Haunting Memories and Haunted Landscapes: Reading the EcoGothic in Apichatpong's *Cemetery of Splendour* and Pitchaya's *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*

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Abstract

Locating the EcoGothic in contemporary Thai fiction and film becomes a challenging mission as literature and arts adapt to survive the repressive and censorious climate. As a result, their potential ecocritical criticism may not be apparent nor empirically accounted for. Analysis of such works requires an understanding of local contexts and a reworking of the EcoGothic. This article aims to interpret and analyse Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015) and Pitchaya Sudbanthad's *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* (2019) under the EcoGothic framework, using hauntology to leverage its interpretation of EcoGothic elements such as their representations of social-ecological memories and their subversion of the nationalist discourse. The analysis shows that these works' potential criticism of social-ecological exploitation in Thailand emerges once the EcoGothic tropes of haunted landscape and haunting memories are foregrounded to conjure up marginalised characters and settings that may otherwise remain impalpable.

Keywords: Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Ecocriticism, EcoGothic, Hauntology, Pitchaya Sudbanthad

There are Thai artists who successfully realised the "Thai bourgeoisie's desire for global ascendancy" (May and MacDonald 133) yet are neglected by their fellow countrymen. These include the 2010 Palme D'Or-winning director Apichatpong Weerasethakul and the recipient of several fiction writing fellowships, including from the New York Foundation for the Arts, Pitchaya Sudbanthad. Apichatpong's feature films are mostly set in Thailand's rural areas and deal with Thai cultural and historical contexts. These include, for example, *Satpralat* (สัตว์ประหลาด *Tropical Malady*, 2004), *Lung Bunmi Raluek Chat* (ลุงบุญมีระลึกชาติ *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, 2010), and *Rak Ti Khon Kaen* (รักที่ขอนแก่น *Cemetery of Splendour*, 2015). Although Apichatpong has recently showed his explicit engagement with environmental issues, his non-human characters (spirits and monsters) and his manipulation of the ambivalence and the half-light in his early films capture the supernatural psychodrama in

the mysterious atmosphere of the tropical landscape in Thailand's rural areas.[1] Pitchaya, on the other hand, with an educational background in environmental studies and a Bangkokian by birth himself, explicitly discusses the ecological fate of the capital and its inhabitants through overlapping episodes of spectral memories and history that haunt a plot of land in Bangkok in his debut novel, *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* (2019).

That both Apichatpong's and Pitchaya's international success contrasts with their quiet reception in Thailand is a curious phenomenon. It is arguable that their lack of wider domestic audience may be due to aesthetic and linguistic difficulty. In the case of Apichatpong's film, its "complex" and "difficult" aesthetics radically break away from the convention of mainstream film grammar and genre (Dargis par. 4). Pitchaya's novel also has a complex narrative structure and style, featuring a huge cast of characters scattered across an extensive timeline (from a nineteenth-century American doctor, to 1970s student protesters, to postapocalyptic Bangkokians in a flooded capital) and an eclectic combination of genres (from a mock nineteenth-century travel log to a sci-fi episode). In addition, the novel may present Thai readers with a huge language barrier as it is originally written in English and has not been translated to Thai yet. Apart from the aforementioned linguistic and aesthetic aspects, there might be other latent factors in their narratives that challenge the dominant discourse and the Thai status quo, and deliver discomforting messages. One such factor may be found in their representations of environmental entanglement with human experience.

Thailand has been dependent on tourism and the manufacturing industry as its main source of income. As a result of unregulated economic development, the industries cause serious environmental crises for the country (Howard 12-13). Yet, the watershed moment of Thailand's and many other Southeast Asian countries' environmental crisis started when unsustainable economic gain was achieved by natural resource exploitation, such as excessive logging, depleting their forests and mountains of trees, minerals, and wildlife (Howard 3). Environmental movements in Asia supported by international groups are often challenged by the governmental authorities as being "a new form of neocolonialism" (Howard 16). National resource depletion, being part and parcel of national economic development and modernization, obstruct environmental consciousness. Due to this hostile atmosphere towards environmentalism, it is then not hard to imagine why environmentalist discourse is underrepresented and an ecocritical presentation of environmental problems in Thai arts and literature rarely makes its way into public awareness and practice. This research article, thus, aims to analyse and interpret Apichatpong's and Pitchaya's narrative potential as having

ecocritical power to criticise environmental exploitation in Thailand and disrupt the dominant discourse on the environment. It will focus on their EcoGothic elements, particularly representations of haunted landscapes and the role of haunting memories. The first section contains an explanation of the theoretical framework underpinning this research. This is followed by a reading of the spectral metaphor, a hauntogenic reading of the EcoGothic elements in *Cemetery of Splendour*, *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*, and Thai cultural production in general. It is this researcher's contention that "the capacity of the spectral" (Shaw 12) and the hauntological entanglement in an ecocritical analysis may strengthen the debate on the present special issue's theme, EcoGothic Asia. Hauntology, as the following sections will explain in detail, should be applied to leverage the EcoGothic reading to uncover environmental discourse and representations under the surveillance or the influence of the autocratic regime, since the aim of hauntogenic reading is to allow neglected or suppressed representations to manifest as a disquieting incentive for environmental consciousness.

