

Climate Refugees and ‘Negative Solidarity’ in Tim Jones’ *Where We Land*

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Abstract Jones’ novella *Where We Land* belongs to the CLI-FI genre and envisages what might happen in New Zealand if a mass of climate refugees from Asia or Oceania should illegally arrive. The author describes a situation similar to the so-called “journeys of hope” occurring in the Mediterranean Sea. The refugees’ boat is attacked by the NZ Navy frigate torpedoes and the few survivals who succeed in landing have to confront armed shore patrols of citizens defending their own territories from the ‘invaders’. Official government propaganda, sense of the ‘nation’ and hate for foreign immigrants intertwine in the story to depict a society with no sense of solidarity or positive affect. The book catches the spirit of ‘negative solidarity’ rising in neoliberal countries, characterized by isolated competitive relations within populist political projects. By analysing Jones’ story, the article shows how neoliberalism destroys the conditions for collective action and collective decision.

Keywords Climate refugees. New Zealand. Negative solidarity. Tim Jones. Neoliberalism.

Summary 1 Introduction: *Where We Land* and Its Context. – 2 The Concept of ‘Negative Solidarity’. – 3 Neoliberalism, The Language of the Commons and Affect Theory. – 4 The (Positive) Affective Turn in *Where We Land*.



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1 Introduction: *Where We Land* and Its Context

First published by New Zealand Paper Road Press in 2015, under the title *Landfall*, the novella *Where We Land* was re-printed in 2019 with the present title by The Cuba Press (Wood 2008).¹ In the “Afterword” to the second edition, author Tim Jones – a writer and climate change activist, born in Britain but naturalized in Aotearoa, where his family emigrated when he was three² – expresses his concern about climate change and the extraordinary rapidity of its effects:

Since it was first published [...] this novella has come closer to reality. Global warming has turned to global heating, the seas are rising faster, and fascism is suddenly fashionable again, tramping its old territories in new and shiny boots. Payment of the bill for colonialism has long been overdue, and now the planet has come calling for the massive ecological and climate debts incurred by the industrial revolution and its aftermath. (Jones 2019, 72)

Jones, who is now in his mid-sixties, has been at the frontlines of environmental battles since high school, as he explains in a webinar given on 10 July 2024 (Jones 2024) to present his latest novel *Emergency Weather* (2023). On that occasion, he recalled the numerous campaigns he has supported throughout his life: from the successful Save Aramoana Campaign (1974-83), which prevented the development of an aluminium smelter plant at Aramoana in the Otago harbour (Gourly 2022), to the more recent ones such as Coal Action Network (2007) to end coal mining in Aotearoa, and Save the Basin (2010)³ for promoting low-carbon transport and, in general, reducing the use of fossil fuels. Jones underlined how decarbonizing the heat industry should be at the top of every Western government’s agenda, but, turning to New Zealand politics, he denounces its ‘short-termism’, namely an endemic short-term view that does not look beyond electoral cycles. Jones’ criticism is not only directed to the centre-right coalition currently ruling the country, which has sidelined the Climate Change Commission. The previous labour government, he contends, often ignored the Commission’s recommendations too. Politics

1 See also Tim Jones’s official website: <https://www.timjonesbooks.co.nz/where-we-land/>.

2 Aotearoa, the Māori name of New Zealand, is now added or used as an alternative to the other name, given by British colonizers. It means ‘the land of the long white cloud’, which is the image that appeared to the Polynesian explorers when they first sighted the country, presumably in the late thirteenth century. See King 2001, 16; see also *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*: <https://teara.govt.nz/en/history/page-1>.

3 See the following sites: Coal Action Network Aotearoa: <https://coalaction.org.nz/>; Save the Basin Campaign: <https://savethebasin.org.nz/>.

thus seem completely ineffective at the task of bringing about a real change, and only focused on imposing the “seductive framing of the new normal”, namely climate adaptation (Jones 2024).

Given Jones' burning interest in environmental issues, it is no accident that in his writing – which includes five poetry collections, two short-story collections and two novels, in addition to the novella under consideration – he has often speculated on climate change and its possible consequences. In particular, the previously mentioned novel *Emergency Weather* and *Where We Land* can both be included in 'Cli-Fi' (Climate Fiction), a genre of writing that takes place in a future world with severely altered weather patterns (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).⁴ They also belong to 'Spec-Fic' (Speculative Fiction) – that is, in Marek Oziewicz's words,

a subgenre of science fiction that deals with human rather than technological problems, a genre distinct from and opposite to science fiction in its exclusive focus on *possible futures*, and a super category for all genres that deliberately depart from imitating “consensus reality” of everyday experience. (Oziewicz 2017; emphasis added)

Indeed, both books imagine possible futures, taking present situations to extremes. *Emergency Weather* explores life in Wellington after a devastating giant storm has crashed into the capital city. *Where We Land* describes New Zealand as a dystopian society subject to a strict anti-migration legislation, which allows the navy to torpedo boats full of climate refugees trying to reach its coasts. The survivors are then finished off by machine guns.

