

2025, 12(1): 228-246

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17572/mj2025.1.228-246>

Articles (Theme)

SOCIAL DARWINISM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE: SURVIVING CLIMATE CHANGE IN AMERICA CITY

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Abstract

Chris Beckett's *America City* (2017) depicts a near-future USA devastated by climate change. Set during a presidential campaign, the novel delves into themes like climate change denial, climate refugee displacement, nationalism, political manipulation, and the impact of media. This article analyses the novel from the perspective of social Darwinism in the Anthropocene, exploring how concepts of survival, adaptation, competition and elimination appear in a world influenced by human-caused climate change. This study emphasises the often-ignored connection between social Darwinism and climate change by examining how communities and nations respond to climate disasters—whether they adapt, resist, or take advantage of the crisis. In this respect, this article aims to explore the degree to which the idea of social

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Darwinism can be relevant in a world ravaged by anthropogenic climate change and how the concept of fitness for survival can be understood during ecological collapse.

Keywords: Anthropocene, social Darwinism, climate change, Chris Beckett, America City

ANTROPOSEN ÇAĞINDA SOSYAL DARWİNİZM: AMERICA CITY ROMANINDA İKLİM DEĞİŞİKLİĞİNDE HAYATTA KALMA

Öz

Chris Beckett'in *America City* [Amerika Şehri] (2017) romanı, iklim değişikliğinden harap olmuş yakın gelecekteki bir ABD'yi tasvir etmektedir. Bir başkanlık seçim kampanyası sırasında geçen roman, iklim değişikliğini inkâr etme, iklim mültecilerini yerinden etme, milliyetçilik, siyasî manipülasyon ve medyanın etkisi gibi sorunları ele almaktadır. Bu makale, romanı Antroposen çağında sosyal Darwinizm bakış açısından inceleyerek, hayatta kalma, uyum sağlama, rekabet ve yok olma kavramlarının insan kaynaklı iklim değişikliğinden etkilenen bir dünyada nasıl belirdiğini araştırmaktadır. Bu çalışma, toplumların ve ulusların iklim felaketlerine nasıl tepki verdiklerini inceleyerek, sosyal Darwinizm ile iklim değişikliği arasındaki genellikle göz ardı edilen bağlantıyı krize uyum sağlayıp sağlamadıkları, direnip direnmedikleri veya bundan faydalanıp faydalanmadıkları bakımından vurgulamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu makale, sosyal Darwinizm fikrinin, antropojenik iklim değişikliğinin etkilediği bir dünyada ne ölçüde geçerli olabileceğini ve ekolojik çöküş sırasında hayatta kalma kavramının nasıl anlaşılabilirliğini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antroposen çağı, sosyal Darwinizm, iklim değişikliği, Chris Beckett, America City

“[E]very human being in the world was simply a node, a meeting point in a network of inhuman forces”
(Beckett, 2017a, p. 291).

Introduction

Chris Beckett is a British author who has written mostly works of science fiction. He is usually known with his Eden trilogy—*Dark Eden* (2012), *Mother of Eden* (2015), and *Daughter of Eden* (2016). Beckett’s next novel *America City* (2017), released simultaneously with both Brexit and the Trump election (Beckett, 2017b, para. 6), can be considered a contemporary example of the New Wave science fiction. Although the novel is set in a near future America where climate change and ecological catastrophes ravage society, it has “reality effect” by offering “insightful reflections on the present” (Resano, 2024, p. 5). This reality effect provides that climate change is not an event that will occur in the far-off future but is already taking place. *America City*, with its focus on the impacts of climate change framed in a presidential campaign, delves into topics such as climate refugeeism, climate change denial, climate change management policy, nationalism, political manipulation, and media influence. Highlighting how humankind is moving amidst unfolding climate disasters, adapting and even benefiting from the transformed geographical and sociopolitical environments, the novel offers a plausible reading in terms of social Darwinism in the Anthropocene. The connection between social Darwinism and the Anthropocene is critical yet often overlooked in discussions of global environmental change. In this respect, this article aims to examine Beckett’s climate-conscious novel, *America City*, under the lens of social Darwinism. With this aim in mind, this article seeks to investigate to what extent the concept of social Darwinism can be applied onto a world devastated by anthropogenic climate change and how the notion of fitness for survival can be interpreted under precarious circumstances.

Social Darwinism

What the term ‘social Darwinism’ means and what influence it has had on the development of social and political concepts have been discussed since its emergence in the nineteenth century. Mike Hawkins (1997) expresses that although it seems easy to phrase such inquiries about social Darwinism, it is challenging to resolve them as the literature on the term demonstrates. Scholars examining the extensive writings on social Darwinism are likely to find themselves more perplexed than informed because the term has been used in numerous fields such as biology, eugenics, ecology, sociology, philosophy, politics and economy. The term conveys different implications in each of these disciplines, which makes it difficult for scholars and theorists to provide a single and satisfactory definition of the term. Despite the difficulty, some scholars

