8 Jeopardised futures

Scanning the horizon in a changing climate

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In this chapter, Annist et al. present several case studies of the ways in which people articulate their concerns for the future, particularly in response to the emerging discourse of climate change. The authors provide an overview of the anthropology of the future and the ways in which it merges with climate topics, to consider how contemporary horizons are crowded with different concerns, placed at different distances, which come into focus according to the immediacy of the need to respond. As awareness of the climate crisis increases, this becomes spotlighted, galvanising emotions and actions. Such a spotlight can, however, come at the expense of seeing it in the context of concurrent environmental and more mundane crises. It is only, they argue, through simultaneous attention to the broader landscape of multiple concerns showing the interlinkages of crises people face that enables properly understanding and articulating the future.

Introduction

Of all the possible jeopardies awaiting us on our collective horizon, climate change has become the most pressing and all-encompassing. It is a challenge that requires joint action – something humanity has rarely been able to muster. As Eriksen (2020) convinces us, there is a clear desire amongst scientists to make a difference outside academic circles and to contribute to problem-led solutions and policy-making. This was also our hope when gathering data around the theme of jeopardised futures. The decision to find our way forward without losing sight of any of the contributions to our panel meant collective writing, as well as endlessly shifting our gaze and approach. We have nevertheless sought a shared meaning and solutions to concerns criss-crossing the issues that have surfaced in our writing, with the hope that this joint effort might prove to have relevance beyond the confines of academia.

Tuned to the urgency and the pressing timeline and with each of us invested in practical solutions, our chapter reveals human responses to climate threats with a focus moving between fears and concerns and the readiness for jeopardised futures. We will be considering a variety of contexts in which present and future, relevance and irrelevance, actual presence and feared prospects regarding change are weighed up and where the anticipations arising from inevitability of or control over futures are experienced.

Studying future, studying climate

Foretelling, prophesying, future mapping, scenario-writing and sophisticated science of predictions all have a solid history that indicates how, in its more abstract dealings with the world, our species ponders the coming days, weeks, months, years, or in some cases even

centuries and millennia. Humans also form visions around their communities' and their cultures' place in the future and actively plan, model and study in preparation for it. Perhaps this ability might be one of the defining features of humanity. Yet, anthropological interest in the future has been slow to emerge (see also Munn, 1992; Wallman, 1992; Appadurai, 2013; Pels, 2015). Direct interest in how the future is related to the anthropological subject of culture is demonstrated in the edited collection Cultures of the Future, notably with a foreword by Alvin Toffler. This treatment of the themes, from alternative futures (Toffler, 1978, x–xi) to 'cultural futuristics' (Maruyama, 1978, xviii), is followed by Robert Textor's more systematic contributions. He formulates the conceptual field of anticipatory anthropology (Textor, 1985, 2005) and a method to go with it, called Ethnographic Futures Research (Textor, 1980). Nevertheless, future has remained mostly in the margins of the discipline.

Whilst anthropologists were mostly looking at the present or past, concentrating on culture as 'pastness' (Appadurai, 2013, 180; see also Bryant and Knight, 2019, 4), humans continued carving out a variety of relations with their future. This has taken a perhaps more intense and global form since the 1990s. Until the end of the Cold War, the future was apparently defined by the choice between two sides – good and evil, communism and capitalism. With the end of communism, as Fukuyama (1989) famously suggested, humanity's history had come to its end. In anthropology, these changes were seen more like the opening of a whole palette of options. Indeed, Ulf Hannerz (2016, 12) suggested that we had entered 'an age of futures'.

Accelerating change in the world as well as in anthropology has meant that since the 2000s, attention to the topic has been accelerating too (see Bryant and Knight, 2019). Along with recognition of the complexity of potential outcomes has come recognition that a uniform, shared future could be challenged by a multitude of futures (see also Valentine and Hassoun, 2019). Alongside studies of futures as they evolve from institutions, policy, organisations (e.g. contributions to Granjou, Walker and Salazar, 2017), a more general theoretical interest emerged in how people not only anticipate but make futures and in the future as a cultural fact (Appadurai, 2013, 285).

In addition to anticipation (see also Nuttall, 2010; Stephan and Flaherty, 2019), such work also addresses hope (see Kleist and Jansen 2016; Bloch, 1986; Appadurai, 2013). Studying 'future' – or 'futures'1 anthropologically also covers hopelessness, disappointment (see Zigon, 2018) and fatalism. The emic approach to futures demonstrates how people's relationships with these vary from enthusiasm to despair, from abstract to concrete, from extended to immediate, or even retrospective, as in the phrase 'the future has already happened'. Just like time can be 'many' (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2017), futures can reach horizons closer to or farther from the present

for different viewers, different occasions, different aims. Our relationship to the future can also be at once purposefully oriented, acknowledged and its embedded futural quality recognised, as shown in the research on anticipation and hope, or on fear and dread, but it can also be one of oblivion, with no relationship to planning or foreseeing, no bearing towards anywhere or anywhen. It is the juxtaposition of directedness and directionlessness, purposeful on the one hand and aimless, routine, unacknowledged movement towards the future on the other, which is curious and informative. Having received such little attention, we argue that this juxtaposition needs to be dissected to understand how we might reach beyond the relations and concerns of everyday futures that are so often relied upon by politicians and policy-makers. This might pave the way to understanding whether knowing the multitude of everyday imagined futures divides our attention and triggers not knowing (see also Latour, 2017, 9) or enables a better focus on the dangers and ways of overcoming them.

