



Dramatizing Environmental Activism: Intersection of Eco-Theatre and Climate Politics in David Finnigan's Kill Climate Deniers

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Abstract

In recent decades, human actions have caused significant changes in climatic patterns and decreased biodiversity. Following the Industrial Revolution, there has been a full degree Celsius increase in the global average temperature, profoundly impacting Earth's climatic systems and processes. The consequences of climate change encompass human and non-human domains, manifesting in various issues, such as air pollution, health emergencies, environmental catastrophes, forced migration, food shortages, and mental health disorders. As these pressing issues unfold, literature- particularly drama- emerges as a crucial medium for addressing global warming. Through its emphasis on environmental challenges and their political and social consequences, theatre is seen as a potent tool for raising awareness and motivating actions in response to climate change.

Accordingly, the current study uses ecocriticism and postcolonial ecocriticism as theoretical frameworks, combined with scientific facts on climate change and global warming to analyze selected dramatic text from Australia. This interdisciplinary approach aims to thoroughly analyze ecological and postcolonial themes in the selected play, highlighting the interrelationships between scientific realities and the environmental or socio-political concerns depicted in Finnigan's play..

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دراما النشاط البيئي: تقاطع المسرح البيئي والسياسة المناخية في مسرحية ديفيد فينغان "اقتل منكري المناخ"

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المستخلص:

في العقود الاخيرة، تسببت الانشطة البشرية في حدوث تغيرات كبيرة في الانماط المناخية وانخفاض التنوع البيولوجي. في اعقاب الثورة الصناعية، حدثت زيادة كبيرة بدرجة مئوية كاملة في متوسط درجة الحرارة العالمية، مما اثر بشكل عميق على النظم والعمليات

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المناخية للأرض. تشمل عواقب التغير المناخي المجالات البشرية وغير البشرية التي تتجلى في العديد من القضايا مثل تلوث الهواء وحالات الطوارئ الصحية والكوارث البيئية والهجرة القسرية ونقص الغذاء واضطرابات الصحة النفسية. ومع تفاقم هذه القضايا الملحة، يبرز الأدب – لا سيما المسرح – كوسيلة ضرورية لمعالجة ظاهرة الاحتباس الحراري. ينظر إلى المسرح على أنه أداة فعالة لزيادة الوعي وتحفيز الإجراءات للاستجابة للتغير المناخي وذلك من خلال تركيزه على التحديات البيئية وعواقبها السياسية والاجتماعية.

وبناء على ذلك تستخدم الدراسة الحالية دمج نظريات النقد البيئي وما بعد الاستعمار كأطر نظرية لتحليل التغير المناخي في استراليا في مسرحية "اقتل منكري المناخ" (2019) لديفيد فينيغان بالاعتماد على الحقائق العلمية عن تغير المناخ والاحتثار العالمي. يهدف هذا النهج المتعدد التخصصات إلى تحليل شامل للموضوعات الأيكولوجية وما بعد الاستعمارية في المسرحية المختارة، وتسليط الضوء على العلاقات المتبادلة بين الحقائق العلمية والمخاوف البيئية والاجتماعية والسياسية التي تصورها مسرحية فينيغان.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تغير المناخ، النقد البيئي، ما بعد الاستعمار، الإنكار المناخي، المركزية البشرية.

Introduction

The term "Global Warming," in its modern sense, was first used by Wallace Smith Broecker in his paper —Climatic Change: Are We on the Brink of a Pronounced Global Warming? on August 8, 1975. Global warming has historically been the prevailing way to describe climate catastrophe, evoking the idea of increasing temperatures and melting glaciers. It is regarded by scientists as the most severe and debated subject facing the world in the twenty-first century (Suraiya 404). Nevertheless, global warming seems inadequate in comprehensively describing human difficulties' complex and extensive scope, and therefore, using the term "global warming" as a conceptualization highlights the pressing necessity to pay more attention to the severe warnings of climate change and its consequences. In this context, global warming refers to environmental disasters as cautionary signs of anthropogenic climate change.

Scientifically, climate change denotes the enduring alterations in the Earth's atmospheric conditions, which have been documented since the late 18th century and are predominantly influenced by human actions. When released into the atmosphere, greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, are the primary drivers of climate change. These emissions arise from the processes of industrialization, deforestation, and the combustion of fossil fuels. These emissions lead to heat retention in the Earth's atmosphere, increasing global temperatures (NASA, 2022). Global warming results in ecological catastrophes such as melting Arctic ice, rising sea levels, and escalating extreme weather occurrences like storms, droughts, and floods. Ecological catastrophes disrupt ecosystems, threatening biodiversity and significantly impacting vulnerable communities. This exacerbates problems related to food insecurity and the deterioration of infrastructure (IPCC, 2021).

