# Complex Ocean Ethics:

# Examining Human-Ocean Relationships through South Africa's Abalone Crisis

*Figure 1. Haliotis midae shell with spiral pattern © peteoxford.*

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# Abstract

In this thesis I explore ethical complexity in literary and ethnographic narratives about human-ocean relationships, focusing in depth on the South African abalone fishery, which many have described as in "crisis." At a time when the fluidity of oceans is being restricted globally as they are increasingly bought, sold, and commodified as a new "frontier" for extraction and development, stories about humans' changing relationship with the ocean give insights into meaningful questions, dilemmas, and concerns about the future of the seas. Contemporary narratives about abalone poaching highlight the complexity in human relationships with the ocean, and the existential challenges inherent in relating virtuously to the ocean. In South Africa, environmental debates about conservation and climate change have been pitted against social concerns, such as the need for poverty alleviation and investment in local communities. The escalating abalone fishery crisis represents a meeting point of crucial and high-profile ethical concerns across environmental and social lines, including inequality, criminality, global neoliberalism, ocean biodiversity, and species loss. I bring close examinations of local fisher ethics and poaching into dialogue with lived and imagined storying of these issues in English-language literature. Through this methodology, I examine how narratives across a range of genres explore the complexities and tensions inherent in concerns about how to live well with the ocean. Across three chapters, I look at how the abalone fishery crisis is represented across a range of narrative forms, including in Mike Nicol and Joanne Hichens' crime fiction novel *Cape Greed,* Shuhood Abader and Kimon de Greef's collaborative non-fiction book *Poacher: Confessions from the Abalone Underworld*, and Mohale Mashigo's speculative fiction short story 'Floating Rugs', among others. In doing so, I argue that existential and narrative approaches to virtue ethics act as fruitful theoretical lenses for the articulation and analysis of grounded and practical understandings of ethical complexity.

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# Preface

## Stories of abalone

I walk around the underground exhibition space in the Sainsbury Centre in Norwich, England, next to the university campus where I've studied for years, here to see an exhibition about the history of creativity and activism by Indigenous peoples from the Northwest Coastlines of North America. Early on in the exhibition, I stop to discuss the provenance of these artworks with my partner. As I do, I notice a shimmering flash of pearly green and blue, which I recognise as abalone shell. Then I see another, and another, and more still.

Turning the corner, I realise there is abalone shell inlaid into many of the objects and garments on display – for decoration on jewellery, to represent the eyes of creatures, and to create attractive details on patterns. I know that abalone shell is used decoratively and ceremonially by Māori peoples, who call it pāua; I have read stories that feature *pāua* adornments and symbols. *Potiki* by Patricia Grace (1986), who is of Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Raukawa, and Te Ati Awa descent springs to mind, and so does *The Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimaera who is of Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki descent (1987). I have also read about the significance of abalone for communities along the Californian coast, including the Indigenous Wiyot, Hupa, Yurok, Karuk, and Tolowa peoples, who tell stories about a spirit called the Abalone Woman (Field 2008: 3). But the appearance of it here in the Pacific Northwest Coast catches me by surprise. Of course, I remind myself, abalone is found off almost every coast around the world. As I walk past the items on display – ceremonial bowls, masks, drums – I see the dimpled mother of pearl glint at me again and again. I also see different names being used to describe it – abalone and *haliotis* are listed interchangeably on the object descriptions. Presumably this fungibility is due to different archivists writing the descriptions, narrating it from different perspectives. I add perlemoen from South Africa, pāua from Aotearoa, and ormer from the United Kingdom to the list of names in my head,

and wonder what other names the Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw people on the Northwest Coast or the communities in California have for abalone. I wonder what stories they tell about it.

A wave of emotion floods over me. I am struck by the omnipresence of this unassuming sea snail that I have spent four years writing about and the diverse significance it has to people and cultures across the globe. People in North America's Northwest Coast have their own unique relationships with abalones, just as South Africans do. These relationships between human, abalone, and ocean are each different, informed by the variances in abalone appearance, size, shape, taste, and the needs and desires of the people towards the molluscs in these coastal areas. Like the Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw, Māori communities also use *pāua* shells for decoration in ceremonial items, and the shell has a spiritual significance too. I reflect on the struggles for visibility the Khoisan Indigenous groups in South Africa experience today, and I wonder about the stories of abalone they might tell from when they lived all along the Western Cape coastline. South Africa, North America, and Aotearoa were and are all united as subjects and legatees of colonial force, connected through a shared trauma. Past and present injustices draw my attention to the better and worse ways that people have related to abalone, as part of their connections with the ocean and other people.

One of my companions asks me if I've ever eaten abalone. I tell them I cannot remember – maybe when I was young and living in South Africa. But I have always been drawn to their colour-changing shells, the iridescent blues, purples, and greens that swirl in an oil spill. People across times and places have paid attention to abalone. They have entwined this sea snail into their lives and included it in their stories. Whether as an item of beauty, a spiritual medium, a meal, an escape from poverty, an aphrodisiac, or a symbol of status, abalone has a draw to humans that is undeniable and that persists today in many forms. The abalone stories I have encountered in my thesis mainly focus on the

commodified value of abalone meat, but abalone shell ashtrays and adornments are often mentioned too. These take me back to my childhood. I, too, have been drawn to write about abalone and the many meanings it has for people in South Africa, its place in roiling narratives about ethics, and the complex currents of oceanic relationships that surround it.

Although, perhaps not for much longer. If fishing rates continue as they are now, then the South African subspecies of abalone *haliotis midae* might be encountered only in nostalgic stories and memories. With the fast-approaching finitude of abalone in South Africa, one could be tempted to assign blame to certain people, places, or behaviours for the wanton destruction of this species. Instead, I seek a perspective that opens up the complexities of human-abalone relationality. I want to spend time with the stories that South Africans are telling about abalone and to see how these stories impact one's understanding of the ethics of abalone fishing and trade, and, by extension, one's understanding of ocean ethics more broadly. In my research, I have come across pictures of abalone shells littered behind houses, discarded after the animal itself has been harvested for its meat. It makes me wonder if these shells will end up as decoration like the ones I see in front of me at the exhibition, or if they will lie unattended, becoming fossils that speak to an earlier time when abalone covered the rock beds around Cape Town's Ocean.

# Introduction

## 1: Abalone in crisis

Abalone, known locally in South Africa as perlemoen, has become the topic of heated discussion regarding ocean ethics for South Africans from all walks of life; from fishers, fisheries officials, and law enforcement who battle on the front lines of the abalone "war," to academics, restauranteurs, and conservationists who seek sustainable ocean futures amidst the "gold-rush" where a coveted sea snail means riches (Hauck 2009: 89; Steyn 2017).[1]

A flat mollusc, *haliotis midae*, has tendril-like tentacles that surround a muscular foot. These frills and eyes on stalks poke out from under a large oval-shaped shell (see Fig. 4).[2] The shell has coarse ridges on top and holes that border its rim, with a smooth and pearlescent inner layer that sits next to the creature's body (see Figs. 1 & 2). Abalones suction their bodies to underwater rock faces near the shoreline, often staying in one area for their whole life and feeding opportunistically on kelp and algae that drift past (Zeeman *et al.* 2012: 211). Younger abalones nestle behind the protective cover of spiny sea urchins, *parechinus angulosus* (see Fig. 3). They are distributed along the Southern coast of

[1] The term "fisher" is used broadly to refer to anyone who personally catches fish for a living. This term is widely used in literature on small-scale fishing (Green 2015; Schultz 2017; Sowman and Raemaekers 2018). I use the terms "fisher" and "small-scale fisher" interchangeably during this thesis to refer to people who fish for a broad range of species, including diving for abalone. Where I refer to other types of fishers, such as recreational or industrial fishers, this will be made clear.

[2] *Haliotis midae* is one of nine species of abalone found locally in South Africa, and as the largest variety it is a popular choice for export. I refer to the species *haliotis midae* using the term abalone throughout the thesis (which technically describes the genus *haliotis* rather than the specific variety found in South Africa) since it is universally used in academic literatures. Apart from where I specifically reference a global context, whenever I talk about the loss or extinction of the species of abalone, this also describes the decline in *haliotis midae* in South Africa specifically, as opposed to the decline of the global abalone family of *haliotidae* abalones. The local name perlemoen is frequently used in the literary texts I quote later in the thesis, and this name refers specifically to the *haliotis midae* variety of abalone (Tshilate *et al.* 2023).

South Africa, in the Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces. There is archaeological evidence of coastal dwellers fishing and harvesting molluscs like abalone, along with crayfish, seals, and fish on the Western coast of South Africa at least 50,000 years ago (Parkington 1988, Mafumbu *et al*. 2022). At one point, abalone crowded the shores of South Africa in abundance but the species has been overfished to the point of near-extinction for over 30 years (de Greef & Haysom 2022: 1). Other varieties of abalone are found all around the world and, like *haliotis midae*, many of these populations have also been overfished, and the organisms have become the subject of contested narratives about access and ownership; representing a cross-section of cultural, economic, and environmental issues around human-ocean relationality.

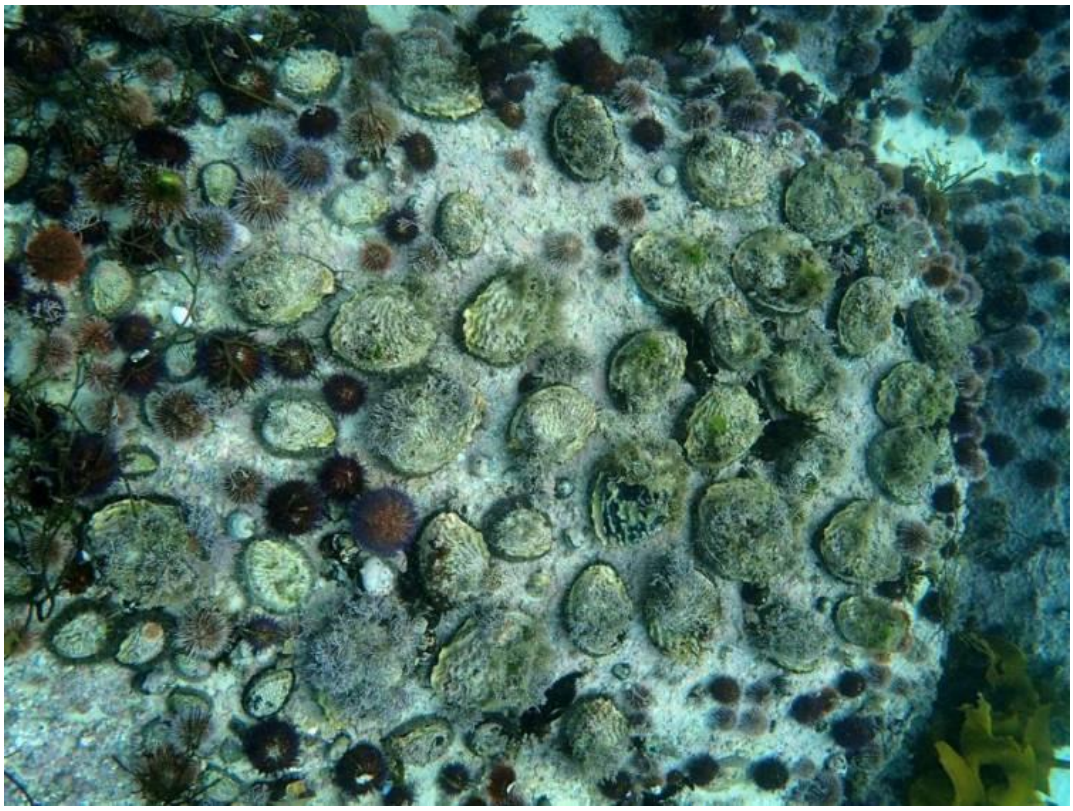

*Figure 2. Haliotis midae on underwater rock face, among parechinus angulosus (sea urchins) © Craig Foster.*

*Figure 3. A live abalone haliotis midae © Adelle Roux.*

*Figure 4. Harvested Haliotis midae abalone in shells © Ashraf Hendricks.*

At the turn of the millennium, marine biologist Rob Tarr participated in an international workshop to address declining abalone populations in British Columbia and develop strategies to rehabilitate the depleted northern variety of abalone (*haliotis kamtschatkana*). Sharing his experience from South Africa, Tarr described his local abalone fishery as a "fishery in crisis." He cited the combined factors of low recruitment [to the legal fishery] and the dramatic increase in poaching, including "violence and organised crime [as] part of the illegal harvest scene" (2000: xiii). At this time, abalone as a species was under threat in waters across the globe, and South Africa was already at a tipping point in terms of both species decline and fishery functionality. This was a juncture where irreversible damage to abalone populations could have been prevented, and where, correspondingly, opportunities to rebuild trust and cooperation were greater.

Charged and contested claims to abalone persisted however, along with the dysfunctional and dangerous nature of the fishery. Almost 10 years later, Maria Hauck used the same language of crisis in her PhD thesis to describe small-scale fisheries compliance in South Africa (Hauck 2009). By describing the abalone fishery as being in crisis, Hauck signified the continuing and increased severity of the situation and its potential to become disastrous. Hauck explained that the abalone fishery was in crisis because of the dramatic increase of quotas allocated to fishers and the impact this has had on the survival of significant proportions of the population of fishers, dovetailing to threaten society's stability and integrity (2009: 49). Hauck also noted the high-profile nature of the abalone fishery, which "began in 1994 with what was known as the "abalone war" – violent confrontations between the police, coastal communities, informal fishers and commercial abalone divers" (2009: 89). The dangerous yet lucrative black market for abalone was undermining the legal fishery's capacity to govern the harvesting of abalone in a sustainable way and threatening the very existence of the legal fishery in turn. With commercial divers more frequently seeking abalone for exchange in

underground criminal markets, the mollusc was a source of income and livelihood for increasing numbers of people. This state of affairs ultimately led to strong, often violent resistance to state fisheries governance and, ultimately, to the closure of the fishery in 2008. This closure did not stop illegal extraction (Hauck 2009).[3]

Hauck reframed questions of non-compliance and illegal fishing in terms of ethics, suggesting social justice approaches, and not only criminal justice methods, for tackling illegal abalone extraction. In doing so, Hauck recognised the distinct histories, ways of knowing, and ways of being in relation to the ocean that small-scale fishers experience in order to legitimise their claims to abalone outside of the law. Such claims destabilise the hegemony of the state narrative about who has access to and/or should benefit from abalone extraction, and therefore what "good" or ethical relations to abalone look like. Contested narratives for how humans ought to relate to abalone derive from the assumptions and experiences of different human-abalone relations, and the valuations of these different relationships for human and non-human benefit. For example, policies that condemn abalone poachers as criminals infer an ethical narrative that illegal divers are criminals, and therefore they are disruptive to the system of law, and therefore likewise to harmonious oceanic relations, emphasising individualistic conceptions of fisher-ocean relationalities. Conversely, though, research that explores small-scale fisher experiences of illegal abalone diving contextualises the actions of poachers within a wider system of political failure, highlighting a systemic narrative in which fishers have been "let down" by fisheries authorities.[4]

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[3] Hauck references an "88% decrease in Total Allowable Catch or TAC from 615t in 1995/6 season to 75t in the 2007/07 season, and a complete closure of the fishery in 2008" (2009: 89).

[4] The term poacher itself is contested. Legal narratives have termed fishers as poachers when they collect more abalone than the law allows. Poacher as a term also carries a derogatory weight to it on top of 'illegal fisher,' deriving originally from European trespassing laws in the 1500s. However, the term has also been reclaimed by illegal fishers themselves, including Shuhood, which was much of

Lesley Green (2020) emphasises how government policies on oceans and fisheries governance by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (DAFF) have been characterised by a lack of care for oceans, marine life, and small-scale fishers alike. This lack of care has manifested in pollution of oceans with toxic waste and the failure to recognise small-scale fishers' needs as legitimate ocean users with a history of diving for abalone in adjacent waters. Green, like Hauck, reframes questions of sustainability and productivity of the fishery in terms of ethics and justice instead. She seeks more inclusive and representative policies and approaches (including narratives) to foster virtuous relations between humans, abalone, and oceans. Green discusses the ways by which an economic agenda radically framed South Africa's relationship with the ocean soon after the country's transition to democracy in the post-apartheid period (2020: 8). In 1996 shortly after the elections, the South African government made a financially unsustainable arms deal called the Strategic Arms Package to buy over R29 billion rand's worth of naval and military vessels – submarines, fighter jets, helicopters, and corvettes (Sylvester & Seegers 2008: 52-53). The expensive items have been criticised as serving only "the most improbable of primary missions" and leading to a lack of funds for human and other resources, and the "impoverishment of the naval dock as a whole" (*Ibid.*: 72, Green 2020: 9). The deal has been criticised as stemming from dominant business interests being prioritised over the public need for a fit-for-purpose navy and following the pattern of corruption that characterised the Apartheid era (*Ibid.*: 52).[5] Despite high hopes surrounding the African National Congress

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my reasoning for using the term poacher in this thesis. Alternative terms I could have used instead of poacher include diver, fisher, harvester, illegal diver, illegal fisher, illegal harvester, etc. The term poacher collectively refers to people described by each of these more specific terms, each of whom I focus on at different points. An alternative approach would be to move between different terms and clarify where the points of crossover are.

[5] Apartheid was an oppressive, institutionalised regime of racial segregation implemented by the South African National Party's government, which engineered and policed the separation of different ethnic groups to ensure

government's promises to uplift the prospects of the country's marginalised majority following the hard-fought transition to democracy, the state's early commitment to a neoliberal agenda facilitated an extractive relationship with the working-class population, as well as its oceans.

Small-scale fishing communities experienced these extractive logics keenly. Instead of providing opportunities to improve their situations after Apartheid, the new democratic state passed laws to "transform" the fishery in fact restricting their access to fish. These laws failed to recognise the traditional small-scale fishery as a sub-sector with different needs and operations to commercial, recreational, and subsistence fisheries (Hauck 2009: 94, Raemaekers *et al*. 2011: 436). These laws dismissed the existence of, and existential relations between, small-scale fishers and oceans, essentially narrating a false reality in which these fishers' way of life and their means of income was ignored and criminalised. By existential I mean something that pertains to and analyses the nature of existence – often human existence. For example, it is clear that humans need things like a hospitable climate and a healthy atmosphere to exist – to *be* humans – meaning that climate change and air pollution are existential threats to humanity. Likewise, small-scale fishers need the ocean to *be* fishers and to deny them access to the ocean represents an existential threat to their way of life.

The restricted legal framework for abalone extraction was developed in alignment with conservation goals, but the motivation for South African fisheries was economic. This was clearly emphasised to small-scale fishers when they saw industrial fishers profited from higher quotas while they lost any rights to fish (Rogerson 2015: 326; Anderson 2015: 319). There is also evidence to suggest the complicity and corruption of authorities governing fisheries regulations and

White European-descended privilege. It was officially legally entrenched from 1948-1991.

enforcement agencies in smuggling abalone, further undermining any perception of legitimacy in the law on who should be able to benefit from the profitable trade in abalone (Minnaar *et al*. 2018; de Greef & Haysom 2022: 20). Moreover, conservation narratives have long been met with suspicion by local communities who have been forcibly displaced from their land and coastal access by fortress conservation initiatives. Such conservation approaches dominated nature preservation in Southern Africa during the 20th century and involved areas of nature fenced off exclusive of people and controlled by the State (Sunde & Isaacs 2008: 4). Communities who have been evicted from a nature reserve or protected area often go on to see their former homes monetised for profit and the corresponding access to these areas of nature being gated to those who can pay for it (Green 2020: 8, Carruthers 1995).

The high price tag on abalone in East Asia has driven state and corporate actors to fight for access to profits from this rock-hugging mollusc. Individual commercial divers, local gangs, and syndicate operations are also fighting for access to abalone as a varied range of actors become involved. The profitability of the abalone trade has undermined attempts by the postapartheid government to balance social and economic priorities for small-scale fishers, some of whom have instead continued to dive illegally. In an extreme example of the abalone fishery being "in crisis," the army was recruited to defend abalone from poachers in 2014.[6]

Two decades on from Tarr's comments, Lesley Green describes the abalone fishery and Cape Town's (South Africa's) oceans as being in "cosmopolitical" crisis. Green refers to Isabelle Stenger's concept of

[6] The South African National Defence Force was also deployed in 2021 to police abalone poaching in the Overstrand region of the Western Cape on more than one occasion (https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/sandf-fighting-abalone-poaching-in-the-overstrand/; https://www.defenceweb.co.za/sa-defence/sa-defence-sa-defence/sandf-returns-to-overstrand-to-combat-poaching/, accessed at 10:11 on 19.10.23).

"political cosmology" to show how fundamental understandings of things in the world (places, organisms, objects, relationships) become disputed. This knowledge can include how things are meaningful, what they are, and who they are for. As an example of cosmopolitical shift, Green writes about the Dutch reorganisation of space and place during the colonial encounter with the Khoikhoi (Khoe, plural Khoena), one group of the original inhabitants of South Africa. In this encounter ||Hu-!gais or "Veiled-in-Clouds" was renamed to Cape Town:

> Maps soon translated ||Hu-!gais into farmsteads and a town based on a new political cosmology of private property and water ownership. The mathematical science of cartography claimed legalised zones of exclusion as "facts." What it actually did was manufacture those facts. Within that claim to represent "only the facts" was what Isabelle Stengers calls "cosmopolitics": a word that speaks to *the capacity to name and render as "transcendent facts" the objects and authority that that approach had manufactured*. (Green 2020: 35).

With the creation of this new regime of land ownership, the Khoena were excluded. Correspondingly, their understandings of how the land could be accessed, what for, and how it was meaningful to them (for example, as stewards of the springs and water-beings there) were destroyed by farmers' understandings of the "property" they had been allocated (2020: 31). Similarly, Green points to the fact that oceans are being mapped, understood, and governed in ways that are cosmopolitically contested. One could also say that cosmopolitics describes processes of telling and re-telling stories that dictate the "facts" of society. While the abalone fishery policies and quotas have been determined by DAFF as elected representatives of government, the policies have been criticised for a lack of proper consultation with relevant stakeholders. The *politics* of the exclusion of small-scale fishers are especially unfair given the explicit recognition of the equal rights of

all, and of traditional *cosmologies,* in the South African constitution (The Constitutional Assembly 1996: Sections 7 and 211).

The abalone fishery "crisis" shows that there is something deeply dysfunctional in attempts to co-exist and work together to establish a balanced and sustainable relationship with the ocean. Contrasting moral narratives criss-cross as citizens clash with government, who fight with commercial divers, who are faced with the army, and all of whom are desperately trying to articulate their moral and existential claim to abalone. Humans live in a time where solutions to oceanic and ecological crises are increasingly sought after. Species decline, ocean health, and the vulnerability of perilous coastal communities are all critical ethical priorities for South Africa, and yet here they seem to be in direct competition. The abalone crisis represents an example of the kind of complex ocean ethics that characterise the lived realities of South African people trying to get by, and to live well, if possible. I am interested in how people conceptualise and navigate this type of ethical complexity, particularly as questions about ocean ethics become increasingly pertinent and timely.

So, how do I begin to unravel the knots and twists in this tangled net of ethical narratives? I begin with a historical review of the socio-economic context in which abalone poaching came to thrive in South Africa, and an analysis of how legal narratives have influenced the existential terms that ocean ethics operates in.

## Context: history of abalone fishery and restrictions

Abalone poaching is highly visible in the public eye of the Western Cape, and in the rest of South Africa moreover. There is a stigma attached to poaching not only because it is illegal but also because those individuals who engage in poaching activity are seen as greedy. There are myriad actors who are involved in abalone poaching activity.

Coastal communities have been implicated in narratives of wrongdoing around illegal abalone poaching through marine legislation that has

criminalised much of their fishing activity, which includes diving for abalone. The lack of allowance for small-scale fishers in marine law has contributed to their alienation from state policies and motivated the recruitment of "thousands of working-class men as divers, boat drivers and other menial workers in the abalone poaching industry." This recruitment of individuals emerges both out of a need to find employment and support their households, but crucially also because of persistent feelings of "disaffection, suspicion and resentment towards the state" (de Greef & Haysom 2022: 1). While recent legislation has tried to change this ethical narrative and to stop the criminalisation of small-scale fishers, the damage has already been done; gang presence for poaching syndicates is well-established and few legal alternative employment options remain. Conservation narratives that ocean ecosystems and fisheries must be "protected" and "kept safe," buttressed by marine laws that defend these claims, conjure images of conservationists as responsible custodians, and corresponding images of poachers as irresponsible and reckless plunderers (South African National Biodiversity Institute 2013: 37). The criminalisation of certain activities is distinct from their moral status, and abalone poaching is a flagship example of this, with much evidence that small-scale fishers view their illegal fishing as morally just despite the law stating that it is illegal and based on a narrative of moral vice. However, processes of criminalisation and moral narrative are not neatly disentangled, as the thesis will show. Narratives of ethics are woven into processes of criminalisation and the process of developing vices or virtues takes place within those narratives and processes of criminalisation.

Laura Blamey *et al*. attribute an increase in illegal abalone fishing to South Africa re-joining global trade maps in 1994, and they have also linked the decline to human-caused climate change, water pollution, habitat degradation and invasive species (2013: 347). There has been much discussion of illicit fishing by fishers who were excluded from the legal fishery. Kimon de Greef & Serge Raemaekers suggest that the

window for establishment and initial expansion of the abalone black market was in the early 1990s when only a handful of companies (all with white owners) were allocated abalone fishing quotas (2014: 3-4). Meanwhile, fishers living adjacent to abalone stocks were excluded from these quotas or any share in the profits (*Ibid.*). The ethnographic literature on small-scale rock lobster fisheries, also overfished illegally, in the village of Hangberg is also an insightful source of ecological and social contextual information for the abalone industry. The two species are linked not only by their significance for small-scale fisher livelihoods, but also because a migration of rock lobsters has indirectly impacted abalone populations in the late 1980s. When the population of rock lobster migrated southeast along the coast, including to the coastal outcrop known as "Hangklip" off Hangberg, increased predation of sea urchins in the area contributed to the decline of abalone (Blamey 2013: 348-349).

Stocks of abalone and rock lobsters are currently overfished due to persistent illegal fishing. Crucially, both have received much attention in academic and media coverage for poaching, and for being central to small-scale fishing histories and economies. I will not focus on rock lobsters in my literary analysis, but it is helpful to compare these connected species foci within small-scale fisheries discourse. They share historical abundance, high market values, and their popularity among small-scale fishers. One key difference in the attention the two species of marine life have received is the elevated international demand for South African abalone, which has led to a higher price tag or monetary material value for abalone in Cape Town. Fisheries conservation of abalone and rock lobster populations takes a number of forms, including restrictions on the total allowable catch (TAC), size limits, seasonal restrictions, and marine protected areas (MPAs) (Hauck 2009; Schultz 2015b; Green 2012, 2015; Sowman and Sunde 2018). Indeed, Hangberg is a good example of a small-scale fishing community who are navigating these conservation measures.

Hangberg is a coastal fishing village in Hout Bay that is home to many small-scale fishers and is adjacent to the Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) conservation area. The TMNP includes an MPA that implements a no-take fishing policy (Sowman & Sunde 2018). The Karbonkelberg reserve was established in 2004 as part of the TMNP protected area with a "no-take" MPA in order to protect species like the west coast rock lobster and abalone. The reserve aims to preserve biodiversity and to prevent the depletion of a unique collection of flora and fauna which are part of the ecosystem on and around Table Mountain (Sowman and Sunde 2018). During the mid-1900s, sanctuaries for resource conservation were established and removed on various occasions and accompanied by differing levels of law enforcement effort, but with consistently little impact on fishing activities in those areas (van Sittert 1994). The official stated purpose of "Sanctuary Zones" like this reserve is to "allow marine species and ecosystems … to exist in a natural state" for biodiversity conservation, but also to "enhance eco-tourism opportunities" (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism 2004: 5).

The use of "no-take" zones of conservation essentially sets up a choice between sustainability of marine life and the livelihoods of local coastal communities. There is resultantly less buy-in by local people with assisting the protection of abalone and ocean sustainability initiatives, despite the fact that abalone is now listed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.[7] From an ecological perspective, overfishing of abalone leads not only to the loss of a previously proliferate species, but also spirals into contributing to biodiversity loss. Because haliotis midae feeds on drift algae (ecklonia maxima), their disappearance is unlikely to affect the "algal community composition" as it might if they were to graze on the rocky substratum (Zeeman et al. 2012: 212).

[7] https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/78771094/78772518 (accessed 16.10.2023, 12:01).

However, the presence of haliotis midae influences space and habitats as its shell supports different communities than the ones the organism lives in (Zeeman et al. 2013). Abalone shells have a ridged texture that create habitable environments for plants like algae (Ibid.: 110-16). This also provides space on surrounding rock for smaller animals like hermit crabs, winkles, and sea cucumbers, a configuration which has been linked to an increase in zebra mussels (Ibid.: 108). This is of course a concern for the oceans, which are becoming progressively less biodiverse (United Nations 2023, South African National Biodiversity Institute 2013). However, if the central goal of conservation is to maintain some sort of pristine nature as humans know it now, this goal can also obfuscate the great variation in nature that has occurred before, during, and surely after, the human race has been actively impacting the environment. The missing feature in some sustainability rubrics is an awareness that change is inevitable and not all human-caused environmental change is bad, and it is fruitful to explore ways to live virtuously *with* oceans, instead of apart from them.

The Hangberg community of fishers in Hout Bay have been fishing in the adjacent waters since the 19th century (van Sittert 1994), and despite restrictions on abalone and rock lobster, fishing has continued in this area. This Hangberg community of fishers are referenced either explicitly or implicitly across the texts I analyse. Many Hangberg fishers have a history of fishing in their families, often with multiple generations of family members using basic fishing equipment and boats to fish for livelihood (Hauck 2009; Branch and Clark 2006). Despite this long history of fishing for livelihood, coastlines were restricted from communities of colour during the colonial encounter and then again under Apartheid.[8] Many of the families that live in Hangberg were

[8] The neighbourhood of Hout Bay was designated as a white-only zone under the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Schultz 2015b; Christopher 2001). The land above the harbour was provided as a township for black residents who were classified as "coloured." This area is known as Hangberg and is one of two townships in present day Hout Bay (Sowman and Sunde 2018; Schultz 2015b). Another township in Hout Bay, called Imizamo Yethu, was created for residents classified

forcibly moved from their family homes and from familiar parts of the coast by colonial settlers and apartheid officials. The spatial legacy of apartheid has impacted urban townships like Hangberg considerably due to the minimal access to basic amenities and services and the unequal distribution of space, and marginalisation continues to increase in these neighbourhoods as South Africa becomes increasingly urbanised and townships become more overcrowded (Christopher 2001: 236). Like many Black and Coloured neighbourhoods in Cape Town, high levels of poverty are common for people living in Hangberg.[9] Approximately 1,000-1,500 of the village's population are small-scale fishers who depend on participation in the small-scale fishing industry for their livelihoods (Schultz 2017: 5). The conditions of economic insecurity experienced by many people living in Hangberg contribute to the participation of local fishers in the community's booming informal west coast rock lobster and abalone fisheries, which operate outside of legal regulation. A significant number of residents have direct or indirect ties to these illegal fisheries, which are crucial to the Hangberg economy (de Greef 2013).

The 1998 Marine Living Resources Act (MLRA), implemented by DAFF, sought to redress the imbalances of colonialism and the apartheid era in the fishing industry by promoting neo-liberal growth, conservation efforts, and encouraging entrepreneurship. One of the MLRA's aims was to increase participation by small- to medium-sized black-owned companies whose proprietors had previously been oppressed under colonial and Apartheid leadership, and so individuals were identified

as "African." Coastal fishing communities living in the Cape were the first to experience settler colonialism in South Africa in the 17th century, which was focused around the port in the Cape for a long time, before colonists attempted to explore other parts of the region. This had a more destructive impact on Indigenous coastal communities in the Western Cape area than other parts of the country's coastline.

[9] These are Apartheid racialised designations for groups of people that are still used colloquially in South Africa today, as well as in academic scholarship.

as being "historically disadvantaged" (DAFF 1998: 22-24).[10] Despite the MLRA's intentions to improve socio-economic conditions for small-scale fishers, many small-scale and subsistence fishing communities lost their rights to fish while industrial fishing corporations profited, due to a complex set of criteria employed for allocating permits to individuals (DAFF 1998: 22-4; Rogerson 2015: 326; Anderson 2015: 319). Abalone poaching began to really flourish in Hangberg after stock collapse in the Overberg coast and Operation Neptune, a government and police collaboration in 2000, cracked down on illegal fishing in the area. Operation Neptune reduced poaching in this part of the coast but also served to scatter poachers to other areas of the coastline, including Cape Town and Port Elizabeth (de Greef & Raemaekers 2014: 17). De Greef & Raemaekers report that in one of the government's attempts to manage the abalone fishery sustainably, they authorised territorial rights to communities living in zones of historic abalone fishing, with an aim to foster custodianship over abalone (*Ibid.*: 7-8). This was unsuccessful. The black market for abalone was already deeply rooted, and soon the government switched to elevated rates of penal measures to police the fishery, including closing the recreational fishery and implementing special armed forces and new court legislation (*Ibid.*; Minnaar *et al.* 2018).

Increasing awareness of the socio-ecological precarity of small-scale fishers has grown with improved understandings of climate-related change to coastal ecosystems – including ocean circulation, acidification and deoxygenation – which impact fish populations and therefore compromise the livelihoods of many fishers (IPCC 2018: 221-5; Sowman & Raemaekers 2018: 160). The proximity of small-scale fishers to oceans also puts them at acute risk of sea level rises, intensified storm patterns and compounding extreme weather events, along with the projected high costs of coastal changes and adaptation,

[10] This phrase "historically disadvantaged" has been the source of reactionary white unease and is directly referenced in *Cape Greed*.

including pollution and overharvesting (IPCC 2018: 222-5; Sowman & Raemaekers 2018: 161). After sustained complaints, protests, and multiple court cases between fishers and the state, the Policy for the Small-Scale Fisheries Sector (SSFP) was created in 2012 and was intended to concomitantly reject individual quotas and stop fishers being criminalised as poachers (Green 2020: 172).[11] Abalone is mentioned in the SSFP as one of the species of ocean wildlife that small-scale fishers have historically targeted and sold for income and sustenance (DAFF 2012: 3). The policy adopts an "integrated and holistic approach which is based on human rights principles" and emphasises a co-management approach that is participatory and equitable. Specifically, one that recognises the value of local and Indigenous knowledge, with attention to past marginalisation of women and other groups (DAFF 2012: 14-15).

The SSFP was developed on the basis of grassroots activism for inclusive and representative governance, and it is based on observations of customary collective governance practices (DAFF 2012; Green 2020; Schultz 2017). Thus, it had the potential to boost access to abalone and other species that have historically been central to livelihoods for small-scale fishers, whilst also reducing stigmatisation of these fishing practices as "poaching." Lesley Green describes the SSFP as "expressed with an emerging discourse of care for the sea and for community members, so that they could live well, without hunger" (2020: 173). However, the implementation of the policy by the Department of Trade and Industry has been multifariously criticised due to its slow execution, a reductionist interpretation of the "basket" catch allowance in terms of financial targets alone, for transforming local collectives into corporate persons, and for easy co-option and

[11] It is worth noting the differences in relative scale between these two groups – there are approximately 60 million small-scale fishers and around 1,500 people in the state. While this does not determine any moral conclusions about narratives of virtue according to a majority, it demonstrates the weight behind small-scale fisher experiences as a majority of people.

brokerage of community representation by local elites with specific skillsets (Sowman *et al.* 2014, Schultz 2017; Green 2020). These facets of the SSFP have had the effect of recreating the total allowable catch (TAC) allocations under a different name, reinforcing corporate business skills, and undermining democratic participation within fishing communities.

DAFF increased compliance measures and the quantity of police enforcement of such measures in response to continued illegal fishing, with small-scale fishers often the recipients of police-enforced compliance, leading to violent confrontations between fishing communities and police. Oliver Schultz has criticised DAFF's penal approach to fisheries management; he comments that the department has "criminalised the hunger of people living in conditions of socio-economic deprivation" (Schultz 2015b: 337). Indeed, in 2003 the Department of Justice created the country's first new environmental crimes court near Hermanus for the exclusive purpose of convicting and imprisoning abalone poachers more quickly and effectively (Tarr 2003; Minnaar *et al*. 2018). As discussed earlier, the South African army was even enlisted in 2014 to support abalone conservation efforts (Green 2020). Schultz suggests that DAFF continues to fail to consider the "moral dimension" of the lived experiences of small-scale fishers. This lack of consideration for ethical narratives has led to an increasing sense of moral legitimacy within coastal communities, at the same time as the government increases the penal approach to governance (2015b: 337). These ethical narratives on abalone have evolved from the historical legal protection of private property, and today narratives of abalone poaching largely operate through the language of marine policy and conservation.

With this context in mind, I will review the relevant literatures about abalone poaching that inform my discussion of narrative and ethics in the abalone crisis. This is an interdisciplinary thesis, and so I introduce literatures as part the traditions in which they emerge before

demonstrating how these literatures weave together in to create my critical framework.

## Ethnographies

A number of anthropologists have focused on abalone and small-scale fisheries governance in Cape Town, which includes studies on abalone fishing. Many of these also focus on South African West Coast rock lobster fishing. These ethnographies provide qualitative data that articulate some of the lived experiences and perspectives of different stakeholders and moral actors involved in the dispute over abalone access (for instance where customary ways of life have been disrupted by the industrialisation of coastlines and top-down changes to governance). Studies of note have looked at senses of place, ways of life, and cultural heritage (Sowman 2015; Sowman & Sunde 2018; Menon *et al*. 2018). Social science literature on small-scale fisheries governance has three main subjects of concern: tensions between methods of governance that are employed by the state and by small-scale fisher communities; contested epistemologies of the ocean and the friction between them; and cross-disciplinary critical analyses of conservation methods deployed in fisheries governance.[12] These analyses of the lived experiences of small-scale fishers are invaluable to my own treatment of de Greef and Abader's *Poacher* as a kind of ethnography, and furthermore to my assessment of the extent to which

[12] For instance, Tarryn-Anne Anderson's interviews with two skippers in Cape Town indicate that fishers' knowledge of the ocean, its inhabitants, and fishing activities are practical and contingently assembled through mentorship, or "small offerings of advice" that are offered to willing learners (2015: 320). Anderson highlights that an embodied process of repeated use and practice is fundamental to ways of knowing the sea, drawing on a history of anecdotal fishing knowledge. This shows that knowledge of the ocean is rooted in practical and embodied experiences. As well as practical knowledge about how to fish, the assemblage of fishers' knowledge also includes awareness of many environmental factors including seabirds, the presence of smaller fish, seals, the colour and temperature of the water, and wind strength and direction (*Ibid.*: 321).

the fiction narratives *Cape Greed* and Mashigo's 'Floating Rugs' can claim to represent the experiences of small-scale fishers.

Some of the aforementioned studies employ moral concepts like justice in their analyses, but they lack an explicit and rigorous evaluation of the moral practicalities of fisher experiences and how they contribute to ocean ethics more broadly. In fact, Schultz is the only researcher who has actively and overtly analysed how fisher lived experiences are linked to ethics. In Schultz's study on small-scale fishers in the Western Cape, fishers reported their experience of fisheries governance as "unjust." They responded by reasserting their moral rights to fish and by disregarding policies that prohibit fishing on environmental grounds, continuing to fish in restricted areas (Schultz 2015b: 336). In interviews, fishers in the Western Cape describe the concept of a "real fisher" (as opposed to fishers who work in the industrial sector), who is the kind of person who "is born with the fishes" and who "has seawater in his veins" (Schultz 2015b: 333). The idea of the "real fisher" is a normative category of personhood that is relevant to fisher ethics, and Schultz's findings suggest that being a "real fisher" justifies one's "moral right to fish," including the right to fish illegally despite government fishing restrictions (Schultz 2015b: 336). The "real fisher" narrative is clearly a powerful one that articulates a history of human-ocean relationalities that is opposed to mainstream legal conceptions of justice.

There is more focus on framing fisheries issues in terms of politics than ethics in anthropological literatures. That being said, political discussions tend to rest upon ethical assumptions so these conversations still provide insight into what is considered moral or immoral as part of the status quo. Discussions of small-scale fisheries in South Africa consistently reference the marginalisation of small-scale fishers who were excluded from uplift schemes in favour of industrialising fisheries during the post-apartheid governmental changes. Schultz and Hauck show that reasons for high levels of

poaching include the feeling among small-scale fishers that state fisheries governance is unjust, and the co-existence of multiple and contrary narratives of (in)justice among small-scale fisher communities, the state, and marine conservationists (2015b; 2009). There is widespread support within social science discourse for a more collaborative or participatory solution to small-scale fisheries governance; one that is people-centred and less determined by positivist scientific perspectives. For example, no-take conservation initiatives were a popular sustainability solution in the 1960s-90s, when the majority of South Africa's MPAs were established. But these protected areas have begun to receive scepticism about their effectiveness and the underlying principles of separating humans from nature, along with the negative impacts they have on small-scale fisher communities (Sunde & Isaacs 2008; Sowman *et al.* 2011). There is more emphasis on humans as part of the conservation landscape, especially where indigenous and local communities have historical ties to land and ocean (Carruthers 1995; IPCC 2018; Todd 2018; Sowman and Raemaekers 2018; IWGIA 2019). Moreover, suspicion grows amongst South African academics as to the effectiveness of no-take zones for achieving conservation goals, especially where MPAs do not consult or incorporate local communities into their design, as with the abalone fishery (McClanahan et al. 2008; Hauck 2009; Sowman & Sunde 2018). Hence, there is political will for, and social science research to support, changes to the ethical status quo in which the rights of coastal communities are respected and are not in opposition to marine conservation laws. Researchers endorse a conception of justice that acknowledges the ways of being, ways of knowing, and ethics of small-scale fisher and Indigenous ocean relationalities. This conception of justice is largely framed in terms of deontology and rights, with some virtue language, like the call to cultivate care.

Studies underline that there remains an impasse between neoliberal or commercial governance and customary approaches to governance, and the latter have been called "moral economies" (Sowman *et al.*

2011; Sowman 2015; Sowman & Sunde 2018; Menon *et al.* 2018). In one article, Merle Sowman compares the principles, values and worldviews between the incumbent SA fisheries governance and local customary governance systems. In doing so, she shows that the state's approach rests on the neoliberal assumption that without no-take zones the ocean would suffer from a "tragedy of the commons" scenario (2015: 367-371). By contrast, she highlights that local fishing communities' approaches to governance foreground community-led participatory decision-making, based on principles of sharing profits and caring for nature. These principles of communal care rest on the contradictory assumption that the environment will replenish under collective management (*Ibid.*: 368-370). Thus, "moral economies" assume that collective and participatory governance of oceans is sustainable, whereas the tragedy of the commons approach to state governance assumes oceans will deplete under communal management, inferring a corollary assumption of individualist perspectives and motivations. While better communication between decision-makers and communities affected could help to raise awareness of these perspectival disparities between governance approaches, Sowman argues that these are "fundamental meta-governance mismatches" that would require political will to actively discuss the root causes, why they persist, and facilitate engaged discourse on a more equitable and sustainable route forwards (*Ibid.*: 374). As it stands, however, the neoliberal economic approach to fisheries governance stands at odds with local customary approaches to managing fisheries. Importantly, each of these positions are bound up with existential understandings of human-ocean relationality and narratives of ocean ethics.

Ethnographies of small-scale fisher and poacher lived experiences provide valuable insights into what it is like to be an abalone fisher in South Africa, both legally and illegally, and there are some examinations of how these groups experience ethical complexity in discussions of contested ideas of justice and "moral economies."

However, little attention is afforded to narratives, and there is no detailed account of what factors are involved in navigating moral concerns, nor what these concerns signify for how one conceptualises human-ocean ethical relations. Schultz and Hauck recognise the moral rights to fish of small-scale fishers with historical coastal claims to ocean relationalities, and yet a legalistic rights-based framework has led to exclusion and contested narratives so far. Scholars nonetheless return reliably to the idea that humans need more care in their oceanic relations, which suggests that older conceptions of virtue and vice may be useful lenses with which to view abalone and ocean ethics.

### Environmental and oceanic humanities

Environmental or ecological humanities projects in academia have been rising in visibility over the last 10-20 years. Discussion about oceans is a new burgeoning field of the environmental humanities, within which emerging literature has been praised for its ability to tap into the cultural imaginary to bridge concerns across the nature/culture divide. South African literature scholars have tackled environmental philosophies though narrative, for example, discussing food politics in global novels and "restoring the earth" or living in an earth-centred way (Stanley 2018; Klein 2021). As of 2012, Rob Nixon described the contribution of literary scholars to the field of the environmental humanities as a "crucial turning point," and in particular the interdisciplinary value of bringing together social scientists and literary scholars (Nixon 2011: 30). The oceanic humanities forms a subdiscipline of the environmental humanities. One of the trends in this area is the shift from conceptualising the ocean as a space of transition from one coast to an oppositional other, towards thinking of the ocean as a space of attention and focus in itself, a collection of particular kinds of meaning and life (Samuelson & Lavery 2019). Authors like Meg Samuelson, Charne Lavery, and Lesley Green examine oceanic humanities from the perspective of the Global South. Samuelson has highlighted the subgenre of "Cape Noir" in South African crime fiction

writing, and Lavery has analysed Indian Ocean literary underworlds.[13] Both scholars explore how literary imaginaries engage with the illicit lived imaginaries and contemporary geopolitical issues that feed into these experiences of complex ocean ethics, both in South Africa and out across the ocean itself.

Green is an oceanic humanities scholar who has written extensively about abalone poaching and South African fisheries from both a social science and also a philosophical perspective (Green 2012, 2015, 2020). She evaluates conflicting epistemological and ontological approaches (ways of knowing and being) to fisheries governance, and in doing so she draws on auto-ethnographic lived experience from her own activism in conversation with the experiences of others from social science literature. In her book *Rock / Water / Life* she argues that reductionist science and social science do not adequately respond to deteriorating oceans, and that there need to be efforts made to enable Capetonian policy-makers and publics to "think, act and desire a 'living together well with the ocean'" (2020: 176). Green recognises a series of marine ecology and fisheries warnings that have signalled an ocean crisis in South Africa over the past 30 years, including two warnings that reference small-scale fishers and abalone poachers in Cape Town (2020: 172-175). In response to the ocean crisis, she calls for a decolonised scientific approach that incorporates the anthropogenics of the city of Cape Town into marine science. That is, a science that does not imagine nature as a pristine wilderness that exists outside of society, and instead one that researches nature and society together (2020: 176). Green brings philosophical and ethical thinking into active conversation with contested issues of abalone poaching across the

[13] *Noir* is a sub-genre of crime fiction that is characterised by a complicated or ambiguous sense of morality in which the protagonist or detective is shown to be implicated in immoral or criminal activities, blurring the lines of right and wrong.

nature/culture divide, and her work is a close touchstone throughout my thesis.

Green critiques the monopoly of marine sciences in the discourse on abalone poaching, and she suggests that reductionist and biased analyses have lost the art of storytelling. She directs the reader to the tradition of storytelling across Sub-Saharan Africa called a "dilemma tale" (2020: 177). This kind of storytelling rejects authorial authority and presents a discussion of ethics that includes multiple perspectives and frames the discussion through a questioning of what each actor should do next. Green presents this type of storytelling as being "less about the knowledge of the 'being' that is each creature than about the 'becomings' of a situation: who will do what next? Who acted ethically?" (2020: 177). She argues that by telling the stories of perlemoen (abalone), as well as those of lobsters, fishers, poachers, environmental managers, the army, and marine biologists alongside each other, people can begin to transform how they conceptualise understandings of ocean relationality. Thus, Green advocates for an ethics that is fundamentally grounded in the lived experiences of the variety of people who relate to abalone, and hence pivots upon a multiplicity of narratives (2020: 178). Such an interdisciplinary approach drives this thesis, as does a focus on multiple narratives that are in tension with each other.

Green explicitly states that her work is written from a decolonial and feminist perspective. It is important to acknowledge the destructive and homogenising impact of colonial and patriarchal structures of oppression on the lived experiences of South African people, and also on academic scholarship writ large. My thinking is informed by the work of a rage of international scholars, including Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Beatrice Okyere-Manu, Daniel Heath Justice, bell hooks, Lola Olufemi, Achille Mbembe. Following these scholars, I actively try to seek out a diverse set of viewpoints and voices, and confront legacies of co-option

and marginalisation of feminised and racialised people in scholarly discourse. As Smith says:

> People, families, organizations in marginalized communities struggle everyday; it is a way of life that is necessary for survival, and when theorized and mobilized can become a powerful strategy for transformation. (2012: 200).

However, I do not refer to the "Anthropocene" in my work like Green and other oceanic humanities scholars do, a concept that describes the geological impact of humans on the earth in the last century. Kathryn Yusoff argues persuasively that the idea of the Anthropocene is unhelpfully misleading, insofar as it infers responsibility to humanity as a whole and directs attention away from the minority of white wealthy Western nations that have caused the majority of climate and geological shifts (2018).