Finding the EcoGothic in the Thai Context: Haunting Memories and Haunted Landscapes

EcoGothic is a neologism coined from the Gothic and ecocriticism. The Gothic is originally a Western aesthetic, a cultural construct of a contradictory nature as "on the one hand, it means a Christian, progressive architecture based on medieval principles, whilst on the other, this same architecture is the setting for suspense, supernaturalism, danger, derangement and horror" (Bloom 13). It is "the longest lasting popular genre" in literature which continues to be reinvented. Since its genesis, the Gothic has been a space for discussion about controversies and "issues otherwise banned or censored or so dangerous to societal norms" (Bloom 13). The term ecocriticism, coined in 1978 by William Rueckert, is an interdisciplinary theory formulated in a timely manner for its political climate in the late 1960s and the 1970s. It was not well-established in academia until late in the twentieth century. Thus, in this sense, EcoGothic is the latest reinvention of the Gothic with a critical environmental theory angle. Before EcoGothic is recognised as an established form of critical enquiry, Simon C. Estok's ecophobia hypothesis paves the way for any theoretical discussion concerning human fear and hatred of nature (Parker 2020; Estok 2019). Ecophobia focuses on "our more negative relations to the natural world" and "our more sinister visions of the environment" (Parker 15). While Elizabeth Parker finds that EcoGothic resists an attempt to define it as a unified construct "due to its nascency [that] is still haunted by some uncertainty" (5), Emily Alder and Jenny Bavidge

propose that it may be viewed as both "a mode of thought" and "an ethical stance" (225). This leads us to the next question: which aspect of the Gothic promoting the ecocritical agenda makes it EcoGothic?

Andrew Smith and William Hughes note that while ecological awareness in Romantic literature has been studied by literary scholars to such an extent that we come to associate its representation of nature in "the Wordsworthian tradition" (2-3) with its sceptical view towards the Industrial Revolution, the critical dialogue of the ecological topic is scarce in Gothic studies even though it shares a historical backdrop with the former. This may be due to the nature of the Gothic mode of representation that tends to be radical and reactionary, hence contradicting the Wordsworthian tradition which idealises nature. Gothic studies alone has been extended to question the way in which the world is reflected in literary discourse and vice versa, but the EcoGothic furthers the debates on class, gender, and national identity to cover the dystopian aspect of the environment in literary representation. Parker elaborates on this point, noting that it is indeed "an undeniable sense of Gothic *ambience* in the natural environments" (34-35) or the Gothic conceptualisation of the sublime setting that differentiates the EcoGothic from eco-horror, which focuses more on Gothic affects such as terror and horror towards the environment. To Parker, foregrounding the Gothic setting and the nonhuman is crucial to a non-anthropocentric position in a literary analysis. The EcoGothic as a theoretical lens, thus, provides us with what Estok has long defended as the need for theorising, a theoretical vision or a scholarly activity that explicitly promotes environmental activism (Parker 269).

Katarzyna Ancuta warns of a potential failure in a quest for the Asian Gothic within Western methodologies and discusses the necessity of acknowledging the region's complex relationship with colonisation as "traumatic experiences capable of producing haunting narratives" (208) and of adopting the pan-Asian approach to the Gothic. Finding the EcoGothic in a Thai context, too, requires an acknowledgment of the country's crypto-colonial modus operandi that affects both reception and mediation of Western-influenced cultural products. Beauty and aesthetics, as cultural constructs, have difficulty in claiming their transcendent values in transnational reception. In a Thai context, Western beauty and aesthetics might undergo this difficulty and not receive much appreciation, not having been localised to serve local practicality nor pledging allegiance to the nationalist concept of Thainess.[2] The Gothic and ecocriticism have been borrowed from Anglo-American literary studies as a shorthand for horror fiction and an analytical lens for the study of both Thai and foreign literature by Thai scholars (Boonpromkul, 2015, 2016, 2019; Chotiudompant, 2008; Sangkhaphanthanon, 2013),