Both stories reflect major concerns of present-day Aotearoa, a country deeply affected by climate change, with regular cycles of droughts and floods, and by increasingly high rates of migration. The latter issue has also become a fearmongering strategy utilized by left and right governments alike. As reported by *The Guardian*, in 2023 “annual net migration to New Zealand hit a near record high of more than 173,000 non-New Zealand citizens in the year to December” (Corlett 2024).⁵ In *Where We Land* Jones elaborates on the fear of a possible mass migration and anticipates, albeit in a paradoxical

⁴ Merriam-Webster Dictionary. “New Adventures in ‘cli-fi’. Taking the Temperature of a Literary Genre”. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/cli-fi-clifi-climate-fiction-genre-words-were-watching>.

⁵ Net migration is the number of immigrants minus the number of emigrants, including citizens and noncitizens (World Bank Group. “Metadata Glossary”. <https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/population-estimates-and-projections/series/SM.POP.NETM>). Aotearoa New Zealand's resident population is about 5 million (4,993,923, according to the 2023 Census).

way, the trend of increasing strictness in immigration rules started by the Labour government in March 2023, when Immigration Minister Michael Wood put forward a bill determining that “[l]arge groups of asylum seekers arriving to New Zealand by sea could be detained in prison for up to 28 days without a warrant” (Graham-McLay 2023). Wood candidly admitted that there had never been an illegal mass-arrival maritime event previously in the country, due to its geographical isolation. He also added that it might remain a low risk event, but it was not a no risk event. This initiative was labelled as “election year cynicism”, imputable to the coming General Election, and a raid into right-wing territory to gain some votes. In fact, the main opposition party at the time, the centre-right National party, reacted not only by supporting the bill, but also by questioning whether it still represented too appealing a regime for people smugglers. The National party won the October 2023 General Election and is now leading a coalition government with two right-wing parties: Act New Zealand and New Zealand First. Needless to say, it has already passed a series of stricter rules for legal immigration, especially for workers in low-skilled jobs (Malcom Pacific 2024). At the moment, defending New Zealand from sea mass-migration does not seem to be a priority because “illegal migration often happens through overstaying a visa” (O’Malley 2024). In *Where We Land* Tim Jones has, however, imagined this event as possible and speculated on its consequences.

The story is told from a double perspective. On the one hand, the readers follow the predicament of a Bangladeshi refugee, Nasimul, who has lost his wife and little son during the journey from the Bay of Bengal to Fiordland in Aotearoa. On the other, we see the point of view of a para-military woman, Donna, who has been recruited with many other civilians to patrol the coasts of the country and stop the entry of new refugees, defined with the dehumanising term of “infiltrators” (Jones 2019, 18). During the training, the military auxiliaries are given a few basic rules, such as: do not shoot unless you have to; do not shoot a citizen; do not allow an infiltrator to escape. Should the rules conflict with each other, the auxiliaries are told to use their judgement, which means, in practice, that they are free to kill all the infiltrators.

In *Where We Land*, the New Zealand government is enacting protectionist measures, nationalist policies and a populist approach based on the principle of “family and country and duty” (Jones 2019, 18), epitomised in the author’s “Afterword” by his reference to a new fashionable type of “fascism” (72). The patriotic message, the “nation’s call” (17), and the attraction of the uniform give New Zealanders “a sense of purpose” (16). They are encouraged to join the paramilitary troops, in order to defend the country from millions of desperate people displaced from their homelands, because they “look south hungrily at our green and fertile lands. They’d overrun us in months if we let them” (16). Indeed, there is also a minority of

citizens, the “so-called shepherds” (18), who attempt to help the survivors from the sunken boats. Their actions are however considered illegal and punished with a long period of mandatory detention.

The novella records a possible rise of populism in reaction to the increasing migration of climate refugees. Populism (namely “political activities or ideas that claim to promote the interests and opinions of ordinary people”, according to Collins Dictionary)⁶ is a phenomenon that mostly develops in liberal democracies, as Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2020, 23) claim. It is an incomplete or “thin” ideology, unlike the full-bodied “thick” ones like fascism, liberalism or socialism (27-8). It must therefore be necessarily combined with other specific concepts, principles or ideological frames. In a Western context, populism is often connected to xenophobic and anti-migration positions (24) – that is, aimed at ‘defending’ lower class citizens against the threat to their rights (allegedly) represented by immigrants. The environmental crisis has added a new category of potential ‘enemies’ that populist governments and political leaders can use: climate refugees. Frequent cyclones or typhoons and floods are devastating many territories and coastal communities in South Asia, such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Coral atolls in the South Pacific (the so-called ‘sinking islands’) are being constantly flooded by the ocean due to sea-level rise, caused by the melting of continental ice sheets and the expansion of sea water as ocean temperatures slowly increase. Many outer low-lying islands in archipelagos such as Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands are no longer habitable, a fact that, in turn, results in internal migration toward the main islands and external migration to Aotearoa, Australia and the Western coast of the USA.