The focus in the anthropology of future(s) has started to shift, but not so much towards research into the ambiguity of our relations with the future. Instead, it has moved towards a recognition of how future's qualities are seeded in the past. Rather than seeing the future as a palette of endless opportunities and fantastical possibilities, a more sober appreciation starts to emerge: that the recent human past and present have already solidified an underlying common future within which the various destinies would inevitably have to unfold. Wallman (1992, 9) notes that the view of the future since the 1990s has not been a particularly optimistic one even if it has widened in scope (see also Eriksen, 2016).

Along with various crises of the 21st century, the acceptance of the extractive and colonising practices, as well as the teleological assumptions of the capitalist idea of progress and growth have started to erode particularly clearly. This has brought a sense of loss of control, even if not (yet) much humility to the Global North. It has affected perceptions of the dominant relationships with the future. This sense of losing control has become aggravated by the potential irreversibility of dangerous change. In recent years, the tone has darkened even further, focusing ever more on environmental, particularly climate, events. Anthropologists document the effects of various ecological and climate calamities, but also risk, turning up the sense of urgency in the face of a very worrying future (Crate, 2011). As humans face regular and more terrifying disasters, the future is characterised by uncertainty (Button, 2010), which has become a powerful framework embedded in political interactions and policy-making (Hulme, 2013). Such volumes as Marshall and Connor (2016) and Granjou, Walker and Salazar (2017) demonstrate how anticipating futures means looking into the future of environmental

change in particular. Indeed, as Granjou, Walker and Salazar (2017, 2) note, futures studies and environmental anticipation studies have co-emerged.

The most recent discussions on climate change in anthropological studies of future recognise and aim to address this urgency (O'Reilly et al., 2020). At the same time, they are calling for recognition that climate change is part of a more complex reality with continued 'practices of dispossession and genocide, coupled with literal transformation of the environment over the last 500 years' (Davis and Todd, 2017, 761). Eriksen and Schober's (2016, 415) reminder that humans have become a geological agent 'responsible for massive detrimental changes to our climate and environment' – captured in the term Anthropocene (see also discussion of the term by Danowski and Viveiros de Castro (2016), 4–6 and Latour, 2017, 112–122) and Capitalocene (Malm and Hornborg, 2014)2 – suggests that the timeline of human impact on the planet's future might long surpass the species itself (see also Mathews, 2020). Anthropologists are tuning their ears to the recognition that 'whatever we do now, the threat will remain with us for centuries, for millennia' (Latour, 2017, 39). It is, thus, a collective reality, stretching towards the future that has become much more shared, globally as well as across generations. Yet, the notion of a 'collective reality' can get stuck behind various contextually-embedded realities, amounting to a feeling of 'stuckness' – 'a specific kind of waiting induced by situations that limit future-oriented actions' (Straughan, Bissel and Gorman-Murray, 2020, 636). This demands anthropological attention and the treatment of this feeling of 'stuckness' to achieve urgent change (see also Baer, 2022).

A future crowded with concerns

The spatial and temporal scale of the future can, we argue, be sufficiently tamed for analysis and thus for understanding what obscures the notion of a shared or collective reality. In this section, we outline a number of case studies to show what anthropological studies of anticipated futures can reveal about our understanding of, and relationship with, the future.

We start with an empirical synopsis by Plaan, to encapsulate the complexity and vacillations of the importance of different foreseen changes in people's lives, followed by shorter overviews by Horstmann, Walker-Crawford, Annist and Plüschke-Altof that touch on similar issues: the multiplicity, specificity and visibility of how unfolding changes affect our understanding and experience of the future through the formation of hierarchies and the framing of impacts.

A sea of long- and short-term changes

Plaan's fieldwork in Newfoundland, Canada took him not only into a field filled with a diverse array of changes, but also to the sea – by nature, a constantly shifting, changing, moving and flowing substance. The fieldwork-based vignette below offers a rich description of the teleoaffect (Bryant and Knight, 2019) and corporeal dimensions of moving towards somewhen, in a complex, similarly fluctuating context of social and economic policies and environmental changes.

> We had left the harbour at 3am and steamed 4 hours and 20 miles towards the east to get to the prized snow-crab fishing grounds. According to our skipper, Jack, going that far as an inshore fisher means facing numerous risks. Rapidly changing weather and unexpected catch rates mean that traps have to be fairly full to make the trip worthwhile with a small inshore boat. His new fishing grounds, that have been extremely good in previous years, have been failing so he is worried he cannot catch his quota for this year. The fishing season started with extreme ice-conditions, resulting from climate change as some climatologists suggest. Along with stronger than usual winds, such weather cuts down on the days fishermen are able to go out. With the pots half-empty, every skipper in Bay de Verde is anxious about the season – and willing to take such risks as Jack is today.
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> After the long steam, real work begins. Checking the pots is physically laborious, monotonous work: pull up a crab-pot3 with a winch, empty it, sort the crab, store it, and move to the next pot. There are 30 pots in one fleet, tied to a kilometre-long line, all of which have to be pulled into the boat. Once all pots have been checked, rebait them and throw back in. Then, climb under the deck to arrange the crab and lay ice on them. By the time you finish you have arrived at a new fleet and everything starts all over again.
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> While the catch rate has been poor, the price is breaking records. This record high price is entwined in relations between power, capital and nature. Over the last 20 years, Alaskan king crab fisheries have collapsed in most fishing areas in the Pacific Ocean, a fact explained by marine biologists and climatologist by climate change – ocean acidification and the changing ocean chemistry. As king crab almost vanished, the two largest markets – Japanese and American crab-consuming markets – turned to the next best thing: snow crab. Prices have beaten records every year since 2010 and with the

US tariffs weakening the Canadian dollar, fishermen have been able to get a much higher price for their catch. These combined effects have substantially influenced the livelihoods of Bay de Verde fishermen. However, changes affect everyone differently and relations with a shifting, uncertain future depend on local hierarchies and people's positions, many of which are represented by the people on our boat.

