"All of That Wealth Underneath": How the Logic of Extraction Blocks Discourses of Sustainability in the U.S.[1]

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"[T]he physical causes […] which can lead to prosperity
are more numerous in America than in any other country
at any other time in history."
Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (327–28)

"As for the garden,
Adam,
after the Fall.
Make no mistake, he said,
We will destroy it all."
Thomas King, 77 Fragments (1)

Introduction

The dictum "land of unlimited possibilities" has been a recurring hyperbole in (self-)descriptions of the United States of America—even *avant la lettre*. The

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highly praised unlimitedness either referred to notions of freedom, social mobility, economic success, or, last but not least, the seemingly endless "natural" resources, which made the former possible in the first place.[2] The narrativization and iconization of this abundance of resources reaches back to the colonial beginnings of the United States. In the late 18th and early 19th century, it became a central topos in the self-image of the young nation, which further evolved in the context of the paradigm of a general settler colonialism and a specific notion of a westward moving *frontier* that promised land in abundance to prospective settlers. Many early texts about the United States virtually advertised this wealth and promised it to willing immigrants (cf. Crèvecoeur; Duden).

Sustainability—in the sense of taking future effects of current actions into consideration—did not only *not* play a role, but it was also literally beyond the discursive horizon, as it was in open conflict with the new republic's fundamental capitalist logics focused on property and profit. Consequently, the process of westward expansion, which rested on the expropriation and genocide of the indigenous population, was in part also marked by short-lived and resource-intensive settlement practices characteristic of "extractive colonialism," where newly founded towns were abandoned quickly when the resources were depleted or when the settlers faced better prospects for profit elsewhere.[3] This is central to the early discourse on ruins in the United States, to which, for instance, a surprised Alexis de Tocqueville made the following comment during his travels, when he discovered remains of white settlements in Upstate New York: "How astonishing! Ruins already!" (328). The familiar idea of America as a big garden (Eden) (e.g., Smith 138ff.) and the vision of an agrarian ideal state obscure two aspects: on the one hand, the expansionist

2 The "land of unlimited possibilities" formula goes back to German author Max Goldberger and his book *Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten*, published in 1903. While Goldberger mainly described the economic upswing in the United States, the title of his book soon became a common saying and was applied much more broadly to different aspects of American society and history (cf. Klautke 7). Moreover, the publisher Henry Luce (135) wrote about "unlimited resources" in the context of "manifest destiny" and the "frontier."

3 The land grab by European settlers as described by so-called settler colonialism, is typically differentiated from "extractive colonialism," which is mainly concerned with the exploitation of resources. However, it is important to bear in mind that the different "types" of colonialism (Nancy Shoemaker identified 12 different ones) do not usually occur in their pure form, rather, "different forms of colonialism might coexist or morph into each other." For a history of American ghost towns see Ling.

land grab and, on the other hand, the ruthless extraction of resources (also in reference to human labor and especially the bio-politics of enslaved labor as part of an early "racialized capitalism"). Both forms of unscrupulousness indeed seem boundless in retrospect.[4]

Around the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, after the Civil War and the "closing of the frontier," notions of unlimited growth shifted to the realms of technological and economic progress. Despite the fact that narratives of progress became increasingly contested, such ideas lived on beyond two world wars and have been revived in the postwar years as well as in more recent times—especially in political discourse. As a topic with affective appeal in election campaigns and political agendas, the fantasy of unlimited resources comes up time and time again and must be analyzed as part of the rhetoric of American exceptionalism.[5] In 1954, amid the economic recovery of the 1950s and at the height of the Cold War, the consensus historian David Potter—in his clearly not uncontroversial socio-psychological study—describes Americans as a "people of plenty," whose character was formed by the prosperity and abundance in the United States ("land of plenty") and whose mentality embodied the constant availability and expenditure of resources. Similarly, the European vision of the United States had, for a long time, been informed by the supposed abundance of resources—and the notion that what is needed from nature can be taken and profitably used for one's own benefit: land, humans, animals, natural resources. The logic of extraction—in part literally, in part metaphorically—underlies representations of these historical processes and developments and is perhaps more relevant at present than it has been for a long time.

It is this notion of extraction that is at the heart of the following analysis. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it is "[t]he action or process of drawing (something) out of a receptacle; the pulling or taking out (of anything) by mechanical means" (*OED* Online). In the "Corpus of Contemporary American

4 Satnam Virdee analyzed in detail "the structuring force of racism in the history of capitalist modernity" (ibid. 22).

5 In the past years, this rhetoric has been employed in an exceptionally aggressive way by former president Donald Trump. Previously, Ronald Reagan had repeatedly referred to America's "unlimited resources" at the beginning of his first presidency, and even Barack Obama had promised: "We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense." And even if Obama talked about having to "end the age of oil," his administration mostly conceded to the oil lobby (LeMenager 9).

English," the most frequent collocate of "extraction"—not surprisingly from today's perspective—is the word "oil" (Davies). The extraction of fossil fuels has been a focal point in U.S. history. Consequently, it does not only take center stage in economic ventures and political debates but also in cultural productions.[6] American capitalism is and has always been essentially an oil capitalism, and the much-lauded "American way of life" would not be possible without it, neither with regard to consumer culture in general, nor the automobile culture in particular—the outstanding importance of oil for the military-industrial complex should also be mentioned here.[7]

Oil capitalism has been and continues to be in stark contrast to all ideas of ecological sustainability and resource conservation. Not least of all Donald Trump has been one of the most powerful proponents of this system: During his presidency, he embraced extraction in his energy policies on a grand scale, promoting both the revitalization of coal extraction and the controversial practice of fracking (the extraction of oil from great depths by means of injections of water and chemical substances). This way, Trump invoked—and simultaneously exploited—the U.S. "petro-imaginary,"[8] which reaches as far back as the 19th century and is linked especially to those regions where Trump had his conservative voter base: Texas, for example, and Western Virginia—a predominantly rural region with a history determined by the extraction of oil and coal and which to this very day is strongly marked by the frontier-habitus. American studies scholar Donald Pease has pointed out that, during his campaign, Trump chose former "frontier sites" as rally sites to deliver his retrotopic (cf. Bauman) election promises:

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6 Frederick Buell refers to the "culture of extraction" and the 19th century "oil-extraction culture," respectively (74). In doing so, he resorts to the work of Ida M. Tarbell, who associated a special kind of ruthless individualism with oil exploration and the speculation surrounding it, i.e., an "oil individualism" (75). In Tarbell, this results in a criticism of monopoly-capitalism à la Rockefeller.