Beside populism, Jones’ narrative also catches the spirit of ‘negative solidarity’ prevailing today in neoliberal countries and takes it to its extreme consequences, as will be explained in the following section.

2 The Concept of ‘Negative Solidarity’

The concept of ‘negative solidarity’ was coined by sociologist Émile Durkheim to criticise the type of social organisation advocated by the utilitarian philosophy that supported the rise of individualism, industrialism and capitalism, as explained by Finn Bowring:

In *The Division of Labour in Society* ([1893] 1964), Durkheim called the form of social organization imagined to be adequate by the

⁶ Collins Dictionary. s.v. “Populism”. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/populism>.

utilitarians – a society based on competitive self-interest – ‘negative solidarity’. Negative solidarity is a social order based on contractual non-interference rather than wilful commitment to a common goal, consisting “not in serving, but in not harming”. “It does not lead wills to move toward common ends but merely makes things gravitate around wills in orderly fashion” ([1893] 1964, 116). (Bowring 2016, 23)

Durkheim highlights how negative solidarity is not true solidarity (Durkheim 1964, 119-20) distinguishing it from the positive solidarity of pre-industrial societies, which rose from the strength of collective conscience. In that context, characterized by a total adherence to common values and beliefs, citizens internalize the collective conscience, but they do so at the cost of their individuality: “This solidarity can grow only in inverse ratio to personality” (129). As societies develop and become more complex, such a ‘mechanical’ kind of solidarity turns into an ‘organic’ one, due to the diversification of roles and duties. The division of labour turns citizens into ‘organs’ of the society, tied by mutual interdependency, and becomes the principal aggregative bond, replacing common conscience.

As Bowring underlines in his critique of Durkheim’s theory, these two kinds of positive solidarity (mechanical and organic) are, in fact, almost the same: they imply a subjection of the individual to the social body, either by totally introjecting the dominant social values or by accepting a fixed division of labour. This act of subordination might protect the individual, but can also reproduce hierarchies of social privilege and inherited wealth, which debunk meritocracy and the individual spirit of enterprise, reinforcing social inequalities. The rise of negative solidarity seems therefore to result from the individual’s need to challenge a static system.

The compromise solution offered by Durkheim’s humanism to overcome the lack of individuality of pre-industrial societies, without affirming the ‘atomistic’ individualism of the industrial era (leading to negative solidarity), is his concept of ‘moral individualism’. The individuals’ growing ‘freedom from’ the constraints of a rigidly hierarchical society can be transformed into ‘freedom to’: in particular, freedom to promote an ethical stance towards human dignity and to recognise the sacredness of the human person.

While Durkheim still believes in a “‘container’ model of society” (Bowring 2016, 22) – that is, a society as a body controlling the anti-social instincts of its members and maintaining social order –, he does not have a pessimistic view like Hobbes or Rousseau, who stressed a break in continuity between the individual and society. For Durkheim, society is a necessary entity for humans, morally and intellectually superior to the members it contains, and it plays a sort of ‘educational’ role. As Bowring explains drawing on another book by Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* ([1894] 1982):

The individual's 'subordination' to society is accepted, moreover, not out of fear of a Leviathan or through then calculated pursuit of self-interest, but because it rests on "feelings of attachment and respect which habit has implanted within him". (23; quotation from Durkheim [1894] 1982, 144)

Durkheim therefore believes that the role of the state consists in promoting the moral faculties of reason, responsibility and self-discipline in its citizens. Hence the essence of social life lies not in physical constraint but in moral authority, a moral authority that becomes naturally internalised.

Bowring underlines the incongruities of Durkheim's ethical individualism, based on "a tension between a negative and a positive conception of human freedom" (26), an idealised vision of liberal humanism, and the belief in the possibility of a reformed capitalism. The anomie and egoism found in modern societies are, for the French sociologist, a result of an absence or insufficient presence of society in individuals (Durkheim [1897] 1951, 258). However, Bowring argues, if Durkheim had witnessed the neoliberal revolutions of the late twentieth century,

he would surely have acknowledged that greed, ruthlessness, and indifference to the sufferings of others are neither instinctual expressions of human nature nor marginal deviations from the normative core of Western modernity, but are traits and values rooted in the economic organization of capitalist societies and the ideological apparatuses that sacralise and sustain them. (34)

Nevertheless, at the end of his study Bowring states that Durkheim is still relevant to this world "not because of the perfection of his ideas, but because their imperfections express the real contradictions with which we live" (36).

