

## Chapter 2

# How a Storm Feels

## Storying Climate Change in the Eastern Himalayas

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Alexander Aisher

But the sea is rising. . . . Don't you think we should keep silent just to enjoy this rather sinister moment?

— Albert Camus, *The Fall* (1956: 30)

### Introduction: Refuge and Vulnerability

Storytellers across the ages have called upon the power and chaos of storms to highlight human vulnerability. Storms abound in Western literature, as metaphors for emotional or spiritual upheaval, chaos, destruction, and sometimes transformation. From the magically invoked storm of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to the dry, sterile thunder without rain of T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, storms have been, and continue to be, "great revealers" (Garcia-Acosta 2002). Who can watch *King Lear* and not feel in the storm that bears down upon Lear his cognitive disintegration and the parallel disintegration of society? Storms can also reveal human helplessness in the face of the powerful ecological sovereignties that stand behind our human presence in the world. Within the history of religion, gods of storm and thunder abound: Zeus. Thor. Lei Gong. Indra.

The wind came back with triple fury, and put out the light for the last time. They sat in company with the others in other shanties. . . . They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God. (Hurston [1937] 1986)

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Notes for this chapter begin on page 61.

As concepts, vulnerability and refuge weave through each other. It takes vulnerability to transform the destructive agent of a storm, which itself is but a hazard, into a *disaster*—and this vulnerability is socially and culturally produced (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2020). Vulnerability finds a counterpoint in the concept of refuge: a place of safety, somewhere that life is secure.

Scholarship on refugia is in its infancy and only now emerging as a major focus of research in conservation biology (Birks 2015). Most refugia have borders that separate what exists inside from what lies outside. Defined by borders—walls, barricades, membranes, the unseen border of values—refugia condition the entry into themselves of forms, forces, and actors that lie outside. Within conservation biology scholarship, *ecological refugia* are places that remain intact, even when areas around them are disturbed. These are places where life-forms can survive and even flourish during periods of intense existential disturbance; places from which, under the right conditions, they may again emerge (Turner 2005). *Climate refugia* harbor life-forms and genetic material needed to repopulate disturbed sites (Keppel and Wardell-Johnson 2012).<sup>1</sup> Sadly, as the multispecies scholar Donna Haraway observes, “Right now, the earth is full of refuges, human and not, without refuge” (2015: 160).

In his masterpiece *The Poetics of Space* (1964), the philosopher of the imagination Gaston Bachelard explores the house as a symbol of human security and refuge and well-being in a turbulent world. For Bachelard, storms *make sense of* the house as refuge, revealing its power to protect those who dwell within it against forces that besiege it. This quality of refuge extends across the shimmering border between humans and other species.

Our consciousness of wellbeing . . . should call for comparison with animals in their shelters. . . . Physically, the creature endowed with a sense of refuge, huddles up to itself, takes to cover, hides away, lies snug, concealed. (Bachelard [1958] 1964: 37)

Like other local impacts of climate change, storms can threaten the fragile border between humans and ecological sovereignties. Even as storms provoke anxiety, they may call upon humans to “upframe” (Kohn 2013) their perceptions—to look beyond the individual storm to the powerful ecological sovereignties that exist beyond it. Storms also force those who experience them *back to place*.

Disasters arise at the nexus of potentially destructive agents and vulnerable human populations, neither of which are static. Some disasters come as “lightning bolts,” but most are slow onset and arise as outcomes of long-running processes: they have *genealogies*, how they came to be what they are. The storm that came at dusk to Talum village, the ethnographic focus of this chapter, might appear to be a lightning bolt, but in fact it was centuries in the making.