Jack, skipper and the enterprise owner, 5th generation fisherman, testifies that the past 25 years hardly resembled the decades and centuries where valuable skills of fishing and knowledge of the ocean to survive were passed down from one generation to the next. Today, such knowledge has little use. Apart from shipping conditions, the fisheries have altered. Codfish, now slowly returning, behave very differently from before. Changes in crab fishing make Jack doubt his skills and knowledge of the ocean environment: 'It's like each year, the ocean is different.'

James, Jack's son, got into crab fisheries in 2010 after buying an enterprise for 100,000 dollars. Back then the crab price was four times less than it is today and he has had to work on off-shore boats to pay for the loan. Even today, when the price is high and income good, he keeps on working on a large scale clam-boat to pay off the loan. When I ask if he would quit off-shore fishing once the loan has been paid, he says without hesitation: 'I have to keep on working.' You never know what the next year will bring, if there will be any crab fisheries or not, what the price will be or whether fisheries managers decide on new regulations. Despite his good position, he is in a precarious situation, not knowing what to anticipate from the future.

Mason, Jack's cousin and his share-member, is helping Jack throughout the season. Compared to a skipper, a share-member has few responsibilities and the income allows a fairly comfortable life, offering 30 per cent of the profit. But Mason's body has experienced too much of the sea – he is growing weary and tired, making it hard to handle all the physical work. This season has been especially tough. One morning, as we are waiting for Jack to sell the catch, Mason leans towards me to say this is probably his last season fishing. His body cannot handle it anymore. The hectic season, shaped by the unexpected weather, has taken the last of his will.

Then there is me, doing ethnographic fieldwork, but also representing a young man in rural Newfoundland, looking for work on the boat. A job as a deckhand is certainly not

> promising a lucrative future – while the pay may look good, you are actually trapped on the lowest level in the fisheries. Almost everyone in the same position who I spoke to were dreaming of becoming skipper-owners but that was all it was – a dream unlikely to ever come true. To achieve that, two years in trade school, then another three years working on a boat as an apprentice and deckhand are needed. Only then you can acquire your own quota and gear.
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> As the crab price started to rise, so did the price for a quota. After years in school and work on boat you would need at least 500,000 dollars to buy a quota and gear to fish it. This is money no young fisherman has. Hence, there are two options: turn to a bank or to a local fish processor for a loan. Loans, usually taking decades to return, create a new, extended time horizon through which to relate to the job, often not tempting for the young men. About 30 per cent of your profit goes to pay the loan, the rest takes care of the gear and the crew. In the end, such calculations simply do not add up and make it not worthwhile to enter the fisheries today.
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> Most importantly, it has become harder and harder to find crab, as our day on the sea proves. The environment is changing faster than ever and even the most experienced fishermen complain that they do not understand the ocean anymore, making it risky for youth to invest their future in fisheries. Even as Newfoundland fishermen are earning more than ever, most youngsters do not see their future in rural Newfoundland and decide to leave.

Jack's hour-to-hour decisions on what to do next are imbued with a forward look and the crews on the sea recognise how misfortunes, a change too far or the wrong kind of change (be that in the form of institutional restrictions, shifts in fish or crab populations, age and bodily decay or something else) may mean the end of the way of life, both for them as individuals as well as for fishing more generally. The industry has seen rapid changes over the years. Jeopardised futures are very concretely present in fishermen's lives, specifically, when tied in with changes in the environment, the industry, one's own bodily and socioeconomic situation, as well as global politics. Furthermore, the futures that fishermen must relate to are multiple and simultaneous and the hierarchies of those futures and/or timelines are ambiguous. Climate change, even if it is the major driver of the changes the crewmen have and will experience, becomes just one change amongst many, immediately present, but stretching towards multiple futures which are at different distances from the present, some more, some less clearly rooted

in today. The changes to the life of today and tomorrow demand awareness of the future, leading to restrained dreams but also appreciation that these are unrealistic. Transformations bring with them various risks, making the vision of the future ever murkier. Changes – past, present, future – form a canvas, or, perhaps as Briggs (1992, 101) suggests, a 'bundle of potentials, some born in the "past", others in the "future", and still others right now'.

The role that climate change plays in causing these changes in Newfoundland seems irrelevant to the locals who shrug their shoulders at questions about their experiences with such changes. Change is scattered throughout different aspects of their lives and they are dependent on their fluctuating positions and circumstances. Although future change may well be driven by the changing climate, it is this diffuse, crowded horizon filled with such a multitude of changes that makes it unlikely for climate change to stand out as a major factor.