The contradictions of the contemporary age were also underlined by Hannah Arendt half a century later, when she used the term 'negative solidarity' to describe the main force underlying global relations. As Ciocca and Manian explain, it was employed in her essay "Karl Jasper: Citizen of the World?", published in 1957, where she argued that "an improved technology of European origin had brought the world together in a globalized unit kept by fear rather than responsibility" (Ciocca, Manian 2021, 3). Arendt was prophetic in foreseeing a global society kept together by the power of technology, which, on the one hand, provides the means for global communication, and, on the other, those for global destruction, with reference in particular to the nuclear threat. Therefore, she questions the humanists' idealised belief in the potentials of humankind, conversely pointing to the nihilistic consequences of a world paralysed by fear

and thus developing a pervasive state of negative solidarity: "This negative solidarity, based on the fear of global destruction, has its correspondence in a less articulate, but no less potent, apprehension that the solidarity of mankind can be meaningful in a positive sense only if it is coupled with political responsibility" (Arendt [1957] 1968, 83). The above-mentioned condition, in turns, leads to "political apathy, isolationist nationalism, or desperate rebellion against all powers that be rather than enthusiasm or a desire for a revival of humanism" (Arendt [1957] 1968, 83).

Ciocca and Manian claim that the same situation appears today in neoliberal societies, made up of isolated individuals deprived of the old sustaining bonds supplied by organic communities and deluded by the promises of capitalism with regard to success, wealth and well-being. The incapacity of politics to offer all citizens effective solutions causes a surge of populism within governments and induces a nihilistic attitude among common people, a reaction that does not translate into a will to reform the system itself, but rather into a generalised rage towards everyone, connected to a sense of meaninglessness, powerlessness and inadequacy (Ciocca, Manian 2021, 3). This discontent is then exploited by autocrats and supremacists coming to power in liberal democracies and enacting a revisionism of liberal values. Drawing from Pankaj Mishra's influential 2017 book *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*, Ciocca and Manian explicitly refer to figures such as Hindu supremacist Narendra Modi, who rose to power in the 2014 Indian elections, and white supremacist Donald Trump, who was elected President of the United States for the second time in November 2024. To hide their ineffectiveness, governments distract people's attention from the real problems by creating imaginary outer enemies, scapegoats onto whom they project people's sense of failure and frustration: immigrants, refugees, 'others'.

The passage from Durkheim's optimistic belief in liberal humanism and a reformed version of capitalism, through Arendt's disillusioned view of contemporary technological society, up to Mishra's picture of populist governments rising in the wake of collapsed social solidarities seems to point to a type of society like that described in *Where We Land*. Jones' dystopic novella conveys the author's scepticism about the possibility of developing forms of responsible and moral individualism in neoliberal Western countries, and shows to what extent negative solidarity could affect society today. In *Where We Land*, negative solidarity is not merely the lack of intervention of the state in economic or social relations, as formulated by Durkheim to describe the utilitarian view. It is the construction of a narrative of fear and hatred towards the alien and the strange, which constitutes the main glue binding people together and encouraging their violent and hyper-defensive attitude, according to the paradigm illustrated by Ciocca and Manian, with reference to Arendt's and Mishra's

views. The brutal protectionism against climate refugees, decided by the New Zealand government and carried out by its citizens, is not a necessary act of defence of a country under attack. Rather, it follows a social and political agenda, enforced in a neoliberal society by capitalism, that works, in Gilbert's terms, by "regulating our modes of relationality, prohibiting many types of relationality and only enabling others, to ensure that only those which facilitate capital accumulation can occur" (Gilbert 2014, 129).

