

# The Figure of the “Climate Refugee” in Inger Elisabeth Hansen’s *Å resirkulere lengselen: avrenning foregår* (2015)

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ABSTRACT: This article addresses the Norwegian response to global climate change and increased human migration through an analysis of the figure of the “climate refugee” in Inger Elisabeth Hansen’s 2015 poetry collection, *Å resirkulere lengselen, avrenning foregår*. In addition to situating the work in the context of the so-called “refugee crisis,” the author also discusses the origins of the term “climate refugee” and the conceptual and ethical problems surrounding such a designation. The article examines notions of aesthetics and poetics in the text, arguing that Hansen draws attention to the ubiquity of risk in the history of cultural exchange between humans. Rather than a poetics that attempts to manage mobile bodies or eliminate risk, the author argues that Hansen advocates for a poetics of relation that takes its inspiration from dynamic forms in nature.

RÉSUMÉ : Cet article aborde la réponse norvégienne au changement climatique global et à l’augmentation de la migration humaine à travers une analyse de la figure du « réfugié climatique » dans la collection 2015 de poésie d’Inger Elisabeth Hansen, *Å resirkulere lengselen, avrenning foregår*. En plus de situer l’œuvre dans le contexte de la soi-disant « crise des réfugiés », l’auteure discute également des origines du terme « réfugié climatique » et des problèmes conceptuels et éthiques entourant une telle désignation. L’article examine les notions d’esthétique et de poétique dans le texte, en faisant valoir que Hansen attire l’attention sur l’omniprésence du risque dans l’histoire des échanges culturels entre humains. Plutôt qu’une poétique qui tente de gérer les corps mobiles ou d’éliminer les risques, l’auteur soutient que Hansen plaide pour une poétique de la relation qui s’inspire des formes dynamiques de la nature.

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“Jeg begynner denne forelesninga med en menneskefot. En liten fot på en stor motorvei gjennom Europa” [I begin this lecture with a human foot. A little foot on a big highway through Europe] (Hansen 2015b). This is how Inger Elisabeth Hansen began a lecture delivered at *Litteraturhuset* in Oslo on September 19, 2015. The lecture was delivered at the beginning of an autumn when the number of refugees arriving to Norway increased dramatically from around 500 per month to 8,000 in the months of October and November combined (“Flyktninger i Norge”). In the lecture, Hansen drew connections between the bones of the foot, their Latin names, and metaphors of travel to show how language often contains evidence of forgotten relationships between people and cultures.<sup>1</sup> That same autumn, Hansen published her first book of poetry in twelve years, *Å resirkulere lengselen, avrenning foregår* [To recirculate longing, run-off occurs]. The collection was something of a triumphant return: Hansen is a critically-acclaimed poet who has also had a long career as a translator and critic. Her 2003 collection *Trask: forflytninger i tidas skitne fylde* [Slog: Transfers in the dirty fullness of time] won the Brage prize and was nominated for the Nordic Council Literature Prize. Upon its release, a number of reviewers characterized *Å resirkulere lengselen* as “climate literature”—a literature that engages with climate change and its implications for human and nonhuman life as well as art (Beddari; Grøtta; NRK; Ruset; Wærp; Aarvik). However, like Hansen’s lecture, the collection also addresses conceptual and ethical problems related to human migration.

In November 2015, Hansen’s lecture would appear on the website for the Norwegian Writer’s Climate Campaign §112, an organization started by the Norwegian Writer’s Union as a means of bringing public attention to climate change and the government’s obligation to protect Norwegian nature. §112 refers to the so-called “environmental paragraph” of the newly-revised Norwegian constitution.<sup>2</sup> But why would a lecture about human migration appear on the website of an organization established to raise awareness about climate change? How might we understand the relationship between a global increase in human migration and climate change? And what could an ecological perspective potentially contribute to our understanding of the figure of the migrant?

The inclusion of Hansen’s lecture on the website of the Norwegian Writer’s Climate Campaign §112 indicates a growing international perception of a relationship between violent conflict and climate change-intensified drought. This perception is accompanied more generally by the sense that a new category of refugee is emerging, the climate refugee.<sup>3</sup> In this article, I will explain the concept of “climate refugee” and the questions and problems it raises both ethically and politically. I will then provide a reading of poems from *Å resirkulere lengselen* that address the precarious position of humans and nonhumans displaced by development, violence, and climate change. Hansen addresses the ethical and

political dimensions of precariousness by drawing attention to the way in which language can be used to manipulate or obfuscate mobile bodies and our relationship to them.

The collection thus brings together two ecocritical modes—"eco-cosmopolitics" and ecopoetics. As defined by Marland, "eco-cosmopolitics" takes a global perspective on environmental issues with particular attention to environmental justice (854). I draw on concepts from theorists of this wave, such as Nixon and Klein, to help articulate the unique situation of the climate refugee, as portrayed by Hansen. Kate Rigby defines ecopoetics as "an ecocritical neologism referring to the incorporation of an ecological or environmental perspective into the study of poetics, and into the reading and writing of (mainly) literary works" (2174). Hansen's collection draws attention to the important role migration has played in the formation of culture. Yet, the uniquely precarious situation of mobile bodies in our time threatens some of the conceptual categories on which Western cultural and literary traditions are based. Hansen's work is ecopoetic in that it critiques a poetics that disregards or exploits the precarious as well as proposes a poetics that draws inspiration from relational forms in nature. This relationality can, in turn, promote a nonviolent stance toward the figure of the migrant.

## The Climate Refugee: Definitions and Challenges

In March 2015, a group of researchers led by Colin P. Kelley claimed to have established a link between drought intensified by climate change and political unrest in Syria (Kelley, Mohtadi, Cane, Seager, and Kushnir). Although there has been disagreement over the scientific rigour of such claims (Fountain), the idea that climate change played a role in the intensity and scale of the Syrian civil war has since entered the popular imagination. In May 2014, a piece of comics journalism titled "Syria's Climate Conflict" was published on the website for *Years of Living Dangerously*, a climate change documentary series airing on Showtime (Quinn). The piece attempted to explain how five years of drought had internally displaced many of Syria's farmers, intensifying pre-existing grievances against Assad's regime and fomenting protest. Also in May 2014, an editorial published in the *New York Times*, which called on European nations to assist Greece and Italy in handling the arrival of migrants by sea, cited a UN report naming "desertification" as a contributing factor to the "migrant crisis" in Europe (The Editorial Board).