Building on Green's work, there is a need for more active exploration of the connections between existential and ethical narratives of abalone, fishing, and oceans. I will delve into lived and storied conceptions of this ethical complexity to highlight the concepts and language that are being used to articulate what it is like to navigate ethical complexity in the context of the abalone crisis from a diverse array of perspectives and across a range of forms.

## Environmental ethics

Many of the ideas of ethics and environmental philosophy in this thesis draw from the field of environmental ethics. Environmental ethics is a branch of moral philosophy that has developed over the last half-century in order to evaluate the relationships between human moral life and the natural world. The discipline endeavours to evaluate the explanatory value of ethical theories to situations such as species depletion, deforestation, atmospheric and ocean acidification, and global warming. One of the fundamental problems identified by this branch of applied ethics is an overly anthropocentric conceptualisation

of the world by humans, which creates an imaginary artificial division between those beings and things that are cultural or part of society, and those beings and things that are natural or part of nature, or the nature/culture divide. This idea predominates in Euro-America and was spread globally through colonial encounters with other parts of the world, when European powers enforced their Western worldviews, concepts, and religions on many Indigenous populations in a systematic project of Imperial domination. Environmental ethics and anthropology have both drawn influences from each other in discussing the nature/culture divide too (for example, Keith H. Basso's 1996).[14] One of the symptoms of this dichotomous nature-culture worldview is the idea of wilderness, defined as an area of land or territory that is wild and inhuman. The wilderness concept has been a driving force in conservation initiatives since the 1970s and has led to an abundance of forced relocations for Indigenous and marginalised communities. For instance, Jane Carruthers has written about the extent of the damage done to impoverished Indigenous South Africans by wilderness conservation in South Africa during the construction of the world-famous Kruger National Park (1995). The nature-culture dichotomy is enhanced and entrenched by neoclassical economics, which does not account for nature as a part of economics or a part of the social world, and which is a legacy of colonialism in many African countries today. I already highlighted critiques of the nature/culture divide and wilderness concepts in conservation initiatives, and these will continue to inform the background of my thinking in this thesis.

[14] Comaroff and Comaroff: "Visible in the … entire European discourse about savagery, was an increasingly sharp – and gendered – contrast between 'nature' (all that exists prior to civil society) and 'civilization' or 'culture' (collectively wrought existence, though not yet the modern anthropological idea of a distinct, meaningful lifeworld; see Stocking 1987:19; also note 21 above). This dichotomy was elaborated most extensively, perhaps, in the debate over the 'noble savage,' a chimaera which relied heavily on images of Africa already in popular European circulation." (108).

Environmental ethics is a traditionally Western philosophical discipline, which largely employs theories and tools that derive from the European canon of moral philosophy and ethics to environmental problems that affect human populations, now and in the future. There is fairly well-established tradition of thinking with Eastern philosophical approaches and increasingly more of a focus on ethical theories from other parts of the world. However, within the Western moral canon, philosophers have traditionally thought about ethics within the framework of three theoretical approaches: rights, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics. One principle of broad agreement across these three strains of environmental ethics is the need for more authentic and attuned ways of thinking about human culture's connections with nature, and particularly more attention to the embeddedness of humanity within the natural world. It is thought that the potential for impactful change to current global ecological crises requires scholars, citizens, and policymakers to cut across disciplines, industries, and societies. Thus, there is a need for systemic change in the way people view nature and culture as interwoven and interdependent, instead of artificially separated. Virtue ethics, one of the oldest moral theories, has enjoyed a resurgence in the environmental ethics literature in recent years owing to its emphasis on daily, dynamic, and self-critical efforts towards empathy, care, and compassion across the different segments of a person's life. Virtue ethics is also helpful for discussing environmental crises on a global scale because of the contextual nature of a virtue-oriented approach, which does not prescribe specific actions or judgements as right or wrong, but instead allows for a moral and cultural plurality of values.

Justice is also a central concern of virtue ethics; not only because it names one of many virtues that a person can strive for, but also because justice represents something fundamental to the project of striving to live virtuously. Aristotle, founder of the philosophical discipline of virtue ethics, called justice a "complete" virtue because it affects humanity universally, independent of culture, beliefs or environment (Aristotle

2004: 115). Justice is an example of a true virtue insofar as it affects or binds all people, regardless of their situation. It follows that all people who live collectively (for example, in a society) have a vested interest in the fair distribution of goods, services, resources, opportunities, and places among those people within the group. Irene McMullin defines the virtue of justice as the ability to know and care about what specific thing is owed to whom and when, and she argues that achieving justice is the primary goal of flourishing (2021: 80).

McMullin is the first scholar to produce an account of virtue ethics that is explicitly phenomenological (2021). The terms "existential" and "phenomenological" refer to a tradition of thinking in philosophy, starting with Husserl, that sought to understand things in themselves by paying attention to how those things (phenomena) appear to people in the context of everyday human experience. McMullin's account foregrounds the relationship between self and world to avoid a bad faith account of ethics, and takes a refreshingly practical approach to ethical reasoning. McMullin's theoretical framework provides a great deal of explanatory value for this project, however it leaves open questions about animal and environmental ethics. In the next section I explore the theoretical foundations of my project, beginning with McMullin's account of phenomenological virtue ethics.[15]

## 2: Phenomenology, virtue, and narrative as tools for understanding

In this thesis, I draw much of my virtue ethical approach from Irene McMullin's book *Existential Flourishing: A Phenomenology of the Virtues*. In this account, McMullin unpacks the existential character of

[15] Although comparisons have been made between virtue ethics and Ubuntu, an African cluster of philosophies and ethical practices, I have chosen not to examine Ubuntu thought in this thesis. While Ubuntu refers to a collection of philosophies that are connected through shared tenets and principles, there are also many contestations and differences between geographical and cultural interpretations of Ubuntu. This expansive topic was too complex and nuanced for my already interdisciplinary project to give due attention to.

virtue ethics, and proposes that a phenomenological analysis of virtue accurately captures what it is to be a human being who strives to live well.

## Phenomenology of the virtues

McMullin takes a phenomenological approach to virtue. Phenomenology refers to a branch of philosophical thinking that is concerned with the study of phenomena – of seeking to understand truths about human existence by examining descriptions of first-person experience. Phenomenology is also a historical movement in the philosophical discipline, associated with a string of thinkers that started with Husserl, and continued with Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Lévinas, and others. One key component of Husserl's phenomenology was the fundamental importance of consciousness as something that is directed towards something meaningful and therefore has an *intentionality*. This means that phenomenology examines the interplay between the experiencer and that which is experienced – between self and world – which is important for McMullin's plural approach to ethics (McMullin 2019: 7). Existentialism is a branch of thought that developed out of the phenomenological movement and is characterised by the principle that "existence precedes essence," which means that the experience of being human informs any definitions of what it is to be human and there is no primary essential nature that defines humanity (Sartre 2007: 20). This runs contrary to much influential philosophical thought that pursues an understanding of the true essence of things as a prior enquiry to the experience of phenomena as secondary or imperfect (for example, Plato's theory of the Forms, Descartes' theory of mind over body, and Kant's theory of metaphysics). Philosophers like Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir distinguished existential features of humanity like freedom and responsibility, using phenomenological understandings of what it is like to be a person in the world to develop ethical critiques of how humans evaluate their existences.

McMullin chooses this existential phenomenological tradition for her virtue ethics for its account of human flourishing, which "navigates the middle path" between "a naturalism that grounds moral theory in science-inspired analyses of characteristic human traits" (*Ibid*.: 1). In taking a phenomenological approach, McMullin attends to the dynamic interplay between the self and the world, the experience of being human *qua* being conscious of oneself and of the world one is a part of. In this way, McMullin's virtue ethics takes seriously the need to trouble the nature-culture divide and what it means to overcome this conceptual separation of human living and nature. In doing so, she focuses on what it is to be consciously aware of this human-nature relationality, or "self-world fit" (2021: 1). Drawing from the existential and phenomenological philosophical tradition, she identifies the kind of thinking that leads to divisions between nature and culture as *bad faith*. In the context of virtue ethics, bad faith is "a failure to face up to the paradox and complexity of being subjects who are also worldly objects that can conceptualise themselves as such" (McMullin 2021: 7). Thus, to accede to the tendency to essentialise and separate the subjective or the objective nature of the human condition is to be in bad faith, and fails to reckon with the complex and ongoing moral task of *being-in-the-world*. That is, the task of experiencing the continual adjustment and orientation of one's self in the context of the surrounding world.

Varying forms of bad faith are identifiable in the representations of abalone poaching that I have reviewed so far. For example, the neoliberal model of economics presents a bad faith perspective through its over-subjectification of human societies. By this, I mean that if the economic model of social life does not accommodate the natural world and the need for natural limits, then it fails to recognise the objective nature of human beings and their societies as beings and societies *in the world* – beings who are dependent on the world and hence constrained by its natural limits. By contrast, the incomplete logic of the tragedy of the commons depends on an over-objectification of

human beings as simply *homo economicus* (self-interested individuals who will always take more than they need) without accounting for the "lived normative responsiveness that defines us in our striving to be in the world well" (McMullin 2021: 1). Both the over-subjectification of neoliberal economic assumptions and the over-objectification of human beings as *homo economicus* misrepresent the experience of being a person in this world by over-abstracting it. As such, they fail to recognise how human beings exist in a dynamic interplay of self-world fit that is characterised by both subjective perspective and objective relationality.

McMullin's virtue ethics helps to articulate fundamental features of the "morality" that is discussed in ethnographies of South African poachers and small-scale fishers, and in social science and humanities literatures on the topic.[16] While the "moral dimension" (Schultz 2015b: 337) of small-scale fisher lifestyles and decisions is invoked in contrast to the ethical underpinnings of fisheries policy, the ethical features and the existential underpinning of these conflicting ideologies have not been analysed in any substantial way. In fact, where morality is mentioned, it almost takes on a contradistinctive capacity insofar as "moral" is a metaphor for non-capitalist or grassroots; it implies a set of principles that is critical of, or in opposition to, neoliberal conceptual frameworks and to incumbent structures of power. For example, in reference to "moral economies" among small-scale fisher communities (e.g., Sowman 2015; Menon *et al.* 2018) and the "moral dimension" of their non-compliance to regulations against fishing abalone (Schultz 2015b: 337). There is also an uncritical association in the social science literature between morality and low socio-economic status. For instance, Menon *et al.* identify moral economies as originating in the

[16] At this point, it is useful to clarify my usage of the terms "ethics" and "morality." I engage with ethics as the philosophical discipline that reflects on morality and develops normative moral theory, or "what we ought to do and how we ought to be in the world" (McMullin 2021: 12). Meanwhile, morality involves the practice of valuing and holding people to account for their actions and choices.

field of "peasant studies," which they distinguish from capitalist enterprise in a binary definition that identifies moral economies as concerned with ethical reasoning and capitalism as therefore not (2018: 6).

The attribution of morality as an integral feature of non-capitalist lifestyle has the effect of distorting the ethics at play in both of these instances. First, the suggestion that the customary economies of fishing communities are moral only insofar as they resist capitalism undermines the ethical nuance and complexity of these evolving worldviews and their political economic frameworks. Second, there is an underlying misunderstanding of morality if the values, principles, and frameworks of capitalism are thought to be somehow amoral. At the worst, this amounts to a systematic conflation of amoral and immoral. If neoliberal capitalism encourages a set of values, principles, and frameworks for political and economic governance, then this is bound up with very specific moral understandings of the world and the role of human beings within it. To be clear, this is akin to saying that understandings of justice and fairness within a capitalist ideology have no moral scope, despite these being intrinsically moral concepts and having material ethical consequence for people whose lives are affected by them. If analysts of capitalist philosophy disassociate this philosophy from its relationships and responsibilities to its agents and the objective world in which it exists, then it is in bad faith. This also follows for the inverse description of non-capitalist economies as distinctive for their so-called morality.

Aiming to overcome such bad faith accounts of morality in relation to ocean ethics, I draw out existential experiences of self-world fit as they are explored through narrative accounts of the abalone crisis.

### Moral tension & complexity

One of the other key features of McMullin's virtue ethics is the "fundamental and irresolvable" tension that she says characterises the pursuit of a moral life. McMullin defines this moral tension as operating

between the conflicting normative demands of the first-person (yourself), second-person (the people around you like friends and family) and third-person intersubjective (the rest of your society or world) that humans constantly negotiate (2021: 40). For McMullin, there is no single answer to these competing claims, and a person cannot reduce any of them to one of the others.

One of the crucial ways that people find self-world fit is through first-person normative demands on the self: "Human beings are defined by a striving to succeed at being who they are, and this success finds its object and its measure in the relationships that we have to the domain of significance we call the world" (2021: 40). In the first-person domain of normativity, individuals experience a moral striving to succeed in personal projects and to express their unique selves, which I refer to in terms of personal striving.[17] Second-person normative authority shows up as a "kind of breach or interruption" of self-interested focus and personal striving, in situations where one finds oneself directly confronted with another person's struggle to be (2019: 53). McMullin posits that it is helpful for understanding this encounter to look at Emmanuel Lévinas' portrayal of the face-to-face encounter with another person's conscious striving self. Lévinas describes this experience as being *asymmetrical* insofar as "we feel answerable to a presence that resists our ability to contain it" (*Ibid.*). Lévinas calls this the "radical alterity of the other" and McMullin identifies such an asymmetrical alterity as the key difference between second-person and third-person normative respons(a)bility (2007: 36).

In contrast to first- and second-person relationality, the third-person normative domain involves a shift in perspective and demands that individuals must "consider [their] position in the human community and

[17] McMullin identifies two different, and sometimes conflicting, aspects of personal striving (self-creation and self-expression) and suggests that these tend to be coordinated through a kind of Nietzschean *style*, as an individual's "character" or "identity" (2021: 47-50).

the world at large … [and] that which is or ought to be shared among all of us" (McMullin 2021: 56). This invites a need for objectivity across a collective of people, which in turn gives rise to political concepts and institutions. McMullin emphasises that genuine flourishing involves a "public deliberation" on what a collective and shareable "vision of excellence" involves for a community, or society, as well as collective participation in creating and transforming institutions and the possibilities of relatability in light of that vision of human excellence (2021: 64).[18] This kind of public deliberation is at work in discussions of abalone ethics across the scholarly literatures reviewed. However, McMullin critiques philosophical accounts that read all moral relationships as third-personal objective and equally reciprocal, which Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings call a "tendency to translate caring into justice" (2019: 55). I follow McMullin, Gilligan, and Noddings in referring to the second-person normative domain in terms of caring and the third-person domain in terms of justice. Most of the social science accounts I have reviewed tend to translate and conflate issues of first and second-person normativity into the third-personal political perspective, and this neglects to account for the lived experience of moral dilemmas along with the way that these responsibilities are in tension.

Indeed, McMullin stresses that the *tension* between the three domains of normativity is more fundamental and characteristic of moral life than any one of them individually. None of these are experienced individually but rather are always tied together in different formations. The very experience of irresolvable tension between these realms of first-, second-, and third-person normative responsibility is precisely what characterises human striving to live well. This can also be thought

[18] McMullin describes third-personal politics and institutions as a system of reference around the self that helps to form a horizon of perspectives, which fill out the perspectives that the individual cannot occupy. She says that this implicit horizon is formalised through the sciences and the academy, which means that as ethicists we must keep up to date with the sciences and other areas of study that inform the horizons of perspectival knowledge.

of as trying to maintain excellent standards of self-world fit. The tension between these different relationalities is lent considerable nuance via those normative responsibilities that fall outside of the human domains, such as one's responsibilities to maintain a sustainable ocean environment, to not wantonly destroy the ocean's inhabitants, or to refrain from polluting its waters. However, McMullin includes a disclaimer in her book that she does not attempt to figure more-than-human relations into her virtue ethics, despite admitting that this poses an "enormous" question (2021: 56). It is certainly a large question; with enormity in both size and importance, especially as the seas become increasingly targets of privatisation and market economies, transforming the landscape of human agency in relation to the ocean (McCormack 2017).

I argue that McMullin's neglect of more-than-human relations in her virtue ethics constitutes a failure to fully commit to a core part of her own phenomenological approach: the need for virtue ethics to acknowledge that morality is defined by self-world fit. David Abram uses the term "more-than-human" to describe the world that humans inhabit and experience as being composed of more than just themselves (1997). The term more-than-human helpfully draws attention to the connections and interactions between humans and what is commonly thought of as non-human nature. As Abram writes, the more-than-human signifies a "larger community" that includes, "along with the humans, the multiple nonhuman entities that constitute the local landscape, from the diverse plants and the myriad animals … to the particular winds and weather patterns that inform the local geography, as well as the various landforms [and ocean forms] that lend their specific character" to the surrounding area (Abram 1997: 14). Thus, the concept of more-than-human encompasses familiar ideas like the non-human or other-than-human world, as well as nature, and the environment, while also signalling the need to question human/non-human binaries like the nature-culture divide. Accordingly, the world in which people find themselves striving to become themselves, to care

for others, and to pursue collective justice is a more-than-human world. In order to flourish, humans are depend on the world.

McMullin gives two reasons for excluding the more-than-human from her virtue ethics. The first is that it is difficult to characterise animal and ecological relationships according to the categories of first, second or third-person normativity. The second reason she gives is that the more-than-human world resists phenomenological characterisation, because phenomenology involves a process of reflection that is unique to a being who has the capacity to consider themselves reflexively (i.e., human). I examine each of these reasons in turn.

Reason one suggests a potential lack of space or scope within McMullin's project, which is admittedly already quite comprehensive. The fact that it is difficult to categorise animal and ecological relationships, or that doing so represents a more substantial project, does not foreclose the value in *thinking about* doing so. It shows that more-than-human relations are complex and escape easy definition, and perhaps too that new categories of ecological relationships are necessary. It also reinforces the fact that McMullin has a culturally specific perspective on the importance of more-than-human relationships for defining what it is to be human. Looking at developments in ethology, biology, and Indigenous and African environmental ethics, research suggests that more-than-human relationships constitute a fundamental part of what it is to be human and to the experience of being a moral agent (e.g., Murove 2008, Todd 2014, Tsing *et al*. 2017, Justice 2018, Chemhuru 2019, & Sheldrake 2021). Contrasting with McMullin's humancentric orientation, Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice argues that Indigenous cultural understandings of what it is to be human are "intimately embedded in kinship relations," with more-than-human relatives (2018: 41). He impresses that this does not only refer to one's genetic lineage but also to "a meaningful context with your diverse relatives and the associated relationships of obligation" that travel beyond species (*Ibid.*). For

Justice, kinship is an "active network of connections, a process of continual acknowledgement and enactment. To be human is to practice humanness" (2018: 41-42) without situating humanity as the limit of "humanness".[19] Justice and McMullin both advocate for a practical engagement with daily concerns of moral relationality, but Justice articulates a more expansive version of this practical approach that is inherently entangled with the more-than-human. I argue that McMullin's account is limited by its understanding of what is human, and must be expanded to incorporate the more-than-human dimension of human self-world fit.

In McMullin's second reason for eliding the more-than-human, she deploys a methodological point that derives from her phenomenological approach to ethics. She writes that "phenomenology cannot give an account of animal/environment flourishing … in complete isolation from the lived experience of human agents, since doing so would rely on a speculative metaphysics closed to the phenomenologist" (2021: 56). McMullin is right to foreground the lived experience of humans as an inextricable part of any phenomenology, but contrary to her I argue that this should not limit the exploration of ways in which human experience must interact and reckon with the legitimate other of the more-than-human in ethics. There is no doubt that non-human animals and ecological environs make up fundamental aspects of human experience and human origin. McMullin acknowledges that "If we talk about animals or the environment from the phenomenological perspective, we must do so in terms of the ways in which their claims to value show up for us as such" and, for me, this is not a functional restriction on one's ability to include the more-than-human world in endeavours of ethical theorising

[19] Justice frames Indigenous kinship in conversation with Donna Haraway's influential theorisation of kin. Haraway observes that kin "is a wild category that all sorts of people do their best to domesticate. Making kin as oddkin rather than, or at least in addition to, godkin and genealogical and biogenetic family troubles important matters, like to whom one is actually responsible" (*Staying with the Trouble* 2016: 2).

(*Ibid.*). My understanding of McMullin's three domains of normativity is that they are all grounded in human experience of value, and do not proceed from an assumption of immutable or essential natural law. Clearly, it is not an easy task to delineate essential values of animals and ecosystems – if indeed such a thing is even ultimately possible – but, equally, McMullin does not seek to proceed from such a universal anchor for human morality either. These categories of normativity are always, in the first instance, rooted in the particular experiences of moral agents and the contexts they find themselves in. This is to say that McMullin's pursuit of central constants in human morality does not begin from universal assumptions about what it is to be a human moral agent. Likewise, I argue that universal assumptions about more-than-human morality are not necessary in an attempt to seek out conclusions about the more-than-human realms of morality.

All of this suggests that McMullin's virtue ethics needs to trouble its human limitations in order to fully capture the human experience of striving to live well. Further, I advocate that it is a natural consequence of McMullin's ethical theory that it becomes more than just human and more than just animal – the dynamic tension between lines of responsibility is something more intertwined. I contend that this critique is not inherently undermined because it is from the perspective of humans; it does not make practical sense to discount the possibility of an environmental ethics solely on the basis of perspective. This would be to ignore the many connections and relationships humans have to the more-than-human dimensions of the world and thus it would be in bad faith to argue as such. Thus, I propose that McMullin's virtue ethics is already up to the task; taken to heart and into the world suggests a much more complex, messy, and difficult reality of self-world fit.

Having outlined the way in which virtue ethics will be conceptualised, I now outline the theoretical foundation for why I bring a range of narrative voices into the conversation about ocean ethics.

## Narrative

Stories abound, and in seeking to understand the complex ethics of the abalone crisis in South Africa, the many discordant voices and conflicting stories are a key focal point for discussions about ethics on the subject. This is even the case at a hyper-local level. For example, Evelien Storme highlights the "community division" and recurring contrary narratives that she encountered in her ethnographic fieldwork with local communities in Hangberg (2023: 2). These included views that "Poaching ruins our youngsters and it ruins the sea" and also views that poaching was "a regular source of income and identity" (*Ibid.*). For complex questions of ocean ethics where different stories of right, wrong, access, and livelihood, compete it is fruitful and necessary to attend to the specifics of certain stories, in order to navigate the highly distributed and complex systemic nature of human-ocean ethics from an everyday human perspective. Thus, narrative offers a route to a more grounded and person-centred understanding of complex abalone ethics.

In *The Narrative Reader* Martin McQuillan suggests that narrative occupies the "impossible space in which philosophy and literature meet one another" (2000: xiii). Indeed, narrative is a form of conceptualisation; it involves recounting events in a particular order, with a teleological orientation from a beginning towards an end (Bennett & Royle 2004: 53). It involves the conceptualisation and communication of a series of events or actions, and hence foregrounds certain aspects while hiding others. Choices about how to order events, which characters and events to emphasise, and which to downplay or even hide, inform the story that a narrative tells. These are choices that people make all the time when they conceptualise and communicate information about the way the world works (e.g., science, religion, and history all narrate different stories about how things have come to be the way they are). Narrative choices also inform the way that people understand themselves and their place in the world.

Story and narrative enable individual people to position themselves and make sense of their presence within an impossibly large and complex system of phenomena and events, making them key mechanisms for meaning-making. Ethics is certainly a sphere of life in which narrative informs understanding and practice. Deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics can all be thought of as different narratives of ethics; they foreground different components – actions, the results of these actions, or specific qualities and dispositions – and they make connections between those components and the value they have for human, non-human, and societal wellness. I am interested in the way that narratives about abalone poaching locate poachers and other actors within the complex ethical problem of the abalone crisis in South Africa. The three texts I look at are heterogenous and diverse, they tell stories using different media (physical, online), genres, and formats, but they are all narratives; each one telling a different story about abalone poaching and the virtues or vices associated with it.

Narrative is also bound up with power dynamics (Bennett & Royle 2004: 57). Ross Chambers writes that storytelling is an "oppositional" practice of resistance and that "narrative power" is often the only strategy left for the weak and dispossessed (1984: 50, Bennett & Royle 2004: 58). Narrative allows disempowered people to tell stories that can re-order events or emphasise a different causality for why things are the way they are, or introduce new narrators with their distinct perspectives on a matter. This offers opportunities for disrupting current power structures; something that is valuable in an unequal society like South Africa. For example, Daniel Heath Justice highlights the difference between the stories that Indigenous communities tell about themselves and the colonial stories that have been told about them. He argues for the importance of Indigenous stories and the power that sharing them has for communities that have been significantly disempowered. Similarly, the narratives I examine in the course of this thesis highlight and represent some of these different (and at times overlapping) perspectives on the abalone crisis. Some of them reinforce dominant

ethical narratives whilst others re-narrate the situation from less visible perspectives.

An analysis of narrative as a way into complex ethical issues weaves throughout the thesis. This methodology enables me to access first-person phenomenological viewpoints on highly complex and massively distributed topics like human-ocean relations and the abalone crisis. Fiction and non-fiction narratives have distinct features and make different choices about what events and information to expose or hide, but they all employ narrative form and use first-person perspective to tell a story about human-ocean relationships in South Africa.

## The role of narrative in virtue ethics

Legalistic frameworks, even revised ones based on participatory feedback, have been shown to clash with contesting understandings of rights by different groups of sea users. Rules put in place under fisheries governance have been rejected by fishers because they do not feel relevant or fair. Brian Treanor writes about the limitations of rules-based systems for navigating real-life tricky ethical conundrums, including as "the lack of sensitivity to context; dubious guidance in particularly vexing situations; the difficulty in dealing with novel challenges" (2014: 174). He claims that relying on rules "full stop" is unhelpful for developing a nuanced understanding of ethics nor skills in navigating specific circumstances in the general project of how to live well. South Africa cannot continue to rely on rules-based systems to attempt to resolve issues around fisheries. Thus far, a legalistic approach to fisheries compliance has resulted in contested understandings of rights and justice, increased illegal overfishing of abalone, and the criminalisation of poor coastal communities.

Virtue ethics is well-equipped to offer support in the practical areas of ethics that Treanor outlines, which he identifies as motivation, transmission, discernment, and cultivation. And a narrative approach to

virtue ethics actively supports the kind of moral reasoning that rules-based approaches are missing. One of the ways that narrative can assist people in learning to cultivate virtue is through the provision of storied role models, in those cases and places where there is a lack of real-life role models. Role models are individuals one respects because they demonstrate exemplary behaviour or they represent the kind of person that one strives to be like. A role model could give advice on how to navigate a certain situation, such as restrictive and unfair quotas for abalone fishing. Or, one can observe the choices and actions of a role model from afar, in hope of emulating them. When one does not have good role models around them, narratives can provide "virtuous exemplars and accounts of their actions in various contexts even when we ourselves are not yet virtuous and have not yet experienced similar situations" (2014: 175). For example, in Chapter Two, I will discuss about the experiences of Shuhood Abader through the narrative of Poacher – a man who spent five years in prison for poaching abalone – in which he shares his story of pain, regret, and ultimately freedom from a life of violence. This narrative can provide insight for people who may find themselves working in the abalone trade or in other industries characterised by violence or oceanic exploitation, those who do not have someone to talk to about how this kind of work impacts one's family, those who grapple with the difficulty involved in finding an alternative path.

Treanor advocates for the ethical role of narratives in teaching values from a young age, but also asserts that this learning continues throughout adult life. Narratives can encourage a desire to be good, evincing the ethical "motivation" Treanor identified, and also an idea of what it means to be good, or the "transmission" of understandings of virtue (2014: 178-184). Stories about history and ethics that provide moral lessons about what is considered good can be found all around the world and across cultures, and Treanor writes that "The diversity of such examples – from America, Europe, India, China, and Africa – illustrates the genuine ubiquity of moral instruction via folktales, fairy

stories, myths, and other narratives" (2014: 184). Religious texts are another example of narrative moral lessons that are hugely powerful in the ways that people understand and navigate ethical dilemmas (the role of religious narrative also comes up in Chapter Two). The processes of ethical discernment and evaluation of circumstances are not solo projects either. Although each individual is ultimately responsible for their own decisions and actions, people are always informed by others in their conceptions of the world and the way they make sense of things, particularly so when it comes to ethics since one's sense of morality is socially and culturally contingent. Treanor underscores the role of tradition as a background to the development of virtue: ethical life involves learning to understand, recognise, and apply moral lessons from traditions and culture, but also to judge, critique, and modify these lessons according to the context and situations one finds oneself in (*Ibid.*).

Treanor claims that, through narrative, one engages with "as-if" imaginary experience, a space in which one can explore how to navigate all sorts of situations that one may not have encountered individually. Within this imaginary, one develops skills in ethical discernment – recognising, for example, the differences between two accounts of flourishing. Through narrative understanding a person can familiarise themselves with "particular examples or illustrations of universal truths" (2014: 191). So, one is able to experience existential facts of human existence – like death, the fact one's time on earth is temporally limited, or the reality of unequally shared resources in a capitalist society – and one can explore how to potentially navigate these facts of life in a virtuous manner. Narratives also give people the chance to experience alternative points of view, encompassing "more diversity than one could ever experience in a single lifetime" (*Ibid.*). Holding a diversity of perspectives together is something that is valuable and needed in discussions of abalone poaching and ocean ethics. As I explore narratives from a variety of authors, directly or indirectly representing a range of stakeholders, I wrestle with areas of

tension and overlap in ethical narratives to show the messy complexity of navigating human-ocean relationships in South Africa.

Across the different perspectives and identities of people with a stake in abalone fishing, trade, and conservation, it is valuable to be able to recognise the range of backgrounds or traditions that these people bring with them to their ethical reasoning. Beyond this, it is just as valuable to attend to the different types of human-ocean-abalone relationships that people have experiences of, and how these life experiences impact on understandings of abalone ethics. I have chosen diverse narratives across a range of genres and by authors with distinct backgrounds in the hope of representing the diversity of narratives and accompanying worldviews that are relevant to abalone ethics. In Chapter One, Mike Nicol and Joanne Hichens present the combined male and female perspective of white writers who come from an academically traditional creative writing background. They seek to narrate the abalone crisis in ways that open up conversations about crime in Cape Town and also to tell a dramatic story about vice. Chapter Two brings Kimon de Greef and Shuhood Abader, with their distinct life experiences, into conversation: de Greef's background, lying in the privileged neighbourhoods of Cape Town, and his research background in marine science and ethnography contrast and combine with Shuhood's Muslim upbringing in the Cape Flats and his experiences as an illegal abalone poacher. Finally, in Chapter Three, Mohale Mashigo's perspective as a Black woman is foundational to her fantasy and science fiction writing, which explores present-day difficulties and possible futures through issues like abalone poaching for Black and Indigenous South Africans.

Treanor discusses the process of applying what is learned from stories to real life, to which end "narrative throws a bridge – the bridge of 'as if' experience – between abstract, faceless, lifeless theory," like how many abalone each person is allowed to fish for, "and concrete, particular, lived experience" like weighing up feeding one's family against the risk

of being arrested for poaching (2014: 193-196). Narrative insights form a matrix of references that help individuals form opinions and take actions in ways that are ethically informed, a "library of scripts drawn from myth, fables, literature, popular entertainment and the like" (2014: 200). Models and archetypes are exemplars that people aim to "thoughtfully emulate" in attempts to express relevant virtuous traits in their lives (2014: 198). Psychologists are increasingly recognising the importance of life narratives, and they claim that people act from "scripts" that are based on "familiar plots and archetypes" more commonly than most would expect (2014: 201). So, in trying to answer questions surrounding what to do about abalone ethics, South Africans need to ask "of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" This is vital to understand conceptions of the good life, and what character traits and dispositions people have narrative exemplars for. This narrative enquiry highlights the terms in which ethical discussions are framed. In the coming chapters I explore a number of archetypal plots and tropes in narratives about abalone poaching, some which are closer to virtue and some that focus more on vice.

Treanor writes that learned habituation of admired traits on the basis of ethical beliefs about what is good forms the final stage of ethical cultivation and application. He argues that facts and arguments influence behaviours and choices less than beliefs, and beliefs are firmly grounded in narratives (2014: 198). Hence, facts about the disappearance of abalone as a species are less likely to motivate a change in fishing behaviour. Inversely, stories about poachers finding alternative ways of life and exploring moral messiness are more likely to impact beliefs and behaviour. For example, the image of the "real fisher" as part of a narrative of authentic human-ocean relationship drives beliefs about the moral right to poach abalone. This narrative of oppressed oceanic relations is grounded in real experiences and histories of marginalised livelihoods, ways of being, and ways of knowing. But it is powerful because of its narrative potency as part of

peoples' identity that motivates an action-commanding belief in what is good and right.

There are some points of confluence between McMullin and Treanor's accounts that suggest their virtue ethical accounts are at least partially compatible. For example, when discussing how to employ narrative responsibly in the service of living well, Treanor encourages the active discussion and critique of narratives with other people, which emphasises the social nature of virtue and reduces the chances of confirmation bias or motivated reasoning (2014: 210). This emphasis on the need to come together to discuss and negotiate ethical terms is in common with McMullin's theorisation of the political sphere. Like McMullin, Treanor also writes that ethical narratives must be examined alongside the insights of relevant spheres of research and enquiry, such as ecology, marine science, anthropology, history, etc., because some narratives do lead people to live unfulfilling lives, like the narratives about growth and progress that I explore in Chapter One (2014: 213). Bringing these two theoretical touchstones together, I employ McMullin and Treanor's phenomenological characterisation of virtue and narrative to elucidate how fiction and non-fiction narratives of abalone poaching provide insights into living well with oceans in South Africa.

It is worth noting that combining a philosophical and literary approach to any subject matter can create an imperfect storm of narratives serving beliefs, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy. One of the unique interventions of this thesis is the closeness of conversation between literature, philosophy, and ethnography. I ground this thesis in a large body of social science and anthropological secondary research such that any philosophical and literary conclusions are supported by research on the lived experiences of small-scale fishers and abalone poachers. By examining a range of perspectives and different narratives about the abalone crisis I have tried to avoid finding

narratives that fit the philosophical perspective I intend to prove (namely, phenomenological virtue ethics).

I chose to look at abalone poaching since it is one of the most high-profile issues in South African ocean ethics, but has received limited critical attention from the humanities as a whole. And while I approached this issue with the training and perspective of a phenomenological virtue ethicist, it was only after researching abalone ethics in depth that the complexity of the situation was fleshed out, thus supporting McMullin's theory of the irreconcilable tension in practically navigating ethics. In choosing to explore an issue of ethics from the meeting (and clashing) point of contested narratives I endeavour to stay open to multiple potentially irreconcilable perceptions of what is viewed as right and just, and what is seen as wrong and unjust. This has led me to argue that narrative is a powerful tool that can serve either of these agendas, and that a responsible implementation of narrative must attend to peoples' lived experience rather than simply buttress an agenda of spectacle or an economic agenda of personal gain.

Emerging from the literature on abalone poaching is a radical ethical solution to the abalone poaching crisis.

## A radical ethical proposal (for abalone extinction)

In their capacity as scholars of abalone poaching and wildlife trafficking, Kimon de Greef and Simone Haysom have proposed the controversial ethical solution of abolishing abalone fishery conservation protections. Examining the reasons why extinction might be considered a virtuous proposal sheds light on the ways that a legalistic and rules-oriented ethics is inappropriate for tackling abalone poaching as an example of complex ocean ethics.

Seeking a solution that is more care-oriented, de Greef and Haysom advocate for a "harm-reduction approach" to managing the illegal abalone trade from within South Africa (2022: 43). This suggestion is based on the recognition that current anti-poaching efforts are "broken," which includes the current focus of policing to arrest

poachers and low-level syndicate bosses, busting drying facilities, and a dysfunctional system for giving out quotas to local communities, with no other action at other parts of the illegal trade (for example, there is no policing in Asia where the majority of demand for the trade comes from). De Greef and Haysom predict that continuing this ineffective approach will lead to further declines in abalone populations and possibly the extinction of the species, outside of aquacultures and perhaps small ocean populations (*Ibid*.). As such, continued legal protections are so ineffective that they are unlikely to prevent the extinction of abalone, and the costs of continuing this approach are untenably high. These costs include the direct costs of police enforcement but also indirect costs such as "the criminalization of low-level poachers and corruption pressure on state institutions" (*Ibid*.). De Greef and Haysom write that "crucial ecological and institutional thresholds have already been breached" for the conservation of abalone (*Ibid*.). The authors acknowledge that no solution is perfect and that ways forward will involve trade-offs, including fundamentally undermining "philosophies that protect other species" (*Ibid*.). In a telling example of the complexity involved in ocean ethics, de Greef and Haysom suggest that adopting a more virtuous harm-avoidant approach to the abalone crisis could mean abandoning policies that protect the abalone species, and the narratives of protection that underly such policies.

To make this argument, de Greef and Haysom rely on utilitarian analyses of cost and benefit. However, in doing so, they identify that there is no solution to complex abalone ethics without a trade-off and so there is no clear ends-based solution. The abalone crisis is at a stage where South Africans are asking difficult questions about what trade-offs may need to be made to minimise future harms to people and ocean. This discussion calls into question ethical commitments to the preservation of species and the opposition of wildlife trafficking. Laws that oppose species extinction have been put in place for good reasons, but they have failed both abalone populations and humans

involved in the crisis. Coastal communities, law enforcement, and divers are all enmeshed in violent and criminalised systems. The limited scope of South African law and policy within South African nation borders is insufficient to impact international trade and high-value markets in China and the East, and this complex context undermines blanket rules for ocean ethics. McMullin's emphasis on the uneasy tension between spheres of responsibility is prescient, as is the inevitability of failing to find this balance in practice. Through an acknowledgement of failure, de Greef and Haysom identify the need for different narratives of human-ocean flourishing, in which humans may not always be stewards of ocean species, and within which human flourishing must be balanced with oceanic flourishing in ways that are not straightforward.

De Greef and Haysom argue that money and energy should instead be spent on community development for coastal communities affected by the criminalisation of the abalone trade. In their discussion of potential routes forward, the pair reflect on how this crisis may have been managed differently with a more virtue-oriented approach:

> What if, instead of slashing legal quotas from the beginning of the 2000s onwards, when poaching began to escalate, the South African government had radically expanded access to the fishery? This question was debated at the time, but discarded in favour of a more cautious approach to preserving the abalone resource – a decision that, we must acknowledge, made sense at the time, based on scientific projections of imminent commercial extinction that only proved inaccurate in hindsight. Yet, it now seems clear that South Africa's approach to spiraling levels of poaching served only to push the fishery more firmly into the criminal economy. (de Greef & Haysom 2022: 48).

The authors highlight how embracing an approach that was informed by a spirit of generosity for fishers and marginalised communities may

have in fact led to a reduction in harms to both people and ocean. Hence, a virtue-oriented approach could have ultimately resulted in better outcomes than an approach informed by a utilitarian, rules-based calculation. The abalone species may have depleted faster, yes, but there likely would have been fewer harms borne out from syndicates setting up in coastal towns to exploit the resource and less incentive for corruption from officials seeking profit. With a more caring approach to coastal communities through the establishment of licit opportunities for stable employment that are not dependent on gang systems, local communities may have also felt more invested in reporting poachers or not choosing to become poachers themselves. De Greef and Haysom's extinction proposal is one that I bear in mind as I look back over the lifetime of this evolving crisis and examine the ethical narratives that have accompanied abalone poaching in the cultural imaginary.

## 3: Thesis structure

In choosing these texts I was led by their focus on abalone poaching, as they comprise three of the few narratives that do this in a concentrated manner. It is worth noting that the film Sons of the Sea also narrates the experience of abalone poachers, but this did not come to my attention until late in the thesis, and as a hard-to-access piece of media, I was not able to acquire it in time for a proper analysis. There has been little written about my primary texts, apart from a handful of academic articles, interviews, and news articles (including Lavery, Samuelson, DeLoughrey). Admittedly, Poacher has received more attention in the South African news than Cape Greed or Floating Rugs, with many online articles discussing its content and revealing insights into an industry that was previously not well-understood. Yet Poacher is only available in South Africa, Floating Rugs is no longer accessible online, and Cape Greed was republished in the United States (after being originally published under the title Out to Score). Despite being published the earliest and having the most international reach of the three texts, Cape Greed has received sparse critical attention. It is cited by Lavery and Samuelson in discussions about crime fiction in Cape Town and Abalone smuggling across the Indian Ocean, but beyond these brief engagements has not made much tangible impact.

I chose these three texts primarily because of their focus on abalone poaching, but also because they presented three distinct perspectives on the abalone crisis in general. Cape Greed is a pulpy crime novel that is not particularly critical of its subject matter; while it deals with corruption and topical issues of ocean ethics in Cape Town, it does so fairly bluntly with the aim of delivering shock and disgust to its readers alongside a sense of intrigue in its thrilling mystery. However, the fact that the seemingly strange subject of stealing sea snails was chosen as the focus for a crime novel demonstrates how deeply the abalone crisis is entangled with the criminal underworld. Thus, examining Cape Greed provides a special insight into public narratives of criminality and morality as a spectacle and as entertainment. Poacher provides a

contrary narrative to Cape Greed insofar as it is highly attentive to, and critical of, the subject matter of abalone poaching, and it highlights first-person lived experiences through its autobiographical format. I chose to examine Poacher as a non-fiction text because, unlike Cape Greed, it narrates the phenomenology of abalone poaching and has begun to disrupt the kind of public narratives about abalone poaching conveyed in Cape Greed. Floating Rugs, meanwhile, presents abalone poaching from a speculative future perspective, inviting readers to consider how this crisis might evolve or what the impacts of it will be. Floating Rugs narrates the abalone crisis in an ultimately ironically more accessible format of a short story (ironic in that it is now entirely inaccessible) that was published online, and with its younger protagonist is aimed largely at younger audiences. I chose this text because it gives the opportunity to examine the future impacts of the abalone crisis, who might be left, and what the legacy will be. Through it, my aim is to explore the complex moral dilemmas of South African ethics from the perspective of young people, and how narratives like Floating Rugs could play a role in this process. In concert these three narratives all offer different vantage points on the abalone crisis and the moral dimensions of it.

In 2006, when Mike Nicol and Joanne Hichens first published *Out to Score* in South Africa – the book was later re-named *Cape Greed* for US publication under the pseudonym Sam Cole – abalone poaching had only recently begun to spiral out of control.[20] Whereas, in more recent narratives, including Kimon de Greef and Shuhood Abader's *Poacher* in 2018 and Mohale Mashigo's 'Floating Rugs' in 2019, the abalone crisis is a well-established and far messier narrative. Alongside these three core texts, I also look at more brief narrative references to poaching from beyond the millennium to the present day, including Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller* from 2005, and Anthony Silverston, Raffaella Delle Donne and Willem Samuel's *Pearl of the Sea* from 2023.

[20] Although I reference the US edition of *Cape Greed* that was published pseudonymously under Sam Cole (2009), I reference Mike Nicol and Joanne Hichens instead for the purpose of academic clarity.

I unpack how conceptions of vice and virtue have been attached to different characters and archetypal tropes that are linked to abalone poaching, in doing so unravelling and making explicit the moral grammar and narrative imaginary for abalone and ocean ethics discussions.

## Research Questions

I investigate three key research questions in this thesis:

1. How do differences in form, genre, and authorial structure influence what is made visible and what is hidden by each narrative?
2. How does a focus on existential virtue and vice change the conversation about abalone ethics? What new ways of thinking or practically approaching abalone ethics are opened up that are not available through rights- or ends-based concepts?
3. How do the present narratives (and key themes within them) connect to or contrast with incumbent legal and academic narratives of abalone poaching?

## Chapter breakdown

The thesis is separated into three chapters, each of which examines one core text in conversation with interdisciplinary critical perspectives. The interdisciplinarity of the thesis has contributed to the potentially unusual structure of the thesis, with a relatively small number of narrative texts for a literary project, but a substantial amount of close textual reading for a philosophy project. Likewise, there is extended conversation between philosophical and literary points, and with research in the sciences and social sciences. The first and third chapters focus on fictional narratives of abalone poaching, bookending the second chapter which focuses more closely on the process of narrative creation. Each of these narratives brings form, genre, and authorial structure to create a narrative that makes certain things visible and hides others. I will examine how each of these narratives highlights different aspects of the abalone fishery crisis, and explore how

concepts of virtue and narrative enable helpful discussions about this crisis. Within these narratives, archetypal themes and narratives of poaching are present, some of which support or challenge legal and academic narratives about abalone poaching.

In each of these chapters, I explore different features of narrative, virtue, and how narratives interact with ethics in practice. In Chapter One, I focus on character and genre, showing both how themes within crime fiction and *noir* stories create certain archetypes and how these, in some ways, accurately represent abalone poaching as a story (e.g., the unapproachable complexity of ethics in *noir*), but also how they can twist it to suit a dramatic criminal narrative that creates a spectacle for the reader. I explore the vice of greed as it is associated with abalone poachers as individuals, articulating an archetypical narrative of poachers as greedy in the context of crime fiction narrative *Cape Greed*. I also explore individualistic philosophies of greed as they are motivated by systems of capitalism and explore unwieldy moral complexity in the ocean ethics of abalone poaching.

In Chapter Two, I look at the process of narrativising one's experience and the attentive relations to ocean environments that Shuhood demonstrates in his storytelling. I also explore the collaborative authorial process of *Poacher* by de Greef and Abader and Shuhood as two writers who bring vastly different life experience and expertise to their partnership. In doing so, I contend the writing of the book itself becomes a profoundly political act. Chapter Two reveals a surprisingly attentive relationship to ocean environments in the context of poaching and thingified representations of abalone. I examine the process of narrative attentiveness and the virtue of an everyday, localised, relationship with nature. I then go on to look at the role of courage in the dangerous career of abalone poaching, and explore the circumstances, role models, and narratives that feature in Shuhood's journey of moral transformation away from a life of violent criminality.

In Chapter Three, I explore Treanor's theory that narrative functions as an experimental space for ethical deliberation and the cultivation of virtue, investigating what lessons 'Floating Rugs' shares with readers through its speculative future for abalone poachers. I also engage with the way that narratives can become symbolic and archetypal for representing certain issues like abalone poaching, examining four archetypal narratives for abalone poaching. I then contemplate 'Floating Rugs' and *The Whale Caller* as examples of narrative virtue ethical education and evaluate the moral scripts and go-to's these stories might offer readers in their lonely deliberations of challenging ethical questions. I consider the risks of techno-optimism for speculative narratives, and the valuable role of patience in creating sustainable ocean technologies.

# Chapter One

## Introduction

In this chapter I begin my examination of narratives about abalone poaching and my exploration of human-ocean relationships in South Africa. I introduce two key features of abalone ethics, one in each of the two layers of this investigation: the presence of greed in abalone poaching narratives, and the complex nature of ocean ethics. First, I look at conceptions of greed and how this vice is prominent in narratives about abalone poaching in both fiction and the public imaginary, locating ethical conceptions of abalone poaching within a virtue ethics framework. Then, I explore complexity in ethical discussions of abalone poaching and human-ocean relationships more broadly.

*Cape Greed* by Mike Nicol and Joanne Hichens, which forms the heart of this first chapter, evinces a narrative of the greedy poacher, one of the more dramatic and notorious narratives about abalone poaching in South Africa's public imaginary. Close reading of the text shows that the greedy poacher trope is explicit in *Cape Greed*'s two poacher characters Tommy and Adonis, and further that this narrative is still a pervasive one in 2023, as demonstrated in a recent graphic novel, Anthony Silverston *et al.*'s *Pearl of the Sea*. Examining greed from a virtue ethics perspective, I distinguish a consequentialist understanding of self-interest from the vicious character trait greed.[21] Philip Cafaro's characterisation of greed as an environmental vice will be a touchstone, alongside Dominika Dzwonkowska and Louke van Wensveen's complimentary examinations of virtue and vice. In the second part of this chapter, I move on to examine how the greedy portrayals of the poachers in *Cape Greed* also demonstrate the ways

[21] When I use the term "vicious" in this thesis, I mean something that is immoral and related to moral vice, as opposed to something that is deliberately or ruthlessly cruel.

that Tommy and Adonis are comprehensively vicious characters, inferring a link between poaching and all-round immorality.

Despite its stark portrayal of poachers as greedy and vicious, *Cape Greed* evinces a complex ocean ethics through its depiction of Cape Town as a city that is infested with a wider culture of greed. In the chapter's third section, I explore the complex ocean ethics that start to emerge from Nicol and Hichens' *noir* depiction of varyingly virtuous and vicious characters who are enmeshed in a sticky web of greed and vice through the abalone poaching crisis. A close reading of the character of the unscrupulous Taiwanese businessman Jim Woo opens up understandings of China in narratives about abalone poaching, and the role of wider global systems, like capitalism and underground criminal networks, which all contribute to ethical complexity and messiness in human-ocean relationships. To close, I explore Lesley Green's concept of an "encounter" to draw attention to the relationalities that people find themselves in the midst of at the point of encounter with abalone and ocean, relationalities that McMullin encourages moral agents to balance responsibilities across in their attempts to live well.