7 Cf. Pease (2017, 31): "The 'American way of life' would be unimaginable without an oil economy marked by surplus production, militarism, automobility, unregulated markets, and mass consumption. Oil capitalism shaped significant turns in US national history." See also Rice and Tyner, who highlight the role of oil for American statesmanship, and Mitchell, who refers to the U.S. as a "carbon democracy."

8 The term "petro-imaginary" appears to have first been used by Georgiana Banita (151) and has since been established as a concept which, on the one hand, takes up aspects of the cultural and political imaginary and, on the other hand, addresses the specifics of oil-related imaginaries.

> Trump channels this colonial settler mentality at his rallies […] A typical Trump rally site hollows a zone of indistinction between the frontier and the normal political order. At a Trump rally, followers collectively participate in the fantasy of their own regression to a state of desublimated rage at a quite literal restoration of a frontier site where these descendants of settler colonists can experience their ancestors' regeneration through violence. The frontier site a Trump rally opens up is, like the original, the not-yet bounded space on either side of the border, which is beyond clear jurisdiction. This alternative geography figures as a topological rendition of capitalist expansion beyond limits. As the primal scene of capitalist accumulation and contract, the frontier names an as yet uncolonized space upon which the processes by which the proper order of capitalist property and racialized capital gets re-installed through Trump's contract from this relentlessly nativist America (Pease 2018, 164).

This frontier scenario is a fitting match for the logic of extraction. It is also the cornerstone of Trump's campaign program, which rested in equal measure on the extraction and exploitation of resources, the explicit departure from the policies of his predecessor (even if the extraction of oil was also heavily increased under Obama, i.e., there has been no complete reversal), and the undermining of well-established political and administrative processes and institutions.[9] The appointment of the Texan Rex Tillerson, CEO of ExxonMobil, as secretary of state already revealed Trump's affinity for petro-fantasies of all sorts. Tillerson, who learned about his dismissal after 14 months as secretary of state via a tweet by the president on March 13, 2018, did not even belong to the hard-core deniers of climate change in Trump's administration. While he did consider it a problem that ought to be solved by a "techno-fix," he did not take it to be a problem that created an ethical obligation or even a political need for action.[10] For Trump, Tillerson appeared to be the right man in the right place—at least temporarily. The fact, however, that Tillerson as a businessman made deals in Russia and elsewhere rather than simply drill "ultradeep" within

9 Thus, in Trump's speech, analyzed below, he describes his cooperation with the U.S.-Environmental Protection Agency as if the EPA were not a controlling body but rather an ally in fighting against control and regulation. He also praises Andrew Wheeler, former coal lobbyist and head of the EPA, for the creation and maintenance of small refineries in the country and as someone "[who] loves the environment."

10 Cf. Tillerson, cited in Mooney. See also Tillerson's keynote at the Argus Americas Crude Summit in Houston, Texas, in January 2020, summarized in Baltimore.

the United States was met with the president's disapproval, as were Tillerson's positions on various political questions regarding climate issues (for instance, his backing of a CO_2-levy and his support of the Paris Agreement; cf. Egan). As he later revealed, Trump utterly disliked it when he was told that his lofty plans were too simplistic and—on top of that—illegal (Tillerson). This statement appears to substantiate Pease's analysis, according to which Trump used the notion of the frontier site for political purposes, a place quasi-unregulated by law, where extraction is primarily a matter of power, possibly of competition, but certainly not of ethics or even moderation in the sense of sustainable management.

To better illustrate the problems arising from this absence of ecological and economic notions of sustainability in the petro-imaginary of the United States, I will analyze Trump's rhetoric of unlimited and affect-saturated "extraction" in the context of his former energy policies that promised short-term success and quick wealth instead of sustainability. A specific focus in this context is on a speech given by Trump at the *Shale Insight Conference* in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on October 23, 2019, from which the first part of the title of this article is taken.[11] In this almost one-hour long address, which was directed at the work force of the local oil industry, the president celebrated his energy-political "successes" and outlined further plans for the energy sector. It can therefore be described as programmatic and can be identified as an example of Trump's characteristic political style referred to as "authoritarian populism." The speech focusses on the "American energy revolution," which he describes as a kind of successful treasure hunt in America, to the supposed benefit of "the people." The repeated reference to subterranean riches evokes adolescent fantasies of unlimited possibilities, and the semantics of revolution is employed to balance against each other the creative and the destructive moments of energy production. The appreciation of the emotional, even sentimental bond to the land in the sense of a rootedness and the exploitation and destruction of the exact same landscape, i.e., the affirmation of the homeland and the simultaneous production of homelessness, are united in a paradoxical kind of conver-

11 The *Shale Insight Conference* is organized by the Marcellus Shale Coalition, the Ohio Oil & Gas Association, and the West Virginia Oil & Natural Gas Association and has been an annual event since 2011. Among the well-known speakers who have supported the consortium's energy agenda in this context are Rudy Giuliani, Sean Spicer as well as Donald Trump.

gence. This can be read as a product of what Fintan O'Toole described as sado-masochistic structures in authoritarian populisms.

Following the analysis of the speech, the second part of the essay focuses on what has been described as "petrofiction," i.e., texts which are concerned, in the widest sense, with oil—its extraction, sale, and impact on society. The term petrofiction functions as an umbrella term for a whole series of cultural productions, and the wide range of semi-fictional and fictional spins on the topic illustrates the historical and spatial variability of the issue, as well as the multitude of competing interpretations of different scenarios (cf. LeMenager 10ff.; see also Ghosh). Similar to sugar, coffee, cotton, and tobacco, oil is the stuff of dreams and nightmares, while the focus in petrofictional texts is usually on aspects that address the effects on humans and the environment. More recent texts often critically address the narrative of progress and success employed by Trump in his speeches and put it in a new perspective concerning questions of sustainability. How the land and its resources are to be used, however, remains controversial, and thus the affirmation of the logic of extraction in cultural productions underlies considerable cyclical fluctuations.

