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The Anthropocene as Impasse: Optimism, cynicism, and the desire for justice in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*

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Abstract

This paper reads Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's People* (2007) for its representation of the impasse that develops in the wake of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984) as its victims wait endlessly for justice. I examine the narrative form that the impasse takes in the novel, detailing how the stagnancy and frustration of the impasse shape the novel's narrative movement. I track the different negotiations between optimism and cynicism that shape people's attachment to justice in the novel's world. The tensions and correlations between these modes of cynicism and optimism serve to trace the affective and political contours of the impasse while offering a critique of the structural impossibilities of movement. I examine how two temporalities—the suspended time of the impasse and the toxic temporality of the poisons—intersect in the novel. At the intersection between the two is the impasse of the Anthropocene.

Keywords: optimism, cynicism, impasse, attachment, *Animal's People*, Anthropocene

Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007) maps the "affect worlds"[1] created by the broken promises of postcolonial nationhood, globalization, democracy, and development, as well as universal human rights. If, as one of the characters in the novel espouses, "[…] things work when we keep our promises to each other and to ourselves, when we don't keep our promises, things fall apart" (Sinha, 2007, p. 204), then *Animal's People* is a novel about the falling apart of things, and the lives lived amidst their ruins. The novel is a fictionalized account of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy of 1984 and the many lives and livelihoods that have continued to be affected by it in the last 37 years. In its imaginative representation of the Bhopal tragedy, the novel lays bare the long afterlives of transnational capital and risk as they play out in the margins of the Global South in the wake of the industrial disaster.

Set in the fictional city of Khaufpur, the novel's plot unfolds about twenty years after a gas leak from a pesticide factory owned by an American corporation kills thousands of

people and disables several thousand more. The uncleaned and abandoned factory site continues to poison the surrounding land and water, leading to widespread illnesses in successive generations. The people of Khaufpur wait for justice twenty years later while the case against the corporation, called simply the Kampani, drags on in court even as their living conditions worsen. The novel tracks how the immediate crisis of the disaster extends into an enduring impasse shaped on the one hand by the Kampani and the state, which continue to defer justice, and on the other by the poisons that continue to cause illnesses and deaths.

In concentrating on the enduring aftereffects of the disaster, *Animal's People* shows us how its violence poisons the ordinary through its persistence, gradually becoming a matter of everyday life. In his influential reading of the novel, Rob Nixon (2011) identifies this gradual, concealed, and often forgotten violence as "slow violence", and shows us how Indra Sinha devises new representational strategies to make this violence perceptible (p. 44). I extend Nixon's focus on the ordinary as a site of violence to the affective realm and see what sort of affect worlds emerge in the course of slow violence. The affect worlds of the Khaufpuri people are shaped by their experience of waiting for redress and justice. As they keep waiting for nearly two decades, their waiting no longer remains a time-bound activity with an expected outcome but rather becomes an everyday condition of existence. The time spent waiting congeals into an impasse. In the first part of the paper, I examine how the novel represents this impasse, and the attachment to justice that is stretched to the breaking point but somehow sustained through the time of the impasse. In the second part, I examine how the novel reveals the precarity of this attachment through intersecting modes of optimism and cynicism.

Novels like *Animal's People,* which eschew apocalyptic narratives to attend to what Stephanie LeMenager (2017) has called "the everyday Anthropocene," add necessary perspective to the genre of Anthropocene fiction (p. 224). LeMenager sees the everyday Anthropocene as a correction to the "epochal discourses" that dominate Anthropocene discourse (p. 224). Originating within geology, the Anthropocene has usually been measured in terms of deep time. But as LeMenager says, "epochs are not attentive to the wearing away of bodies" or to "their slow depletion" (p. 224). They do not show us what it means to live through the Anthropocene "day by day," especially with the "economic and sociological injuries" that it distributes so unevenly (p. 224). *Animal's People* represents such an everyday Anthropocene and grounds it in the context of marginalized lives in the Global South. In her theory of a "global political economy of affect", Dia Da Costa (2016) reminds us that "the affective experience of time is different across different spaces" and that it is necessary to be attentive to these differences (p. 4). *Animal's People* represents a very specific experience of affective temporality, which sharpens our critical narratives of the Anthropocene; it offers us a view of the impasse as lived in a Global South context in the wake of environmental violence and in the pursuit of environmental justice.