## *Cape Greed*

*Cape Greed* is a story that highlights the global nature of the abalone trade between South Africa and the East, specifically Taiwan and China. References to abalone and oceans, as well as geopolitics with China and Taiwan litter the pages of the novel, providing the context for a story of duplicitous criminality and vice in Cape Town. The novel follows a rotating cast of protagonists, led by Jeffrey (Mullet) Mendes and his friend Vincent Saldana. Mullet is nicknamed for his 80's hairstyle and also perhaps for his passion for fishing, as mullet is also the name of a fish known locally as "harder."[22] Vincent is a second-generation Chinese

[22] Mullet (or harders) are another oceanic species that is also being fished unsustainably in South Africa, like abalone. The World Wide Fund for Nature's Southern African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (WWF SASSI) rates harders as "orange – think twice" due to the damaging effects of fishing methods, including

police officer who is homeless and grieving his wife's death one bottle at a time. His father's fishing boat was lost at sea and his mother owns a "small Chinese restaurant, the Hot Wok," where Vincent occasionally takes a shower after a late night and Mullet often orders takeaway from (2009: 51). In the first scene of the novel, Vincent takes advantage of his position within the Anti-Poaching Unit of the police to sneak Mullet some of the abalone meat that was seized from poachers that morning – "Free from the sea … Who's gonna know?" – so that Mullet can cook abalone steaks to impress his new date Rae-Anne (2009: 5). The abalone bust in question brings Vincent and Coastal Management inspector Sonny Furniss together with abalone poacher and up-and-coming gangster Tommy Fortune, who is caught out after diving for "pearlies" with his sun-lounging and diva-esqe partner in crime, Adonis (2009: 8-10). Vincent and Tommy get into a violent tussle with a screwdriver after Vincent provokes Tommy, which ends with Tommy and Adonis' arrest.

Eighteen months later, the story introduces two parallel mysteries. Mullet and Vincent have both left the police and are now a team of somewhat dysfunctional private-investigators. When two different clients land on their desk on the same day, Mullet and Vincent each take the lead on one of the new cases. As with any crime investigation, the plot thickens as the ties between characters become more knotted and complex than they seem at first. Mullet and Vincent's investigations lead their paths to cross with old enemies Tommy and Adonis, and newer foes from the criminal underworld, Jim Woo and a shady criminal organisation called the Brotherhood. These criminal characters are fleshed out more fully later in the chapter insofar as they appear as avatars of greed. Mullet, Vincent, and Rae-Anne survive most of the rest of the cast at the end of the novel, triumphant over their criminal gangster foes in Cape Town. Despite this victory the effectiveness of

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the proliferation of ghost nets in the sea and bycatch of vulnerable other species (https://wwfsassi.co.za/fish-detail/134/, accessed 12:07 on 19.09.2023).

law enforcement is also in question, with police officials always one step behind Mullet in solving case.

*Cape Greed* tells a story about unrestrained desire for commoditised items, wealth, and power across international waters, and in this first section I explore to what extent this greed is narratively attributed to the characters themselves, in the form of individual vices.

## 1: Narratives of greed in abalone poaching

### Crime fiction as a spectacle

*Cape Greed* tells a fictional story about the abalone poaching crisis in South Africa that revolves around criminality. Crime fiction provides a sensationalist lens to condemn abalone poachers as the villains in a story of South African ocean ethics. Or, at least, they are the villains that the police are chasing, while the syndicates employing divers are less visible and more difficult to reach. The book is written for an audience that *wants* to hear about the dark and hidden parts of the city through characters and plots that bring violence and subterfuge out of the shadows and into the light. From the divers – Adonis sunning his legs while Tommy plunges into the ocean to lever off abalones with a screwdriver – to nefarious ring-leader Jim Woo – orchestrating a human safari hunt for street children – *Cape Greed* delivers a characterful depiction of the criminal underworld that is at once dazzling and deeply upsetting.

Crime fiction books like *Cape Greed* serve an imaginative and exploratory function whereby they fill out and deepen the stories that are sketched out in news articles at a surface level. Jesper Gulddal and Stewart King write that crime fiction acts as more than just a form of popular entertainment; it becomes an interface for social concerns, providing "a narrative vector for exploring a range of wider social, political, cultural or philosophical issues," including, in this case, concerns about the global trade of abalone and what it could mean for the future and ethics of oceans in South Africa (2020: 15). Susanna Lee writes that detective novels tend to follow moments in history when

governments or law establishments have been "corrupt or incompetent, laws illogical and their application uneven" (2000: 284). Indeed, South African crime fiction has flourished in the postapartheid state alongside the rise in corruption and increasing crime rates (Binder 2017). As shown, fishing and conservation laws around abalone have been surrounded by contested moral narratives about who deserves what and how the ocean should be accessed, and there has been widespread corruption and ineptitude in the governance and policing of abalone restrictions.

Crime fiction makes visible that which is hidden. Moreover, it has been described as a kind of puzzle that readers engage in alongside detectives, analysing the information and even trying to beat the detectives to the solution (Gulddal & King 2020: 14). Michel Foucault wrote that crime literature replaced the public's desire for a "spectacle" of the disciplining of criminality after the decline of the "scaffold" of public torture and execution (1995: 68-69). Foucault speculated that in this transition the spectacle of criminality moved "from the physical confrontation to the investigation" and in doing so engaged a different social class through the operation of intellect, although today crime fiction has in effect returned to the masses and is largely perceived as an accessible genre that is distinguished from more "sophisticated" forms of literature (1995: 69). Sabine Binder agrees with Jean and John L. Comaroff that crime fiction can have a restorative function in a society like South Africa's where real and threateningly high levels of violent crime are only mildly tempered by an unreliable criminal justice system (2017: 264). In a disordered reality, crime fiction can "be a discourse of resistance, an active coping strategy" (*Ibid.*).

*Cape Greed* also uses *noir* tropes to tell the gritty story of abalone poaching in Cape Town. Timothy Morton claims that the narrative form of *noir* also applies to the form of ecological consciousness or awareness; what he terms "Dark Ecology." For Morton, "Dark ecology puts hesitation, uncertainty, irony, and thoughtfulness back into

ecological thinking." (2010: 16). He goes on to describe the "weird" looping experience of reading a noir novel or watching a noir film, whereby "The noir narrator begins investigating a supposedly external situation, from a supposedly neutral point of view, only to discover that she or he is implicated in it. The point of view of the narrator herself becomes stained with desire" (2010: 16-17). In this way, he rejects the "metaposition" as a reasonable or possible position from which to make ecological assessments, judgements and strategies. Instead, one is always implicated in questions of ocean ethics with their complex and systemic roots in inequality and individualised relationality that stretch throughout Cape Town, but also extend across the oceans. As the chapter proceeds, I reject such a metaposition on the notion of greed; seemingly an egoistic vice that can be located in individuals, *Cape Greed* demonstrates how individualised greed is learned through greedy culture. The narrative of the greedy poacher in *Cape Greed* is in tension with the *noir* moral ambiguity of the novel, which communicates the systemic complexity of ocean ethics, reinforcing the interconnectedness of the characters' moral beliefs and choices.

Meg Samuelson characterises *Cape Greed* as part of a growing "Cape Noir" genre that is characterised by "hot topics of raw-material extraction, cheap and counterfeit goods and infrastructural development" that "structure the terms of this Global South encounter" (2020: 98). Samuelson's analysis draws out themes of "compromised transactions" that take place within a Western neoliberal paradigm of economic development in the Global South (2020: 103), in which "developing" countries in Africa come to rely on Western aid due to the large debts they have as postcolonial independent states. Moreover, Asia is crucial to the dynamic of the Global South encounter in ways that are reflected in *Cape Greed* through the abalone crisis.[23]

[23] Samuelson notes that Dipesh Chakrabarty and Amitav Ghosh link the inception of the "Anthropocene" to the rise in Empire, viewing the climate crisis "through the prism of empire" (Ghosh 2016: 87, 92, quoted in Samuelson 2020: 99). This moves them to acknowledge that "the continent of Asia is conceptually critical to

So, what does this crime fiction narrative about poaching highlight about South African politics? What does it exclude, and what connections does it make? How are perceptions of abalone and ocean ethics narratively coded according to genre? The repetition of criminal narratives about poaching in the news – of poachers being captured, sites of poaching being investigated, and the depletion of the abalone species despite government protections – contributes to abalone being seen in light of its connection to human vice and moral corruption in South Africa. See, for example, a *New York Times* article about abalone poaching from 2006 when Nicol and Hichens published their novel. The author of the article considers socio-economic and racialised issues that lead people to poaching abalone, but also emphasises the high profits for divers. An anti-poaching officer is quoted as saying "But they all drive BMWs. Look at the cars they're driving and the life they're living. I don't think it's for the family," inferring personal greed as motivations for poaching over more virtuous reasons (Wines 2006). The image of expensive illicit lifestyles with fast cars and gun battles on the ocean captures the imagination of audiences and draws them into a topic like abalone poaching.

Images of shootouts between police and heavily armed poachers give a shocking image of conflict, death, and destruction over choppy waves. As Tommy says in *Cape Greed,* "Sometimes the guys had firefights out here. AK'ing one another. Like it was a forking war zone" (2009: 8). So, abalone poaching is a narrative spectacle: one that is both scary in its violence and taboo in its illicit ocean exploitation, and as such is a captivating story for readers. The abalone crisis provides a rich

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every aspect of global warming" and it has a dual role as both "protagonist and victim" in this story (*Ibid*.). Many people living in deprivation and poverty in Asia are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change and are in this position because they are the victims of the "Western industrial nations that set the Anthropocene on course" (Samuelson 2020: 99). However, at the same time "attempts to effect a democratisation of goods and elevate them from poverty are contributing to the emission spike that is hastening the progress of the Anthropocene" (*Ibid.*).

tapestry for an exploration of human vice and criminality. Indeed, *Cape Greed* begins with an abalone bust similar to the violent battles that make news headlines. First, the bust is told from the perspective of law enforcement, with police officer Vincent smarting over an injury: "Bastard attacked me. Poacher we've been trying to nail … Some guys gotta show their muscle" (2009: 6). In this scene, Vincent is the victim and he depicts the poacher who attacked him as violent for no other reason than to show off. In the next scene, this image of the violent poacher is complicated when Vincent is shown to provoke the attack and to have been drinking on the job. Consequently, the clarity of his judgement is implicitly called into question. In examples like this, Nicol and Hichens use a *noir* writing style to blur the lines of morality and draw the reader into a criminal matrix of people and their misdeeds, all swirling around the hot commodity of abalone in Cape Town.

The stakes of this messy story of criminality and grey morality escalate to more violent heights when Tommy takes out his lethal revenge on his other captor, fisheries department employee Sonny Furniss. Tommy reflects with notes of irony and sarcasm on Sonny's faith in people and his bravery in facing the crowds at a protest that quickly turns violent:

> Sonny the righteous. Put your hand in the hand of the man who stilled the water. What was amazing was that after all the killings there'd been, cops shooting perlemoen poachers, perlemoen poachers shooting cops, Inspector Furniss still came out alone. Like receiving a petition was not a big-deal situation. (2009: 32).

Soon enough, one of these vivid battles ensues. Tommy uses the natural escalation of anger in the protesting crowds to obscure the "job" he is there to do, waiting until after placards knock Sonny's clipboard out of his hand and the crowd begins to surge (2009: 33). Two children throw "bomb-bags" with petrol over Sonny, before "Someone tosse[s] a flame at Furniss. Tommy saw it in slow motion: this little streak of fire arcing over the heads. Whoosh. Furniss was a

furnace" (2009: 34). Sonny's murder is symbolic insofar as he is a representative of the fisheries conservation system and the heavily-policed abalone quotas. Sonny represents the environmental philosophy that underpins fortress conservation in South Africa too, with his appeals to "respect the sea. If you're going to take perlemoen like you're doing, you're going to kill it" (2009: 33). His gruesome, public death, filmed by a TV cameraman, infers the ineffectiveness and fragility of both the system of quota enforcement and of a simplistic understanding of ocean ethics, in which "quotas earn you a living" (*Ibid.)*. However, the brutal form that Tommy and Adonis' revenge takes is shocking and out of proportion to the role that Furniss played in the arrest. They even celebrate with glee in the aftermath – leering and chatting each other up while they get ready to party "All night long" (2009: 35). Supporting the image of poachers as vicious criminals, Tommy and Adonis find joy in watching Sonny burn to death.

The behaviour of Tommy and Adonis is clearly vicious, both in the sense of the cruelty that is demonstrated by choosing such a torturous death, and also in the sense that they act with vice. The pair's revenge demonstrates an entitled anger and greed to not only even the score for their arrest, but to go further and watch the inspector suffer, demonstrating a disrespect for the dignity of human life. McMullin articulates a deontic constraint for her virtue ethics, stating that by harming or killing another person you take away their ability to pursue their own personal life projects and their opportunity to seek a flourishing life. This is, of course, something Tommy and Adonis seem to have no concerns about. They are happy to coopt a public protest, in which a coastal community appeal unfair quotas that prevent them pursuing their own livelihoods, and use the protest to further their own violent goal of revenge.

Nicol and Hichens use the characters of Tommy and Adonis to portray what I call the greedy poacher story. In this narrative, illegal divers are portrayed as people who are motivated by selfish desires and

intentionally seek to harm the people around them. In this context, I understand greed as a harmful desire for something that is out of proportion to any need or deservingness for that thing. This image or trope of the greedy poacher enables the narrative to communicate an implicit (and sometimes explicit) assumption that abalone poaching is immoral because it stems from the possession of a greedy, vicious character. In this way, *Cape Greed* portrays the phenomenology of morality using ideas of vice and virtue.

### The greedy poacher

The theme of the greedy poacher in *Cape Greed* contributes to a narrative of ocean ethics in which the wrongness of poaching abalone is located within the corrupt character of those people who choose to poach. The image or trope of the greedy poacher is distinct from, but overlaps with, the legal moral narrative for why poaching is wrong on a deontological basis, because it is against the law and actions that are against the law undermine the shared moral contract within a society. This rests upon the assumption of self-interest in poachers that appears in the tragedy of the commons model. In this self-interested narrative, abalone poaching is wrong exactly because when individuals collect more abalone than their allotted quota, they undermine a collective sense of fairness by taking more than their share from a common resource. This is a consequentialist argument in which the locus of immorality lies within the impacts of the poachers' choice to take more than their allotment because that means there will, ultimately, not be enough for everyone. *Cape Greed's* narrative of greedy poachers represents morality in the public imaginary as operating through opposing notions of virtue and vice.

When presented with a reef full of abalone clustered together, Tommy calls the reef a "gift," implying that he believes the shellfish are there *for* him (or anyone else) to take. Tommy does not give anything to the sea in thanks for the gift of abalone he receives, however, and instead thinks in celebration about the monetary rewards he will receive from

extracting the abalone. He thinks to himself "All this perlemoen lying down there like money," demonstrating his view of abalone *as* money, and as a route to his own personal wealth (2009: 8). There is no indication that Tommy nor Adonis think about limits on how much abalone they should take or what the impact on the reef will be. Tommy collects "big ones the size of his hand because with Woo weight counted," which means he does not take the juvenile abalones, a practice that negatively impacts the replenishment of the species more significantly (2009: 9). However, the reason he only takes big ones is also because the abalone is so densely packed on this reef and because of the promise of financial reward, and not because he is trying to support the sustainability of the abalone species. Indeed, Tommy recalls their employer Jim Woo telling the two men to poach as much abalone as they can: "Whatever you can get I'll buy. Top rate" (2009: 8). With this job description and the incentive of significant earnings, the book does not give the sense that the two divers would hold back: "In three months they'd seen more money than they'd scored in three years pushing dagga and Mandrax tabs. Pearlies was hot stuff" (*Ibid.*). If they had complete freedom to dive without the police's anti-poaching efforts, the implication is that Tommy and Adonis would take as much abalone as they could "like money," seeing it as a shiny prize (*Ibid.*).

A preliminary outline of greed will aid my analysis of the characters Tommy and Adonis as greedy poachers. Philip Cafaro (2005) defines greed as one of four key ecological vices, which humans, in a global society, must seek to address and limit in order to develop a better relationship with nature and to avoid environmental destruction. Cafaro speaks from a largely US perspective, but the vices he formulates have been discussed within the traditions of virtue ethics in a European context since the ancient Greeks. Similar ideas of virtue and vice also exist within African and Asian traditions of ethics, so I will examine individual virtues and vices according to their relevance to the Cape Town context. Quoting the American Heritage Dictionary, Cafaro defines greed as "an excessive desire to acquire or possess more than

what one needs or deserves, especially with respect to material wealth," and then broadens this definition to include an extreme or excessive desire for any other thing (2005: 147). In order to prove that greed is a vice, and moreover an environmental vice, Cafaro goes on to argue that greed is a character trait that harms both the greedy person themselves, and also the people, society, and environment around them:

> [A]ny character trait, habit, intuition, or way of life that cannot be sustained indefinitely is vicious. Furthermore, any character trait, habit, intuition, or way of life whose current pursuit jeopardizes the well-being of others, now or in the future, is unjust. (2005: 152)

Hence, Cafaro presents an account of environmental vice that defines viciousness in terms of the sustainability of a behaviour and its negative impact on flourishing, individually and collectively. Now to examine how Tommy and Adonis' behaviour in *Cape Greed* lines up with this definition.

Cafaro's definition of greed as an excessive desire for more than what one needs in terms of material wealth is built into Tommy's character. Even his surname, "Fortune," spells out his motivations and the object of his desire: amassing wealth and flaunting this newly-earned fortune to all. This is clear from the passage above, in which Tommy sees abalone as money and eagerly extracts it, taking as much as he can in order to make greater profits than he could in his previous line of work selling drugs. Tommy's desire for abalone is a symptom of his exaggerated desire for wealth, which is emphasised in *Cape Greed* through Tommy's "branded threads," which his employer Woo examines with amusement:

> Clothes he'd bought him. The Animal pants, the Cockfighter T-shirt, Gravis flip-flops. Even the Ray-Bans he stuck in his hair. Bought because it amused Woo to see Tommy and his pal

> Adonis strutting about, figuring themselves for the hippest gangsters on the streets. (2009: 63).

Woo's amusement at Tommy and Adonis' pride in their labelled apparel is condescending because what feels like significant wealth to the poachers is in fact negligible for Woo, who prefers high-class demonstrations of wealth, like cigars and expensive wines from his own personal wine farm. Here Tommy enjoys the opportunity to indulge in the spoils of his wealth by showing off his new clothes and accessories. References to these aesthetic tags are repeated during the novel from the perspective of Tommy and other characters, which reinforces the importance of a particular luxury gangster aesthetic to Tommy as a character, and further demonstrates that this is comprehensively viewed as a form of indulgent excess. Tommy's "false front teeth inlaid with emeralds" are his greatest source of pride and are a symbolic cornerstone of the pride in his curated appearance, one that is over-indulgent to the point that it becomes offensive to others (2009: 32). Tommy loves to grin and flash his emerald-encrusted teeth at victims as part of an intimidation strategy, a move that undermines any attempt at criminal stealth by ensuring strangers will not only recognise but remember him in their horror flashbacks, if he decides to let them live. This obnoxious attitude to flaunting wealth and the associated rich boy aesthetic combine to create a stereotypical up-and-coming gangster image that people can readily associate with criminals, and especially in with abalone poachers in Cape Town.

Tommy's yearning to show off emblems of his fortune is a core part of his character in the novel, and it represents much of what he finds satisfaction in. For instance, he bullishly speeds down the fast lane in his expensive BMW – another luxury purchase – without concern for the safety of others; "Tommy ran the needle to one-fifty … The Beemer a dream in a tailgate situation … Everyone got the message, the fast lane was his" (2009: 31). Tommy identifies so strongly with his abalone-earned wealth that he cuts himself off from his family and community

because he is embarrassed by their inferior lifestyles, judging even his partner Adonis for living in the Muslim quarter when he could afford a Sea Point flat, and rejecting any kind of relationship with his own mother. Instead, Tommy develops a surrogate relationship with an elderly lady in his building, Mrs Kaplan, who he considers to be a peer in a more appropriate socio-economic bracket. He even expresses the wish that "things would be different" if his own mother could be more like the "cool broad selling on his pearlies to her mates" across the hall, showing that Tommy perceives Mrs Kaplan to be similarly aligned in terms of her morals because she is also willing to hustle abalone as an illicit commodity (2009: 102). Hence, Tommy engages in – and admires the image of – the consumer.

This epitomises greed for Dominika Dzwonkowska, who specifically discusses the vice in relation to consumerism, focusing on shopping culture and leisure in the West (2013: 69-70). She writes:

> [W]e see *homo consumens*, who is trapped in a vicious circle of unlimited desires, and who after satisfying one desire discovers new ones, thus incessantly following the desires. These desires do not serve a vital need, but are a means to present the higher status of consumers, their social status. (Dzwonkowska: 70).

This definition of greed aligns with Cafaro's definition of an intense and unquenchable desire for *something*, and brings greed into the context of global consumer culture. Dzwonkowska comments that the existence of greedy societies "with such a high consumption factor" leads to excessive consumption of resources and the associated high levels of waste of these resources. Indeed, Tommy's desire for wealth represents the symptom of an unsustainable habit of consumption, and draws one's attention to the harmful – and therefore *vicious* by Cafaro's definition – ecological impacts of excessive consumption and fast fashion. Abalone is a pertinent example of global consumer culture. Mullet acknowledges that "Smuggling abalone was a better deal than smuggling diamonds," a comparison that is lived out in the character of

David Welsh, an ex-diamond diver-turned-abalone farmer because of the higher profits up for grabs (2009: 25, 73). As a commodity with extremely high monetary value, abalone markets are oriented towards wealthy buyers who can afford to buy the shellfish despite the unreasonable prices, simply because it is symbolic of excess and therefore of high status. Vincent comments on abalone's unjustifiable value to Mullet in the first few pages of *Cape Greed*, "Street value in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taipei about twenty US apiece. What you're looking at here is more'n my annual salary. You wonder guys are killing for the stuff?" (2009: 6). Abalone has only increased in value in the seventeen years since the novel was first published, with de Greef and Haysom listing it as rising to $63 USD per kilogram in 2020 (2022). For the reader the status of being an abalone poacher, and being able to peddle in such rare and expensive goods, makes up a crucial part of Tommy's self-satisfied, greedy image.[24]

Adonis also demonstrates an excessive desire for fast fashion like Tommy, with his feminine "pale blue jacket with fur on the cuffs and collar" criticised by multiple characters during the novel (2009: 33). However, Adonis' greed is epitomised in his drug-taking habit. Setting expectations for the character early on, Tommy calls Adonis a "drug addict" when he asks Tommy for a "hit" in the morning, suggesting his substance dependency (2009: 100). The pair's shared addiction is then revealed when Tommy joins Adonis in taking "snow and a couple of buttons … doing a line each in the car, laying them down on the dashboard with Tommy's flick knife," demonstrating the hypocrisy in Tommy's critique of Adonis' habit (*Ibid.*). Adonis' drug-taking is shown to be unsustainable, and especially harmful to himself and Tommy,

[24] The constant demand for abalone despite such high prices is guaranteed because the shellfish functions as a symbol of status in Chinese and Taiwanese culture. The place that abalone has on luxury dinner tables in Taiwan is shown when Woo visits the Brotherhood in Taipei: Jim Too represents this Eastern desire for abalone with his favourite menu choice being abalone, "food for the dragon" (2009: 28). I discuss the international context of the commodity and consumer culture around abalone later in the chapter.

when the two men's payment from employer Woo is delayed by a few days. Adonis experiences acute symptoms of withdrawal and the need for a fix drives the pair to hurt themselves and each other. Tommy watches as "Adonis jiggered about the room, a cigarette in each hand. Like a drama queen deluxe" (2009: 175). When Tommy reminds him that their payment has been delayed to Friday, Adonis will not accept it, lunging at Tommy for telling him the bad news "with both cigarettes. He was sobbing. 'We gotta get our money'" (*Ibid.*). The two clash violently and Adonis comes away from the encounter with burns from Tommy's lighter (*Ibid.*). Adonis' despair persists despite the fact that Tommy has prepared a Mandrax pill concoction, and when Tommy hands it to Adonis he replies "blubbing, 'I gotta have it. I gotta have it'" his words expressing the insistent craving of addiction and the pain he experiences in moments when he cannot sustain his habit (*Ibid.*). Tommy admits he is also feeling the withdrawal: "He had the sweats and nausea himself. No way was he going to last till Friday without a solid hit of smack" (2009: 175-6). Evidently, Tommy and Adonis' drug addiction is unsustainable and harms them, physically and emotionally.

Cafaro writes that greed also causes people to focus too intently on first-person concerns (2005: 147). This means that greed encourages people to fail in their efforts to balance normative responsibilities across all of the three, equally important, spheres of moral concern that McMullin outlines. He says that greed is the most "selfish-making" vice and that it restricts individuals from being generous or responsive to the demands of justice (*Ibid.*). In Tommy's case, his desires for riches and revenge give him an aggrandised sense of self, with "everything going his way what with Mister Forking Woo paying up major bucks" (2009: 31). Tommy is frequently described ironically as "the main man," with Vincent mocking his "BMW" and "Snappy threads," and Woo also scorning his confidence, "Tommy Fortune oozing I'm the man, look at me" (2009: 11, 30). Moreover, as Cafaro warns, Tommy's over-inflated ego leads him to harm the people around him, his environment, and

ultimately himself. This is most evident in Tommy and Adonis' relationship.

Tommy and Adonis' intimate, and at times romantic, relationship is also clearly an abusive one. Despite the fact that Adonis is the only character who seems to care for Tommy and accept him for who he is, Tommy constantly mocks Adonis and plays games of control with him. He lashes out at Adonis verbally and physically when he is late for the heist – "I'm pissed off with you girlfriend," he spits out, shoving Adonis against a tank – and also physically attacks Adonis when he is suffering withdrawal symptoms (2009: 150). With a lighter in his hand, Tommy's hit "scorched across Adonis' arm. The guy went down on the floor, howling, curling into a foetal position," and in response Tommy sits back and takes a "long drag," ignoring his partner's distressed behaviour (2009: 175). These violent outbursts are not returned by Adonis to Tommy, and Tommy's frequent demonstration of his temper serves as a coercive force of intimidation in their relationship that keeps Adonis under Tommy's influence. Tommy's ego is further demonstrated when he unenthusiastically visits his mother after a friend suggests that she's not well, retorting that "she better be dying" for him to go (2009: 102). Despite his mother's exasperation with his behaviour and her suggestion that things are difficult, Tommy only shouts at her for not being "sick" and for taking down his school picture. He is solely focused on the pride that this picture of him with a medal previously afforded him, and neglects to care about the loss of his relationship with his mother or listen to her pleas that he "Turn to Jesus" and pursue a more virtuous path (*Ibid.*).

Greed prevents people from leading flourishing lives because its excessive nature is out of proportion to reality. So, it can leave people constantly unsatisfied with their situations because of an "insatiable longing that actual possession cannot slake" whereby one desires more than one needs, meaning that desire continues despite acquiring the things that were the object of the desire (Cafaro 2005: 147). Tommy's

unsatisfiable need to take from others is shown in a scene where he steals from his neighbour Mrs Kaplan, under the guise of needing medication. The elderly lady sees through his plan and asks him "What's it you really want, Tommy? Money? For drugs? … You think I don't know?" (2009: 180). As a former nurse, Mrs Kaplan sniffs out Tommy's plan and takes pity on him, finding a roll of notes from her bedside drawer and generously offering them to Tommy, who promises to pay her back in abalone. In comparison to most other characters in the novel, Tommy has a relatively high opinion of the elderly lady across the hall. Despite this, Tommy keeps the stolen valuable he has stashed in his hand, a "solid brass" paperweight "with strange lettering," taking more than he needs from Mrs Kaplan and disrespecting her expression of virtue and neighbourly generosity (2009: 179-180).

*Cape Greed* thus portrays a *prima facie* greedy poacher narrative through the characters of Tommy and Adonis who are hyper-visibly greedy – almost *ad nauseum* – and who, as divers, are the most visible type of poacher. This archetypal image of divers as greedy gangsters is clearly one that is present in the public imaginary, an image that people conjure up when they think of poachers and the kind of vicious motivations that drive their actions. Thus, Tommy and Adonis' longing for riches and their fast-paced drug-fuelled lifestyle, all driven by selfish and unfettered desire for money, clothes, and substances, fulfils expectations within the public imaginary for the kind of low-level vicious criminals that fit right into a gritty crime fiction novel.

Taking a short departure from analysing *Cape Greed*, I want to demonstrate the continuing contemporary relevance of the greedy poacher in narratives and the public imaginary. To show this I briefly turn to contemporary graphic novel *Pearl of the Sea* (Silverston *et al*. 2023). In this comic, a teenage girl encounters an aggressive group of abalone divers while diving for crayfish, who steal her haul before getting chased by the police. Protagonist Pearl shouts "Poachers!!"

when she sees the divers speeding over in their boat. Two nets full of abalone, with a recognisable swirl shape on their shells, make the three illicit divers clearly recognisable as abalone poachers (2023: 8-9). The police soon follow in chase of the poachers, as Pearl watches them race by (2023: 10). The poacher characters are shown to be lazy, with one shouted at by his boss for "slacking off!?" on his packing job at a local fish factory, then telling him that he is "lucky to have a job in this town" (2023: 19). The story is set in a poor neighbourhood, and the reason that Pearl dives for crayfish is because her father struggles to find work as a chef to support their household. Mindful of their need for money and food, Pearl strikes up a deal with the poachers in which she agrees to search an off-limits wreckage site where she has seen abalone (2023: 9). Later on, Pearl rejects her arrangement with the poachers when she befriends an enormous tentacled creature, Otto, who helps her catch more fish than she needs, giving her a legal way to provide for her household. The two abalone divers show jealousy at seeing Pearl's bounty, and convey a threatening and imposing attitude when they ask to see her "secret spot," commenting that "we'll have to keep an eye on her" when she refuses (2023: 94-95). Cementing the impression that they are greedy characters, Pearl comments "Ugh, those guys. They'd do anything for a quick buck" (2023: 95).

The graphic novel escalates the lengths to which the poachers are willing to go to for a profit in an action-packed scene where they team up with an angry old fisherman to hunt the leviathan-like creature Otto, planning to sell "that beast" to "the highest bidder" (2023: 129). However, Pearl rescues Otto, and when the old fisherman's wheelchair gets broken during the fight, he is saved by creature. The fisherman is so grateful that he experiences an instantaneous moral transformation in which he goes from seeing creature as a monster to be hunted to a saviour to be praised (2023: 152). However, the two poachers are not shown again, suggesting they escape on their large boat and maintain their greedy and vicious characters lifestyles (2023: 141-152). *Pearl of the Sea* is situated within a socio-economic narrative that describes the

haves, have nots, and those who want more than they need, but also within a narrative of ocean ethics that seeks to provide moral exemplars for human-ocean relationality. Despite the fact this narrative has a radically different genre and target reading group to *Cape Greed*, the image of divers as greedy poachers persists strongly.

## 2: A wider exploration of vice

Depictions of the greedy poacher in *Cape Greed* do not only focus on the vice of greed, however, but suggest a person of wholly vicious character. The novel portrays the illegal actions of the poachers as illegal, as wrong, and shows how these actions stem from a certain kind of person, with a particular character, values, or lifestyle. Because of this, the reader slides from being offended by Tommy and Adonis' irresponsible abalone poaching actions to being offended by their vicious characters as a whole, and there is an implicit suggestion that abalone poachers are a certain kind of bad person. This is shown especially well through the scenes in which the two poachers take joy in inflicting harm on others, something which is separate from and supplementary to their greed for money and clothes.

### From greedy poacher to all-round vicious character

Apart from the fiery murder of Sonny Furnace, Tommy and Adonis' lust for violence is also evident in a scene where the two men and Tommy's cousin Delmont seize a freezer truck full of abalone. Tommy and Adonis indulge in a gratuitous display of violence against the truck drivers, taking enjoyment in making the two Xhosa men feel emotionally and physically uncomfortable as the poachers force them to stand "legs spread, arms high against the truck," and intimidate them, by prodding and poking them with guns "into the guard's balls" and "into the driver's pot belly" (2009: 114, 115). In a string of racialised quips and slurs, Tommy mirrors the violently provocative actions of Vincent in the first arrest scene of *Cape Greed*, incessantly insulting the driver and the guard as if this gives him a sense of self-satisfaction. When the driver tells the men to "take the lorry" and asks them to spare his life for his

children's sake, the poachers laugh and mock traditional Xhosa family arrangements with lots of children: "To prove you a man. Different mamas I imagine. Like you don't know about AIDS" (2004: 114). Delmont gets tired of the taunting at the men's expense and tells Tommy they should go, but Tommy resists and continues harassing the two strangers, forcing them to strip naked. Delmont asks "What are you doing?" in exasperation at his cousin's apparent need to assert his dominance despite the increasing risk of them being seen or arrested the longer they stay (2009: 115). Tommy and Adonis continue to work as a pair to draw out the hijacking encounter and to cause the driver and guard as much discomfort as possible before they end their lives.

The pair's self-satisfied enjoyment in inflicting violence on innocent strangers conveys a vicious form of arrogance and related lack of care for other people. When the guard asks "Are you going to shoot us?" Tommy smiles and says slyly "We kindly types," suggesting he will refrain from unnecessary violence. Yet still he draws out the encounter. Finally, Delmont intervenes for the third time and reminds Tommy of the job: "We got the truck. Let's go. Let's get outta here. You don't want to corpse them, Tommy" (Ibid.). Despite these pleas, and the already-extended scene of humiliation and torture, Tommy and Adonis "sniggered" at leaving the two men naked by the side of the road, proceeding to shoot them anyway with "another run of Beethoven" to cover up the noise (Ibid.). Tommy and Adonis are greedy, gluttonous in their need to assert control and enjoyment of causing others pain. These vices of greed and gluttony work together to compound each other and to demonstrate an all-round image of vicious character.

As evidenced so far, greed is a character trait that encourages people to focus on themselves. It makes them selfish and stops them from caring about the needs of others. In McMullin's terms, I could describe greed as a vice that unbalances normative claims to caring and justice in favour of personal striving alone, so much so that greed encourages an active neglect of second- and third-person responsibilities. Being

greedy also invites an inauthentic pursuit of personal striving because it encourages a misalignment of self with world through its exaggeration of needs and desires that become out of proportion with reality. McMullin writes that a person is always able to take multiple "stances" on themselves: in the first-person stance, "we are oriented toward the task of individual self-becoming and hence more focused on the ideal" (2021: 190). Such a stance encourages people to see themselves in terms of who they want to be and to judge situations based on their own personal desires, which can become exaggerated. This first-person idealistic view is usually tempered by the experience of other peoples' moral claims on one, and also importantly by the third-person perspective, in which:

> [H]uman beings can understand themselves as public objects defined by various third-personally ascribable facts … [with] all the concrete contours of one's situation – including the existing social roles and norms that one does not create but to which one must nevertheless respond (*Ibid.*).

This third-person viewpoint allows one to see oneself in terms of shared understandings of things. Things like how much money one needs to be happy, the impact of poaching on ocean ecosystems, and the ways that violence harms others. To embrace greed in the way that Tommy and Adonis do in *Cape Greed* requires an outright rejection of these shared understandings of the world and of the moral and material needs of the people around them, in favour of an individualistic and idealised view of themselves.

This philosophy of an individualistic approach to success and flourishing encourages not only greed but a cluster of characteristics that relate to self-interested and inward-looking behaviour, including other environmental vices that Cafaro highlights like gluttony, arrogance, and apathy, whilst Dzwonkowska also mentions egoism or pride (2005, 2013). Rosalind Hursthouse writes that vices often cluster or aggravate other vices, even if they do not "form a unity:"

> The old, familiar, vices of pride and vanity make us unwilling to acknowledge our greed, self-indulgence, short-sightedness, and lack of compassion; dishonesty, exercised in the form of self-deception, enables us to blind ourselves to relevant facts and arguments and find excuses for continuing as we are (think of the people who are still pretending that global warming isn't happening): cowardice makes us unwilling to go out on a limb and risk the contempt of our peers by propounding unpopular views, and so on. (Hursthouse 2007: 157).

Many of the vices Hursthouse mentions above as influences on or accelerants to other vices operate along individualistic lines, causing people to look inwards and indulge the self, or to disrupt their lines of communication with other people and their relationships to the external world. Hursthouse is speaking specifically about environmental disaster here, however her point about vices clustering applies in equal measure to social and economic manifestations of vicious behaviour.

In the context of South Africa's extremely high rates of violence against women, the scene where Tommy and Adonis sexually assault Rae-Anne further cements their characters as wholly vicious and willing to transgress fundamental principles of ethics.[25] This breaks McMullin's minimal deontic constraints for a person to be able live virtuously, particularly in relation to interpersonal ethics. McMullin writes that "to be minimally moved by the second-person claims of others is to feel oneself obligated not to engage in gross moral violations such as torture, rape, brainwashing, or murder. These prohibitions specify the lowest common denominator for moral decency" (2021: 100). The

[25] The narrativisation of sexual assault alongside other forms of physical violence reflects the high incidence of violence against women in South Africa. 10,818 rape cases were reported in the first quarter of 2022 and the country has the highest rape incidence in the world (Gouws 2022). See Du Toit and Gouws for examinations of these exceptionally high levels of gender-based violence in South Africa (2014, 2022).

assault happens after Mullet attracts Tommy's attention when Mullet neglects to pass on information about Tommy's whereabouts to the police. As a result, Tommy and Adonis find Rae-Anne at Mullet's house on the day the couple were set to move in together. This context emphasises Rae-Anne's symbolic domesticity in the novel, with meals as "ritual" and her push for Mullet to commit to their relationship by moving in together (2009: 59). The poachers destroy the fragile yet growing sense of belonging for the couple by wrecking their apartment and torturing Rae-Anne. In this scene, their wholly vicious characters are also directly contrasted with the relatively virtuous character of Rae-Anne and her attempts to build a happy and authentic life together with Mullet. Later, in hospital, Rae-Anne tells Mullet "You couldn't have done a better thing" in reference to him eventually ending the lives of Tommy and Adonis. This further bolsters the impression that Tommy and Adonis are irretrievably morally corrupt if Rae-Anne, herself a reformed heroin addict, considers them not worth saving or rehabilitating (2009: 288).

There is also a comprehensive sense of vice that comes from the fact that Tommy and Adonis are involved in almost every scene of violence in the novel. This holds from the very first arrest scene where both Vincent and Tommy attack each other to the assault scene involving Rae-Anne at the end. The proliferation of violence around the two poachers throughout the course of the novel generates a sense that these men are invested in a violent and dangerous lifestyle, and signals that their appetite for the feeling of authority over others that comes from asserting one's dominance through physical force. Indeed, as Tommy drives through his old neighbourhood of Lavender Hill with blacked out windows he enjoys the "reek of fear" that emanates from people on the street, stopping what they are doing out of fear a shooting could be about to happen (2009: 103). The greedy poacher narrative thus contains an implication of not only greed but a comprehensively vicious character.

The representation of Tommy and Adonis as greedy and wholly vicious also feeds into archetypal expectations for criminals in a crime fiction novel. Christiana Gregoriou suggests there are three significant and preferred criminal archetypes within crime fiction: the monster, the vampire, and the spoilt child (2000: 169). Monsters are cold and evil in their very nature, vampires commit evil actions because they have been transformed into something monstrous (e.g., trauma), and spoilt children are not born or made into criminals, but simply enjoy indulging in criminal behaviour (*Ibid.*). The first of these archetypes is suited to a genre that depicts monstrosity within humanity but it is less helpful in representing the way that vicious and criminal behaviour actually emerges as a combination of nature and nurture.[26] The monster archetype also serves to create exclusionary narratives in which otherness can be imbued with an essential kind of deviant monstrosity which reinforces distance based on racial, national, physical, or psychological difference (Gregoriou 2000: 175). This kind of monstrous otherness is clear in the character of Woo, who I examine more closely in Section 3. The second two archetypes of the vampire and spoilt child make sense within a virtue ethics framework, however. Vampires describe people who have had poor moral luck in which difficult circumstances have led them to rely on harmful behaviours to be able to cope with their situation. Spoilt children represent people who fail to live up to their moral responsibilities and have aligned themselves with poor role models who reinforce an enjoyment of harmful behaviours. Both vampires and spoilt children represent a failure to live up to an authentically relational ethics. However, the vampire archetype can to some extent represent the systemic elements of disadvantage that lead

[26] Research suggests that people are not innately antisocial, but that any harmful psychological predispositions are brought out or reinforced through environmental factors, for example a lack of positive developmental support (Beaver 2008, Longe 2022). See, for example, discussions of the negative impacts of gender stereotypes with masculinity as "tough" and "manly," and the associated lack of parental and cultural support to address harmful behaviours or poor mental health where these are seen as "normal" for boys or men (hooks 2015, Caraballo 2023).

a person to fail their responsibilities to other people in order to survive in a situation where they are practically limited.

Tommy and Adonis fit neatly into the category of the spoilt child insofar as they gleefully indulge in vicious acts against others "because they like it" and "refuse to take responsibility" for their actions (Gregoriou 2000: 169). Given their upbringing in the highly deprived Cape Flats, *Cape Greed* fails to explore the impact of poor moral luck and the way that growing up as boys in poverty and in a violent environment could have contributed to Tommy and Adonis' identities and life choices. There is a small attempt at this in the character of Delmont, who is from the same area of Lavender Hill but who has not embraced a life of criminality. Delmont joins the heist with Tommy and Adonis because he is saving up for his wedding; because he has no other way of affording it otherwise due to his situation. Moreover, he shows restraint on more than one occasion when he criticises Tommy's enjoyment of the criminal lifestyle. Delmont is only engaging in criminal work while he tries to find honest employment doing building work, and seeks to create a more virtuous life for himself and his partner in the future. Despite being a criminal character, Delmont fits better into the role of the unwilling vampire, who must commit acts of criminality to survive. Few lines are dedicated to Delmont however, and he is not shown actively diving for abalone, meaning that readers must focus on the excessively (and perhaps unrealistically) vicious behaviour of poachers Tommy and Adonis. In doing so, the novel really leans into a greedy poacher narrative using archetypes of criminality in which gangs of abalone poachers are seen as wholly vicious. Even as a crime fiction novel, the poacher characters are reductionist and unrealistically vicious, perhaps demonstrating how easy it is for writers to lean into the greedy poacher stereotype, particularly writing in 2006 when the novel came out.

It is evident here how narratives of criminality like the greedy poacher are actively racialised and how vice is conceptually bound up with a

specific demographic of people in Cape Town, which Nicol and Hichens make use of when they use the image of the greedy poacher to create characterisations of vicious criminals.[27] When Vincent watches Tommy and Adonis carrying out the heist on Sea Farm with Delmont, he describes such a spectacle. While Tommy barks orders at his companions, Adonis stands out in his fluffy jacket and makes Mullet look twice; "Any other time Vincent would've sworn the guy was a girl. Down to wearing a fur-collared jacket. Except the way he minced had queen writ large. A bloody queer!" (2009: 148). In this scene and in others, Adonis' queer sexuality is highlighted as a source of curiosity and disgust. Tommy and Adonis move between speaking in the distinctive English and Afrikaans dialect of Cape Coloured communities. Tommy shouts "Fork you" and then "Jou ma se poes" at Adonis, before "Mr Shooter hit the homo guy across the head with the gin. A one-blow pistol whip" before the two get into a tussle and Adonis is "pummelling at Mr Shooter's chest with both fists" (2009: 149-150). It is abundantly clear from the way that Nicol and Hichens depict villains and other characters in *Cape Greed* that the image of abalone poachers as vicious people creates a core part of the way ethics is imagined in this narrative.

In the next section, I discuss how the culture of greed and individualism is depicted as infecting the whole of the Cape in *Cape Greed*, and the systemic and pervasive issues the novel points to demonstrate a fundamental complexity in discussions about ocean ethics.

## 3: Complexity in ocean ethics

### Culture of greed

Like a disease or pandemic, the culture of vice infects Cape Town and *Cape Greed's* characters to different extents. This theme emerges from the *noir* genre of storytelling but may also infer the systemic and

[27] In personal correspondence with me, Hichens confirmed that she wanted to represent certain highly visible gangs in Cape Town through the novel.

discursive nature of complex ethical issues like abalone poaching. *Cape Greed* also suggests that vice seeps further, from the Cape across the Indian ocean to Taiwan.

Cafaro highlights how greed can accentuate the gap between wealthy and poor, one way in which it spreads. Judith, Roger, and Marina – the so-called clients that give Mullet and Vincent their investigative assignments – represent the white affluent part of Cape Town. Mullet works with Judith Oxford, "a Brit" with "blue eyes that didn't look away but went at your eyes like lasers," to investigate the alleged illicit affairs of her husband Roger Oxford, a financial investment "magician" (2009: 14, 268). Meanwhile Vincent investigates a robbery for client Marina Welsh, an attorney who Vincent finds "alluring" with her dimpled smile (2009: 67). Marina hires Vincent to act in a surveillance capacity at Sea Farm, the abalone cultivation business that she co-owns with her brother David Welsh, who is himself an ex-diamond diver with a "Jesus beard, sandy hair" and a minimalist approach to security on his abalone farm (2009: 68). Each of these three characters is connected to the wealthy businessman Woo, and all four of them are infected with the greedy virus, motivated by increasingly selfish plots for financial and personal gain.

By contrast, Tommy previously lived in the deprived Cape Flats area, much more humble beginnings than other wealthy characters. Despite this, he does not use his money to support a family or invest back in his community. This means that, despite his roots, Tommy also becomes complicit, like wealthy characters Woo and Judith, in "fuelling envy in the poor and vanity in the rich, and undermining the social bonds necessary for a happy society" (Cafaro 2005: 148). Given that South Africa has the highest wealth inequality in the world, with the top 1% of earners taking home almost 20% of income and the top 10% taking home 65%, it is apt to describe the Cape as greedy (World Population Review 2023). Racialised and gendered distributions of wealth and privilege play a role in this, as well as the culture of individualism and

egoistic vices that maintain the capitalist economic status quo.[28] Inequality and the capitalistic system of wealth accumulation are key drivers in unhealthy relationships to money. This culture of greed that affects people like Tommy from poor backgrounds, along with people like Woo from seemingly wealthier ones.

Louke van Wensveen writes that greed, the fifth Deadly Sin of Christian theology and touchstone vice for much ethics discourse since, is a "major concern" in eco-literature, with "socially aware authors" noting greed's propensity to "enhance economic and political inequities, which, in turn, can harm the environment" (2000: 101). She goes on to say that greed *qua* consumerism involves consumption for its own sake. This, van Wensveen echoes Wendell Berry in saying, is contrary to nature because it involves unnatural concepts of using things up, waste, and disposability (*Ibid.*). Van Wensveen also highlights that greedy consumerism has "deeper roots in alienation, insecurity, loss of the ability to provide basic necessities at a local level, as well as larger structural problems" (*Ibid.*). *Cape Greed* demonstrates these lines of inequality and racialised systems of inequality within South Africa. More broadly, though, it shows how these structures extend across the ocean to China and Taiwan. These systems of inequality create a landscape of ethical complexity within which practical questions about living well and relating well to the ocean become more difficult.

A capitalist system encourages people to focus on themselves instead of how they might help others who have less, or how they might help with ocean flourishing. Val Plumwood links this sort of individualistic egoism to a masculinised philosophy of the self as economic subject, defined by his separateness. Relatedly, she highlights how feminist philosophies focus more productively on relations of care and

[28] The World Bank also writes that "High inequality is perpetuated by a legacy of exclusion and the nature of economic growth, which is not pro-poor and does not generate sufficient jobs. Inequality in wealth is even higher, and intergenerational mobility is low, meaning inequalities are passed down from generation to generation with little change over time." (2023)

friendship with nature and other people, and how these relations enable ethical responses to the world (1993: 141-145). This should not be confused with an essentialist statement about women as inherently caring, nor men as universally autonomous.[29] Incidentally, Val Plumwood links a masculin*ised* relationship to nature with a rights-based approach to thinking about environmental ethics:

> Rights seem to have acquired an exaggerated importance in ethics as part of the prestige of the public sphere and the masculine, and the emphasis on separation and autonomy, on reason and abstraction. A more promising approach for an ethic of nature, and also one much more in line with the current directions in feminism, would be to remove rights from the centre of the moral stage and pay more attention to some other less universalistic moral concepts such as respect, sympathy, care, concern, compassion, gratitude, friendship and responsibility. (1993: 173)

Both feminist and environmental justice literatures have linked the systemic inequality of wealth to racialised and gendered harms against nature, especially in the Global South. Plumwood suggests in this quote that rights-based narratives of ethics emerge from an individualistic way of seeing people as separate and autonomous, and from a moral approach that relies on universalizable and abstractable principles. Importantly, she highlights that both of these approaches have also been traditionally masculinised. This way of seeing the world tends to

[29] Trish Glazebrook's findings following ten years of field work in Ghana working with subsistence farmers elucidate the material circumstances that give rise to these patterns and the philosophies that have informed them: "Women's care practices promote cooperation because many *women are already so over-worked that sharing responsibilities is a benefit*, while valuing well-being above profit safeguards precious, limited resources ... Women's agriculture and knowledge systems offer a new beginning for understanding nature and human possibilities for dwelling. These possibilities are *alternative economics aimed not at the individual accumulation of private wealth*" (2019: 441, emphasis added). Hence, women's caring work arises "relationally in their work," and contrasts with the individualist philosophy of capitalism.

readily separate people from oceans and their natural environment, contributing to a bad faith abstraction of moral agents from the world in which they seek to find a sense of fit and to flourish. Although rights have afforded people fundamental protections and help to dictate a moral minimum standard, Plumwood indicates in her statement that individuals' ethical connections and responsibilities to nature are fundamentally at odds with a rights-based framing that relies on seeing people as individual separate units. A more relational view of the world can help people overcome this limitation on an ontological level whilst more subjective, local concepts of virtue (that have traditionally been seen as feminine) can help them to find practical and practicable ways of looking after oceans within their relevant cultural and ecological context.