Timothy Morton states that "the end of the world is correlated with the Anthropocene" (Morton 13). This cautionary statement suggests that the Anthropocene epoch is associated with the existential threat of global warming and its subsequent represented in a drastic change in climate patterns, from extreme weather events to global floods. Morton refers to this phenomenon as 'global warming' rather than

'climate change' to emphasize the serious nature of the crisis. Climate change refers to a massive problem that is challenging to grasp. However, it requires immediate action. Global warming focuses on the root causes of rising temperatures instead of the various impacts and causes of climate change (Morton 13).

Despite the urgency of the problem and the scientific agreement regarding climate change, there are groups of people who deny anthropogenic climate change, known as climate deniers. Climate denial is the rejection of the belief that human activities are the main cause of global warming, disregarding the consequences of this denial as "climate change will be very harmful to, at least, hundreds of millions of human beings" (Faria and Paez 60-61). The reason behind their denial is to achieve personal interests at the expense of marginalized entities such as poor people and the environment. These deniers are embodied in politicians, media figures, and corporation owners. They do not deny the occurrence of climate change but reject to consider that their industrial activities cause global warming by releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, thus changing the climate to preserve their economic and political interests (Faria and Paez 60). Finnigan's *Kill Climate Deniers* exposes the political sphere in degrading the ecosystem through their inaction about climate change issues.

Statement of Problem:

The issue of climate change, primarily caused by human activities, is considered one of the most critical environmental and social challenges of our age. It demands global awareness and practical procedures through diverse scientific, cultural, and creative mediums. However, the lack of emotional and intellectual engagement in conventional scientific discussions creates a knowledge gap, resulting in a disconnection from the environmental crisis and a failure to recognize the climate emergency as a crucial issue that requires action. The profound impact of theatre in eliciting public empathy is underscored as a way to bridge this gap by presenting the implications of global warming and its gradual manifestation to the general public in the form of ecological disasters.

Approach and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, textual analysis approach to investigate the representation of climate change in Australia. The methodological framework combines ecocritical theory and postcolonial ecocritical perspectives to illuminate how David Finnigan's *Kill Climate Deniers* (2019) engages with environmental issues and the sociopolitical dimensions of the climate crisis. As Huggan and Tiffin argue, "There is no social justice without ecological justice" (Huggan and Tiffin 35).

Ecological justice and social justice are closely intertwined. Ecological justice is concerned with the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens among all organisms, it acknowledges that

environmental crisis disproportionately affect the marginalized groups. Social justice is concerned with the outcomes of ecological degradation and its effects on poor people, such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination. In this respect, Cheryl Glotfelty identifies ecocriticism as "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature the physical environment" (Glotfelty xviii), thus ecocriticism can help to illuminate the connections between ecological and social justice by examining how literature represents these issues. It raises awareness about environmental problems, challenges the dominant narrative, and advocates for more justice and a sustainable future. On the other hand, the term "ecocriticism" is comprised of two Greek words, "Eco" and "critic," which both stem from the word "oikos," meaning household or home, and "kritis," meaning judge. When used together, these terms imply the notion of a 'house judge' (Howarth 69).

To illustrate the relationship between human activities (as colonial practices over the marginalized nature) and climate change, this study adopts postcolonial ecocriticism which is a theoretical framework that investigates the intersections between colonialism, ecological disturbances, and capitalist exploitation against ecosystem which is the real home for all entities. It examines how historical and contemporary colonial practices driven by economic motives continue to harm and exploit Indigenous people and the natural world. By conveying how neocolonialism shapes environmental attitudes, policies, and practices, postcolonial ecocriticism provides a critical lens through which to comprehend the complex relationship between power, nature, and capitalism (Huggan and Tiffin 11).

The current study explores the relationship between human beings, the environment, and non-human entities, challenging anthropocentric perspectives prioritizing human beings over the natural world and emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living and non-living entities. Val Plumwood states, "Our [collective] failure to situate dominant forms of human society ecologically [has been] matched by our failure to situate non-humans ethically" (Plumwood 2). Anthropocentrism is associated with ethical failure as humans neglect to consider their ecological impacts, thus causing environmental degradation, as they fail to recognize the ethical worth of nature's value and its inhabitants.