This was the narrative taken up by the Norwegian Writer's Climate Campaign \$112. On November 1, 2015, the campaign's website published a link to "Syria's Climate Conflict," following a poem by Frode Grytten entitled "Tusener segler igjen" [Thousands sail again]. Grytten had delivered this poem the previous day on *Dugnad for flyktingene* [Charity drive for refugees], a televised fundraiser aired by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK). The publication of Grytten's

poem along with the comic indicated that the editors of the website had (unofficially) adopted the narrative that climate change contributed in some way to this migration. That same week, Hansen's lecture would also appear on the website. Continued publication of poems dealing with migration and displacement on the website serve as further indication that, as artists and writers in Scandinavia consider climate change, one of the concerns weighing on them is the increase in human displacement it may cause and the ethical challenges this increase poses, particularly to the comparatively stable countries to which migrants are likely to flee.<sup>4</sup>

The situation of people in flight is always precarious, but the status of so-called "climate refugees" is also legally ambiguous. According to the U.N. High Council on Refugees, "displacement linked to climate change is not a future hypothetical—it's a current reality" ("FAQ on Climate Change"). An annual average of 21.5 million people has been "forcibly displaced by weather-related sudden onset hazards—such as floods, storms, wildfires, extreme temperature—each year since 2008" ("FAQ on Climate Change"). Yet the 1951 Geneva convention and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees define "refugee" narrowly as a person who undertakes a border-crossing due to a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" (Wihbey). Moreover, experts argue that internal displacement caused by much slower processes such as loss of economic livelihood will represent a far greater problem than international displacement. Because it does not involve a border crossing, however, internal displacement is at risk of being crowded out in the attentions of both the public and policymakers by the dramatic images of events such as the recent European "migrant crisis."

However, drawing a connection between violent conflict and climate raises ethical problems. As has been the case with the war in Syria, the suggestion that "natural" forces played a role in the conflict could seemingly absolve an authoritarian regime of human rights violations. Rather than an intentional act of war, it seemingly reduces the conflict to a random act of nature. This is further complicated by the fact that climate change is not purely "natural" but anthropogenic. As important contributors to the field of environmental justice have recently argued, colonial and global capitalist structures often "export" the worst effects of industrialization and climate change onto formerly colonized regions. Klein, for example, argues that climate change has been perpetuated by practices informed by colonial ideology. When governments seek to distribute the negative environmental externalities of industrialization, formerly colonized regions are deemed "sacrifice zones," in which the environmental consequences of the consumption habits of former colonial powers are exported onto people whose lives and livelihoods are deemed less valuable than others'. Similarly, Nixon argues that the worst environmental consequences of industrialization are borne by the poor and people of colour, constituting a form of "slow violence" against

these communities. Thus, while the previous legal definition of refugees assumed that persecution is perpetrated by human beings, while nature acts with no will of its own and with a power beyond human control, climate change (and the millions it has the potential to displace) troubles these distinctions. Nature, rather than acting in a manner beyond the human moral framework, begins to act as a result of human choices. Those choices are made not by “the human” as a universal category but in the context of structures of power, in which some humans have a disproportionately negative impact on the planet and others disproportionately bear that impact.<sup>5</sup> People forced to migrate due to climate change are thus in a precarious position, not only physically but also in terms of their legal status because the concept of “refugee” assumes a distinction between violent conflict caused by humans and natural disasters as “acts of god” that is no longer tenable in the era of anthropogenic climate change.

### *Å resirkulere lengselen: Precariousness in Western Thought*

Although Inger Elisabeth Hansen’s 2015 collection was largely received as “climate literature,” in it, Hansen explores intersections between climate change, trade, violence, and power. She also considers how language impacts bodies and materials as well as our ability to think and talk about what is happening in the world—especially as climate change undermines ideas central to Western thought, such as the stability of nature. This is understandable given that Hansen has long been interested in unseen or unspoken figures.<sup>6</sup> *Trask* (2003) depicts colonial mobility and how the appropriation of objects and ideas impacted Western aesthetics and the European sense of self. *Det brente hjertet* (1999) [The burnt heart] was a joint project with Maryam Azimi, a political activist and poet who was under special protection in Norway at the time. Hansen’s interest in language as a mechanism of power and control also derives from her interest in Latin American avant-garde poets and their effort to subvert colonial and fascist rhetoric through linguistic experimentation. The political in her poetry is often present in the form of language critique. The problem of climate change, however, seems to add a new dimension of precariousness both for those in flight and those who respond to that flight in language.

Hansen represents this instability in *Å resirkulere lengselen* through twenty-five poems that range widely in time from a mythic past to the contemporary present, as well as throughout the animal world, from coral reefs to mice. One of the elements that brings human history and animal life together is the sense of things acting strangely or going wrong, often due to changes in the environment. These changes seem to be in the process of radically reconfiguring the conceptual frameworks that have historically been used to make sense of the world. In several poems, Hansen does this by addressing animals that are acting strangely, often failing to act in their evolutionary best interests.<sup>7</sup> But she also does so by drawing

attention to the role of disruption in ancient culture and civilization; many of these cultural references have their origin in the Near East yet migrated west to become part of European tradition. Hansen represents this using figures such as maps, trade routes, constellations, the alphabet, and even genetic material that are on the verge of disintegrating or in the midst of reconfiguring themselves. Thus she both downplays the exceptionality of our moment while also urging caution: At a moment when so many bodies are also made vulnerable by displacement, the collection asks us to question how we receive, react to, and represent this bodily process of cultural transmission. It acknowledges the element of exploitation that is often present in the language that we use in such receptions, reactions, and representations, and asks us to imagine if these are possible without it.