3 Neoliberalism, The Language of the Commons and Affect Theory

In his seminal monograph *Common Ground: Democracy and Collectivity in an Age of Individualism* (2014), Jeremy Gilbert illustrates the resurgence of a (renewed) Hobbesian view of human nature in neoliberalism, promoting "competitive individualism and market-oriented consumerism as the templates for all social relations" (Gilbert 2014, 42). The capitalist paradigm behind neoliberalism, in fact, aims "to maximise the profitability of any interaction [...] having no interest in interactions beyond their profitability" (43). In Hobbes' anti-social view of humans, the state was represented as a Leviathan, a single giant individual made up of an aggregation of separate, formally identical but unrelated individuals, each pursuing his/her own interest: a sort of "meta-individual" (51). What binds individuals together is their subjection to the power of the sovereign, who represents the only possible cement of society and the force preventing a perennial war of everybody against everybody else, according to the well-known formula "homo homini lupus". In Gilbert's view, neoliberalism also theorises competitive individualism as natural to humans. Individuals are not the product of social relations. Relations just happen to them; they do not define their identity or existence (32). Like Hobbes, neoliberal supporters do not believe in lateral bonds of fellowship or common purpose, but only in a collection of parallel 'vertical' bonds, linking each individual to a central or superior locus, which can be a central institution, a leader or an idea (50). This vision is fostered by capitalism's tendency to "creative destruction", in Schumpeter's terms ([1942] 2003),⁷ or "deterritorialization", in Deleuze and Guattari's words ([1972] 1983), and by its drive to weaken social bonds, disaggregate collectives and disrupt communities (Gilbert 2014, 46). Neoliberalism is, in fact, grounded on the combination of individualised liberalism

⁷ This expression refers to the relentless search of capitalism for new markets, new commodities, and new sources of profit.

and public authoritarianism – i.e. “the weakening of democratic capacities and deterioration of public life” (47), which is fairly visible in the low rates of political participation and civic engagement in today’s liberal democracies. Economic lobbies and minority interests control politics rather than the mass of ordinary people, against a background dominated by the death of ideologies and ethical values. Politicians are technocrats, influenced by their perceptions of voters’ wishes and seeking solutions to localised or specific problems from appropriate ‘experts’ rather than being representatives of “a coherent body of ideas and goals” (7), as the above-mentioned story of ex-Minister Wood demonstrates. In this context, Gilbert says,

elections become increasingly empty procedures, offering publics the opportunity formally to validate programmes whose contents they have virtually no control over, and which differ little between competing parties. (1)

In Gilbert’s view, the fall of the Soviet bloc had been a clear pre-condition for “the full-scale neoliberal assault of the 1990s” (12). If capitalism regulates our modes of relationality by inhibiting relations that do not produce profit, the ex-Soviet system, too, with its authoritarian socialism allowed only certain modes of relationality, prohibiting those forms of relationship “which might enable concentration of power and resources to accumulate anywhere outside the purview of the state apparatus” (129). Gilbert therefore seeks viable alternatives both to authoritarian socialism and the hegemonic culture of competitive individualism in this era of late capitalism, which is the economic basis of our condition of postmodernity (Lyotard 1984), or late modernity (Giddens 1991), or liquid modernity (Bauman 2000), so much so that Fredric Jameson explicitly defined postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson 1991).

The basic postulate of individualism, the independent autonomy of the individual, is debunked by Gilbert. Quoting Canadian painter Emily Carr’s famous statement “You come into the world alone and you go out of the world alone yet it seems to me you are more alone while living than even going and coming” (Carr 2006, 69; quoted in Gilbert 2014, 34), Gilbert replies that this cliché of individualist culture is easily refutable (at least in its first part) because babies are born with their mothers and in any known culture childbirth is always attended by the members of the community (Gilbert 2014, 34). Extending this highly symbolic moment to human experience in general, he underlines how the biological and cultural existence of humans depends on their relations with others:

The necessarily relational nature of human existence clearly extends beyond the basic biological level as well. Culture as such is

nothing but a set of relations of various kinds: relations between individuals and groups, relations mediated by custom, by symbolic and non-symbolic forms of communication, between past, present and future. [...] The human capacity to act alone in the world is incredibly limited. (34)

He then turns to affect theory, drawing in particular from Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon, Hardt and Negri, and analysing the influence of Hume, Spinoza and Marx on them. Affect or "affectivity", in Simondon's terms, is the basic medium of intersubjectivity (147). Like Simondon, Gilbert believes that collective groupings constitute themselves neither by virtue of a community of action (namely, their commitment to a common activity or project), nor by identity based on conscious representations, but rather that "inter-individual participation is possible when affectivo-emotive [*sic*] expressions are the same" (Simondon 2005, 248-9; quoted in Gilbert 2014, 143). What binds the collectivity is the sharing of sentiments and sensations that operate at a subconscious level. The implementation of affect could therefore play an important role in theorising new forms of communality and contrast neoliberal modes of relationality.

Common Ground concludes by offering viable alternatives to the neoliberal narrative, in particular following a "language of 'the commons'" (164), where the notion of commons is distinct from the conservative idea of a homogeneous community, but implies people with a shared interest in defending or producing a set of resources and is therefore the basis of an egalitarian and potentially democratic set of social relationships (165). The commons can ultimately be understood as "that domain of creative potential which is constituted by, and constitutive of, sociality as such" (167). Gilbert proposes a model of society where people engage in "a lot more meetings" (211), creating spaces where it is possible to envisage a world based on communality, and produce forms of "radical and experimental anti-individualism" (216). He also provides examples of experiences of participatory democracy in social and political movements, for instance those narrated in Francesca Polletta's book *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting* (2002).