## Methods and Background

The following study is based on data gathered in the state of Arunachal Pradesh between 2001 and 2003. This state, located in the extreme north-east of India, is a core part of the Indo-Burma “biodiversity hotspot” (Myers et al. 2000), and represents one of the most biologically diverse terrestrial ecosystems on Earth (Thompson 2009). With a wide altitudinal range (100–7,090 meters), the state includes five major climatic zones—alpine, temperate, subtemperate, subtropical, and tropical. Inhabited by twenty-four major indigenous ethnic groups, self-identified “tribes,” most communities depend directly on subsistence shifting cultivation for their livelihoods (Singh, Pretty, and Pilgrim 2010), informed by a rich heritage of biocultural knowledge systems (Singh et al. 2015).

While the Nyishi, whose biocultural knowledge is at the center of this chapter, reside in several districts of Arunachal Pradesh, this chapter is based on data collected in the upland district of Kurung Kumey—named after the two principal rivers that flow through it—one of the most remote districts in the state, and indeed anywhere in India. At the time of my doctoral fieldwork, no villagers had heard of global warming. While seven hundred villages dotted the valleys of this district, consisting of nearly fifteen thousand households, the focus here is on just one village. To preserve its anonymity, I call this village Talum.

The way communities model disasters matters. In his definition of *genealogy*, which evolved into a method, Michel Foucault included investigation into those elements of phenomena that “we tend to feel [are] without history” (1980: 139). It is impossible to attribute definitively any individual storm event to climate change; this form of causal analysis is fraught with statistical difficulties. However, it is possible to aim for something resembling the life history of a storm and to articulate its complex emotional form. Most storytellers do not aim for a continuous trail so much as a sequence of discrete footprints (Berger 1982: 284–85). So too for this genealogy of a storm. The movement shall be back from the present into a collectively remembered past, a movement “upriver” to the ontological sources of a storm-that-feels.

## Climate Change in the Water Tower of Asia

In this moment, our species stands unequally, collectively, in all our diversity, before the ecological sovereignties of climate. Like some hunters in stories told by Nyishi storytellers, we inhabit the liminal silence between human action (our own, others’), and drastic outcomes in the more-than-human realm. There was a time when the novelist Albert Camus could

write, “Nature is still there, however She contrasts her calm skies and her reasons with the madness of men” (1955: 137). That time has passed. We are together now — we always were.

The concept of adaptation is at the heart of contemporary scholarship on global climate change, as is the recognition that it occurs, so often, “inside” communities (Adger, Lorenzoni, and O’Brien 2009: 338). For good reason, climate ethnographers have begun to press into the foreground how climate change is experienced (Roncoli, Crane, and Orlove 2008; Strauss and Orlove 2003), often through those diverse conceptual and expressive instruments, like stories and songs, through which communities have always engaged places (Basso 1996: 53). Climate change is a multispecies event with its own distinctive sociality, and as multispecies scholar Anna Tsing notes, “We have a lot to learn about how humans and other species come into ways of life through webs of social relations” (2013: 28).

Across the emerging subfield of multispecies ethnography, a new wave of scholarship has started to foreground the sensory, embodied, and affective quality of interspecies encounters—the more-than-human *becomings* that occur when species meet. They are focusing the ethnographic lens upon “new kinds of relations emerging from nonhierarchical alliances, symbiotic attachments, and the mingling of creative agents” (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010), new intersubjectivities (Candea 2010), new forms of life that come into being in the intimate “contact zones” (Haraway 2008) where nonhuman vitalities blend with (apparently) other-than-human realities (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010), and points of contact where the border dividing “Nature” from “culture” shimmers and species in contact with each other co-create more-than-human forms of sociality (Tsing 2013). Through this lens, landscapes come into view that are “enactment(s) of multiple conjoined histories” (Tsing 2013: 34). It is as a *social* event produced by encounters between myriad species that climate change can threaten and violate social, moral, or religious norms (Crate 2008; Roncoli et al. 2008).