In the historical Hollywood drama *Giant* (1956), the agricultural use of the land as a cattle range is still in competition with its use as an oil field and both are normatively saturated: the pasture as rich in tradition, not estranged, idealized in a nostalgic, romanticized manner, but also backward-looking; the oilfield as nouveau riche, estranged, yet forward-looking (cf. LeMenager 5). The film can be regarded as an example of a variant of petrofiction that emerged in the 20th century and has plainly been categorized by Stephanie LeMenager as "pro-oil propaganda" (94). Upton Sinclair's novel *Oil!* (1927; film: *There Will Be Blood*, 2007) is also part of this corpus, as is the television series *Dallas* (1978–1991). The latter fails to critically discuss the wealth and its origin but rather, quite uncritically, indulges in it. It is worth considering the hero of the series and soap opera, businessman and "oil baron" J.R. Ewing, in analogy to former U.S. President Donald Trump. More recent productions portray the oil business in a more ambivalent and critical way: among them, the film *Promised Land* (2012; for an analysis of the film, see the article by Germanaz and Marak in this volume), separate episodes of television series, for example *Longmire* ("The Calling Back," 2015), and numerous literary texts, such as Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit* (1990; discussed by Gesa Mackenthun in her contribution to this book) and John Sayles' *Yellow Earth* (2020). The latter provides an approach to the cultural imaginary different from campaign speeches and election pledges. Literature can be seen as a kind of interdiscourse (cf. Link),

which takes up symbolizations from the cultural imaginary, adapts, modifies or affirms them in a kind of interplay across established discourse boundaries. In such a vein, a novel is the focal point of the second part of this essay. Jennifer Haigh's *Heat & Light* (2016) is set in rural Pennsylvania, approximately 60 miles from Pittsburgh, and it was published in the same year as Donald Trump was elected president of the United States, not least with the votes of the population of Pennsylvania. The fictional Bakerton is not unlike the town of Barnesboro, where the author herself is from (see my interview with Jennifer Haigh in this volume). Already the novel *Baker Towers*, published in 2005, introduces Haigh's Bakerton-universe and she returns to it in the short stories *News from Heaven: The Bakerton Stories* (2013). My focus on *Heat & Light* is not only to acknowledge it as an outstanding literary text, it also pays tribute to the gender-political dimension of the "petro-imaginary" in light of the topic of sustainability and its affective dimensions and side effects.

Thus, in analyzing the link between extraction, frontier spirit, and populism as represented by Donald Trump, the aspect of gender-specific codes within the discourses and the hegemonic notions of femininity and masculinity involved also need to be taken into account. The settler colonialism described in my introduction and its actual as well as metaphorical occupation of the land and the extraction-related damages and devastations to it have been explicitly examined in various seminal works in the field of American studies. In context of the "critical myth-and-symbol school," Annette Kolodny observes a logic of violent penetration and metaphorical violation of the land in the early sources of American colonization by whites, as the title of her classic work *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975) pointedly suggests. This imagery is not only relevant for gender politics but also from an ecological point of view: Kolodny's "psychohistory" demands a different treatment of both women *and* land, which have been exposed to the "most unbridled and seemingly gratuitous destruction" (27) for a long time. For previous historical periods, Carolyn Merchant has brought together the gender-political and eco-critical dimensions of settlement, referring to the "death of nature," with nature having female connotations and being symbolized accordingly. Merchant's study ends with a reference to the Three-Mile-Island-accident in the Pennsylvanian nuclear power plant in 1979, which had clearly shown the consequences of putting economic interests and profit maximization above the security of the people and the health of the earth: "Three Mile Island is a recent symbol of the earth's sickness caused by radioactive wastes, pesticides, plastics, photochemical smog, and fluorocar-

bons" (295). This accident also plays an important role in Haigh's novel, as the story is set in different time layers and thus historicizes the connection between the different forms and stages of the extraction of resources, placing them on a temporal continuum linked to one and the same region.

For the representations and fictionalizations supplied by the "petro-imaginary," the interdependencies between gender and violence are obvious. According to Heather Turcotte (200), gender and sexuality are central to the symbolizations and representations of petro-violence, i.e., violence which occurs in and is connected to the context of oil exploration and extraction, a connection that has often been neglected in environmental political discourses up until now (cf. Daggett 28). This also results from a continuing sentimentalization and mystification, or rather re-mystification, of the resource oil, which obviously still is more effective than ecological considerations of sustainability and which includes the classical ideas of mystified heroism and rugged masculinity.[12] Cara Daggett used the term "petro-masculinity" for this kind of masculinity construction, marked by misogyny, racism, and the denial of climate change. Accordingly, the semantics of penetration and extraction with their male connotations in the context of "drilling" and fracking hardly require an interpretation. However, it can be shown in a next step, that frontier-sentimentality manifests itself as masculine "petro-nostalgia" (Dagget 31) or "petromelancholia" (LeMenager 102) in yearnings which bear clearly regressive and retrotopic traits. Daggett describes this as a gateway for authoritarian positions, as long as they cater to the "psycho-affective dimensions" (35) of these yearnings. It is not by coincidence that Daggett also refers to *Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, the first volume of *Male Fantasies*—Klaus Theweleit's seminal work on the theory of fascism—, in order to demonstrate how the control of liquid flows of all kinds can go hand in hand with violence and fantasies of annihilation. Here again, we encounter a sadomasochism which facilitates authoritarian structures, flanked by misogyny and a propensity to violence (ibid. 42–44). This connects to a number of current concerns, especially Trump's energy political fixation on the exploitation of fossil fuels, which, according to Daggett, reveals the latter's "nascent fossil fascism" (ibid. 27).

12 The term "oil-fetishism" was repeatedly used to analyze and characterize this mystification (cf. Huber 296).

"Drill, Baby, Drill": Trump's Energy Policies as Part of His Retrotopic Populism

The fact that Donald Trump's election victory was not due to a majority of votes of all Americans (the "popular vote") but a majority of electors in the electoral college, determined by the winner-takes-all principle in the individual states, has been sufficiently pointed out elsewhere. Analyses of the election have discussed in detail how Trump—as a surprise to many—could win three states which previously had commanded democratic majorities for decades, even if they were often characterized as swing states: Pennsylvania (one of the founding colonies which stretches far into the west), Michigan, and Wisconsin. These three states, of which Pennsylvania is the most populous and accounts for 20 electoral votes (only California, Texas, New York, and Florida have more), represent in a special way the 18th and 19th century history of settlement, settler colonialism, and the frontier experience, retrospectively glorified in countless texts and classical Hollywood Westerns since James Fenimore Cooper's historical novels. In her partly autobiographical novel *A New Home—Who'll Follow?* (1839), Caroline Kirkland made an early attempt at demystifying the frontier-romanticism and its connotations of masculinity by describing the hardships of this life, the loneliness of women, and the quite unexpected absence of Indians and other spectacular ingredients of the white male narrative of "proving oneself." Ironically, the symbol of the adventure in the West for Kirkland is the hardly sensational but even more so unpleasant "Michigan mudhole," in which her carriage gets stuck, and which consequently thoroughly demystifies the myth of the West, right at the beginning of her journey (Kirkland 5ff.). Nonetheless, it is exactly this myth of the supposedly formative American experience at the border between "civilization" and "wilderness" that so firmly established the myth of the frontier in the cultural imaginary of the United States; so much so that it can be conjured up, time and time again, in a highly effective way by American presidential candidates, not so long ago by Donald Trump. The politics of affect in Trump's campaign and governing style also relied on a re-enchantment of extraction—American-style and America first—and on a discrediting and erasure of environmental sustainability considerations in the context of global multilateral projects as simply "un-American." This is possibly the most simplistic "argument" that is currently being made in environmental policy debates. The term retrotopia fittingly characterizes the one-sided nostalgic glorification of bygone times, times which are referenced in a palimpsest-like way: the 1980s (Ronald Rea-

gan's presidency), the 1950s ("economic miracle" and postwar conservatism), the turn of the century (Theodore Roosevelt and his "Rough Riders"), or the 1830s (Andrew Jackson's presidency during the "Indian Wars"). The vagueness of the reference makes it all the more resonant and evokes U.S. Cold War discourses of superiority as well as older imperial discourses and frontier romanticism along with their respective "pioneers."