but they are not generally used by Thai authors to define their works. This, however, does not mean that Asian (or Thai) literature and film are devoid of the Gothic. On the contrary, Ancuta suggests Asian authors may "embrace the Gothic on an unconscious level and without any intention to follow the specific demands of the genre" (210). Suradech Chotiudompant's analysis of two classic British Gothic novels and one "Thai Gothic" novel probes into the transcultural transmission of literary convention from British to Thai literary production in the Gothic convention, pointing out how these elements reveal the breaking of Thai status quo regarding social class and gender (57). Ecocriticism has also received considerable attention from both liberal and nativist academics in Thailand. Thanya Sangkhaphanthanon, for example, attempts to localise and adapt Western imports (ecocriticism and ecofeminism) for his studies of Thai classical literature.[3] Phacharawan Boonpromkul adopts an ecocritical lens to unravel the socio-political and environmental discourse in contemporary Thai fiction and film. Noting the author's use of personification in animating the tree spirit, Phacharawan reads the narrative about the quest for the city pillar as a criticism of the religious-royalistic complicity in Thailand's environmental exploitation.

The EcoGothic, on the other hand, has not been applied by Thai academics and artists to analyse or to define Thai fiction and film. A confrontation with dark ecology and a straightforward call for environmentalism may be one of the reasons why the EcoGothic is less popular than ecocriticism. Moreover, the impalpable EcoGothic elements in some works, particularly ones produced under an environment hostile towards anti-authoritarian ethos, may not be explicit on purpose. According to the report of findings and discussion by PEN America's Artists at Risk Connection (ARC), Asia witnesses a high rate of threats to freedom of expression. State-sponsored censorship enforces "a culture of conformity" and promotes "self-censorship" not only in artistic expression, but also other critical practices (Yeluri et al. 18). Censorship, in other words, is in Asia's social fabric and Asian artists learn to cope with it. Acknowledging the context of the works is, thus, crucial to a critical interpretation. In the case of the texts selected for this research, the scarcity of lexical and symbolic items, the textual and visual evidence, should not imply the absence or the insignificance of EcoGothic elements. In a search for EcoGothic elements in these selected works by Thai artists, this research turns to hauntology as an additional conceptual framework to leverage the hermeneutic practice in interpreting the metaphor of ghosts and haunting. The purpose is not only to accept the presence of the ghost but to "unearth and unpack to the extent possible a text's layers and dynamics of spectral presences" (Rahimi 4), to foreground the concealed presence of EcoGothic elements,

and to use the theories in service of "bring[ing] to light social and environmental injustices and perhaps [helping] curb violence against people and the environment" (Estok 42).

Hauntology or *hantologie* is a neologism popularised by Jacques Derrida in *Spectres de Marx* (1993) as an analytical metaphor for the spectral existence of communism in the post-Cold War discourse and an alternative global system that was not realised. It has been adopted by various scholars of different disciplines to broadly observe the temporal and ontological inconsistency of human experiences or "that which had been to be but was not, that which could have been, the future that hailed the past but was forced to disappear from the horizon" (Rahimi 1). In this sense, hauntology may be viewed as a playful and contrastive pun to ontology, a philosophical inquiry into the nature of being. Hauntology, as an inquiry into non-being, can be applied as a critical lens to disengage from the present time and being and to make present the alternative future and self that are thwarted by the former. A hauntological reading of texts, intending to unearth the haunting meaning and subjectivity, then contains a deconstructionist agenda to uncover temporal and ontological aporias and ellipses and to question the status quo. As Colin Davis observes, while left-wing scholars and critics are not keen on Derrida's deconstructionist agenda in his *hantologie*, the concept is welcomed by literary critics as a critical framework that can be applied to different methods of interpretation and criticism (373).

The act of writing and reading literary texts appeals particularly to hauntology because, as Derrida puts it, "writing, textuality [...] and haunting are not only interrelated; they are inseparable" (Shaw 15). Katy Shaw explains that this is because hauntology problematises one of the essential characteristics of literary textuality, namely, intertextuality containing traces of other writers' materials (15-17). She writes, "As amalgamations of other writers' materials, texts enjoy an intertextual dynamic with a network of exterior texts, alluding, connecting to or recycling narratives and characters, symbols and motifs" (17). Thus, the act of reading in the present is "inextricably haunted" since it gives the past a voice or a return (Shaw 16). Hauntology is, thus, translated into literary criticism as a close reading and a thematic discussion of the metaphorical trope of ghosts and haunting. Sadeq Rahimi proposes that there are two aspects of the reading of metaphorically haunted textuality: by hauntology and exorcism (4-5). While exorcism aims at a cleansing of the spectral metaphors, hauntology "animate[s]" a text/subject through an outpouring of ghosts and other spectral entities from otherwise silent depths of the text/psyche" (Rahimi 4). In doing so, it does not promote any political order, but rather "upsets the political order and the normative notion of justice" to

