

## ESSAY

# Critical engagements on *Making Kin not Population*: An epistolary review essay

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Anxiety about humans (over)reproducing has mobilized global capital and biomedical interventions, from hormonal contraceptives to sterilizations, historically as well as in the contemporary moment. It has allowed wealthier states to stand back as people are decimated from famine, droughts, and the communal and human tensions mobilized following such drastic climatic events. Contemporary climate change rhetoric, in both the liberal progressive public spheres and critical academic scholarship, has now started to revisit the “population problem.” However, in returning to this question, scholars seem to have missed a lot of what feminists and climate activists from the Global South have said and written. One example of such work, which we review in this essay, is the 2018 volume *Making Kin not Population*, edited by Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway.

Note to readers: This is not your typical review essay. It is an epistolary essay written across time (starting in July 2019) and space (between the United States and Aotearoa New Zealand). We use this strategy to lay bare our thinking processes but illustrate the importance of cross-boundary, transnational dialogues about reproductive politics in anthropology and feminist STS.

We are two women scholars who often speak to each other but decided to make our conversations about population public because it allowed us to do two things: first, offer our review of a book, and second, to share the deeply personal politics of race and gender mobilized when we talk about “populations.” We resisted the temptation to write a generic book review, with the established narrative arc starting at mapping the key arguments, pinning at the disappointments or limitations of the book, and resolving with a recommendation or caution. We share, sometimes perhaps too emphatically, the stakes for us as junior scholars, thinkers, and beings in this space—academic and earthly. This epistolary review essay begins with the premise that, yes, we *need* to be able to talk about population(s). And yes, we should all think about making kin beyond “our” biological relations. But we argue that we should also be cautious in the language we use about “population.” Our exchange draws on historical problems and future-facing potentials through a conversation that ranges from toxic overpopulation narratives and white feminist betrayals to borders and occupying SpaceX for kinful flourishing.

However, this writing also has its limits. You cannot revise an epistolary essay written across time in its entirety or it loses the very essence of what it is doing: recording moments of academic thought grounded in a particular historical moment. We are writing this opening reflexive note for our readers, not necessarily as a way to “prepare” them for what may read as a jarring read but to specifically outline three key ideas for anthropologists to consider when reading this essay:

1. This writing is inherently interdisciplinary, and perhaps in many ways, given who we critique, antidisiplinary. For the readership of a four-field journal like *American Anthropologist*, our rebellious writing should look and feel familiar. Many of us in anthropology are writing and are concerned about kin-making in the Anthropocene. The politics of reproduction have been at the heart of anthropological unpacking since the 1990s (Ginsburg and Rapp 1991) and the “natural” connections to kin-making a key grounding in our tradition. The writing in this essay is a nod to those histories but also a cautionary tale about who gets to write and how they write about the environmental collapse with an eye on the future.
2. We often turn to fiction in this writing, not necessarily to “make our case” but as sites from wherein we can participate in a possible future-making project. The imaginary, the fictive text, has served people of color as one place from where we want to learn about our pasts and future.

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Most recently, in reading Benjamin's (2016a, 2016b, 2019) ode to fiction alongside the Visweswaran (1994) interrogation of anthropology's and ethnography's simultaneous commitment and denial of fiction, we see fiction writing not just as a space that allows us a glimpse into the grounded future but as a place from where our own imaginations are allowed to be (albeit, perhaps momentarily) unmoored from colonial, masculinist, and white academic training.

3. While we are not the first to review this book critically in light of environmental concerns (Dow and Lamoreaux 2020) or the first to engage with the environmental politics of reproduction (Lappé, Jeffries Hein, and Landecker 2019; Sasser 2018), we are perhaps the first that attempt to situate ourselves—bodily, boldly, and angrily—in our writing. This writing is inspired by amazing anthropologists and scholars who take very seriously the relationship between population(s), people, kin-making, and the environment.

Finally, a note on the timeline of when this work was written. We started writing this essay in July 2019. This impacts what you read. We also do not directly engage with COVID-19 in this writing, as the bulk of our writing had finished by the start of the pandemic. As we near publication in August 2022, the concerns we highlighted at the start still stand. We can imagine writing another essay in a few years when we reflect on COVID-19 through the climate change and population collapse crisis; however, currently, in light of this pandemic, we are just trying to learn, absorb, take notes, and take care.