The unfolding story of climate change in the Himalayas carries global significance. Forming a 2,400-kilometer-long and 150- to 400-kilometer-wide chain of high mountains, deep valleys, and elevated plateaus, the Himalayas exert a profound influence on the climate of the Indian subcontinent and upon the Tibetan plateau (Nandargi and Dhar 2011). Forming a barrier to the southwest monsoon winds carrying humidity from the Indian Ocean northward toward the Tibetan plateau, they drive warm air upward, forcing moisture to condense and fall as heavy rain across the foothills and adjoining plains of India. As such, they directly affect the Indian monsoon system, upon which 20 percent of the human species depends. Here too is gathered 116,000 square kilometers of glacial ice, the

source of ten of Asia's largest rivers, responsible for providing water for around 1.3 billion people. In this, "The Water Tower of Asia" (known also as the "Third Pole"), climate change is a story of things known precisely, lesser-known things, known unknowns, and the lurking presence of unknown unknowns.

The climate of the Himalayas varies with elevation, and climate scientists know that many terrestrial animal and plant species have already shifted their ranges and seasonal activities (IPCC 2014). They know a warmer climate means that a greater proportion of total rainfall will come from heavy precipitation events like blizzards and rainstorms (Cullen 2011), which is significant in a region given to sudden changes in the weather, cloud bursts, high winds, snowstorms, and flash floods (Nandargi and Dhar 2011).

Climate change in the Eastern Himalayas will have profound consequences for the well-being of hill communities as well as those downstream in Assam and Bangladesh (Sharma et al. 2009). The state of Arunachal Pradesh is already one of the wettest places on Earth (Roy 2005). Models predict that climate change here will be a story of increasing extremes, with more severe weather, droughts, heatwaves, and floods (Sharma et al. 2009). Already, according to current models, monsoon wet spells are getting wetter, and dry spells are becoming more frequent (Nature 2014). Glacial melting may also have ecological knock-on effects, including more frequent glacial lake outburst floods, as meltwater from snow and ice stored in high-elevation wetlands and lakes breach with devastating results. Of significance to the ethnographic subject matter of this chapter, climate change in the uplands may also bring more frequent and more severe cyclonic storms and monsoon depressions, and resulting landslides, debris flows, and flash floods.

In the Eastern Himalayas, climate change is also a story of changing interspecies dynamics. This includes changing breeding and migration patterns of birds and fish (Cruz et al. 2007), seasonal insect emergence, and disruption of pollinator relationships and predator-prey relationships (Xu et al. 2009). Models predict heightened extinction rates among species with narrow geographic and climatic ranges (Sharma et al. 2009).

Some of these changes are already underway. Ahead of detailed scientific data collection, indigenous and place-based communities in the region have already noticed more erratic rainfall (Singh et al. 2010), changes in snowfall pattern and intensity (Yadav and Kaneria 2012), earlier budburst and flowering of plants, and emergence of new agricultural pests and weeds (Chaudhary and Bawa 2011). Some report changing monsoon regimes, degrading permafrost, melting Himalayan glaciers, and shifting tree lines (Xu et al. 2009). Others have observed more frequent and more

intense extreme weather events, including tropical cyclones and thunderstorms (Cruz et al. 2007).

At the intersection of indigenous environmental knowledge and rural livelihoods, villagers in Solukhumbu District in Nepal, the westernmost extent of the Eastern Himalayas, have already reported reduced snowfall and increasing difficulty in predicting the timing of rains and snows (Sherpa 2012). In West and East Siang Districts of Arunachal Pradesh, several hundred kilometers to the east, Adi tribal communities are also reporting more frequent weather anomalies, increasingly erratic rainfall, and more frequent flood events, with increasing soil erosion and increasing presence of crop pests, threats that will be aggravated by erosion of biocultural knowledge among younger generations in some indigenous groups (Singh et al. 2010).

No one knows how the story of climate change in the Eastern Himalayas will unfold, but human and nonhuman communities in the tribal state of Arunachal Pradesh appear to be particularly vulnerable. This is because climate change intersects with already existing heavy pressures on biodiversity, including species overexploitation through hunting (Aiyadurai and Velho 2018; Yadav and Kaneira 2012), high population growth rates across the state (Census of India 2011), weak infrastructure (Sharma et al. 2009), inadequate access to services (Committee on Himalayan Glaciers 2012), and the fragile mountain ecologies that define this region. These are likely to amplify the impacts of climate change.