Impasse is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a road or way having no outlet" and figuratively as "a position from which there is no way of escape". Lauren Berlant (2011) employs the term to describe and diagnose the neoliberal everyday in which life-sustaining infrastructures are slowly crumbling, leaving one to cope with emergent realities for which there is not yet a "narrative genre" (p. 200). In the absence of any available genres to make meaning of new realities, people maintain "optimistic attachments"[2], often to their own detriment, to dying fantasies such as that of the "good life", which in reality may no

longer be available and might actively keep people from thriving. Berlant names such an attachment "cruel optimism" (p. 2). Critics like Da Costa and Jodi A. Byrd (2011) have critiqued Berlant's concepts of cruel optimism and the impasse for their lack of attention to colonial histories and non-western contexts. Da Costa (2016) reminds us that many groups of people in the Global South have not, unlike their western counterparts, recently lost access to the "good life," but that they are born into "a pervasive and intractable sense of marginality and insecurity" (p. 1). It is just such a context in which *Animal's People* stages its exploration of attachment, optimism, cynicism, and impasse. The affective structures that emerge in this context are necessarily different from the ones that Berlant has written about.

The impasse I study in *Animal's People* refers to a suspension of temporality borne out of protracted periods of waiting. The impasse is a suspension between the attachment to a promise and its continual deferral. The attachment, in this account, is not to fantasies of the "good life", which are structurally out of reach of the extremely poor gas victims in Khaufpur. Their attachment is instead to the promise of legal justice in the face of near total abandonment by the state. This attachment is not shaped by nostalgia for a once just society but is maintained alongside attitudes of skepticism and cynicism.

Before I move on, a brief introduction to the novel's cast of characters are given. A teenage survivor of the gas disaster, the narrator has a spine deformed by the leaked poison in such a way that he cannot stand or walk upright and must move about on all fours. He dismisses his own humanity, rendering it a thing of hearsay – "so I'm told" – and takes upon himself the name "Animal" (Sinha, 2007, p. 1). The Khaufpuri gas victims' community – "Animal's people" (Sinha, 2007, p. 183)—that the novel represents are people living in extreme poverty in slums surrounding the factory grounds. The novel also features Zafar, a political activist leading the Khaufpuri social justice movement; Nisha, Zafar's partner and co-worker in the movement; Farouq, another co-worker; Somraj, Nisha's father who was once a famous singer before the gas leak took his voice; Elli, an American doctor who opens a free clinic in Khaufpur; and Ma Franci, an old French nun who makes Khaufpur her home.

Waiting and impasse

During an address to a Khaufpuri gathering, the Minister for Poison Relief makes a claim about the relief work his department has been doing, which immediately draws "scornful laughter" from the crowd (Sinha, 2007, p. 131). One asks him to name "one example of relief work" done by his department in the past one year (p. 131). Another mordantly offers a bit of leniency, and asks if anything was done in the last two years, maybe even five. Animal points out that soon "various numbers of years start flying around" (p. 131). In laughing about how long it has been since the government did any relief work, the Khaufpuris foreground how they experience citizenship itself as an act of counting years, as an experience of waiting.