### RESPONSE 1: REMEMBER THE TOXIC HISTORY OF “POPULATIONS” (NAYANTARA)

On July 31, 2019, a news story popped up on my Twitter feed with a catchy title and a photograph of an attractive, wealthy, heterosexual interracial couple cradling a cute baby. Retweeted by Reproducing the Environment (@RepoEnviro), an account I follow, the couple announced to the world that they would only like to have two children because they were concerned about the environment. The couple in question were (then) British royalty: Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, and Princess Megan, Duchess of Sussex, who had recently married and were then celebrating their first child.<sup>1</sup> They, like many people who are “concerned about the environment,” indeed see their reproductive lives and the choices they *and* others make as paramount to the climate crisis. As someone who studies the Malthusian logics of contraceptive markets in India and Aotearoa New Zealand, this simplistic narrative of “over-reproducing” couples and contributing to a large human population to the detriment of the environment is a familiar one.

In India, as well as *about* India, there has been and continues to this day an overwhelming anxiety about population—both within the upper-caste elite “modern” Indians and globally, as the specter of the “overpopulated” Indian nation overwhelms the resources of the world. Within Aotearoa New Zealand, climate change activism is an incredible and palpable force that is indeed reassuring about the future, yet within this progressive space, you often hear rumbblings about the population growth “over there” (China and India). The anxiety mobilized by the contemporary climate change lobby, deeply couched in a Western liberal ethos, sees population as a problem, even after generations of feminist scholars and activists from the Global South have pointed out that it is the consumption patterns and extractive resource economies of the Global North that are a much larger problem.

This anxiety about “overproducing” or excessively reproducing humans has historically mobilized global capital and biomedical interventions, from hormonal contraceptives to sterilizations (Hartmann 1995, 2010; Rao 2004, 2005, 2010; Rao and Sexton 2010), just as it has allowed wealthier states to stand back as populations are decimated under famine, droughts, and the communal and human tensions mobilized after or due to such drastic climatic events (Connelly 2003, 2008; Nadkarni 2014). Contemporary climate change rhetoric is revisiting the “population problem,” including the volume *Making Kin not Population*, edited by Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway.

For this epistolary review essay, we begin with the premise that, yes, we *need* to be able to talk about population(s). And yes, we should all think about making kin beyond our biology. But we argue that we should also be cautious with the language we use about “population” because of its toxic history, which impacts the lives (reproductive and beyond) of women in the Global South. We need to be cautious with our words when, statistically speaking, one nonhuman “pet” in the Global North has the carbon footprint of a sports utility vehicle (SUV) driven for 10,000 kilometers—as outlined in the Vale's controversial and well-researched book *Time to Eat the Dog?* (Vale and Vale 2009). We need to be careful about whose kin-making is encouraged and whose is denied. We need to be cautious, as the focus on population size singularly allows the elite to virtue signal by not having children while continuing with measurably more-damaging lifestyles. The contemporary royals and our Western feminist colleagues claiming allyship or accomplice status will have to rethink their entire histories and futures if they care about the environment, and not just limit the number of children they have.

### RESPONSE 2: “WITH WHOSE BLOOD WERE MY EYES CRAFTED?” (DANYA)

When you write about “need[ing] to be able to talk about population(s),” I am also reminded of one of the, to me, fatal flaws in the introduction and in Donna Haraway's essay, “Making Kin in the Chthulucene: Multispecies Reproductive Justice,” in this volume. As you suggest, the problem lies in how (Clarke and Haraway 2018) write about population in this volume. They (especially Haraway in her sole-authored essay) insist on writing about

population as a concept, unmoored from history and politics, rather than as a historically contingent and murderous invention of the economic, social, and biological sciences.

While I don't object to this strategy *tout court*—Janet Roitman (2014), for example, used it to great effect to understand how the idea of “crisis” circulates within the US financial system in *Anti-Crisis*—it does not satisfy when applied to the concept of population. Haraway's doubling down on “population” is particularly disappointing to me, as well as to feminist science studies scholars beyond this volume, like Sophie Lewis (2017) and Helen Hester (2018). Haraway, for her part, disavows this latest generation of “cyborg feminist” theorists in favor of environmental catastrophism (Weigel 2019). Even Haraway's fellow contributor in *Making Kin not Population*, Michelle Murphy, suggests giving up the concept of population “to make room for other ways of creating a politics of reproductive justice” that is not so deeply embedded in legacies of “population” that declare some people (typically Black, Brown, Indigenous, poor, and from the Global South) to be “waste” (pp. 102, 106).

Haraway's doubling down on the commitment to “population” as a generative concept feels like a betrayal of what she taught me, and many others, about how to ask about and how to see the oppressive power of technoscientific tools and artifacts. What happened to that famous and perpetually vexing question, posed in “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspectives”: “With whose blood were my eyes crafted?” (Haraway 1988).