Trump has never been shy about his economic and energy policy views and thus substantiated previously rather latent contradictions (which had also been characteristic of the policies of the Obama administration). As keynote speaker at the *Shale Insight Conference* in Pittsburgh in October 2019, Trump formulated the principles of his energy policies once more and simultaneously celebrated his first "successes."[13] His populist rhetoric makes use of clear antagonisms and opposition pairs, providing supposedly obvious solutions to the problems involved. The argumentative pattern is evident in five terms Trump employs, in part in a rather idiosyncratic way: *revolution*, *disaster*, *treasure*, *energy workers*, and *dominance*.

First, Trump establishes a clear dichotomy between his presidency and that of his predecessor, arguing that President Obama and his Democrats had been blocking the American economic development and energy political independence and that they had been standing in the way of the "American energy revolution." The latter, according to Trump's stylization and metaphorization, refers to fracking and similar practices in Pennsylvania and elsewhere. In the first part of his speech, he discusses in detail how he has already reversed all previous policies originally issued to protect the environment and to foster ecological sustainability (many of them introduced under Obama), including the "Waters of the United States Rule," the "Clean Power Act," and, of course, on an international level, the Paris Climate Agreement. The semantics of revolution has a nationalist basis and refers to American independence of foreign resources and foreign tutelage and the return to America's own, longstanding strength, also in reference to energy politics ("We believe the United States should never again be at the mercy of a foreign supplier of energy [...] We are committed not only to energy independence but to American energy dominance."). In the speech, Trump also repeats the famous sentence that he "was elected to represent the people of Pittsburgh, not the people of Paris." Revolu-

13 For a video and a transcript of the speech, see Trump 2019a and 2019b respectively. In what follows, all quotes are taken from the speech given in these sources.

tion in this case does not go hand in hand with social redistribution but with the consolidation of hierarchy and inequality.

In many of his speeches, Trump employs terminology that is also prominently used in debates about sustainability. However, he criticizes the prioritization of ecological matters as a principally wrong-guided attack on U.S. interests, repeatedly refers to the policies of his predecessor as well as the current continuation of these policies by Democratic politicians as a "disaster," and even talks of "total destruction." Yet in his case, the metaphors of catastrophe and destruction do not refer to environmental damage, climate change, and air pollution but to economic issues—without reference to any notion of sustainability. The environment does not appear to be worthy or even in need of protection—unlike the economy. Jobs need to be created, secured, and protected from "total destruction." The sustainability debate is thus reduced to absurdity. Trump's political campaign promises to save sectors and regions that had been especially hard hit by deindustrialization by means of a short-term "re-industrialization"—for example by reviving "King Coal" (as in the "Trump digs coal" slogan) and by extending fracking—turned out to be anachronistic and are tantamount to a rejection of environmentally friendly technologies that promote sustainability. It seems only apt to acknowledge Naomi Klein's thesis of "disaster capitalism" as a perfidious strategy of profit optimization under the cover of crisis management, which she illustrates with various examples (e.g., the profits of the oil industry following hurricane Katrina [cf. Klein 2007, 2017]). The crises of the "rust belt" and of the cities and states belonging to it, among them Pittsburgh, develop at a slower pace and take place in longer temporal cycles. Nonetheless, they are cases of "disasters," the intended management of which, as announced by Trump, clearly allows analogies to Klein's examples. Besides the Obama administration and Barack Obama himself, there are further individuals who receive a scolding from Trump—all those who do not unconditionally agree with his political course, among them Democratic members of Congress, and former governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo. The latter for the time being provided a fitting foil for comparison with Trump in several aspects: as a Democrat and thus political opponent (Cuomo had also been touted as a potential presidential candidate), as a pipeline opponent (Cuomo, who in the meantime has stepped down due to sexual harassment allegations, was against a gas pipeline across his state and against fracking), as part of the establishment (already his father had been governor of New York), and as part of the East Coast elite (Cuomo is originally from New York City—as is Trump himself, however).

In his speech, Trump distances himself sharply from any kind of hesitation and procrastination and presents himself as the doer *par excellence*. Any skepticism towards extraction, any deliberating policies of sustainability are equated with passiveness and inaction and consequently demonized. The people in Democratic New York were "sitting on a goldmine of energy," while the Democrats were keeping those treasures, the mineral resources, well away from them. The Trumpian treasure hunt in all of its manifestations (drilling, offshore drilling, fracking, mountaintop removal) and by all possible means is praised as a remedy in order to keep in check both supposedly anti-business bureaucrats, who insist on authorization procedures and slow down the "energy revolution," as well as civic protests of various groups. The latter are hardly addressed directly, and when some protesters loudly make themselves heard in the room, they are implicitly threatened by Trump, who taunts them by telling them to go home to their "mama" immediately. This is a well-known strategy: It is the feminization of environmental activists as "tree huggers," which insinuates a loss of "true" masculinity.[14] The closeness to nature and the concern for it (traditionally linked to femininity and passiveness) contrasts with its subjugation, domination, and exploitation and their respective connotations of masculinity and activity. This is also part of a complex that Daggett refers to and analyzes as "petro-masculinity."[15] And this is also where the cultural and ideological difficulty of a turn towards sustainability—roundly rejected and even ridiculed by Trump and his followers—becomes apparent. It would presuppose a rethinking on many levels in order to question hegemonial cultural settings, to accept alternative epistemologies, to recode notions of ecological, economic, and social sustainability as desirable and attractive, and to establish such attitudes in the cultural imaginary.

14 Not only is "treehugger" a relevant term from the perspective of gender politics, but at the same time it insinuates a wrong-guided sentimentality, ridiculous esotericism, and a work-shy detachment from reality (especially in contrast to the physically hard-working people in the energy industry, including fracking) and thus discredits environmental concerns.