The opening poem of the collection, “Bruk og misbruk av klippeblåvingen” [Use and misuse of the chequered blue], provides a good introduction to the dual themes of precariousness and exploitation (2015b, 11–12). In it, the speaker addresses a species of butterfly (*Scolitantides Orion*, or the chequered blue) that is in danger of being wiped out in Norway due to housing development. The speaker is fearful for the butterfly, but also enthralled by its precarious situation. This precariousness provides her with an opportunity for creative fantasy, as she, riffing on the butterfly’s Latin name, imagines conveying the butterfly, or using it as a conveyance, to transcend the earthly and take refuge in the cosmic. This impulse of the poet to use the precarious nonhuman as a vehicle for her own longing is, however, rejected by the poem because it offers no real refuge to the threatened species. Elsewhere, Hansen responds to romantic tropes, such as the albatross from Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner,”<sup>8</sup> and in her engagement with the butterfly there are echoes of the dead rabbit Wergeland describes in “Min lille kanin” (My little rabbit, 1829), which Dvergsdal argues is an example of the romantic poet who introduces spirit to dead matter via aesthetic representation, thus demonstrating his own superiority to nature (147–48). It is this conception of the human as separate from and above nature that the speaker rejects in her refusal to use the butterfly as a vehicle for her own longing for the transcendent.

Although engagement with and critique of romantic tropes is commonplace in ecologically-engaged poetry, Hansen also engages with the exploitation of precariousness in Western aesthetics more generally. The terms “precarity” and “precariousness” are deployed frequently in literature on globalization from both a socioeconomic and ethical standpoint. As Iversen helpfully distinguishes, while “precarity” describes vulnerability as a result of the unequal distribution of protection, resources, and material goods, “precariousness” describes vulnerability as a general condition of life (159). Research on precarity and the growing class termed “the precariat” abounds in the social sciences; precariousness, however, has been most notably taken up by Judith Butler (2006, 2009) and proves a useful

concept for literary accounts of globalized violence and migration. Interestingly, climate change brings precarity and precariousness together in obvious ways: As arguments such as Klein's and Nixon's highlight, both the responsibility for and consequences of climate change are unequally distributed, while, at the same time, the threat of climate change represents a universal threat to the general conditions of life.

But, where literature is concerned, Simon During points out that precariousness plays a crucial role in the Western conception of creation and creativity. During calls on literary scholars to "pay more attention to a cultural history of precarity" (54), arguing that "precariousness is not merely a social condition connected to capitalism. Rather it is built into the archaeology of Western thought and practice wherever the human condition is thought of as bound either to deprivation, danger, insecurity or uncertainty" (55). During argues that the precariousness of the human is central to Western tradition in the form of the expulsion from Eden, as well as the Homeric tradition of the risk-taking hero who experiences life as full of danger and moreover becomes heroic through his choice to live dangerously. He further explains, "the assumption that precarity is fundamental to human existence has often been transmuted into a will to precariousness as an authentic condition for being human" (55). Engaging with tradition by pointing out where it performs effacements, distortions, or has become out of date is, for Hansen, one of the main ways in which literature engages with politics. She writes, "Den politiske litteraturen er en dialog med tradisjonen, en kritikk av overleveringene, en kronisk blasfemi, en kritikk av tradisjonen om mennesket, en smittebærer, en 'oppdatering i anledning tausheten' om mennesket, om dem som stadig blir skjøvet ut av virkeligheten" [Political literature is a dialogue with tradition, a critique of what has been passed down, a chronic blasphemy, a critique of traditions about humanity, a contagion, an 'updating in the case of silence' about humanity, about that which is constantly pushed out of reality] (2003a, 99).

Hansen's engagement with ancient literatures, whether classical, Judeo-Christian, or Near Eastern reflects a similar recognition that there is a long tradition of regarding risk as fundamental to the creative process. In Hansen's collection, this seems to have a dual potential: First, to potentially valorize destruction at the expense of an other who is more vulnerable than the subject and, second, to allow us to see the potential in migration and human vulnerability for new connections and aesthetic forms to emerge. This is what makes precariousness an uneasy state in Hansen's recent poetry, as demonstrated in her poem about the endangered butterfly. The butterfly's risk becomes the poet's opportunity. Yet aesthetic responses that seek refuge "beyond" the material, rather than providing a way out of a precarious situation, provide only temporary consolation. This consolation proves far more soothing to the subject, while the other being addressed remains in just as risky a state as before.

## An Alternative Aesthetics of Relationality

“Bruk og misbruk av klippeblåvingen” [Use and misuse of the chequered blue] presents a central dilemma in Hansen’s collection, namely, how the precarious position of an endangered species can be “used” and “misused” by the poetic subject. Elsewhere in the collection, Hansen suggests that language can perform a similar operation on humans at risk. Rather than a longing for transcendence, here the desire is to mitigate risk to oneself.

In the poem “Å resirkulere lengselen: Stein tilbake på stein” [To recirculate longing: Stone back upon stone] this “longing” finds its expression in the language of bureaucracy:

Å resirkulere lengselen  
 det som ens tilfeldighet blir foreviget i  
 sluttbrukererklæringen  
 lagringsmulighetene  
 (2015b, 14)

[To recirculate longing  
 that like one’s coincidence is immortalized in  
 the end-user certificate  
 the storage capabilities]

The stanza relates longing to the formalization (described as immortalization) of relationships through end-user declarations and storage capabilities. Through the language of policy, these terms allude to the Norwegian arms trade and the export of carbon. Both are terms that have “circulated” in Norwegian news reports surrounding these issues. End-user certificates are official documents in which states seeking to import weapons certify that they are the ultimate recipient of the sale and do not intend to sell the weapons to a third party at a later date (Weapons Law Encyclopedia Project).