Gilbert also warns us that thinking of affects as always positive is a mistake, since they can index a diminution of agency rather than an augmentation of it. For example, the language of populists or supremacists is particularly effective in exploiting affects (emotions and sensations) in order to construct enemies that must be feared, or to create alliances with an imaginary homogenous collectivity that is at risk and whose rights must be defended, as Jones' novella demonstrates. Affects must thus be carefully handled as they can also be manipulated.

Interestingly, the words used in the novella by the commander of the military auxiliary, Sergeant Wilson, during his speech to the new

recruits (Donna included), evoke the tone and content of a real document, the “British National Front Poster”, from which Sara Ahmed has extracted some lines as an incipit for her study on the emotionality of texts, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* ([2004] 2014). Sergeant Wilson’s words and Ahmed’s incipit are reported below.

We’re a military auxiliary, but we’re also a team. *We help defend our country*, but we also take in young people and give them a sense of purpose. We train them in weapons and tactics, but we also train them in life. [...] We must never forget that the threat we face is very real: *millions upon millions* of poor and desperate people, displaced from their teeming homelands by the rising seas, who look south hungrily at our green and fertile lands. *They’d overrun us* in months if we let them, and the Shore Patrol is a vital second line of defence that frees our nation’s Navy and Army to do what they each do best. (Jones 2019, 16; emphases added)

Every day of every year, *swarms of illegal immigrants* and bogus asylum seekers invade Britain by any means available to them [...] Why? They are only seeking the easy comforts and free benefits in *Soft Touch Britain*. All funded by *YOU* - The British Taxpayer! (British National Front Poster). (Ahmed 2014, 1; emphases added)

Both narratives construct the opposition between ‘us’ and the illegitimate ‘others’, by working on emotions. The second text actually uses ‘you’, but it is a ‘you’ that includes the Poster’s writers, who appear as kindred to the addressees of the message and part of the same group; so, it is in fact ‘us’. They also create a homogeneous community of New Zealanders/British, composed of kin by race, culture and religion, who feel love for their nation and want to defend it from dangerous intruders. Even the historical racial contrast Non-Māori/Māori seems to be resolved in the novella. The patrol is also formed by members who are easily recognizable as Māori from their names, such as Mere and Corporal Rewiti. The common enemy erases ethnic differences, as during the two World Wars of the twentieth century, when a mixed-race NZ division fought with the Allied army. In that case the enemy was a real foreign army. Māori men enlisted as volunteers “to demonstrate their ‘pride of race’ to the world and their own country, and thereby to have their rights and full citizenship acknowledged at home” (Della Valle 2010, 218). In *Where We Land*, on the other hand, both Māori and Pākehā⁸ are acting against an imaginary enemy, inflated by the government’s propaganda, from fear of losing their own privileges.

⁸ New Zealanders of European origin.

The vulnerability of the country is also underlined in both texts (“they’d overrun us”/“Soft Touch Britain”), as well as the danger of the contact with the ‘others’, defined as an indeterminate multiplicity (“millions upon millions”) or a generic horde (“swarms”). The two narratives point to the pernicious nature of the proximity with the ‘others’, as in an epidemic: contact and contagious have in effect a common root in the Latin verb *tàngere* (‘to touch’). As Ahmed asserts, “to take in is to be taken in” (Ahmed 2014, 2).

In her fascinating monograph, Ahmed explores texts that “circulate in the public domain, which work by aligning subjects with collectives by attributing ‘others’ as the ‘source’ of our feelings” (1). Using Spinoza’s theory that emotions shape what bodies can do, increasing or diminishing the power of their action, she suggests dealing with emotions not by asking what emotions are, but rather what they can do (4). Ahmed’s conclusion is that feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as “effects of circulation” (8). Therefore, she adds, “the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others” (10). Ahmed’s view of emotions offers an interpretive key to the final scene of Jones’ novella, which describes a major turning point in the story: the narrative of hate informing the main thread of the plot is suddenly undermined by Donna’s direct contact with the ‘other’, which completely changes her perspective.

4 The (Positive) Affective Turn in *Where We Land*

The clash between the (abstract) image of the dangerous immigrant depicted by the supremacist government’s propaganda and the emotion ‘shaped’ by the contact with the (concrete) ‘other’ occurs when Donna finds herself alone in front of Nasimul in the flesh.