allow justice to "[emerge] as an articulation of lost meanings" (Rahimi 67). In other words, hauntology brings forth a confrontation with what is otherwise passed over since the purpose of hauntology is, according to Derrida, to "learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship" (Shaw 9). There are literary critics who incorporate hauntology in their reading of Asian Gothic fiction as hauntogenic texts and intertexts. Anita Satkunananthan (2020), for example, adapts Derridean hauntology in her postcolonial feminist reading of contemporary Malaysian fictions to deconstruct their discourse of the Western Gothic tradition and Chinese diasporic narratives, and constructs what she terms "Malaysian Chinese Domestic Gothic fiction" as a hauntogenic palimpsest of Western and Chinese traditions. Such theoretical flexibility then proves the versatility of hauntogenic criticism in literary studies.

Fictitious narrative, particularly one with an extensive and complex temporality, often engages in a discursive contestation between history and memory in the narrator's and characters' voice. Precisely at this point literary studies intersect with memory studies, for what are narratives, fictional or otherwise, made of if not recollections and memories.[4] For example, literary studies intersect with memory studies when the aim is the authentication of human subjects in life-writing genres such as memoir, biography, and autobiography (Cabillas, 2014; Fivush and Grysman, 2016; Harbus, 2010; Saber, 2019). However, to deny non-humans the history of life and to keep them merely as a backdrop and an ornament to the narratives may be anthropocentrically blinkered. Ecocriticism may link up with literary-memory studies and complement what has been long overdue in the latter — ecological memory in literary discourse. Social-ecological memory is, according to Stephen Barthel et al., "memory of groups that engage in ecosystem management" (256). Touching briefly on the topic of social-ecological or cultural memory, Robert P. Harrison suggests that forests are sites of cultural anxiety and negotiation found in both folk and literary literature in the history of Western civilisation. They may appear as uncanny landscapes or EcoGothic tropes such as the ghostly non-humans that haunt and lurk in such a setting. The loss of forests and wild animals or, in the case of this article, the suppression of the depiction of memories of such loss, may represent not only an ecological crisis, but a civilisation's crisis of cultural imagination (R. P. Harrison xi). Therefore, social-ecological memory depicted in literary works not only can but should be analysed to fully unpack the cultural aspect of ecological issues.

This paper contends that if the silencing of artists who deviate from the status quo, interpreted as an attempt at protecting and preserving the nation's cultural purity against foreign

contamination, is a metaphorical exorcism, then the act of critical reading may be a much-needed summoning of spirits to "vindicate, liberate, revive [...] help the ghost leave the confinements of a haunted place, person, society, or text" (Rahimi 4). Hauntology is, thus, adopted to locate and analyse EcoGothic elements such as haunting landscapes and social-ecological memories used as a subversion of dominant socio-political and environmental discourse in the extratextual world. My analysis will focus on Pitchaya's and Apichatpong's representation of Bangkok and Khon Kaen as haunted urbanscapes where the environmentally-displaced non-humans—the unwanted spectres of Thai ecology—are forced to reside.

Bangkok's Haunting Memories

Pitchaya achieves the effect of disjointed social-ecological memories by presenting different points of view and juxtaposing the preterite and the present tense in both the story and the plot. Characters from the distant past and future cross paths on one plot of land in Bangkok and are connected to one another through remnants of memories. Each chapter is not chronologically arranged, but contains different characters' episodic memories of their life events, chance meetings, public broadcasting, and a letter, all witnessing and constructing the ecological history of the city. *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*, in this sense, may be categorised as a postmodern novel.

Under these cacophonous voices of human characters and their disjointed memories, there lie the non-humans with their muted voices and concealed presence. There are three main non-humans dominating the narrative space and time: the big house by the river, the Chao Phraya River, and the animals. The ebb and flow of the river, the heartbeat of Bangkok, dominates the narrative as flood preparation and evacuation and flood-succumbed Bangkok are vividly depicted. Such a depiction can only be achieved by someone who knows the city and its waters intimately. Yet, the original source that controls the romance of an elite family, the tragedy of the poor and the working class, and the futuristic tale of a postapocalyptic Bangkok in the story, is not the Chao Phraya River nor the big house on its banks, but a non-human entity whose presence is concealed in the said house — teak.