The timing of the publication of Hansen’s collection coincides with public debate around the sale of Norwegian military equipment to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Kuwait, which doubled from 2014 to 2015 (Hotvedt and Grymer). All of these nations are participants in the civil war in Yemen. In 2015, Norway ranked tenth among the world’s arms exporters, and they ranked fourth in 2008, the peak year for exports. Although law bars Norwegian companies from selling weapons to countries at war, whether or not the law is observed in practice has often been the subject of debate. The end-user certificate can be related to many forms of longing—the longing for prosperity and security, as well as the longing to avoid or absolve oneself of the consequences

of arms export. The stanza suggests that legal language codifies these longings, making them seem more realized or realizable than they actually are.

Similarly, “storage capabilities” can be related to climate change and energy policy, in particular to technocratic solutions such as large-scale Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS). In an article from May 2015, Nils A. Røkke, the director of climate at the Scandinavian research institution SINTEF, argued that Norway could take the lead in such a project due to the carbon storage capacity of the North Sea:

Vi sitter på brorparten av lagringsmulighetene for Europa sammen med Storbritannia, mens store punktutslipp ligger på kontinentet ... Jeg kan ikke se noen risiko ved at vi tar et initiativ for å etablere CCS-kjeder ... Det vil vise lederskap og en helhetstenking med sikte på bærekraft for et land som i praksis lever av å eksportere CO<sub>2</sub>.  
(Redaksjon)

[We are sitting on the lion’s share of the storage capabilities for Europe together with Great Britain, while large emissions points are on the continent ... I cannot see any risk in taking an initiative to establish CCS-chains ... It will demonstrate leadership and comprehensive thinking with focus on sustainability for a country that in practice lives off of exporting CO<sub>2</sub>.]

Røkke provides a good example of how terms such as “lagringsmulighetene” [storage capabilities] are used in Norwegian policy discourse. Røkke mentions an opportunity for Norway to take a leading role in climate policy but also a concern that Norway’s prosperity is grounded upon the export of CO<sub>2</sub>. The reference to Norway’s “storage capabilities” in the poem, then, could allude to the codification of a longing for prosperity based on providing opportunity to others (such as fossil fuel) but at a cost. It also conveys a longing to mitigate damage to the planet by taking back and absorbing all the “bad stuff” Norway has put out into the atmosphere. Røkke’s utterance expresses an uneasiness with the damage the Norwegian oil industry has done to others and a desire to undo it.

Through reference to end-user agreements and storage capabilities, then, the poem suggests how “sacrifice zones” are produced through language: Certain regions and people are not explicitly deemed less valuable than others. Rather, the language of risk mitigation and technocratic solutions steps in to preserve the Norwegian self-image as pacifist and environmentally conscious, while at the same time effacing the concrete damage done to others. Hansen further demonstrates this by speeding up the “slow violence” that trade and environmental policies perform when she describes risk evaluation as a stone that is picked up and thrown at another person. Rather than the weapon or the carbon committing violence directly, the language of risk evaluation becomes in

itself a form of violence. The calculation in which one person's safety and prosperity is valued over another's takes material form.

At the conclusion of the poem, the speaker asks,

Lengselen som kastes, blir den resirkulert i en annen?  
 Lengselen som kastes, blir den resirkulert som stein i en annen?  
 (2015b, 14)

[The longing that is thrown, is it recirculated in another?  
 The longing that is thrown, is it recirculated as stone in another?]

Here, longing is hurled, as risk evaluation was. This directs attention toward the material implications of policy. Although it is an easy leap from a military weapon to a stone (both do physical violence), the poem also points us to the link between carbon emissions and physical violence. The poem suggests the language of "storage capabilities" promises an absolution that cannot be delivered. Referring to these in the context of "circulation" (or "recycling") reminds us of the materiality to which legal language refers, that neither carbon nor weapons are ever fully destroyed but stay "out there" long after they have been released. While it is tempting to use language to obscure the risk one exposes others to in the service of personal security, as with arms and carbon, that longing is never destroyed but enters those it is hurled at only to be reconstituted and hurled back again. In this way, Hansen suggests violence toward others becomes a form of violence toward the self.

The idea of self-protection as a form of recirculating violence calls to mind Judith Butler's essay "Precarious Life." In it, she undertakes a reading of Levinas's account of the face in which the face of the other makes a demand on the subject, such that the subject has a duty to respond to the other's suffering; this suspends the subject's natural right to self-survival. She writes, "The non-violence that Levinas seems to promote does not come from a peaceful place, but rather from a constant tension between the fear of undergoing violence and the fear of inflicting violence. I could put an end to my fear of my own death by obliterating the other, although I would have to keep obliterating ... I could put an end to my anxiety about becoming a murderer by reconciling myself to the ethical justification for inflicting violence and death under such conditions" (2006, 137). "Å resirkulere lengselen" [To recirculate longing] represents the "constant tension" Butler describes through the image of the stone that is bureaucratic language. Through the image of the thrown stone, Hansen suggests the absurdity of a violent defense that, rather than absolving the tension produced by our vulnerability, only ensures that violence must be endlessly repeated—immortalized.

Butler uses Levinas to contrast representation with address, or discourse. The representation of the Iraq war in American media justified violence by denying vulnerability and instead valorizing displays of military power. This representation precluded discourse, or the confrontation by the face and its grief, that “something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent” and which affirms the human (2006, 144). The immortalized violence in Hansen’s poem is also disguised by bureaucratic language that prioritizes a defense of one’s sense of self (the idea of Norway as a good actor on the world stage), precluding confrontation with the consequences of all of our global entanglements. It is worth noting that Hansen does not separately articulate political and environmental entanglements but, through reference to carbon and arms, asks us to see the interrelations between economics, politics, environments, and bodies. (After all, there are carbon emissions involved in the production of all those weapons.)