15 An alternative model of accepted masculinity is described by Martin Hultman in reference to Arnold Schwarzenegger as "ecomodern masculinity." Schwarzenegger had outgrown the clichés of the male hero as bodybuilder, cowboy, or also Terminator and instead managed to project a new mixture of "toughness and compassion" onto himself with his political career (Hultman 87). It is not by coincidence that Schwarzenegger was often targeted by Trump's snide criticism.

The slogan "Drill, Baby, Drill" which served as a subtitle to this paragraph predates Trump's presidency even though it pointedly characterizes his positions in several respects. The slogan was already introduced in 2008 by the Republican Michael Steele and was intoned with its obviously suggestive undertones at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota, during which John McCain was chosen as the presidential candidate with Sarah Palin as vice-presidential nominee. It was already in this context that the link between fracking practices and explicit "country first"-rhetoric emerged, from which it is only a small step to "America first" (cf. Steele). Palin took up the slogan and used it as the headline of a 2009 article directed at Barack Obama. In it, she aggressively pledged in favor of offshore drilling in Alaska and elsewhere, quite similarly to Trump.

Obama consistently opposed encroachment on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) and other protected regions of the United States. Consequently, Trump blames the Obama administration for not digging up "America's vast energies and treasures." The inability or unwillingness to unearth America's vast treasures is a recurring accusation throughout his speech. It is indeed quite remarkable that Trump likes to use the term "treasure" (see also 2017a, 2019c), evoking the invitation to a treasure hunt on a grand scale, with its associations of Gold Rush (along with its accompanying atmosphere) as well as the memories of typical classics in film and youth literature, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. Following literary scholar Leslie Fiedler, the regressive aspect of "petro-masculinity" could be identified here in the form of a greedy narcissism with a one-sided view of the world as a place to satisfy one's own libidinal wishes, crying "Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!" like Stevenson's Captain Flint.

While Trump refers to his political adversaries as "anti-energy zealots," who are "blinded by ideology"—the ideology of sustainability one could add—, he flatters the workers in attendance by attributing positive characteristics to them, calling them "our great energy people." However, he reserves the title "warriors" (which are apparently needed in a revolution) for his Pennsylvanian party comrades and congressional representatives. Trump portrays the former as having been unjustly deprived of the treasure they deserve up until now, thus catering to the resentments of those "left behind" in contrast to the elites and interpellating them as the big winners of his energy policy turnaround. Whilst Trump directly addresses the "great energy people," workers—men and women—appear on stage on either side of the speaker like well-draped extras. Clad in safety vests and helmets as "blue-collar workers," they simultaneously

represent fervent adherents of his policies. Three of them are allowed to briefly step in front of the microphone in order to add an appearance of authenticity to the whole choreography. In the course of his performance, Trump seems to already extract the energy from his "energy workers," who greet him with thunderous applause. Their display on stage is meant to validate his policies as politics for the "common people." A wide angle shot of the room reveals that, apart from the workers onstage, it is mainly filled with oil industry officials and lobbyists. This is hardly surprising, given that the conference fees start at $625 and the Shale Insight website describes its participants as the "leaders" and "decision makers" of the branch. Thus, the dramaturgy of the event presents Trump on stage flanked by his blue-collar supporters, while the audience mostly consists of participants in suits and ties who attend the spectacle. The phrase "energy people" obscures the difference between the two status groups, while the term "energy" is repeatedly being linked to "potential"—which in a quite neo-liberal style re-delegates the responsibility for the success of energy production to every single person in the room. If they fail to realize the energy potential, it is not the failure of Trump's politics. Regulatory intermediaries—be they labor unions or government agencies—find no (positive) mention. Any sets of rules and regulations appear a source of annoyance and a hindrance to the exponential "unlocking" of profit potentials, i.e., the energy revolution.

The re-nationalization of Trump's policies directs attention back to certain parts of the country which had been hit hard by deindustrialization (and which Trump idealizes in a rather one-sided way), and it combines notions of national greatness with those of nostalgic memories of the days of coal mining and other extractive practices. Trump's agenda owes its attractiveness for voters, who see themselves as the losers of globalization and its economic consequences, to this type of retrotopic references.[16] The speech ends with Trump reaffirming his energy policies and the superiority and "dominance" of the United States, which according to him is now once more "the greatest energy superpower in the history of the world." Other countries would try to emulate the United States but still never catch up, due to the superiority of the American "energy workers," who—as has already been stated—are objectified multiple times during and after the speech. In the end, diverse topics and slogans superimpose each other, when Trump "supplements" his

16 Cf. in this respect the seminal and much discussed empirical studies by Cramer, Hochschild, and Duina.

explanations concerning energy with several other campaign topics: the right to own weapons, the necessity of building a wall at the border to Mexico, and getting rid of "sanctuary cities" in order to "keep America great."

Thus, Trump's speech at the *Shale Insight Conference* turns into an election campaign event—like so many other of his appearances, regardless of place and occasion. On a podium offered by the fossil fuel industry, speaking to the fossil fuel industry, the U.S. president talks in the fashion of a businessman, not a statesman, and he uses the stage mainly to stylize himself as a doer—a "builder" and a boss. To summarize, Trump's speech puts economics and ecology in an antagonistic front-line position, which he correlates with further binary oppositions: masculinity/masculinization vs. femininity/feminization; active domination of nature vs. passive conservation; American independence vs. American dependence and dictation by other nations; prosperity and well-being vs. poverty and unemployment; economic profit maximization vs. ecological sustainability. The front-line between economy and ecology characteristic of authoritarian populisms eliminates forms of mediation and compromise as well as social issues that represent an important dimension of sustainability debates. The social inequality between blue-collar workers with their Trump-pleasing pathos formulas on stage and the industry officials in the auditorium is successfully obscured—as is the fact that the extraction is mostly only short-lived anyways and the jobs in extension of the idea of "extractive colonialism" are not sustainable. This is accomplished by inserting the position of the treasure-seeking president into the crumbling foundation of American exceptionalism, built on 19th century extraction-based settler colonialism and promising a new "golden era of American energy" (Trump 2017b).