Pitchaya weaves into the story a central spatial image — a colonial-style teak mansion upon which a high-rise is being built and later submerged with the sunken city. This spatial entity does not have any proper name, and yet many characters, willingly or otherwise, make it their home. The memory of its male heir, Sammy, reveals that the house is built from the

family's fortune made from the teak trade in the northern towns of Thailand. Standing on what in extratextual reality is a heavily deforested area in Thailand, Sammy recalls a memory of his father telling him about his own childhood memory of visiting these mountains in the north to see how trees are cut "to feed Bangkok's hunger" (ch. 1). Laohachaiboon and Takeda describe how the teak trade in Thailand has a long and deep-seated history in the country's geopolitics and consequential conflicts with Western colonialism. Rivers are key to the teak trade as logs need to be transported via rivers. Wealth and affluence in teak logging, like the centralised administration in Thailand, must be floated from the periphery to the centre. The accumulation of wealth generated by the exploitation of the northern forests concentrates in the downstream capital. In the case of Sammy's family, their fortune is floated down from the northern provinces, such as Lampoon, a hometown of the displaced and later amnesiac woman named Lucky, via the Chao Phraya River to Bangkok.

The teak trade is the ultimate symbol of the Bangkok elites' exploitation of the country's natural resources. Although it eventually leads to ecological destruction and the sinking of the entire nation, teak logging allows Sammy's family to rise as elite members of Thai society and to escape the "mosquito-breeding marsh" (ch. 2) by selling off their house and land. For example, Sammy's father is a diplomatic officer in London, making "our nation proud" (ch. 1) and Sammy himself is a Western-educated expatriate photographer. Yet here, the drowned city is not depicted as an ecological apocalypse: far from it, Thais adapt well to the aquatic world as they are born to acclimate and survive the rising water. This point is emphasised in the ethnographic writing by the nineteenth-century American missionary character, Phineas, who writes that "The Siamese as a race thrive in the aquatic realm. They live as if they have been born sea nymphs that only recently joined the race of man" (ch. 1). Thais are a flood-resilient tribe and proud of their culture and tradition, even if many of their cultural and religious practices are ecologically unsustainable. The exploitation of teak forests for urban construction of residential and religious infrastructure (for example, the teak legs of the Giant Swing) is done without remorse nor critical reassessment simply because it is a way of life.

In addition to the uprooted teak trees, humans in those exploited areas are also deracinated. The memories of those who are displaced by Bangkok's greed cement their place in the capital in the form of haunting. Many spectres are haunting Bangkok in this novel, but the ones closely related to the teak mansion are the teak spirits and the Isan (อีสาน Northeastern region) migrant labourers. The oldest part of the house is believed to be haunted by the spirits

of an ancient teak beam with its trickling sap. Believing that her decision to sell the house angers the teak spirits, Sammy's Bangkok socialite mother, Pehn, hires a medium and an American pianist for a rite of exorcism that conjures spirits to be temporarily appeased. Next is the ghost of Gai, a migrant labourer working in a high-rise building to replace the old teak mansion. Although readers are not told directly about what happens to the exploited provinces after the natural resources are depleted to feed the hungry Bangkok elites and opportunistic foreigners, they can imagine it from the existence of some characters who migrate to the capital in search of a better life. Gai falls to his death from the high-rise building without adequate safety supplies. His death is mourned by the genteel urbanised Bangkokians, but is soon ignored when the "fresher news of deaths and mayhem that reminded them again of the mysteries of karma" (ch. 2) grabs hold of their amnesiac brains. A bribe is paid and the building continues until it is finished — business as usual. Later, the spot where Gai dies persistently haunts someone's memory, that is cloud-sourced to simulate a virtual reality of pre-flood Bangkok to gratify the nostalgia of the rich for Old Bangkok. Because his death, even in its contemporary time, is treated as an insignificant event that barely sticks in anyone's memory, Gai becomes a nameless and shapeless spectre that haunts the spot where he died in the simulated world. "[T]here's no source for this. [...] The shadow is here at this spot, part of the scan at the time, yet also not here," (ch. 4) explains Mai, the rich employee of a flood-fighting technology company who now resides in a simulated afterlife, to her friend, Pig, who still lives an organic life in a drowned Bangkok. Mai believes that Gai's ghostly glitch is caused by a "memory, just not human memory," but the memory of the building and the land because "Places remember us" (ch. 4). Mai's assertion that places remember us may be true in a metaphorical sense, which implies the issue of collective memory or what a place or a country wants to remember or to forget. Animism, an essential component of Thai Buddhism, allows ample room for the supernatural to replace a logical and materialist explanation of man-made climate disaster, permitting the culprits to avoid a direct confrontation or a confession, entrenching the culture of impunity and licensed complicity. Collective guilt and shame, an inability to forget, and a failure to remember the unpleasant history linger on as cognitive residues. Ultimately, nothing and no one are forgotten, not completely at least.