As Iversen mentions, it is possible to critique Butler’s concept of precariousness for its appeal to universality and inattention to structures of power. She cites Shulman in particular, who writes that Butler’s precariousness “selects only the universal vulnerability to injury and death, while ignoring other forms of vulnerability, say, to climate change or economic oppression, which might generate different political conclusions—and profound conflict” (quoted in Iversen, 159–60). Hansen’s precariousness, conversely, reveals how climate change, economic oppression, and military defense are imbricated, thus appealing both to shared precariousness (through the use of “longing” and the idea of “recirculating” violence) and to the precariousness that is experienced disproportionately by formerly/neo-colonized, poor, and/or racialized others.<sup>9</sup>

## Travelling Gods and Starling Flocks: New Conceptual Forms

While “Å resirkulere lengselen” [To recirculate longing] deals with migration in the form of circulating objects, elsewhere the collection deals more explicitly with migrating bodies. Hansen uses these to suggest how new understandings and aesthetics might be configured in the context of global human and environmental change. At least four poems, three of which I will discuss,<sup>10</sup> link the migration of culture with the movement of bodies necessary for that migration to occur. In this sense, they historicize migration by drawing attention to cultural interactions between the ancient Near East and the classical and European worlds. They also link cultural transmission explicitly to bodies in motion, in a way de-abstracting these relationships. In some of the poems, this migration is also linked to environmental change. Just as “Å resirkulerer lengselen” [To recirculate longing] uses bureaucratic language to draw connections to the arms trade and energy policy, while also relating them to the concrete experience of violence, these poems mix discourses in order to make visible interrelationships among state violence, economy, language, desires, and the body. This can have a

disorienting effect. As one of Hansen's reviewers has noted, following all the historical, geographical, and literary allusions in the collection requires the average reader to turn to Wikipedia with some frequency (Grøtta). One could regard this as a weakness, but the challenge it poses to the reader could also be regarded as an aesthetic that represents the conceptual difficulties presented by climate change. As Timothy Morton argues, climate change is not an event but a "hyperobject," a "non-local" phenomenon that is "massively distributed in time and space" (Morton 910). While the relationship between any particular weather event and climate change is difficult to establish (Morton 906-09), the impact of climate change on human society and culture can be even more difficult to identify. And yet, one has the sense that things are not as they once were, that systems are acting, for lack of a better word, weirdly. Requiring frequent references to outside information, as well as embedding references back and forth between the poems, Hansen's collection can be read as a kind of "hypertext," one that uses intra- and intertextual references to suggest that migration is a part of the climate change "hyperobject": It is a large-scale phenomenon implicating numerous objects and systems, involving interrelated causes and effects that strain human comprehension.

The two poems "Munnvaskingsrituale for guder" [Oral cleansing ritual for gods] and "Fluktrute for guder" [Escape route for gods] use a ritualistic confrontation between mythical beings to suggest connections between environments and human culture (2015b, 15, 16). In the first poem, a collection of deities referred to only as *gudene* [the gods], perform a ritual meeting in a river, described as "den flytende grensa mellom rikene" [the moving border between kingdoms]. Hansen's "kingdoms" here call to mind the various overlapping pantheons of ancient Near Eastern cultures, as well as the pantheons of the Greeks and Romans, and even Gallic, Celtic, Norse, or other deities. Rather than the inventions of humans, these are real, embodied figures with mouths that must be ritually cleansed before they interact with one another. This ritual cleansing that precedes communication is a departure from the hurled stones (in the form of bureaucratic language) that stood in for discourse in the previous poem.

These embodied figures can also be read as representatives of entire cultures or "kingdoms." A shared sense of culture as embodied creates a meeting point for these "kingdoms" within the natural setting of a flowing river. First, though, they must remind themselves of their shared physicality by cleansing their mouths with "the same water":

de vasket munnen i elva før de åpnet den og slapp ordene ut, de presenterte seg  
for hverandre med samme vann i munnen  
(2015b, 17)

[they washed their mouths in the river before they opened them and let the words out, they introduced themselves to one another with the same water in their mouths.]

As in “Å resirkulere lengselen” [To recirculate longing], Hansen connects this ritualized meeting to commerce through a mix of discourses, describing the gods as “kortreiste guder og langveisfarende” [local gods and long-distance travellers]. *Kortreist* is the term used for “local” in the phrase *kortreist mat*, or “local food,” a favoured environmentalist cause that is gently ironized here. The society with the luxury to consider whether their food is “local” or flown in from afar meets a society of weary travellers in the form of these gods. The important element in the poem, however, is the ritual cleansing: The gods are described as knowing that “alle guder blir skitne i kjeften ... derfor vasket de skitten i kjeften ut, de skylte det ut, hele krenkelsesarsenalet” [all gods’ mouths get dirty ... therefore, they washed out the dirt in their mouths, they rinsed it out, their entire offensive arsenal]. Again, as in the previous poem, language is depicted as a potential instrument of violence. However, the prophetic voice of the poem (Ecclesiastes is an important intertext for the collection as a whole) seems to declare that these “kingdoms” used to know how to come together peacefully. They are not any more peaceful by nature but rather know that cleansing ill-intent from one’s language is a necessary prerequisite for a meeting between cultures. Like the valorization of risk, During argues that the belief that “society was once more stable and coherent than it is” is a foundational “myth” in Western discourse (55). But Hansen side-steps this myth in her account of the meeting of the gods, who recognize their shared precariousness as well as shared capacity to do violence and seek to mitigate it through ritual.

References to myth in the collection as a whole suggest that this meeting can be read as a kind of history of cultural interactions. But, just as the threat of violence hangs over the meeting of the gods, cultural exchange is predicated upon vulnerable bodies. In the next poem of the collection, “Fluktrute for guder” [Escape route for gods], the gods are met with a problem: The river has dried up (2015b, 16). Displaced from their environment, the gods can no longer conduct their social ritual: “Bli vann, sa de, men det ble ikke vann” [Let there be water, they said, but there was not water] (16). Unable to exert power over nature as they should, the gods transform themselves into a drop of water, the water drop lands on a beetle, and the beetle begins to convey them across the expanse of the desert. In the time of climate change, “god,” like “nature,” is an unstable, unpredictable actor, which changes its conceptual role in human life.