"More than most places, Pennsylvania is what lies beneath": Jennifer Haigh's Literary Archeology of a Region in *Heat & Light*

The concept of region is significant for the petro-imaginary in times of globalization. Sustainability debates also emphasize the role of glocality, i.e., the global-local nexus. A reflection on the return of regionalism against the changed backdrop of globalization cuts across disciplines; it can also be found in literary and cultural studies (cf., for example, Mahoney/Katz; Lösch et al.). Jennifer Haigh's novel *Heat & Light*, which was published in 2016—the year Trump was elected president, also by a majority of the residents of Pennsylvania, who associated his promise to reindustrialize the region with hopes

for a better life—is set not far from the site of Trump's previously analyzed speech. The novel contextualizes and historicizes the statements of the then incoming president in multiple ways, since it incorporates in its plot different groups of actors and their different perspectives in multiple narrative strands (cf. Michaud), thus unraveling the complexity of extraction practices. Literary critics attest Haigh a great success with her novel. As a chronicler of Western Pennsylvania, the author focusses on a little town close to the metropolis of Pittsburgh. The town Bakerton is a microcosm in which important steps in the region's history but also in that of the nation are condensed: the dispossession of the land of the Seneca; the immigration from southern and eastern Europe in the 19th century; the progressing industrialization; coal mining, which thanks to the jobs in the mines led to the town's modest prosperity while severely damaging the workers' health and from time to time even killing them. Originally, the town was named after the mines, whose name again derives from the Baker brothers, the founders of this "company town" in the 1880s, "who dug the first coal mine in the valley and named an entire town after themselves" (Haigh 2016: 3). Not far from the fictional Bakerton, Titusville, Pennsylvania, is also the site of the first oil boom in American history, when in 1859 Edwin L. Drake discovered oil for the so-called Seneca Oil Company. However, the region was also the site of the biggest reactor accident in the history of the United States, where dangerous amounts of radioactive substances leaked from the Three-Mile-Island-reactor in 1979, about which the population was only inadequately informed and in a piecemeal fashion.

These events are already history when the novel sets in. The earlier history with its focus on immigrant families at the times of coal mining is told in Haigh's previous novel *Baker Towers* and her short stories in *News from Heaven*. In *Heat & Light,* the coalmines have already been closed for a very long time. A tragic mining accident in which a lot of men died has become part of the town's collective memory. Now it is almost a ghost town, partly reduced to ruins, partly run down and neglected—a place in decline, hoping for a different economic future. The construction of a new prison complex has created new jobs in the structurally weak region, agriculture is still practiced in some places, and there is a pub in the town's old noble hotel called "The Commercial" and various public facilities. It has become a town of women and widows ("Only the widows remain," 11). The remaining inhabitants are willing to believe in a new economic miracle, when they receive offers to sell the subterranean lease rights for their land in order to extract natural gas via fracking from the "Marcellus Shale" that expands a mile below the surface of the earth. "*Beautiful property*

you've got here" (9–10, italics in original)—this is the first sentence with which Bobby Frame, the sales agent of the energy company from Texas, addresses the land owners in Bakerton, and most of them are easy targets for him. As part of his sales strategy, he uses the language and the typical euphemisms of the energy corporations that also Trump used in his speech: "*Buried treasure*, says Bobby, feeling the poetry" (10). Yet not all of them sell their lease rights, and this leads to tensions among the inhabitants who up until then had been living side by side quite indifferently. Slowly, protest materializes against the practice of fracking, especially after the workers brought in from Texas have already started to work and Bobby Frame's promises and claims do not prove true—neither concerning the financial compensation nor the quality of life of the inhabitants during the fracking process. The statement "We drill a half mile down […] We're so far down you'll never know we're there" (10) turns out to be plain wrong.

The plot starts in 2010 and ends in 2012, while the story line is interspersed with flashbacks: The one reaching back furthest is to the year 1979, from which the story returns to the present in several time jumps (1988, 1992, 2004, 2005). The text creates a multi-faceted panorama of the people involved, who hold different views on the promised comeback of the town and on fracking as part of the projected "energy revolution." The ensemble of Bakerton's inhabitants consists of Rich and Shelby Devlin and their two children, Braden and Olivia; Rena and "Mack" (Susan Mackey), who practice organic dairy farming on their ranch; and Rena's son Calvin who is serving time in the prison where Rich works as a guard. Rena meets Lorne Trexler, geologist and activist, who organizes protests against fracking, and she starts to support his work. Then there is the Rev. Jess, whose husband Wes, her predecessor as the parish pastor, had died of cancer early on and who had attributed his illness to his childhood in close proximity to the damaged Three Mile Island reactor. Wes' story following the disaster is reviewed retrospectively in a separate section of the book. Jess, who is now single, is drawn to one of the oil workers, Herc, with whom she builds a relationship, while Herc hides his family in Texas from her. Other workers of the drill rig—Brando, Jorge, Mickey—also come into view: Each and everyone of them is uprooted, alone and has left his family temporarily for the strenuous work ("There are no soft jobs on a drill rig," 98), content they have one in the first place; their social relationships are mainly confined to the camp and the pub. Aggression and struggles for recognition and about distribution between workers from Texas and locals are on the rise, while those actually responsible are hiding behind a chain of subcontractors,

telephone waiting lines, and "slippery PR flacks" (205) and remain elusive. The state and its agencies appear to be absent—Bakerton has a single "town cop" (Chief Carnicella is chief of police without any employees, 78). The regulatory authorities Trump rails against in his speech do not exist in Bakerton, and the people, lured by the prospects of profit, entirely in line with the vague and ultimately unfulfilled rhetoric of "potential," are defenseless against the profit interests of the companies and the distortions caused by the unscrupulous exploitation practices. The police does not even protect the most vulnerable, Bakerton's women and children, from domestic abuse.

Most workers who come to Bakerton are originally from Texas, and Texas is also the site of the headquarter of the company which operates the fracking in Bakerton and which considers the new site a pathbreaking investment, a steppingstone for their expansion in the North East. The CEO of the company, Clifford 'Kip' Oliphant, posing for a cover story with his horse in front of his ranch, is hailed as a "new cowboy" at the "new frontier" of fracking (26). Here, the novel demonstrates the continuity of the cultural imaginary between the old settler colonialism and the new forms of resource extraction as well as between the "old" oil drilling in Texas and the application of the new fracking technology in the North East of the country—and this in an almost legal vacuum. Haigh's meticulously detailed description of a shareholder meeting of Dark Elephant Energy clearly points to, in some ways even anticipates, the kind of setting of Trump's speeches in front of officials and lobbyists, as discussed above in an exemplary way. The manner in which the novel details the CEO's preparations in his hotel room, self-indulgently practicing his poses, honing his rhetoric, choosing his clothes, and doing anything to make a good impression and to convince the audience, appears almost like a parody, and the depicted behavior shows clear traits of an authoritarian populist style of leadership. In the short term, he will succeed, but in the long run—and this is part of poetic justice—he will suffer personal and professional damage. At the same time, the novel is equally critical in its portrayal of the protest culture against fracking: The charismatic professor of geology and environmentalist Lorne Trexler makes increasingly condescending remarks about the population of Pennsylvania, also affronting Rena, when she accompanies him to a protest event in New York, where she experiences a feeling of estrangement with university protest culture. Also, Mack feels out of place when she parks her pick-up on the college campus. Lorne's former student, now advisor for an energy company, makes fun of Lorne's arrogance: "Lorne Trexler, the famous populist, champion of the working classes until they dare to disagree with him"

(375). Hence, also Lorne instrumentalizes the residents of Bakerton for his own ends and dumps them when they are no longer useful to him. With this depiction, the text of course runs a certain risk of reproducing the well-known topos of the seducibility of "honest people" by outsiders, not only found in the Western and in numerous representations of the heartland but also in populist rhetoric.

