

Precarious Oceans and Vulnerability: Micropolitics of Care in Romesh Gunesequera's *Reef*

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Abstract

Inoperative grammatology of post(g)locality followed by the incremental desires of neoliberal elites to marketize abundant oceanic resources scattered across the world renders the oceans extremely *vulnerable*—an appalling phenomenon which at once lays bare the vulnerability of the oceans conditioned by the strands of ‘precariousness’ and at times calls for the actualization of ‘micropolitics of care’—an ethically sound exercise which seems to be able to hold the oceans back from being economically subjected to the predatory ‘faces’ of contemporary neoliberal precarity. In this context, Romesh Gunesequera’s *Reef* is critically taken up to examine the rapid disappearance of coral reefs along with the illegal marketing of endangered marine species like dolphin so as to make readers aware of how the ocean stands at risk and moreover to put literary emphasis on the enactment of ‘micropolitics of care’ which seems to be able to effectively take on the wicked designs of contemporary neoliberal precarity for the greater sake of planetary consciousness.

Keywords: Precarity, Ocean, Vulnerability, Micropolitics of Care, Faciality

Introduction

The face is a politics. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari 181)

‘x explains y, signed z’. (*Dialogue II*, Deleuze 19)

In continuation with what Michel Foucault aptly reflects in “Societies Must Be Defended” that power politics plays an instrumental role in redefining the rights to live and die in the contemporary times: “It is the power to make ‘live’ and ‘let’ die . . . And then this new right is established: the right to make live and to let die” (241), it can further be worked out in the

context of post(g)locality that with the advent of neoliberal economic regime in post-1990s, the question of precarity once again gets ‘resurfaced’ as the contemporary form of Neoliberalism steadily switches from ‘care-mentality’ to newer structures of ‘precarity’—an important sociopolitical turn that allows the ‘logic of precarity’ to perform an ‘abstract machine’ to produce ‘conditions’ for the advancements of diverse economic ‘territorializations’. Whereas, noted economist Guy Standing explains the ‘precariat’ as a “new social class” (Hogg 1) which stands checkered by various structures of ‘precarity’ in the form of an economic (in)security, Judith Butler ingeniously couples the ‘logic of precarity’ with an “inescapable vulnerability” (Hogg 1) that finds home in tangible ‘organization’, ‘distribution’ and ‘hierarchization’, owing to the workings of contemporary Neoliberalism. Following these subtle observations, one may argue that the operative logic of precarity stands in tandem with the functional becomings of Late Capitalism which rides the scopes of contemporary neoliberalism to let ‘precarity’ find new ‘faces’ and ‘surfaces’ in the rigid structures of contemporary Neoliberalism. Interestingly, the ‘becomings’ of precarity, in the times of contemporary Neoliberalism, do not just stand confined in the *lived* experiences of impoverished human beings dwelling in the margins of the societies; rather, it has profound bearings on the *silent* negotiations of nonhuman agents on the Earth in the sense that greedy contemporary neoliberalists prefer to marketize abundant nonhuman resources of the Earth, thereby producing newer ‘conditions’ for ‘precarity’ to function as an ‘abstract machine’. In other words, ‘abstract machinic’ functioning of ‘precarity’ allures ‘human’ agents of contemporary Neoliberalism to hold the nuanced ‘negotiations’ between nonhuman entities by territories and strata, thereby imposing the structures of governmentality on the geokinetic unfolding of the Earth. In short, the pervasive presencing of precarity lays bare the sheer vulnerability of the oceans which constantly grapple with the exploitative onslaughts of contemporary Neoliberalism to let the Earth find ‘lines of flight’ on the one hand and on the

other hand, it calls for the urgent need of the actualization of ‘care-mentality’ to safeguard the existing marine resources from the inevitable extinction. This article seeks to elucidate why the territorializing precarity of contemporary Neoliberalism needs to be discarded to restore the ‘micropolitics of care’ on the ‘plane of consistency’² so that new forms of human ‘negotiations’³ with the nonhuman entities like the oceans can be worked out both to stave off the challenging ‘faces’ of precarity at bay and to enunciate the vulnerability of oceans afresh.

In order to contextualize contemporary Neoliberal precarities and its relationship with the vulnerability of the ocean, Romesh Gunesequera’s masterpiece, that is, *Reef* (1995) is taken into account, which exposes how the mushrooming growth of global cultural tourism industry, in the post-1990s Sri Lankan context of post(g)locality, impacted the pristine marine and its adjacent coastal lives equally, thereby resulting in the steady rise of blue trafficking of endangered marine species across the world and exacerbating the vulnerability of the ocean to the designed precarities of neoliberal elites. This article is split up into three interconnected segments—whereas the opening segment makes a modest attempt to expose the operations of precarity in connection with the question of vulnerability, the second segment puts the spotlight in the nuanced interactions between precariousness and vulnerability in the context of the ocean, aiming at foregrounding the need of ‘micropolitics of care’ to safeguard marine resources, and the third segment takes up Gunesequera’s *Reef* to contextualize the actualization of ‘micropolitics of care’ in the looming ‘faces’ of neoliberal precarity to forge ‘human’ negotiations with the ‘nonhuman’ ocean *anew*.