*Cape Greed* hosts a largely masculine cast of characters that demonstrate exaggerated desire and greed – for abalone as a commodity, and also as a libido enhancer. Profiteering businessman Jim Woo serves as an especially good example of how greed and a masculinised desire for superiority tie together in *Cape Greed*. Vincent first meets Woo at Sea Farm, where Marina introduces him as the investor in her brother's abalone farming business. Woo sees himself as a grand puppeteer, secretly pulling the strings of other characters to bring Vincent and Mullet into his deadly plot of deceit and desire. In another scene, Judith thinks to herself that the Taiwanese businessman is "Mr Completely Untrustworthy" while he tells her that "Everything we do is a game" (2009: 29). One of these games involves Woo's employees, the poachers Tommy and Adonis, who Woo sets up, with the help of his hired muscle Afrikaner Arno Loots, to burglarise Sea Farm at the same time that Vincent is running surveillance on the robbery, simultaneously bringing the old enemies together and cashing out on the insurance at his own abalone farm. Woo also actively encourages Tommy's revenge mission on the men responsible for his arrest. By plotting to bring Tommy and Vincent together, Woo provokes both Tommy and Vincent to pursue each other once more,

inciting their mirrored lust for revenge. All of Woo's games involve a financial payoff for him at the end; he enjoys the trickery because it flatters his ego but also because he exploits every opportunity possible to grow his personal wealth at the expense of others.

On multiple occasions, Woo references the belief that eating abalone can enhance male libido. Woo chooses to order abalone as "Food for the dragon" during his meal with Judith, and later speculates that the abalone was "pumping up his juices" before getting into bed with Marina (2009: 29, 37). Associations between abalone and increased libido show how oceanic exploitation – along with the exploitation of nature more broadly – is connected to the gendered desire for a masculine sense of power and dominion. Woo also disapproves of Judith for "dominating her husband," which further demonstrates his investment in a philosophy of egoist masculine domination over women, nature, and abalone (2009: 30). Adonis also refers to Rae-Anne as a "Pretty chick for a hotnot," highlighting Rae-Anne's Coloured and potentially Indigenous ancestry. Specifically, he brings up the history of exploitation of the "Venus Hottentot," Sara or "Saartjie" Baartman who was an indigenous Khoisan woman and who was "instrumentalized and dehumanized" for the distinctive appearance of her African body in life and in death (Nicol & Hichens 2009: 278; Boni 2019: 49; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991).[30] The fact that Adonis' comment directly precedes his and Tommy's physical attack on Rae-Anne further inscribes the masculinised, greedy desire for dominion and control over feminised bodies of African women and nature.

[30] "Khoisan" is an umbrella term for the San, Griqua, Cape Khoi, Nama, and Korana (Verbuyst 2016: 94). The term has been criticised as being offensive due to its colonial and racist origins which compared the appearance of Khoikhoi pastoralists and San hunter-gatherers (*Ibid.*). However, the term is still used widely by Indigenous South Africans who self-identify as Khoisan and by academics – see, for example, Khoisan scholar and activist June Bam's work (2014). I follow Rafael Verbuyst in using the term Khoisan in response to Indigenous activists self-identifying in this way (2016: 94)

## Noir messy morality

Charne Lavery writes about *Cape Greed* as one of a selection of crime fiction texts that situate South Africa in relation to the ocean, and more specifically as part of the Indian Ocean World. Her focus is on things that are hidden, and within this space she is interested in the connections and flows across the Indian Ocean that are driven by invisible criminal activity (2016: 545). Lavery is interested that the oceanic connection between Cape Town and Taiwan in *Cape Greed* is made through abalone:

> … which constitutes a particularly powerful symbol of oceanic submersion: a mollusc that grows along one coastline – which forms the outer western limit of the Indian Ocean world – and is prized at its furthest eastern edge; also, an invisible commodity that must be drawn up into the light in order to be converted to value. (Lavery 2016: 547)

The image of divers delving into the darkness of the ocean to bring up shellfish to the light, soon to be funnelled back into shadowy and invisible trade networks is aesthetically apt for the subject of *noir,* with its dark and shadowy themes of vice. Aptly, each of *Cape Greed*'s characters effects an assemblage of virtue and vice with abalone tightly wound up in the middle.

Like the hard-boiled detective that classically epitomises *noir* fiction, the book's characters contain multiple positionalities, vulnerabilities, and moral dimensions. All of these characters are implicated and ensnared in a knotty web of desire – like a rough fishing net, the detectives themselves and the police, supposedly representations of justice, are bigoted and misogynistic. They encourage the reader to question the *de facto* perspectives of so-called right and wrong, detective and criminal, by showing these two to be embroiled in each other's worlds, motives, and vices, through a murky in-between. Mullet, for example, laughs at his police friends' racist jokes, revelling in a sense of superiority that derives from exploitation and abuse, one that

"Human rights guys will pull your nails out for" (2009: 43). He also describes women in derogatory terms based on their appearance whilst articulating misogynistic, entitled assumptions of superiority over his partner, cursing himself for being "a weak bastard" who "let[s] women walk all over you. They move in, they deball you, simple as that" (2009: 232). These vicious characteristics and habits are narrated as rough threads that pervade the whole weave, such that even the more virtuous characters are still so far from perfect.

Abalone divers as "poachers" are one symptom of the greedy disease that is visible in *Cape Greed*, but so are power-hungry businessmen, destitute street children, and corrupt police officers who think they should be empowered to deliver justice in whatever form they see fit. As Mullet says after his first consultation with wealthy Judith Oxford, "what they did in the leafy suburbs was what they did in the slums … if stuff went too far you ended up the same kind of dead" (2009: 17). In this way, *Cape Greed* expands the greedy poacher narrative to describe a wider culture of greed and consumerism across the Cape. True to Mullet's observation, Tommy, Woo, and Judith end up paying for their greed with their lives, none of them knowing when to stop submitting to their respective desires for revenge, power, and money. Furthermore, Vincent and Mullet pay for their own entitled greed through the harms that befall their loved ones. This highlights the complex and messy nature of *noir* ethics, from which one is unable to detach oneself.

As Elisabeth Bronfen writes that in the film genre of noir "no one is innocent. Everyone partakes of the dark transactions ending in deception, madness, betrayal, even if they are not all classed as murderer or thief" (2013: 278), and this is abundantly clear in *Cape Greed's* netted and knotted relationalities of vice. Correspondingly, Bronfen argues that "Everyone must pay, although perhaps not with their lives" (*Ibid.*), and the consequences for entanglement in the web of greed come for all the characters. Some experience trauma and

horror whilst others die in pursuit of their unfulfilled desires. Wondering whether his relationship with Rae-Anne will survive the trauma of her attack, Mullet reflects on a familiar pattern: "It'd happened with him before. He'd seen it with others. You got bitten. The fangs sank into your flesh and shot their poison. Nothing you could do about it after that. You could pray to any god you wanted, that poison was going to turn things bad." (2009: 287-288). The web of greed ensnares Mullet and he pursues Tommy without recourse to the police, seeking a vigilante justice that he believes criminals like poachers deserve. For this pursuit of greedy desire for vengeance, he jeopardises his relationship to the person he cares most about.

Samuelson highlights how the poaching narrative ties together geopolitical anxieties about Chinese influence with environmental concerns, in which Africa is the site of "extraction and exploitation" (2020: 105):

> [T]he *poaching plot,* which is funneled through crime fiction and other appropriated and repurposed genres … functions as a shorthand for the anxieties that surround the China-in-Africa story in the Anthropocene. Translated into it are both the geopolitical concern with "resource capture" (Chan 2013: 36) and that of the "Sixth Extinction" effected by the human [race] as "geological force" (Kolbert 2014). (Samuelson 2020: 101).

While *Cape Greed* does not explicitly foreground an Anthropocene narrative, the "purloining" of illicit national goods that contribute to species decline is key to the abalone story (Samuelson 2020: 102). Samuelson's "China-in-Africa" story is visible in Tommy and Adonis' argument about imported commodity items – clothes, cars, and even television shows. China is everywhere in *Cape Greed;* in import-export trade with branded clothes, cars, and tv shows, and in expensive illicit abalone. Chinese influence is also clearly visible through the depictions of food in *Cape Greed*, from Mullet ordering takeaway from Vincent's mum's restaurant the Hot Wok, to Woo ordering abalone off the menu

of a Waterfront restaurant (2009: 28). Philip Harrison, Yan Yang, and Khangelani Moyo write that the "model minority" and the "Chinese dragon" or "yellow peril" are two influential images that re-occur in socio-political images of South Africa's representation of China and Taiwan over the years (2017: 31-41). The characters of Vincent and Woo represent different aspects of this story, with Vincent and his mother examples of the model minority citizens in South Africa while Woo assumes the archetype of the greedy dragon who steals from Africa.

Indeed, Vincent and Woo are striking representations of South Africa's relationship with China and Taiwan. Vincent represents the naturalised Chinese citizen; he is a second-generation immigrant, but apart from his parental Chinese heritage and his looks – described as a "Slitty-eyed forker" and "chinkified à la Vince" (2009: 10,81) – he is depicted just like any other South African character. During his encounter with Woo, Vincent reveals that he does not speak Mandarin, prompting Woo's disapproval and criticism that Vincent is a missing part of "his heritage" (2009: 79). Woo makes sure to cement his connection to Taiwan in this encounter. He tells Vincent that Taiwan is the "rightful government of China," a position that Vincent politely undermines in his reply, "that so?" (2009: 78), thereby hinting at the ongoing dispute over sovereign rulership of China between the two countries. The meeting of these two characters in the novel essentially represents the meeting (and violent clashing) of China and Taiwan in Africa.[31]

Karen Harris argues that the metaphorical conceptualisation of Eastern abalone syndicates (and in this case libido) as "the dragon" is frequently correlated with a perceived untrustworthiness of Chinese people in South Africa (2019: 365). Harris proposes that prejudice, stereotyping, and Sinophobia contribute to persistent perceptions and narratives of "the Chinese community at large as perpetrators of poaching," and she argues that this is bound up with the essentialist conception of the

[31] For a discussion of South Africa's historical relationship with the "two Chinas," see Williams & Hurst 2018.

Chinese as the dragon who swoops in to greedily steal treasure from South Africa (2019: 267). *Cape Greed* leans strongly into the portrayal of Chinese characters as either model minority or as mafia dragon-esqe figures, without a lot of room for nuance. Evidently, Eastern desire for abalone funds and buttresses the illegal international trade, as does organised criminal presence (represented in *Cape Greed* by the activities of Woo and the Brotherhood).[32] However, local factors also contribute to propping up the trade, such as porous borders to neighbouring African countries from which abalone can be legally sold, the corruption and complicity of South African officials (represented by Vincent's giving Mullet seized abalone), and the socio-economic factors that have created a large group of impoverished citizens (including small-scale fishers) who choose to take up poaching careers (represented by Tommy and Adonis).

Jonny Steinberg's review of the early abalone trade as of the 1990s, focusing on the porosity of South Africa's borders as one of the key factors that allowed the illegal trade to flourish (Steinberg 2005). The fluidity of the ocean's borders and the unstable nature of the coastline are both symbolic of the creeping threat of vice in *Cape Greed*. This *noir* surrounding of vicious criminality is aptly depicted by the multimillion dollar "perlemoen industry" that Steinberg notes was in the 1990s "controlled by street gangs on the shoreline and by transnational

[32] From the 1970s onwards, Harris tracks Chinese "criminal organisations that were modelled on traditional Chinese and Hong Kong triad societies" and began to operate in South Africa (2019: 275). First reports of black-market abalone trading in the Western Cape were also in December 1978 (Geyser, 'Perlemoen Industry Investigation,' *The Argus*, 13 December 1978, 1; cited in Harris 2019). While Harris argues that "triads and smuggling organisations" are located at the centre of abalone poaching – the "heart" of the industry - she also recognises the wider role of local actors and lower-level government officials that play a part in the "illusiveness and efficiency of the trade both within and outside of South Africa's borders" (2019: 275), which she supports with reference to de Greef and Abader's *Poacher*. This is compounded by the fact that police "have been implicated in the syndicate operations" in the illicit abalone trade (*Ibid.*). As we saw in the illicit gifting of abalone in *Cape Greed*'s police station, the economic draw of the abalone trade often overcomes the ethical jurisdiction of the law.

criminal enterprises on the trade routes to east Asia" (2005: 1). Tommy and Adonis are the shoreline street gangs while Woo and the Brotherhood elicit transnational criminal operations. Moreover, Steinberg writes that the "pre-existence in South Africa of a large east Asian organised crime network" was one of four key factors that enabled the steep rise in abalone smuggling, because illicit trade routes between South Africa and East Asia were already firmly established well before the introduction of abalone as a commodity available for barter (Steinberg 2005: 2-3).

In presenting readers with complex "conundrums" and blurred lines between criminality and distributive justice, *Cape Greed* "draw[s] readers into the condition of inhabiting the Anthropocene" or oceanic crisis (Samuelson 2020: 103-104). This is achieved by positioning humans as *noir* characters in this story of abalone's destruction: "We start by thinking we can 'save' something called 'the world' 'over there,' but end up realizing that we ourselves are implicated" (Morton 2007: 187). In a similar way, the greedy poacher narrative lures readers into thinking that the abalone crisis is an individualised problem resting within the poacher themselves, when in reality there is a *culture* of greed in which all are implicated.

Narrative resolution attains a particular importance within the genre of crime fiction insofar as it represents justice. The classic detective story is "structurally tilted toward the ending as the moment where the mystery finds its solution, and social order is re-established," although this can also signify an "authoritative stance of the protagonist" in which the kind of justice and moral judgement they arrive at is left unquestioned (Rolls 2020: 178). The figure of the detective is especially important to the cultivation of ethics within crime narratives because often the moral fibre of society at large is in question and the detective, while imperfect, becomes the arbiter of moral justice by following their

individualised moral compass (Lee 2000: 285).[33] Mullet's summary execution of Tommy and Adonis is an instance of the detective figure carrying out criminal justice against the criminal(s), which is reinforced in kind as a moral good for the world when Rae-Anne thanks Mullet for killing them. Lee analyses crime fiction alongside theories of justice, and she notes that what happens to the perpetrator of a crime at the end of a story "tends to reveal both what society wants and what it realistically expects from punishment" (2000: 283). Thus, the deaths of Tommy, Adonis, Woo, and Marina signify moral the righting or punishing of the wrongful actions of these vicious characters, with Woo receiving an especially brutal torturous death, "[s]lashed until there was no skin left, no muscle intact, and his guts spilled out," that is proportionate to the extent of his cruelty and crimes (Nicol & Hichens 2009: 290).

It is notable that the character with the most obvious outsider status – Woo representing Chinese/Taiwanese immigrants – is also othered as the most vicious character and receives the most spectacular narrative closure. *Cape Greed* thus delivers a particular aspect of the public imaginary around ethics reified in a way that is coded by the genre expectations of crime fiction narratives. Returning to Foucault's comparison between the spectacle of crime fiction and historical public penal measures, there is a sense in which both of these processes make visible a process of bringing criminals to justice. Foucault describes the spectacle of public execution as a kind of ritual display that was memorable to spectators by design. This display often involved the recitation of charges and a trial in which a confession was obtained, before there was a show of justice triumphing over criminality: "the fact that the guilty man should moan and cry out under the blows is not a shameful side-effect, it is the very ceremonial of justice being expressed in all its force" (1995: 34). The ritualistic, excruciating nature of Woo's

[33] Interestingly, Lee writes that the independent moral compass of the detective has tended to reproduce "the traditional and even religious principles he claimed to ignore" (2000: 285).

death brings his shady and less visible business dealings into the light, particularly as his death is filmed on video camera and published on the internet for anyone "who got the address" to see (2009: 291).

In a *noir* setting, however, moral alignments are less clear-cut and more ambiguous. There is an attempt to disorient the spectator (Conrad 2007: 1). This is exemplified through Candy Liu and the Brotherhood who remain at large by the end of *Cape Greed* despite the brutality of their own revenge tactics, speaking to the systemic nature of injustice and the difficulty of finding any neat ethical solution to contemporary ocean crises. More than simply writing crime fiction for the sake of engaging readers' disgust and horror, crime writers can choose to expose issues they think are important by narrating them in an accessible format. South African literary criticism attests to the capacity of crime fiction to provide social analysis (Erasmus 2007, Binder 2017). Mike Nicol has spoken in interview about the social issues he writes into his crime novels and how he navigates incorporating his own moral analysis through choices like how villainous characters die (Binder 2017: 270). Matthew Christensen notes that African crime fiction gives individual citizens a way to think through moral complexity, specifically as a reaction to the post-democratic shift to neoliberal governing philosophies and free-market capitalism (when crime fiction flourished as a genre in South Africa). He contends that these detective stories:

> [G]enerate fictive truths to mediate the chasm between popular and official narratives of collective justice in moments of acute transformation in the relationship between the individual and the state. (2015: 315).

Attempting such a commentary, Nicol and Hichens have created vicious characters like Tommy, Adonis, Woo, and the Brotherhood in order to tell a story with a moral imperative that poaching is wrong. But, through the looping plot and the morally dubious detective characters of Mullet and Vincent, they have made visible wider social systems and their accompanying ethical complexities.

It is worth saying that Nicol and Hichens could have emphasised this ethical complexity more explicitly. One particular area of improvement would be a sense of nuance in the motivations and lifeworlds of the villainous characters. With the exception of Delmont, who barely features in the novel, all the criminals are characterised as vicious to an excessive degree and there is very little in the way of portraying their motivations or how they feel about their backgrounds (and for some of them there is nothing). From a virtue ethics standpoint, it would have been more interesting to see where Tommy, Adonis, and Woo have come from and why they became greedy abalone poachers, to see some hesitation or doubt from them when they commit atrocious crimes, or to see the system of greed and vice that is the criminal underworld in Cape Town.

A pandemic of greed surrounds abalone, drawing value from the global system of capitalism and the individualised culture that disrupts relationships and relationality. Within this system, the ocean and abalone are sites of criminal and also ecological encounter, bringing people and events together to create complex assemblages of ethical responsibilities. By looking more closely at these encounters, it is possible to find a bridge and a way into the complexity of ocean ethics from a particular vantage point where one can explore not only vicious oceanic encounters but also virtuous ones.

## Ocean as a site of relational encounters

There is a strong sense of place in *Cape Greed*, thoroughly rooted as it is in Cape Town.[34] The novel constantly makes connections to abalone and ocean, so much so that the narrative takes place at the intersection of the issues that abalone touches in South Africa. For example, abalone farming is represented just as well as poaching is, and the story benefits from the fact that Hichens learned from her brother's experience of starting his own abalone farm on the West coast, just like David Welsh (Erasmus 2007). With this insight, the novel includes detailed information about the shed setup for rearing and maintaining abalone as well as abalone ecology in the tanks, like the need for plenty of kelp as food and the fact that abalones largely live on the same areas of rock for their whole life (*Cape Greed* 2009: 70-71).

Green pays attention to the *encounters* of different things and relations in environments – viewing the environments as meeting places, and noticing the people who are there along with their histories, and what contestations there are about the ecologies present. She observes that the marine encounter in South Africa brings together a host of actors, disasters, and potential futures, including: the impact of lobster (kreef) on abalone populations and the linked fisher injustice battles; irresponsible sewage disposal and failures in township sanitation; and the contribution of the state and science in each of these meeting points, among others (2020: 171-200). Green summarises a cross-section of the layered struggles that intersect around Cape Town's oceans, linking abalone's predation with poachers' struggles for livelihood, among others, to the wider economic-driven governance approach to oceans in South Africa.

> Perlemoen are struggling to survive poachers, who are trying to survive the predatory economy and the new lobster regime.

[34] Hichens has also confirmed that scenes from Taiwan also took inspiration from her personal experience of the country through family connections (Erasmus 2007).

> Ocean-users are fighting the brand-management approach to water quality, which is hopelessly inadequate on a day-to-day basis. What is in common here? (Green 2020: 185)

Green shows that these issues around abalone are one of many that contribute to oceanic destruction, each of which stem from systemic issues in South African approaches to science and governance. Green also argues that people tend to create artificial boundaries and binaries that separate environmental issues into land/water or past/present/future. This is something that many academic and scientific actors are guilty of, but it is also a tendency towards categorisation that is more broadly rooted in the West's culture and philosophical tradition. In removing boundaries around what is thought of as distinct things, it is possible to be less siloed in environmental efforts and ethics, and can draw attention to the productive and lively connections between struggles (2020: 15, 19-21). Green references Aimé Césaire's postcolonial recognition that imposing taxonomies and naming things as discrete objects created a sort of surrealism that effectively distorted the world by removing the relations between. "Poetry for him was bicycle riding for me: a way of slowing down, questioning the connections that had been taught, and erased, and reduced to things. And making different connections" (2020: 16). Green articulates artificial isolated environments, once seen relationally, through their ghostly phenomenology. Places (environments) have become ontologically haunted by the ghosts of their forgotten parts, ultimately contributing to a spooky and distorted idea of nature (2020: 15).

This brings to mind passages of ghosts from *Cape Greed,* in which haunting is used as a device to narrate encounters with ocean and place. For example, Sea Street in the novel signifies the changing landscape of the city and increasing disconnection to the ocean, evidenced by the obstacle course of "[h]igh-rises, hotels, the conference centre, the motorway in-between before you even hit the

docklands and the Waterfront" (2009: 18). The street's name recalls memories of when one could walk straight down the street to reach the ocean shore. The novel communicates a nostalgia for a time of simpler oceanic relationships, which is shown through Mullet's reflections about fishing and his musings about Sea Street's history:

> Maybe once you could've gone down here to the sea, eighty, ninety years ago. When Cape Town had the sea at the end of the street. Fishing boats pulled up on the beach, fishermen coiling ropes, mending their nets, lobster traps, oars, nets hanging to dry, whaling cottages either side of the street. Kids playing. Sailors wandering around searching out booze and a screw (*Ibid.*).

This hauntology expresses the traces and remnants of previous coastal matter, relations, and flows between land and ocean.[35] The ways in which the ocean was once meaningful to peoples' lives through fishing is expressed through this memory of what Sea Street once was, alongside a contrasting image of the street in its transformed current state, which serves business, travel, and tourism. These contemporary developments infer the commercialisation of the ocean and the city of Cape Town, although the line about sailors seeking evening entertainment connects past to the present-day through the character of Mullet who is himself also a fisherman and pursues these same pleasures.

Mullet expresses a longing for a simpler time and a simpler life, both of which are linked to the ocean. He reflects to himself that "Guys who

[35] Jacques Derrida creates the notion of "hauntology" to describe present ontologies that are haunted by historical contexts and discourses that return and recur in his discussion of Marx: "the dead can often be more powerful than the living; and that is why to interpret a philosophy as a philosophy or ontology of life is never a simple matter … that of Marx or whomever, which relates everything back to life only in the condition of including their death and the alterity of its other without which it would not be what it is" (2006: 60). Green draws on this notion in her book and applies it to ecological encounters (2020: 15).

made a living out of fishing had a life" (2009: 22). Mullet's perception that fishing means living well suggests that he does not imagine himself as becoming the kind of fisher who would be limited by quotas and would struggle to earn a living, or perhaps that he romanticises becoming a type of fisher from the past that no longer exists. He clearly does not imagine the experiences of the small-scale fishers and quotas that the citizens of Dutch Bay protest about down the road. Mullet even reflects at one point that "There was something about the life of seals that was infinitely better than the life of humans," suggesting a romanticisation of the ocean in general (2009: 170). This nostalgia – or perhaps anemoia – for simpler oceanic relationships also serves as a contrasting image with the contemporary complexity of oceanic relationships.

As well as nostalgia for simpler times, *Cape Greed's* theme of haunting also signifies a recognition of the past's injustices that haunt the present. Mullet feels "the mood of the sea" and hears "Voices talking in strange languages. Voices, he reckoned, of sailors who'd been rounding the Cape for centuries," and he invokes the many foreign sailors to Cape Town, including Dutch and British colonists, slaves imported from across the Indian Ocean world, and others who stopped off on their journey to Asia (2009: 41).[36] The ocean becomes a site of peopled encounters and relations across generations. Lavery comments on how this "ghostly presence of long-dead foreign sailors in the harbour" draws out the slave history of South Africa and its connections to the Indian Ocean world (2016: 547). She highlights that the same routes and connections are being used today to funnel criminal activity, represented in *Cape Greed* by an "unusually diverse cast of characters" from both local and foreign shores (*Ibid.*). Lavery links Nicol and Hichen's inclusion of the living alongside the dead, current ocean inhabitants with past ones, as signalling a diverse

[36] Slaves from across the Indian Ocean included people from India, Sri Lanka, maritime southeast Asia, Madagascar, and other parts of Africa like Mozambique and parts of Eastern and Western Africa (Worden 2023, Marks 2023).

understanding of who is relevant to the abalone crisis and to the evolving future of South Africa's oceans.

On the other side of many of these encounters with foreign sailors were Khoisan groups of people. And before any of these sailors rounded the Cape's coastal tip and began to wrestle for control of the area, Khoisan peoples were diving and collecting abalone, among other fish and shellfish, from the ocean. Given the Khoisan's geographical location on the west coast of Africa, while Xhosa and Zulu communities occupied the eastern coast, abalone would have packed the coastline:

> Before the settlers' arrival, history records that the San people were living in peace along the coast enjoying crayfish, mussels, perlemoen, and seals as their basic foods, and the archaeological evidence of the fish bones found in the coastal caves inhabited by the San shows that they were skillful fishermen. The Khoisan could also collect ample marine resources, such as mussels and crayfish, as well as veldkos (berries or corms). (Mafumbu *et al*. 2022: 2).

Mafumbu *et al*. also highlight how these historical relationships with oceans provided "livelihoods, food, recreation, and healing as well as being places of ancestral worship for indigenous people" (*Ibid.*). This emphasises the role that oceans have played in human communities' sense of belonging and meaning-making throughout time. Such hauntologies point towards the relational encounters between people and ocean across space and time. Looking at abalone allows one to zoom into one set of relations, between individuals and communities, and between humans and non-humans. It is these sets of relations that McMullin also sees moral agents as existing in the midst of – and attempting to respond in virtuous ways.

McMullin does not discuss the vice of greed or virtue of restraint in *Existential Flourishing*, but she does discuss the related vice and virtue of arrogance and modesty. McMullin writes that modesty is to do with esteem, and that it is the virtue that solves the existential problem of

inequalities of success or accomplishment. When this existential problem threatens one's ability to respond to the three terrains of normative claim because of this unequal landscape, modesty:

> resist[s] modes of self-understanding that unduly emphasize either the openness or closure of one's identity for definition and it is motivated to do so by a second-person concern for the other person's welfare. (McMullin: 201).

Greed contrasts with modesty insofar as it may encourage a desire for success, in the form of wealth and power, which is not tempered by the second-person awareness of other peoples' experience of pain at one's own success, particularly in the context of inequality. On the other side, greed often clusters with arrogance. Arrogance involves the satisfaction and enjoyment of success without care for others' pain. This is demonstrated in *Cape Greed* by Woo and Marina's satisfaction in plotting to create pain and disaster for others. Marina boasts to Woo, for instance, that Vincent "has a raw wound when it comes to Tommy Fortune" while they plan the stakeout of a heist that will bring the two unsuspecting enemies together (2009: 119). In McMullin's existential virtue ethics terms one might frame greed as a poor response to the existential problem of wealth inequality and disparity of life quality within a capitalist system. Both greed and arrogance encourage a neglect of the third-person recognition of need and inequality, and the recognition of oneself as a part of this relational system of finite resources.

Restraint, also known as moderation or temperance, is a virtue that clusters with modesty; it tempers greed insofar as it involves managing a reasonable amount of desire in a way that is realistic and meaningfully informed by an understanding of the needs of others.[37] Restraint responds to the existential problem of scarcity of resources, and

[37] See, for instance, Van Wensveen's definition of the virtue of restraint as "a matter of delicate interaction and as such [it] represents the 'golden mean' between passivity and exploitation" (2000: 93).

modesty helps one to develop an awareness of identity, attainment, and sovereignty and to foster an appreciation for each person's need for dignity in these areas. Both restraint and modesty cluster with a kind of respect and appreciation for the dignity of others, including the more-than-human world. Lee observes how justice in crime fiction narratives often takes the form of rehabilitation for the detective and society at large, as well as the more obvious guise of justice delivered through criminal retribution (2000: 285). She comments that rehabilitation involves the virtue of restraint and an investment in personal relations: "ethical responsibility connects to emotional presence in personal relationships" (Lee 2000: 286). *Cape Greed* lingers mostly on depictions of vice, and so the appearances of virtue are brief and somewhat ambiguous, but the primary examples of living well (or at least living well *enough*) are indeed relational and mostly revolve around the character of Mullet.

Mullet's relationship to the ocean through fishing signifies an attentive and respectful relationship, in which he actively focuses on feeling his connection with the ocean and tuning into its "mood," and does not throw litter overboard while fishing like his friends do (2009: 41). Mullet's anemoia for a simple life of fishing is also a symptom of his modesty. Despite the fact that his friends beg him to come back to police work given his skills in the past, Mullet does not boast about his policing abilities and in fact gives up the job in pursuit of a simpler life with less money (2009: 42). Finally, Mullet puts care into relationships with people around him, including his relationship with Rae-Anne (although he also takes it for granted), and his offerings of food and shelter to street-child Bom-Bom on his porch. In the end, Mullet, Rae-Anne, Vincent (and arguably Delmont) are all rewarded for their attempts at a virtuous disposition by virtue of the fact that they survive their battles at the end of the story. The assassin Candy Liu and the Brotherhood that back her also survive despite their crimes, albeit on distant shores from Cape Town, leaving the reader unclear as to whether survival indicates some sort of narrative moral reward. True to

this moral ambiguity, Lee suggests that contemporary crime fiction narratives portray ethics as a "complicated and multifaceted phenomenon, a series of decisions, a sustained mode of being" in which protagonists must strive to become exceptional examples of virtue amidst "moral crisis" (2000: 286-289). This complexity of ocean ethics thus manifests to individuals as a need to navigate the balancing of personal responsibilities alongside a responsibility to continue attending to the needs of others and to nature, and this is exemplified particularly well through narrative.

McMullin's virtue ethics foregrounds moral plurality and the need to balance responsibilities along each of these first-, second-, and third-person lines. Flourishing involves attending to multiple relationships in order to care for oneself, other people, and the non-human world of nature. The characters in *Cape Greed* who are *most* virtuous and who are rewarded with their lives at the end are those ones who care about the suffering of others and care for the people in their lives, and for the ocean. Humans are relational beings who live in a shared world. By disconnecting from others and unduly prioritising personal gain, individuals hurt themselves and others, meaning that neither the individual nor the community flourishes.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the way that the crime fiction and *noir* novel *Cape Greed* provides a space for the public imaginary around abalone poaching to be explored through a focus on the most dark and depraved characterisations of Capetonian morality. In this imaginative space, writers Mike Nicol and Joanne Hichens give life to the popular narrative of the greedy poacher, in which illegal abalone divers are self-serving individuals who destroy the abalone species through their vicious and self-serving exploitation of the ocean. Other characters in the novel serve as explorations of the global and systemic factors that contribute to abalone poaching and the thriving trade with China and Taiwan. The novel's portrayal of poachers employs some reductionist

and racialised stereotypes in the attempt to depict moral depravity, and while it endeavours to represent the complexity involved in abalone poaching and issues of ocean ethics, it is not always successful in this attempt. The few examples of virtue in the novel line up with relational understandings of human nature and the importance of specific virtues of care, respect, and modesty. Examining a crime novel like this gives insight into the kinds of narratives that might sell to the general public, and demonstrates that abalone poaching and the greedy poacher are spectacles in South Africa, emblematic of the messy corruption and shady criminal underworld.

In the next chapter, I explore the perspective of the abalone diver and the relationship between diver, abalone, and ocean in more depth. I unravel some of the reductionist assumptions evident in narratives of poaching through an examination of the phenomenological experience of navigating the moral messiness around questions of how to live well alongside oceans.

# Chapter Two

## Introduction

So, what does a non-fiction narrative about poaching make visible, foreground, and connect in its collaborative and autobiographical account of illegal abalone fishing? And how does this influence one's understanding of ocean ethics in a way that is different to ethnographic or fictional accounts like *Cape Greed*? In the prologue of *Poacher: Confessions from the Abalone Underworld*, journalist and academic Kimon de Greef acknowledges the story of abalone and its detrimental impact on South Africa's oceanic ecosystems: "Many people are familiar with this poaching narrative: a legacy of outrageous decline, fuelled by greed and criminality" (2018: 10). *Prima facie*, then, this book could be a route to understanding environmental vice in the context of the ocean through an analysis of those factors that drive people to develop extractive relationships with the ocean. To this end, *Poacher* could fill in some of the systemic and background features of moral luck that were missing from *Cape Greed*'s depictions of how someone becomes a greedy poacher. This is certainly part of the interpretive draw of this text, but I am also interested in the way that *Poacher* provides a narrative of the full moral landscape of vice, virtue, and moral transformation.

While stories of moral flourishing and success are crucial to an understanding of ethics, they only give part of the story. To understand the full spectrum of moral experience, academics of ethics and environmentalism, and moral agents more broadly, need examples of the profound challenges that people experience in their striving to live well, which in turn contribute to the core existential difficulty at the heart of moral life. The ocean itself is increasingly the target for global forces of private property, marketisation, and techno-development, and, caught squarely within those crosshairs, many coastal communities and people who harvest organic life from the ocean for work do so from positions of poverty, inequality, and disempowerment. *Poacher*

narrates the bad, the good, and the difficulty involved in moral transformation. It enriches understandings of the kind of person who could become an abalone poacher, travelling far from the simplistic criminal characterisations of Tommy and Adonis in *Cape Greed*.

*Poacher* gives the reader a first-person account of a black-market industry that is shrouded in secrecy, by necessity due to its covert nature. Hence, this is one of the first opportunities for outside observers of the trade to understand what it is really like to be an abalone poacher in South Africa. There have been academic studies on abalone poaching and on small-scale fishing communities like the examples discussed in the introduction (e.g., Hauck 2009, Raemaekers *et al*. 2011, Sowman 2015, Anderson 2015, Rogerson 2015, Schultz 2015, Sowman and Sunde 2018), and there have been fictional stories written about the abalone situation in South Africa (like *Cape Greed* and 'Floating Rugs'), but *Poacher* is the only in-depth non-fiction account written by an abalone poacher in South Africa. There have also been reports produced about the industry as a whole (e.g., Okes *et al*. 2018), but there has not yet emerged a phenomenology of ocean ethics from the perspective of a diver who plunges into the ocean and pries – who physically extracts – the molluscs from the rocks themselves. While this naturally means that *Poacher* is limited to the lived experience of one man, Shuhood Abader, his collaboration with Kimon de Greef ensures that Shuhood's account is well-researched and evidenced.[38] De Greef cross-references and buttresses Shuhood's story with scientific knowledge on the subject and contextualises his experiences within the

[38] A note about how I refer to Kimon de Greef and Shuhood Abader: The book is written from the perspective of Kimon engaging in dialogue with Shuhood so it includes many quotes from Shuhood, and sometimes also has scenes involving both of them in conversation. For my discussion of the scenes, memories, and thoughts that they share in the book I refer to Kimon and Shuhood by their first names, following the book itself where Shuhood is the protagonist and Kimon is his conversant. However, for my analysis of *Poacher* as a discursive project between two writers I refer to de Greef and Abader by their surnames in line with my references for other authors in the thesis. It also bears clarifying that Shuhood Abader is a pseudonym.

current and historical political situation in South Africa to create a sturdy weave of lived experience and criticality. Through Shuhood's eyes, it is possible to move closer to an experience of what it's like to be a poacher, what his relationship to the natural world is, and what sorts of moral dilemmas someone in his position encounters on a daily basis.

In this chapter, I argue that Shuhood's account of his experiences as a poacher, combined with Kimon de Greef's research and narrative on the subject, generate incisive insight into the kinds of complex philosophical problems that oceanic concerns give rise to. I initially look at *Poacher* as a kind of nature writing through which Shuhood demonstrates a *contemplative* attitude to the ocean, a term that Simone Kotva finds is common to both philosophical and spiritual reflection and which means an ordinary kind of passive attentiveness to nature (2019: 248). More specifically, I argue that Shuhood displays a narrative and aesthetic *attentiveness* to nature, that spills over beyond the water and to the natural world more broadly. In the second part of this chapter, I consider Shuhood's experience of risk and thrill in his ocean endeavours and examine the virtue of courage alongside the vice of rashness. To finish, I explore Shuhood's potential as a role model for others who occupy criminalised or transgressive roles in relation to the sea. Shuhood's story is a pertinent example of moral transformation, however it also foregrounds the fundamental role of moral luck – the immovable material conditions in which agents strive to live well – for any possibility of moral flourishing. Thus, an account of place and local material conditions must inform ocean and environmental ethics. Shuhood's spiritual journey is closely linked to his journey of moral transformation throughout the book. Using McMullin's virtue ethics model, I will look at Shuhood as an example of the situational factors that can play a role in moral development and the way that virtue is developed over the course of a lifetime.

## *Poacher*

Shuhood wrote the story of his life as a poacher whilst serving time in prison for abalone poaching. Shuhood teams up with Kimon after

being introduced by their publisher when Kimon decides to write a book about the illegal abalone industry. The pair form a convivial bond after they spend many hours discussing Shuhood's experiences, with the two men spending time together with Kimon's girlfriend and Shuhood's family on multiple occasions outside of a work context. The writers collaborate to create a non-fiction account of abalone poaching that combines lived and learned understandings of the abalone trade in South Africa. The story of *Poacher* starts with Shuhood's arrest as he sees his life crumble, before returning to the start of his poaching career, after he was previously jailed for stealing from drug dealers. The narrative winds between attentive descriptions of Shuhood diving and more functional descriptions of the machinations behind the abalone trade, and highlights the deeply personal motivations and challenges he experiences in his burgeoning poaching career. Ultimately, Shuhood faces up to his own ethical conflicts between his Muslim faith and the violent and extractive lifestyle that abalone poaching necessitates. *Poacher* loops back around to Shuhood's arrest for poaching and how this negatively impacts on his relationships to his family. This last part of the narrative shares Shuhood's efforts to transform his moral relationship with himself and with nature.

Abalone, or perlie (perlemoen) for Shuhood, is central to the narrative of *Poacher* and is mentioned on almost every page in the book. However, this focus is often in relation to the activities that surround abalone extraction, its value, and the social and economic machinations that have erupted around it. Abalone the creature, as a particular kind of organism, is only dwelt on in a few passages. Although it is at times unclear whether the descriptions of abalone – and the corresponding desire to focus on the creature(s) – originate from Kimon or Shuhood, it is likely to be a combination of the two authors' contributions. Or, alternatively, it may be the compounded result of the two as they find common phenomenological ground in their focus on abalone.

## 1: Perceptions and representations of nature in *Poacher*

### Abalone, thingified

The first time the reader encounters abalone as a living creature rather than an object of value is on page 13 when de Greef introduces his own journey and relationship to abalone poaching as an academic and professional subject area. He gives a detailed explanation of abalone physiology, as seen from the perspective of someone observing the mollusc in a glass tank:

> Like Shuhood, my life had changed course with abalone.
>
> The abalone spends its adult life peeping out over a muscular foot. Its tiny face has eyes on yellow stalks and a puckered mouth with two tentacles. Pressed against a glass aquarium – like at the Chinese restaurants that sell live abalone in Cape Town, ostensibly farmed but often purchased from poachers – this mouth looks strangely expressive, as if it is gasping, or flung open in song. Because of its face the creature is easier to identify with than, say, a mussel, but this does not in the least bit trouble divers like Shuhood.
>
> Inside the mouth is a rasped tongue called a radula. Up close the radula resembles a thin strip of sanding paper, equipped with neat rows of miniature teeth. The natural diet of the abalone consists of kelp and other seaweeds, which it methodically abrades with its tongue. The residue passes through its digestive tract, foul-smelling and bitter. "First thing you do after shucking a *perlie*," Shuhood said, making a quick movement with both hands, "is twist off the guts."
>
> The shell grows in a clockwise spiral, a row of ventilation holes perforating its leading edge. Its shape is described by the scientific name shared by all abalone species: *Haliotis*, Latin for 'sea ear'. The outer surface is rutted and grey, the inside

> pearlescent and smooth. 'Perlemoen,' the Afrikaans name for abalone, is derived from the Dutch for 'mother of pearl'.
>
> There is an exquisite beauty to the shell, used since ancient times for jewellery, yet it is the flesh of the abalone, and chiefly its broad foot, that has made it so valuable. Prepared correctly, abalone is tender, with a delicate, buttery taste. This has drawn it into the crosshairs of human desire and produced a bizarre offshoot of global resource capitalism: a smuggling epidemic of snail feet, for displays of social rank. (2018: 13).

In the first and last lines of this passage de Greef shifts from describing abalone as a creature, to describing abalone as a thing, insofar as it is a commodity that has capital value because of its social status. It is abalone the thing rather than abalone the creature that becomes the object of global underworld trade markets, which in turn comes to define and change the lives of those who take up the hunt for it in South African waters. Like much of the book, this description of abalone contrasts studious examinations of the creatures in their unique animality and liveliness – complete with anthropomorphised quirks (peeping, gasping, singing) – against statements about common practice for killing and harvesting them. Seeing these side by side, the oscillation between creature and thing, and back again, gives the reader a sense of how intricately linked these two senses of abalone are in human-abalone entanglements and the narratives about them.

In quotes, Shuhood's talks about abalone frequently due to the substance of his work, but the animal is almost always viewed and described in a functional capacity and in relation to his work on or to abalone as object rather than subject. He does not focus on the vitality of individual abalones like de Greef does in his quote, because for Shuhood, the abalone species has undergone a process of *thingification*. He describes searching for, finding, dislodging, harvesting, carrying, and selling abalone in an end-to-end operational process, rather than a relational one. Occasionally, one encounters a

brief mention of the liveliness of these creatures, such as "the abalone clinging to one another as they dropped inside [the pouch bag]" (2018: 23), but Shuhood does not linger on these moments. Instead. he provides many more descriptions of their butchering, of the "Gouge, lever, twist" metronome that ends with "Abalone slime dribbled across the deck and fish rose to tear at the discarded guts" (2018: 79).

Aimé Césaire uses the term "thingification" to talk about the colonising logic of domination and submission, of reducing racialised people to functions and breaking them away from "their gods, their land, their habits, their life" (1972: 21-22). Later, the Comaroffs also write about an increasing "confusion of people with things" in postcolonial South African democracy, exemplified through ritual killings and the trading of body parts for occult purposes. They argue that this intensified violence is a modern form of value-production amidst insecure labour conditions, severe inequality, and a neoliberal free market (1999, 2018). Hence, the idea of turning living beings into things is well-established and has been linked to processes of dehumanisation, commodification, and more broadly the separation of beings from their environment and lives and the linking of them to capital value-production. I use the term thingification to signify the way that abalone as a living creature is reduced to its thing-like properties in order to hunt it, remove it from its habitat, and kill it *en masse*, and then prepare it to be sold as an object. Thingified perceptions of abalone sit alongside knowledge of abalone as a living creature – just as colonial authorities recognised oppressed peoples as having lives – but they are thought of and treated like things as part of a system of commerce in which divers aim to harvest as many "resources" as possible in order to generate capital.

De Greef highlights the process and effects of the "tragedy of the commons" among abalone divers, where each takes a bit more than their allotted amount to maintain sustainable stocks of the molluscs (2018: 201). While, I maintain that this critical framing is insufficient in

that it fails to account for the self-reflexive relationship between harvesters as both subject and object – as I outlined in my introduction – it nevertheless shows the way that capital-driven exploitation of animals like abalone forces workers to habituate attitudes that maximise profits, especially in instances where harvesting these species are a means for survival and livelihoods.

## Attentiveness (to the ocean)

Abalone's thingification is notable in its striking divergence with the rest of Shuhood's *attentive* descriptions of the oceanic and natural world he encounters. Tom Greaves looks at practices of attentiveness to nature as part of positive aesthetics (2022).[39] Greaves' focus on attentive practices is part of a broader approach to philosophy *as a way of life*, and away from doctrines or theses of philosophy. In this way, "positive aesthetics becomes a set of practices designed to help us draw out and appreciate the beauty that one is committed to finding, if possible, everywhere in the natural world" (2022: 67). These practices give one a route to experiencing "phenomenal beauty" through the interaction between the objective and the subjective by "taking up attitudes and cultivating practices that allow the beautiful ways that nature can appear to manifest themselves" (2022: 69). Kimon and Shuhood do not perhaps think of themselves as practising attentiveness or positive aesthetics, of course. But when they pause to reflect on moments of their experience, they share the process of opening up subjectively to allow the world to appear as beautiful or to manifest in its difference. Greaves provides an array of ornithological examples to demonstrate what positive aesthetic practices look like, with some of these involving observation of birds in the garden, or the appreciation of changing colours on a mottled swan's back, but he also the experience of watching birds of prey at hunt. Similarly, Shuhood's experiences of the

[39] Positive aesthetics is a branch of aesthetics that was inspired by John Muir that focuses on the beauty of nature and the positivity we can draw particularly from one's perceptions of wild nature (Allen 2019).

sky, ocean currents, and a panoply of sea creatures, but also the cycle of death – of abalone and of humans too – are all valid foci of his practices of attentiveness.

Samantha Vice's article on the amaZulu peoples' relationship with their Nguni cattle is a helpful example of practices of attentiveness, which also provides an illuminating contrast with the way that abalone is thingified (2023). The amaZulu centre much of their society around their cattle – they are central to food, work, and rituals that acknowledge key points in a person's life like birth, marriage, and death (Vice 2023: 197). However, these cattle also function as companions and as teachers for the young boys who look after them, and are incorporated in traditions of collective memory, creative practices, and an attentiveness to the animals themselves and the way they reflect aspects of the natural world around them (Vice 2023: 202). Vice outlines how *The Abundant Herds* documents the hundreds of colour patterns and horn shapes among the Nguni cattle. She also recognises the way that the naming these patterns and shapes is done creatively, with an appreciation of the animals' individuality, but also with an attentiveness to the people, objects, and places that surround them and that make up the amaZulu's lifeworlds (Poland *et al.* 2003). For example, names might reflect people or other animals, like *inyonikayiphumuli* which means "birds that never rest" and describes white cattle with black points while it identifies the behaviour of cattle egrets that fly around the fields where the cattle graze. Names can also describe domestic objects like *inkomo ephuzingwebu* which describes an animal "with a white snout that seems to have been dipped in the froth of fresh beer" (*The Abundant Herds* 2003: 39, 75, 128, quoted in Vice 2023: 197, 202).

Vice highlights the way that these attentive aesthetic practices contest typical ways of describing animals. This holds especially for farm animals that tend to be described as a mass in terms of their generic characteristics. Or, if they are described individually, it is only in relation to their thingified potential as objects of commodification (2023: 196-

197). Hence, there is a similarity in the way that farm animals and abalone are thingified within fisheries for the purpose of large-scale killing and profit-generation. The amaZulu naming practices for their cattle constitute a remarkable example of the way that animals with whom people have a functional relationship do not necessarily need to be subjected to processes of thingification. As a crucial part of this, interactions between Nguni cattle and their owners are not defined by the sped up and marketised logics of capitalism. Indeed, "Their names and their owners' appreciation transcend the practical, let alone the commercial" (2023: 207). Vice talks specifically about functionalist accounts of animals and points out that, despite the limitations to functionalist accounts of farm animals, functionalism can be useful and appropriate. For example, in a scientific context for understanding animal biology and ecological relations. But she maintains that it "is often deficient and giving in to aesthetic delight often takes us beyond it" (2023: 210). This attests to the driving force of commercialisation in the thingification of animals, yet also the capacity of an aesthetic eye to enable a view that expands past a simply functionalist account and enables perception of the animal in its liveliness and within the context of its world.