There are multiple contexts to this waiting. The many illnesses caused by the factory's poisons constitute one kind of waiting. For example, an old Khaufpuri man describes the pain from his ulcers as "unceasing" (Sinha, 2007, p. 283). In a long, run-on sentence, he describes the pain that does not allow him to pray, work, or even sleep, defeating any attempt to structure his time – his "days and nights blur into a dream" (p. 283). Further, as Zafar points out, Khaufpuri people are terrified by "what horrors might yet emerge in their bodies" (p. 283). The "might yet" of his statement makes clear the ongoing and unpredictable

nature of their illnesses. This torturous temporality is further exacerbated by an inefficient and unwelcoming public healthcare system in which people are expected to "queue all day", the doctor "barely looks" at them (p. 24). While the people continue to suffer the effects of the factory's poisons, they also wait as their court case against the Kampani unfolds over two decades, the American defendants not showing up at all in court for most of that time.

The Khaufpuri people's long wait is not incidental but a direct result of their marginalized position within the state and within larger transnational relations, their enemy being a powerful multinational corporation. As many have noted, waiting and making someone wait are inextricably enmeshed in power.[3] The novel tracks how this long waiting period slowly thickens into an impasse: how the Khaufpuris come to *feel* time differently, not as flowing from one event to another, but rather as stuck and suspended. This *felt sense* of time, in my reading, is crucial to the concept of the impasse. It is not that objectively speaking, time has halted but that it *feels* as though it has gotten stuck to some people. What the impasse names is not only the political reality of the continual deferral of justice but also its affective temporality.

This impasse is as material as it is affective: while the Khaufpuri time seems suspended, the poisons in their bodies, their water, and their land remain active, spreading, and mutating. The longer the Khaufpuris wait for justice, the more of them die without it. As Zafar told the judge at one of the hearings, there was no justice for the thousands who died since that night, and "as [they] speak, the factory is poisoning the water of thousands more. Must all perish before these Amrikan defendants appear?" (Sinha, 2007, p. 52) The Khaufpuris are caught in the impasse that is created between delayed justice and ongoing toxicity, a site fraught with urgency on one side and slowness and delay on the other. When Elli visits the office of the Ministry for Poison Relief to complete the procedures to start her clinic, they ask her to wait. When she reminds them that she cannot wait very long since there are sick people who might die without treatment, the secretary tells her: "[…] we are dealing with claims that go back twenty years, what difference will a few days make?" (Sinha, 2007, p. 169) The slowness of the legal system in this impasse subsumes and then erases the urgency of the toxicity that nevertheless continues to claim lives.

The novel conveys this sense of impasse using different narrative devices, which I will go on to examine. One of the most potent ones is the figure of Kha-in-the-jar. An aborted foetus with two heads, a "child of the poison", Kha is preserved in a glass jar for twenty years as a medical specimen (Sinha, 2007, p. 59). Sinha borrows this figure from the discourse of Bhopal's social justice movement and enlists him as an important interlocuteur in Khaufpur's tragedy: Kha speaks to Animal (or Animal imagines Kha to be speaking to him). Pramod K. Nayar (2017) has shown how in Bhopal, images of aborted and deformed foetuses, stillborns, and dying babies embody both the denial of futurity and a haunting from the past (p. 100). A figure with its roots in that context, Kha expresses his sense of being stuck between the past and the future and finds it unendurable: "it's like being trapped in an egg" (Sinha, 2007, p. 58). He tells Animal that he waits to be born, and waits to burn, never having lived. The waiting of the unborn dead straddles life and death, past and future, and serves as an index to the prolonged suffering of the community and their long wait for justice.

While Kha seeks speedy destruction, asking Animal to destroy him with fire and free him from his jar, his body shows signs of a slow attrition: "worse for wear, body seems furry like he's starting to fall apart" (Sinha, 2007, pp. 137–138). This long, enduring process of

unraveling is also characteristic of the impasse. As Sianne Ngai (2013) points out, the "slow processes of attrition or wearing-out or exhaustion" are, despite their slowness and negativity, not "non-happenings" but "particular forms of change" that occur in an impasse even when time feels stuck or suspended (para. 5). The figure of Kha represents that stuckness in multiple ways. In his corporeal form (as an aborted "child of the poison"), as well as in the spatiality (constricted within the jar) and temporality he inhabits (life/death, past/future), Kha is a densely packed figure for the impasse within which the Khaufpuris live as well as for their desire to break out of it.