Offsetting Precarity: Making Sense of Vulnerability

I wish to present precarity as a condition of vulnerability relative to contingency and the inability to predict. (Ettlinger 320)

In “Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics” (2009, 2), Judith Butler explains that the notion of precarity implies a “politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer

from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death”, thereby implying that whereas the responsible government of a nation-state is expected to reduce the ‘conditions’ of precarity to allow people ‘live’ and ‘let’ them die, practitioners of contemporary Neoliberalism choose to exploit the ‘abstract machinic’⁴ potentials of precarity to render people on the tenterhooks so that biopolitical measures could be taken up to restrict the ‘free’ economic movements of human beings. In other words, contemporary neoliberal government tries to maximize the ‘conditions’ of precarity to exploit the economic uncertainties of marginalized human beings who, in turn, are subjected to biopolitical measures for sheer exploitation. In short, precarity turns out to be a neoliberal instrument to make marginalized people exposed to various ‘surfaces’ of uncertainty which contributes to the conditional *co-becomings*⁵ of vulnerability along with the changing ‘faciality’⁶ of precarity. Whereas Butler finds precarity as a “politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability” (2), Liam Conwell distinguishes the ‘language of precariousness’ from the ‘language of precarity’ in that whereas the “the former term can be interpreted as a vernacular description of the conditions of uncertainty that are endemic to contemporary capitalism, the latter is a more immediately political concept that signals both the conditions of uncertainty and a subjective consciousness of these conditions that can be actuated as a site for politics” (30). Taking Conwell’s standpoint into account, it can be argued that there exists an onto-epistemological difference between ‘precarity’ and ‘precariousness’ whereas the notion of ‘precarity’ is socio-politically charged up, ‘precariousness’ could well be understood as a *descriptive metaphor* for referring to the ‘conditions’ of uncertainty. In other words, ‘precariousness’ could also be figured out as an ontological given that cuts across the existential becomings of all human and nonhuman entities residing on the Earth. It is true that political configuration of ‘precarity’ happens to be a *biopolitical strategy* to maximize the heterogeneous orders of uncertainty for largely the economic exploitation of ‘human’ beings,

onto-epistemological unfolding of precariousness needs to be critically investigated to bring out the multiplicities of vulnerability. Whereas the biopolitical ‘logic of precarity’ stands attuned to a model of dense hierarchization and stratification, chancing upon the extremities of economic uncertainty, Deleuzian reading of ‘precariousness’ shows that the deterritorial becomings of precariousness get shaped up by the way it makes ‘alliances’ with the political, social and cultural ‘forces’ of reterritorialization and gets ‘unfolded’ in tandem with the aleatory movements of singularities. Therefore, an epistemic shift from the ‘facilities’ of ‘precarity’ to the ‘surfaces’ of precariousness needs to be carried out to elucidate how the wave of ‘precariousness’ in actuality functions as an ‘abstract machine’ to hold together the coordinates (what Deleuze and Guattari call ‘concrete elements’ in *A Thousand Plateaus*) of ‘precariousness’ assisted by human and nonhuman entities (what Deleuze and Guattari call ‘personae’ in *A Thousand Plateaus*). In *Dialogues II*, Deleuze and Parnet hold that “there is an AND between the two, which is neither the one nor the other, nor the one which becomes the other, but which constitutes the multiplicity (34-5). Taking the viewpoint of Deleuze and Parnet into account, it can tenably be contended that an understanding of the *mediatedness* of ‘precariousness’ has to be inclusive of its ‘rhizomatic’ liaisons with the orders of stratification.

Whereas contemporary neoliberalism attempts to biopolitically govern the ‘subjects’ by means of the capitalistic production of the ‘conditions’ of precarity, ‘precariousness’ can well be understood as a ‘zone of singularities’—(event)ual variabilities of which negotiate the Event and their nuanced ‘negotiations’ get precipitated in “history” (*The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze 53). Following the singular ‘unfolding’ of ‘precariousness’, it can be put forward that ‘precariousness’ at once ‘connects’ human beings with their nonhuman counterparts and at times ‘disconnects’ the former from the latter inasmuch as it refuses to be reduced to codes, strata and territories. In short, ‘precariousness’ is a matter of an experience and cannot be

readily quantified in terms of ‘points of reference’ as it is intensively charged up with a sort of *chaosophical immanentism*.¹⁰ In *What Is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari pertinently reflect:

Chaos is defined not so much by its disorder as by the infinite speed with which every form taking shape in it vanishes . . . Chaos is an infinite speed of birth and disappearance . . . Science approaches chaos in a completely different, almost opposite way: it relinquishes the infinite, infinite speed, in order to gain *a reference able to actualize the virtual* . . . Philosophy proceeds with a plane of immanence or consistency; science with a plane of reference. (118)

Deleuze and Guattari mean to argue that unlike science, philosophy resorts to a ‘plane of immanence’ to hold the chaosophical multiplicities back from being caught up in a “freeze-frame” (*What Is Philosophy?* 118) and it is by working out the notion of ‘actual and its virtual coordinate’, it can be argued that human and nonhuman beings seem to ceaselessly ‘confront’ the actualities of ‘precariousness’ and its virtual coordinates in order to make *thoroughfares* amidst the oddities of Life.