took pains to define social Darwinism. Mark Moisevich Rosenthal and Pavel Fyodorovich Yudin introduced one of the earliest definitions of the term: “the unwarranted carrying over of the Darwinian law of the struggle for existence among plants and animals into the field of human social relations and the class struggle” (1949, p. 114). According to Rosenthal and Yudin, social Darwinism asserts that “ruling and exploiting classes must be made up of people who are in some way possessed of superior talents, who are ‘victors’ in the struggle for existence” (1949, p. 114). They wrote that this theory is for the bourgeoisie to “try to justify predatory imperialist wars, the exploitation of colonial peoples, the inflaming of racial hatreds, and the social inequalities of capitalist society” (1949, p. 114). In their definition, Rosenthal and Yudin argue that social Darwinism is the inappropriate application of Darwin’s biological evolutionary law of the survival of plants and animals to human social relations and class conflict. They claim that Darwin’s struggle for existence is deliberately misapplied by the ruling and exploiting classes, who see themselves superior, the most talented and victorious, to rationalise exploitative imperialist wars, oppression of colonized peoples, incitement of racial animosities, and social inequalities within capitalist society.

R. John Halliday points out that there is no strict definition of social Darwinism that “has been agreed on as yet, either by explicit consent or by common research practice” (1971, p. 389). Halliday nonetheless suggests that social Darwinism is an “enterprise or ideology, founded in the nineteenth century, which holds social evolution to depend upon the operation of the law selection of favourable heritable variants” (p. 389). Halliday’s definition emphasises the evolution of human society by analogy with Darwin’s law of natural selection among plants and animals. Along with Halliday, James Allen Rogers also puts that social Darwinism is “the application of Darwin’s theory of natural selection to the evolution of human society” (1972, p. 265). For Rogers, it is a notion that sees human society through Darwin’s view of the nonhuman world. In the same vein, Michael Ruse also describes that social Darwinism is “a generic term for theories of human social development and maintenance which are in some way inspired by biological evolutionary theories” and adds that “this ‘inspiration’ could take the form of seeing human sociality as a straight extension of the animal (and perhaps plant) domain, or it could involve some sort of analogy” (1980, p. 23). Halliday, Rogers and Ruse all share the idea that social Darwinism reflects Darwin’s law of natural selection in the animal and plant domains on the social evolution of humans.

Social Darwinism is a concept which Darwin never held in his evolution theory (Grace & Montagu, 1942, p. 75; Lungu, Dragoescu Urlica, & Coroama-Dorneanu, 2020, p. 77; Radick, 2019, p. 279; Rogers, 1972, p. 265), and it was discussed long before Darwin (Midgley, 1983, p. 366). Social Darwinism as a concept is usually traced back to the ideas of Thomas Robert Malthus about struggle for existence (Bannister, 1979, p. 15; Claeys, 2000, p. 223; Grace & Montagu, 1942, p. 75; Lungu, Dragoescu Urlica, & Coroama-Dorneanu, 2020, p. 77; Rogers, 1972, p. 266; Ruse, 1980, p. 24; Wells, 1907, p. 709) and those of Herbert Spencer about survival of the fittest (Bannister, 1979, p. 15; Claeys, 2000, p. 227; Jones, 1981, p. 243; Lungu, Dragoescu Urlica, &

Coroama-Dorneanu, 2020, p. 77; Midgley, 1983, p. 366; Rogers, 1972, p. 266; Rosenthal & Yudin, 1949, p. 114; Ruse, 1980, p. 23). Although social Darwinism did not originate with Darwin, it is named after him because Darwin's biological evolutionary theory has been easier to reach and more persuasive than the social evolutionary theories of Malthus and Spencer, and more adaptable to social sciences (Dickens, 2000).

In his autobiography, Charles Darwin reveals that he developed his evolution theory upon reading Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) in October 1838 (F. Darwin, 1911, p. 68). In this work, Malthus primarily contends that the food supply will diminish as the human population expands because the population increases geometrically while the food supply rises only arithmetically, resulting in insufficient food and limited space for more people. That is why Malthus points out that human community is condemned to struggle for life, hunger, need, disease and death. For Malthus, the weakest and poorest individuals or groups fail in this struggle for existence. Malthus thereby reasons that the growth rate of human population would be controlled in this way. Darwin expresses in his autobiography that Malthus's idea of the struggle for existence helped him to comprehend natural selection among animals and plants after his "long-continued observation of the habits of animals and plants" that "under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones to be destroyed" (F. Darwin, 1911, p. 68). While Malthus's notion of the struggle for existence ends up with misery and vice for most of human population, Darwin's concept of the struggle for existence encourages survival, invigorating biological progress and biodiversity. Moreover, Darwin's struggle for existence emphasises "dependence of one being on another" ([1859] 1968, p. 116). Darwin exemplifies that "[t]wo canine animals in a time of dearth, may be truly said to struggle with each other which shall get food and live. But a plant on the edge of a desert is said to struggle for life against the drought, though more properly it should be said to be dependent on the moisture" (p. 116). Such elimination of animals from competition for food and survival, along with the mutual dependence of plants on their physical conditions, results in the destruction of the unfavourable variations and the preservation of favourable ones, leading to more profitable variations—a process which Darwin calls "natural selection" (p. 131).