Both as physical bodies and as the embodiment of particular cultures, the gods are now at risk:

mens gudene hver for seg havner i feil sirkler, mens gudene hver

for seg blir omsatt på svartebørsen, mens gudene hver for seg blir sprenget  
og røvet og tatt som gisler, blir gudene samlet trillet gjennom ørkenen  
(2015b, 18–19)

[while the gods one by one end up in the wrong circles, while the gods one by one  
are traded on the black market, while the gods one by one are blown up and robbed  
and taken hostage, the collection of gods is being wheeled across the desert]

This is cultural transmission gone wrong: The circulation of objects of cultural value (the “gods” conceived as totems or idols) meets obstacle after obstacle, and irreplaceable things are being lost. This could allude to the recent destruction of invaluable cultural material due to violent conflict and iconoclastic terrorism in the “cradle of civilization.” Yet, if we consider the history of the transmission of objects from the Near East to the rest of the world, isn’t the black market, seizure, or “kidnapping” also perhaps the norm? The vulnerable gods draw attention to the vulnerability of cultural objects, their implication in violent exchanges. By using the figure of “gods” to suggest physical objects, representations of culture, and individual bodies, Hansen suggests that to take care of physical bodies, to concern ourselves with the plight of vulnerable individuals, is also a way of preserving and keeping intact a shared sense of human culture. The disintegration and loss of gods “one by one” represents a loss of shared history, but also seems predicated upon the denial of the role of history in contemporary events. The gods in the poem seem to be completely forgotten. They are gods of the past. This reflects the sense in which a Eurocentric conception of history has lost its sense of relationality—the idea that its interconnection with the Near East is nothing new, but rather newly denied. Thus “slow violence” is carried out in two forms: the dried-up river alludes to the slow violence that results from climate change’s disproportionate impact on these regions, while the denial of the region as a source of culture enacts violence on history and memory.

Hansen more explicitly relates the “collection of gods” to the migrant’s plight in “Ditt personlige kart: GPS of the mind for travelers” [Your personal map: GPS of the mind for travellers] (2015b, 31–33). Immediately the title suggests how changing technology requires new conceptual categories, as “map” is transformed into the “GPS of the mind.” “Dette er ditt personlige kart” [This is your personal map], the poem begins, thereby introducing the map as a conceptual tool rather than as a neutral technology. Just as the end-user declaration can be the product of a reified longing for prosperity or security, the map becomes the result of choices regarding what to see: “Du kan velge om du vil plotte dem inn, du kan velge om du vil plotte dem ut, de illegale, de illegales marked, de illegale varene deres” [You can choose whether to plot them in, you can choose whether to plot them out, the illegals, the illegals’ market, their illegal wares]. As is frequently the case in Hansen’s work, the repetition of phrases with slight differences each

time expresses relationships and the impact of linguistic choices on thought; the relationship between so-called “illegals” and the economic demand for them and their labour is invoked through a kind of ritualized speech act. Just as the gods commanded “Let there be water,” the choices made by the mapmaker command: Become a person, or Become an object. The idea of “sacrifice zones” is concretized through the figure of the map, as the poem articulates the role of language in creating them.<sup>11</sup>

However, the poem goes on to emphasize how the body of the migrant cannot be separated from the products s/he brings or the processes that bring them. The mapmaker only gains the illusion of control by plotting them in or plotting them out. The mapmaker’s ability to tinker with migrants—turning on the sounds or turning them off, introducing or disappearing people and their wares—calls to mind Butler’s argument that representation fails to provide the groundwork for nonviolence. Hansen also suggests this through her depiction of mapmaking (a form of representation) as objective and distanced, but therefore also callous and even aggressive. This comes across in particular in the section where the mapmaker introduces a bang (as from a bomb) and watches the migrants run: “De kan løpe når det smeller, ... du kan ta tiden på dem, du kan prøve ut verdensrekorden på ditt personlige kart, du kan løpe dem ut av kartet” [They can run when there is a bang, ... you can tell time by them, you can try out the world’s record on your personal map, you can run them off the map].

The administrative tool of the map, which has strong associations with colonialism, is perhaps not an unexpected trope to use to portray a callous attitude toward migrant bodies. The poem takes a more surprising turn when it also critiques nature as a conceptual category, one less messy and therefore more desirable than the realm of human culture. After the migrants have been driven from the map, the commanding voice of the poem suggests, “du kan erstatte dem med stær, med lovlig migrerende fugler” [you can replace them with starlings, with legally migrating birds]. The obvious contrast here is between the “illegal” migration of people and goods that is marked as undesirable and the “legal” migrations of nonhuman nature. Starlings are indeed native to Africa, Asia, and Europe and migrate between these regions. However, if their global distribution is taken into account, the allusion to starling migration does not serve well as an example of natural, and therefore desirable, migration. In fact, starling migration famously troubles the distinction between the categories “natural” and “cultural.”

As Dillard explains in her important contribution to American nature writing, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974):

Starlings came to this country on a passenger liner from Europe. One hundred of them were deliberately released in Central Park, and from those hundred descended all of our countless millions of starlings today. According to Edwin Way Teale, “Their coming was the result of one man’s fancy. That man was Eugene Schieffelin,

a wealthy New York drug manufacturer. His curious hobby was the introduction into America of all the birds mentioned in William Shakespeare.” The birds adapted to their new country splendidly.  
(Dillard 37)

The starlings’ arrival dramatically transformed the environment of the Blue Ridge Mountains, where Tinker Creek is located. Starling movements and roosting have become a prominent feature of the region. As Dillard points out, rather than “natural,” this transformation “was the result of one man’s fancy”: in particular, an enthusiasm for Shakespeare that did not limit itself to the transmission of texts but extended to the transmission of bird species from Europe to North America. A certain conception of stability in nature might support a belief that adaptation is a limited process; surely, birds would not be able to adapt so quickly but would die out, as nature “intended.” On the contrary, the birds still thrive, presenting new challenges to the region’s inhabitants. The reference to starlings in “Ditt personlige kart” [Your personal map], then, introduces the idea of nature as a stable and preferable category only to subvert this expectation by choosing as its example a bird that is a notorious “invasive species.” The example demonstrates that even migration in nature can result from a confluence of economic factors (the drug manufacturer’s wealth), cultural attitudes (Eurocentrism), and environmental conditions (starlings’ adaptive capabilities).