The tension between past feminist critique of technoscience and present accommodation to one of its most deadly artifacts is right there in the text of Haraway's essay. On page eighty-six, for example, she writes:

The numbers in these studies seem different from the figures of global billions of the Born Ones and the Disappeared—more modest, perhaps more situated. But are they? What does scale do to questions around “Make Kin Not Babies” and “Making Kin Not Population?” Crafting scale and patterns of distribution are always germane to shaping shareable fact-based realities, to realizing and derealizing some worlds and not others. Making good facts is fundamental work for non-cynical, science-friendly, skilled adults. This is as true of “small” as it is of “big.” The “global” is a relentlessly complex crafted reality dependent on category making and scale making. Lives and deaths of humans and nonhumans are in the balance.

This is exactly the point of critiques of her recent work that takes “population” as a generative starting point for a new politics of reproduction. Haraway knows the critiques: she relates them to readers in the next pages of the chapter. One thing that she refuses to see is that scale *does* change the meaning of technoscientific categories. The *direction* from which new concepts are animated or deployed or reinvigorated also matters—whether they come from “below,” from the oppressed, or from “above,” from the oppressors. Whoever wields technoscientific concepts morphs their politics. Those with more whiteness and more capital tend to be the ones to wield them most powerfully.

Why disembody “population” from its history, from the racist, capitalist, and patriarchal powers that have shaped it? Doing this seems to disavow the work of decades feminist theory and methodology. In dismissing critiques of her recent work in this essay, Haraway also chooses not to engage with the work of junior scholars and practitioners, like you and I, seeking to use intersectional feminist analysis to hold individuals, organizations, and domains accountable to the harms they cause.

If the aim of this edited volume is reconciliation with the life sciences, I think this is the wrong goal. With the growth of STS—particularly feminist STS—and the slow but steady progress in building alliances between critical social scientists, engineers, and life scientists, I believe the time for softening our critiques and seeking conciliation with the oppressive histories of technoscience is well behind us. Now is the time to build new, appropriately contextualized languages in encounters with allies who are also seeking decolonial and feminist scientific practices, not to revive tainted ones of the past. And this is the project of the rest of the contributors to this volume, whose correctives I hope we can turn to soon.

### RESPONSE 3: “POPULATION BOMB” AND ACADEMIC FEMINIST BETRAYAL (NAYANTARA)

I think you are right to see this as a betrayal! I think this is the crux of the matter. This tiny little book, with two of my favorite scholars' names on the front, feels like a betrayal. Having read (almost, I think!) everything Clarke and Haraway have ever written and being inspired as a graduate student and then a junior scholar working on contraceptive and reproductive politics, it was rather saddening to see their stance on population politics in light of the contemporary climate crisis. On the first page of this edited volume, Clarke writes:

In 1900, world population is estimated to have been 1.6 billion people; today it stands at 7.6 billion and is estimated to exceed 11 billion by 2100, if birth rates continue to drop as they have been almost everywhere. For human survival, food production will need to increase considerably affecting ecologies and biodiversity even more devastatingly. These burdens are far too great, too structural, and too ruinous for feminists and our allies to ignore any longer, however fraught addressing them may be. Multispecies reproductive justice fully integrated with human and non-human environmental justice and savvy environmental action is our goal; making kin, especially non-biological kin, is our fundamental means.

These are powerful numbers. They are shared often in certain circles when these groups are expressing their anxiety around the climate crisis. But we anthropologists and feminists know that numbers can hide complex realities about everyday life. Right after these numbers in the introduction, the aspirational words that follow are on point, which allows us to imagine a better future, or, more basically, a human future. This call to “making kin, especially non-biological kin” is laudable. But it ignores the fact that making kin—biological or otherwise—has been a privilege that white women have historically enjoyed. For other women, kin-making has been severely denied—from enslaved people in the American South not being able to nurture and raise their own babies to mass-sterilization camps that targeted women (and men) in places like India, sometimes denying them the ability to reproduce.

These lines on the first page of the book also harken back to a dangerous text that launched contemporary anxieties around population: *The Population Bomb* by Paul Ehrlich (1968). Ehrlich opened the book with a passage that to this day, after reading it more than a hundred times over the years, makes me angry. Of Delhi and its people, he wrote:

The streets seemed alive with people. People eating, people washing, people sleeping. People visiting, arguing, and screaming. People thrusting their hands through the taxi window, begging. . . . People, people, people, people. As we moved slowly through the mob . . . the dust, noise, heat, and cooking fires gave the scene a hellish aspect.