However, the term natural selection caused misunderstandings at the time. In a letter to Darwin dated 2 July 1866, Alfred Russell Wallace argued that the term was "to a certain degree indirect and incorrect, since, even personifying Nature, she does not so much select special variations as exterminate the most unfavourable ones" (F. Darwin, 1903, p. 268). For this reason, Wallace suggested that Herbert Spencer's term, the 'survival of the fittest', is more appropriate to Darwin's evolution theory. After Wallace's proposition, Darwin decided to adopt the term and used it from the fifth edition (1869) of the *Origin of Species* (Rogers, 1972, p. 278). He retitled the chapter on natural selection as "Natural Selection, or The Survival of the Fittest" (C. Darwin, [1869] 1871, p. 84), and rewrote the last sentence in the definition of

natural selection as “This preservation of favourable variations, and the destruction of injurious variations, I call Natural Selection, or the Survival of the Fittest” (p. 85). Darwin’s adoption of Spencer’s survival of the fittest in human communities as the idea of the survival of nonhuman species in his biological evolutionary theory contributed to the development of social Darwinism in that it built a bridge between biological progress and social progress.

Accordingly, Herbert Spencer is acknowledged to develop and popularize social Darwinism. He argued the concept first in his *Progress: Its Law and Cause* (1857) and elaborated it in *First Principles of a New System of Philosophy* (1862). Unlike Malthus’s pessimistic and aggressive view on human evolution, Spencer’s social evolutionary theory is more optimistic and milder because Spencer suggests that humans have the potential for adapting to social and environmental circumstances. Establishing his evolutionary theory on the notion of the survival of the fittest, Spencer emphasises the profitable effects of the pressure of population growth on human community. For Spencer, the most intelligent and the most mechanically talented individuals of each generation as well as the ones who successfully adapt to their changing environment would survive for the ultimate good of humankind (1852, p. 496). Assuming the principle of inevitable human social progress through free competition of individuals or groups, Spencer, like Malthus, opposes the charity for the poor, ill and weak. For Spencer, poor, ill and weak individuals or groups should not be supported as they are unfit for social progress. Helping the unfit would defy the natural order of the world since “the ‘survival of the unfit’ represented an evolutionary blasphemy by removing ‘nature’s’ punishment for those too idle or improvident to adapt” (Hawkins, 1997, p. 96). Human communities are to get rid of the least adapted individuals or groups for the advancement of society in a better and broader environment. That is why Spencer distinguishes people between those who benefit society and who do not. If people do not benefit society, it is their portion to disappear and become extinct. In addition to his disapproval of the encouragement of the unfit, Spencer also protests any artificial interference and state intervention in the individual competition of social progress. He denounces public welfare and social state for the sake of rational human progress and individual freedom. Hence Spencer rather supports free-market ideology as “the most civilised form of human competition” in the struggle for survival of the fittest (Steger, 2005, p. 10).

Along the same line with Spencer’s notion of the survival of the fittest in free competition, social Darwinism defends free-market economics and opposes state-socialism. In this sense, it encourages “unregulated competition between individuals, groups, nations, or races” as well as species (Halliday, 1971, p. 391), and justifies industrialisation, imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, racism, class discrimination, and environmental exploitation. Within this context, the words ‘fit’ and ‘unfit’ are associated with political, economic, social, racial and ecological concerns. The concept of the survival of the fittest, therefore, refers to the fortification of wealth, power and hierarchy. In social Darwinism, political, economic and social elites,

who emerge victorious from the competition for struggle for existence owing to their origin, intellect and talent, are viewed to deserve to survive more than the relatively deprived political, economic and social groups, who need welfare services. As Lungu, Dragoescu Urlica and Coroama-Dorneanu point out, social Darwinism, “in its narrow interpretation, focuses on determinism, social selection and domination” (2020, p. 78). Industrialists, imperialists, colonialists, capitalists, racists and anthropocentrists, who are supposedly selected ‘by nature’, provide hypocritical excuses and explanations for their oppressive and exploitative actions by references to social Darwinism.

Another catchphrase of social Darwinism is ‘eugenics’ alongside the ‘struggle for existence’ and ‘survival of the fittest’. The term eugenics was coined by Francis Galton (1883), Charles Darwin’s cousin. Galton borrowed the term from the Greek word ‘eugenes’, meaning “good in stock, hereditarily endowed with noble qualities” (p. 24). He describes eugenics as

the science of improving stock, which is by no means confined to questions of judicious mating, but which, especially in the case of man, takes cognisance of all influences that tend in however remote a degree to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they otherwise would have had. (p. 25)

Eugenics is not artificial selection but selective breeding. It proposes control of the birth-rate of particular social groups or races in the guise of biological unfitness. It aims “to breed the ‘fit’ and to sterilize or to limit the breeding of the ‘unfit’” for successful evolution of human society (Halliday, 1971, p. 398). Eugenics supports social Darwinism by arguing that some races, ethnicities and social classes are biologically superior to others, promoting hierarchy, sterilisation and even extermination of the inferior ones. Eugenics was particularly practised in Italian fascism, which was identified with the superiority of Mediterranean race and cultures, in Nazi ideology to maintain the purity of German nationalism at the expense of the genocide of the Jews for betterment of the Germans, and in Francoism, which represses Spain’s cultural diversity to promote Spanish nationalism. Such incidents in history reveal that eugenics justifies discrimination and oppressive policies.