Alongside many accounts of abalone-as-thing, there is one early memory in which Shuhood shares a more attentive description of abalone. This encounter was from the early 1990s when abalone poaching was not seen as a problem by scientists or the South African government, and so recreational permits were cheaply available (2018: 47). Although Shuhood is hunting abalone in this memory, the molluscs have a different value to him since he does not see them as a source of livelihood. He is merely a teenager who is earning some pocket money. Besides, based on what his neighbour and diving partner (deceitfully) tells him, it is only the abalone's shells that are worth something so abalone meat is less of a priority in his mind:

> Johan gave me a wetsuit, albeit tattered and torn, a pair of goggles and flippers. We took to the water and he showed me how to spot the perlemoen by looking closely for the fine hair-like tentacles that protrudes on the edge of the shells, the shells sometimes being camouflaged by other sea growth. I often mistook limpets for perlemoen. If you not fast enough with the metal lever to take it off the rocks or reef, then it would cling or suck even harder, forcing me to abandon it. Nevertheless, I soon got the hang of it and our pouch bags were full.
>
> … "I started to enjoy the underwater world," Shuhood wrote. "It was a new world to me, a world of wonders." Fish of different shapes moved through the shallows. Kelp blades roiled in the swell – now amber, now in shadow – as they lifted and sunk with the tide. Below, on the reeds, abalone lay packed beside limpets and spiny urchins, easy to harvest once Shuhood learned to spot them. (2018: 46-47)

In this extract, Shuhood's descriptions are both functional and reflective. It is clear from this passage Shuhood has a job to do and he sees abalone within the scope of that job, but he is also *attentive* to the ocean environment as a whole. He sees abalone as one of many creatures and components within an ecosystem that he is occasionally a part of, and this is something he lingers on, that he "start[s] to enjoy" while he is submerged, watching the kelp swaying and the fish moving in changing patterns through the water. There is a focus on the aesthetics of the ocean environment in this passage that is separate from the task of finding and extracting abalone; while the underwater encounter is enabled by Shuhood's task of hunting abalone, the ocean is not solely viewed through an extractive lens.

## Nature writing

In fact, some of the passages in *Poacher* read like excerpts of nature writing. From the very first line in Chapter One, "Lightning flashed at

sea as the poachers cut across the flat water," the reader witnesses the living, imposing, and perilous environment in which abalone poachers immerse themselves, figuratively and literally (2018: 17). This attentiveness to nature and the ocean environment deepens Shuhood's phenomenological immersion in the midst of a lesser-known natural world and his observations and interactions with the other beings that occupy this oceanic landscape. The genre of nature writing is conventionally associated with British and American literary traditions, but the reason I mention it here is that nature writing has a connection to aesthetic components of writing that is less common in other non-fiction environmental genres of writing like environmental geography and history.[40] Richard Mabey writes that "What characterises the most convincing nature writing is a willingness to admit both the kindredness and the otherness of the natural world" (1997: vii). These twinned, contrasting components of nature writing – kindredness and otherness – both come across in the above quotes from Shuhood. Mabey's sense of kindredness comes across in the first passage above, when Shuhood describes the ocean as an "underwater world" with a similarity in kind and in relation between the waves, kelp, fish, abalone, and urchins that he sees. The way he describes this patch of the ocean is almost like a neighbourhood, noting how each species shares the space with him. Meanwhile, the otherness that Mabey mentions is strikingly visible in Shuhood's recollection of the lightning flashing over the ocean whilst he rides a boat across the water, a foreboding image. The reader also gets a sense of otherness from the way abalone actively resists being taken by Shuhood, clinging to the rocks when he is not fast enough.

[40] A sense of poetics and aesthetic description are present in traditional black South African oral cultures, with some examples being the amaZulu's naming practices for their Nguni cattle and isiXhosa literature that engages with geography, flora, and fauna (Vice 2023, McGiffin 2019). Moreover, devotional and religious writings often take a more literary and narrative style of writing, and as a Muslim Shuhood likely draws influences from the poetic writing style of the Qu'ran and this narrative tradition (Kermani 2006).

The writing in *Poacher* displays a rich attention to detail and the reader finds both colourful and gritty images of the interaction between humans, abalone, and ocean.

> Their pouch bags filled quickly, the abalone clinging to one another as they dropped inside. Some were older than ten years and had spent their entire lives on the same set of rocks. Their feet left circular patches as the divers lifted them off: negative images, outlined by algae and encrusting corals, that would inch inwards until another abalone slid over to claim the space. (2018: 23)

The passage indicates a relational and changing underwater landscape of water, rock, coral, algae, and more – an elemental ecosystem that lives and breathes and, with the arrival of Shuhood, also dies, shuck by shuck, as abalone shadow images are left like calling cards on the rocks. Mabey writes that the "inextricable links" that one observes in the natural world, whether they are overlapping or undermining, demonstrate its importance for ethical inquiry, as well as scientific (1997: ix). Indeed, the ghostly sight of abalone negative images left on the rocks stimulates care and concern for the survivability of their species. Seeing the legacy of divers removing abalone who have lived for years on a piece of rock and the relationship between human and abalone that is visible in this image invites one to question the ethics of whatever mechanics drive this intensified predatory relationship. The passage continues:

> Dusk swept over the lagoon, lighting the sky amber, then purple. It was dark when they finished shucking, tossing the empty shells over the side. Shuhood's wrists ached from the repetitive strain of prising loose the meat. On the horizon the storm broke, flickering behind the clouds. The men dived back in to rinse the slime from their bodies and turned back towards shore. (2018: 23)

Herein the embodied feel of the encounter with nature becomes clearer, as the rough and repetitive motion of shucking abalone meat from their shells, and the bodily ache this produces, is intensified by the ephemeral colours of the sky. It is moody – eerie, even – exploring the underwater world at night like this as a storm foments on the horizon. The narrative communicates the physically challenging experience of facing the elements to descend into the dark and cold sea. It is clearly not a harmonious narrative of ecological relations, but the entanglement of nature is made evident. Shuhood draws attention to the way that skin and body come into contact with abalone shells, flesh, and slime, all with the crackle of the storm backgrounding the harvest.

Shuhood swims alongside a range of oceanic megafauna as well as small sea creatures, and throughout the book there are vivid descriptions of the underwater animals and places he encounters. In these passages of nature writing, it is clear that Shuhood practices a sort of passive attentiveness to his environment and his ocean relations; he is not underwater to observe the ocean and write about it, but while he is there to work his senses are keenly tuned to the environment that he is in. On his first scuba dive, after praying to Allah, Shuhood descends to "the bottom of the kelp forest" where he feels "a stabbing pain in his knee," but instead of being distressed he is amazed by the bed of sea urchins he has landed on: "'it was beautiful, red, green, purple and yellow,' he wrote" (2018: 63). This is similar to the type of attentiveness that Kotva calls *contemplation*, which is common to both philosophical and spiritual reflection and which means an ordinary kind of passive attentiveness to nature, to "the 'everyday experience of … comingling' between selves and environment" (2019: 176, incl. quote from Bennett 2010: 115). In his ocean explorations Shuhood has different types of interactions with a range of creatures, during which his role in the underwater ecosystem shifts – from predator, to prey, or intruder, but also sometimes anonymous stranger or simply fellow swimmer. On the same dive, he learns how to swim alongside sharks and to avoid catching their interest by shucking abalone out of the

water. "Now and then one of the sharks would come straight towards us and in an instant turn away with just the tail brushing my face" (2018: 78). The experience of a shark swimming quickly towards and then away from a person underwater may not seem "everyday" to most people. Nevertheless, to maritime poachers there is a kind of ordinariness about these perilous interactions with the underwater world, and divers quickly learn that this is a part of their workplace environment.

## 2: Writing Nature

### Narrative attentiveness

Greaves gives some examples of different ways that one can be attentive to nature, enabling a more critical understanding of what Shuhood is doing in his attentive nature writing. Greaves describes three examples of practising attentiveness: focusing, envisioning, and allowing. In the last of these examples, allowing, individuals engage in a free play where they let a scene unfold through their perceptual senses and seek to resist their typical filters and frames, in what Greaves calls "ephemeral events" of perceptual re-composition (2022: 65). In this last practice of positive aesthetics, Greaves offers one of his most evocative examples of experiences of changing natural light, including seeing "intense sunlight bursting through the clouds to highlight the crests of the wavelets on a pond that a moment before only offered us a dark conglomeration of tangled weeds" (*Ibid.*). When describing the practice of *allowing*, Greaves distinguishes between instances when one perceives nature as a "scene, soundscape, or complete sensory experience" by allowing a kind of sensory free play, and other instances where one's perception focuses more on functional and causal relations (2022: 64).

It strikes me that it is these perceptions in free play that Shuhood so attentively describes the experience of in his nature writing passages. Greaves' description of the ephemeral light is starkly similar to Shuhood's description of seaweed rippling in the light; "Kelp blades

roiled in the swell – now amber, now in shadow – as they lifted and sunk with the tide," and he frequently mentions the changing colours and light intensity and how these refract in the water (2018: 47). The sensory free play Shuhood engages in seems to be at odds with the functional work he is doing to remove abalone from the seabed. Indeed, Greaves agrees with Vice that functionality is superseded by aesthetic relations to nature in being able to describe the phenomenology of nature, and he suggests that functionality does not contribute helpfully to positive aesthetics because knowing what is happening at a functional level does not necessarily help one to *appreciate* something. Thus, the contrary experiences of aesthetic attention to light in water sits alongside Shuhood's causal relationship with abalone depletion, like currents and cross-currents in a many-faceted relationship with the ocean. Furthermore, it is through narrative form that Shuhood shares his plural relationship and experience of the ocean, and through storytelling the reader can appreciate the poetic beauty of nature as he encounters it; alongside the brutal, routine, and thingified destruction of abalone. Shuhood's storytelling suggests he engages in the aesthetic practice of narrativising.

Narrativising is like naming or describing the way that nature appears to one, but the narrativisation of aspects of nature captures these aspects as part of an experiential story. The process of narrating one's phenomenal experience brings together aspects of the world as they are experienced into a plot: a sequence of events. Other narrative features may also be present, for example Shuhood includes characters (with motives and stakes), imagery, conflict, and resolution. In Chuck Wendig's book *Damn Fine Story* he claims that it is difficult to define exactly what a story is, but he maintains that a story happens when something changes, or when the status quo is disrupted (2017: 10-12). Consider, for instance, this account of Shuhood's hair-raising encounter with the sea whilst investigating a new diving spot at Smitswinkel Bay:

> He plunged into the darkness and switched on his dive lamps. Everywhere he turned abalone blanketed the reefs … When he ascended he had to swim on his back to carry the heavy load, not noticing that he was being tugged towards a rock wall where waves were breaking. A surge lifted and tossed him over, dumping him at the bottom. It held him under for so long that he thought he would die. "Some people say they see their lives flash by in front of them," he wrote. "I only thought, I hope they find my body. Then I felt the force of the water ease and I bobbed up out of the darkness and gulped fresh air." (2018: 162)

Shuhood's attentive and beautiful descriptions of the natural world in *Poacher* draw the reader in and grab their attention, but it is in those moments where the world is disrupted when his story becomes captivating. When he manages to escape, Shuhood is once more delighted to find a "deserted paradise" for diving: "In front of him was a flat reef indented with shallow rock pools, leading towards a large cave … He had taken two large pouch bags with him this time and filled both with shucked abalone in less than an hour" (2018: 162-3). Wendig says that stories can manifest like stage magic, and in this passage Shuhood successfully performs a narrative trick for his readers: the magician shows the audience the world (in this case an abundant supply of abalone), then performs a shift and breaks the world (a terrifying near-death experience), before putting the world back together (Shuhood emerges to discover a rich paradise and perfect diving spot) (2017: 21).

There are sudden breaks and hairpin turns in Shuhood's storytelling that keep one held on the edge, with this particular story coming to a happy ending. Shuhood returns with his wife Fatima, some sandwiches, and a thermos of hot coffee. Almost like a reward for the death-defying antics of fighting off the tide, Shuhood and the reader end this sequence of events with an attentive passage that describes the ocean

world with a passionate and attentive appreciation: "The marine life around him was explosive in its richness: bright geometries of coral and shellfish, interspersed with seaweeds and territorial fish … They spent the whole day at the cave, skinny-dipping in the pools" (2018: 163). Again, this is side by side with descriptions of abalone extraction, as Shuhood leaves behind "a trail of bare patches, roughly circular, like footprints worn down to the rocks," a line that, all of a sudden, imbues the well-worn conservation mantra to leave only footprints behind with a contrary sense as it accompanies the disappearance of a species from the ocean (2018: 163). Shuhood also shares more tragic stories about diving in Morocco and the Eastern Cape, with equally rich descriptions of the landscapes and the feel of those places, which are likewise full of twists and turns, but without the happy ending that the Smitswinkel Bay story has.

Storying experience is a way that people connect with the natural world around them across oral and written cultures. The Western Apache, for one, also use practices of narrative attentiveness, through which knowledge of places and people in those places are passed down through generations. For example, places "with names such as Widows Pause For Breath, She Carries Her Brother On Her Back, and Bitter Agave Plain – places made memorable, and infinitely imaginable, by events that happened long ago when the people's distant ancestors were settling into the country" (Basso 1996: 8). Keith Basso has written about the way that the Western Apache also teach moral lessons through storied names of places. By naming places and then later by visiting those places and telling their story, valuable lessons regarding agriculture, danger, and value are taught through the reliving of those stories in those places, and thus moral lessons are passed down through communities from their ancestors. Although readers do not necessarily visit the places that Shuhood describes, one takes on a new perspective when reading about Shuhood's excursions in the sea in pursuit of abalone. This altered perspective shows what it is like to experience the worst horrors of diving for abalone alongside the raw

beauty of it, providing a more nuanced and textured phenomenology of abalone poaching that is not reducible into a binary of just vice or virtue.

### Localised aesthetic sensibility

Shuhood actually feels most connected to nature when he is with horses, and his relationship with them is vital for moving on from incarceration and to seeing himself as a different person. "When I'm riding" he tells the reader, "I can escape the prison out of me. On a horse you can leave things behind" (2018: 175). Shuhood's relationship with his horses attests to a caring attitude, and in terms of a broader animal ethic he says he would "never kill an animal unnecessarily" (2018: 216). Shuhood hunts guinea fowl (a native African bird species, slightly smaller in size than a chicken) to give meat to "the poorest of the poor," and he specifies that this is only with the permission of farmers who view the birds as a pest, likely on the grounds that farmers would kill them anyway (*Ibid.*). He describes a patch of land on the Cape Flats between the farms and beach that he and his family ride past every week as a "little patch of wilderness" (*Ibid.*). Going through the different species of wildlife and the natural beauty of the place, Shuhood lists mongoose, porcupines, duiker (a small antelope variant), and snakes, all amidst "crystal-clear fresh water pools" (*Ibid.*). He objects to seeing the destruction of this ecosystem as young people "come with packs of dogs to chase down the duiker and rip them apart for sport, which makes me angry" (*Ibid.).* Ironically, speaking as a poacher, Shuhood is also frustrated to see farmers "encroaching more and more into the bush" and woodcutters who illegally "chop down the trees and sell it alongside the roads" (*Ibid.*). Perhaps this speaks to his perception of such destruction of nature as unjustified, unlike his own illegal abalone hunting, or perhaps this reflection comes from the distance he gains after finishing his poaching career – it is unclear exactly when Shuhood makes this judgement. More interestingly than an ethical weighing up of harms, though, Shuhood's concerns about his local environment suggest that he cares about nature and that protecting local

ecosystems is important to him, and therefore that he knows the stakes that are at play in abalone poaching. This is something that is not made clear in the narration of poacher characters Tommy and Adonis in *Cape Greed*, so it is notable that Shuhood narrates an ecological awareness of his local surrounds.

Shuhood poses questions about whether one species is more valuable or worthy of preservation than another, implicitly comparing the local birds' habitat loss and deforestation to the decline of abalone populations. He suggests that the media and environmentalists are overly focused on abalone over other species in South Africa. Looking at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) list of endangered species, abalone is significantly more endangered than the animals Shuhood names, which are listed as of "least concern."[41] Shuhood's point still stands for other South African species, though, including the African Penguin, White Steenbras, the Cape Gannet, all listed as "endangered," in the same category as Perlemoen. The comparison is even more stark when you put Perlemoen next to the Rough Moss Frog, Riverine Rabbit, or Estuarine Pipefish, who are listed as "critically endangered" and can only be found in small areas of the country, but for whom there is little public awareness of.

It is useful to reflect on this metric: lists like the IUCN encourage one to look at nature from a national and global perspective and to see animals as countable and comparable, like products on a shelf in a stock room of the kind from the early scene of *Cape Greed* when Vincent gives Mullet a haul of abalone that they have lifted from arrested poachers. From this perspective, abalone is clearly more endangered. The genre of nature writing offers another interesting

[41] According to the IUCN Red List all species of duiker found in South Africa (Common Duiker and Blue Duiker) are listed as "least concern" while Perlemoen is listed as "endangered." The Cape Grey Mongoose is also in the category of "least concern," as is the Cape Porcupine and Harrier-hawk. See, for instance: 'Haliotis Midae' (Peters 2021) and 'Sylvicapra Grimmia' (IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group 2016).

critical vantage here. Jos Smith writes that ethical concern for wildlife – Mabey's "kindredness" with the non-human world – is a relationship that has received more public attention since groups like Friends of the Earth campaigned for the protection of endangered species of animals from overhunting in the 1970s (2017: 12). This popular consciousness around animal welfare as an ethical issue is a key narrative that drives suspicion of poachers as they undermine the legal protections in place for threatened species.

Corporations and governments also use this sort of narrative and at times weaponise it towards individual poachers as a *prima facie* morally justified reason for their criminalisation, but this tends to be divorced from a contextual understanding of the motivations for hunting wildlife illegally. Furthermore, the criminalisation of abalone divers, and other types of poachers, tends to be divorced from the foundational sense of kindredness with animals. It is instead driven by a thingified view of animals as resources and a desire to increase control of said resources and to return capital benefits for state and business. This is also often bound up with the same extortion of resources but occurring outside of the purview of the law, as is observable in embedded police and fisheries department corruption, with "evidence to suggest that every single government agency tasked with combatting abalone poaching has been compromised to some degree by corruption linked to the trade" (de Greef & Haysom 2022: 28). In *Cape Greed* this is narrated when Vincent shares the abalone from a bust with his friend for a date. In *Poacher* this is shown from the opposite perspective as Shuhood agrees to share his profits with a police officer in exchange for his freedom.

Carruthers reviews the nature writing about elephant populations in South Africa and she comments on the gap between European and American traditions of nature writing and South Africa's environmental writing history, where the genre is not "mature, sophisticated, and varied" as it is in the West or even interesting to the South African

reading public, although this comment seems to exclude a number of South African groups with mature and varied oral traditions for narrating nature which are not usually labelled as nature writing (2011: 87). Wildlife management and conservation also has a brutal history in South Africa, and Carruthers has also written about the close relationship between managing animals in the creation of the Kruger National Park. This cosmopolitical process involved removing people from the land in order to create areas of natural beauty, that are now controlled by the state and can deliver profits through tourism (1995). In the twentieth century, when elephant populations were endangered in South Africa after being hunted to excess (for sport and the ivory trade), the government funded an official – Philip Pretorius – to single-handedly destroy the largest remaining elephant population in the Addo bush in the Eastern Cape, because the elephants there were hampering the citrus estates there and undermining recent investment in expensive irrigation schemes (2011: 81-82).

In one example of "nature writing," Pretorius documents how between June 1919 and August 1920 he massacred the Addo elephant population from 130 to 16 over the course of 13 months. Once they had been drastically reduced in numbers the remaining animals were cordoned off in a National Park in 1931 (Hoffman 1993; Carruthers 2011: 99). The more manageable elephant population were no longer "objects to be obliterated" but objects to be observed and profited from (Carruthers 2011: 82-3). Carruthers notes how Pretorius' book was unlike his "nature writing" predecessors who had also written about their elephant exploits but who hunted for sport and branded themselves with the image of a "metaphorical 'military campaign' in which masculine heroes might display their prowess against elephants" (*Ibid.*). By contrast, Pretorius' mission "was a real military campaign" that was conducted by a paid governmental official (*Ibid.*). Significantly, Pretorius' autobiography was not published in South Africa, only in England in Australia, and later translated into Dutch and published in Amsterdam, evidencing the taste for this game hunt narrative in places

that are far away from the environment and animals it describes (Carruthers 2011: 81).

Shuhood's perspective on nature, and his writing about it, is one that is local and informed by his relationships to the parts of the natural world in which he participates and finds meaning. Likewise, his perspective on abalone is not the stock room one, but one that is informed by the real and material need to survive that led to him hunting the animal. This pursuit was not for sport but because it was a job that afforded him earnings and a lifestyle that were otherwise unattainable, such as moving his family out of his wife's parents' house to have their own home. At the same time, the stock room perspective on abalone as a high-value commodity – the thingified perspective – is what makes poaching a viable job option. Shuhood struggles with this during his poaching career, because capitalist values are in opposition to his religion and spiritual dedication. He is not necessarily an environmentalist, but he is open and receptive to the world around him in a way that is not dogmatic or idealistic; it is practical and grounded in ordinary observations of the thick and vibrant life around him.

Shuhood's approach to the natural world demonstrates an aesthetic sensibility in which nature's "subtle animating force" is glimpsed in passing moments that "hint at the life of the natural world" (Greaves 2023: 124). Shuhood feels this keenly when he is with horses. He emphasises that the rush of riding, in ironic comparison to the rush of fast cars, bikes, or boats, is tied to the act of focusing on the horse and its intentionality, having an aesthetic sensibility to its bodily reactions and signals. Indeed, "You must be able to read it: watch his ears, see where his attention is lying. It's not a machine under you. And there's no better rush than that" (2018: 175). Rebecca Tamás points to the way that allowing oneself to be affected and to be attentive to the *difference* of nature has the effect of allowing in different thoughts and even opens up to different ways of thinking (2020: 47). In this context, Shuhood's experience of being with horses and attending to them allows him to

escape the weights of his own identity and to see himself as someone else, someone who does not carry the violence and trauma of prison around with him.

### Peripheral perception of nature

Greaves distinguishes the above aesthetic practices (focusing, envisioning, and allowing, and, I can add narrativising) as only a small selection of the exercises and practices of positive aesthetics (and environmental aesthetics more broadly). These exercises "shape, guide and alter perception *qua* perception with a view to cultivation and enhancement" (2022: 4). And, by perception *qua* perception, Greaves specifies "perception as lived experience, entwined with capacities of imagination, memory and thought, but not subordinated to any other capacity or activity as its aim," thus any perception that is in service of another task (such as watching the horse's ears to be able to tell where it is heading and where you need to steer it) would not serve to cultivate and enhance a person's aesthetic sensibility (*Ibid.*). It is worth clarifying that I do not interpret Greaves' above sense of perception as signifying only an experience of perception in which one has the opportunity to wander, aimless, simply in pursuit of perceiving nature and without other motivations to be out in the natural world. This is an uncommon experience, and if perception *qua* perception was restricted to occasions where a person has *sought out* nature to perceive for the sake of perception, then this discussion of positive aesthetics would be limited to a privileged few. Instead, most people tend to be in the midst of nature for another reason, such as taking out the bins, walking a dog (or riding a horse), or going to the shops. In these instances, perception for its own sake surely overlaps and takes place in close proximity to perception in service of another end. For example, Shuhood shifts from observing the horse's body language as an experience of being with the horse *qua* feeling the horse's liveliness, to observing the horse's bodily signals to be able to ride effectively. With two families of children and as the sole earner for his household, Shuhood must still make time for all of his familial, religious, and community commitments, and thus

is unlikely to have much time for wandering and seeking out nature. On occasions where nature jumps out or catches his eye this is likely to be accessed via the periphery of his perceptual faculties. Hence, the fact that Shuhood is in the ocean to dive for abalone or on the beach to ride his horse does not preclude a moment of perception *qua* perception. Much like the amaZulu's appreciation of their Nguni cattle, the "utility and symbolic significance [of the cattle] for humans does not prevent them being appreciated for themselves and their sheer pointless beauty" (Vice 2022: 17).

Similarly, Kotva writes that developing an attentive relationship to nature as part of a spiritual practice of "contemplation" means to develop and practice *ordinary ways of looking at the world* (2019: 248). Kotva explores a history of interest in the "'passive' faculties of intuition, feeling and pleasure" among Simone Weil and long history of philosophers (2020: 6). It is this passive embodiment of sensibility that aligns with the kind of peripheral perception and appreciation of nature that I contend *Poacher* gives examples of. For instance, Kotva discusses the field writing that informed the early study of ornithology – when the science was open to amateur bird-watchers to share their observations with the scientific community (2019). Some of the descriptions of birds from untrained bird-watchers were foundational for scientific understanding of birds today, even though their notes often bridged into devotional descriptions as much as phenomenological ones, which Kotva notes "may best be described as attentive" (2019: 255). Likewise, Shuhood's untrained observations about nature and the abalone poaching world give one a view that is less object-oriented than academic observations about abalone and the ocean are. It is engaged on a more personal and relational level. Shuhood develops a habitual relationship with underwater worlds, an attunement that is formed over time from repeated actions (Kotva 2019: 243). This habitual relationship with the ocean enables him to navigate the practicalities and the perils of working at night in the sea, or observing nature under conditions of high stress and pressure. In this existentially fraught

experience of submersion and the overcoming of hostile elements, Shuhood shows how he shifts his mindset away from a reasoned and rational understanding of nature to an oceanic dynamic that is more immediate and learned though attention and habit. Whether it is praying to Allah before "sinking slowly in the clear water;" or diving by himself despite the risks to his safety; even learning to adjust his fear tolerance to be able to swim in the same waters as sharks, an attentive disposition to the ocean enables Shuhood to thrive in the corrosive world of abalone poaching (2018: 63).

### Political narrativisation of nature

Kotva argues that passive attention and attentiveness are important for developing both an ecological mindset and also a political one. Both Kotva and Greaves draw on Pierre Hadot's concept of spiritual exercises and brings together the philosophical history and value of these ancient exercises with adjacent spiritual-religious traditions of contemplation from early Christian writers and mystics. For each of these traditions Kotva highlights how practices of attentiveness have been part of a way of thought and life in which contemplation of nature is central, something that is also present in Shuhood's spiritual practice of Sufism, an Islamic form of mysticism (2020: 175). While Tamás shows how natural environments create new possibilities for thought, Kotva emphasises that the conceptualisation of those natural environments has repercussions outside of one's thoughts. Kotva writes that the impact of one's internal thoughts on the world outside of themselves has been proven by "No less than myth or religion, [but] climatology" (2019: 242). Science is informed by people's thoughts and Kotva argues that "good science" in the midst of ecological crisis must be informed by "good intentions," a word that shares its root and some meaning with "attention" (2019: 248).

The shared authorship of the book brings together Shuhood Abader's lived experience and attentiveness to the ocean with Kimon de Greef's marine biological and social scientific expertise. This was a writing

process that Shuhood and Kimon undertook together, and what the reader encounters in the pages of *Poacher* comes from a "participatory approach to storytelling" (2018: 14). Kimon writes that Shuhood's manuscript "forms the spine of this book" and that he has tried to preserve Shuhood's voice throughout, only adding edits for clarity (2018: 14). Kimon describes himself as Shuhood's "co-author and interrogator," and much of the book is written from Kimon's perspective as a storyteller, with quotes from Shuhood's manuscript and his subsequent interviews with Kimon (2018: 14). As this is a collaborative process, one encounters the evocative flourishes of Kimon's writing style together with Shuhood's vibrant descriptions of being out at sea. Kimon was shocked upon first meeting Shuhood because "Keeping track of what he said was like drinking from a fire hydrant. Stories rushed from him, rendered with a precision I had never encountered in a subject" (2018: 31). Moreover, Kimon confirms that the atmospheric, vibrant, and scenic descriptions in the book are not embellished, but firmly grounded in Shuhood's lived experience and his keen interest in his surroundings: "He remembered how the sky had changed colours sixteen years before as he drove a haul of abalone into Hout Bay; how the first time he had seen abalone harvested at night the shells had glowed with phosphorescence" (*Ibid.*).

Kimon writes that the "raw detail" of Shuhood's manuscript was "astonishing" to him, and that his main additions to Shuhood's sketches have been to develop Shuhood as a character, to help him tell his own story, and to provide context for this story from South Africa and the abalone black market, in order to give a critical perspective on Shuhood's experiences of the trade (2018: 31). In an example of Shuhood's "cinematic writing style," Kimon quotes him gazing out over the sea, left with his thoughts after the other divers had gone in already:

> I looked at the forsaken ship [the *Boss 400*, which ran aground in 1994] and wondered if the crew had survived, and what the cause was of that mighty ship ending up the way it did. The sea

> was calm and flat and not even a breeze blowing … there was a full moon and it made that shipwreck look eerie. (2018: 61)

In commenting on the detailed, dramatic style of Shuhood's writing, Kimon mentions that Shuhood has always been an avid reader, including in prison where he favoured books over watching television.

> Then a sudden little splash and my mind was brought back to the first diver that ascended … with a thud the weight belt was thrown on deck, then came the pouch bag, handed to me with a chugging scraping sound. (*Ibid.*)

Part of what Kimon is praising in Shuhood's writing style and ability to recall details is what I call narrative attentiveness, a practice that Shuhood evidently started to develop early on through his lifelong hobby of reading and his wider passion for consuming and sharing stories. This being said, it is worth noting that *Poacher* is a collaborative project between not just a poacher and a journalist, but two writers. At times it is impossible, and perhaps irresponsible, to fully untangle the weave of their voices from each other.

The plural structure of *Poacher* provides first-person lived experiences side-by-side with investigative journalism and marine biology. The reader simultaneously has a second-person moral interest in Shuhood's story and his prospects, and a third-person interest in abalone as an organism, a global commodity, and a symbol for South African socio-politics. Getting into the thick and messy personal story of living from the abalone trade alongside the academic perspective of abalone as an object of study allows for cosmopolitics to happen. Whereas earlier I discussed cosmopolitical *crisis*, Stengers envisions that a more productive "cosmopolitics" involves the coming together of discussants with competing experiences and the negotiation of their perspectives, without prioritising one over another (2018: 149). Kimon and Shuhood's experiences as South Africans have for most of their lives been separated by the segmented nature of the city, an "apartheid vestige that produces strange distortions of time and space" and

operates to keep people who live in different parts of the city from mixing (2018: 25). Kimon writes that despite their close proximity – only living some 10 kilometres apart – he struggles to imagine two lives that are further apart: "Around the time of Shuhood's arrest, I was finishing matric exams and preparing to begin a marine biology degree" (*Ibid.*).

Stengers argues that the interface between science and the public sphere is failing to produce communication, and she suggests humans need to "civilise" encounters with science in order to pursue political ecology (instead of political economy), in the context of natural and climate disaster. Stengers contends that "civilisation" involves the weaving of relations and that, contrary to this, capitalist logic is "intrinsically incapable of being civilised, because what matters for it is not possibilities for relations, but opportunities for exploitation" (2018: 149). As discussed in Chapter One, the individualising and separating logics of capitalist philosophies discourage a relational understanding of human-ocean ethics. Attesting to science's capacity to neglect relationalities (or hauntologies), South Africa's scientific community has been reticent to accept the role of the country's history of racial exploitation in scientific "claims to authority" and has, on the whole, accepted a dichotomy of scientific truths about nature as being opposed to political affairs of society, economy, and culture (Green 2020: 16-17). As mentioned in the Introduction, thinking science alongside a more active relational approach has propelled de Greef and Haysom to advocate for a radical change in abalone fishery management. The pair have suggested that South Africa should remove abalone's protected status and allow the last of the species to be fished, in favour of focusing on social development for the communities who are dependent on the illegal trade. De Greef and Haysom show how ocean ethics must be contextualised within the complexities of the illicit world of abalone poaching. In the next section I examine Shuhood's lived experience of being a poacher and how this informs the way he writes about the ocean.

## 3: Writing Poaching

### Danger and existential courage

One example of the way *Poacher* diverges from nature writing is that it has a distinctly different *genre*-feel. It is clear that Shuhood's relationship with abalone is one that involves high stakes and early on in the book Kimon comments that to effectively participate in the illicit abalone trade "requires accepting, and indeed seeking out, threatening situations, the trade ill-suited for levels of caution that most people would consider nominal" (2018: 19). Reading through some chapters of *Poacher* is like trying to keep up with a fast-paced thriller; it bends the mind to think this is the real story of someone's life when it seems far from the mundane and rhythmic routine that many people are accustomed to. One can readily see how Nicol and Hichens adapted a version of the abalone poaching story into a gripping crime fiction narrative.

Kimon recounts one time after another how Shuhood narrowly evades arrest. For example, during a high-speed sea chase when Shuhood's boat is pursued by two of the fisheries department's flagship vessels, "The ocean expanded as the city behind them shrunk. At the flat line of the horizon the sun began to rise, leaving the men vulnerable to being spotted" but they narrowly manage to hide their boat behind a large freighter ship, "a mountain of steel" (2018: 146). Their next challenge was waiting out the day out at sea, with no phone reception and not enough petrol to get both boats back to shore; "In our black wetsuits we soon began to fry" Shuhood writes as he recalled sitting in the boats without any water, while spotters notified them of the enduring heavy police presence: "We were what you would call sitting ducks" (*Ibid.*). Chilling, daring, hair-raising anecdotes like this are peppered in between Shuhood's attentive gaze over the oceanic world he is in, which attests to the distinct lack of harmony that can characterise the marine landscape.

In one of the most shocking and violent anecdotes in the book, Shuhood and his carrier Freddie, who has been in and out of the police's custody in a string of arrests, both get into a fraught car chase with some park rangers.[42] At one point they are driving along a narrow mountain pass, and Shuhood recalls blocking the pursuing vehicle from reaching Freddie's car as it contained all the abalone from their dive – the critical evidence the police need to be able to charge the men with poaching. While he swerves in front of the car, his ex-wife "Nuraan sat next to him, smoking a cigarette. The children, in the back, both younger than ten, were quiet" (2018: 153). At one point in the pursuit the police car catches up with Shuhood, and when a ranger reaches in to his truck to take his keys, Shuhood grabs the ranger's arm and proceeds to drive his vehicle while still holding on to her. She is dragged, screaming in Afrikaans, along next to the vehicle while she still holds tight onto his keys, until Shuhood presses his wife's cigarette into her arm and slows to let her fall away (2018: 153).

In this story it is not only Shuhood but also his family's safety that is at risk, and the physicality of his struggle with the ranger shows how moral constraints are crossed to earn a day's wages and avoid arrest. At the end of the chase, when Shuhood checks if his children are all right, they reply that they are fine and would like ice cream. In a powerful moment of whiplash, the whole family visits McDonalds on the way home, funded by Shuhood's daring survival tactics (2018: 154). So, when McMullin writes that "Courage seems to be a virtue more appropriate for an era of warfare and chivalry than for the soft lives that most of us typically lead," it strikes me that there is a wide gap between the lived experiences of poachers and people working in most professions (2019: 202).

[42] De Greef explains that "The job of a carrier is to collect abalone after a dive, breaking the chain of evidence linking poachers to their catch. To become a carrier is simpler and less frightening than learning to dive, but the payoffs are far lower" (2018: 151).

Shuhood certainly demonstrates an ability to keep his focus in high-octane situations, which suggests some sort of courage, if one defines courage as something like the ability to capably face difficulty or danger.[43] This is something he takes pride in, writing that not everyone "has the balls" to dive for abalone (2018: 57, 149). From a phenomenological point of view, however, McMullin describes courage as a virtue that is specific to situations where a person experiences "existential death;" when they face up to the critical possibility that "the self I am is in danger of ceasing to be" (2021: 214). With this revised definition, it is not clear whether Shuhood feels as though his life is on the line in these situations or whether anything is really risked. These incidents happen on a regular basis and the poachers view arrest as another part of the job; they often return to the sea immediately after court hearings and view these inconveniences more as threats to income than to their life or sense of self as a person. This suggests that Shuhood's experiences of facing up to danger on a regular basis do not constitute courage in the existential sense of the virtue, because his "grounding identity" is not at stake (McMullin 2021: 210).

Shuhood is also a self-proclaimed adrenaline-junkie. As such, he does not "endure pain and danger for the sake of a *better* self," but in fact sees his sense of self as bound up with the high-stakes and dangerous lifestyle of a poacher (*Ibid.*). This sense of thrill is evident in the following boat chase:

> "The sea would make holes and in we would go," Shuhood wrote; then "it would close up and lift us high out of the water" … "I held on so tight to the pontoon ropes," he wrote, "I hardly noticed my hands were bleeding." The skipper changed direction again and bore towards the river-mouth. He read and

[43] This is how, for example, the Cambridge Dictionary defines courage: in terms of the ability to "control" one's "fear in a difficult or dangerous situation" (McIntosh 2013, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/courage).

> rode each wave as it came, waiting until the last moment to accelerate into the trough … "He knew his shit," Shuhood wrote, "so when he told the crew to toss the cylinders overboard nobody questioned him." ... Although the men had lost money, Shuhood was elated. "Running from the law in stormy seas, living to tell the tale," he wrote, "I felt more alive than anything I've felt before." (2018: 148-9)

For Shuhood, evading the law has been part of his experience of working life since he was young. He had already been arrested and served prison time for stealing from drug dealers before he was 30, and the risks of capture whilst working as a poacher are well-known, given the high profile of the abalone trade. Poachers see these stakes as part of the job, and so any threat to selfhood is contextualised by the fact that a sense of self in this job is already bound up with thwarting law enforcement. It is worth qualifying, however, that this does not suggest poachers are indifferent to arrest. Rather, abalone divers become accustomed to the radically different stakes that threaten themselves and their way of life, adjusting their perspective on what is a worthwhile risk and what normal looks like; "on a long-enough time axis, most threats tended to fall within tolerable limits for Shuhood" (2018: 19).

There is no doubt this is a deadly profession, and of the people Shuhood knows "at least seven men he worked with have died poaching abalone; dozens more have been arrested or developed drug problems," and these numbers are likely to have increased since the time of writing (2018: 11). The lived reality of human-ocean relations for abalone poachers like Shuhood evidences the radical contextual differences that concepts like safety and danger have in a material sense in conjunction with the related ethical impacts of these higher risk levels. Abalone poaching is the sort of career that only a certain type of person can pursue and succeed in; this line of work requires hard work, thick skin, and a knack for graft. *Cape Greed's* image of Adonis tanning his legs in the boat while Tommy dives down to collect abalone seems

far from the shocking reality of abalone poaching that Shuhood describes. The police chases and the violence of the abalone industry certainly lend themselves to a crime fiction narrative. Yet where *Cape Greed* depicted a carefree enjoyment of criminal vice, evocative of a spoiled child, *Poacher* highlights how a learned desensitisation to danger and difficulty are necessary survival tools.

## Oceanic otherness

As well as the threat of police beatings, arrest, and jail time, there are other reasons why Shuhood maintains an adjusted level of risk tolerance. Fundamentally, oceanic submersion brings its own significant dangers. These new circumstances and oceanic conditions also present opportunities for some of the best examples of narrative attentiveness in the book. Kimon writes that Shuhood has "almost drowned on at least four occasions and once felt the thud of a fellow diver being struck by an onboard motor" (2018: 11). From Shuhood's first plunge into the ocean to dive for abalone, it is clear that he is risking his life and, crucially, that the odds are often not in his favour. He learns how to use oxygen tanks on the fly and how to adjust his weight belt to allow for different currents, brushing with death on multiple occasions on his first few dives. He learns much about his diving equipment with no instruction, but instead by trial and error, fearful of being regarded as an amateur and losing out on the opportunity to dive and earn a day's pay. As Shuhood's understanding and skills with his diving equipment improve, he is required to constantly adapt these to new oceanic conditions that he finds himself in.

When diving in Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha) in the Eastern Cape, Shuhood learns almost too late that he needs to adjust his weight belt for the stronger currents than those he is used to in the Western Cape. Shuhood brushes off indications from the other divers that his equipment is not set up correctly because he is nervous about seeming inexperienced, despite this being only his fourth time diving (2018: 73). After collecting just seven abalones, Shuhood falls prey to the strong

tidal surges without sufficient anchorage from his weight belt, and begins panicking when his oxygen runs low and he is unable to surface without the current taking him further out to sea. This is the second time in a matter of months that Shuhood nearly drowns, and he tells himself that to survive he must adjust his mental state: "I had to forget about panic and regulate my breathing" (2018: 74). The main danger of scuba diving involves the effects of pressure in the bloodstream. Decompression illness, commonly called 'the bends' results from the release of dissolved nitrogen in the tissues and bloodstream when a diver ascends too quickly for the nitrogen to escape via respiration, hence Shuhood needing to focus on his breathing (Salyer 2007; Bassett 2019: 14). Symptoms can be mild to life-threatening and severe decompression sickness is deadly (*Ibid.*). Hence, Shuhood tries to regulate his breathing so that the nitrogen can be released gradually despite his low levels of oxygen and need to ascend quicker than expected. Shuhood steels himself and attends to his surroundings, seeking out his faith to help him find his way back to shore:

> He took a bearing from the sun and turned to face the coast. When the surge pulled him in, he clung fast to the rocks; when waves rolled in the current dropped and he swam hard through the murk. He moved slowly towards the lagoon, forcing himself to breathe slowly. He prayed the whole time – "even the most unreligious people think of God when they find themselves in life-threatening situations," (*Ibid.*)

Shuhood often mentions praying before he dives, which highlights the fact that each time an abalone poacher plunges into the ocean they put their life on the line, often in the dead of night and with armed forces in pursuit.

On Shuhood's trips to Morocco and the Eastern Cape, his descriptions of the beautiful landscape are interspersed with anecdotes of Shuhood and his diving partner Ali frustratedly struggling to navigate the oceanscape below. On his trip to the Eastern Cape, for instance,

Shuhood awakens "to the cries of a fish eagle" and is greeted by "Nguni cattle with wide horns … roaming the beach," leaving him stunned by the "beauty and serenity of that place" (2018: 192). Later that morning, however, Ali and Shuhood are confronted with an ocean that is completely cloudy with no visibility. Shuhood recalls that "The waves hit like cannon shots against the rocks and the water was a dirty brown colour" (*Ibid.*). The otherness of the ocean environment and its reluctance to habituate human divers gives way to an anonymous beauty, what Tamás calls the "unassailable difference of the nonhuman" (2020: 45). This sense of nature as other is both aesthetically and phenomenologically apparent in Shuhood's experience, and narrativisation of this communicates the laborious and dispiriting experience of these failed attempts to navigate inhospitable waters.

In one memory, Shuhood recalls reckoning with the deathly extent of the sea's alterity to human divers. Shuhood was diving in Sea Point, Cape Town where his friend and occasional diving partner Carl died only a week before. Carl was diving solo and so was Shuhood at the time. When the former did not reappear, Shuhood helped to alert the police who found his body, weighed down by the ballast of his rig and weight belt (2018: 204-5). Shuhood is not normally shaken by the deaths of other poachers, and he claims he is "not into omens and that," but nevertheless he took Carl's death very seriously (*Ibid.*). Shuhood would also often dive alone, preferring the lower risk of capture – where a large group of divers is more likely to attract attention and suspicion – but Carl's death reminded him of the risks when one had nobody there to watch one's back. In what became a recurrent pattern towards the end of his career, Shuhood considered giving up poaching, briefly, before he ran out of money and realised once more that without another source of income he had to return to the sea (2018: 205).

Shuhood's description of the ocean imbues the scene with a sense of loss: "On an overcast day he returned to Sea Point. The ocean was grey and flat like a lake. He kicked over reefs he once harvested, now

denuded of abalone" (2018: 205). This line communicates an almost haunting beauty to the unmoving ocean, but the tension begins to rise as Shuhood fails to find a familiar set of rocks. He realised he had been descending deeper than he thought – currently at 27 metres when the deepest he could go was 33 metres (2018: 206). As Shuhood turned to start swimming back to shore he attended to the ocean around him, seeking out its familiar signals to help him get back to safety:

> But with no sun in the sky he could not orientate himself. Shafts of light can serve as a compass if you take your bearings before getting in. Kelp stems usually point towards land, bent by incoming swells, but in the sand flats surrounding Shuhood there was "a big, big, emptiness". (2018: 206)

Shuhood realised he had unwittingly been swimming further out and was at 31 metres, fast approaching the maximum depth that his diving cylinders could handle. Shuhood had to rise to the surface, slowly "for the nitrogen in his blood to dissipate" even though his core temperature was dropping after being in the water for over an hour (*Ibid.*). The horror of his situation suddenly became clear as he removed his mask and "Sea Point's high rises appeared in miniature, clumped beneath the curve of Signal Hill" (*Ibid.*). Shuhood realised he was 400 metres out to sea in the shipping lane.

In this encounter, Shuhood interprets the sea as being actively malicious. After Carl dies in the same patch of water he faces up to an almost impossible fight with the ocean:

> I've never been in a situation like this and I'm starting to stress. You're on top and you don't know what predators are underneath you. You *mos* know sharks normally attack from below. It's safer to be down there, so you can watch them. Now I'm swimming on top and I can't see shit. (2018: 206).

Fighting currents, and ultimately dumping his weight belt and catch bag, Shuhood swims for hour on hour and gradually inches closer to

shore. Even as another surge pulls him off course, he keeps picturing his family at home, and finally reaches the shore over four hours after he had entered the sea (*Ibid.*). In passages like this towards the end of *Poacher*, Shuhood is no longer invested in his sense of self being defined by the daring poaching lifestyle. He becomes increasingly concerned for his freedom from prison and his safety from the perils of the ocean's alterity. This is all bundled with the fact that these elements represent threats to his place within his family and his valued way of life with them. With this in mind, when he steps into the ocean and actively risks his life, and with his ability to continue being a father, Shuhood comes to embody McMullin's existential courage.

Reeling from his near-death experience, Shuhood turns to spirituality for reprieve and to be able to grieve his friend, inviting a Sufi friend to perform a prayer on the beach to invite Carl's spirit to rest (2018: 207). As they stood "facing the black ocean," Shuhood's companion stuttered and struggled to get his words out (2018: 207). He told Shuhood "it was like there was something in front of his face there. It was trying to push the words back in" (2018: 207). The ocean in this scene is an active and threatening presence, and it makes that presence perceptibly known through the spiritual connection Shuhood's friend makes, to the extent that he can feel its resistance from outside of the water itself. This kind of experience of nature as undeniably present is far from the experiences of nature on the periphery that I discussed earlier. Here, the ocean confronts Shuhood with a sense of finitude that cannot be ignored; nature is not the background to a human story but becomes the main antagonist in a tragic plot for many poachers like Carl, who lose their lives to the ocean.

## 4: Poaching and environmental virtue ethics

### Role models and moral character

Shuhood's spiritual journey is connected to the ocean through his poaching and the sacrifices it requires of him, and likewise Shuhood's moral journey of transformation is also closely linked to his deepening

of spiritual commitment. McMullin's account, like many virtue ethics perspectives, emphasises the core importance of role models in moral development and the cultivation of virtue over a lifetime.

From a young age, individuals learn from the people around them about what good looks like and why they should value it. As a child, a person's early role models determine much of how they approach questions of ethics, and this influential matrix of relationalities develops as one takes on new role models, for example during adolescence when people often shift peer groups and start developing their own identity as more distinct from parental and family identities (McMullin 2021: 113-8). Shuhood was brought up in a supportive family who valued faith, family, and community (2018: 38-44). His mother, Rosa, has a strong ethical code that is informed by her Muslim faith, and she cares deeply for her two children. Shuhood acknowledges that she always tried to teach him to do the right thing, and it is clear from her prominence in the book and her continuing presence in Shuhood's life today that Rosa was a strong role model from an early age (2018: 222). From his mother, Shuhood received the moral guidelines and framework he needed to be able to recognise goodness, what is owed to him and others, and to strive for this. However, Shuhood also found role models on the streets, those who were less concerned with right and wrong and were instead more interested in how to survive, how to prove themselves.

Shuhood grew up in a deprived neighbourhood after his family was relocated from Simonstown which was designated as a 'white' area by the 1950 Group Areas Act to Grassy Park. Grassy Park is a suburb of the Cape Flats region of Cape Town, and was designated as a 'Coloured' area. There was a lot of violence and crime in the Cape Flats with little police or social support (Gardener *et al.* 2015, Chauke 2023). McMullin makes clear in her account of virtue ethics that some people have less of a chance of achieving flourishing if they are dealt a poor hand at the start of their lives. In addition to this, people are at their most

impressionable at a young age and therefore most open to negative influence from role models because at this time "one is committed to loving imitation of the whole person as a kind of unanalyzable unit" (2021: 141). Shuhood mentions in the book that he has a competitive streak; in his words, he believes that "if someone else can do it, I can do it" (2018: 62). This desire to match the skills and achievements of others is a great motivator, but it can also mix dangerously with role models who demonstrate harmful behaviours. Shuhood felt the need to prove he was tough to his peers. As he recalls, "'I was a good-looking *laaitie*, coming out of a middle-class family,' … 'With these underprivileged kids, I always had to prove myself'" (2018: 34). This is a mindset that evidently travels with him later in life when he feels the bravado and need to match other poachers' exploits or to beat them.