Throughout the book, Nasimul’s predicament is narrated in separate chapters and from his own point of view: the trip from Bangladesh to the Tasman Sea in terrible conditions, the loss of his son and wife, the attack on the boat carrying him and other immigrants by the NZ navy, his fortunate and fortuitous survival. These chapters alternate with those dealing with Donna: the preparation for her first night shift with the patrol, her unsatisfying everyday life, the political and military indoctrination she receives, and the general atmosphere in the country. The two threads show an opposite perspective on the issue at stake, but are destined to come to an intersection.

Interestingly, Jones builds the world of his novella through small details and dialogue, as Vyas (2019) noted. For example, in Chapter 1, the sense of the refugees’ fatal destiny is conveyed by a series of statements and allusions expressed in a plain language, as in a chronicle. We learn that Nasimul’s son died of cholera “in the camps”

(Jones 2019, 9). The third-person narrator does not explain what “the camps” are, but the word evokes a negative connotation from common sense. Also, Nasimul’s wife had been kept alive through the Tropics by her will to see the land again, although the closest place would be the Australian continent, “where it was said whole groups of people could disappear into the interior without ever being noticed or pursued, if only they could find their way ashore through the frigates and the proximity mines and the thickets of razor wire” (8). Weakened by dysentery and cold weather she eventually dies, but the reader might suppose she would not have survived in Australia anyway. Finally, the river ferry carrying the refugees was inevitably overloaded since “no self-respecting Bangladeshi river ferry sailed without at least twice the number of passengers it was rated for” (9). The allusion to the country’s customs rather than the profit made by human smugglers is pervaded by bitter irony, which continues when the narrator says that the situation was soon regularized, not by government functionaries but by death. When the ferry is torpedoed by the NZ navy, there are in fact enough lifeboat places for everyone.

The other part of the story is narrated through Donna, a young woman with a low-paying job in a country apparently going through economic depression. Her hours at the stockroom of a clothes shop risk being cut because “south of the Harbour Bridge no one could afford to buy clothes any more” (25). We are also told that coffee was a “rare and precious fluid” (65), and that people used ration cards in the shops (69). Donna has joined the patrol only to earn a few extra bucks, but she is thrilled to have been given a cap, a jacket, a badge (17) and, most of all, a walkie-talkie, since cell phones have been forbidden by the government for health reasons: “Donna wished she still had her phone. She thought all that cancer stuff was bullshit” (14). Her reaction denotes a superficial and conformist attitude. The third-person narrator indirectly divulges Donna’s frustration, through her extremely coarse language and continuous complaining about everybody and everything: “Donna wondered what the flying fuck she was doing here with this bloody dog and this bunch of grinning morons” (24). Among them is Big Bob Sergeant Wilson, who had groped Donna when he thought no one was looking (17). Donna dreams of a better job, maybe in the army, where they take anyone “who could stay off the pills and shoot straight” (25). The world depicted by Jones is therefore one of economic slump, sexism, drug addiction and xenophobia.

In the final part of the novella, Donna and her four patrol mates manage to capture and bring to the auxiliary police’s headquarters a ‘shepherd’ (one of those citizens who rebel against the government’s policies; in this case, a teacher from West Auckland), and a brown-skinned woman infiltrator, hidden by the shepherd in an abandoned house on the coast. The teacher is interrogated and beaten; the

woman, who has a gunshot wound, is kept in a separate room. During the operation, Donna's attitude oscillates between obedience and boredom, especially when she is not directly in action. She follows the group's rules, carries out her assignment uncritically, executes orders and acts mechanically, keeping a detached and cold attitude. She passively identifies with the group's purpose and reasons. There seem to be no active relationships between the patrol members. As in neoliberal societies at large, relations just happen, since individuals are not the product of real social relations. If they get together, it is for an apparently profitable common goal.

However, Donna has to go back to the abandoned house to fetch Rufus, the dog that has sniffed out the two 'outlaws' and has been left behind, inside the house, because the two prisoners needed all the attention of the patrol members. Donna worries about Rufus, its well-being and its possible suffering from a sense of abandonment. Meanwhile, after swimming across a long stretch of sea, Nasimul lands ashore and enters the house, hungry and exhausted. He finds Rufus, wagging its tail, happy to see a human being. Nasimul shares the water and chocolate that he finds in the place with the dog: a gesture of solidarity towards another living being. Then he falls asleep.