In this regard, it can be argued that aleatory singularities of ‘precariousness’ provide conditional support in the form an ‘abstract machine’ to let the ‘intensities’¹¹ of vulnerability find tangible manifestations in the domain of exteriority. Here, one may be reminded of Gediminas Lesutis who explains the configurational overlapping between ‘precariousness’ and vulnerability in the following terms: “*precariousness*, as an ontologically shared vulnerability of a human body, is mediated, negotiated, and constituted into precarity – a spatially engendered condition of everyday life” (22), thereby suggesting that ‘precariousness’, as it were, lays down a chaosophical ‘plane of immanence’ to drive vulnerability to find material forms of manifestation. Lesutis aptly holds that it is the ‘precariousness’ that is indeed politically turned into rigid segmentarities of ‘precarity’ supported by “extractive capitalism” (22) so as to govern the economic lives of marginalized human beings. Whereas Lesutis figures

out ‘precariousness’ as a ‘shared’ condition and precarity as ‘a condition of life’, it is contended after Deleuze and Guattari that whereas ‘precarity’ turns out to be a ‘performative’ reference to the ‘striated space’¹², ‘precariousness’ could be held as a ‘metonymic’ reference to the ‘smooth space’¹³ which always slips into ‘alliances’ to move towards the new ‘orders’ of reterritorialization. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari elucidate that an act of reterritorialization “must not be confused with a return to a primitive or older territoriality, it necessarily implies a set of artifices by which one element, itself deterritorialized, serves as a new territoriality for another” (174). Whereas, in ‘striated space’, Deleuze and Guattari argue that “lines or trajectories tend to be subordinated to points” and in ‘smooth space’, “it is the opposite: the points are subordinated to the trajectory” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 478). Whereas Lesutis understands vulnerability as “an externally imposed condition” (28) backed up with the strands of precarity and then proceeds to hold vulnerability as an “ontological constraint” (28), it can be put forward on the contrary that ‘precariousness’ is replete with differential ‘repetitions’ of singularities which ceases vulnerability to be an ‘ontological constraint’ and instead, allows it to forge new ‘alliances’ with possibilities on the plane of *chaosophical immanence*. Thus, the event of vulnerability is grossly irreducible to codes and strata, blocks and territories.

At this point, one may stop and think: does the experience of vulnerability stand limited to marginalized human beings who cannot grapple with the onslaughts of neoliberal precarity? Is vulnerability the *actual* shared reality of *virtual* ‘precariousness’? In “From ‘Social Exclusion’ to ‘Precarity’. The Becoming-migrant of Labour: An Introduction”, Carl-Ulrik Schierup and Martin Bak Jørgensen situate the notion of “precaricity” in the context of “precarisation of city life” (13) and how marginal dwellers suffer neoliberal restructuring of city-life in terms of the actualization of precarity, it can be argued that the material experience of vulnerability cannot be restricted to ‘human’ lives; rather, needs to be delimited to that of

‘nonhuman’ beings which silently take on the adverse impact of ‘precarisation’ played by contemporary neoliberalists. In this regard, one may be reminded of “Vulnerability, Precarity, and the Ambivalent Interventions of Empathic Care” where Vrinda Dalmiya explains vulnerability as “frailties associated with human embodiment” (68) and precarity as “exclusionary political orders” that renders “some more vulnerable than others” (68), thereby implying that ‘precarity’ is a political instrument that is employed in tune with neoliberal capitalism to rule sections of economically marginalized people by turning them ‘more vulnerable than others’. Whereas Dalmiya restricts her observation in the miserable lives of migrant ‘care’ workers, it is contended that vulner(ability) of nonhuman entities is politically exploited by contemporary neoliberalists to turn them into veritable *vulnerables* so as to make these subject to structures and strictures of precarity. In continuation with it, one may add up that vulnerables are differentiated embodiment of vulnerability whereas ‘precariousness’ stands tied to the process of differentiation in the domain of the *virtual*. Making *sense* of vulnerability thus stands incomplete if one does not take into account the following excerpt from *Dialogues II* by Deleuze and Parnet:

Every actual surrounds itself with a cloud of virtual images. This cloud is composed of a series of more or less extensive coexisting circuits, along which the virtual images are distributed, and around which they run . . . The actual is the complement or the product, the object of actualization, which has nothing but the virtual as its subject. Actualization belongs to the virtual. The actualization of the virtual is singularity whereas the actual itself is individuality constituted. (148-149)

It means that an *actual* experience of vulnerability is constitutive of *virtual* presencing of ‘precariousness’ which accounts for *co-extensive* becomings of vulnerability on the plane of chaosophical immanentism. Therefore, the ‘logic of precarity’ may not be helpful in making

sense of the differential ‘repetitions’ of vulnerability experienced by nonhuman entities which find ‘precariousness’ as the *kinetic impetus* of the gradual unfolding of vulnerability.