De Greef writes that "To hold his ground in the aftermath of apartheid's urban purges, [Shuhood] acquired a new persona: unafraid of fighting anybody, quick with a knife" (2018: 34). Looking back on his history, Kimon and Shuhood discuss whether the evictions and Shuhood's beginnings in a rough area impacted on his opportunities. On one occasion, Shuhood takes full responsibility for the course of his life and writes "I'm where I am now because of the decisions I made." (2018: 34). In another conversation, however, Shuhood blames the circumstances for his misfortune, saying he would "never have gotten mixed up with the gangs" if his family had not moved, although he recognises it is possible that he might still have worked as a poacher (2018: 34-5). The high levels of poverty and community violence in the Cape Flats created an environment in which Shuhood's role models and his possibilities for developing a strong identity were largely tied to violent and criminal behaviours.[44]

[44] High levels of youth violence have been observed within communities in Cape Town, as has the frequent exposure of children to violence in their homes, schools, and communities (Gardner *et al* 2015: 800). Children in Cape Town also report knowing people in their communities who commit criminal activity on a daily basis and that they are also victims to daily violent behaviour (*Ibid.*). Hinsberger *et al.* highlight a cycle of violence in low-income urban communities

Shuhood also became familiar with the black market from a young age because in his neighbourhood it "was not an abstract concept but operated in front of him on the street" (2018: 45). Before his poaching career, Shuhood had been to prison for getting mixed up with vigilantes who were fighting with drug dealers on the Cape Flats. When he was subsequently released at the age of 30 there were few legal job options available to him (2018: 55). Kimon reflects that "It is in South Africa's chinks and fissures that the illicit abalone trade has taken hold … Not everyone who inherits this history turns to a life of crime, but by any measure the likelihood is far greater" (2018: 44-5). Statistics illustrate that there is an increased likelihood of criminality in the poor areas like the Cape Flats, and although Shuhood's story is a narrative of crime it foregrounds the role that circumstances play, something that is less clear in the crime fiction narrative of *Cape Greed*.

Shuhood started working in mobile phone repairs when he first got out of prison, but there was not much work and he soon started considering alternatives. Abalone poaching was an attractive job prospect as it offered the possibility of an elevated income and lifestyle. It was also an option that avoided the violence of getting involved in gangs, which "was at odds with [Shuhood's] beliefs as a Muslim" (2018: 11). He took some work driving a van to drop off and pick up a group of other divers and saw that they were earning much more than he could as a driver. For Shuhood, poaching meant being able to provide for his family by working hard at a job that involved risk and skill, but which did not involve getting mixed up with gangs again. It seemed better than the alternative options available to him. As Shuhood ferried the divers out in the early hours and then took them home before the sun rose, he observed the other men enviously:

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in South Africa that predominantly impacts young men and Chauke discusses how the developmental experiences and future opportunities of young people in the Cape Flats is dramatically impacted by gangs and a culture of violence in their communities (2016, 2023).

> These guys grew up with the sea in their blood, living in the Hout Bay fishing community … they took care of their own by providing for their families and others … I really admired those divers for having the balls to go into the sea at night and make a living, and I wondered if I would have what it takes to be one of them. (2018: 57)

The poachers' income and daring lifestyles were aspirational for Shuhood; they had found a way to work outside the legal system that was relatively removed from gangs, drugs, and violence.

These poachers were Shuhood's new role models, and he saw their lifestyle as representing a morally and qualitatively superior way of living to what he currently had. He would later come to reckon with the intersections between the abalone and drug trade, but for now this was a rare opportunity for Shuhood to uplift his prospects. Despite his wife Nuraan's protests about the risks involved, Shuhood was determined to earn more to support his family (2018: 62). With no proper training in using diving equipment Shuhood had a near-death experience the first time he dived for abalone (as discussed earlier in the chapter), but he nevertheless could not wait to return to the water: "I was going to be a diver from now onwards and nothing was going to stop me" (2018: 65). Soon Shuhood moved his family into a place of their own, and out of sharing a room at his wife's parent's house (2018: 56). Shuhood relished in the earnings and the rush of working in a dangerous environment, and he was keen to be the best he could be at this exciting new type of work.

Within the abalone world, Shuhood starts to distinguish and evaluate characters, and he notices the nuances and differences in poachers with different motivations and pressures. Legalistic and conservational narratives frame all abalone poaching as essentially immoral, but Shuhood observes how some divers have more and others have less virtuous lifestyles associated with the trade. As de Greef comments, "The stereotype of poachers burning through money in pursuit of status

– sneakers, flashy cars, women, liquor – is broadly accurate but often false" (2018: 211). As Shuhood himself becomes more experienced as a diver, he discusses the value of finding a good character who you can trust to work with, versus the perils of working in bigger groups with people who are out for themselves, or where there are more uncontrollable variables to contend with. For example, Shuhood blames his deck assistant for his final arrest in Langebaan, North of Cape Town. While keeping watch from shore the assistant did not notify their boat after seeing "There were people on the slipway [who] watched us launch," which ultimately led to the 16-month sentence during which Shuhood wrote his manuscript (2018: 26).

Shuhood often prefers to work by himself or with just one other person (2018: 96-7). Even when he does find a good group of divers to work with, Shuhood finds himself torn between his own comparatively careful lifestyle and the more reckless way that other poachers live. For example, while working in Port Elizabeth, Shuhood describes the other men as "coarse and reckless. After getting paid they would load up on booze and descend on dive bars in the suburbs, ordering shooters and getting into fights. 'They pulled up at my hotel with a limousine they'd hired for the night, just getting totally smashed,' Shuhood told me. 'Prostitutes, coke, liquor. I said, no, you guys go on.'" (2018: 149). In contrast to this experience of luxury, Shuhood also meets divers in the Eastern Cape (unofficially known as the Transkei, an "apartheid-era Xhosa Bantustan" or segregated area) who dive in more perilous conditions with extremely low visibility, no diving equipment, and a high concentration of sharks, in order to give their family a fraction of what divers in the Western Cape are earning (2018: 184-91). Even more than Shuhood, for divers in the Eastern Cape poaching abalone is about survival. Hence, the profession of abalone poaching draws a diverse collection of people with differing motives and values.

Poaching offers Shuhood the opportunity to pursue a version of himself that he initially perceives to be better off in terms of morals and quality

of life. But later, when Shuhood decides to make a more profound commitment to his Muslim faith he undergoes a tension between his spiritual-moral values and his lifestyle as a poacher: "The spiritual pursuit of goodness has not always been in step with his [Shuhood's] life circumstances or the decisions he has felt compelled to make" (2018: 167). While in prison, Shuhood joined the *26s* gang in order "to preserve his dignity" because those who are not in the numbers gangs get "pulled around by the nose and beaten" (2018: 168).[45] De Greef observes that "vanishingly few men exist who can pass through South Africa's correctional services system without either hewing to its internal governing network of the Number or becoming a *frans"* (*Ibid.*). De Greef mentions that Shuhood's history with gangs is something he was reluctant to include because it is a part of his life that he is ashamed of and does not sit neatly alongside his spiritual commitment. Shuhood was worried that readers would "just see me as another gangster" (*Ibid.*), perhaps like the stereotypes of Tommy and Adonis from *Cape Greed*. Kimon's reasoning for pushing back against Shuhood's resistance is that by describing the lived reality of poverty, violence, gangs, and the prison system, he wanted to illuminate some of the publicly hidden "forces that draw people into the underworld" (*Ibid.*). This narrative decision to make visible the personal, emotional, and circumstantial challenges Shuhood experienced as part of his journey to becoming an abalone poacher highlights both how initial moral luck and background factors outside one's control play a large role in whether someone gets involved in criminal activity at a young age.

A more detailed examination of criminality elucidates a more nuanced moral perspective on the competing and sometimes impossible decisions that people face in the context of poverty and the criminal justice system, to be able to survive and get by, before they can begin

[45] The Numbers Gang is a criminal organisation within the South African prison system which includes the *26s*, *27s*, and *28s*. Non-gang members without numbers are labelled "frans," and these people fall prey to constant violence and bullying.

to attempt to flourish as a person. Shuhood's story complicates the greedy poacher narrative, but it also tells a different story to small-scale fisher historical claims to abalone. In Shuhood's story of poaching as a career choice, readers gain greater perspective on the complex situational factors that draw individuals into vicious behaviour. Kimon's narrative decision to foreground the messiness of striving to flourish in Cape Town exposes the reductionist and hegemonic nature of legal narratives of abalone and ocean ethics. Practically, these blanket narratives of criminality as immorality create conditions where the label of criminality excludes individuals from licit job opportunities, leaving large swathes of young people who grow up in violent neighbourhoods to end up seeking job opportunities within the criminal world. Poor quality of life in large areas of Cape Town, with rising unemployment, housing shortages, and gang violence, has led many people (largely men) to take up lucrative employment in the abalone poaching industry. These conditions are crucial considerations in any attempt to understand the moral landscape of human-abalone and human-ocean relations in South Africa (de Greef & Haysom 2022: 19).

McMullin argues that even in situations where one is surrounded by a corrupt community of norms and expectations, it is still possible to resist this and enact transformative change in one's life. She draws on Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and other thinkers in the existentialist tradition who emphasise the freedom that each person has (2021: 147). Individuals are free to interpret and apply the moral norms they encounter in their own way, and because of this they are also responsible for their actions. As moral agents, the norms people have learned are powerful motivators for action. Each person can either pursue or push against such norms to further their life projects and pursue their conception of the good life. For his part, Shuhood ends up pursuing a career in abalone poaching because it allows him to fulfil his project to be skilled and effective at work that challenges him. Furthermore, it enables him to be a good husband and father who can buy a home of their own for his family and provide for them

economically. However, he feels gripped by a tension in this decision when he is brought to face up to the systemic links between poaching and drugs, "an irreconcilable conflict that had threaded through his poaching career" (2018: 19). This tension is especially obvious on one job where Shuhood works directly with a merchant who also operates as a drug dealer and is therefore in Shuhood's view "responsible for wrecking lives, profiting from a crime that Shuhood had considered, at times, to be punishable by death" for its destructive impacts on his community (*Ibid.*). Most of the time Shuhood could compartmentalise his personal work as a diver from the black-market machinations of his trade on a wider scale. But it becomes hard for him to maintain the distinction when confronted with someone who was imbricated in both of these worlds, with each one feeding the other.[46] Here, Shuhood's visions of the good are in conflict.

McMullin says that when one perceives either an alignment or a tension between the way a person interprets how they should go about acting or living, they experience their character – them*selves* and the selves that they hope to become, their possible future selves – as crucially at stake (2021: 203-6). This is when existential courage is needed to face up to the potential loss of self. The extent to which one perceives a risk to this sense of self, and future self, correlates to how seriously that person takes the impact of their choices and decisions. When Shuhood commits to Sufism, after his time in prison, he internalises a new vision of himself on a path of goodness, in which his responsibilities to others take higher priority than before. Shuhood reflects: "I decided there's no place for that [the violence of the criminal underworld] in my life as a family man. People see me on the outside with my kids, and now there's this whole other world inside there that doesn't fit" (2018: 168). This

[46] The two trades are irretrievably enmeshed in South Africa. Abalone deliveries are sometimes exchanged directly for drugs and abalone profits go to funding drug or weapons purchases (de Greef & Haysom 2022).

vision of his future self becomes the motivator that drives him to give up his career and life as a poacher, with its risks to life and freedom.

### Spiritual commitment and taking responsibility

Shuhood deepens his Muslim commitment when he joins a Sufi order, called a *tariqa*. As part of this new spiritual journey of development Shuhood works on his personal moral growth, which involves committing to the people around him and his Muslim community. Shuhood is part of the Tijani order, which came to South Africa from Western Africa and mainly Senegal where there is a strong sufi presence (Molins-Lliteras 2009). Shuhood joins his local *tariqa* in the *zawiya* (Islamic school) "in a neat brick house in Gugulethu, a predominantly black settlement near Cape Town" (2018: 169). Susana Molins-Lliteras' has conducted ethnographic research with the Niassene branch of the Senegalese Tijaniyya in Gugulethu, the one that Shuhood is a member of (2009). As part of their role in the community, she writes that the *zawiya* is in Gugulethu because the Tijani leadership wanted to invite black South Africans to Islam and to "uplift" the township community with Islamic education and activities (2009: 224). As a result, the Tijaniyya has created a multicultural environment where there exists a mixture of people across typical class and race boundaries (2009: 224-5).

There is a strong focus on fostering community spirit within the Niassene *tariqa* and this involves enriching people within the community, a relational and community-centred approach that is far from the extractivist logics of abalone poaching and the individuating philosophy of capitalism.[47] Shuhood's spiritual commitment involves praying twice a day and reciting a set of prayers that the sheikh has

[47] Molins-Lliteras and others have commented on the interweaving of economic success, education, and spirituality as part of the philosophy and practice of the Niassene Tijaniyya, for example by providing economic support for people who want to improve their educational qualifications (2009: 225). There is a distinctive sense of learning what it means to be Muslim in an African context – which is facilitated by strong travel links and a network in South Africa, Senegal, and other African countries including Mali, Nigeria, and Sudan (2009: 225).

taught him. Through prayer and study, Shuhood seeks to adopt an attitude of grace to all that he encounters in life: "Everything you see and believe in – you learn that nothing is going to come your way if it wasn't meant. No harm will befall you, no good will come to you. That is how I aspire to be." (2018: 170). This philosophy of grace seems to require an acceptance of both fortune and tragedy, the good and the bad, together in a modest and humble appreciation of oneself in the context of the wider world. Indeed, the Tijani order aims for "the purification of the heart in preparation to host Allah" and in this way Sufism encourages an acceptance of something greater than oneself and in doing so leads people away from individualistic or self-aggrandising behaviour (Molins-Lliteras, quoted in de Greef & Abader 2018: 169).

Such a humbling perspective gives Shuhood a structured way to think more critically about how he wants to live his life to be able to embody a spirit of grace. As a result, he decides that his role in the criminal world of abalone – and by extension the "netherworld" of prisons and gangs – does not fit with what he perceives a good life to look like (2018: 170). Molins-Lliteras says that spiritual adherents can bring positive change to the world only "through changing and overcoming themselves" (de Greef & Abader 2018: 171). Thus, Shuhood is prompted to examine how he might rebalance and redistribute his responsibilities to be in line with a transcendental life of moral and holy dedication. McMullin writes that an external perspective like this can help individuals to observe an over-emphasis on one normative responsibility (e.g., individualism) that is at odds with family and community responsibilities and participation in these spheres (2021: 145). For Shuhood, an overly individualised focus on safety and survival was something he learned during his first stint in prison.

Shuhood describes how he needed to be overly concerned for his personal safety in prison, which overrode his ability to attend to the needs of other inmates. The armour he constructed made it more

difficult for him to be a husband, father, and community member back outside the prison walls. Shuhood writes that in prison each person looks after himself, to ensure their individual survival. When he first arrived there, he was keen to rise the ranks in the gangs so as to prove himself. Over time, though, he became disillusioned with the idea of a 'brotherly bond' between the members. When Shuhood's life started to change, "the inherent violence of this system – stabbings for initiations, beatings to discipline *franse* – began to jar with Shuhood's conception of himself" (2018: 168). With a family of his own to look after and act as a role model to, he could not reconcile these two sides of his life. Whenever Shuhood returned to prison, he would have to "play the game" and he regretted that to "safeguard myself I gotta be this ugly person that I don't want to be" (2018: 171). Shuhood's responsibilities to others were out of balance through an overemphasis on individualism and prioritisation of personal normative responsibilities over one's duties to support others and the community at large.

McMullin avers that transforming one's moral compass is a challenging task, however. She discusses the need for a 'global critical distance' in order for individual moral agents to be able to assess, and re-assess, their own identity possibilities and projects. This precipitates efforts to overcome corrupt ideas of what living well looks like. "Unless we can achieve some kind of critical distance from the exemplars who model the practical identities and life plans that shape our seeing of the world, there is no hope for an account of moral development that is not fully hostage to the moral quality of one's original exemplars" (McMullin 2021: 137). This is where the public and shared nature of human life plays a crucial role in moral lives. The claims of the shared world require a person to step outside of their immediate circle, and these claims can refer to the person to new and different role models with very different experiences to them (including religious, historical, fictional role models).

Shuhood wrestles with his desire for radical change, which is inspired by his spiritual commitment to moral growth. Moreover, his moral transformation is also influenced by the care and attentive contemplation of Shuhood's natural surroundings that I discussed at the start of the chapter. On occasion, Shuhood's attentive descriptions convey the contested feelings he has about being a part of this inspiring environment whilst also contributing to its decline:

> Shuhood kicked away from shore. The visibility extended 10 m in each direction, softly lit from above. He saw 'different types of starfish and small sea cucumbers and an assortment of fish that weren't scared of me,' he wrote. 'It made me feel like I was part of this environment all along.' 'Then it struck me that I was here to participate in its destruction,' he added. (2018: 64)

Here Shuhood reflects briefly on the moral dilemma of his role in this ocean, his reason for being there and swimming along with the other creatures.

> 'I also saw abundance … everywhere I looked it was there, so tightly packed together as if there wasn't enough space for all of them on one reef … my conscience quickly disappeared and I took out the twelve-inch dive knife strapped to my leg and got to work.' (*Ibid.*)

However, his guilt is assuaged by the abundance of abalone on the reef and the impression that he is not taking more than the ocean has to give. Years later, Shuhood is struck by the unavoidable reality of abalone depletion whilst diving off St James in Cape Town's False Bay. Going back over and over the same reefs where he previously found abalone proliferating, he could now only see urchins in their place. Shuhood consequently describes the reefs as being "raped to oblivion," knowing he was part of the reason for this decimation (2018: 200).

Shuhood writes that he wants to seek forgiveness for his sins against nature and humanity by performing a pilgrimage to Mecca (2018: 217). This statement comes in *Poacher's* epilogue, and it sits in tension with statements elsewhere in the book that suggest Shuhood is not remorseful for his poaching career. In fact, this lack of remorse was the reason he was rejected by his first publisher, but is not an issue for Kimon, who is more interested in the opportunity to get an insider account into the underground world of poaching (2018: 31). The epilogue suggests that Shuhood acknowledges his sins against others, or his abuses of second- and third-person moral responsibilities, through hunting to excess and violence toward other people. For this he seeks atonement through spiritual devotion. However, he does not feel regret or guilt for his actions, perhaps because he views his actions and his choices as justified given the circumstances. They contribute to the man he is today and the life he has lived.

Shuhood eventually arrives at a position where his sense of self is not bound up with poaching and continuing to dive for abalone instead represents a risk to who he is at home. At this point, even with his radical tolerance of risk it is not a worthwhile exchange to sacrifice life or freedom for his work. He remembers his last boat dive, watching dawn break: "I thought to myself that this is not what normal people do for a living,' he wrote. 'I spent the whole night out on sea risking my life and my freedom" (2018: 211). Shuhood faces up to an existential dilemma: when one's way of being in the world (including identity and key relationships) is at risk one must face up to the challenge of whether to stick to one's principles to maintain who they are despite these challenges. Courage is required when a person cannot go on being the self they once were – for example, because of a significant career change – and one is required to make a dramatic choice or renounce the person they previously were, in favour of a "better self" (McMullin 2021: 206). McMullin describes the moment where a person recognises that they cannot go on living the life they have been living thus far, and the fact that this is symbolic for the person that they are

and will be going forwards, as Shuhood does when he watches the sun start to rise and reflects on risking his life and freedom each night (2021: 212). "The ordinary men of Cape Town were asleep next to their wives and would soon get up to go to work. 'I just felt tired, tired of being tired, and yearned for a normal life because I didn't feel normal at all.'" (2018: 211). While Shuhood's turn away from poaching is partially motivated by a need to move away from a career that is showing diminishing returns, it also involves a more central existential transformation of his identity. This is a choice that involves facing up to difficulty and fear of reckoning with the fact that this defining choice will direct potential futures that are significantly different from Shuhood's current way of living – futures that could lead to legitimately better or worse prospects in terms of meeting Shuhood's goals to be present with his family and to lead a more 'normal' life.

Shuhood finds new ways to experience the thrill that he previously loved about diving abalone, primarily through horse riding. Through his love of horses, he develops a close and attentive connection with the horses themselves, and to the beaches that he rides down on his regular rides. It is through his relationship with horses that he etches pathways in the sand, and it is thus that he is able to observe the beach and its changes over time on a regular basis.

## Conclusion

So, what does *Poacher* as a narrative make visible and what does it hide? First off, an aesthetics of attentiveness to ocean worlds is an unexpected component of a narrative about exploitative abalone poaching. This surprising richness of narrative attentiveness and nature writing sets the scene for the ways in which Shuhood as a character does not fit the stereotypical image of a poacher or a criminal. His experiences and his nuanced sense of ethics are at odds with the simplistic representation of greedy abalone poachers in *Cape Greed*. Conversely, *Poacher* affords one an alternative perspective on the motivations, challenges, and character arc of a Capetonian poacher. The rich sense of otherness that Shuhood portrays in his narratives of

the ocean suggests an attentive everyday relationship with oceans that is both practically and spiritually engaged, unravelling and undermining any sense that extractive livelihoods like abalone poaching foreclose respectful or caring relationships with nature.

*Poacher* reveals the way that abalone creatures are thingified and commodified for the purpose of the trade. This reiterates *Cape Greed*'s masculinised attitude to objectified abalone and the stock room representation of abalone is a feature of the complex systems of capitalism and global trade. I have not lingered on de Greef's discussions of the underground poaching world in *Poacher* for the sake of space, though they are informative and valuable resources. Avatars of capitalism and greed like *Cape Greed*'s Woo are certainly present in Shuhood's interactions with syndicates and gang operations in Cape Town. Nonetheless I have instead chosen to focus on the phenomenological encounter Shuhood has with the ocean in order to highlight this under-represented perspective of the diver who physically immerses themselves in the ocean and transforms abalone from creature to object. The narrative of the poacher as diver has also enabled a focus on the dangerous practical reality of abalone poaching and the level of risk that such a career entails.

*Poacher* articulates the systemic complexity of navigating ethics in South Africa, with extremely high levels of violence and criminality in poor and unequal areas. This is positioned alongside the cycles of violence that leave many young men with few licit employment options, making abalone poaching an attractive option by comparison to gang-related careers. I have examined how economic, social, and geographical inequality in Cape Town has manifested for Shuhood and other communities in the Cape Flats and other poor neighbourhoods. This, along with a brief examination of the prison system in South Africa, adds texture to Chapter One's analysis of the individuating logics of capital. Shuhood's story also emphasises the way that a survival mentality to reduce one's locus of care to the self and to undermine a

sense of responsibility for others. This is not to say that poverty or incarceration will causally lead to immoral characters or choices, but instead shows how these lived realities materially limit peoples' options and may funnel people into choices, lifestyles, or careers that they would not otherwise elect, all in order to survive.

The narrative choices undertaken in *Poacher* to depict Shuhood's background and personal story enable a more contextual understanding of how someone is more likely to choose a career in abalone poaching in an unequal society with few employment options for people growing up in poor and violent neighbourhoods. For Shuhood, his faith provides a compelling narrative of its own that enables him to begin a path of moral transformation that is grounded in an embrace of relationality. This narrative is accompanied by a cast of people who act as role models for a virtuous lifestyle and act as exemplars for Shuhood. Community involvement and caring for others than oneself are core components to Shuhood's Sufism, and his motivation for adopting a more virtuous way of life is rooted in care for this family and an aspiration to become more responsible towards them. This acceptance of relationality is bound up with his project to stop his extractive poaching lifestyle and disengage from the violent world of criminality.

At this point, I want to reflect on de Greef & Haysom's radical proposal, which seems all the more fitting now that I have looked at one of the projects that brought de Greef to suggest the decriminalisation of poaching with Haysom. Legal narratives that criminalise poaching as an individualised (greedy) phenomenon occlude the root causes of poverty and community violence that draw people into cycles of criminality and violence, demonstrated both by Shuhood's experience and by the ethnographic accounts of small-scale fisheries examined in the Introduction. These essentialised narratives of criminality impact on future opportunities for young people (particularly men) who then end up being drawn back into criminal careers after imprisonment because

of high levels of unemployment and the diminished chances of finding legal careers under the shadow of a criminal record. Abalone diving presented a positive alternative to Shuhood: it is one of the most lucrative jobs a person can get in the criminal underworld without climbing the gang hierarchy. Furthermore, the diving itself is non-violent and does not directly involve drugs, even if it is ultimately imbricated with drugs, gangs, and violence. Decriminalisation of abalone diving like de Greef and Haysom suggest would end the punishment of people for finding livelihoods in a scarce employment market, but it clear that there is a need for investment in communities and for the creation or marketisation of alternative legal job options. In co-writing *Poacher,* Shuhood and Kimon engage in a political act of narrating an alternative and under-represented perspective on abalone ethics and human-ocean relationships. In doing so they open up possibilities for radical proposals on ethical problems like the abalone fishery crisis that are contrary to failing conservation and policing efforts.

Concepts of virtue ethics have been helpful for reflecting on the practical and contextual reality of ethics, as has a focus on the lifetime as a whole rather than specific actions. Looking at circumstances, role models, and narratives have enabled a discussion of moral corruption and moral transformation that attend to the role of interpersonal connections and developmental factors on lived navigation of ethics. In the following chapter, I bring this conceptual analysis of virtue, narrative, and relationality to analyse speculative narratives and how these can impact on public imaginaries about the moral significance of poaching and explore alternative possibilities for human-ocean relationships. Likewise, choices about genre, authorial structure, and form all impact on the kind of story that can be told about human-ocean relationality and the impacts of these choices are clear after reading these two very different narratives that are both about abalone poaching in Cape Town.

The narratives I have looked at thus far highlight distinct archetypal themes on abalone poaching – that of the greedy poacher versus poaching as career, the perspective of the poacher as a criminal versus the poacher as a diver, with the perspectives of poaching as a career and the poacher as a diver creating space for more nuanced poaching narratives. In Chapter Three, I continue the discussion of archetypal narratives of abalone poaching.

# Chapter Three

South African writer Mohale Mashigo picks up on problematic fisheries governance issues in her speculative fiction short story 'Floating Rugs', building on *Poacher*'s exposition of inequality and systemic routes into poaching.[48] 'Floating Rugs' calls attention to the fact that the label of 'poacher' has been given to people living in places that governments or people of power wanted access to, like coastlines and oceans. Rhinos are one of the most well-known and recognised animals globally in poacher narratives, and by linking rhino poachers with abalone poachers Mashigo points out a pattern of deterritorialisation and criminalisation of local and Indigenous populations by South African authorities. Employing narratives of conservation, governments have benefitted from legalistic moralisations of access and space that have legitimated the cosmopolitical enclosure and ownership of land and oceans, in order for these areas to be exploited for economic gain.

## Introduction

The main text I focus on in this chapter is Mohale Mashigo's short story 'Floating Rugs' (2019), a narrative that decentres abalone poaching from its typically male viewpoint and imagines how this narrative might evolve in the future (2019).[49] 'Floating Rugs' incorporates two of the archetypal narratives already encountered in the thesis – the greedy poacher from *Cape Greed* and the fisher injustice narrative from small-scale fisher ethnographies. I compare 'Floating Rugs' with Zakes Mda's

[48] Speculative fiction and speculative dialogue describe modes of thought about the future and the posing of questions or possibilities which invite one to imagine what may come and how the world may change, pointing towards possible consequences of current events and processes. The genre of speculative fiction is like a sibling to science fiction but it does not claim to include scientific or mathematical thinking and it is less strongly associated with space.

[49] Unfortunately, neither the short story 'Floating Rugs' nor the collection *Current Futures* is currently accessible through the website where they were published (https://go.xprize.org/oceanstories/floating-rugs/, accessed 06.08.2021, 10:47). The reason for this delisting is not currently known.

*The Whale Caller* (2006), and explore the idea that the community in 'Floating Rugs' could be the future generations of Mda's Hermanus coastal village; creating a speculative vision of what a possible future could look like for local fishing communities and abalone poachers. I examine how *The Whale Caller* evinces a more nuanced poacher narrative, which has resonances with Shuhood's story and reflects some of the complexity of his experiences in *Poacher*. I explore how the archetypal narratives in these stories are politically symbolic and exert a strong persuasive force in ethical discussions, employing Brian Treanor's theory of narrative virtue ethics to highlight the potency of narrative for navigating environmental ethics. Specifically, I explore Treanor's existential concept of the lonely moment of ethical choice, and examine what virtue ethical lessons 'Floating Rugs' could offer readers in their own lonely moments of decision-making.

In the second part of this chapter, I explore the peculiar ethical space that 'Floating Rugs' occupies as an environmental justice story within a collection of stories that is intended to publicise techno-futurist organisation XPRIZE and their Ocean Discovery Competition in collaboration with petro-giant Shell. I delve into Elizabeth DeLoughrey's critique of the *Current Futures* short story collection as the unhelpful promotion of narrow, unearned techno-optimist philosophies about ocean futures. I then explore the role of technology in ocean futures more broadly and look at Capetonian social enterprise Abalobi as a case study. Accompanying Irene McMullin's theorisation of the virtue of patience, I outline a framework for conceptualising the role of technology in oceanic future thinking and environmental justice efforts more broadly, in which techno-optimism can be viewed as an impatient attitude to human temporal finitude and what is possible within this limited scope.

## 'Floating Rugs'

Mohale Mashigo's short story 'Floating Rugs' focuses on a local fishing community who reclaim an abandoned underwater resort as their home in the near-future. The protagonist Ella is a young person who lives with her brother Zuko and works with him and other community members to observe and safeguard marine life using their non-invasive radar system, "kind of like Underwater Big Brother" (Mashigo 2019).[50] Zuko and fellow tech developer Shireen built the software and radar machines to enable ocean observation and clean-up in a way that "made the conservation work safer for us" (*Ibid.*). The story begins with Ella being scolded for "going on an NRM (Net Removal Mission) by myself" to save a whale who was trapped in a ghost net – an abandoned fishing net (*Ibid.*). Abandoned or discarded nets, along with other ghost fishing gear, are the focus of conservation organisations who aim to clear the ocean of waste and to reduce the risk they pose to marine life. This is the work that Ella's community do in the future: "Every day there are diving teams that are collecting plastic, ghost nets and pollution from the water. We dismantle the ghost nets and collect the metal from that to sell off or to use for the upkeep of our cabins" (*Ibid.*). However, there are strict protocols entrenched to keep divers safe, and Ella ignores these rules when she goes out to save the whale, which is "what made my solo NRM so awful in my brother's eyes" (*Ibid.*).

Ella's brother and the community elders ask her to show a visiting journalist around their home, in what Ella perceives to be punishment for her rule-breaking. James or "Journalist Man" meets Ella on the beach before they swim down and into the ocean neighbourhood, where Ella notices with surprise and contempt that James is "shaking and out of breath" after "the same 500 metres" that Ella's "eight-year-old neighbour, Zandi," swam "half asleep most mornings" (Mashigo 2019). Mashigo paints a picture of what it might be like to live

[50] I have assumed that Ella is a girl from the name, but the character is not gendered at any point in the story.

in the ocean, from Ella describing the different coloured stoeps (verandas) that look from above "like rugs floating in the water," to the "dark blue ripples" that reflect the ocean's watery hues onto James' face from the window. It is easy to see why James soon becomes fascinated by this lifestyle of "living between both worlds" that combines marathon swimming with high-tech fingerprint and iris-scanning (*Ibid.*).

Ella resists James' visit long before the journalist even arrives by covertly deleting emails from Zuko's computer. She and others, "Neighbours and elders alike" are concerned, and the memory of exploitation by the anonymous "Swedish man was still too fresh. We didn't want to hide but it was necessary if we were going to protect our way of life" (Mashigo 2019). Their suspicions about the potential exposure that their community will get from media coverage stem from the community's past experiences of marginalisation by outsiders, who take the form of European corporate developers and government actors.

"Journalist Man" often talks about living in-between land and ocean in the story. Climate change has transformed the world these characters live in through rising sea levels. Oceans are more immanent and vital to human living in this changed society, and as such any insights into ways of living closely with oceans is valuable to wider society. James represents this global perspective through his employment with National Geographic (Mashigo 2019). The older generations of Ella's community experienced the abalone shortages that are visible today. They poached for fish when quotas were not sufficient for them to feed their families – they are speculative representations of Shuhood's contemporaries.[51] The development of the underwater resort in which

[51] Ella's ancestors are described as small-scale fishers who fish for livelihood and to feed their families. Whether they poached abalone is ambiguous as the story references both abalone and rhino poaching, but they are described as poachers and the fact that they are working as fishers in a coastal area makes the former more likely: "Poaching was just an excuse for powerful people who wanted to keep us out of the water and hopefully drive us away from our homes … Perlemoen poachers chose death by water, rather than going to jail" (Mashigo

they now live resulted from the purchase and exclusion of this part of the ocean from the local fishing community, "end[ing] our old way of life" (*Ibid.*) Ella recalls that "A lot of The Elders worked on the underwater resort project" to continue earning, and "[i]n the evenings they would dive and catch fish for their families because they weren't making enough money (*Ibid.*). After the developer – "Swedish Man" – leaves under ambiguous circumstances the reclamation of the submarine facility represents a reorganisation of power in which the local coastal community re-establish their connection with the ocean. The reason why the Swedish Man fails to finish the tourist development is left ambiguous, and hence this is not a story of revolution or activist revolt, but instead a story about how people might respond and create new ways of living in the face of deterritorialisation and exclusion.

Ella knows that the elders think sharing their way of life could "slow down the decay of oceans," but she is more concerned about the ways that the visibility of their community could be abused (Mashigo 2019). Ella acknowledges that "James gets it" as she watches him transfixed by the whales "disappearing and reappearing in front of the window," but she is convinced that his readers will not have the same understanding (*Ibid.*). After the community's previous experiences, Ella presumes that outsiders "will want to turn this into a destination where they get drunk in the ruins of beach front houses and take selfies 'with the tribe.'" (*Ibid.*). Ella correspondingly mulls over whether she can dissuade James from writing his story, considering poisoning him in a drastic measure to keep the outsider silent. She speculates that there are "many terrible things in the ocean that shouldn't be consumed" as she makes James' next cup of tea. After a brief but entrancing glimpse of a life lived underneath the ocean waves, 'Floating Rugs' ends with a

2019). I have suggested in my analysis that Ella's ancestors would have been likely to also fish/poach abalone given its abundance in the area "somewhere after Hermanus and before the Eastern Cape" and the quantity of social science literature showing small-scale fishers who have also poached abalone as discussed in the thesis' Introduction.

morbid indication of the stakes involved in protecting this coastal community and their way of life.

'Floating Rugs' is a feminist narrativisation of what future justice for small-scale fishing communities could look like. It was published online, and true to the ephemerality of online narratives, is currently unavailable – all one can access for now is discourse about the narrative, not the narrative itself. As with much of her writing, Mashigo blends events and temporalities in 'Floating Rugs', simultaneously recalling the stories of Ella's net removal mission, her meeting with Journalist Man, and the history of their community with the Swedish Man developer. Mashigo's writing centres around the lives and concerns of Black and Indigenous people in contemporary South Africa and, as can be seen in 'Floating Rugs', often targets a younger audience. As well as being a novelist, she also writes for South African comic *Kwezi*, on which she says "I cannot tell you how happy it makes children to see a superhero who looks like them and lives in a country like theirs" (*Intruders* 2018: xv).[52] In her short story collection *Intruders,* Mashigo asserts strongly that she tries to foreground South African issues, viewing herself and other speculative fiction writers as engaging in a project that "predicts (it is fiction after all) Africa's future 'post-colonialism'" (2018: xi). In 'Floating Rugs' Mashigo highlights social and environmental justice struggles for coastal and small-scale fishing communities, and she weaves a possible future in which a local community reclaims ocean territory from tourist development and eco-capitalism. She goes on: "In South Africa, for instance, there needs to exist a place in our imaginations that is the opposite of our present reality where a small minority owns most of the land and lives better lives than the rest" (*Ibid.*). In this justice-oriented narrative Mashigo shares a vision of current and future human-ocean relationships for Black and local South African communities.

[52] Mashigo also does other narrative work including script writing and musical performing, demonstrating a proficiency in creating a range of narrative forms.

## 1: Archetypal (symbolic) narratives of poaching

As has been shown, vivid concepts of ethics are imbued within archetypal representations of poaching in fiction and non-fiction narratives. These archetypes provide the building blocks for stories about poaching. Moreover, they abound in narratives within the public imaginary, as evidenced in media, government, and conservation sources. The *greedy poacher narrative* is one such archetype for poaching narratives, which is visible in *Cape Greed* and media representations of poaching, tying poaching to vicious choices and lifestyles. However, narratives containing the greedy poacher also tend to involve stereotypes in their characterisation of poaching – simplistic negative associations with the character of the poacher. There is also the comparatively virtuous *fisher injustice narrative* that is found in much social science research on abalone poaching and fishing quotas, and which is present in 'Floating Rugs.' Most recently, a mor e nuanced perspective on abalone poaching has emerged through Shuhood's *poaching as a career narrative*, and with it a more complex and contextual representation of both challenges and moral transformation involved in a story of poaching. This could be a new archetypal narrative for poachers as characters. 'Floating Rugs' represents the fisher injustice narrative from the perspective of the coastal community, and it critiques the greedy poacher narrative for its deployment of harmful and misleading stereotypes about poachers. What remains to be seen and what I will now assess, is whether there is room for nuance in 'Floating Rugs' or *The Whale Caller*.

### Greedy poacher and fisher injustice narratives

Ella identifies the community in her story as the descendants of current fishing communities who are embroiled in abalone poaching. Her explanation for why she wants to keep the community's way of life hidden cites the harmful impact that the label of poaching historically had on her community's jobs and lives. She recalls how "Strangers ended our old way of life with a few popular words. Words that were a lie and accusation: poaching. 'Poaching plunders marine resources,'

was what the people in suits kept repeating" (Mashigo 2019). These "popular words" and the accusative element of the poaching label infer a greedy poacher narrative in which poachers steal from the oceanic commons to satisfy their own selfish desires. In describing the words as popular, Mashigo points to the ever-present and high-profile nature of this greedy narrative (e.g., in government policy) along with the inference of all-round vice in the public imaginary and in public narratives.

The fishing community Mashigo describes in 'Floating Rugs' could be a real community in South Africa. It could, for example, invoke the Lambert's Bay fishers whose "livelihoods [were] effectively criminalized" by fishing rights allocations (Nthane *et al.* 2020: 749). There is a strong tradition of tourist accommodation developments in conservation areas, removing rights from local communities to access what was previously their territory and instead charging visitors to experience living in the wild. The world-famous Kruger National Park in Northeastern South Africa is a landmark example of this sort of conservation work that reserves the right to access to those who can pay, and the Cape Point reserve is another (Carruthers 1995, Green 2020). Mashigo imagines what this kind of eco-tourism could look like when the beachside cottages are reclaimed by the ocean and developers begin setting their sights below the waves.

Much like the experiences of the Lambert's Bay fishers, having livelihoods and lifestyles ended overnight is common to many small-scale fishers around the country whose fishing practices were criminalised as poaching by the Marine Resources Protection Act. Both legal and conservation narratives have contributed to the public perception that poaching is wholly immoral and unjust in a wholesale sense. Utilising the persuasive argument that conservation is for the common good, poaching is set in contrast as a self-centred wrong. Abalone poaching is a marquee example of this because of the high-profile violence from gangs, for example, of "shootouts, arson attacks

and lurid rumours of beheadings and of vanquished rivals being fed to great white sharks" (de Greef and Haysom 2022: 18). Instances of even the military being called out to enforce abalone quotas are memorable and reinforce the impression many South African citizens have of abalone poaching as a stark and violent example of wrong-doing.[53] With the involvement of military, conservation narratives suddenly imply that poachers are not only a breach of the moral social contract, enforceable by police, but they implicitly become a threat to national security and survival.

And so, I return to narrative – the most influential tool in constructing these publicly understood binary archetypes of poaching that are, if not black and white, sepia at best. Treanor argues that the best use of narrative is as a method of ethical education that can inspire and motivate people through the communication of virtues. He goes on to explain that narrative works well for ethical education because it creates an experimental space for engaged thinking: "We use narrative to *experiment* with possibilities, exploring different situations and different ethical responses. We project ourselves into stories and make judgements about the actions of characters" (2014: 178). This experimental narrative space helps people to develop their ability to discern virtues and values, and to distinguish between which of these succeed in certain situations and which do not. Treanor postulates that narratives help people to identify good role models, and that they are "a central part of the method by which we *apply* and *cultivate* virtues in our own lives. Because narratives provide 'as-if' experiences, they often constitute the first step, as it were, on the road to actually developing a particular virtue" (2014: 180). Hence, in this experimental narrative space, individuals can imagine and practice taking certain courses of action in order to etch mental scripts for themselves on how they would try to act virtuously if they encounter a similar situation in reality.

[53] See, for example, media coverage of military patrol of the ocean and policing of abalone poaching in publications like defenceWeb (Martin 2020, 2021).

In the experimental ethical space of 'Floating Rugs' Ella's community of elders take narrative power back into their own hands when they tell their children and grandchildren the poaching story from their perspective. In doing so, they undermine the greedy poacher narrative with a contrasting narrative of fisher injustice:

> It's a story our elders tell us from when we were young enough to understand. It's about greed, corruption, tourism and righting wrong. Poaching was just an excuse for powerful people who wanted to keep us out of the water and hopefully drive us away from our homes. The government was cracking down on poaching. Rhino poachers were being jailed, if they were found alive. Perlemoen poachers chose death by water, rather than going to jail. A lot of The Elders worked on the underwater resort project. In the evenings they would dive and catch fish for their families because they weren't making enough money. (Mashigo 2019)

In this retelling, moral blame is unravelled and poachers are the victims of powerful and dishonest actors, actors who stand to benefit from ocean development and, more broadly, from the disempowerment of those communities who could challenge their claim to ocean territory. Mashigo describes the greedy poacher narrative in South Africa as an "excuse" to move local communities off coastlines, which she links to profit, tourism, and corruption in state and corporate organisations (*Ibid.*). She does not dispute that people are illegally diving and fishing, but she does offer a practical and virtuous explanation for at least some of these poachers' actions – namely to feed their families in the absence of other ocean-based work. The fisher injustice narrative is visible in social science research on small-scale fishing communities, and the above extract highlights how narratives of criminality have been bound up with a pattern of displacement of local and Indigenous communities of colour during Apartheid and colonialism, as highlighted earlier in research by Carruthers and others. The passage also highlights how

this pattern of displacement from coastal territories is linked to unemployment, poverty, and often death at the points of encounter with the perilous ocean itself.

'Floating Rugs' highlights the power of words, metaphors, and stories. In it, Mashigo positions the greedy poacher narrative as an *accusation*, a set of words that perform the action of directing blame and guilt for species loss and ecosystem decline to a specific group of people. The fisher injustice narrative acknowledges the unfair environmental and social value judgements associated with exclusion and contained within the greedy poacher narrative, which create pain and hardship for Ella's community. Mashigo suggests that these few words terminated the community's "way of life," through more than just income loss and the capital material mechanisms of survival (Mashigo 2019). Indeed, she shows that the unjust actions of powerful actors – and their inception, propagation, and proliferation of the greedy poacher narrative as a tool to wield in a project of privation – have undermined core relationships with the sea that contribute to a sense of character and meaning-making for the community. Newly unemployed fishers took construction jobs at the tourist development to feed their families "because it meant they were back in the water" (*Ibid.*). In tension and torsion, the fisher injustice narrative shows how the purchase of private land superseded historical relationships between fishing communities and the ocean, on the basis of monetary exchange and the employment of legal frameworks by "strangers" in "suits." Resultantly, Mashigo's future narrativisation of the imagined community in 'Floating Rugs' illustrates some of the ways that neoliberal development strategies have had cosmopolitically destructive impacts on coastal communities without consulting or incorporating them in the development of coastal areas. 'Floating Rugs' highlights how people without a historical relationship to the coast and the ocean are able to manoeuvre words, systems, and structures that are familiar to them but are unfamiliar or unavailable to local communities, in order to monopolise on moving them away from their land and ocean.

This international model of exclusion through economic development has impacted other colonially suppressed communities around the world in similar ways because corporate capital acts globally to tell the same story in different environments. Indigenous and local communities around the world similarly invested in projects of recovery and reclamation – of practices, contexts, and literatures – in response to colonial logics of exploitation and expropriation (Allen 2012: xvi). As Māori theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith of Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou descent writes in her seminal book on decolonising research methodologies:

> Indigenous knowledges, cultures and languages, and the remnants of Indigenous territories, remain as sites of struggle. Attempts by governments and companies to flood territories in order to build hydroelectric dams, to destroy rain forests in order to mine the lands beneath, and to poison the land, the waterways and the air – these projects bring Indigenous groups into direct confrontation with a wide range of Western power blocs that include scientific communities, environmental organizations, local and national governments and their bureaucracies, rich country alliances, multinational corporations and the media. (Smith 2021: 114).

Adding coastal development and oceanic drilling to Smith's list of extractive projects that require de-populating areas of land and coast, one can see how narratives like the greedy poacher can be operationalised by powerful actors to gain access to territories. Indeed, 'Floating Rugs' resonates with Māori author Patricia Grace's novel *Potiki*, which tells the story of a Māori community who, across the Indian Ocean from Ella's community in South Africa, also battle coastline development when they are excluded from their ancestral coastline and ocean livelihoods (1986). The global impact of extractive development demonstrates the anonymous logic of such capitalist processes, and the ways that this universalised greed for profit actively

undermines relationships with ocean, including the kind of attentive grounded connections that Shuhood Abader engages in within his local environment.

Environmental (in)justice scholarship also highlights the way that systems of oppression marginalise people according to their geographical location. Notably people who are in proximity to margins, like the coast, and people who live in areas with high quantities of 'natural resources,' like the ocean. These justice critiques employ concepts within the rights-based tradition of ethics. For example, Moenieba Isaacs and Emma Witbooi's use of a human rights framework to argue that small-scale fishers are being unjustly prevented from their right to food through inappropriate fisheries management (2019). Likewise, Nthane et al. criticise South Africa's post-1994 neoliberal agenda and the failings to deliver transformative justice for small-scale fisher communities (2020: 744). These justice critiques show that baseline needs that are not being met for people to be able to live in the fundamental way, including needs for shelter, food, safety, and health. Rights-based narratives and frameworks of this type are a good way of defending basic needs, and these are important as fundamental deontic constraints for people to be able to live well, as Irene McMullin notes (2021: 100). However, a virtue ethics perspective emphasises that fundamental rights are also not ethically sufficient for people to be able to flourish; people need more than basic survival to live up to their full potential in terms of personal striving, caring, *and* justice. It is accordingly vital, then that fishers get justice, but it is also crucial that they also deserve more comprehensive flourishing.

'Floating Rugs' presents a radically different picture of poachers and what their lives, families, and personal motivations might look like to the representation of poachers in *Cape Greed*. Through these texts I can compare aspects of the greedy poacher and fisher injustice narratives. Starting with the figure of the abalone poacher, there are contrasting perceptions of what kind of person dives illegally for

abalone. This complication is demonstrated from the first time one meets the poachers and then is buttressed by their actions throughout the respective stories. In *Cape Greed,* the two abalone divers are introduced as criminals in the first chapter through their arrest – their criminality is thus positioned as indivisible from their work which is in turn indivisible from *who they are*. Even after Tommy and Adonis are freed from jail, their self-serving and reckless behaviour re-entrenches a sense of deservedness around the criminal label and thus reinforces the link between abalone diving and vicious character. By contrast, the community in 'Floating Rugs' is introduced as a neighbourhood first and foremost. Their poaching activities are only introduced later in the context of dwindling employment options. The community's conservation work and collective ethos also undermine the criminal label of poaching by signifying their commitment to virtuous ways of living, like caring for each other and their ocean environment.

These unlike stories also suggest different types of role models for poachers and the kinds of actions and decisions they model as 'good' and enjoyable. *Cape Greed's* poachers are distinguished as vicious through their self-centred motivations for violence and harmful behaviour – greed, cruelty, and unfettered desire. Worse still, there is no real sense of Tommy or Adonis wrestling with any moral tensions. Despite the fact that many of their actions harm others, over and over, in the pursuit of their own self-gain, the pair are quick to act and do not seem to worry, regret, or even necessarily *notice* these harmful actions. In this way, they model corrupt behaviour for each other and other poachers. The joy that Tommy and Adonis take in the excesses of vice is emphasised by contrast with Delmont, who is also employed in the same criminal jobs with them but who is more cautious and considerate of other peoples' welfare. It is Delmont who tries to convince Tommy to leave the two truck drivers alone. However, he is mocked and soundly overruled by Tommy and Adonis, illustrating the divergence in their values. The *Cape Greed* poachers characterise a corrupt sense of 'good,' which consistently involves personal satisfaction over

consideration for the needs of others and therefore an imbalance across the moral spheres of personal striving, caring, and justice. *Cape Greed* similarly suffers from the black and white stereotypes associated with narratives of the greedy poacher in simplifying Tommy and Adonis as evil without any room for shades of grey.

Looking at the poachers in 'Floating Rugs,' by contrast, they are driven to fish illegally because of a desire to feed their families and maintain their imperilled connection with the ocean. Their motivations are not excessively self-centred like those of the poachers in *Cape Greed*, and Mashigo's cast seek to care for others rather than harm them. That is, they take what they need to survive and are not greedy or wild in their desire. Moreover, Ella clearly reflects on her competing moral obligations and the views of others who disagree with her. Whilst Ella projects a stubborn and self-assured sense of conviction in the correctness of her opinions, characteristic of a younger protagonist with a less conflicted sense of morality, she is also mindful of the views of others. Importantly, she shows that she considers the impact her actions have on others. For instance, when the Elders tell her "Ella, this could help people understand. We could make a huge difference," Ella leaves the conference room to avoid being "disrespectful" (Mashigo 2019). This signals efforts on her part to try to navigate and balance the existential moral responsibilities in her life, like when she considers a more cautious approach than poisoning James' tea at the end – "Maybe I can still convince him not to publish his article" – despite her urgent sense of duty to protect her community (Mashigo 2019). As with Ella's ancestors who chose to poach abalone, even the harmful actions that Ella considers are driven by the motivation to protect those who are close to her and who are vulnerable to exploitation.