He dehumanized them as “people, people, people” and could not see them as Rupa, or Suresh, or Bhim, or Aziz, or Zara, or Ved, or Parul, laughing, talking, cooking, and feeding. To him, with his Stanford professorial privilege, they were just people reproducing themselves and their assumed miserable circumstances. In the book, Ehrlich proposed that Indian “overpopulation” was a threat to American security and standards of living and consumption. He called on his *allies*, the “advanced nations,” to talk about population and population control in “overpopulated countries” like India. He resurrected Malthus and Malthusian anxieties, which launched a long litany of reproductive and other basic human rights being denied to women (and men) by the states under pressure from international organizations and other countries. I cannot list these in this short essay (and maybe you just need to wait for my book for the finer details), but the point that I’d like to make is that Ehrlich made a dangerous eugenic argument that was taken up globally as a “progressive” narrative to “save the Earth.”

I am afraid that *Making Kin*, while fortunately not a best-seller like *The Population Bomb*, is playing a similarly dangerous game. When senior, highly respected scholars focus on the specter of population explosion and its impact, they forget to look at the things that are actually causing the problem—including their own lifestyles and extractive economic structures. Also, if they had paid attention, the total fertility rate (TFR) in historically “overpopulated” nations is rapidly declining. For example, India has as TFR of just replacement level, at 2.1, and even lower in urban centers (Appleton 2022). Further, when they call on “allies,” it reads as code for particular allies, because if they had read and engaged with the feminists and activists from the Global South and saw them as allies, then they’d know better than to open this book with those statistics and numbers. In many ways, I, along with other feminist academics (and activists) from the Global South, see this work as a betrayal (one we are familiar with from elite and white liberal feminists), but this one hurts more, particularly given the impact both Clarke’s and Haraway’s earlier scholarship has had on my (and perhaps our collective) thinking and doing.

#### RESPONSE 4: OCCUPY SPACEX FOR KINFUL FLOURISHING! (DANYA)

You’ve named the specter that haunts this volume: the “population bomb” myth. One might add to our cast of undead the Club of Rome, models of mimetic “development” foisted on postcolonial states, and mid-twentieth-century neoliberal economics in the Global North. Haunting, as anthropologists know, isn’t imaginary; it is social, historical, symbolic, embodied. Just naming the spirits isn’t enough to extirpate them or to learn to live with them.

Another book I’ve spent time with lately traces the subsequent genealogies of these ghouls: architectural historian Fred Scharmen’s (2019) book *Space Settlements*. In it, Scharmen tells a kaleidoscopic story of a 1975 NASA workshop where engineers and artists convened to imagine and visualize how to build human habitation structures in space. The impetus for the conference was the population bomb concept. Its popularity had been boosted by new computing and visualization technologies that allowed adherents, like the Club of Rome, to create pseudo-objective mathematical models and graphs of the coming catastrophe. The population bomb was said to be *apocalyptic enough* to justify huge financial investments in building engineering capacity, technological artifacts, and social-engineering programs so that a selection of Earth people could live permanently in space. But, as we know, even the fear of disaster wasn’t—won’t be—enough to create permanent space settlements within the lifetimes of the white American men who crafted these imaginaries.

Hauntings don’t stay still in time or space. Nor do imaginaries, which might be the social scientist’s vexatious version of a haunting—spirits in the ether that can’t be pinned down but seem to suffuse every ambition, every piece of work an actor comes in contact with. That’s the delightful thing about the structure of Scharmen’s book: we see how the concept of population scales and dilates, extending beyond Earth’s problems into extraterrestrial futures. It’s also the demonic thing about “population.”

The futures of *Making Kin* offer some redemption from the problems we've discussed in this volume so far. Rather than a future based on resurrecting "population," what about a future based on "alterlife," Michelle Murphy's term for living otherwise in an ongoing apocalypse? In conversation with Métis and Indigenous feminisms, Murphy emphasizes the ongoingness of activist networks in the face of problems that are material as well as ideological, and thus about bodies and physical work, rather than purely conceptual questions. Rooted in her own embodied experience of sex, family, and desire, Kim TallBear zeroes in on remaking intimacy through feminist and Indigenous polygamies as a decolonial political strategy—and also a strategy for making kin otherwise. Politics, and political concepts, are rooted in kin-making. Ruha Benjamin writes of hauntings, of the afterlives of Black people separated from kin and persecuted and used up. Afterlives of past generations sustain future lives, providing the basis for modes of kinship that have already endured through enslavement and apocalypse justified in part by population thinking.