Social Darwinism in the Anthropocene

Social Darwinism played a significant role in the Anthropocene, a term used by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer (2000) to describe the current geological age, in which human activities on earth, atmosphere and ecology have had the greatest influence on the environment and climate, leading to large-scale environmental destruction, ecological imbalance, food insecurity and climate change. Although social

Darwinism emerged in the nineteenth century, it is not an outdated concept because its principles reflect on anthropogenic environmental destruction and climate change today. Industrial, imperial, colonial, racial, capitalist and hierarchically superior human populations—‘naturally’ privileged ones—have adversely affected Earth’s natural systems through industrialisation, imperial expansion, colonial exploitation, racial oppression, capitalist greed and discriminatory social class system. These human activities caused unprecedented rise in greenhouse gas emissions, environmental pollution, biodiversity loss, deforestation, imbalances in the terrestrial and marine ecosystems, unequal use of natural resources, and eventually climate change. The insatiable desire of these human populations to control and exploit nature and nonhuman beings threatens not only the future of nonhuman communities but also that of human civilisation. In this sense, human beings become the causal force which appears in different social and ecological relations.

The Industrial Revolution marked a turning point in human impact on the Earth, as industrialists prioritized economic growth over environmental sustainability. Driven by competition and technological progress, they exploited natural resources and justified environmental destruction through social Darwinism. This ideology portrayed industrialists as the ‘fittest’ and dismissed indigenous and non-European communities as inferior for resisting industrialisation, legitimising both ecological harm and cultural marginalisation.

Industrialisation gave rise to capitalism and a free-market economy, intensifying wealth inequality and reinforcing Social Darwinist ideas that favour the rich and powerful as the ‘fittest’. Social Darwinists liken economic competition to natural selection, asserting that the most intellectually and economically efficient individuals thrive. This ideology justifies resource dominance by wealthy corporations and nations, while marginalising poorer communities and viewing nonhuman beings as inferior. As a result, unchecked capitalism leads to environmental degradation, climate change, and ecological injustice, disproportionately harming vulnerable human and nonhuman populations.

The nineteenth century also witnessed unprecedented imperial expansion and colonial exploitation. Western empires colonised non-Western regions to get more resources such as timber, minerals, and fossil fuels for their economic growth and world supremacy. European colonial powers caused plantation agriculture, mass deforestation, mining operations, depletion of natural resources and irreversible transformation of the natural landscape in indigenous regions. Like industrialists, colonisers prioritised raw materials, economic growth and competition with other European colonisers over ecological sustainability and welfare of the nonhuman beings. Western empires used the ideology of social Darwinism to justify territorial conquest, resource extraction, and the oppression of indigenous populations. As David Starr Jordan points out, “[i]t is not the strength of the strong but the weakness of the weak which engenders exploitation and tyranny” (1911, p. 35). Profit-driven European colonisers viewed themselves as the most civilised, thus the fittest, population to exploit the alien land and suppress native people, who were seen

inferior and unfit. Colonisers, for representing the most advanced civilisation, considered themselves to be selected by nature for the development of white societies. Under the ideology of social Darwinism, colonisers disregarded large-scale environmental problems, ecological imbalance and unsustainability, climate change, and social disruption in indigenous communities.

Imperial expansion and colonial exploitation are followed by racism. Social Darwinists believe that racial differences are hereditary and fixed, implying that some races are superior by nature while others are inferior. European colonisers used this biological determinism to justify their invasion, oppression and exploitation of non-European and indigenous people. White colonisers viewed themselves naturally rightful authorities to dominate non-white and weak populations. Eugenics also reinforced racial inequality. As Clarence M. Case states, eugenics “too often accepts the present competitive, capitalist, exploitative regime as fundamentally right—so much so that success under it becomes the evidence [...] of a superior ability” (1922, p. 11). Competitive, capitalist and exploitative imperialists and colonisers also see the landscape, flora and fauna of the indigenous people, who are poor, weak and unfit by genetic inheritance, inferior and relentlessly use and damage them. Exploitation, depletion of natural resources, and pollution thereby occur in areas inhabited by racialised communities. So, racial groups suffer disproportionately from environmental disasters and climate change.

Bearing the sources of social Darwinism and developments in industrialisation, imperialism, colonialism and capitalism in mind, the social class has always been the focus of social Darwinism. Both Malthus and Spencer stressed the superiority of the upper class over the lower class and rich populations over poor populations. The upper class and richer populations are seen to be the fittest for survival in human society while the lower class and poor people are viewed to be unfit in human progress and are allowed for no room for betterment and social mobility. The connection between class distinction and the Anthropocene is closely linked, as socioeconomic structures influence both the origins and effects of environmental decline. The Anthropocene is not experienced equally among social classes. Rather, social class hierarchies determine who bears the greatest responsibility for environmental damage, who experiences its effects, and who possesses the authority to influence actions regarding climate change and ecological emergencies. The wealthiest people and corporations are responsible for most of carbon emissions, deforestation, and pollution. However, it is the lower-income people who suffer existential threats of environmental destruction and climate change more as they cannot take financial measures to resist the worst effects of environmental and climate crises (Martinez-Alier, 2002). The elites ensure their survival while the poor encounter increasing dangers. So, it is the rich communities who have the power to shape responses to ecological crises and climate change.