Ella's character represents a noble conviction to fight for what she believes is 'good,' for the people she loves and their way of life. But is she too noble? Is there any room for nuance? Her understanding of the 'good' is informed by the fisher injustice narrative, which also

oversimplifies and idealises the fishers as virtuous. This archetype, too, contains stereotypical images of poachers as benevolent fishers and is reinforced by the depiction of Ella's community as fully harmonious with their ocean environment. This does not leave space for ethical complexity and tension like the nuanced narrative that *Poacher* communicates. In this way, the greedy poacher and the fisher injustice narratives act as archetypal poles of virtue and vice, each containing stereotypes that can undermine fuller depictions of ethical complexity. But these poles are not equal and opposite: while each of these narrative archetypes can reduce situations to either virtue or vice, the current incumbent narrative about abalone poaching is closer to the vicious depiction and so fisher injustice narratives can help to shift this understanding. Hence, the fisher injustice narrative has the potential to shift attention from the current perception of poachers because it highlights the voices of people who are vulnerable and have been oppressed. Whereas, the greedy poacher narrative reinforces perceptions of poachers conveyed by powerful actors. Nevertheless, neither of these archetypes has enough scope for nuance and therefore struggles to communicate the ethical complexity of the abalone crisis.

Well-known narratives like the greedy poacher and fisher injustice contribute to the narrative scripts that people employ in their efforts to make sense of ocean ethics issues like abalone poaching, to be able to decide what they think and how they should act in relation to such an issue. Narrative scripts are like moral go-to's that give people expectations for how things tend to play out in a situation, like asking what is a 'good' response to the problem of scarce resources? How should a person go about responding to unemployment in the context of poverty? Narratives that describe poaching as greedy suggest that turning to abalone diving to feed oneself and support one's lifestyle is a self-serving and harmful response to this problem. On the other hand, narratives that frame poaching as a necessary result of small-scale fisher injustice suggest that, in a situation with few options, poaching might be a practical way of providing for oneself *and* other dependents, if

indeed there are any other options at all. Narrative scripts play a key role in ethical meaning-making by enabling people to respond to novel situations with moral dilemmas that there are no 'rules' for. When a person is in an impossible situation, having to choose between hunger and the law, these two narrative scripts might influence that person in making their different life choices. Both of these scripts convey more oversimplifications in the dilemma of poaching, but they continue to inform much of the discourse on poaching.

In order for these virtue scripts to make sense, Treanor says that they need to be driven by a desire to be a good person, which is why he writes that cultivating the desire to be good is the first step in an ethical education. Treanor explains this with reference to Paul Ricoeur's delineation of ethical telos (1992: 170, referenced in Treanor 2014: 178). Ricoeur identifies the need for an overarching ethical aim for the pursuit of the good life, which drives attempts to be a good person. This overall aim leads to certain moral norms, and these norms then branch off to create specific duties and rules. Accordingly, any specific duties and rules at the anchor of this moral structure follow directly from the overarching ethical aim of the person. For Treanor, it is foundational that one's rules, duties, and norms are informed by a conception of the good. He argues vehemently against ethics where rules are the foundational keystones (like deontology or a human rights framework). Treanor's reasoning is practical, and he refers the reader to independent moments of moral deliberation:

> lonely emergencies – when moral norms fail us because they are insensitive to the unique features of the particular case, or because the issue in question is entirely novel, or because we find ourselves caught in an inescapable, tragic circumstance. (2014: 178)

In these lonely circumstances, when the rules do not seem to apply or there is conflicting advice, an overall conception of the good life or what kind of person one yearns to be can help guide one and offer

clues, but not roadmaps, to ethically-informed courses of action. Evidently, these are the kind of nuanced situations that Shuhood navigates in *Poacher*, caught between the two extremes of the greedy poacher as a demonised criminal and fisher injustice narratives with the idealised image of virtuous fishers. Equally, Ella's community navigates the legacies of these decisions that form the lonely moments of decision-making that Ella shares with the reader.

Individuals also employ narrative scripts in their evaluation of other peoples' behaviour, and exposure to either the greedy poacher narrative or the fisher injustice narrative might well motivate whether or not a witness to abalone poaching chooses to report what they have seen. This is the situation that Zakes Mda describes in his novel *The Whale Caller*, which acts as a fruitful comparative text for the upcoming discussion (2006).

### *The Whale Caller* and the nuanced poacher narrative

Mashigo's 'Floating Rugs' could very well be a future scenario for the village in fellow South African writer Zakes Mda's novel *The Whale Caller*. Mda describes a similar community of fishers who are also battling quotas and accusative narratives of poaching. The two stories are also spiritually resonant in the shared attentive relationships that their respective protagonists have with whales. They also explicitly both take place along the same stretch of coast, with *The Whale Caller* based in Hermanus on the southern coast of the country, and the 'Floating Rugs' community located somewhere undefined between Hermanus and the Eastern Cape. It is unclear whether Mashigo intended for this thread of commonality, but the preponderance of Southern Wright whales that Hermanus is famed for could be a further hint. In any case, it is no surprise that both authors have focused on local fishing communities, the issue of quotas, and abalone poaching, given that these are all high-profile issues that impact many people in South Africa's Cape coastlines.

In interviews, Mashigo has cited Mda as an inspiration and an influence on her work. She has spoken with respect about the way that Mda "builds extraordinary worlds and stories" and is able to "write complex stories and be funny" (Birat & Mashigo 2021: 9, Phala 2016). She likes that Mda writes stories "about black people I could know," and the authors both certainly create characters that resist stereotypes and who are enmeshed in the complexities of contemporary South African society (Phala 2016). Both authors incorporate traits of magical realism in their work, and Mashigo identifies her work as speculative fiction, although as she herself says, the line between these designations is thin, if it is there at all, and almost always racialised (Birat & Mashigo 2021: 3). Mashigo says that Africans are particularly adept at writing science and speculative fiction because "When I listen to some of our folktales, I say to myself, this is definitely spec fic; if anybody should be thriving in this genre it should be Africans" (*Ibid.*). Mashigo and Mda use the tools of speculative fiction genre to imagine new and different human-ocean entanglements (with human-whale relationships being a particular focus for these stories), whilst also grappling with past and present-day issues that persist and haunt ocean users like small-scale fishing communities.

The story that the poacher in *The Whale Caller* has echoes the one that the Elders tell their grandchildren in 'Floating Rugs' – of powerful actors (governments and businesses) profiting whilst the local fishing community loses out on income and way of life. There is also a likeness in the naming conventions that Mashigo and Mda use in both texts. In 'Floating Rugs' there are The Elders, Journalist Man, and Swedish Man, and in *The Whale Caller* there is the Whale Caller himself. This way of describing characters transforms them from individuals into archetypes who are symbolic of a broader culture and positionality. Journalist Man and Swedish Man represent the media and development industries respectively, and European influence more broadly, highlighting historical patterns of spectatorship and exploitation that South African

people have experienced at the hands of these industrial and colonial interests.

While travelling along the coast, the eponymous Whale Caller discovers a hidden bag of abalone, "a purplish brown sea snail whose muscular foot is as broad as his open hand. Never has he seen such a big abalone before. The bag is full of perlemoen of varying sizes and colours, ranging from grey to deep purple" (2006: 190). This description evokes the distinctive appearance of the molluscs with their evanescent colours and large muscley body. By comparison, 'Floating Rugs' does not spend much time dwelling on abalones themselves so much as the legacies they have left behind. This is perhaps because the underwater resort is deeper than the rocks on which abalones cling, or perhaps because in the future there simply is no more *haliotis midae* as a result of overfishing – the truth is never made clear.

Upon being confronted by the man to whom the bag belongs, the Whale Caller employs a greedy poacher narrative to charge him with taking more than he should from the ocean. The Whale Caller argues with the man who comes to collect the bag, accusing him of stealing and breaking the law. And, of even more concern to the Whale Caller, this man is robbing the ocean of generations of abalone: "Do you know how long it takes for those perlemoens to mature? Eight years. Eight years, I tell you." (2006: 191). The Whale Caller's travelling partner and lover Saluni warns him to leave the man alone because she has heard scary stories of poacher's violent reactions when they are caught. The poacher defends himself, saying that although he is breaking the law, it is for a good reason because this "perlemoen is for the pot," to feed himself and to "feed our children" (2006: 190). The poacher compares his situation, living in a "shack," to the big companies who are making money from generous government quotas and the rich poachers who are living in "double-storey houses in dusty townships" (2006: 191). As if to lend testimony to his claims, the poacher is described in the book as a "puny man in faded jeans, tattered T-shirt, filthy baseball cap and

sneakers that long ago lost their colours" (2006: 190). This poacher is not a threat physically, and he is too poor to buy himself new clothes – he is neither rich nor powerful as a result of his perceived criminality, unlike the syndicates or corporates. The puny man tells the story of fishers being denied quotas and the large businesses that profit from abalone, and he asks "What about us, sir? Do you think if I apply for quotas I will get them? How are we expected to survive?" (2006: 191). He is from "the coloured township of Blompark" and their whole economy is dependent on poaching. De Greef & Raemaekers write about how Hermanus was the first place that abalone really started being fished and exported in big quantities, suggesting that the impact on local fishers began earlier than other parts of South Africa (2014).[54]

Inviting the Whale Caller and Saluni to "spend the night at his shack so that they can see what he is talking about," the puny man tells them more about how he started out as a poacher and his personal journey (2006: 191).

> [H]e started harvesting the rocks on the kelp beds for the precious creatures. It was for the pot. But the temptation was too great. Soon he was harvesting to sell. Now his ambition is to have direct access to the white middlemen who in turn sell to the Chinese syndicate bosses. There are established racial hierarchies in the illegal abalone trade. Coloured folk sell their harvest to white men who pay about two hundred rands a kilogram. The white men sell to the Chinese men for about a thousand rands a kilogram. The Chinese ship the abalone to the Far East where they get about two thousand five hundred rands a kilogram for it. And these are the old prices. (Mda 2006: 192)

[54] In *Poacher,* De Greef tracks the earliest abalone divers in South Africa after Shuhood tells him these were initially white people, contrary to the present-day demographics that the trade draws in; "You never mentioned something important," Kimon recalls Shuhood telling him; "It's the whites that started all of this" (2018: 48).

This passage reveals a more nuanced version of the fisher injustice narrative. Mda describes a man who experiences a fluid set of perceptions and motives. At the beginning of the passage abalones are described with reverence as "the precious creatures," and it is the man's need to care for himself and others drives his illegal diving. By the end of the passage, however, abalone is thingified as "the harvest," and the personal desire to earn more money comes to motivate his poaching in equal measure to his survival needs. However, the puny man's desire for better earnings is not (yet) out of proportion to his and his community's need, particularly in comparison to the amount others are taking. As The Whale Caller puts it, "Why must he [the puny man] be the only one who remains poor for the rest of his life?" (2006: 191).

The deep inequalities and racialised hierarchies that mark South Africa are reflected in the abalone trade, and the puny man's choices are informed by a contextual evaluation of his circumstances and the systemic injustice *of* those circumstances. In Christopher P. Davis' thesis on the postcolonial in literature, he writes that Chinese trade has added another layer to existing racial and economic hierarchies in South Africa, complicating them and highlighting the ways that globalisation embeds and perpetuates colonial structures of labour and oppression in both formal and informal fisheries (2016: 68). The puny man's community has experienced racialised marginalisation which has in turn led to the neighbourhood's high levels of poverty despite Hermanus' up-and-coming influx of tourism and wealth. He served a few months in prison for poaching and is haunted by the memories of sleepless nights with a "solitary naked bulb [that] was left on for the whole night in his cell," representing the oppressive conditions within the criminal justice system (2006: 194).

In a demonstration of this stratified hierarchy, the humble meal of rice and fried abalone that the poacher cooks for the Whale Caller and Saluni can be contrasted with the luxurious display of abalone in a seafood banquet that the latter two characters witness in another

scene. The Whale Caller and Saluni see "a long buffet counter of crayfish, langoustine, perlemoen, curries, rotis, [and] samosas" being served to tourists in an expensive restaurant while 'window shopping,' a shared pastime the duo enjoy that involves walking around and 'consuming' food from the restaurants that they can't afford to buy, imagining and describing what the dishes might taste like (2006: 115). B. Jamieson Stanley writes that "[e]ntangling crime, conservation, and alimentation, abalone exemplified the snarl of concerns that motivate eco-novelists such as Mda to engage with food and hunger" (2018: 37). Indeed, in describing the buffet's cultural heritage and the way the restaurant promotes this "South African cuisine," *The Whale Caller* emphasises the wealth disparity between the protagonists and the restaurant-goers:

> Everyone knows that in the Western Cape when they talk of South African cuisine they mean the Cape Malay food that is a result of the melting cultures of Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Khoikhoi and Dutch. The same kind of interbreeding that brought into existence the wonderfully coloured people of the Western Cape. (2006: 115)

The fact that the local residents like the Whale Caller and Saluni eat plain macaroni with grated cheese most nights, rather than these luxury cultural food items, is a telling example of the commodification of culture and heritage. The simultaneous impoverishment of local fishing communities in the Western Cape region and the serving of their culture's cuisine in expensive restaurants demonstrates the racialised power dynamics over ocean resources as commodities. This sets in sharp relief the irony of strict quotas on abalone and crayfish that were given to small-scale fishers, with both of these foods forming an integral part of traditional South African cuisine, while industrial fishing operations have profited from them as products. *The Whale Caller's* more nuanced poacher narrative gives one a window into the complexities and cultural particularities that characterise human-

abalone-ocean relationships in South Africa, thereby showing how abalone can signify something quite different – depending who caught it or whose plate it is served.

The puny man's story resonates with the fishers that Shuhood admires in *Poacher*. The fishers who served as role models for Shuhood are the small-scale fishers that are represented in ethnographies and in the fisher injustice narrative; he saw their poaching lifestyles as aspirational, as a way of pursuing an alternative livelihood to a Cape Town's gangs. Similarly, Shuhood's motivations for poaching were not always feeding his family, as he got a thrill out of poaching and its dangerous lifestyle. He craved success and bigger wins, just like the puny man in *The Whale Caller*. However, Shuhood was also not purely motivated by greed, and his poaching career did support his family's livelihood, and precisely because of this it led to a moral tension with his core Muslim values. He struggled to work alongside other poachers who lived a high-flying lifestyle like the one that Tommy Fortune represents in *Cape Greed* and who would fit into the greedy poacher narrative. The nuanced poacher narrative resists archetypal minimisation, as is visible in the greedy poacher or the fisher injustice narratives, insofar as it does not paint a black and white picture of good and bad, with actors placed on one side or the other, without room to oscillate.

## Narrative virtue ethics

Narratives like the *nuanced poacher* offer alternative moral scripts for lonely existential ethical dilemmas. It is worth clarifying that while one might be *alone* in moments of ethical deliberation, the crucial significance of the "lonely" element is the need to individually take responsibility and to choose between difficult courses of action. Hence, moments can be existentially lonely insofar as they remind one of the responsibilities that each person must decide on the course of action they take, which is a responsibility that they are ultimately alone in having. Indeed, every choice one makes is one's own, even if set amongst a maelstrom of social, economic, cultural, and material factors

that are outside of one's control. Lonely moments are represented in the conundrums the protagonists tackle in stories like *Cape Greed, Poacher,* 'Floating Rugs,' and *The Whale Caller* navigating when they consider dangerous careers as poachers or agonise over the impacts of sharing a poaching community's story with the outside world.

Ricoeur contends that there is no "mathematical answer" to someone's calculation over whether a course of action *really* counts as realising an important value for them, or indeed moves them towards their idea of the good life. Instead, Ricoeur posits that one can find helpful guidance for what action to take by returning to one's ethical aim, the desire to be good and become a good person. Martha Nussbaum exemplifies this point in her description of how narrative brings ethics to life:

> Among stories of conduct, the most true and informative will be works of literature, biography, and history; the more abstract the story gets, the less rational it is to use as one's only guide. Good deliberation is like theatrical or musical improvisation, where what counts is flexibility, responsiveness, and openness to the external; to rely on an algorithm here is not only insufficient, it is a sign of immaturity and weakness. (Nussbaum, 'An Aristotelian Concept of Rationality:' 74, referenced in Treanor 2014: 178)

Indeed, Treanor argues that moral norms or rules are more like a "shorthand," which can at times be insufficient to guide one's decisions in a "broader and more complicated story" (2014: 178). In situations where moral norms and duties are contested, with no clear path to follow, referring to familiar narratives that are bound up with one's image of a good person can help tease out which decision(s) would fit into that picture.

'Floating Rugs' conveys one such narrative for what being a good person could look like: Ella is broadly portrayed as virtuous, albeit textured with a little ambiguity towards the end of the story when she considers poisoning James. Ella makes active attempts to respond to

her own needs as well as the needs of the community and ocean ecosystem around her, for example in the various ways she tries to protect her community from exposure. Despite the fact Ella has been "deleting Journalist Guy's emails" from Zuko's computer, she also attempts to respect the Elders' wishes to "help people understand" by staying quiet and giving James a tour of the community's setup (Mashigo 2019). Nevertheless, whilst guiding James around their neighbourhood Ella returns to her goal of protection and considers her options to "convince him" not to write the story (*Ibid.*). In presenting this demonstration of competing priorities, 'Floating Rugs' suggests that practically navigating the task of living a flourishing life (for Ella) involves balancing commitments to: personal safety, community and neighbourly duties, and oceanic environmental activism. Customary African decision-making processes by the "Elders" and multispecies care are core features of the ethics that Mashigo's future community practice. Ella is thus concerned with what is best path for herself, her community, and her ecosystem to be able to flourish. Simultaneously, she is fairly inwardly-focused insofar as she is less concerned with what is best for wider society.

Counterposing the depiction of Ella, 'Floating Rugs' suggests that a bad or vicious life is involves selfish pursuits at the expense of others, demonstrating an imbalance across first-, second-, and third-personal spheres. Characters like the Swedish Man are driven by individualistic motivations for profit-seeking that are detached from the environment, and the value of non-human beings are limited to spectatorship. In an example of the Swedish Man's lack of genuine engagement with the ocean environment, one of the speculations about his disappearance depicts him being eaten by sharks "while he was admiring the cabins covered in kelp" (Mashigo 2019). This separation from the natural world is exemplified in the underwater eco-touristic venture that the Swedish Man heads up, which is shown to exploit both the ocean and local community through a commodification of ocean aesthetics:

> Land living is ugly, it's too steady and it's arrogant … James gets it now; I can see it in his eyes. Those who read his work won't though. They will want to turn this into a destination where they get drunk in the ruins of beach front houses and take selfies 'with the tribe.' (*Ibid.*)

The imagined audience for such a tourist resort is likewise depicted as consisting of people who are shallow in their consumption of a thingified ocean and of simplistic stereotypes about the coastal residents. These imagined tourists thus lack a sense of respect or appreciation for their dignity nor the nuance of the coastal community's ways of life. For both the Swedish Man and the tourists, personal pleasure and greed are championed over an authentic engagement with the needs of other people along with the political and material conditions of the society that they live in.

For a character to be a narrative role model in the way that Treanor and Nussbaum suggest above, there needs to be enough detail to get an insight into their motivations, values, and decision-making. Ella is the only character in the short story who is substantiated insofar as the reader is privy to struggles and tensions in her ethical decision-making. Thus, the reader is invited to relate Ella's negotiation of virtue and her context to their own personal situation. In fact, because Ella is the only intimately accessible character, she is also a great evocation of the experience of lonely decision-making.

> The NRM [Net Removal Mission] wasn't my fault; Shireen's ear infection meant she couldn't do it ... Whale season meant the radar machines were constantly sending alerts. I knew what the problem was almost immediately when I looked at the whale radar screen in the bottom right hand corner. It was a whale caught in a ghost net and there was no saying how long it had been struggling for … There was always somebody in Main Station making sure we were safe. That's what made my solo NRM so awful in my brother's eyes, despite the fact that I was a

great swimmer and whales were generally laid back.
(Mashigo 2019)

It is Ella's voice alone that the reader hears when she discusses making the decision to save the whale and her consideration of the variables involved. It is a risky decision, as there is no one watching and therefore backing Ella up on her NRM to check she is safe, but this is counterposed against her swimming prowess. Ella will also have to reckon with her brother's judgement and possibly punishment if she goes ahead, but against this there is the whale's safety to consider, and the fact that the moment to act is fast passing by. Similarly, Ella is alone in her reflections when she considers the various poisonous substances in the ocean and how she might convince – or force – James to not write about their underwater community. Ella is alone in making her decisions through her solitary narrative voice. No one is able to help her make her decisions in those moments. And yet the time-sensitivity and high stakes of these moments suggest a pressing need for decisions to be made.

Reading 'Floating Rugs' as a source of a narrative virtue education, one can examine what ethical resources this short story offers people. Treanor says that virtue ethics must include a comprehensive conception of characteristics that contribute to a person's goodness, including "at least, her individual flourishing, the flourishing of the social groups of which she is a part, and the flourishing of the environment in which the first two sorts of flourishing take place," as well as other non-virtue-oriented components of ethics (similar to the deontic constraints McMullin discusses) (2014: 178). Treanor, like McMullin, also draws these three spheres from an Aristotelian virtue ethics framework, but McMullin emphasises the existential tension between these competing spheres. These three dimensions of moral life are present in 'Floating Rugs' and are evidently in tension for Ella. Two key conflicts in the short story navigate moral complexity in human-ocean relationships, and the story explores how this sort of complexity

may continue to characterise attempts at flourishing in an imagined future. Firstly, when Ella removes the ghost net from a whale in the unsupervised excursion that invites Zuko's ire. This scene highlights moral tensions around protecting both oneself and others, including more-than-human others, and the need to make trade-offs without a clear answer as to what is 'right' in a given situation. The second conflict is around Ella's suspicion of the visiting journalist and her consideration of lethal lengths to protect her community's way of life. This scene highlights ongoing issues around the risks to Indigenous and local communities that come from increased visibility and the related hazards of exploitation and commodification that can come with a desire to share traditional ecological knowledge and practice. I will examine each of these conflicts to discuss the tension between first-, second-, and third-personal existential spheres of responsibility that they reveal, and which they help readers to think through in relation to ocean futures.

In the first conflict around the whale removal mission, the reader sees Ella's thought process during the moment when she decides to save the whale, and can imagine 'as if' they themselves were in the situation. Ella says she "knew what the problem was almost immediately" when she sees the whale radar and realises one of the whales is stuck in a ghost net, explaining why it is falling slowly behind the others in the pod (Mashigo 2019). She calculates the probability of her own success in being able to save the whale as high and evaluates the risk to herself as low, given that "I was a great swimmer and whales were generally laid back" (Mashigo 2019). Later, Ella's brother reminds her that the rules say no one dives alone, suggesting a code of conduct (some deontic constraints) in their community that seemingly supersede circumstance. However, in the moment where Ella makes her decision, she responds to her feeling of responsibility for the whale's wellbeing, and no one is there to tell her what the right decision is. This demonstrates how someone might respond to the call of ecological and oceanic second-person responsibility for animals, for more-than-

human beings. It implicitly asks the reader if they would be the kind of person to risk their safety in order to swim out and save the whale, if they had the tools to do so.

The conflict that Ella navigates here is between first-person responsibility (to look after her own safety by not going on a mission without backup) and her second-person responsibility (to save the whale who she sees caught in a net). Yet, there is also a conflict between two distinct foci of second-person responsibility; Ella's duty to save the whale versus her responsibility to follow her community's rules, and in doing so, collectively look after each other. Cutting the net free of the whale is a worthwhile trade in Ella's mind, and in fact I would argue that given Ella's strong-willed character and steadfast care for others, that she would not even consider the alternative option (to leave the whale unaided).

> It's not as simple as I'm making it out but it was certain curiosities that lead us to the water. Perhaps it was that the sea had stopped giving to them or that they had seen how much was taken from it but they decided to stay and fix what was wrong. Like a visiting family member, we kept going back until the underwater cabins became our homes. (Mashigo 2019).

Ella looks after the whale like a family member, and the impression of the whales and the humans coexisting like family is stressed by the way the whales always seem to be at the window. This speaks to the messiness of ocean relationality with the ocean as a family member, more like second-person social relationality than third-person society/environment relationality. In fact, the broader narrative suggests that Ella is the kind of person who tries to protect the people (including non-human animals) around her at all costs – even where she risks her own safety or the safety of others.

The story contrasts Ella's experience as a young person and someone who has grown up surrounded by ocean with land-oriented perspective, including her brother's. She tells the reader how "Zuko

grew up on land but I belong in the ocean. I fall asleep surrounded by it; I wake up to it and spend my time picking thorns out of it" (Mashigo 2019). Ella's oceanic perspective is immersive and comes with an activist multispecies ethic – the ghost net being one such thorn – and a strongly protective relationship to her environment. This is also linked to her perspective as a young person and suggests a tendency towards caring for herself and her immediate community, with less concern for the wider society or world. In fact, there is little to no contact between Ella's oceanic community and the wider world in the story beyond their exposure to James – she mentions "land living schoolmates" but apart from that her peculiar situation of living in the ocean shelters her from the rest of society (*Ibid.*). Ella does not suffer any harm as a result of her dive, but she is scolded by her brother who disapproves of her ethical judgement. But then, of course, Zuko was not there in that lonely moment. Ella counters Zuko's criticism that she does not "fear the water" enough with the statement that she nonetheless has "a healthy respect for the place I call home," suggesting that through her more immersed sense of belonging in the ocean as *home*, she has a different perspective on its both importance and its otherness (complete with all the dangers this can pose) (*Ibid.*). Zuko signifies a more compartmentalised view on the relations between humans and non-human animals than Ella. Conversely, she appears to see her responsibilities to the non-human animals around her as equal to the humans in her community, and seemingly as *more* valuable than responsibilities to humans outside of her community. There is even a narrative nod to acknowledge her actions when a whale "kept swimming up to the window" outside Ella's bedroom and she "was convinced it was the one I helped free from Ghost Net a few hours earlier," returning to thank her (*Ibid.*).

In the second key ethical conflict in the story, Ella and the community's suspicion of the journalist is contrasted with her brother and the Elders' desire to share knowledge and best practices more widely for the chance to "slow the decay of oceans" (Mashigo 2019). For Ella, the need

to safeguard her community is in conflict with her duty to listen to the elders and to follow the decision of the collective, especially when "Neighbours and elders alike were concerned [with] the memory of the Swedish man … still too fresh" (*Ibid.*). Here Ella's first-person responsibility (Ella's need to protect herself and continue to enjoy her way of life) is aligned with second-person responsibility (to protect her community, their way of life, and to safeguard the ecosystem from an unknown risk). However, another dimension of second-person responsibility is in conflict with these imperatives (specifically Ella's duty to not harm the journalist) and moreover, a third-person responsibility (to share knowledge and practice about ocean relationalities) is also in tension with Ella's safeguarding duties. Given her previous actions to save her underwater community, risking her own safety to save the whale, it is clear that Ella is willing to make sacrifices "to protect our way of life" and to stop "someone writing about us like we were some 'lost conservation tribe.'" (*Ibid.*). The consequences for Ella's thorny decision are not relayed through the story, although they are suggested by reference to the community's previous experience of capitalist oppression and the loss of their way of life that accompanied it.

Ella is suspicious of another looming, European-led exploitation of their community as a commodified extension of nature. She worries about the possibility of losing their way of life to commercial exploitation, and dreads the idea of people viewing and treating their village as a reductionist Indigenous stereotype. To be sure, she highlights critical questions about the risks of visibility for Indigenous communities. Ella resents being given the job of showing around Journalist Man James from National Geographic and she is cognisant of their differences. She comments that he seems surprised about her height and her "flat feet," drawing attention to the racialised optics of their encounter or possibly future adaptations for swimming in an oceanic environment (Mashigo

2019).[55] If Ella chooses to let the journalist share their underwater way of life, this may lead to powerful actors seeking to exploit them and their way of life. However, if Ella intervenes in the situation, then she risks her own virtue by breaking another one of the community's (and humanity's) deontic constraints. If Ella values life, and she demonstrates that she does by saving the whale, then it is likely that killing a person is tantamount to undermining this fundamental principle to not kill.

'Floating Rugs' poses the question from an outside perspective, too. James asks "why would you want to keep this place a secret?", opening up the dilemma of whether to share or conceal Indigenous or unusual ways of living and weighing up the potential harm or benefit that can come from this visibility (Mashigo 2019). Mary Jane Rubis and Noah Theriault write about the value and importance of selective "acts of evasion and concealment" of "world-making practices amid overlapping interventions by extractive industries and conservation" (2019: 16). Rubis and Theriault note that international conservation and development organisations "too often objectify Indigenous traditions as resources for conservation" but they fail to engage with the systems of politics, economics, and ecological relations that are bound up in dispossession and landscape transformation, undermining meaningful collaboration and often disrupt the ecological processes and assemblages they hope to protect (*Ibid.*). In response, communities sometimes respond with ambivalence to narratives of the erasure of Indigenous ways of living in order to promote their own interests under the guise of scarcity, where otherwise they might be more vulnerable to exploitation (*Ibid.*). In 'Floating Rugs,' the journalist has to promise to keep the location of the community a secret in order to gain the trust of the Elders and to be able to visit. In fact, it seems that the reason that the Elders consider his request is out of a concern for society or the

[55] Mashigo has spoken elsewhere about American sneakers not being "made for our feet" (Intruders 2018: xiv).

world as a whole, given that James says their community could be "an in-between that could very well save our future." (Mashigo 2019).

'Floating Rugs' narrates a future for abalone poachers and their descendants not as environmental destroyers or criminals, but as fishers, neighbours, and conservationists. Thus, it explores how redistribution of power (mediated through territory and technology) could enable flourishing possibilities for small-scale fishers and local communities. However, the tension here twists upon whether this way of life will be at risk once more if it is shared more widely; is its sustainability contingent in some way upon its loneliness? In this way, the story foregrounds intergenerational legacies of marginalisation and it suggests that these issues are unlikely to be resolved in the near future. Current breakdowns in trust and care between groups of people and powerful actors will continue to leave lasting impressions on people in the future and will inform complex questions of ethics and oceanic relationality. Evidently, there are valuable and pertinent examples of lonely decisions and ethical dilemmas in this second tension in 'Floating Rugs' that will serve a narrative virtue ethical education.

Although particularly suited for younger readers, 'Floating Rugs' asks pertinent questions and delivers moral lessons for anyone affected by, or interested to be informed about, questions of Indigenous and local community sovereignty and the future sustainability of human-ocean relationships. Between 'Floating Rugs' and *The Whale Caller*, it is clear that there are contextual and nuanced archetypal narratives about abalone poaching available in South African fiction genres, which see beyond the criminality of the profession. Both these narratives also hint at the high stakes involved for people who turn to poaching. 'Floating Rugs' emphasises how the histories of dispossession and exploitation evident in *The Whale Caller* will inform future human-ocean relationalities going forwards. In the second part of this chapter, I look more closely at the space that 'Floating Rugs' occupies as a speculative

narrative set in the future; one that imagines the role of technology in such a future.

## 2: Technology and patience in ocean futures

In this section I begin by looking at the publishing context for 'Floating Rugs' within an online collection of speculative and science fiction short stories called *Current Futures: A Sci-Fi Ocean Anthology* (Various 2019). The focus of these stories, on future ocean technology, kickstarts a discussion about the role of technology in ethical futures of abalone and oceans. I go on to discuss some virtuous responses to technology and managing the abalone crisis in South Africa, as one symptom of a complex crisis of human-ocean relationality.

### XPRIZE's *Current Futures* anthology and techno-optimism

In *Current Futures,* authors imagine a future "when technology has helped unlock the secrets of the ocean" (XPRIZE 2019b). The anthology was organised by the XPRIZE Foundation who brought together writers and artists from around the globe to create 18 stories and illustrations. Together, they collectively imagine how future seascapes and underwater depths could be transformed by technological innovations. The stories are online and free to read for anyone with an internet connection (although currently the site is unavailable, showcasing the ephemeral contingency of online narratives).[56] XPRIZE Head of Communications Eric Desatnik produced the collection and has claimed that the motivation for commissioning these stories is the belief that storytelling inspires people and builds optimism for the future. On this basis, XPRIZE wanted *Current Futures* to remind people of "the mystery and majesty of the ocean, to establish the critical need for discovery and stewardship, and to instil a sense of hope for the ocean's future" (XPRIZE 2019b). In describing oceans as 'mysterious and

[56] It is worth noting that the prerequisite of internet access excludes many people around the world who are experiencing economic deprivation or who live in remote areas without infrastructure anyway. For many, the internet is still a privileged commodity.

majestic,' Desatnik denotes an unknowable quality of immense or overwhelming sublime otherness, a quality that speaks to Shuhood's aesthetic attentive engagements with oceans. A response of 'discovery and stewardship' seems to (somewhat counter-intuitively) approach this powerful otherness with a need to gain knowledge of that which resists humans, to keep and guard such a mighty and unknowable phenomenon. The scientific method drives this sort of approach: to study and seek to understand that which is currently not understood, and in this respect the metaphor of 'unlocking' the ocean's secrets is a powerful one.

XPRIZE funds and accelerates progress on future-facing tech innovations and has led a number of competitions to kickstart technological advances. *Current Futures* was one of a series of mini-competitions that accompanied the three-year Shell Ocean Discovery XPRIZE, which offered a $7 million prize to the team of scientists and engineers who could produce the best map of the ocean floor using high-speed and low-cost unmanned technologies. The pursuit of this competition was to see, map out, and study parts of the ocean that humans cannot not physically reach – which is the vast majority of the ocean. The Ocean Discovery competition ran from 2015 to 2019 in partnership with oil and gas giant Royal Dutch Shell (Shell). XPRIZE often partners with high-profile organisations. Most recently, XPRIZE have partnered with the Musk Foundation, headed by controversial tech mogul Elon Musk (of South African origin), to work on carbon removal solutions (Edwards 2021). The finances and technology credentials of XPRIZE's partner organisations are evidently an influential factor in driving these partnerships, perhaps more than their environmental histories, even where these partners are the face of XPRIZE's ostensibly environmental competitions. For instance, Shell – as the XPRIZE sponsor for the competition – was able to lead the charge in negotiating with Ocean Discovery teams to use their technology for business activities, such as oil and gas exploration or to maintain production wells and pipelines (Rosen 2018: 508). Critical questions

about the ethical and ostensibly ecological intentions of XPRIZE initiatives like the Ocean Discovery competition are well-founded, given the fact that profit-driven and extractivist goals are clearly at the heart of partnerships with Shell and the Musk Foundation.

Whereas 'Floating Rugs' narrates an ocean ecosystem in which humans are active participants in ocean conservation, the Ocean Discovery competition incentivised the exploration of depths far beyond the reaches (and survivability) of human beings. This deep-sea exploration is conceptually linked to XPRIZE's bigger sibling project to explore space. The very first XPRIZE competition, and the reason the organisation was founded was to encourage space tourism and make private space travel *economically* feasible.[57] In the promotional material, the reasons that XPRIZE give for mapping the ocean floor are framed as a natural evolution of the scientific project to explore that which is not understood, to identify ways to detect pollution, and to explore new minerals, flora, and fauna for human benefit and conservation efforts. These reasons position the ocean as valuable to the extent that it can be the study of humans and because it can offer resources to humans.

XPRIZE founder Eric Diamandis states that "we have better maps of the surface of Mars than we do of our own seafloor. The Shell Ocean Discovery XPRIZE will address a critical ocean challenge by accelerating innovation to further explore one of our greatest unexplored frontiers" (XPRIZE 2015). This comparison has been shown to be unhelpful and even "absurd" as scientists know a lot about the deep sea, if not everything, but it is a completely different environment to the surface of a planet (Jamieson *et al.* 2020: 804). The language that Diamandis uses to promote the project suggests that this competition is driven by a colonial desire to expand territorial control of 'unexplored frontiers,' and advance technologies for the sake of progress. The concept of

[57] See https://www.xprize.org/prizes/ansari, accessed 16:02, 01.09.2022.

acceleration itself is an interesting one; acceleration suggests a need to speed up the pace of something – in this case processes of technological development and ocean exploration. One could describe this philosophy of acceleration, which drives the whole project of XPRIZE competitions to kickstart new technologies, as impatient.

Elizabeth DeLoughrey points out that discussions of frontiers have always been linked to efforts to bring areas of the earth under control. She writes:

> There is critical new scholarship being produced about the enclosure of the ocean, "speculative capitalist futures," and the oceanic "techno-frontier" which is "always open and expanding." Under the guise of neoliberal extractive regimes, the ocean has become a new space of the blue economy, a new commodity frontier in the scramble for rare earth elements and so-called green energy supplies, leading to new vocabularies and practices of deep-sea oil exploration, subsea carbon dioxide capture (CCS), and ocean carbon sequestration. (DeLoughrey 2022: 149)

In the pattern that DeLoughrey notes here, XPRIZE's collaboration with Shell and the resulting technological advances have indeed contributed to deep-sea oil exploration. Moreover, her point about the always-expanding techno-frontier and the drive towards enclosure and ownership highlights that the philosophical underpinnings of this competition value techno-optimism and a capitalist approach to environmental issues and oceanic futures. DeLoughrey points out how such an extractive approach can be camouflaged within speculative future writing and 'hopeful' imaginaries of techno-futures, like the *Current Futures* anthology and 'Floating Rugs' as one of these speculative short stories. Indeed, positive stories about oceanic futures are perhaps especially appealing in comparison to doom and gloom narratives of climate collapse and ocean crisis (XPRIZE 2019b).

DeLoughrey argues that the *Current Futures* anthology is an example of emergent literary 'speculative capitalist futures', understood as stories that provide social capital or buy-in for petrocapitalist ocean exploitation. The short story collection places XRIZE and Shell within the social imaginary of future-facing thought and discourse, and develops a kind of social vocabulary for extractivism in the oceans. As XPRIZE representative Desatnik says, stories are influential in building beliefs like hope and "optimism for the future" (XPRIZE 2019b). Treanor also writes that beliefs are grounded in narratives, and that those beliefs influence individuals' desires, choices, and actions more than objective facts (Treanor 2014: 200). DeLoughrey highlights that as much as narrative is a powerful tool to share virtue, it is also a powerful tool that can be used to perpetuate vice. So, do future narratives about oceans and abalone poachers – like 'Floating Rugs' – unhelpfully tangle up visions of sustainability for fishers with extractive practices and beliefs about technological innovation?

## Future ocean narratives and the role of technology

Demonstrating the risks to oceans that speculative narratives pose by encouraging capitalist social buy-in, DeLoughrey considers the recent current of environmental economics; the blue economy, where state and corporate actors partner in ocean technologies and extractive industries. For example, in 2012, South Africa signed an international ownership agreement to an Exclusive Economic Zone for 200 kilometres out to sea along the full 3,000 kilometres of the South African coastline, which Green notes gives a legal framework for the state to 'buy' ocean areas and sell these off to companies for extraction (2020: 9). In an example of this kind of corporate ocean sale, South Africa's Department of Mineral Resources and Energy granted ocean exploration rights Shell and a local partner, Impact Africa, in 2014. Last year, the Xolobeni community on the Eastern coast or South Africa's 'Wild Coast' successfully fought to stop Shell's plans to conduct Seismic Blasting, "the blasting of sound waves into the sea to determine the size of oil and gas deposits beneath the ocean floor" which could be

harmful to marine life but also importantly they had not been properly consulted about (Magome 2022, Chutel & Krauss 2022). Despite the focus on the right to proper consultation, there is speculation over whether the ruling could set a precedent for other oil and gas surveys on Africa's coastline, insofar as the community was positioned as the custodians of the environment.

Local fishers have been at the centre of this contestation over ocean futures:

> Nontsindiso Nongcavu, a fisherman who joined the case as a plaintiff, agreed that the judgment gives communities a needed weapon to fight for their land. "Our government leaves us nowhere," said the 42-year-old, who supports a multigenerational family trapping rock lobster. (Chutel & Krauss 2022)

Indeed, abalone poachers may have also been part of this conversation and the community resistance. This is the same stretch of coast that Shuhood visits in one of his exploratory poaching enterprises, and where he encountered groups of poachers who are willing to risk extraordinarily dangerous diving conditions for poorly-paid abalone exchanges because of the extreme level of poverty they are living with. Indeed, Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, an advocate from the Xolobeni community commented on the fact that Shell offered no financial incentive for the community, and pointed out that the ocean is central to many of the community's rituals (Magome 2022). This contestation and the cosmopolitical shift in ocean territory from local community to the state is reminiscent of the reorganisation of ǁHu!gais into the settlements of Cape Town.

DeLoughrey points out that ocean exploration is being done in the absence of addressing "devastating ecological loss" (2022: 148). Not only will this new gold rush to chart the oceans and mine the seas continue to cause ecological destruction, as surely as previous exploration and extraction activities have, and as surely as the gold rush

for abalone has wiped out nearly the whole species. In a more fundamental narrative move, such a focus on exploration on that which is unknown also moves public interest towards an amorphous solution to problems, and away from reckoning with the particularity and complexity of local issues. Attention is shifted away from existing struggles over contested territory, including damage to small-scale fisher livelihoods within the current abalone fishing and ocean governance crisis. In doing so, attention is also shifted away from the existing meaningful relationships that humans already have with the ocean, towards the unknown.

Due to the positionality of their stories, Mashigo and the other authors of stories in *Current Futures* create – whether with or without intentional endorsement – a social license for techno-optimist and petrocapitalist narratives of ocean futurity. DeLoughrey defines techno-optimism as "the eco-modernist conceit that human ingenuity will solve the ecological crisis caused by racial capitalism. By extension, the narrative of techno-optimism highlights and even re-entrenches a nature/culture divide" (2022: 155). In support of this point, the promotional literature for *Current Futures* and the Ocean Discovery competition frame technology as a solution to environmental problems and as a necessary, inevitable, or even virtuous pursuit. This neo-colonial philosophy of exploring frontiers also suggests a strong division between nature and culture insofar as nature must inevitably be conquered and discovered by humans, with the metaphor of 'unlocking secrets' suggesting powerful connotations of the possibility that ocean exploration just might solve those tricky ecological problems that seem to difficult and complex to conceptualise.

Technology plays a central role in 'Floating Rugs' and its narrative future. It is through the conservation technology, "like Underwater Big Brother" that Ella and her community are able to participate in ocean clean-up work (Mashigo 2019). This technology also enables a kind of stewardship of the ocean insofar as Ella's community monitor sea life

and clean up human waste that is damaging to the creatures' and ocean's health. But instead of technology distancing people from oceans, this technology is in service of the close relationship between people and ocean that this future story depicts. Technology in the story is also linked to knowledge, and thus power, which is why the journalist is interested in their community and why outsiders could be a threat, if they wanted this knowledge for themselves. However, the values and collaborative decision-making that Mashigo foregrounds in 'Floating Rugs' subvert techno-optimist conceptions of human mastery over nature with 'techno-fixes' for environmental problems. In Nigerian-American writer and scholar Nnedi Okorafor's words, Mashigo's writing is "interested in technology" and "skews optimistic," but this interest in technology is as a tool that serves an ethic of collective and multispecies care (2019). The optimism is directed towards the culture, values, and practices of South African people, and the story wrestles with "what is … [and] what has been," in order to show "what we feel inside" (Okorafor 2019, Mashigo 2018: xii). Whereas technology is a tool for 'Floating Rugs,' technology is a paradigm for XPRIZE.

Due to its position within the *Current Futures* collection, 'Floating Rugs' contributes to an optimistic narrative about the technological nature of future human relationships with the ocean. However, 'Floating Rugs' can also be read as a critique of this techno-capitalist model of colonial development. It is a story about the way that products of marginalisation like a tourist resort that disenfranchises a whole community can be turned into spaces for interspecies flourishing. Although colonial structures of inequality fuel the development of this particular underwater resort, the physical structure that is left behind becomes the home for people and the site for community ocean conservation. Resultingly, 'Floating Rugs' indicates how community values and a virtue-oriented approach can redirect the way people use technology, and infrastructure, if there is the opportunity to democratise ownership. In the spirit of democratisation, in the next section I look at an example of a participatory approach to creating

more just small-scale fisher futures using technology. In this section, I examine how this project engages with existing narratives like the fisher justice narrative, and also with other future-oriented discourses around utopias.

### Abalobi: re-narrativising ocean futures?

Abalobi is an app that has been created to help small-scale fishers keep track of their catches and market the fish they catch to consumers more effectively.[58] Abalobi is an isiXhosa term for a small-scale fisher, which presumably was chosen during the co-development of the project, however it is interesting to note that the app is currently only available in English and Afrikaans (Green 2020: 195, Castillo & Vosloo 2018: 8). The application is an open-source system for information management that can be accessed via mobile phone or any other device. The primary 'fisher' app is a simple logbook that is designed to record catch information easily and intuitively by small-scale fishers on a daily basis. There are also other apps that expand on this, for example the 'marketplace' app, which can link fishers with consumers, like restaurants or individual customers, to get better prices for their catch. The fact that the app can be accessed on a mobile phone is a potential strength as it could make the technology more accessible to people from lower income backgrounds, like small-scale fishers. Cellular phones are highly common in South Africa, with 112.7 million connections registered as active in early 2023 (equivalent to 187.4% of the country's total population, and 72.3% of the population have internet access. However, a piece of research on the Abalobi app and its users highlighted that data costs can be prohibitively high while "many people use their phones sparingly when going online" (Kemp 2023, Castillo & Vosloo 2018: 5). So, there could also be limitations to using the app for fishers who are unable to afford sufficient data packages to power the online components of the app.

[58] See https://abalobi.org/, accessed on 23/11/2023.

The social enterprise behind the platform was co-founded by fisheries science researcher Serge Raemaekers and it was developed based on the findings from interdisciplinary research involving two small-scale fisher communities in the Western Cape, who have been described as contributing to the development of and co-creating the app (Castillo & Vosloo 2018, Nthane *et al*. 2020). The aim of developing Abalobi in collaboration with small-scale fisher communities to suit their specific needs is to improve small-scale fisheries management and governance and to reduce economic inequality in coastal communities (Castillo & Vosloo 2018, Nthane *et al*. 2020). The app creators and owners mention a collective design approach and co-ownership model in the paper by (Nthane, Saunders, Fernández, & Raemaekers 2020). The UNESCO-Pearson Initiative for Literacy report on Abalobi suggests that data sharing is in the hands of fishers themselves insofar as they can decide how much information they want to share regarding their catch or issues they have encountered that might be relevant to the industry (2018: 10). Despite the company's promotion of its transparency around data-sharing, they share little data about their own governance and finances that is not narrated into their story of change. The last publicly-available annual report was from 2020 and there are no public policy documents available (e.g., constitution, annual accounts, safeguarding policies) that could verify whether the company is run collaboratively, as it claims to be. On Crunchbase the company ownership is listed as under Serge Raemaekers and Abongile Ngqongwa, Deputy Director of Small-Scale Fisheries at DAFF, but this is all the governance information that is available online, amidst a wealth of narrative promotion.

Raemaekers has spoken in a popular TED Talk about Abalobi and small-scale fisher contributions. In this talk, Raemaekers employs the fisher injustice narrative to make a persuasive argument for why fisheries are in need of ethical transformation. He begins by countering and contextualising environmental arguments about food and ocean sustainability by arguing that a key way for people to respond to "the

fisheries crisis" is to continue to eat fish and, in fact, to eat more, but importantly eat the "right kind of fish," which is caught and sold by the "right kind of fisher" (Raemaekers 2017). Critiquing MPAs as the default method of conservation, Raemaekers suggests that investing in small-scale fishing communities is a more appropriate response to improving people's relationships with oceans on a larger scale. He points out the value of the small-scale fisher approach, including low-impact gear and knowledge of a range of species of fish that are under-fished and could replace in-demand and overfished species. Telling the story of his own involvement in this project, Raemaekers recalls that during his PhD, counting abalone stock on the Wild Coast of South Africa, he became interested in the stories of small-scale fishing communities, and wanted to know more about their perspective on fisheries governance. He celebrates what he has learned from the local ecological knowledge of small-scale fisher communities about fish identification, location, and "reading" or attentively engaging with the sea (*Ibid.*). Although Raemaekers celebrates the knowledge that fishers possess, he also positions himself as something of a white saviour in this video, centering his importance to this project of uplift for marginalised small-scale fishers.