A picture emerges of a region of outstanding biological and cultural diversity, where communities—human and other—are extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. For this reason, the story of climate change must be told at a *human* scale, at the scale of communities who are *inside* these changes, and at the scale of the multispecies assemblages of which they are a part. As a villager comments in the event described below, as they chant away an approaching storm, “I do not want to see Dojung move.”

## A Storm at Dusk

The following event occurred at 4:15 P.M. on 17 May 2003 in Talum village, near Koloriang, high in the uplands of Arunachal Pradesh. It was dusk, and a dozen villagers had congregated at the second hearth of the largest longhouse in the village. Several hours earlier, the wind had begun to blow from an unfamiliar direction. Now it was whipping up through the longhouse floor, shoving flames to the side, throwing shadows across the split bamboo walls. With no electricity in this village (like most in the

uplands at this time), the body of the longhouse was dark except for the flames of two fires. Several villagers had asked the hunter Tarido, an accomplished hunter (*nyigum*) who was able to commune with hunting spirits, to discover the cause of the gathering storm.

The hunter nudges a battered aluminum tin closer to the flames. Sitting on his haunches, he scrutinizes its contents. Inside, an egg turns in the boiling water, gathering signs. He waits patiently for several minutes, then removes the egg with his fingers and slowly unwraps the shell. Turning it in his hand, he inspects the white of the egg, then pulls it apart, searching for telltale marks and indents: traces of spirit influence. In front of the gathered villagers, he pops the yolk in his mouth and shifts it around with his tongue. Finding what he is searching for, he spits the embryo into his upturned palm, and moves it around with a finger, scrutinizing it. Shaking his head, without looking up, he states flatly, "Someone must have done something wrong."

Earlier that afternoon, the wind began to blow from the dry sunlit *nyobia* side of the valley: an unfamiliar direction. Those who noticed it said it was *karfoonum*: strange, unexpected, out of place. They didn't know if it was also *siru*, a message from spirits. That's why they asked him to perform the oracle. The strangeness of the wind raised questions.

A sudden blue flash illuminates the outline of the rough wooden doorway of the longhouse. A deep growl of thunder sends a pig scurrying under the longhouse, as several chickens scamper up from the muddy ground into the refuge of the roost. The hunter thrusts his chin toward the other side of the valley. "It is coming from the *nyobia* side. People there must have done something." The young second wife of my host swings her infant from her back to her breast, frowns, and snaps up at the roof, "Go to Yapup village! We don't know anything!"

"Someone must have killed a child of the spirit Dojung," the adult son of the old hunter Takar shouts across the fire. "Yes!" another villager calls. "Someone over there!" The man looks up at the roof and shouts, "Swallow whoever stole your child!" Across the fire, one of the hunters of the village, a young man who oscillates back and forth between the village and Koloriang township half a day's walk away, fixes his hunting mentor Tarido with a steady gaze. "Do it! Chant the clouds away! Tell them to go!"

Voices rise in agreement. For a moment, the hunter crouches still beside the fire, then he inhales deeply, leans into the fire, and begins to chant: "We humans who live here, we have done nothing wrong! We have done nothing wrong!" Jabbing a finger at the other side of the valley, he chants, "We are not your target! Go there to the people who swallowed your child! Whoever killed your child, go there! There, to that side! Sniff out the culprit there! We know nothing here! Go there! Go there!"

Another flash of lightning, and another deep rumble of thunder tumbles through the air of the valley, through the taught body of the longhouse and the villagers gathered there. From the shadows, a voice rises. Tirey, the youngest son of the *nyubu* shaman-priest of this village who also oscillates between the village and Koloriang, leans into the firelight. His eyes dart between the faces as he announces he has something they should know. Earlier that day, a group of his friends came to him in Koloriang and told him that they were planning to trek up above Koloriang to the mountain lake at the source of the Payu River. Like him, they knew it was a spirit-lake, *sinyuk*, set aside for the powerful mountain spirit, Dulu-Kungu Dojung. But they said they wanted to dam-fish there, where the fish were abundant. They asked him to come with them, but he declined. Instead, he walked back to the village.