A terrain of immediate and extended dangers

The situation for the Karen minority of Eastern Myanmar, a group Horstmann has worked with for ten years, shows that addressing climate change ethnographically highlights how political and power factors act in mutual relation with other immediate and extended processes. Inhabiting a region with some of the most important ecosystems that are considered one of the most vulnerable in the world to climate change, the Karen are very clearly exposed to global warming, flooding and drought. Yet, for Karen villagers, vulnerability to future and already emerging extremes of climate change match several other ongoing or foreseeable detrimental fluctuations. Coming from a past dominated by suffering (see also Horstmann, 2016), the Karen are today faced with continuing military inroads: rural state-making in the form of damming the Salween River, military road building and the creation of military bases. This growing militarisation of the countryside is a further invitation to international investments for building highways, hydroelectric power projects, housing complexes and casinos, which leads to dispossession and land grabbing, violently enacted by conglomerates of Burmese military and business investors. This infrastructuration of the Karen environment speaks of a jeopardised future at the interface between climate change and global political upheavals, causing marginalisation and discrimination with no sign of betterment on the horizon.

The prudent start of democratic participation brutally stopped with the military coup in early 2021. As a result, many Karen villagers have become internally displaced and face food insecurity and dispossessions, and with this, life is unfolding into a future full of concern. The damming of rivers is of particular concern as the Karen's subsistence production relies on a traditional irrigation system (called 'ku' in Karen) for planting rice, medical herbs and

vegetables. For their rice fields, which require methodical maintenance and protection through irrigation, water is harvested from the Salween River. This process is altered through damming. Such harmful developments in the region have been called ‘ceasefire capitalism’ (Wood, 2011), a process of military exploitation of the territorial gains and ceasefire agreements that have enabled military access to land and natural resources. The military relies on the absence of an armed rebellion movement to build up military infrastructure, new military bases and roads to bring in weaponry as well as to secure access to development projects – such as the envisaged dams on the Salween River. As the rivers are dammed, the locals become increasingly worried. According to a local leader, the Salween River,

> … is our means of living for villagers here. If the dams are built, it is the same as killing us. We don’t have any other means of livelihood. We depend on these mountains and rivers. I will oppose these dam projects as long as I live.

(Karen News, 2015)

Together with local villagers, Karen River Watch most recently held a protest in March 2021 near Hat Gyi Dam, one of the proposed dam sites in Hlaingbwe Township, Karen State.

Like the case of the Newfoundland fishermen, it is the immediacy of the consequences of environmental change combined with a myriad of other changes that form the present and future for the Karen people. On this canvas of multidimensional changes the expected, anticipated, regular developments as well as sporadic, unpredictable shocks coexist with a great multitude of external forces that undermine and will continue to undermine people’s lives, but also hold them hostage so that they can deal only with the most immediate threats.

Picking the fights

The city of Huaraz in the Peruvian Andes, where Walker-Crawford carried out his fieldwork (2017–2018, see Walker-Crawford, 2023), faces a high risk of flooding due to melting glaciers. As a result of climate change and glacial retreat, Palcacocha Glacier Lake has grown immensely in volume. An international team of scientists produced flood models that point to an acute hazard to the city of Huaraz and surrounding areas (Huggel et al., 2020).

Yet scientists and local government authorities are perplexed that many locals seem unconcerned about this risk of flooding. Farmers in particular find it difficult to relate to flood models – disaster may strike, but nobody knows when. Farmers in the Cordillera Blanca mountain range above the city of Huaraz face significant uncertainty about environmental changes, but they perceive these in relation to the socioeconomic inequality and historical

marginalisation of Indigenous Peruvian Quechua speakers, which can be traced back to colonial times. Quechua-speaking villagers are particularly worried about a perceived decline in the amount of water available for irrigation and household use as they depend on glaciated mountains for water. Glacial retreat leads to flood risk in the short term and water scarcity in the longer term. Many locals see the latter as an immediate threat to their livelihoods. Water is crucial for agricultural livelihoods; many depend on rain and glacial meltwater for irrigation. Rainfall has become increasingly unpredictable as glaciers are retreating. Faced with decreasing reliability of water resources, many worry that agriculture will become more difficult, threatening the rural way of life, although this may be expressed to happen over a rather vaguely defined period of time. As Yarush, a middle-aged villager, stated: 'If the glaciers disappear, we'll have to die.'

While villagers in the Cordillera Blanca are convinced that their environment is changing, few utilise scientific terminology to express their concerns. Whilst the changes fit unquestionably in the context of climate change, this concept has no equivalent in the Quechua language. Although most villagers speak Spanish as a second language and are able to understand discussions about climate change, these are often embedded in scientific and statistical conceptions that bear little relation to farmers' daily lives. Their understanding of environmental change comes from seeing the mountains gradually lose their white cover and their experience of shifting weather patterns. The farmers face practical concerns about how to live in an increasingly unpredictable environment: when should they plant crops if rainfall no longer begins in September, but can happen anytime between August and December? Where can households find drinking water when mountain springs dry up? These questions address the uncertain, worrisome future in a concrete way, through and because of the consequences already present or related to immediate concerns – that of irrigation and of access to water.

In contrast, government authorities believe that addressing the risk of glacial lake outburst floods, which local and foreign scientists have documented extensively in the region, should be the priority. Both issues – water scarcity and potential flood – are a result of glacial retreat. Yet, instead of addressing both, creating a comprehensive understanding of the changes, leading officials argue that glacial flood hazard is the more specifically predictable urgent issue and water scarcity needs only to be addressed in the long term. Some argue that the latter issue was easier to mitigate in technical terms According to a leading local authority in Huaraz, 'The [water problem] is less urgent. The amount of water can be regulated. You have to drink less water, bathe less, look for water elsewhere, look for a solution.'