Although the novel's narration prioritises the point of view of the elites and middle-class Bangkokians, Pitchaya makes sure that when it concerns working-class issues it must hit Thailand's sore spot. So apart from Gai's episode, Pitchaya inserts a section dedicated to one of the most traumatic chapters of contemporary Thai history — the 6 October 1976 massacre.

Like Gai the migrant labourer, Siripohng, comes to Bangkok to study for better chances in life and never leaves. He and Nee are young lovers who participate in the 1976 protest and become "a cell of the beast", a part of "a giant animal" that "chants and roars [...] demand[s] a constitution" (ch. 1). Siripohng is shot during the crackdown and dies in his lover's arms on Thammasat University's football field, and from that day on he becomes the ghost that haunts Nee's memory. The animal metaphor is used here to represent a wild and undomesticated spirit, an uncontainable power, and a powerful and fearful entity. In this sense, the 1976 massacre exposes Thailand's middle-class political anxiety towards the EcoGothic "monster" (Parker 138-9), the fearful nonhuman who represents the Other Thai identity deviating from the conservative and middle-class Bangkokian norm. Ironically, the mobilisation of the October animal, triggered by natural resource depletion and underdevelopment in the rural areas and remote provinces, is indeed the hegemonic group's doing. Interestingly, the word "animal" or *sat* (สัตว์) in Thai is also a pejorative term used to attack others by implying their inferiority. Therefore, this non-human metaphor is a double entendre. The disparaging connotation of the animal metaphor is evident once the narration shifts to focalise on the elite characters. The 1976 protest fuelled by what Siripohng sees as a call for "uninterrupted electricity and multistory department stores" (ch. 1) and an innocent cry from the students for equal distribution of the nation's wealth is interpreted by Sammy's mother (Bangkok socialite Pehn) as "fiery passions [that] would upturn everything for the worse and even destroy the society she'd cherished" (ch. 2). Through Pehn's perspective, Pitchaya allows a glimpse of the true historical event captured by the Pulitzer Prize photographer, Neal Ulevich, as the character recalls "she could feel it justifiable that someone's grown child was hanged from a tree as a cheery mob beat his lifeless body with a chair" (ch. 2). This scene lays bare the anti-communist and ultranationalist discourse that the culling of communists, the undesirable nonhumans and the Other of the Thai identity, is not a sin because those protesting students and political dissidents are less than humans. They are only *sat*.

The ghost, according to Rahimi, is a metaphor for the intergenerational transmission of traumatic experiences (20). Like the spectre of Marx that haunts Europe, the death of the October animal haunts Bangkok because it represents an alternative social order of agrarian socialism that never happened in agrarian myth-ridden Thailand. Socio-ecological issues that trigger the killing and cause this social trauma have never been reckoned with. Bangkok, as Nee reflects, "makes new ghosts" (ch. 4) out of its inhabitants, transforming them into the very atoms of the city that permeate both her body and mind. Yet, once the narrative temporality

switches to the future, Pitchaya, exercising his dark poetic justice, prophesies the true survivors of ecological disaster triggered centuries ago by the teak trade: the animals, the fish and the birds, the middle and working-class Bangkokians all organically survive in the depleted and flooded city, while the rich are only virtually alive to be haunted by the climate ghosts they have created.

Khon Kaen as a Haunted Town

The concept of the urban landscape as a traumatised space is materialised as *mise-en-scènes* in Apichatpong's *Cemetery of Splendour*. Unlike Pitchaya's climate ghosts, which are summoned to haunt the Bangkok elite's anthropocentrically blinkered reality and make them amnesiac, Apichatpong reveals how, in the process of being haunted by dreams and fantasy, Thais are turned into somnambulists and mediums. Here in Khon Kaen, a big Isan town, Jenjira (Jen), a middle-aged housewife, gets stuck in a limbo landscape between an urban city where she lives with her American husband and a supernatural world of dreams, where she falls in love with Itt, a soldier suffering from sleeping sickness whom she takes care of as she passively watches her field hospital being excavated to reveal the ancient ruins underneath.

With the film shot and set entirely in Khon Kaen, Apichatpong "embraced the town's energy" ("Cemetery of Splendour" par. 8) by rejecting conventional filmic styles, allowing the real place to fully express itself in slow cinema aesthetics. The results are a unique and dreamlike film language and cinematography as the real and the supernatural landscape are smoothly blended and humans and non-humans walk alongside each other in the same landscape. Both time and space are disrupted: the past fantasy haunts the present landscape and reclaims its presence for "[w]hat haunts is not that which is gone, it is that which was expected to come" (Rahimi 6). Such a treatment of the setting is dubbed as "Isaan-ese Magical Realism" (Thaitrakulpanich par. 4) *mise-en-scènes* — a dreamlike and haunted setting set entirely in an authentic locale.