Precariousness, Vulnerability and Ocean: Negotiating Micropolitics of Care

The blue humanities name an ocean-infused way to reframe our shared cultural history.

(*Ocean*, Mentz xviii)

. . . [Blue Humanities Thinking] explores the diverse physical shapes and phases of water on our planet. (*An Introduction to Blue Humanities*, Mentz xviii)¹⁴

In “Toward a Blue Humanity”, Ian Buchanan and Celina Jeffery contend that blue humanities as a disciplinary framework needs to be worked out to refashion human-ocean interface as “[blue humanities aims at] historicizing the ocean and making it part of contemporary consciousness in a way—we hope—that will enable environmental activism’s bid to ‘save’ the ocean” (12). Buchanan and Jeffery seem to suggest that blue humanities at once is a modest interdisciplinary exercise to restore our “sense” of “connectedness” (12) and at times offers a critical lens to reexamine the dire impact of ecological catastrophes in the context of the ocean, thereby pointing at how global capitalism renders the ocean as a *vulnerable* and *reducible totality* instead of viewing it as a *sum* of our shared ‘precariousness’. This contention can be backed up by referring to *The Logic of Sense* where Deleuze clearly reflects that “Nature is not collective, but rather distributive, to the extent that the laws of Nature . . . distribute parts which cannot be totalized. Nature is not attributive, rather conjunctive: it expresses itself through “and,” and not through “is” . . . Nature is indeed a sum, but not a whole” (267). It means that in the context of the ocean, it is true that ‘precariousness’ actually provides ‘kinetic’ stimulus to the deterritorial becomings of the ocean which cannot easily be subjected to the structures and strictures of precarity for long inasmuch as it is governed by aleatory movements of singularities. It is blue humanities thinking that actually helps scholars explore how the oceans

across the world stand at risk and urgently need human ‘care’ to take on the challenges of contemporary neoliberal precarity. In fact, in “Introduction: Science Studies and the Blue Humanities”, Stacy Alaimo upholds the enormous role of blue humanities to critically take up “. . . epistemological problems of scale, onto-epistemologies of rapidly altering and utterly entangled lifeworlds, and the urgency of extinction” (431) so as to figure out how contemporary neoliberal structures of precarity work together to turn the oceans into easy *vulnerables*. In *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, Alaimo particularly points at the sheer “exposed” states of the ocean as easy *vulnerables* for the practitioners of contemporary neoliberal precarity:

Atomic testing. Dead zones. Oil “spills.” Industrial fishing, overfishing, trawling, long lines, shark finning, whaling. Bycatch, bykill, ghost nets. Deep sea mining and drilling. Cruise ship sewage. BP. Fukushima. Radio active, plastic, and microplastic pollution. Sonic pollution. Climate change. Ocean acidification. Ecosystem collapse. Extinction. The destruction of marine environments is painful to contemplate. (111)

This brilliant exposure at once points at the vulnerability of the oceans conditioned by the strands of ‘precariousness’ and at times underlines how vicious exploitations of neoliberal human beings in different forms render the oceans *vulnerables*—a *reducible totality* that cannot unfortunately lead one to take the measure of the dense mediation of vulnerability embedded in its unfolding ‘precariousness’.

Here, one may be reminded of Alaimo’s insightful reflection in *Exposed*: “Modes of thinking, being, and acting may arise from a political recognition of being immersed in the material world, as they contend with the conceptual challenges of shifting timescales and traversing geo-capitalist expanses where one’s own small domain of activity is inextricably bound up with networks of harm, risk, survival, injustice, and exploitation” (157). This critical reflection reveals how the inability of human beings in ‘shifting timescales’ results in putting

the oceans at risk and more importantly, how the vulnerability of the oceans consequently gets checked as it stands in tune with that of the *becomings* of marine and terrestrial lives. Vulnerability of the oceans thus stands interspersed by the heterogenous unfoldings of various marine species which are politically reduced to mere *vulnerables* to make the movements of the oceans subject to ‘strata’ and ‘territories.’ This reductive approach to the vulnerability of the oceans can well be dealt with the actualization of the ‘micropolitics of care’ inasmuch as the vulnerability of the oceans stands mediated through that of ours. In *The World Is Blue: How Our Fate and the Ocean’s Are One*, Sylvia Earle accounts for the need of ‘care’ to stop the fates of humans and the oceans from being an *easy prey* to the exploitative designs of neoliberal precarity:

“If the ocean dried up tomorrow, why should I care?” The question, posed by a cheeky Australian reporter in 1976, made me face up to that remote but painful possibility . . . Life can exist in the absence of a lot of things, but as astrophysicist Christopher McKay puts it: “The single non-negotiable thing life requires is water” . . . Earth’s life-support system—the ocean—is failing. But who is paying attention? . . . The big question is, what can we do to take care of the blue world that takes care of us? (13-16)

Earle rightly asked question—what do we do to ‘take care’ of the oceans which ‘take care’ of us?—so as to remind the greedy practitioners of neoliberal precarity that the ocean happens to be the earth’s ‘life-support system’ which is ‘failing’ nowadays more rapidly than ever before, which calls for the invention of “a new way of thinking” (Earle 14) for the scholars working in the domain of Blue Humanities so as to contend with the awful challenges of neoliberal precarity. Earle has ingeniously suggested in the question asked that the actualization of the ‘micropolitics of care’ could be brought in to work out *new* modes and mechanisms of ‘care’ to make the challenges of neoliberal precarity null and void. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze

and Guattari elucidate how micropolitics offers ‘minor’ openings characterized ‘flows’ which pull micropolitics out of the structured workings of macropolitics: “the molecular, or microeconomics, micropolitics, is defined not by the smallness of its elements but by the nature of its “mass”—the quantum flow as opposed to the molar segmented line” (217). Taking resort to this powerful contention, one may contend that an act of care tends to take up ‘micropolitical’ becomings characterized by ‘quantum flow’ to evade hierarchized and marauding operations of neoliberal precarity and ‘unfolds’ itself when it stands in differential relationships with some combinatory factors including culture, ethics, politics, and ecology, among others. It means that an act of care takes up ‘lines of flight’ to unsettle ‘arboreal’¹⁵ workings of neoliberal precarity and negotiates political, cultural, social, ethical and ecological factors to re-lay the singularities of the oceans in *detrterritorial* movements of ‘smooth space’. Whereas neoliberal precarity employs ‘striated’ politics to regulate economical-ecological dynamics of the oceans, ‘micropolitics of care’ could well be engaged in a battle against the former as a veritable ‘war machine’ to turn the crevices of neoliberal precarity wide open on the one hand and on the other hand to align ‘micropolitical becomings’ of care with the deterritorial flows of ‘smooth space’: “we define “war machines” as linear arrangements constructed along ‘lines of flight’. Thus understood, the aim of war machines isn’t war at all but a very special kind of space, *smooth space*, which they establish, occupy, and extend” (*Negotiations*, Deleuze 33). This critical reflection of Deleuze in *Negotiations* attests to the ‘revolutionary’ potentials of ‘smooth space’ which may be worked out as a *fluid launchpad* to let ‘micropolitics of care’ take up ‘lines of flight’ against the regimented maneuvers of neoliberal precarity.

Contextualizing Micropolitics of Care in Romesh Gunesequera’s *Reef*

The meeting between these two notions, difference and repetition, can no longer be assumed: it must come about as a result of interferences and intersections between these

two lines: one concerning the essence of repetition, the other the idea of difference.

(*Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze 27)

Romesh Gunasekera's *tour de force*, that is, *Reef*, happens to be an elaborate critique of how the practitioners of neoliberal precarity aim at exploiting abundant marine resources including endangered species like dolphin, reefs, and so on to expand the world-wide marauding operations of precarity to the inner recesses of the ocean on the one hand and on the other hand calls for differential practices of 'care' to unsettle the free reign of neoliberal precarity across coastal and oceanic spaces. Garbed in the form of a fiction, Gunasekera exposes the 'vulnerability' of the ocean in the Sri Lankan coastal regions conditioned by strands of 'precariousness' through the tale of Mr Ranjan Salgado who, in spite of being a marine biologist, loses his academic integrity while coming to terms with the adverse changes happening to the ocean every now and then and 'surprisingly' engages himself in thinking of building a 'marine park' to give in the strong pull of neoliberal precarity thereby leaving the ocean at jeopardy. When the fiction begins, Salgado is introduced as a connoisseur of Sri Lankan cuisine: "At night, when alone, he usually liked to eat bread and western food: *courses*. Small discs of fried meat and creamy mashed potatoes the disappeared without a trace into his body. Corned beef was a favorite. He ate it with a *seeni-sambol* that burned the roof of your mouth" (8). Along with having considerable interests in Sri Lankan cuisine, *Reef* uncovers that Salgado prefers to study "mosquitoes, swamps, sea corals and the whole bloated universe" (24) and writes on "transformation of water into rock—the cycle of light, plankton, coral and limestone—the yield of beach to ocean" (24). While working on the mushrooming growth of 'coral business', Salgado exclaims in sheer wonder and awe: "Coral grows about as fast as your fingernails, but how fast it is disappearing? Nobody knows!" (47-8), thereby directly pointing at the 'vulnerability' of the ocean to the g(l)ocal operations of neoliberal precarity. In fact, he

stands shocked at finding the free reign of ‘bombing’, ‘mining’ and ‘netting’ in the middle of the ocean which is replete with a number of ‘delicate’ and endangered species:

You see, this polyp is really very delicate. It has survived aeons, but even a small change in the immediate environment—even su if you pee on the reef—could kill it, Then the whole thing will go. And if the structure is destroyed, the sea will rush in. The sand will go. The beach will disappear . . . You see, it is only the skin of the reef that is alive. It is real flesh: immoral . . . Mister Salgado threw up his hands, ‘But who cares?’ (48)

This deep concern of Salgado reveals how delicate ‘beings’ of the ocean struggle for their existence while taking on the irresponsible and irrational activities of human beings and there exists a shortfall of ‘care’—micropolitics of which could be employed as a ‘war machine’ against the workings of neoliberal precarity. One may also be reminded of another textual example which underlines the explicit manifestation of neoliberal precarity in the form of ‘global tourism’ and how it really puts the ocean at risk, thereby underscoring the need of ‘micropolitics of care’ to take on the onslaughts of neoliberal precarity:

All they see is pockets full of foreign money. Coming by the plane-load. Don’t they realize what will happen? They will ruin us. They will turn us all into servants. Sell out children . . . our country really needs to be cleansed, *radically*. There is no alternative. *We have to destroy in order to create*. Understand? Like the sea . . . He let go of me and stared at the ocean turning itself inside out . . . (111)

This textual excerpt exposes how neoliberal precarity rides the wings of ‘global tourism’ to turn coastal people and oceanic species into easy *vulnerables* so as to reduce ‘precariousness’ embodied in ‘vulnerability’ to the discernible *vulnerables* for the marauding marches of neoliberal precarity. Pitted against this ‘straited’ politics of neoliberal precarity, ‘micropolitics of care’ could be employed as a ‘war machine’ to *radically* take on the challenges of neoliberal precarity. In other words, the production of *new* modes of care-mentality needs to be carried

out to unsettle and resist the free reign of neoliberal precarity in the grab of ‘global tourism’ in the context of Sri Lankan coastal regions. It is quite possible to execute inasmuch as the deterritorial movements of the ocean can well be put in tandem with the ‘establishment’, ‘occupation’ and ‘extension’ of ‘smooth spaces’ by care in the form of a ‘war machine’. In other words, ‘differential repetitions’ of the ocean can tenably be aligned with the ‘micropolitical’ unfolding of care which denies to settle in a *reducible totality* and ceaselessly produces itself while being paired up with the combinatory interplay among cultural, political, ethical and ecological heterogeneities. This productive potentials of the ‘micropolitics of care’, as the text indicates, needs to be engrafted onto the ‘differential repetitions’ of the ocean so as to empower the latter to effectively take on the reductive workings of the neoliberal precarity.

Gunsekera’s *Reef* divulges how the local government is quite involved in letting impoverished locals getting engaged in the practices of illicit exportation of endangered fishes for making livings out of it:

‘Someone has caught a dolphin,’ the crab-seller said. ‘They got a dolphin?’ ‘Yes, they will kill it quickly, Very good money. Someone’s lucky day’ . . . ‘Killing . . .’ she shook her head to herself. ‘Why dolphins?’ What next?’ Outside a man was filling an unmarked van with baskets of dead fish, Small pieces of bleached white coral marked the municipal parking lot. (118)

This poignant case at once divulges lackadaisical attitude on the part of the local government in taking apt punitive steps against fish-smugglers and at times exposes a terrible truth: the local government seems to have got overridden by the stands of neoliberal precarity which does not allow the local government to adequately ‘take care’ of the coastal as well as marine *lives* so that the practitioners of neoliberal precarity keep on treating coastal as well as marine *lives* as potential *vulnerables*. Gunsekera seems to have subtly suggested that unless a *new* of mode of care-mentality is worked out, the ongoing deterioration of the ocean cannot be brought under

check. Interestingly, the adverse influences of neoliberal precarity have not just only incapacitated local government in *taking care* of the coastal as well as marine *lives* alike but also have impacted otherwise strong academic and ethical integrity of an individual like Mr Salgado who ‘procrastinates’ in drawing the obvious conclusion on the palpable impact of neoliberal precarity on the ocean and at one point in the fictional narrative, he, surprisingly, gives vent to the following thought:

I used to think that in a month or two, the next year, I would have a chance to turn the whole bay into a sanctuary. A marine park. I used to plan it in my head: how I’d build a jetty, a safe marina for little blue glass-bottomed boats, some outriggers with read sails, and then a sort of floating restaurant at one end . . . It would have been a temple to your gastronomic god . . . I thought of it like a ring, a circular platform with the sea in the middle. (177)