Ecocriticism and postcolonialism seek to transform ideologies from egocentrism to ecocentrism through decentering human beings 'exceptionalism' and acknowledging the agency and value of the natural world. Ecocriticism and postcolonialism aim to blur the boundaries between humans and non-humans imposed by modern civilization, suggesting that humans are involved in complex networks of ecological interdependencies. Postcolonial ecocriticism challenges the Western ideology of development; Huggan and Tiffin demonstrate that development is another form of neocolonialism represented in ecocolonialism by man over nature as a noble cause for exploitation (Huggan and Tiffin 27).

Previous Studies

The play *Kill Climate Deniers* by David Finnigan has been abandoned in academic revisions despite covering the critical issues related to climate change, perhaps because of its provocative title to some categories, leading researchers to avoid engaging in political debate on the climate issue. However, a review of the play in *The Journal of Performing Arts* discusses the play *Kill the Climate Deniers*. The journal's review only discusses dramatic techniques in portraying ecological issues as existential problems in a dark comedy style through the absurd theatre to emphasize the urgent need to address climate impacts.

The Colonial Roots of Climate Denial: A Postcolonial Analysis of *Kill Climate Deniers*

Kill Climate Deniers is a satirical black comedy play by the Australian playwright David Finnigan. It concentrates on a group of radical eco-terrorists who attacked the Parliament House -during the Fleetwood Mac concert- after being provoked by the interview of Gwen Malkin (environment minister), taking large numbers of climate deniers, including Australian politicians and journalists, who advocate for climate denial, as hostages. These eco-terrorists demand that the Australian government stop carbon emissions and coal exports, or they will execute all the captives. The play examines the themes of climate change, environmental injustice, and political inaction. The play introduces a thought-provoking and humorous exploration of the anthropogenic climate problem.

David Finnigan aims to politicize the issue of climate change and political mismanagement in addressing a new form of colonialism known as ecological colonialism by anthropocentric powers. The play addresses political ecology and political economy in relation to climate change. The Australian political economy is the primary driver of climate change denial. Politicians and corporations prioritize rapid economic development over environmental sustainability through the heavy dependence on mining processes, extraction of fossil fuels, deforestation, and contamination. All these factors cause global warming, which the same politicians and corporations deny. They deny anthropogenic global climate change as they resist any force (the scientific force) that could threaten their wealth and political positions, as a result, hindering any action that seeks to address climate change. David Finnigan produces *Kill Climate Deniers* to criticize the Australian government's inaction in addressing the root causes of climate change.

Through postcolonial ecocritical analysis, the play discusses the role of human dominance over the ecosystem as a form of decolonization made by humans, bringing unprecedented ecological challenges to the world, such as climate change, as defined by IPCC (2022) as a form of neocolonialism.

Neocolonialism perceives nature primarily as a capitalist commodity and a secondary thing rather than as a source of life. Climate change is framed as a global issue, inherently rooted in the complex interaction of historical, economic, and political factors. Postcolonial ecocriticism as a critical lens reveals the insidious nature of neocolonialism in exacerbating climate change, causing and perpetuating inequalities, and hindering global action to mitigate its impacts.

Climate deniers cunningly attempt to transform the public concentration from the complex issue of neocolonialism within climate change towards more simple and charged social problems as the funded Jalan, a radio host, seeks to underestimate ecological matters by focusing on describing scientists:

These overpaid librarians they call scientists are now insisting, from their ivory towers, that it's getting hotter every day. I'm fired up about it this morning, as I am every morning, from 5 am, outrage and a sense of wounded entitlement, for all you listeners out there who have a sense that the currents of history have passed you by and you are irrelevant and unwanted. I may be wealthy and well-connected beyond your wildest dreams but I speak for you, I am you. Coming up we've got more ads for parasitic financial agencies preying on the elderly and confused, but right now I've got on the air Gwen Malkin. Environment Minister (Finnegan 16).

Jalan's colonial discourse offers a stark portrayal of the media landscape dominated by a neocolonial, anti-intellectual discourse through Jalan. His discourse, characterized by outrage and disregard for expertise, mirrors cultural ideology that dismisses the scientific consensus in favor of dominant narratives. This aligns with environmental racism, which often positions humans as superior and progressive, imposing their worldview on Indigenous culture and environment and regarding these entities as inferior. "I speak for you." This line represents a false representation when Jalan positions himself as the people's voice, suggesting a direct connection and understanding of their concerns. This is a common tactic used by colonial powers to justify their actions and suppress dissent (scientific consensus and environmental activists).