Dillard also points out that the human response to nonhuman migrants can be just as hostile as their response to human ones. One Virginia town in the 1970s attempted to rid itself of the “nuisance” of roosting starlings through a series of extreme measures. Although one would expect nature lovers to come to the birds’ defense, she points out, “the local bird societies screamed for blood—the starlings’ blood. Starlings, after all, compete with native birds for food and nesting sites” (Dillard 38–39). The idea that we can escape the gesture of self-preservation at the expense of others by reverting to the category of “nature” is also disproven by the example of the starling. At the same time, the unnaturalness of the town’s identification with native birds rather than starlings demonstrates the arbitrary nature of such identifications and with it the possibility to form other kinds of relationships. “Ditt personlige kart” [Your personal map] draws a parallel between “illegals” and “invasive species” that directs attention to the language we use, while also denying that the category “nature” is either culture- or problem-free. Thus, nature becomes unavailable as a category that can be appealed to in order to deny migrants’ existence or rights.

While “nature” as a category is denied in the poem, natural processes do provide inspiration for alternatives to such fixed conceptual categories. Hansen turns in the end of the poem to the movement of starlings:

du kan sjokkere deg med stær, oppstandelsen når de stiger fjær mot fjær over Tiberen, skingeret når de kutter himmelen, snitter den med vingespissene, skjærer den i biter ...

kan du holde styr på dette, kan du holde styr på den kollektive oppstandelsen av stær, på gittercellen i himmelen, på det som farer gjennom flokken, manøvrerer den elektrisk, lukker den i kretsløpet i himmelskallen  
(2015b, 41–42)

[you can shock yourself with starlings, the commotion when they rise feather against feather over the Tiber, the screech when they cut the sky, snip it with their wingtips, cut it to bits ...

can you keep track of this, can you keep track of the collective commotion of starlings, of the latticework in the sky, of that which travels through the flock, manoeuvres it electrically, shuts it into circulation in the skull of the sky]

In contrast to the technology of the map, which facilitates control, the movement of starlings resists it. In resisting control, however, it also provides an awakening (“du kan sjokkere deg” [you can shock yourself]) of the mind and senses. The image of the flock of starlings, whose migration is neither “natural” nor “cultural,” brings into question the idea that any migration can be controlled. Instead of suggesting control as the ideal response—that which can eliminate the “problem” of migration—the poem suggests that migration offers an analogy for a different way of thinking. The astonishing ability of many individuals to move in a group that is both bounded and fluid has the potential to “cut the sky” but also fill it with “circulation.” This suggests the creative potential that migration provides, both in creating new contacts between individuals but also in providing alternative conceptual frameworks that liberate rather than oppress. This is expressed in the poem’s final line: “den knuste kuppelen åpner ikke, den knuste skallen åpner” [the broken cupola does not open, the broken skull opens]. The “skull” here is both the “skull of the sky,” which often in the collection refers to the divine (as in “Bruk og misbruk av klippeblåvingen” [Use and misuse of the chequered blue]), as well as the “skull” of the “mind” referred to in “GPS of the mind”—the mind which has, throughout the poem, been called on to make its own map. Yet now maps have been dispensed with, and the flock provides potential for different models, in particular, a focus on a relationality that allows things to move in concert (that which travels *through* the flock, manoeuvres it electrically), rather than forms of control that perform convenient erasures.

## Conclusion

Climate change poses extreme conceptual challenges, and, though it has been less discussed, the mass migrations of our time also pose challenges to our ability to account for their scale, causes, and effects, as well as to keep sight of

individual experiences in the midst of abstract processes. Moreover, climate change and migration are interlinked, but elucidating this link requires caution, lest we rely on it to absolve humans of perpetrating violence, either directly through acts of war or indirectly through the “slow violence” of pollution and/or climate change.

Hansen’s collection represents one attempt to grapple with some of these conceptual challenges. It demonstrates that seeing the relationship between increased displacement and migration and climate change allows us to see human precariousness as both a shared condition (due the global “background condition” that is climate change) and one that has human causes. That climate change is anthropogenic forces us to consider the greater responsibility that some people have in heating the planet, as well as the way in which some populations are more greatly impacted by this warming than others. Hansen’s interweaving of myth and the history of cultural and economic exchange with the language of its contemporary administration (end-user declarations, energy policy, food policy, maps, and markets) activates both shared and unequally distributed forms of precariousness. The relationship between migration and climate change also calls into question human conceptual frameworks and with them aesthetic traditions. Hansen’s collection uses the interface between environmental change and migration to call out the potentially exploitative gesture of projecting one’s longing for stability or transcendence onto the “natural” (nonhuman) migrant, such as the butterfly or the starling, as well as to demonstrate that the stable category of nature no longer provides a refuge from social problems. In a world increasingly dominated by human activity, even nonhuman migration is the product of cultural as well as natural conditions.

Hansen’s collection offers at least two aesthetic approaches that are in tune with these conceptual changes. The first is the (analog) “hypertext,” in which the poems abound with allusions that transcend the typical logic of time, space, or discourse, moving freely between cultures, states, historical eras, and human and nonhuman nature. These movements are difficult to “keep track of,” but they are necessary to truly understand our present global moment in its historical context. The other is the potential to derive forms from nature—not forms that lend stability or security but those that reconfigure conceptual categories by drawing attention to relationality over boundaries or borders. This is the kind of form offered by the starling flock; it constantly shifts and changes before our eyes (or minds). Hansen’s frequent deployment of repetition with a difference (repeated phrases that are nearly identical with gradual or slight shifts in wording and meaning) performs in language what the starlings perform visually. Language has a similar capacity to shift and change as it is deployed differently and in different contexts, but within limits. Just as the flock does in a sense have a border, albeit a shifting one, language can remain just sufficiently within the conventional to be understood, while also venturing out into new territory.