For a moment, the villagers sit in silence around the fire, taking in what the young man has said. The hunter Tarido is the first to react. He jumps up and strides out through the low doorway. I grab my bag with my audio recorder and follow him outside, finding him crouched beside the skull-rack on the resting platform. Perched on the edge of the platform, facing into the valley, a silhouette against the darkening line of hills, he shouts over to me, "Dojung sent the storm! I do not want to see Dojung move!"

Crouching in the gathered dusk, he takes up the chant, to the storm, to the spirit Dojung: "Do not come to this place! Do not swallow our village! Do not come to this place! Do not swallow our village!" Another flash of lightning illuminates the clouds pushing like an army over the tropical forests of the valley, and again the thunder shakes the air of the valley. "No one here killed your children! Go there, to the sunlit side! Go there! Attack whoever swallowed your children there! No one here killed your children here! Do not come here!"

I look down at my digital recorder lying upon the split bamboo floor of the platform, buzzing in its little open universe, and in that moment the batteries fail, and the storm and village dissolve back into the antimatter of unrecorded time.

## Genealogy of a Vengeful Storm

*Re-*: back. *Fugere*: flee. Refuge. In oral histories across the uplands, storms like this usually end in disaster. They rip open the fragile leaf thatch of the longhouse and tear it from its hardwood and bamboo frame, or uproot the entire structure and wash it and its terrified inhabitants down to the river below. In such stories, domestic animals living beneath the longhouse, tokens of human wealth, flee back to the forest and take refuge there (Aisher 2016). But the storm that came that dusk to Talum village did not conform



to this pattern: no animals fled “back” to the forest, no human wealth was retrieved. Instead, the storm turned away. But questions remain.

The storm was alive. Villagers gathered in the longhouse felt it sniffing out a human culprit. From their perspective, this storm wasn’t just metaphorically angry or vengeful: it *was* angry, furious, filled with desire for revenge. It was a site of more-than-human sociality: a storm-that-feels.

But there was more to it than that. To articulate how the storm felt for Nyishi villagers gathered in the longhouse that night we must track back through key moments in its genealogy, moments through which it became what it was. A genealogy of this storm-that-feels, and its emotion, can proceed by piecing together fragments of its past and placing them in service to the present; a methodological pathway that could lead to a deeper understanding of extreme events in general.

Understanding this storm demands an appreciation of the “innate” fury of storms, how they assault human senses. However, beneath its phenomenal surface, this storm was rich with stories and histories. Tirey’s confessional account to villagers traced a line back from the storm, to events that (supposedly) occurred earlier that day: a group of young men strode up through the forests above Koloriang, to a mountain lake at the source of the Payu River, to dam-fish there.

From the standpoint of villagers gathered in the longhouse, this was, in the language of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, “dangerous human interference.” Why? Because for Talum villagers, mountain lakes like this were “mother-places” (*aaney-nyoku*): safe havens for spirit-owners of the wild. As such, they had to be approached with great care. For villagers gathered in the longhouse that night, such lakes should not have been approached at all: humans who visit them invite danger and misfortune. Such lakes, and their indwelling spirits, neither need nor desire human presence. From the standpoint of Dojung, such lakes were a refuge. They were safe havens from human predation. Fishing and hunting in their vicinity was forbidden. Even uttering the name “Dojung” in forests around them risked angering powerful master spirits.

So it was that the young men’s plan to fish there amounted to an *invasion* of a refuge. In the Nyishi uplands, in the moment this storm came, stories abound of villagers who inadvertently wandered too near to such lakes and suffered bleeding from the mouth, nose, and ears, symptoms of spirit-attack. The power of such lakes is inseparable from the rumors that surround them. The landscape of the uplands is a shared landscape, suffused with diverse claims, human and other. Inevitably, perhaps, tensions existed between these diverse stakeholders. As villagers said, humans and spirit-owners of the wild were like “two hands holding the same object”; the land was akin to “a bead on a thread.” Stories set them apart.