The novel also sketches the impasse by way of contrast through Ma Franci's tempestuous fantasies of the Apocalypse. She believes that the Apocalypse began in Khaufpur with the gas leak and will soon end the world. She reads from the Book of Revelation and interprets the world through its prophetic lens. In the long wait for justice, Ma Franci's prophecies of the Apocalypse, the Resurrection, and the Day of Judgement function as fantasies of teleology, closure, and inexorable justice that stand out against the paralysis of the present. We may identify these narratives as belonging to the "genre of crisis" which as Berlant (2011) points out, "may distort something structural and ongoing within ordinariness into something that seems shocking and exceptional" (p. 7). The superimposition of such a "genre of crisis" onto reality turns the ordinary objects of a destitute present into forceful portents of the Apocalypse. Scorpions who live in the walls of her home become things of great promise—they will grow to the size of horses, wear golden crowns, and when "they beat their wings, it will sound like an army of chariots rushing to war" (Sinha, 2007, p. 62). These narratives make the present more liveable by generating and sustaining the expectation that things will come to a head, and that present suffering will end in a momentous and meaningful culmination through the promise of divine justice. Their narrative velocity and inclination towards climactic action, however, throw into sharp relief the stagnancy of the present. When Ma Franci pronounces that "Terror will return to this city. It began here, here it will end", Animal notes the true terror of their world: "Fucking world didn't end. It's still suffering" (pp. 63–64).

For Ma Franci, belief in divine justice is a way of compensating for the fading promise of worldly justice, an affective strategy for making the world more liveable. But for most Khaufpuris, closure and justice become bywords for the absurd and the impossible. When someone says something unbelievable, others reply, "Oh sure, and the Kampani is come to court" (Sinha, 2007, p. 34). For them, the processes of law are suspect, and its promises are never to be taken at face value. Even so, their fight for justice has continued for over two decades. As such, the novel limns the impasse within which Khaufpuri public life is caught: while the Kampani and the state use all means to evade their responsibilities towards Khaufpuri gas victims, the community is always vigilant in their relationship with the Kampani and the state, anticipating every move to scuttle justice and acting to prevent it. We can identify an attachment to justice here that the Khaufpuris attempt to sustain. For example, when the news of an out-of-court settlement between the state and the Kampani reaches the Khaufpuri gas victims, they are horrified: "After we've waited so long, they should let justice take its course" (Sinha, 2007, p. 260). In order to let "justice takes its course", the people take out demonstrations, go on hunger strikes, publish political pamphlets, and disrupt illegal meetings between politicians and the Kampani lawyers.

The Khaufpuris' continued investment in the pursuit of legal justice is already accompanied by skepticism and disbelief, as we saw above, which cannot then simply be

explained as cruel optimism. Da Costa (2016), in her study of the Chhara people, offers us an alternative that might name this knowing and sceptical attachment, "cruel pessimism" which she shows exists in a mutually constitutive/competitive relationship with forms of optimism as well (p. 3). She suggests that for the most marginalized people in the Global South, "the investment in attachment to normative ideals" and "expectations of fruition" have been disconnected for a long time, even before the neoliberal present (p. 12). We see this chasm between attachment and expectation in *Animal's People* as well. The novel traces an affect world that is shaped by the two oppositional positions of cynicism and optimism directed at the same object: the pursuit of justice.

The Khaufpuri attachment to legal justice absorbs several kinds of tension besides their own skepticism. On the one hand, as they wait for justice, the Kampani's poisons continue to slowly kill them. On the other hand, they face additional resistance in the form of criticism from politicians and other privileged citizens. They see the Khaufpuris' continued affective investment in the court case as an act of troublemaking, of being bad citizens. Elli's friend, a rich doctor, tells her that the best thing for Khaufpuris would be to "forget about the disaster," because the rest—"citizens, the city council, the chamber of commerce, everyone"—wants to "move on" (Sinha, 2007, pp. 152-153). When Elli asks him what that would mean for those still waiting for justice, he tells her that the poor people "never had a chance" and that if not for the factory, there would be myriad other reasons "they would have died anyway" (pp. 152-153). In moving on, he suggests the poor would be facing the fact of their own dispensability as citizens and as human beings. Their pursuit of justice for past (and ongoing) violence is seen by Elli's friend as pushing against a future-oriented time of progress, and as tarrying within the impasse.