The title, *Å resirkulere lengselen* [To recirculate longing], then, reflects both the potential and the uneasiness of responding to climate change and human and nonhuman migration aesthetically. To recirculate or recycle longing can be a process by which the same material is renewed through presentation in new forms. Longing, however, can take a destructive form (as with the stone hurled at another). Hansen's work suggests how longing might be directed away from destruction of the other toward destruction of settled concepts (such as nature/culture, us/they) that no longer serve us well. This has the potential to open the mind to an aesthetics of relationality rather than representation. Yet, these are so far only suggestions. As the title concludes, "avrenning foregår" [run-off occurs]: recycling or recirculation are never perfect processes. Some elements are always lost in recirculation.

#### NOTES

1. For more on this essay within the larger context of the Norwegian Writer's Climate Campaign §112, see Coughlin.
2. The paragraph states, "Enhver har rett til et miljø som sikrer helsen, og til en natur der produksjonsevne og mangfold bevares. Naturens ressurser skal disponeres ut fra en langsiktig og allsidig betraktning som ivaretar denne rett også for etterlekten. Borgerne har rett til kunnskap om naturmiljøets tilstand og om virkningene av planlagte og iverksatte inngrep i naturen, slik at de kan ivareta den rett de har etter foregående ledd. Statens myndigheter skal iverksette tiltak som gjennomfører disse grunnsetninger" [Everyone has the right to an environment that ensures their health, and to a nature of which the productive capabilities and diversity are maintained. Nature's resources shall be distributed according to a long-term and comprehensive perspective that also preserves the rights of our descendants. Citizens have a right to information on the condition of the natural environment and on the impacts of planned and implemented interventions in nature, such that they can preserve the right they have under the preceding paragraph] (Jakobsen).
3. My early thinking about the figure of the climate refugee was informed by the panel "Precarity and the Refugee" held at the 2017 MLA convention in Philadelphia, especially Alyssa Battistoni's presentation, which touched on how climate change forces us to reconfigure the concept of natural disasters.
4. Examples include Per Clement Woetmann's "Nye digte" [New poems], which thematizes dangerous Mediterranean crossings; Marte Huke's "Morgen og kveld på Samoa" [Morning and evening on Samoa] is set on Samoa, one of the nations in the Pacific most gravely threatened by climate change; "Kor mykje kostar ein Indianar" [How much does an Indian cost?] by Helge Torvund reflects on economic calculations regarding the cost of climate change and the ethics of "sacrifice zones"; the American poet Cheena Marie Loe also contributed two poems from her collection *A Series of Un/Natural/Disasters*, which considers how climate change troubles categories such as "refugee" and "evacuee" ("D I K T / Poems").

5. The disproportionate contribution that some human societies have made to climate change, as opposed to others is belied by the term “Anthropocene,” a proposed geological age defined—in a radical break with previous geological eras—by measurable human impact on the environment. The concept has been critiqued from a number of viewpoints, however, especially from a postcolonial perspective. As Morrison argues, the Anthropocene concept disregards previous human impact on the planet and defines the European project of dominating nature as a biological imperative. It thus “hides a disturbing extension of colonial discourse into a post-colonial world” (75).
6. Hansen’s articulates her view on the relationship between politics and literature in several essays included in *Blindsoner* [Blind spots] (2003). She emphasizes, for example, that writers can engage with the political by writing from *randsoner* [marginal zones]: “Hvis politikk handler om forutsetningene for å delta, om forholdet mellom den enkelte og makten, må de politiske flatene oppstå i de utsatte sonene, i de usette overgrepene, der hvor uttrykksløsheten invaderer” [If politics concerns itself with the prerequisites for participation, with the relationship between the individual and power, then political surfaces must be found in the unspoken zones, in the unseen assaults, the places where the inexpressible invades] (2003b, 177).
7. See “Spør musa” [Ask the mouse], “Kast ikke skylda på den lille klovnefisker, ikke på den blå safirdjevelen heller” [Do not place blame on the little clownfish, nor the little sapphire devil either] “Rapport fra forsuringen av Lophelia” [Report from the acidification of Lophelia] (2015b, 28, 29, 30).
8. See “Å være eller ikke være albatross” [To be or not to be an albatross] (2015b, 53–54).
9. Hansen writes about her negative reaction to calls in the Norwegian media for authors to write literature that measures up to the 9/11 terror attacks. Using Jean Paul Sartre’s concept of “nausea,” she cautions that identifying with the pain of the other can be akin to “consuming” or even “devouring” it. Instead, Hansen writes, “Skal man identifisere seg med andres smerte, må man kunne identifisere sin egen, for å avgrense den, og ta standpunkt til forskjellene” [If one is to identify oneself with others’ pain, one must be able to identify one’s own in order to delimit it and take a position on the differences] (2003b, 179). *Å resirkulere lengselen* takes a similar stance toward (climate) refugees and other vulnerable bodies.
10. “Navigasjon uten stjerner” [Navigation without stars] is the fourth, which I do not address in this article (2015b, 17–18).
11. The choice to plot mobile bodies out of the map calls to mind Hansen’s position on poetry and the gaze: “Poesien inneholder en undervisning om at i blikket bor den som ser verden og den som gjør verden usett” [Poetry contains the teaching that within the gaze lives the one who sees the world and the one who makes the world unseen]. She argues that in politically engaged literature one would expect to find “en slik utgangsposisjon, å reflektere blikkets begrensinger inn i diktet, å politisere blikket for å gi frihet til å se” [such a starting point, reflecting on the gaze’s limitations within the poem, politicizing the gaze in order to provide the freedom to see] (2003b, 172).

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