In the Anthropocene, the premise of social Darwinism that social progress occurs through the conflict of humans with human circumstances evolves into the conflict of humans with nonhuman circumstances too. Social Darwinism unveils its dark and unethical side in the Anthropocene through the promotion of opportunism, self-interest and manipulation. The unfit become pawns in the grip of the fit since social Darwinism in the Anthropocene conveys achieving fitness at the expense of other human and nonhuman beings. As Thomas Henry Huxley states, the word 'fittest' is commonly used "in a good sense, with an understood connotation of 'best'; and 'best' we are apt to take in its ethical sense. But the 'fittest' which survives in the struggle for existence may be, and often is, the ethically worst" (L. Huxley, 1900, p. 322). The struggle for existence in the Anthropocene exposes evils and corruptions in human beings. In this sense, environmental degradation reshapes the laws of development of human society. Within this framework, this article aims to study Chris Beckett's *America City* by exploring the struggles of humans for existence under the precarious conditions during the anthropogenic climate crises.

Representations of Social Darwinism in America City

America City, a "peri-apocalyptic narrative",² is set in twenty-second century North American continent drastically affected by anthropogenic climate change (Resano, 2024, p. 5). Offering representations of social Darwinism in the Anthropocene, the novel deals with the survival and evolution of the people in the USA in an inhospitable world ravaged by climate catastrophes. While rising temperatures and extreme droughts have rendered much of the southern region, especially states like California, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico and Texas, uninhabitable, hurricanes and floods have made the eastern region, particularly states like Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey, unliveable. Due to the devastation of their homes and lack of food supply, thousands of the US citizens from the southern dust bowl states and the eastern storm coasts are forced to migrate northward in search of safer areas, such as the northern states of America and Canada. Some of the migrants manage to build new homes, but are forced to move again, whereas many of them seek to survive in trailers and camps. However, the influx of climate refugees has caused severe tensions between local populations in the north and the newcomers from the south and east, leading to social unrest and growing resentment. Even some northern states like Alaska, Idaho and Montana threaten to close their borders to their fellow Americans, which leads to the fragmentation of the nation.

Amid this situation, Washington State Senator Stephen Slaymaker, a former soldier fighting in the African Copper Belt and a conservative politician whose main aim is to maintain the unity of America, shows up to restructure the entire nation to effectively meet the challenges posed by new climate realities. Senator Slaymaker suggests that the government should fund the building of proper homes for climate refugees in

² It pertains to a story that takes place just before, during, or at the threshold of an apocalypse—essentially at a time when the world is falling apart or experiencing disastrous transformation but has not completely ended yet.

the northern states, despite his earlier commitment to reduce federal government intervention in the famine in Mexico, for which Slaymaker said “Mexicans have got to look after themselves. We didn’t ask them to live in Mexico. We didn’t ask them to have more kids than they knew how ta feed” (Beckett, 2017a, p. 11; emphasis in original). There is a contradiction between Slaymaker’s intervention in the US climate refugees and his eugenic attitudes towards Mexicans, which indicates that Slaymaker, as an American, has a tendency for biological determinism. Holding Americans superior to Mexicans and, thus, seeing the former fitter for survival while the latter unfit, Slaymaker implies the limitation on the breeding of the unfit for successful evolution of American society. Adopting a Malthusian approach, Slaymaker wants Mexicans to fail in the struggle for existence so that the imbalance between the growth rate of Mexican population and increasing demand for food supply could be countered. Slaymaker’s attitudes towards Mexicans also reminds the reader of Donald J. Trump’s “anti-immigrant and ‘Mexican-phobic’ rhetoric” (Verea, 2018, p. 197).

Since Slaymaker runs for the US presidency, he launches a campaign for a great federally funded resettlement program in the northwestern states, including Alaska, for the climate refugees from the Dust Country and Storm Coast. This program is not only related to helping the refugees but also to using tax money wisely to avoid excessive and unnecessary spending on climate victims in their native land. Slaymaker believes that people are “not distributed properly any more. Folk aren’t in the places where they can be productive” (Beckett, 2017a, p. 23). Slaymaker aims to achieve productivity by temporarily federally supported decent homes and proper jobs for the climate refugees. After maintaining productivity, he plans that the federal government will later stop to intervene in their life, “get off people’s backs again and let them get on”, which refers to Social Darwinian approach (p. 23). Unlike his Malthusian approach to Mexicans, Slaymaker adopts Spencerian social evolutionary understanding in that he believes fellow Americans have the potential for adapting to social and environmental circumstances. Slaymaker emphasises the profitable effects of the pressure of migration population growth on northern communities. If climate refugees successfully adapt to their changing environment, they will benefit for the ultimate good of the nation. In contrast to Spencer’s disapproval of any artificial interference and state intervention in the competition of social progress, Slaymaker, nonetheless, favours public welfare and social state to some extent for the progress of American nation in the Anthropocene.