The novel records how maintaining attachments to legal justice in such a situation is a laborious and often thankless task because nothing seems to change. When Somraj expresses his faith that "justice will reward us in the end", his daughter, Nisha, is upfront about the receding prospect of justice: "Maybe you remember such a thing as justice, but in my lifetime, there's been no sign of it" (Sinha, 2007, p. 34). The work of maintaining such long political movements requires a great deal of affective investment. But in an impasse, such as this, no matter how much one invests of oneself and one's energies, the novel suggests, nothing yields. A sense of weariness emerges out of the citizen-state relationship, an affect the novel is committed to documenting. The novel represents such weariness as an accretive, durative affect that registers both the passage of time and the failure of institutions. It is useful to read such weariness through the framework of "ugly feelings," as theorized by Sianne Ngai (2007): minor, weak, negative feelings emerging from obstructed agency instead of potential, characterized by a flatness rather than heightened intensity, and often, lacking a specific object or feeling but having a "critical productivity" (pp. 1–7). As an affective register, weariness is an inventory of delays, setbacks, obstructions, and frustrations. When this inventory grows longer, the burden of weariness grows heavier and registers viscerally as a weighing down.

The novel condenses these contemplations about weariness through the haptic imagery of Zafar bearing the weight of the world on his back. Animal dreams of Zafar, walking into the Nutcracker with the world on his back. The world, Animal thinks, must have been heavy, because Zafar staggers under its weight, hardly being able to hold it in place (Sinha, 2007, p. 83). This very Sisyphean image captures the feeling that political mobilizing in an impasse, within brutally unequal relations of power, is tiring, recursive, and

unending. Nisha is in the dream too, following Zafar, asking to share the burden, but Animal believes that Zafar could not hear her. While Zafar displays his characteristic patience in the dream, his weariness isolates him in such a way that, overwhelmed by its weight, he cannot hear Nisha or share the burden with her. Weariness as an affect emerging from such situations of prolonged resistance to continuing injustice, is not a binding effect but one that strains at interpersonal and social bonds.

Maree Pardy (2009) writes that "the prolonged durée of chronic waiting produces dullness, or a deadening of vitality," leading to feelings of "resignation, defeat and hopelessness" (pp. 199–200). We see this in Nisha, who confesses her own dream to Animal. When their fight will be won, she and Zafar will move to Ratnagiri: "We would live in a little house by the sea, we'd grow vegetables and have lots of children" (Sinha, 2007, p. 146). Weariness here creates a rupture between the public and the private, eating away at attachments to the world. However, she and Zafar plan to leave only on the "day [they] win, when there's justice, and no more need for [them]". Nisha's dream of a private life perfectly secluded from the political is always deferred by the political dream, which is itself indefinitely delayed: "This struggle, it's going to go on and on and on. It will outlast all of us. If our children grow up here, it will blight their lives too" (Sinha, 2007, p. 285). We may say that weariness is not only a register of the time of waiting that has been endured but also of the time that is yet to be endured.