Several other characters inhabit the fictional world of this novel, yet it is the town itself that constitutes the center of the story, a marginal place for the United States that, for centuries, has experienced nothing but extraction and has periodically been "disemboweled" and then forgotten once more: "Rural Pennsylvania doesn't fascinate the world, not generally. But cyclically, periodically, its innards are of interest. Bore it, strip it, set it on fire, a burnt offering to the collective need. Bakerton understands this in its bones" (11). The imagery of the "entrails," suggesting a kind of slaughter as it is performed in the context of meat production, is drastic, and it goes hand in hand with other practices of violation, ultimately even annihilation—not primarily of jobs but of a habitat that is fit for human beings. Looting nature and sacrificing Bakerton is the downside of the adolescent story of a treasure hunt and the promise of happiness that can be heard in both Dark Elephant Energy's marketing and Trump's speech. The place itself, from which the treasure is extracted by any means available, is virtually a collateral damage in the procedure. In a similar context, Traci Voyles has coined the term "wastelanding," which she uses to describe the process of exposing an ecosystem and its human inhabitants to irreversible environmental pollution—in a calculated manner and without providing any protection. In this, it follows the logic and economy of extraction without a single thought on sustainability and ecological consequences. Many of the characters in Bakerton have internalized this logic, no questions asked, as "knowledge in the bones" (Shotwell 125). The connection between the logic of extraction and the metaphor of violent penetration has repeatedly been polemically explicated in analogies of "fracking" and "fucking": Protest posters say "MOTHERFRACKERS, GO HOME" (370), Bakerton is suffering a "FRACKING NIGHTMARE" (179), and Darren (Rich's brother) wonders: "*Fracking*. The word sounds subliminally obscene, a genteel euphemism for *fucking*" (179). This, once more, brings to mind Annette Kolodny's *Lay of the Land*.

On the occasion of a birthday party for Rich's father, who had been a mine worker himself, the family eventually grasps the actual extent of the encroachment caused by oil extraction on their own land they themselves now no longer have control of:

> They cross the yard together, Dick, Rich, and Braden leading the way, followed by Darren, Shelby, and Olivia. They climb the rise and look down. Five acres of pasture have been razed and flattened, spread with gravel and marked off with chain-link fence […] The scale of the operation is shocking, but not surprising. Rich knew what he was in for. (193)

Together, three generations speechlessly stare at the huge sealed and fenced area. Later on, when they are having their barbeque, it becomes noisy and uncomfortable. The situation seems like a reprise of the titular metaphor in Leo Marx's study on the industrialization of the former agrarian nation, *The Machine in the Garden*:

> An immense truck, larger than any he's ever seen, is climbing the access road, or trying to. The thing moves at the speed of a cruise ship, enveloped in a cloud of diesel fumes […] In stunned silence they watch the hulking machine inch up the ridge. That it moves at all is a straight-up miracle. It's as though an aircraft carrier has run aground in Rich's back yard." (195–96)

Here, Haigh impressively creates a form of what Miles Orvell (2006) has referred to as "destructive sublime": a moment of being overwhelmed, almost a perverted experience of grace in the face of the presence of technology and its destructive potential.[17]

The emphasis on the disproportionality of the military-grade high tech of fracking and the modest size of the farm highlights the disproportionality of the means of energy extraction themselves and also the asymmetry of power between the large Texan corporation and the individual landowner whose dreams of future farming are being shattered by fracking. Rich's aspirations for an economically viable future on his land and for his family have thus failed. In a way, Rich embodies the link between the generations and the professions in the novel—he was in the army (in a war also waged for oil), works in prison, jobs in his father's bar, goes fishing with his son, and dreams of a future life as a farmer. Like many in Bakerton, he considers his failure in the face of the reality of extraction as the result of his own wrongdoing: his greed to get the money for the lease, his inability to read the small print of the contract, and his unrealistic hopes to be able to farm the land on his own again. At the end of

17 Cf. Orvell's conceptualization of the term as an ambivalent combination of "aesthetic excitement" and "ethical response" (2006) and his analysis of the large-format photographs of the Canadian artist Edward Burtynsky, especially in the publication *Oil*, as an example for the "apocalyptic ruin" discourse (2016, 32–36).

the novel, he reminisces his childhood and how he was interested in the early history of the region before settler colonialism:

> How the world must have looked then, in Indian times: his own corner of the world before roads and bridges, tipples and steel mills, the sprawling strip mines that blackened the earth like char. As a boy he imagined it, vividly. As a man he learned it didn't matter. (427)

This reflection contrasts the visions of re-industrialization and the "technological sublime" of fracking with another kind of imagination, a sketch of a premodern existence, connoted with childlike curiosity and innocence and colored with nostalgia. It seems to me symptomatic that Rich quietly takes refuge in a retrotopia instead of envisioning an ecological utopia, when his private conceptions of the future lie shattered by economic realities. According to Fredric Jameson, "it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (xii)—and one could modify this: the end of extraction-based oil capitalism. However, sustainability depends to a considerable degree on whether and how convincingly it can be imagined: "The imagination structures existent practices of sustainability which are carried out in a variety of social fields (politics, economy, civil society, science) and which in turn structure the imagination" (Adloff 292). In a positive light, the above quotation from the novel can also be understood as an indication that unlearning the (neo)colonial views and certainties internalized through socialization represents the first step towards a liberation of the imagination from the well-worn tracks of the logic of exploitation.

