in these dispersed and fluid spaces. Rafi and other migrants are forced to live there in a contradictory state of being. The denial of legality exempts the states from any civic duty towards them which perfectly fits with their neoliberal scheme of austerity. And the fear of deportation and incarceration ensures that the workers provide cheap labor without resistance. In this context, precarity now corresponds to both labor conditions symptomatic of neoliberalism and ontological conditions of vulnerability and uncertainty – both mediated by the capitalist logic of accumulation and dispossession.

In addition, the ongoing era of neoliberalism has exacerbated both climate crisis and precarity. The accelerating destruction of tropical rainforests, exploitation of natural resources, and increasing emission of carbon over the last few decades coincides with privatization and profit-driven policies of neoliberalization, leading to further environmental degradation (Harvey *Neoliberalism* 172-5). Capital’s reshaping and re-engineering of nature, relentless exploitation of resources, and unrestrained carbon emission resulting from accumulation processes have caused the climate crisis which has been greatly intensified in its neoliberal phase. Simultaneously, neoliberal economic policies have ensured that labor becomes cheaper, employment becomes unstable, and social protection is massively curtailed. All of these have inflicted the unprotected migrant workers and climate refugees with a constant feeling of insecurity and anxiety which have become the very condition of their existence. *Gun Island* captures this anxiety of existence exacerbated by neoliberalism which is incarnated in the climate refugees. These subjects of climate change-induced precarity are also subjects of neoliberalism who embody neoliberal class conditions and expose its exploitative domain. The novel’s depiction of precariousness gestures to the class dimension of climate change to imply that both neoliberal capitalism and climate change hit hard the class that loiters at the margins of the capitalist machine. My reading of *Gun Island* substantiates that climate change has appeared as a novel determinant of

precarity. However, to comprehend its dynamics and implications, the lens needs to be shifted towards its capitalist mediation when capitalism is considered a world-ecology of organizing nature to the end of unrestrained accumulation and unchecked exploitation.

Conclusion

Gun Island departs from the conventional norm of locating human vulnerability in wars, social and political conflicts and economic nexus of dependability to look into how anthropogenic climate change makes life precarious. This paper, from the novel's representation of climate refugees, has argued and tried to establish that the planetary impacts of climate change and the global dynamics of capital coincide to create an additional interface of precarity. *Gun Island* projects precarity in the contour of the Anthropocene but this paper offers a critique of this premise and posits it in the frame of the Capitalocene through the operation of subsumption by capital. There is a Latin phrase in *Gun Island*, "Unde origo inde salus – 'From the origin salvation comes'." The underlying motive of this paper has been to address this origin. This research maintains that the current climate crisis is engendered and exacerbated by capitalism's way of organizing nature and the precarity induced by it is also structurally mediated by capitalism. Although climate change and the concomitant array of crises do not always overtly display a billiard-ball causal relationship to capitalism, they are indeed cognate of manifesting their bearings in different spheres of human life and planetary reality. Capitalism can indeed be located simultaneously as the origin and the underlying structure that has subsumed the processes that have led to this crisis. In order to address climate change and associated precarity along with the corresponding array of crises, it is requisite to address capitalism, its structural coordinates, and its matrix of relations.

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