Optimism, cynicism, and political emotions

Even though the novel represents people's attachment to justice, it does not romanticize it or celebrate what Ghassan Hage has called their "stuckedness" or the grit individuals display in times of crisis.[4] The novel cuts through these possible narrative risks by deftly shading its sketch of optimistic attachment with dark strokes of cynicism through the interactions between Zafar and Animal. On the one hand, Animal's voice, which Nixon (2011) characterizes as the "environmental picaresque" (p. 46), offers dark critiques of discourses like that of human rights, often in profane language.[5] His insistence on his 'animality' prods open the very category of the 'human'. For most of the narrative, he refuses to be termed a human being and wonders "…how it is that in the same world there are people like the lawyers and creatures like [him]" (Sinha, 2007, p. 263). If, on the one hand, the Kampani lawyers represent powers that seem impervious to all moral and legal claims, on the other hand, people like him and his fellow Khaufpuris must navigate their precarious worlds with increasingly constrained agency and a shrinking sense of possibility. For Animal, the category of universal humanity would implode if it is made to accommodate differences as vast and brutal as these.

On the other hand, we have Zafar, a political activist who abandons his studies after the gas leak and comes to Khaufpur to help in the fight against the Kampani. Seen as the leading organizer of the movement, it is Zafar who "has kept the fight against the Kampani alive so long" as Nisha tells Animal (Sinha, 2007, p. 27). Since it is Animal who narrates the story, his cynicism frames our access to Zafar, whose emotional responses Animal often finds ridiculous, idealistic, and foolish. Though loved and revered by the people of Khaufpur, Zafar is the one who shapes much of the movement's rhetoric and many of its strategies. Like Animal, Zafar also critiques the inadequacies of the human rights discourse, pointing out how words like "*rights, law, justice*" are always changing shape, but he nevertheless continues to hold on to its promises and principles (Sinha, 2007, p. 3, emphasis original). He

is the one who tells Animal that, as a "human being", he is entitled to "dignity and respect", and he must not call himself an animal. While Zafar embodies the optimistic attachment to justice that keeps the political movement alive, Animal epitomizes a kind of hardboiled cynicism in his unflinching acknowledgement of the world's capacity for cruelty. The tensions and intersections between these modes of cynicism and optimism serve to trace the affective contours of the impasse while offering a critique of the structural impossibilities of movement.

Zafar works to keep up the morale of the people fighting for justice. He acknowledges both the exhausting nature of their long fight—"they seek to wear us down"—as well as their condition of "having nothing," but interprets these circumstances not as cause for despair but for confidence—"armed with the power of nothing [to lose], we are invincible, we are bound to win" (Sinha, 2007, p. 54). In the long wait, in which every court hearing is nothing more than a postponement, he organizes celebrations for any progress that they make within the larger impasse— "something new has happened"—however small that progress may be (p. 54, emphasis added). Zafar's efforts in this direction may be seen as seeking to maintain an attachment to the promise of justice made by the state within the rules set by it. This also shapes their movement and the strategies they choose. While people turn up for "demos with him, block roads, shout slogans" (p. 185), he stops them from resorting to violence. At different points in the novel, Zafar and his associates go to different localities trying to "calm things down" (p. 282). Zafar tells the people that their side must be "impeccable", that the smallest violent gesture will get them termed "extremists" or "terrorists" (p. 282). He tells them, "we must not allow anger to rule us, if we break the law, we place ourselves in the same situation as the Kampani" (p. 282). Emotions, to be politically effective, for Zafar, must stay within the bounds of the law.

Deborah Gould (2009), in her study of ACT UP and its affective politics, writes that social movements often involve an emotional pedagogy that "disciplines" feelings and shapes the members' sense of what is "politically possible, desirable, and necessary, thereby helping to establish a political horizon and to determine whether we turn to political activism—and in what forms" (p. 46). The novel shows us the pedagogies and processes through which the Khaufpuri political movement establishes its horizons. Animal notes that on the factory walls, which are always covered in slogans and messages to the Kampani, "Zafar's lot never write what they really feel", instead writing "high-sounding shit" using terms like "justice and liabilities" (Sinha, 2007, p. 177). Animal believes that Zafar censors *real* feelings in seeking to keep the movement's political strategies within the bounds of the law.