This situation is problematic on multiple levels: villagers feel misunderstood and neglected, while authorities may implement adaptation measures that fail to meet the needs of the Quechua-speaking villagers, thus reproducing deep-seated social inequalities. Given the lack of understanding between government officials and rural communities in a context of widespread corruption allegations, authorities' concentration on flood defences is not trusted. Accordingly, the majority of farmers interviewed expressed doubt about warnings from the authorities on the glacial flood hazard. Rather, they suspected that this was a ploy for corrupt authorities to siphon money into their pockets through unnecessary public infrastructure projects. Even if flooding were a real possibility, water scarcity was much worse. As one elderly lady from the village of Cantu remarked: 'In a drought you die slower. It's much sadder.'

Almost tragicomical in its lack of mutual understanding of the diverse consequences of glacial retreat, this example draws our attention to the perceptions of, but also distinct responses to, different future jeopardies – a drought versus a flood. Even if such potentialities affect the same people, even if they are caused by the same phenomenon of climate change, different responses have different consequences. Furthermore, this reveals the differing time horizons of the jeopardies being experienced and the clashes between views on urgency and long-term manageability, with varying expectations of trust in the sources of predicting and defining these. Rather than the scattered nature of future related concerns, either relentlessly mundane like for the fishermen, or starkly oppressive like for the Karen, it is the two different scenarios of jeopardy that demand attention and divide people here, drawing their focus away from the underlying shared nature of the issues, as their spotlights focus on different dangers and risks.

Climate focus juxtaposed with environmental concerns

Our fourth case focuses on Estonia, one of the countries with the lowest level of concern in Europe regarding climate change: only 30 per cent of the population consider climate change to be one of the biggest challenges for the country (EIB, 2019, see also Plüschke-Altof, Vacht and Sooväli-Sepping, 2020). The media rarely discusses climate topics and has tended to separate them into specialised sections rather than presenting them as part of a more general problem. This does not mean that Estonians are immune to environmental issues. On the contrary, there is a long history of environmentalism considering a range of specific themes (see also Annist, 2020). One of the most active environmental groups, called Estonian Forest Aid (EFA), has been focusing on excessive logging and clearcutting – an unwelcome and worrying change that is lamented for robbing people of their roots and heritage, beloved berry

and mushroom picking sites and places of spiritual recuperation, as well as destroying wildlife habitats. It is seen as a painful loss for a nation that views itself as 'forest people' (see also Remmel and Jonuks, 2020; Annist, 2020). Curiously, it is forests, not climate that has been the focus of even the local chapter of Extinction Rebellion (XR), elsewhere a clearly climate-oriented direct-action group. In Estonia, XR has engaged in regular 'stand-ins' in front of the State Forest Management Centre in order to protest against clear-cutting and unsustainable forest management practices. On their placards and other forms of communication, climate has rarely ever been the focus. The discontent and concern for the future has related in particular to the loss of biodiversity and quality of life and has been seen to be caused by the offences of the state slanted towards or even corruptively involved in the business interests of the forestry sector.

The connection between logging and climate change has primarily emerged in discussions about how the EU green goals see a shift to forest products (i.e., renewable energy and carbon sinks) as a climate change solution, predicting that it will both reduce carbon emissions by reducing the need for plastics or concrete, and store carbon in timber products (see, for example, Aosaar, 2018; Anger-Kraavi et al., 2020). These arguments are used by the forestry industry to justify continued or even increased logging and clearcutting. EFA as well as other environmentalists point out that this approach neglects the importance of undisturbed forest soil as a powerful prime carbon sink. Furthermore, climate aims have taken priority in many policy documents over biodiversity and socio-cultural aims. Thus, the forests' function as the provider of biodiversity, including berries, mushrooms, as well as being the site for relaxation and a source of national pride, ends up being juxtaposed with the aims of climate transition and even climate protests. As an activist commented in a closed environmentalist group, setting the forest protests against climate protests:

> I'm afraid that […] if [climate] protests intensify and are taken into consideration [by policy makers], the result would be a much more horrible ecological catastrophe under the name of 'renewable energy'. Fossil fuels will then be replaced by biofuels exactly because of this huge pressure on politicians […]. We cannot endlessly sow energy intensive plants on the fields, or turn forests into tree farms. But this is exactly what is happening. [H]as anyone calculated which is destroying biodiversity faster – global warming or its jarring through turning forests into energy farms?
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> (Tõnu, FB post from 29 September 2020)

Also, a young Fridays for Future (FfF) activist reported that during their Friday's demonstrations, passers-by approached them to tell them to stop focusing on such an unimportant topic as climate and to address instead something important, such as forest protection (Rennit, 2020). Problems are pitted against one another; loss of the future through exhausted biodiversity is set against climate protection. Whilst the former is seen as emerging from the natural concern of people worried about the threat to life on earth, the latter is seen to emerge from the timeless horizons of green capitalism – where proposed solutions simply reproduce the problem or ignore another issue that is just as important.