Despite Slaymaker’s radical solution about climate refugeeism, he denies anthropogenic climate change. He takes a “medieval” stand on the issue of what caused climate change, believing that God is responsible for it (p. 29). Slaymaker, who owns the biggest trucking company in the country, sees climate change as a God-given challenge rather than a result of destructive human activity. Although the previous generation tried to warn politicians and people about climate problems and strived to act on the matter, nobody became concerned with it as both politicians and billionaires were interested in short-term profits. The

impending disaster was ignored as it was seen too abstract. The issue that was once seen abstract now becomes concrete with storm people and dustbowl people migrating northward, disturbing the northerners, and impacting the natural order of the Earth. In contrast to what Slaymaker believes, climate change is caused by detrimental human activities. It is humans who “just trash one place and then move on and trash another” (p. 171).

Slaymaker hires Holly Peacock, a British young woman working as a public relations consultant, to promote his campaign for migration crisis. Holly works to publicise Senator’s policy about helping the migrants find new homes to his suspicious “core supporters”, “firm opponents” and “the floaters who are open to persuasion” (p. 24). Holly is assigned to create a narrative that works for both “the ones that are *most* resistant to large-scale federal welfare projects and the most worried about migration from other states into their communities” and the ones “that are the *most* enthusiastic about large federal spending projects” (p. 24; emphasis in original). It shows that American society is divided into several parts of groups of individuals because of climate crises. One part consists of *delicados* and *barreduras*. *Delicados*, who are generally people from the north that are made up of intellectuals like “university people, writers, artists, scientists, computer architects, and so on” (p. 24), support individual freedom and rights, democracy and free enterprise and pretend to take “personal responsibility for all the problems of the world” yet “don’t really act that way” (p. 11; emphasis in original), and *barreduras*, meaning “the dirt [one] sweep[s] off the floor” (p. 25), who are usually people from the Dust Country and the Storm Coast that consist of “unskilled service workers, government employees, first- and second-generation immigrants” (p. 24), are the sufferers of the impact of climate change and forced to migrate northward. *Barreduras*, who are mostly Mexicans, Cubans, Dominicans or Haitians, are not welcomed in the north. Another part consists of northerners and fellow Americans on the eastern coasts and in the south. While people in the north do not want to take any responsibility for the storms on the eastern coasts and think of the storm people “dumb enough” to live there (p. 33), storm survivors recognise that the security and military units do not treat them like they are Americans but more like they are “Mexicans or Haitians or something” and “outsiders trying to get in” (p. 36). Northern residents also meet the fellows in the south “with suspicion and hostility”, and the former do not feel sorry for the latter as it “might mean acknowledging an obligation to help them, to give up some part of the comfort blanket that folk wrap around themselves against the frightening world” (p. 92). The other part consists of storm people and dustbowl people. Storm people refer to dustbowl people as “dusties” (p. 46), meaning “incompetent peasants who blamed their bankruptcies on the weather and then asked the taxpayer to clear their debts” (p. 177), while dustbowl people, who are farmers leaving their own land because of the drought in the south, call storm people as “storm trash” since the former view the latter “as lazy bums who’d never done anything at all” (p. 122). *Delicados* see themselves superior to *barreduras*,

northerners over fellow climate refugees, storm people over dustbowl people and vice versa—a social Darwinian superiority that supposedly allows for fitness for survival.

Most of the *delicados* and northerners claim that climate refugeeism and Slaymaker's reconfigure program ask "a lot of [them] to really care that much about anyone other than" themselves (p. 126). However, humans are "the product of millions of years of evolution [...] The ones who weren't so good at looking after themselves were winnowed out, the ones who were best at it survived" (p. 126). *Delicados* and northerners think that the "old animal game" continues and they feel themselves selected as they live in safety and comfort in the north (p. 127). As being fitter in climate change, they do not want to upset their population's biological stability by encouraging the survival of the dustbowl and storm people, namely those unfit. They do not want to share their life and money "for a problem that isn't of their making" (p. 129). They believe that "they've got to play that way or they'll just be wiped out" (p. 165). Adopting an ethnically biased attitude on the superiority of northern Americans over *barreduras* and their fellow migrants, they relieve themselves from any responsibility for the sufferings of the migrants, who have become unfit, and from any obligation to contribute to their support. In line with Spencerian notion of social Darwinism, they think that migrants belong to the bottom of the social scale and thus should not be helped but rather be left to their fate for the benefit of human society. Opposing the actions of charity that could prevent social progress, *delicados* and northerners insist that they should stay within their own sphere and maintain their lives as appropriate to their social environment. Thus, struggle for existence during climate crises threatens integrity and social progress of all America.