Raemaekers' talk suggests an attentive, everyday relationship between fishers and oceans, but he also frames this relationship using the romanticised image of fishers as "the ultimate observers, they have saltwater running through their veins" (Raemaekers 2017). This is a narrative choice to portray fishers as harmonious custodians of the ocean, leaning into an image of small-scale fisher culture that has echoes of the noble savage. One of the benefits of the Abalobi app to fishers alongside observations, logging catch, and managing operations is "simply [that] they can showcase that they exist, that they are legitimate in their informal fishery" (Raemaekers 2017). Indeed, Raemaekers says the collective approach to mobile technology design and the centering of small-scale fisher perspectives and needs has "spurred on a movement of fishers claiming their fishing rights,

claiming their human rights, but showcasing to us that they too have a voice in science and conservation" (*Ibid.*). Looking at some of the language and metaphors Raemaekers uses, including the idea of seawater veins and the demonstration of fisher rights to show they exist, he explicitly employs the fisher injustice narrative here. He does not comment on poachers as part of this analysis of fisher knowledge, aside from to point out that the app can be used to report illegal fishing activity. However, the Abalobi project can create better pathways to earning through traditional fishing livelihood methods, offering alternatives to poaching, and Raemaekers' app has reportedly spurred this reclamation of rights. Similarly, Raemaekers offers the opportunity for consumers to bypass restaurant markups and the value chains that see fishers themselves losing out on profits, to access "storied seafood" or "traceable seafood" through the digital platform (*Ibid.*). This further highlights the narrativisation of fishers and their lifeworlds as part of Abalobi's marketing. Arguably, this technology could be a tool that allows conservation scientists to work with fishers collaboratively instead of working at odds, through cosmopolitically different epistemologies and ontologies of the ocean. Thus, Abalobi could represent an opportunity for collaboration and more equitable employment for fishers, but it is worth noting the fact that in pursuing this goal the company's marketing deploys reductionist stereotypes in order to pursue this end, instead of communicating nuance and ethical complexity.

As seen, small-scale fisher livelihoods have been significantly impacted by abalone quotas and other fisheries restrictions. Abalobi is a technological tool that enables the recognition of small-scale fisheries and provides ways for them to interact with markets and customers, acting as a way of translating existing fishing practices into data that fits reporting criteria, but moreover by changing the nature of fisher-customer logistics in order to benefit the people on both sides. Abalobi is a technology-oriented ethical response to the abalone fisheries crisis and more broadly human-ocean relations, but at least it wrestles with

the issues in the here and now; with present lived experiences and difficult ethical situations, rather than seeking out 'techno-futures' in unknown and unoccupied parts of the ocean like XPRIZE competitions. Small-scale fishers contribute substantially to South Africa's fishing industry, and around the world small-scale fishers contribute two-thirds of the world's market catch for consumption (FAO 2014, quoted in Castillo & Vosloo 2018: 4). This is also a large industry in South Africa, with an estimated 30,000 small-scale commercial and subsistence fishers' livelihoods dependent on catching and selling inland fish and marine life (Castillo & Vosloo 2018: 4). Despite the extent of small-scale fisher operations and their significant contribution to the fishing industry, fishers' contributions are not recognised by authorities due to a lack of reporting and data (e.g., their invisibility in national accounting systems). Abalobi could provide a solution to the reporting and data issue, while ensuring that fisher data is not shared without their individual or collective permission (Castillo & Vosloo 2018).

As well as the logbook and data sharing, the Abalobi accounting tool can link up to fisher cooperatives and is being implemented as the official catch management system for the SSFP (Castillo & Vosloo 2018: 13). This could facilitate and possibly strengthen fisher cooperatives, thus improving transparency and helping to resolve some of the issues and contestations around the implementation of new SSFP from 2012 onwards by democratising fisher literacy in fisheries systems (whereas previously this role was easily coopted by a small minority of fishers). One of the insights from small-scale fishers about key issues to them is the difficulty of reorienting their relationship to the 'value chain' to be able to get a higher price for their catch. As a result, Abalobi aims to give fishers the ability to link up with markets and buyers directly, like restaurant chefs, to sell fish directly and be able to access prices that are higher up the chain (Nthane *et al.* 2020: 753). Shuhood also discusses the value chain in relation to abalone in *Poacher*, showing similarities in how the local South African fishing industry disadvantages local fishers, when in the context of

international abalone markets, abalone divers themselves earn some of the lowest rates in the business (de Greef & Abader 2018: 135). Evidently, economic markets are structured so that the people who are in the sea doing the work to actually catch the fish that people want to eat are the ones who tend to lose out on earnings from that fish due to a number of 'middlemen' who connect the product with the buyer. Meanwhile, Abalobi aims to surpass bureaucratic chains to bring fishers and their 'storied' seafood directly to buyers.

As a tool for ocean epistemology, Abalobi could provide a formal way for fishers to share their observations and updates about the ocean, for example information about ecology, commerce, and safety, potentially improving knowledge about changing oceans by linking up the observations of a whole fleet of fishers who are in the water all year round. There is an emphasis on transparency and traceability in data-gathering and sharing to reduce the risk of reproducing incumbent hierarchies of power in data management. The Abalobi project aims to impact not only how fishers relate to the ocean but also to improve consumer relationships to fish and to the ocean. By creating more opportunities to eat locally-sourced and seasonal seafood Abalobi also targets the reductionist and thingifying logics of typical fisheries markets, in which certain species of fish become over-consumed and over-fished.

Lesley Green writes about the wider impact of Abalobi as an ocean ethics intervention to transform fisheries, and to impact on the social, economic, and environmental conditions that influence people to work as poachers: "It makes it possible for fishers to supply buyers with species that are not part of the two dozen managed fisheries, potentially taking pressure off those species. And it minimises the likelihood that fishers will operate under the radar as "poachers." (Green 2020: 197) If Abalobi is successful in its aims and it offers genuine alternatives to fishers to be able to pursue viable livelihoods, then legal fishing would once again offer a genuine alternative to

poaching, without the violence and criminality that is bound up with the latter. It is worth bearing in mind that this employment option would convert those poachers who are currently seeking good alternatives to illegal fishing, but is unlikely to stem the tide of high-profile syndicates who are making large profits and who will likely switch to another trade if/when abalone becomes extinct. De Greef and Haysom mention that legal employment opportunities for abalone poachers and an engagement with communities where poaching is increasingly are vital to a future where abalone does not simply get replaced by a different trade commodity if the species becomes extinct (2022).

Green also writes that the possibilities for collaborative ocean observation are crucial to scientific research and marine conservation, for example, "tools for noting the appearance of unusual species, as well as ocean conditions, including sea temperatures and winds or signs of algal blooms" (Green 2020: 195-6). Like Ella's underwater community in 'Floating Rugs' who already live immersed in the ocean and who are attentive to its currents and changes, small-scale fishers are already out on the ocean and have an attentive everyday knowledge of its ebbs and flows, of the different types of fish and where they are located. This type of lived knowledge and relationship with the ocean that is common to small-scale fishers and Shuhood, is notably different to the deep-sea automated exploration of the ocean's depths.

Green praises the centrality of care (for local concerns and values) "instead of quota" in the design of Abalobi (2020: 196). For example, the safety of fishers has been noted as a priority, with one of the apps providing functionality for fishers to share locations and call for help when they are in an emergency, and to note where they observe signs of poaching or illegal fishing (*Ibid.*). Having read about Shuhood's near-death experiences out on the ocean, this sort of support network could make a real difference to whether a fisher lives or dies. Nthane *et al.* explicitly discuss the use of technologies to support small-scale fisher flourishing. In the past, development work with technological

interventions have reproduced existing inequalities and power structures. In this project the academics wanted to "shift power relations in governance and market structures" e.g., by attending to not only who generates fisheries data, but also who analyses it (2020: 744). In this way, the development and deployment of Abalobi as a tech approach has been less oriented towards finding a solution to the problem of fisheries crisis, but more towards finding pathways to support existing relationships.

Nthane *et al*. suggest that environmental justice efforts will require working strategically within and around techno-capitalist-extractivist systems. In subverting neoliberal structures using socialist alternatives, they write that efforts may need to be "interstitial" and "symbiotic," rather than "ruptural" (2020: 748-9). Indeed, Nthane *et al*. reference Erik Olin Wright's concept of 'Real Utopias,' which involves strategic practices like working within markets and economic structures, but disrupting these to get better prices, for example, for fishers who are disadvantaged by economic inequality (2020: 748). Building on these thoughts, in the next section I discuss how focusing on the virtue of patience may help one to conceptualise more and less helpful attitudes to technology as part of future ocean ethics.

## The virtue of patience: a temporal attitude to techno-optimism

McMullin's discussion of the virtue of patience provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between technologies like Abalobi and narratives of ethics and ocean futures like 'Floating Rugs,' and why these are different to the technologies and narratives of techno-optimism that are promoted by organisations like XPRIZE and Shell.

McMullin describes the virtue of patience as a practical response to the existential human condition of being temporally limited (2021: 152). In other words, one's experience of time tends to be that there is not enough of it to do all the things one wants to do. It is difficult to find time to support the people around one whilst also pursuing the

identity-defining projects in one's lives let alone community- and society-defining projects. Conflicts, and the need to balance these priorities, are visible across the three narratives I have examined in varying degrees: in *Cape Greed,* Mullet tries to care for his relationships with Vincent and Rae-Anne, whilst also attempting to find time to go fishing, alongside putting in extra detective work, looking after the street child who visits his porch, and ultimately seeing these things clash when he is not there to stop Rae-Anne's attack or when Bom-Bom is killed. In *Poacher,* Shuhood seeks to support his family, which is in conflict with his attempts to find a way to earn a livelihood and support his family through his passion of horse riding, instead of through poaching. Meanwhile, he also tries to find time for his family, religious, and community commitments through his Sufism. In 'Floating Rugs,' Ella endeavours to care for her community and the whales she witnesses in need, whilst seeking the thrill of swimming in the ocean and doing conservation work, but this is sometimes in conflict with what the Elders see as her duty to share their way of life with the outside world. Through these examples, one can see the difficulty of meeting and balancing competing first-, second-, and third-personal priorities in a limited amount of time.

Patience is a virtue that helps one respond to, not rail against, this temporal finitude, and moreover to flourish within it. A patient approach involves recognising one's limits and taking responsibility for the inevitable losses involved in balancing one's time and efforts. As McMullin writes:

> What the patient person rejects is a sense of entitlement to a limitlessness in which long-term commitments can be realized without short-term suffering, to a limitlessness in which time is a boundless commodity and all possibilities can therefore be realized. (McMullin 2020: 175)

Hence, to practice patience as a virtue involves a shift in perspective to see projects and pursuits in view of what they enable in the long term,

to be able to patiently pursue these ends and accept that other possibilities are closed off by one's choice to spend time on those given projects. By cultivating patience to pursue long-term goals and put time into these goals, one orients oneself towards the future – and future consequences – in a way that is informed by limits and therefore is realistic about future possibilities and also future inevitabilities.

Impatience, by contrast, is an "implicit perfectionism" with a "normatively loaded" unrealistic sense of the possibilities available to a person, and by extension to humanity (McMullin 2020: 171). Thus, techno-optimism is impatient in the sense that it responds to the observation of human temporal and worldly limits, and the lack of concern for said limits (e.g., relying on an unrealistic economic model) by doubling down on this approach and assuming humanity will prevail by continuing to use the same methods of technological innovation. This assumption of perfectionism and desire to exceed one's natural limitations of time leads to the kind of entitled attitude McMullin mentions above, and to the attempt to realise a limitlessness in which anything is possible. Environmental destruction and climate change threaten the limits of the natural and human world, and these limits have been made clear. Humans have observed these limits and the surpassing of them through a number of indicators – e.g., ocean pollution and acidification, rising seas, ocean warming, species decline and extinction, loss of biodiversity, etc. A perfectionist approach to human capability is impatient and refuses to wait. It is to take responsibility for previous failures and to acknowledge limits so that one can work within them towards flourishing in the long-term, as opposed to short-term gains (e.g., profits).

Environmental justice efforts are aligned with a patient approach insofar as they foreground worldly limits and are future-oriented towards long-term sustainability and meaningful efforts towards flourishing. A good environmental justice approach, therefore, must be realistic about what is possible, making room for imperfections and

mistakes. 'Floating Rugs' and Abalobi both narrate futures where technology plays a role in environmental justice efforts, but not an impatient one where the pursuit of technological innovation is the solution to human problems. Both of these examples of South African futures imagine or use technology alongside an informed understanding of the material limits and current struggles of South African coastal communities. In 'Floating Rugs,' innovative radar technology helps the community to carry out conservation efforts, but dialogue and care – not technology – are at the foundation of the new underwater society. Moreover, there are clearly moral trade-offs and dilemmas at the core of preserving relationships with the ocean, like Ella's contemplation over the journalist or her community's fate, emphasising that there are not easy answers and suggesting the need for a patient approach. Similarly, Abalobi as a phone app intervention can only offer the possibility of challenging inequalities because its starting point is social research and participatory work with fishers. The Abalobi initiative takes time to engage with the needs of fishers, rather than seeking a 'techno-fix' that makes these needs and problems go away, as long as consultation with fishers continues.

Abalobi is also an emplaced environmental justice intervention, which is shown by one of the concerns listed in the UNESCO-Pearson Initiative for Literacy case study report on the potential scalability of Abalobi to other regions of South Africa due to the "highly contextualised nature of the co-design process" (2018: 5). This means that when the app is extended to other areas of the country, or perhaps beyond to adjacent coastal territories, the organisation will need to repeat the participatory design processes to establish the specific needs of the different communities and to foster a sense of local ownership. There is further evidence of a patient approach within the design of Abalobi in the report, whereby "co-design is not an easy process, and requires significant time and resource commitments" (Pearson 2018: 14). The placement of trust and the commitment of time and confidence between participants is key to enabling practical but sensitive

conversations, for example, discussions about finances bearing in mind "race and power dynamics [that] are constantly in play" in the collaborative design process (*Ibid.*). This is something that Mashigo highlights particularly well in the relationship between Ella and Journalist Man in 'Floating Rugs,' indicating how technology or innovation alone cannot unite or build trust between people who have histories of exclusion and inequality between them. Thus, both 'Floating Rugs' and Abalobi are mindful of the irreducible moral plurality in contemporary South African social, political, and economic dynamics.

## Utopian visions of ocean futures

Returning to DeLoughrey's critique, she comments on the parallels between techno-utopias in 'speculative capitalist future' narratives like the *Current Futures* collection, and speculative finance, both of which "inform the extractive imaginary" (2022: 154). Whereas before speculative genres have been pitched as progressive and anti-capitalist insofar as they make visible the "everyday violence of finance capital" to show its vicious nature, DeLoughrey suggests that this making visible and centering of capitalism and extractive technologies in a future context in fact normalises these structures as a necessary part of humanity's future, and makes them "available for consumption" (*Ibid.*).

> My question is how to disentangle what becomes visible – be it newly discovered deep-sea creatures or the mapping of sea floor vents – from commodification. (DeLoughrey 2022: 155)

It seems there is a fundamental question here about the way that narratives can make something visible and whether how this implies the process of making that phenomena or way of living an object for consumption, and particularly consumerist consumption. Although DeLoughrey sees the value of "spaces of revelation, critique, and enchantment in speculative fiction," she argues that the Current Futures collection is largely let down by its techno-optimist bent and the "individualistic, flat characters who function as problematic allegories

of the Anthropocene" (2022: 157). DeLoughrey highlights that the speculative narratives in the *Current Futures* collection present post-apocalyptic survival as dependent on the concept of innovation, and that this model is central to, and therefore further, a capitalist and extractivist model of navigating the future (2022: 156). Innovation stimulates movement away to something new and often is employed in efforts to innovate for its own sake as part of a techno-optimist and growth-oriented mindset.

Rebecca Evans agrees that while techno-utopian narratives can foster hope, they fail to reckon with the capitalist and imperialist structures that are embedded in a technological adaptation approach and that cause social and environmental violence; they foster hope in spite, not hope in faith (2018: 505). In contrast, apocalypse narratives are critiqued for their overwhelming emotional effect on the consumers of said narratives and the loss of hope or motivation that follows, thus dampening efforts towards social and environmental action (2018: 506). With this in mind, Evans says that people need the sense of possibility that dystopian apocalypse affords interlocutors to think outside of current oppressive structures, without reinscribing the totality of extinction that apocalypse prescribes (2018: 506). As a result, Evans endorses the emergence of apocalypse narratives that leave open some space for the possibility to incorporate the positive features of apocalypse, but that do so without dissuading social engagement.

In Nthane *et al.*'s review of Abalobi, they refer to Wright's 'Real Utopias' framework, which could be one example of the sort of 'in-between' narrative of transformative ethical futures that Evans highlights the need for (Nthane *et al.* 2020, Wright 2011). Wright's grounded sociological approach to utopian research employs the narrative work of the imagination to engage with different possibilities for social organisation, capturing "the spirit of utopia," whilst attending to the concrete details of how these possibilities are (and can be) achieved, with a focus on real life examples, such as the participatory citizen

process in setting the city's budget in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and Wikipedia as an open-access encyclopaedia compiled by unpaid volunteers (2011: 31). The redistribution of power and inequality in these 'Real Utopias' undermine individualist economic theory and expectations, by demonstrating significant community-oriented impacts, including the reorientation of economic funds to the needs of the poor and disadvantaged and the disappearance of corruption due to fund transparency in the Porto Alegre example (*Ibid.*). Nthane *et al*. emphasise the pragmatic and grounded nature of Wright's approach to utopian thinking insofar as he balances the need to imagine different possibilities to contemporary systems and structures in societies with a practical and strategic approach to making these alternatives into realities. This involves considering "strategic alternatives existing within capitalism's niches from which varieties of non-market relations, egalitarian participation, democratic governance and collective action can take hold" (2020: 748). I would also argue that Wright's Real Utopias represent a patient approach to conceptualising futures; one that is rooted in an understanding of current issues and tensions, and is informed by a realistic sense of limits on humanity; one of these perhaps being (at least for now) the presence of a hierarchical and extractive capitalist system.

Nthane *et al*. use Wright's Real Utopias to evaluate the effectiveness of technologies like Abalobi as transformative pathways for fishers to be able to lead flourishing lives. In arguing for the useful applicability of strategic Real Utopias like Abalobi, they highlight the challenges and complexity of living ethically that small-scale fishers experience in South Africa: "The Apartheid government's inequitable distribution of resources remains stubbornly entrenched, affecting where people live, their education and subsequent career prospects, access to basic services and dignity" (Nthane *et al*. 2020: 757-8). This astute and attentive reflection on the lived reality of abalone poachers and small-scale fishers in their attempts to flourish highlights the intractable institutions and divisions of the Apartheid-inherited socio-economic

system of inequality. Resultantly, "[i]t is imperative that fisher interventions remain attuned to this complexity where the real needs of fishers, including dignity, identity and cultural practice are not overlooked in favor of mainstream economic upgrading initiatives." (*Ibid.*). Evidently, an informed understanding of the way these complex systems restrict possibilities of human-ocean relationality is central to the research and practical work that feeds into and emerges from Abalobi.

Wright opens up 'utopian' narratives of possibility that are practical and grounded in real world possibilities – ones that "interstitial" or "symbiotic" with current systems, and not necessarily "ruptural" or do not require the complete collapse of capitalist hierarchies of power (Wright 2006: 1). Nthane *et al*. suggests that such a materially-informed concept of strategic utopias creates possibilities for equality, democracy, and sustainability within current systems (2020). This evinces a patient approach to ocean futures and technology, and one that acknowledges that while a world outside of capitalism is an admirable goal, many people need ways to get by and attempt to flourish within the context of messy systemic complexity. Mashigo has also talked about the need for future thinking that is neither wholly utopian nor dystopian. Accordingly, the futures she imagines are something in between – or perhaps set aside from – these poles. In her introduction to *Intruders,* she poses the following questions:

> Is the future still filled with (generational) inequality? Are there any smart cities or has corruption stolen opportunities for young people to influence the direction of technology? If resources and education currently benefit only one group, what does that mean for the use of technology in the future? How does who we are right now affect an imagined future? … I'm also interested in who we are now, no matter how unremarkable we seem, under the lens of speculative fiction. (Mashigo 2018: xiii)

These questions, and the closing statement about writing 'who we are now, no matter how unremarkable' demonstrate Mashigo's sharp focus on present-day material circumstances and the contextual messiness that South Africans find themselves living in and living through. Mashigo's projects, including 'Floating Rugs,' are distinctly different to the kind of speculative techno-optimism that DeLoughrey warns about. They do not propose innovation and techno-optimism with an impatient attitude but instead explore a patient engagement with present-day tensions and limits on projects of fulfilment, with an eye to the future and sustainability of such projects.

One driving vision for Mashigo, like DeLoughrey's desire to think outside of capitalism, is the need to imagine futures that are "free from white supremacy" (*Intruders* 2018: xii). Thus, Mashigo highlights the racial inequity at play in the nature/culture divide, and the specific effects of this in South Africa. In keeping with Mashigo's vision for liberated South African futures, 'Floating Rugs' imagines a more complicated scenario than a straightforward utopia. European capitalist forces have failed in their development projects and the local community have reclaimed power, but they are keenly aware of the cost involved in the journey to get there, with difficult and possibly deadly virtue dilemmas still on the horizon. Furthermore, 'Floating Rugs' is open-ended and does not require a catastrophe so monumental that it would stifle readers' motivation for social action, as Evans avers is so important.

Okorafor emphasises the role that futuristic thought and speculative genre has for African people: "Africanfuturism … is rooted first and foremost in Africa. It's less concerned with 'what could have been' and more concerned with 'what is and can/will be'. It acknowledges, grapples with and carries 'what has been'." (Okorafor 2019). While Okorafor's Africanfuturism is "interested in technology," this genre is also crucially concerned with sovereignty, reclamation, and moving narratives about Africans out of the past and into the future (*Ibid.*). A

story like 'Floating Rugs' is valuable as an ethical exemplar and a future narrative for fisher communities, who are living the history that Mashigo describes right now – readers who may be poachers or have parents for poachers, like Shuhood's children. For abalone poachers and their families, this story recognises their struggle and opposes popular narratives of poachers as criminals. In sum, technology may be there and be interesting for speculative African narratives, but what drives them is a strong phenomenology of place and shared lived experience.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the presence of archetypal narratives of poaching that come up again and again – the greedy poacher and fisher injustice being two key and repeated narratives that sit in tension with each other. These touchstone narratives are symbolic in the public consciousness in their representation of contested sides of the debate around the fisheries crisis. Looking at some extracts from *The Whale Caller* in conversation with *Poacher,* I explored a more nuanced poacher narrative that resists archetypal minimisation, of poaching as a career, symbolising a set of circumstances and choices that are neither wholly criminal nor noble. The fluidity and mess of narratives like the nuanced poacher or poaching career provide examples of virtue that are rooted in lived experience. They engage the task of practically navigating the rich and murky moral in-between where there is no clear right or wrong. Through Treanor, I attested to the ethical educational value of narratives like 'Floating Rugs' and *The Whale Caller* to be able to engage with public discourses on poaching and to give readers opportunities to engage with the 'as if' virtue ethics space of imagination. Narrative scripts and moral go-to's are valuable for lonely moments of ethical decision-making when rules do not – and cannot – offer a clear course of action. Ella exemplifies a lonely protagonist, and she demonstrates persistent issues of trust and exposure that are likely to continue to challenge local fishing communities in the future.

In the second part of this chapter, I examined the *Current Futures* collection *that* 'Floating Rugs' is a part of, and DeLoughrey's charge that many of the stories in it promote 'speculative capitalist futures.' Given this cause for concern, I explored the role of technology in 'Floating Rugs' and other future narratives of abalone and ocean to understand more about techno-optimism and vice. I found that future narratives about abalone poachers and oceans do not always tangle up visions of sustainability with practices of extractivism and techno-optimism. In particular these visions are informed by a patient appreciation of human and oceanic limits. McMullin's characterisation of patience as a virtuous response to the existential temporal limitedness of human experience served as a helpful conceptual framework for deepening an understanding of how technology can be realistically approached as part of imaginative and real futures. Mashigo's efforts to write "who we are now, no matter how unremarkable" and Abalobi's attempt to story seafood to promote "the real needs of fishers, including dignity, identity and cultural practice" demonstrate a patient engagement with the messiness of fisher and poacher lived realities, although they both suffer from romanticising fishers (Mashigo 2018: xiii, Nthane *et al*. 2020: 758). In both of these attempts to depict the messy realities that people experience using the fisher injustice narrative there is a tendency towards idealisation of fishers as noble and harmonious stewards of nature. For the purposes of a practical approach to ethics, narratives like these shed light on the perspective of small-scale fishers and help to shift the incumbent narrative of poachers as greedy criminals. However, there is a need for more nuance and complexity in these narratives if they are to help people navigate moral tensions in a realistic, grounded, way.

# Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis, I acknowledged that the language of crisis increasingly frames discussions about climate and environment, and noted that in the South African context social and economic crises are often in tension with ecological issues. The abalone fishery crisis is a pertinent example, in which crucial existential challenges for how to live well as human beings are in conflict with efforts to relate virtuously to oceans, and contested ontologies of human-ocean relations combine with highly charged political and economic histories.

It is worth noting at this point that the present thesis is not (and could not be) an exhaustive examination of ethics in narratives about abalone poaching or oceans. For example, there has not been scope within this project to examine the narratives about abalone in media coverage of the topic in South Africa, or internationally. A parallel or future project would likely find different, if related, images, tropes, and moral assumptions in media narratives to those that I have found in fictional and non-fictional literary explorations of abalone.

## Narrative and virtue as lenses for the abalone fishery crisis

Thinking back on some of the questions I outlined at the beginning of the thesis, I would like to reflect on some of the above insights about abalone poaching and the South African fisheries crisis, through the lens of narrative and virtue. I begin by examining which choices about narrative structure and the writing process have meaningfully impacted the ethical story that each of the three key narratives are able to tell. Each narrative shares a different perspective on abalone poaching for reasons that are linked to genre, authorial perspective, and the self-contained form of the story itself. Read together, these narratives weave commonalities and contestations that help one to understand the landscape of storytelling and the public imaginary around abalone and ocean ethics more fully.

## How do differences in form, genre, and authorial structure influence what is made visible and what is hidden by each narrative?

The figure of the poacher changes and grows across the three narratives. In *Cape Greed,* abalone poachers are depicted through lurid images of over-indulgent thieves and thugs whose lives are driven by greed and vice, to the extent that they do not have meaningful and caring relationships with each other. The poacher characters of Tommy and Adonis, along with their boss Woo, all receive justice for their vicious behaviour in death at the end of the novel, cementing them as criminals and wrong-doers. In *Poacher,* the abalone poacher becomes a full and complicated human man who experiences challenges and hopes in his attempts to seek thrill and joy but also care for his family and stay faithful to his religion. Shuhood as a character delivers a richer and more nuanced conception of ethics across the spectrum of virtue and vice. The narrative closure to *Poacher* shows that Shuhood wrestles with his feelings of responsibility for damage to abalone stocks and the ocean, and he follows a journey of moral and spiritual transformation towards a non-violent and non-extractive career, oriented around his passion for horse-riding. 'Floating Rugs' describes the abalone poacher through their absence, as a figure from past generations who is only known through the stories that outlive them. In these stories poachers are small-scale fishers, who are victims of injustice, unfairly denied access to ocean livelihoods. Children and grandchildren of abalone poachers wrestle with issues of trust as they attempt to heal from this historical marginalisation, ending with uncomfortable questions about whether Ella will break her ethical duty not to kill others in order to protect the invisibility and vulnerability of her local community. 'Floating Rugs' does not offer narrative closure to this moral dilemma, mirroring questions of ethical resolution about the current abalone poaching crisis.

The genres of crime fiction, autobiography, and speculative fiction contribute specific features to the telling of the abalone poaching story.

These different narrative styles for telling such a story mirror the cosmopolitically contested understandings of the world that lead groups of people to fight over possibilities for relating to land, ocean, and resources. In approaching the abalone fishery crisis through distinct genre conventions, one can highlight specific viewpoints and exaggerate details as if to form an argument or a provocation. These genres follow traditions in form and style, although they also break and experiment with their inherited traditions. The fact that the abalone fishery crisis has been chosen as the topic for a genre of non-fiction represents the high-profile and vital nature of such a crisis in South Africa, although the frequent extracts of personalised nature writing within the text offer a subversive perspective on this popular issue. Meanwhile, the choice of subject matter for crime fiction reflects the imbrication of abalone fisheries with the criminal underworld in South Africa and across international waters, and highlights this crisis as one symptom of a society characterised by violent inequality. In addition, Mashigo's choice to target the issue of abalone poaching and small-scale fishing communities within a speculative fiction story further attests to the importance of ethical decisions that are made today for the sake of future generations.

*Cape Greed's* crime fiction genre leans into an individualistic representation of vice as spectacle, but the *noir* leanings of the genre also show the messiness of pervasive vice throughout the city of Cape Town, and further, across the ocean. Crime is a contemporary genre of story that is in demand and it serves a valuable role in a violent and corrupt society through its creation of a space for imagined justice. Crime stories about abalone poachers with more nuanced villains could provide a positive space for reflection on systemic problems within the South African social and justice system. By contrast, the realism of *Poacher's* non-fiction writing creates a raw sense of the lived experience of diving for abalone amidst the othering and often unwelcoming ocean waters. There is a thrilling genre similarity in the death-defying antics that Shuhood recalls and the dangerous lifestyles

of Tommy and Adonis, which attests to the resonance of Nicol and Hichens' choice to write a crime fiction novel about abalone poaching. A text like Poacher may well attract a true crime audience, given its focus on the criminal underbelly of the abalone trade. However, the book combines extracts of criminal spectacle with attentive aesthetic narrativisation of the kindredness and otherness of ocean worlds. In addition to this, de Greef's academic research into the history of fisheries and marginalisation in South Africa gives valuable context to generate understanding of the ethical complexity of human-abalone relationships.

*Poacher*'s autobiographical narration is well-suited to communicating the first-person experience of lonely moral tensions between personal striving, caring, and justice. For instance, it becomes abundantly clear that when Shuhood was initiated into the numbers gang in prison, he feels unable to pursue any type of moral responsibility – to himself, the people around him, or society, as he simply tries to *survive* the midst of challenging circumstances. This is complemented by the collaborative authorial structure of *Poacher* and the fact that readers switch between Shuhood's personal perspective and a third-person view on the history and scientific data on abalone poaching from Kimon's research. Likewise, 'Floating Rugs' protagonist Ella also finds herself, like Shuhood, in a series of situations where she alone is responsible for her moral decisions. 'Floating Rugs' shows the existential tensions inherent in moments of moral decision-making, highlighting the more-than-human dimensions of ethical responsibility in a future world where nature and culture are less divided. *Poacher's* attentive style of nature writing about the ocean reflects Ella's aesthetic gaze over the ocean and her neighbouring whales. These oceanic gazes are in stark contrast to the thingified descriptions of 'stock room' abalone in *Poacher* and the processes of commodification for both Indigenous people and oceanic place in 'Floating Rugs.'

The speculative fiction genre of 'Floating Rugs' creates an imaginary space for conceptualising the futures of marginalised small-scale fishers and abalone poachers. However, DeLoughrey problematises speculative narratives when they are associated with tech-giants and petrocapitalist extractive organisations like XPRIZE and Shell. The association between 'Floating Rugs' and XPRIZE's Ocean Discovery Competition implicates it with narratives of techno-optimism and a social sense of tacit legitimacy around capitalist extractivism. Nevertheless, 'Floating Rugs' also demonstrates a patient and caring approach to oceans, using technology as a tool rather than a paradigm for creating more ethical ocean futures. A grounded way of thinking about alternative futures as 'real utopias' combines some of the speculative future thinking of 'Floating Rugs' with a pragmatic and strategic approach to creating more ethical, more complex futures. The short story form of 'Floating Rugs' in some ways resembles an oral story, fittingly, given that the story incorporates tales passed between generations. The online publishing of the story further contributes to the ephemeral nature of such a story, much like oral storytelling, which requires there to be someone who knows and is able to tell the story for dissemination.

The systemic context of hierarchical and extractive capitalism is clearly present in each of these three narratives. This economic system, paired with a background of historically-rooted inequality, drives and perpetuates the illegal abalone trade through the lack of legal employment options, which compounds with cycles of criminality and imprisonment for mostly young men. Additionally, extravagant profits for abalone on the international market continue to feed the extractive system, with a whole swathe of 'middle men' profiting from the trade in between the diver and buyer. Each of the stories wrestles with this distributed and systemic context in relation to the individual human characters, whether fictional or not. These two perspectives of individual human striving to flourish and the unapproachable mess of systemic ethical relations are in tension throughout the thesis, both

equally necessary to understanding the experience and the nature of ocean ethics, but requiring a dramatic shift of perspective. However, the form of narrative lends itself to this project insofar as narrative negotiates tensions between localised first-person perspectival striving and the diffused, systemic complexity of the world; narratives live out these tensions through characters who interact with the world in varying levels of moral success and failure, along with everything in between.

In this way, narrative is an apparatus for articulating the bridge between human phenomenological experiences of ethical striving to live well and the attempt to engage with the messy complexity of worldly ocean ethics (Despret 2008).

### How does a focus on existential virtue and vice change the conversation about abalone ethics? What new ways of thinking or practically approaching abalone ethics are opened up that are not available through rights- or ends-based concepts?

McMullin's existential account of virtue ethics states that the phenomenological character of living well involves a constant negotiation of self-world fit, of striving subjectively towards one's goals and projects, but also of having reflexive knowledge and responsibility to one's objective place in the world. In Chapter One, this framework for self-world fit invites scepticism around atomistic ways of viewing the self as separable from others or viewing abalone creatures as thingified commodities. One experiences the relationality of the self *in the world* through the three overlapping normative perspectives, first-person striving, second-person care, and third-person justice, each of which demands a minimum level of moral responsiveness if one is to be considered virtuous. In Chapter Two, the multiplicity of demands on one person become clear through Shuhood's experiences of trying to survive and live well for his own sake, but also to be able to care for the people around him, and moreover to consider the wider environmental and societal impacts of his choices. It is unrealistic to expect to be able

to flourish in all realms simultaneously because one's responsibilities to personal striving, care, and justice are in inevitable tension and conflict with each other. In Chapter Three, Ella's conflicting responsibilities to herself, her more-than-human community, and wider society are also very clearly in tension. 'Floating Rugs' narrates her experience of existential crisis, the lonely moment, where she decides what version of herself that she is going to pursue, dependent on whether she chooses to poison the journalist to protect her neighbourhood. This existentially relational and incomplete concept of the self enables discussions of specific moral dilemmas that are rooted in the phenomenological reality of navigating ethics on a day-to-day basis.

The moment of existential crisis, in which one faces competing moral responsibilities that necessitate the need for moral failure in one sphere of one's life, in order to act virtuously in another, can be overwhelming and action-mitigating if one does not have tools to navigate such circumstances. In line with Treanor, I suggest that a narrative approach to thinking through courses of action as part of a story of cause and effect, and having narrative examples to call upon, provides productive possible routes out of existentially lonely moments of moral crisis. Possessing a concept of what good looks like and the acquisition of good moral exemplars through narrative and in the real world assist in these circumstances too, both of these being key components of a virtue-oriented approach to navigating ethics. In the three texts I have looked at in this thesis some of the tools that inform an understanding of what ethical deliberation over poaching looks like are: an exploration of motivations for poaching, an examination of the extent to which characters deliberate over their courses of action, and the development of character over time. With reference to these mechanics and others, I have examined key ethical themes in the abalone fishery crisis, along with wider implications of these themes for the public consciousness around human-ocean relationships.

In *Cape Greed*, a focus on greed highlights the exaggerated needs of self, over the need to care and contribute to justice as part of one's ethical responsibility to creating a good shared world. In other words, there is a constant prioritisation of first-person striving over the other dimensions of responsibility, and therefore a failure to attend to holistic self-world fit. Existential questions about the inequalities of resources, money, and need are central to an examination of greed, which is a vicious (or an inappropriate) response to such inequality. There are a cluster of individualistic vices that greed is linked to, including arrogance and gluttony. Attention to these vices provides a helpful framework for interrogating broadly individualistic and atomistic philosophies that are popular in neoliberal economics and capitalism, and hence have increased in the age of globalising capital.

Such a relational perspective also offers critical distance from embracing the interpretation of poachers like Tommy and Adonis as wholly greedy and individualistic. Their characters are formed in a society that encourages and rewards individualistic and selfish behaviour through capital rewards, and the character of Jim Woo shows that the more ruthless you are the more money you can make. This society-wide perspective reveals more about the conditions and circumstances within which each person undergoes their moral journey of striving to flourish. Looking at the high levels of socio-economic inequality in South Africa and the challenges that might lead someone into a life of criminality offers a more nuanced, relational, and systemic understanding of the complexity involved in moral striving for many South Africans living in neglected coastal neighbourhoods who choose poaching as a career. This systemic complexity of ethics is shown through the monstrous character of Jim Woo; but it is only in *Poacher* that the relational nature of the circumstances leading someone to consider a poaching career are narrated in a meaningful way.

Shuhood's experiences in *Poacher* are shocking, and the dangerous situations he encounters and endures in his career leave the reader on

edge. This raises the interesting question of whether poachers demonstrate a rare modern-day virtue of courage in their extractive duties, as they bravely face up to difficulty on a regular basis. There is certainly a heightened level of risk that poachers encounter, and people are forced to develop an increased tolerance for risk in neighbourhoods where they experience high levels of criminality and community violence. However, with McMullin's concept of existential courage, I distinguished high risk-taking like adrenaline-seeking from risk-taking that involves the sacrificing of one's sense of self, through the potential loss of meaningful projects and goals. With time, as Shuhood nears the end of his poaching career, he comes to demonstrate a distinctly existential courage when he faces up to the reality that every time he dives into the water, he risks not going home to his family. Or, worse still, he risks his own life. The fact that Shuhood sees so few employment alternatives to poaching that he continues to have to go back to the water, with a sense of foreboding dread at what he might lose, demonstrates the stark and messy reality behind the choice to poach abalone. Shuhood's choices are between a bad situation, or a worse situation, and knowledge of this experience is a telling testament to the need for greater legal and rewarding employment opportunities for people living in areas like the Cape Flats and for people holding criminal records.

The future speculation about abalone poachers' descendants in 'Floating Rugs' brings a temporal dimension to the conversation about virtue and vice. A core environmental critique of techno-optimism as a form of bad faith future-thinking interrogates the assumption of human superiority. In other words, a critique of techno-optimism like DeLoughrey poses argues that it is unreasonable to assume that humans will successfully control uncertain and dangerous natural processes in the future, by way of a continued reliance on human ingenuity and innovation. The failure of this assumption of human success rests on the contrary argument that humans need to instead meaningfully engage with past failures and take responsibility for the

relationship between human lifestyles and the exceeding of the earth's natural limits. McMullin calls a refusal to admit human and worldly limits impatience, and I contend that techno-optimism as a sustainability 'solution' to environmental 'problems' is an impatient approach to ocean futures. 'Floating Rugs,' is a story about abalone poacher futures, and Abalobi as a storied approach to creating just small-scale fisher (and hence also poacher) futures. Both employ technology in their narrativisations of justice, but I contend that they utilise technology as a tool within a patient approach to understanding the issues and limits of current human-ocean relationships. By contrast, organisations like XPRIZE employ technology (as a form of human innovation) as a paradigm for human success and dominion over earth, in a thoroughly impatient approach to pursuing ocean futures, which does not account for existing problems in society and instead chases solutions in the deep-sea.

Thus, a virtue-oriented approach is a practically useful way of thinking through ethical issues that is contextually open to nuance. However, certain deontological constraints are necessary and important for maintaining a minimum standard of moral responsibility, such as the duty to not kill others, or to impair their ability to flourish by actively harming them or restricting their freedom. These duties are implicit within a virtue-oriented approach, but there is also fruitful room for some linguistic and theoretical moral multiplicity in acknowledging that minimal limits can be more helpfully expressed in terms of deontology. Likewise, the language of rights – human rights, and also fisher rights in this case – continue to be valuable ethical tools for defending the minimum needs a person has for surviving and flourishing. Sadly, these minimum standards continue to be unmet for many impoverished coastal neighbourhoods and fishing communities in South Africa. I maintain a pragmatic approach to ethical language, in which terms of deontology can be helpful in certain circumstances. But one must be cautious, as a focus on the minimum can lead to the pursuit of human and environmental survival, instead of human-ocean flourishing. I hold

that virtue ethics provides the most holistically appropriate approach to ethics as long as it is phenomenologically grounded in the lived reality of moral agency, enabling it (through narrative apparatus) to contend with the mess of ethical complexity in human-ocean relations.

Despite the context of individualistic and pervasive vice, it is clear that legal and illegal (abalone) fisheries represent a point of connection with oceans. Local fishers and poachers like Shuhood have valuable ecological knowledge and they maintain attentive localised relationships with the ocean, despite the circumstances of their extractive jobs. Individualistic and impatient relationships with oceans are harmful to humans, abalone, oceans, and to other parties involved in the human-ocean encounter. By contrast, an embrace of relationality between selves, and between self and world offers a more authentic and virtue-oriented way of engaging with people and oceans. Lesley's Green's concept of an encounter is conceptually helpful in articulating the layered and intersecting relations in places like oceans.

### How do the present narratives (and key themes within them) connect to or contrast with incumbent legal and academic narratives of abalone poaching?

Across the three core texts, concepts of virtue and vice are associated with certain themes that form archetypal narratives of abalone poaching. These archetypes inform the moral scripts that are currently in circulation about abalone poaching and ocean ethics. In my research I have identified the following archetypal narratives of abalone poaching: the greedy poacher, fisher injustice, poaching as a career, and the nuanced poacher narrative. In the Introduction, I showed how legal protections for abalone (and the violent policing of these laws) present a deontological narrative of ocean ethics. Legal narratives of authenticity and criminality combine with concepts of fortress conservation to portray abalone poachers as wrongdoers and disruptors of legal harmony and safety. The greedy poacher narrative builds on this narrative of legal wrong-doing to suggest that poachers

are individually vicious characters. Such a narrative is dangerous because it excludes any contextual awareness of the complex ethical drivers that might lead someone to take up the dangerous profession of abalone diving. This is not to say that the greedy narrative in *Cape Greed* has no grounds in reality. There are many people who have lived violent and indulgent lifestyles of 'sex, rock, and roll,' funded by abalone poaching; as de Greef writes, "[t]he stereotype of poachers burning through money in pursuit of status – sneakers, flashy cars, women, liquor – is broadly accurate but often false" (2018: 211). However, the simplistic depiction of Tommy and Adonis as poachers does not go far enough to demonstrate the interaction of ethical complexity with vicious lifestyles. I have offered a critical appraisal of *Cape Greed's* depiction of poachers and the concerning potential for archetypal greedy poacher narratives like this one to sustain nature/culture divisions on poaching extraction. Such racially-stereotyped ideas of vice as the main driving force behind illegal abalone fishing are dangerous insofar as they essentialise and explain away an issue, often reproducing existing prejudices and divisions of inequality.

The publication of *Poacher* in 2018, along with de Greef's prolific journalistic writing and collaborations with international wildlife trade and transnational organised crime expert organisations like TRAFFIC and Global Initiative have no doubt impacted the public consciousness around abalone poaching to create more awareness of the lived reality for poachers, thus destabilising the greedy poacher archetype and creating room for a more textured narrative archetype of poaching as a career.[59] Short stories like Mashigo's 'Floating Rugs' are also a positive influence in their narration of alternative perspectives on abalone poaching and their centering of small-scale fisher experiences,

[59] For examples of de Greef's journalism on abalone poaching's root causes and contested ethics, see: de Greef 2017, de Greef 2018a, de Greef 2018b, de Greef 2018c, de Greef 2020. For collaborations with TRAFFIC and Global Initiative, see: de Greef & Raemaekers 2014 and de Greef & Haysom 2022.

although the fisher injustice narrative does not leave as much space for subtlety as the poaching as career narrative. Both *Poacher* and 'Floating Rugs' connect contemporary small-scale fisher struggles to histories of forced relocation of Indigenous and local communities from land, coast, and other natural resources. Both narratives show how a pattern of disenfranchisement and marginalisation by state and corporate actors have created increasingly impossible conditions for living and flourishing in these neighbourhoods with rising unemployment, inequality, and violence. These stories show how legal and conservation narratives have combined, in the worst case, to criminalise peoples' ways of life. Narratives like *Poacher* and 'Floating Rugs' reflect political action that has conflicted with legal narratives of poaching that misrepresent and exclude small-scale fishers, such as the political skirmish over lobster stocks after their mass migration in 2012 (Green 2015).

Treanor's theory of narrative virtue ethics shows how stories provide useful exemplars for how to live well, and moreover how individuals can develop their ethical education by reading widely, especially if they do not have good role models around them in real life. By reading the above narratives in conversation with social and marine science research on small-scale fishers, it is clear that both fiction and non-fiction narratives like 'Floating Rugs' and *Poacher* tell stories that are authentically informed by the lived experiences of real communities. These stories offer spaces to explore charged and contested environmental issues in a relatively safe way, through reading. Moreover, via the processes of writing and narrating, Shuhood Abader and de Greef develop a cosmopolitically engaged conversation that bridges worldviews and perspectives through the medium of their collaborative storytelling. Likewise, Mashigo writes a story that liberates abalone poachers from their situation now and imagines a future for a young girl, which is not unrealistically uprooted from today's trauma. In doing so, she contributes to shifting the narrative on abalone poaching ethics and to influencing the public imaginary around ocean ethics in

an authentic and attentive way. Narrative forms thus provide promising ethical pathways for both writers and readers to be better engaged with issues of abalone poaching and, more expansively, ocean ethics. These archetypal narratives and their representation of real lived experiences of ocean relationality sit uneasily next to each other, at times overlapping and sometimes in direct tension. As a narrative ethical education, one must interrogate and read such narratives together in order to get a fuller picture of how different people view ocean ethics and whose need is greatest, such that one can direct support and care to those people and those relationships who least able to live well in the context of the fisheries crisis. Discourse about narratives is vital to collectively come to a shared understanding of worldbuilding that is informed by both insightful research and narratively-aware engagement with ethical issues where there are no easy solutions.

In the example of Abalobi, Raemaekers' comment that small-scale fishers have seawater running through their veins leans into the fisher injustice narrative insofar as it inspires an image of ocean guardians. Linked to Schultz's image of the 'real fisher,' which I discussed in the introduction (Schultz 2015b), the fisher injustice narrative highlights a history of fisher-ocean relations, and the unethical restriction of fishers from the fishing of certain species as a form of livelihood. This is an important narrative archetype for understanding the experiences of small-scale fishers and it has been used by Raemaekers and others to encourage public support for small-scale fishers' cause. As a narrative archetype, it leaves less room for the ethical complexity of human-ocean relations in practice, but as discussed, some deontological considerations of rights as a fundamental basic are necessary. Such a rights-based argument can be unhelpfully broad-brush though, and a virtue-oriented approach offers the potential for a focus on more comprehensive flourishing.

Accordingly, de Greef and Haysom suggest there is a need to go further than highlighting fisher injustice, if finding justice for fishers

means fitting them into the existing legal frameworks. In order to destigmatise the reasons that someone might choose a career like abalone poaching, de Greef and Haysom suggest that abalone diving could be decriminalised, with resources re-directed to disrupting harmful pathways to criminality. This proposal seems less radical now, having looked at some of these narratives of abalone poaching. A key part of the success of such an 'extinction' proposal is the necessary efforts to create legal and virtuous alternative career options to poaching in coastal communities where gang operations and community violence are embedded. Options outside of the world of criminality, especially for young people, must be available to disrupt the inevitable transfer from one illegal economy to another if and when abalone stocks dry up. Abalobi offers sustainable and profitable improvements to the livelihood opportunities for small-scale fishers, and aims to improve the health of South Africa's local food system too. Alternatively, if excluded fishers can find jobs at abalone farms like the HIK farm in Hawston, this could also be a promising way of reorienting knowledge and skills into the legal economy (Imray 2023).

De Greef and Haysom's extinction proposal foregrounds an attitude of care and generosity for communities who experience overwhelming challenges to their ability to live well, especially given that abalone stocks are already beyond the point of recovery. A practice informed by care and generosity can also be justified as deontologically right or as promoting an ultimate good in utilitarian terms. However, the benefit of taking virtue-oriented approach, rather than a punitive one, offers a simpler and more persuasive ethical argument. A helpful way of viewing the extinction proposal might be to see it as an example of a Real Utopia, as Wright argues for. Evidently, the extinction of a whole marine species is deeply regrettable. However, within the constraints of a thriving global trade, a booming criminal underworld, and a failing social support and justice system, the decriminalisation of abalone poaching may be one of the few through-routes that offers some promise of improved opportunities for flourishing. Moreover, as I have

hopefully made clear, a pragmatic approach to ocean ethics must recognise the unavoidable conflict between different moral priorities. It is simply impossible in the abalone fishery crisis, with the situation being as advanced as it is, to be able to save the abalone species and also stop the cycle of harm that implicated with an economy that has employed thousands of working-class men over the last three decades (de Greef & Haysom 2022).

Abalone is not a charismatic creature, but it is at the centre of a complex and nuanced ocean ethics. Abalone is symbolic of the global nature of human relationships with oceans, and in South Africa it is one symptom of an unhealthy fishing industry that needs some care. A relationship with the ocean is essential to survival and to meaningful connections to the world, and contested struggles for access and relationality are likely to continue. Finding pockets of subversion and utopian reorganisation of systems offer promising routes to a more relational, virtuous, and storied human-ocean ethics, even in the context of extractive capitalism. These efforts are important and valuable in deprived neighbourhoods in South Africa, and they are especially needed for small-scale fishers and coastal communities.

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