A horizon lit by concern

Our cases in the previous subsection suggest that unfolding changes and anticipations form a busy, even harried landscape towards people's futures. Short and longer-term demands need to be addressed as they come along and the priorities and hierarchies of concern are defined by their immediacy as well as their familiarity. In such a terrain, the reality of a climate-jeopardised future may well be acknowledged but cannot be attended to before these other concerns. The climate dimension of the issues may not be relevant outside some of its more present, plausible and recognisable dimensions – those crowding the present rather than the future. As Appadurai has pointed out, 'To most ordinary people—and certainly to those who lead lives in conditions of poverty, exclusion, displacement, violence and repression—the future often presents itself as a luxury, a nightmare, a doubt, or a shrinking possibility' (Appadurai, 2013, 299).

What is particularly intriguing is that for all the cases we have discussed, climate change appears to have clear links to many of the concerns that people face both right now and with increasing force in the future. People are also far from indifferent to environmental change, nor do they reject climate change or its anthropogenic causes. Nevertheless, climate change does not seem to have a notable role in the way future concerns are being framed. The lens is fixated elsewhere, it captures a different edge or is diffused between different points. The burdensome financial instruments, rights to oppressive military structures, disappearing forests and vanishing access to irrigation create a certain parity of anticipated, but also concrete and in some way practically present futures. Attention to a seemingly more abstract and distant, even if potentially more destructive and longer-lasting, change is diverted or pushed aside, or dissolves into the background as the landscape of future concerns is already so inundated.

In the following section, we concentrate on cases where climate futures are brought into view, or the frame is changed to capture the looming climate-triggered jeopardies. Climate change is

or comes into focus, even fills the whole view, with a different set of anticipations and perceptions of what is to come – or in some cases, where 'to come' is recognised as 'to-already-be'. The future itself comes into view in a different or more intense form: it is as if the threat that a focus on climate change delineates reminds people of the future itself as a precarious, uncertain, dangerous reality, subject to tipping points (Nuttall, 2012), which cannot be reversed.

Acknowledging the climate stakes

Whilst the majority of the Andean farmers focus on water scarcity, expecting solutions from the local authorities who in turn expect the farmers themselves to figure out how to get by with less water, there is one farmer and mountain guide, Saúl Luciano Lliuya, who has a different view of future threats. In line with scientific scenarios, his gaze is directed at the increasing likelihood of flooding from the glacier lake right above his own house, which threatens his home as well as the city of Huaraz. He sees climate change as the cause. Furthermore, he identifies culprits: people who should take responsibility and bear the burden of strengthening the flood defences. With the help of the environmental NGO Germanwatch, Saúl has sued the German energy giant Reinish-Westphalian Power Plant (RWE). The claim emerged after Saúl met a group of German climate activists through a mutual friend and expressed his concern that while Peruvians had contributed very little to global warming, they faced some of its worst impacts. After establishing a link to German lawyers developing legal tools for addressing climate change, the claim against RWE was brought to court – which could potentially set a precedent to hold polluters accountable for their contribution to global warming. In a short video made by Germanwatch (2015), Saúl concludes 'Because this is not just a regional problem for us … if we are successful, it could make a change, even on a global level. If we don't speak out, if we don't raise our voice, then we will die.'

The future is not just crowded with concerns: a particularly severe, existential threat looms over everything, linking the local issues to the global, drawing out the sharedness of human fate.

In Estonia, the climate-centred protests come from the FfF movement, consisting mostly of youngsters from Estonian schools. Their aim is clear and originates from climate reports:

> I actually had a look at the facts and this was very awful, I had to do something and nobody did anything, somebody had to, it was basically fear that made me act, when you read this [IPCC] report, [you] see that we have only 12 years left.

(Laura, 18, FfF)

Whilst climate is not the focus of XR protests in Estonia, for some members it has acquired a similar force of defining their present as something that stretches into a terrifying, climate-defined and close future.

> It was when I stumbled upon […] this page where this guy was describing his utter despair for his children in the face of a destroyed earth […] I followed his links to why – and found that page [on Near Term Human Extinction]. That was awful. […] On some level I still hoped, so I kept looking. But it was absolutely unreserved anguish that I felt. […] It was this recognition that we are talking about my own future – see, suddenly, the timeline on which I had thought about the future, my own future [taps on her chest] was different. Shorter. Stopping, you know, for me and for humankind, rather abruptly, and very, very soon.

(Ann, 40s, XR)

Jeopardy, now climate-shaped and within the immediate personal time horizon, induces fear with its magnitude. Such fear before the future – fear that can reach none of the usual human sources for hope – has become a new reality, a new existence day to day. Future suddenly permeates today with unexpected, unfamiliar force. Having become part of the knowledge system of observing the future that unfolds with increasing carbon dioxide levels, complete with details on tipping points and the increasing destabilisation of Earth systems, the focus of people looking at this horizon is fixed on a future with a sense of how the present unstoppably, uncontrollably unfolds towards a catastrophe. Indeed, as Peeter, a 16-year-old FfF activist states: 'The term "climate change" has changed to "climate crisis" because people's existence is at risk. Change does not have a negative connotation, but of course, a crisis does.'

By framing climate change as a climate crisis, the Fridays for Future movement has linked climate change, similarly to Saúl, to socio-spatial issues. But it has also become a generational issue, in that temporal justice requires overcoming tempo-centrism and bringing the future into the line of vision more clearly – 'futuralising' the present (Bryant and Knight, 2019, 14). This kind of framing does not only turn climate protection into a question of (potential) human extinction, but also shifts the gaze towards the distant future where the crisis awaits the youngest, the most innocent, with the most terrible force.