What Slaymaker seeks to do is to "reconfigur[e] America to keep it together" in the face of climate and migration threats (p. 25). He intends to maintain America's prosperity by keeping the population reasonably stable and having "enough land and resources to be able to produce most of what [Americans] need within [their] own borders" (p. 39). Instead of viewing and treating climate refugees as victims, Slaymaker wants them to be "pioneers" (p. 28). He plans his "new America" to be in "Seattle, Juneau, Anchorage – stretched out in a long chain along the continent's north-western edge" (p. 31). Slaymaker then announces his candidacy for presidency with the slogan "Building a New America" (p. 106). Holly seeks to publicise Slaymaker's attempt at building a new America as "an investment in [Americans'] future as a nation, as a strong, united country, a fortress of peace and prosperity in a ravaged world, a shining city where [their] children can grow up with a secure future" (p. 108). She formulates a clever yet ethically questionable plan for Slaymaker's building a new America. She suggests Canada open its border to migrants and share their burden in the northern states. In the meantime, America has "built a two-thousand-mile wall *and* a minefield *and* a fence *and* a specially designed fleet of drig gunships, to keep out displaced Mexicans" (p. 153; emphasis in original)—a reference to Trump administration stressing the need to build a wall along the southern border with Mexico for allegedly national security (Verea, 2018). During the famine in Mexico,

Americans have left Mexicans to their fate because they see Mexicans as inferior race that should disappear as they do not benefit American society. Americans view themselves biologically and culturally superior to other races. They believe they are selected thanks to their intelligence, strength and wealth, in contrast to Mexicans or Latinos who are inferior in that they are lazy, criminals and less intellectually gifted than themselves.

Holly prefers Canada for its less population, more hospitable space, fewer weather problems and prosperity. Canada has emerged as the leading global power while the USA has been notably weakened because of climate crises. “[T]he quixotic” Senator agrees with Holly and decides to build towns in Canada and create jobs there for the migrants (Jensen, 2017, para. 6). To run their plan, Holly manipulates both American and Canadian folks by pointing out that Canada is a major contributor to climate change as the country is one of the big oil producers though America has produced much more oil than Canada, which is why Canada must help America solve the migration crisis. Slaymaker organises a meeting at the Peace Arch, a monument built on the international boundary between America and Canada to “commemorat[e] the peace treaty that ended the War of 1812 between the USA and the British colonies that were to become Canada”, which signifies the lasting peace and friendship between the two countries (Beckett, 2017a, p. 221). During his call for help from Canada, a chaos between Americans and Canadians breaks out, ending up with the death of several Americans. So, this event creates another part of groups of individuals: the Yankees and Canucks. Slaymaker’s speech is understood by Canadians not as a humanitarian call for help but as a demand for American invasion. Slaymaker’s propaganda causes hostility between the Yankees and Canucks as Americans are feared to take jobs, strain resources, and endanger the Canadian way of life against their consent. At this point, Canadians display social Darwinist tendency by seeing Americans inferior and unfit for survival in their own territories. To avoid Malthusian struggle for life, food and space, Canadians do not want Americans to increase in numbers. Canadians seek to keep the human population under control not to suffer less room, less food and business opportunity in their own country. Moreover, the Canucks do not see the Yankees profitable in Spencerian sense as the latter immigrates to Canada not for contribution but for exploitation. Canadians believe that they do not have to help Americans if they are not able to adapt to climate change in their country, because helping the unfit, as Spencer argues, disturbs the political, socioeconomic and natural order of Canadian territories.

The reader then learns that Slaymaker won the election and has been the president of the USA for three years. In the meantime, hurricanes on the east coast of America and drought in the inland states have gotten stronger, causing people to go on migration northwards and westwards across the country. The reader also finds out that three new cities were established in Canada as the US settlements, which are “Lincoln City in Yukon, Jefferson in the Northwest Territories, and America City in Nunavut, the largest of the three” (p. 261). Swiftly putting his reconfigure program into action, Slaymaker gets violent reactions from

Canadians, particularly the locals in Nunavut, due to some cultural concerns. A bomb explodes in the still-uncompleted city hall of America City killing and injuring lots of Americans. The North Canadian Army (NCA), an Inuit organisation that emerged as a militant faction of a political party functioning across all three Canadian territories, claims responsibility to halt America's "illegal colonies" (p. 263). The NCA tries to protect the local lifestyle from an influx of American immigrants. It views the US settlements in Canada as illegal colonies because Americans in America City are not satisfied with seeking refuge, using American dollars and flying the American flag in another country; they rather demand to have their own American police force and have full representation in Canadian territory legislatures and not to pay income tax to the Canadian federal government. America tries to run its imperial and colonial policies under the guise of climate refugeeism. To be the most superior in the Anthropocene and the fittest during climate emergency, Americans tend towards territorial conquest and suppression of indigenous people. Following social Darwinist ideology in its competition for survival, America wants to regain its world supremacy at the expense of Canadian and native populations. America, as a social Darwinist nation, uncovers its dark and immoral aspect in the Anthropocene through the promotion of opportunism, self-interest and manipulation. Breaking the peace and fellowship with Canadians, Americans' social Darwinist attitude in the Anthropocene reveals evils and corruptions in their society.