To understand how the storm felt that night, we must understand that the atmosphere in the village matters. Based on overhunting and declining wildlife—conceived as declining wealth of Dojung spirits—there was a sense in the village of mutual *distrust* between humans and Dojung spirits. Villagers well knew that hunters who neglected the feelings of spirit-owners of wildlife played a dangerous game. For all they took, or stole, many paid “the cost of a child.” In this at times hostile landscape, this forest of mirrors suffused with multiple perspectives, simply witnessing something strange, unexpected, or out of place could be a precursor to spirit-attack (Aisher 2016).

With a strange hint of nostalgia, elderly respondents in Koloriang recalled the long era of clan warfare, cattle theft and longhouse burnings that continued on for centuries in the uplands. That world of surprise attacks, wife capture, abduction of enemies, and retrieval of blood-price—part of a clan warfare imaginary—lived on in uplanders’ perceptions of spirits (Aisher 2020). Perhaps it was an appropriate imaginary for a landscape as fragile as that. Tales abounded of human actions and their consequences: a “reciprocal environment” (Bird-David 1990) that could switch to a *taking environment* and bite back, through hunting failure or crop failure, or death of domestic animals, or death of family members—or a storm. On the night of the storm, the wind blew from an unfamiliar direction, and this triggered villagers’ collective discussion that led to Tirey’s confessional account of the young men fishing in the spirit-lake.

Across many stories, storms were media of revenge. They primed villagers to perceive the danger in the strange wind that blew that afternoon from an unfamiliar direction. That’s why they gathered in the longhouse and why the hunter performed the oracle. Through their stories, they knew human folly could trigger revenge. The hurt that Dojung felt the evening of the storm had its origin also in an ancient story recounting the separation of humans and spirits. The storm’s anger was the anger a person feels when agreed borders have been encroached. The villagers gathered there knew Dojung inhabited the hills long before humans came, and they knew Dojung bore the weight, and the cost, of the human presence.

Like climate change itself, storms can serve as triggers for those who encounter them, to “upframe” (Kohn 2013: 78) their perceptions to a realm of powerful ecological sovereignties that seem to stand behind these phenomena. The storm also triggered an exchange of perspectives between villagers and the storm. Like a mirror, it urged them to reflect on how Dojung felt about *them*. For a moment, it forced them to return to the value of refuge—for them, but also for Dojung.

Neat naturalistic classifications can erase these features of indigenous experience. As Venkatesan reminds us, “Ontologies, theories of being and

reality, have histories (and genealogies)” (2010: 154). So too for this storm. Oral narratives, the central method of communicating knowledge in the uplands, offer a pathway into the atmosphere of mutual mistrust between humans and spirits. A hunter from the village sees a monkey with a necklace of white beads climbing into the crown of a *sangrik* fig tree. Unable to stop himself, he shoots at it with his shotgun. On his deathbed two years later, he admits to villagers that whenever he passed that tree after that event, he would hear a strange, high-pitched sound emanating from its crown. Everyone in Talum knew aggressive spirits dwelled in that spirit-tree. Everyone agreed that these spirits were responsible for the hunter’s death.

Knowledge uncertainty suffused villagers’ response to the storm. It underpinned their request to the hunter to perform an oracle and chant away the storm. They knew, through their stories, individual actions often have collective consequences. Like all storms, this storm had a genealogy: how it came to be what it was. It also possessed a genealogy of emotion: how it came to feel as it felt. And in feeling as it did, it revealed a deeper value: the value of refuge. And it also revealed what it means to invade a refuge and how this feels both for humans and for spirits of the wild.

Over the coming era of climate change, storms will continue to be sites of more-than-human sociality. As great revealers, they will continue to urge humans to upframe their perceptions, from individual storms to the ecological sovereignties that surround the human village.