Anticipating worse things to come: From flashlights to spotlights

As climate concerns more generally come to the centre of attention, the flashlight on the very specific worries that people can afford to concentrate on give way to a broader spotlight on the larger looming danger. Looking at such futures from the angle of climate change mostly lights the future horizon with fearful images. Recognising a change that affects everyone's lives, a change detailed, predicted and modelled scientifically, but also a change that is concrete and which will have specific impacts, brings with it a new kind of certainty about what the future holds, how far the dangers are and for whom. With this come new relations with emotions such as fear and anger and through that, hope.

This certainty has mostly been studied in relation to various millenarian movements (but see also Krauss, 2015; Skrimshire, 2019). The question is no longer whether but when the disaster will come; whether it will be mind-numbingly awful, or perhaps could be softened by the types of action that activists are pushing for.

In practice, such fear is not merely a moral exercise. Many if not most of the people fixated on this kind of horizon would agree that they are what Günther Anders (2007, 29–30) has appropriately called 'prophylactic apocalypticians': hopeful that their message of the vision of the apocalypse will move masses into action on time and urgently bring about change with prophylactic effect on the future. The FfF movement employs their own emotions to mobilise others, proliferating an understanding of climate change as climate crisis (Reichel, Plüschke-Altof and Plaan, 2022) – of which its founder Greta Thunberg's speeches are perhaps the best-known example. One young FfF member dissects their strategy:

> What we do differently is that we talk straight and with simple words so that every fool could understand. When scientists talk of global warming, we say that the Earth is burning. … to create some emotion. This can be anxiety or fear, somehow something negative.
>
> (Laura, FfF, 18)

Indeed, Laura's earlier quote on fear mobilising her, as well as the clear links between climate fear and activism (see also Annist et al., 2023) questions the apathy hypothesis (e.g. Hall, 2014), which suggests that fear does not mobilise. Just like FfF, XR employs the same strategy, offering talks under the name of 'Heading for Extinction' to bring the issue into the spotlight. These strategies aim to achieve recognition of the urgency – collapsing the timelines of present and future changes into one.

Lighting the landscape towards the future: From spotlights to floodlights

Fear-induced activism might harbour a way to move forward with a clearer vision of the future, but there is also a danger in having the spotlight on climate change: it gets stuck on one issue and thus looks past or shifts out of focus the multitude of issues criss-crossing landscapes from today to multiple and timewise differently positioned tomorrows. These dangers cannot go away because a specific issue has been brought into the discussion as a potentially extinction-grade threat. Focusing on the threats from climate change does not necessarily shape a different outcome. Just as those concerned about the state of Estonian forests point out, addressing only one issue would simply bring about a different kind of horrible future:

> … a good example today would be Eastern Viru county [in Estonia]. Let's say we go there and manage to pressurize [the politicians] so that there will be an exit from oil shale by 2024, right, yesss! But then it's replaced by a phosphorite mine … what do we do then? […] So, yes, climate was saved in the Estonian context but Eastern Viru has been dug up anyway …
>
> (Kalev, 30s, XR)

The protests against dam development in Karen areas confront several of the unfolding, unwelcome future changes together. The local organisation Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN) has established the Salween Peace Park[4] against harmful developments to establish some control over their future and has published extensively on the impact of climate change on local futures. Drawing the attention of international organisations such as UNDP and the media on their efforts to survive, to protect the environment and to address human rights violations, whilst emphasising local knowledge and local ownership of natural resources, can be conceptualised as a strategy of 'worlding' (see also Ong, 2011): branding Karen traditional eco-systems to the world, both to protect and safeguard the local environment, raise awareness on indigenous climate change adaptation and also to empower local organisations and protect human rights. Climate concerns are expressed in detail in many of the KESAN materials even if their main actions stamp the future with intentions for peace and security, sustainability and conservation – the future stretching beyond the current experiences of danger and concern, or as was expressed at the launch of the park: 'Although we will die one day, our children will live peacefully. This brings us great joy' (KESAN, 2018). The organisation has enabled locals to concentrate on the solutions to many concerns in one go amidst deep-running, serious issues.

XR also demonstrates a high awareness of unavoidably complex realities in coeval existence alongside the climate crisis – indeed, to attempt to highlight one and not solve other issues would inevitably lead to failure. At least some of the people in and around the movement in Estonia are aware of the approaches and practices in the UK and find these valuable. According to one of them:

> The level to which XR … I mean, XR in England (sic!) …is aware of … how complicated all this is, around climate change, socially as well – I am really impressed! In Estonia, I hadn't come across climate movements discussing class issues and race issues and suchlike. We try to be mindful here too, of the different backgrounds of people …

(Mare, 50s).

It is, in other words, important to reach out to other visions of the future where instead of just climate change, a multitude of seemingly unrelated issues emerge simultaneously or take precedence. Rather than lamenting the lack of recognition of climate issues, XR offers a 'no blame and shame' approach. This is accepted and mostly adopted by its members in their activism interactions and means supporting people in coming to an understanding about what awaits us all, rather than accusing some of being blind and not focussing on the issues that members see as most important. XR documents demonstrate clear awareness of the challenges of reaching those who truly struggle with their daily lives. There is a determination to work towards overcoming these in concurrence with socioeconomic issues:

> XR has something denied to working class communities for generations – a voice. It needs to use this voice to celebrate positive grassroots ecological initiatives already happening in working class areas. It needs to present them as possible models for building a wider regenerative culture.