Jalan's colonial discourse supports colonial projects and policies by fostering a sense of victimhood and resentment through "wounded entitlement," which means that climate science is wronging the audience. In this context, Jalan's dismissal of the scientific evidence is a colonial practice of ignoring or suppressing knowledge that challenges dominant anthropogenic narratives. He concentrates on emotional response over reason and rational response by describing environmental movements as an "outrage" and "fired up" to undermine rational discourse and ecological thinking, which is crucial in addressing climate issues. Jalan calls these movements "parasitic financial agencies" (Finnigan16) a distraction tactic to divert attention from the core issue of climate change to a more familiar subject to maintain the status quo and protect human interests.

Deloghrey and Handley argue that the separation between human and their environments empowers environmental colonialism by *Homo sapiens* (259). This dichotomy is the cornerstone of Western thought that justifies the exploitation of nature and marginalized communities historically. Jalan embodies the strategy of othering by constructing the audience (the forgotten Indigenous and natural world) as "you" and places himself as their "champion." This is a traditional tactic of hegemonic rhetoric where the colonizer claims that he is the spoken voice of his people while simultaneously reinforcing hierarchical structures.

The environment minister Gwen Malkin, in the interview with Jalan, proposes a technocratic solution to mitigate the rising temperatures as she claims, "The sun is very hot. It heats the earth. So, for example, if Australia ever got too hot. We could, we are exploring ways to, to, block out the sun" (Finnigan 17). She accuses the sun of changing the climate rather than industrial activities to protect corporations' interests and maintain their abuse of the natural world. Malkin's solution aims to manipulate the environment rather than controlling greenhouse gas emissions.

Malkin follows a technocratic solution, which means industrial management of resources employed by governments that make technical decisions. Although Goonyarra Station is a fictional company, Finnigan criticizes this technocratic approach, which focuses on quick technological fixes without considering the potential consequences (Demeritt 226). The negative impacts of this measure are pollution and changing weather patterns, leading to drought in some areas and flooding in others. This approach is used at the expense of the Environment and the indigenous Australian people because the negative effects of this technology outweigh its benefits, as it could lead to poisoning the air. If this technocratic approach reduces temperatures, the rest of the countries will imitate and adopt it to avoid moving away from industrialization, which results in burning fossil fuels and global warming. The environment minister is depicted as seeking to satisfy corporate interests through her political power rather than preserving the Environment.

On the other hand, in response to Malkin's suggestion, Catch (an eco-activist) attacks the Parliament House with a group of eco-activists as a form of pressure on the Australian government to mitigate the root causes of climate change. This attack serves as a response to stop the ongoing ecocide caused by politicians and other ecological deniers regarding climate change. In the context of ecocriticism, Catch's attack is perceived as an emotional response to the consequences of ecological destruction. She decolonizes the Anthropocentric narrative that places human well-being above the well-being of other entities. Catch's "active involvement" engages the audience with immersive experiences. She transforms the passive audience into active participants, confronts them with the seriousness of the current ecological

situation, and invites them to think about their relationship with the environment and consider how capitalist companies contribute to the worsening environmental situation. This shift challenges the traditional binary between the distant viewer and the performer.

Eco-activists play a crucial role in amplifying the discourse of environmental justice and charging it with emotional resonance to motivate change at social and political levels. However, the role of an eco-activist is well performed by two characters in the play *Catch and Throat*, the characters of environmental activists representing the social response in the face of climate change risk. As Catch says: "We are here speaking on behalf of future generations, and we have a pretty simple request for you.. .We want you to stop climate change. Now. Not fictionally in 20 years, now. Tonight. Or everyone dies" (Finnigan 66). Those eco-terrorists attack the deniers as they oppose the geoengineering project because of the complex risks of their ability to legitimize the continued reliance on fossil fuels. Proposing geoengineering by Malkin can be seen as a form of climate denial as it refers to the severe reduction in greenhouse gas emissions that are either unattainable or unnecessary. Her perspective implies that large-scale technological solutions will be sufficient to address climate change, potentially leading to delay or preventing more sustainable and effective mitigation strategies. Blocking the sun is a technological fix designed to mitigate climate change by reflecting carbon dioxide emissions (Co2) from the Earth to cool the planet.

Like their historical counterparts, these corporations practice hegemonic power over resources and indigenous people. Furthermore, both historical colonialism and corporate practices disregarded the rights and well-being of local communities, causing ecological imbalance and social inequality. Colonized people in the past were subjugated; simultaneously, the natural environment is subaltern, their voices are silenced, and their silence is shifted for profit, reflecting the colonial suppression of Indigenous knowledge and practices.

Throat: In the mental picture you paint you need to think about your own house. Where you live right now, and project forward 30 years. House aged by 30 years or so. You gotta have yourself in the picture, 30 years on, how old will you be? Do those calculations in your head before we go on. You gotta have your family, especially any children, they'll be adults. Gotta have the east coast of NSW and Queensland hit by increasing storm surges, wiping out coastal towns. Gotta have rising heat Intense droughts destroying Australian farmland (Finnigan 84-85).