None of these strategies centers concepts before bodies, governmentality before relationality, or future benefits over current harms. Since I've been watching too many space operas lately while indulging in Scharmen's book, I wonder what these modes of kin-making mean not only for terrestrial muddling-through but also for other places and modes of living where humans might find themselves in future community. What would multiplanetary kin look like? How should kin and more-than-kin relations structure thriving in fragile environments? What new/old forms of expertise, materials, training, and leadership might need to be freshly enacted and embodied, in new contexts and toward new ends, and who ought to be doing it? What would engineering futures not out of fear of disaster but out of hope for happiness and healing actually entail?

The feminist versions of these futures are not the same long-termist, "let people die today to make some future humans richer" versions of space futures represented by Elon Musk's SpaceX or Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin. These technodeterminist institutions are also eugenic, with each founder quite willing to sacrifice the poor on Earth for the rich Martians or multiplanetary elite of the future. Feminist space futures ask questions about how to help people flourish in the process as well as at the destination and emphasize care and connection over competition and speed.

So let me introduce a new slogan: Occupy SpaceX for kinful flourishing!

## RESPONSE 5: MAKING SPACES IN/OF/FOR THE CONTEMPORARY (NAYANTARA)

I love this proposition!!! "Occupy SpaceX for kinful flourishing!" And I can imagine it as an edited volume to counteract some of the problems in *Making Kin*. This also allows us to highlight the possibilities situated in the wonderful chapters by TallBear, Benjamin, and Murphy and is one absolute and definitive way to occupy this space—this space for populations and kin in the afterlife and in the afterlife of the contemporary. It is also helpful to think about these chapters in the edited volume that serve as powerful counternarratives to the message in the introduction and Haraway's chapter. These chapters make possible a chance to redeem the contemporary and rethink it as a place where kin-making is not restrained or restricted to the privileged. These chapters do the political work of occupying the singular narrative that could emerge from the introduction—they occupy space in *Making Kin*, thereby making possible multiple narratives in/from this space. Inspired by these chapters and all the possible ways we can occupy SpaceX, it is also imperative to think about the multiple possibilities in the limitations of the contemporary.

Living in Aotearoa New Zealand, an island in the Pacific, I am acutely aware of the losses and dangers to my neighboring islands—where lives and livelihoods are under threat by sea-level rise. These spaces on the verge of extinction and submergence are not in the future; they are in the contemporary. They are not narratives of the future; they are evidence of the past manifesting in the present. Having moved from India to the United States in 1999 and then to this island I now call home in 2015, I have seen closely the devastating climatic events that force mass migration and the complete restructuring of physical and political spaces in three continents. Disaster capitalism (Klein 2007; Loewenstein 2017) has its strongest kin in environmental degradation, a direct descendent of capitalist and colonial exploitative economic systems. And this disaster capitalism is hinged on bordered states, with clear demarcations on where the extractive exploitation can be undertaken and where the benefits of this exploitation can and has been experienced.

Attempting to redeem and rethink the contemporary as SpaceX for kin-making requires us to open the conversation on border politics rather than overpopulation narratives. *Making Kin not Population* could just as well have been titled *Making Kin not Borders*. And these borders, policed and maintained by state-supported capital or capital-supported states, ensure that the spaces we occupy and radicalize are limited in the potentialities we envision. In order for kinful flourishing, we will have to do the political work that TallBear, Murphy, and Benjamin (and others) do in this volume—they sit within the narrative to excavate space for redeeming and redreaming the ways we think about population(s). They make it possible for us to see the potential value for continued conversations on population(s), but *differently*. We need to think differently about borders—political, legal, and otherwise. If we are concerned about environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and overall human precarity, then we need to think about the politics of resource redistribution—not "overpopulation." We need to imagine spaces that are not deeply embedded in capitalist logics of exploitation and exclusion, thereby making possible kin-making alongside baby-making equitably for all.

When I go for walks with my twenty-month-old child, he says "ta ta" to the dog walking down the street in front of our house and also to the bus-ticket machine at the end of our street. He has long chats with mushrooms and oddly arranged Play-Doh. He kisses goodbye to the hallway bench and gets excited to come home and "meet" his latest obsession—the Pukeko puzzle (comprising a total of nine pieces). His multispecies awareness and ability to see the agentive possibilities in nonhuman actors make me hopeful for him occupying and inhabiting SpaceX. I worry about the day he will be informed that you don't say "ta ta" to the bench or dog, as they are not human. But while I live in this moment, holding onto him each night as

he sleeps, I often think of the ways intellectually and practically we need to reconstruct more fluidly our ideas of where, when, and with whom we make kin. I think of the need to open up the spaces we currently occupy and also be willing to occupy new spaces. In looking positively toward all the potential spaces to occupy, be those afterlives, borderless nation-states, multispecies kin, or nonhuman agentive possibilities, *Making Kin* shows us simultaneously the limitation and potentialities of examining population(s) and their politics.