This textual excerpt vouches for the insidious inroads of neoliberal precarity into the thoughts of an individual like Mr Salgado and lays down the ground ready for practices of ‘micropolitics of care’ as a *smooth politics* against the structured operations of neoliberal precarity. In other words, setting up of a marine park in the middle of the ocean happens to be an extended reflection of neoliberal precarity in the sense that Mr Salgado, in spite of being a marine biologist, indulges himself in thinking of making money by means of putting the oceanic *lives* at jeopardy—it is as it were that the ocean is understood to be a *reducible totality* instead of a *deterritorial assemblage* of heterogeneous ecologies. Practices of ‘micropolitics of care’ in tandem with the ‘differential repetitions’ of the ocean could offer *new* modes of care-mentality which is urgently required to pull off a win over the exploitative reign of neoliberal precarity. Gunesequera’s fictional exposure of the increasing vulnerability of the ocean calls for the actualization of ‘micropolitics of care’ which is at once equipped with the subversive power of a ‘war machine’ to take on the ‘straited’ politics of neoliberal precarity and at times can

facilitate ‘sensible’ human beings to adequately *take care* of the ocean which *takes care* of us in praxis. Against the practices of “conspicuous consumption” (Gunasekera 135), ‘micropolitics of care’ may help ‘sensible’ human beings to strike up a departure from the strong pull of neoliberal precarity and instead, help them inculcating the habit of an ethical engagement with oceanic *lives*. In this regard, one may be reminded of *Eating the Ocean* where Elspeth Probyn argues: “I wonder how we can care a bit more, or a bit better, for the entire entangled marine elements that we devour when we eat the ocean . . . can we eat with the ocean?” (7). Here, Probyn argues for the ‘sustainable’ use of fishes so as to ‘care’ a bit more to the oceans. This contention could be questioned by referring to Ian Buchanan’s rejoinder titled “Must We Eat Fish?”: “. . . it is an argument in favour of the death of the ocean” (81). At this point, one may stop and think: how should ‘micropolitics of care’ figure in addressing the problematic of ‘eating the ocean’? This intriguing question could critically be responded by arguing that human beings can neither pragmatically put a stop on the consumption of fishes *per se* nor can be indifferent to the possibilities of the oceanic life nor can stay aloof from ‘eating (up) the ocean’ but can productively negotiate ‘micropolitical becomings’ of care to forge an ethical engagement with the ‘differential repetitions’ of the ocean and its adjacent coastal ecologies. This contention can further be elucidated this way that coastal people can neither be disengaged from depending on the necessary sustenance from the oceans nor be employed as pliable tool for the territorial expansion of neoliberal precarity. In short, ethical practices of ‘micropolitics of care’ may come useful in putting up resistance to the appalling ‘faces’ of neoliberal precarity in general and particularly in reinventing ‘lines of flight’ to facilitate oceanic ecologies to survive the oddities of contemporary planetary crisis.

Conclusion

It is quite deniable that it is the unmappability of care that actually allows one to put it in combinatorial interplay with a number of factors—cultural, political, social and ecological, among others—thereby making a modest attempt to unsettle the free reign of neoliberal precarity in the context of the ocean. Being the ‘life-support system’ of the Earth, it is argued that, the ocean chooses to posit itself in the ‘middle’ thereby giving material forms to the ongoing geophilosophical tensions of the Earth. Thus, an ethical engagement of the ‘micropolitics of care’ with the multiplicity of an ocean may help us figuring out the differentiating materiality of an ocean expressed through the extensive transformation of its ‘outside’. In *Critical Environments Postmodern Theory and the Pragmatics of the “Outside”*, Cary Wolfe holds that

an “ethics of thought” . . . [produces] new concepts by means of the continual confrontation of thought with its own outside” (xix) and following this contention, it can well be understood that in association with ‘differential repetitions’, ‘micropolitics of care’ constantly confronts its own ‘outside’ to slip through the pitfalls of neoliberal precarity and thus stands capable of working as a veritable ‘war machine’ against the practices of economic territorialization.

It is through the subtle ‘trans(in)fusion’ of the molecules of discontinuity or what Karen Barad holds in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* “the intra-active ongoing articulation of the world in its differential mattering” (381), the ocean seeks to function as a ‘middle’ to the ‘intensive’ dynamism of matter—an important dimension of planetary consciousness—which is still left to be explored. In short, opposed to the arboreal structurality of neoliberal precarity, ethical unleashing of ‘micropolitics of care’ in alignment with the logic of ‘continuity-contiguity’ may be useful not just only in mapping the polytonality of the vulnerability of the ocean but also in tracking down the predatory strides of neoliberal precarity across the nonhuman spaces. Blue Humanities

thinking here can play an instrumental role in the actualization of the ethical unleashing of ‘micropolitics of care’ inasmuch as water, as Stefan Helmreich recently holds in *A Book of Waves*, nowadays, turns out to be “a mode of thinking and writing” which “mixes with many new forms and materialities to rescript worlds and futures” (304).