During Jen and Itt's leisurely walk in an arid and neglected public park, Itt (through a female medium) projects a spatial perception of the imaginary ancient realm, the golden palace in his dreamland, onto the real landscape. The supernatural is accepted without any question: Jen and Itt's dialogues on the real and the imagined are blended seamlessly as they sleepwalk in the EcoGothic landscape. True to the words of goddesses who visit Jen, underneath the now urbanised Khon Kaen there lies an ancient city full of prosperity and splendour. The existence

of the ancient city as an imagined space explains why the present-day soldiers are in a catatonic state: they are taken back to this ancient land to help their King fight. This revelation, thus, turns the mundane urban landscape into a cemetery, a final resting place where the ghost is kept alive and the living become the ghost. Everyday settings such as the school, the park, and the shopping mall are reanimated as dark and fantastical settings, a borderland between the historical and the haunting.

Fig. 1. Jen and the spirit medium observing the landscape during their walk, scene still; *Rak ti Khon Kaen (2015)*; imdb.com, 1 Feb. 2022, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2818654/mediaviewer/rm97747969/.

Thus, these soldiers are turned into ghosts by the mythical past, haunting the present by regurgitating the bygone myth of an ecologically rich Thailand. In this scene Itt shows Jen the Hall of mirrors, golden bathroom, Burmese jade bathtub, pink stone foot basin — the fantasy of the country's material richness that is kept alive in the well-known Thai saying "In the water, there is fish. In the fields, there is rice." This saying is originally from the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription and was later popularised by *Luang* (หลวง Major-General) Wichitwathakan, who composed a nationalist song using the exact expression to boost the country's morale during the Cold War era in 1954. Jen's dialogue ironically reveals a stark truth and reality of the land: the park, now littered with broken life-size human statues and a bomb shelter imitation (see fig. 1), is meant to be a tourist attraction and an educational memorial site about the impact of the Laotian Civil War on the Nong Khai province. The project is unsuccessful because the park is flooded.

The torrent sweeps away not only the dream of a local economic boom, but a memorial site of Jen's childhood memories too. Like teak logs floating downstream to Bangkok, the influx of rural Isan people floods urbanised areas such as Khon Kaen and Bangkok. They become the climate ghosts, the unrecognised environmentally displaced people who haunt big cities. Apichatpong effectively captures the vagueness of the symbolic meaning of the haunting in one scene that recurs two times in this film. There is not any dialogue nor an explanation, except people's ghostly apparitions and senseless movements in this scene. It shows park visitors playing a game of musical chairs as they continuously trade places as new actors arrive and depart from the scene, replicating the frantic and almost meaningless migration of environmentally displaced Isan people.

Fig. 2. Jen with her eyes wide open watching the excavation of her field hospital, scene still; *Rak ti Khon Kaen (2015)*; imdb.com, 1 Feb. 2022, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2818654/mediaviewer/rm802391041/.

At the end of the walk, Jen voices her despair at being a captive in an imagined community built from ancient history, "I think I am dreaming, Itt. I want to wake up, I really do." The breaking of the nationalist enchantment is suggested by Itt in the medium's body, "You just need to open your eyes wider." The last scene (see fig. 2) is a literal dramatisation of the dominant political discourse, *ta sa-wang* (ตาสว่าง eyes wide open or a state of political awakening) used by the Red Shirt protesters, most of whom are from the Isan region. For what he dubbed as his "last film" in Thailand (Kohn par. 21), Apichatpong reveals another haunting memory of modern Thai politics that would once again be swept into the realm of unforgettable forgetfulness and oblivious remembrance.

A Jungle Full of Ghosts

Thai horror films have been internationally successful since the 1990s, making use of "a pan-Asian horrific image of urbanization" (Ainslie 58). Thailand's imagination and folk reserve of the horror seem like a limitless well of cultural capital that continues to fascinate audiences and scholars alike (Ainslie, 2015; Chaiworaporn and Knee, 2006; Knee, 2005). Many female ghosts in Thai films, such as *Nang Nak* (นางนาก a counterpart of *Pontianak* or the White Lady archetype), are extensively studied (Ainslie 61), but few are conjured for a hauntogenic confrontation and an ecological reassessment. Teak spirits, the faceless and nameless shadow of a dead migrant labourer, and sleepwalking Isan lovers — these are not jump-scare constructs in penny dreadfuls of mainstream Thai horror films, but meticulously crafted cultural constructs representing Thai cultural amnesia, the "haunted metaphor" (Rahimi 33) of the unforgettable or untold social-ecological memories that traumatise the land. The hauntogenic dynamics in the ontological disruption akin to cognitive dissonance is ingrained in the Thai belief system and cultural practice, influencing the production of fiction and film. When a straightforward discussion of social trauma is expurgated or censored, the conversion of traumatic memories and experiences of ecological loss into spectral metaphor, in other words turning them into double meaning symbols, is a clever tactic to deliver their messages without triggering the authorities. Pitchaya and Apichatpong indeed engage in Thailand's export of its cultural capital, yet through that process they are rendered into ghosts themselves.