## RESPONSE 6: POPULATION AND ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES: WHICH WAY FORWARD? (DANYA)

And the occupation is already underway! The orthographic shift from SpaceX to space X creates territory, in your hands, for noncapitalist, nonextractive inhabitations of what is otherwise an avatar for greed, excess, colonialism, and sky pollution. I'm reminded as well—to get back to our starting point—of where I learned to pay attention to the liberatory potential of changes in text, changes in grammar: Donna Haraway's (1985) "A Manifesto for Cyborgs." So your response again reminds me of the vexing disappointment of her retrenchment into population discourse in recent years, while also appreciating and taking up your intervention to reframe the issue of population as one of borders.

It seems there are a lot of borders potentially at stake in your provocation: modern political borders of nation-states, yes, but also pre-nation-state territorial borders, the borders formed by contrasts in substance—the "natural" borders between New Zealand, Australia, and North America formed by water pooling over low areas of land on the Earth's crust, for example—species borders, borders between living and nonliving (which is, as you suggest, a highly Eurocentric and enculturated way to slice and dice the world), borders between planetary and extraplanetary.

But I don't want to reduce the stakes and ethics and politics of all of these borders to one ontologically flat plane. So I'll invoke another speculative scenario to think with in order to focus: Malka Older's (2016) debut novel, *Infomocracy*. *Infomocracy* describes a mid-twenty-first-century world in which nation-state borders have been abolished. Instead, the entire human population on Earth is organized into "centenals" of 100,000 people each. Each centenal controls the people within its borders and the territory beneath its people. Geography and the political process are governed by an entity called "Information" that is a hybrid of the United Nations (in its people-managing functions) and Google (in its data-management, news, and voting-management functions). In this technocratic world, different governments create patchworks of different centenals, each with their own laws, social safety nets, and economic norms. In some recently powerful nation-states like China and the United States, the same governments still control vast contiguous swaths of territory. Switzerland has opted out of the centenal system entirely.

I think Older's book brings up two things relevant to our conversation. First, she explores what a world without borders looks like. Her answer seems to be: we would still have borders, because we would still have this problem of figuring out how to divide and subdivide seven-plus-billion people into manageable units of population. It's not that "population" doesn't exist; it's just that it is differently managed. Gone, for the most part, are the legal structures of nation-state borders. Political identity and governance are largely decoupled from ethnonationalist identity and from myths that equate political sensibilities with historically racialized identity categories in the nation-state system. Yet how to manage people, resources, information, leadership, and representation are still all problems to be managed. They are localized differently, but, as we see in the book, that doesn't mean that everyone gets along. It doesn't prevent, for example, political assassinations and the ongoing threat of war.

The second thing that I find interesting for our conversation is that Older presents a reconfiguration of borders without an assumption that there are new frontiers into which some imagined "overflow" of people can expand, or be pushed, into. There are no space colonies, no unexplored frontiers on planet Earth. In *Infomocracy*, people have to continue to deal with each other on this surface of the Earth. And it's not easy. Getting rid of borders doesn't get rid of all of humanity's existing problems, and it creates new ones. It depends on a highly sophisticated, global digital surveillance system that makes Foucault's worst nightmares seem tame by comparison. Every individual is infinitely trackable, and populations can be selectively redefined and redefined: by political affiliation, polling data, voting data, viewing data, and, yes, by physical appearance and gender and movement in physical space. This borderless future requires, to invoke Haraway (2016) at her most troublesome, staying with the trouble on Earth.

One thing that goes underexplored in Older's book is how this system reshapes kinship. Are families still imagined to be microcosms of the nation-state, as Patricia Hill Collins (1998) argues? Ethnonational microunits to be defended, protected, reproduced? Are there still sects or centenals in which men feel they have the right to decide whether their sister's or daughter's romantic partner is "white enough" to become part of the family in order to maintain the racial purity of the family political unit? Does a borderless world mean a world in which the myth of the compulsorily heteronormative, racially pure nuclear family carries less weight? If so, what would new kinships look like? (I should mention that Older perhaps hints that the loss of the nation-state is good for women and queer folks. Many of the key characters are queer, and homophobia and transphobia do not seem to exist. But it is unclear, in my reading, whether this is part of Older's optimistic vision for the near future or a consequence of the reshuffled political landscape.)

So, if we were to start from kinship rather than from the top-down, god's-eye view of population, what do you think a reconfiguration of borders would look like? Or to bring it back to the volume at hand, what would Kim TallBear's challenge to unsettle settler sexuality, and thereby unsettle settler kinship, look like scaled up to, say, a world divided into centenals? How can we—anthropologists—work to break the hold of ethnonationalist kinship on the political imagination of the population at large?