Notes

1. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari lay out ‘lines of flight’ in terms of “movements of deterritorialization” (3) that results in the production of “destratification” (3) of territory. They resort the notion of ‘lines of flight’ to call the operations of ‘ideology’ in literature into question and argue: “. . . [all] we talk about are multiplicities, lines, strata and segmentarities, lines of flight and intensities, machinic assemblages and their various types, bodies without organs and their construction and selection, the plane of consistency, and in each case the units of measure” (4). Thus, one may find onto-epistemic resemblance between ‘lines of flight’ and ‘multiplicity’.

2. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari conceptualize the ‘plane of consistency’ as “the outside of all multiplicities” (9) characterized by “the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization” (9). It means that the ‘plane of consistency’ is “composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion” (21), thereby staging the becomings of multiplicities.

3. Deleuze uses the word ‘negotiation’ to refer to a ‘zone of irreducibility’ that stands conditioned by the ‘co-becomings’ of singularities that make up the ‘plane of consistency’.

4. In *What Is Philosophy?* (1991), Deleuze and Guattari understand ‘abstract machine’ to be an onto-epistemic equivalent to the ‘plane of immanence’ which functions as “the single wave that rolls them [multiple waves] up and unrolls them” (36).

5. The notion of ‘co-becoming’ refers to the ‘double becoming’ that stages the relational interplay between “the people to come and the new earth” (*What Is Philosophy?* 109). It is also employed to refer to the co-existential correspondences between deterritorialization and reterritorialization: “Deterritorialization and reterritorialization meet in the double becoming” (*What Is Philosophy?* 110).

6. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari hold that it is “. . . faciality itself that organizes the line of flight” (124). It means that the notion of facility “. . . has become the point of departure for a deterritorialization that puts everything else to flight” (129)

7. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explain the nuanced operations of ‘rhizome’ in terms of laying down six principles— ‘Principles of connection and heterogeneity’, ‘Principle of multiplicity’, ‘Principle of asignifying rupture’, ‘Principle of cartography and decalcomania’.

8. ‘Zone of Singularities’ refers to the ‘plane of consistency’ that stages the actualization of free movements of ‘intensities’.

9. Deleuze considers ‘unfolding’ as a productive process that is contingent upon the dynamics of “enveloping-developing, involution-evolution” (*The Fold*, Deleuze 8) which empowers an entity “. . . to fold its own parts and to unfold them. not to infinity. but to a degree of development” (*The Fold*, Deleuze 8).

10. Whereas in *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, Guattari understands chaos to be “the reservoir of existential operators and the optional matters of their manifestation” (104), Deleuze and Guattari in *What Is Philosophy?* argue that “the philosopher brings back from the chaos are *variations* . . . scientist brings back from the chaos variables . . . artist brings back from the chaos varieties” (202). Following these critical reflections, it could be contended that chaosophical immanentism happens to be the operative grammatology of ‘plane of consistency’ that stages the deterritorial movements of free ‘intensities’.

11. Intensities, in this context, could be mapped as ‘free singularities’ that travel in alignment with the movements of deterritorialization.

12. ‘Striated’ space refers to a ‘metric’ spatiality that embraces territorialization. It means that ‘striated’ space could be understood as “space is [that is] counted in order to be occupied” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari 362). ‘Striated’ space is understood to be capable of explaining the “laminar movement of flows” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari 370) and turns out to be an embodiment of a homologous space.

13. ‘Smooth’ space is onto-epistemologically “vectorial, projective or topological” (361) in nature. It is both found as “the space of the smallest deviation” and “a space of contact, of small tactile or manual actions of contact. . .” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari 371). In other words, it is “. . . a field without conduits or channels, . . . [that] is wedded to a very particular type of multiplicity: nonmetric, acentered, rhizomatic multiplicities that occupy space without “counting” it. . .” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari 371).

14. In *Remapping Energopolitics: Blue Humanities, Geophilosophy and Sri Lankan Minor Writings*, Abhisek Ghosal underlines the profound importance of taking blue humanities into account while trying to figure out the nuanced ‘interconnectedness’ between humans and the ocean: “Blue Humanities thus functions as a fluid epistemic portal to facilitate one to step into the worlds of intersectional ecology” (2). One may also find a Deleuzean reworking of ‘blue humanities thinking’ in “Blue (Infra)structuralism: Blue Postcoloniality, New Earth and the Ethics of Desiring-production” where Abhisek Ghosal and Bhaskarjyoti Ghosal contend:

Blue (infra)structuralism seeks to account for the “smooth space” that an ocean embodies and helps one understand how an ocean works by the principles of “trans(in)fusion” (Ghosh 2021, 2) and “transcorporeality” (Alaimo 2010, 2). An ocean is made up of “flows” that seek to “fold” in the process of becoming, thereby producing “fields” or what Deleuze and Guattari call “a plane of consistency” (1987, 190). (207)

15. Deleuze and Guattari posit the notion of ‘arboreal’ in connection with the enunciation of nomadic movements to mean that an ‘arboreal’ structure is suggestive of a closed system of operation.

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