Holly came to terms with the reality of her contribution. It was her idea to establish the US settlements in Canada and it was her who named the largest city as America City. Holly recognises that the Slaymaker administration is planning to fund the NCA to break out riots and violence so that the administration sparks the rise of nationalist movement in Canadian territory for their advantage. Holly, who was once practical about her position, begins to grapple with the ethical implications of her job. She is especially disturbed and disillusioned by how readily the American public is swayed into endorsing policies that take away individuals' rights. The Slaymaker administration's reconfigure program for American climate refugees turns into an invasion and annexation of the three northern territories in Canada. Thus, Slaymaker's pioneers intend to take the land from the Canadians just as the first settlers in America took the land from the Indians. They conquer Canadian lands and exploit and suppress native people to render them less fit in the struggle for existence in climate change. In this respect, Slaymaker, as his name suggests, turns out to be a creator of violence, chaos, death and power misuse. He stands for a saviour figure who must discard another nation to protect his people.

Following the first bomb, the NCA explodes another bomb in Lincoln City in Yukon and attacks with a rocket in Jefferson in the Northwest Territories two days later. The American Freedom Fighters conducts a retaliatory bombing assault on Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut. Then, the Canadian military deploys soldiers to major Canadian cities across the three territories while the US government, denouncing this action as a provocation, positions its own troops along the border with Alaska. These military operations lead to civil

rebellion in the US settlements, which ends up with the foundation of a new United Republic of Northland, defended by a new army, provided security by its own police force and represented by a three-star flag. Slaymaker's reconfigure program develops in an unexpected way. The mission to keep America together causes more fragmentation, clash and devastation. As the storms, floods and drought intensify in the background of the novel, the rebels and Slaymaker reach a compromise by the Treaty of Accession, by which Slaymaker becomes the president of Northland and the USA. During the Accession celebrations, President Slaymaker, however, is assassinated by a young Inuit man. So, the novel ends in ambiguities in that whether America will succeed in getting fitter in the struggle against the effects of climate change, whether the conflict between Americans and Canadians will be resolved, whether the northerners and climate refugees will be reconciled, and what actions America will take to reduce the impacts of climate change in the north. Focusing on the discourses of "(dis)enfranchisement, (in)hospitality, (un)belonging, and (anti)cosmopolitanism", struggle for existence in the Anthropocene shows the brutal process of survival in the face of climate disasters (Resano, 2024, p. 5). Survival depends on ruthless leaders, good or bad, and determined nations and folks, right or wrong and compassionate or hateful.

Conclusion

This article has explored *America City* within the framework of social Darwinism, concentrating on the notions of struggle for existence and survival of the fittest during the anthropogenic climate change. The book delves into the politics surrounding disaster management, examining how crises can be exploited for political advantage, and who gets marginalized or labelled as 'other', 'inferior' and 'unfit' in this context, who the powerful elites or the fittest are that maintain control, who the threatening im/migrants are that drain limited resources, and who the previous allies have become, now viewed as globalist foes. The novel gives a bleak yet compelling vision of a future shaped by climate disasters, forced migration, and political opportunism. Although the novel is set in the twenty second century, its emphasis on the mundane and the daily experiences of people from various backgrounds, including their sorrows, aspirations, connections, and dialogues fosters a feeling of realism. That is why Beckett focuses "less on the speculative question 'what if?' than the more provocative and poignant 'what when?'" (Jensen, 2017, para. 10).

The novel criticizes the shortcomings of earlier generations in tackling climate change while depicting the grim truths of a world where existence relies on power, prosperity, and geographic privilege. Through depicting the challenges faced by climate refugees and the survivalist mindset of the wealthy, the novel highlights the risks of unrestrained nationalism and the ethical issues of adaptation in the Anthropocene. What started as a remedy for climate refugees has evolved into an imperialistic endeavour, strengthening the concepts of social Darwinism, nationalism, and resource-focused geopolitics. In promoting assistance

and adaptation for American climate refugees, Slaymaker concurrently maintains an exclusionary and hierarchical perspective that ignores the survival of non-Americans, especially Mexicans and other marginalized communities as well as that of Canadians, fellow nation. The inconsistency in his policies underscores the selective implementation of evolutionary survival principles, favouring individuals considered 'fit' while neglecting or exploiting those identified as 'unfit'. The division of society based on ethnicity, race, wealth, and geography illustrates the growing disparities worsened by climate change. Slaymaker's new America, instead of representing a symbol of unity and advancement, reflects historical trends of displacement, colonialism, and exploitation.

Oscillating between hope for survival and a sense of despair or extinction yet edging closer to the latter, the novel conveys a warning regarding the moral and political challenges that climate emergencies will create, prompting readers to consider the responsibilities of both individuals and countries in a world where survival increasingly relies on adaptation and collaboration. As the story ends, Beckett urges the reader to wonder if striving for national survival while harming others genuinely ensures a thriving future or simply hastens the downfall of global stability. So, humankind's attempts at the evolution towards progress could result in devolution and degeneration in the Anthropocene. The author also makes us reflect on the lasting effects of policies motivated by self-interest and reassess the ethical obligations of tackling climate-induced displacement in today's world.

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