**RESPONSE 7: MAKING KIN, NOT BORDERS: FOR ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE (NAYANTARA)**

Ah, this was beautiful to read. And a reminder of why we work so well together, Danya. You take my provocation and then actually ask me to do some serious thinking about what my idea around making kin not borders would look like. And I agree, Older's book is a brilliant future-facing scenario, which indeed shows us that the borders we knew/know of are no longer good organizing principles, but rather new systems are in place that ironically replicate the same goal of managing seven billion people. I agree that the nation-state borders are not the only ones we need to think about, but rather multiple borders that shape humans and nonhumans. And most concretely, you ask: What would a kinship look like if that was the organizing principle and how would it help manage large populations? For me, as a cultural studies scholar trained in feminist STS and anthropology, kinship is a brilliant way to examine the mutable and multiple contemporary multispecies enchantments. And for me, the analysis is grounded in the very real 2019 of India, and not the future space that Older writes about. It allows for a real biopolitical analysis and identifies one of the flaws in *Making Kin not Population*. For that book, the future is situated in and looks like Euro-America (for most of the authors). However, that world should not be our goal, as replicating it is too damaging for our ecologies, but also because it is underpinned by a logic that has the socioeconomic world crumbling onto itself. Feminists and development studies scholars from the Global South have repeatedly tried to move the debate around what "development" futures ought to look like.

It is for this assumption around future worlds and populations that *Making Kin* cannot have currency for the allies and accomplices across the world who are fighting for women's rights in face of the population and climate conflation. It is devoid of so many conversations, including debates around populationism in places like India (Bhatia et al. 2020; Hendrixson et al. 2020; Hodgson and Watkins 1997). So in order to (re)imagine *Making Kin not Population* as *Making Kin not Borders* or *Making Kin not Populationism*, I visit your questions around borders. For me, the conversation around borders and making kin in the contemporary is grounded in the political climate in India. This is not a future-making exercise in the abstract but the very real and political exercise underway in India (and China—however, I will refrain from that analysis as we are limited in space) for the past few years.

In 2019 and picking up again in June 2020 (as the world comes to terms with COVID-19 and the purpose of political struggle), there have been ongoing protests across India against the ruling democratically elected Hindu conservative government that passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) in December 2019. This act gives Indian citizenship rights to people from religious faiths who have crossed the border into India ("illegally") without proper documentation. The conservative government, responsible for the management of almost 1.3 billion people, wants to accommodate these undocumented migrants who have crossed the border from neighboring Muslim countries (only three countries have been listed—Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan—as these are spaces where religious minorities are persecuted as per the Indian government's analysis). This seems great in one sense. However, it is also problematic because they have categorically excluded Muslim undocumented migrants from this citizenship option. This gets further complicated by the presence of a prior act waiting to be implemented in India—the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

The NRC is incredibly important (because of how dangerous it is in its exclusionary project), but I draw on just one point about the NRC that bears attention for this essay: the bill is intended to help manage the large undocumented population of India (beyond migrants). Currently, there is no national register that lists every Indian citizen, as many mothers have given birth to and loved their babies without registering them with local authorities. The NRC aims to replicate the social security system in the United States and help in surveying and managing the population. While that may seem harmless to some, the NRC, if implemented, will automatically make noncitizens of people and their kin who have lived in India for generations but have no state-authorized documents proving their kinship ties. This deep desire of the state to manage, to control, to count, to include, and to exclude is in stark denial of the porous borders between India and its neighbors, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. It is in denial that mothers travel across these borders daily to work in order to feed their children. It is in denial that young men and women travel across these borders to marry and work. It is in denial that making kin, even if it means adding to the population, is about loving and caring beyond a bordered space. Border crossings are a revolutionary act for some but also an everyday occurrence for others. We as feminist scholars and activists need to recognize and resist the temptation of a singular narrative around kin and populations.<sup>2</sup>