## Conclusion: Feeling into Climate Change—Why Stories Matter

In this era of anthropogenic climate change, extreme events will continue to remind humans of the need for *conviviality* with powerful ecological sovereignties and the more-than-human sources of human flourishing. Like an angry storm passing over a village, some will offer a counterpoint to *solastalgia*, that sense of loss that can come with dramatic change or deterioration of a once familiar landscape. Some will force those communities who encounter them to reacquaint themselves with the landscape and recognize once again the necessity for exchange with the other-than-human sources of human flourishing. In part, this is what it means to return to place.

As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recognizes, to deal with climate change we need new “convincing physically-based storyline[s]” (Stott 2016: 1518). Global climate change resists being condensed to a single story of molecules, particles, and other elements—in part because it is the story of countless communities facing what the weather brings. In the language of the poet Louis MacNeice, climate change is “incorrigibly plural.” As Cullen puts it, “If climate is impersonal statistics,

weather is personal experience” (2010). The personal and impersonal need to be reconnected. Stories offer a crucial bridge. Recognizing landscapes as *multispecies assemblages* (see Tsing 2013) also helps to draw us closer to their potent more-than-human agency. By drawing an inert background into a living foreground, such a recognition can facilitate the telling of new stories. As Le Carré puts it, “The cat sat on the mat is not the beginning of a story, but the cat sat on the dog’s mat is” (Barber 1977).

Exploring how global warming intersects with local realities resonates with current work on the anthropology of emotion. As a leading scholar in the field, Andrew Beatty argues that the particularity of emotion runs counter to the dominant focus in anthropology and much climate science upon systems, groups, collectives, and cultures. The very multidimensionality of emotion renders it a casualty of any description that is too general, in part because “the occasion, expression and meaning of emotion are personal and particular, there being no such thing as a general emotion” (Beatty 2014: 555). This holds true for the storm that came to Talum village. We won’t get anywhere by asking “how do storms feel?” because storms in general, like humans in general, don’t feel anything at all.

To get back to personal and felt experience, we need to ask: “How did *this* storm feel to *these* villagers on *this* night?” To answer this, we need to ground our accounts in the stories of those who encounter them. As Beatty notes, “Emotions are not the creation of a moment. They participate in manifold relationships formed over periods of time” (2010). Only detailed narrative accounts that honor the particularity of individual lives—accounts that include the “plots and players, the people who inhabit the roles” (Beatty 2013), not all of whom are human—can get back to emotions in all their rich complexity. Sometimes it is only through story that humans can express how the human world appears a little way out from the human shore.

From my perspective now, several years after leaving Talum village, the storm is above all a story of two refuges, not one: the refuge of a longhouse and the refuge of a spirit-lake. It speaks to me now of humanity’s need to identify and conserve refugia. As Bachelard reminds us, well-being, human and other, “takes us back to the primitiveness of the refuge” ([1958] 1964: 91). In the challenging time ahead, story may yet play a crucial role in conserving those places that humans co-create best through acts of setting them aside.

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**Alexander Aisher** is based at the Department of Anthropology of the University of Sussex, UK. As an environmental anthropologist and ecological designer, he has a deep and abiding interest in multispecies ethnography, wildlife conservation, climate change, indigenous environmental knowledge, storytelling, and adaptation. In 2003, he became the first anthropologist in over forty years to conduct long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the internationally contested Protected Area and “biodiversity hotspot” of Arunachal Pradesh in the Eastern Himalayas. In 2007, he was awarded a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship to explore community-led environmental decision-making. In 2018, he returned to Arunachal Pradesh, site of his doctoral fieldwork, to offer policy recommendations on conservation of wildlife, oral history, and indigenous identity.

## Note

1. For some scholars, the term *biocultural refugia* captures the quality of those places that “not only shelter species, but also carry knowledge and experiences about practical management of biodiversity” (Barthel et al. 2013: 2–3).

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