Although Zafar symbolizes an attachment to the promise of legal justice, he is far from naïve about it. As Animal puts it, Zafar gives him the job of listening around to find out what the municipality and the state government are up to "because those buggers were always up to no good" (Sinha, 2007, p. 27). Zafar's optimistic attachment is also tempered with skepticism and vigilance. At one point, Zafar confesses to Animal that he felt there was no hope for them-"let go of hope and keep fighting, it's the lesson of Khaufpur" (p. 75). Animal probes further and tells us that, being the "fool" that he is, Zafar gets "emotional" and answers that "it is love" that helps him carry on his long fight (p. 75). Thus, while Zafar's efforts endear him to the people, Animal perceives him not only as an emotional fool but as a political one as well. At one point, disagreeing with Zafar's boycott of an American clinic, Animal says:

> Zafar brother, you're a fool. You're making the people suffer for nothing. The Kampani is stronger and cleverer than you. Go ahead, block the clinic, march, stop the traffic, shout all the slogans you like. Nothing changes. The people go on suffering, the Kampani does what it wants and no one can say anything to it. It's the fucking Kampani I admire. (p. 137)

Bringing his cynicism to bear on Zafar's determined optimism, Animal lays bare the limits of lawful, respectable, and nonviolent politics within the larger ambit of transnational power relations. In her dissertation on cynicism as a neoliberal emotion, Carolyn Veldstra (2014) writes that even though cynicism is often vilified in popular culture, it is an important political emotion that recognizes the failure of neoliberal promises and the "situation of hope's impossibility, at least in terms of the frames in which hope is offered" (p. 14). Positioning himself as an "affect alien", that is, as someone who does not share an affective orientation with the majority (Ahmed, 2010, p. 37), Animal provides an important critical function with his cynicism. In addition to questioning Zafar's unfounded optimism, Animal also shows us the emotional friction within the movement—not everything comes together without conflict. For example, he tells us of Zafar's own version of "democracy", a kind of meeting with various stakeholders to determine the movement's course of future action, in which "everyone has their say, followed by a big fucking row, after which everyone does what Zafar wants" (Sinha, 2007, p. 123).

While he does not always agree with the movement's rhetoric and trajectory, Animal fantasizes about justice in his own way. Thinking of the gas leak and the Kampani's "wickedness" which is "beyond all limits", Animal finds himself thinking of the many ways in which he may exact revenge (Sinha, 2007, p. 283). As an Animal, he tells us, he is not "subject to the laws of men" and lists the acts of violence and humiliation he would like to subject the Kampani to, all involving some form of bodily mutilation and humiliation (p. 283). The anger and hatred he feel in the moment are so intense that he is afraid they will "burst out of his skin" (p. 283). Animal's powerful emotions here are proportionate with the Kampani's crimes – just as their wickedness goes "beyond all limits", so does Animal's hatred, spilling out of the borders of his skin as well as outside the bounds of law (p. 283). But these can only be fantasies because the Kampani, with its vast transnational mechanisms, has no body—"no face," as we are told elsewhere (p. 229)—that can be subjected to all these violent punishments. While in the beginning, Animal feels empowered by these emotions, filled with the potential to undertake all sorts of punitive action, he finds that his "rage" is "quickly gone", leaving him "limp, body's like a goatskin filled with grief" (p. 284). As grief replaces his hatred and rage, Animal feels too limp and paralyzed to act.

Animal finds a reflection of a similar affective trajectory in the Khaufpuri community as well. When it is heard that Zafar might be dying of his hunger strike against the Kampani, commotion erupts as the people of Jyotinagar march to the factory in anger. Animal describes "the fury of the people" in an accumulation of metaphors of natural disasters, including storms, floods, avalanches and forest fires (Sinha, 2007, p. 310). But as Animal keeps observing, he realizes that once the people are within the factory grounds, "they do not know what to do" (p. 310). The crowd is "full of energy" and "wants to do something, but no one can agree what" (p. 311). Soon, Animal realizes that "the despair of twenty years has turned into rage" and that it could well lead to "destruction and death" if it is not "directed" (pp. 314–315). Through these observations, the novel seems to suggest that while despair and anger provide affective potential and force, outside of the binding affective

structures of the attachment to justice, they disintegrate and lose direction. At the same time, without these feelings, there can be no attachment to justice.