These political projects in India (CAA and NRC), while complicated on multiple levels and pitting the interests of differently positioned people in this extremely diverse postcolonial nation-state, also require a particular simplistic bureaucratic, colonial document rendering of kin relationships in order to belong *inside* the Indian border. They require a denial of the complicated ways kin is actually made. For my thinking around borders, populations, and kin-making, I turn to another brilliant piece of fiction writing. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Arundhati Roy's (2017) latest novel, one of the main characters, Anjum, adopts and then has to let another mother raise her daughter. As the book ends with a hard but well-lived life, Anjum is now surrounded by the people she has loved and who have loved her—including her daughter and her daughter's other mother. Poetically, over cake at the daughter's birthday party, Anjum is informed by a younger *hijra* (this is an identification that Anjum, the character, and Roy, the author, have chosen, and thus I respect and utilize the word as opposed to colonizing their world with an appropriate English word) that there will not be too many of them (*hijras*) left now, as they have such impressive surgeries and hormonal treatments. Anjum, however, longingly wishes for there to be more like them, not less, that make another world possible—another world that is not deeply rooted in colonial scientific sex/gender boundaries. Utopian possibility lies in life beyond the normative, to live on the edge of society. By the end of the book, Anjum and Tilo, two of the main characters, are living in an abandoned graveyard behind a public mortuary. Another world is possible—Anjum and Tilo live in it,

and it is perhaps in seeing our biological and material unanchored from different borders of sex/gender, mortuary/home, mother/another mother, Indian/not Indian, and similar binary discourse. This “another world” is made possible not by conformity but rather in allowing movement across particular borders to love, to parent, to care, to give, to occupy, to *make kin* in a burial ground behind a public mortuary.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON MAKING KIN, (NOT) MAKING POPULATION: BEYOND NATALIST POLITICS (NAYANTARA AND DANYA)

In concluding this epistolary essay inspired by the book *Making Kin not Population*, we hope we have mapped out a trans-disciplinary response. We do so as intellectual kin (Nayan brought Danya into the disciplinary family of anthropology in 2014) who are, at this time, physically displaced from one another (Danya writes from Brooklyn, in the United States, and Nayan from Wellington, in Aotearoa). Through this journey, we have made the argument that the book *Making Kin* frames a problematic engagement with population politics and has the potential to hurt the very real lives (reproductive and otherwise) of women in places like India (where Nayan works). Further, it misjudges the opportunities that feminist scholars have to make institutional and intellectual demands of life and climate sciences. Just as feminist and Indigenous methodologies are making meaningful inroads in disentangling these fields from sexism, patriarchy, and eugenics, Clarke and Haraway seem to be rushing to embrace the racist discourses that undergirded nineteenth- and twentieth-century population panics. At the same time, the volume offers ways through colonialist framings of crises of climate and kinship: alterlife, afterlife, rejections of settler sexuality. The volume is thus deeply vexing, embodying both betrayals and possibilities.

This is, perhaps, only fitting for a book about kinship that represents some of the feminist lineages to which we each trace our own intellectual parentage. Family inspire us, but sometimes they also disappoint. But thinking with/in feminist families is forcing us to have a very important conversation as feminists responsible for training the next generation. It opens up a space for a progressive, nonwhite, feminist engagement on the border between anti- and pronatalist politics. It forces us to think about making or not making kin beyond the limited natalist framework. We suggest that we have the courage to *make kin* with the very women this rhetoric around *not population* is asking us to abandon.

While the exercise of critique is one of our modes of engagement, the other is a future-facing project. Where do we want to concretely start to imagine a future without borders and boundaries—both the ones we know and understand currently and those yet unimagined? For this reason, we find it helpful to place *Making Kin not Population* in the middle of an ongoing conversation about how to best inhabit the colonizing and eugenic legacies of twentieth-century technoscience. We think it entails rejection more than accommodation, imagining more than recuperating, materializing kin more than (re)configuring concepts. As a standalone volume, *Making Kin* is not blazing entirely new trails (even though the scholars it includes have done exactly that through their work over the years). But it does catapult us into thinking productively about new entanglements of human and nonhuman futures on this beautiful Earth.

As anthropologists, we must take on the task of connecting the dots between the environment, capitalist and colonial legacies of extractive economic orders, recurrent population panics, and borders. We have to be attentive to histories and presents, just as we imagine a future space—a future space not in some “colony” on Mars but rather here, on Earth, as earthly beings. As reproduction and its spectral, racialized apocalypse, overpopulation, are dragged, again, onto the center stage of transnational geopolitical machinations on the environment, we must collectively denounce simplistic fearmongering in the name of population. This holds true even when the fear emanates from within our own house.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> At the time of the revisions on this writing, the couple has exited the British royal family, given an explosive interview to Oprah where they held the monarchy as a racist institution, and announced their second pregnancy. The arguments of this text still hold, given they are still only considering two children.

<sup>2</sup> There is limited space here, thus, I cannot go into the rhetoric in contemporary India around the Muslim “population” overtaking the Hindu “population” as a tool to mobilize state violence and everyday hatred against the Indian Muslim kin. The many rules around making and denying kin in India, historically and in the present, are periodically drawn into the population and population-control discourse. An important conversation for another piece of writing.

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