Unfortunately, while Nasimul is sleeping Rufus eats the chocolate leftovers and gets sick. When Donna arrives in the house, her reaction in front of the sick dog and the sleepy infiltrator is to feel pity for the non-human and not for the human. After discovering that Nasimul has given Rufus food that is harmful to dogs, she comes close to killing the man. Then something happens. Emotion prevails over cold detachment and diminishes Donna's sense of hyper-defence. She seems to enlarge the surface and boundaries of her 'self' to include Nasimul: a real contact occurs, which goes beyond political propaganda and indoctrination. Donna feels Nasimul has the same right to live as she has. Therefore, she neither kills him nor reveals his presence to anybody else. A state of confusion is evident in her contradictory behaviour. She knocks the man unconscious but makes sure he is still breathing; then she runs away, leaving some water, chewing gums and a few coins. She has infringed the law to give him a chance. When Nasimul comes to his senses, he will wander around the countryside until he finds a grocery shop run by a brown-skinned man, who speaks Bengali and helps him. He is safe, at least for the moment.

The process of enlarging the surface of one's self is activated by emotions, as Ahmed (2004, 117) explains. Emotions play a crucial role in the 'surfacing' of individual and collective bodies. They "create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds" (117). This is the reason why, she argues, emotions are not a private matter and do not belong to the individual only. They are the result of the contact with others, since "all actions are reactions,

in the sense that what we do is shaped by the contact we have with others" (Ahmed 2014, 4). Donna's reaction is the result of a 'circulation of affects', that stirs emotions, changes her behaviour and saves Nasimul's life. Before pulling the trigger of the gun, she repeats to herself the story fabricated by the government about the refugees, but this does not correspond to the human she sees in front of her:

She tried to think of him as just another infiltrator, a nameless brown figure escaping from the teeming, broiling North, floating south to overwhelm New Zealand and its way of life. Let in one, they said, and you may as well let them all in. Now she had her first chance to do her duty. Was she going to fail her country?

Yes. Yes, she was going to fail her country. All she could see before her was a man cowering in fear of death. He was a stationary target, and she was good at shooting stationary targets but she could not bring herself to shoot this one. (Jones 2019, 58)

Ahmed uses psychoanalysis but also Marxist theory in her discourse. Language constructs emotions, and emotions work as a form of capital. Affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as a result of its circulation (Ahmed 2004, 120). In the title of her essay, "Affective Economies" (2004), Ahmed is using the term 'economies' to suggest that emotions circulate and are distributed across a social as well as psychic field (120). Given this, affective economies need to be seen as social and material, as well as psychic: "In other words, the accumulation of affective value shapes the surfaces of bodies and worlds" (121), for example the body of a controversial concept like 'nation' or, in our case, the image of an immigrant.

Jones' novella shows how the populism, supremacism and protectionism of the imaginary New Zealand government aim at defending the status quo: the privileges of a Western country, neoliberal democracy and the capitalist system. New Zealand politicians do so by propaganda - specifically, by using a language which inflames emotions reinforcing the boundaries (or rather walls) of the socially-constructed body called 'nation' (as claimed by Benedict Anderson), and increasing the fear of losing what seems to belong only to the nation's members. A different emotional discourse could ignite an alternative approach to refugees and immigrants, prompt the search for solutions and remedies, and activate a different concept of collectivity animated by the creative "language of the commons", in Gilbert's terms, rather than competitive individualism.

Jones' novella describes the condition of immigrants or refugees as a common feature of a global and fluid world, where masses of people, desperately fleeing from wars, famines or environmental disasters, try to enter the rich Western countries. It is a global space of "flows", in Appadurai's terms (1996), characterised by movement and

mobility, affecting people in different and contradictory ways, and creating unequal relations of power. In recent years, displacement, mobility, and placemaking have asserted themselves in human experience, consciousness, and imagination with newly compelling force. Jones' book seems to advocate the spreading of a 'postmigrant' attitude in the present global world. 'Postmigration' refers to a new set of emergent spaces of plurality and is a concept in which the prefix *post-* is not just temporal, but also epistemological (Bromley 2017, 36). *Where We Land* also underlines the need to develop a "language of the commons" and an affective economy if we want to enter a new cultural, political and economic paradigm, which can replace neoliberalism and its effects: competitive individualism, negative solidarity, a binary vision of reality.

Where We Land is a short, powerful book that poses many questions connected to our contemporaneity and goes to the core of crucial issues of today's global reality. While inducing a reflection on the pernicious relationality fostered by capitalism and encouraged in neoliberal societies, Jones warns the readers about its possible extreme consequences. The degeneration of the controversial concept of negative solidarity from the original utilitarian view into an irrational narrative of fear and hatred towards the 'other' shows its questionable nature and intrinsic dangerousness. The novella's open ending seems to point to a different direction. It highlights the importance of the circulation of affects in human relations, in private and public life, to undermine the false certainties and easy solutions provided by populists. Most of all, it promotes the search for alternative viable ways of co-existence for human beings in complex societies increasingly marked by racial, ethnic, socio-economic differences – that is, a major change of paradigm.

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