What is below the ground, the supposed treasure, remains hidden from the readers of Haigh's novel. The lives of the novel's characters in Bakerton take place above ground. Here they observe the changes to their drinking water and in their animals' behavior, and they sense how the earth is shaking. *Heat & Light* spells out the grave and lasting side-effects of the course Trump advertises in his speech at the *Shale Insight Conference*—and which he has continued to espouse ever since. Haigh's novel is the poetic "package insert" to his promised cure-all, possibly even unmasking him as a fraudulent "miracle healer" who captivates his audience with fantastic prospects (which soon turn out to be false predictions) in order to make them forget their own vulnerability along with the injuries inflicted on them. In Haigh's novel, however, there are no easy causalities and one-sided blame. Rena's realization that it is probably Shelby herself who is harming her daughter to compensate for an attention deficit and that she is not sickened by the quality of the water after fracking (even if it smells bad) does not stop Lorne from exploiting the child's illness for his

own purposes. When the fracking company changes its business model and replaces its CEO because the market collapses due to oversupply, the workers are let go and the "drill sites go silent" (405) virtually overnight. Fracking in Bakerton ends, at least momentarily, since it is no longer profitable—and for no other reason than that. And above it all, a sentence is floating midair, keeping alive the nostalgic desire for meaning and dominance at the entrance to the town, in pale letters that are hardly legible any more: "BAKERTON COAL LIGHTS THE WORLD" (180, 425).[18]

Conclusion

The goal of this essay was to examine in an exemplary way Donald Trump's speech at the *Shale Insight Conference* 2019 (an example of a whole series of programmatically similar energy political speeches during his presidency and after) and Jennifer Haigh's novel *Heat & Light* from 2016 in order to identify and analyze the logic of extraction, "American-style," in different discourses in their respective culture-specific varieties and ideological orientations. The programmatic rejection of considerations of sustainability has already been described as a cornerstone of exploitation in context of the 19th century critique of capitalism—"Après moi le déluge! is the election cry of every capitalist and of every capitalist nation" (Marx). Donald Trump's speech delivered 150 years later on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean seems to confirm this diagnosis. However, a closer look reveals that the logic of extraction in Trump's rhetoric is amalgamated with certain mythologems of U.S. history and elements of American exceptionalism, and it is precisely this combination that guarantees the kind of resonance in parts of the population that enabled Trump's path to the White House and secured him astonishing approval ratings. While the former president propagated an increased exploitation of resources as a simple solution to the economic problems of deindustrialization, Haigh's fictional text indicates that the extraction of fossil fuels is responsible for the

18 While many of the life plans in Bakerton fail, Mack and Rena's farm possibly remains the only positive and viable model for sustainable management. Yet also their business success suffers damage due to the town's association with the practices of fracking, since the urbanite costumers in Pittsburgh no longer trust the quality of their products. Sustainability needs to be commodifiable, too. The novel leaves open to what extent their business will recover from this.

crisis of the economic system, that, in fact, the extraction capitalism produces these crises.

The literary contextualization of fracking within historical forms of a depletion of nature sheds light on the long history of unscrupulous exploitation and extraction, which have created social and economic inequality and caused the destruction of nature and continues to do so, ignoring any considerations about sustainability. This historization modifies the simplifying antagonisms and dichotomies proclaimed by Trump and the fracking lobby. Against the backdrop of U.S. self-stylizations, the sustainability discourse is taunted to be fundamentally un-American in that it has little alignment with the hegemonic notions of masculinity, success, and a treatment of nature that prioritizes technological progress over care. This is clearly suggested by Trump's speech in a not-so-subtle way and with an air of authoritarianism. At closer sight, however, Trump's populist practices of performance reveal the division between the workers (who are instrumentalized as extras with only a minor role to play) and the industry officials and lobbyists (who control the means of production). In contrast to this, I consider Haigh's novel—despite all the stark differences between political and literary discourse—as a contribution that adds to the complexity of the energy policy debate and examines the mixed emotions and affective dissonances (Ladino's term) attached to the topic. That both discourses refer to the cultural imaginary constitutes a unifying element. *Heat & Light* challenges the dichotomies that Trump's speech creates, and it shows that contrary to the propagated *frontier*-drunk faith in progress in a neoliberal fashion, there cannot only be "winners" and "potentials" and that the underground treasure hunt demands a high price from many people. Moreover, the novel shifts the focus from primarily economic factors to ecological and social ones. Interpersonal relations—at times violent and exploitative (also in the sense of "petro-masculinity")—recur as the main theme and they reveal profound differences between people and their different socializations and milieus. Many more aspects could be addressed, for example the continuing relevance of the oil crisis, dating back to Jimmy Carter's presidency (an epigraph in Haigh's novel comes from him), or the ongoing resistance of indigenous groups to Trump's energy policies (which includes the construction of controversial pipelines on Indigenous territory), simultaneously pointing to the tragic history of land dispossession and destruction of alternative epistemologies.

The difficulty of anchoring notions of economic and environmental sustainability in the U.S. cultural imaginary in the first place has been diagnosed

repeatedly; at times it seems easier to captivate the public's imagination with asteroid mining and the colonization of space as new frontiers of energy production (cf. Abrahamian) than to encourage ecological rethinking towards the use of renewable energies and the protection of the environment. The petro-regime suggests and nurtures notions of a dependence on oil and other fossil fuels, which it portrays as being without alternative. This way, it can fuel even the most far-fetched notions of a successful search for these raw materials and mineral resources time and time again with reference to the frontier spirit.

In an era of globalization, such a petro-regime is of course not only an American phenomenon, as is demonstrated by critical petrofictions of other countries. If we broaden our perspective, we can find literary treatments of the topic also in so-called oil states. As examples, one could refer to Abdalrachman Munif's novel *Cities of Salt* (1988 [1984]) from Lebanon, the novel of the Egyptian author Nawal El Saadawi *Love in the Kingdom of Oil* (2001 [1993]), the short story "Oil Field" (2011) by Saudi-Arabian author Mohammed Hasan Alwan, and *How Beautiful We Were* (2021) by the Cameroonian-American writer Imbolo Mbue. Some texts by Nigerian author and environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa (1995 [1986]) also address the role of oil as a resource in the context of corruption and state failure in Nigeria. Saro-Wiwa paid for his system-critical revelations with his life, especially for his disclosures of neocolonial extraction practices and environmental pollution by Shell in his home region of Ogoniland for which he created international publicity. Two further texts within a Nigerian context are Ben Okri's short story "What the Tapster Saw" (1988) and Helon Habila's novel *Oil on Water* (2010).

An important aspect for analyzing sustainability discourses is the identification of culture-specific patterns that either challenge or promote it. Literature, as well as popular culture, can play a role in making sustainability narratable and imaginable and thus to develop and circulate notions of sustainability. Literature invites reflection on a problem without explicitly calling for action and perhaps has a special role to play here in context of work within/on the cultural imaginary. I have touched on how fundamental a shift in thinking must be in order to prioritize sustainability over other interests, in this case in the United States, in terms of gender discourses, regional differences, structures of feeling, and a long history of habitualized extraction and exploitation of natural resources. To provide a broader perspective, there are elements in the national manifestation of anti-sustainability sensitivities that can be connected to transnational and transcultural discourses. Therefore, it seems pos-

sible—and necessary—to anchor the topic of sustainability in a transnational (cultural) imaginary in the long term.

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