Thailand's resistance to foreign aesthetics and languages has been addressed by many postcolonial scholars. Saichol Sattayanurak, for example, comments on the concept of Thainess that "[Thais] can imagine social changes only in terms of material progress, but cannot imagine changes in terms of social relationships [...] Instead, Thais see things in the modern system of social relationships that do not fit in the framework of 'Thainess' as 'abnormal' behavior that must be quelled or corrected" (33). Some observe that the making of the modern Thai identity has been complicated by the crypto-colonial condition, in which the nation has longed to be on an equal footing with Western nations yet keeping their foreign cultures at arm's length and insisting on the monolithic uniqueness of Thainess (Harrison and Jackson). Such an ambivalent attitude towards Western cultures in arts and literature results in what Harrison terms a "censorious environment" (R. Harrison 21), which impedes the production of unconventional film and fiction. This is particularly true in the case of Apichatpong, whose 2007 film, *Saeng*

Satawaat (แสงศตวรรษ *Syndromes and a Century*) was heavily censored by the Board of Censors in Thailand.

Spectres are haunting these works — the spectres of Thai social-ecological memories and those who remember and refuse to silence them. Apichatpong and Pitchaya skillfully craft the EcoGothic representations of depleted landscapes and climate ghosts, while their presences are the embodiment of the aesthetics of the exorcised. Both artists and those who are influenced by them will certainly continue to haunt Thailand and the world at large, insisting on being seen and lived with. Perhaps when exorcism cannot repel them, one should, as this hauntogenic reading suggests, learn to live with these ghosts and finally let them speak.

Notes

[1] Apichatpong's new art installation and AI-generated fiction, "A Conversation with the Sun", was launched on 28th May 2022. This project is his collaboration with an MIT Media Lab researcher, Pat Pataranutaporn, and inspired by Apichatpong's "contemplations of the Sun as he embarked on long walks amidst nature" (see "Project Overview: A Conversation with the Sun").

[2] As many scholars of Thai studies observe, such symptomatic resistance against foreign aesthetics and languages hints at Thailand's cultural and linguistic homogeneity that shrouds its ultranationalist agenda. *The Ambiguous Allure of the West*, edited by Rachel V. Harrison and Peter A. Jackson, serves as a comprehensive and critical postcolonial analysis of contemporary Thai culture. Additionally, the debate on Thailand's language policy and its nationalist ideologies has been extensively studied (see Baker, Will, and Wisut Jarunthawatchai. "English Language Policy in Thailand." *European Journal of Language Policy*, vol. 9, no. 1, Apr. 2017, pp. 27-44, http://doi.org/10.3828/ejlp.2017.3).

[3] Thanya suggests that ecocriticism and ecofeminism are different from other literary criticisms of an interdisciplinary nature previously applied to the study of Thai literature, such as psychology, anthropology, or Marxist political economy promoted by certain educational institutions and schools of thought (7). Such a grounded interpretation of ecocriticism and ecofeminism not only indicates an intellectual rift among Thai humanities scholars working on Thai literature using critical lens imported from the West but also the analytical resilience and the transcultural potential of ecocriticism itself.

[4] Shifting from individual memory preserved the study of psychology to social memory, memory studies after the 1980s have become multidisciplinary in the social sciences and humanities (Bosch 2). In this disciplinary cross-pollination, the concept of social memory and place as a construction of collective identity and a subversive tool against the history of hegemonic power is developed and supported by many scholars and thinkers (Connerton, 1989; Edensor, 1997; Halbwachs, 1951, 1992; Hofmannsthal, 1902; Le Goff, 1992; Said, 2000). One of the most influential concepts about social memory is Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* (memory space). Nora writes, "Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us

to the eternal present, history is a representation of the past" (8). History has secured a solid position in the public consciousness. Memory, on the other hand, is elusive, equivocal, and cacophonous, and it permeates through our spatial experience. Memory is constantly vying for formal historical discourse on social identity against formal historical discourse.

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