Even before he witnesses the commotion that takes place in Zafar's absence, Animal starts to believe that Zafar and, by extension, all that he stood for are necessary to their movement. When Zafar lies dying, Animal tells him, "you are our hero, you are our leader, we need you. Now come back and fight" (Sinha, 2007, p. 301). Calling him "invincible, untouchable, immortal", Animal cannot fathom life or the movement without Zafar's presence and direction (p. 307). Threatened by Zafar's loss, Animal sheds some of his cynicism and sarcasm; he becomes earnest. Zafar, on the other hand, takes on some of Animal's characteristics, surprising Animal with his "pessimism" and his desire to be less serious and to be "more like [Animal]" (p. 301). This curious interchange of characteristics between Animal and Zafar in this episode suggests how inseparable cynicism and optimism are for the text.

Much like Animal, the text itself finds it impossible to imagine its narrative world without Zafar. The day after Animal tells us of his death, it is found that Zafar and Farouq were in fact alive and were "taken by jeep to the places where trouble was worst, to show themselves, that they were not dead, they calmed the people and sent them back to their homes" (Sinha, 2007, p. 356). It is the return of Zafar that reassures the people and restores the old order. In killing Zafar and then bringing him back to life, the text embodies the impasse itself, choosing to maintain the attachment to the promise of justice even as it shows how insecure that promise is for the Khaufpuris.

This narrative back-and-forth that the text performs is mirrored in other episodes. If Zafar's death was one kind of mistaken ending, another is Animal's misunderstanding of his own death. Having run away from the city and come to the forest, high on the psychoactive datura, Animal comes to believe that he has died and come to Paradise. When Zafar and the others find him in the forest, he welcomes them, adding, "there's honey and water for all. The Apokalis and the bad times are over" (Sinha, 2007, p. 354). When they manage to finally convince Animal that he is not in fact dead, he feels "life drop like a heavy mantle about [his] shoulders" and begins "to weep for pity that [he] was to return to the city of sorrows" (p. 357). With this, the novel adds one final dark stroke to its sketch of the impasse, presenting even death as more eventful and meaningful than their endless wait. Animal's supposed demise, so closely following on the heels of Zafar's rumored death, is also further evidence of the text's deliberate and inseparable intertwining of the modes of cynicism and optimism—neither, it seems, can exist without the other.

Conclusion

Through a close reading of *Animal's People*, I have examined the novel's representation of the impasse as borne out of a long waiting period. I considered the ways in which the affective structures of cynicism and optimism together trace the contours of this impasse. Two distinct temporalities shape the novel's plot. Whereas on the one hand, time is suspended as the people keep waiting for legal justice, on the other hand, the factory's poisons continue to leak into bodies, water, and land, making people sick. One is an affective temporality, the other toxic, and the people of Khaufpur remain stuck between the two. The impasse created by the intersection of these strange, overlapping temporalities constitutes the Anthropocene.

Notes

1. I borrow the term "affect worlds" from Lauren Berlant (2012) to describe how the public sphere is organized by feelings as much as by rationality (p. 340).
2. Optimism, as defined by Berlant (2011), is an attachment to anything outside of the self that promises something. This is not always a happy or pleasurable attachment. The feelings that attach to these attachments may vary. What it essentially names is a "structure of relationality" rather than a particular feeling. (p. 13)
3. See Pierre Bourdieu (2000), Javier Auyero (2012), and Barry Schwartz (2007).
4. Ghassan Hage (2009) speaks of how "stuckedness in crisis" has come to be seen as an "endurance test," where the individual's capacity to "stick it out" is celebrated as a form of heroism rather than calling for change (p. 97).
5. Adele Holoch (2016) has written about the use of profanity in *Animal's People*, arguing that it erases the artifices that separate privileged readers from its subaltern figures while also rendering both the narrator and his readers abject.

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