Throat's speech is a powerful encounter against the dominant discourses of Malkin and the media regarding climate change by making the audience envision an apocalyptic and grim future and highlighting the crucial and slow nature of the climate crisis, particularly in the context of Spivak's "can the subaltern speak?". Throat amplifies the voice of the subaltern not as a social category but as a

condition (natural world, marginalized people) that is rendered voiceless and colonized because of the catastrophic impacts of climate change. These communities withstand the worst effects of corporations' waste. She motivates them to participate in democratic processes and their capability to influence economic and environmental policies and reassess their relationship with the planet to decolonize the environment from Anthropocentric hegemony because their acceptance is a form of soft denial of climate change.

Finnigan's *Kill Climate Deniers* covers the complexities of climate problems; the play explores humanity's capacity for self-destruction. By constructing climate change as a wicked problem caused by human actions, Finnigan invites audiences to confront the urgency of combating this global threat. The play seeks to redress Anthropocentric bias by amplifying the sub-alternated nature's silenced voice and disregarded agency. By combining postcolonial and ecocriticism theories, the focus has shifted from anthropocentric representations of the effects of colonialism on humans and metaphorical interpretations of natural landscapes into physical realities experienced by the natural environment as a colonized category by man to address the ecological balance of human and non-human interactions. This theoretical framework aims to restore the environment's right position through individuals' understanding of the planet's agency. The play's investigation of climate denial, political inaction, and the consequences of our choices starkly warns of our actions' interconnectedness and the earth's health. Environmental crises are intricately associated with the state's inability to effectively preserve the balance of ecosystems and address climate change in a way that does not negatively affect the state's economy. Malkin's representation as Minister of the Environment exemplifies the political failure that perpetuates environmental degradation and social and ecological injustice, portraying her as representing political expediency, achieving corporate influence for economic prosperity, and striving for elevation to a higher position by compromising environmental ethics.

Finnigan emphasizes the necessity of community participation in making political decisions through the figures of eco-activists Catch and Throat. Finnigan emphasizes the pressing need for political accountability in safeguarding the environment for future generations and confronting climate denial. In response to political inaction, Finnigan expresses his ideology through the radical eco-activists Catch and Throat, who break the law to protect the planet by provoking a revolution against environmental injustice and how these ideologies affect modern audiences. Finnigan calls for a radical change in individuals' behavior, values, and thoughts by shifting from anthropocentrism (egocentrism) to ecocentrism.

Conclusion

The play highlights the delayed effects of nature's anger of climate change against man's practices that are not directly observed but will be insoluble by the next thirty years to make the audience think rather than accept the current political inaction. When Throat presents a bleak vision of a future controlled by climate change, she shocks the audience with a dystopian future of the far-reaching consequences of global warming, which will lead to resource scarcity, forced mass migration, and social dysfunction, threatening the survival of the whole planet. This dystopian portrayal starkly warns of the potential consequences of individuals' inaction and the urgent need to combat climate change denial.

Finnigan presents climate change as neocolonialism since the hierarchical system of control marks colonialism. *Kill Climate Deniers* demonstrated how neocolonialism contributed to and continued to shape the threat of global climate change, particularly in tropical and coastal regions. Colonialism perpetuates economic, social, and environmental racism as a result of Anthropogenic climate change, as well as producing a new form of slow imperialism that retraces the ancient pathways designed by past colonialism. In this context, Anthropocentrism aligns with Eurocentrism, where man establishes industries (settlements) in distant environments to extract resources and goods from these environments to benefit developed countries, as they consider these resources infinite. However, some doubt climate science, especially those with influence, overlook human activities and do not recognize that the agency of nature is contributing to global warming and its continuation. Finnigan portrays radical eco-activists as a type of social response to political decisions and despair over their ineffective choices to illustrate the severity of the crisis.

Kill Climate Deniers illustrates how capitalist practices are the main drivers of climate change; postcolonial ecocriticism is considered the best theory to deal with the domination of anthropocentrism over natural ecosystems within the field of literature. Human beings seek to achieve maximum profits at the expense of the ecosystem, disregarding nature's role in the environmental changes induced by this ambition. Postcolonial ecocriticism emphasizes the connection between man and nature, as ecological concerns cannot be separated from human practices because everything in the universe is affected by everything. This theory proves that capitalism is the modern form of colonialism; it imposes changes upon the planet in an attempt to make the environment as large garbage through mining processes as what Finnigan presented in the play.

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