(Greenjacker and Extinction Rebellion, 2019)

XR strives, according to one of the activists, to 'embody the new world we are trying to create' (Mark, 30s, XR). This kind of prefigurative politics aims to be inclusive, to achieve intersectionality and thus to recognise the array of jeopardised futures. This approach, even if today it is still primarily present in the form of hopes, dreams and aspirations, is envisaged to materialise through aware actions at the grassroots level. In sum, instead of a restricted

spotlight on climate change, the field of future horizons is floodlit, making visible different foci, ties and depths.

In prefigurative politics and the ideologies of climate activists, the present already coexists with the future, but even more importantly, diverse concerns coexist and explain the need for social as well as climate justice. Rather than the flashlights on the most immediate concerns devoid of underlying issues, or the spotlights on the terrors of looming climate and environmental crises, movements such as XR and KESAN are capable of illuminating the whole terrain: they show a future with full recognition of the myriad concerns and everyday obstacles that humans face.

Discussion

The data in this chapter along with shifts in anthropological attention more generally demonstrate a merging of 'the future' and climate change. The science, narratives and discourses of one increasingly define the other (see Nuttall, 2012). The future 'is never a tabula rasa of endless possibilities. Futures are already crowded with fantasies, paranoias, traumas, hopes, and fears of the past and present' (Pink and Salazar, 2017, 18). That future – the horizon towards which we are taken in the cusp of changes – is also crowded with different and fluctuating topics, surfacing in response to different stages of life for individuals but also in response to the recognition of global challenges. And the future is only ever, in a very abstract sense, on the horizon. There are many events, expectations and anticipations, from the present to the furthest imaginable point in the future that matter to people in response to what is going on in their lives. Although climate change has become gradually recognised as the defining force of what future lies ahead, its ascent above or to the forefront of other issues has not been uncomplicated.

We think differently about the future when it is filtered through climate concerns: the horizon of unfolding futures is ablaze, making this the most vital, overpowering issue of today. But to expect this to become the focus for everyone is not so straightforward. The life circumstances of many are already too challenging, with the flashlight needing to be focused on the issues closest in immediacy and familiarity. This also divides rather than enables focus on a shared underlying concern, even within a community, such as Huaraz. Extreme suffering has occupied some, especially in the Global South, for centuries and today, it combines with new shocks, with climate change being a somewhat more remote or less frequent concern.

Focusing the spotlight on environmental issues, including climate change, has arisen from activist groups as well as from those already experiencing the future that activists merely fear;

there is recognition of globality and sharedness of a worrying future. Yet, something is still missing. However global and shared climate concern may be, it cannot trump biodiversity concerns, or ignore the lack of sharedness of the context, realities and histories (see also Valentine and Hassoun, 2019) of those peering into their futures.

It is thus valuable to juxtapose different depths and insights of the future. The comparative ethnographic study of future imaginaries in times of global warming presented here reveals that while perceptions of crises arise within each unique context, common themes emerge among people's concerns about the future. While this can point to the practical challenges arising in efforts to move towards a different future, it also highlights the imaginative possibilities for envisioning better futures. However, this might not happen through hope alone: 'Hope only goes so far', as Tsing (2018, 74) wryly notes. For many, there is simply room for precarious or exhausted hope – mere hope that hope exists in the future. For some, the priorities of today mean working on the most immediate, time-sensitive concerns that cannot be postponed. Raising the importance of climate concern above all else is insensitive to people's everyday relations with a future that sprawls out before them, littered with the concerns and tasks that must be tackled along the way.

Even if climate change is spotlighted as the greatest danger on our horizon, it might not be a helpful strategy to collapse that future into today to demand action now. Climate movements, even if seemingly spotlighting the one, shared issue, have, in fact, been searching for a better way to approach the busy landscape of diverse futures. They have welcomed the floodlight and its ability to illuminate all the other concerns we are facing coevally – not to diminish them, but to understand the kinds of worries that people face in diverse contexts. Aside from the fact that this may unearth the root causes of many if not most of the issues that people face today, demanding systemic changes may encourage a shift from an abstract relationship with a diffuse future horizon to a more tangible, focussed relationship which includes what Bloch (1986) has called 'concrete hope'.

Taken together, the above cases reveal that to solve our future challenges, we need to acknowledge all the varying terrains, changes near and far and concerns that crowd our horizons, whether alert or unaware of the future potentials. To truly be capable of addressing the whole landscape of 'not-yets', the floodlights are necessary, along with the institutional, often science-based mechanisms that are needed to turn those lights on – the IPCC reports, the flood predictions, the organisations and protest movements, creating hierarchies of concerns based on the assessments of greatest, most severe and often globally envisioned risks. Furthermore, collapsing climate change present and future into a single global concern needs

to happen alongside the whole terrain of often very different futures. This hard-to-systematise terrain must be taken into consideration when aiming to motivate. Only then, we argue, can concrete hope truly be provided to those passing the time between now and hereafter.

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Notes

[1] In this article, we use ‘future’ in singular form when a uniform point of arrival is expected or feared, and ‘futures’ in plural when an array of different outcomes is imagined or when this multitude of potential futures is in other ways present or recognisable.

[2] Capitalocene refers to a distinct geological epoch defined by capitalist processes which have had a major impact on organising nature and the planet’s future (see Moore 2016).

[3] A type of trap used to fish crab.

[4] Salween Peace Park is a grassroots alternative to the Myanmar government and opposes the destructive plans of foreign companies in the Salween River basin.